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DEVASTATING AVALANCHE

Nadhira Al Harthy’s body brought back to Oman

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The body of Omani mountaineer Nadhira Al Harthy was brought home on Sunday, days after she was killed in a devastating avalanche on Pakistan’s Broad Peak, as rescue teams continued efforts to recover the remaining victims from the world’s 12th-highest mountain.

Paying tribute to its employee, Oman’s logistics company TRANSOM said Nadhira’s legacy would live on through the lives she touched.

“Today, as the late Nadhira Al Harthy returned home, we were reminded that the greatest legacy we leave behind is the kindness we show and the lives we touch,” the company said in a post on X.

The company extended its condolences to her family and loved ones, praying that Allah grants her mercy, forgiveness and the highest place in Paradise.

It said her memory would remain in the hearts of those who knew her and that every sincere prayer offered for her would be a lasting gift.

Meanwhile, the ground rescue team deployed on Broad Peak reached the location of renowned British-Nepali mountaineer Nirmal Purja, popularly known as “Nims Dai”, at an altitude of around 5,700 metres.

According to the Alpine Club of Pakistan, rescuers also sighted three additional bodies at the site



on Sunday, although their identities have yet to be confirmed.

Senior Nepali mountaineer Mingma David Sherpa, who travelled to Skardu from Kathmandu to assist in the recovery operation, said the multi-phase mission was being carried out under extremely hazardous conditions, with the safety of rescuers remaining the top priority.

According to Sherpa, the recovery team plans to move the bodies from the current location to Camp 1 before transporting them to the Japanese Camp on Monday.

If weather and mountain conditions permit, a helicopter evacuation may then be possible.

“The main objective of this campaign is to safely recover the bodies of our deceased friends

and return them home with dignity,” Sherpa said in a social media post, adding that every decision was being made with the safety of the rescue team as the highest priority.

The tragedy unfolded on Thursday when a massive avalanche struck a 10-member expedition attempting to climb Broad Peak, which rises 8,047 metres above sea level. The team was at an altitude of about 6,600 metres when communication was lost before reports of the avalanche emerged later that day.

Nadhira was among the 10 climbers reported missing following the avalanche. Her death, along with that of Nepali climber Pur Bahadur Gurung, was confirmed by the Alpine Club of Pakistan on Friday.

ROP’S KHAREEF PLAN 24/7 OPERATIONS, QR CODE NAVIGATION AND MORE PATROLS

These proactive steps will provide a safe environment for citizens and visitors during the ongoing monsoon season

SALALAH: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) continues to implement its integrated security and traffic plans during the Khareef Dhofar (monsoon) season 2026.

This comes within the framework of ROP’s efforts to enhance security and safety, and keep pace with the increasing number of visitors. These efforts involve raising the level of field readiness, enhancing security deployment, and providing police services to facilitate smooth traffic flow and maintain the safety and security of citizens and visitors throughout the tourist season.

Colonel Salim Mohammed Al Kaf, Assistant Commander of the Dhofar Governorate Police, stated that the ROP has intensified its field presence by deploying patrols and security checkpoints across various sites and main roads.

This proactive approach aims to address any developments and provide a safe environment for citizens and visitors throughout the season. He affirmed that the command is continuously working



ing to raise its readiness and performance to ensure the maintenance of security and public order, while achieving the highest safety standards during the Khareef Dhofar season.

Enhance rapid response

To enhance rapid response to various reports, reduce traffic accidents, and provide guidance and assistance to tourists and

users of the roads leading to the Dhofar Governorate, the ROP has established security points in multiple locations. These points encompass general security, the air ambulance, and the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority. They have been provided with direct contact numbers to facilitate communication and ensure comprehensive security coverage across all road stretches. **>A5**

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN Over 100,000 visit Jabal Akhdar Festival

1 The Jabal Akhdar Festival 2026 has attracted more than 100,000 visitors since its launch through the end of July. The festival features a diverse 45-day programme combining entertainment, cultural, sports tourism as well as also providing platform for SMEs business activities. **>A4**

OMAN North Batinah boosts Oman’s food security

2 Performance indicators for 2025 confirm continuous growth in North Al Batinah supported by farm projects, investment opportunities, infrastructure, and logistical services that helps raising production efficiency, developing food industries, and increasing exports. **>A5**

MARKET Domestic liquidity tops OMR28.6bn

3 Total domestic liquidity in Oman rose by of 12.7% to reach OMR28.6012 billion by the end of May 2026, compared with OMR25.3760 billion during the corresponding period in 2025, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). **>B1**

NCSI DATA

Oman records fewer births and deaths in first half of 2026

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman recorded declines in both births and deaths during the first half of 2026, according to the latest figures, with live births falling by 1.7 percent and deaths dropping by 7.3 percent compared to the same period last year.

Official statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed that 32,405 live births were registered by the end of June 2026.

Of these, 28,828 were born to Omani parents and 3,577 to expatriate families.

Data

Among Omani births, 14,793 were boys and 14,035 were girls. Expatriate births comprised 1,847 boys and 1,730 girls.

In June 2026 alone, Oman re-



corded 5,560 live births, down from 5,665 in May.

The monthly total included 4,958 Omani births and 602 expatriate births.

The data showed that births among Omani females registered the largest year-on-year decline, falling 3.7 per cent, while births among Omani males edged up 0.3 per cent. Births among expatriates declined 2 percent, with male births down 1.5 percent and female births down 2.4 per cent.

The number of deaths also continued to decline.

A total of 4,590 deaths were recorded across the Sultanate by



the end of June, representing a 7.3 per cent decrease from the corresponding period in 2025.

Deaths among Omani nationals fell 6.6 per cent to 3,646, including 2,106 males and 1,540 females.

Expatriate deaths dropped 9.9 percent to 944, comprising 759 males and 185 females.

During June 2026, 736 deaths were registered, compared with 768 in May.

The June figures included 590 Omani and 146 expatriate deaths.

Female deaths declined more sharply than male deaths.

Deaths among Omani women fell 10.6 percent, compared with a 3.8 percent decline among Omani men. Among expatriates, female deaths dropped 16.7 per cent, while male deaths declined 8.3 per cent.

The figures are provisional and do not include births and deaths occurring outside the Sultanate.



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INTERIM CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE SIX MONTHS ENDED 30 JUNE 2026



Said Mohamed Al-Aufi
Chairman

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE SIX-MONTH PERIOD ENDING 30 JUNE 2026

The first half of 2026 marked strong progress for Sohar International, driven by disciplined execution, sustained growth and strategic initiatives that strengthened the Bank's position in Oman's financial sector.

Key milestones included our appointment as investment advisor to Dhofar Governorate, progress on the proposed acquisition of Neo Group in Saudi Arabia, and advancement of regulatory approvals for our Hong Kong Representative Office, expanding our presence locally, regionally and internationally.

Reflecting the confidence of our customers and stakeholders, Sohar International was named Oman's Top Banking Brand at the AIIWA Awards.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

The profit for the six-month period ending 30 June 2026 increased by 15% to **﷮** 53.0 million compared to the same period last year.

Total operating income increased by 26% to **﷮** 145.6 million with increases in net interest income, net profit income and other operating income.

Total operating expenses increased by 29% to **﷮** 67.1 million reflecting the Bank's continued investment in our branch operation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as well as continued strategic investments in Omani talent, technology and expanding our international reach.

Total assets increased by 30% to **﷮** 10,258 million compared to 30 June 2025 of which loans, advances and financing (net) increased by 43% to **﷮** 6,974 million. Customer deposits increased by 26% to **﷮** 7,943 million resulting in an 88% net loan/deposit ratio.

The 33% increase in total equity of **﷮** 296 million compared to 30 June 2025 includes **﷮** 200 million from the perpetual tier 1 capital issuance in September 2025 and **﷮** 22 million net unrealized gains on equity investments.

GROWTH AND MARKET EXPANSION

Our diversified business model continued to gain momentum. Investment Banking expanded assets under management while diversifying its platform across infrastructure, real estate, private equity, asset monetization, and cross-border investments. The Bank also strengthened its capital markets franchise through its role as collecting bank for the OMIFCO IPO and the Ministry of Finance Domestic Sukuk Series 11, expanded its corporate finance and advisory business across key sectors, and enhanced institutional asset servicing through a strategic custody partnership with a global bank.

Our growth strategy continued to advance across key markets. In Saudi Arabia, the proposed Neo Group acquisition would expand our capabilities in asset management and financial advisory services. In Hong Kong, our Representative Office will serve as a gateway to wider Asian markets, strengthening cross-border trade and investment opportunities between Oman and Asia.

These achievements earned Sohar International industry recognition as Best Bank in Oman – Large Banks Category at the 11th New Age Banking Summit Oman, while Visa recognized the Bank for outstanding performance in payments and portfolio growth.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Strategic partnerships remained central to Sohar International's growth strategy. A key milestone was the Bank's appointment as investment advisor to Dhofar Governorate, supporting the governorate's economic diversification strategy while strengthening the Bank's advisory capabilities. The Bank also expanded its Government Banking franchise by securing the banking relationship of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, advancing collaboration with the Ministry of Health, and progressing the integration of the Royal Oman Police digital identity verification service into its digital ecosystem.

Sohar International also established strategic partnerships with several high-profile Omani corporates supporting renewable energy, digital commerce, customer engagement, logistics, industrial development, real estate, and regional economic growth.

DIGITAL-FIRST TRANSFORMATION

Digital transformation continued to shape Sohar International's growth. Retail Banking introduced digital onboarding for youth and minor accounts, enhanced savings and subscription management, expanded self-service capabilities, strengthened card and payment services, launched MAAL–Oman's first domestic-scheme prepaid card—and integrated a real estate ecosystem. Lifestyle banking was further enhanced through partnerships with Oman Air, House of Travel, Omantel, and Qatar Airways, providing customers with integrated travel, lifestyle, and connectivity benefits.

Within Corporate Banking, we advanced our digital proposition through the launch of a dedicated SME mobile banking application and the introduction of corporate internet banking in Saudi Arabia. Transaction Banking expanded its capabilities across digital payments, merchant acquiring, cash management and cross-border liquidity management, supported by strategic mandates with leading Omani corporates. The Bank also launched Visa Commercial Choice Travel in partnership with Visa—the first solution of its kind in Oman for the travel sector—and strengthened its digital payments ecosystem through collaboration with Thawani Technologies. Trade Finance and Financial Institutions further extended the Bank's international reach through higher trade volumes, a broader correspondent banking network and diversified funding sources.

Operational excellence also advanced through automation of the auto finance journey, digital fixed deposits for corporate customers, enhanced workflow automation, and continued digitalization of internal processes. The launch of Innovation 360, the first internationally recognized innovation benchmarking framework adopted by a bank in Oman, further embedded innovation as a driver of sustainable growth and operational excellence.

These achievements earned Sohar International the Best Digital Bank of the Year award at the 11th New Age Banking Summit Oman, while Visa also recognized the Bank for its outstanding performance in payments and portfolio growth.

SERVING CUSTOMERS

Delivering a differentiated customer experience remained central to Sohar International's strategy. During the period, the Bank enhanced its retail banking proposition through dedicated solutions for women, retirees, youth, affluent, and first-time banking customers, while introducing the Zahiya proposition, a dedicated pensioners account, a government-supported marriage loan, and a fully digital Auto Loan journey.

We also expanded customer access through new communication channels, including Snapchat, and established a dedicated customer service unit at the Social Protection Fund headquarters. Additional enhancements included digital fixed deposit opening and a targeted

merchant POS offer, supporting greater convenience for both individual and business customers. Strategic partnerships with Travel House, participation in major real estate platforms, and lifestyle collaborations further enriched customers' travel, lifestyle, and home ownership experiences.

Customer engagement improved through the phased rollout of Khatam across the branch network, real-time customer feedback capabilities, enhanced service quality monitoring, and continuous improvements to digital channels, resulting in higher customer satisfaction and stronger digital engagement.

These efforts were recognized with the "Customer Experience Team of the Year" award at the Oman Customer Experience Forum.

ESG & SUSTAINABILITY

The Bank continued providing financing, advisory, and specialized banking solutions across renewable energy, fisheries, food security, infrastructure, logistics, tourism, and real estate, while strengthening our sustainability agenda through strategic partnerships with United Solar Holding Inc. and Green Steel.

A key milestone was the launch of the "Transform Your Catch into Gold" initiative in Al Ashkharah, in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, promoting financial inclusion, digital adoption, and tailored financing solutions for fishermen while supporting food security, sustainable fisheries, and Oman's blue economy.

The Bank also expanded financial inclusion through tailored solutions for youth, retirees, SMEs, and underserved segments, while promoting financial literacy through the Responsible Finance for a Sustainable Oman program. Community engagement was further strengthened through the Oman Mall E-Gaming activation in support of the World Cup 2026, creating an interactive platform to engage younger audiences, alongside a nationwide cybersecurity awareness campaign aimed at promoting safe digital banking practices and protecting customers against financial fraud.

Environmental stewardship advanced through a structured electronic waste recycling program with Evergreen Gulf Recycling Hub Services, alongside broader community initiatives promoting recycling, health awareness, women's empowerment, and financial resilience in support of Oman Vision 2040.

SERVING OUR COMMUNITY

As Strategic Partner of Khareef Dhofar 2026, the Bank continues to support regional development and sustainable tourism while extending its contribution to entrepreneurship, education, sports, and cultural initiatives. The Bank strengthened its international presence by sponsoring the Oman Pavilion at Gulfood Dubai 2026, showcasing Oman's food and agribusiness sector while supporting national export promotion and international trade opportunities.

The Bank also strengthened its investment in education, youth development, and social inclusion through partnerships with Sultan Qaboos University, the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, schools, the Oman Design Association, and community sports initiatives. Programs delivered in collaboration with Sharakah, the Al Noor Association for the Blind, the Omani Women's Association – Bousher, the Association for Early Intervention, the Positive Vision Association, and the Fak Kurba initiative further advanced skills development, women's empowerment, disability inclusion, and social welfare.

During the period, Sohar International supported the National Group Marriage Initiative, reinforcing social cohesion and support for Omani families. The Bank expanded its contribution to the non-profit sector through the continued growth of the My Charity platform, the launch of a digital payment gateway for the Oman Charitable Organization, support for the Imam Jabir bin Zaid Endowment Foundation, the Al Kamil & Al Wafi Endowment Foundation, and investment support for the Bait Hassan Foundation, enabling customers to contribute securely and conveniently through digital channels.

The Bank also continued empowering SMEs, women entrepreneurs, and emerging businesses through specialized programs and tailored financial solutions, supporting private sector growth, innovation, and long-term economic resilience.

SERVING OUR PEOPLE

Strengthening our leadership pipeline, Sohar International continued to enhance capabilities through its Kafa'a High Potential Program, while expanding investment in national talent through Tomohi Graduate Program, providing practical banking experience for a new cohort of Omani graduates. Across the organization, competency assessments, targeted learning programs, nationwide training initiatives, and employee engagement activities continued to strengthen leadership capability, sales excellence, customer service, operational effectiveness, and the collaborative One Bank culture.

These efforts were recognized with the Middle East Best Employer Brand award at the World HRD Congress, reaffirming Sohar International's commitment to building a high-performing, future-ready workforce.

RECOGNITION

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to all our stakeholders for their ongoing trust and confidence, an enduring source of strength in our journey of transformation and long-term sustainable growth. The dedication and shared purpose demonstrated by our people remain central to delivering on our strategic goals and upholding the values that define Sohar International.

