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Duqm emerges as new tourism hub with RO853mn investment

Our Correspondent
Duqm

Tourism investment in Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) exceeded RO853mn at the end of 2024, underscoring Duqm's growing appeal as a coastal destination and business hub.

According to SEZAD figures, tourism development in the zone includes 21 hotels, ten hotel apartment buildings and a multi-facility complex comprising hotels, villas and serviced apartments. Sixteen tourism projects were completed by the end of 2024, 11 were under construction and five in pre-construction phase.

Ahmed bin Ali Akaak, CEO of SEZAD, said Duqm's location on the Arabian Sea, with access to the Indian Ocean and moderate year-round temperatures, positions it as a strategic tourism destination. The area is also home to several natural and recreational sites including Duqm Beach Park, the Rock Garden, Saay District

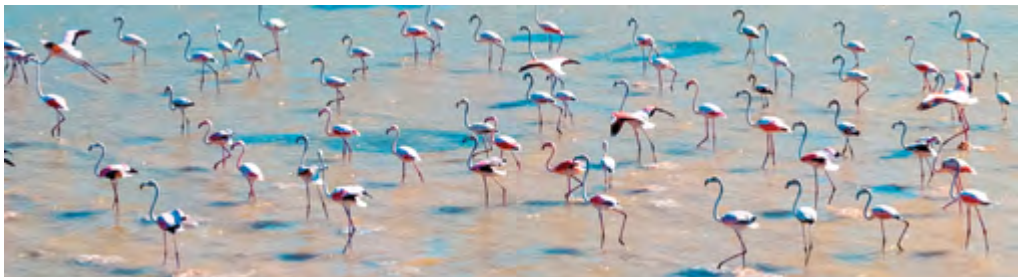


Duqm's appeal lies not only in its natural assets but also in its infrastructure and services

AHMED BIN ALI AKAAK

Public Park and nearby attractions such as Barr al Hikman and Al Maha Nature Reserve.

Akaak said the tourism momentum is supported by Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), which continues to offer incentives for private investment. He added that Duqm's appeal lies not only in its natural assets but



also in the infrastructure and services available to both tourists and investors.

Launched earlier this year, SEZAD's 2025-2030 strategy focuses on enhancing quality of life and attracting tourism-related investment. One of its priorities is to promote a balanced urban lifestyle through commercial, social and recreational develop-

ment aimed at residents, tourists and investors alike. Another key focus is positioning Duqm as a distinct destination through diverse tourism offerings.

Among the promotional initiatives is the ongoing 'Pass By' campaign, designed to attract visitors transiting through or travelling to Dhofar. The campaign has gained traction in recent

years, helping to raise awareness of Duqm's tourism potential and drawing more visitors.

Akaak said further growth is expected in 2025 as the campaign expands and more events are held to showcase Duqm. Its open coastline offers multiple beach locations in the town centre, as well as in Nafun village and Ras Madrakah.



Germany, France, UK press Israel on aid

London, UK - Leaders of Britain, France and Germany called on Israel to allow unrestricted humanitarian aid into Gaza on Friday, warning of a 'humanitarian catastrophe'.

The joint appeal comes after French President Emmanuel Macron pledged to recognise a Palestinian state and followed a call between him, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz.

In it, they demanded an immediate ceasefire and warned that 'withholding essential humanitarian assistance' is unacceptable - though the statement broke no new diplomatic ground.

The three leaders said they are ready to take further action to support both a ceasefire and a political process towards lasting security and peace in the region, but did not specify what steps they might take.

Oman commends France move

Muscat - Oman has commended and welcomed the announcement by French President Emmanuel Macron that France will recognise the State of Palestine during the UN General Assembly in September.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Friday, Oman called on other countries that have not yet recognised the Palestinian state to do so, embodying the two-state solution and consolidating the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to establish their independent state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. 'This will advance the chances of achieving peace and justice in the Middle East,' it said.

TRUMP RECEIVES OMAN'S NEW AMBASSADOR IN WASHINGTON



US President Donald Trump received Talal bin Sulaiman al Rahbi, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Sultanate of Oman to the United States of America, during a ceremony held at the White House on Friday. Rahbi conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, along with his best wishes for the president's health and well-being, and for continued progress and prosperity for the US government and its people. President Trump wished the ambassador success in his duties and expressed hope for further strengthening of bilateral relations between the two countries.

Macron's announcement has revealed divisions among the European trio - known as the E3 - over how to address the humanitarian crisis and bring the Israel-Hamas war to an end.

While all three countries support a Palestinian state in principle, Germany has said it has no immediate plans to follow France's lead. Macron intends to formalise the recognition at the UN General Assembly in September.

Britain also has not joined the move. On Friday, 221 members

of the UK Parliament signed a letter urging recognition.

Trump dismisses Macron decision

US President Donald Trump has dismissed Macron's decision to recognise a Palestinian state as pointless.

"What he says doesn't matter," Trump told reporters at the White House. "He's a very good guy, I like him, but that statement doesn't carry weight." Trump told reporters.

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Iran: Nine people killed in gun, grenade attack on courthouse

Manufacturing, FDI and exports drive Oman's industrial momentum

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The industrial sector recorded a 27.5% increase in foreign direct investment during the first quarter of 2025, taking total FDI in the sector to RO2.749bn, according to figures released by Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP). The manufacturing sector also posted steady gains, supported by higher demand across regional and international markets.

Non-oil exports grew 7.2% between January and May 2025 to RO2.7bn. The United Arab Emirates remained the top im-

Omani factories managed to expand production despite global market volatility and supply chain pressures

KHALID SALIM AL QASSABI



porter of Omani goods with RO485mn, up 22.9%, followed by Saudi Arabia at RO451mn, up 34.9%, and India with RO280mn, up 38.9%.

HE Dr Saleh bin Saeed Masan, Undersecretary for Commerce

and Industry, said the figures reflect the impact of policies to build a resilient and competitive industrial base, in line with Vision 2040 and Industrial Strategy 2040. He highlighted the role of incentive plans and efforts to im-



Investor confidence remains strong due to the business environment, regulatory frameworks and incentives

JASSIM AL JADIDI

prove services in industrial zones.

Khalid bin Salim al Qassabi, Director General of Industry, noted that Omani factories managed to expand production despite global market volatility and supply chain pressures. He at-

tributed this to public-private sector collaboration and reduced operational costs, which led to higher project activity and improved Omaniisation rates in industrial zones. MoCIIP continues to support initiatives focused on

local value chains and broadening the national production base.

Jassim bin Saif al Jadidi, Technical Director at the Undersecretary's Office, said investor confidence remains strong due to improvements in the business environment, updated regulatory frameworks and enhanced incentives. These include targeted industrial financing, logistics upgrades, technology localisation and international partnerships.

The petrochemical and electrical conductors sectors led the growth in manufacturing. Iron and aluminium industries also reported consistent gains, while cement companies began to

recover from earlier losses. Tiles and ceramic production showed signs of revival, though glass manufacturers continued to face operational issues.

Food processing firms - including milling and beverage producers - posted higher profits, driven by operational efficiency and increased demand across local and regional markets.

Investments were concentrated in sectors identified as strategic - renewable energy technologies aligned with Oman's green economy goals; mineral production and exports; and food and medical industries supporting national security.

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Summer break: Chance to grow, learn and reconnect

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With schools in summer break and temperatures soaring across the sultanate, families in Oman are being encouraged to view the season as an opportunity for meaningful engagement, self-development and quality time together. Rather than seeing summer merely as a time for rest, experts are urging parents to make the most of this time by fostering learning, creativity and personal growth in their children.

"Summer is not a void - it is a gateway to exploration and enrichment," said Khalid al Balushi, an educational consultant. "Children should be steered away from excessive screen time and instead be guided towards activities such as reading, learning new skills and engaging in experiences that leave a lasting impact."

Domestic tourism continues to be a preferred choice for many Omani families, offering an accessible and enjoyable alternative to international travel. Oman's varied landscape, particularly the cooler climes of Jabal Akhdar and Jabal Shams, provides an ideal setting for summer excursions. University lecturer Dr Salim al Rawahi noted that these locations offer scenic hiking trails, temperate weather and panoramic views that appeal to all age groups.

"Visiting traditional souqs, heritage sites and historic forts in places like Nizwa, Bahla and Suhar also helps children connect



Our aim is not just to educate, but to help children build confidence, leadership, critical thinking and teamwork

DALIA AL IRAQI

with Omani identity and history," Rawahi added.

Coastal areas such as Ras al Hadd and the khareef season in Dhofar remain popular, along with cultural hotspots that blend relaxation with educational value.

Beyond travel, experts in child development advocate using the summer as a time to cultivate interests and talents. Dr Aisha al Kindi, a specialist in training and development, said the holiday is an excellent time for young peo-

ple to explore hobbies or participate in short courses. "It's an opportunity to instil a love of learning and nurture creativity, whether through painting, coding, languages or sports."

Across the sultanate, a wide range of structured summer programmes is on offer, including Quran classes that combine religious education with discipline and routine. Dalia al Iraqi, director of a private summer centre in Muscat, said that these programmes place increasing emphasis on soft skills.

"Our aim is not just to educate, but to help children build confidence, leadership, critical thinking and teamwork," she explained.

Experts also highlight the psychological benefits of engaging children in planning their own activities and allowing them to try new experiences. According to psychologist Dr Mazen al

Ghailani, such involvement fosters independence and reduces the stress often associated with the school year. "These activities are essential for children's emotional well-being. They offer a sense of achievement and help children feel more in control of their time," he said.

Families are encouraged to take advantage of a range of opportunities - from educational workshops and creative indoor pursuits to volunteering and community involvement. Initiatives such as beach clean-ups, food drives and home-based projects help instil values of responsibility, empathy and social contribution.

"Summer should not be perceived as idle time, but rather as a valuable season for building memories, strengthening bonds and learning in ways that extend far beyond the classroom," said Ghailani.

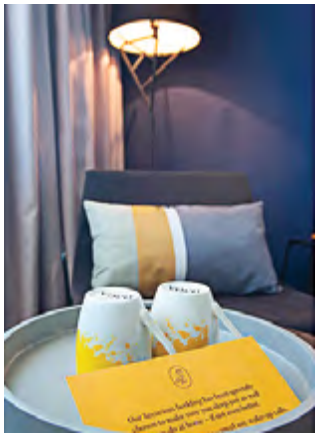
First voco hotel in Oman to open in Al Mouj this year

Muscat - IHG Hotels and Resorts has announced the signing of a management agreement for voco Muscat Al Mouj, a 251-key beachfront hotel set to open in Q4 2025. The deal with Golden Group Holding marks the first signing of the voco brand in Oman, further expanding IHG's premium portfolio across the Middle East.

Centrally located in the Al Mouj Muscat neighbourhood, a waterfront development known for its luxury residences, yacht marina, championship golf course and high-end retail offerings, the new hotel will cater to both leisure and business travellers.

Launched in 2018, voco is IHG's fastest-growing premium brand, already making its mark with openings and signings across Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Known for its bold identity and thoughtful touches, the brand blends the character of individual hotels with the benefits of a trusted global name, offering guests a reliably different experience.

Upon opening, voco Muscat



Al Mouj will join the brand's growing portfolio of more than 100 open hotels globally and a robust pipeline of more than 95 properties.

Haitham Mattar, Managing Director of IHG Hotels & Resorts, India, Middle East and Africa, said, "We are delighted to bring the voco brand to Oman in partnership with Golden Group Holding. Al Mouj Muscat is one of the region's most exciting lifestyle destinations and we believe voco's distinctive charm and premium hospitality offering makes

it a perfect fit for the destination. This signing reflects our commitment to supporting Oman Vision 2040 by contributing to the country's tourism and economic diversification strategy."

Sheikh Salem al Ghazal, Chairman of Golden Group Holding added, "Partnering with IHG to introduce voco to Oman is a significant milestone in our journey to enhance Muscat's hospitality offering. voco's blend of informal charm and global quality perfectly complements the dynamic spirit of Al Mouj. We look forward to delivering a hotel that embodies excellence, reflects Omani hospitality and attracts travellers from across the globe."

When it opens later this year, voco Muscat Al Mouj will offer 251 rooms and suites, along with five distinct dining experiences including an all-day dining venue, speciality restaurant and lobby lounge. The hotel will also feature three meeting rooms, a spa, swimming pool, fitness centre, business centre, ample parking and a barber shop.

Girl Guides gather in Dhofar to build skills, leadership

Our Correspondent
Salalah

The 24th Summer Scout Camp for Girl Guides and Advanced Scouts opened on Friday in Jabal Ashur Plain, Dhofar. Organised by Ministry of Education, the camp will run till July 30 under the theme 'Community Partnership: Leadership to Build the Future'.

The event has brought together 270 guides and leaders from across Oman. The camp's programme features training workshops, scientific and cultural visits, as well as sporting activities, including a sports day at Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah. The schedule also includes competitions, group



games and talent showcases.

Amina bint Marhoon al Shabibi, camp leader, said the activities aim to strengthen participants' leadership and learning capabilities, promote teamwork and exploration and instil national values. She added that the camp applies core elements of the Girl

Guides method and helps raise community awareness of the movement's role.

The camp is designed to develop life and camping skills while encouraging a spirit of challenge and adventure through direct interaction with nature and partnerships with local communities.

Oman Kite Festival 2025 wraps up with global participation

Our Correspondent
Sur

Oman Kite Festival 2025 concluded on July 24 after ten days of international competitions and coastal events held across several locations in the sultanate.

Organised by Omran Group in collaboration with Oman Sail, Visit Oman and Oman Adventure Centre, the festival drew more than 90 athletes from around the world. The event aimed to promote adventure-based tourism by leveraging



Oman's coastal geography and expanding the country's appeal as a destination for niche sports.

The closing ceremony took place at The Beachfront in Sur, under the patronage of Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of South Sharqiyah, in the presence of Dr Khamis Salim al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, and officials from partner entities and sponsors.

The headline event - Oman Downwinder - featured four competitive legs: from Barr al Hikman to Masirah Island, then onward to Ras al Ruwais, fol-

lowed by a route from the Pink Lagoons to Al Ashkharah, and concluding with a final stretch from Ras al Jinz to Ras al Hadd.

Omani competitor Ayman bin Abdullah al Ghafri took first place in the Downwinder, ahead of Oman's Mukhtar bin Abdulkarim al Mujaini and Egypt's Ahmed Mohamed Gamal.

Other races included the Kite Course at Barr al Hikman, the Coastal Race at Masirah Island and the Slalom event in Ras al Hadd. In the Slalom race held in Sur, Majid al Kharousi secured

first place.

Sultan bin Sulaiman al Khudoori, Assets Manager at Omran Group, congratulated participants and reaffirmed the festival's alignment with Oman's National Tourism Strategy 2040, which promotes sports and experience-led tourism.

Shaima Said al Asmi, Events Specialist at Oman Sail, noted the importance of such events in supporting local economies and encouraging entrepreneurship. "Each event has the potential to contribute to the tourism sector

in governorates across Oman," she said.

Known for its maritime heritage, Sur provided the backdrop for the festival's finale. A strong public turnout highlighted growing domestic interest in marine sports and the potential of these to boost tourism and related services.

Organisers noted that the festival continues to position Oman as a destination for adventure sports, while helping promote the country's natural assets to global sporting communities.

Digital services surge as Oman advances towards e-government goals

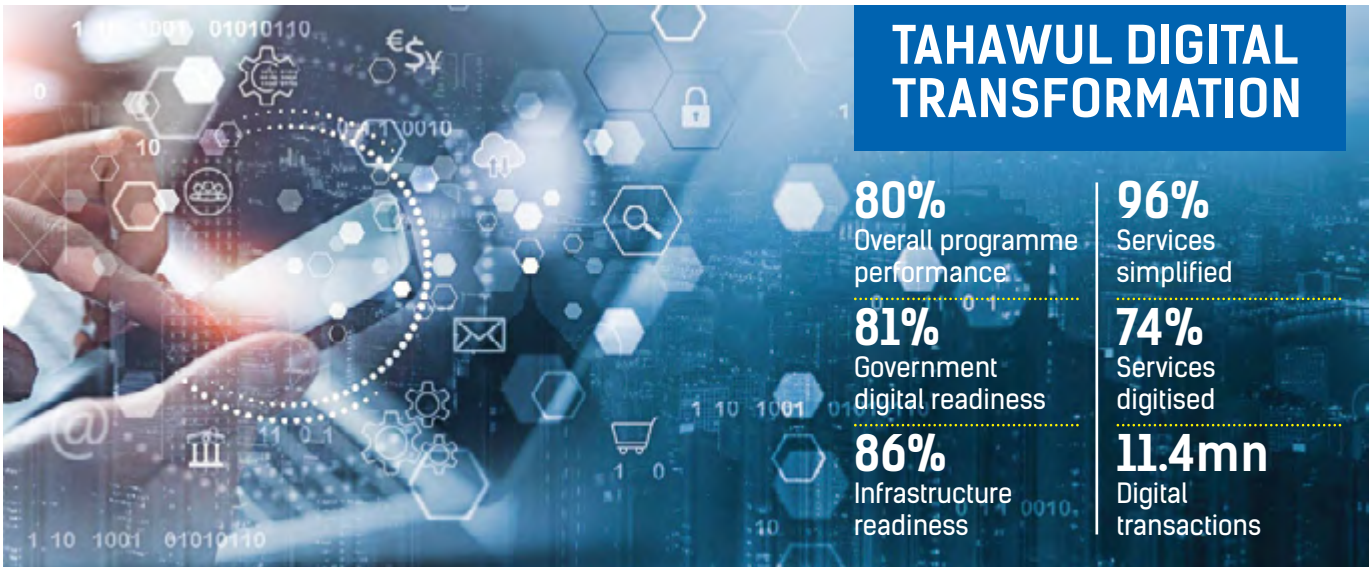
Our Correspondent
Muscat

The National Programme for Digital Transformation - Tahawul - has achieved an 80% overall performance rate since its launch in 2021, marking a 19% increase over the results recorded in mid-2024.

