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4 HELPING KIDS STAY TRUE IN A VIRAL WORLD

His Majesty discusses de-escalation of war with Türkiye President, German Chancellor

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a phone call from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Türkiye on Sunday.

Discussions during the call focused on the latest developments regarding the Israeli aggression against the Islamic Republic of Iran and its concerning repercussions in the region. They also exchanged views on ways to de-escalate tensions and reduce hostilities in a manner that safeguards the security and stability of nations while protecting the interests of their peoples.

They emphasised the importance of prioritising dialogue and diplomacy, returning to the negotiating table, and adhering to the principles of international law as the optimal path to resolving conflicts and preventing the escalation of crises in the region. His Majesty the Sultan also received a phone call from Friedrich Merz, Chancellor of Germany. The call addressed the current regional situation and its ongoing conflicts and tensions. They stressed the importance of intensifying international efforts to solidify de-escalation and avoid the risks of further confrontation, to safeguard security and stability.

The German Chancellor expressed deep appreciation for Oman's balanced approach and wise policy in advocating peace efforts and promoting dialogue. He commended Oman's constructive role in bridging perspectives between parties, reinforcing principles of cooperation, serving mutual interests among nations and enhancing opportunities for a dignified life for peoples around the world.

HM valued the efforts of the German government in supporting security and its commitment to fostering mutual understanding and cooperation based on respect and shared interests. — **ONA**

IRAN, ISRAEL BOMBARD EACH OTHER

IRAN AND Israel launched fresh attacks on each other overnight into Sunday, killing scores and raising fears of a wider conflict, as US President Donald Trump said it could be ended easily while warning Tehran not to strike any US targets.

Israeli rescue teams combed through rubble of residential buildings destroyed by Iranian missiles, using sniffer dogs and heavy excavators to look for survivors after at least 10 people, including children, were killed, raising the two-day toll to 13.

Sirens rang out across Israel after 4 pm on Sunday in the first such daylight alert, and fresh explosions could be heard in Tel Aviv.

In Iran, images from the capital showed the night sky lit up by a huge blaze at a fuel depot after Israel began strikes against Iran's oil and gas sector — raising the stakes for the global economy and the functioning of the Iranian state. Iran has not given a full death toll but said 78 people were killed on Friday and scores more have died since, including in a single attack that killed 60 on Saturday, half of them children, in a 14-storey apartment block flattened in Tehran.

Israel launched "Operation Rising Lion" with a surprise attack on Friday morning that wiped out the top echelon of Iran's military command and damaged its nuclear sites, and says the campaign will continue to escalate in coming days. Iran has vowed to "open the gates of hell" in retaliation.

The Israeli military warned Iranians living near weapons facilities to evacuate.

"Iran will pay a heavy price for the murder of civilians, women and children," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said from a balcony overlooking blown-out apartments in the town of Bat Yam where six people were killed. An official said Israel still had a long list of targets in Iran and declined to say how long the offensive would continue. President Masoud Pezeshkian said Iran's responses will grow "more decisive and severe" if Israel's hostile actions continue. **SEE P6-P7**



A woman carries her child following the Israeli strikes in Tehran on Sunday. ***— Reuters***

INBRIEF

STEPS TO ENSURE SAFE RETURN OF CITIZENS FROM IRAN



SAYYID BADR BIN HAMAD AL BUSAIDY

MUSCAT: *In light of ongoing regional developments, the Sultanate of Oman continues to intensify efforts to secure the safe return of its citizens from areas affected by escalating tensions Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, reaffirmed the ministry's commitment to providing round-the-clock assistance to Omani citizens wishing to return home. He noted that the ministry has allocated dedicated communication lines for citizens in both Muscat and Tehran according to their geographic location, in addition to providing support via the ministry's official app and WhatsApp channels.*

In a statement, Sayyid Badr stressed the importance of intensifying diplomatic and political pressure at the international level to end this unlawful and irresponsible aggression, and to uphold the principles of international law in support of peace, security and stability.

NEW BANKING RULES TO EMPOWER CONSUMERS

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

The Central Bank of Oman has introduced a comprehensive Open Banking Regulatory Framework that places consumers at the centre of the digital banking revolution, granting individuals full control over their financial data. Under the new rules, customers must provide explicit electronic consent before any bank or licensed third-party provider can access their account information.

A permission dashboard must be made available to users, enabling them to view, manage, or withdraw data-sharing consents in real time. Consent must be renewed annually, and customers retain the right to request modification, transfer, or deletion of their personal data.

The framework mandates strict safeguards for data privacy and cybersecurity. Financial service providers must deploy multi-factor authentication, and encrypted communication protocols. "The power is now in the customer's hands," said a CBO brief. "Open Banking, when used responsibly, will foster innovation, reduce costs and protect consumer rights — while making Oman a competitive player in regional fintech." The framework also outlines that customer data cannot be stored or processed outside Oman without prior approval and customer consent.

Commercial registrations must appoint at least one Omani

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

To accelerate Omanisation and promote investment, the Ministry of Labour (MoL) and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Investment Promotion on Sunday directed commercial registrations to employ at least one Omani employee.

The rule applies to every commercial registration that has completed one year since its establishment and covers foreign investment establishments, enterprises with more than 10 workers, those with fewer than 10 workers, and commercial registrations held by entrepreneurs and self-employed individuals. Failure to comply within the period will result in restrictions on new licences, and the ban will come into effect online.

Foreign investment entities that have completed one year of commercial activity are required to submit a plan for hiring at least one citizen within three months.

A blanket restriction will apply to all non-compliant foreign investment firms, regardless of the number of expatriate employees.

Firms will be granted a grace period not exceeding three months from the notification date to comply with the decision.

Companies employing more than 10 workers must submit an Omanisation plan to hire at least one national within three months.

Firms employing fewer than 10 workers must submit a plan to employ at least one Omani within six months.

All such firms will be assessed within a six-month period from the notification date to evaluate their contribution to the Local Added Value (LAV).

If the firm's contribution to LAV is established, temporary exemption from the appointment requirement may be granted.

Establishments owned by entrepreneurs and self-employed individuals will be granted a one-year grace period from the date of notification to adjust their status and fulfil Omanisation requirements.



The ministry urged all concerned establishments to comply with the new regulations to avoid penalties and support national employment goals.



SHORT*TAKES*



Sayyid Badr holds talks with Dr Johann David Wadephul of Germany on strengthening bilateral ties.

Oman, Germany discuss closer ties amid regional tensions

MUSCAT: *Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received here on Sunday Dr Johann David Wadephul, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany to discuss strengthening bilateral ties.*

The two sides explored opportunities to expand economic cooperation, with a particular focus on renewable energy initiatives.

On the political front, the two sides exchanged views on the serious tensions currently gripping the region due to Israel's military aggression against the Islamic Republic of Iran. The ministers also discussed developments in ceasefire negotiations for the Gaza Strip, updates on the Yemeni crisis, and ways to contain conflicts and crises through dialogue and peaceful means.

Both sides emphasised that security and stability cannot be achieved through violence or the imposition of military solutions, stressing that the only path to just and lasting peace lies in political negotiations, diplomatic channels, adherence to justice and international law, and respect for state sovereignty.

The meeting was attended by Munthir bin Mahfoudh al Mantheri, Head of the Europe Department at the Foreign Ministry and Dirk Lölke, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA



Dr Al Sabti toured the Saeed Pharmaceutical Industries plant and viewed the production lines.

Health minister discusses investment opportunities

TUNIS: *Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, discussed investment opportunities in the health sector in the Sultanate of Oman at a meeting with Tunisian businessmen in the capital, Tunis, on Sunday as part of his official visit to the Republic of Tunisia to participate in the Regional One Health Conference for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).*

During the meeting, the minister of health affirmed the Omani government's commitment to strengthening partnerships with investors, highlighting the facilities provided by the Sultanate of Oman to encourage investment in the health sector and address any challenges that may face investors.

The health minister and his accompanying delegation toured the Saeed Pharmaceutical Industries (IPS) plant, where they viewed the production lines and the other facilities. The minister listened to a detailed explanation from the factory's management regarding the work mechanism, manufacturing quality and the technologies applied at the plant.

The visit aimed at strengthening health cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Tunisia and exchanging expertise in the fields of pharmaceutical industries and health investment.

MoCIIP prepares for khareef business season

THE Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has affirmed the completion of preparations to welcome the Khareef Dhofar (monsoon season 2025), one of the governorate's most prominent economic and tourism events.

This is achieved through a series of inspection campaigns and awareness initiatives, reinforcing ongoing efforts to ensure a sound and secure business environment while stimulating local and foreign investments.

Mohammed bin Khalifa al Badrani, Director-General of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in Dhofar Governorate, stated that the Khareef Dhofar season presents a significant opportunity to revitalise commercial and economic activity in Dhofar.

This necessitates intensified oversight of commercial establishments to ensure compliance with legal and professional requirements, as well as educating shop owners on sound business practices that stimulate market activity and safeguard consumer rights. He emphasised the importance of monitoring essential requirements in commercial outlets, such as electronic payment systems, to facilitate service provision for targeted businesses.





MOHAMMED BIN KHALIFA AL BADRANI

He explained that the Directorate has been conducting comprehensive inspection campaigns for several months, covering markets, commercial complexes, restaurants, hotels and retail outlets, to verify compliance with health regulations and commercial business laws.

He added that the Directorate, in collaboration with relevant authorities, is organising workshops and awareness sessions for merchants and business owners to promote a culture of compliance and innovation in service delivery, aligning with visitor expectations during the Khareef Dhofar season.

Al Badrani noted that Dhofar Governorate has seen significant growth in the commercial sector, with 718 commercial registrations recorded by the end of Q1 2025, reflecting the sector's vitality and increasing investment interest in the governorate. He highlighted that construction and contracting activities topped the list of the most licensed commercial activities, with a total of 2,100 licences issued by the end of Q1 2025, compared to 1,274 licences in 2024 — demonstrating the momentum in Dhofar's construction and infrastructure sectors.

As for new investments in the governorate, he clarified that the number of new investors in Q1 2025 reached 1,217, with 88 commercial registrations issued, reflecting investor confidence in Dhofar's economic environment. Al Badrani pointed out that the number of commercial licences issued in Q1 2025 reached 9,527, compared to 13,800 in 2024, attributing the decline to the reorganisation of certain commercial activities and updated procedures to ensure higher service quality and operational sustainability.

In the industrial sector, 1,155 industrial licences were issued in Q1 2025, compared to 1,742 during the same period in 2024. — **ONA**

Aviation sector confirms readiness for khareef season

MUSCAT: The Civil Aviation Sector has confirmed its complete operational readiness to ensure a safe, smooth and efficient travel experience for passengers visiting Dhofar Governorate during the upcoming khareef season, which traditionally attracts increasing numbers of domestic and international tourists.

The comprehensive preparations involve coordinated efforts between the Civil Aviation Authority, Oman Airports, Oman Air and SalamAir as part of an integrated national system aimed at enhancing air transport operations. This includes increasing domestic flight frequencies and optimising operational efficiency at both Muscat International Airport and Salalah Airport to ensure seamless air traffic flow while maintaining the highest standards of service quality and safety.



Authorities emphasised that these preparations reflect the sector's commitment to developing a comprehensive and sustainable aviation system that supports Oman's tourism economy.

Flight operations will see significant expansion during the peak period. Oman Air will operate up to 12 daily flights during the busiest periods starting from July 1, while SalamAir will increase its operations to 8 daily flights during July and August.

Capacity enhancements include Oman Air adding over 70,000 additional seats for the season, representing a 16% increase compared to last year, while SalamAir has expanded its capacity by 58% with approximately 176,000 seats available for 2025.

Special fare structures remain in place for Omani citizens, with Oman Air maintaining fixed pricing starting at RO 32 for one-way trips and RO 54 for round trips between July 1 and September 15. Similarly, SalamAir offers fares beginning at RO 30 for single journeys and RO 48 for return flights during the same period.

Oman initiates protection of humpback whales

NAJAH AL RIYAMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

In a rare convergence of international scientists, environmental leaders and policymakers, Oman played host last week to a groundbreaking workshop focused on protecting one of the world's most endangered and isolated whale populations — the Arabian Sea humpback whale.

The workshop was considered the start of efforts to develop a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for the population, which is isolated to the Arabian Sea and listed as Endangered under the IUCN Red list of Threatened Species. The workshop facilitated regional collaboration, particularly between Oman and India, guiding the convergence of national conservation efforts into a regional framework. This process is supported by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in conjunction with the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), platforms with a conservation agenda that will allow the plan to be adopted by all range states boarding the Arabian Sea.

"The scientific community has built a strong foundation of knowledge over the past 25 years," said Suaad al



Harthy of the Environment Society of Oman. "The CMP efforts now support the aspirations for development of government policy and regional collaboration."

A special focus was placed on Masirah, which is internationally recognised as an "Important Marine Mammal Area" and home to what is considered to be the most important Arabian Sea humpback whale habitat in Oman.

"Scientific teams from around the region have been identifying threats and advocating for protection of this population as a matter of urgency" commented Dr Andrew Willson from Future Seas. "The threats from human activities throughout this population's range are rapidly accelerating and the whales are faced with the cumulative impacts of multiple stressors."

SHORTTAKES



The three-month programme included knowledge acquisition and skills in basic nursing. - ONA

MOH CELEBRATES GRADUATION OF HEALTH ASSISTANTS

MUSCAT: *The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Sunday celebrated the graduation of the 2nd and 3rd batches of the Health Assistants Programme.*

The programme supports the Health Ministry's strategy on consolidating the national health workforce and achieving Oman Vision 2040 goals for the health sector.

The programme seeks to raise the efficiency of competencies in health sector and enable them to promote healthcare services in Oman.

The second and third batches of the Health Assistants Programme included more than 100 male and female graduates. The programme constitutes a link in national initiatives implemented by the Ministry of Health to meet the health system's need for technical support personnel.

The three-month programme included knowledge acquisition, skills in basic nursing, first aid, patient care and handling of medical devices, in addition to practical training at primary and secondary healthcare institutions.

*The graduation ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Badria bint Mohsen al Rashdiyah, Director-General of Health Services at the Ministry of Health, and attended by department heads, programme supervisors and health and training personnel. — **ONA***

MANDATORY ACCREDITATION FOR ENGINEERS

MUSCAT: *The Ministry of Labour (MoL) announced on Sunday that starting from August 1, 2025, all engineers working in the Sultanate of Oman, including those currently employed and those to be appointed in the future, must obtain a professional accreditation certificate from the Oman Society of Engineers (OSE) in order to receive or renew a work permit.*

According to MoL, the issuance or renewal of work permits for engineers will be conditional upon presenting a valid professional classification certificate issued by the Sector Skills Unit (SSU) for engineering.

Meanwhile, the statement said all engineers must therefore submit an application to OSE to obtain the required certificate before approaching the ministry for any work-related permits.

The ministry clarified that no work permits will be granted to engineers after the specified date without submission of this certificate. This regulation aims to ensure the professional competence of engineering practitioners in Oman, reinforcing quality standards and aligning with national workforce development goals.

Enhancing opportunities for SMEs in energy sector

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) recently held its 14th dialogue session on enhancing opportunities for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the energy and minerals sector.

The session aimed at focusing on improving the business environment and making it more attractive to enterprises in this sector. As part of ASMED's efforts to partner and integrate with relevant entities to improve the business environment for SMEs, the dialogue session focused on opportunities in the energy and minerals sector.



The session aimed at focusing on improving the business environment and making it more attractive to enterprises in energy and minerals sector.

The session was attended by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED), along with officials from relevant authorities and owners of small and medium enterprises in the energy and minerals sector.

Adnan al Harrasi, an entrepreneur in the chemicals sector, said, "I had some ideas to share that needed to be discussed. The dialogue session provided a platform for entrepreneurs to raise issues and obstacles hindering their projects and find appropriate solutions from relevant authorities in each vital sector."