I acknowledge with gratitude the vital role of our regulators, the Central Bank of Oman and the Financial Services Authority, whose strong governance, transparent frameworks, and steadfast guidance have enabled sustained progress across the banking sector.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and the entire team, I express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik whose visionary leadership continues to guide the nation towards lasting prosperity and socio-economic advancement.

Said Mohamed Al-Aufi
Chairman

INTERIM CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUNE 2026 (﷮ '000)

	30 June 2026 (Unaudited)	31 December 2025 (Audited)	30 June 2025 (Unaudited)
ASSETS			
Cash and balances with Central Bank	206,319	323,400	268,492
Due from banks	544,070	650,941	657,843
Investment securities	2,192,220	2,153,538	1,883,292
Loans, advances and Islamic financings (net)	6,974,476	5,763,904	4,861,563
Other assets	196,217	91,862	57,822
Investment properties	2,900	2,900	2,900
Property and equipment	78,233	75,695	75,309
Intangible assets	63,918	66,556	69,349
TOTAL ASSETS	10,258,353	9,128,796	7,876,570
LIABILITIES			
Due to banks	878,976	977,478	565,602
Customer deposits	7,942,971	6,826,799	6,312,737
Other liabilities	248,646	170,933	106,189
TOTAL LIABILITIES	9,070,593	7,975,210	6,984,528
SHAREHOLDERS' EQUITY			
Share capital	702,508	702,508	702,508
Share premium	18,038	18,038	18,038
Legal reserve	65,947	65,947	55,900
Other reserves	16,435	1,571	(5,869)
Retained earnings	158,882	165,522	121,465
TOTAL SHAREHOLDERS' EQUITY	961,810	953,586	892,042
Perpetual AT1 securities	200,000	200,000	-
Mandatory Convertible Bonds	25,950	-	-
TOTAL EQUITY	1,187,760	1,153,586	892,042
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY	10,258,353	9,128,796	7,876,570
CONTINGENT LIABILITIES			
COMMITMENTS	1,982,246	1,469,419	1,177,178
	<i>Baisa</i>	<i>Baisa</i>	<i>Baisa</i>
Net assets per share	145.4	144.1	134.8

These interim condensed consolidated financial statements were approved and authorised for issue by the Board of Directors on 30th July 2026.

INTERIM CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE SIX MONTHS PERIOD (UNAUDITED) (﷮ '000)

	Six months ended 30 June 2026	30 June 2025	Three months ended 30 June 2026	30 June 2025
Interest income	187,175	151,870	99,180	76,760
Interest expense	(96,963)	(76,262)	(50,559)	(38,264)
Net interest income	90,212	75,608	48,621	38,496
Net income from Islamic financings and investing activities	7,832	6,677	3,708	3,670
Other operating income	47,553	33,287	21,966	18,365
TOTAL OPERATING INCOME	145,597	115,572	74,295	60,531
Staff costs	(36,362)	(31,382)	(18,461)	(14,864)
Other operating expenses	(28,200)	(18,092)	(14,085)	(11,253)
Depreciation	(2,531)	(2,651)	(1,284)	(1,399)
TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES	(67,093)	(52,125)	(33,830)	(27,516)
NET OPERATING INCOME BEFORE IMPAIRMENT PROVISIONS	78,504	63,447	40,465	33,015
Loan impairment charges and other credit risk provisions (net)	(16,065)	(12,202)	(9,076)	(4,914)
PROFIT BEFORE TAX	62,439	51,245	31,389	28,101
Income tax expense	(9,409)	(5,095)	(4,428)	(3,410)
PROFIT FOR THE PERIOD	53,030	46,150	26,961	24,691
Items that will not be reclassified to profit and loss				
Revaluation gain/(loss) on equity instruments held at fair value through other comprehensive income (FVOCI)	14,828	524	(7,586)	829
OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME/(LOSS) FOR THE PERIOD	14,828	524	(7,586)	829
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE PERIOD	67,858	46,674	19,375	25,520
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME ATTRIBUTABLE TO EQUITY HOLDERS OF PARENT COMPANY	67,858	46,674	19,375	25,520
PROFIT ATTRIBUTABLE TO EQUITY HOLDERS OF PARENT COMPANY	53,030	46,150	26,961	24,691
	<i>Baisa</i>	<i>Baisa</i>	<i>Baisa</i>	<i>Baisa</i>
Basic earnings per share for the period	7.00	6.97	4.07	3.73
Diluted earnings per share for the period	6.83	6.81	3.98	3.64

(The complete accounts of Sohar International Bank SAOG will be delivered to any shareholder or any interested parties who request them in either Arabic or English, as requested, within 7 days of receipt of a written request. Request should be submitted to Sohar International Bank Finance Department)

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Expo in Salalah brings together SMEs from Oman and Bahrain

the Omani-Bahraini Products exhibition is providing a platform to display their products and services, enhance commercial and investment partnerships

SALALAH: The ninth edition of the Omani-Bahraini Products exhibition opened in the Wilayat of Salalah.

Organised by the Omani-Bahraini Friendship Association in cooperation with the Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain in the Sultanate of Oman, the exhibition will run for eight days with the participation of several small and medium enterprises (SMEs) from the two countries.



The exhibition aims to support SMEs in the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Bahrain by providing a platform to display their products and services, enhance commercial and investment partnerships, and open direct marketing channels between pro-

ducers and consumers, thereby contributing to the development of trade exchange between the two countries.

The exhibition also seeks to enable enterprise owners to exchange expertise and knowledge in the fields of production, marketing,

and business management, and to benefit from successful experiences, alongside enhancing opportunities to access new markets in a way that supports the growth of the small and medium enterprise sector.

The exhibition highlights the

cultural, craft, and heritage diversity of the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Bahrain, introduces visitors to the products of both countries, and provides an interactive environment that encourages building future economic and investment partnerships among

participating enterprises.

Rudaina Amer Al Hajri, Chairperson of the Omani-Bahraini Friendship Association, said that organizing the exhibition comes within the framework of enhancing economic and commercial cooperation between the two countries and supporting small and medium enterprises by providing opportunities for marketing and raising awareness of their products, which positively reflects on their business growth and expansion.

She added that the exhibition includes approximately 30 small and medium enterprises showcasing diverse products, including fashion, perfumes, incense, Omani frankincense, Omani halwa, accessories, heritage and craft products, as well as household supplies, reflecting the productive and cultural diversity of both countries.

She expressed the Association's expectation that the exhibition will constitute an effective platform for opening new horizons for commercial and investment cooperation, contribute to supporting small and medium enterprises, and enhance economic integration between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Bahrain.

— ONA

ROYAL AIR FORCE OF OMAN



Recruitment procedures for new officer cadets begin

MUSCAT: Acting in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) on Sunday began recruitment procedures for a number of citizens who wish to join the military service as officer cadets.

The recruitment process ranges between the stages of approval endorsed by the RAFO to the final stage of admission to join the RAFO.

Military service

The RAFO extends its expertise and capabilities to facilitate the citizens' joining the military service in a manner that enables them to perform the national duty and contribute to defending the homeland and preserving its gains.

These efforts are in pursuance of the approach undertaken by the Sultan's Armed Forces to provide

employment for national youth in accordance with approved plans and programmes aimed to supply the Sultan's Armed Forces and other departments of the Ministry of Defence with qualified national competencies and contribute to the nation's prosperity under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander.

— ONA

AL DAKHILIYAH GOVERNORATE



Pomegranate harvest season commences in Jabal Akhdar

AL JABAL AL AKHDAR: The harvesting of pomegranate trees began recently in the Wilayat of Jabal Akhdar in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. The crop's cultivation runs through the month of August every year.

Statistics issued by the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdar show that the number of pomegranate trees stands at more than 27,000 and that the marketing value of the crop during the last season (2024-2025) stood at about OMR1.3 million.

Statistics also show that the percentage of healthy fruits in the Wilayat of Jabal Akhdar stood



at more than 90 percent, and the average number of fruits per tree was equal to 60.

Pomegranates constitute the main economic crop for farmers in the Wilayat of Jabal Akhdar.

The pomegranate harvest season also adds more diversity to recreational tourism and heritage tourism in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Akhdar.

— ONA

PILOT PROJECT

Production of biofuel through cultivation of Camelina plants

MUSCAT: Nama Water Services is implementing a pilot project to cultivate the Camelina plant, one of the most prominent sustainable crops used in the production of biofuel.

The project will be carried out in partnership with Hema Energy company as part of Nama Water Services' commitment towards the consolidation of environmental sustainability and the realisation of green economy targets.

The project embodies Nama Water Services' approach to transform recycled water into a strate-

gic resource that consolidates sustainable development. It envisages the use of recycled water in an innovative manner to enhance food security, diminish carbon emissions and support clean energy transition.

The project seeks to establish an integrated technical system for measuring the potential of the Camelina in carbon sequestration, in addition to the plant's economic and commercial feasibility.

Under the partnership, Nama Water Services will supply recycled water, while Hema Energy

will undertake the project's technical management, operation and data analysis.

The project receives the attention of various national entities, including the Sultan Qaboos University (which will provide research and technical verification), the Environment Authority (which will oversee the project's environmental aspects) and Oman Net Zero Centre (which will ensure that the project aligns with the Sultanate of Oman's objectives to achieve zero neutrality).

— ONA



**DEEPAL**

TOUCH THE FUTURE

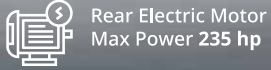
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COMMENTARY

The boy at the back of the classroom

School days are a good reference to look back to. They don't only bring back memories but they are an important source of information. The funny thing is that, with no apparent reason, one occasion has always been a vivid memory in my mind.

For a group of fifteen year-olds, it is always fun to roll papers and throw at each other in the classroom when the teacher is not looking. But that was not one of the proudest moments of my school days. Many of the turning points came when our teacher got fed up with our pranks. One day, he picked up one of the rolled up paper, put it gently on the table and looked sternly at us. When the giggles from the naughtiest girls died down, the teacher raised his right hand stuck out four fingers.

He very calmly asked, "who is the cleverest of you can count these fingers?" The answer was obvious but we kept quiet, our minds busy asking about the motive of the question. He repeated the question and again there was silence. Then from the back of the room, a small voice from the smallest kid in the class, said, "three."

None of us were surprised from the answer. We had already dismissed him as a dumb boy not acknowledging that he had no full control with his mental faculties.

To our surprise, the teacher said it was a correct count. He



walked to the back of the class and rewarded the boy with money. He then walked back, picked up the paper roll and asked another question, "who would like to catch it?"

He threw it up in the air and none of us made a move to get it. It landed on the head of a girl in the middle and dropped on the floor. He then turned to the writing board and re-started the lesson. I don't remember anybody else in that class throwing things at each other from that point onward.

I guess there are more than the core lessons to be learned in any classroom environment. Since, we spend nearly half of our growing up life in a classroom, teachers do provide the backbone of that experience. When he stuck up his fingers, he was asking us for the obvious, really telling us, there is no hidden agenda in knowledge.

The irony was that, while we were busy playing pranks, the mentally challenged kid was the only one who was paying

attention to the teacher. For many years, I wondered if the teacher was trying to prove a point when he accepted the wrong answer from the count of his fingers. Now, I am convinced that he was. Unlike throwing paper rolls, not everything can be seen with a naked eye. We all saw four fingers but the backroom kid saw more than that.

Since he never participated in any classroom discussion before that, for him it was an opportunity to break his own tradition. The teacher sensed that and he had to encourage it. None of that was planned but from a bad situation, came up a useful one. Not only our paper throwing days came to an end, but the boy moved to the front row and made a reasonable improvement from a kid of his condition.

It has been a lesson that I never forgot above all the math or science that have been taught in the class in my entire school days.

MEETING WITH BUSINESS OWNERS AND INVESTORS

Labour ministry discusses private sector challenges

SALALAH: The Ministry of Labour has discussed the challenges facing the private sector, alongside presenting a package of proposals and ideas aimed at modernising the labour system and enhancing the quality of services provided to enterprises.

This came during a meeting held yesterday by Dr. Mahad Said Ba'owin, Minister of Labour, with business owners and investors at the headquarters of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry branch in Dhofar Governorate.

The meeting featured a dialogue session entitled "Strategic Dialogues and Shared Visions



with the Private Sector for a Sustainable Labour Market," which addressed a number of topics, including enhancing the efficiency of employment and training programmes to empower national cadres, as well as aligning outcomes with labour market requirements and rapid economic

developments.

The meeting is part of the "Labour Forum 2026" activities, aimed at strengthening partnership with the private sector and opening direct channels of dialogue with business owners to discuss labour market-related issues. — **ONA**

ASHOR MOUNTAIN PLAIN

Summer camp starts in Dhofar

SALALAH: The 25th Summer Camp for Guides and Senior Guides was launched on Sunday at the permanent scout camp in the Ashor Mountain plain in Dhofar Governorate. Organised by the Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate General of Scouts, Guides and Student Activities, the camp is held under the slogan "Our Future Lies in Our Values" and will continue until 7 August.

More than 350 guides and senior guides from various governo-

rates of the Sultanate of Oman are participating in the camp, which features a diverse programme comprising training workshops, scientific and sightseeing visits, and sporting and cultural activities, including competitions and team games, alongside an event titled "National Day: My Heritage is My Identity".

The camp offers participants a hands-on experience to explore the natural assets that distinguish Dhofar Governorate, in a manner that contributes to the promotion

of domestic tourism and reinforces concepts of environmental sustainability through direct engagement with the governorate's nature and terrain, via an integrated package of specialised programmes and activities.

The camp aims to refine the personal and physical skills of the guides, develop their leadership abilities, stimulate innovation and teamwork, foster a spirit of adventure and challenge, and prepare them for active participation in community service. — **ONA**

Jabal Akhdar Festival draws over 100,000 visitors by the end of July

The festival brings together 95 participants representing SMEs, home-based producers, farmers, restaurants, cafés, and local retailers

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Al Jabal Al Akhdar Festival 2026 has attracted more than 100,000 visitors since its launch through the end of July, continuing its role in stimulating tourism and economic activity in Wilayat Al Jabal Al Akhdar.

The festival features a diverse 45-day programme combining entertainment, cultural, sports, and tourism experiences, while also providing direct marketing platforms for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), home-based businesses, and local farmers.

The festival, organised by the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate in cooperation with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (Riyada), with OQ Gas Networks as the strategic partner, brings together 95 participants representing SMEs, home-based producers, farmers, restaurants, cafés, and local retailers.

This provides direct outlets for marketing Omani products and creates new opportunities for business owners to benefit from the increased tourist activity during the summer season.

The festival also contributes to the local economy by boosting demand for products and services, increasing commercial activity, and creating an interactive environment where visitors and entrepreneurs can connect in one location. This reflects Al Dakhiliyah Governorate's commitment to leveraging its natural and tourism assets to strengthen local content and economic development.

The event offers a wide range of attractions for visitors of all ages, including daily performances on the main stage, a travelling carnival, a family zone, a youth zone, a children's world, a cinema dome, interactive inflatable games, a neon zone, and the "Floating Pan-



try" experience using three-dimensional hologram technology, presented for the first time in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

These attractions enhance the visitor experience and encourage longer stays at the festival.

Throughout August, the festival will continue to host a variety of special events, including performances by the Drive More One sports car team, a tourism hike through the villages of Al Jabal Al Akhdar, a sports caravan, a traditional games league, a running race, the Gulf Equestrian Forum, and the Fig and Olive Forum, which showcases the wilayat's agricultural and cultural heritage.

These activities broaden the festival's appeal to diverse audi-

ences and interests.

