

O M A N
عمان
D A I L Y

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SUNRISE 05:20 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR 03:53 AM
DHUHR 12:13 PM
ASR 03:31 PM
MAGHRIB 07:00 PM
ISHA 08:23 PM

AI VOICE SCAMS: A RISING DIGITAL THREAT

INBRIEF

HM GREETES ICELAND PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik greeted President Halla Tomasdóttir of Iceland on the occasion of her country’s National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan wished the Republic of Iceland further progress and prosperity under the leadership of President Tomasdóttir and members of the government. His Majesty lauded the depth of relations binding Oman and Iceland, hoping that bilateral relations would continue to develop and serve the two countries’ mutual interests.

EA: NO ABNORMAL RADIOACTIVITY FROM ONGOING WAR

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority (EA) has affirmed that current data indicates no abnormal radiation levels or environmental pollutants affecting the atmosphere in the Sultanate of Oman, confirming that the environmental situation remains stable and safe to date.

The Authority urged citizens and residents to obtain information from official sources and not to circulate rumours or unverified information.

In a statement, the Authority emphasised its close monitoring of ongoing regional developments, as part of its national role in tracking and assessing any potential environmental impacts, including radiation pollution. — ONA

GRAPE FESTIVAL KICKS OFF



The Grape Festival in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate officially opened at Al Fursan Hall in Al Rawdah village, Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi, on Monday. **REPORT ON P2**

857-km final phase of Oman’s longest dual carriageway begins

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JUNE 16

Oman has commenced the final construction phases of the dualisation of Sultan Said bin Taimour Road, a strategic highway that, once completed, will become the longest dual carriageway in the country. The road stretches from Oman’s central desert to the southern Governorate of Dhofar and plays a vital role in enhancing national connectivity, economic integration and transport safety.

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology confirmed the start of construction on the third, fourth and fifth phases of the project. These

segments span approximately 400 km and are being developed at a cost of over RO 258 million (\$670m). The construction period for the three phases is expected to be 36 months.

According to Said bin Mohammed Tabook, Director-General of Roads and Land Transport in Dhofar Governorate, the three sections will significantly improve travel efficiency between the central and southern regions of the country. He explained that phase three extends from the Wilayat of Haima to the Wilayat of Maqshin and covers 132.5 km. Phase four begins in Maqshin and continues to the area of Dawkah, adding another 135 km. Phase five then links Dawkah to the Wilayat of Thamrait, also with a length of 132.5 km.



Construction work is underway along the Sultan Said bin Taimour Road between Maqshin and Dawkah.

These final phases are part of a broader national infrastructure initiative to upgrade the Sultan Said bin Taimour Road to a dual carriageway, eventually bringing its total length to approximately 857 kilometres. This makes it the longest dual road in the country, serving as a critical transport corridor for both passenger vehicles and commercial freight, particularly during the annual khareef season when Dhofar sees a significant influx of domestic and regional tourists.

The project is being implemented by a consortium of companies that includes both Omani and Saudi partners. The road has been designed to withstand Oman’s variable desert climate, ensuring

accessibility throughout the year.

Eng Tabook stated that the road is not merely an infrastructure upgrade but a national integration project. He noted that it would significantly boost economic development by supporting the movement of goods and people across the country. The highway is also expected to facilitate overland logistics from Salalah Port and energy zones in the south to the industrial and commercial centres of the interior and northern Oman.

The upgraded road will also improve access to remote communities in the governorates of Al Wusta and Dhofar, contributing to broader goals of economic inclusion and sustainable development.

HM holds phone call with Iranian President

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik made a phone call with President Dr Masoud Pezeshkian of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Monday.

During the telephone conversation, His Majesty the Sultan extended condolences and sympathies to the Iranian President for the victims of the Israeli attacks on his country, condemning the damage inflicted on infrastructure and facilities and wishing the injured

a speedy recovery.

His Majesty the Sultan emphasised the importance of de-escalation from both sides and a return to negotiations, dialogue and understanding to halt the spectre of ongoing conflict and its catastrophic repercussions, safeguarding lives and resources.

His Majesty the Sultan further reaffirmed the commitment of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman to actively contribute

through all political and diplomatic means to resolving this crisis, preventing its escalation and establishing fair and just settlements that restore normalcy.

For his part, the Iranian President expressed appreciation for the earnest efforts undertaken by the Government of the Sultanate of Oman under the leadership of His Majesty the Sultan to bridge perspectives and resolve conflicts through

peaceful means, reinforcing the pillars of security and peace, and fostering stability and prosperity for all nations. He affirmed that while his country faces heinous Israeli aggression, it backs diplomatic solutions through dialogue and negotiation, adheres to international law and respect for state sovereignty and calls on the international community to stand with justice and the right of nations to self-defence. — ONA

Iran urges Trump to make Israel halt war; crude falls



Emergency personnel work at an impact site following Iran’s missile attack in Tel Aviv on Monday. — Reuters

IRAN CALLED ON US President Donald Trump on Monday to force Israel to cease fire as the only way to end the four-day-old aerial war, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said his country was on the “path to victory”.

Israeli forces stepped up their bombardment of Iranian cities, while Iran proved capable of piercing Israeli air defences with one of its most successful volleys yet of retaliatory missile strikes.

“If President Trump is genuine about diplomacy and interested in stopping this war, next steps are consequential,” Iran’s

Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said on X.

“Israel must halt its aggression, and absent a total cessation of military aggression against us, our responses will continue. It takes one phone call from Washington to muzzle someone like Netanyahu. That may pave the way for a return to diplomacy.”

Sources said that Tehran had asked Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Oman to press Trump to use his influence on Israel to agree to an immediate ceasefire. In return, Iran would show flexibility in nuclear negotiations, said the two Iranian and three regional sources.

US President Donald Trump said that Iran was not winning its conflict with Israel and

should re-enter negotiations “before it’s too late.” “They have to make a deal, and it’s painful for both parties, but I’d say Iran is not winning this war, and they should talk, and they should talk immediately, before it’s too late,” Trump told reporters at a G7 summit in Canada.

Stocks rose and oil prices fell more than \$2 per barrel on Monday after reports that Iran is seeking an end to hostilities with Israel, raising the possibility of a truce and easing fears of a disruption to crude supplies from the region. The dollar dipped against the euro and pound, while safe-haven gold declined slightly. — Agencies

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SHORTTAKES



SHABAB OMAN II
DEPARTS BARCELONA
FOR LISBON

MADRID: The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) vessel ‘Shabab Oman II’ on Monday left the Port of Barcelona in the Kingdom of Spain, bound for the Port of Lisbon in the Portuguese Republic. The vessel is on its seventh international voyage, titled ‘Glories of the Seas’, to the European continent. During the voyage, ‘Shabab Oman II’ will call at several ports and stations. — ONA

VISUAL IDENTITY
OF BAHLA FORT
UNVEILED



MANAH: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, in collaboration with Unesco’s Chair for World Heritage Management and Sustainable Tourism in the Arab Region and Marasim Tourism & Investment Company, on Monday unveiled the visual identity of Bahla Fort. This initiative aims to highlight the fort’s historical, cultural, and architectural significance through a unified design. The event took place at Oman Across Ages Museum. Eng Ali bin Ahmed al Shaqsi, Director-General of Bahla Fort Management and Operation Project, stated: “This fort has stood through the ages as a testament to Omani ingenuity and a symbol of our deep-rooted civilisation, whose eternal glories continue to be recounted across generations.” He emphasised that the launch of Bahla Fort’s official identity marks a renewed vision that harmonises form and substance. On his turn, Dr Hussein bin Sulaiman al Salmi, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Administrative and Financial Affairs at the German University of Technology, noted that the visual identity competition attracted 31 participants from nine countries – the first such initiative for a Unesco World Heritage site in the GCC. He highlighted Bahla Fort’s 1987 Unesco listing, recognising its significance as a medieval defensive structure featuring unique earthen architecture and ancient irrigation systems. — ONA

MoCIIP signs agreements to
boost industrial workforce

FAISAL AL AJMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 16

THE Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) signed a series of strategic agreements for building national capabilities in the Sultanate of Oman’s industrial sector. The agreements were inked on Monday in the presence of several high-ranking officials, including Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy.

The MoUs, with private and public sector organisations, are part of broader efforts to implement the Industrial Strategy 2040. The national strategy is designed to create a knowledge-based, diversified industrial base and increase the contribution of Omani talent to the sector.

One of the key initiatives includes the establishment of an industrial training centre in Al Batinah North Governorate through a memorandum of understanding between the ministry, the Governor’s Office, and Jindal Steel. The centre will be used to impart specialised training to enhance the employment opportunities for Omani youth.

Eng Sami bin Salim al Sahib, Corporate Strategist at Jindal Steel, commented on the occasion, “In alignment with the endeavours towards realising the goals of Oman Vision 2040 and the national Industrial Strategy, a new specialised training centre will be established to aid in capacity building in the industrial sector.”



As part of the pacts, a new training centre and digital procurement platform will be launched.

Eng Al Sahib added, “In its first phase, the centre will focus on training and qualifying job seekers for employment in the sector. In the second phase, the programme will be expanded to upskilling and professional development of current industrial staff, strengthening the national workforce and long-term industrial development.”

Another milestone agreement was with Daleel Petroleum to fund the creation of “Tasneea,” an e-platform linking industrial procurement and contracts with local manufacturers, fostering local content and improving supply chain efficiencies.

Oman Cables Chief Operating Officer, Mohannad al Lawati, detailed the scope and range of the programmes, saying that, “Over 400 employees have been registered in technical and professional development programmes, while over 33 have been

enrolled in leadership training programmes.”

For her part, Nasra bint Saif al Habsiyah, Director-General of Commerce, MoCIIP, stated that a cooperation programme has been signed with Al Alamiya Retail Company. The programme involves the provision of 300 opportunities for qualification, training, and employment for the national workforce –100 direct placements with training and 200 training opportunities with future employment.

Eng Khalid bin Salim al Qasabi, Director-General of Industry, said, “The agreements will help to build national capacities in the industrial sector by developing qualified local talent, increasing local content, and realising greater added value in the supply chain. These are designed to improve the competitiveness of Omani products and their promotion in foreign markets.”

Oman promotes safe e-shopping at National Forum

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 16

The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA), in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, hosted the national E-Commerce Forum on Monday under the theme ‘E-Commerce: Between Consumer Rights and Supplier Responsibilities.’ The event brought together key stakeholders from the public and private sectors, as well as digital economy specialists, to spotlight the importance of consumer protection in the evolving digital marketplace.

This initiative reinforces Oman’s commitment to advancing digital rights and



The forum forms part of the CPA’s broader ‘Safe E-Shopping’ campaign

promoting safe online shopping in support of Oman Vision 2040, which places strong emphasis on innovation, knowledge-based growth and digital transformation.

Opening the forum, Muzna bint Rashid al Maamariyah, Acting Director

of Communication and Media at the CPA, underscored the significance of collaborative dialogue among consumers, suppliers, regulators and economic players.

A key highlight of the forum was a video presentation followed by an overview of the CPA’s awareness campaign titled ‘Safe E-Shopping: A Vision Built on Achievement,’ presented by Dr Muneera al Fikri.

The first panel session featured presentations on regulatory measures and digital market safety. Azza al Kindi from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion addressed ‘E-Commerce Regulation in the Sultanate of Oman,’ followed by Khalid al

Siyabi from the CPA discussing ‘Safe Shopping in the Digital Economy.’ Hajer bint Qambar al Ajmiyah from the Central Bank of Oman concluded the session with insights on ‘Regulatory Framework for Financial Consumer Protection.’

The second session delved into behavioural economics and digital policy frameworks. Arwa bint Obeid al Zaabiyah from the Ministry of Economy presented ‘Digital Fraud from a Behavioural Economics Perspective,’ while Hilal al Alawi from the TRA discussed postal service rights related to e-commerce. Rashid al Alawi from MoCIIP wrapped up with a presentation on the ‘Policy and Executive Programme for the Postal Sector.’

Al Sharqiyah North grape festival highlights agricultural growth

MUSCAT: The Grape Festival in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate officially opened on Monday at Al Fursan Hall in Al Rawdah village, the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi. Held under the auspices of Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the event was jointly organised by the ministry and the Office of the Governor. It brought together farmers, entrepreneurs, agricultural engineers, the Majlis Ash-Shura representatives, shaikhs and dignitaries.

In his address, Governor Mahmoud



Estimated grape production is set at 635 tonnes, with returns expected to surpass RO 1 million. — Photo by Abdulwahid al Hamadani

al Thuhli praised the festival as a testament to successful collaboration between government bodies and the local community.

The 2024 edition builds on this momentum with a model grape farm project aiming to cultivate an additional 100 acres, raising the total to 127 acres. Estimated production is set at 635 tonnes, with economic returns expected to surpass RO 1 million. Six high-quality international grape varieties – renowned for storability and transportability – have been introduced to enhance

global market competitiveness.

Dr Saud al Habsi, in his opening speech, underscored the festival’s role in empowering farmers and advancing local agricultural production. The first day featured a documentary on grape farming in Oman and a presentation by Dr Rashid al Yahyai of Sultan Qaboos University, emphasising the role of biotechnology and farmer-academic collaboration in sectoral growth.

On June 17, the festival continues with workshops and papers from agricultural bodies and banks.

SHORT TAKES



ISG INTL HOSTS OMAN’S FIRST TED-ED EVENT

MUSCAT: ISG International proudly hosted Oman’s first-ever TED-Ed event on May 28, marking its official recognition as the nation’s first TED-Ed School. A total of 34 enthusiastic learners participated in the TED-Ed programme, undergoing weeks of ideation, mentoring and peer collaboration. The journey culminated with 10 exceptional student speakers taking the stage to present powerful, original talks inspired by personal insights and global issues.

These talks were the result of a deeply reflective process guided by the English Department, whose faculty mentored students through idea development, storytelling techniques and public speaking skills.

Gracing the event as chief guest was Nisham Rayees, renowned public speaker and Oman FM broadcaster. Also present were Ahmed Rayees, President of the ISG School Management Committee; Sunil Kattakath, Convenor; Papri Ghosh, Principal of ISG; and Pyarija Cidar, Vice-Principal of ISG International.

The young speakers — Hrithik Sunilkumar, Keyanna Ann James, Mehreen Fatima Bhamla, Aradhana Rachel Roy, Jaden Lazarus Stephen, Ayaana Zakkir Hussain, Aliyah Chopra, Vivaan Gupta and Reuben Thomas John — captivated the audience with talks that were insightful and impressively articulate.

Nisham commended the students’ confidence and depth, describing the event as a “visionary platform that nurtures future leaders.” Beyond being a public speaking showcase, the TED-Ed programme at ISG reflects the school’s broader educational mission — to nurture critical thinking, creativity and confident communication. It stands as a testament to ISG International’s dedication to shaping globally minded youth through innovative learning opportunities. With this landmark achievement, ISG International has set a bold precedent for student-led discourse in Oman — ensuring that young voices are not just heard, but celebrated.

HOUSEMAID AMONG 3 ARRESTED FOR THEFT IN SEEB

MUSCAT: The Police Command in the Governorate of Muscat has arrested a Filipina housemaid along with two Pakistani nationals for attempting to steal jewellery and large sums of money from a house in the Wilayat of Al Seeb.

According to a statement issued by the Royal Oman Police (ROP), the suspects were caught in possession of stolen gold items and cash during the operation. Authorities confirmed that legal procedures are currently underway.

The Royal Oman Police urged residents to remain cautious and to report any suspicious activity, reaffirming their ongoing efforts to safeguard communities across Oman.

OMAN TAPS INDIAN MARKET WITH 6-CITY TOURISM ROADSHOW

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
[@patkaushal](#)

In a strategic push to attract travellers, the Sultanate of Oman has rolled out a six-city sales mission across India, aiming to deepen business ties with the country’s travel trade and promote Oman as a premier destination for leisure, luxury and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) tourism.

The campaign, running from

June 8 to 21, spans Hyderabad, Kolkata, Indore, Kochi, Goa and Bhubaneswar, targeting high-potential outbound tourism hubs.

Through a series of B2B meetings, destination presentations and networking sessions, Oman’s delegation is engaging directly with Indian tour operators, travel agencies and event planners.

The initiative is spearheaded by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, with key officials such as Saada al Harthy, Director of the

Business Development Department, and Mubarak bin Salim al Harrasi, Head of the Arab and Asia Market Section, leading the mission.

Their participation underscores Oman’s commitment to strengthening tourism partnerships and fostering mutual growth in the sector.

Air connectivity between the two countries is also a central focus, with Oman Air and SalamAir actively supporting the campaign.

MoSD, Unicef launch guide to boost child protection

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 16

In a significant move to bolster child protection efforts, the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), in partnership with the United Nations Children’s Fund (Unicef) office in the Sultanate of Oman, launched the Child Protection Guide under the auspices of Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development (MoSD). The launch was attended by representatives from various government bodies, civil society organisations and international partners.