The session covered various topics including policies, legislation, licences and enablers that support SMEs in developing innovative solutions and partnerships in the energy and minerals sector.

It also aimed to enhance the role of SMEs in the sector by presenting innovative ideas, improving operational efficiency, encouraging government and private partnerships, and raising awareness of the sector's importance in supporting the national economy.

Summer travel plans disrupted due to unrest

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

Tensions in the region escalate, travel plans are being revisited. Iran has been a popular destination for medical and leisure tourism, as northern Iran is known for its exceptional weather during the summer. However, tourists who went for Eid holidays are now rushing to find ways to return. The route back will likely be by road or sea.

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, reiterated the round-the-clock efforts to facilitate the evacuation of Omani citizens wishing to return to their homeland.

He noted that the Foreign Ministry has allocated direct contact numbers in Muscat and Tehran based on the geographical distribution of citizens, in addition to the possibility of communicating via the ministry's app and other social media tools.

The ministry urged all Omani citizens who are currently in Shiraz and nearby areas to gather at specified locations in the Islamic Republic of Iran, namely assembly points in Shiraz and Bandar Abbas to facilitate procedures to ensure everyone's safety and return to Oman.

"My parents are still in Iran. They have been there since the Eid holidays. They have already been contacted by the ministry, but they are in Mashhad, Iran, which is up north. We are not sure when they will be able to plan their journey back," said a concerned daughter.

Some citizens conveyed through social media that they are still stuck in Baku, Azerbaijan. The summer holidays have begun for some sections of the school students, and amidst summer holiday planning comes the current situation in the region that has prompted airspace closures, resulting in the cancellation of some popular destinations for Omani tourists.



Motorists queue at a petrol station in Tehran on Sunday, after overnight Israeli missile strikes struck two fuel depots in Iran's capital. — AFP

Issa al Harthy, Sunny Island Travel and Tours, told the Observer: "Once the current conflict is over, the situation will return to normal, but there will be cancellations to the northern hemisphere and Central Asia."

"Many Omanis might not be in the mood to travel under the circumstances. People usually like to travel to Iran for medical treatment and for religious visits, but now that is not possible," he added.

When asked if there had been cancellations yet, he replied, "We have not sold many tickets to Central Asia; it is important to wait and see. Many Omanis also like to travel to the Far East and Africa. We have the optimism that after the dust has settled down, Omanis and residents will resume travelling. And we might see last-minute decisions to travel."

Nizam Aniyaram, B - One Travels, said, "We have had destination bookings to Central Asia, with Georgia being popular, but connecting flights have been cancelled. So our travellers have had to make changes. As of now, we think it is a temporary situation."

Salam Air had announced a temporary suspension of flights from/to Iran and Iraq. The destinations that have been impacted are Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Russia, Armenia, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan.

Airlines in the UAE have also mentioned that some other flights may face delays or rerouting.

Passengers are advised to check the flight status of the respective airlines.

Meanwhile, Oman Air announced the cancellation of flights to Amman, Jordan.

RAM unveils new Human Capital Management Programme

MUSCAT: The Royal Academy of Management (RAM) announces the launch of the Future of Human Capital Management programme, a groundbreaking initiative that aims to strengthen and hone national competencies of national talent, enabling them to contribute to achieving Oman's strategic vision for the future.

Designed for human resource development managers across the public sector, the programme aims to cultivate high-performing and supportive organisational environments by enhancing participants' effectiveness and ensuring the efficient implementation of strategies.

Delivered in partnership with Integrated Business Solutions (IBS), the new initiative reflects an ongoing commitment to achieving organisational excellence by investing in human capital.



The initiative aims to strengthen and hone national competencies of national talent

The two-month programme will equip participants with advanced capabilities as it explores strategic workforce planning, talent management, leadership development, and effective communication, each playing an essential role in improving productivity and organisational performance. Ultimately, the Future of Human Capital Management programme will enable participants to implement their new knowledge and practical skills, contributing to driving institutional efficiency and innovation.

"The launch of the Future of Human Capital Management programme represents a pivotal step towards the realisation of Oman Vision 2040 by investing in our national talent. We believe that equipping human resource leaders with advanced leadership capabilities is essential to drive the development of dynamic and innovative workplaces, which directly contribute to enhancing organisational performance and towards achieving long-term goals. The programme also seeks to provide participants with an opportunity to reflect on cutting-edge global practices and explore effective practical tools, enabling them to become strategic partners in driving impactful and lasting results in their organisations and society at large," said Abla al Buali, supervisor of the new programme.

The programme takes a holistic learning approach that links theory with practice. Participants will engage in interactive workshops and explore real-world case studies and hands-on activities that are directly applicable to their professional roles. It will also include dialogue sessions with distinguished local and international experts in the area of human capital management. Moreover, it fosters peer-to-peer engagement and the cultivation of professional networks that will support participants' long-term career development.

HELPING KIDS STAY TRUE IN A VIRAL WORLD

BALQEES AL ORAIMI

INFORMED PARENTING + SELF-AWARENESS = DIGITAL RESILIENCE. In an age where the world fits in the palm of a teenager's hand, the race to follow every trending challenge or viral video has become a defining feature of youth culture.

But as our children scroll endlessly through short clips and glamorous influencer reels, something vital is being lost — authenticity, self-awareness and the ability to think independently.

The rapid-fire world of social media is shaping how young people think, behave and even perceive themselves. Viral 'trends' often push youth to imitate, perform, or conform just to feel accepted. While this might seem harmless on the surface, the deeper effects on identity and self-worth are far more concerning.

So why are so many of our children swept up in trends? The answer lies in basic human needs: acceptance, recognition and belonging. Social media platforms offer these in the form of likes, shares and follows. But the validation is fleeting — and often built on inauthentic behaviour.

As Mariam al Ghailani, a social worker, explains: "The real danger is that teenagers don't even realise they're copying others. They believe they're expressing themselves, when in reality they're following a formula crafted by others to gain approval." While some online trends may appear playful or fun, many promote risky, superficial, or even harmful behaviour.

From dangerous physical challenges to mocking others for views, today's 'fun' can lead to tomorrow's regret - or worse. Salim al Kharousi, a father of three teenagers, says: "What worries me the most is how my kids justify everything online as 'just a joke' or 'just for views'. Dangerous stunts have become normal because they're repeated so often - it's alarming."

We cannot fight fire with bans. Technology is not the enemy - ignorance is. The solution lies not in restricting access but in fostering awareness and resilience.

What can parents and educators do?

- Build identity
- Encourage critical thinking
- Create safe spaces
- Lead by example
- Promote digital literacy
- Celebrate individuality

Dana al Siyabi, a university student, shares: "I used to panic if I didn't join the latest trend or get enough engagement online. But once I started focusing on what truly interests me and sharing my authentic experiences, I felt more self-respect and peace."

Trends will come and go — but our children's values and identities must remain strong.

As parents, educators and community leaders, we are responsible for helping young people discover their voice, their values and the strength to go against the tide when needed.

SHORT*TAKES*



ROBOTICS INITIATIVE MAKES WAVES ON NATIONAL STAGE

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

A volunteer-led Robotics Education Initiative has made waves on the national stage by clinching second place at the World Robot Olympiad (WRO) — Oman National Qualifiers 2025, in the RoboMission Junior Category for ages from 11 to 15. The community Robotics Education Initiative which rocketed to the National Podium at WRO Oman 2025 is the result of the relentless efforts of a group of people who geared the young minds into the world of robotics and marks a shining example of what community, commitment and creativity can achieve when united by purpose.

The winning team, ROBOMINDS, featured three bright young minds including Nusrat Mohiuddin, aged 12, Muhammed Narmawala, 13, and Muhammed Shahul Hameed, 14. Launched on May 2, the Robotics Initiative was born from a simple but bold purpose to increase access to high-end technologies among students.

Speaking to the Observer, Aleem Mohiudheen, the lead volunteer and the architect of the initiative, attributed the secret formula of success to the students for their dedication and to the community members. "This resounding success is proof that with focus and hard work, communities can achieve wonders — even in a short span," he said.

"We encourage all communities — across Oman and around the world — to replicate this model. The Darsait Robotics Volunteer Team is ready to support and guide anyone who shares this vision."

The initiative was supported by a passionate team of volunteers including Shakil Narmawala, Ubaid Ur Rahman, Shiraz Khan, Sanif Danyal and several others who dedicated their time and expertise in mentoring the students.

17.3% WORK DONE ON WADI BANI KHALID ROAD

WADI BANI KHALID: *The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology continues to implement the Wadi Bani Khalid steep road project in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate. The 9-kilometre road begins at the Manakh area and ends at the village of Muzayra, the centre of the wilayat.*

Eng Yousuf bin Abdullah al Mujaini, Director-General of Roads and Land Transport at the Ministry, stated that the project has so far achieved a 17.3-per cent completion rate and is expected to open to traffic by the end of 2026.



The project includes road safety features such as concrete and metal barriers

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), he explained that the road consists of two lanes, each 3.5 metres wide, with 1.5-metre asphalt shoulders, box culverts and drainage channels to ensure road safety during rainfall.

He added that the project includes essential road safety features such as concrete and metal barriers, directional signage, road markings and warning paint. He emphasised that the project will enhance traffic flow and boost urban, tourism and economic activity. — ONA

Workshops kick off for Human Rights Strategy

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

UNDER the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs, the Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) has launched a series of workshops aimed at preparing Oman's first comprehensive National Human Rights Strategy. More than 55 representatives from government bodies, private sector organisations and civil society institutions are participating in the initiative.

The workshops aim to assess the current legal, regulatory and procedural landscape across key human rights areas, identify major challenges and explore opportunities. They seek to develop strategic objectives that are both implementable and measurable, with a clear short- and long-term vision.

This effort is being carried out in accordance with Article (11) of the OHRC Statute, issued by Royal Decree No (57/2022), which mandates the Commission to formulate and monitor the strategy in coordination with relevant entities. It marks a pivotal step towards creating a national policy document grounded in a realistic understanding of the human rights situation in Oman.

Dr Rashid bin Hamad al Balushi, Chairman of the OHRC, emphasised that the strategy reflects Oman's openness to the international human rights system and



Under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saeedi, OHRC launched a series of workshops aimed at preparing the first National Human Rights Strategy

reaffirms its commitment to voluntary international obligations - while remaining rooted in national values, cultural identity and humanitarian principles.

Utilising a SWOT analysis framework, the workshops are designed to assess strengths and weaknesses, evaluate risks and define strategic objectives backed by solid indicators and a clear baseline for future monitoring. The formal announcement of the National Human Rights Strategy is scheduled for December 10, 2025, to coincide with International Human Rights Day, ushering in a new era of institutional human rights work in Oman.

Running from June 15 to July 3, 2025, the workshops are divided into four working groups and covers: Civil and political rights, economic and social rights, environmental and cultural rights and freedom to participate in public life with particular attention to vulnerable groups such as women, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities.

Dr Jamal bin Eid al Khadouri, OHRC member, remarked that the strategy will reinforce Oman's human rights framework, elevate its global standing and align with Oman Vision 2040, as well as international agreements and national laws.

Inclusion has been a cornerstone of the planning process, with OHRC ensuring participation from academic institutions, civil society organisations, and the private sector - acknowledging that a collaborative approach is essential.

Participant Hamad bint Mohammed al Abri, Head of the Security and Safety Statistics Department at the National Centre for Statistics and Information, said: "Through our contribution of data and indicators across 15 axes, we help strengthen Oman's position globally by identifying and addressing existing gaps in human rights performance."

Meanwhile, Abdulaziz bin Ali al Saadi, Director of Legal Affairs at OHRC and a member of the strategy's executive team, highlighted the extensive groundwork, including several consultative meetings to ensure that the strategy is both inclusive and data-driven.

KO honoured with best community initiative award

MUSCAT: Knowledge Oman (KO), the leading community knowledge sharing platform, has been awarded with the prestigious Best Community Development Initiative Award at the International Business and Innovation Excellence 2025 event held recently in Muscat.

Balqees al Hassani, who leads the platform for the past five years, collected the award on behalf of the team. The award represents the sixth achievement of both global and local recognition that Knowledge Oman has received since its inception in 2008 for its contributions to community development.

"I am honoured to receive this prestigious award on behalf of the team," said Balqees al Hassani, President of Knowledge Oman. "Being recognised for the projects and work we do for the community fuels our passion to continue to go bigger and do more for the betterment of the society."

The International Business and Innovation Excellence 2025 event brought together influential leaders, visionary, innovators and changemakers from across the globe. Knowledge Oman's recognition affirms its standing as a role model in community development, driven by innovation, volunteerism and a clear national vision.



Balqees al Hassani

The award represents the sixth achievement of both global and local recognition that Knowledge Oman has received since its inception in 2008 for its contributions to community development. Knowledge Oman's recognition affirms its standing as a role model in community development, driven by innovation, volunteerism and a clear national vision

Under Balqees's leadership, KO has expanded its footprint, empowering thousands of individuals through knowledge-driven programmes and community initiatives aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

Founded in 2008, KO has become a pioneering platform that bridges academia, industry and civil society. The platform has received multiple awards since its inception in 2008 that includes the Best Community Leadership in 2022; International Standard Web Technology Award 2009; Brand Leadership Award in 2010; Outstanding Contribution to the Cause of Education in 2012; and the Golden Strategic Award for Culture in 2013.

سلطنة عُمان
وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات
Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

رؤية عُمان 2040

Request for Expression of Interest Investment

Request for Expression of Interest No.EOI.1/2025

Development of office software applications for word processing, presentation creation, and spreadsheet management, based on open-source technologies in the Sultanate of Oman

The Internal Investment Committee at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology is pleased to invite local companies and investors specializing in the software sector to submit an Expression of Interest for the development of office software applications for word processing, presentation creation, and spreadsheet management, based on open-source technologies. These applications should be ready for deployment and use across various workplaces and meet standard office requirements in different work environments. This initiative aims to **support technology localization efforts and enhance national digital sovereignty.** The government will contract to purchase a number of licenses for a specified period, in accordance with the terms outlined in this announcement.

Competition Submission Requirements:

- Expression of Interest Letter for Investment in Open-Source Office Software Solutions for Government Institutions in the Sultanate of Oman.
- Submission of the proposal preliminary operating model.
- Submission of company profile, commercial registration, and activity-related licenses of the applying company.
- Submission of a preliminary economic feasibility study for the project.
- Submission of documents demonstrating the company's and employees' experience in the field of software development.
- Any additional documents that support the investor's proposal for the project.
- All documents must be submitted in **PDF format** and sent via email to: **Investment@mtcit.gov.om**, clearly stating the **title and reference number** of the Expression of Interest (EOI).

Investors interested in development of desktop software applications based on open-source technologies are requested to submit their applications no later than July 20, 2025.

For any other inquiries, you can reach us via the following contact details:

PHONE NUMBER	E-mail
24685340 24685341 24685091	investment@mtcit.gov.om

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OMAN DAILY **Observer**

MONDAY - **JUNE 16** - 2025

7

IRAN-ISRAEL WAR

Arch foes step up strikes amid calls for peace

Two Iranian drones shot down in Iraq

A HEAVY CLOUD OF SMOKE HUNG ABOVE TEHRAN AFTER ISRAELI AIRCRAFT HIT TWO FUEL DEPOTS

SIX PEOPLE WERE KILLED AND AT LEAST 180 INJURED AT THE SITE OF A STRIKE IN BAT YAM, ISRAEL

THE ISRAELI MILITARY WARNED IRANIANS TO EVACUATE AREAS NEAR WEAPONS FACILITIES NATIONWIDE

IRAN SAID THAT IT HAD STRUCK SITES USED BY ISRAELI WARPLANES FOR REFUELLING

Israel airspace remains closed for 3rd day

BAGHDAD: *Two drones launched from Iran towards Israel were shot down over Iraq by the US-led international coalition to defeat the IS group, two Iraqi military officials said on Sunday. "The international coalition at Ain al Asad (military base) shot down two Iranian drones that were en route to Israel," one official said, referring to an Iraqi airbase housing foreign troops in western Iraq.*

The drones were shot down overnight on Saturday to Sunday, he added, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the matter. The other official said the drones were targeted because they entered the defensive perimeter of the anti-jihadist coalition, where troops are instructed to engage any potential threat.