Ahmed bin Salem Al Toobi, Director General of Administrative and Financial Affairs at Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, said that the Al Jabal Al Akhdar Festival has become one of the governorate's key seasonal drivers of economic activity by attracting visitors and providing direct opportunities for SMEs, home-based businesses, and farmers to market their products.

He added that the festival also highlights the wilayat's unique natural, agricultural, and cultural heritage.

He noted that the governorate works each year to further develop the festival into an integrated platform that combines tourism, economic development, culture, and sports, thereby enhancing the

value of the tourism season and increasing benefits for the local community and business sector.

He emphasised that the diversity of activities and partnerships has expanded participation and enriched the visitor experience.

Hamdan bin Mohammed Al Riyami, a participating entrepreneur, said that the festival provides an excellent opportunity to promote pottery as one of Oman's traditional crafts closely tied to the country's cultural identity.

He noted that the strong visitor turnout has enabled him to reach a broad audience, introduce them to the pottery-making process and its cultural significance, and market his handcrafted products in a setting that blends tourism

with heritage.

He added that the festival serves as an important platform for artisans to showcase their products and engage directly with consumers, helping preserve traditional crafts while opening new opportunities to develop their businesses.

Meanwhile, Hatem bin Rashid bin Marhoon Al Fahdi, the owner of a plant nursery, explained that his participation aims to introduce visitors to the distinctive plants and agricultural products of Al Jabal Al Akhdar.

He said the festival has significantly increased public awareness of these products and strengthened their connection with visitors and nature enthusiasts.

He added that the steady flow

of visitors has helped expand his customer base and promote locally produced agricultural goods associated with the mountain's unique environment, emphasising that such events provide valuable support for agricultural enterprises and enhance their market presence.

Al Jabal Al Akhdar Festival 2026 will continue until August 29, offering a diverse 45-day program. Visitor numbers are expected to continue rising as the festival progresses, further strengthening Al Jabal Al Akhdar's position as a premier summer tourism destination and enhancing the contribution of tourism and commercial activities to the local economy of Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

North Al Batinah boosts its position as Oman’s major food security hub

North Al Batinah Governorate possesses a broad agricultural production base with the cultivated area reaching 99,676 feddans, alongside 61 agricultural nurseries and two agricultural research stations

SOHAR: Performance indicators for 2025 confirm continuous growth across various productive sectors in North Al Batinah Governorate, supported by a package of strategic projects, investment opportunities, infrastructure, and logistical services that contribute to raising production efficiency, developing food industries, and increasing exports.

Eng. Nasser Ali Al Marshoodi, Director General of the Directorate General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in North Al Batinah Governorate, said that the governorate possesses a broad agricultural production base, as the cultivated area by the end of 2025 reached approximately 99,676 feddans, compared to 94,242 feddans in the previous year, achieving a growth of 4.35 percent, alongside 61 agricultural nurseries and two agricultural research stations.

He added that vegetable production reached nearly 860,000 tonnes, fruit production exceed-

ed 87,000 tonnes, in addition to more than 225,000 tonnes of fodder crops.

He explained that the Ministry continued to implement agricultural support programmes that contributed to raising productivity and improving crop quality through expanding the cultivation of improved Omani wheat varieties and establishing model fields for mango, lemon, guava, fig, and sidr crops, among others.

This was alongside implementing intensive preventive programs that contributed to reducing red palm weevil infestations by 36.71 percent, and executing aerial spraying programmes to combat Dubas bugs for the autumn and spring generations, covering 48 villages over an area exceeding 818 feddans.

He pointed out that the livestock sector represents a key pillar in the governorate's production system, as the total number of livestock reached approximately 680,000 head, with an annual production reaching 500,000 litres of milk and 4 million poultry, supported by an integrated network of veterinary services including government and private clinics, laboratories, and veterinary pharmacies, in addition to grazing sites and a mobile clinic.

He indicated that vaccinating more than 841,000 animals during 2025 contributed to lowering disease rates, explaining that the governorate includes 13,218 fishermen, 5,431 fishing boats, 6 ports, and 8 fish markets, alongside 214 fish marketing outlets and 31 investment projects, enhancing the value chain for the fisheries sector.

He affirmed that agricultural development in the governorate relies on an advanced water infrastructure that includes 5 recharge and protection dams, in addition to 17 community partnership dams, cloud seeding stations, a wide network of hydrometric monitoring stations, groundwater monitoring wells, as well as 993 aflaj (tradi-



tional irrigation channels), while implementation of new water resource projects continues.

e stated that the governorate possesses an integrated food safety control system comprising 6 quarantine and food safety offices, 183 food establishments, 71 food warehouses, 27 automated bakeries, 14 water bottling plants, and 13 ice factories, in addition to testing laboratories, thereby enhancing product quality and the safety of food imports.

He noted that 50 opportunities were offered within food security projects during 2025 via the Tatweer platform with an investment value of OMR307 million across an area of 1,527 feddans, expected to provide approximately 200 job opportunities, stressing that these projects cover various plant, animal, fisheries, and water sectors.

He explained that Saham Agricultural City represents one of the most prominent future projects, established over an area of 92.3 square kilometres, including 22 square kilometres of agricultural area, taking into account integration between agricultural, residential, and service activities, thereby enhancing the model of integrated agricultural cities and supporting the achievement of

Oman Vision 2040 targets.

Al Marshoodi highlighted the diversity of agricultural investments in the governorate, where banana cultivation projects emerged on an area of 150.3 feddans with an investment value of OMR800,000 and a production capacity reaching 1,270 tonnes annually; onion projects over an area of 374 feddans with a production capacity of 2,888 tonnes; alongside onion and okra production projects across 100 feddans valued at OMR240,000; in addition to a lemon and mango project covering 50 feddans valued at OMR250,000; a fig project spanning 16.6 feddans with a production capacity of 31 tonnes; and potato projects over 510 feddans with a production capacity of 813 tonnes.

He added that the governorate is witnessing qualitative investments in food industries, most notably the sugar refining project represented by Oman Sugar Refinery plant, which is the first integrated megaproject of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman, constructed at Sohar Port and Freezone with an investment of OMR150 million across an area of 20 hectares, featuring a production capacity of up to 1 million tonnes of refined sugar annually and a storage capacity of 500,000 tonnes of raw sugar and 70,000 tonnes of refined sugar, making it one of the largest industrial projects supporting food security in the Sultanate of Oman.

He also explained that Development Bank contributed to funding 319 projects in the governorate with a value exceeding OMR7.86 million, covering agricultural, livestock, fisheries, water, and food industry sectors, thereby enhancing the growth of small and medium investments in the food sector.

He pointed out that the fodder cultivation project using treated water in the Wilayat of Saham is considered a model for sustainable investment, as it is established over an area of 35 feddans expandable to 103 feddans, valued at OMR350,000 with an annual production capacity of 1,200 tonnes and an Omanisation rate reaching 96 percent.

Meanwhile, the fodder cultivation and livestock breeding project in the Wilayat of A'Suwaig, established on an area of 100 feddans valued at OMR1.5 million with a production capacity of 1,100 tonnes, contributes to supporting red meat production and enhancing local market stability.

Al Marshoodi emphasised the role of the integrated logistics city

as a fundamental pillar in supporting the growth of agricultural exports by facilitating shipment clearance procedures and elevating service efficiency through specialised inspection platforms, laboratories, and advanced round-the-clock storage facilities, contributing to accelerating export movement and ensuring product safety and quality.

He explained that plant exports exceeded 81,000 tonnes during 2025, compared to 76,000 tonnes in the previous year, achieving a growth rate of 7.89 percent and surpassing the annual target of 6 percent, amid the city's growing role in enhancing the export capacity of Omani products.

He noted the execution of an Omani sesame and fava bean cultivation project in the Wilayat of A'Suwaig over a total area of 3 feddans—one feddan for sesame and two feddans for fava beans—with a productivity reaching approximately 500 kilograms per feddan annually, with the possibility of harvesting twice a year. He stated that the project has reached the marketing stage and the product is being introduced to local markets.

In the same context, he explained that the sugarcane cultivation project in the governorate, located in the Wilayat of Saham over an area of 30 feddans with a productivity reaching 50 tonnes per feddan, has entered the 100 percent marketing phase, with plans to enhance added value through processing the product, in addition to operating entirely on solar energy.

He added that several partnership agreements were signed, including a memorandum of understanding with Oman Sugar Refinery Company to purchase raw sugar, and another with the Oman Agriculture Development Company to utilise sugarcane waste, supporting the integration of production chains and enhancing sustainability in the agricultural sector. — **UNA**

KHAREEF DHOFAR SEASON

ROP highlights safety guidelines

< FROM A1 The Assistant Commander of the Dhofar Governorate Police also highlighted the role of the Wadi Harit Police Station in welcoming visitors and highlighting to them traffic safety guidelines and safe driving procedures in mountainous areas and on roads experiencing low horizontal visibility due to fog.

Lt. Colonel Sulaiman Said Al Hattali, Director of Operations at the Dhofar Governorate Police Command, explained that the security and traffic plan is based on three main pillars: main roads, event venues, and tourist destinations such as beaches and water springs. He added that the operations centre operates around the clock to receive all types of reports and complaints, dealing with them swiftly and effectively, whether they are traffic accidents or requests for assistance and guidance.

Lt. Colonel Khalifa Juma Al Qawaita'i, Assistant Commander of the Special Task Force Unit in Salalah, pointed out that the unit's operations focus on providing support and backup to police stations and other teams deployed across tourist sites through rapid intervention to address various security incidents.

He added that a motorcycle support force has been launched to ensure quick access to rugged areas and rapid response to all reports and emergencies. This force is deployed across beaches, plains, and open spaces to expand the scope of security coverage and keep pace with the growing movement of visitors.

The Dhofar Governorate Police Command seeks to utilise modern technologies and smart systems to regulate traffic and reduce congestion as part of its strategy to develop the traffic management system during the Khareef season.

In this context, Lt. Colonel Ahmed Said Ghawas, Assistant Director of Traffic at the Dhofar Governorate Police Command,

clarified that traffic regulation begins at the Wadi Harit Police Station checkpoint. A dedicated Quick Response (QR) code is provided, which drivers can scan with their phones to instantly receive a map of alternative routes without long waiting times, especially in the event of truck breakdowns or accidents.

He added that to alleviate congestion in vital locations within the Wilayat of Salalah, there has been cooperation with the Dhofar Municipality to grant traffic priority to the most congested lanes at traffic lights.

He noted that certain reckless behaviors and serious violations endanger lives and properties, disrupt smooth traffic flow, and breach public order. These include drifting, stunt driving, driving over green spaces, overtaking from the road shoulder, and leaning out of vehicle windows or sunroofs while driving. He emphasized that these serious violations are dealt with in strict accordance with the applicable traffic laws and regulations.

In the context of efforts aimed at enhancing safety along the coastlines during the season, Lt. Colonel Alawi Hafidh Al Haddad, Commander of the Coast Guard Police Unit in the Dhofar Governorate, stated that securing the beaches is a top priority. A workforce and various vehicles, including all-terrain vehicles and jet skis, have been deployed, especially at the most crowded beaches, to maintain the safety of beachgoers during the season.

He stressed that visiting beaches requires exercising caution and vigilance due to rough seas, high waves, and rip currents. Therefore, the focus is placed on the awareness and preventive aspects to avoid drowning incidents or falls from rocky cliffs.

The Mounted Police Station is also participating by conducting security patrols in various tourist areas, particularly in locations that are difficult to access with standard police vehicles. — **UNA**

وزارة الصحة
Ministry of Health

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) Per set
3029/2026/MOH/HQ-265	Maintenance works at DGMS New Offices (Old Center of Disease Surveillance and Control)	09-08-2026	02-09-2026	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board , Second, Third	● SME: 10 ● LO: 25
3028/2026/MOH/HQ-264	Maintenance Works in Madha Health Center at Musandam Governorate	09-08-2026	09-09-2026	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board Excellent, First, Second	● SME: 10 ● LO: 25
3027/2026/MOH/HQ-263	Supply & Installation of Medical Equipment (Spine Surgery) for Ibra Hospital at North Sharqiah Governorate	09-08-2026	02-09-2026	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board Excellent, First, Second, Third, Fourth	● SME: 10 ● LO: 25
3019/2026/MOH/HQ-261	Replacement of Mortuary Refrigeration Unit in Adam Hospital at Al Dakhiliyah Governorate	09-08-2026	09-09-2026	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board , Excellent, First, Second	● SME: 10 ● LO: 25
3016/2026/MOH/HQ-260	Upgrading and Replacement of Air Handling Unit for Operation Theater in Sohar Hospital at North Al Batinah Governorate	09-08-2026	09-09-2026	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board Excellent, First.	● SME: 10 ● LO: 25
3013/2026/MOH/HQ-259	Supply of Surgical Items (Respiratory Care) for the Royal Hospital	09-08-2026	02-09-2026	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, Excellent, First, Second, Third, Fourth	● SME: 10 ● LO: 32.5
2864/2026/MOH/HQ-246	Supply of Surgical Items and Instruments	06-08-2026	26-08-2026	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, Excellent, First, Second, Third, Fourth	● SME: 10 ● LO: 25
3094/2026/MOH/HQ-290	Supply & Installation of Air Cooled Chillers with Circulation Pumps in Ibra Hospital at North Al Sharqiyah Governorate	13-08-2026	09-09-2026	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, Excellent, First, Second.	● SME: 10 ● LO: 25
3089/2026/MOH/HQ-289	Supply of Surgical Items (Neurophysiological Monitoring)	20-08-2026	09-09-2026	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, Excellent, First, Second, Third, Fourth	● SME: 10 ● LO: 25
3088/2026/MOH/HQ-288	Supply and Installation of Printers & Computer Peripherals for Samail New Hospital at Al Dhakhliyah Governorate	09-08-2026	26-08-2026	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, Excellent, First, Second	● SME: 10 ● LO: 25

● Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.

● Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

● For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200 , Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

PROPERTY DAMAGED

8 killed in heavy rains in India’s Keralam state



NEW DELHI, At least eight people have lost their lives and 13 others have been injured in the Indian state of Keralam, following heavy rains that triggered landslides, flooding, and widespread property damage.

Keralam Chief Minister V.D. Satheesan stated in a release today that 27 homes have been completely destroyed and 196 others

partially damaged, with 5,792 people relocated to 209 relief camps across the state, according to India’s Press Trust of India news agency.

He added that the government would ensure assistance is provided to the families of the victims and to those who have lost their homes and livelihoods.

-ONA



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225 RESCUED

Five killed, 41 missing in Indonesia’s ferry fire

JAKARTA: Five people have died and another 41 are missing after a ferry caught fire in Indonesia on Sunday morning, authorities have confirmed.

The Mutiara Sentosa 2 ferry was carrying a total of 271 passengers and crew members from Indonesia’s second-largest city, Surabaya in East Java, across the Java Sea to Makassar in South Sulawesi.

Search and rescue officials said 225 people had been rescued by Sunday afternoon but that an operation was still ongoing.

Some passengers reportedly jumped overboard and were picked up by a nearby ship. Four other vessels were on standby nearby but could not approach because of the risk posed by flammable material on the ferry, officials said.

What have Indonesian authorities said?

“Based on preliminary reports from the field, passengers are waiting to be evacuated by the vessels in the vicinity of the incident site,” said Muhammad Masyhud, a senior official at the Indonesian Ministry of



Transportation.

“The safety of passengers and crew is our top priority. We are continuously coordinating with all relevant parties to ensure that the evacuation process can proceed quickly, safely, and effectively,” he added.