The figures, released at the end of May 2025, highlight progress made across government institutions in digital infrastructure readiness, simplified public services and increased adoption of e-services. According to Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the average readiness of government bodies for digital transformation reached 81%, while infrastructure readiness stood at 86%.

Procedures for 96% of targeted government services were simplified, including 381 services revised under Manjam Labs - a collaborative initiative to improve government service efficiency. Additionally, 74% of priority services have been digitised, and between January and May this year, 48 government agencies processed more than 11.4mn digital transactions.

A total of 4,100 services were indexed in the government's digital services guide, and 33 advisory sessions were held to support public sector



digitalisation.

H E Dr Ali bin Amer al Shidhani, Undersecretary for Communications and Information Technology and Chairman of Tahawul's technical committee,

The direction of the transformation aligns with Oman's broader digital economy goals and aims to enhance service delivery and empower local talent.

He noted that the direction of the transformation aligns with Oman's broader digital economy

goals and aims to enhance service delivery and empower local talent.

Among key achievements is the launch of a unified government services portal, now offering 23 services from various agencies. The platform has recorded 35,746 users and processed 3,905 service requests. A library in sign language has also been activated to support users with disabilities.

The OmanNet electronic payment gateway is now fully operational, handling 14.5mn digital transactions in the first quarter alone. The system is designed to reduce fraud risk and encourage electronic payment adoption.

The Wusool system for electronic document and records

management has registered over 17,000 active users and processed more than 1.5mn documents across 20 government entities.

In the first half of 2025, over 1.57mn digital transactions were signed using electronic authentication. The National Electronic Integration Platform exchanged 163mn records, while more than 90 digital public consultations were held to enhance citizen participation in policymaking.

Tahawul is a core initiative under Oman's National Digital Economy Programme. It runs from 2021 to 2025, targeting a shift to a fully digital government based on principles of good governance and adoption of emerging technologies.

Tourism efforts lift June traffic at Oman airports



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Airports recorded a 2% year-on-year increase in passenger numbers in June 2025 with 1,134,924 travellers passing through the sultanate's airports, up from 1,109,745 in the same period last year.

Oman Air posted a significant jump in point-to-point passenger traffic, nearly tripling from 75,000 in June 2024 to 200,000 in June 2025. These passengers - flying directly into Oman without onward connections - now represent 58% of the airline's total load, nearly double that of any other Gulf carrier, according to the airline. The figure marks a key achievement in Oman Air's strategy to support inbound tourism and national economic objectives.

Mike Rutter, Chief Commercial Officer at Oman Air, said, "A core pillar of our strategy is to increase point-to-point traffic; not simply by adding more flights but by ensuring each flight brings more visitors directly to the country. The growth we have achieved is the direct result of careful route planning, targeted marketing and a network strategy that prioritises stable demand over aspiration. Our approach not only supports national tourism goals, but also drives a stronger revenue performance for the airline, which in

turn will enable us to open new routes sustainably."

The overall increase in June traffic is attributed to ongoing efforts by Oman Airports and its partners to position the country as a year-round destination by enhancing airport services and improving the traveller experience from arrival to departure.

Oman Airports said it remains committed to offering smooth and secure travel by upgrading facilities and deploying smart technologies to cut processing times and enhancing comfort.

The onset of khareef in Dhofar also contributed to the rise, drawing tourists with its cooler temperatures and natural landscapes.

Oman Airports described the June figures as a positive sign of the effectiveness of tourism promotion efforts and of the airports' readiness to handle growing demand in line with international service standards.

The company expects travel activity to remain strong in the coming period, supported by seasonal tourism events and infrastructure development aimed at improving the travel experience across all airports.

However, data released by National Centre for Statistics and Information earlier this month showed total passenger traffic through Oman's four main airports fell 3% in the first five months of 2025 compared to 2024.

Sulaimani in 800m semis of World Uni Games

Berlin - Oman's Mohammed al Sulaimani has qualified for the 800m semi-finals at the 2025 FISU Summer World University Games in Germany after clocking 1:49.34 in the heats, his best time of the season.

Despite finishing fourth, the 23-year-old advanced on time, surpassing several seasoned competitors and becoming the only Arab athlete to qualify for the semi-finals.

The university team's technical staff, led by coach Saeed al



Rashidi, expressed satisfaction with Sulaimani's progress, citing his performance as a significant step forward in his competitive development.

The games are being hosted across six German cities - Bochum, Duisburg, Essen, Mülheim an der Ruhr, Hagen and Berlin - from July 16 to 27. Around 8,500 athletes from more than 100 countries are participating in 18 sports, making it one of the largest multi-sport events this year.

Month of Safar started on Saturday

Muscat - The crescent moon marking the start of the Islamic month of Safar 1447 AH was sighted in Oman on Friday evening, corresponding to July 25.

Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs confirmed the moon sighting. As a result, Saturday, July 26 was the first day of Safar 1447 AH.

In a statement, the ministry extended prayers for a blessed month filled with goodness, prosperity and blessings, and asked Allah Almighty to make all months of the year full of success and peace.

PRAYER TIMINGS	
Fajr	4.11am
Sunrise	5.35am
Duhr	12.18pm
Asr	3.41pm
Maghrib	6.57pm
Isha	8.16pm



Royal Oman Police

Directorate of Public Relations & Security Information

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Royal Oman Police (ROP), represented by the Department of Public Relations and Security Media, announces the launch of a public electronic auction for a selection of used vehicles. The auction will take place on Sunday, August 03, 2025, via the official ROP auction platform: www.rop.mzadcom.om, and will run for one day only.

Prospective buyers may inspect the listed vehicles between July 29 and 31, 2025, from 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM at the vehicle impound yard of the General Directorate of Transport in Airport Heights.

Auction Terms and Conditions:

- All participants must register on the auction platform: www.rop.mzadcom.om.
- A **non-refundable deposit of OMR 500** is required via the platform. This deposit will be forfeited if the winning bidder fails to complete payment or finalize the registration and transfer within the designated timeframe.
- A **brokerage fee of 2%** of the vehicle's value is applicable, **plus 5% VAT**.
- The full vehicle payment must be made via **electronic transfer within 24 working hours**.
- Vehicle registration and transfer must be completed within **3 days** of payment. A late fee of **OMR 5 per day** will apply beyond this period. The ROP assumes no responsibility for any loss or damage.
- The ROP and the auction platform are **not liable** for any discrepancies between vehicle images/descriptions and actual condition. No guarantees are made regarding the vehicles' functionality or technical soundness.

For further details, please visit www.rop.mzadcom.om or contact **98886154**.

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Oman LNG boosts market position with record output, new contracts

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman LNG achieved its highest-ever production in 2024, while maintaining exceptional safety standards and a plant efficiency rate of 98.23%, reflecting its unwavering commitment to operational excellence and sustainable performance.

Hamad bin Mohammed al-Naamani, CEO of Oman LNG, confirmed that the company is preparing for a new phase of expansion with the commencement of long-term sales contracts this year, encompassing volumes from both Oman LNG and Qalhat LNG.

The company is prioritising advanced upgrades and maintenance to enhance its capabilities and surpass its 2024 achievements once these improvements are completed. This will position it at the forefront of gas producers globally, in terms of both performance and competitive cost.

In a statement to the Oman News Agency, Naamani said that 2024 marked a significant shift in the company's commercial strategy, with long-term sales contracts totalling 10.4mn metric tonnes per annum, providing a solid foundation for a diversified

and flexible commercial portfolio.

He added that this strategy has enabled the company to strike a balance between long-term commitments and the ability to respond to immediate market opportunities. This approach has allowed the company to supply reliable energy to its partners while maximising added value, reinforcing Oman's role in supporting global energy security.

Regarding innovation and transformation in the energy sector, Naamani emphasised Oman LNG's commitment to supporting the sultanate's carbon neutrality targets by 2050. This includes investing in short-term efficiency improvements and implementing long-term emissions management programmes.

He noted that the company achieved its highest-ever energy efficiency rates in 2024 and was recognised with the 'Golden Path' award by the United Nations Environment Programme for its efforts to reduce methane emissions – both of which are key indicators of its dedication to low-carbon LNG production.

He pointed out that the company is investing in energy efficiency solutions that support a



The year 2024 marked a significant shift in Oman LNG's commercial strategy, with long-term sales contracts totalling 10.4mn metric tonnes per annum, providing a solid foundation for a diversified and flexible commercial portfolio

HAMAD BIN MOHAMMED AL-NAAMANI



gradual reduction in emissions, relying on proven and highly cost-effective technologies. All investments aimed at reducing

emissions undergo thorough and comprehensive evaluation.

The company is also investing in research and development

projects in collaboration with local universities, including studies on hydrogen fusion and a pilot project focused on methane

emissions – seen as a starting point for developing clean energy molecules. Naamani underlined that this approach balances enhancing current performance with preparing for a low-emissions future, positioning Oman LNG as a reliable partner in the global energy transition.

On the topic of safety and sustainability leadership, Naamani stated that last year the company recorded over 27mn work hours without a lost-time injury, with no operational safety incidents reported for more than 3,500 days.

Regarding social responsibility and national development, the company's CEO explained that Oman LNG remains committed to allocating 1.5% of its net income after tax to social investment. This includes support for key projects such as the Sur Maritime Museum, the Masar initiative to promote tourism, and the provision of advanced medical equipment to healthcare facilities, including MRI machines and kidney dialysis units. The company also prioritises human capital development through leadership academies, practical training for youth, and initiatives supporting small and medium-sized enterprises.

Omani banks' profits rise 7.6% to RO276mn in H1

Muscat – The total net profits of Omani banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) rose by 7.6% in the first half of this year, reaching RO275.9mn, compared to RO256.3mn during the same period last year.

This growth reflects the increased pace of economic activity, the expansion of the business sector, and higher demand for loans and Islamic financing, coupled with a rise in deposits. Banks are also taking several measures to mitigate risks, reduce default rates, diversify revenue sources, and enhance efficiency.

During the first half of the year, banks provided financing to various economic sectors, numerous private sector and development projects, and individuals. Total credit extended by banks reached RO26.2bn by the end of March, up from RO25.5bn in December 2024.

Banks recorded gains in their market value estimated at RO438.3mn in the first half of the year, rising to RO4.708bn by the end of June, compared to RO4.270bn in December 2024.

Bank Muscat leads the banking sector in market capitalisation, with over RO2.64bn. Sohar International ranks second with RO933mn, followed by NBO with RO487.7mn.

ONA

OQEP launches share buy back programme

Muscat – OQ Exploration and Production Company (OQEP) on Thursday announced a share buy back programme following approval from the Financial Services Authority of Oman (FSA).

The programme is intended to further enhance OQEP's ability to deliver value to its shareholders, in addition to its current base annual dividend of \$600mn and half-yearly performance linked dividend.

The share buy back programme will be initiated 15 days after this announcement, in accordance with FSA and Muscat Stock Exchange regulations. The programme will be conducted pursuant to the company's extraordinary general meeting held on June 24, 2025, which amended its Articles of Association to enable OQEP to repurchase its shares.

Following commencement, the programme will be maintained for a period of up to six months or until the target range for share repurchases is achieved. The target range for repurchase is 45mn to 60mn ordinary shares.



Ahmed al Azkawi, CEO of OQEP, said, "The share buy back programme reflects our confidence in OQEP's strong fundamentals and long-term growth prospects. Our shareholders will now benefit from a return of capital programme which includes a base dividend of RO231mn, a performance linked dividend and share buy back programme. OQEP continues to focus on growth, operational excellence, portfolio optimisation, generating robust and predictable cash flow, and ensuring long-term value for its shareholders."

MSX index breaks 4,700-point barrier as rally extends for 5th consecutive week

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Muscat Stock Exchange's (MSX) main index recorded new gains last week, surpassing the 4,700-point threshold and extending its winning streak to five consecutive weeks.

The index reached 4,777 points – its highest level since early November – before trimming gains and closing the week at 4,718 points, up 64 points overall. Sectoral indices also posted positive performances, led by the Industrial Sector Index, which climbed 116 points. The Services Sector Index rose by 78 points, the Financial Sector Index by 27 points, and the Shariah Index by approximately 8 points.

This upward trend was supported by increased institutional investment in the MSX and growing investor optimism regarding improved financial results, following the recent announcement of listed public joint-stock companies' earnings for the first half of the year.

Last week, the Muscat Stock Exchange recorded a market capitalisation gain of RO178.2mn, reaching RO28.821bn by the close of trading on Thursday.



Trading value at the Muscat Stock Exchange surged by 64% to RO135.1mn last week, compared with RO82.3mn the previous week. The number of executed transactions also rose by 26.5%, from 10,593 to 13,400

Trading value surged by 64% to RO135.1mn, compared with RO82.3mn the previous week. The number of executed transactions also rose by 26.5%, from 10,593 to 13,400.

OQ Base Industries led trading activity, with trades valued at RO36.5mn – accounting for 27% of total trading value. Bank Muscat followed with RO22.2mn,

Oman Flour Mills with RO18.7mn, OQ Exploration and Production with RO16.5mn, and Sohar International with RO12.7mn, representing 9.4% of the total.

A total of 47 securities advanced last week, while 28 declined and 12 remained unchanged. Dhofar Power Generation Company posted the highest gain, rising 32.7% to

close at 77bz. Building Materials Industries increased by 25.4% to close at 79bz, and Al Suwadi Energy climbed 17.5% to reach 94bz.

Among the biggest losers, United Finance bonds fell 30% to close at 70bz. Barka Water and Power shares declined by 12.2% to 180bz, and Oman Arab Bank's 2024 mandatory convertible bonds dropped 9% to close at RO1.

In a significant development, OQ Exploration and Production announced its intention to repurchase a portion of its listed shares on the Muscat Stock Exchange. The company plans to buy between 45mn and 60mn shares at market price. The re-

purchase process will commence on August 9 and continue until February 9, 2026, or until the targeted number of shares has been acquired.

Following the announcement, OQEP's share price fell by 16bz – from 348bz to 332bz. The share had previously seen a price increase after the company's extraordinary general meeting on June 24 approved an amendment to its articles of association, introducing a provision related to share buybacks.

Last week also saw the launch of Ahlibank's pre-emptive rights issue, which is open to shareholders from July 24 to 28. Valued at RO50mn, the bank announced that share allocation will take place on July 30. The offering, priced at 142bz per share, is part of Ahlibank's efforts to raise capital.

Ahlibank's share closed at 150bz at the end of the week's trading, down two baisas from the previous close. Four transactions were executed, amounting to RO10,600. Meanwhile, the pre-emptive rights saw 51 transactions involving 91mn rights, valued at RO96,000, with prices ranging between one and two baisas.

Global natural gas demand growth set to accelerate in 2026, says IEA

Paris, France – Following a slow-down in 2025, growth in global demand for natural gas is expected to rise in 2026, according to the IEA's latest quarterly Gas Market Report.

The report provides a short-term outlook for natural gas supply, demand, trade and more in 2025 and 2026. It finds that market fundamentals remained tight in the first half of 2025 due to a combination of lower Russian piped gas exports to the European Union, relatively modest growth in liquefied natural gas (LNG) output and higher storage

injection needs in Europe.

In this context, and amid elevated macroeconomic uncertainty, global natural gas demand growth is forecast to slow from 2.8% in 2024 to around 1.3% in 2025. The increase this year is expected to be almost entirely driven by North America and Europe, with the growth in consumption in the Asia-Pacific region – where many markets tend to be sensitive to higher prices – falling to its weakest annual rate since the energy crisis in 2022.