*Several missiles and drones have fallen in Iraqi territory, mostly in the desert, without causing casualties. An "explosive drone" was shot down by the coalition at Ain al Asad on Friday, according to an Iraqi official. The government in Baghdad is a close ally of Tehran, but also a strategic partner of Iran's arch-foe the United States, which has some 2,500 troops in Iraq as part of the coalition. Baghdad and Washington have agreed on a timetable for the gradual withdrawal of the coalition's forces. — **AFP***

TEL AVIV: *Israeli authorities said that the country's airspace was closed on Sunday for a third consecutive day, after two nights of deadly missile strikes from Iran in response to Israel's military campaign. "Due to the security situation and in accordance with the instructions of security authorities, Israeli airspace is currently closed to civilian aviation — no incoming or outgoing flights are operating," said a joint statement from the transport and foreign ministries.*

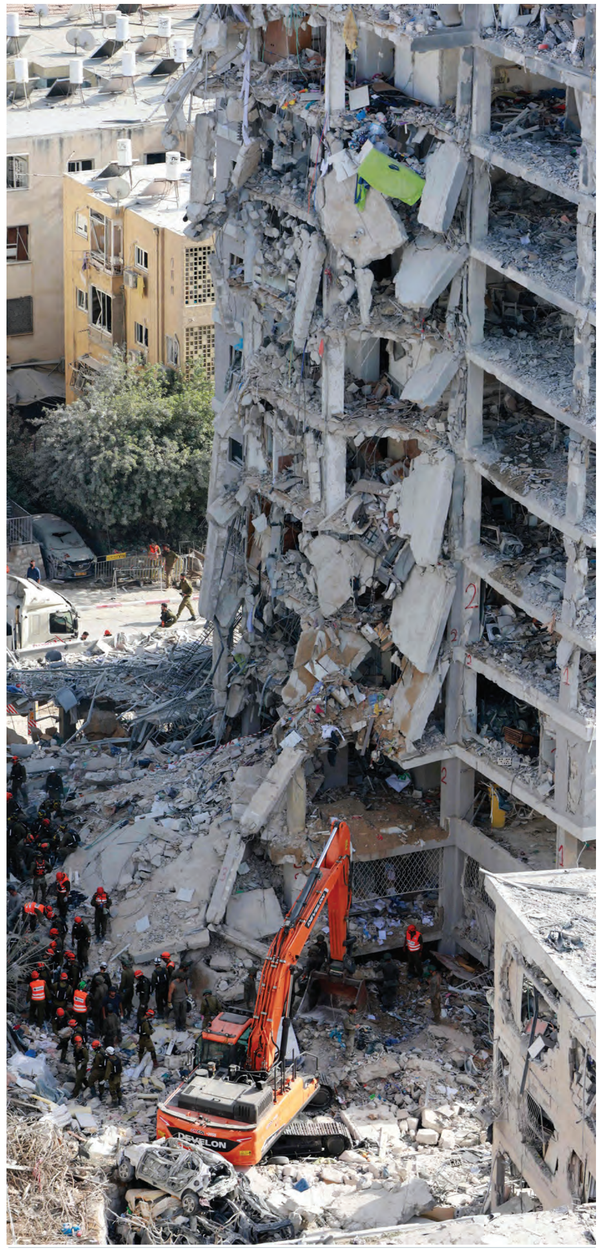
*Israeli media reported that thousands of Israeli nationals were stranded abroad since Friday when the Israeli military began striking military and nuclear targets in Iran. Iran responded firing hundreds of ballistic missiles into Israeli cities, destroying residential buildings and leaving 13 people dead. A statement from the Israel airports authority spokesperson confirmed that Ben Gurion International Airport near Tel Aviv would remain closed, saying "a notice regarding its reopening will be given with at least 6 hours' advance warning". "A decision to resume flights to Israel will only be made once it is deemed safe to do so," the statement said. Meanwhile, Israel's land border crossings to Jordan and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula remain open. — **AFP***



*People watch from a bridge as flames from an Israeli attack rise from Sharan Oil depot, in Iran. — **Reuters***



*A man walks through the smoke of an explosion following the Israeli strikes on Iran. — **Reuters***



*Israeli rescuers search through the rubble at the site of an overnight Iranian missile strike in Bat Yam. — **AFP***



*Rescue personnel work at an impact site following a missile attack, in Bat Yam. — **Reuters***

ISRAEL pressed its bombardment campaign on Iran on Sunday, striking a defence facility and fuel depots as the two arch foes kept up their most intense confrontation in history. It came after Iranian missile fire targeting Israel killed at least 10 people overnight, according to authorities, pushing the death toll up to 13 since Iran began its retaliatory strikes on Friday.

In Tehran, a heavy cloud of smoke hung above the city after Israeli aircraft hit two fuel depots. For days, Iranians have formed long queues at petrol stations, fearing shortages. Iranian media later said Israel attacked a facility affiliated with the defence ministry in the central city of Isfahan, reporting "possible damage". The Israeli military said its air force had targeted "more than 80" positions in Iran's capital overnight.

Following the strikes, US President Donald Trump said Washington "had nothing to do" with ally Israel's intense bombardment campaign that was launched early on Friday, hitting key military and nuclear sites as well as residential areas. But Trump also threatened to launch "the full strength and might" of the US military if Iran attacks American interests, saying on his Truth Social platform that "we can easily get a deal done between Iran and Israel, and end this bloody conflict!!!" Iran's top diplomat Abbas Araghchi nonetheless said that Tehran had "solid proof" that US forces had supported Israel in its attacks.

Israeli police said six people were killed and at least 180 injured at the site of an overnight missile strike in Bat Yam, near Tel Aviv on Israel's Mediterranean coast. First responders wearing helmets and headlamps picked through the bombed-out building as dawn broke, with police saying at least seven people were missing. "There was an explosion and I thought the whole house had collapsed," said Bat Yam resident Shahar Ben Zion. "It was a miracle we survived."

In northern Israel, rescuers and medics said a strike late on Saturday destroyed a three-storey building in the town of Tamra, killing four women. Israeli authorities have reported a total toll of 13 dead and 380 injured in the country since Friday. Iran's UN ambassador said 78 people were killed and 320 wounded in Friday's first wave of Israeli strikes. Iranian authorities have not provided an updated toll as of Sunday, but Tehran said Israel has killed several top military commanders and nuclear scientists.

After decades of enmity and conflict by proxy, it is the first time the arch-enemies have traded fire with such intensity, triggering fears of a prolonged conflict that could engulf the entire Middle East. In Iran's capital early on Sunday, journalists heard a series of blasts. The head of Tehran's traffic police Ahmad Karami said "heavy traffic was reported at the capital's exit points".

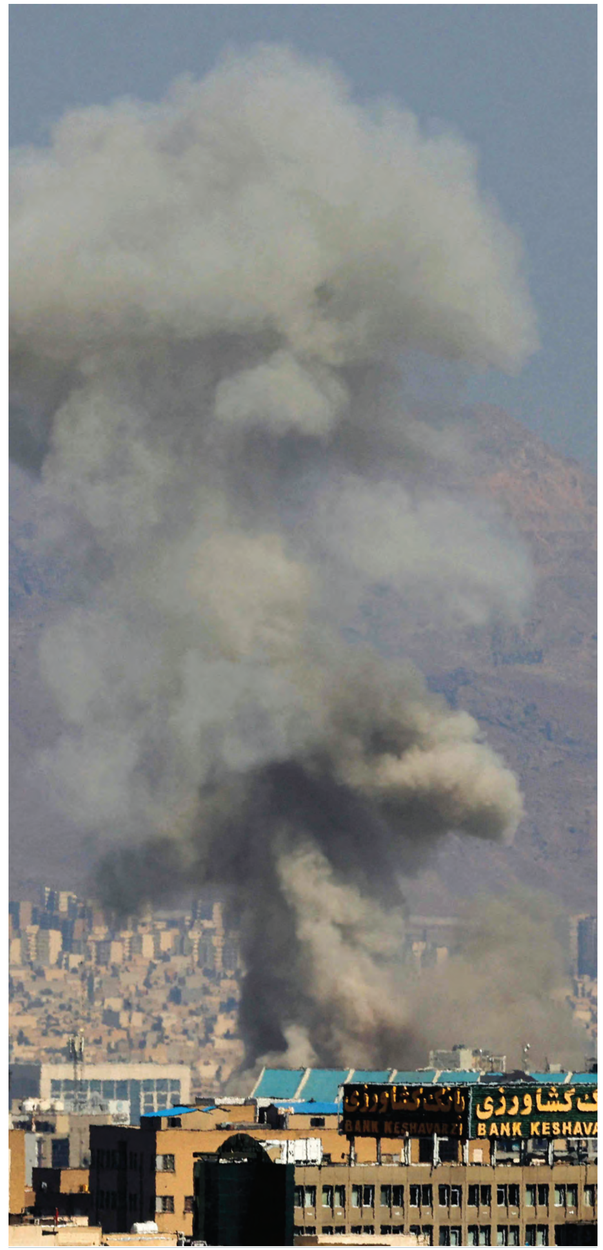
Israel said its forces had struck the defence ministry headquarters in Tehran, where Iranian news agency Tasnim reported damage. The Israeli military also said it had struck nuclear sites, including the secretive Organization of Defensive Innovation and Research (SPND), fuel tankers and other targets.

The Iranian oil ministry said Israel targeted two fuel depots in the Tehran area. A journalist saw a depot at Shahran, northwest of the capital, on fire. Iranian media later said that police had arrested two suspects over alleged links to Israel's Mossad spy agency.

On Sunday, the Israeli military warned Iranians to evacuate areas near weapons facilities nationwide. "The Zionist regime crossed a new red line in international law" by "attacking nuclear facilities", Araghchi told foreign diplomats, according to state TV. "If the aggression stops, naturally our responses will also stop," he added.

Araghchi also condemned on Sunday Israel's attack a day earlier on a major gas facility operating at South Pars, the world's largest known gas reserve located off of Iran's southern Bushehr province.

The attacks persisted despite global calls for de-escalation, with Iran scrapping scheduled nuclear talks with the US, saying it was "meaningless" to negotiate while under fire from Israel. — AFP



*Smoke billows following an explosion in central Tehran. — **AFP***

Board games: Where fun and learning meet



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

MEMORIES of childhood spent playing Ludo and Snakes-and-Ladder are almost disappearing with the tides of time, but other board game options have become popular among different social groups.

While Covid saw an exponential rise in the popularity of board games, their continued popularity is more surprising but happening for all the right reasons.

Already worth billions of dollars, the tabletop board game market is set to grow to $32 billion by 2032, according to Forbes. This is a massive rise for a past-time which was considered more suitable for retirement communities and rainy days.

An important reason for the rise of board games is the need for tangible experiences in a digital world of screens.

Gathering around a table and actually playing with someone across the table adds a dimension that younger players may not have experienced.

Of course, nostalgia is a big factor too. Many millennials have fond memories of playing board games with family and friends and they do try to share the experience with their children. These games create memories and help to connect with our past, adding chatter and nostalgia to the mix.

Board games also provide social connections. It is not surprising that there is a trend towards cafes which offer board games to choose from. These create opportunities for face-to-face interactions, creating a community and enhancing social relationships that are being lost in the world of Zoom calls.

There is also a wide variety of board games to choose from today – not just the traditional Monopoly or Scrabble but also games like 'Catan' and 'Ticket to Ride', which cater to every taste and age. Some have also become competitive, with gamers meeting other enthusiasts in physical competitions.

Tabletop games have also re-invented themselves to stay relevant. There are story-driven and interactive games which depend on collaboration and narrative immersion. Games like 'Pandemic' make players work towards a common goal, increasing and improving collaborative skills.

Narrative games like 'Gloomhaven' immerse players in a story where the choices they make will change the course of the story. This creates opportunities for players to understand the consequences of human action, even through fiction.

Board games remain a popular way for families to bond, allowing children to choose the games and explain the rules gives them ownership and makes them feel valued

Of course, board games have found a digital space as well, with players engaging in interactive games online. It is this adaptability that makes the games popular.

Board games offer nostalgia, social connections, imaginative space and technological possibilities. But they also have many educational benefits. Games like Settlers of Catan help with strategy, Sushi Go enhances calculation skills, and of course, Scrabble improves language abilities.

But games also help in developing other skills like cooperation, team building, communication and cultural awareness. They also help in developing personality traits like patience, politeness and concentration.

There is almost no negative side to playing board games. They remain a popular way for families to bond. Allowing children to choose the games and explain the rules gives them ownership and makes them feel valued.

This long summer, introducing our families to the age-old tradition of board games may be the best use of our time.

RARE GANDHI PORTRAIT UP FOR UK SALE

AKSHATA KAPOOR

A rare oil painting of Indian independence leader Mahatma Gandhi, which is believed to have been damaged by an activist, is to be auctioned in London in July.

Gandhi, one of the most influential figures in India's history, led a non-violent movement against British rule and inspired similar resistance campaigns across the world. He is the subject of tens of thousands of artworks, books and films.

But a 1931 painting by British-American artist Clare Leighton is believed to be the only oil portrait he sat for, according to the painter's family and Bonhams, where it will be auctioned online from July 7 to 15.

"Not only is this a rare work by Clare Leighton, who is mainly known for her wood engravings, it is also thought to be the only oil painting of Mahatma Gandhi which he sat for," said Rhyanon Demery, Bonhams Head of Sale for Travel and Exploration.

The painting is a "likely hidden treasure", Caspar Leighton, the artist's great-nephew, said.

Going under the hammer for the first time next month, the painting is estimated to sell for between £50,000 and £70,000. Clare Leighton met Gandhi in 1931, when he was in London for talks with the British government on India's political future.

She was part of London's left-wing artistic circles and was introduced to Gandhi by her partner, journalist Henry Noel Brailsford.

"I think there was clearly a bit of artistic intellectual courtship that went on," said Caspar, pointing out that his great-aunt and Gandhi shared a "sense of social justice". The portrait, painted at a crucial time for India's independence struggle, "shows Gandhi at the height of his power", added Caspar. It was exhibited in London in November 1931, following which Gandhi's personal secretary, Mahadev Desai, wrote to Clare: "It was such a pleasure to have had you here for many mornings doing Mr Gandhi's portrait."

*"Many of my friends who saw it in the Albany Gallery said to me that it was a good likeness," reads a copy of the letter attached to the painting's backing board. Although there is no documentation of the attack, a label on the back of the painting confirms that it was restored in the United States in 1974. Under UV light, Demery pointed out the shadow of a deep gash running across Gandhi's face where the now-restored painting was damaged. "It feels very deliberate," she said. The repairs "add to the value of the picture in a sense... to its place in history, that Gandhi was again attacked figuratively many decades after his death", said Caspar.— **AFP***

You return from Haj, but not as you were

A pilgrimage is a journey to a holy place, one that often leads to deep personal transformation. After such a journey, the pilgrim returns to daily life, but never quite the same. A pilgrim is, quite literally, someone who has come from far away, travelling with purpose towards a sacred destination. Traditionally, this involves a physical journey to a place of profound spiritual significance for those of a particular faith. For Muslims, it is a journey to Mecca to perform the fifth pillar of Islam, Haj.

Haj unites belief with action, thought with movement. It makes sense that this harmony is best achieved when the sacred is not only spiritual but has a material presence and specific location. When you embark on a pilgrimage, you feel an inner calling: "There is something I need to find." Often, that "something" is not a place, but a part of yourself.

