

O M A N
Observer
D A I L Y

IDEAS IN AN AGE OF SPEED

4

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IN BRIEF

OMAN, MALDIVES DISCUSS IRAN WAR

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received a telephone call from Iruthisham Adam, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Maldives. The conversation addressed the cordial relations between the two countries and means to enhance mutual cooperation, along with an exchange of views on the latest regional and international developments. The two ministers affirmed the importance of intensifying efforts aimed at containing tensions, supporting dialogue, and advancing efforts to reach political solutions that contribute to achieving security and stability and enhancing opportunities for regional and global peace.

PROJECT TO MAKE EVs, BATTERY CELLS

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) signed an investment usufruct agreement with EL B&T, a Korean electric vehicle (EV) technology company, to establish a project for the production of electric vehicles and battery cells in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD). The project has an investment value of approximately RO 96.2 million (\$250 million). The agreement was signed on behalf of OPAZ by Qais Mohammed al Yousef, Chairman of OPAZ while Dr Young Ill Kim signed on behalf of the company. The project will be implemented in two phases. **DETAILS ON P13**

EVACUATION OF VIRUS-HIT



A boat approaches the Dutch flagged hantavirus-stricken cruise ship MV Hondius after it arrived at the industrial port of Granadilla de Abona on the island of Tenerife in Spain's Canary Islands on Sunday. Repatriation flights for the nearly 150 passengers onboard the ship hit by a deadly hantavirus outbreak are planned to the United States, Britain, France, and other countries, Spain's interior minister announced. — AFP

RO 495 million real estate deals signed in Oman

MUSCAT: Agreements, project awards and investment partnerships worth more than RO 495 million were announced on Sunday as the 21st Oman Real Estate, Design & Construction Exhibition and Conference 2026 opened in Muscat, underscoring the accelerating pace of urban development and growing investor confidence in the Sultanate of Oman's real estate sector.

The four-day event, hosted at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, is organised by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning in partnership with the Oman Real Estate Association and Connect. The exhibition and conference have drawn broad participation from local and international developers, contractors, consultants, investors and urban planning specialists. The opening ceremony was held

under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance. A key highlight of the opening day was the signing of a strategic partnership agreement between the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and Saudi-based Retal Urban Development for the development of residential neighbourhoods 3, 15 and 17 in Sultan Haitham City. The Musstir Heights project,

to be established in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, was also announced on this occasion. This project, developed by Musstir Company, a subsidiary of Mohammed Al Barwani Group, represents an investment of RO 300 million and forms part of the master plan for the Al Jabal Al Aali project in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. **DETAILS ON P13**

Sector's contribution to GDP rises to RO 1.132 bn

MAJLIS HOSTS MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND WATER RESOURCES

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, MAY 10

THE MAJLIS ASH'SHURA on Sunday hosted Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, during its regular session of the third annual sitting of the tenth term to discuss the ministry's statement across several key axes related to strengthening Oman's food and water security system, highlighting sector achievements, and outlining future strategic directions.

In his statement, the minister reviewed the performance of the agricultural, fisheries and water resources sectors during the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan, the achievements and indicators realised, as well as the strategic directions, programmes and projects planned under the Eleventh Plan, in alignment with national targets.

FOOD SECURITY
Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, said that the statement carries strategic significance given the pivotal role of the agriculture, fisheries and water resources sectors in supporting national development, strengthening food security and ensuring



The Majlis Ash'shura on Sunday hosted Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

the sustainable management of natural resources for future generations. Delivering his statement, the minister said agricultural and fisheries production increased from 4.3 million tonnes in 2020 to 5.6 million tonnes in 2025, while the sector's contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) rose from RO 776 million to RO 1.132 billion, reflecting sustained growth in production and economic performance.

Food self-sufficiency reached 67.3 per cent, with self-sufficiency rates standing at 146 per cent in fish, 99 per cent in dates, 96 per cent in milk, 95 per cent in table eggs, and 79 per cent in vegetables, reinforcing Oman's domestic food security base.

He also pointed to major advances in water infrastructure, including the establishment and operation of 85 groundwater recharge dams, 116 surface storage dams, and seven flood protection dams, supported by a national hydrometric monitoring network of 3,483 stations, including 672 remote-operated stations, alongside 14 cloud seeding stations aimed at improving long-term water sustainability.

FISHERIES
In the fisheries sector, he noted that the sector is supported by more than 60,000 Omani fishermen, 119 fish processing factories, and 24 fish landing

ports, reflecting the breadth of infrastructure supporting one of Oman's key productive sectors. On investments, the minister said 493 usufruct agreements valued at RO 1.870 billion were signed in support of food and water security sectors, while exports from food, fisheries and agricultural industries exceeded RO 1.2 billion in 2025.

AGRICULTURE
The agricultural sector has extensive resources for expansion, the minister said. Cultivated land area stands at 312,000 acres, with more than 9.1 million palm trees. The livestock population is estimated at 4 million head, supported by 69 government veterinary clinics, 41 mobile clinics and a veterinary hospital. He added that per capita water share reached 369 cubic metres, achieving 90 per cent of the target, while the wastewater treatment rate stood at 98 per cent. In employment, the sectors provided significant job opportunities. Omani workers in food security sectors stand at 51,283, those in technical and specialised positions 1,220, and self-employed workers rose to 48,789, enhancing the sectors' role in supporting the national labour market. **SEE ALSO P2**

Iran says it has sent response to US peace proposal

TEHRAN: Iran has sent its response to a US proposal to begin peace talks to end the war, Iranian state media reported on Sunday, as two carriers were allowed to pass through the blockaded Strait of Hormuz. The response, sent to mediator Pakistan, focused on ending the war on all fronts, especially Lebanon, and on the safety of shipping through the strait, Iranian state TV said, without indicating how or when the vital waterway might reopen. Pakistan has received Iran's response to the US proposal and the response has been sent to the US, a Pakistani government official involved in the talks said.

The source did not provide further detail about the proposal. This followed a US proposal to end fighting before starting talks on more contentious issues, including Iran's nuclear programme. There was no immediate US comment on the Iranian response. After some 48 hours of relative calm following sporadic clashes last week, hostile drones were detected over several Gulf countries on Sunday, underlining the threat still facing the region despite a month-old ceasefire. Still, the QatarEnergy-operated carrier Al Kharaitiyat passed safely through the strait and was heading for Pakistan's Port Qasim, according to data from shipping analytics



An Iranian woman walks past a mural painted on a wall in the capital Tehran on Sunday. —AFP

firm Kpler, the first Qatari vessel carrying liquefied natural gas to cross the strait since the US and Israel started the war on February 28. Sources said earlier the transfer, which offered a modicum of relief to Pakistan after a wave of power blackouts caused by a halt to vital gas imports, had been approved by Iran to build confidence with Qatar and Pakistan, both mediators in the war. In addition, a Panama-flagged bulk carrier bound for Brazil that had previously attempted to transit the strait on May 4, passed through, using a route designated by Iran's armed forces, Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency reported on Sunday.

As US President Donald Trump was due to visit China this week, there has been mounting pressure to draw a line under the war, which has ignited a global energy crisis and poses a growing threat to the world economy. But, despite diplomatic efforts to break a deadlock between the two sides and the passage of the two vessels, the threat to shipping lanes and the economies of the region remained high. Tehran has largely blocked non-Iranian shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, which before the war carried one-fifth of the world's oil supply and which has emerged as one of the central pressure points in the war. **SEE ALSO P6 & 7**

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MOH-4219-10/2025

SHORT TAKES



The project with support from Oman LNG cost RO 249,635

Urology surgery project launched at Ibra Referral Hospital

IBRA: Ibra Referral Hospital on Sunday launched a surgical endoscopy system — a device for urological and paediatric surgery, with support from Oman LNG. The project cost RO 249,635. The launch of the system stems from efforts undertaken by the Ministry of Health to improve its services to citizens and residents and to introduce modern technologies that contribute to the realisation of high-quality healthcare.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Jabri, Director of Ibra Referral Hospital, Senior Consultant in Accident and Emergency Medicine, said that the launch of the system aims to raise the efficiency of diagnosis and ameliorate treatment services rendered to citizens and residents.

The system also offers an opportunity to localise advanced surgical services at the hospital, in addition to enhancing cooperation with private sector institutions.

Dr Ahmed explained that the surgical endoscopy unit for urology and paediatric surgery would provide its services using advanced methods. The services of the new device would benefit the governorates of Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South and Al Wusta, he added.

Dr Ahmed affirmed that the device would help diminish the number of treatment sessions required, enhance patient comfort, ease pain, minimise transfers to secondary care hospitals and spare patients the hassle of travelling for treatment. — ONA

Al Sharqiyah North honours cultural, innovation winners



360 students and teachers were honoured for their excellence.

IBRA: The Directorate-General of Education in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate celebrated on Sunday in Ibra the honouring of high-achieving students and winners of cultural and scientific innovation competitions for the 2025-2026 school year.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Intisar bint Abdullah Ambosaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Supporting Educational Programmes.

The celebration comes within the framework of the commitment to nurturing talented and creative individuals, motivating students toward excellence and innovation, and fostering a culture of achievement and positive competition across various educational, cultural and scientific fields.

The number of honourees reached approximately 360 students and teachers, in recognition of their efforts, excellence, and honourable achievements at the level of the governorate’s schools.

The ceremony programme included the presentation of several diverse segments, including chanting and poetry, as well as the honouring of high achievers in various fields and competitions. — ONA

Real estate expo opens amid investment push

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MAY 10

THE 21st edition of the Oman Real Estate Conference and Exhibition 2026 opened on Sunday under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The conference brings together government officials, investors, developers and international experts to explore the future of urban development and real estate investment in Oman.

Organised by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning in partnership with the Oman Real Estate Association and Connect, the four-day event highlights Oman’s accelerating urban transformation and growing appeal as a regional hub for sustainable real estate investment.

The exhibition serves as a platform to showcase major urban projects, integrated communities and investment opportunities, while strengthening collaboration between public and private sector stakeholders. Visitors are also exploring residential projects, financing solutions and modern construction technologies presented by leading local and international companies.