The guide serves as a comprehensive and practical reference aligned with international standards. It is specifically designed to assist frontline workers — including social workers, teachers and healthcare providers — by unifying key concepts, simplifying referral procedures and enhancing coordination among stakeholders. The ultimate goal is to enable rapid and effective interventions that ensure the protection of children and the creation of a safe and nurturing environment for every child in Oman.

Sayyidah Maani bint Abdullah al Busaidy, Director-General of Family Development at the Ministry of Social Development, stated that the guide represents a strategic milestone in integrating national efforts to combat child abuse, neglect and exploitation. It empowers professionals to act with greater efficiency and aligns with both the Child Law and Oman Vision 2040, reinforcing the



Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, at the event on Monday

country’s commitment to child welfare. Unicef Representative in Oman, Sumayra Chowdhury, underscored the collaborative spirit behind the guide, noting that it symbolises not only guidance but a shared promise to take humane and decisive action whenever a child faces danger. She emphasised that this initiative reflects the strong, ongoing partnership between Unicef and the Government of Oman in building inclusive and responsive child protection systems.

Haitham bin Salem al Khaduri, Director of the Family Protection Department, described the guide as a national framework that consolidates Oman’s obligations under both local and international child protection laws.

It supports the development of a unified case management system, enhances specialist capacity and contributes to community awareness, policy reform and violence prevention.

As part of its implementation strategy, the Ministry of Social Development and Unicef will roll out a series of workshops and training sessions across Oman’s governorates.

These efforts aim to ensure the guide’s effective and consistent use while reinforcing professional practices grounded in children’s rights. The Child Protection Guide is a testament to Oman’s dedication to nurturing its youngest citizens, safeguarding their rights, and laying the foundation for a brighter and more secure future.

Al Hinai Coding Initiative powers digital future

SIHAM AL SAIDI
MUSCAT, JUNE 16

The Al Hinai Coding Initiative, spearheaded by tech educator Mohammed al Hinai, is igniting a passion for programming among children across Oman. With more than 5,000 trainees and an inclusive approach that reaches even the remotest corners of the country, the initiative is fast becoming a national model for creative and impactful tech education.

A pioneering developer of educational programmes since 2006, Al Hinai was inspired by



The initiative is fast becoming a national model for creative and impactful tech education

the BBC micro:bit initiative launched in 2015, which aimed to introduce coding to over one million children globally. Building on this vision, he crafted an entirely homegrown curriculum tailored to Oman’s youth — an approach that emphasises learning through real-world challenges and hands-on application.

“What makes this initiative truly special,” says Al Hinai, “is that it’s built entirely from the ground up. The curriculum, activities and learning paths are all designed to make programming fun, accessible and deeply impactful.

Programming becomes a form of expression, not just a technical skill.”

These workshops are offered free of charge through Al Hinai’s mobile coding lab, a travelling classroom that has reached students from Musandam to Salalah.

Feedback from teachers and parents has been overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the initiative’s ability to keep children engaged in meaningful learning and laying a strong foundation for future academic and professional pursuits in science and technology.

Arab presenters to join Khareef Dhofar media coverage for first time

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JUNE 16

For the first time, presenters from Arab countries outside the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) will participate in the live media coverage of Khareef Dhofar Season. The initiative is part of a wider effort by the Ministry of Information to broaden regional engagement and strengthen the cultural identity of the monsoon season.

Dr Mohammed al Sheshai, Director-General, Information Department in Dhofar Governorate, confirmed in an exclusive interview with the Observer that the ministry



DR MOHAMMED AL SHESHAI

One of the season’s flagship programmes is Al Nas Wal Khareef (The People and the Monsoon), which will be broadcast live every afternoon from 2:30 pm to 4 pm. The show will be produced from a mobile studio that travels across

is fully prepared to deliver a multi-platform media campaign for Khareef Dhofar 2025. The plan includes daily live coverage across television, radio, print and digital platforms.

Dhofar’s natural sites. It will feature presenters from the GCC and, for the first time, presenters from other Arab countries. This expansion reflects the ministry’s aim to give the season a wider Arab media profile.

Another key programme is Layali Al Khareef (Monsoon Nights), which will air every evening from 9 pm to 10 pm from the cultural venue Awdat Al Madi (Return to the Past). This show will highlight the evening events taking place across the governorate, especially those connected to Dhofar’s heritage and tourism appeal.

Radio coverage has also been expanded. The programme Atheer

Al Khareef will air daily from 5 pm to 7 pm between August 15 and 31. It will be broadcast from the dedicated radio studio at Awdat Al Madi and will focus on cultural and recreational content. In addition, the general radio service will provide continuous festival coverage, while Al Khareef Wal Shabab (The Monsoon and Youth) will be dedicated to youth voices and highlight initiatives by young Omanis and small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Dr Al Sheshai also confirmed that the media plan was developed in coordination with other stakeholders. A high-level meeting

was recently held between Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, and Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, to finalise the media strategy and ensure alignment across all platforms.

He noted that all event zones have been renamed in Arabic as part of a broader effort to reinforce national identity. This year’s coverage will also include real-time updates across newspapers, radio, TV, Oman News Agency and social media platforms. The strategy is designed to deliver a unified media message that reflects the essence of Khareef Dhofar.



AHMED AL KAABI

AS ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) continues to advance at an unprecedented pace, a new and alarming form of cyber fraud has emerged — AI-powered voice cloning. Using sophisticated technology, fraudsters can now replicate real voices with astonishing accuracy, tricking victims into believing they're speaking to a trusted friend or family member.

This type of fraud has not yet been reported in the Sultanate of Oman; however, its increasing spread in several countries raises concerns about its potential arrival in the region especially given the widespread use of voice technologies and digital communication in everyday life.

According to several international cases, the fraud process typically begins with the scammer obtaining a voice recording of the victim, either through a phone call or a voice message shared on social media. The fraudsters then use sophisticated AI software to analyse the voice and create an imitation that is nearly indistinguishable from the original.

Once this "cloned voice" is generated, the scammers contact the victim's acquaintances or family members using the same tone and phrases, urgently

requesting a money transfer under false pretences such as an emergency or unexpected issue. Trusting the familiar voice, some individuals may send money without verifying the identity of the caller.

In response to this growing threat, several global banking institutions and cybersecurity experts have issued serious warnings, urging people to be cautious and never respond to financial requests — even from familiar voices — unless the speaker's identity is verified through a more secure method, such as a video call or in-person meeting.

Amjad al Busaidy, an information security expert, explains: "Anyone with just a few minutes of a recorded voice can now use AI tools to create a voice clone identical to the original and use it in fraudulent schemes that are hard to detect using traditional methods."

He adds, "The real danger isn't only in the technology itself, but in people's unquestioning trust in a familiar voice especially when someone seemingly close asks for urgent help."

COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY
Al Busaidy emphasises the importance of spreading digital literacy across all segments of society. We need broad awareness

campaigns — not just targeting individuals, but also led by banks, and ministries responsible for technology and education to clarify the risks of AI when used for criminal purposes, he said.

To combat this evolving form of fraud, concrete steps must be taken to strengthen the protection of both individuals and institutions. The first of these is to verify the identity of the requester through a video call or in-person meeting, rather than relying solely on the voice, no matter how familiar or convincing it may sound.

Additionally, people should never transfer money based solely on a voice message, especially if the request comes in unusual circumstances or includes a sense of urgency, a common tactic used by fraudsters to confuse victims and push them into making rushed decisions.

Users should also be cautious when sending voice messages through public apps or open group chats, as these could easily be stolen and used for voice cloning. It is equally important not to share personal voice clips in spaces accessible to strangers.

Finally, if you suspect any attempt of this kind of fraud, it is crucial to report it immediately to the relevant authorities.

Early reporting can help track such tactics and prevent their spread in the community.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Relatives and friends hold portraits of POWs during rally, in Kyiv. — AFP

1,245 BODIES RETURNED FROM RUSSIA, SAYS KYIV

KYIV: Russia has returned 1,245 bodies to Ukraine, Kyiv said on Monday, the final stage of a deal to repatriate more than 6,000 dead Ukrainian soldiers agreed at peace talks this month. Russia and Ukraine reached a deal on a large-scale exchange of prisoners and bodies of killed soldiers, the only visible result from two rounds of direct talks in the Turkish city of Istanbul.

“Another 1,245 bodies returned to Ukraine — repatriation part of Istanbul agreements has been completed,” the government agency coordinating the repatriation said. Ukrainian Defence Minister Rustem Umerov said on Facebook that Kyiv has received more than 6,000 bodies in total over the past week.

The Russian defence ministry gave a slightly different figure of 1,248 for the number of bodies returned in the final stage of the accord — three more than Kyiv said it had received. Ukrainian Interior Minister Igor Klymenko on Monday accused Russia of “deliberately complicating the identification process”. “Bodies are returned in an extremely mutilated state, parts of (the same) bodies are in different bags,” Klymenko said on Telegram. — AFP

LA CURFEW TO CONTINUE FOR ‘COUPLE MORE DAYS’



Demonstrators take part in a protest during national rally in downtown Los Angeles. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: A nightly curfew in Los Angeles will continue for “a couple more days,” Mayor Karen Bass said, the ninth day of protests that have seen US President Donald Trump launch a military-backed crackdown. Demonstrators began protesting on June 6 against immigration raids launched by the Trump administration to round up undocumented migrants in the heavily Latino city in Democrat-led California.

Bass issued an overnight curfew on June 10 on the downtown area at the heart of the protests to stop incidents of vandalism and looting. On Sunday she said she is hoping that the number of people behind the violent incidents “will taper off”. “So I know the curfew will be on for at least a couple more days,” she said in a televised interview with local news channel KTLA, adding that she cannot predict how many more days exactly. “We don’t know how many raids are going to happen, we don’t know what the character of the raids will be, and every time that happens it really generates a lot of anger in the city,” she said. — AFP

UN SLASHES GLOBAL AID PLAN OVER ‘DEEPEST FUNDING CUTS’

GENEVA: The United Nations said on Monday it was drastically scaling back its global humanitarian aid plans because of the “deepest funding cuts ever” — leaving tens of millions of people facing dire straits. The UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said it was seeking \$29 billion in funding for 2025 compared to the \$44 billion originally requested in December, in a “hyper-prioritised” appeal.

Drastic US funding cuts have

had dramatic consequences for emergency aid, vaccination campaigns and the distribution of drugs to fight AIDS. Other major donor countries have also cut back their contributions in the face of an uncertain economic outlook.

“Brutal funding cuts leave us with brutal choices,” OCHA chief Tom Fletcher said in a statement. “All we ask is one per cent of what you chose to spend last year on war. But this isn’t just an appeal for money — it’s a call for global responsibility,

for human solidarity, for a commitment to end the suffering.”

In total, the original plan covered more than 70 countries and aimed to assist nearly 190 million vulnerable people. Even so, that plan acknowledged there were 115 million people the UN would not be able to reach. “We have been forced into a triage of human survival,” Fletcher said on Monday.

The mathematics “is cruel, and the consequences are heartbreaking”. — AFP

40 killed in Gaza as UN slams Israeli aid system

ISRAELI fire killed at least 40 people, half of them near an aid distribution site operated by the US-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation on Monday, the territory’s health ministry said, as UN officials denounced Israeli-backed aid delivery methods. Medics said at least 20 people were killed and 200 others wounded near an aid distribution site in Rafah, the latest in daily mass shootings that have killed hundreds of Palestinians trying to reach food since Israel imposed a new distribution system after partly lifting a near three-month total blockade.

Israel has put responsibility for distributing much of the aid it allows into Gaza into the hands of a new US-backed group, the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, which operates three sites in areas guarded by Israeli troops. The United Nations has rejected the plan, saying GHF distribution is inadequate, dangerous and violates humanitarian impartiality principles.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military about Monday’s reports of shootings. In previous incidents it has occasionally acknowledged troops opening fire near aid sites, while blaming gunmen for provoking the violence. Relatives arrived at Nasser Hospital to mourn the dead. Women and children wept beside bodies wrapped in white shrouds. “We went there thinking we would get aid to feed our children, but it turned out to be



Palestinians salvage items from the rubble of a house hit in an Israeli strike on the Bureij camp. — AFP

“Scores of people have been killed & injured in the past days, including of starving people trying to get some food from a lethal distribution system

PHILIPPE LAZZARINI

a trap, a killing. I advise everyone: don’t go there,” said Ahmed Fayad, one of those who tried to reach aid on Monday.

Philippe Lazzarini, the head of the United Nations Palestinian refugees agency UNRWA, said in a post on X: “Scores of people have been killed & injured in the past days, including of starving people trying to get some food from a lethal distribution system.” Before the new system was set up, aid had been distributed to Gaza’s 2.3 million residents mainly by UN agencies such as UNRWA, which employ thousands of staff inside Gaza and operate hundreds of sites across the breadth of the enclave.

Lazzarini said Israel had not lifted restrictions on UN agencies

including UNRWA bringing in aid, despite an abundance of assistance ready to be moved into the enclave. On Sunday, COGAT, the Israeli military aid coordination agency, said that this week it had facilitated the entry of 292 trucks with humanitarian aid from the United Nations and the international community, including food and flour, into Gaza. It said the Israeli military would continue to permit the entry of humanitarian aid while ensuring it did not reach Hamas. Before Monday’s incident, the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said that at least 300 people had so far been killed, and more than 2,600 wounded, near aid distribution sites since the GHF began operations.

— Reuters



INDIANS WAIT FOR REMAINS AFTER CRASH

AHMEDABAD: Indian health officials have begun handing relatives the bodies of their loved ones after one of the world’s worst plane crashes in decades, but most families were still waiting on Monday for the results of DNA testing. Mourners have held funerals for some of the 279 people killed when the Air India jet crashed in the western city of Ahmedabad on Thursday, but others are facing an anguished wait.

There was one survivor out of 242 passengers and crew on board the London-bound plane when it slammed into a residential area of Ahmedabad, killing at least 38 people on the ground as well. Air India said there were 169 Indian passengers, 53 British, seven Portuguese and a Canadian on board the flight, as well as 12 crew members. — AFP

EXTRADITION ORDER

Bangladesh orders ex-leader Hasina to return



Bangladesh’s war crimes court ordered fugitive ex-leader Sheikh Hasina on Monday to return to face trial on charges amounting to crimes against humanity. Prosecutors have filed five charges against Hasina, including abetment, incitement, complicity, facilitation, conspiracy and failure to prevent mass murder — charges that amount to crimes against humanity under Bangladeshi law. The trial will resume on June 24 without her if she fails to return. — AFP

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Large wildfire rages outside Athens



Dozens of Greek firefighters struggled to tame a wildfire that raged through a thick forest northeast of Athens that has forced authorities to order evacuations. Assisted by 17 aircraft and 30 engines, 120 firefighters were deployed to the village of Ano Souli. Residents of the village and the nearby town of Marathonas were ordered to leave their homes. Greece has hired a record number of firefighters this year in anticipation of a difficult fire season. — Reuters

SURGING VIOLENCE

Nigeria attack forces thousands to flee



More than 6,000 people have fled their homes in central Nigeria after a deadly attack by gunmen last week, emergency services said. “As of last night, displacement figures stood at 1,069 households, comprising 6,527 individuals,” the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) said. More than half of those displaced — many of whom are women and children — “are in urgent need of food, non-food items, potable water and essential medical supplies,” NEMA added. — AFP

SPIRALLING AIR WAR RAISES DEATH TOLL

The escalation has sparked growing international concern as it marks



Smoke billows for the second day from the Shahrana oil depot, northwest of Tehran. — AFP

G7 confronts Israel-Iran crisis as Trump dominates summit

KANANASKIS: Group of Seven leaders including US President Donald Trump prepared to hold talks on Monday in the Canadian Rockies, tackling issues including whether they can find common ground on an escalating conflict between Iran and Israel.

The three-day gathering in the mountain town of Kananaskis marks the return to the international diplomatic calendar for Trump, who has stunned allies by defying norms and slapping sweeping tariffs on friend and foe alike.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney had designed an agenda aimed at minimizing disagreements within the club of wealthy industrial democracies — Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States. But Israel shocked the world two days before the summit with a surprise, massive

military campaign against Iran.

Canada is now sounding out countries about making a joint call on Israel and Iran, diplomats said. The statement could call for de-escalation or could simply back Israel, saying that it has a “right to defend itself” due to Iran’s contested nuclear work.

European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said that she spoke with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu before the summit. “Of course I think a negotiated solution is, in the long term, the best solution,” she said, stopping short of calling for an immediate ceasefire.

Japan made a forceful break with allies in the United States and Europe when it denounced Israel’s strikes as “deeply regrettable.” European powers have all steered clear of criticizing Israel on the Iran

strikes, despite separate concern about the humanitarian situation in besieged Gaza. French President Emmanuel Macron has called for restraint and urged Iran to re-enter talks with the United States, while also blaming Tehran for escalating tensions over its nuclear programme.