During Haj, pilgrims may lose track of time or forget what day it is. Yet, in that timeless space, they begin to remember who they are, or more importantly, who they are becoming. Every step of a pilgrim is a question; every mile walked is a meditation. Pilgrims walk with intention, seeking not just the destination, but the meaning behind their journey.

There is a kind of alchemy on the road they walk. As they perform the rituals of pilgrimage, they live a different life, even if briefly. The longer they walk, the lighter they feel — not because their backpack grows lighter, but because their burdens begin to shift. Regret turns into reflection, pain becomes an offering, and doubt transforms into prayer.

Over time, the nature of pilgrimage has evolved, modes of transport have changed, and technology is now part of the experience. Today's pilgrim may carry a smartphone, documenting each moment, but the sincere spirit of the journey remains the same. Pilgrimage still breaks down barriers — social, cultural, and personal — and opens the heart to new perspectives.



A pilgrim uses a cold water fountain to cool down during Haj pilgrimage in Mina. ***— Reuters***



ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is an author, translator and communications professional

At its core, pilgrimage is a test of patience and character. It can be spiritually, emotionally, and physically demanding. There are no five-star hotels, no luxury spas, and no guarantees of comfort. Yet, for many, it is the most rewarding experience of their lives.

The sacredness of Haj offers an unparalleled opportunity to draw closer to Allah. Muslims around the world strive for the chance to perform it at least once in their lifetime, as it is a fundamental pillar of Islam. Haj is not only a religious obligation; it is a chance for spiritual renewal.

Muslims believe that Haj allows one to wipe the past sins and return home forgiven. The Prophet, Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) said, "Whoever performs Haj and does not commit any obscenity, or transgression shall return free from sins as he was on the day his mother gave birth to him." He also said, "The reward of a Haj Mabroor is nothing but paradise." Accordingly, most pilgrims agree: you never return the same. It is not about reaching a sacred place or seeing a famous site; it is about what happens within you as you move through the journey with humility and openness. Many come back quieter, more grounded. Some make life-altering decisions; others simply carry a deeper sense of gratitude.

Even if you return to the same place, you are not the same person. You have been shaped by the road, blessed by the wind, and humbled by your own weakness. You bring home something invisible but powerful: a story, a truth, a moment of peace you didn't know you needed.

Pilgrimage is physically demanding, emotionally taxing, and spiritually intense. But these challenges deepen the experience. It is far more than a trip to a sacred destination, instead, it is a profound inner transformation. Haj offers Muslims not only the opportunity to fulfil a religious obligation, but also the gift of forgiveness, clarity and rebirth. The road may be difficult, but in that difficulty lies its meaning.

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Oman calls for peace amid rising regional tensions

EDITORIAL

THE ESCALATING conflict between Israel and Iran has the potential to destabilise the entire Middle East region, with significant implications for global security and diplomacy. The recent exchange of strikes, including those on energy facilities and military targets, has heightened fears of a wider regional war.

The situation is dire, with both sides exchanging intense missile strikes. Israel has targeted Iranian energy facilities, and Iran has retaliated with ballistic missiles and drones aimed at Israeli infrastructure and population centres. The attacks have resulted in casualties on both sides, including civilians, and caused significant damage. The conflict has already led to a rise in the death toll and injuries.

Earlier, Oman has strongly condemned Israel and described the act as a 'heinous military aggression' by Israel against the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran, targeting sovereign facilities and resulting in casualties.

It denounced the attack as a dangerous and reckless provocation, a flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter and the tenets of international law. It warned that such aggressive conduct undermines the foundations of regional stability and peace.

In a continued diplomatic push to help de-escalate rising regional tensions, Oman has held a series of telephone calls with different countries in the region and around the world. Oman's position is clear. There is an urgent need to halt the aggression and deter the aggressor through peaceful and lawful means, in accordance with the principles of international law and justice.

Oman has warned of the grave humanitarian and security consequences that could arise from continued hostilities, including bloodshed, destruction, and instability. It has reiterated the importance of collective regional and international efforts to uphold peace and protect the supreme interests of the region and its peoples.

The conflict could have long-term implications for the region. Israel's actions may undermine its international standing and could lead to a shift in the balance of power. The conflict could also impact Iran's nuclear programme, potentially pushing it to accelerate development of nuclear weapons.

The situation is highly volatile, and the potential for escalation is significant. The actions of key players, including the US, Iran and Israel, will determine the trajectory of the conflict and its impact on the region and the world. The conflict could escalate further, potentially drawing in other regional actors and the United States. Iran has the capability to retaliate, and there are concerns about attacks on US military bases and critical infrastructure. The situation could also lead to a disruption of global oil supplies and a rise in energy prices.

The US and Iran were scheduled to meet in Muscat for the sixth round of talks, but these were cancelled amid the escalating violence. Oman's role as a mediator is also being challenged. Oman has historically served as a bridge between Iran and Western states, but the ongoing conflict and the perception of the US's role have made this role more difficult.

Oman has reiterated the importance of collective regional and international efforts to uphold peace and protect the interests of the region and its peoples

The diplomatic outreach is part of Oman's broader stance against the recent escalation. The assault comes at a critical time, coinciding with intensified international efforts to resume nuclear negotiations between Iran and the US.

The timing reveals a deliberate intent to derail the diplomatic process and fuel a wider conflict — one that could have serious consequences for both regional and global peace.

Oman's mediation efforts have been instrumental in promoting peace initiatives concerning broader regional tensions involving Iran. Its unique position allows it to navigate complex relationships while prioritising humanitarian needs — a model that could serve as a blueprint for future diplomatic engagements across similarly volatile regions.

Oman's diplomatic initiatives have earned recognition from the UN as an essential player in promoting peace within the tumultuous landscape of the Middle East. Its approach emphasises dialogue over conflict, positioning Oman as a vital mediator capable of bridging divides among various stakeholders.

Oman has continued its role as a peacemaker under His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, maintaining a diplomatic stance that emphasises neutrality and mediation in regional conflicts. His Majesty has committed to upholding the principles of Oman's foreign policy of peaceful coexistence and non-interference in the affairs of other nations.

ISRAEL'S IRAN ATTACK TESTS TRUMP PROMISE NOT TO BE DRAGGED INTO WAR

SHAUN TANDON

For President Donald Trump, few goals on the world stage have been more explicit — he will not drag the US into another "forever war". Yet Israel's massive strikes on Iran will test that promise as never before, potentially setting up a showdown with his base as Trump decides how much support the United States will offer.

Trump had publicly called for Israel not to strike as he sought a negotiated solution, and his roving envoy Steve Witkoff had been scheduled to meet Iranian officials for the sixth time on Sunday. Trump, who hours earlier warned that an attack would cause "massive conflict", afterward praised Israeli strikes as "excellent". He boasted that Israel had "the best and most lethal military equipment anywhere in the world" thanks to the US -- and was planning more strikes unless Iran agrees on a deal.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio insisted that the US was not involved in the strikes and warned Iran not to retaliate against the thousands of US troops stationed in nearby Arab countries. A US official, however, confirmed that the US was helping Israel shoot down retaliatory missiles fired on Friday by Iran.

"The US has calculated that it can help Israel and that the Iranians will obviously be aware of this, but at the end of the day, at least at the public level, the US stays out," said Alex Vatanka, founding director of the Iran programme at the Middle East Institute in Washington.

Most key lawmakers of Trump's Republican Party quickly rallied behind Israel, whose prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, is a hero for many on the US right and has long called Iran an existential threat.

But Trump's populist "America First" base has been sceptical. Tucker Carlson, the prominent media commentator who counselled Trump against a US strike on Iran in the first term, has called fears of Tehran building a nuclear bomb overblown.

In an unusually political video this week, Trump's director of national intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, warned after a visit to Hiroshima that "warmongers" were putting the world at risk of nuclear catastrophe.

*Daniel Shapiro, who served as US ambassador to Israel under former president Barack Obama, said it had been certain the United States would back Israel's defence against Iranian retaliation. But Trump will face a harder decision on "whether to use the United States' unique capabilities to destroy Tehran's underground nuclear facilities and prevent an Iranian nuclear weapon," said Shapiro, now at the Atlantic Council. — **AFP***

The new middle east war

IN ITS air strikes across Iran, Israel reportedly killed senior military leaders as well as prominent figures in the country's nuclear programme. It also appears that Israel further degraded Iranian air defences, struck additional military targets and attacked at least one nuclear-related installation – and possibly more.

Despite Israel's claim that it was acting preemptively, the attacks constitute a classic preventive action, mounted against a gathering threat, rather than an imminent danger. The difference has legal and diplomatic implications, as preventive military attacks tend to be far more controversial, falling under the heading of wars of choice.

Preemptive attacks are seen as a form of self-defense and tend to be accepted as necessary. These are likely to be distinctions without meaningful differences for Israel, which has carried out such strikes (though more limited) against nascent Iraqi and Syrian nuclear programs in the past.

Moreover, acting against Iran plays well domestically: It is one of the few issues that most Israelis – deeply divided over the war in Gaza, the role of the courts in their democracy, and the country's secular-religious balance – can agree on.



RICHARD HAASS

The writer is an American diplomat. He was president of the Council on Foreign Relations from July 2003 to June 2023.

It is too early to offer a definitive assessment of the success of Israel's air strikes. That assessment will depend on several factors, beginning with the extent and consequences of the damage, how much time Iran would need to rebuild what it has lost, and how deeply Iran's military and nuclear leadership have been disrupted.

WHY NOW

Why Israel chose to conduct this operation now has yet to be satisfactorily explained. According to Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, "In recent months, Iran has taken steps that it has never taken before, steps to weaponize [its] enriched uranium." But it will be important to see if the Israeli government had new intelligence or developed a new assessment of Iranian capabilities and intentions.

We know from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that Iran was actively producing highly enriched uranium and had not been forthcoming about its nuclear-related activities. In recent weeks, however, US intelligence officials confirmed their assessment was that Iran had not yet decided to produce a nuclear weapon.

According to reports, largely based on statements from Israeli officials, the United States knew about the intended attack in advance and did not attempt to stop it. While we will likely learn whether it truly gave a green as opposed to a yellow light, it seems all but certain that it did not flash a red one, as it has at other times over the years.

PROSPECTS OF TALKS REMOTE

Still, US officials have sought to distance America from the Israeli action, stating that Israel acted unilaterally and making it clear that Iran should not attack US forces in response.

The degree to which the US is prepared to assist Israel in any future military actions against Iran, or in buttressing its ability to defend itself from Iranian retaliation, is unclear. Prospects for reviving US-Iran nuclear negotiations, which President Donald Trump has suggested should continue, seem remote. It is too early to offer a definitive assessment of this operation's success.

That assessment will depend on several factors, beginning with the extent and consequences of the damage. What was accomplished, how much time Iran would need to rebuild what it has lost, and how deeply Iran's military and nuclear leadership have been disrupted remain unknown. A related question is whether and how the attack will affect the Iranian regime's hold on the country, which the Israeli attack may have been designed to weaken.

IRAN RETALIATION

A second consideration is the scope of future Iranian retaliation. Iran's initial response was relatively modest: some one hundred drones launched toward Israel, against which Israel is well prepared to defend. But subsequently Iran launched several waves of ballistic missiles.

The obvious question is what else will Iran choose to do against Israel and Israeli targets around the world. It is far from clear, though, that Iran has an attractive set of options, given its demonstrated vulnerabilities.

Also to be seen is whether Iran acts against the US, which withdrew many of its personnel from the region in anticipation of retaliation, or against one or more of its Arab neighbors. Despite Iran's ongoing efforts to improve relations with the Gulf States, an Iranian effort to interfere with the region's energy industry cannot be ruled out. That would jeopardize its standing in the Gulf but raise the price of oil (already up in the wake of Israel's attack), inflicting pain on the West and possibly increasing Iranian revenues at a time when sanctions relief, a subject of the nuclear negotiations with the US, is no longer imminent.

IMPACT OF STRIKES

There is also the prospect of additional Israeli military strikes against known and suspected nuclear sites, a step both Netanyahu and Trump have warned is coming. This, too, would require an assessment of what was accomplished and what the consequences might be.

Iran, seeking to deter an attack like the one that just occurred, will have to decide whether to redouble its nuclear efforts, reconstitute its program in more difficult-to-destroy facilities, and continue to cooperate with the IAEA.

Adding to the complexity is whether outside partners – such as China, Russia, and North Korea, all of which have experience developing nuclear weapons – will lend assistance, and how both the US and Israel will respond if they do. Before determining whether military action was the best available policy, we will also need to learn more about what could have been negotiated and verified between the US and Iran. This could affect the political reactions in both Israel and Iran concerning whether the attacks could and should have been avoided.

MORE QUESTIONS

For now, there are more questions than answers about what happened or what could happen next.

The only certainty is that this latest chapter in the conflict-torn Middle East is just beginning.

@Project Syndicate, 2025.

SPORTS

SHORT*TAKES*



The meeting focused on exploring avenues of mutual cooperation.



IBSF president toured the Oman Olympic Museum.

SECRETARY-GENERAL OF OOC RECEIVES PRESIDENT OF IBSF

Abdullah bin Mohammed Bamakhalef, Secretary-General of the Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), received Mubarak Hamad Al Khaterin, President of the International Billiards and Snooker Federation (IBSF), on Sunday at the OOC headquarters, as part of his official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

The meeting focused on exploring avenues of mutual cooperation between both parties, including opportunities to further develop the sport of billiards and snooker at both the national and international levels. Discussions highlighted the importance of keeping pace with the sport's global progress and enhancing its competitive presence.

The two sides also exchanged views on supporting relevant programs and initiatives, and emphasised the significance of establishing effective channels of communication between the OOC and the International Federation to support the sport's growth in line with global standards.

This meeting comes as part of the OOC's continued efforts to strengthen ties with international sports organisations and expand collaborative opportunities that align with its goals of advancing the sports sector in accordance with best international practices. As part of the visit, Mubarak Hamad Al Khaterin toured the Oman Olympic Museum, located within the OOC premises, where he viewed exhibitions, archival documents, and models that chronicle the journey of sports in Oman and the nation's participation in Olympic, regional and international events.

U-16 basketball team continue camp in Buraimi



The national team has gone through several preparation phases

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

THE Oman U-16 national basketball team continues its training at the closed internal camp at the Al Buraimi Sports Complex, as part of the final stage of preparations for the Gulf regional qualifiers of the Asian Championship. These qualifiers will be hosted by the Kingdom of Bahrain from July 7 to 12, with only two teams from the Gulf earning qualification to the Asian finals.

The camp began last Friday and will run until June 26, under the supervision of Tunisian coach Zouheir Al Ayachi and his Omani assistant, Ali al Balushi. The team is undergoing two training sessions daily morning and evening focused on skill development, tactical awareness, and physical conditioning.

In coordination with the technical staff, the Oman Basketball Association (OBA) plans to arrange friendly matches during an external camp in Bahrain starting June 27 to boost readiness before the qualifiers. The team aims to play four friendly games two against Manama Club, one against Muharraq Club, and another against a local Bahraini academy.

The national team has gone through several preparation phases, starting with weekend camps, followed by a mid-year camp that included trial matches against youth teams from Al Seeb, Al Amerat and Nizwa.

These matches provided the coaching staff with valuable opportunities to evaluate the players and address weaknesses. Following the conclusion of the youth league, the team entered a closed camp that included a series of friendly matches in the UAE. Among them was a close game against an academy that ended in a narrow two-point loss, and a strong win over the UAE national team with a score of 56 – 29 — a significant improvement considering that Oman had previously lost to the same team by more than 15 points in the last Gulf Championship.

The current camp includes 15 players: Saddam al Shizawi, Khuzaymah al Shibli, Rashid al Eisai, Mohammed al Shizawi, Abdulrahim al Roushdi, Elyas al Obaidani, Al Mulhim al Obaidani, Abdulsamad al Subaihi, Muhannad al Batashi, Nawar al Bahlouli, Adam al Hinai, Jade al Kindi, Saif al Yahyai, Sami al Busaidy, and Sultan al Sinani.