A major highlight of the opening ceremony was the announcement of several strategic agreements linked to future cities and integrated developments, particularly Sultan Haitham City.

The ministry signed an agreement with Retal Development Company to develop residential neighbourhoods 3, 15 and 17 within Sultan Haitham City over an area exceeding 640,000 square metres, with investments surpassing RO 320 million.

Infrastructure contracts covering roads, bridges, landscaping and site preparation were also awarded to Al



The Oman Real Estate Conference and Exhibition was opened under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance.

- Investments worth more than RO 320 m announced for new residential neighbourhoods in Sultan Haitham City
- The ‘Sorouh’ initiative secured investments exceeding RO 123 million for integrated residential neighbourhoods across several governorates
- More than 2,167 residential units are planned under newly signed development agreements

Tasnim Group, Strabag Oman and GDS, reflecting the rapid pace of implementation within the project.

Speaking on the sidelines of the exhibition, Fahad bin Mohammed al Rashidi said Oman’s real estate sector has witnessed significant progress in recent years, driven by large-scale urban projects and investor-friendly regulations.

“Sultan Haitham City represents one of the region’s most promising future city models, combining advanced infrastructure with a planning vision focused on sustainability and quality of life,” he said. He added that the strong participation of Gulf and international firms reflects growing confidence in Oman’s economy and the competitiveness of its real estate and tourism sectors.

The event also witnessed the awarding of consultancy supervision services for developers’ construction works in Al Thuraya City in cooperation with Khatib & Alami to strengthen project governance and quality standards.

In addition, a memorandum of understanding was signed with Artas Holding for the development of the Al Khuwair Downtown project, expected to become a modern urban and economic hub in the capital.

Meanwhile, Ozgur Demir described Oman as one of the region’s most attractive emerging

real estate markets due to its economic stability and clear urban planning vision.

“The projects showcased during the exhibition reflect a modern approach towards building integrated and sustainable cities that prioritise innovation, green spaces and smart infrastructure,” he said.

The exhibition also saw the signing of five agreements under the ‘Sorouh’ initiative to develop integrated residential neighbourhoods across several governorates, with investments exceeding RO 123 million and plans for more than 2,167 residential units.

Additional investment opportunities were announced under the initiative, including six new residential and urban development projects covering more than 1.4 million square metres in strategic locations across the Sultanate of Oman.

On the social responsibility front, the ministry signed an MoU with Dar Al Attaa Association to implement social housing projects for eligible families, including ‘Hay Al Atta’a 2’ and ‘Hay Al Atta’a 3’ in Al Amerat.

The opening ceremony also featured the launch of several endowment investment opportunities through the ‘Tatweer’ platform in cooperation with the Oman Endowment Foundation.

Dr Abdulaziz bin Amer al Suwaei said the initiative marks an important step towards modernising endowment investments and strengthening institutional partnerships that support Oman’s economic and social development.

Alongside the exhibition, specialised programmes including ‘Ruwad’ and ‘Itqan’ were launched to build national capabilities in real estate marketing, digital innovation and urban planning technologies, reflecting the ministry’s focus on empowering Omani talent and advancing smart urban development.

Call for sustainability in food, water security

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, MAY 10

Attention is increasingly turning to the next phase of Oman’s food and water security development, with growing focus on improving resource efficiency, accelerating the adoption of modern technologies, and enhancing value creation across productive sectors to support long-term sustainability.

Speaking at the Majlis Ash’shura on Sunday during its regular session of the third annual sitting of the tenth term to discuss the ministry’s statement across several key axes related to strengthening Oman’s food and water security system, Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said the coming phase will



The Majlis Ash’shura on Sunday hosted Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, during its regular session of the third annual sitting of the tenth term.

focus on accelerating technical and digital transformation, strengthening the sustainable management of natural resources, and improving implementation efficiency to maximise the impact of programmes and projects, reflecting a broader shift toward more efficient models of food and water management.

He stated that expanding the investment base, generating employment opportunities, and accelerating technical and digital transformation in ways that improve efficiency and raise added value.

Khuwaidam al Maashani, Member of the Majlis Ash’shura representing Taqah, pointed to the importance of developing the fisheries sector into a more integrated productive and industrial system with higher added value, capable of generating wider growth opportunities and employment, while benefiting from artificial intelligence and modern

technologies to improve sector performance and competitiveness.

Abdulaziz al Balushi, Member of the Majlis Ash’shura representing Ibri, highlighted the importance of expanding sustainable water management solutions, including the use of solar-powered well systems, alongside strengthening agricultural infrastructure, protecting productive land, and developing more efficient tools for managing water resources in farming areas.

Ali Ghuwas, Member of the Majlis Ash’shura representing Thumrait, also pointed to the importance of creating a more enabling environment for agricultural projects in a way that supports sustainability, strengthens farmers’ stability, and helps improve productivity in food security goals.

SHORT TAKES



Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South, emphasised the importance of the media as an active partner in supporting development paths. — ONA

AL SHARQIYAH SOUTH HIGHLIGHTS ACHIEVEMENTS

SUR: Al Sharqiyah South Governorate on Sunday reviewed the developmental progress in the governorate through visual presentations covering qualitative projects and initiatives in the tourism, economic, service and cultural sectors, alongside infrastructure and digital transformation projects.

The meeting addressed several achievements attained by the governorate, most notably the Wilayat of Sur joining the Unesco Global Network of Learning Cities, its selection as the Capital of Arab Tourism for 2024, and Masirah Island receiving international recognition as the first healthy island in the Eastern Mediterranean region. It also highlighted progress in institutional performance indicators, digital transformation and cybersecurity.

Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South, emphasised the importance of the media as an active partner in supporting development paths, enhancing awareness, and conveying national achievements with professionalism and objectivity. He praised the role of media institutions in keeping pace with the developmental movement taking place in the governorate.

He also reviewed the most prominent projects and initiatives implemented during the 2023-2025 period, which included the development of internal roads, the digitisation of services, and the execution of several community initiatives and developmental projects in partnership with the private sector. The meeting featured a discussion session that addressed various developmental projects and future plans for the governorate.

The briefing was attended by Dr Yahya Badr al Maawali, Governor of South A'Sharqiyah, the Walis, and several officials and media professionals in the governorate, within the framework of enhancing institutional communication, strengthening the partnership with the media, and reviewing the governorate's key achievements and projects. — ONA

AL BATINAH SOUTH 'S MOUNTAIN VILLAGES EMERGE AS A NEW TOURISM INVESTMENT HUB

AL RUSTAQ: The mountain villages in the Governorate of Al Batinah South are experiencing a notable acceleration in tourism investment, driven by their rich natural assets and stunning terrain.

These attributes have positioned the region as an attractive destination for hospitality projects ranging from heritage inns to eco-lodges (green lodges).

This growth aligns with Oman's broader strategy to diversify and enhance the sustainability of its tourism product.

Data related to investment in this sector show a notable concentration in three main wilayats of Al Rustaq, Nakhal and Al Awabi, with a total of 18 mountain tourist establishments providing approximately 154 hotel rooms.

This reflects growing interest in developing mountain tourism and meeting the needs of visitors seeking an authentic environmental and cultural experience.

The Wilayat of Al Rustaq topped the list in terms of the number of tourist establishments in



This reflects growing interest in developing mountain tourism.

mountain villages, hosting 10 facilities offering 112 hotel rooms, with a variety of classifications including guesthouses, heritage inns, and eco-lodges, in addition to a tourist camp, rest houses and one one-star hotel.

These establishments are spread across several prominent mountain locations such as Wadi Bani Auf, Wadi Al Sahtan, and Wadi Al Hoqain, as well as mountain villages with distinct tourism appeal such as Balad Seet, Bima and Wajma village, thereby enhancing the wilayat's attractiveness

as an integrated tourist destination. In the Wilayat of Nakhal, the number of mountain tourist establishments reached 7, providing 33 rooms, most of which are concentrated in guesthouses (6 establishments), in addition to one eco-lodge.

These investments are located in natural and mountain areas such as Wadi Mistal and the villages of Hadash, Wakan, Al Hajar and Al Taw. These tourist facilities have contributed to enhancing the tourism appeal of the mountain villages and surrounding wadis.

In the village of Al Aliyah in Wadi Bani Kharous, the Wilayat of Al Awabi, there is one mountain tourist establishment classified as a guesthouse, offering 9 rooms.

This indicates promising opportunities to enhance tourism investment in mountain areas, particularly as these villages offer a tranquil environment for recreation and a passion for adventure, especially given their natural assets and mountain terrain suitable for this type of tourism.

This growing investment momentum underscores the importance of mountain villages in supporting the tourism sector in the Governorate of Al Batinah South.

These establishments contribute to stimulating local economic activity, generating job opportunities, and enhancing the participation of local communities in tourism development, in line with the objectives of 'Oman Vision 2040,' which aims to diversify national income sources and promote sustainability.

— ONA

CEDAW panel reviews women’s empowerment efforts

MUSCAT: The committee tasked with following up the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) on Sunday held its first meeting in 2026.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, who heads the Committee.

The meeting explored national initiatives and programmes on women's welfare. It looked into efforts made in drafting the Oman's statement to respond to



CEDAW Committee held its first meeting for 2026.

observations on the fourth national report of the Convention.

It also reviewed the National Plan for Omani Women, the programme of cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund

and a project titled 'Encyclopedia of Omani Women'.

The meeting elaborated on ways to develop the Law of Oman Human Rights Commission in a manner that guarantees the expansion of

mechanisms for protecting women's rights and preserving women's legal guards against any forms of discrimination.

The meeting studied the alignment of Omani measures with the Paris Principles, with the objective of ensuring women's representation in organisational structures of national institutions.

The meeting discussed the National Digital Empowerment Initiative (codenamed 'Makeen') with a view to enhancing the presence of female talents in digital fields. — ONA

‘Diplomacy key in resolving conflicts in the region’

IDRIS AL BLAUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 10



The growing convergence between Chinese and Omani foreign policy principles advocate dialogue, mutual respect and peaceful coexistence.