The fire, the cause of which remains unclear, was reported by the ship’s captain who, according to officials, has not been in contact since.

Indonesia is an archipelago of

more than 17,000 islands where marine accidents are a regular occurrence, due to a combination of unpredictable weather conditions and lax safety standards.

Last month, a ferry transporting more than 70 people sank while sailing near Selayar, a small tropical island south of the much larger Sulawesi.

At least four people were found dead, and 14 others remained missing until the end of the search operation. -OW

KEYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

12 militants killed in two operations in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistani military has announced the killing of 12 militants in two separate security operations conducted in the Waziristan region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and the Nushki area of Balochistan province.

The Inter-Services Public Relations, the media wing of the Pakistani armed forces, stated in a release today that the first operation

was carried out in the Razmak area of North Waziristan, resulting in the deaths of five militants. One security personnel was also killed, and quantities of weapons and ammunition were seized.

Nushki area of Balochistan

The statement added that the second operation was conducted in the Nushki area of Balochistan

province, resulting in the deaths of seven militants. Security forces also destroyed improvised explosive devices and ammunition found at the site of the operation.

The Pakistani military, according to the statement, affirmed that its security operations against militant groups are ongoing, emphasizing its continued efforts to strengthen security and stability in the border regions. -ONA

FROM ALLIES

Zelenskyy demands Patriot interceptors

KYIV: Following a deadly Russian strike, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Saturday issued an urgent demand to Western allies to transfer Patriot air defence interceptors to Ukraine, asserting that anti-ballistic missiles must defend lives rather than “sit in stockpiles”.

Zelenskyy’s address came after Russia launched a heavy aerial attack involving 35 missiles, predominantly ballistic, alongside nearly 190 drones of various types. He said that the strikes primarily targeted the capital, Kyiv, as well as critical infrastructure in surrounding municipalities including Brovary and Vyshneve. At least nine people were killed and 40 others injured in the Kyiv region alone.

Calling directly on Washington and European capitals to make the necessary political decisions, Zelenskyy warned that delay gives Moscow further opportunities to target Ukrainian civilians as Russia refines its high-speed attack tactics.

“Of course, we see every leader and every country that responds. But the only strong and just response - the one that truly achieves its goal and helps people - is additional support for us here in Ukraine, for our people, for our state. The world has Patriot missiles. What matters now is for our partners to make the political decision - the decision to provide the necessary

packages,” Zelenskyy said in his address shared on X.

“The United States knows what we need. Europe knows what we need. Anti-ballistic missiles must protect people - not sit in stockpiles. And every day without this relevant vital assistance gives Russia another chance to kill our people,” he added.

Zelenskyy pointed out that Moscow is increasingly using jet-powered “Shahed” drones, warning that Russia’s prolonging of the war allows it to develop new tactics that threaten security beyond Ukraine.

Beyond the capital region, Zelenskyy highlighted that constant FPV drone operations and bombardments were reported in Kherson, Mykolaiv, and the Dnipro region cities of Nikopol and Marhanets. Strikes also damaged an apartment building in Odesa and hit communities in Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, and Sumy, leaving dozens more wounded.

In tandem with air defence requests, Zelenskyy called for stricter international sanctions targeting individuals and entities involved in producing Russian ballistic weapons, launchers, and components. Claiming enforcement gaps within G7 jurisdictions, Zelenskyy urged international partners to shut down channels aiding Russia’s oil refining capacity and fuel sector to impede Moscow’s war effort. -ANI

AVIATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Indian PM Modi inaugurates Vizag airport, seeks Southeast Asian tourists

VIZIANAGARAM: Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Vizag Airport, named Alluri Sitarama Raju International Airport, located at Bhogapuram, marking a significant milestone in India’s aviation infrastructure journey and strengthening Andhra Pradesh’s position as a key economic and connectivity hub.

The airport has been developed on 2,200 acres of land by GMR Visakhapatnam International Airport Limited (GVIAL), a GMR Aero-led subsidiary, under the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model on a Design, Build, Finance, Operate and Transfer (DBFOT) basis.

The airport, completed several months ahead of schedule, will commence commercial operations on August 17, 2026.

Strategically located, the Vizag Airport is envisioned as the Gateway of the East, improving connectivity for northern Andhra Pradesh and its coastal belt, as well as southern Odisha.

With giants like Microsoft, Google, Reliance, and others announcing plans to set up Data Centres near Vizag Airport, Visakhapatnam is all set to become the economic capital of the East.

The airport is expected to act as a powerful catalyst for economic growth, tourism, employment generation, and inclusive socio-economic development, directly supporting the Government of India’s vision of Viksit Bharat powered by



modern, resilient infrastructure.

Dubbed as a powerful engine of growth, the Vizag Airport will strengthen trade, boost exports, and unlock the immense tourism potential of Andhra Pradesh by enhancing connectivity for people and businesses.

The airport is expected to further strengthen Visakhapatnam’s emergence as a major economic centre, supported by significant investments in data centres, manufacturing, logistics and technology sectors.

Vizag Airport is the third Greenfield airport developed by GMR Airports Limited (GAL) and the

seventh airport to be operated by the Group, after Delhi, Hyderabad, Goa, Medan (Indonesia), Mactan Cebu and Nagpur. It also reinforces GMR’s track record of delivering large-scale infrastructure projects efficiently and ahead of schedule.

Speaking on the occasion, G B S Raju, Business Chairman, GMR Airports Limited, said, “Airports are powerful engines of economic growth. The Vizag Airport has been developed with a long-term vision to unlock opportunities in tourism, trade, cargo and aviation-linked industries. We are confident that the Airport will emerge as a

major gateway for India’s eastern corridor, driving investment, employment and regional prosperity for decades to come.”

Indana Prabhakar Rao, Deputy Managing Director, GMR Group, said, “The successful completion of Vizag Airport reflects the dedication and expertise of thousands of professionals who worked tirelessly to bring this vision to life. The airport blends modern design, advanced technology and sustainability, creating a world-class facility that will serve passengers, businesses and communities for generations.”

SGK Kishore, Executive Director and Chief Innovation Officer, GMR Airports, added, “The Vizag Airport represents the next generation of airport infrastructure in India. Built with a strong focus on technology, and passenger experience, it combines operational excellence with future-ready capabilities. We are proud to deliver a world-class gateway that will support the region’s growth aspirations.”

Kanwarbir Singh Kalra, Chief Executive Officer, GMR Visakhapatnam International Airport Limited (GVIAL), said, “The inauguration of Alluri Sitarama Raju International Airport marks the culmination of an extraordinary journey of collaboration, engineering excellence and unwavering commitment from our teams and partners.” -ANI

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Trump cancels planned attacks on Iran, brings Israel into fold

Trump said there have been urgent appeals from Middle Eastern Countries to hold off any attack as “perimeters of a deal has been agreed to”

WASHINGTON, DC: US President Donald Trump has announced the cancellation of a planned attack on Iran, subject to being able to rapidly make a deal with the Arabian Gulf country, while noting that Israel has joined him in this commitment.

Trump said there have been urgent appeals from Middle Eastern Countries to hold off any attack as “perimeters of a deal has been agreed to”. He asserted this would include immediate and total opening of the Hormuz Strait and an end to Iran’s nuclear threat.

The announcement hinges on



two pivotal concessions from Tehran: the unhindered opening of the Strait of Hormuz to re-establish international maritime traffic through the critical global energy chokepoint, and an enforceable end to Iran’s nuclear advancement programme.

While the cancellation of the strike signals a temporary reprieve from total escalation, Trump emphasised that the pause is entirely conditional on Iran’s readiness to “rapidly make a deal.”

“The USA is locked and loaded and ready to go against the Islamic Republic of Iran, at levels of Military Terror, Strength, and Power not seen since World War II. Despite this, we have just been asked

agreed, for the future benefit of the WORLD and, likewise, the survival of a successful and prosperous Iran, to cancel the attack, subject to being able to rapidly make a DEAL. The Country of Israel joins me in this commitment,” he added.

“Get to work, everybody, and get it DONE,” Trump urged stakeholders, leaving the ball in the court of negotiators to translate the framework into a binding treaty.

Hours before Trump’s announcement, Iran cautioned the United States against any “adventurous action”, declaring that it would respond decisively should American forces launch fresh strikes on Iranian targets, thereby heightening tensions across the Middle East.

The warning followed remarks by US President Donald Trump on Friday, in which he said he was losing faith in talks with Tehran and threatened additional attacks, stating the US would be “hitting them” if required.

According to Araghchi’s Telegram account, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi informed the Pakistani and Turkish officials that Iran would respond decisively to any “aggression” and reviewed the implications of what he termed destabilising moves by the US, along with the rising threat of regional instability.

Notably, the inclusion of Israel marks a significant diplomatic pivot as a top American military commander stationed in Europe also cautioned the Pentagon on Saturday that Washington may soon confront hard decisions on missile defence resources as the ongoing conflict with Iran continues to place heavy pressure on American military stockpiles.

The development was reported by The Washington Post, which noted that the chief of US European Command, Gen. Alexus Grynkech, informed Pentagon officials earlier this week that the United States lacks adequate naval assets to continue intercepting Iranian ballistic missile strikes on Israel. The account emerges against a backdrop of mounting concerns about the depletion of advanced US interceptor missiles after months of military activity in the Middle East.

While the fresh agreement announced by US, with no official confirmation or acceptance from Iran, offers a temporary reprieve from total escalation, the cessation of the conflict is entirely conditional on the swift finalisation of the text. **-ANI**

PRaises TRUMP

Don’t think Iran has ever faced President like Trump: Rubio

WASHINGTON, DC: US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Saturday praised President Donald Trump’s decisive strategy against Tehran, stating that the Iranian regime has never encountered an American leader who acts with such directness.

Speaking in an interview with Fox News, Rubio reflected on Washington’s approach to the Islamic Republic and highlighted a sharp shift from past precedent, asserting that Tehran can no longer rely on usual tactics to evade consequences.

“I don’t think the Iranian regime has ever faced a President like Trump, which is somebody that actually takes action,” Rubio said. “They got used to, for 20-30 years -- not just the U.S., but the broader world -- allowing them to get away with things like lying, breaking deals.”

Detailing the impact of recent military actions, Rubio stated that US strikes have “severely degraded” Iran’s defensive capabilities, claiming that the regime has lost the conventional shield it once relied on for protection.

“They still have missiles and they still have drones, and they



can still do damage,” Rubio acknowledged. He emphasised, however, that Iran no longer possesses the “conventional shield that they were going to hide behind.”

He asserted this as the reason why Iran now appears eager to negotiate deals regarding denuclearisation and the Strait of Hormuz, emphasising that Washington is dealing from a position of absolute strength.

“And that’s changed the whole dynamic. It’s the only reason why they are now willing and in some cases, seem eager, to do a deal on denuclearisation, to do a deal on the straits. Because we are now approaching them from a position of strength, not from a position of weakness,” he added.

Addressing Tehran’s foreign policy goals and long-standing efforts to project power across the Middle East, the Secretary of

State emphasised that Washington must significantly raise the stakes to curb the regime’s regional influence.

“They want to export their revolution,” Rubio added. “That does have to change -- and the only way you’re going to change that is if you make the price of it too high for them to be able to pay.”

Hours after Rubio’s remarks, US President Donald Trump announced the cancellation of a planned attack on Iran, subject to being able to rapidly make a deal with the Persian Gulf country, while noting that Israel has joined him in this commitment.

Trump said there have been urgent appeals from Middle Eastern Countries to hold off any attack as “perimeters of a deal have been agreed to”.

He asserted this would include immediate and total opening of the Hormuz Strait and an end to Iran’s nuclear threat.

While the cancellation of the strike signals a temporary reprieve from total escalation, Trump emphasised that the pause is entirely conditional on Iran’s readiness to “rapidly make a deal.” **-ANI**

IN PERU

13 killed in tourist aircraft crash

LIMA: At least 13 people were killed when a small aircraft crashed in Peru, according to police, news agency Al Jazeera reported.

The incident occurred on Saturday as the aircraft was transporting passengers, identified by officials as predominantly tourists, to observe the renowned Nazca Lines, a collection of historic archaeological sites featuring massive geoglyphs carved into the ground.

“We have information that 11 passengers and two crew members have died,” Police Major Jorge Andrade told reporters at the crash site in the southern region of the country.

According to Al Jazeera, local media outlets indicated that the crash site was rapidly engulfed in fire, making immediate rescue operations impossible.

The aircraft had reportedly taken off from Pisco in the department of Ica, while further details regarding the cause were not immediately available.

Peru remains a premier international travel destination, attracting visitors from around the world to explore the nation’s heritage landmarks, including the Incan citadel of Machu Picchu and the massive Indigenous stone structures of Cusco.

Al Jazeera reported that more than 4.1 million international tourists visited the South American nation of nearly 35 million inhabitants in 2025, based on figures released by Peru’s Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism.

The famous Nazca Lines are situated in the desert region adjacent to the country’s southern coast, running along the Andean mountain range.

Dating back to between 500 BC and 500 AD, the site has been for-

Peru remains a premier international travel destination, attracting visitors from around the world to explore the nation’s heritage landmarks

mally designated a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) due to its profound cultural value.

UNESCO defines the archaeological site as “among archaeology’s greatest enigmas because of their quantity, nature, size and continuity”.

“The geoglyphs depict living creatures, stylised plants and imaginary beings, as well as geometric figures several kilometres long,” UNESCO stated on its official portal, adding that “They are believed to have had ritual astronomical functions.”

Due to their vast physical scale, the ancient figures are predominantly viewed from aircraft, allowing passengers to clearly observe the carved depictions of animals, including monkeys, hummingbirds and cats.

Saturday’s fatal crash involved an aircraft belonging to the fleet of Peruvian sightseeing operator Aerodiana, Al Jazeera reported, citing local accounts.

-ANI

UPSCALE DINING VENUE

Restaurant explosion in central Moscow kills three, injures 21

MOSCOW: A homemade bomb detonated during a private function at an upscale dining venue in central Moscow on Saturday, resulting in three fatalities, including the female suspect carrying the explosive, and leaving 21 others wounded, CNN reported, citing statements from Russia’s National Anti-Terrorism Committee provided to state news agency RIA Novosti.

According to the committee, an unidentified woman tried to gain access to Balzi Rossi restaurant on Kudrinskaya Square while in possession of what security officials assessed was an improvised explosive device. The device detonated prematurely outside the premises, killing both the security guard who intercepted her and a restaurant patron.

Law enforcement agencies have not yet established the identity of the woman or determined the motive behind the attack. It remains unconfirmed whether the suspect intentionally triggered the detonation.

The blast occurred at approximately 8:10 p.m. local time (1:10 p.m. ET) adjacent to an outdoor



terrace at Building 1 on Kudrinskaya Square, situated just outside the entrance to Balzi Rossi, as reported by Russian state news agency TASS, citing the Main Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The establishment was closed to the general public at the time of the explosion to accommodate a private banquet, according to details posted on its official website.

In the aftermath of the explosion, an investigative task

force, alongside emergency response personnel, immediately secured the area to conduct forensic operations.

The Kudrinskaya Square building forms part of Moscow’s iconic “Seven Sisters”, a collection of historic Stalinist skyscrapers constructed during the 1950s. The prominent residential structure is situated along the Garden Ring in the city’s central Presnensky district.

Balzi Rossi operates on the

ground floor of the historic tower. Following the incident, head chef Carmine Alfieri expressed gratitude for the public support extended to the establishment, confirming that the staff remained unharmed while downplaying the severity of the event.