Also participating in the camp are Ghassan al Busaidy, Director of National Teams, and Amer al Zaidi, the team's physiotherapist, as part of the administrative and medical staff.

In a statement, head coach Zouheir Al Ayachi said, We are working according to a detailed training plan that progresses from improving fitness to focusing on both team and individual tactics. There is a clear improvement in the players' performance, especially in passing and off-the-ball movement.

Al Ayachi emphasised that the upcoming external camp in Bahrain will be a decisive step in the team's preparations, pointing to the value of the friendly matches to be played there.

The coaching staff hopes that this intensive preparation will result in an honorable performance in the qualifiers and achieve the goal of qualifying for the Asian Championship finals.

Former Napoli manager Gattuso named new Italy coach after Spalletti sacking

FORMER AC MILAN and Napoli manager Gennaro Gattuso has been appointed Italy national team coach, the Italian football federation (FIGC) said on Sunday.

Gattuso replaces Luciano Spalletti, who was sacked last week following a heavy defeat by Norway in a World Cup qualifier. The former midfielder will be formally introduced as coach on Thursday at Rome's Parco dei Principi Hotel.

"Gattuso is a symbol of Italian football - the blue jersey is like a second skin for him. His motivations, his professionalism and his experience will be fundamental to best face the upcoming commitments of the National Team," FIGC President Gabriele Gravina said in a statement.

"Aware of the importance of the objective we want to achieve, I thank him for the availability and total dedication with which he has received this challenge, sharing the FIGC project for the overall development of our football, in which the blue jersey plays a strategic central role."



Gennaro Gattuso. — ***AFP***

Spalletti departed after a stint of under two years, overseeing his final match, a 2-0 victory against Moldova, just a day after revealing he had been dismissed following Italy's 3-0 defeat by Norway in their opening World Cup qualifier.

Gattuso, who guided Napoli a Coppa Italia title in 2020, is tasked with getting Italy to next year's World Cup, after they missed out on the last two editions of the tournament.

A FIGC source said the 47-year-old has been given a one-year contract, including the World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Gattuso made 73 appearances for Italy and was a member of the 2006 World Cup-winning squad. He recently left Croatian club Hajduk Split by mutual consent, after a third-placed finish in the country's top flight.

FIGC member Gianluigi Buffon had discussed Gattuso's appointment on Saturday. Veteran Italian coach Claudio Ranieri was the FIGC's top candidate for the role, but the 73-year-old declined the offer, choosing instead to concentrate on his position as senior advisor at AS Roma.

Italy, third in World Cup qualifying Group I, will host Estonia in Bergamo on September 5 before taking on Israel in Hungary three days later.

Gattuso began his coaching career as player-coach at Swiss club Sion in 2013 where he finished his playing days after 13 seasons with Milan but was fired after winning two of his 10 league games in charge.

Over a 12-year coaching journey, Gattuso has led nine clubs, including Milan, Spanish side Valencia, and a brief stint at Ligue 1's Olympique de Marseille.

— Reuters

SHORTTAKES



Mercedes' British driver George Russell gestures after winning the pole position. — **AFP**

RUSSELL SNATCHES POLE POSITION FOR CANADIAN GP

MONTREAL: *George Russell put his Mercedes on pole position in Canada for the second year in a row on Saturday with Formula One champion Max Verstappen alongside for Red Bull two weeks after they clashed in Spain.*

McLaren's Formula One championship leader Oscar Piastri qualified third with Mercedes rookie Kimi Antonelli in fourth place.

Lando Norris, Piastri's British teammate and closest title rival only 10 points behind the Australian after nine of 24 rounds, qualified seventh at Montreal's Circuit Gilles Villeneuve.

The clash between Russell and Verstappen in Spain remained a talking point going into the weekend, with the Red Bull driver on the brink of a ban as he chases an unprecedented fourth successive Canadian victory.

Verstappen, 0.160 slower than the pole time, is only a penalty point away from suspension and Russell will try to turn that to his advantage on the short run down to turn one from the start.

Verstappen had no complaints about his grid position. Verstappen's teammate Yuki Tsunoda missed out on the final shootout in 11th place and will start last after collecting a 10-place grid drop for a red flag breach in Saturday's final practice.

That will lift Alpine's Argentine Franco Colapinto to 11th, with his teammate Pierre Gasly alongside Tsunoda on the back row.

Norris was fastest in the first phase, with Piastri second,after a brief red flag delay triggered by Albon's car shedding its engine cover and leaving debris on the track.

While Albon progressed, teammate Carlos Sainz was left in 17th place — but will move up to 16th — and fuming at what he said was "massive impeding" by Hadjar.

Stewards said they would investigate. Canada's only active F1 driver Lance Stroll, who missed the previous race in Spain due to hand and wrist pain, also failed to get over the first hurdle at his home Grand Prix and will start 17th for Aston Martin.

— **Reuters**

Russell on pole for second year in a row in Montreal

Verstappen completes front row for rivals who collided in Spain

Formula One world championship leader Piastri lines up third

McLaren teammate Norris only seventh



Inter Miami CF's Marcelo Weigandt in action with Al Ahly's Mohamed Hany and Nejc Gradisar. — **Reuters**

Inter Miami draw with Al Ahly in CWC opener

LIONEL **MESSI** and Inter Miami were held to a 0-0 draw by Egyptian side Al Ahly on Saturday night in the opening game of the Fifa Club World Cup (CWC), as Fifa's new 32-team tournament got off to a smooth start in front of 60,927 fans in Florida. Messi was denied a storybook stoppage-time winner when he saw his curling shot from 20 yards out tipped on to the bar by Mohamed El Shenawy as Miami piled on the pressure in the final minutes of the game.

Al Ahly, who were cheered on by over 10,000 of their supporters, were left to rue a first-half penalty from Egypt international Trezeguet which was saved by Miami's Argentine keeper Oscar Ustari.

But the Egyptians also had El Shenawy to thank for another fine save in the dying seconds to keep out a header from Maxi Falcon as Miami pushed for three points in the Group A clash.

For organisers Fifa, who have faced heavy skepticism over the necessity for the tournament, the absence of a goal was the only disappointment on a night that delivered everything else that their president Gianni Infantino had hoped for from the opening night. Fears of a low crowd for the opener eased as the seats in the 64,000 venue began to fill up with the stadium almost full at kick-off time.

Thousands of fans of Al Ahly, record 12 times African Champions League winner and 45-time league champions of Egypt, arrived at Hard Rock Stadium well ahead of kick-off and made their presence felt with singing and chanting.

The stadium, home to the NFL's Miami Dolphins, witnessed chaotic scenes last year at the final of the Copa America between Argentina and Colombia where fans broke into the ground after long delays to enter.

PENALTY DRAMA

But there was an efficient filter system set up for ticket and security checks well away from the stadium perimeter and there were no signs of any problems.

Nor was there any indication of the controversial crackdown on illegal immigrants from US President Donald Trump's administration having any impact on the game in the heavily Hispanic South Florida community.

This is the first edition of the new expanded format for the tournament which features clubs from every continent and concludes with the final at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey on July 13.

Infantino has called the competition a "new era for football" bringing globalisation to the club game but critics have said it adds to an already congested calendar.

While there were no goals to celebrate, the game was far from boring with Al Ahly enjoying the better of the first half before Miami improved significantly after the break.

Al Ahly opened up Miami's defence with ease in the opening minutes of the game and Emam Ashour was denied by Ustari after being put through by Trezeguet.

Palestine international striker Wessam Abou Ali had an effort ruled out for offside in the 31st minute and then the Denmark-born forward had a fierce strike tipped over by Ustari.

The penalty came when Telasco Segovia bundled over Zizo but Trezeguet's spot kick was weak and parried out with the former Aston Villa forward unable to react fast enough to the rebound.

Miami were stronger after the break with Messi going close in the 64th minute with a free-kick which grazed the post before hitting the side-netting, tricking part of the crowd into thinking he had scored.

He nearly did in stoppage time, after a well-worked short-corner but the outstretched finger tip of El Shenawy was to deny him.

Miami face Porto in Atlanta on Thursday before returning home to face Brazil's Palmeiras on Monday. — **AFP**

Mertens beats Ruse to win Den Bosch title in Singapore Open

NETHERLANDS: Belgian third seed Elise Mertens beat Elena-Gabriela Ruse 6-3 7-6(4) in the final of the Libema Open in Den Bosch on Sunday to claim her second WTA Tour title of the year, adding to her victory in the Singapore Tennis Open in February.

The win earned Mertens her tenth WTA singles title and first on grass, though she has won the Wimbledon women's doubles title in 2021, while also extending her winning head-to-head record against Ruse to 4-0.

"It's been an incredible week," said Mertens, who had to dig deep to save 11 match points and overcome two-times winner Ekaterina Alexandrova in Saturday's semi-final.

"I mean yesterday I had 11 match points against me. I managed to still win that match. It's tennis, anything can happen. So I'm very proud that I took that chance yesterday and today."

Mertens trailed 3-1 in the first set after being put under early pressure by the Romanian qualifier. The Belgian recovered from her shaky start and saved two break points to secure a crucial hold in the fifth game, which turned the tide of the contest.

The set was brought back on serve at 3-3 after Ruse double-faulted twice, and Mertens quickly reeled off three more games to clinch the opener, with Ruse taking a lengthy medical timeout between the sets and having her thigh strapped. The pair traded breaks halfway through the second set and Ruse was able to earn two set points at 5-4, but Mertens showed great resilience to hold serve and force a tiebreaker, which she powered through with little trouble.

"First of all, I would like to congratulate Elise. You beat me every time, so what can I say," said Ruse, who committed seven double faults in the match.

"I'm really sad and angry, but I will try next time... I'm very proud of myself. I didn't expect to be in the final here. It's such a nice tournament."

In the men's final later on Sunday, Canadian Gabriel Diallo takes on Belgium's Zizou Bergs. — **Reuters**

The Belgian recovered from her shaky start and saved two break points to secure a crucial hold in the fifth game, which turned the tide of the contest.



Elise Mertens celebrate with the trophy.

SHORT*TAKES*



Second-placed Italy's Jannik Sinner holds his trophy next to former US tennis player Andre Agassi at the Roland-Garros. ***— AFP***

Sinner had 'sleepless nights' after dramatic French Open final loss

MUNICH: *Italian Jannik Sinner said on Sunday he had experienced "a few sleepless nights" since his historic French Open final loss to Carlos Alcaraz.*

Sinner, 23, tasted defeat after five hours and 29 minutes in Roland Garros' longest ever final last weekend and wasted three match points, having been two sets up.

"I had already a few sleepless nights, but I think everyday it gets better," Sinner told reporters before starting his grass season in Halle, Germany next week.

"Tennis is important in my life but nevertheless family and friends more important.

"Nonetheless I think often about the match," the world number one added.

Sinner failed to add to his Australian and US Open titles in the already legendary decider with Spaniard Alcaraz in Paris.

He returned home to Trentino-South Tyrol after the gruelling encounter on clay.

"I was very relaxed with my family. We grilled a bit, played table tennis with my friends," Sinner said.

"Really normal things, nothing special. I like going home, when a lot is going on.

"I feel safe at home and with my friends," he added.

Sinner returned from a three-month doping suspension in mid-May and now turns his mind to defending the title in Germany.

"The ball can bounce a bit funny because of the grass, and you have to serve intelligently," Sinner said.

"But in general, it is a surface on which I took a step forward last year and we will see how it goes this year," he added.

Meanwhile, British number one Jack Draper believes the rivalry between Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner will be crucial if tennis is to regain the spotlight shone on it during the Federer-Nadal era.

Last weekend's epic Roland Garros final — won by the Spaniard, who came from two sets down to defend his title in a French Open record five-hour, 29-minute marathon — enraptured audiences, pushing viewing figures to new heights for broadcaster Warner Bros Discovery.

Draper, the second seed at Wimbledon warm-up Queen's in London this week and entering at a career-high world number four, acknowledges everyone in the game benefits when the sport's biggest names are playing at their captivating best.

"I think tennis is in a really good spot in a way that the depth of it, especially the top 100, is extremely strong," said Briton Draper,who has been drawn against American Jenson Brooksby in the Queen's first round. ***— Agencies***



Taylor Fritz lifts Stuttgart Open trophy.

Fritz downs Zverev to lift Stuttgart Open title

TAYLOR FRITZ defeated Alexander Zverev in straight sets in a rain-hit final in Stuttgart on Sunday to win his first ATP title of the season.

The American eased to a 6-3, 7-6 (7/0) victory despite being held up by a lengthy rain delay early in the second set.

Fritz has now won his last five meetings with Zverev and is set to climb to fourth in the world rankings, a place behind the German. "It was not so great a clay season, so to come here and start the grass season off perfectly, I am super happy to get the title and to do it here," said Fritz, who did not lose a service game in the entire tournament.

Fritz has now won his last five meetings with Zverev and is set to climb to fourth in the world rankings, a place behind the German.

Fritz lost in the first round of the French Open last month to Daniel Altmaier, ending a clay-court season in which he won just three matches in four tournaments.

Last year's US Open runner-up bounced back, though, with his first trophy since winning in Eastbourne 12 months ago, also on grass.

Top seed Zverev is still waiting to win the first grass-court title of his career and he has never even reached the quarter-finals of Wimbledon, which gets under way on June 30.

Fritz moved into a one-set lead courtesy of a break in the eighth game. He missed the only break point of the second set but raced through the tie-break, winning the last 11 points of the match.

Fritz also beat Zverev in the Wimbledon fourth round last year, fighting back from two sets down. His opponent was angry with the behaviour of people in Fritz's player box on that occasion. The American's girlfriend also posted videos on social media apparently referencing domestic abuse allegations against Zverev, which were later deleted. **— AFP**

German becomes oldest WTA 500 winner with Queen's triumph

LONDON: Tatjana Maria completed her fairytale run at Queen's Club as the German qualifier beat American Amanda Anisimova 6-3, 6-4 in Sunday's final to become the oldest winner of a WTA 500 event.

The 37-year-old's victory secured the fourth singles title of her career, and her first since 2023 on the clay in Bogota.

World number 86 Maria is the first German to win a WTA 500 title since Angelique Kerber in 2018 in Sydney.

In the first women's tournament at Queen's since 1973, Maria is the event's first female champion since Russia's Olga Morozova 52 years ago.

When Morozova won in west London, the prize money was just £1,000 ($1,353).

Maria banked a cheque for £120,000 and more importantly earned a huge confidence boost ahead of Wimbledon, which starts on June 30.

The mother of two arrived at Queen's on a nine-match losing streak and had to survive two rounds of qualifying matches to reach the main draw.

Deploying her slice-heavy style to devastating effect, she stunned sixth seed Karolina Muchova, fourth seed Elena Rybakina and reigning Australian Open champion Madison Keys en route to the final.

Maria, who has taken two maternity breaks from the WTA Tour, has never been past the second round of any Grand Slam except Wimbledon, where she reached the semi-finals in 2022.

But once again she proved a formidable force on grass, brushing aside Anisimova to secure her second title on the surface as her husband and young daughters Charlotte and Cecilia watched from courtside.



Tatjana Maria poses with the trophy in west London on Sunday. ***— AFP***

"A dream come true. I came here I was never thinking I could hold the trophy at the end," Maria said.

"When we arrived my little girl said: 'Wow that's a nice trophy, so big' and I said: 'OK let's go for it, I will try to win it'. And in the end I've won it, it's incredible.

"Everything is possible if you believe in it. You go your way, doesn't matter which it is but you have to keep going. I want to show this to my kids and hopefully they are proud. It's amazing." Asked if she planned to celebrate with her family, Maria said: "For sure. This doesn't happen every week so we have to celebrate with something.