Iran on Monday urged Britain, France and Germany to pressure Israel to stop its deadly attacks on Iran as fighting raged between the two foes for a fourth day.

“Germany, France and England should have very clearly condemned the Zionist regime’s crimes, especially against the Natanz nuclear facility,” said foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei, adding that European powers should focus on “stopping the aggression” and holding Israel “accountable”.

— AFP

IRAN launched missiles at Israeli cities on Monday after Israeli strikes deep inside the Islamic republic, raising Israel’s death toll by 11 on day four of an escalating air war. After decades of enmity and a prolonged shadow war, Israel on Friday launched a surprise aerial campaign targeting sites across Iran, saying the attacks aimed to prevent its arch-foe from acquiring atomic weapons — a charge Tehran denies. Israel’s strikes have so far killed at least 224 people, including top military commanders, nuclear scientists and civilians, according to Iranian authorities.

In retaliation, Iran’s Revolutionary Guards said it had “successfully” struck Israel with a salvo of missiles and warned of “effective, targeted and more devastating operations” to come. The Iranian attacks hit Tel Aviv, Bnei Brak, Petah Tikva and Haifa — with shattered homes, smouldering wreckage and stunned residents picking through debris. “The entire shelter shook,” said Shlomi Biton, who had taken cover with his five children in Haifa. “There were many, many explosions.” Ido, a student whose house was hit, recalled scenes of panic. “There were 12 to 13 children there in the shelter screaming.”

The death toll in Israel rose by 11 on Monday, the prime minister’s office said, bringing the total since Friday to 24. US ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee

said the missile barrage also lightly damaged a building used by the American embassy in Tel Aviv. In Iran, foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei condemned as a “war crime” an Israeli strike that damaged a hospital in the western city of Kermanshah. A previous report said a nearby workshop had been the target.

Iran’s missile attack followed waves of intense Israeli air raids that struck targets across the country — from the western border with Iraq to Tehran and as far east as Mashhad, where the airport was hit. While some people fled Tehran, others vowed to stay. “It is natural that war has its own stress, but I will not leave my city,” said Shokouh Razzazi, 31, in the capital, where the Grand Bazaar was closed amid the ongoing Israeli strikes.

The escalation has sparked growing international concern. China urged both sides to “immediately take measures to cool down the tensions” and avoid plunging the region into deeper turmoil. European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen also called for calm, telling Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that “a negotiated solution is, in the long term, the best solution”.

Iran, in turn, urged the International Atomic Energy Agency to condemn Israeli strikes on its nuclear facilities. “We expect the (IAEA) Board of Governors and the director general to take a firm position in condemning this act and holding the regime

(Israel) accountable,” said spokesman Baqaei. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan meanwhile told his Iranian counterpart in a phone call that Ankara is ready to play a “facilitating role” to end the conflict.

In a televised address, Iranian armed forces spokesman Colonel Reza Sayyad vowed a “devastating response” to Israeli attacks. “Leave the occupied territories (Israel) because they will certainly no longer be habitable in the future,” he said, adding shelters would “not guarantee security”.

Addressing Iran’s parliament, President Masoud Pezeshkian urged citizens to “stand strong against this genocidal criminal aggression with unity and coherence”.

US President Donald Trump insisted Washington had “nothing to do” with Israel’s military campaign but warned any Iranian attack on American interests would trigger “the full strength and might” of the US military. On Sunday, Trump urged both sides to “make a deal” while expressing doubts about near-term peace prospects. “Sometimes they have to fight it out, but we’re going to see what happens,” he said.

Asked by Fox News whether regime change in Iran was one of Israel’s objectives, Netanyahu said: “It certainly could be the result, because the Iran regime is very weak.” As hostilities intensified, Iran said it was scrapping planned nuclear talks with the United States, calling dialogue “meaningless” under bombardment. — AFP



People check the damage at the site of an Iranian missile strike, in southern Israel. — AFP

shattered homes, smouldering wreckage on the fighting grounds



Israeli air defence systems are activated to intercept Iranian missiles over Haifa. — AFP

Tehran residents flee Israeli attacks, sparking huge jams

PARIS: Residents of Tehran have fled the Iranian capital in large numbers in the face of Israeli bombardments, creating immense traffic jams on the main road heading north, according to social media content posted on Monday. Images verified by AFP shot by a social media user from an overpass, showed near immobile traffic on a Tehran highway heading north with almost no vehicles in the opposite lane. Israel on Friday launched a surprise aerial campaign

targeting sites across Iran, saying the attacks aimed to prevent its archfoe from acquiring atomic weapons — a charge Tehran denies. The Israeli strikes have so far killed at least 224 people, including top military commanders, nuclear scientists but also civilians, according to Iranian authorities. Iranian authorities have closed civilian air space until further notice due to the Israel attacks, leaving land routes the only way out of Tehran which

has been the main focus of Israeli attacks.

Israel has warned Iranians to stay away from any military infrastructure in a city where the security forces maintain a heavy presence, both overt and covert. Videos filmed inside Iran and posted by Persian-language TV channels based abroad, such as Iran International and Manoto, as well as widely followed bloggers including Vahid Online, showed long queues of cars barely moving as they tried to leave Tehran. — AFP

Judiciary chief vows swift punishment for Israel spies

TEHRAN: Iran’s Chief Justice Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejei has issued a stern warning to anyone cooperating with Israel, promising swift and harsh punishment.

“Without leniency and with full determination, they will face the harshest punishment in accordance with the applicable laws and with the utmost urgency,” Mohseni-Ejei said on Monday, according to the Tasnim news agency. Cooperation with Israel or foreign intelligence services is

often punishable by death in Iran. The judiciary chief said that anyone taken into custody for such connections should be brought to trial immediately, with verdicts issued quickly and punishments carried out swiftly and publicly, especially given the current war situation.

The state-affiliated Mizan news agency reported on Monday that Iran had executed another man convicted of spying for Israel. The man, arrested in 2023, was found guilty under Islamic law of “waging war

against God” and “corruption on Earth.” This marks the third execution linked to espionage charges in recent months. “Esmail Fekri, a Mossad agent convicted of the capital offences of ‘corruption on Earth’ and ‘moharebeh’ (waging war against God)” was hanged after going through the full process of criminal procedure,” Mizan said. Mizan said the execution was carried out after all legal procedures were completed and the verdict was upheld by the supreme court. — dpa

France shuts Israeli weapons booths

LE BOURGET: Geopolitical tensions roiled the opening of the Paris Air Show on Monday as French authorities sealed off Israeli weapons industry booths amid the conflicts in Iran and Gaza, a move that Israel condemned as “outrageous”.

Black walls were installed around the stands of five Israeli defence firms at the trade fair in Le Bourget, an airfield on the outskirts of Paris.

The booths displayed “offensive weapons” in violation of agreements with

Israeli authorities, a French government source said. The companies — Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), Rafael Uvision, Elbit and Aeronautics — make drones and guided bombs and missiles.

An Israeli exhibitor wrote a message in yellow chalk on one of the walls, saying the hidden defence systems “are protecting the state of Israel these days. The French government, in the name of discrimination is trying to hide them from you!”

The presence of Israeli firms at

Le Bourget, though smaller than in the past, was already a source of tension before the start of the Paris Air Show.

A French court last week rejected a bid by NGOs to ban Israeli companies from Le Bourget over concerns about “international crimes”. Local lawmakers from the Seine-Saint-Denis department hosting the event were absent during French Prime Minister Francois Bayrou’s visit to the opening of the air show in protest over the Israeli presence. — AFP

China urges Iran, Israel to cool tensions

BEIJING: China urged Iran and Israel to “immediately” take steps to reduce tensions on Monday after Tehran unleashed a barrage of missile strikes on Israeli cities and Israel struck military targets deep inside Iran showing notable impacts.

“We urge all parties to immediately take measures to cool down the tensions, prevent the region from falling into greater turmoil, and create conditions for returning to the right track of resolving issues through dialogue and

negotiations,” Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said.

Israel’s surprise assault on Iran last week, launched after decades of enmity and a prolonged shadow war fought through proxies and covert operations, has touched off the most intense fighting yet and triggered fears of a lengthy conflict that could engulf the Middle East.

China’s top diplomat Wang Yi held phone calls with his Israeli and Iranian counterparts, the

foreign ministry said, in which he made clear to both Beijing’s support for Tehran.

Guo said on Monday “all relevant parties should immediately take steps to put the brakes on the escalation and to cool down the tensions”.

“Force cannot bring lasting peace,” he said. “China will continue to maintain communication with the relevant parties, and promote peace and encourage dialogue, to prevent further turbulence in the region,” he said. — AFP

OPINION

Between worry and hope: Finding peace amid unrest



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is the senior editor of Oman Observer

HER usual pleasant face has lines of worry. Our conversation usually begins with topics of humour that are about life, and especially children.

One of the recent ones was about keeping kids and teenagers entertained during summer holidays. She told me how her daughter declared on the very first day that she was bored and expressed how much she missed her friends.

Thanks for the apps that make it possible to stay in touch. WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, etc, must be overactive as more and more schools are closing for the summer. But even this means they need content for their social media. So parents need to plan with their offspring.

My friend, however, is now concerned about something else. Her parents have been on holiday in one of the places that now falls under the category of regional unrest. They felt safe until yesterday, but the blasting has changed everything.

Fear has set in, and this must be the case with a lot of other families. She said she just wants her parents to get back as soon as possible. The reality changes so fast in life. A few days ago, there was a plane crash

in Ahmedabad, India. Then, some people constantly live with uncertainties in their lives in the regions of unrest and conflict, as in the case of Gaza, where children have never known a proper home with rooms, a beautiful holiday, or joy without fear. Yet, they survive because their situation makes them tougher. And many dare to dream.

Can there be dreams when they have not experienced peace yet, or the charms of life? Their wounds must be healed, but they could be deep. And what can these be healed with?

Can they be healed with better experiences that will also become part of their memories? Fear, anger and moments might become their collective identity for the children who suffer in their early lives. Only a psychologist or a psychiatrist might be able to authenticate that thought, but the reality is that they are also part of this earth. And when they grow up, there is not much time to catch up and merge with society to succeed. Because life is full of expectations.

Just say these two words out loud: “expecting” and “accepting”. Expectations lead you to stress; life has taught you that not all your expectations are going to be met. Acceptance, on the other hand, is the one that

Expectations lead you to stress; life has taught you that not all your expectations are going to be met. Acceptance, on the other hand, is the one that will solve most of the problems.

will solve most of the problems.

It was the late Shaikh Khalfan al Esry who taught me the power of acceptance. When going through the anxiety of a situation, he calmly said, “Accept the situation. And you will be in control. You will realise how you will come up with the solutions.”

But it is not easy because your mind builds so many situations and possibilities. But once you succeed in accepting the situation and overcoming your questions such as, ‘Why me?’ you realise you have the power and you are not weak anymore.

We have to believe tomorrow is better. You must want to make it better. If we have been making mistakes, we need to find a way to break the pattern. We need to take a break to see the big picture. Because we need not be in an area of conflict to be troubled in life, it could be within our minds. The reasons could be medical, and one might need professional assistance, but even then, one needs a break to bring peace to mind.

For now, it is the worry of having everyone reach home safely from regions that are experiencing unrest. But we have to remember worry does not give us any comfort; we need to work with hope and determination.

MOROCCO BOOSTS DESALINATION TO FIGHT DROUGHT

AHMED ELJECHTIMI

Morocco is accelerating investments in desalination plants, water transfer projects and new dams to mitigate prolonged drought and meet rising demand from agriculture and cities, water minister Nizar Baraka said.

Years of drought have strained water resources, shrunk the national cattle herd and contributed to food price inflation and rising unemployment.

Morocco operates 17 desalination plants. It has four others under construction, and plans to build nine more, aiming for a total capacity of 1.7 billion m3 annually by 2030, Baraka told a conference on the country’s water challenges held by Medias24 in Casablanca on Thursday.

Desalinated water will not be used for wheat due to cost concerns and the scale of agricultural land involved, but will free up more dam water for inland farms, he said.

Improved rainfall this year - though still below average - has seen dam filling rates rise to 39.2 per cent as of June 11, from 31 per cent a year earlier, Baraka said. Despite years-long water stress, agriculture using underground water has expanded, along with fresh produce exports to Europe. “There was a mismatch between the pace of agricultural policy and water policy... exacerbated by climate change,” Baraka said.

Water-intensive crops like melons have been banned in Tata and reduced by 75 per cent in Zagora, two key producing desert regions, he said.

With uneven rainfall across the country, a major waterway - that is already linking the water-rich northwest to Rabat and Casablanca - will be extended by 2030 to fill in dams supporting farmers in the drought-stricken regions of Doukala and Tadla. The waterway is backed by Emirati funding, under a deal which also includes construction of a 1400-km power line by 2030 to deliver renewable energy produced in the south to desalination plants across the country.

“Using renewable energy will help significantly reduce water costs,” Baraka said.

Morocco currently runs 17 desalination plants, with 4 under construction and plans for 9 more by 2030, targeting a total capacity of 1.7 billion metre cube per year to sustain cities and agriculture desal, Morocco is constructing new dams and extending an Emirati-funded waterway (reaching Rabat/Casablanca already) into drought-hit regions like Doukala and Tadla by 2030

New plants (namely, near Casablanca) will tap exclusively into wind and solar sources — some supported by a 360 MW wind farm — marking a shift toward green desalination. — AFP

Creating joyful family moments at home, nearby

SUMMER holidays are a cherished time for families. School is out, the weather is warm, and the days are long — inviting everyone to slow down and spend quality time together.

Yet, with rising costs of travel and entertainment, many families seek meaningful, affordable and enjoyable ways to make memories without leaving home or their neighbourhood. Fortunately, some of the most lasting bonds are built not in expensive resorts but in simple shared experiences, filled with love, laughter and purpose.

One timeless way to bring families together is through game nights. Whether it’s classic board games, card games, or even video games, this activity is fun for all ages. For families with older kids, hosting a video game tournament or taking turns on multiplayer games can be a lively bonding experience.

Similarly, movie nights never go out of style. Parents and teens can enjoy detective or mystery movies, which not only entertain, but also sharpen observation skills and critical thinking as everyone tries to guess ‘whodunnit’ before the big reveal. For families who prefer quieter evenings, reading together can be deeply enriching. Organising a family book night or even a neighbourhood book club encourages everyone, especially children, to develop a love for reading. A great idea is to pick books that have been adapted into movies. After finishing the book, the family can enjoy a movie night to compare both versions — fostering discussion and critical thinking in a relaxed setting. This habit can extend beyond summer, nurturing lifelong learners.

Karaoke nights are another fantastic way to bring joy into the



DR NAJMA AL ZIDJALY

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

Families can turn an ordinary summer into a season of togetherness, growth and shared values. These moments create long-lasting memories that outshine even the grandest vacations



Involving children in farming is another wonderful way to spend time together while teaching responsibility and appreciation for nature.

home. Families who enjoy music can take turns singing their favourite songs, laughing at off-key moments, and even discovering new musical interests together. This activity, while light-hearted, also builds confidence and allows different generations to connect over shared tunes or introduce each other to new genres.

Involving children in gardening is another wonderful way to spend time together while teaching responsibility and appreciation for nature. Over the summer, they’ll learn to care for living things, observe growth and take pride in their small but meaningful contributions to the household. These quiet, mindful moments can have long-term positive effects on their emotional well-being.

But summer isn’t only about fun inside the home — it’s also an opportunity to foster community spirit and compassion. One of the most rewarding and heartwarming activities a family can do together is caring for stray animals in their neighbourhood. Families can

take daily or weekly walks with their children to leave out food and water for stray cats, dogs, and birds. Involving children in such acts nurtures a sense of social responsibility and purpose, showing them that small efforts can make a big difference in the lives of others.

By engaging in these thoughtful and cost-effective activities — be it reading, gardening, gaming, or helping animals — families can turn an ordinary summer into a season of togetherness, growth and shared values. These moments become part of a family’s story, creating long-lasting memories that outshine even the grandest vacations.

In a world that often measures happiness through material experiences, these simple pleasures remind us that the strongest bonds are built through time, attention and care. Summer holidays, after all, are not just about escaping routines — they are about reconnecting with one another, finding joy in the everyday and discovering that love, fun and meaning can be found right at our doorstep.

Israel cannot lecture the world on nuclear weapons



BADR AL DHAFRI

The writer is head of proofreading and translation at Observer

THE recent Israeli attack on Iran, launched under the codename “Operation Rising Lion” on June 13, 2025, has dramatically escalated tensions in the Middle East. This act has reignited longstanding debates about nuclear rights, international law, and the legitimacy of unilateral military action. The strikes were not defensive but rather a dangerous provocation that disrupted fragile diplomacy and increased regional instability. Under international law, Iran remains a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which guarantees the “inalienable right” to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, including uranium enrichment under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards. Iran has repeatedly maintained that its nuclear programme is civilian in nature. To date, the IAEA has not presented conclusive evidence to the contrary. Disagreements, therefore, must be handled through legal and diplomatic frameworks—not through pre-emptive military strikes. Meanwhile, Israel — which is believed to possess approximately 80 nuclear warheads — has never signed the NPT and refuses to allow inspections of its nuclear facilities. This double standard — demanding rigorous scrutiny of Iran while shielding its own programme from oversight — seriously undermines global nuclear governance. In the coordinated air operation, Israel deployed over 200 aircraft, including F-35s, targeting more than 100 locations across Iran.