The report sees global de-



mand growth picking up again in 2026 and accelerating to around 2% as a considerable increase in LNG supply eases market fundamentals and fosters stronger demand growth in Asia. In 2026, LNG supply is set to rise by 7%, or 40 bcm – its largest increase since 2019 – as new projects come online in the United States, Canada and Qatar.

The report includes a special section on the role of the Middle East in global gas markets, noting that geopolitical tensions in the region have fuelled recent price volatility.

"The backdrop for global gas markets is shifting as we enter the second half of this year and look towards 2026. The wave of LNG supply that is set to come online is poised to ease fundamentals and spur additional demand, especially in Asia," said IEA Director of Energy Markets and Security Keisuke Sadamori.

"However, our latest forecast is subject to unusually high levels of uncertainty over the global macroeconomic outlook and the volatile geopolitical environment. The IEA continues to monitor gas markets closely and to work with

stakeholders around the world to support security of supply."

In the first half of 2025, global natural gas consumption in Europe increased by 6.5% year-over-year, primarily supported by the electricity sector amid lower power generation from wind and hydro. While this should not be interpreted as a structural trend, such episodes highlight the key role gas-fired power plants often play in ensuring electricity supply security in markets with higher shares of variable renewables.

WAM

ECB keeps rates unchanged as inflation hits 2% target; Lagarde urges caution

Piero Cingari

After a year of uninterrupted rate cuts, the European Central Bank (ECB) hit the pause button on Thursday, with President Christine Lagarde saying Frankfurt is now in a good place as inflation returns to target.

In a unanimous decision, the ECB Governing Council kept interest rates unchanged, holding the deposit facility rate at 2%.

"We are at 2% inflation, which is our medium-term target," Lagarde said, striking a cautiously confident tone at the post-meeting press conference.

While the eurozone economy has shown signs of resilience, Lagarde warned that trade tensions, a stronger euro, and geopolitical uncertainty continue to cloud the outlook. "We are well-positioned to deal with turbulent waters," she added.

Lagarde reaffirmed the ECB's data-driven stance, stressing that decisions would continue to be made on a meeting-by-meeting basis.

"We are not pre-committing to any particular rate path," she said.

Inflation in focus, but no signs of urgency

Annual inflation rose to 2% in June from 1.9% in May. While energy prices increased on a monthly basis, they remained lower than a year ago, Lagarde



The European Central Bank kept rates unchanged as inflation hit its 2% target. ECB chief Cristine Lagarde urged patience, citing global risks and reaffirming a data-driven approach

remains firmly at 2%."

Trade tensions weigh on outlook

While recent surveys point to continued expansion in both manufacturing and services, the ECB warned that downside risks to growth persist, particularly from escalating trade disputes and financial market volatility.

Lagarde was asked whether the recent appreciation of the euro could affect inflation.

She responded that the ECB does not target exchange rates, but does monitor them carefully as they feed into the bank's inflation forecasts.

In response to speculation about a potential trade deal between the US and EU, Lagarde said the ECB is not in a negotiating position, but noted that "the sooner trade uncertainty is resolved, the less we'll have to deal with, which would be welcomed by any economic actor, including ourselves."

Lagarde confirmed that the ECB will reassess its outlook in September when new projections are published. Until then, the message is clear: no rush, no promises, just patience.

"There will be plenty of data in the coming months," she said.

"Our collective determination is to keep inflation at 2%, proceed meeting by meeting, and remain data dependent."

(Source: Euronews.com)

Trump pushes US Fed for big interest rate cuts

Terry Lane

US President Donald Trump urged the Federal Reserve to lower interest rates again, but this time in a construction zone.

The president and some of his allies toured the Federal Reserve buildings under construction on Thursday. In the past two weeks, Trump has ramped up his criticism of the cost overruns on the building project. Analysts said Trump's public upbraiding of the construction was potentially laying the groundwork for firing Fed Chair Jerome Powell.



US President Donald Trump and Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell tour the Federal Reserves headquarters renovation project on Thursday in Washington, DC

Donald Trump urged the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates by three percentage points, saying it would help the housing market and save the federal government on interest payments

Trump seemingly walked back some of his threats against Powell, saying he didn't believe it was "necessary" to fire him. However, Trump did not back off from his insistence that the central bank should cut its influential federal funds rate at its meeting next week.

Trump said the Fed's stance on interest rates is holding back economic progress. The Federal Reserve has held interest rates in the 4.25% to 4.5% range throughout the year as it waits to see how tariffs will affect the economy.

"Everything is good. The one thing we have to do is get housing prices down and get interest rates down so people can buy a house," Trump said.

Trump said interest rates should be cut by three percentage points. However, that is unlikely to happen in one meeting. The Fed typically makes cuts of a quarter-point at a time. The last time the Fed cut rates an entire percentage point was March 2020 at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Before that, they cut one percentage point in December 2008, during the Great Recession.

Trump's allies are also pressuring Powell and his colleagues.

According to a Bloomberg News report, Azoria Capital's James Fishback filed a lawsuit today to force the Federal Reserve to open up meetings of the Federal Open Market Committee to observers. The Fed has always conducted its meetings behind closed doors.

Presidents have rarely visited the Federal Reserve, with former President George W. Bush's visit in 2006 being the last time it occurred.

(Source: Investopedia.com)

Pakistan says 'very close' to finalising trade deal with US

Washington, US – Pakistan is "very close" to finalising a trade deal with the US, the country's top diplomat said on Friday, expressing optimism over growing economic ties between the two nations.

"I think we are very close to finalising [a deal] with the US," Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said during a conversation at the Atlantic Council in Washington.

"Our teams have been here in Washington... a committee has been tasked by the Prime Minister to fine-tune now. It's not going to be months, not even weeks – just days," Dar said.

His remarks came just hours after meeting with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio at the State Department, where the two discussed bilateral and regional issues, including strengthening bilateral trade and enhancing collaboration in the critical minerals and mining sectors.

Dar said the agreement would include cooperation on trade and minerals, and he invited US entrepreneurs to invest in Pakistan's vast resources, particularly in mining and offshore gas.

He also said institutions like the US Export-Import Bank and the World Bank are ready to support American investors.

"There is great potential," he added, noting Pakistan's natural resources are valued at \$6–8tn.

Anadolu Agency



Ishaq Dar

Unaudited Interim condensed financial statements for the six-month period ended 30th June 2025

BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Muscat City Desalination Company SAOG ("MCDC" or the "Company"), I am pleased to present the Directors' Report together with the unaudited financial statements of the Company for the six-month period ended on 30 June 2025.

Health, Safety and Environment (HSE)

The HSE performance of the Company to date has been satisfactory, with no Lost Time Accidents ("LTA"). The operator entity, Muscat City Desalination Operations and Maintenance Company LLC ("MCDOMC") has completed 3,410 days without any LTA since commercial operations commenced on 19 February 2016. Similarly, there were no environmental incidents for the same period.

Operations

In the first half of 2025, the Company achieved a higher availability of 97.77%, as compared to 96.77% during the same period in 2024. The water dispatch during the first six months of 2025 was 30,565,328m³, a decrease of 3.9% as compared to 31,806,996m³ during the same period in 2024. The total forced outage rate for the six-month period ending on 30 June 2025 has been 0.25% (30 June 2024: 0.12%).

Financial Results

The Company's revenue for the first half of 2025 was RO 8.745 million whilst the direct operating cost being RO 5.600 million. Accordingly, the gross profit for the period was RO 3.145 million, which is 1.2% lower as compared to the corresponding period last year. General and administrative expenses for the first half of 2025 were RO 0.495 million, which is higher by 1.6% as compared to the corresponding period last year. Finance costs for the first six months of 2025 were RO 1.223 million, which is 8.5% lower than the finance costs incurred for the corresponding period last year.

The Company recorded profit before tax ("PBT") of RO 1.425 million, which is 3.0% higher than the PBT for the same period last year. Overall, the Company achieved profit after tax of RO 1.202 million for the period as compared to profit after tax of RO 1.164 million for the corresponding period in 2024.

As of 30 June 2025, the share price of MCDC was 70 Baizas (30 June 2024: 71 Baizas).

During the Annual General Meeting held on 23 March 2025 ("AGM"), the Company's shareholders resolved to authorize the Board of Directors to determine and distribute cash dividends in May and November 2025, out of the retained earnings of the Company as reflected in the Company's audited financial statements for the financial year ended on 31 December 2024, provided that the aggregate amount of the dividends shall not exceed Baiza 5.143 per share (i.e. totalling circa RO 800,000), to the Company's shareholders who are registered in the Company's shareholders' register at Muscat Clearing & Depository Company SAOC as at dates to be determined by the Board of Directors.

Pursuant to the authority granted by the shareholders at the above-mentioned AGM, the Board of Directors, at its meeting held on 23 April 2025, has resolved to distribute cash dividends with a value of Baiza 2.572 per share out of the Company's retained profits for the period ended 31 December 2024 to the shareholders who are registered in the Company's register at Muscat Clearing & Depository Company SAOC as at 15 May 2025, amounting to circa RO 400,000. The dividend was paid in May 2025.

Corporate Governance

The Board of Directors and Management of the Company believe in the importance of the internal control system. The Company has a comprehensive system of internal controls in place. The Company has periodically carried out comprehensive review of its key internal policies and procedures in order to ensure its compliance.

The Audit Committee has approved the Internal Audit Plan for 2025 which is being implemented throughout the year.

Information Security

The Company has developed information technology ("IT") and security policy and procedures pursuant to the Financial Services Authority (previously the Capital Market Authority) ("FSA") Circular No. E/1/2022 on Information Security Guidelines for Public Listed Companies. Some enhancements to the Company's IT systems and controls have been implemented, whereas some longer-term enhancement projects are being implemented.

During the second half of the financial year, assessments of the policy, procedures and IT infrastructures will be conducted by consultants who are accredited by the relevant authorities in Oman to ensure that the company's information security measures are robust, compliant with regulations, and effectively protect against potential threats and vulnerabilities.

The Internal Audit Unit will review the implementation of the enhancement projects with supervision by the Audit Committee.

Future Outlook

All reasonable and prudent measures have been and will continue to be taken by the Company to ensure high standards of health, safety and environmental compliance, and to sustain and improve reliability and availability going forward.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to extend our utmost appreciation and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik bin Taimur Al Said and His Government for their continued support and encouragement to the private sector by creating an environment that allows the Company to participate effectively in the growth of the Sultanate's economy and to contribute in the building of a strong nation.

Tamer Cankardes
Chairman of the Board



MUSCAT CITY
DESALINATION
COMPANY SAOG

Unaudited interim condensed statement of financial position as at 30th June 2025

	Unaudited 30 June 2025	Audited 31 December 2024
	RO'000s	RO'000s
Assets		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	76,384	77,654
Lease asset (right of use assets)	217	222
Non-current portion of fair value of derivative financial instruments	1,132	1,892
Total non-current assets	77,733	79,768
Current assets		
Trade and other receivables	1,816	1,568
Cash and cash equivalents	2,529	2,286
Current portion of fair value of derivative financial instruments	116	189
Total current assets	4,461	4,043
Total assets	82,194	83,811
Equity and Liabilities		
Equity		
Share capital	15,555	15,555
Legal reserve	3,040	2,920
Retained earnings	5,113	4,431
	23,708	22,906
Hedging Reserve	1,060	1,769
Net Equity	24,768	24,675
Non-current liabilities		
Non-current portion of term loans	37,003	38,796
Provision for decommissioning obligation	748	724
Deferred tax	6,271	6,173
Lease liability - non-current portion	239	241
Shareholders' bridge loans	5,869	5,870
Shareholders' stand-by equity loans	754	754
End-of-service benefits	30	52
Total non-current liabilities	50,914	52,610
Current liabilities		
Current portion of term loans	3,780	3,841
Lease liability – current portion	4	4
Shareholders' bridge loans	600	600
Trade and other payables	2,128	2,081
Total current liabilities	6,512	6,526
Total liabilities	57,426	59,136
Total equity and liabilities	82,194	83,811
Net assets per share (RO)	0.159	0.159

Unaudited condensed statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the six-month period ended 30th June 2025

	Unaudited 2025	Unaudited 2024
	RO'000s	RO'000s
Operating revenue	8,745	8,961
Operating cost	(5,600)	(5,777)
Gross profit	3,145	3,184
Other income	(2)	24
Administrative and general expenses	(495)	(487)
Finance costs (net)	(1,223)	(1,337)
Profit for the period before tax	1,425	1,384
Income tax	(223)	(220)
Profit for the period	1,202	1,164
Other comprehensive income / (loss) for the period –		
<i>Items that may be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss</i>		
Changes in fair values of derivative financial instruments	(834)	490
Deferred tax on changes in fair values of derivative financial instruments	125	(74)
Other comprehensive income / (loss) for the period net of income tax	(709)	416
Total comprehensive income / (loss) for the period	493	1,580
Earnings per share – basic and diluted	0.008	0.007

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests them either in Arabic or English to the company's address at PO Box: 1935, PC: 114, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman or go to our website www.mcddoman.com

Sohar International backs 3rd edition of Sport Spark 2025

Reinforcing its long-standing commitment to youth empowerment, community development, and the promotion of impactful local partnerships that contribute to in-country value, Sohar International has announced its strategic partnership for the third edition of Sport Spark 2025.

Hosted at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), the immersive indoor sporting event spans over 9,000sqm of fully air-conditioned halls and is organised in collaboration with the Muscat Governorate, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and several private sector partners, a press release said.

The event was officially inaugurated in the presence of Ahmed Mohammed al Humaidi, chairman of Muscat Municipality and Abdulwahid Mohamed al Murshidi, CEO of Sohar International, along with distinguished representatives from the public and private sectors. Running until August 16 across Halls 1 and 2 at OCEC, the event offers a dynamic environment that brings together sports, innovation, and community engagement.

Murshidi stated, "In light of the challenges facing communities today, it is essential to prioritise the promotion of a healthy



and active lifestyle among youth and all individuals. Sporting events like Sport Spark play a vital role in providing a safe and motivating environment that enables everyone to engage in

physical activity, especially during seasons when outdoor exercise is less feasible. By supporting this initiative, we reaffirm our commitment to creating opportunities that enhance

both physical and mental well-being, nurture local sporting talent, and foster a spirit of collaboration and community.

"We believe that investing in such initiatives is an investment

in the future of our generations and reflects the important role national institutions play in contributing effectively to social and economic development. Sohar International remains steadfast

in working alongside its partners to support initiatives that cultivate inspiring and sustainable environments, helping to develop skills and promote overall community welfare."

Through this strategic partnership, Sohar International underscores its continued support for forward-thinking initiatives that transcend traditional frameworks, providing an inclusive and enriching space for youth and families to connect, develop, and thrive. Now in its third year, Sport Spark continues to grow in scale and impact, offering more than 20 sports disciplines—including the introduction of indoor golf and hockey.

The event welcomes children, youth, and families to a well-structured environment under the guidance of professional coaches, tailored to various age groups and skill levels. This year's edition features a host of first-time activities in Oman, such as the Muscat Night Run with 2.5km and 5km track options, the Football Academies Cup with participation from 23 local and regional teams, and the Ninja Obstacle Series, offering a modern, high-adrenaline take on obstacle-based competitions.

In addition to sports tournaments and e-sports challenges, the event also caters to the corporate sector by offering customized packages for team-building days and professional recreation.

Bank Muscat raises awareness on effective wealth management

Bank Muscat has always aimed at positioning itself as the trusted and preferred partner for customers seeking better returns on their savings and investments. With a focus on personalised investment options, the bank's wealth management solutions are set to redefine the investing experience of customers.

In line with this vision, Bank Muscat has launched a special campaign to raise awareness about the significance of effective wealth management. This initiative is designed to assist individuals in achieving their financial goals by providing tailored investment plans and personalized wealth management services. The bank's investment offerings encompass a range of products, across mutual funds, bonds and other asset classes, a press release said.



Customers of Asalah Priority Banking and Al Jawhar Privilege Banking can access these investment offerings, under the guidance of an experienced wealth managers and can start investing as per their risk appetite, with the minimum applicable amount for local and international securities. Abdulnasir al Raisi, general

manager of Personal Banking at Bank Muscat, said, "We offer customised wealth solutions designed to meet the unique needs of our customers. With a dedicated team of certified wealth managers, the Bank is committed to guiding customers through their investment journey, ensuring they have access

to a wide range of investment options, including local and international securities, bonds and mutual funds, along with comprehensive portfolio tracking. I would like to thank the bank's customers for their trust in our services and invite them to take advantage of the wealth solutions we provide, for planning and achieving their long-term financial goals."

The bank provides tailored investment solutions to help high profile customers achieve their financial aspirations, be it retirement planning, generation of passive income or wealth diversification. Some of the common investment options include: securing a stable, predictable income through interest especially for retirees, generation of passive income from investments, focusing on long-term growth.