Alfieri said on Instagram, without elaborating, “We’re all fine, and our restaurant and kitchen are in perfect condition; there was just a minor issue at the restaurant entrance.” **-DW**



ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: The aircraft had reportedly taken off from Pisco in the department of Ica, while further details regarding the cause were not immediately available. **-credit**

SPORTS

Bumrah ruled out of Sri Lanka two-Test series amid recovery

India are already without Harshit Rana and Nitish Kumar Reddy for the series, while Washington Sundar will also miss at least the first Test

MUMBAI: Jasprit Bumrah will not travel to Sri Lanka for India's two-Test series in August.

Cricinfo reported that the BCCI medical team has advised Bumrah not to rush back to action as he needs more time to completely recover from the left knee issue he has been nursing since the T20 World Cup earlier this year. No replacement has been named yet.

Bumrah has not bowled since the second ODI of the England series in Cardiff on July 16. He was ruled out of the final match of the series, played at Lord's, with BCCI saying an impact injury while fielding in the Cardiff ODI was the reason.

It is learned that immediately after the England series got over, Bumrah took an injection to the knee based on the plan drawn up by the BCCI medical team for his long-term fitness. Bumrah reached the BCCI's Centre of Excellence



(CoE) in Bengaluru this week and underwent fitness tests. It is understood that the medical team felt Bumrah could risk sitting out for an extended period if he returned to bowling right away as that could potentially aggravate the issue.

Details of the exact nature and extent of the injury are yet to be confirmed, but Bumrah had trav-

elled to the CoE in late March as well to get conditioning and fitness clearances for the IPL, which had come a day prior to Mumbai Indians' season opener. Bumrah played 13 matches in the IPL season, sitting out MI's last fixture.

India are already without the services of Harshit Rana and Nitish Kumar Reddy, who are out with

hamstring and quadriceps injuries, respectively. Washington Sundar has also been ruled out of the first Test with a hamstring injury, while Akash Deep is in the middle of a long layoff following stress reactions on his back.

Immediately after India lost the ODI series in England, captain Shubman Gill had put the spotlight

on the frequent injuries the India players had been going down with, saying "if after every match some player is missing then somewhere we are missing a trick".

Gill's larger fear was if the trend continued, it would have a severe impact on India's performance at the 2027 World Cup, which will be played next October-November

in southern Africa.

Gill had said that if his players were not able to "finish a two-to-three-match series", it would be a concern at the global tournament, where teams will play a minimum of 11 games.

"It becomes a little difficult that you come to the ground on the morning and you come to know a player has a niggle, then it's almost like do you want to take a chance," Gill said. "Some player is 80% fit, you are playing with five bowlers and if this player comes out after bowling five overs, then who will bowl? This is difficult. So as a group we need improved our fitness and all those things."

The first Test in Sri Lanka begins on August 15 in Galle and the second on August 23 at the SSC in Colombo. Ahead of the series, the team will play a three-day practice match in Colombo, starting on August 7.

The series in Sri Lanka is India's first in the World Test Championship cycle since the 2-0 home defeat to South Africa in November. Before that, they had drawn a five-Test series in England 2-2 and beaten West Indies 2-0 at home. India are fifth in the WTC standings, while Sri Lanka are sixth.

India squad for Sri Lanka Tests: Shubman Gill (capt), KL Rahul (vice-capt), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rishabh Pant (wk), B Sai Sudharshan*, Dhruv Jurel (wk), Ravindra Jadeja, Kuldeep Yadav, Manav Suthar, Mohammed Siraj, Prasidh Krishna, Gurnoor Brar, Devdutt Padikkal, Saransh Jain. (*Subject to fitness clearance). - Agencies

ODI SERIES



Security plans in place for any Afghanistan protests, says Cricket Ireland

DUBLIN: Cricket Ireland (CI) has said that "appropriate" security plans have been drawn up for the forthcoming men's one-day series against Afghanistan amid the possibility of protests.

The governing body has been liaising with stakeholders, including the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), to ensure the five ODIs pass off without incident.

Cricket Ireland's decision to host the series has been criticised because of the plight of women in Afghanistan who face severe restrictions on their rights and freedoms, with widespread barriers to education, employment, movement, public participation and personal autonomy under Taliban rule. The first two ODIs will be played in Bready next Wednesday and Friday, with the remaining three fixtures at Stormont on August 10, 12 and 15.

"Appropriate security measures are in place, and all necessary arrangements have been made to ensure the safety and security of players, supporters, officials and staff," Cricket Ireland said in a statement. The PSNI said it did "not comment on operational matters" but an "appropriate and proportionate policing plan" will

be in place to "ensure the safety of everyone involved" should there be protests at the matches.

"The right to freedom of speech and peaceful assembly are fundamental human rights. They are protected in law and allow individuals to engage in peaceful protest," said a PSNI spokesperson.

"However, these rights are limited by the need to uphold the rights of others, protect public health and safety, minimise disruption to normal life and by the need to prevent and detect crime.

"If the Police Service identifies potential criminal offences, or unacceptable impact on the rights of others, we will take lawful and proportionate action."

Neither England nor Australia schedule bilateral series against Afghanistan, although they fulfil fixtures against them at major international tournaments.

Cricket Ireland chief executive Sarah Keane said shortly after she was appointed earlier this year the decision to host Afghanistan this summer came with some "moral discomfort" given the plight of women in the country. Female participation in sport has effectively been outlawed since the Taliban returned to power in 2021. - Agencies

ENGLAND CRICKET

Root: Fleming a 'big reason' I wanted captaincy again

LONDON: Joe Root has described Stephen Fleming's appointment as England Test head coach as a "big reason" for his own desire to return to the captaincy, four years after his resignation.

The ECB confirmed Fleming and Root's new roles on Thursday, succeeding Brendon McCullum and Ben Stokes respectively. Rob Key, England's managing director, said Fleming's input had informed the decision to offer Root the captaincy again, with Key suggesting the vacancy had arrived "too soon" for Stokes' vice-captain Harry Brook.

Root worked alongside two permanent head coaches, Trevor Bayliss and Chris Silverwood, during his initial five-year stint as England's captain between 2017 and 2022. Paul Collingwood was in interim charge for his final series, against West Indies in early 2022, and he worked with Brendon McCullum for one Test at The Oval last month in Stokes' absence.

"If I'm being brutally honest, it [Fleming's appointment] was a big reason why I wanted to do it," Root told the ECB. "I'm very excited by the way he sees the game, where he sees us sit as a team, and the work that we have to do to get to where we want to get to. All of that got me very excited about taking this role on.

"I'm very much looking forward to working with him. He's obviously got a wealth of experience and done some amazing things within the game as a player and as a coach, and I'm very much looking forward to the next little while, and us trying to build something pretty special together."

Root has captained England more than anyone else in Test cricket, with a mixed record of 27 wins, 27 defeats and 11 draws. He said that he feels like a "hugely different" person to when he quit the role in 2022, and that he would take inspiration from Stokes and McCullum's leadership.

"The last four years have been the most fun I've had in professional cricket, and a big part of that was down to the way that they got me to see the game, how I fit into that side, and the experiences that we managed to create on and off the field," Root said.

"Clearly, the last little while is probably what's fresh in everyone's mind, but you're looking at a four-year period where we did a lot of amazing things. I've taken a



lot from that, and I feel it will be a big part of how I want to approach things moving forward as a leader of this team.

"The thing that stands out the most for me is the shift in mind-

set that was created around how we want to play the game: trying to strip the fear away from things, make sure guys feel that they can really just allow their talent to come out as frequently

as possible, and in big moments in games. The more that can happen, the better."

England are expected to pick a squad for their three-match Test series against Pakistan next week, while most of their players are involved in the Hundred. They are only due to have two full training days before the first Test at Headingley on August 19, for which Marcus Trescothick will be interim head coach with Fleming in New Zealand due to family commitments.

"It's always a huge honour to turn up to the start of a Test series and to get your teeth into what will be a really good contest against a good team in Pakistan," Root said. "I'll be very much looking forward to it, and getting all the guys in.

"[The Pakistan series] is going to be slightly different. It's going to be quite tricky. It's a very short turnaround [from the Hundred, which ends on August 16]. So it's going to be important that we start really well in those two days that we have leading into the game."

DATA CENTRE CAPACITY
India's data centre capacity could rise to around 3-3.6 GW by 2030, with hyperscalers and emerging AI-focused cloud players expected to become the dominant drivers of new demand, according to a report based on expert assessment cited by Axis Capital.

MARKET

BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSX INDEX ENDS HIGHER
The MSX index closed at 7,295.45 points, up by 0.25% from previous close. The Sharia Index ended up by 0.22% at 580.20 points. Oman Oil Marketing, up 9.91%, was the top gainer while, Shell Oman Marketing, down 3.75%, was the top loser.

Oman's domestic liquidity exceeds OMR28.6 billion by end of May

The data showed that the narrow money supply (M1) increased by 26.9% to OMR9.0730 billion at the end of May 2026, compared with OMR7.1483 billion during the same period last year

MUSCAT: Total domestic liquidity (M2) in the Sultanate of Oman recorded an increase of 12.7% to reach OMR28.6012 billion by the end of May 2026, compared with OMR25.3760 billion during the corresponding period in 2025, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).
The data showed that the narrow money supply (M1) increased

by 26.9% to OMR9.0730 billion at the end of May 2026, compared with OMR7.1483 billion during the same period last year.
Total currency issued rose by 8.9 per cent to OMR1.7579 billion by the end of May 2026, compared with OMR1.6142 billion at the end of May 2025.
Foreign assets increased by 2.5% to OMR7.5936 billion, compared with OMR7.4101 billion during the

corresponding period of 2025.
Private sector deposits with commercial banks and Islamic windows grew by 10.5% to OMR24.2188 billion by the end of May 2026, compared with OMR21.9112 billion during the same period of the previous year.
Total loans and financing extended by commercial banks and Islamic windows increased by 11.5 per cent to OMR37.4224 billion by the end of May 2026, compared with OMR33.5629 billion during the corresponding period in 2025.
Meanwhile, the average interest rate on total loans declined by 4.0 per cent to 5.327 per cent at the end of May 2026, compared with 5.551 per cent during the same period last year.
The Omani Rial nominal effective exchange rate index also declined by 2.8 per cent, falling from 117.6 points at the end of May 2025 to 114.3 points by the end of May 2026. -ONA



GOVERNMENT DATA



India's renewable power hits record high, coal share falls to annual low

NEW DELHI: Renewable energy's share in India's electricity generation rose to a record 20 per cent in July, while coal's contribution fell to its lowest level in a year, reflecting the country's growing reliance on clean energy, according to government data.
Renewable power generation climbed 30 per cent year-on-year to 36.25 billion kilowatt-hours (kWh) in July, driven by higher output from solar and wind projects. As a result, coal's share in the power mix declined to 65.7 per cent, down from 69 per cent in June, based on Reuters calculations using Grid-India data.
The milestone comes after solar and wind generation together crossed 100 gigawatts for the first time on July 13, meeting a record 42.8 per cent of the country's electricity demand during daytime hours.
"Most of the peak power demand is now occurring during the daytime, when solar generation is at its highest," said Manoj Kumar, an analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA), noting that the increasing contribution of renewables is

reshaping India's power generation profile.
Despite its reduced share, electricity generated from coal-fired plants increased 12.8 per cent from a year earlier to 119.4 billion kWh in July, as overall power demand continued to rise.
Analysts attributed the increase in coal generation to weaker hydropower output caused by El Niño-related weather conditions. Lower rainfall has reduced hydroelectric generation while above-normal temperatures have boosted demand for cooling, particularly during nighttime when solar power is unavailable.
Hydropower output declined for a second consecutive month, prompting CREA to warn that reduced hydro generation and rising electricity demand could create a power shortfall of nearly 18 billion kWh, increasing dependence on coal-fired generation.
Overall, India's electricity generation rose 10.4 per cent year-on-year to 181.79 billion kWh in July, highlighting robust growth in electricity demand even as renewable energy reached record levels. -Agencies

IN SECOND HALF OF 2026

China's central bank to enhance financial support for real economy

BEIJING: China's central bank said Sunday that it will continue to implement a moderately loose monetary policy in the second half (H2) of 2026, strengthen counter-cyclical adjustment, and take solid steps to promote sustained and improved economic development.
The People's Bank of China (PBOC) said in a statement released after its work conference for the second half of the year that it will make comprehensive use of monetary policy tools and adjust them in a timely manner.
Also, the PBOC will maintain ample liquidity, guide financial institutions to enhance the balance of credit supply, and align

the growth of social financing and money supply with expected targets for economic growth and overall price levels. The PBOC will promote the high-quality development of a "technology board" in the bond market, steadily implement risk-sharing instruments for technological innovation and private-enterprise bonds, and explore the sharing of information and integrated application of data in the sci-tech finance sector.
It will also improve the credit enhancement system for private enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and strengthen financial service capabilities for SMEs in H2. -Xinhua

OMAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

Commercial registrations in Al Wusta Governorate reach 7,000

HAIMA: Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) branch in Al Wusta Governorate seeks to stimulate economic, investment, and commercial activity through a set of programmes and initiatives supporting business owners and investors, as well as working to facilitate the investment climate in the governorate.
Active commercial registrations in the governorate are witnessing rapid growth amid strong demand from business owners, small and medium enterprise (SME) owners, and entrepreneurs to establish promising investment projects.
Abdulrahim Zayed Al Junaibi, Director of the OCCI branch in Al Wusta Governorate, explained to Oman News Agency (ONA) that the number of commercial registrations up to the beginning of the current year reached nearly 7,000 commercial registrations, amid high demand from investors and those wishing to establish promising commercial projects.
He noted that this reflects continuous growth in economic activity in the governorate and confirms the growing confidence of investors and business owners in the promising investment opportunities provided by the governorate across various sectors.
Al Junaibi said that the OCCI branch in Al Wusta Governorate is keen on empowering the private sector and enhancing the business environment by implementing several qualitative initiatives and programmes. Most notable among these is organising the Duqm Forum, which is dedicated in each edition to a different economic sector, such as smart cities and the blue economy, with the participation of experts and specialists from within the Sultanate of Oman and abroad, aiming to transfer knowledge and open new horizons for business owners.



to developing entrepreneurs' capabilities and stimulating a culture of innovation.
Regarding the delegations and visits organised by the branch, Abdulrahim Al Junaibi stressed that the branch pays great attention to strengthening economic relations and opening new markets

for business owners.
It organised visits for a number of trade delegations, the most recent of which was to the Republic of Tanzania, aiming to examine economic experiences in the logistics, industrial, and agricultural sectors, and promote the investment opportunities offered by the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.
The branch also organised numerous visits to government institutions and companies operating in the governorate to discuss the needs of the private sector and enhance cooperation opportunities. During the coming period, it intends to undertake visits to Dhofar and North Al Batinah Governorates to learn about industrial and logistical experiences and visit factories and ports, as well as introduce the investment opportunities enjoyed by Al Wusta Governorate.
Regarding localized projects in the governorate, Al Junaibi pointed out that Al Wusta Governorate is witnessing growing growth in localized projects, benefiting from the economic capabilities it possesses—foremost among which

is the Special Economic Zone at Duqm—alongside projects in the logistics, industrial, fisheries, tourism, and agricultural sectors.
The chamber's branch works with various partners to encourage business owners to take advantage of these opportunities and enhance the participation of small and medium enterprises in development projects, contributing to generating added value for the local economy.
Regarding economic activity in the governorate, Al Junaibi explained that economic momentum in Al Wusta Governorate is experiencing rapid development, supported by strategic projects and investments taking place in the governorate, led by the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. The logistics services, industrial, fisheries, agriculture, and tourism sectors are also witnessing remarkable growth, enhancing the governorate's position as one of the promising investment destinations in the Sultanate of Oman and creating an attractive environment for domestic and foreign investment. -ONA

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Mechanical Engineer with 11+ yrs experience in projects & marketing in Oman having valid D/L. Seeking suitable placement. Contact : 91162085

ENGINEER

Indian male 31, having Oman experience of 8 yrs(sales & project Engineer) with valid D/L. Contact : +968 75227433 . nafeesnooruddin@gmail.com

Pakistani male, Diploma in Mechanical Engineering, having 10+ yrs experience as Sales Engineer in UAE, 15 yrs experience as operation manager in Oman with D/L, looking for job. Contact: 99495131. Email : Manzoor.ahmed1997@gmail.com

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Washington state declares state of emergency as wildfires rage

The Washington Department of Natural Resources has cautioned that under these conditions, “new fires can grow out of control rapidly, our aircraft response may be limited by wind and smoke

WASHINGTON: Washington Governor Bob Ferguson declared a statewide state of emergency and burn ban on Saturday morning as an unprecedented wildfire crisis gripped the region, with active blazes scorching nearly 3,000 acres.