LYU JIAN
Chinese Ambassador to Oman

Chinese President Xi Jinping's four-point proposal for safeguarding peace in the Middle East, which centres on peaceful coexistence, respect for national sovereignty, adherence to international law and balancing development with security. Lyu stressed that China supports an immediate ceasefire and remains committed to promoting dialogue and political solutions to regional disputes.

He also underscored the growing convergence between Chinese and Omani foreign policy principles, noting that both countries advocate dialogue, mutual respect and peaceful coexistence. Oman's role as a regional mediator was repeatedly praised during the discussions, particularly its efforts in facilitating indirect negotiations and reducing tensions in the Gulf.

Participants engaged in an extensive discussion on the future of regional security and China's evolving role in the Middle East. Questions raised during the symposium touched on post-war Gulf security arrangements, China-US relations, educational cooperation and opportunities for Omani youth in emerging sectors such as artificial intelligence, green energy and digital

technology. Responding to questions from participants, Ambassador Lyu said the "great majority" of countries and peoples in the region desire peace despite the complexity of the current situation.

He added that China would continue supporting all initiatives aimed at de-escalation and dialogue, while strengthening cooperation with Gulf countries across trade, technology and education.

The symposium also shed light on the expanding China-Oman partnership. China remains Oman's largest trading partner, with cooperation growing in renewable energy, infrastructure, education and environmental protection. Ambassador Lyu noted that more than 1,200 Omani officials and technical personnel have received training in China, while scholarships and Chinese-language education opportunities for Omani students continue to increase.

Participants concluded the symposium by reaffirming the need for stronger international cooperation, greater dialogue between nations and continued commitment to resolving interstate disputes through peaceful and diplomatic channels.

Al Najd Agriculture Development Company

شركة النجد
للتطوير الزراعي

Tender announcement for the Provision of Logistics Services

Al Najd Agricultural Development Company (SAOC), announces tender as following:

S/N	Tender No.	Tender Name	Tenders Submission Date
1	2/2026	Provision of Logistics Services	Last Day 1/6/2026

The companies and institutions operating in the Sultanate and specialized on the Provision of Logistics services can obtain tender requirements and documents, from the company's offices at the addresses below: -

- The company head office is in Thumrait, Hanfit area, during official working hours from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM.
- The company's office in Muscat, Bousher, Ghala area, during official working hours from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM.

For more information, please contact the following number: 98048123

We Al Najd Agriculture Development Company SAOC is an agriculture producing company based in Shasr, near Thumrait, Dhofar and we would like to request a quotation for trailer transportation services as per the following details:

- Pickup Location: Shasr (Thumrait, Dhofar region).
- Delivery Location: Silal Fruit and Vegetable Market, Muscat.
- Type of Cargo: Fruits and Vegetables.
- Estimated Quantity: 20 Tons per Trailer.
- Loading Period: June 2026 to July 2026

Kindly provide your quotation along with the following details:

- Freight charges (one-way only).
- Availability of trailers per day (2 to 5 required per day).
- Transit time.
- Terms of payment.
- Any additional charges

SPOTLIGHT

IDEAS IN AN AGE OF SPEED

BALQEES
AL ORAIMI

IN AN ERA defined by relentless speed and instant access, ideas are no longer measured solely by their depth but increasingly by how quickly they travel and capture attention. With the dominance of digital platforms and the rise of bite-sized content, an important question emerges: have spaces for deep intellectual discourse in Omani society diminished, or are they simply evolving to fit a new rhythm? Today's audience is markedly different. The traditional reader who once engaged with long-form articles and extended debates now navigates a constant stream of condensed ideas - scrolling, skimming and deciding within seconds. This phenomenon, often described as 'digital brevity,' does not necessarily signal a decline in intellectual engagement, but rather a transformation in the way ideas are consumed and processed. In Oman, where dialogue has long been rooted in calm and thoughtful exchanges - whether in community gatherings or cultural forums - this shift presents a notable contrast. Discussions that once unfolded gradually, allowing room for nuance and reflection, are increasingly replaced by quicker interactions, often limited to short comments or immediate reactions. Depth has not disappeared, but it appears less visible in the public sphere, requiring more deliberate effort to sustain.

Ahmed al Qalhathi, a young Omani in his twenties, reflects this generational balance: “We live in a fast-paced world, and short content is often more convenient. But at the same time, many important topics deserve more explanation than what we usually see online.” His perspective highlights a growing awareness among young people of the trade-off between speed and substance.

From another perspective, Salim bin Abdullah, a retiree in his sixties, believes the pace of discussion has changed significantly. “In the past, we would spend hours discussing a single topic in depth. Today,

conversations
feel rushed, sometimes
ending before they truly begin.
It's not that everything has changed,
but we have certainly lost some
patience for dialogue."

Core issues - identity, social transformation, the economy and education - remain central to public discourse. However, they are often presented in simplified formats designed to suit digital platforms. While simplification can improve accessibility, it becomes problematic when it turns into oversimplification, reducing complex matters to attention-grabbing headlines that fail to capture their full dimensions.

Ahmed al Masrouri, an academic specialising in digital media, offers a broader perspective: "The issue is not the speed of

The issue is not the speed of content itself, but how it is produced.

The media, therefore, stands at a critical intersection between attracting audiences and maintaining content quality. In an increasingly competitive environment, some platforms lean towards fast, high-engagement material, sometimes at the expense of thoughtful analysis. Yet credible efforts continue within both traditional and digital media to restore depth, presenting serious content in ways that are engaging and accessible.

AHMED AL MASROURI
Digital media specialist

voices who are reimagining intellectual discourse, delivering meaningful insights through innovative formats that combine clarity, brevity and depth.

Ultimately, the challenge is not to choose between speed and depth, but to reconcile them. A society that successfully embraces modern tools while preserving its capacity for critical thinking is one that can maintain intellectual balance. In this process, education plays a vital role in fostering analytical skills, families contribute by nurturing a culture of dialogue, and the media must continue creating spaces that encourage thoughtful and substantive discussion.

DIGITAL BREVITY IS RESHAPING
DISCOURSE - IDEAS ARE CONSUMED
FASTER, OFTEN AT THE EXPENSE OF
DEEPER REFLECTION

OMANI SOCIETY STILL VALUES
THOUGHTFUL DIALOGUE - BUT
MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS
NOW REQUIRE MORE INTENTIONAL
SPACES AND ATTENTION

SHORT TAKES



The new centres are in the wilayats of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and Dima W'attayeen.

2 NEW CENTRES
ADDED FOR HOLY
QURAN CONTEST

MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science announced the addition of two new centres for the preliminary qualifiers of the Sultan Qaboos Holy Quran Competition in its 34th edition.

The new centres are located in the wilayats of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and Dima W'attayeen.

Yousef bin Mohammed al Balushi, Deputy Head of the Preliminary and Final Qualifying Committees for the Sultan Qaboos Holy Quran Competition, said in a statement that this year, two new centres have been added for the competition's preliminary qualifiers in the wilayats of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and Dima W'attayeen, bringing the total number of centres to 28, distributed across all governorates of Oman.

Al Balushi added that registration for the competition will remain open until July 7. He noted that the preliminary qualifiers will begin on August 3. — ONA

Omani student wins
award for beauty brand

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, MAY 10

IN A MARKET dominated by global cosmetics giants, a young Omani student is gaining attention for proving that locally developed, health-conscious beauty products can compete through innovation and purpose-driven entrepreneurship.

Kulthoom al Maamari, founder of the emerging beauty brand 'Shahad Beauty', has secured first place at the Al Batinah North level and second place nationwide in the 'Rukaz' entrepreneurship competition.

The achievement has transformed her student-led initiative into one of Oman's promising youth business ventures.

Unlike conventional cosmetics brands, Shahad Beauty focuses on vegan and skin-friendly products made from plant-based ingredients, aiming to reduce exposure to harsh chemicals, particularly for frequent users of makeup.

Speaking to Observer, Al Maamari, a secondary student from Safeya bint Abdulmutalib School, said the idea was inspired by growing awareness among young consumers about the link between cosmetics and skin health.

"Our goal is to combine beauty



Kulthoom al Maamari, founder of 'Shahad Beauty', has earned laurels.

Shahad Beauty brand focuses on vegan and skin-friendly products made from plant-based ingredients

with skincare," she said. "Many girls today are looking for healthier options, especially products suitable for daily use. That is why we focus on natural ingredients that are gentle, safe, and suitable for different age groups, including children."

She added that although plant-based raw materials increase production costs, the brand's value

lies in safety, quality, and long-term consumer well-being.

The project stood out in the Rukaz competition not only for its product concept but also for its sustainability-driven business model and market-oriented approach. Judges reportedly praised its economic viability and alignment with the global shift towards clean and ethical beauty products.

Al Maamari described the competition as a turning point in her entrepreneurial journey.

"Winning first in Al Batinah North and second nationally gave me confidence that Shahad Beauty can grow into a leading Omani brand," she said.

"It also taught me how to present ideas professionally, understand financial planning, calculate profit margins, and respond strategically to market needs."

She now plans to expand the brand with new product lines, stronger digital marketing strategies, and the launch of an online store targeting customers across Oman and beyond.

As global demand for clean beauty continues to rise, Shahad Beauty reflects a new wave of Omani youth-led ventures driven not only by profit, but also by wellness, sustainability, and responsible innovation.

REGISTRATION OPENS FOR FALLING WALLS LAB CONTEST

MUSCAT: The Research and Innovation Authority, in collaboration with the German Falling Walls Foundation, has announced the opening of registration for the Falling Walls Lab competition in Oman for 2026, starting from May 10 until June 11.

The Falling Walls Lab is a global forum for presenting innovative ideas and research work from various disciplines. It aims to strengthen relationships among researchers, academics, entrepreneurs, professionals and investors, thereby supporting innovation and the exchange of scientific expertise.