LG unveils 100" QNED EVO TV

LG Electronics (LG) ushered in a new era of cinematic brilliance in Oman with the regional launch of its groundbreaking 100-inch QNED evo TV, hosted at the Sharaf DG outlet in Mall of Oman.

The unveiling was a grand affair attended by Sudhir M, Group CEO, OTE Group, Sandeep Attri, senior general manager, OTE, Goli V Rao, assistant GM, OTE, Subir Mokha, country head - Oman, Sharaf DG, and Pradeep Dwivedi, merchandising manager - Oman, Sharaf DG, along-

side media representatives and premium customers, a press release said.

The new 100-inch QNED evo promises to transform living spaces into stunning entertainment hubs, combining AI-powered technology, cinematic picture quality, and intelligent personalisation. This ultra-large TV is a testament to LG's commitment to elevating home entertainment experiences and delivering innovation tailored to the Gulf market's appetite for luxury, scale, and immersive de-

sign.

At the heart of the new QNED evo is LG's Dynamic QNED Color technology - a Nano-based color gamut solution achieving 100% Color Volume certification, presenting images with incredible richness and vibrancy. The 8 AI Processor 4K Gen2 further enhances every frame, upscaling content to 4K and delivering a 9.1.2 virtual surround sound experience that adapts to individual preferences through advanced voice recognition and AI assistance.

Visit Qatar partners with Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre

Visit Qatar announces a year-long partnership with the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre (NMACC) in Mumbai — a first-of-its-kind, multi-disciplinary space dedicated to celebrating arts and heritage — marking the beginning of a new era of global cultural confluence.

This collaboration reinforces Visit Qatar's commitment to establish the country as a premier destination for Indian visitors. Through this partnership, Visit Qatar looks forward to welcoming the Indian visitors and invite them to come and explore the exceptional experiences that blend luxury, heritage, and world-

class infrastructure, a press release said.

Commenting on this partnership, Eng Abdulaziz Ali al Mawlawi, CEO of Visit Qatar, said, "India is among the most important strategic tourism markets and currently represents the second-largest source of visitors to Qatar. Our partnership with the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre reflects our commitment to positioning Qatar as a preferred destination for Indian travellers seeking premium and holistic travel experiences. Through such high-level collaborations, we aim to strengthen our presence in key markets."

Muzn Islamic provides Shari'ah-compliant benefits

NBO Muzn Islamic Banking offers a diverse range of eco-friendly credit cards that combine sustainability, global privileges, and full Shari'ah compliance, designed to meet the needs of a wide range of customer segments.

Available in Gold, Platinum and Signature tiers, the cards are structured on Qardh Al Hasan principles and provide a host of premium services tailored for modern and responsible spending, a press release said.

Commenting on the offers, Salima Obaid al Marzooqi, assistant general manager - chief Islamic Banking officer at NBO, said, "At Muzn Islamic Banking, we are continuously reimagining how Islamic finance can meet the evolving needs of our customers. Our credit card is not only based on ethical banking principles but also reflects our commitment to environmental



sustainability. By integrating global lifestyle benefits with Shari'ah-compliant financial solutions, we provide customers with a seamless way to align their values with their everyday choices. This is yet another step forward in our mission to deliver innovation that honours tradition while serving the needs of a dynamic, conscientious market."

The Gold Credit Card offers essential benefits including medical and travel assistance, car

rental discounts and special hotel deals through Booking.com and Agoda. Likewise, the Platinum Credit Card includes additional privileges such as airport lounge access, exclusive offers through the Xperience with Entertainer app and enhanced travel privileges. Going further, the Signature Credit Card combines all the features of the Platinum Credit Card and further includes multi-trip travel insurance, concierge and chauffeur

services, airport transfers and premium benefits on international bookings and rentals.

Direct Debit E-Mandate

Meanwhile, NBO Muzn Islamic Banking has announced the launch of its Shari'ah-compliant Direct Debit E-Mandate service, to streamline recurring payments for both individuals and businesses.

Available on Muzn Islamic Banking's Corporate Internet Banking services and the Muzn Islamic Banking app, the new digital solution complements the nationwide digital transformation efforts by providing a reliable and efficient way to manage high volumes of transactions without delays.

Salima Obaid al Marzooqi, assistant general manager and chief Islamic Banking officer at NBO, said, "At Muzn Islamic Banking, we recognise that customers seek so-

lutions that align with their values, not just digital services. The Direct Debit E-Mandate reflects our commitment to build a future-ready, Shari'ah-compliant banking ecosystem that meets the evolving needs of both individuals and businesses. It also offers operational efficiency, transparency and trust within a secure, user-centric platform."

The Direct Debit E-Mandate enables customers to schedule automated payments directly from their bank accounts, reducing manual processing and administrative costs. This fully digital service helps to ensure cash flow stability, avoid payment delays and have greater control over financial commitments. It also allows customers to create, approve, modify or cancel payment mandates while receiving real-time notifications for all mandate activity and payment transactions.



Diploma in Waqf Leadership cohort-1 graduation held

In a groundbreaking initiative to advance the future strategic vision for leading and developing the Waqf sector and establishing a comprehensive, sustainable Islamic financial model, the Professional Diploma in Waqf Leadership proudly celebrated the graduation of its inaugural cohort.

This milestone marks the fruition of a strategic alliance between Bank Nizwa, Tawafuq Financial Consultancy, and the College of Sharia Sciences, dedicated to cultivating national human capital specialized in Waqf leadership, a press release said.

The graduation ceremony was held under the esteemed patronage of H E Dr Mohammed

bin Said bin Khalfan al Maamari, Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs, and attended by senior officials, distinguished leaders from the Waqf and banking sectors, and representatives from the partnering institutions.

Since its launch earlier this year, the Professional Diploma has underscored the critical importance of harmonizing rigorous academic research with specialised practical application in the endowment sector. Its mission is to equip a new generation of leaders with the expertise and vision required to spearhead this pivotal sector.

Developed through a robust strategic partnership—Bank Nizwa serving as the banking partner, Tawafuq as the executive

partner specialising in Islamic financial consultancy, and the College of Sharia Sciences as the knowledge partner—the programme delivers a comprehensive, tailored educational experience meticulously designed to address the unique characteristics and operational demands of the Waqf sector.

Under the expert guidance of Dr Mohammed Fakhri Suwailah, Islamic Banking and Endowments advisor and senior manger of Waqf Investment at Bank Nizwa, participants engaged in an intensive curriculum covering Islamic jurisprudence, legal frameworks, corporate governance, risk management, regulatory compliance, performance metrics, contemporary Waqf investment strategies,

internal and Sharia audit, and Waqf accounting.

By embracing an innovative pedagogical approach that transcends conventional methodologies, the diploma programme has solidified a management paradigm focused on maximising the developmental and investment impact of endowments. Graduates have been empowered with the essential tools, insights, and competencies to elevate operational efficiency, uphold transparency standards, and ensure the long-term sustainability of the sector.

Reflecting on the occasion, Khaled al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa, stated, “This milestone underscores our firm commitment to partnering with like-

minded institutions that share our vision of advancing Islamic finance through the development of highly skilled and specialised professionals. Initiatives of this nature are essential in cultivating individuals with a profound understanding of Waqf systems, alongside the analytical and managerial competencies needed to thrive in today’s evolving institutional landscape.

“This programme embodies our belief in structured, purposeful learning as a catalyst for sustainable transformation and meaningful impact within the sector. We are proud to have partnered with Tawafuq and the College of Sharia Sciences in empowering the first cohort of graduates of the Waqf Leadership Diploma.”

Radisson Blu Sohar celebrates Oman Leadership Awards 2025

Radisson Blu Hotel and Resort, Sohar proudly announces the remarkable achievements of general manager Salah al Mamari and executive chef Mahmoud Eladly, who have been named Oman’s Most Influential General Manager and Most Influential Chef, respectively, at the prestigious Oman Leadership Awards 2025.

Presented by CMO Global, a leading platform in the travel and hospitality industry, the awards recognise outstanding leadership and contributions by general managers, chefs, and senior professionals who have demonstrated excellence in branding, innovation, service delivery, and community impact, a press release said.

With over 20 years of industry experience, general manager Salah al Mamari has established himself as a visionary leader, steering Radisson Blu Hotel and Resort, Sohar to new heights in guest satisfaction, operational performance, and sustainability.

“I am honoured to receive this award and proud to lead a team that exemplifies innovation, collaboration, and excellence,” he said. “This recognition is a reflection of their unwavering dedication to creating exceptional guest experiences.”

Eladly has transformed the hotel’s culinary scene by artfully blending traditional flavours with modern creativity. From crafting



Salah al Mamari



Mahmoud Eladly

menus to orchestrating large-scale culinary events, he has been instrumental in shaping the hotel’s gastronomic identity.

He said, “Being part of Radisson Blu Hotel and Resort, Sohar is equally rewarding, with each day bringing fresh challenges and opportunities. This recognition inspires us to keep innovating and delighting our guests with memorable dining experiences.”

Kia Carens and Carnival - ideal for families, business

Offering best-in-class cargo and passenger space, the Kia Carens and Kia Carnival present a bold take on utility. Designed to deliver optimal functionality for businesses, Kia’s MPV range takes a multifaceted approach, enabling smooth and convenient daily operations.

The Kia Carnival delivers a fresh perspective on the next generation of vehicles that transcend this traditionally utilitarian segment. Powered by a dynamic 3.5ltr V6 engine, it delivers 268hp and best-in-class 627 litres of luggage capacity—raising the bar in both utility and performance, a press release said.

Equipped with multi-seating configurations, including Slide-Flex 2nd-row seating and 3rd-row AC vents, the Carnival also features a Keyless Entry System, button start, Bluetooth voice recognition system, Integrated Display (4" Cluster + 12" Navigation or 12.3" Cluster + 12.3" Navigation), and a wireless smartphone charger. With best-



in-class passenger and cargo room, and seamless connectivity, it ensures utility in every aspect of life.

Make deliveries on time and carry out daily operations effortlessly. The Kia Carnival is a complete package—it enhances driver confidence with Advanced Driver Assistance System (ADAS) features—the most comprehensive standard ADAS suite in its segment—and includes advanced features like Blind-Spot Collision Avoidance Assist, Forward Collision Avoidance Assist (FCA 2), and Lane Following Assist (LKA), maximising safety from all angles.

For businesses and families alike, the SUV-inspired design of the 7-seater Kia Carens offers exceptional utility for small and medium-sized businesses. It’s a versatile solution for a wide range of enterprises—from corporate travel and tourism operators to small bakery and restaurant owners, taxi services, and corporate fleets by the day—or as an ideal family car for school drop-offs.

Designed with comfort in mind, the Carens is equipped with steering-mounted audio controls, a rear-view camera, smart key with button start and, roof-mounted AC vents.

Al Maha launches ‘Fuely Autofill’

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG is proud to announce the official launch of Fuely Autofill, a breakthrough in fuel delivery services and the first fully automated B2B fuelling solution in the GCC.

Developed with cutting-edge RFID technology, Fuely Autofill revolutionises how businesses manage fleet fuelling by eliminating manual intervention and ensuring absolute precision, safety, and transparency, a press release said.

The system works by installing an RFID tag on both the



Fuely vehicle dispenser and the customer’s vehicle. Once in proximity, the tags communicate, and the system automatically dispenses the correct grade and volume of fuel.

“Fuely Autofill represents a major step forward in fleet man-

agement and fuel logistics. By removing human intervention, we eliminate the risks of error and fraud while offering unmatched convenience and control to our customers,” said Ahmed Salim al Kindi, Lubricant, Fuel Cards and Retail Sales via Internet Manager.



الشركة العالمية لإدارة الفنادق ش . م . م

Hotel Management Company International SAOG

THE CHEDI, MUSCAT شيدى . مسقط

ص.ب: 964 الخوير - الرمز البريدي 133، سلطنة عمان

P. O. Box 964, P.C. 133, Al Khuwair, Sultanate of Oman

BOARD OF DIRECTOR'S REPORT

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I hereby present the second quarterly report ending 30 June 2025 of the Hotels Management Company International SAOG.

The company achieved the following financial results during the period:

1. The company generated total revenue of RO. 4.882 million (vs. related period previous year RO. 4.522 million) which is a increase of 7.97% as compared to the corresponding period of the previous year in total revenue.

2. The company has Net income after income tax of RO 0.452 million vs. related period previous year net income of RO. 0.499 million. It shows a decrease of 9.42% as compared to the previous year of the same period.

Achievement:

1. The first six months were among the best-performing periods for The Chedi Muscat since the pandemic. After completing half a year, The Chedi has not only achieved its budgeted figures but has also surpassed them, with a 2% increase in overall revenue and 9% in room revenue. These results were achieved without compromising its leading position within its competitive set.

2. The Chedi's main source markets remain stable, and it maintains its popularity and customer base in these markets through various sales, marketing, and PR activities.

3. The resort consistently aims to provide unobtrusive and genuine service to its guests. The low staff turnover and their loyalty continually help The Chedi sustain its top position on Tripadvisor and similar customer feedback platforms, which contributes to its success and helps retain its loyal clientele.

4. The resort has been nominated for numerous prestigious awards such as the World Travel Awards, the World Spa Awards, Travel + Leisure - World's Best Awards, Condé Nast Readers' Choice Awards, the World Culinary Awards, Destination Deluxe, Forbes Travel Guide, among others.

Outlook

This summer started off with a great performance in June. The Chedi managed to achieve its room revenue budget for the month, and the coming months look positive despite the recent political developments in the region.

Oman Air is making positive progress in its turnaround strategy, increasing its network to 25 countries and 44 routes. A new route to Amsterdam and a future direct flight to Japan will significantly boost Oman's tourist arrivals. From 1st July, Oman Air will commence flying to Amsterdam, providing a major advantage to travellers not only from the Netherlands but also from the entire Benelux region.

UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 June 2025

	30-Jun 2025	30-Jun 2024
Non-current Assets	4,288,432	6,292,688
Property, plant and equipment	4,263,181	5,178,867
Fixed deposits – long term	-	681,074
Deferred tax Asset	25,251	432,747
Current Assets	4,335,367	5,141,629
Inventories	378,227	381,611
Debtors and Prepayments	596,550	612,835
Due from related parties	3,028	12,470
Bank and cash	3,357,562	4,134,713
Total assets	8,623,799	11,434,317
Current Liabilities	1,339,679	1,960,386
Current portion of term loan	-	700,000
Creditors and Accruals	1,333,607	1,250,963
Due to related parties	6,072	9,423
Income Tax payable	0	0
Non-current liabilities	346,887	2,299,228
Term Loan	-	1,750,000
End of service benefits	346,887	549,228
Total liabilities	1,686,566	4,259,614
Net assets	6,937,233	7,174,703
Equity		
Share capital	3,000,000	3,000,000
Legal reserve	1,000,000	1,000,000
Retained earnings		
/(accumulated losses)	2,937,233	3,174,703
Total equity	6,937,233	7,174,703

UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME For the Period ending 30 June 2025

	30-June 2025	30-June 2024
Turnover/ Revenue	4,882,289	4,521,820
Operating costs	(3,874,405)	(3,489,719)
Operating profit	1,007,884	1,032,101
Administration & selling expense	(332,303)	(328,643)
Impairment loss/reversal of loss on trade receivables	(7,460)	(12,110)
Board Remuneration	(49,000)	0
Management & licence fees	(157,386)	(143,670)
Net Operating Profit	461,735	547,678
Interest expense	71,244	88,140
Interest income	(3,071)	(63,985)
Profit on disposal of property, plant and equipment	1,524	14,890
Profit for the period	531,432	586,723
Taxation	(79,715)	(88,008)
Profit after tax provision	451,717	498,715
Earnings per share	0.151	0.166

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who request the company in either Arabic or English as requested within 7 days of receipt of the request.

China’s PM Li Qiang calls for global ‘consensus’ on AI regulation

Shanghai, China - Chinese Premier Li Qiang on Saturday urged the international community to build a global consensus on artificial intelligence (AI) governance, highlighting security risks amid the raging tech race between Beijing and Washington.

Speaking at the opening of the World Artificial Intelligence Conference (WAIC) in Shanghai, Li said it is prudent to look at 'how to find a balance between development and security (which) urgently requires further consensus from the entire society'.

Li also announced the creation of a Chinese-led body to promote global AI cooperation and open-source development to keep AI from becoming 'the preserve of a few countries and a few enterprises'.

The tech rivalry between US, China

The three-day WAIC event comes amid intensifying US-China competition in advanced AI technology.

Just days before, US President Donald Trump announced the slashing of AI regulations to maintain the US' dominance in the field even as Washington continues to restrict exports of high-end chips to China, citing national security concerns.

These restrictions are forcing Chinese companies to look for alternatives, with startup DeepSeek introducing an AI model in January that matched the performance of leading US systems, despite working on less advanced chips.