According to CNN, the emergency declarations followed a historic decision by the National Weather Service, which issued a rare Particularly Dangerous Situation Red Flag Warning across Central and Eastern Washington. Marking the first time such an alert has been invoked in the state, officials warned of severe fire weather driven by historically

strong winds and low humidity.

CNN reported that the Washington Department of Natural Resources has cautioned that under these conditions, “new fires can grow out of control rapidly, our aircraft response may be limited by wind and smoke, and our already taxed wildland firefighters will be in more dangerous conditions.”

Governor Ferguson has also announced plans to survey the damage firsthand.

“I’ll be heading to Spokane Sunday morning to meet with responders and monitor the emergency response. My thoughts are with the first responders and all those under evacuation tonight. If you are in the area, please continue

to be vigilant and follow directions of emergency personnel,” he wrote in a post on X.

At the centre of the ongoing emergency is the fast-moving Old Trails Fire in Spokane County. Fueled by extreme winds, the blaze has torn through nearly 3,000 acres, threatening roughly 4,000 buildings and forcing thousands of families to flee under heavy, smoke-choked skies, according to Washington State Forester George Geissler, CNN reported.

Emergency management officials issued mandatory Level 3 “Go Now” evacuation orders across multiple Spokane neighbourhoods, opening an emergency shelter at a community college.

Fires burning in towns

“When the sun sets and the sun rises in the morning, I think we’re going to be in shock to see some of the scenes that emerge out of there. You’ve got fires burning in towns. You’ve got level 3 evacuations like I haven’t seen before. This is a very dangerous and very complex series of events,” CNN reported Washington National Guard Major General Gent Welsh as saying.

Beyond residential zones, the relentless fire has pushed toward

Riverside State Park and forced emergency evacuations at critical municipal infrastructure, including a local veterans’ hospital, a water reclamation facility, and a waste energy plant, CNN reported.

A concurrent blaze, the Fairview Fire, has compounded evacuation pressures in the county, alongside a rare county-level Fire Warning issued by the weather service.

According to CNN, the disaster has severely crippled local infrastructure. Avista Utilities reported at least 25 active outages cutting power to nearly 13,400 customers due to emergency shutoffs, while monitoring group NetBlocks confirmed widespread internet disruptions across fire-affected zones.

To bolster local containment and rescue operations, the Washington National Guard has mobilised units to assist with traffic control and evacuations, making an initial deployment of 30 personnel available alongside a broader manpower pool.

Statewide, firefighters are confronting 10 large active fires spanning over 200,000 acres. Crews from 14 states and an incoming Australian firefighting team have joined local forces to combat the historic surge. **-ANI**

LARGEST EVACUATIONS

French firefighters extinguish a massive blaze, 200,000 return home

PARIS: The signal to move comes suddenly — and within a minute or so the fire truck is full and speeding off into the distance, a cloud of orange dust swirling in its wake. “There’s always a bit of adrenaline when you get the call,” marine firefighter Julien says. “But we’re trained; we’re prepared.”

Maitre Julien — whom DW can only identify by rank and first name — is part of Marseille-based battalion deployed to France’s Gironde region to tackle a wildfire which prompted the largest evacuations in the country since World War II.

Some 264 firefighters were injured in the fight against the Gironde fire, four of whom lost their lives. In nearby towns, French flags still fly at half mast to mark the loss. “It’s always on our mind,” Lieutenant Damien, another marine firefighter, explains as his team members haul the firehose out behind him.

Big battles on little sleep

Letitia, a firefighter and medic, said she tries to ask how colleagues are feeling “without being too intrusive.”

“It’s the fatigue above all,” she says when asked about the most common problem affecting her colleagues. “They’re sleeping very little.”

“Do you see all of that?” Maitre Julien asks, gesturing out the car window as he drives past rows of blackened trees and swathes of scorched earth at the roadside. “All of that’s already burned. But you can see small peels of smoke here and there. We absolutely have to extinguish those so fires don’t restart.”

When Julien pulls up at another hotspot, the risk of flare-ups comes sharply into focus: The air smells burned and a cloud of white smoke fills the sky. Within about 20 minutes, the smoke turns thick and black, and the fire — previously under control — was visible burning bright again through the trees.

Here by the firefighters’ side are improvised teams of local volunteers — farmers and tradesmen and women who took it upon themselves to use their tractors or vans or four-by-fours to transport water to firefighters on the front line, and often head into the blazes themselves without proper protective gear or training.

“We’re here because we’re needed. And because we want to help,” Steven Page, one volunteer, told DW. Maitre Julien said they played a “primordial” role, saving firefighters “precious time” in the fight.

Winning a ‘David and Goliath’ fight, together

At times, firefighters said, this felt like a “David and Goliath” battle. But they came out on top. By Saturday, France’s Interior Ministry declared the fire was no longer progressing. Most of the



220,000 evacuees were allowed to return home.

That’s keeping EU crisis management chief Hadja Lahbib busy. She visited Bordeaux on Thursday, meeting local officials in Ornano fire station’s crisis room and learning how they felled trees and vegetation across 150 kilometers (93 miles) of land to create tactical firebreaks and prevent the flames from reaching the city.

Dotted around the green lines on the map representing firebreaks are different European flags: Germany, Slovakia, Portugal, Spain, Belgium, Sweden, Czechia, Switzerland, Turkey — some of the countries that sent firefighting aircraft, firefighting crews, and technical teams through the EU’s crisis management mechanism.

More EU funds to fight climate-fueled fires?

“Climate change isn’t knocking on our door. It’s here,” Lahbib told DW on Thursday. Last year, her team laid out an EU crisis preparedness plan designed to better anticipate and prevent wildfires and other disasters through EU cooperation. “For that we need the means,” she said.

“We proposed a budget of €10.7 billion (\$12.3 billion), which is an important amount of money, but at the same time, it pays back,” she said. “It’s better to prevent — to anticipate — then to recover. So I hope that member states will follow our proposal.”

EU states pay into a communal seven-year budget for the bloc. Some national governments facing their own financial woes — including Germany — are skeptical about the EU Commission’s bid to lock in its biggest-ever global budget.

Lessons for the future

Climate campaigners also accuse the EU of walking back on big green promises as the bloc pursues a red-tape-cutting agenda to better compete with the likes of China and the US.

“This isn’t ‘just nature.’ Decades

Extremely difficult for our country, says Greek PM

ATHENS: Addressing the outbreak of the ongoing wildfires, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis outlined the severe operational obstacles posed by extreme weather, while offering a full defence of state preparations and expressing profound appreciation for frontline responders.

In a post on X, Prime Minister Mitsotakis described the current period as “extremely difficult for our country” and highlighted how conditions have tested the collective resilience of the Fire Service, Civil Protection, local governments, and citizens alike.

Mitsotakis noted that despite record investments

of burning coal, oil and gas are making wildfires more frequent and more destructive,” Greenpeace wrote in a statement last week.

But Lahbib gave a cautious response when asked about allegations that EU states were dragging their feet on climate action. “This is not the moment for controversy and so on. This is a moment of solidarity,” she said. “We will have the time to draw on the lessons learned.”

In Brussels, where a small monitoring and decision team runs a bloc-wide crisis response center, unit chief Maria Zuber is already busy planning.

“We need to think of informing the population,” she said. “We need to think of evacuation plans. We need to invest in early warning tools. So all this is something that we we are mapping. I think that is

in civil protection infrastructure, including expanded aerial and ground assets, new technologies, personnel hires, and structural reorganisations, nature can occasionally overpower human planning.

“I want to start with the first major fires of this summer. These days are extremely difficult for our country, with extreme weather conditions and winds that in many areas reached as high as 10 Beaufort. These conditions have tested and continue to test the resilience of the Fire Service, the Civil Protection, the Local Government, and the citizens themselves,” he wrote. **-ANI**

the main challenge — that we need to change our mindset.”

Wildfire season far from over

Back in Gironde, Maitre Julien is all too aware of what’s ahead. “We know we’ll have more intense fires like this one more frequently,” he said. Even this year’s wildfire season isn’t over yet — Julien and his team still have all of August and September to get through.

But for now, there’s a moment of reprieve. At a hastily setup command center in Lège-Cap-Ferret, firefighters can get a meal and some rest before heading back home, or out on their next shift. There’s little privacy — just rows of camp beds in a sports hall full of people. Outside, some firefighters prefer to lie on the ground in the shade of empty firetrucks. **-ANI**

BROAD PEAK

Ground rescuers reach Purja; bodies to be brought down

KATHMANDU: The ground rescue team deployed on Broad Peak has reached the location of renowned British-Nepali mountaineer Nirmal Purja aka “Nims Dai” at an altitude of about 5,700 metres.

As per the Alpine Club of Pakistan, the rescuers have sighted three additional bodies at the same location, with identities yet to be confirmed.

Mingma David Sherpa, one of the senior Nepali mountaineers who flew to Skardu in PoJK’s Gilgit-Baltistan from Kathmandu, wrote on social media that the multi-phase retrieval effort is being carried out under extremely challenging conditions, with team safety prioritised above all else.

“According to the information received from the ground team today, the team is planning to bring the team from the current location to Camp-1. Then tomorrow, it is reported that the team will bring the Japanese camp. If the weather and mountain conditions cooperate, there is a possibility of a helicopter from the Japanese camp. The main objective of this campaign is to safely rescue the bodies of the deceased friends and return them home with dignity. The safety of the entire team involved in the rescue campaign is our top priority. Every decision is being taken with the safety of the team as the highest priority,” Sherpa wrote on a social media post.

In the first phase of the recovery mission, the searchers will physically carry the recovered remains through steep, highly technical terrain from the upper slopes down to Camp-1.

As of now, direct high-altitude

helicopter extractions have been ruled out due to the hazardous landscape and the possibility of further avalanches. As per the searchers, the body will be brought down to Japanese Camp by Monday in case the conditions remain favourable.

Provided the weather remains stable, and the mountain avoids secondary slides, Pakistani Army Aviation helicopters are on standby at the Japanese Camp to airlift the deceased climbers and the recovery personnel to safety in the valley below.

Famed Nepalese-origin mountaineer Nirmal Purja tragically lost his life following the avalanche on Broad Peak, Nimsdai Foundation announced on Saturday.

In an official statement shared on its Facebook page, the Nimsdai Foundation also said that it received confirmation of other members who also perished during the avalanche.

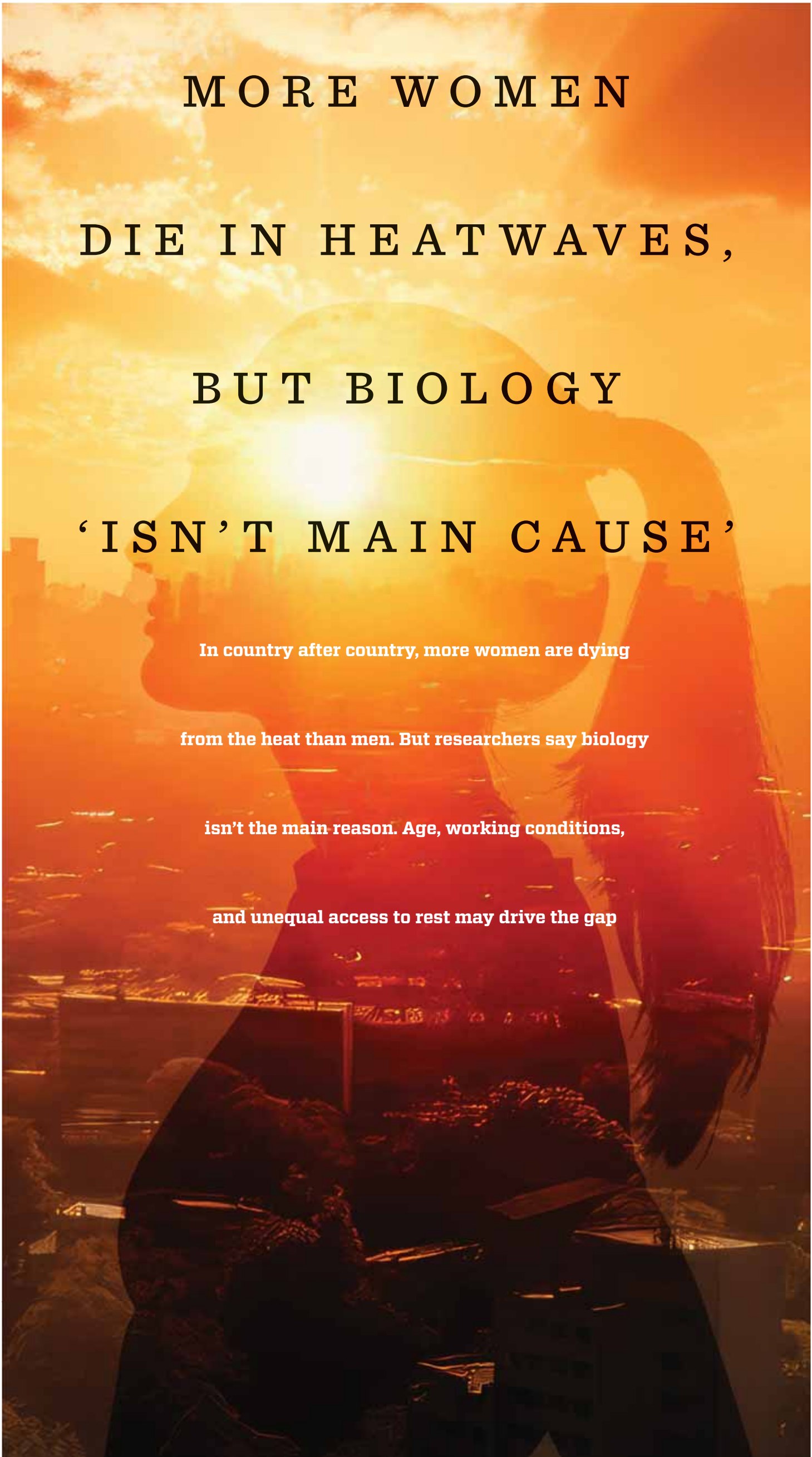
“Today, it is with profound sadness and immense heartbreak that we confirm that Nirmal ‘Nimsdai’ Purja, tragically lost his life following the avalanche on Broad Peak. We have also received confirmation that other members of the expedition sadly did not survive,” the Nimsdai Foundation said.