The Lab derives its name from the fall of the Berlin Wall, symbolising the role of science and humanities in removing barriers between nations and transferring research from laboratories to society for practical benefit and application. The Lab organises an annual event that attracts science and innovation enthusiasts from



Registration for Falling Walls Lab competition in Oman ends on June 11. — ONA

various world countries to learn about diverse experiences and cultures.

Participation is open to innovators and researchers from various disciplines, subject to a number of eligibility criteria, including that no more than 10 years have passed since obtaining a bachelor's degree, no more than 7 years since a master's degree, and no more than 5 years since a doctoral degree. Currently enrolled bachelor's, master's, and doctoral students may also apply. Applications must be submitted in English only.

Those wishing to participate can register via the following website: <https://falling-walls.com/falling-walls-lab-nizwa-oman>

The winner of the competition will have the opportunity to represent Oman in the Falling Walls Lab finals, scheduled to be held during November 5-9, in Berlin.

The competition requires the submission of a research project, innovative idea, social initiative, or entrepreneurial venture, presented using PowerPoint in no more than 3 minutes, with the aim of persuading the judging panel of the idea's significance and viability. The panel comprises an elite group of experts, academics, researchers and business leaders.

Oman is participating in the competition for the 11th consecutive year. In the previous edition, 158 ideas and projects were submitted, of which 20 advanced to the local qualifiers, and 3 winners were selected to represent Oman in the finals held in Berlin.

Investment Manager Report

Ahli Islamic Money Market Fund

On behalf of the Fund Management Board, we are pleased to present the reviewed financial results of Ahli Islamic Money Market Fund for the quarter ended March 2026:

FOR THE QUARTER ENDED		
31st MARCH 2026	31/03/2026	31/12/2025
Number of units	82,553,931	76,495,929
Net asset value (RO)	83,264,252	77,017,638
Net asset value per unit (RO)	1.104	1.091
Dividend Paid Per Unit (RO)	-	-
Net profit/(loss)	905,475	2,797,347

Market Outlook

In March 2026, the Federal Reserve held the federal funds target range at 3.50%–3.75%, adopting a “hawkish pause” due to rising stagflation risks. The escalation of the regional conflict, which closed the Strait of Hormuz and pushed Brent crude above \$110, reignited inflation, with core PCE climbing to 3.1%, forcing the Fed to abandon expected rate cuts. Despite a cooling labor market (92,000 jobs lost; 4.4% unemployment), policymakers prioritized price stability, delaying any easing until late 2026 or beyond.

Financial stability risks include \$500B in debt-financed AI infrastructure, and leadership uncertainty remains as Kevin Warsh awaits confirmation to replace Jerome Powell. Money markets remain attractive, with elevated short-term yields and strong liquidity, particularly for GCC and USD-denominated placements.

U.S. Treasury yields were broadly stable in March: 1-month T-bill 3.69%, 12-month 3.72%, 2-year 3.79%, and 10-year 4.31%.

GCC central banks kept policy rates at 3.50%–3.75% in line with the Federal Reserve. Despite the Fed's March “hawkish pause” amid inflation and geopolitical risks, global rates are expected to ease gradually, supporting continued demand for low-risk, short-term investments.

Our Fund remains an attractive option and well-positioned, targeting ~4.6% returns in the short term, with daily liquidity and a strong focus on capital preservation. The fund remains a low-risk, stable solution for investors navigating global uncertainties, with returns subject to the Federal Reserve's rate decisions.

Financial Statements				
for the period ended 31 March 2026				
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION				
	31 March 2026	31 March 2025	31 December 2025	
	RO	RO	RO	
ASSETS				
Investments at amortised cost	58,624,182	30,356,797	56,695,218	
Investments at fair value through profit or loss (FVTPL)	13,691,670	-	13,513,826	
Cash and cash equivalents	9,675,189	22,922,660	5,732,601	
Accrued profit on investments	1,273,211	642,046	1,075,993	
Total assets	83,264,252	53,921,503	77,017,638	
LIABILITIES				
Accruals and other payables	710,321	263,347	521,709	
Total liabilities	710,321	263,347	521,709	
Total net assets attributable to the Unitholders	82,553,931	53,658,156	76,495,929	
Net asset value per unit	1.104	1.054	1.091	
STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME				
	31 March 2026	31 March 2025	31 December 2025	
	RO	RO	RO	
	(3 months)	(3 months)	(12 months)	
INCOME				
Profit on investments	845,054	537,393	3,008,503	
Fair value changes in investments at fair value through profit or loss	177,844	-	171,925	
	1,022,898	537,393	3,180,428	
EXPENSES				
Management fees	96,130	51,711	310,005	
Custodian and administration fees	11,462	7,020	38,500	
Fund Management Board fee	1,500	500	3,000	
Foreign exchange loss	1,368	-	3,363	
General and administration	6,962	4,541	28,213	
	117,423	63,772	383,081	
Net profit and total comprehensive income for the year/period	905,475	473,621	2,797,347	
Net profit per unit	0.013	0.012	0.048	

Note: The Fund does not have any item of other comprehensive income

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AI Najd Agriculture Development Company

شركة النجد للتممية الزراعية

Tender announcement for the Provision of Agricultural Services

AI Najd Agricultural Development Company (SAOC), announces tender as following:

S/N	Tender No.	Tender Name	Tenders Submission Date
1	1/2026	Provision of Agricultural Services	Last Day 1/6/2026

The companies and institutions operating in the Sultanate and specialized on the Provision of Agricultural Services can obtain tender requirements and documents, from the company's offices at the addresses below: -

- The company head office is in Thumrait, Hanfit area, during official working hours from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM.
- The company's office in Muscat, Bousher, Ghala area, during official working hours from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM.

For more information, please contact the following number: 98048123

IRAN THREATENS US SITES
Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps threatened to target US sites in the Middle East and "enemy ships" if its tankers come under fire.

HEZBOLLAH TARGETS NORTHERN ISRAEL
Hezbollah said it targeted troops in northern Israel with drones in response to repeated Israeli attacks on Lebanon despite truce.

RUBIO MEETS QATARI LEADER
US Secretary of State Marco Rubio met the leader of ally Qatar to discuss "security across the Middle East", the State Department said.



MIDDLE EAST LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

IRAN SENDS RESPONSE
The Islamic Republic of Iran sent on Sunday through Pakistani mediators its response to the latest text proposed by the United States.

SUPREME LEADER BRIEFES MILITARY
The head of Iran's armed forces unified command met Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei and received from him "new guiding measures."

DRONE ATTACKS ON SHIPS
Drones were launched at several targets in the Gulf, with one hitting a freighter sailing towards Qatar from Abu Dhabi.

IRAN'S 'PRESSURE CARD'
Qatar's PM told Iran's top diplomat Abbas Araghchi in a phone call that using the Strait of Hormuz as a "pressure card" will only deepen the crisis.

PARAMEDICS KILLED
Lebanon's health ministry said two paramedics from the Hezbollah-affiliated Islamic Health Committee were killed and five others wounded in Israeli strikes.

AIRCRAFT HIT KOREAN SHIP
South Korea said that one of its cargo vessels damaged days ago in the Strait of Hormuz was hit by "two unidentified aircraft" and analysis was being conducted.

ISRAEL OPERATED FROM IRAQ
Israeli forces established a makeshift base using an old airstrip in Iraq's desert during the war against Iran, confirming a report by The Wall Street Journal.

IRAN has sent its response to a US proposal to begin peace talks to end the war, the IRNA news agency reported on Sunday, as two carriers were allowed to pass through the blockaded Strait of Hormuz. The IRNA report said the response to a US proposal to end fighting before starting talks on more contentious issues, including Iran's nuclear programme, had been sent to Paksitan, which is mediating. But no details were immediately available.
After some 48 hours of relative calm following sporadic clashes last week, hostile drones were detected over several Gulf countries on Sunday, underlining the threat still facing the region despite a month-old ceasefire. Still, the QatarEnergy-operated carrier Al Kharaitiyat

IRAN RESPONDS TO US PROPOSAL

THE IRNA REPORT SAID THE RESPONSE TO A US PROPOSAL TO END FIGHTING BEFORE STARTING TALKS ON MORE CONTENTIOUS ISSUES, INCLUDING IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME, HAD BEEN SENT TO PAKSITAN, WHICH IS MEDIATING.

passed safely through the strait and was heading for Pakistan's Port Qasim, according to data from shipping analytics firm Kpler, the first Qatari vessel carrying liquefied natural gas to cross the strait since the US and Israel started the war on February 28. Sources said earlier the transfer, which offered a modicum of relief to Pakistan after a wave of power blackouts caused by a halt to vital gas imports, had been approved by Iran to build confidence with Qatar and Pakistan, both mediators in the war. In addition, a Panama-flagged bulk carrier bound for Brazil that had previously attempted to transit the strait on May 4, passed through, using a route designated by Iran's armed forces, Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency reported on Sunday.

With US President Donald Trump due to visit China this week, there has been mounting pressure to draw a line under the war, which has ignited a global energy crisis and poses a growing threat to the world economy. But, despite diplomatic efforts to break a deadlock between the two sides and the passage of the Qatari gas tanker, the threat to shipping lanes and the economies of the region remained high. On Sunday, the United Arab Emirates said it intercepted two drones coming from Iran, while Qatar condemned a drone attack that hit a cargo ship coming from Abu Dhabi in its waters. Kuwait said its air defences had dealt with hostile drones that entered its airspace.

Tehran has largely blocked non-Iranian shipping through the narrow Strait of Hormuz, which before the war carried one-fifth of the world's oil supply and which has emerged as one of the central pressure points in the war. Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, who discussed Pakistan's mediation efforts to end the war with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Miami on Saturday, told Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi that using the Strait of Hormuz as a "pressure tool" would only deepen the crisis. He told Araqchi in a phone call that freedom of navigation should not be compromised, the Qatari foreign ministry said on Sunday, without specifying the exact date of the call. Turkey's foreign minister also spoke to Araqchi, an official in the Turkish foreign ministry said.