Li, without naming the US, criticised monopolistic control and called for open access to AI technologies, warning of insufficient supply of AI chips and restrictions on talent exchange otherwise. "Only by adhering to openness, sharing and fairness in access to intelligence can more countries and groups benefit from (AI)," he said.

At the WAIC opening ceremony, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a video message that AI regulation would be 'a defining test of international cooperation.'

More than 800 companies are participating in this year's WAIC, showcasing over 3,000 tech innovations.

DW



At least 13 Cambodians, including five soldiers, killed in clashes with Thailand

Phnom Penh/ Bangkok - At least eight Cambodian civilians and five soldiers were killed in cross-border fighting with Thailand, the Cambodian Defence Ministry said on Saturday.

Ministry spokeswoman Maly Socheata told a news conference in Phnom Penh that 21 Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) personnel and at least 50 civilians were also injured during heavy cross-border artillery fire, which began on Thursday, the Khmer Times reported.

A total of 35,829 Cambodian civilians have been displaced from high-risk areas in Preah Vihear, Oddar Meanchey and Pursat provinces. Thailand has reported 15 fatalities, including one soldier, during the clashes, which reportedly continued for a third straight day. Thousands of Thai people have also been displaced due to the clashes.

Thailand deployed fighter jets while Cambodia launched rockets in the clashes, with the two nations accusing each other of initiating the gunfire.



A total of 35,829 Cambodian civilians have been displaced from high-risk areas in Preah Vihear, Oddar Meanchey and Pursat provinces

Thailand has reported 15 fatalities, including one soldier, during the clashes between Southeast Asian neighbours, which continued for a third straight day

The Southeast Asian neighbours have a border dispute along Cambodia's Preah Vihear province and the northeastern province of Ubon Ratchathani in Thailand, which has renewed tensions since May 28 when a Cambodian soldier was killed.

The UN Security Council on Friday held an emergency private meeting in New York on the conflict, with the attendance of representatives of both Cambodia and Thailand.

"We asked for an immediate ceasefire - unconditionally - and we also call for a peaceful solution to the dispute," Cambodia's UN Ambassador Chhea Keo said after the meeting, adding that the council 'called for both parties to show maximum restraint and to resort to diplomacy'.

Anadolu Agency

Thai Navy dispatches vessels

Meanwhile, the Thai Navy dispatched four vessels Saturday near its border to support land forces, according to the Khaosod English news website.

The Royal Thai Navy launched the 'Trat Pikhat Pairee 1' (Trat Strike 1) operation against Cambodian forces on three points along the border, after the Cambodian army reportedly expanded its position, The Nation

GUARDIANS OF NATURE

A fishing boat returning home along a river, flanked by mangrove trees, at Tarumajaya village of Bekasi district, in West Java province, Indonesia, on the World Mangrove Day on Saturday (Xinhua)

Qatar-US Air Force One deal nears completion

Istanbul, Turkey - The US and Qatar are days from finalising an agreement for the transfer of a Boeing 747-8 aircraft to the Pentagon that is intended for future use as Air Force One, according to communication reviewed by *The Washington Post*.

A memorandum of understanding, dated July 7 and signed by US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth and Qatari Defence Minister Soud bin Abulrahman Al-Thani, describes the plane as an unconditional 'donation' to the US Department of Defence.

Sources familiar with the deal, however, said it is awaiting final approval following requested updates. Once completed, the US Air Force will begin renovating the aircraft, a process expected to cost hundreds of millions of



dollars, and take years.

Air Force Secretary Troy Meink told lawmakers renovations would cost less than US\$400mn and take under a year - claims disputed by some Democrats.

The deal sparked controversy after the Trump administration announced it in the spring.

Critics questioned the legality and practicality of the donation, especially amid reports that the plane might later be transferred to Trump's presidential library.

Hegseth declined to disclose renovation costs at a Senate hearing, citing national security, prompting sharp criticism from Democratic Senator Jack Reed.

"Why can't it be revealed in this setting?" Reed asked, expressing concern about transparency and budgeting.

The Pentagon reportedly plans to pull funding from the delayed Sentinel missile programme to finance the plane's refurbishment, with additional budget adjustments included in a recently passed US\$150bn defence package.

The final agreement, which emphasises compliance with US and Qatari laws, does not limit future use of the aircraft beyond stating it must follow American legal standards.

Previous language specifying US Air Force custody was removed during negotiations after objections from Washington.

Anadolu Agency

What has changed in Niger two years after the coup?

Niamey, Niger - On July 26, 2023, Niger was thrown into political turmoil. A coup d'état was announced on state television just hours after members of the presidential guard detained democratically elected President Mohamed Bazoum.

The coup was led by the head of the presidential guard, General Abdourahmane Tchiani, with support from elements of the nation's armed forces.

When he took power two years ago, Tchiani justified the coup by citing growing insecurity, harsh economic conditions, and what he described as excessive influence from Western powers, particularly the country's former colonial ruler,

France.

Niger has experienced multiple military takeovers in the past, but this time was different: Many citizens took to the streets to show their support for the military leaders.

But in the two years that followed, some analysts say little has changed for the better. "In some cases, the situation has worsened," Mutaru Mumuni Muqthar, executive director of the West African Centre for Counter Extremism, told DW.

With the events of July 26, Niger joined the ranks of neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso, which were already under military rule. In early 2024, Niger, along with Mali and Burkina



As Niger marks two years since the July 26, 2023 coup, the military junta faces a critical test

Faso, announced its withdrawal from the Economic Community of West African States, or ECOWAS. The move marked a major shift in the region, deepening the divide between the military-led governments and the bloc pushing for a return to civilian rule.

Job losses in non-profit sector

Niger's current leadership has forced many nongovernmental organisations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) - which had been assisting more than two million people affected by armed conflict - to shut down operations.

For some Nigeriens, especially those who lost their jobs following the leadership change, life has become more difficult.

"Right now, I'm suffering. It's been a year since we stopped," said Souley, 35, who lost his job as a nutrition researcher at a local NGO after the coup, in an interview with DW.

Mahamane, 32, also lost his position as an assistant coordinator at an NGO based in Tillabéri. "Right after the coup, funds weren't coming in regularly, and our activities were delayed," he said.

"Finally, they decided to stop funding altogether."

"There is a very constricted space for civil society or NGO

work, so there are a lot of job losses in that space," said Muqthar from the West African Centre for Counter Extremism.

Niger already struggles with high levels of youth unemployment. In 2023, the International Labour Organization estimated that about 23% of Nigeriens between the ages of 15 and 29 were unemployed - one of the highest youth unemployment rates in Africa.

Rights groups, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, have accused the junta of cracking down on freedom of the press and expression in the media and civil society.

DW

Gaza: Death stares at 100,000 kids

Children are facing imminent death due to complete lack of baby formula and nutritional supplements

Gaza City/Ankara - More than 100,000 children in the Gaza Strip, including 40,000 infants aged under 1, are facing imminent death due to the complete lack of baby formula and nutritional supplements, the Government Media Office in Gaza warned on Saturday.

In a statement, the office described the situation as an unfolding 'massacre in slow motion', accusing Israel of deliberately starving Gaza's youngest population through its blockade and closure of all crossings.

According to the office, mothers have resorted to feeding their babies water for days in the absence of formula, while hospitals and health centres are witnessing a daily surge in cases of acute and life-threatening malnutrition.

Health authorities in Gaza have reported 122 deaths so far due to starvation and malnutrition, including 83 children, amid the near-total collapse of the medical system and a critical shortage of basic food supplies.

Calling the crisis 'a shocking warning issued in the name of humanity and global conscience', the media office demanded the immediate entry of baby formula and nutritional supplements, the reopening of all crossings without conditions, the lifting of Israel's 'criminal siege', and urgent international intervention to halt a 'deliberate extermination campaign against children'.

The office concluded by holding the Israeli government and its international allies 'fully responsible for a looming crime against



Health authorities in Gaza have reported 122 deaths so far due to starvation and malnutrition, including 83 children

Mothers have resorted to feeding their babies water for days in the absence of baby formula, while hospitals and health centres are witnessing a daily surge in cases of life-threatening malnutrition

humanity', warning that continued global silence amounts to 'explicit complicity in the genocide of Gaza's children'.

Hamden denies US claims of aid theft
Meanwhile, Senior Hamas official

Izzat al-Rishq on Saturday rejected recent US claims that Hamas has stolen humanitarian aid in Gaza. In an official statement, Rishq said: "The allegations about Hamas stealing aid are politically motivated and baseless."

An unreported US Agency for

International Development (USAID) study examined 156 cases of lost or stolen aid between October 2023 and May 2025, and found no evidence of the Palestinian group Hamas benefiting from the US-supplied aid. The report contradicts claims by Israel and the US, which have been used to justify a controversial new armed private aid operation, which has resulted in over 1,000 deaths among aid-seekers.

The official noted that the American narrative diverts attention from 'the real obstacle to any ceasefire or humanitarian agree-

ment: the Israeli government led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu'. "These statements by (US President Donald) Trump and (US presidential envoy for the Middle East Steve) Witkoff do not align with the assessments of the mediators and contradict the reality of the negotiation process," he said.

Rishq affirmed that Hamas has engaged with the negotiations 'with full national responsibility and flexibility' since the beginning of the talks, aiming for a 'comprehensive agreement that ends the aggression and al-

At least 12 more killed in Gaza Strip

Gaza City, Palestine - At least 12 Palestinians were killed and several injured in a wave of Israeli airstrikes on Gaza City on Saturday, while 12 others were recovered from the rubble in the Morag area north of Rafah in southern Gaza, according to local civil defence and medical sources.

Rescue workers retrieved the bodies following coordination with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Rafah Civil Defence Directorate said in a statement.

The victims were transferred to the Nasser Medical Complex in Khan Younis, it added.

Separately, four people were killed and others wounded when an Israeli airstrike hit an apartment in the Al-Rimal neighbourhood in the western part of the city, medical officials said.

Three Palestinians were killed in an Israeli strike target-

ing a civilian gathering in Tel al-Hawa, west of Gaza City, medical sources told Anadolu.

Elsewhere in the Gaza Strip, another Palestinian was killed and several others injured in an Israeli attack on a group of civilians near the Bani Suheila roundabout, east of Khan Younis in the south of the territory.

The same sources said one person was killed and others wounded when Israeli artillery shelled a house in the Block 3 area of Al-Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza.

A young man and his wife died after debris from a nearby building collapsed on their tent following an Israeli bombing.

A Palestinian waiting for aid trucks in northern Gaza was shot and killed by Israeli forces while several other people also waiting for aid were injured by live fire in the Al-Waha area and transferred to the Al-Shifa Medical Complex in Gaza City for treatment.

Anadolu Agency

Iran: Nine people killed in gun, grenade attack on courthouse

Tehran, Iran - Nine people were killed on Saturday when unknown assailants launched a gun and grenade attack at a courthouse in southeastern Iran, local media reported.

The assault happened in the province of Sistan-Baluchistan, near the borders with Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The province frequently sees clashes between security forces and armed groups, including the Sunni group Jaish al-Adl (Army of Justice), which has demanded greater rights and autonomy for Iran's ethnic Baloch.

State news agency IRNA reported that the attack targeted a courthouse in Zahedan, the capital of southeastern Sistan-Baluchistan province.

Zahedan lies some 1,130km (700 miles) southeast of the capital, Tehran.

The province's deputy police commander, Alireza Daliri, said the attackers attempted to enter



People gather around a courthouse that was attacked, in Sistan-Baluchistan province, Iran, on Saturday

the building disguised as visitors.

The assailants threw a grenade into the building, Daliri said, killing several people inside.

The dead included at least six civilians - including a mother and child - and three assailants, IRNA reported. More than a dozen others were injured.

Citing eyewitnesses, the Baluch human rights group HAALVSH said several judiciary staff members and security per-

sonnel were killed or wounded.

IRNA said the three dead gunmen were killed in clashes with security forces following the attack. The Iranian judiciary's Mizan Online news site labelled the killings a 'terrorist attack'.

Sistan-Baluchistan province is home to Iran's Baloch minority, who have long complained of economic marginalisation and political exclusion. The province is one of the least developed

parts of Iran. Baloch are typically Sunni Muslims, whereas Iran is majority Shiite.

The Baloch homeland extends into Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan province, where residents have expressed similar grievances of economic marginalisation and where the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) group has carried out numerous attacks.

DW

Hundreds of Tunisians call for the fall of 'authoritarian regime'

Tunis, Tunisia - Hundreds of Tunisians marched through the capital on Friday to denounce President Kais Saied's increasingly authoritarian rule, as they chanted 'The people want the fall of the regime'.

Marking four years since his controversial power grab, the protesters criticised the 'authoritarian regime' for turning the country into an 'open-air prison'.

The demonstrators said Tunisia has slid into authoritarian rule under Saied, marked by mass arrests and politically driven trials aimed at crushing dissent.

Rallying under the banner 'The Republic is a large prison', the protesters, led by women, chanted slogans demanding the release of jailed opposition leaders, journalists and activists.

Four years ago, on July 25, 2021, Saied dissolved the parliament, removed the prime minister and began ruling by decree.



Protesters wave banners against Tunisia's President Kais Saied on Friday as they walk down a street

Critics branded the move as a coup.

Since then, Saied has dissolved key judicial bodies, dismissed judges and overseen the jailing of numerous opponents.

Most of Saied's prominent political opponents, including Rached Ghannouchi and Abir Moussi, are all behind bars.

"Tunisia has become an open-air prison," said Saib Souab, whose father, lawyer and Saied critic Ahmed Souab, is behind

bars. Even those not imprisoned live in fear of arrest, Souab said.

A 2024 report by rights group Amnesty International said that Tunisian authorities are using vague legal charges to arrest of critics of the government.

Monia Ibrahim, wife of jailed politician Abdelhamid Jelassi, told Reuters news agency that the aim of Friday's protest was to restore democracy and free political detainees.

DW

Are Kurds, Syria's largest minority group, at risk of sectarian violence?

Damascus, Syria - In the aftermath of the latest violence against minorities in Syria, military representatives of Syria's largest minority, the around 2.5mn Kurds, have now clarified that for them, 'disarmament is a red line'.

On Thursday, Farhad Shami, the spokesperson for the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), told the local TV channel al-Yourum TV that 'those betting on our capitulation will lose, the tragic events have made that clear'. He was referring to the deadly violence between Bedouin Arab tribes and the third-largest religious minority, the Druze, which rattled the country earlier this month.

Stating the SDF's 'red line' is all the more significant, as Syria's Kurds are also politically at a critical juncture.

A planned meeting on Thursday in Paris about key details of an earlier peace deal between the Kurds and Syria's interim government led by President Ahmed al-Sharaa was postponed, and has not yet been rescheduled.

The sticking points of the agreement, meant to be implemented by the end of the year, are the integration of the Kurdish forces into Damascus' national army and the authority over Syria's Kurdish region with its border crossings to Iraq and Turkey, as well as the region's oil



A Syrian Kurdish woman dances and holds the Kurdish flag

fields and prisons with thousands of 'Islamic State' fighters.

Meanwhile, a Syrian government source told the news

agency AFP that 'using the events in Sweida or along the coast (where violence against the Alawite minority took place in

spring this year) to justify refusing to return to the state fold is a manipulation of public opinion'.

"A genuine national dialogue

cannot happen under the threat of weapons or with backing from foreign powers," the source added.

Turkey warns Kurds

On Wednesday, however, The Associated Press news agency reported that Damascus had requested Turkey's support to strengthen Syrian defence capabilities. Ankara is known as fierce supporter of Syria's interim president.

Turkey also considers the Kurds in Syria to be affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK, which is categorised as terrorist organisation by Turkey, the EU and US. Therefore, Turkey

would like to see the Syrian Kurdish forces either integrate in Syria's national army, or to lay down their weapons along with the recently announced end of the PKK and the symbolic weapons' destruction ceremony in Iraqi Kurdistan on July 11.

Turkey has also been trying to clinch a defence agreement with Damascus. But such a deal would reportedly include establishing Turkish military bases on Syrian territory, presumably in Syria's northeast where the Kurdish population resides under the administration of the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.

DW

‘Don’t have friends’: Germany sees loneliness epidemic among youth

Berlin, Germany - Three years ago, Felix Wunnike realised he had struck a chord with young people. Whenever the business psychology graduate posts videos on his TikTok account about ‘finding friends’, his followers respond immediately.

“Even when I just said in the video, ‘Send this video to your best friend’, the top comment with the most likes was always something like, ‘I don’t have any friends,’” Wunnike told DW. “I noticed that many of my younger followers feel really lonely and say that they really don’t have any friends at all. That shocked me a lot.”

While loneliness can make it more difficult for adults to find a job and keep it, for young people it can affect their grades in school. Wunnike has now written a self-help book entitled *Everything You Need to Know About Finding a Friend*.