Strikes were carried out on nuclear facilities in Natanz, Isfahan, and Fordow, as well as on missile sites, oil infrastructure, and IRGC command centres in cities such as Tabriz and Kermanshah. Satellite imagery and IAEA reports confirm extensive surface damage. However, Iran’s underground nuclear facilities appear mostly intact. Among those killed in the attacks were top Iranian officials, including Major Generals Mohammad Bagheri and Hossein Salami, as well as prominent nuclear physicist Fereydoon Abbasi and academic Mohammad Mehdi Tehranchi. Iranian health authorities report that at least 406 people were killed and 654 wounded, with over 90 per cent being civilians. Iran responded with “Operation True Promise III,” launching around 350 projectiles — over 150 ballistic missiles and more than 100 drones — some with support from Ansar Allah forces in Yemen. Although approximately 80–90% of these were intercepted by Israeli defence systems, several penetrated Israeli airspace, striking cities including Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Bat Yam. As a result, 24 Israelis were killed, and over 494 were injured. There was also minor damage to the US Embassy in Tel Aviv. The fallout of the conflict extended beyond the battlefield. Iran’s retaliatory strikes triggered a mass exodus from Tehran, with over 100,000 residents temporarily or permanently fleeing the city. Iran also imposed Internet restrictions to control the spread of panic. Perhaps most notably, the attack torpedoed

Achieving peace in the Middle East needs fairness, responsibility and equal respect for all countries’ rights. Military power alone will never ensure lasting peace or security

ongoing diplomatic efforts between Iran and the US, which had been quietly mediated by Oman. Iran had signalled willingness to reduce uranium enrichment in return for sanctions relief. But following the strikes, Iranian officials declared the talks “futile,” effectively halting any progress. The international community must treat this crisis as a test of its commitment to lawful conduct. The NPT, the IAEA system, and UN Security Council mechanisms exist to regulate nuclear development and enforce peace. These structures fail when selectively applied. Allowing Israel to act outside of them while punishing Iran within them corrodes global trust. This military escalation also sends a dangerous message: that powerful states may enforce their will with impunity, while others must adhere strictly to rules. That is not justice. Sustainable peace and security can only be achieved through diplomacy, mutual respect, and cooperative engagement—not by air raids. Iran, like any sovereign nation, has the right to pursue peaceful nuclear technology under international law. Concerns about its intentions should be raised through transparent, evidence-based dialogue within existing frameworks — not through bombs and sanctions. As the consequences of this conflict continue to unfold, the world faces a stark choice: to uphold the rule of law or to permit its erosion through silence and double standards. True peace in the Middle East will not be achieved by those who flout the rules while demanding others obey them.

Khamenei, Iran’s political survivor, faces ultimate test

STUART WILLIAMS

Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has weathered a series of challenges but Israel’s unprecedented strikes mark his most serious crisis yet, threatening both the clerical system he leads and his own physical survival. Khamenei, Iran’s top leader since the death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989, has ruled in the face of sanctions, near constant international tensions as well as protests that were ruthlessly repressed. With Khamenei aged 86, the issue of succession was already looming large in Iran. But his moves now will have a decisive impact on the future of the system of which he has been a pillar since the 1979 Islamic Revolution that ousted the shah. Meanwhile, his own physical survival could be at stake, with a senior American official saying Donald Trump rejected an Israeli plan to kill Khamenei but Israel is still not ruling out such a move. “Khamenei is at the twilight of his rule, at the age 86, and already much of the daily command of the regime is not up to him but to various factions who are vying for the future,” said Arash Azizi, senior fellow at Boston University. Israel’s success in killing key Iranian figures, including the army chief and head of the Revolutionary Guards, has illustrated how Israeli intelligence can track Iranian leaders and raised the question of whether Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu could give an order to seek to kill Khamenei himself. The movements of the supreme leader, who has not left Iran since taking up the position and made his last foreign visit to North Korea in 1989 while still president, are subject to the tightest security and secrecy.

Karim Sadjadpour, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said Khamenei faced a “self-inflicted dilemma” and already lacked the “physical and cognitive acumen to lead Iran into a high-tech war”. While keeping up the rhetoric of confrontation with the US and Israel and backing proxies like Hezbollah in Lebanon, Khamenei long kept Iran out of direct conflict with its foes. “He has prided himself on deterring conflict away from Iran’s borders since he assumed the supreme leadership in 1989,” said Jason Brodsky, policy director of US-based United Against Nuclear Iran. “So Khamenei has badly miscalculated, “ Brodsky said the nearest comparison to the current situation was the attacks against leaders blamed on the opposition in the early 1980s which saw the then president killed and Khamenei himself wounded in a 1981 assassination attempt. “It will be an experience that Khamenei will undoubtedly draw upon in the current context,” Brodsky said. — AFP

Israel’s war with Iran may last weeks, not days

WHEN Israel and Iran clashed last year, they fought in short and contained bursts that usually ended within hours, and both sides looked for off-ramps that allowed tensions to ebb. Since Israel started a new round of fighting on Friday, the two countries have said they will continue for as long as necessary, broadening the scope of their attacks and leading to much higher casualty counts in both countries. This time, the conflict appears set to last for at least a week, with both Israel and Iran ignoring routes toward de-confliction.

FORCED TALKS Israel seems motivated to continue until the destruction of Iran’s nuclear enrichment programme, either by force or renewed negotiations. Yet Iran has shown no sign of voluntarily ending enrichment, a process crucial to building a nuclear bomb, and Israel has no known ability to destroy a pivotal enrichment site that is buried deep underground. “We’re weeks rather than days away from this ending,” said Daniel B. Shapiro, who oversaw Middle Eastern affairs at the Pentagon until January. “Israel will keep going until, one way or another, Iran no longer retains an enrichment capability,” added Shapiro, now a fellow at the Atlantic Council, a Washington-based research group. “It’s now clear that if Israel leaves this unaddressed, its campaign will have failed.” Want to stay updated on what’s happening in Iran and Israel? Sign up for Your Places: Global Update, and we’ll send our latest coverage to your inbox. While Israel has easily struck Iran’s main enrichment site at Natanz, central Iran, it lacks the American-made “bunker-buster” bombs needed to destroy a smaller subterranean site dug deep into a mountain near Fordo, northern



PATRICK KINGSLEY

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Israel and Iran both have little incentive to stop and no obvious route to outright victory. Much depends on President Trump.

Iran. Israeli officials hope that their strikes on other targets — including Iran’s top military commanders, nuclear scientists and its energy industry — will inflict enough pain to encourage Iran to willingly end operations at Fordo. For now, Iran seems far from such a capitulation, even if Israel has shown increasing dominance in Iranian airspace, according to Sanam Vakil, who leads analysis of the Middle East at Chatham House, a London-based research group. Though Israel hopes to prompt its collapse, the Iranian government remains in full control of Iran and still has substantial stocks of ballistic missiles, even if Israel has limited its ability to fire some of them. “I don’t see any surrender coming from Tehran right now — there are no white flags being waved,” said Dr Vakil. “It’s very hard to see Iran walking back its enrichment rights while Iran’s programme still looks operational and Iran is intact as a state,” she added. “Their goal is to survive, to inflict damage and show their resilience.” **TRUMP’S STAND** Much depends on how President Trump reacts. Unlike Israel, the US has the munitions and the aircraft to destroy Fordo. Analysts like Shapiro say that Trump could consider such an approach if Iran chooses to accelerate its efforts to build a nuclear bomb instead of reaching a compromise. “That will create a critical decision point for Trump, about whether the United States should intervene,” Shapiro said. It may also now be easier for Trump to intervene without serious security consequences, given that Israel’s attacks have already degraded Iran’s defensive abilities. Others say that Trump is likelier to avoid direct confrontation with Iran unless the Iranian military

shifts its attacks from Israel to US interests and personnel in the Middle East, narrowing Trump’s room for manoeuvre. Since Friday, Iran has avoided providing such a pretext for US involvement. The president’s statements since Friday indicate that his current preference is to use Israel’s military gains as leverage for renewed talks with Tehran. Trump has overseen negotiations with Iran, hoping that Tehran would agree to end its enrichment programme without Israel’s military intervention. Those talks stumbled after Iran refused to back down. In comments over the weekend, Trump suggested that Iran, chastened by Israel’s attacks, might finally make compromises that it had not previously considered. As a result, some analysts say that Trump could press Israel to end its attacks — when and if he judges that Iran has become more malleable. “This will end when Trump decides to end it, which will probably happen when he thinks Iran is ready to compromise,” said Yoel Guzansky, an expert on Iran at the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv.

IRAN U-TURN? Such a U-turn has historical precedent, even if it feels unlikely for now, experts said. The Iranian leadership made a similarly unexpected compromise at the end of the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, according to Meir Javedanfar, who teaches Iranian studies at Reichman University in Israel. After rejecting numerous offers to end the war, Ayatollah Khomeini eventually agreed to a deal after the costs of the war became too great, Dr Javedanfar said. “Khomeini made a 180-degree change,” he said. “This is again what Israel is hoping for.” But history also suggests this may take time. The deal that ended the Iran-Iraq war took eight years to reach.

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



Oman's 'Al Ghanim' in first place

‘Al Ghanim’ secures first place in France’s Montauban race

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, JUNE 16

The Royal Court Affairs, represented by the Royal Cavalry continued its impressive show on the European racing circuit after ‘Al Ghanim’ won first place in the seventh race at Montauban Racecourse in southern France. The race, held on Sunday, was for purebred Arabian horses over a distance of 2250 metres.

‘Al Ghanim’, ridden by French jockey Sami LeQolliex and trained by seasoned trainer Élisabeth Bernard, delivered a commanding performance, showcasing stamina and precision. As the race unfolded, ‘Al Ghanim’ maintained a strong pace before launching a decisive surge in the final stages to clinch the first place, reinforcing the growing status of Omani horses in European events.

The Montauban event is part of a prominent series of international Arabian horse races hosted by France each year. This edition attracted horses and stables from several top racing nations including Oman, France, the UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Belgium and Italy. These races are recognised for their highly competitive standards, and serve as crucial platforms for evaluating horses ahead of Grade 1 international contests.

The inclusion of elite Arabian thoroughbreds, trained under various international systems, offers a dynamic competitive atmosphere, further adding to the value of victories such as ‘Al Ghanim’.

Recent Success of ‘Al Rasha’ Adds to Royal Cavalry Momentum, when ‘Al Rasha’ secured victory in the eighth race at Bordeaux Racecourse, a 1600-metre contest also reserved for purebred Arabian horses. Under the guidance of jockey Michael Forest and trainer Élisabeth Bernard, ‘Al Rasha’ delivered a similarly strong performance, highlighting the consistent preparation and quality within the Omani team.

With back-to-back victories at two major French racecourses, Oman’s Royal Cavalry continues to strengthen its footprint in international equestrian sport. These wins reflect not only athletic excellence but also strategic planning and investment in breeding, training, and global engagement. As the European racing season progresses, Oman remains a name to watch among the elite of Arabian horse racing.



Oman's 'Al Ghanim' in first place

Kubica wins ‘mental battle’ to triumph at Le Mans

LE MANS, FRANCE: Former Formula One driver Robert Kubica has long since tackled the demons of a near-fatal accident 14 years ago but Sunday’s victory in the 24 Hours of Le Mans is arguably his greatest achievement yet.

The 40-year-old Pole roared to victory in his bright yellow “privateer” Ferrari to give the Italian marque a third consecutive win in the most famous endurance race in the world.

In a thrilling 93rd edition of the race, which saw the top four separated by just over 20 seconds going into the final 15 minutes, Kubica and his AF Corse co-drivers Philip Hanson and Ye Yifei (#83) finished just 14.084sec ahead of a Porsche (#6) driven by Kevin Estre, Matt Campbell and Laurens Vanthoor.

In so doing they knocked the two factory Ferraris, who started the race as favourites, into third and fourth.

FERRARI WIN
LE MANS FOR
THIRD YEAR
IN A ROW

KUBICA TAKES
CHEQUERED
FLAG FOR
CUSTOMER AF
CORSE TEAM

YE BECOMES
FIRST CHINESE
DRIVER TO WIN

PORSCHE
PENSKE SECOND,
FACTORY
FERRARI THIRD

“It’s been a long 24 hours but an enjoyable one. Grazie mille, grazie a tutti,” said Kubica over the team radio as he took the chequered flag.

Kubica was one of Formula One’s brightest prospects when he won the 2008 Canada Grand Prix but a harrowing accident in a rally in Andorra in 2011 almost cost him his life.

Trapped upside down in his car before being freed and whisked to hospital, Kubica suffered several serious injuries and underwent a partial amputation of his right forearm.

“What happened was very unfortunate, but I was very lucky,” he said after Sunday’s victory.

“It took me quite a few years, not only to recover physically but also mentally.

“What happened happened and I have to accept it. One of the worst periods of my life was when my mind wouldn’t accept the fact that my arm was failing.”

He returned to racing cars, however, winning the WRC2 championship and taking part in sports car races. In 2017 he moved back into Formula One, testing for Renault before racing for Williams in 2019.



Campaign hats for Republican presidential candidate and former US President Donald Trump.



AF Corse's Robert Kubica, Yifei Ye and Philip Hanson celebrate on the podium. — Reuters

GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT

But Sunday’s win which made him the first Pole ever to win Le Mans tops any of his other achievements behind the wheel.

“It was quite difficult to live with, but I’m happy to have achieved my personal goals,” he said.

“The best thing I’ve achieved in my life - it’s nothing to do with racing - it’s more the battle I won with my mind.”

Both of Kubica’s co-drivers were also first-time winners with Ye the first Chinese driver to triumph.

“I’m at a loss for words,” said Ye who arrived in Le Mans at the age of 14 on an exchange programme to try and become a professional driver.

“It’s going to take me some time to realise everything that’s happened today. Right now I feel like I’m dreaming. Maybe in two seconds I’ll wake up and none of this will exist.

“In China, the car industry has come a long way. When my father was my age, there were no cars on the roads, and we’re talking about the 1990s. Becoming a professional driver was impossible.”

With three of the top four, it was certainly a good day for Ferrari but there will undoubtedly be some at headquarters in Maranello who might not be so happy.

As the winning car was not entered directly by the manufacturer, but by the AF Corse team, Ferrari will not take the points for victory in the World Endurance Championship.

Cadillac locked out the front row of the grid but #12 of Will Stephens, who had taken pole, had to settle for fifth with the second car (#38), featuring former Formula One world champion Jensen Button, coming home in eighth. — AFP

Electrical fault halts Al Harthy in ‘Le Mans 24hrs’

FAULTLESS DRIVING, top strategy and a very quick BMW M4 LMGT3 were not enough to deliver what looked likely to be a bid for a dream victory at this year’s 24 Hours of Le Mans for Ahmad al Harthy and Team WRT — electrical problems in the early hours of Sunday, 15th June, forcing retirement.

Oman’s Al Harthy and team-mates Valentino Rossi and Kelvin van der Linde had delivered an incredible performance throughout the first half of the twice-round-the-clock encounter at the eight-plus mile Circuit de la Sarthe in France, with LMGT3 silverware well within their grasp. Sadly, though, and for the second year in succession, the 24 Hours of Le Mans ended in misfortune for Al Harthy and Team WRT, having led the class or been inside the top two for the most part since lights-out at 16:00 local time on Saturday, 14th June.

After qualifying an excellent third on the grid for the



Al Harthy during the race

biggest race of the season, round four of the FIA World Endurance Championship, the team choose to begin the 24 Hours with van der Linde and he very quickly climbed into second in LMGT3 close behind the leader.

Van der Linde remained in touch in the No.46 BMW M4 and after the initial pit-stops, the South African was back up

to second. Oman’s Al Harthy climbed behind the wheel for his first miles of the race in hour two and was within less than four seconds of the LMGT3 lead with one hour and 45 minutes elapsed. After another stop, Al Harthy moved up into the lead and he then began to build his advantage, driving faultlessly. Just over three hours into the race the

Omani, who is supported by prestigious partners OQ Group, Sohar International, Omantel, Oman LNG, BMW Oman, Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), and Experience Oman, led by around 25 seconds. Half an hour later the lead was up to roughly 60 seconds, before handing over to Rossi for his first stint of the race. Holding second place initially, the Italian was every bit as competitive as his two team-mates and he soon moved the No.46 BMW back into first place in LMGT3.