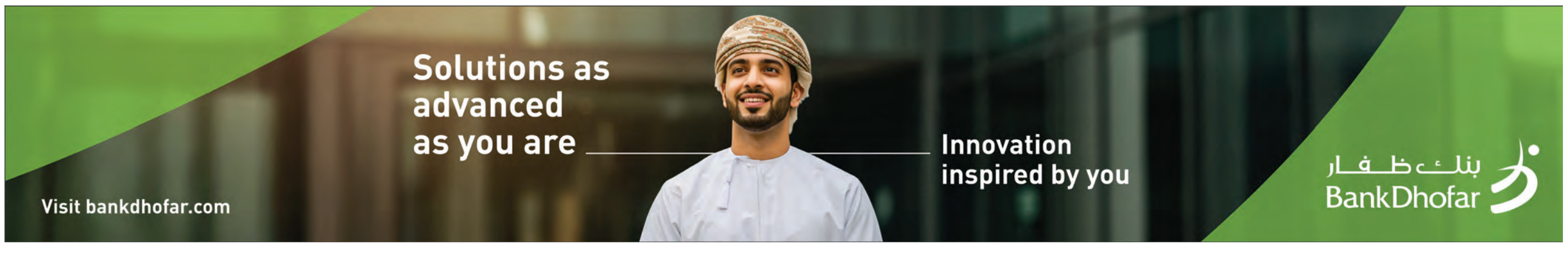
"I think the kids will probably want some crepes with Nutella!" Anisimova has struggled to live up to her early success after reaching the French Open semi-finals aged 17 in 2019.

She took an eight-month break from tennis and dropped out of the top 400 after suffering with depression bought on by the scrutiny and expectations that came with being a teen prodigy.

The 23-year-old returned last year and won the Qatar Open this February, reaching a career-high 15th in the rankings before underlining her renaissance by defeating Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen to reach her first grass-court final. **— AFP**

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
4,503.744

BUSINESS



NEW*FRAMEWORK*



This regulation includes comprehensive provisions relating to the pricing of telecom services.

TRA ISSUES NEW REGULATION ON TELECOM TARIFFS

MUSCAT: *The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has introduced a new regulatory framework governing retail tariffs for telecommunications services in Oman. The new regulation replaces the earlier framework established by Decision No 27/2016.*

This updated regulation includes comprehensive provisions relating to the pricing of telecom services offered to individual consumers, businesses and government institutions. It also incorporates mechanisms for monitoring and addressing pricing practices that may breach fair competition thresholds.

Targeting all licensed providers of public telecommunications services in the retail market, the regulation is designed to align with global and regional developments in the sector. According to the TRA, the framework aims to enhance fair competition, ensure transparency and safeguard the rights and choices of beneficiaries in the Omani telecom market.

The move comes amid rapid shifts in telecom technologies and business models, making tariff regulation a critical element in ensuring market stability and consumer protection. — ONA

Tender for upgrade of Port Sultan Qaboos

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

OMAN'S Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has kick-started the process of upgrading Port Sultan Qaboos to support its transformation into a national hub for cruise tourism.

Under a tender floated recently by the ministry, consultancy firms with expertise in port and maritime engineering have been invited to bid for a contract to provide advisory services on the construction of a new breakwater and additional berth, as well as to oversee significant reclamation works at Muscat's roughly 50-year-old maritime hub.

In addition to developing a concept master plan encompassing all aspects of the port's proposed upgrade, the selected consultant will also be invited to identify, as an option, investment opportunities arising from this expansion.

Given the cruise tourism-centred focus of the upgrade, these opportunities are expected to be linked to food and beverage outlets, hospitality, high-end retail, arts and crafts, and related sectors, say experts.

Last October, the ministry tasked Asyad Ports — a subsidiary of Asyad Group — with undertaking a feasibility study into the upgrade of Port Sultan Qaboos.



The cruise ship pictured at Port Sultan Qaboos in February this year.

The study also covers the operational and commercial aspects of the project, aimed at supporting its development into a major cruise tourism hub.

Opportunities for strategic partnerships with investors to help deliver this vision were to be fully explored as well. Officials announced at the time that the modernisation plan would be implemented in three phases.

The initial phase will focus on rehabilitating the port's existing infrastructure. The second phase will involve upgrading equipment and operational systems.

In the final phase, a new berth will be constructed to accommodate larger cruise vessels, enhancing the port's capacity to meet rising tourism demand.

According to cruise shipping experts, a berth length of at least 370 metres will be required to handle some of the largest cruise ships in operation today. Icon of the Seas, currently the largest cruise ship by gross tonnage and passenger capacity, measures 365 metres in length.

Other mega cruise ships in its class include the Wonder of the Seas (362 metres), Symphony of the Seas (361 metres), and Harmony of the Seas (362 metres). By comparison, the largest cruise ship to have visited Muscat to date is the AIDAcosma (337 metres), which made its maiden call in November 2022.

In line with Muscat's positioning as a cruise tourism hub, the modernisation will also aim to attract leisure and recreational vessels, including superyachts, catamarans and sailships, to Oman. Investment opportunities related to this segment of the maritime tourism sector will be explored as well.

Under a tender floated recently by the ministry, consultancy firms with expertise in port and maritime engineering have been invited to bid for a contract to provide advisory services on the construction of a new breakwater and additional berth, as well as to oversee significant reclamation works at Muscat's roughly 50-year-old maritime hub.

Port Sultan Qaboos, which has undergone multiple upgrades over its 50-year history, currently features nine berths with a combined length of 1,750 metres. A passenger terminal is presently being modernised to align with the goals of the port's broader expansion.

In 2024, Port Sultan Qaboos welcomed a record 190 cruise ship calls, surpassing its target of 134 vessels for the year. The deadline for submission of offers for the consultancy services contract is July 24, 2025.

Oman Lens partners with Bahrain Space Agency

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

OMANI space start-up Oman Lens has partnered with Bahrain's Space Agency and China based Starvision to launch an AI-powered payload on board its satellite OL-1, marking the first Omani-Bahraini collaboration in the space sector.

The collaboration enabled the launch of the first specialised payload for detecting and identifying clouds in satellite images using advanced artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, according to SpaceTech Gulf, a leading analytics and space market intelligence company in the Gulf and MENA regions.

In a statement, Oman Lens shared the following, "Oman Lens expresses its pride and delight in the fruitful collaboration with the Bahrain Space Agency and China's Starvision in the implementation of a pioneering project that marks a significant step forward in the use of artificial intelligence for satellite image analysis to detect and identify clouds."



Launch of satellite OL-1 last November.

The Omani start-up further added: "This project represents a key milestone in our journey to enhance the use of advanced technologies in the space sector and reflects our commitment to building strategic partnerships that support knowledge localisation and foster innovation across the Arab world."

Speaking to the media, Dr Mohammed Ibrahim al Aseeri, Chief Executive Officer of the Bahrain Space Agency, highlighted the significance of the project, "This project marks another milestone in the accomplishments of the Bahrain Space Agency and contributes to strengthening Bahrain's position among leading nations in the space sector.

It is also a clear testament to the agency's wide-ranging international partnerships, the technical progress made by its members, and the scientific and practical competencies that paved the way for this exceptional and high-value collaboration."

Space engineer Yaqoub al Qassab at the agency added that the project is part of a set of initiatives aimed at strengthening local space capacities.

"This project is part of a series of initiatives aimed at building national capacity in the development and integration of AI algorithms with satellite components. The technical team behind the project forms the nucleus of a specialised Bahraini team focused on applying AI technologies in space, serving sustainable development goals," he said.

According to Al Qassab, the agency is currently in the process of creating new algorithms for the detection of marine vessels.

Satellite OL-1 successfully launched last November 2024, on board Chinese commercial carrier rocket Lijian-1 Y5 from the Dongfeng Commercial Aerospace Innovation Test Zone. It recently marked 5,000 hours of continuous orbital operations.

Oman Lens shared that data from the satellite will be used to monitor the country's landscapes, infrastructure and natural resources. It is also the first of a planned constellation of 20 satellites.

TURNING SMARTPHONES INTO SALES TOOLS: OAB LEADS DIGITAL INNOVATION

MUSCAT: *In a bold stride towards digital innovation and financial inclusion, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has unveiled its cutting-edge Soft POS (Point of Sale) solution, transforming ordinary smartphones into secure, contactless payment terminals.*

This game-changing product is reshaping how small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Oman conduct business — streamlining operations, boosting mobility and reducing overhead.

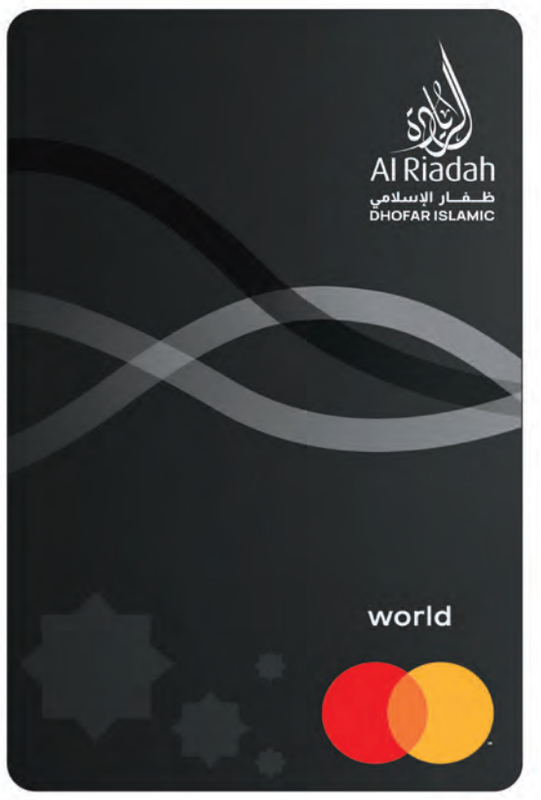
Designed with the needs of entrepreneurs, mobile vendors and growing SMEs in mind, OAB's Soft POS system eliminates the cost and complexity of traditional POS devices.

By simply downloading the "OAB Mobile Pay" app on any NFC-enabled Android smartphone, merchants can start accepting card payments instantly — no cables, no paper and no extra equipment.

The system supports contactless payments via debit and credit cards, mobile wallets and smart devices. It also offers digital receipts, real-time inventory management, tax tools and liquidity tracking — all from the palm of the merchant's hand.

Most merchants are up and running within 24 hours of applying.

Juma al Fulaiti, Deputy Head of Retail Banking in Oman Arab Bank, stated, "Our Soft POS solution reflects OAB's deep commitment to SME empowerment and financial accessibility".



The Dhofar Islamic MasterCard World credit card offers customers exceptional benefits that suit their exclusive lifestyles.

Mastercard World credit card: An invitation to experience a world of exceptional privileges

MUSCAT: *Dhofar Islamic Banking, the Islamic window of BankDhofar, invites customers to apply for the Dhofar Islamic MasterCard World credit card and experience a world of exceptional privileges.*

Designed exclusively for priority banking customers, the Dhofar Islamic MasterCard World credit card offers customers exceptional benefits that suit their exclusive lifestyles.

This underscores the bank's commitment to providing distinguished banking solutions that meet customers' aspirations, enhance their financial flexibility and enrich their lifestyles within as well as outside the Sultanate of Oman.

The Dhofar Islamic MasterCard World credit card allows customers to enjoy an enhanced spending experience as it unlocks a comprehensive suite of rewards, travel benefits and lifestyle offerings that can be availed both locally and internationally. Additionally, cardholders enjoy 1.5% value back on all international purchases and 1% value back on purchases made within Oman, earning consistent rewards with every transaction.

Another key benefit of the Dhofar Islamic MasterCard World card is the 12 complimentary accesses to over 1,200 airport lounges in more than 450 cities across over 135 countries, facilitated through the convenient MasterCard Travel Pass app.

The first lounge visit is complimentary without any spend condition while subsequent visits are unlocked after a $1 equivalent international transaction, providing extended complimentary access for three calendar months from the date of the last qualifying transaction.

The complimentary lounge access is highly popular as it allows customers to enriching their travel experience.

Beyond lounge access, the card unlocks a world of travel and lifestyle benefits which include a 10% discount on any international roundtrip airfare from Cleartrip using the code MCWORLD, up to two complimentary items at Costa Coffee in Dubai's Airport via the MasterCard Travel Pass App and the 'Priceless Cities' collection offering thousands of unique experiences and offers in over 40 cities globally, spanning dining, travel and entertainment.

BYD presents hot summer deals on futuristic range

BYD is proud to present its Hot Summer Deals on its futuristic range of vehicles for customers in Oman. New BYD customers can enjoy 3 years/60,000 km free service plans on the purchase of electric vehicles.

What's more, participate in the grand raffle for a chance to win an all-expenses-paid holiday to Türkiye. Plus, scratch and win exciting prizes including an iPhone 16 Pro Max, Apple Watch, Apple AirPods and a free EV battery charger for the convenience of charging your BYD at home.

BYD's dynamic lineup of EVs includes the Atto 3, Sealion 7, Seal and Han. Don't miss this exclusive opportunity to turn heads on the road with a brand-new BYD.

The BYD ATTO 3 is the perfect choice for those seeking an electric SUV with impressive performance and fuel efficiency. Powered by BYD's revolutionary Blade Battery, it delivers exceptional safety and high-performance output in a premium comfort setting.

The gym-themed cockpit is designed to deliver an immersive driving experience with a 5-inch LCD dashboard, the exemplary 12.8-inch rotatable screen, rhythmic interactive ambient lighting and ergonomic seats, the Atto 3 is a perfect balance modernity, luxury and performance.



What's more, participate in the grand raffle for a chance to win an all-expenses-paid holiday to Türkiye.

Redefining the SUV segment, the recently launched Sealion 7 EV showcases the full power and vigor of BYD's revolutionary e-Platform 3.0 and Blade Battery technology. It delivers seamless power, precision handling and exceptional efficiency — accelerating from 0 to 100 km/h in just 4.5 seconds.

For enhanced security, The advanced driver assistance system (ADAS), features five radar sensors and nine airbags, significantly enhances safety. Its Cell-to-Body (CTB) battery integration also makes it one of the safest and smartest electric SUVs on the road.

Another ocean-inspired model, the BYD SEAL, is an all-wheel-drive, fully electric sedan that incorporates BYD's cutting-edge blade battery.

Designed to be spacious, practical, safe and comfortable, it also delivers an impressive range of 570 km on a full charge and acceleration from 0 to 100 km/h in just 3.8 seconds, the SEAL delivers both performance and efficiency.

Inspired by Chinese dragon, the all-electric BYD Han represents power and strength. This sleek, sporty sedan takes driving to new heights, reaching 0 to 100 km/h in just 3.9 seconds. Other sophisticated features include the multifunction dashboard, featuring the BYD Heart shift lever, a 12.3" LCD display and a 15.6" 8-core rotatable touchscreen.

MEETHAQ ISLAMIC BANKING'S SOLUTIONS AVAILABLE AT BOOTHS

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing strategy to expand its offerings and ensure accessibility for all customer segments, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat, has launched dedicated service booths at various commercial centres across the Sultanate of Oman. The initiative is designed to provide convenient access to Meethaq's Sharia compliant banking solutions and services for customers and visitors alike.

By making these services readily available at key commercial locations, Meethaq aims to simplify the banking experience, allowing customers to seamlessly access products, services & solutions and enjoy a more enhanced and efficient banking experience.

Meethaq will operate dedicated booths for three days at 5 selected commercial centres across various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, supported by Meethaq's expert staff, who will introduce customers and visitors to Sharia-compliant services and solutions.



By making these services readily available at key commercial locations, Meethaq aims to simplify banking experience.

Meethaq's team was available at the Mall of Oman in Muscat on June 12-14 and they will be available at the Sur City Centre in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate on June 19-21, Sohar City Centre in Al Batinah North Governorate on June 26-28, Nizwa Grand Mall in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate on July 3-7 and Salalah Grand Mall in Dhofar Governorate on July 10-12. All booths will be open during the morning and evening working hours of the respective centre.