Wunnike has identified two reasons for this trend: the COVID-19 pandemic and social media.

“Despite all the positive aspects, I think it’s important to warn people about the downsides and dangers of social media usage, namely that we forget about real life. When we look at our friends’ Instagram stories, we overlook the importance of building friendships in real life.”

One in six people feels lonely

According to a recent study by the World Health Organization, one in six people worldwide feels lonely. Among teenagers, it’s even one in five. Loneliness



According to a recent study by the World Health Organization, one in six people worldwide feels lonely

‘How do I find friends?’ is the most common question German influencers get asked on social media. Loneliness has become a pressing issue, with far-reaching consequences

is becoming an increasingly serious problem in Germany, according to a survey carried out by one of the country’s leading public health insurers late last year.

Young people who suffer from loneliness are more susceptible to authoritarian thinking, according to Claudia Neu. The sociologist has studied what happens when loneliness causes young people to stray down a path of political extremism. She led a study which ex-

amined the connection between loneliness and anti-democratic attitudes among young people in Germany, and came to a pretty discouraging conclusion.

“Young people between the ages of 16 and 23 are particularly susceptible to conspiracy theories and tend to condone the use of political violence,” said Neu. “It’s important to note that while a statistical correlation has been found, it does not necessarily imply causality. Not

every lonely person votes for the far-right Alternative for Germany, nor does every AfD voter have elevated levels of loneliness.”

Neu has now written a book on this topic, entitled ‘Loneliness and Resentment’. Her thesis is that when people no longer feel connected to society and, worse still, react to this with resentment, there is a real potential threat to democracy. She argues that lonely people are in fact victims, having expe-

rienced discrimination much more frequently than people who are not lonely.

“They repeatedly feel rejected. They are frustrated when at a social get-together they once again fail to connect with anyone and return home feeling alone,” she said. “This type of rejection can generate resentment. And this they see as unfair and are unable to let it go, blaming others, and ultimately becoming bitter and angry.”

‘Higher risk’ in rural areas

Neu has headed the Sociology of Rural Areas department at the universities of Göttingen

and Kassel since September 2016. She said living in remote areas increases the likelihood that people feel lonely, because humans depend on interaction and communication.

“If there is a lack of opportunities to meet people, then there is a significantly higher risk of loneliness,” Neu told DW. This then changes perceptions, she said, adding that she has found that chronically lonely people perceive spaces differently.

“They see their surroundings as darker and more unsafe, they feel less comfortable both in public and in private spaces. And they are less likely to believe that their community can work well together,” she said.

Living alone

A survey conducted by health insurer Techniker Krankenkasse showed that around 60% of people in Germany say they experience loneliness in their private lives. According to the Federal Statistical Office, 17mn people in Germany live alone - that’s one in five. This represents an increase of 22% over the past two decades.

According to Neu, the increasing individualisation of society has both positive and negative aspects. “On the one hand, people have more freedom to choose. It has become much easier to end an unhappy partnership. On the other hand, being alone also carries the risk of becoming isolated. Nevertheless, I would be cautious about drawing a direct connection between living alone and loneliness,” she warned.

Does loneliness increase with age?

Most studies have indicated that the elderly are more likely than young people to feel lonely. Their partners and friends pass away, and their family may not be living close by. However, a recent study by the German Centre for Gerontology paints a more nuanced picture. According to the study, people between the ages of 43 and 65 feel lonelier than those in old age.

Stefan Stuth, who co-authored a survey entitled ‘Loneliness in the Second Half of Life’, told DW that unemployment is a major problem. Those who lose their job in middle age feel ashamed and stigmatised. The loss of what they see as a meaningful occupation can drive them into self-imposed isolation, he said.

The elderly, on the other hand, do not experience this problem. “Reaching retirement age means you no longer have to be employed. There is no longer a stigma of unemployment that leads to mental suffering,” Stuth explained. However, he added, the factor that has the greatest influence on loneliness is wealth or poverty.

“The lower the household income, the higher the level of loneliness,” he said. “Those with low incomes and limited financial resources have fewer opportunities to participate in society. This, in turn, leads to isolation and has a negative impact on psychological well-being.”

DW

NASA set to cut 20% of workforce

Washington, D.C., US - Roughly 20% of the workforce at National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is set to depart the agency, a spokesperson confirmed on Friday, marking a significant shift as the space agency grapples with restructuring under the Trump administration’s broader push to reduce the size of the federal government.

Approximately 3,870 NASA employees have opted to leave through the government’s Deferred Resignation Programme, though the agency noted the figure may change in the coming weeks as applications are finalised or withdrawn. After the resignations and natural attrition are accounted for, NASA expects to maintain a civil servant workforce of about 14,000.

The reduction, described by the agency as an effort to become ‘streamlined and more efficient’, comes amid rising concerns about the potential impact on NASA’s mission readiness and safety standards. “Safety remains a top priority for our agency as we balance the need to become a more streamlined and more efficient organisation and work to ensure we remain fully capable of pursuing a Golden Era of exploration and innovation, including to the Moon and Mars,” NASA said in a statement.

This is the second major wave of departures since President Donald Trump re-entered office and resumed

efforts to shrink the federal workforce. The first round, initiated shortly after his inauguration, offered a buyout to federal workers, resulting in the voluntary departure of around 870 NASA employees - roughly 4.8% of its workforce at the time. That effort was coordinated by the Department of Government Efficiency, now led by tech entrepreneur Elon Musk.

The latest round, launched in early June with a deadline to opt in by July 25, saw around

Around 3,870 NASA employees have opted to leave, though the agency noted the figure may change in the coming weeks as applications are finalised or withdrawn

3,000 additional personnel - about 16.4% of the agency - choose to leave. The programme is designed to minimise the need for involuntary layoffs, NASA officials said.

“The reason we are doing this is to minimise any involuntary workforce reductions in the future,” former acting NASA Administrator Janet Petro said during a June 25 agency town hall. “That is our whole goal, minimising that.”

Trump’s citizenship restrictions blocked

Washington, D.C. US - A federal judge on Friday blocked the Trump administration from ending birthright citizenship for the children of parents who are in the US illegally, issuing the third court ruling blocking the birthright order nationwide since a key Supreme Court decision in June.

US District Judge Leo Sorokin, joining another district court as well as an appellate panel of judges, found that a nationwide injunction granted to more than a dozen states remains in force under an exception to the Supreme Court ruling. That decision restricted the power of lower-court judges to issue nationwide injunctions.

The states have argued Trump’s birthright citizenship order is blatantly unconstitutional



and threatens millions of dollars for health insurance services that are contingent on citizenship status. The issue is expected to move quickly back to the nation’s highest court. White House spokeswoman Abigail Jackson said in a statement the administration looked forward to ‘being vindicated on appeal’.

New Jersey Attorney General

Matthew Platkin, who helped lead the lawsuit before Sorokin, said in a statement he was ‘thrilled the district court again barred President Trump’s flagrantly unconstitutional birthright citizenship order from taking effect anywhere’. “American-born babies are American, just as they have been at every other time in our Nation’s his-

tory,” he added. “The President cannot change that legal rule with the stroke of a pen.”

Sorokin acknowledged his order would not be the last word on birthright citizenship.

The Trump administration has not yet appealed any of the recent court rulings. The president’s efforts to deny citizenship to children born to parents who are in the country illegally or temporarily will remain blocked unless and until the Supreme Court says otherwise.

A federal judge in New Hampshire issued a ruling earlier this month prohibiting Trump’s executive order from taking effect nationwide in a new class-action lawsuit. US District Judge Joseph LaPlante in New Hampshire had paused his own decision to allow

for the Trump administration to appeal, but with no appeal filed, his order went into effect.

On Wednesday, a San Francisco-based appeals court found the president’s executive order unconstitutional and affirmed a lower court’s nationwide block.

A Maryland-based judge said last week that she would do the same if an appeals court signed off. The justices ruled last month that lower courts generally can’t issue nationwide injunctions, but it didn’t rule out other court orders that could have nationwide effects, including in class-action lawsuits and those brought by states. The Supreme Court did not decide whether the underlying citizenship order is constitutional.

Euronews

Holding back Russia’s summer offensive, says Ukraine

Kyiv, Ukraine - According to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukrainian forces are holding back Russia’s summer attempts to break through defences along parts of the front line.

“They are not advancing. It’s very tough for our guys out there. And it’s tough everywhere,” Zelenskyy told reporters. “It’s also very hard for the Russians - and that’s good for us,” he added.

With the war now in its fourth year after Russia’s February 2022 full-scale invasion of its neighbour, the effort is draining resources on both sides, although Russia has more resources and people to sustain its fight.

Ukraine, meanwhile, is seeking further support from Western partners.



Russia has claimed the capture of some villages and hamlets in recent weeks, but no defensively stronger urban areas have fallen to its troops.

Russian sabotage and reconnaissance groups have repeat-

edly attempted to stage minor incursions near Pokrovsk in the eastern Donetsk region to film symbolic footage, such as raising a Russian flag, but Ukrainian forces have repelled those efforts, Zelenskyy said.

“It happened five to seven times recently, sometimes with only two or six people. Once they tried to hold a position with 12 people - and all of them were eliminated by our defenders,” Zelenskyy said.

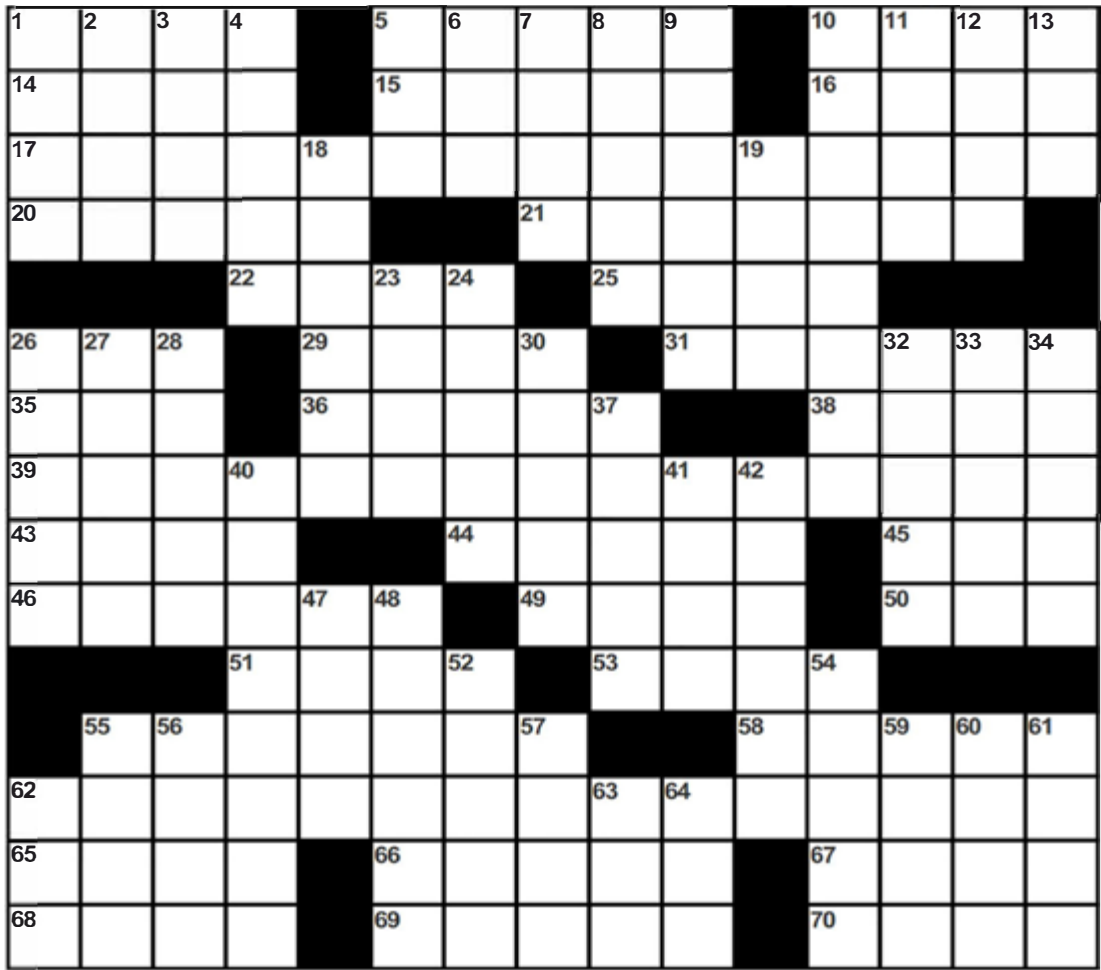
Zelenskyy described the situation in the northeastern Sumy border region as ‘much better’ than in recent months, noting progress by Ukrainian forces over the past six weeks.

Russia has also intensified its bombardment of Ukrainian cities, with the second-largest city Kharkiv struck with a powerful glide bomb for a second straight day on Friday. Seven people were injured, officials said. On Thursday, 42 were injured.

Joyce Msuya, the United Nations’ deputy humanitarian chief, told the Security Council on Friday that Ukraine’s humanitarian situation is ‘deteriorating’ due to expanding Russian attacks on civilian areas across the country.

Euronews

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1) What you're filling in
5) Site of a Muslim pilgrimage
10) Had a sensation
14) One way to serve a steak
15) Hope for a nominee
16) "I had no..."
17) Like a neat, perfect arrangement
20) It's spotted in Westerns
21) Fish-eating birds
22) Rosemary or thyme
25) Use a bayonet
26) Hardly a gentleman
29) Was a blabbermouth
31) Quenches
35) Biochemistry abbr.
36) "Sacro" follower
38) "Damn Yankees" femme fatale
39) Extremely naive
43) Flexible mineral
44) Satan (with "the")
45) Astrological carnivore
46) Cheated at hide and seek
65) Scarf material
50) Auction merchandise, sometimes

51) Bird of old Rome
53) Soil type
55) Current measures
58) Baggy
62) Between a rock and a hard place
65) Relax on a couch
66) It gives one a leg up
67) Proceeds from a heist
68) "Trick" joint
69) Heavy British weight
70) Certain voiced votes
DOWN
1) Get a handle on
2) Member of Indian royalty
3) Modern Persia
4) Swimming pool measurement
5) Content starter
6) Yearling's mother
7) Crime boss
8) Prefix with "cross"
9) Human aces
10) Bright meteor
11) Duane or Nelson
12) Directors Spike and Ang
13) Sailor, in slang
18) Kind of license
19) Face-to-face exam
23) Lady Macbeth or Ham-

let
24) Hunter's hiding place
26) Finish a pie crust
27) "Tomorrow" musical
28) Do the running man
30) Oasis fruit
32) Bearlike marsupial
33) "... Gantry"
34) Wooden shoe
37) Raise trivial objections
40) Spongy tree gall
41) Tall fodder holder
42) Acid-neutralizing compound
47) "... happily... after"
48) Most desperate
52) Brief quarrel
54) Coffee order, sometimes
55) Soon, to a bard
56) Having X and Y chromosomes
57) He's "the Man" of baseball
59) "Works for me"
60) Pivot
61) Congers
62) Breed
63) Half of the tai chi symbol
64) "Adolescent" start

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
You aren't exactly famous for turning down dares, resisting the impulse to boldly go where no one has gone before or for driving back the urge to do anything you're told not to. In fact, these situations are more like invitations to you! That doesn't mean you're never surprised, however, or at least caught a little off guard when you finally get the message from a long-suffering friend.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
Take equal parts impulse and romance, add in a giant pinch of random (most likely thanks to a coincidence of some kind), and you get a day that you won't ever forget and neither will whoever is lucky enough to be by your side. It's a recipe for deep infatuation, and since no one loves being in love like you do, you're only too happy to play. Watch to see what happens next!



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
You can't seem to even try to be polite while your caustic acquaintance is talking, especially if they're trashing someone you know or even someone you barely know, really. If you're feeling about the person they're trashing, it doesn't matter what they say. You just do exactly what you should anyway. Make your decisions based only on your personal impressions.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
Secrets are all around you, seemingly at every turn now, but you're not really liking it all that much. You're more the straightforward type. The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth is what you need. Of course, gossip has never really been your thing since it's way too easy for it to spiral into untruths. Someone comes to you with a huge secret they need to whisper in your ear now, but don't fear.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
If you're getting excited about something new, and you almost certainly are, don't try to hide it. Everyone gets to act like a kid now and then! Speaking of thrills, there could be romantic fireworks coming your way quite soon. If someone sounds like they're spoiling for a fight, though, make sure to warn them that your ire is running hot, so if they're dumb enough to start something, you're ready to finish it.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
You're not overly emotional. In fact, you'd reliably choose to have oral surgery (without anesthesia, even) over a serious discussion of your feelings, especially if they're as close to the surface and as hard to ignore as yours happen to be just now. That doesn't mean you need to shut down. Just choose your people with care.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
If you had something scheduled for today, whether a firm plan or just a half-expected meeting or appointment, you should probably just move on. Things just don't turn out the way you expect them to, but the good news is that you're always up for a change in plans. That's especially true right now since you have friends in high places who can help you to make the best of a bad situation.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
You don't exactly have a reputation for being chatty, but maybe you should. Few are as talkative, friendly or amicable as you, whether you're in the company of friends or total strangers. There's certainly no one better at making those strangers feel welcome either. Those traits come in handy over the next few days, which are sure to be busy. Clear off your social calendar!