Iranian lawmakers have said they are drafting a bill to formalise Iran's management of the strait, with clauses including forbidden passage to vessels of "hostile states". Recent days have seen the biggest flare-ups in fighting in and around the strait since a ceasefire began a month ago: the UAE came under renewed attack on Friday and sporadic clashes were reported between Iranian forces and US vessels in the strait.

Washington imposed a blockade on Iranian vessels last month but Tehran has so far taken its time before responding to calls to end a war that surveys show is unpopular with US voters facing ever-higher gasoline prices. A CIA assessment indicated Iran would not suffer severe economic pressure from a US blockade for about another four months, according to a US official familiar with the matter.

A senior intelligence official characterised as false the "claims" about the CIA analysis, which was first reported by the Washington Post. The US has also found little international support in the conflict, with Nato allies refusing calls to send ships to open the Strait of Hormuz without a full peace deal and an internationally mandated mission. — Reuters

DEEPENING CRISIS

Qatar warns using Hormuz as 'pressure tool'

Qatar's prime minister told Iran's foreign minister that using the Strait of Hormuz as "a pressure tool" would only deepen the crisis in the Gulf. Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani also told Iran's Abbas Araqchi in a phone call that all parties in the conflict should respond to mediation efforts to end the war. Meanwhile, a cargo vessel was attacked by a drone in Qatari waters northeast of Mesaieed port as the ship travelled from Abu Dhabi, causing a limited fire. — Reuters

COORDINATION OFFER

Moscow offers to transport enriched uranium

Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Russia was prepared to transport and store enriched uranium from Iran if needed as part of a deal to end the war in Iran. Putin said Russia had transported enriched uranium from Iran once before, in 2015. He said all parties to the conflict had agreed to transporting the uranium out. "But then the United States hardened its position and demanded that the uranium be transported exclusively to US territory. — dpa

AIRSPACE INCIDENTS

Kuwait, UAE defences deals with attacks

The United Arab Emirates' air defences dealt with two drones coming from Iran on Sunday, the Defence Ministry said, the latest in renewed attacks on the oil-rich Gulf country. The attacks prompted the UAE to shift to remote learning for schools last week, but authorities said that in-person learning would resume from Monday. Meanwhile, Kuwait's army said it had detected and dealt with several hostile drones in the country's airspace at dawn on Sunday. — Reuters

S KOREA SAYS 'UNIDENTIFIED AIRCRAFT' HIT CARGO SHIP

SEOUL: A South Korean cargo ship hit in the Strait of Hormuz six days ago was struck by unidentified aircraft, the foreign ministry in Seoul said on Sunday, days after the fire-damaged HMM Namu arrived in Dubai. US President Donald Trump has claimed that Iran had "taken some shots" at the Panama-flagged vessel and urged South Korea to join American operations aimed at restoring normal shipping through the strait. The vital waterway has been virtually closed since the United States and Israel launched a war against Iran on February 28, with Tehran responding with attacks across the Middle East and imposing a chokehold on the strait that has rattled global energy markets.

Iranian ambassador to South Korea Saeed Koozechi (C) leaves the Foreign Ministry in Seoul. — AFP

"... two unidentified aircraft struck the outer plate of the port-side ballast tank at the stern of the HMM Namu at roughly one-minute intervals, causing flames and smoke," foreign ministry spokesman Park Il told a news briefing about Monday's attack. He did not specify what kind of aircraft were involved, saying they "were captured on CCTV footage, but there are limitations in identifying the exact type, launch origin and physical size of the objects".

Tehran has denied responsibility for the attack, with its embassy in Seoul posting a statement on its website saying that it "firmly rejects and categorically denies any allegations regarding the involvement" of its forces. — AFP

IRANIANS SHORE UP DAMAGED HERITAGE SITES

TEHRAN: As fears of renewed conflict hang over Iran, conservationists are shoring up battered historic sites and taking stock of the damage caused by the war with the United States and Israel, though experts warn some repairs could take years. At Golestan Palace, a defining cultural landmark in central Tehran, shattered mirrors, broken doors and debris from ornate ceilings now lie scattered across parts of the site after shockwaves from strikes on the capital following the outbreak of war on February 28.

The former royal residence, known for its sprawling gardens, pools and royal halls, has been listed as a Unesco World Heritage site since 2013. The fragile truce in place since April 8 has allowed experts to begin gauging the scale of the damage, though the complex remains closed to the public. "The damage has been assessed at several levels, but a more detailed specialised evaluation is still underway," Ali Omid Ali, a restoration specialist and head of the technical engineering department at Golestan Palace, said. For now, he said, teams are focused on stabilising damaged structures and preventing further collapse before broader repair work can begin. "We need a more stable situation to start the restoration process," he said. — AFP

Lebanon says two paramedics killed by Israel

BEIRUT: Lebanon's health ministry said two paramedics from the Hezbollah-affiliated Islamic Health Committee were killed and five others wounded on Sunday in Israeli strikes on the country's south despite a ceasefire. A ministry statement said that Israel "directly targeted, with two strikes, two Health Committee sites", killing one paramedic and wounding three others in Qalaway, and killing another paramedic and wounding two others in Tibnin.

The statement decried Israel's continued "violation of international laws". Israel has kept up strikes despite a ceasefire in place since April 17 that was supposed to halt hostilities with Hezbollah. The Hezbollah has kept up its own attacks, mainly on Israeli troops operating in south Lebanon but also across the border.

Israel strikes have expanded in recent days, while Lebanon's health ministry has raised the overall toll since war erupted to around 2,800 dead, including more than 100 health and emergency workers. Israeli strikes have killed dozens of people in Lebanon since the ceasefire. Under the terms of the truce released by Washington, Israel reserves the right to act against "planned, imminent or ongoing attacks". Its troops are operating in an Israeli-announced "yellow line" around 10 kilometres deep running inside Lebanon's border, where residents have been warned not to return.

On Saturday, Lebanon's National News Agency reported heavy Israeli strikes in various parts of Lebanon including one that killed seven people, and several raids around 20 kilometres south of Beirut outside Hezbollah's traditional strongholds. Lebanon and Israel are preparing to hold a third round of talks on May 14-15 in Washington, with veteran Lebanese diplomat Simon Karam recently appointed by President Joseph Aoun to lead his country's delegation.

A first landmark meeting between the countries, which have no diplomatic relations, was held days before US President Donald Trump announced the ceasefire, while the second round came as he announced a three-week truce extension. Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East conflict on March 2 when it launched rockets at Israel to avenge the killing of Iran's supreme leader in US-Israeli strikes.

Hezbollah said it targeted troops in northern Israel with drones on Saturday in response to repeated Israeli attacks on Lebanon despite an ongoing truce between the two sides. In a statement, the group said that it "targeted a gathering of Israeli enemy army soldiers near Misgav Am", just over the border, in retaliation for "the Israeli enemy's violation of the ceasefire". Hours later, it said it had launched another drone at "a gathering of Israeli enemy soldiers at a helicopter landing pad" in Shlomi, also along the countries' shared frontier.

The group also announced attacks on Israeli military targets inside Lebanon using rockets and drones. After Hezbollah's first announcement, the Israeli military reported "several" explosive drone launches by Hezbollah into Israeli territory, saying one army reservist had been severely wounded and two others moderately injured in one of the attacks, without specifying where. — AFP

OPINION

How Attenborough brought the natural world into our homes



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is an Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

AS THE famous natural historian and broadcaster David Attenborough turns 100 this week, it is an opportune moment to see how individuals can single-handedly make a difference in the way that we understand our universe. His work continues to impact multiple generations of nature and wildlife lovers across the world. Attenborough started in broadcasting in the early 1950s when he helped to produce a series called ‘Animal Patterns’ for the BBC. Ever since, he has been associated with issues of conservation, fostering a global love for animals and nature through impactful storytelling. While his early work focused on discoveries of lesser known places and species, he later worked towards creating awareness, addressing losses in biodiversity and the urgent need to protect the natural habitat of animals and birds, including marine animals. Attenborough travelled around the world and explored the hidden treasures of nature, bringing them into our living rooms with

sensitivity and humour. The impact of his works has been tremendous. He has done groundbreaking work in bringing unknown and unseen people and species to our attention. His contact with an unknown tribe in New Guinea, with whom he held a long conversation without knowing their language, is a masterclass in sensitivity and curiosity. However, it is his connection with animals that became Attenborough’s endearing quality, along with his passion for conservation. His iconic 1979 ‘Life on Earth’ series helped boost conservation efforts for mountain gorillas in Rwanda. His narration of ‘Blue Planet II’ in 2017 created a massive public outrage against corporations and their contribution to single-use plastic pollution. Attenborough’s has long been a trusted voice of conservation, including a statement at the COP26 to policymakers to reconsider the relationship of governments with private corporations which profited without giving back. Perhaps the most important aspect of

Perhaps the most important aspect of Attenborough’s work and success is the humility in his works

Attenborough’s work and success is the humility in his works. His manner of approaching animals, the tone of his delivery and the respect that he exudes to his viewers showcase a human willing to learn and share knowledge. Attenborough combines his natural curiosity with technical skills and an instinct for the story. His 1979 documentary ‘Life on Earth’ became the first series on nature to cost more than one million dollars, but was an international blockbuster. Producing and presenting for over 70 years, Attenborough has seen it all: from the birth of colour television to Artificial Intelligence. He has also embraced it all, without the cynicism of a purist. At 87, he dived into the Great Barrier Reef and at 96, he filmed wildlife in Finland. He continues to inspire, educate and create awareness with his work. Recognition of his work has come in the form of an extinct marine reptile ‘Attenborosarus’, some trees, as well as research boats named after him. In fact, his lifetime work points to ways that make our universe unique and worth protecting.