One quarter of the way through the race, 22.00 local time, van der Linde was back behind the wheel and held an advantage of 14 seconds at that stage. Just before 23.00, with 100 racing laps in the book, he remained at the front with a buffer of half-a-minute over the nearest rival. The entire race strategy from Team WRT was working like clockwork as midnight neared.

SHORT TAKES



West Indies' Shai Hope in action. — Reuters

WEST INDIES BEAT IRELAND BY 62 RUNS TO WIN T20 SERIES

LONDON: Evin Lewis smashed 91 from just 44 balls as the West Indies beat Ireland by 62 runs to clinch a T20 series victory in Bready on Sunday. Lewis and West Indies captain Shai Hope put Ireland to the sword with a swashbuckling 122-run partnership for the first wicket in only 10.3 overs. The tourists powered to 256 for five from their 20 overs, a daunting total which ranked as their second highest in T20 internationals. Lewis, 33, was the mainstay of the innings with eight sixes and seven fours, while Hope made 51 from 27 balls.

BRIEF SCORES West Indies 256-5, 20 overs (Lewis 91, Hope 51, Carty 49 not out; Humphreys 2-16) Ireland 194-7, 20 overs (R. Adair 48; Hosein 3-27, Holder 2-49) **RESULT:** West Indies won by 62 runs Series: West Indies won three-match series 1-0

Keacy Carty maintained his fine recent form with an unbeaten 49 from 22 balls. Matthew Humphreys was the sole bright spot for Ireland with two for 16 as the West Indies blasted 20 sixes. After losing Paul Stirling in the second over, Ross Adair and Harry Tector produced a partnership of 101 in 58 balls to give Ireland hope. Tector made 35 from 28 deliveries before being pinned lbw by Roston Chase and Adair soon departed for 48. Ireland never recovered from losing three wickets for two runs and ended on 194 for seven, with Mark Adair

unbeaten on 31. Akeal Hosein took three for 27 and Jason Holder picked up two wickets. The West Indies' win was enough to seal the series after the first two games were abandoned without a ball being bowled on Thursday and Saturday. — AFP



Shai Hope. — Reuters



USA midfielder Brenden Aaronson (11) and team USA celebrates after scoring the fourth goal. — Reuters

US, Saudi, Costa Rica and Mexico win in CONCACAF

THE UNITED STATES ended their four-match losing run with a resounding 5-0 win over Trinidad and Tobago in their opening game of the CONCACAF Gold Cup on Sunday in San Jose. Mauricio Pochettino and his team, which is missing several Europe-based regulars, had faced plenty of criticism after recent friendly defeats to Turkey and Switzerland. In desperate need of a change in mood around the team, a year out from the World Cup they will co-host with Canada and Mexico, Pochettino fielded an attacking line-up. Against a Trinidad team, coached by former Manchester United striker Dwight Yorke, it proved to be just the kind of stress-free comfortable win that the Argentine coach was seeking.

The USA were on top from the outset with two early chances for striker Patrick Agyemang and it was the striker who helped create the 16th-minute opener. Agyemang won the ball off Trinidad defender Alvin Jones, found Jack McGlynn on the right who kept his cool and clipped the ball to the back post where Malik Tillman collected and then slotted home. It was a tough day for Jones, who then gifted the USA their second goal with a back-pass that went straight to winger Diego Luna who broke away and then unselfishly squared to Tillman for the PSV Eindhoven midfielder's second. Trinidad were showing why they have fallen down the FIFA rankings, slipping to 100th and fourth in the Caribbean, below Curacao,

lacking any kind of solidity. The lively Luna created the third, a minute before the break, when he cut in from the left and his low shot deflected off Agyemang and beat the helpless Marin Phillip. It was easy going for Pochettino's side in the second half with Trinidad managing to threaten once when Tyrese Spicer put a low ball across the face of the goal but the sliding Dante Sealy was unable to connect. With the game fizzling out, Pochettino made a triple substitution and that added some late urgency to his side's attack. Sub Brenden Aaronson cut in from left and squeezed a low shot past Phillip's near post and then another man off the bench, Haji Wright completed the convincing victory when he broke down the left and drifted inside before placing the ball in the far corner. The USA, looking for an eighth Gold Cup title, face Saudi Arabia and Haiti in their remaining two games in Group D.

SAUDI ARABIA WIN OVER HAITI Saleh Al Shehri's penalty kick in the 21st minute held up as the winner as Saudi Arabia shut out Haiti 1-0 in CONCACAF Gold Cup Group A, play on Sunday night in San Diego. Al Shehri drew a foul in the penalty area on Frantzdzy Pierrot in the 18th minute, then converted a right-footed shot to the bottom left corner to lift Saudi Arabia (1-0-0, 3 points) in the opener for both teams. Haiti had an opportunity to pull even in the fifth minute of second-half stoppage time, but Saudi Arabia goalkeeper Nawaf Al Aqidi (four saves) denied Dany Jean in the center of the

goal on a right-footed shot from outside the box. Haiti goalkeeper Johny Placide finished with three saves. **MEXICO DOWN DOMINICAN REPUBLIC** Edson Alvarez registered a goal and an assist to help Mexico post a 3-2 victory over the Dominican Republic in CONCACAF Gold Cup Group A, play on Saturday night in Inglewood, Calif. Peter Gonzalez and Edison Azcona scored goals for the Dominican Republic. Mexico struck in the 44th minute when Orbelin Pineda sent a cross to Alvarez, who sent a header into the net. Mexico made it 2-0 in the second minute of the second half when Jimenez scored on a right-footed shot. The Dominican Republic got on the board in the 51st minute when Gonzalez sent a left-footer into the net. Two minutes later, Mexico countered on a corner kick taken by Alexis Vega. Alvarez headed the ball, and it glanced off Montes' head and went into the net. The Dominican Republic tallied again when Azcona's right-footed shot caromed off a defender to cut its deficit to one.

COSTA RICA SINK SURINAME Costa Rica upended Suriname 4-3 with a penalty-kick goal in the 13th minute of stoppage time in CONCACAF Gold Cup Group A, play on Sunday night in San Diego. Capitalising on a foul in the penalty area by Suriname's Dion Malone, Manfred Ugalde converted the winner on a right-footed shot to the bottom right corner. — AFP

Spaun defeats MacIntyre to bag first US Open major golf title

OAKMONT: J J Spaun achieved his dream of winning his first major golf title by capturing the US Open. Doing it with a 65-foot birdie putt on the last hole was pure magic. Spaun birdied four of the last seven holes to win at Oakmont on Sunday, firing a two-over 72 to defeat Scotland's Robert MacIntyre by two strokes, clinching matters with his stunning putt at the 72nd hole. "Just to finish it off like that is just a dream," Spaun said. "You watch other people do it... you see crazy moments. To have my own moment like that at this championship, I'll never forget this moment for the rest of my life. Spaun drove the par-four 17th green to set up the tap-in birdie that put him ahead to stay, joining a list of birdie-birdie finishers to win the US

Open that includes Jack Nicklaus, Ben Hogan, Tom Watson and Jon Rahm. "It's definitely like a storybook, fairytale ending, kind of underdog fighting back, not giving up, never quitting," Spaun said. "With the rain and everything and then the putt, you couldn't write a better story. I'm just so fortunate to be on the receiving end of that." Spaun, whose only prior PGA Tour win was the 2022 Texas Open, was a runner-up at the Cognizant Classic and Players Championship this year, losing a playoff to second-ranked Rory McIlroy at the latter. "I just felt like you keep putting yourself in these positions, like eventually you're going to tick one off," Spaun said. Spaun made bogeys on five of the first six holes, including the first



JJ Spaun celebrates with the championship trophy.

three, and birdied four of the last seven. "As bad as things were going, I just still tried to just commit to every shot," Spaun said. "I tried to just continue to dig deep. I've been doing it my whole life." Spaun has been resilient. In 2018 he was diagnosed with one type of diabetes but treatment was ineffective. In 2021, Spaun found he had been misdiagnosed and had another type of diabetes. On Sunday morning, he made an early trip for medicine. "My daughter had a stomach bug and was vomiting all night long," Spaun said. "Kind of a rough start to the morning. I'm not blaming that on my start, but it kind of fit the mold of what was going on, the chaos." A

96-minute storm delay was crucial, allowing Spaun to reset after his miserable start. "I just needed to reset everything, kind of like start the whole routine over," Spaun said. "I felt like I had a really good chance to win the US Open at the start of the day. It just unravelled very fast. "But that break was actually the key for me to winning this tournament." That and his monster 65-foot birdie putt at the final hole. "I was just in shock, disbelief that it went in and it was over," Spaun said. "I couldn't even believe what I witnessed when that went in." Neither could his playing partner, Norway's 14th-ranked Viktor Hovland, who settled for his best US Open finish at third on 282. — AFP

SPORTS



PSG's #08 Fabian Ruiz (2ndR) celebrates with teammates. — AFP

PSG cruise over Atletico, Bayern thrash Auckland at CWC

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN laid down an ominous marker on their march towards global domination at the Fifa Club World Cup (CWC) on Sunday as Bayern Munich showed no mercy to Auckland's amateurs with a ruthless 10-0 walloping. The first full day of action at the inaugural edition of the 32-team club tournament saw newly crowned European champions PSG produce a scintillating 4-0 rout of Atletico Madrid after Bayern's double-digit drubbing of Auckland City. The New Zealand minnows are one of the Cinderella stories of the tournament, made up of amateur players who had to take unpaid leave to travel to the United States.

But Bundesliga Bayern were in no mood to be charitable and duly ran riot in Cincinnati. Jamal Musiala scored a second-half hat-trick after coming off the bench while

Kingsley Coman, Michael Olise and Thomas Mueller all netted twice.

Sacha Boey scored the other goal in a Group C game that amounted to target practice for Bayern, who will face tougher tests against Boca Juniors and Benfica.

"We have to remain modest but it was important to be able to say that we took the game seriously," said Bayern coach Vincent Kompany.

"It was a good first match at the tournament, but of course challenges are going to grow and it's going to become more difficult." Auckland's interim coach Ivan Vicelich admitted that his team had run into the "reality of football against one of the world's top teams." "It is a dream for players coming from an amateur level to play in this environment," Vicelich said.

"We knew it was going to be a very difficult game, playing against one of the top teams in the world, potentially one of the

favourites for the Club World Cup, so we are just really proud of the players' efforts."

HUNGRY PSG ROUT ATLETI While Bayern were left satisfied with a clinical opening, PSG delivered a statement win over Atleti in front of an 80,619 crowd at a sun-baked Pasadena Rose Bowl — the venue for the 1994 World Cup final.

The French champions shrugged off searing heat — temperatures reached 31 degrees Celsius (88 Fahrenheit) shortly after the midday kick-off — to produce the kind of adventurous, attacking display which became their calling card en route to their dazzling Champions League triumph earlier this month.

Fabian Ruiz and Vitinha gave PSG a 2-0 lead by half-time before Senny Mayulu and Lee Kang-in sealed an impressive Group B win with late goals against an Atleti team who struggled to cope with the

“The club is hungry, the fans are hungry, the players and the team are hungry, and that’s a good feeling. We have the same objective as in other competitions, which is to go as far as possible and try to win it.”

DIEGO SIMEONE

French side's multi-faceted attacking play.

PSG are bidding to crown a superb season which saw them win four trophies at home and in Europe.

On Sunday's evidence, few would bet against Luis Enrique's side from being crowned world champions.

"We had the objective of making history this season, but this is a new chapter," Luis Enrique said in his post-match news conference.

"It's a nice challenge for the players and the team, to want to keep winning.

"The club is hungry, the fans are hungry, the players and the team are hungry, and that's a good feeling. We have the same objective as in other competitions, which is to go as far as possible and try to win it." Atletico manager Diego Simeone refused to cite the heat as a factor in his team's defeat. "We both played in the same weather conditions," Simeone said.

"They played much better than we did. They have amazing players and that's why they've just won everything." Brazilian champions Botafogo hung on for a 2-1 win at a determined Seattle Sounders. The Copa Libertadores holders took the lead in the 28th minute when Jair Cunha rose superbly to head in a cross curled in at pace by Alex Telles.

Igor Jesus doubled the advantage on the stroke of half-time with a bullet header. It was a different story after the break. The Sounders dominated possession and put Botafogo's defence under intense pressure, pulling a goal back through a deflected Cristian Roldan header. Seattle pushed forward in search of the equaliser but some desperate defending and fine goalkeeping from John saw the Brazilian club over the line.

Palmeiras drew 0-0 with Portuguese giants Porto in Group A at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey. — AFP



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INVESTMENTATTRACTION



Consultancy firms with “Excellent” or “First” classification from the General Secretariat of the Tender Board are invited to participate.

TENDER ANNOUNCED
FOR SHALEEM
MINING CLUSTER
MASTER PLAN

MUSCAT: The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has issued a consultancy tender for the master plan, detailed design, and Phase 1 supervision of an integrated mining economic cluster in the Wilayat of Shaleem and the Hallaniyat Islands, Dhofar Governorate.

The project is being managed by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn). Consultancy firms with “Excellent” or “First” classification from the General Secretariat of the Tender Board are invited to participate.

The deadline for purchasing tender documents is June 25, with bid submissions due by July 9.

At its third meeting this year, OPAZ’s Board of Directors reviewed progress on the Ministry of Economy’s plans to establish industrial clusters: a mining hub in Shaleem, cold chain and food industries in Duqm, and aluminium-based industries in the Sohar Free Zone — all aligned with Oman’s industrial strategy.

The Shaleem cluster is strategically located along regional shipping routes and is rich in natural resources such as minerals, fisheries, and renewable energy. It also features tourism assets and oil and gas concessions.

The project aims to attract investment into the mining and downstream industries, increase value-added production, and support related sectors like logistics, energy, and food security. It is expected to enhance sectoral integration and broaden Oman’s production and export base, boosting the mining sector’s contribution to GDP.

Shaleem and the Hallaniyat Islands are particularly promising due to their coastal location and reserves of gypsum, limestone, and dolomite. — ONA

Major agro logistics hub
coming up in Najd area

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 16

OMAN Agriculture Development Company (OADC) – newly rebranded from the wholly state-owned Nakheel Oman Development Company – has announced the commencement of construction work on a major agro logistics hub at Najd in Dhofar Governorate.

Formally known as the Integrated Center for the Collection, Sorting, and Marketing of Agricultural Products in the Najd area of Dhofar Governorate, the 50,000-tonnes-per-annum capacity facility will serve as a one-stop aggregation centre for the Najd Agricultural Zone, the largest of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman.

Construction of the new Najd agro logistics hub at Saih al Khairat is being undertaken in collaboration with the Najd Agricultural Development Office at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, according to OADC.

“The project seeks to strengthen collaboration with the agricultural community in Najd by enhancing the region’s agricultural logistics infrastructure.

This includes produce collection from local farmers, cold storage, sorting, packaging, and processing — all aimed at improving product quality, minimizing waste, and expanding market access for Najd’s agricultural output, both locally and regionally,” OADC – a subsidiary of Oman Food Investment Holding Company



Illustration of the new Integrated Centre at the Najd Agricultural Zone.

Formally known as the Integrated Centre for the Collection, Sorting and Marketing of Agricultural Products in the Najd area of Dhofar Governorate, the 50,000-tonnes-per-annum capacity facility will serve as a one-stop aggregation centre for the Najd Agricultural Zone, the largest of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman.

(Nitaj) – said in a post.

“Scheduled for completion by the end of the second quarter of 2026, the project represents a strategic step forward in building a more efficient and sustainable agricultural sector,” the company further added.

Covering a farming area of over 54,000 acres, the Najd zone – with its abundance of groundwater resources,

nutrient-rich soil, and favourable climate and environmental conditions – is tipped to evolve into Oman’s leading ‘breadbasket’, with the potential to reduce the country’s dependency on basic food imports and move toward self-sufficiency.

The zone is witnessing the largest inflow of investments across all facets of the agricultural and livestock value chain, with the government earmarking land plots for, among other activities, crop cultivation, livestock farming, fruit and vegetable production, and greenhouses, alongside processing and value-added industries.

According to the Ministry, the value of agricultural and farm assets in Najd totaled around RO 190 million at the end of 2024, with assets worth a further RO 50.5 million under development.

Revenues from agriculture and farm output amounted to

approximately RO 66 million during the 2023/2024 season, with the livestock sector contributing about RO 40 million.

Agricultural production has also grown significantly: date production surged to 1,880 tonnes in 2024, up from 502 tonnes in 2022; wheat output soared by 600 per cent to 10,510 tonnes, up from 1,500 tonnes in 2022.

Recognising the zone’s potential to contribute to food security and economic diversification, a new Agricultural City is currently in the master-planning phase.

The masterplan envisions investments in agri-processing industries, agricultural education, and even agri-tourism. It also aims to build capacity within Oman’s agriculture sector through the use of cutting-edge technologies such as vertical farming, hydroponics, and aquaponics, supported by AI-driven solutions.