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
You're about to surprise your people in a big way and shock anyone else who's never seen this side of you. You can often seem detached and weirdly impersonal, and you're good at that image too. Right about now, though, you're hard-pressed to keep your eyes dry in the face of a dopey rom-com. Don't panic. This is just a phase!



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
Things are getting better now, just like you thought (or hoped) they might. You feel like a weight has lifted off your shoulders. You're not bored with this downtime either. A seeming coincidence puts you back in touch with someone you thought you might never see again. Ready or not, here comes your striking wake-up call. You still care, and it seems that they do too. What comes next?



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
A colleague you've been thinking about recently, someone who has been returning those furtive glances for some time now, is just about to signal in one way or another that they're ready for a staring contest. In fact, they may even be brave enough to walk up and say hello, hoping for a conversation. Whatever happens, you've got to admire their brass.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
It's the perfect time to be you. You're already flexible and able to see the bright side of any person or situation. You sail through all challenges that come up through the day and should be well on your way to a fantastic few days by the end of the evening. Be nice to anyone who isn't quite as lucky as you. After all, not everyone has your adaptability.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. hat type of apple was adopted by The Beatles' "Apple Records" as its symbol?
A. Gravenstein
B. Braeburn
C. Golden Delicious
D. Granny Smith

02. Sunspots on the sun are the result of what?
A. Magnetism
B. Flares
C. Nearby swarms of asteroids
D. Concentrations of helium

03. The first Pierre de Coubertin medal awarded was to Eugenio Monti who competed in what discipline in the 1964 Winter Olympics?
A. Bobsled
B. Bobtail
C. Bobbing for apples
D. Bobbidi

Answers: 1.D 2.A 3.A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

C	P	A	R
K	N	E	S
G	S	L	A
O	P	I	P

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

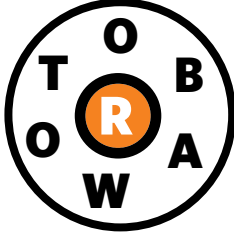
SOLUTION
20-25 words: Excellent,
15-20 words: Very good,
10-15 words: Good,
5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

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

REPEAT OR REVENGE?

World champions Spain eye treble while England seek redemption in Euro final

Basel, Switzerland - Spain's remarkable run in international competitions reaches another high on Sunday when they take on England in the final at the Women's Euros in Basel, playing in their first European decider in only their fifth appearance at the tournament.

The reigning world and Nations League champions will be looking for a repeat of their defeat of England in the 2023 World Cup final as they seek to add the European crown to their trophy cabinet.

"Now we'll start looking at England more closely, although our analysts have already been watching them live and studying their performance in this Euro," Spain coach Montse Torme said after her side's 1-0 semi-final win over Germany on Wednesday.

"We're going to dive deeper into their game, and we're going all-in."

For all their dominance in recent years, Spain are still relative newcomers at the top table in women's soccer, and their only previous visit to the semi-finals at the Euros was in 1997.

They followed that up with quarter-final exits in 2013, 2017 and 2022. By contrast, Germany, whom they had never beaten at a major tournament before Wednesday, won the tournament five times since 1997.

For long-serving captain Irene Paredes, success at the Euros is

another welcome milestone in her side's progress towards being the kind of dominant team the Germans once were.

"It's incredible. We're making history," she told reporters.

"This is what we wanted. It's been tough, but we're in the final."

And with Aitana Bonmati set to clash with Lauren James of England, the match will showcase two of the modern game's premier creative dribblers vying for one of football's biggest prizes.

Both sides boast a host of players who are more than comfortable with the ball at their feet and capable of bringing the crowd to theirs every time they take on an opponent, as well as defenders ready to stop them.

James faces fight to be fit

Meanwhile, England manager Sarina Wiegman said she "does not know yet" whether forward James will be available for the final. James was substituted at half-time of England's semi-final victory over Italy on Tuesday with an ankle injury.

She was seen applying ice to her ankle while sitting in the dugout for the remainder of the match, which went to extra time before England won 2-1.



Spain's Aitana Bonmati (L) and England's Lauren James, if she is fully fit, will play vital roles in deciding the outcome of Sunday's final



Bonmati keen to add Euro crown to glowing trophy cabinet

Lausanne, Switzerland - Aitana Bonmati is hoping to add another piece of silverware to her bulging trophy cabinet when Spain play their first Women's Euro final, taking on holders England in Basel on Sunday.

The 27-year-old playmaker has won six league titles and three Champions League crowns with Barcelona and taken home the Ballon d'Or Feminin in 2023 and 2024, as well as a World Cup and Nations League title with Spain.

"It would close the circle a little bit -- this, together with the Olympic Games," she told reporters at the team's base in Lausanne on Friday.

"We want to add the only tournaments that we are missing. For me personally, it would be very nice in the future to have the memory of having won the great tournaments at the highest level in football."

Spain's best finish to date in the Euros came in 1997 when they came third, and their only appearance in the Olympic tournament led to an agonising fourth-place finish at the Paris Games in 2024, where they lost the bronze-medal match to Germany.

Sunday's final -- a repeat of the 2023 World Cup final -- promises to be a tight affair, with six of the last seven games between the two sides decided by a single goal and the seventh a scoreless draw.

"The game on Sunday is unique, very one-on-one, where things are decided by the smallest margins. Anything can happen, no matter how experienced or knowledgeable you are," Bonmati explained. "They have it too, they have lived through many finals. It is going to be a very equal match in that respect."

Bonmati and her teammates are very conscious of where the game will be won and lost.

We are ready for anything, says Spain's Putellas

Lausanne, Switzerland - Spain are remaining tight-lipped about what they expect from England in Sunday's Euro 2025 final in Basel, but midfielder Alexia Putellas says her side are ready for whatever Sarina Wiegman and her squad come up with.

"England is a team that can come up with many things - they can be in a low block and move forward, or they can be a team that wants to do both things, (but) we are a team

with a lot of resources," Putellas told reporters at the Spanish team's base in Lausanne on Thursday.

"If they decide to be in the low block and move forward, we have been able to play (in the past) and score goals. We are well-balanced so that they do not move forward ... it's hard to get the ball off us, we are ready for anything."

The showdown pits title holders England, who have flirted with elimination en route to the



Alexia Putellas

final, against world and Nations League champions Spain, who have started their games in Switzerland slowly before growing into them and taking over.

Putellas said that her side would not be taking anything for granted.

"I try not to think about what has happened, what we have done or what we haven't done. In the end, these are unique moments that we have to live and that we are very excited about," she said.

The game is also a rematch of the 2023 World Cup final that Spain won 1-0, and the two sides have also met in the Nations League earlier this year, with England winning 1-0 in February and Spain grabbing a 2-1 victory in June.

"We are very excited, very ambitious, excited to continue growing, to continue making history and I think that gives us a lot of energy, we get a lot of energy to achieve our goal," Putellas said.

England's Agyemang 'a nightmare to play against'

Oberentfelden, Switzerland - In a few short years, striker Michelle Agyemang has gone from being a ball girl at Wembley to scoring vital goals for England that will see them contest the Women's European Championship final on Sunday as she leads the charge for young players in Switzerland.

The 19-year-old came off the bench to score two crucial equalisers in the knockout stage against Sweden and Italy that helped them into the decider against Spain, playing with a youthful freedom and swagger that has lit up the competition.

"What a tournament from Michelle, especially coming in with the seniors just a couple of months ago ... what a great player, what a bright future she's got," England defender Lucy Bronze said. "She's a little bit of the unknown and she brings something different ... I think it gives her a lot of confidence and the team give her a lot of freedom," Bronze added.

Whether she starts Sunday's final up front or on the bench,



Michelle Agyemang

Agyemang will enjoy huge support in the England squad.

"I think she's quality. I think what she brings, she's a nightmare to play against," England and Arsenal defender Leah

Williamson said.

"I'm glad she's my teammate at club and country. She deserves her flowers. I hope she gets them ... I hope she's ready to go at the weekend."

Ten-woman Brazil hold Colombia to top Group B at Copa America

Quito, Ecuador - Colombia failed to capitalise on their numerical advantage in Friday's final Group B match at the Women's Copa America, as the reigning champions Brazil held them to a goalless draw despite being a player down.

Brazil's goalkeeper Lorena was shown a red card in the 21st minute after handling the ball outside the penalty area in a bid to stop Linda Caicedo's shot during a rapid Colombian counterattack.

After consulting with assistant referee Mariana Aquino, referee Milagros Arruela dismissed Lorena, forcing Brazil to rely on substitute goalkeeper Claudia for the rest of the match.

Despite enjoying a numerical advantage, Colombia were unable to break the deadlock, with attempts from Valerin Lobo and Mayra Ramirez failing to find the back of the net.

"Today was a very tough game, very exhausting, and we wanted to win, but now we have to keep working hard for what's coming," Lobo said after the match. Brazil stood firm in de-



Brazil's resolute defensive display proved too tough for Colombia

fence, and in the second half they tried to take the lead with attempts from Yasmim, Gabi Portilho and Dudinha, but they were all unsuccessful.

"We knew it would be a very

difficult game, but we're very proud of this result with one player less. Now it's time to rest and think about the semi-final," Portilho said.

Both teams were already

through to the semi-finals, and Group B leaders Brazil will face Uruguay on Tuesday. Meanwhile, runners-up Colombia will take on Group A leaders Argentina.

Red Bull’s Mekies hails Horner for his support

Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium - New Red Bull Formula One team boss Laurent Mekies praised predecessor Christian Horner on Friday and revealed the Briton had been supportive and kept in touch since his sudden sacking two weeks ago.

Mekies has been promoted from sister team Racing Bull to become only the second Red Bull principal since the energy drink brand entered the sport in 2005.

“Yes, we have spoken,” the Frenchman told reporters at the Belgian Grand Prix, his first race at the helm. “He has been nothing other than supportive, even in the extremely difficult context for him.

“He was the first one to text, he was the first one to call. I think again this morning or yesterday, we texted each other again.”

Mekies said nobody would replace Horner as a character and he certainly would not try to do the job in a similar manner to the Briton, who had been in charge at Milton Keynes for more than 20 years. Instead, he said he would seek to “empower” more of his staff and rely on the existing strengths within the team.

Horner has not spoken publicly since his July 9 sacking, although he did address factory staff before leaving.

Mekies said he had been contacted “out of the blue” by Red Bull’s head of corporate projects Oliver Mintzlaff and motorsport consultant Helmut Marko to offer him the job of principal.

His immediate response was to ask for time to consider,

and then he put the phone down. “First thought obviously goes to, in this moment as well, to Christian,” he explained. “Because it’s not something that, you know, I could have expected. And he had been nothing else than extremely supportive with me these last two years.”

Mekies said he had then called back and accepted the challenge.

“You just say, of course. You know, if you think you need me there, I will go there.”

Mekies said providing the team’s four-times world champion Max Verstappen with a fast car was a priority, as that would then resolve other issues about his future plans, and morale was holding up.



Laurent Mekies

REBOOT BEGINS



Red Bull’s Max Verstappen celebrates his sprint victory at Belgian Grand Prix sprint on Saturday

Verstappen takes sprint win in Red Bull’s first race under new boss Mekies

Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium - Formula One champion Max Verstappen won a “cat and mouse” Belgian Grand Prix sprint on Saturday in Red Bull’s first race under the leadership of Laurent Mekies following Christian Horner’s dismissal.

McLaren’s championship leader Oscar Piastri finished second, after taking a dominant pole position for the 100km race, with the Australian increasing his advantage over teammate Lando Norris to nine points.

Norris ended up where he started, in third place on a bright afternoon at the longest and second fastest track on the calendar.

Charles Leclerc was fourth for Ferrari with Haas’s Esteban Ocon fifth and Carlos Sainz sixth for Williams. Haas’s Oliver Bearman and Racing Bulls’ Isack Hadjar completed the scoring positions.

Qualifying for what could be a soggy main grand prix at Spa-Francorchamps on Sunday followed later.

“Well done Max. Very, very impressive defence, very well controlled. You didn’t leave anything on the table there,” Mekies told Verstappen over the team radio after the Dutch driver took the chequered flag.

Verstappen, starting second, used straightline speed to slip-

stream into the lead at les Combes on lap one and held off Piastri for the remaining 14, with the Australian 0.753 seconds behind at the flag.

The win was Verstappen’s first, in either a sprint or grand prix, since Imola in May and it was knife-edge all the way.

“I knew of course it was going to be very tough to keep them behind. So it’s just playing like cat and mouse, DRS, battery usage,” he said as the large contingent of Dutch fans celebrated.

“The whole race was within seven tenths, so I couldn’t afford to make big mistakes. I had one tiny lockup in the last corner, but apart from that it was, for us, a great result to keep them behind.

“You have to drive over the limit of what’s possible. Tyre management goes out of the window. I did 15 qualifying laps to keep them behind on a track where tyre management is important.”

Piastri had few real chances - close enough to hope but too far to make a move stick.

“I tried my best to snake my way through the straights and not give too much of a tow but didn’t have enough straight-line speed and then obviously didn’t have enough speed for the next 15 laps either,” he said.

Norris was a further 0.661 adrift after losing third place to Leclerc on lap one and taking it back a few laps later.

“I wasn’t going to get past anyone unless Oscar got past Max. They drove good races,” said the Briton. “I was hoping for a bit of battling but the Red Bull was too quick in the straight.”

The sprint was a disappointment for Mercedes, with George Russell 12th and Kimi Antonelli 17th. Ferrari’s Lewis Hamilton also had a tough time, finishing a distant 15th after starting 18th.

Pirlo appointed manager of Dubai-based United FC

Dubai, UAE - Former Italy captain Andrea Pirlo has been appointed manager of Dubai-based United FC, the United Arab Emirates’ second-tier club announced on Friday.

Local media reported the 46-year-old has signed a two-year deal with the club. Founded in September 2022, United FC are

also known as Dubai United. The club earned promotion from the third-tier in the 2022-23 season.

“Pirlo brings with him a unique footballing vision and valuable coaching experience from spells at Juventus and Sampdoria,” the club said in a statement.

“His arrival marks an exciting



Andrea Pirlo

new chapter for United FC and reflects the club’s growing ambition in the UAE football landscape.”

Pirlo guided Italian Serie B side Sampdoria to a seventh-place finish during the 2023-2024 season. He was sacked in August last year after a poor start to the season.

Pirlo retired from playing in 2017 after establishing himself as one of the best midfielders of his generation.

He helped Italy win the 2006 World Cup, won the Champions League twice with AC Milan, and lifted four consecutive Serie A titles with Juventus from 2012-2015.

Atletico’s De Paul joins Messi at Inter Miami

Miami, US - Argentine midfielder Rodrigo de Paul has left Atletico Madrid and will join Major League Soccer side Inter Miami, the LaLiga club announced Friday.

“Rodrigo de Paul bids farewell to Atletico Madrid and will continue his professional career at Inter Miami,” the club said in a statement.

De Paul will join his compatriot and friend Lionel Messi, with whom he has won two Copa America titles, a Finalissima and the 2022 World Cup.

The 31-year-old made nearly 200 appearances in four seasons under fellow Argentine coach Diego Simeone but leaves the Spanish capital without silverware.

De Paul made his debut for Argentine club Racing Club in 2012 and has also played for Valencia and Serie A side Udinese.

Messi, Alba suspended for missing MLS All-Star
Lionel Messi has been suspended for one game after sitting out the MLS All-Star Game without prior approval, the



Rodrigo de Paul (R) with Lionel Messi

league said on Friday.

The Inter Miami forward and his teammate, Jordi Alba, did not compete on Wednesday despite not being injured, even though they were included in the All-Star roster.

“Per league rules, any player who does not participate in the All-Star Game without prior approval from the league is ineligible to compete in their club’s next match,” MLS said in a statement.

The suspension will see Messi, the league’s main attraction, miss Inter Miami’s match against the visiting FC Cincinnati on Saturday. Cincinnati lead the Eastern Conference standings.

Messi has scored 18 goals so far this season.

“I know Lionel Messi loves this league. I don’t think there’s a player - or anyone - who has

done more for Major League Soccer than Messi. I fully understand, respect, and admire his commitment to Inter Miami, and I respect his decision,” MLS Commissioner Don Garber said in a statement.