HIGH-GLAM AI AVATARS BOOST TRUMP AHEAD OF MIDTERMS

ANUJ CHOPRA

Clad in military fatigues, the blonde women lavish praise on President Donald Trump and tear into his rivals - but these influencers are AI-generated, flooding tech platforms with fervent political messaging ahead of the US midterm election. The rise of hyper-realistic AI avatars - parroting Trump’s political slogans such as ‘America First’ and echoing his talking points on issues such as immigration - underscores the use of new technology in efforts to energise his Make America Great Again (MAGA) conservative base. “Where are all my MAGA friends at? If you voted for Trump, say it loud in the comments and you’ve got yourself a new follower from Texas,” an AI-created woman declares on TikTok, sporting a red MAGA hat. “Trump is the future of America,” reads text overlaid on another AI-generated TikTok video. In an Instagram clip set to the Village People’s “YMCA,” an avatar portraying a “MAGA patriot” says she “came out of the closet as a Trump supporter.” It’s not clear who is behind the AI accounts and whether they are part of a coordinated influence operation ahead of the November elections that will determine whether Republicans maintain control of Congress. Earlier this year, Trump himself posted on his Truth Social platform a video of a platinum blonde AI avatar - sporting the high-glam look popular among his fans - that pushed unfounded corruption allegations against California’s Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom. In recent months, US media have detected hundreds of AI-generated pro-Trump influencers - young men and women depicted in military fatigues or dressed as immigration agents - commenting on hot-button political issues, including the Iran conflict. The Governance and Responsible AI Lab (GRAIL) at Purdue University has also tracked numerous such accounts across TikTok, Instagram and Facebook. “The growing wave of political AI influencers amid the 2026 elections is a glimpse into a future where hyper-targeted AI content can be used to shape public opinion,” Andrew Yoon of CivAI, a nonprofit focused on AI’s capabilities and dangers, said. Such content is “increasingly difficult to detect, especially when made by sophisticated operators,” Yoon said. As AI technology becomes more and more sophisticated, online manipulation using phony influencers could “become even more personalised and difficult to control,” he added. — AFP

US, China have a common foe. It’s not the USSR

THE SUMMIT between President Trump and President Xi Jinping in Beijing this week could be the most significant encounter between American and Chinese leaders since Richard Nixon met Mao Zedong in Beijing in 1972. That summit eased decades of Sino-American animosity and forged a tacit alliance between the US and China against the Soviet Union. This summit comes at a similar transformational moment in world affairs, when there is a new shared threat to both China and America. It is a metastasising disorder that could destabilise the world and harm both countries unless they figure out a way to simultaneously compete and collaborate against a growing list of challenges. These challenges can be successfully confronted only by their collective action — starting with the US and China together creating guardrails against the malign uses of AI, now that the latest models have demonstrated staggeringly powerful cyberattack capabilities. Two paradigm shifts have changed the world since the Nixon-Mao summit. The first — still not widely appreciated, although the alarm bells are now ringing off the wall — is the emergence of these new, asymmetric artificial intelligence tools that could superempower small, malign actors, be they fighters, anarchists, criminals, political groups, or small nation-states. Two guys in a cave with a laptop, access to the latest AI models and a Starlink terminal could attack the critical infrastructure of any society. The second has to do with globalisation. The Nixon-Mao summit began the process of taking the world from disconnected to much more connected and then interconnected. When Nixon and Mao began



The summit between Donald Trump and Xi Jinping is scheduled for May 14–15, in Beijing.



THOMAS L FRIEDMAN

The writer is an Opinion Columnist with NYT

This summit comes at a similar transformational moment in world affairs, when there is a new shared threat to both China and America

easing China out of its isolation from the global economy — which Deng Xiaoping then vastly accelerated by shifting China to state-led capitalism — they unleashed a cascade of economic and technological forces. By the time the early 21st century rolled around, the combination of China joining the World Trade Organization and the world being wired with the Internet meant that more people in more places could compete, connect and collaborate in more ways for less money on more things than at any other time in human history. It is why I wrote a book in 2005 titled ‘The World Is Flat.’ It is in the nature of technological change, though, that each major step forward comes faster than the previous one, because it builds on the tools that the previous era unleashed. So, years after I argued that the world is flat, technology and other forces marched on and took us, as Dov Seidman, the founder of The HOW Institute for Society, argued, from interconnected to interdependent, or as he puts it, from flat to ‘fused.’ You could unplug from the flat world. There is no escaping the fused world. We are all going to rise

and fall together now. That is not only because advances in the Internet, smartphones, fibre optics, satellites and wireless communication have fused us technologically more than ever before. It is also because a set of planetary-scale challenges has fused our fates together more than ever before as well. These challenges are so large in scope and so indifferent to national borders that no single state, however powerful, can address or escape them alone. We know what they are: mitigating climate change, preventing the spread of nuclear and biological weapons, managing global migrations, controlling pandemics, keeping global supply chains that we all now depend on operating smoothly and — most important and immediate — managing this new AI species we have conjured up. We have been able to postpone or get by with limited collaboration on many of these planetary-scale issues, but time is up on AI’s cyberattacking powers. There is no kicking this can down the road. There is no more road. — New York Times

Do we drive our cars or they drive us?



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author,
translator and a
communications
professional

EVERY DAY, millions of people step into their cars carrying more than keys and destinations. They carry moods, burdens, ambitions and choices. The road becomes a moving reflection of who we are in that moment: impatient or patient, careless or considerate, hurried or humane.

It is easy to believe that the kind of car we drive defines us. A powerful engine might suggest confidence. A luxury vehicle might indicate discipline and success. A taxi weaving through traffic might seem to tell a story of recklessness. But how far does this connection go? Can the brand of a car influence a driver’s character, attitude, or behaviour? Yet these observations, while common, deserve a closer look.

Perhaps it is not what we drive that matters, but how we drive, and more importantly, who we choose to be when we do. Consider the taxi driver, often judged in a fleeting glance. Behind the wheel is not just a driver, but a person navigating long hours, financial pressure, and the constant demand to keep moving. What looks like impatience may actually be strength. What seems like aggression may be determination. There is a quiet resilience in that motion; a reminder that not all urgency is carelessness!

Now consider the driver of a luxury car,

moving smoothly, almost effortlessly. It is easy to assume discipline, control, and even superiority. But true calmness is not found in polished surfaces or silent engines; it is revealed in humility, in respect for others on the road, in the willingness to share space rather than grasp it.

The road, in this sense, is one of the few places where all distinctions disappear. Expensive cars stop at the same red lights as modest ones. Hence, status fades in traffic and what remains visible is behaviour. Do we react, or do we respond? Do we see other drivers as obstacles or as people? These are the choices that define us and not the logo on the front of the car.

Here lies a powerful truth that driving is one of the most ordinary acts that offers extraordinary opportunities for character. In a single commute, we are given dozens of chances to practice patience, empathy and limit. To turn frustration into understanding and to replace desire with intention.

However, every journey offers a quiet invitation to become better than we were the moment before we turned the key.

Yes, cars may reflect aspects of our identity and may even influence how others see us, but they do not limit who we can be. Because the most important upgrade is not found in horsepower or design, it is found in mindset.

Driving is one of the most ordinary acts that offers extraordinary opportunities for character. In a single commute, we are given dozens of chances to practice patience, empathy and limit

Imagine roads where drivers choose politeness over competition. Where strength is measured not by speed, but by self-control and where respect travels faster than any machine. That world does not begin with better cars. It begins with better choices made by ordinary people, in ordinary moments, behind the wheel.

So, do we become what we drive? Perhaps the more important question is not what our cars say about us, but what our driving says about our values. Courtesy, patience and responsibility are not features that come with any brand; they are choices made behind the wheel.

In the end, character is not measured in horsepower or price tags, but in how we navigate the shared road of everyday life. The most revealing moments are not in the badge on the hood, but in the small decisions: the pause to let someone merge, the patience at a crowded junction and the limit when no one is watching.

Cars may carry us from place to place, but character is what determines how we travel. On the long road of human behaviour, it is still the driver — not the machine — who chooses the direction. And no matter what we drive, we always have the power to drive differently to become better versions of ourselves.

South Korea welcomes rare baby bump as population shrinks

MATTHEW WALSH AND JIHYE SHIN

Kim Su-jin and her husband have set aside their doubts and embraced parenthood, joining a small but notable wave of South Korean couples having children despite the country’s steep demographic decline.

South Korea has one of the world’s lowest birth rates, and the government has spent billions of dollars trying to encourage citizens to have more babies and cushion the worst impacts of a shrinking population.

The Asian nation is still nowhere near reversing the trend, but a modest baby bump has come after years of consistently low statistics - even as experts disagree on the underlying causes.

Kim, 32, a freelance music industry worker, gave birth to her daughter in January last year despite earlier financial concerns during her four-year marriage. She shook off worries over housing, schooling and work “because we believed that having (a baby) would bring us happiness”, she said. South Korea’s fertility rate hit a record low in 2023 but has picked up since then, with the number of monthly births consistently rising compared to the previous year.

Nearly 23,000 babies were born in February, the most for that month in seven years, according to the statistics ministry.

The on-year growth of 13.6 per cent was the highest for any February since records began in 1981. The uptick in births has tracked a similar, though less even, rise in marriages going back to mid-2022, official figures show.

Experts said the trend may reflect more positive attitudes towards family among younger South Koreans.

But they differed on what was driving the shift and how important it was compared with factors such as pro-natalist policies.

Hong Sok-chul, an economics professor at Seoul National University (SNU), said the programmes had been “quite effective”.

“Rather than trying to force marriage or childbirth... the government focused on lowering the direct and indirect costs to make these choices more rational,” he said.

Kim Woo-jin, 33, said vouchers she received from the government had “played a significant role in alleviating the financial burden” of pregnancy, childbirth and child-rearing.

She cited a payment of two million won (\$1,400) when her daughter was born last year, a one-million-won voucher to cover maternity fees, and subsidies for transport and post-natal care.

“I believe that the significant improvements (in state support)... played a role in the recent rebound” in births, the office worker said.

South Korea also pays parents a one-million-won monthly allowance during the baby’s first year, while other policies include low-interest loans for young families buying homes, expanded parental leave and subsidised fertility treatment.

Some companies also hand large bonuses to staff who have children. — AFP

Surviving extreme heat in India’s salt pans

INDIA FACES challenging heatwaves each year, but few places endure conditions as searing as the country’s western desert salt pans, where workers rely on simple techniques to survive almost unbearable temperatures.