These dedicated booths present an excellent opportunity for customers and visitors to avail Meethaq's various Sharia-compliant banking services and solutions with ease.

These solutions will include account openings (including children and savings accounts), salary transfer requests, enrollment in Meethaq's savings plan and consultations on other financing products and solutions.

Customers can also inquire about services tailored to their specific needs, enabling them to choose the most suitable banking options.

National Finance supports child development initiatives

MUSCAT: As part of its commitment to supporting community initiatives and contributing to childhood development, National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman's leading finance company, announced the signing of a cooperation agreement with the Children First Association.

The agreement aims to support the association's efforts to promote children's rights and to create safe, stimulating and educational, cultural; and health-focused environments for children in the country.

The agreement was signed by Tariq Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer at National Finance and Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation at SQU and the Chairwoman of the Children First Association.

This partnership represents a significant step that reflects National Finance's commitment to supporting community welfare institutions and empowering children, who are the cornerstone for building a more prosperous future for the nation.



The agreement aims to support the association's efforts to promote children's rights.

Through this collaboration, National Finance company contributes to funding the association's awareness and development programmes, as well as supporting national events such as conferences and seminars related to childhood issues.

Through its programmes and initiatives, the association focuses on instilling the values of citizenship, strengthening national identity and providing awareness and training support to children and caregivers in various health, psychological and educational fields.

Commenting on the strategic partnership, Tariq Sulaiman al Farsi said: "We value this partnership, which goes beyond a strategic cooperation to become a solid investment in the future of the Sultanate of Oman.

GROWTH AGENDA



The projects are being overseen by the Governor's Office through its Development Committee, which plays a key role in advancing the governorate's strategic growth agenda.

RO 4.5 MILLION IN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN AL BATINAH SOUTH

AL RUSTAQ: *Al Batinah South Governorate is pressing ahead with a series of infrastructure and development projects worth RO 4.5 million, aimed at stimulating investment, trade and tourism across its wilayats.*

The projects are being overseen by the Governor's Office through its Development Committee, which plays a key role in advancing the governorate's strategic growth agenda.

According to Saud bin Said al Maawali, Deputy Chairman of the Municipal Council and Head of the Development Committee, the projects reflect broader efforts to strengthen the local economy, support small and medium enterprises (SMEs), generate employment for youth and enhance infrastructure and tourism offerings.

Al Maawali said the projects are aligned with Oman's decentralisation policy and form part of the national economic transformation strategy under the Tenth Five-Year Plan and Oman Vision 2040.

"We are focusing on initiatives that not only enhance public services and amenities but also promote economic vibrancy and community well-being," he added.

Among the major undertakings is the Barka Waterfront Development Project in Al Muraisi, which stretches over two kilometres and is designed to become a major recreational and tourism hub. With an investment of RO 1.9 million and 55% of construction completed, the project will feature sports and entertainment facilities, support services for tourists and designated investment zones aimed at creating jobs for locals.

In Al Musannah, a similar waterfront development is underway in Al Awaid at a cost of RO 1.7 million. Currently 35% complete, the project spans two kilometres and includes plans for restaurants, commercial outlets, children's play areas and sports facilities to enhance the area's appeal for residents and visitors alike.

Other key initiatives include the Wadi Al Maawil Commercial Market, which is nearly complete with a 95% construction rate. Covering 16,000 square metres and comprising 27 shops, the RO 319,000 project is expected to become a focal point for commerce and tourism in the wilayat.

Meanwhile, the Al Awabi Commercial Market, built over 1,200 square metres with an investment of RO 200,000, has reached 70% completion. The project will house 16 shops and is part of ongoing efforts to revitalise economic and social activity in Al Awabi.

*Another significant development is the upgrade of Nakhal Public Park, which is 70% complete at a cost of RO 452,000. Enhancements include new recreational facilities and improved infrastructure to transform the park into a major family and tourism destination. The project also includes three dedicated spaces for SMEs and local family businesses, offering fresh investment opportunities in Nakhal and surrounding areas.— **ONA***

CEO TALK

A CEO's bold vision for innovation across sectors

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

"LEADERSHIP," to me, has always been about purpose, not position," says Hilal al Sinani, CEO and Founder of Sur International Investment Group, as he reflects on a journey that has seen him build one of Oman's most dynamic and diversified enterprises.

Al Sinani's philosophy is more than a slogan — it has shaped his company's growth across sectors as varied as marine services, electric vehicles (EVs), manufacturing and esports. From humble beginnings in marine technology to leading multi-sector innovation, his path has been defined by clarity of vision, resilience and a drive to empower others.

In an interview with *Oman Observer,* Al Sinani shared how his desire to solve real-world problems and create opportunities for Omanis inspired the launch of Sur International Investment Group.

"I started with a vision to bridge industry gaps — first in marine technology and then in sectors like EVs and digital gaming. I wanted to build something that created value across multiple fronts — economic, social and technological."

One of the group's earliest milestones was the establishment of Marine Technology Co, which has grown into a trusted name in Oman's maritime sector.

The recent award of a three-year Single Point Mooring (SPM) maintenance contract marks a major achievement for the company. "It's a strong endorsement of our operational capability and reliability," Al Sinani noted.

Expanding into the electric vehicle space, Al Sinani has led the company in forging strategic partnerships with international firms in clean mobility.



I started with a vision to bridge industry gaps — first in marine technology and then in sectors like EVs and digital gaming. I wanted to build something that created value across multiple fronts — economic, social and technological.

HILAL AL SINANI
CEO and Founder Sur International Investment Group

"We are aligning ourselves with globally recognised names to introduce electric vehicle solutions that support Oman's energy transition," he said.

"This isn't just about being in the EV business — it's about contributing to the nation's sustainability and industrial development."

Most recently, Al Sinani launched Nova Esports, a new platform under the Sur International umbrella, aimed at developing local talent in the global gaming ecosystem.

"Esports is not just entertainment — it's a fast-growing digital industry," he explained. "With Nova, we're giving young Omanis a chance to compete globally and build careers in the digital economy."

"These achievements represent more than business success — they reflect our ability to adapt, lead change and invest in the future," he said.

But the path hasn't been without its trials.

"In the beginning, securing capital and winning trust in new industries was a real challenge," Al Sinani recalled. "We overcame this by being consistent, transparent and delivering results. Over time, trust followed."

Managing growth without sacrificing quality has also been key.

"Fast expansion can stretch a business thin, but we tackled that through strong internal systems and by empowering our teams to take initiative and ownership," he said.

Among his proudest moments, Al Sinani cites the group's move towards international marine certification and its high-level partnerships in the EV sector.

"But what truly matters to me is impact — when our platforms lead to job creation, skill-building and genuine opportunities for others, that's when I feel we've succeeded."

Central to Sur International Investment Group's growth is a strong organisational culture built on trust and innovation.

"Culture starts at the top," Al Sinani emphasised. "I believe in leading by example, promoting integrity and supporting a team that's empowered to think big and act boldly."

Looking ahead, Al Sinani sees Sur International Investment Group playing a transformative role in Oman and beyond.

"Whether in marine services, clean energy mobility, or digital platforms like esports, our ambition is to scale responsibly, build lasting partnerships and contribute to Oman Vision 2040 and youth development."

To future leaders, his message is clear: "Stay grounded, be driven by purpose and never stop learning. Relationships, resilience and integrity will always matter more than the title on your door."

Despite overseeing a growing portfolio, Al Sinani is intentional about maintaining balance. "It's a continuous process," he said. "I focus on wellness, time with family and trusting my leadership team. A well-balanced life makes for more effective leadership."

From the docks to the digital realm, Hilal al Sinani's story is a testament to Omani ambition — purposeful, forward-looking and deeply rooted in impact.

PASSENGER TRAFFIC AT OMAN'S AIRPORTS REACHES 4.7 MILLION

MUSCAT: Passenger traffic across the Sultanate of Oman's airports reached just over 4.7 million by the end of April 2025, representing a 4.1% decline compared to the same period in 2024, according to preliminary data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Muscat International Airport handled 4,222,789 passengers during the first four months of the year, down 4.7% from 4,428,726 recorded in the corresponding period of 2024.

The number of flights also fell sharply, totalling 29,731, an 8.6% decline from 32,520 flights during the same period last year.

In contrast, Salalah Airport posted positive growth, registering a 6.8% rise in passenger numbers to 458,394, up from 429,181 a year earlier.

However, the number of flights dipped marginally by 0.2% to 2,974, compared to 2,980 last year.

Sohar Airport saw a dramatic contraction in activity. Passenger numbers plunged by 98.7% to just 307, compared to 23,842 in the same period of 2024.

The number of flights also declined sharply, falling by 62.5% to 72 flights.

At Duqm Airport, both passenger and flight numbers saw slight decreases. Passenger traffic dropped by 2.7% to 19,565, while flight movements edged down by 1.9% to 204.

As for passenger nationalities at Muscat International Airport in April 2025, Indian nationals topped the list with 182,628 passengers, comprising 99,163 arrivals and 83,465 departures.

Omanis followed with a total of 101,087 (45,072 arriving and 56,015 departing), while Pakistani nationals accounted for 47,078 passengers (25,426 arriving and 21,652 departing).

— ONA



Muscat International Airport handled 4,222,789 passengers during the first four months of the year.

SPARKING FEARS

Markets fall as Israel-Iran conflict escalates



Stock markets across the Gulf fell on Sunday morning after Israel and Iran launched fresh attacks on each other overnight, sparking fears of a widening conflict in the Middle East.

*The Qatari stock market index slid 2.9% by around 08:15 GMT. Saudi Arabia's benchmark index recovered some ground to trade 1.6% lower, after plunging 3.6% at the open as stocks fell across sectors.— **Reuters***

VAST BUSINESS

Trump reports over $600m crypto income



Donald Trump reported more than $600 million in income from crypto, golf clubs, licensing and other ventures in a public financial disclosure report released on Friday that provided a glimpse of the vast business holdings of America's billionaire president.

*The disclosure form, which appeared to cover the 2024 calendar year, shows the president's push into crypto added substantially to his wealth.— **Reuters***

COMMERCIAL DEMAND

Boeing trims projection for 20-year demand



Boeing expects global demand for air travel to increase by more than 40% by 2030, driving the need for thousands of new jetliners in the next few years, according to its 20-year demand forecast for commercial airliners released on Sunday ahead of the Paris Airshow.

*The company expects demand for 43,600 new airliners through 2044. That is essentially the same as last year's edition. — **Reuters***

Work-life balance: myth or reality?



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The writer is an assistant professor at the marketing and management department of the College of Banking and Financial Studies in Muscat.

THE dynamic business landscape, emerging work patterns, job insecurity, the pressure of automation, the threat of artificial intelligence and workplace competitiveness have blurred the lines between work and life for millions of professionals globally. While 60% of employees worldwide report having a healthy work-life balance, burnout remains widespread, with 82% of workers at risk and rates continuing to rise.

Many professionals scorn, ridicule and perceive the work-life balance as non-existent. There are two opposing schools of thought on this global dilemma of the workplace cauldron.

One perspective stems from the belief that work-life balance is an unattainable myth. It states that work and life are deeply intertwined, exacerbated by the flux of work patterns and artificial intelligence.

The second perspective is that work-life imbalance is a reality and it can be resolved with leader interventions, policy shifts and attitudinal transformations. Work-life balance is at the core of the sustainable future of work and organisational productivity.

While burnout is a global phenomenon prevalent across all sectors, the healthcare, technology/IT, finance and education sectors are at higher risk due to demand for long hours, high emotional calls and chronic understaffing, which are some burnout drivers.

In most European countries, work weeks are shorter, vacation policies are more generous and there is a stronger emphasis on leisure and family time.

Many of these countries are ranked higher for their work-life balance. Many European countries have also enacted legislative rules and laws granting employees the right to disconnect from work outside official working hours.

France, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, Iceland, Greece, Cyprus, Slovenia and Slovakia have laws that protect employees' mental health and promote a culture of work-life balance. In the Middle East, the burnout rate is lower at 43%.

In contrast, Asian countries like India, China, Japan and South Korea often prioritise long working hours and dedication to work. India reports 62% burnout, which is 3 times the global average. China stands at 58% with a "996 culture" from 9 am to 9 pm, six days a week.

Recently, a leading Indian IT business leader, Narayan Murthy, has been criticised and shunned by the public and media for their outrageous suggestion that a 70-hour working week is necessary for Indian global competitiveness.

Leaders also released similar comments from other industries, like L&T leader SN Subramanyam, who suggested employees work 90 hours per week, which sparked outrage and criticism from professionals and leaders across all walks of life.

While 60% of employees worldwide report having a healthy work-life balance, burnout remains widespread, with 82% of workers at risk and rates continuing to rise.

These are signs of burnout, mental health risks and productivity decline. Japan was traditionally known for a culture of workaholism. Traditionally, Japan was known for this approach of "live to work" national culture and "Karoshi," which means death by work.

However, Japan has embraced the "work to live" culture since a decade and is making significant policy and national behaviour changes to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

This cultural shift in Japan is driven by younger generations who prioritise life over work. Australia and New Zealand were traditionally recognised for work-life balance due to their job climate, security, annual leave and focus on well-being.

However, recent assessments indicate that both countries face deteriorating work-life balance and increasingly toxic work environments. Intriguingly, the US also struggles with work-life balance: 66% report officially having difficulty and 77% of the working population experience burnout.

Similarly, 79% to 92% of UK workers have experienced burnout at some point in their careers.

Work-life balance is complex, evolving and intensely influenced by nations, technology and individual perceptions. Whether the readers believe it is a myth or a reality, the world needs to move towards a balanced work-life synchronisation for the sustainability and well-being of humankind.

IRAN ATTACK SHUNTS GULF INTO MORE VOLATILE REALM

GEORGE HAY

***THE** Middle East has taken one of its periodic lurches into turmoil. Earlier this week, impending talks between the United States and Iran raised the prospect of a nuclear deal that would have eased tensions in the region. A series of strikes by Israel on the Islamic Republic of Iran on Friday morning mean that's off the table.*

Any talk of stability in the Middle East rings hollow given Israel's near two-year campaign in Gaza, that region's unfolding humanitarian crisis, direct military strikes between Israel and Iran, and attacks by Ansar Allah on ships in the Red Sea.

But US President Donald Trump's recent tour of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, plus his decision to lift sanctions on Syria, had pointed to a less fraught future.

A US deal to curtail the capability of Tehran to build nuclear weapons would have cemented relative regional peace, which in turn would help to enable inward investment in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries as they seek to wean their economies off oil. That's a bigger prize for Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman than settling old scores with Tehran.

Much depends on how and where Iran responds. One option is that Tehran restricts its retaliation to Israel, as it did in April and October last year when responding to Israeli strikes which targeted the leadership of Iranian proxies like Hezbollah. Right now that's the outcome oil traders seem to be betting on.

The price of a barrel of Brent crude was up just 6% at $74 on Friday morning — roughly the same level as in March and the autumn of last year, and far off the spike above $120 a barrel that followed Russia's war on Ukraine in 2022.

Saudi and the United Arab Emirates collectively have 4 million barrels a day of spare capacity to deploy, while the International Energy Agency expects global supply to grow by 1.6 million barrels daily this year, more than twice the increase in demand. In other words, there's plenty of scope for the global economy to avoid an oil shock.

Still, it's equally possible that Iran sees Israel's strikes as a calculated extension of its negotiations with Trump – who used a social media post on Friday to urge a deal — and decides to respond by targeting US military bases in Qatar and Bahrain.

That could spark a regional struggle that might threaten the flow of oil through the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's daily supply passes, choke off Iranian crude exports of 1.5 million barrels per day, and chill foreign investment in the Gulf.