The disaster struck on Thursday around midday while a 10-member expedition team was ascending Broad Peak, standing at 8,047 metres, at an altitude of approximately 6,600 metres. The team lost all communication on Thursday morning before reports of the massive avalanche emerged that evening, according to official statements, as reported by Dawn. **-ANI**



ACE CLIMBER: A file photo of famous Nepalese mountaineer Nirmal Purja who died at Broad Peak.

LIFESTYLE



MORE WOMEN
DIE IN HEATWAVES,
BUT BIOLOGY
‘ISN’T MAIN CAUSE’

In country after country, more women are dying
from the heat than men. But researchers say biology
isn’t the main reason. Age, working conditions,
and unequal access to rest may drive the gap

Observing recent heatwaves in Europe, one pattern has often been remarked on: More women appear to be dying than men. During Europe’s then-record summer of 2022, a study found 56% more heat-related deaths among women than men, drawing on mortality data from 35 countries.

Germany, which has just logged its deadliest heat season since 2016, with close to 9,800 heat-related deaths by mid-July, according to the Robert Koch Institute, is seeing the same pattern again this year.

Are hormones making heatwaves more dangerous for women?

Some of the recent coverage has leaned on the hormonal reading that women’s bodies simply aren’t equipped for heat. They sweat less, carry more body fat, and progesterone nudges core temperature up.

But scientists who study the effect of heat on the human body say that’s largely incorrect. “Overall, studies usually show only slightly more vulnerability to heat in women compared to men,” said Alexandra Schneider, an environmental epidemiologist and deputy director of the Institute of Epidemiology at Helmholtz Munich. “It’s not really a very strong signal.”

The small differences that do exist are real: Women do have a lower sweat rate, less skin area relative to body size, and fat distribution that affects thermoregulation. Hormones play a role too, but unevenly across a lifetime.

Schneider points to one group in particular: Women past meno-

pause, when cardiovascular risk climbs. Older women with existing heart disease, she says, are probably at the highest risk of all.

But even in those cases, she doesn’t think biology is the main cause for the extra deaths during a heatwave. “The living conditions, the social environment where women live, makes probably even more of a risk than just the differences in hormone status.”

A research gap, not a biological difference

Toby Mündel, a kinesiology professor at Brock University in Canada, who studies extreme human environments, says that the impact is “overstated,” when asked whether there’s a real biological basis for the claim that women are more likely to die in heatwaves.

The factors that most determine how a person copes with a

heatwave, Mündel says, are age, body size, fitness and habitual activity, and not biological sex.

Sweating is one example. Even though women do sweat less, that doesn’t make them more vulnerable, because they compensate in another way. “They send blood flow to the skin, vasodilation, much better than males do,” Mündel says, meaning their blood vessels widen more efficiently, moving heat to the surface where it can escape.

Pregnancy, which many assume must be dangerous, is another example. “As a woman progresses through pregnancy, she actually becomes better at handling heat,” Mündel says. He draws a clear line between physiology and circumstance: There are good reasons not to have pregnant women doing heavy outdoor labor in extreme heat. But their bodies aren’t the reason.

Why does the data suggest otherwise?

Partly, Mündel’s argument is based on what gets measured. Studies often count hospital and emergency admissions, and women are far more likely than men to seek medical help. “That is not a physiological thing,” he says. “Are they actually struggling, or have they just sought help earlier?”

Underneath it all sits a research gap. “We have about a hundred times as much data and evidence on men. We have nearly zero on women,” Mündel says. “It’s like comparing cats and dogs.”

Numbers from Germany point in the same direction. The Robert Koch Institute attributes the higher female death toll to the fact that women make up a larger share of the oldest age groups. Its estimates also break down deaths per 100,000 people, and by that

measure, the picture flips.

In every older age band this summer, the male death rate is higher than the female one. In other words, more women are dying in heatwaves only because more very old women are alive.

The real risk is exposure for women, not biology

If the gap isn’t physiological, where does it come from?

Laurie Parsons, a researcher at Royal Holloway, University of London, studies how heat stress moves through the global economy in construction, garment factories, farming, driving, street vending.

Across the board, he says, women spend 30% to 50% more of their working time above heat-stress thresholds than men. In construction, when comparing men and women doing the same

job, the figure rises to around 50%.

The reasons, he says, are structural. Women often wear more clothing for the same job. Men are more confident asking for breaks. And where men’s work is visibly strenuous, it’s recognized as a heat risk and rewarded with rest. But women’s work is steadier, less obviously punishing, and gets no such relief.

Parsons compares it to the difference between a plane crash and asbestos exposure: One is a sudden, visible catastrophe, the other a slow, constant harm that’s easy to miss. “Male heat stress tends to be this taller risk, where you get relatively visible moments of physical distress that can be managed,” he says. “Female heat stress is constantly there, but much less visible, because it doesn’t have those same obvious peaks in the working day.”

Then the shift ends, he says. Men rest, but women cook, clean and care for children.

Heat also cuts into pay. Parsons says workers under heat stress are around 30% less productive in the garment sector, which he says is the easiest to quantify.

In formal jobs, workers make up for it with longer hours during the hottest part of the day, feeding what he calls “a vicious cycle” of worsening health and falling output. The self-employed have no such buffer. For them, heat stress just means less income, which ripples the wider family over time.

For Parsons, the starting premise is flawed. “Heat stress is not an atmospheric condition,” he says. “It is a social condition, which happens within particular atmospheric circumstances.” -dw

SPORTS

Eala stuns former world No.1 Osaka, to meet Pegula in final



The 21-year-old Philippines left-hander delivered an impressive victory over the four-time Grand Slam winner from Japan to reach her second career WTA final

WASHINGTON: Alexandra Eala stunned former world No.1 Naomi Osaka 6-4, 6-2 on Saturday to reach the women's final of the WTA and ATP Washington Open, where she will face third-ranked Jessica Pegula.

The 21-year-old Philippines left-hander delivered an impres-

sive victory over the four-time Grand Slam winner from Japan to reach her second career WTA final, having dropped the first last year at Eastbourne.

"I'm super proud of my performance," Eala said. "I played really well, I had a great mentality and I stayed locked in until the end."

Eala, set to jump to a career-best 24th in the world rankings, had previously ousted second seed Elina Svitolina for her sixth top-10 victory of the year after dethroning 2025 Washington champion Leylah Fernandez.

It was the first meeting of the Asian stars, with Eala facing one of the idols of her youth.

"She definitely has aura and she definitely has power," Eala said of Osaka. "I remember watching her finals in the Australian Open and US Open so it was a great experience to share the court with her and I'm really happy I was able to produce that level against her."

Osaka, ranked 13th, was thwarted in her bid for an eighth career WTA title and first since taking the 2021 Australian Open.



"I hit a lot of unforced errors, so that was probably one of the main reasons" for the loss, Osaka said.

Pegula, seeking her 12th career WTA title and third of the year, eliminated Russia's Diana Shnaider 7-5, 6-4 in the other semi-final.

"It's going to be a battle," Pegula said of the final. "Alex, I'm a big fan of her. She's the future of the tour and she's already here."

Pegula, who won her first WTA title in 2019 at Washington, fell behind 5-2 against Schnaider, but the 32-year-old American top seed battled back to reach her fourth final of the year.

A semi-finalist at this year's Australian Open, Pegula has lifted trophies at Dubai and Charleston this season.

Pegula beat Eala in a 2025 Mi-

ami semi-final in their only career meeting. "I'm more well-rounded. I'm physically a little bit better. I've improved on a couple of my strokes. Serve has also improved quite a bit," Eala said of her game then and now.

Fritz vs Jodar

The men's final will send American Taylor Fritz, ranked 10th, against 19-year-old Spaniard Rafael Jodar.

Fritz fired 13 aces in ousting 33rd-ranked countryman Brandon Nakashima 6-3, 3-6, 6-3.

"I dug very deep just to keep holding," said Fritz, who seeks an 11th career ATP title and first since last year at Eastbourne.

Jodar, assured of cracking the world rankings top 20 next week, won his first ATP title in April

at Morocco. Jodar continued his meteoric rise with a thrilling victory as he battled past Alejandro Tabilo 6-7(6), 6-4, 6-4 in the semi-finals.

With his victory, the 19-year-old Spaniard advanced to his first ATP 500 final, the biggest title match of his young career.

Standing between the rising Spaniard and his maiden ATP 500 title is third seed Fritz.

"It is great," Jodar said following his milestone victory. "I am doing good things with my team and especially my dad. He's always there with me, so I really appreciate it... It means a lot to be in the final. But I have to keep pushing because there is another tough match tomorrow when I will face Fritz in the final." - Agencies

MEMPHIS CLASSIC

Teen Liutova reaches first WTA final

MEMPHIS: Russian 16-year-old Kristina Liutova is into the final in her first WTA Tour-level event, booking a title shot at Memphis Classic with a 7-5, 6-1 victory over Elvina Kalieva on Saturday.

Liutova, ranked 229th in the world, will be the youngest player to contest a WTA final since American Coco Gauffin Austrian in 2019.

The first player born in the 2010s to make a WTA final, she called her week in the 250-level event a "miracle journey" after her quarterfinal win over sixth-seeded Caty McNally.

In her first WTA main draw match she advanced past top-seeded Ekaterina Alexandrova, who retired with heat illness with Liutova leading 7-6 (7/2), 4-6, 5-4.

She beat Australian Maya Joint



in the second round before knocking off McNally 6-3, 6-4.

In Sunday's final she will face 114th-ranked Czech Darja Vid-

manova, who beat 83rd-ranked Renata Zarazua of Mexico 6-3, 6-3. Vidmanova, 23, will also be playing her first WTA final. - Agencies

LOS CABOS OPEN



Gea upsets Shapovalov to capture first ATP Tour title

LOS CABOS: Arthur Gea won his first ATP Tour title in Los Cabos on Saturday. Five days ago, Gea arrived at the Mifel Tennis Open by Telcel Oppo having notched merely three tour-level victories.

On Saturday night at the ATP 250 event, the 21-year-old produced a composed performance to upset defending champion Denis Shapovalov 6-3, 6-4 and clinch his first ATP Tour title.

"I didn't know how I would win this week," Gea said during the trophy presentation. "I was really happy every day to win one more match, one more, then one more. And I have finished with a trophy, so it was an amazing week."

Competing in his first ATP Tour final, Gea embraced the moment without nerves. After saving four break points at 2-2 in the opening set, the Frenchman applied pressure on Shapovalov's serve and earned the decisive break at 4-3 before serving out the set. Gea carried that momentum

into the second set, dictating with his shotmaking and court coverage while breaking early in the third game.

Although Shapovalov levelled at 3-3, the Frenchman responded immediately with another break and maintained his intensity to close out the victory in one hour and 29 minutes. The 21-year-old saved six of the seven break points he faced. After converting his first championship point, Gea pointed to his team, then roared in joy, celebrating his milestone victory.

After defeating Soonwoo Kwon, Michael Zheng, third seed Francisco Cerundolo, Coleman Wong and Shapovalov to notch his first ATP Tour title, 21-year-old Gea became the sixth ATP Tour champion born in 2005 or later, joining Joao Fonseca, Jakub Mensik, Learner Tien, Rafael Jodar, and Shang Juncheng in that list.

The Frenchman needed three sets in each of his first three matches but found his best form

as the week progressed. In the second round, Zheng led Gea by a set and had two break points at 4-4 in the second set. But the Frenchman survived and crafted his dream week.

Gea began the week at a career-high World No. 127 in the ATP Rankings and will soar to No. 81 or No. 82 depending on an ATP Challenger result on Sunday.

With his title triumph, the 21-year-old became the 11th first-time ATP Tour champion this season. Despite the loss, Shapovalov can take confidence from his final run in Los Cabos as he now turns his attention to the National Bank Open presented by Rogers on home soil in Montreal, where he reached the semi-finals in 2017.

"Very happy to be back on court, healthy again," Shapovalov said. "A few weeks ago we didn't know if I would even be at this tournament. So to be back, playing at such a high level, is definitely very special." - Agencies

Djokovic to make return at Cincinnati Masters

CINCINNATI: Former world No.1 Novak Djokovic said that he would make his return to competition at the Cincinnati Masters next month, almost a month after he crashed out of the Wimbledon semi-finals at the hands of Jannik Sinner.

The August 13-23 tournament in Cincinnati marks the 39-year-old's first appearance there since his 2023 title.

"I am very happy to announce that I will be in Cincinnati this year, for the first time since 2023," Djokovic said on the tournament's social media.

"I really look forward to coming back, playing in front of you again, and seeing all the fans from around the world. See you soon!"

The Serb, currently ranked fifth in the world, joins a dream line-up ahead of the US Open



including Wimbledon winner Sinner, world No. 2 Alexander Zverev and No. 3 Carlos Alcaraz, who has been nursing a wrist injury since April.

After Cincinnati, Djokovic is expected at the August 30-September 13 US Open, where he will bid for a 25th major title. - Agencies

WORLD NO. 4

Auger-Aliassime to play for hometown pride at Montreal Masters

MONTREAL: World No. 4 Felix Auger-Aliassime will be playing for local pride when the ATP Montreal Masters begins in his hometown.

The Canadian returns as second seed to a tournament he attended frequently as a budding young player, when he used to watch and study his sporting idols up close in training between matches.

"There were several times when

I didn't have a ticket, so I would watch all the training sessions," he said on Saturday at the event, where he is seeded behind Roland Garros winner and Wimbledon runner-up Alexander Zverev. "I learned even more things during training since they (fans) have the chance to be very, very close to the players."

Auger-Aliassime recently split with his longtime coach of 10 years,

Frederic Fontang, after losing a frustrating Wimbledon five-set quarter-final to Novak Djokovic.

Auger-Aliassime's best performance at the Canadian event was a quarterfinal four years ago. Last year he lost in the second round.

Despite the hometown support, Auger-Aliassime said he will aim to stick to his usual routines and focus solely on his game.

"Already, my expectations or hopes are at the same level as the publics. So already, there is no gap at that level," he said. "I have my work to do, I have my preparation, I have my routines, so all that doesn't change."

"I try to change as few things as possible, even if I'm playing in Montreal. Yes, I'm a bit more in-demand obviously than at other

tournaments, but I try to keep my routines. "The brain is used to having its routines. And that helps to program oneself well or to prepare well for the tournament."

All 28 seeds in the 128-strong field receive first-round byes, with Auger-Aliassime set for the second round against the winner from France's Luca van Assche and a qualifier. - Agencies





Messi returns as Crew hold Miami to a draw

The Argentine star missed a few chances in the team's 2-2 result

MIAMI: Brais Méndez scored a late equaliser in his MLS debut and the Columbus Crew played Inter Miami to a 2-2 draw on Saturday night.

Columbus (5-8-5) ended Miami's six-game winning streak. Miami (11-2-5) is still unbeaten in seven straight games.

Méndez curled a free kick from the right side that went untouched off the post and into the net in the 84th minute to tie it.

Lionel Messi, who entered as a substitute in the 53rd after leading Argentina to its second straight World Cup final appearance, had several good scoring chances in the closing stages but couldn't find

the back of the net. Columbus also scored on an own goal in the first half. Luis Suárez opened the scoring in the 16th for Miami — with his seventh goal in the last four regular-season games.

Suárez became the fifth player in MLS history to record at least 10 goals and five assists in each of his first three MLS seasons.

Noah Allen gave Miami a 2-1 lead on a header in first-half stoppage time. Kickoff was delayed 40 minutes by inclement weather.