“Unfortunately, we have a long-standing policy regarding participation in the All-Star Game, and we had to enforce it.

The 31-year-old Rodrigo de Paul made nearly 200 appearances in four seasons under fellow Argentine coach Diego Simeone but leaves the Spanish capital without silverware

It was a very difficult decision.”

All-Star competitions are a mainstay of North American sports, where the men’s “Big Four” leagues use the exhibitions to boost their players’ profiles, but a rarity in professional soccer.

“We’re going to take a hard look at the policy moving forward. I’m committed to working with our players to determine how the rule should evolve,” said Garber.



Ruben Amorim

Man United won’t sell players on the cheap, says Amorim

Manchester, England - Manchester United manager Ruben Amorim has said he is prepared to reintegrate the club’s exiled players into his squad if they cannot be sold for fees that match the valuations expected by the former Premier League champions.

Alejandro Garnacho, Jadon Sancho, Antony and Tyrell Malacia have been excluded from the squad that has travelled to the US for the club’s pre-season tour with the quartet seeking transfers away from Old Trafford.

But while they have had to work separately from the first team squad since United returned for training ahead of the new season, Amorim acknowledged he would be prepared to accept the players back into his squad should they not be sold.

“Some players have to find a new place to have more space in the team and other players

clearly show they want a new challenge and want new teams,” Amorim told reporters in Chicago ahead of Saturday’s pre-season meeting with West Ham United.

“We are just allowing these players to have time to think and to decide. If we reach a point where they have to join the team, they will join the team because they are our players.

“I’m ready to receive the players. They have more competition, more competition if you want to play in the World Cup next year, you need to play.

“So I’m really happy with that because I have more options. If they have to fight each other to play, for me it’s perfect.”

United have signed Matheus Cunha and Bryan Mbeumo so far, while England winger Marcus Rashford has left to join Barcelona on loan as Amorim’s side looks to bounce back from a lowly 15th place finish.

BLOKES OF TROUBLE

Woakes double strike rocks India after Stokes ton help England make 669

Manchester, England - Chris Woakes took two wickets in two balls in the first over to stun India on day four of the fourth Test, the touring side slumping to 1-2 in their second innings at lunch on Saturday after England had racked up 669.

Though a half century from captain Shubman Gill helped India battle back to 86-2 at tea on Saturday, they are trailing the hosts by 225 runs and still have their backs to the wall.

Captain Ben Stokes' first century in over two years fired England to their fifth highest total in Test history in the morning session at Old Trafford, and the hosts lead India by 310 runs.

With 15 minutes to navigate before the interval, India crumbled under the pressure, with Yashasvi Jaiswal caught in the slips by England centurion Joe Root and Sai Sudharsan following him back next ball.

Resuming the day on 544-7, with Stokes on 77, the England

skipper looked nervy as he edged towards a long-awaited ton, pointing to the skies - a celebration in tribute to his father - when he reached three figures.

Stokes became only the fourth England player in Test history to take five wickets and make a century in the same match, and was the first captain to do so.

After Liam Dawson had been dismissed and Stokes passed his latest milestone, the skipper upped the ante, with a huge six and another four taking him past 7,000 Test runs and the hosts past 600. The boundaries continue to flow, with Brydon Carse getting in on the act before Stokes was out for 141.

Carse attempted one six too many and was also caught on the boundary for 47 to bring England's colossal innings to an end.

Earlier on Friday, Joe Root moved to second in the all-time Test run scorer charts with a superb 150 to put England in control. Yorkshire batter Root

strolled to a staggering 38th Test hundred, before passing another milestone in climbing above former Australia captain Ricky Ponting into second place in the all-time list as he reached 121 not out just before tea.

Root eventually was stumped off the bowling of Ravindra Jadeja, but the damage to India's resolve had been done.

"Joe is something we have become accustomed to in the past few years," England number three Ollie Pope told reporters.

"The way he goes about his cricket, the way he trains is amazing, he is a joy to watch who keeps getting better and better. From a team perspective it is amazing to have him. We try not to rely on him, but the way he constantly steps up is amazing. The number of hundreds are ridiculous.

"He would have been aware of the records. He is not a massive one for landmarks, but that is a pretty cool one today."

Root overtook South African all-rounder Jacques Kallis to go third in the rankings in Friday's morning session, with his 104th score of fifty or more - only India great Sachin Tendulkar has more in Test cricket.



England captain Ben Stokes celebrates his century against India on Saturday; Chris Woakes took two wickets in two balls in the first over



David hits fastest T20 century for Aussies in series win over West Indies

Basseterre, Saint Kitts - Middle order batter Tim David smashed the fastest Twenty20 International century for Australia as they sealed a six-wicket victory over the West Indies in the third T20 on Friday to take an unsailable 3-0 lead in their five-match series.

David hit 11 sixes and six fours to finish on unbeaten 102 off 37 deliveries, with Australia crushing the hosts with 23 balls to spare at Warner Park in Basseterre, Saint Kitts.



Tim David

"I was just having a great time in the middle playing for Australia...I didn't think I would get the opportunity to get a hundred for Australia so I'm stoked," David said.

"The pitch was good and small boundaries so you have to back your strengths. Warner Park is a great place to bat and it was great to have experience here in the CPL (Caribbean Premier League).

"I've spent a lot of time working on power hitting but now I'm

working on my shot selection."

Put into bat after Australia won the toss, West Indies got off to a solid start helped by a 125-run opening stand between Shai Hope and Brandon King.

Mitchell Owen provided Australia with a much-needed breakthrough when he took out King, who had holed out to deep forward square, while Shimron Hetmyer (9), Sherfane Rutherford (12) and Rovman Powell (9) were all removed cheaply.

West Indies' total was

boosted by a fine unbeaten 102 off 57 balls by captain Hope as they posted 214-4.

Australia's reply initially stuttered as they found themselves 61-3 in 5.5 overs, but David scored a sparkling ton to eclipse Josh Inglis' record (43 balls) for fastest T20 century for Australia by six deliveries.

"I don't think we had enough runs on the board. On a pitch like that with the dimension of the ground, we know it's going to be hard to defend," Hope said.

"We're very powerful strikers but we have to give credit to the Australian bowlers."

Australia had won the first T20 by three wickets and second by eight wickets.

"We've played well so far in the series. We've executed well with the ball and there are no words for that innings from Tim David. We're giving guys opportunities in different roles. As a group we've played really good cricket," Australia captain Mitchell Marsh said.

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Walking the corridors of the Scuola dei Mosaicisti del Friuli (Friuli Mosaicists School) on a Friday morning, the first thing I noticed was the silence.

I had expected the chatter of students, the hum of conversation between teachers, the shuffle of footsteps. Instead, the air was still, broken only by the occasional tap of a hammer and the delicate click of tiles sliding against tiles.

The second thing was the mosaics – everywhere. In the entrance courtyard, where a full-scale tessellated version of Picasso's Guernica greets visitors. In the hallways, where tiled reproductions of artworks like Michelangelo's Pietà and the Virgin and Child from Istanbul's Hagia Sophia line the walls. Mosaics climbed across flat surfaces and curled around corners, turning the entire building into a living archive of pattern, precision and patience.

Those same qualities were on full display inside the classrooms where students sat bent over their workstations, eyes locked on the fragments beneath their fingers. Mosaic, I would learn over the course of my visit, demands this kind of concentration: a craft shaped not just by hand and material, but by a collected atmosphere where meticulousness can thrive.



together with others, it creates an artwork. There's no ego in mosaic-making."

Glancing at the craft's rich history – which dates to Mesopotamia in the 3rd millennium BCE and stretches across countries and cultures, from the Greeks to the Maya, the Byzantine Empire to the Islamic world – it's easy to see her point. There are no Giotto's or Raphaels in the mosaic arts, no singular Mona Lisa. Instead, this expressive form has always relied on anonymous virtuosity, walking a fine line between art and artisanship.

That's been all the truer in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, where mosaicists never stopped honing the craft, even as it slipped from the spotlight from the Renaissance onwards. With its abundance of stones from the Tagliamento (Friuli's main river) and close cultural ties to Venice – a city long at the epicentre of European art and craftsmanship – the region quietly became a stronghold of mosaic tradition, its skilled artists sought after across continents.

Tessera by tessera

In the 19th Century, Friulian artist Gian Domenico Facchina even helped usher mosaics into the modern era, devising the rovescio su carta (reverse on paper) method to assemble panels off-site – a game-changer for scale and speed. The foyer of Paris' Opéra Garnier was the first to showcase it.

TESSERA SERA...

The school has been nurturing this kind of dedication for more than a century. Founded in 1922 in Spilimbergo, a small town of medieval lanes, a stately castle and Renaissance palazzi in Italy's north-eastern Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, it was originally created to provide formal training to local artisans and preserve the area's ancient mosaic tradition – one that dates to the Roman Empire and has left its mark on everything from Byzantine basilicas to modern monuments.

Today it's the only academic institution in the world entirely devoted to the mosaic arts. Students of all ages, from high school graduates to mid-career creatives, come from across the globe to enroll in its rigorous three-year programme, during which they learn historical mosaic techniques – from intricate Greco-Roman patterns to luminous Byzantine compositions – before experimenting with more contemporary, freeform designs.

Most visited site

In recent years, the school has also become a destination in its own right, drawing design-loving travellers intrigued by the singular world of mosaics to explore its grounds on both public and private tours. Some 40,000 visitors do so annually, making the Scuola Mosaicisti one of the most visited sites in Friuli.

While around 40 students are admitted to the three-year programme each year, no more than 15 complete the full curriculum, earning the title of maestri mosaicisti (mosaic masters). Of those, only a select group of six go on to do a fourth year – a sort of master's degree – to further sharpen their skills.

Hidden in a quiet Italian town is one of the world's most unique mosaic art schools – and a rewarding destination for curious travellers, writes freelance lifestyle writer Marianna Cerini. Mosaic-making is an incredibly precise specialty requiring the artist to painstakingly place together hundreds, sometimes thousands, of small pieces called tesserae



"It takes a lot of hard work and discipline to become a maestro mosaicista," said Gian Piero Brovedani, the school's director. "This is an art that's both humbling and exacting. It teaches you to slow down, pay attention and find beauty in repetition."

Indeed, mosaic-making is an incredibly precise specialty. It requires the artist to

painstakingly place together hundreds, sometimes thousands, of small pieces called tesserae (which can measure as little as 0.5cm) to form intricate patterns and lifelike scenes. Made from marble, glass, smalto (opaque glass tiles) and even shells, these tiny inlays demand thorough craftsmanship and an intuitive sense of rhythm and placement.

'Erase' yourself

As Brovedani noted, it's also deeply collaborative. Mosaicists generally work solo on sections of large compositions, but the true effect of that work emerges only when viewed in unison. "It's a craft that asks you to 'erase' yourself, in a way," said third-year teacher Cristina de Leoni. "One tile on its own doesn't say very much, but

Since then, Friulan mosaicists – most trained in Spilimbergo – have made their mark worldwide: from Rome's iconic Foro Italico sports complex to the New York City subway station at the World Trade Center; from the dome of Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre to Tokyo galleries. These works are proof of a tradition that continues to evolve, tessera by tessera.

"The duality of mosaics makes them endlessly fascinating," said Purnima Allinger, a third-year student who left a marketing career in Berlin to pursue mosaics. "It's a precise and meditative-like craft, but also expressive and emotional like art. You're always shifting between the two – it keeps you completely engaged."

Amos Carcano, a maestro mosaicista from Switzerland, agrees. "You work with your hands, but you're also constantly inventing, playing with texture, colour and patterns. Contemporary mosaics push those boundaries even further. It's a tradition, but it's also wide open."

Carcano is currently one of 10 alumni working on one of the school's most ambitious pieces yet: a 1,265-sq-m mosaic floor for the courtyard depicting Friuli's native flora and fauna – a project set to take more than a year.

At the Scuola dei Mosaicisti del Friuli, students have been mastering the ancient art of mosaic-making since 1922. And increasingly, you can learn even as a visitor. The school offers corsi brevi – short courses ranging from four-day intensives to week-long programmes – to give travellers a hands-on introduction to the art. (Courtesy: bbc.com)

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At the ripe age of 66, for Hamed al Harthy - Oman's lone veteran ultra-trail runner - who has participated in almost all the prestigious ultramarathons and ultra-trail runs in some of the most 'treacherous' terrains around the world, the 'show' has just begun!

Never exhausted on taking on daunting challenges, where youngsters would think twice before signing up, Hamed has always participated in ultra-trails where the difficulty levels are high. 'When the going gets tough, the tough get going' - this adage most aptly describes his demeanour, and he admits that without an iota of pride - rather he takes pride in the fact that his health has remained concurrent with his spirit all through.

Recently back from ChongLi 168 - one of Asia's most iconic ultra-trail running events in the scenic mountain range of Zhangjiakou, the venue of the 2022 Winter Olympics, held between July 11-13, Hamed has not set himself time to unwind. Instead, he is already making plans and preparations for a bigger challenge - the 122km Silk Route Ultra in Ladakh (India) on September 11.

The ancient 'Silk Route' across the Karakoram pass connected North West India with Central Asia from Yarkhand, Kashgar and Turkestan. This route was strategically important and one of the longest trade routes in ancient times, not only for exchange of commodities but also for cultural exchanges. As this famous Silk route passed through the Nubra Valley (Ldumra - the valley of flowers), this race has been aptly named the Silk Route Ultra.

This ultra-race is for all those who have been running the Khardungla Challenge for several years and for those ultra-runners and Ironman athletes who always want to test their endurance further. In fact, Hamed's participation in ChongLi was in preparation for Ladakh.

In an exclusive chat with Muscat Daily, Hamed shares his passion. Excerpts:

Which was the last race you participated in this month?

I participated in the 168 Ultra Trail ChongLi in the second week of July. As I understood, there were 4000 athletes doing ultras and 6000 doing smaller races.

Were you the oldest runner?

Not really. This race is open to runners between 24 to 79 years of age, I am told.

How would you rate the difficulty quotient of this race?

It was difficult considering the Sun and running in open areas. So one would need to carry an additional litre of water with electrolytes. Very few sections offered shade from trees, the rest had just tall grass. Also, the first 19km was difficult to negotiate as the trail was very narrow. The burden, however, was re-

TRAIL RUNNER



OUTDOOR OBSESSION

HAMED AL HARTHY, OMAN'S VETERAN ULTRA-TRAIL RUNNER IS UNSTOPPABLE... ALL THROUGH EACH YEAR, HE IS EITHER PHYSICALLY OR MENTALLY INVOLVED IN SOME TRAIL OR THE OTHER AROUND THE WORLD. BACK FROM ONE RACE IN CHINA, HE IS ALREADY GETTING SET FOR ANOTHER IN INDIA, IN SEPTEMBER



duced as aid stations were manned with professional volunteers. Things were quite easy, I'd say.

How did you tackle this race?

As usual, I study the trail, aid stations, elevations, downhill sections, etc in detail by accessing whatever information I can. I set up a strategy and a plan, and stick to it almost 80 per cent.

What preparation did you do and did you have any sponsors?

I have been preparing for this race since the beginning of this year, and in April, I went to Turkey for a 122km race. I do my long runs in Jabal Akhdar to avoid the summer heat in Muscat.

As for sponsors, I had Sohar International as the sponsor for the ChongLi Race - they will continue their support for the upcoming 122km race in Ladakh region of India which is the highest ultra-marathon in the world.

What was the expected duration of the race and what timing did you clock?

The expected duration was 28 hours - I completed the race in 26 hours. During the night, however, in one of the aid stations, I took the 50km exit by mistake,

instead of the 100km exit. I was misguided by one of the volunteers but I do not blame him - we both learnt a lesson from this.

An organiser detected through GPS that I had got lost but couldn't reach me on time. At the next aid station, I was told to wait for 20 minutes and redirected on the correct route. They gave me the option to quit the race, if I wished to. But for me, quitting is never an option. I decided to continue, though this deviation cost me more than three hours. Otherwise, I could have completed the race within 20-22 hours.

What's next? Are you preparing for any other race this year?

Yes. My next goal is the ultramarathon in Ladakh which is around 46 days away in September. I have already resumed training - outdoors as well as in a gym. For long runs, I head to Jabal Akhdar.

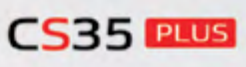
Do you think corporates must back ambitious individuals who seek to set new records?

100% yes. The country has a lot of potential and young athletes need an opportunity to participate in international races. However, many can't afford the cost involved.

Do you foresee yourself as a coach for international trails in the future?

I have many pressing priorities as of now. I am a board member of Himam Trail runs in Oman. I help in working out the strategy of trail running in Oman. The good news is, Oman is catching up very fast. We are already on the world trail map and communities involved.

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