The masterplan further prioritises sustainable water management and the integration of land dedicated to various agriculture-based activities such as post-harvest processing, education, and rural tourism.

Significantly, the Najd complex is the latest in a series of agro logistics hubs either operational or under development across the country. The largest by far is the Khazaen Central Fruits & Vegetables Market (Silal), serving as a national node for fresh produce logistics covering Muscat, and North and South Al Batinah. Another hub, albeit smaller, is currently in operation in Nizwa.

RO 2.59 billion invested in tourism projects

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has confirmed that land usufruct agreements signed across various governorates are playing a key role in advancing Oman’s tourism sector and enriching visitor experiences.

These efforts are part of the national strategy to enhance tourism investments and support sustainable development.

Operating under the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021–2025), the Ministry aims to attract RO 3 billion in private tourism investment. So far, RO 2.59 billion has been secured, with a strong focus on integrating small and medium enterprises (SMEs) into tourism-related value chains.

From early 2024 to the end of May 2025, 45 land usufruct contracts were signed — 14 of



From early 2024 to the end of May 2025, 45 land usufruct contracts were signed.



AMEERA AL LAWATI
Director-General of Tourism Development at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

segments.

Ameera bint Iqbal al Lawati, Director General of Tourism Development at the Ministry, said the goal is to diversify

them this year — to implement various tourism projects across Oman.

These include eco-friendly luxury camps, hotels, and resorts catering to different market

Oman’s tourism offerings both geographically and functionally.

“These projects go beyond traditional accommodation and aim to deliver integrated tourism experiences that enhance destination appeal while supporting local communities through job creation and economic activity,” she said.

She added that the Ministry seeks to balance supply and demand by expanding services in ecotourism, mountain tourism, and adventure tourism, all while maintaining Omani identity and environmental values.

Al Lawati underscored the importance of private sector collaboration and ensuring that citizens see tangible benefits from these investments in their communities. — ONA

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This sacred responsibility has evolved far beyond the basic provision of deposit accounts and simple interest returns.

BankDhofar redefines fund management in today’s changing financial landscape

MUSCAT: In the intricate web of modern finance, banks — whether conventional or Islamic — serve a fundamental and enduring purpose: the effective stewardship of customer funds. From individuals and SMEs to large corporates and institutions, customers entrust banks with their capital, expecting not only safety but also value appreciation. This sacred responsibility has evolved far beyond the basic provision of deposit accounts and simple interest returns.

Traditionally, banks have placed client funds in a variety of time-tested instruments: fixed deposits, savings accounts, treasury bills and government bonds, to name a few. These options offer dependable returns and capital protection, providing a solid foundation for conservative investors. Islamic banks, meanwhile, channel customer funds into Sharia-compliant instruments such as Mudarabah or Wakala-based placements, emphasising ethical profit-sharing and risk mitigation.

However, as markets become more dynamic and customer expectations more sophisticated, banks in Oman and across the region have embraced innovative strategies to maximise the value of their customers’ funds. Today, the banking experience is no longer just about security — it’s about strategic growth.

Creative solutions have emerged to meet this need. Banks are leveraging digital wealth platforms, introducing structured investment products and offering diversified portfolio options tied to global markets. ESG-aligned funds, sector-focused investments (like tech or green energy) and cross-border investment vehicles are gaining traction.

Some banks even offer curated financial planning sessions and digital tools that simulate growth projections based on varying risk appetites. These offerings transform passive funds into actively managed assets with long-term growth potential.

Importantly, the role of banks as custodians of wealth is not simply transactional — it is also relational. Banks that excel in this domain recognise that managing client funds is not about short-term gains, but about cultivating long-term financial well-being. They view their clients as stakeholders in a shared journey, deserving of transparency, strategic insight and personalised advisory.

In Oman, where total deposits in the banking system continue to climb year on year, this relationship-based approach has never been more vital. It is not enough to hold funds — it is about making them work harder and smarter for the customer.

BankDhofar, one of the largest and most progressive banks in the Sultanate of Oman, exemplifies this philosophy in action. With a clear customer-first ethos, BankDhofar has gone beyond traditional fund management to offer a bespoke advisory experience.

MUSCAT: In line with its strategic agenda to broaden its nationwide footprint and strengthen its presence across key areas, ahlibank recently inaugurated its newest branch in Al Rusayl.

This achievement embodies the bank’s commitment to enhancing access to its services and products, while offering financial solutions that meet the growing needs of individuals and enterprises alike. As

part of a wider network expansion initiative, the Al Rusayl branch reinforces ahlibank’s mandate to serve high-potential locations while further advancing the bank’s customer-centric growth trajectory.

Commenting on the inauguration, Muneer al Balushi, AGM Head of Retail Distribution in ahlibank, stated, “Al Rusayl is a dynamic industrial enclave, home to a diverse cluster of companies that form a vital

NBO AND INJAZ OMAN CELEBRATE COMPLETION OF FINANCIAL LITERACY PROGRAMME

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) hosted a closing event at its Head Office in Muscat to mark the successful conclusion of the current school semester’s cycle of the More Than Money Programme, delivered in collaboration with Injaz Oman.

The event featured an interactive student workshop, alongside inspiring remarks from NBO and Injaz Oman representatives. This milestone marked the conclusion of a semester-long initiative that



This milestone marked the conclusion of a semester-long initiative that positively impacted 1,568 students across Muscat and Al Dakhiliyah governorates.

positively impacted 1,568 students across Muscat and Al Dakhiliyah governorates. Delivered in alignment with the Ministry of Education’s academic guidelines, the programme supports the nationwide efforts to prepare the youth for a better future by equipping school students with essential financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills — empowering them to make the best financial decisions and contribute productively to Oman’s growing economy.

SBA unveils exciting Toyota summer campaign

IN a move that promises to elevate the excitement of summer for car buyers across Oman, Saud Bahwan Automotive (SBA) has announced an irresistible Toyota Summer Campaign. Designed to deliver more value, more convenience and the thrill of winning, the campaign offers a bouquet of exceptional benefits that make owning a Toyota even more rewarding. The campaign that began on June 1, 2025 will last until July 31, 2025.

Customers purchasing any Toyota can enjoy free service from 3 years / 30,000 kms up to 10 years / 100,000 kms (whichever is earlier), 1-year insurance, exciting Scratch & Win prizes and the chance to enter a Raffle Draw where they can win one out of 16 iPhone 16 Pro Max and also enter a Grand Raffle Draw to win 1 out of 5 international holiday packages to Istanbul for two adults for 4 nights and 5 days.

(Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year.

Terms & Conditions apply. Customers can visit any Saud Bahwan Automotive showroom for exact details). The campaign



The campaign offers a bouquet of exceptional benefits that make owning a Toyota even more rewarding.

is valid across a wide range of popular Toyota models, each celebrated for its dependability, performance and cutting-edge features.

Whether it is the bold and powerful Hilux that is built to conquer with confidence, the dynamic and fuel-efficient Corolla Cross that brings hybrid innovation into daily drives, the rugged-yet-refined Fortuner that dominates with its commanding road presence, or the ever-stylish and smooth-riding Camry that redefines executive comfort, there is a Toyota for

every lifestyle and personality. Commenting on the campaign, a spokesperson from Saud Bahwan Automotive said, “This summer, we are giving our customers more reasons to smile. Our campaign combines unbeatable peace of mind with exciting experiences, from extended service and insurance to instant prizes and a dream getaway.

It is our way of thanking customers for choosing Toyota, a brand synonymous with quality and trust.” With such attractive rewards and Toyota’s

legendary reputation for reliability and innovation, now is the perfect time to drive home a Toyota and start the summer in style.

For adventurers seeking excitement, the Hilux Adventure delivers exceptional performance with its powerful 4.0-Litre V6 engine, producing 235 HP and 38.3 Kg-m of torque.

The Auto Disconnect Differential ensures uninterrupted momentum, making every drive exhilarating.

This robust yet thrilling machine is engineered by Toyota to set your heart racing.

On the other hand, the Hilux 4X4 comes equipped with a 2.7-Litre Petrol Engine, offering both 5-speed Manual and 6-speed Automatic Transmission options, delivering an impressive 164 HP.

The Fortuner is available with a choice of two potent petrol engines. For those seeking a balance of power and efficiency, the 2.7-Litre Four Cylinder Engine delivers a robust 164 HP and 25.0 Kg-m of torque. For drivers craving more excitement, the 4.0-Litre V6 Engine churns out an exhilarating 235 HP and 38.3 Kg-m of torque, providing heart-racing performance.

BANK MUSCAT HOSTS SEMINAR ON GLOBAL FINANCIAL MARKETS

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, recently hosted a seminar on Global Financial Markets for its corporate and institutional customers in the Wilayat of Suhar.

The seminar witnessed the engaging participation by a number of decision-makers and financial professionals representing a range of industries. The event was organised as a part of a series of events held to raise awareness and explore the trends around latest developments in financial markets and their impacts on the day to day business of the customers.

The seminar focused on a



The seminar witnessed the engaging participation by a number of decision-makers and financial professionals.

variety of subjects connected to the most recent changes in the global financial markets to support customers by providing access to expert insights helping them make informed financial decisions in a dynamic global

economy’s performance in the coming years.

By continuing to conduct such events, Bank Muscat aims to shed light on numerous themes concerning the world economy, its prospects and global financial

markets. It is also an opportunity to engage with customers in fruitful discussions.

In line with the continuous development in the banking industry, Bank Muscat always strives to serve the needs of customers by consistently improving its products and services.

It makes every effort to give them the best possible experience. With an ever-expanding customer base in all governorates, the bank has been successful in maintaining people’s trust for more than 4 decades.

Bank Muscat provides a comprehensive suite of treasury and financial markets products and services on a 24x7 basis.

Strengthening financial access in key areas: ahlibank opens Al Rusayl branch



The Al Rusayl branch reinforces ahlibank’s mandate to serve high-potential locations while further advancing the bank’s customer-centric growth trajectory.

part of Oman’s economic backbone.

The rationale behind selecting Al Rusayl for our latest branch stems not only from its strategic commercial significance, but also from the growing appetite for principled, value-centric banking solutions among both individuals and businesses in the area.

At ahlibank, we believe that easy access to banking services and products is a catalyst for building

comprehensive financial systems in which economic development is in harmony with the needs of society.

By establishing our presence in Al Rusayl, we are also affirming our role in supporting regions that fuel national development. This new branch represents a tangible translation of this commitment, as it combines financial integrity with easy access to services for the communities we seek to empower.”

BUSINESS

TECHTRANSFORMATION



Discussions focused on how organisations can adopt proactive, data-driven strategies to respond to rapid change.

FORUM HIGHLIGHTS
STRATEGIC
FORESIGHT AMID
GLOBAL CHANGES

MUSCAT: The “Future Foresight Forum” opened at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) to explore how strategic foresight can guide institutions through ongoing economic and technological transformation.

Organised by the International Development Academy for Training and the Reference Academy for Consulting and Management Development, the three-day forum is held in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and OCCI.

Eng Hamoud bin Salem al Saadi, Second Deputy Chairman of OCCI and Chairman of its Al Batinah South Branch, inaugurated the event, which brings together experts from eight countries.

Discussions focused on how organisations can adopt proactive, data-driven strategies to respond to rapid change, empower national talent and improve institutional agility. Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saidi, CEO of Tatweer International Training Academy, emphasised the importance of shifting from reactive responses to anticipatory planning based on analysis and innovation.

Dr Abdulsalam al Yahya, economic expert at OCCI, addressed the forum on adapting to economic and geopolitical volatility. He stressed the need for a long-term strategic vision and policy flexibility to navigate ongoing challenges.

Day one covered topics including artificial intelligence in forecasting, corporate governance and the digital economy. — ONA

OMAN’S OIL
EXPORTS TOP
100 MILLION
BARRELS

MUSCAT: Oman’s oil exports totalled just over 100 million barrels by the end of April 2025, reflecting a 3.4% year-on-year decline from 103.5 million barrels recorded during the same period in 2024, according to preliminary figures from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The average price of crude oil also dropped by 5.2%, settling at \$75.90



Daily average oil production fell to 986,700 barrels per day.

per barrel, compared to \$80 per barrel a year earlier.

Meanwhile, daily average oil production fell to 986,700 barrels per day, down from 997,100 barrels per day last year. Cumulatively, total oil production decreased by 1.9%, amounting to 118.4 million barrels, compared with 120.65 million barrels during the same period in 2024. — ONA

Rise in complaints amidst
growth in e-commerce

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JUNE 16

AS e-commerce gains traction in Oman, the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has reported a rise in complaints from consumers in the Sultanate of Oman.

Speaking to the Observer during a recent e-commerce conference, the Director of Market Regulation and Monitoring Department at the CPA, Khalid bin Salem al Siyabi, shared the following, “Over the past few years, we’ve seen a significant increase in consumer complaints. In 2022, we received 29 complaints. In 2023, that jumped to 493 complaints, and RO 5,272 was recovered for consumers.

In 2024, complaints quadrupled to 1,845. In just the first quarter of 2025, we received 2,208 complaints and recovered RO 31,249 for consumers. This is a major increase compared to 2024 — and it’s only the first quarter.

The annual increase is significant, reflecting a strong shift toward e-commerce in Oman.” According to Al Siyabi, the surge is due to shifts in consumer behaviour as more consumers resort to online shopping. “This reflects broader global trends.

Consumer habits have shifted — people no longer drive to stores as often; instead, they rely on online platforms. While this has made shopping more convenient, it has also



The Consumer Protection Authority recorded over 2,200 e-commerce complaints in Q1 2025 alone, exceeding the total for all of 2024.

opened the door to new challenges, such as fraud, unverified sellers and misleading advertising,” he said.

The official added that unclear and inaccurate production descriptions are amongst the frequent issues reported.

“Many consumers receive products that don’t match what was promised. That’s a major issue — consumers often complain about differences in colour, size, or features. In many cases, the product descriptions

on e-commerce sites are vague or unclear, which causes confusion and leads to disputes or complaints,” he said.

Moreover, the Director shared that the Authority has detected various cases of electronic fraud, in which case the Authority directs consumers to file reports to the Public Prosecution or the ROP directly.

Urging consumers to take several precautions before making purchases, he stressed: “Our main advice is to stay informed and cautious before making any online purchases.

Consumers should ensure that the platform they’re using is properly licensed. For websites, they should look for secure connections — that means URLs beginning with “https” and a visible padlock symbol.

These are signs that the website is legitimate and less likely to be involved in fraud.” he said.

The Consumer Protection Authority is a key stakeholder in the country’s E-Commerce programme, which was launched in 2023, and falls under the Digital Economy Programme umbrella.

Last year, Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, unveiled that the value of the Omani e-commerce market is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 9.8 per cent from 2023 to 2027 to reach a market size of \$3.27 billion.

Iran-Israel conflict raises energy security concerns

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 16

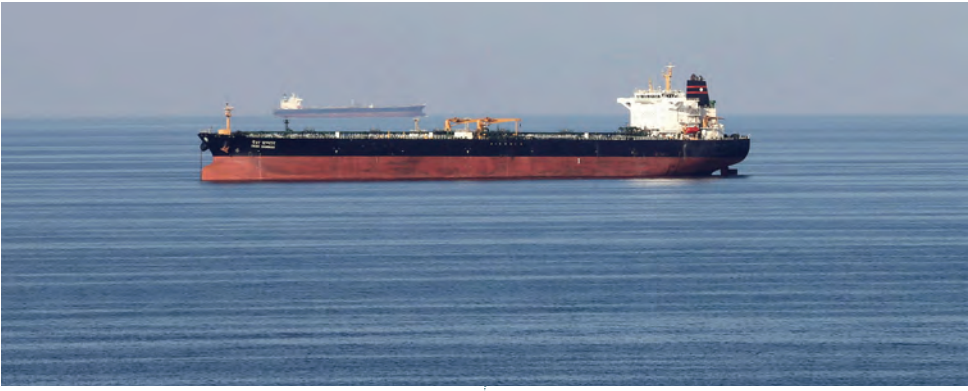
HOSTILITIES between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the State of Israel have intensified in recent days, drawing heightened international attention to the potential implications for regional stability, energy security and global economic performance.

While diplomatic efforts are ongoing, economic experts and regional analysts continue to monitor developments with caution.

At the centre of international concern is the Strait of Hormuz — a critical maritime passage through which nearly 20 per cent of the world’s crude oil and 25 per cent of global liquefied natural gas (LNG) are transported daily.

A prolonged disruption to the Strait would pose significant risks to energy markets and the economies that depend on secure and stable trade routes.

However, analysts say the likelihood of a full closure remains



The conflict has already slowed tanker booking. Picture credit: Reuters

limited.

“A complete shutdown of the Strait of Hormuz would not only have a profound effect on global markets but would also harm Iran’s own economy,” said Azzah al Habsi, a prominent Omani economist, in a post.

“The majority of Iran’s essential goods — including food, medicine and other imports — pass through the Strait. Any disruption would come at great cost to all sides involved.”