Up to 50,000 workers in Gujarat spend eight months on the remote salt pans without electricity or healthcare, relying on a tanker to deliver drinking and washing water every 25 days. They use shaded rest breaks, cloth-cooled water bottles and staggered hours to survive.

In Gujarat’s Little Rann of Kutch, summer temperatures routinely cross 45C, and can climb to 47-48C. The same dry heat that makes life punishing also makes the desert ideal for salt production - Gujarat produces roughly three-quarters of India’s total salt output.

“We work in staggered timing... doing our work in early mornings and after sunset,” said 42-year-old Babulal Narayan, who rakes the salt as brine water dries in shallow pools.

During the hottest hours, many retreat to makeshift huts - frames of sticks draped with coarse homespun cloth, plastered with wild donkey dung. “We sit here every two to three hours, so that we do not feel weak or dizzy,” said 17-year-old salt worker Bhavna Rathore.

The dung blocks the sun and allows heat to escape, while the rough cloth allows some air to pass through, she explained.

The huts offer shelter in a landscape without trees or natural shade, and where the sun reflects harshly off the white salt crust.

Kanchan Narayan, 44, uses a damp cloth-wrapped bottle hung on a string, cooling the drinking water inside via evaporation.

“The wind helps to cool the water,” she said.

Poornima, a salt pan worker, sips black tea during the day - saying the hot drink induces sweating in the dry weather to cool the body.

The salt is produced by pumping saline water from bore wells into shallow pans, where the water evaporates under the sun and wind.

Workers rake the surface daily to



A salt pan worker holding a handful of harvested salt at an alkali flat in the Little Rann of Kutch region in Gujarat. — AFP



UZMI ATHAR

The writer is South
Asia correspondent
with AFP

ensure even crystallisation. Over weeks, a thick crust of salt forms, which the workers break and stack into mounds.

The job has always involved enduring harsh conditions, but this year the India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecasts an “above-normal number of heatwave days” across several regions, including Gujarat. Workers are exposed to the heat for longer than before.

Previously, they relied on expensive diesel pumps to bring the saline water to the surface. But a switch to solar has brought down costs and allowed families to operate the pans for longer.

That means work that used to end in March now continues into the hottest months.

The consequences for workers can be deadly, with regular reports of fatigue, dizziness and nausea - signs of heat stress, when the body’s natural cooling systems are overwhelmed. This can cause organ failure and even death.

Several studies have found high levels of dehydration, heat stress and even signs of kidney malfunction among these communities.

“I take a paracetamol whenever fever becomes high,” said Kanchan, a rare worker wearing rubber

boots - to protect against prolonged exposure to brine, that can crack skin so deep it bleeds.

India has no fixed legal temperature at which work must stop.

Instead, it relies on IMD heatwave thresholds - around 40C for alerts and 47C for “severe” conditions - with local authorities imposing restrictions.

The desert conditions make the extreme heat marginally more survivable - at low humidity, sweat evaporates more quickly off the skin, cooling the body.

But conditions are growing harder, with heatwaves intensifying and unseasonal storms also threatening livelihoods.

A sudden rainstorm can dissolve crystallised salt overnight - forcing workers to restart the evaporation cycle.

“A big dust storm hit us last month, destroying salt worth Rs 200,000 (\$2,100),” Narayan said.

He and five relatives made a profit of Rs 250,000 (\$2,635) - or \$450 each for eight months of hard work. But families say they have little alternative.

“What else will we do?” said 65-year-old worker Rasoda Rathore.

“We have no land to farm, no livestock to earn our livelihood from... this is all we know.”

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



Oman's U-18 national team during their Round of 16 encounter against Kazakhstan.

OMAN U-18 BEACH VOLLEYBALL TEAM BOW OUT IN ROUND 16

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
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Oman's national U-18 beach volleyball team continued its campaign in the Asian U-18 Beach Volleyball Championship currently taking place in Uzbekistan, recording mixed results after securing a victory over Singapore before suffering a defeat to Kazakhstan in the Round of 16.

Following their opening-match loss to Thailand on Thursday, Oman bounced back strongly in their second group stage match on Friday, defeating Singapore 2-0 to revive their hopes of progressing in the continental competition.

The Omani side delivered a composed and confident performance throughout the match, controlling play and sealing a straight-set victory. Oman claimed the first set 21-13, before maintaining their momentum to win the second set 21-17, securing a deserved victory that boosted the team's morale in the tournament.

The win highlighted the team's determination to recover from the opening setback and demonstrated the players' ability to compete at a strong level against Asian opposition in one of the continent's leading youth beach volleyball competitions.

On Saturday, May 9, Oman faced a difficult challenge against Kazakhstan in the Round of 16, where the Kazakh side proved too strong and secured a 2-0 victory, ending Oman's journey in the tournament.

Kazakhstan took control of the match from the start, winning the opening set 21-9, before completing the victory in the second set 21-11 to advance to the quarterfinals.

The Asian U-18 Beach Volleyball Championship is being held in Uzbekistan from May 6 to 10, featuring some of Asia's most promising youth teams. The tournament serves as an important platform for developing young talent and providing players with valuable international experience.

Oman had been drawn into Group D alongside Thailand and Singapore, with the national team aiming to achieve positive results while gaining exposure and strengthening the development of beach volleyball in the Sultanate.

Despite exiting the tournament, Oman's participation reflects the Oman Volleyball Association's continued efforts to develop youth national teams and provide players with international competitive opportunities, as part of its long-term vision to build a promising generation capable of representing the Sultanate with distinction in the future.



Oman's U-18 national team during their Round of 16 encounter against Kazakhstan.

Oman drawn in Group A of AFC Asian Cup 2027



RIYADH AL BALUSHI
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OMAN'S NATIONAL football team has been drawn in Group A alongside host nation Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Palestine following the official draw ceremony for the AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027, held on Saturday in Diriyah, Saudi Arabia.

The 19th edition of Asia's premier football tournament will take place from January 7 to February 5, marking the first time Saudi Arabia will host the continental championship in its history. The event will feature 24 national teams competing under the expanded tournament format introduced in 2019 by the Asian Football Confederation 'AFC'.

As the host nation, Saudi Arabia was automatically placed in the first position of Group A after being seeded in Pot 1, The draw subsequently placed Oman, Kuwait and Palestine alongside the Green Falcons in what is expected to be a competitive and balanced group featuring strong Gulf and Arab rivalries.

Oman will be aiming to make a strong impression at the continental tournament and advance beyond the group stage, building on the team's experience from previous AFC Asian Cup appearances and



Asian Cup draw

the noticeable development of Omani football in recent years.

The draw ceremony was staged in the historic city of Diriyah, one of Saudi Arabia's most prominent cultural and heritage landmarks, in the presence of AFC officials, representatives of participating member associations and a number of former Asian football stars.

Defending champions Qatar, winners of both the 2019 and 2023 AFC Asian Cup titles, were drawn in Group F alongside

Japan, Thailand and Indonesia in what promises to be one of the tournament's toughest groups.

Qatar will be seeking to continue its continental dominance and secure a third consecutive title.

Among the other Arab teams, Jordan was placed in Group B together with Bahrain, Uzbekistan and North Korea. Group C includes Iran, the United Arab Emirates, China and Tajikistan, while Group D features South Korea, Iraq, Syria and either Lebanon or Yemen, with the final qualification spot yet to be decided.

The tournament will continue to follow the expanded 24 team format, with teams divided into six groups of four.

The top two teams from each group, along with the four best third-placed teams, will qualify for the knockout stage beginning with the Round of 16.

Saudi Arabia's hosting of the tournament represents a major milestone for the Kingdom, which has undergone rapid development in sports infrastructure and facilities in recent years as part of its ambition to stage major regional and international sporting events.

The 2027 edition also marks the return of the AFC Asian Cup to its traditional four year cycle after scheduling adjustments affected the previous edition, which was hosted by Qatar in 2024 following China's withdrawal as host.

Oman sends strong delegation to 4th GCC Games in Doha

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 10

Oman will take part in the official opening ceremony of the 4th GCC Games Doha, as Qatar hosts the regional multi-sport event from May 11 to 22 under the slogan "One Gulf, One Heart."

The Omani delegation is headed by HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said, Chairman of the Oman Olympic Committee and Head of Oman's delegation to the Games. He is accompanied by Abdullah Ba Mukhalef, Secretary-General of the Oman Olympic Committee, Dr Marwan al Juma, Deputy Head of Delegation, along with members of the administrative and technical teams and national squads.

Oman's flag during the opening ceremony will be carried by taekwondo athlete



Ali al Balushi during his participation in the third GCC, Kuwait.

Nibras al Tooqi and women's 3x3 basketball player Shamsa al Dhaha al Khinji.

Oman is competing with 11 national teams across swimming, taekwondo, table tennis, fencing, karate, shooting, athletics, 3x3 basketball, snooker, volleyball and bowling. The national teams will be aiming to

deliver strong performances and compete for podium places in a Games that brings together athletes from all GCC countries.

The opening ceremony is scheduled to be held at Al Shaqab Indoor Arena, with organisers promising a distinctive ceremony reflecting the unity and shared

sporting identity of the Gulf. The fourth edition features 17 sports, including handball, table tennis, athletics, padel, fencing, boxing, taekwondo, karate, swimming, billiards, snooker, 3x3 basketball, shooting, archery, volleyball, equestrian and bowling.

Oman enters the Doha Games with ambitions to build on its best-ever medal tally, achieved at the third GCC Games in Kuwait in 2022, where Omani athletes won 32 medals — 12 gold, five silver and 15 bronze. Oman had earlier won 11 medals at the inaugural edition in Bahrain in 2011 and 29 medals at the second edition in Dammam in 2015.

Badr bin Ali Awlad Thani, Director of Oman's delegation, said the administrative team had completed all arrangements to receive the national teams in Doha.



Winners of the Oman Open Badminton Championship 2026 celebrate with officials after the tournament concluded on Saturday.