The risk that the latest flare-up in the Middle East turns into something more prolonged and economically problematic is clear – and arguably underpriced. ***— Reuters***

Paris overtakes London into global top five of tech

LONDON has been overtaken by Paris as Europe's leading tech hub for the first time, reigniting concerns over the strength and attractiveness of the UK's biggest city. The French capital has been named as the only non-US city in the world's top five global ecosystems, according to Dealroom's 2025 global tech index, overturning years of consistent outperformance by London.

Despite raising more venture capital than Paris in recent years, London's tech firms saw a smaller gain in enterprise value. The report found that between 2017 and 2024, the total enterprise value of Paris tech firms grew just over five fold, outpacing London's 4.2 times over the same period.

Paris's AI sector is emerging as a particularly powerful force, with nearly half of the city's $7.8 bn in funding last year going to AI, including standout rounds from Mistral AI, Poolside and electra.

Meanwhile, London, four weeks ago, saw the collapse of one of its best-known AI unicorns, Builder AI, while earlier last month London-listed Deliveroo agreed the terms of a takeover by its larger US rival Doordash and fintech giant Revolut, three weeks ago, chose Paris as a base for continental European expansion in a blow to the city it was founded in.

"Deliveroo being snapped up is yet another painful example of a British success story bought out by a US giant", said Mark Pearson, chief executive of Fuel Ventures.

He added: "It's a clear signal that the UK is losing its grip on scaling and retaining its own tech champions." Director of Station F, Europe's largest startup campus, Roxanne Varza, credits Paris's sharp rise to AI expertise and policy support, saying that the ecosystem "has really accelerated over the last few years, largely due to the AI talent and a new wave of repeat founders".

She added: "More international firms are building strong teams here because they're excited about the potential".



The skyline of La Defense business district is seen behind the Eiffel tower in Paris, France. ***— Reuters***



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

London continues to lead Europe in AI investment, with startups raising $3.5 bn last year, ahead of Paris's $2.4 bn, and Munich's $763m. Optimism also persists in deep tech and life sciences.

Recently, BioNTech committed £1bn to a decade-long UK expansion, opening a new AI hub in London and research space in Cambridge. The investment, backed by government support is expected to create over 400 jobs.

It is interesting to note — as mentioned above — that digital bank Revolut has chosen Paris for its fresh western Europe headquarters with a major one billion euros investment. The British-born fintech giant said it will create over 200 jobs in France, in what it calls the "largest investment in the French financial sector in a decade."

The firm has also applied for a French banking licence, which it revealed at the "Choose France" investment summit hosted by President Emmanuel Macron at Versailles. While London will remain its global headquarters, the move follows a series of tribulations in its UK business.

Revolut finally secured a UK banking licence last year after a three-year wait that resulted in Nikolay Storonsky, the fintech's CEO, blasting the UK for its "extreme bureaucracy". Stronsky had previously dismissed the notion of a London listing for the firm as "not rational" when compared to the liquidity offered in US markets.

Meanwhile, Sid Jajodia, Revolut's chief banking officer, said new operations in Paris would put the company closer to its "largest fastest-growing customer base." Jajodia praised France's "dynamic banking ecosystem" and cited strong regulatory framework as key factors behind the move. Officials in Paris celebrated the endorsement from the fintech giant.

Augustin de Romanet, president of Paris Europlace, said: "Revolut's strategic investment — as Europe's leading fintech — reinforces Paris' standing as a key financial centre, supported by a robust, innovative and forward-looking ecosystem."

He added: "This choice reflects the strong momentum we are collectively building to strengthen France's economic competitiveness and international influence."

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ENTERTAINMENT

Chamorro, who brought peace to Nicaragua, dead at 95



***VIOLETA** Chamorro, who brought peace to Nicaragua after decades of war and was the first woman elected president in the Americas, died on Saturday at the age of 95, her family said. Chamorro, who ruled the poor Central American country from 1990 to 1997, "died in peace, surrounded by the affection and love of her children," said a statement issued by her four children.*

As president, Chamorro managed to bring to an end a civil war that had raged for much of the 1980s as US-backed rebels known as the 'Contras' fought the leftist Sandinista government.

That conflict made Nicaragua one of the big proxy battlegrounds of the Cold War.

Chamorro put her country on the path to democracy in the difficult years following the Sandinista revolution of 1979, which had toppled the US-backed right-wing regime of Anastasio Somoza.

In a country known for macho culture, Chamorro had a maternal style and was known for her patience and a desire for reconciliation.

When she won the 1990 election at the head of a broad coalition, she defeated Daniel Ortega, the Sandinista guerrilla leader and icon who is now president again.

Ortega has been in power for 17 years and is widely criticised by governments and rights groups as having crushed personal freedoms, all political opposition and judicial independence with autocratic rule.

Chamorro died in Costa Rica, where she moved in 2023, to be close to her children, three of whom are living here in exile because of their opposition to Ortega.

Chamorro — Nicaraguans referred to her affectionately as "Dona Violeta" — had been living far removed from public life for decades. In her later years, she suffered from Alzheimer's disease.

"Her legacy is unquestionable," said Felix Madariaga, a Nicaraguan academic and political activist living in exile in the United States.

"She led the transition from war to peace, healing a country destroyed by war. The contrast with Ortega is clear and deep," said Madariaga.

*Chamorro was the widow of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, who came from one of Nicaragua's most prominent families. — **AFP***

QUICK FEATURES



FASHION

A model parades during the launching of the Rio Fashion Show at the Christ the Redeemer Sanctuary in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP



COLLECTIONS

Britain's Catherine, Princess of Wales talks with Senior Fashion and Textiles Curator, Oriole Cullen and Director of Collections Care and Access, Kate Parsons, as she is shown a 19th Century Riding Habit. — AFP



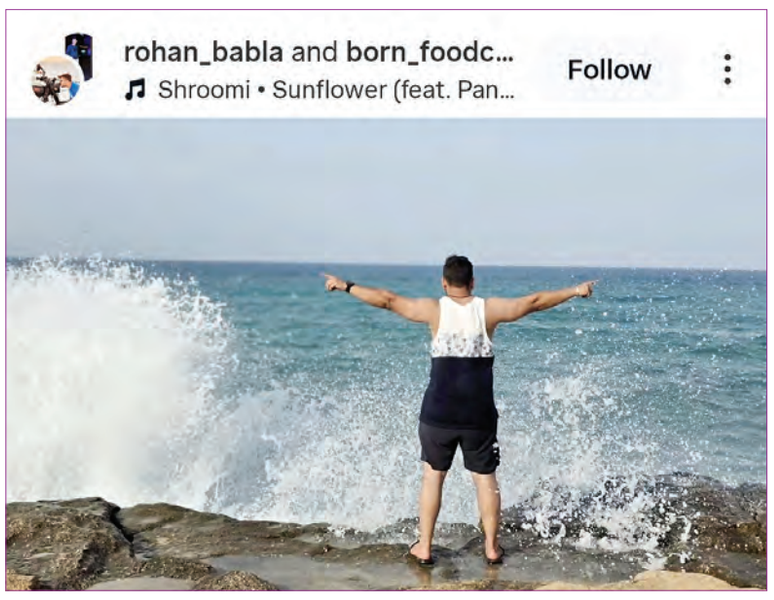
FILM

Iranian director, screenwriter and producer Jafar Panahi speaks during a question and answer session with the audience at the Sydney Film Festival. — AFP

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Archaeologists find France's deepest shipwreck



***ARCHAEOLOGISTS** have uncovered what they believe are the remains of a 16th-century merchant ship, located over 2.5 kilometers beneath the surface of the Mediterranean Sea off southern France. This discovery marks the deepest shipwreck ever found in French territorial waters and potentially the world's deepest such find in any waters. The vessel is thought to have been sailing from northern Italy laden with ceramics and metal bars when it sank. Despite some modern household waste found among the cargo—such as a soda can and yoghurt pot—the site remains remarkably well-preserved and largely intact, thanks to its extreme depth, which has prevented looting and disturbance.*

The wreck was discovered unintentionally in early March by an underwater drone during a routine survey near Saint-Tropez, as part of a government project monitoring France's deep-sea resources. The sonar initially detected a large object, prompting further investigation with high-definition cameras and an underwater robot. The site has been dubbed "Camarat 4" and features nearly 200 jugs with pinched spouts, some marked with "IHS," the monogram of Jesus, or decorated with plant and geometric patterns. These inscriptions suggest origins from Liguria, in what is now northern Italy.

Other artifacts include approximately 100 yellow plates, two cauldrons, an anchor, and six cannons. Marine Sadania, an archaeologist involved in the project, described the site as "frozen in time," due to its pristine state, which offers a rare glimpse into maritime history. Over the next two years, researchers plan to create a detailed 3D digital model of the wreck and analyze samples, aiming to preserve and study the site before sharing findings with the public.

*This discovery far surpasses the previous record of a sunken French submarine at 2.3 km depth near Toulon. — **AFP***



Ancient Malian city celebrates annual replastering of mosque







THOUSANDS of Malians have replastered the iconic earthen mosque in the historic city of Djenne during an annual ceremony that helps preserve the World Heritage site.

To the sound of drums and festive music, townsmen on Thursday coated the towering three-minaret mosque with fresh mud plaster.

The annual replastering with "banco" — a mix of earth and water — shields the mosque from harsh weather ahead of the Sahel region's often violent rainy season.

"This mosque belongs to the whole world," said Aboubacar Sidiki Djiteye, his face streaked with mud as he joined the "unifying" ritual.

"There's no bigger event in Djenne than this," he said.

"Replastering the mosque is a tradition handed down from generation to generation," said Bayini Yaro, one of the women tasked with carrying water for the plaster mix.

Locals prepared the mix themselves, combining water, earth, rice bran, shea butter and baobab powder — a hallmark of Sahel-Sudanese architecture.

Chief mason Mafoune Djenepo inspected the fresh coating.

"The importance of this mosque is immense. It's the image on all Malian stamps," he said.

A blessing ceremony followed the replastering, with Quran verses recited in the mosque courtyard. Participants then shared dates and sweets.

First erected in the 13th century and rebuilt in 1907, the mosque is considered the world's largest earthen structure, according to the United Nations' cultural body, Unesco.

Djenne, home to around 40,000 residents and known for preserving its traditional banco houses, has been on UNESCO's World Heritage list since 1988.

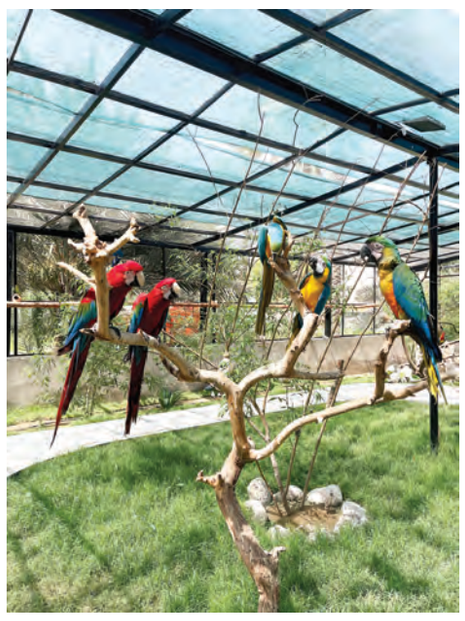
Local communities, alongside international organisations like Unesco, are actively working to safeguard Djenne's architectural legacy. Initiatives include repair projects and sustainable tourism programmes aimed at promoting awareness and funding for conservation efforts. The people of Djenne, primarily of Songhai and Bozo descent, uphold these traditions as vital symbols of their identity and history. Women often participate in the nuanced craft of mural decoration, while elders transmit techniques through apprenticeships.

Despite challenges, community-led efforts and governmental support underscore a collective commitment to preserving Djenne's unique heritage. These banco houses not only serve as residences but also as cultural landmarks, contributing to Djenne's status as a Unesco World Heritage site. Their preservation ensures that future generations can continue to appreciate the town's historical significance and architectural beauty amidst a rapidly changing world. The site was added to the endangered heritage list in 2016 due to its location in central Mali, where a group of fighters linked to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State group, as well as ethnic militias and criminal gangs, have waged a violent insurgency since 2012.

— AFP















WADI AL MAAWIL EMBRACING ITS VITAL ROLE AS SANCTUARY FOR BIRDS

BY ZUWAINA AL SULEIMANI

STEPPING into the lush, green landscape of Wadi Al Maawil, one will be greeted right away by a symphony of sounds — birds singing, chirping and calling from every direction. The air is filled with the fresh scent of grass and blooming flowers; and the warm sun filters through the trees.

As you walk along the winding paths, you can see flashes of colour from bright feathers — reds, blues, greens — blending beautifully amidst the greenery. Every step you take feels like entering a natural concert, where the melodies of nature put your mind at ease and your senses on high alert.

You might even spot a bird perched quietly on a branch or swooping gracefully through the sky. It's a place that makes you want to stop and just listen, watch and connect with the lively world of birds around you.

In this vibrant setting stands the Oman Bird Haven Reserve — a real haven for feathered creatures and anyone interested in the wild. It's not just a safe home for more than 250 bird species; it's a story of conservation, education and community. This project started back in 2015, driven by a desire to protect local and migrating birds while helping people learn why they matter. After years of planning and effort, the reserve opened its gates for visitors on June 2, 2025, inviting everyone to see the beauty and importance of birds in a place shaped by passion and purpose.

Wadi Al Maawil was chosen for its perfect spot — wide open spaces, a good climate and diverse landscapes that make it ideal for birds to live comfortably. Now, nearly 250 species call it home — from local birds to those rare and endangered that need special care. It's also a key stopover for migrating birds passing between continents. So, if you're a birdwatcher or just a nature lover, this place is a treasure. The team here takes great care in looking after the birds, making sure they get the right food, good safe habitats and any medical attention they might need — especially important considering Oman's hot summers and chilly winters.

Of course, the reserve isn't only about watching birds; it's about building a connection with nature. Visitors can enjoy displays where birds fly freely, guided tours that explain the different species and even photograph the amazing moments when birds take flight. Schools and families can join educational programmes that help young people understand why protecting our environment is essential. Strict rules make sure that all the birds are healthy and safe — no illegal trafficking or harm allowed here. It's a place that cares about wildlife and the future of our planet.

In recent years, Wadi Al Maawil has really changed. The local authorities have focused on developing it responsibly — investing in sustainable ways to grow the area while keeping it true to its natural roots. Today, it's a perfect getaway spot, with modern facilities that blend into the landscape, making it great for relaxing, exploring, or learning. Visitors can enjoy the calm surroundings, knowing that their visit supports conservation efforts.

But Oman's importance for birds goes far beyond Wadi Al Maawil. The country is a major stopover for thousands of migratory birds travelling between Africa, Asia and Europe. Places like Bar Al Hikman are famous among birdwatchers because they provide critical resting and feeding spots — think endless mudflats and salt flats filled with wading birds like sandpipers, flamingos and plovers. According to experts, Oman's wetlands support over 80 different species that are vital for the survival of migrating birds. These areas aren't just hotspots for bird enthusiasts — they're essential habitats that help keep bird populations healthy across continents.

For anyone keen to see the magic firsthand, Oman offers plenty of opportunities. Whether it's the wide mudflats of Bar Al Hikman, the rugged mountains, or the deserts, each landscape supports a diverse array of birds. It's this variety that makes Oman a bird lovers' paradise, helping thousands of birds rest and refuel on their long journeys.

So, when planning your next trip, think about Wadi Al Maawil. It's a place that's grown and improved over the last few years, combining natural beauty with a real sense of purpose. Bring your curiosity — and maybe a pair of binoculars — and keep your eyes open. There are so many birds waiting to be seen and every sighting is a chance to learn about the importance of protecting these incredible creatures. Whether you're part of a school group, a family, or a solo explorer, visiting Oman's reserves gives you a unique opportunity to connect with nature — and maybe even inspire the next generation to care for our planet.