NUCLEAR RISK RAISES ALARM

While maritime stability remains a central focus, experts are also warning of the far-reaching consequences that could result from a potential military strike targeting nuclear facilities. Though such an event remains hypothetical, its implications would be severe — both from a humanitarian and environmental standpoint.

“Nuclear sites are not constructed to endure direct military attacks,”

Al Habsi noted. “A strike of this nature could lead to the leakage of radioactive material, creating long-term health hazards across the region.”

She pointed to historical precedents such as the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, where radioactive particles reached countries thousands of kilometres away, including Türkiye and the United Kingdom.

In the Gulf context, radiation fallout from such an incident could affect neighbouring countries, disrupt agricultural systems, harm ecosystems and lead to lasting economic dislocation.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

In her analysis, Al Habsi outlined four possible scenarios based on current regional dynamics, each with distinct implications for oil markets, investor sentiment and economic stability: First, a de-escalation scenario remains the most desirable outcome.

This would involve the resumption

of diplomatic dialogue and nuclear negotiations, allowing tensions to subside.

In this case, global oil prices are expected to stabilise between \$65 and \$75 per barrel; and regional markets would likely benefit from reduced risk premiums and improved investor confidence.

Second, a contained conflict scenario envisions limited military exchanges without wider regional involvement.

Under this condition, oil prices are likely to remain elevated in the \$80 to \$90 range.

While energy flows may continue uninterrupted, sectors such as tourism, aviation and logistics could experience short-term disruptions due to heightened security measures.

Third, a wider escalation scenario could emerge if regional actors become directly involved or if threats to maritime navigation in the Strait of Hormuz materialise. This would likely drive oil prices above \$100 per barrel, trigger global market volatility and impact supply chains beyond the energy sector.

RENEWED STRIKE

Crude markets stabilise after surging 7%



Oil prices edged down on Monday, after surging 7% on Friday, as renewed military strikes by Israel and Iran over the weekend left oil production and export facilities unaffected.

Brent futures were down 84 cents, or 1.13%, to \$73.86 a barrel by 10:55 GMT, while US WTI futures were off 91 cents or 1.25%, to \$70.97 Both benchmarks jumped more than \$4 a barrel in Asian trading before giving back gains. — AFP

INDUSTRY SURVEY

Manufacturers look elsewhere amidst tariffs



The United States is no longer a top three export market for British manufacturers in the wake of President Donald Trump’s tariffs, an industry-wide survey revealed on Monday.

For the first time since 1988, when manufacturers’ organisation Make UK began such a poll, the United States is not “the second most favoured destination for export growth... behind the EU”, a statement said. — Reuters

UPSIDE RISKS

Pakistan’s central bank holds rate at 11%



Pakistan’s central bank kept its key interest rate unchanged at 11 per cent on Monday, in line with expectations, as the conflict between Israel and Iran; and volatile global oil prices added upside risks to inflation.

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) briefly paused its easing cycle in March after cutting rates by 10 percentage points from a record high of 22 per cent in June 2024. — Reuters

Apple failed to deliver the intelligent AI



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The writer is the founder of Knowledge Oman.

A LITTLE less than a year ago, my wife's birthday was approaching. I was searching for a special birthday gift that is thoughtful, impressive, and useful.

While window shopping and walking through virtually most of the shopping malls and centres here in Oman (let alone abroad during my short travels) and driving through the city, I could not miss seeing the new Apple iPhone 16 promoted on almost every digital screen, huge billboards inside the buildings, and outside on the highways, and the social media feeds/ads, be it on YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat or Twitter (now known as X after Elon Musk took over the helm).

Practically everywhere I looked, I saw (and continue to actually see) the new smartphone with a bold and beautiful brand/promise/tagline, the “Apple Intelligence”. Simply, a promise from probably one of the most expensive smartphone manufacturers in the world (Apple) that the artificial intelligence (AI) will finally come to their iPhone in a way that only they could do.

Like anything I mostly do, I read, researched and consequently bought into the promise of the future (with a unique way of integrating AI into the already existing successfully touted smart mobile device).

I jumped into the bandwagon, especially since I found this would be the perfect gift for my wife as an upgrade to her existing

old model iPhone, but of course with the AI-powered feature apart from just the basic upgrade of the storage and memory space, the onboard camera quality and finally the processor speed.

Fast forward to today, I must admit that I am quite disappointed, especially with the high price tag paid (approx. RO 580) for a promise (Apple Intelligence) that is yet to be materialised in practice (but is only available today as a concept and on paper since a year ago when it was introduced).

So what really happened? Like almost everyone else, I bought into the promise of the “Apple Intelligence”.

Yet unlike everyone else, I realised today that it’s probably a gimmick.

Apple made the new iPhone look like the smartest phone ever made in history, where AI would be utilised as a feature to simplify our daily tasks, manage our lives better, and even offer creative tools on top of what is already available today as consumer AI-related apps (such as ChatGPT, Gemini and the like).

If you watch last year’s Apple Worldwide Developers Conference (WDC 2024), you will see that an amazing experience was promised (i.e., the Apple intelligence); nevertheless, fast-forward today, that was only a concept, not even a practical real demo that you can feel and play with.

Apple, during the conference and later via the mass media, talked about how they will utilise AI across all your apps, predicting what

Simply, a promise from probably one of the most expensive smartphone manufacturers in the world (Apple) that the artificial intelligence (AI) will finally come to their iPhone in a way that only they could do.

you need, and even edit your writing like a personal assistant.

All that sounded like the ideal smart device that is not only quite secure (as opposed to Android or Huawei, as it claims) but also blends better privacy, better design, and generative power, thanks to AI.

In reality, the roll-out of features was very limited, and only a few of what has been promised were released (e.g., rewording, summarising and paraphrasing text), pretty much as what other generative AI apps can do (or even better too). Why did Apple do that?

In my humble opinion, to remain or seem competitive in the market race for AI and also to ensure shareholders continue to gain profits from the mass sales that are done as a result. I am not happy, nor are many who realised the same.

In conclusion, the futuristic gift that I bought for my wife did not materialise to date (though she loves the phone being a loyal Apple customer). The excitement of the same continues to be a frustration instead. Most “Apple Intelligence” features that were promised and we saw remain a dream yet to be fulfilled.

I hope Apple will soon react to this fiasco of selling an expensive promise (or device per se) with a real deed that puts a smile, productivity and a real future into the hands of consumers. Until we catch up again next week, let’s continue to be positive of the beautiful innovative future.

OPEC+ WOULD STRUGGLE TO COVER MAJOR IRANIAN OIL SUPPLY DISRUPTION

AHMAD GHADDAR & SEHER DAREEN

OIL MARKET participants have switched to dreading a shortage in fuel from focusing on impending oversupply in just two days this week.

After Israel attacked Iran and Tehran pledged to retaliate, oil prices jumped as much as 13% to their highest since January as investors price in an increased probability of a major disruption in Middle East oil supplies.

Part of the reason for the rapid spike is that spare capacity among Opec and allies to pump more oil to offset any disruption is roughly equivalent to Iran's output, according to analysts and Opec watchers.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are the only Opec+ members capable of quickly boosting output and could pump around 3.5 million barrels per day (bpd) more, analysts and industry sources said.

Iran's production stands at around 3.3 million bpd and it exports over 2 million bpd of oil and fuel. There has been no impact on output so far from Israel's attacks on Iran's oil and gas infrastructure, nor on exports from the region.

But fears that Israel may destroy Iranian oil facilities to deprive it of its main source of revenue have driven oil prices higher. The Brent benchmark last traded up nearly 7% at over \$74 on Friday.

An attack with a significant impact on Iranian output that required other producers to pump more to plug the gap would leave very little spare capacity to deal with other disruptions - which can happen due to war, natural disasters or accidents.

And that with a caveat that Iran does not attack its neighbours in retaliation for Israeli strikes. Iran has in the past threatened to disrupt shipping through the Strait of Hormuz if it is attacked.

The Strait is the exit route from the Middle East Gulf for around 20% of the world's oil supply, including Saudi, UAE, Kuwaiti, Iraqi and Iranian exports.

Iran has also previously stated that it would attack other oil suppliers that filled any gap in supplies left due to sanctions or attacks on Iran.

"If Iran responds by disrupting oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz, targeting regional oil infrastructure, or striking US military assets, the market reaction could be much more severe, potentially pushing prices up by \$20 per barrel or more," said Jorge Leon, head of geopolitical analysis at Rystad.

— Reuters

Oman & Italy: Partnership of opportunity

THE Sultanate of Oman and the Italian Republic are leveraging deep historical and diplomatic connections to cultivate a dynamic economic partnership. Rooted in ancient trade routes and centuries of mutual respect, this enduring relationship fosters a stable environment for long-term projects, notably in cultural heritage and strategic infrastructure, by mitigating investor risks and promoting shared commercial interests.

Formal diplomatic relations began in the early 1970s, solidified by Italy's 1975 embassy opening in Muscat. Ongoing high-level engagements and Italy's appreciation for Oman's mediating role in international dialogues underscore a strategic alignment beyond economics.

This diplomatic depth enhances Oman's global standing and ensures a stable environment crucial for attracting foreign investment, while strengthening Italy's role as a key European partner in the Gulf.

Recent bilateral trade between Oman and Italy has seen significant expansion, reaching €708.9 million in 2024, a 31% increase and a 30.6% annualised growth over five years.

Omani exports to Italy notably more than doubled from €103.9 million in 2023 to €243.4 million in 2024, indicating diversification potential. While Italy maintained a considerable surplus with €692.3 million in exports to Oman, NCSI (National Centre for Statistics and Information) data for 2024 shows Oman's trade deficit with Italy exceeding RO 32 million.

Oman's exports, mainly unwrought aluminium and ferro-chromium, reflect its industrial strength, while Italy's exports of industrial components, machinery and tools (totalling approximately RO 40.07 million in imports for Oman) highlight its role as a technology supplier.

This complementary trade structure points to significant opportunities for investment, joint manufacturing and technology transfer to boost Oman's value-added production. Italy is a tourist-



Ongoing high-level engagements and Italy's appreciation for Oman's mediating role in international dialogues underscore a strategic alignment beyond economics.



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The writer is founder and CEO - Smart Investment Gateway, economists, board adviser & business transformation mentor

attracting country, with 57 million attracted in 2023, one of Oman's top agenda is to boost tourism. There is some synergy in this field. Italian tourists are attracted to Oman, some agencies hire chartered flights.

The convergence of Oman's national development agenda, Oman Vision 2040, with Italy's advanced industrial and technological capabilities, creates a fertile ground for strategic investment and business opportunities across multiple sectors.

Oman Vision 2040 prioritises economic diversification, carbon neutrality and an increased contribution from the private sector. Italy, with its strengths in green technologies, advanced engineering and sustainable development, is uniquely positioned to support these goals.

Key sectors for enhanced collaboration include the energy transition, particularly green hydrogen, where Oman plans ambitious investments, with Italy offering innovation and expertise.

Opportunities also exist in advanced oil and gas technology, as Oman actively seeks foreign expertise in sophisticated drilling, hydraulic fracturing and enhanced oil recovery (EOR) technologies. Italian companies like ENI and Saipem are already well-established in this sector in Oman.

Infrastructure and construction present significant demand for Italian expertise, equipment and services, driven by Oman Vision

2040 mega-projects like the Duqm Refinery and the expansion of Muscat International Airport. Italian technical expertise is also highly sought after in technology and innovation, aligning with Oman's long-term development strategy. Oman's burgeoning tourism sector, emphasising eco-tourism, cultural preservation and sustainable development under its Oman Vision 2040, offers significant opportunities for Italian companies specialising in sustainable tourism development and cultural heritage management.

Italian archaeological and restoration knowledge has already greatly benefitted Omani heritage projects. Oman also presents a consistent market for premium “Made in Italy” products across fashion, footwear, jewelry, luxury goods and shipbuilding.

Furthermore, opportunities in water and waste management align with Oman's sustainable development goals, offering further avenues for collaboration. Exchange of students can be an area. Oman armed forces and security forces use Italian equipment.

Both nations stand to gain substantially. Oman benefits from Italian technical expertise, technology transfer and accelerated sustainable development for a more diversified economy. Italy gains energy security through access to Oman's natural resources, including future green hydrogen and leverages Oman's strategic gateway to GCC, Indian Ocean and East African markets, aligning with initiatives like the “Mattei Plan for Africa.”

This partnership drives significant two-way investment, impacting both private sectors. The Oman Investment Authority's (OIA) successful real estate investment in Milan, yielding a 50% return, signals Oman's growing capacity for outward investment into European markets and a shift towards sophisticated capital flow, strengthening its global financial footprint.

Italian businesses are also increasingly investing in Oman, drawn by Oman Vision 2040's focus on high-growth sectors and investor-friendly reforms.

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SIT. WANTED

INDIAN male (Mechanical Engineering) with 3 years experience in Diesel engine works (Gensets/ Engines), 2 years in Machine Maintenance, seeks job. Contact: 78022420

INDIAN male 14 years experience light/ heavy driver. Looking for suitable opening currently in Oman. Contact: 77050986/ 91280205, email: kokkadmou@gmail.com

INDIAN male MBA, 20 years experience in Oman & GCC in Project sales/ Dealer market in All construction materials including Cables & Accessories having D/L looking for the post of Sales Manager/Assistant Manager. Contact: 00968 78099493

INDIAN Male, 4 years of experience in web development in a product based company. Looking for a suitable position as software developer. Contact: + 968- 99226403 suhail23599@gmail.com

INDIAN Male /CPA, CMA, CA Finalist & BCOM/ 10+ years of Experience/ Currently Working as Finance Manager, Looking for Senior Management Roles in Finance. Contact: 78611653. Email: jobcpacma@gmail.com

CHIEF accountant, MBA finance, 9+ years experience in financial statements, auditing, budgeting, VAT, tax, fixed assets, reconciliation, payroll. Seeking a full-time or part-time position in a senior role. Contact: akramhaniffa@yahoo.com / 93988825.

ACCOUNTS/ Finance: Indian male (MBA Fin) having more than 19 years of experience in Oman accounts & finance looking for suitable placement, NOC available and can join immediately. Contact: 92076716

LOOKING for part time OR full time Accounts/ Finance job. 20yrs experience in Muscat. Upto finalization & Audit. Please contact: 92065499

SIT. WANTED

PLANNING Engineer, PMP. Indian male 11 years experience in Construction Projects. Well versed with Primavera P6 Software, strong communication skills, Interpersonal skills, EDT Claims, Recovery schedules, project control. Having Omani Driving Licence. Contact: 78002582 . Email: engineer4planning@ gmail.com

SIT. WANTED

LOOKING for job. Senior Logistics coordinator. 9 years Oman exp in operations (customs, import, export, freight). Contact: +968 76986562

A SUDANESE resident in Salalah, BSc of administrative sciences with 21 years of experience in the fields of (sales/ management/ logistics and fleet). Contact: +968 98510880.

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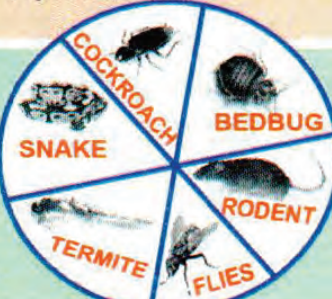
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ART/LIFE



A large artwork by Omani artist Ali Al-Habsi, featuring a red background with a grid of small, colorful, stylized figures and a central panel with four portraits of Omani people.

A R T

AN OMANI ARTIST UNCOVERING THE HIDDEN BEAUTY IN OMAN'S OLD ARCHITECTURE_{>20}

ENTERTAINMENT

‘How to Train Your Dragon’ soars to top of N America box office



“HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON,” a live-action reboot of a popular 2010 animated film, roared to the top of the North American box office with \$83.7 million in weekend ticket sales, industry estimates showed on Sunday.

The family-friendly film from Universal and DreamWorks Animation tells the story of a friendship between a Viking named Hiccup (Mason Thames) and a dragon called Toothless.

“This is an excellent opening for a live-action animation remake and it’s especially good for the fourth episode in a series like this,” said David A Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research.

Disney’s “Lilo & Stitch,” another live-action remake, kept up its excellent summer returns with \$15.5 million, Exhibitor Relations said.

So far, the film about Hawaiian girl Lilo (Maia Kealoha) and her blue alien friend Stitch (Chris Sanders) has grossed nearly \$860 million worldwide.

Recent box office success of live-action versions of animated classics like “Lilo & Stitch” and “How to Train Your Dragon” is driven by nostalgia, stunning visual effects and strong marketing. Fans cherish these stories and modern CGI brings them to life in new ways. Strategic release timing and merchandise tie-ins boost excitement, while audiences seek comfort in familiar, beloved characters. These factors combined make such films highly appealing, ensuring they remain popular with audiences worldwide and dominating ticket sales.

Debuting in third place is A24’s “Materialists,” a sophisticated rom-com starring Dakota Johnson, Pedro Pascal and Chris Evans, at \$12 million.