Messi had not played competitively since captaining his country in their 1-0 loss on 19 July. The 39-year-old scored eight goals and registered four assists during the tournament. The forward was given a huge ovation by the Inter Miami home fans when he came on in the 53rd minute as his side led the Major League Soccer match 2-1.

Brazil midfielder Casemiro, who joined Miami in July after leaving Manchester United, inadvertently equalised for Columbus when he put the ball into his own net as he stretched to block a cross.

But Noah Allen headed the home side back in front before Brais

Mendez curled in an 84th minute free-kick on his debut to earn Columbus Crew a draw.

Messi had a couple of chances for a winner in added time but put a looping header narrowly wide before sending a right-foot shot over the bar.

Lewandowski scores twice on home debut

Robert Lewandowski scored two goals, including the winner, in his home debut for the Fire, helping Chicago beat Charlotte FC 2-1 on Saturday.

Lewandowski, who made the move from FC Barcelona in a two-year deal with Chicago, equalised in the 20th minute off a screamer from outside the box that tied the game at 1.

He scored his second goal of the night in the 68th minute with a go-ahead shot to the bottom left corner to seal the win for the Fire (9-6-2), who played their first home match in over two months.

Pep Biel gave Charlotte (7-7-4) an early lead with a shot from the right side of the box on an assist from Idan Toklomati.

Charlotte pushed for an equaliser late and earned a corner in stoppage time, but Chicago held on to preserve the one-goal lead.

Whitecaps battle back for 1-1 draw with LAFC

Thomas Müller scored on a penalty kick late in the second half as the Vancouver Whitecaps battled back for a 1-1 draw with Los Angeles FC on Saturday night.

The Whitecaps (10-3-4) and LAFC (10-5-4) remain tied in the Western Conference with 34 points apiece.

The Whitecaps controlled most of the opening half, but Son Heung-min's goal gave LAFC the lead at halftime.

Müller's goal came in the 76th minute after he was hauled down in the box by defender Yevhen Cheberko. Müller calmly struck the ball into an open side of the net.

A crowd of 40,086 watched the Whitecaps play their first game at BC Place Stadium since April 25th. The Whitecaps were forced on the road while the stadium hosted seven FIFA World Cup matches. - Agencies

Ambitious Arsenal won't sit still this summer: Arteta



LONDON: Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta said on Saturday that the Gunners will not "sit still" and are looking to bolster squad competition with "ambitious" transfer plans this summer.

The Spaniard led the London club to their first Premier League title in 22 years last season and is aiming to "improve and evolve" his squad as they aim to defend their crown. Arsenal have added goalkeeper Illan Meslier and forward Christos Tzolis to their ranks this summer, while turning defender Piero Hincapié's loan move into a permanent switch.

They are expected to sign Brazil midfielder Bruno Guimarães from Newcastle United, while the Gunners have also been linked with a move for Real Madrid winger Vinicius Jr.

"We expect to have movements in the next few weeks, obviously," said Arteta after his side's 4-1 pre-season win over Girona.

"We want to get better like anybody else, and you can see the transfer market and our opponents... We won't sit still and we are very ambitious with what we are doing.

"The margins are very small. Because we want to get better and the level is going to increase. We need to increase the competition internally. We need to make sure we identify the things that we don't have in the team."

Arsenal will play Manchester City in the Community Shield on Sunday, August 16, before starting their 2026-27 campaign at home to Premier League new-

comers Coventry City on Friday, August 21.

Tzolis showed Arsenal fans a glimpse of what may be to come as he scored on his first Gunners appearance in their opening pre-season win over Girona.

Signed to replace Leandro Trossard after his transfer to Beşiktaş, the Greece international made the switch to north London in a £34m transfer from Belgian side Club Brugge.

Tzolis, 24, skipped beyond Arnau Martínez before firing a low effort into the bottom of the net via the help of a slight deflection in the 30th minute.

But it was German forward Kai Havertz who slotted Arteta's side into the lead 14 minutes earlier.

Sixteen-year-old Max Dowman threaded a fine pass through for Havertz to calmly finish when one-on-one with Girona goalkeeper Paulo Gazzaniga.

Four minutes after the break, Martínez climbed highest from the Girona corner to halve the deficit before Dowman reinstated Arsenal's two-goal lead three minutes later.

The flurry of goals was not over there as Gabriel Jesus made it three goals in five minutes to fire the Gunners into a 4-1 lead.

Arteta named a strong starting XI in Spain with Viktor Gyokeres, Havertz and Hincapié each playing 30 minutes after their return from the World Cup.

Arsenal will travel to Dublin for their second pre-season game when they take on Real Betis at the Aviva Stadium on 5 August.

35-YEAR-OLD



Former England striker Welbeck joins Chelsea from rival Brighton

LONDON: Chelsea continued their off-season recruitment drive by signing former England international Danny Welbeck from Premier League rival Brighton on Saturday.

The 35-year-old striker, who has been capped 42 times by his country, will head straight for Hong Kong to join up with head coach Xabi Alonso and his new teammates on their pre-season tour.

"When you hear of the interest from Chelsea, it's something that fills you with such immense pride," Welbeck said after signing a two-year deal. "Knowing the history of Chelsea, it's a club that wants to win trophies and is pushing to do that every single season."

"I'm really honoured to come to a club of this stature at what feels like a really exciting time. I've got that fire in my belly and I'm ready to give it everything for this club to make everyone at Chelsea, and the supporters, proud."

No fee was disclosed for Wel-

beck, who joins fellow new recruits Morgan Rogers, Maxence Lacroix, Marco Palestra and Geovany Quenda at Stamford Bridge.

Welbeck began his career at Manchester United and also enjoyed a five-year spell with Arsenal. He joined Brighton from Watford in 2020.

He has made 400 Premier League appearances and has Champions League experience and two World Cup campaigns to his name.

His arrival also raises question marks about the future of Chelsea's other centre-forward options. Joao Pedro is regarded as the club's first-choice option, while they also have Liam Delap, Emmanuel Emegha, Marc Guiu and Nicolas Jackson on their books.

Welbeck has scored 16 times in 42 appearances for England.

His last cap came in 2018 and he was overlooked for a place in Thomas Tuchel's 2026 World Cup squad. - Agencies

PREMIER LEAGUE

New boss Maresca is perfect for City: Gvardiol

LONDON: New manager Enzo Maresca is a "perfect one" for Manchester City, defender Josko Gvardiol said on Saturday.

The Italian has been given the perhaps unenviable task of taking over from the legendary Pep Guardiola, who stepped down at the end of last season after a trophy-laden decade in charge.

Maresca signed a three-year deal to succeed the Spaniard, having previously won the Championship title with Leicester and the Club World Cup with Chelsea.

The 46-year-old took charge of City for the first time in Saturday's friendly defeat on penalties by Inter Milan in Hong Kong.

"The level is that high and he has been chosen with reason as the manager," said Gvardiol.

"I think he has a quality, has some new ideas and also we need to see what we are going to do [with] the style of [play], the football we are going to play and the tactics. "I think he is a perfect one, but of course, it takes time. It's something totally new, it's not easy to change the manager, so we will take time."

"It's our job to help him as much as possible and also to listen to try to adapt as quick as possible."

"I met him, we spoke a little bit about my injury [and] also how we played, how I played before with Pep, and that's it, more or less."

Gvardiol missed five months of last season after sustaining a broken bone in his right leg in January, before returning to play twice in May. There had been speculation throughout the campaign that Guardiola could leave and signs pointed at an exit, before the manager finally confirmed his decision in the last week of the season.

"Some would say he could have told us earlier, some would say not," said Gvardiol.



"I think it was perfect timing because it can affect you mentally if he would have said it earlier."

"We knew at some point he has to tell us. He has been here for 10 years and it is time to rest a little bit and retire. We could feel it."

"[The 2024-25 season] he was in between, about to leave, then he stayed - great because it was another season to try to win something. Two seasons ago we struggled, 13 games without winning."

"Unfortunately it was time [for him] to go but who knows with him, maybe after six months when he gets the energy back."

Dias to become the new captain?

Gvardiol played all four games at this summer's World Cup as Croatia suffered an agonising last-32 defeat by Portugal, seeing a late equaliser ruled out by the video assistant referee.

City team-mate Ruben Dias featured for Portugal in that game, while midfielder Rodri captained Spain to World Cup glory.

Both players are candidates to take the armband at City following the departure of Bernardo Silva, who left to join Real Madrid upon the expiry of his contract, while experienced defender John Stones has joined Inter on a free.

Gvardiol, meanwhile, will extend his stay at Etihad Stadium after signing a new five-year deal last week. Asked about the club's leadership group, Gvardiol said: "It's difficult to tell you about this but we need to see."

"Ruben is one of the leaders in our team and he is probably going to be on the top now - maybe the most important one."

"He will need some guys who have been here for a longer time. So if that's on me, I will take responsibility." - Agencies

ROUND-UP

Mitsubishi Motors Oman launches enticing summer service campaign



The campaign offers Mitsubishi owners a comprehensive summer vehicle inspection along with exclusive service benefits designed to keep their vehicles performing at their best despite extreme temperatures

MUSCAT: General Automotive Company (a part of The Zubair Corporation), the authorized distributor of Mitsubishi Motors in Oman, has announced the launch of its Summer Service Campaign, aimed at helping customers prepare their vehicles for the demanding summer months while ensuring maximum comfort, safety, and reliability on the road.

Running from 15 June to 15 August, the campaign offers Mitsubishi owners a comprehensive summer vehicle inspection along

with exclusive service benefits designed to keep their vehicles performing at their best despite extreme temperatures.

Labour discount

As part of the campaign, customers can avail a free check-up covering critical vehicle systems, including the air conditioning system, cooling system, tyres, and belts. In addition, customers will receive a 20% discount on labour and a 50% discount on genuine Mitsubishi parts for repairs identified during

the inspection.

The initiative reflects Mitsubishi Motors Oman's commitment to delivering exceptional aftersales support and ensuring customers enjoy worry-free driving throughout the summer season. By proactively inspecting key vehicle components that are most affected by high temperatures, the campaign helps enhance vehicle performance, improve reliability, and reduce the risk of unexpected breakdowns.

Commenting on the campaign, Manoj Ranade, General Manager of General Automotive Company, said: "Oman's summer can place significant stress on a vehicle's cooling, air conditioning, and mechanical systems. Through our Summer Service Campaign, we aim to provide our customers with expert preventive care, ensuring their vehicles remain comfortable, dependable, and ready for every journey throughout the season."

The Summer Service Campaign can be availed across all 14 authorized Mitsubishi Motors service centres across Oman.

STRENGTHENING MARKET PRESENCE



Dhofar Islamic opens new branch in Falaj Al Sham

MUSCAT: BankDhofar's Islamic banking window, Dhofar Islamic, has announced the opening of a new branch in Falaj Al Sham in the Wilayat of Bausher, reinforcing its expansion strategy aimed at strengthening market presence and catering to the evolving banking needs of all segments of society.

The newly inaugurated branch is positioned to serve individuals as well as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in one of Muscat Governorate's rapidly developing residential and commercial hubs, reflecting the growing demand for Sharia-compliant banking services in areas witnessing sustained urban expansion and population growth.

The expansion underscores Dhofar Islamic's commitment to enhancing customer accessibility and delivering banking services in line with the highest standards of quality, convenience and operational efficiency. The branch offers a comprehensive portfolio of Islamic banking solutions, includ-

ing current and savings accounts, personal finance products, and specialised financing solutions tailored for SMEs — a sector regarded as a key driver of economic growth and diversification in the Sultanate of Oman.

In line with ongoing digital transformation trends within the banking industry, the branch also provides advanced digital banking services designed to enhance customer experience, streamline transactions and improve service efficiency.

The move further reflects Dhofar Islamic's broader commitment to advancing financial inclusion in Oman by enabling individuals, entrepreneurs and businesses to access secure, convenient and innovative banking solutions that support financial stability and stimulate economic activity across multiple sectors.

The branch opening is also aligned with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, particularly in supporting economic diversifi-

cation and strengthening the contribution of the financial sector to sustainable national development.

In addition to providing flexible financing facilities, the Falaj Al Sham branch will offer specialised financial advisory services aimed at supporting SMEs in their growth and expansion plans, thereby contributing to private sector development and job creation within the national economy.

Dhofar Islamic noted that the new branch has been designed to provide a modern banking environment centred on customer convenience, offering an integrated banking experience that combines innovation with operational excellence.

With the addition of the Falaj Al Sham branch, Dhofar Islamic's network now exceeds 30 branches across various governorates of Oman, enabling the bank to deliver a broad spectrum of banking products and services to diverse customer segments, including children, youth, women, entrepreneurs and premium banking clients.

INDIAN SCHOOL MUSCAT

Indian envoy visits ISM; launches digital portal, new learning facilities

MUSCAT: Indian School Muscat (ISM) accorded a warm welcome to Prashant Pise, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, during his maiden official visit to the school following his recent appointment. The visit highlighted ISM's academic excellence, technological innovation, and holistic student development.

The Ambassador arrived at 8:30 am and was received with a traditional welcome before being escorted to the New Multipurpose Hall by the school band. He was accompanied by Syed Ahmad Salman, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Indian Schools in Oman; Damodar Katti, Director-in-Charge of ISM; Dr. Kiran G.R., President of the ISM School Management Committee; Principal Rakesh Joshi; and other Board, Management Committee, and school leaders from across Oman.

The programme opened with the National Anthems of Oman and India, followed by a potted-plant welcome from ISM student leaders, reflecting the school's commitment to environmental sustainability.

In his welcome address, Dr. Kiran G.R. President of Indian School Muscat, Management Committee, thanked His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for his visionary leadership and support to the Indian community in Oman, and highlighted Prashant Pise's distinguished diplomatic career across Tunisia, Iraq, Cairo, Tripoli, Tokyo, Mauritius, and London, alongside ISM's achievements in academics, innovation, and culture.

A fusion dance performance preceded an address by Syed Ahmad Salman who spoke of the



collective responsibility to build future-ready learning environments. A specially curated video traced ISM's five-decade journey into a leading regional institution.

Addressing the gathering, Prashant Pise commended the school for upholding high academic standards while preserving Indian values in a changing global landscape. He invited students to ask questions on academic preparation and career aspirations, urging them to pursue their goals with confidence and a global outlook.

A key highlight was the formal launch of ISM's redesigned official website by the Ambassador, alongside the Board of Directors and School Management Committee. Built to international standards, the platform showcases the school's 50-year legacy, administrative structure, facilities, and alumni testimonials.

As a token of appreciation, Class XII student Teesta Alice Varghese presented the Ambassador with hand-painted artwork. The programme concluded with a choir performance and a vote of thanks by Principal, Rakesh Joshi.

Pise then toured the D-Block campus, visiting newly digitised senior classrooms equipped with interactive boards. He then inaugurated two upgraded Primary Computer Laboratories in B-Block, featuring next-generation desktops, high-speed connectivity, and coding software, followed by the AI and Innovation Hub in A-Block featuring advanced robotics kits, 3D printing, augmented and virtual reality technologies, interactive panels, and AI learning resources designed to foster creativity, critical thinking, and innovation.

The visit concluded at the Jibroo Campus, where the ambassador inaugurated a new artificial-grass playground for kindergarten and primary students, and toured the renovated IT laboratory and modernised classrooms, interacting with young learners and appreciating the faculty's dedication.

The visit reflected ISM's continued investment in educational excellence and digital transformation, reaffirming the strong partnership between the Embassy of India, the school management, and the wider Indian community in Oman.



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