“It’s a grown-up story that’s well-timed as summer counter-programming,” Gross said.

“Mission: Impossible — The Final Reckoning” — the latest and ostensibly last, in the hugely successful Tom Cruise spy thriller series based on a 1960s TV show — held its own in fourth place at \$10.3 million.

The Paramount film has now topped the \$500 million mark worldwide.

In fifth place was Lionsgate’s “Ballerina,” a “John Wick” spin-off starring Ana de Armas as a dancer turned contract killer and co-starring Anjelica Huston. Keanu Reeves makes a brief appearance as the hitman Wick. It took in \$9.4 million. —AFP

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



A man playing a harmonium during a Hindu festival.

HERITAGE

Indians people celebrate the Hindu Ratham festivity organised by the Tamil-Hindu-association in Fuerstenfeldbruck near Munich, southern Germany. —AFP



Brad Pitt and Jerry Bruckheimer at a press conference.

FILM

US film producer Jerry Bruckheimer and US director Joseph Kosinski take questions about “F1: The Movie,” starring Brad Pitt during a news conference during the first practice session for the 2025 Formula 1 Grand Prix du Canada. —AFP



BTS members holding a photo of themselves.

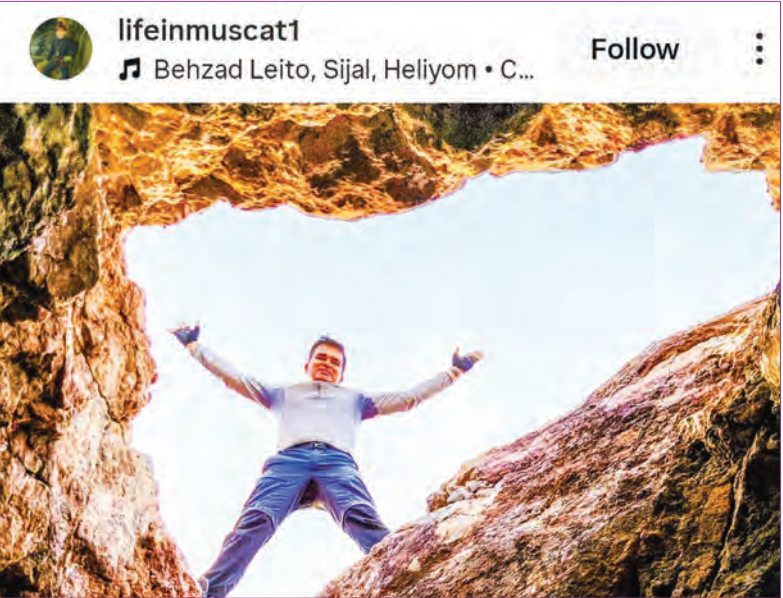
MUSIC

A fan of K-pop boy band BTS holds an ‘ARMY Bomb’ and a picture of BTS members during the annual ‘BTS Festa’ celebrating the group’s debut anniversary at KINTEX exhibition centre in Goyang. —AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Appreciating Grand Structures



Beauty of Remote Places

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Ancient trees, dwindling in the wild, thrive on sacred ground



The Putuo hornbeam, a hardy tree that thrives in the damp air by the East China Sea, could be easily overlooked by visitors to the Huiji Temple on an island in Zhejiang province.

The tree has an unremarkable appearance: spotty bark, small stature and serrated leaves with veins as neatly spaced as notebook lines. But as far as conservationists can tell, no other mature specimen of its species is alive in the wild.

The holdout on the island, Mount Putuo, has been there for about two centuries. And according to a study published in the journal *Current Biology*, its setting may have been its salvation.

The study found that religious sites in eastern China have become refuges for old, ancient and endangered trees.

Buddhist and Taoist temples have long sheltered plants that otherwise struggled to find a foothold, including at least eight species that now exist nowhere else on Earth.

“This form of biodiversity conservation, rooted in cultural and traditional practices, has proved to be remarkably resilient,” said Zhiyao Tang, a professor of ecology at Peking University and one of the study’s authors.

The trees survived at religious sites partly because they were planted and cultivated there.

The report noted that Buddhism and Taoism emphasize spiritual association with plants and the temples tended to be left undisturbed, shielding the areas from deforestation. — JACEY FORTIN / NYT



This year’s hot new tool for chefs? ChatGPT.

FOR FOUR months in 2026, the Chicago restaurant Next will serve a nine-course menu with each course contributed by a different chef. One of them is a 33-year-old woman from Wisconsin who cooked under the pathbreaking modernist Ferran Adrià, the purist sushi master Jiro Ono and the great codifier and systematizer of French haute cuisine, Auguste Escoffier.

Her glittering resume is all the more impressive when you recall that Escoffier has been dead since 1935.

Where did Grant Achatz, the chef and an owner of Next, find this prodigy? In conversations with ChatGPT, Achatz supplied the chatbot with this chef’s name, Jill, along with her work history and family background, all of which he invented. Then he asked it to suggest dishes that would reflect her personal and professional influences.

If all goes according to plan, he will keep prompting the program to refine one of Jill’s recipes, along with those of eight other imaginary chefs, for a menu almost entirely composed by artificial intelligence.

“I want it to do as much as possible, short of actually preparing it,” Achatz said.

As generative AI has grown more powerful and fluent over the past decade, many restaurants have adopted it for tracking inventory, scheduling shifts and other operational tasks. Chefs have not been anywhere near as quick to ask the bots’ help in dreaming up fresh ideas, even as visual artists, musicians, writers and other creative types have been busily collaborating with the technology.

That is slowly changing, though. Few have plunged headfirst into the pool in quite the way Achatz is doing with his menu for Next, but some of his peers are also dipping exploratory toes into the water, asking generative AI to suggest spices, come up with images showing how a redesigned space or new dish might look, or give them

crash courses on the finer points of fermentation.

“I’m still learning how to maximize it,” said Aaron Tekulve, who finds the technology helpful for keeping track of the brief seasonal windows of the foraged plants and wild seafood from the Pacific Northwest that he cooks with at Surrell, his restaurant in Seattle. “There’s one chef I know who uses it quite a bit, but for the most part I think my colleagues don’t really use it as much as they should.”

The pinball-arcade pace of a popular restaurant can make it hard for chefs to break with old habits. Others have objections that are philosophical or aesthetic.

“Cooking remains, at its core, a human experience,” chef Dominique Crenn wrote in an email. “It’s not something I believe can or should be replicated by a machine.” Crenn said she has no intention of inviting a computer to help her with the menus at Atelier Crenn in San Francisco.

It is true that generative AI consumes vast amounts of electricity and water. Then there are the mistakes. According to OpenAI, the company that owns ChatGPT, 500 million people a week use the program. But it is still wildly prone to delivering factual errors in a cheerily confident tone. (The New York Times has sued OpenAI and Microsoft, the creators of ChatGPT and other AI programs, alleging they violated copyright law by training their chatbots with millions of Times articles. The two companies have denied that.)

None of the chefs I interviewed takes the chatbot’s information at face value, and none will blindly follow any recipe it suggests. Then again, they don’t trust most of the recipes they find in cookbooks or online, either.

Cooks, like other humans, are forgetful, distracted and hemmed in by their own experiences. AI has its shortcomings, but these aren’t among them. Chefs who consult the big electronic brain when they’re devising a new dish or dining room find it helpful for the same reason bands like working with producer Brian Eno: Some of its suggestions

are so unexpected that it can jolt them out of a creative rut.

“You can get really hyper-specific ideas that are out of the box,” said Jenner Tomaska, a chef in Chicago. For the Alston, a steakhouse he opened Friday, Tomaska wanted a variation on the Monégasque fried pastry known as barbagjuan. ChatGPT’s earliest suggestions were a little basic, but as he fed it more demanding prompts — for instance, a filling that would reflect Alain Ducasse’s style, steakhouse traditions and local produce — the fillings got more interesting. How about Midwestern crayfish, white miso and fresh dill, with pickled celery root on the side?

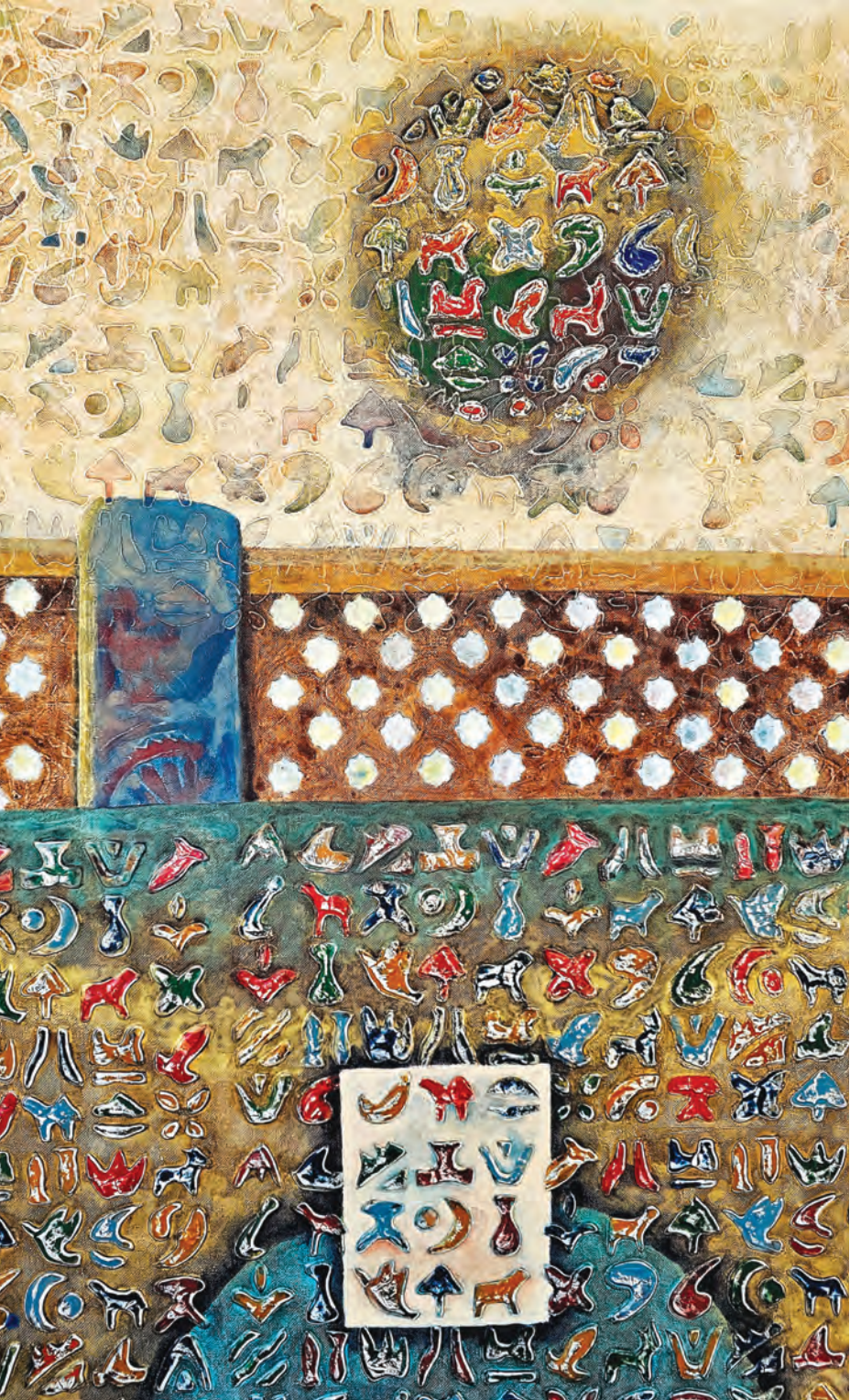
“It’s a little bizarre, because I like to talk through these things with people, and I’m doing it with something that doesn’t exist, per se,” Tomaska said. But arming himself with ideas from his solitary talks with ChatGPT, he said, “does help bring better conversation to the creative process when I do have someone in front of me.”

AI-generated visualizations, like those from Midjourney, have helped chef Dave Beran communicate his vision for his new Santa Monica restaurant, Seline. He wanted a warm, magical ambiance inspired by the shadowy interiors of Aska and Frantzén but with a softer feel.

Beran repeatedly prompted Midjourney to reflect that mood, even imagining cozy scenes like a fireplace. These images acted as a “translator,” providing a shared language for discussions with his architect and designer.

Currently, AI can’t physically build or cook but serves as an inspiring tool. Chefs often take AI suggestions and interpret them into real dishes or spaces, making AI-driven concepts feel less unsettling than AI art, which can be immediately displayed. Since chef Grant Achatz started experimenting with ChatGPT, it’s become an essential creative tool, fueling ideas for menus, set design, and storytelling. While AI offers inspiration, human interpretation remains crucial in bringing these ideas to life. —NYT

FEATURES



about the everyday beauty of the neighbourhoods, the old houses, and the decorative doors. He's drawn to the tiny details — the patterns on a door, an inscription, the way sunlight hits an old wall. “These little things have always been fascinating,” he says. “They’re like secret messages, waiting to be uncovered.” His artworks try to capture this feeling — bringing back the shine of those old doors or making us see the beauty in their simple, yet intricate designs.

Patterns are a big part of his art — geometric designs, inspired by traditional Omani motifs, are repeated over and over, creating balance and rhythm. You’ll also notice floral motifs, leaves, and flowers, which connect the art to nature. Arabic calligraphy isn’t just writing; it’s art in itself. It’s used to decorate buildings and surfaces, turning words into visual artworks and making every corner feel like a piece of history.

Juma points out that Oman’s artistic styles weren’t



AN OMANI ARTIST UNCOVERING THE HIDDEN BEAUTY IN OMAN’S OLD ARCHITECTURE

BY RUQAYA AL KINDI
Instagram: @ruqaya.alkindi

FROM THE moment you look at his paintings, you’re drawn in. You see the thick lines of carved doors, the curved patterns on windows, the swirling calligraphy, and even the tiny details like jewellery, vessels, or stars — all recreated with a modern twist. It’s as if Oman’s old walls and stories are whispering to you through his brushstrokes. His work celebrates the beauty of architecture, yes, but also the life that revolved around these structures — religious gatherings, scholarly pursuits, everyday life, all woven into his art.

Juma al Harthy’s paintings make you step into a world where history, culture, and artistry come together in vibrant displays of colour and detail. His work feels like a window into Oman’s soul — rich with stories of ancient buildings, intricate designs, and the crafts that have been passed down through generations.

His art isn’t just about pretty pictures; it’s about capturing



the spirit of Oman’s architecture, its symbols, and its stories, all in a way that feels fresh and exciting. What makes Juma different from other artists? It’s his deep connection with Oman’s history, his keen eye for detail, and his ability to blend traditional Islamic art with contemporary styles — all while making it accessible for everyone.

One of his most famous pieces, Jibreen Icon, takes us on a visual walk through Jibreen Castle. It’s a stunning pair of paintings inspired by one of Oman’s most iconic castles. These images don’t just show the stone walls; they tell stories about the people who lived there, the traditions they kept, and the secrets hidden in the carvings and inscriptions. The paintings highlight everything from the beautifully painted decorations to the engraved writings on the doors, making you feel like you’re walking through the castle yourself.

Juma uses a mix of abstract and impressionist styles, which gives his work a lively, almost dream-like feel. He talks about how he’s capturing not just the physical aspects of the castle, but also its political, cultural, and social significance. The middle of the painting features a ship’s rudder — a symbol of leadership and guidance, representing Imam Bilarab bin Sultan al Yaarubi, who built the castle in 1670. The castle was more than just a fort; it was a hub of learning and faith, a place where scholars gathered, and his attention to the inscriptions he found there reveals his fascination with the stories carved into the walls.

Juma’s love for Oman isn’t just about the history, it’s

developed in isolation. They absorbed influences from East Africa and other nearby regions through trade and cultural exchanges. That’s why his work often reflects a mix of styles and influences — an echo of Oman’s place as a crossroads of different cultures.

For Juma, research and understanding are crucial. He dives deep into the history of Islamic art, Oman’s cultural heritage, and world art traditions. His pieces aren’t just pretty — they’re meaningful, filled with stories and history that engage everyone who looks at them. People from all over the world find his work captivating because it combines beauty with a sense of storytelling and history.

Apart from creating stunning works, Juma has been busy showing his art at events across Oman and internationally. His famous Olive Branch project, created for a luxury hotel in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, symbolises Palestinian resilience. It’s a reminder of how steadfast and brave the Palestinian people have been, even in the toughest times. Currently, Gaza endures a brutal siege, and Juma feels a connection to this ongoing struggle, using his art to highlight hope and resistance.

His artistic journey has taken him beyond Oman’s borders. He’s showcased his work at exhibitions, participated in cultural forums and had some of his pieces purchased by collectors as far away as France. For example, last year, three of his artworks found a home in a private residence there, thanks to a collaboration with a Russian artist living in Oman.