Indian player sweeps titles at Oman Open Badminton Championship

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 10

THE OMAN Open Badminton Championship 2026 concluded on Saturday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, with India's Balasubramannian N G emerging as the standout performer after winning three titles in men's singles, men's doubles and mixed doubles. Organised by the Oman Racket Sports Committee(ORSC) from May 7 to 9, the championship brought together players from Oman and the expatriate community, producing strong competition across three main categories.

Balasubramannian sealed the men's singles title with a 21-13, 21-15 victory over second seed Ali Shahhosseini in the final. He then partnered Diya Anil to win the mixed doubles crown after a hard-fought 19-21, 23-21, 21-14 win over Vaishakh Nair and Bitu Mansouri. His third title came in the men's doubles, where he teamed up with Rajesh Ravi to defeat Jeswin Mathew and Vaishakh Nair 18-21, 25-23, 21-14 in one of the most exciting finals of the day.

The closing ceremony was held in the presence of Hisham al Sinani, Director-General of Sports Welfare and Development at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and Dr Abdulrahim al Droushi, Chairman of ORSC, who later crowned the winners.

After the conclusion of the matches, Hisham al Sinani and Dr Abdulrahim al Droushi crowned the winners. In the men's singles, Balasubramannian took first place, Ali Shahhosseini finished second, while Philip Afolabi and Varun Lakshman shared third



Balasubramannian sealed the men's singles title with a 21-13, 21-15 victory over second seed Ali Shahhosseini in the final.

place.

In the men's doubles, Balasubramannian and Rajesh Ravi claimed first place, followed by Jeswin Mathew and Vaishakh Nair in second. Ved Yogendra Katiyar and Naufal Ligo Saufik, along with Ajmal Ali and Ali Shahhosseini, finished third.

In the mixed doubles, Balasubramannian and Diya Anil won the title, Vaishakh Nair and Bitu Mansouri came second, while Rajesh Ravi and Christine Danith, and Ali Shahhosseini and Sara Shabani, took third place.

Dr Abdulrahim said the championship represented a successful conclusion to the 2026

Oman badminton season, noting that the series of events reflected progress beyond the court.

"The Oman Open Badminton Championship came as the closing event of our 2026 badminton activities, and we witnessed very high technical levels," he said. "Across the three open championships, nearly 185 matches were played, managed by 23 Omani referees and supported by seven organisers. These numbers are important indicators that go beyond the tournament itself."

He added that the committee, two and a half years after its formation, was pleased with the organisational standards achieved. "We

are satisfied with the level of performance and with the commitment to the standards of the Badminton World Federation in terms of organisation and implementation. We also focused this year on tournaments for Omani players, women players and the Centres for Athlete Development, with the total number of matches over around 12 days reaching 210."

Al Sinani praised the standard of play and said such tournaments would support the growth of badminton in Oman. "We were pleased to attend and take part in this championship, where we saw excellent technical levels and strong performances. These tournaments are an important motivation for players in the Sultanate of Oman, both Omanis and residents, and they also create opportunities to discover Omani talents who can support national teams in future external participation."

Balasubramannian said winning three titles was beyond his expectations. "I am very happy, especially because I did not expect to win in three categories. I started preparing three months ago, and it was difficult to balance my work as a coach with training as a player," he said. He also praised the organisation, officiating and crowd support, adding that Oman has promising young players who can develop strongly if they begin training at an early age.

Mixed doubles champion Diya Anil also praised the tournament's organisation. "It was a very good experience. The championship was well organised, and the umpires and line judges did a good job. Everyone had a chance to play, and that made the competition positive," she said.

Oman Sail's 49er team prepares for world championships

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 10

Oman Sail's High Performance 49er team of Ahmed al Hasani and Waleed al Kindi will join the world's top sailors at this year's 2026 49er, 49erFX and Nacra 17 World Championships as the pair continue their journey towards qualification for the LA28 Olympic Games. Held in Saint-Pierre Quiberon on France's Atlantic Coast, racing runs from May 12-17, where the strong winds and the potential for high tides will pose a new challenge for the team within a spectacular natural arena for high-performance racing.

The team from Oman Sail will join over 86 pairs from around the world, including Olympic medalists

and many from the Sailing Grand Slam tour who will all be looking to build form ahead of their Olympic qualification campaigns.

After the World Championships, attention shifts to Kiel Week and the 49er European Championships, both in Germany. Coach Jacek Nowak will accompany the team to all three events where the goal is continued improvement from competing in highly competitive fleets while preparing for the 2026 Asian Games in Japan and future regional Olympic qualification events.

Oman Sail's 49er coach, Jacek Nowak, said, "The World and European Championships will be a big test for our sailors and an important check of our progress as we continue our journey towards



Part of the team's participation in the Princess Sofia Regatta.

Olympic qualification from the Asian region. Every race from now on is a chance to learn and improve, and by testing ourselves against an Olympic-level fleet we are offering

our team an opportunity to impress, gain experience and sail against some of the best in the world."

Hashim al Rashdi, Oman Sail's Head Performance Coach, added, "We have been encouraged by recent performances and now must take the next step in our development. The team has worked very hard to improve race after race, both physically and tactically, and we believe they have the potential to fulfil our ultimate goal of qualifying for the Olympic Games and representing the nation in Los Angeles in 2028."

Competition will take place over 15 races over five days with the first three days serving as the Preliminary Series and the final two an Elimination and Final Series

where the winners will be decided.

Later in the season, the 49er team will compete in Gdynia, Poland, venue for the 2028 World Sailing Championships, as part of the annual Gdynia Sailing Days festival.

Oman Sail's commitment to the development of successful youth, senior, women's and Para Inclusive Sailing teams aims to provide opportunities for all in the sport of sailing and create pathways for national development beyond sport. As a host venue, partner, and valued member of the world sailing community, Oman Sail promotes the country regionally and internationally while also using sailing to deliver long-term learning opportunities in complete alignment with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

SPORTS

NBAPLAYOFFS



Oklahoma City Thunder guard Ajay Mitchell makes a pass under the basket as he is defended by Lakers center Deandre Ayton. — **Imagn Images**

THUNDER TOP LAKERS FOR 3-0 NBA SERIES LEAD, CAVS CLAW BACK AGAINST PISTONS

LOS ANGELES: The Oklahoma City Thunder used another explosive second half to beat LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers 131-108 on Saturday, pushing the Lakers to the brink of elimination in the NBA playoffs.

Ajay Mitchell scored 24 points and handed out 10 assists without a turnover to help the Thunder take a 3-0 stranglehold on the best-of-seven Western Conference semifinal series.

The Lakers will host game four on Monday trying to become the first NBA team to rally from 3-0 down to win a playoff series.

“I’m not giving up on this series,” defiant Lakers coach JJ Redick said. “We’re going to try to win on Monday. We’re going to try to extend the series and we’re going to try to take this thing back to OKC.”

The Cleveland Cavaliers, fuelled by 35 points from Donovan Mitchell and clutch shooting from James Harden, avoided falling in a similar hole, grabbing a crucial 116-109 game-three victory over the Detroit Pistons to cut their series deficit to 2-1.

The Cavs, who dropped the first two games in Detroit, remained unbeaten at home in these playoffs.

But the Lakers, still without injured scoring champion Luka Doncic, couldn’t conjure a crucial win as their series shifted to Los Angeles.

Rui Hachimura led the Lakers with 21 points and James added 19 points, six rebounds and eight assists.

But the Thunder’s depth was just too much for the depleted Lakers.

“That’s the strength of their team,” Redick said.

With reigning Most Valuable Player Shai Gilgeous-Alexander connecting on just seven of 20 shots from the floor, second-year guard Mitchell — starting in place of injured Jalen Williams — stepped up.

“He’s a gamer,” said Gilgeous-Alexander, who finished with 23 points. “It might be a shock to the world, but this is no shock to us.”

As in game two, the Lakers took a two-point lead into half-time, this one largely on the strength of 11 first-half three-pointers.

But again the Thunder exploded in the third period, opening the second half on a 21-6 scoring run.

After that it was all but over. The Lakers connected on just eight of 22 shots from the field in the third period, including just one from three-point range. Their turnovers began to mount, and the Thunder pushed their lead to as many as 27 in the fourth quarter.

Gilgeous-Alexander said the Thunder, who swept the Phoenix Suns in the first round, will “absolutely” be aiming to finish off the Lakers on Monday.

“We would never want to waste an opportunity to win a basketball game,” he said. “We’ve got to do the same thing we did in the first three games — be the aggressor, play the right way together.”

— **AFP**

MAN CITY KEEP TITLE RACE ALIVE, LIVERPOOL HELD BY CHELSEA



Chelsea’s Enzo Fernandez celebrates scoring their first goal with Wesley Fofana. — **Reuters**

MANCHESTER CITY kept the pressure on Arsenal at the top of the Premier League with a 3-0 win over Brentford, while Liverpool were booed off after a 1-1 draw against struggling Chelsea on Saturday.

With three games of the season left for both title contenders, City closed to within two points of the Gunners, who face a tricky trip to relegation-threatened West Ham on Sunday.

After a dramatic 3-3 draw at Everton on Monday, Pep Guardiola’s men could not afford another slip up if they were to retain hope of a seventh title in nine years.

A resolute Brentford, still in the running for European football themselves next season, held out until the hour mark when the in-form Jeremy Doku curled into the top corner.

Erling Haaland backheeled in a second to move four goals clear of Brentford’s Igor Thiago in the battle for the Golden Boot.

Haaland then turned provider for Omar Marmoush to score what could be a vital third in stoppage time.

City cut the goal difference gap on Arsenal to one and now must hope the Hammers cause an upset in a huge clash at both ends of the table at the London Stadium.

Arsenal face already-relegated Burnley and Crystal Palace, days before the play in the Conference League final, in their final two games.

City host Palace on Wednesday before a tough trip to in-form Bournemouth and host Aston Villa on the final day of the campaign.

SLOT PROMISES ‘COMPLETELY DIFFER-ENT’ LIVERPOOL

Liverpool inched towards Champions League qualification but failed to inflict a seventh consecutive league defeat on Chelsea.

Ryan Gravenberch’s sweet strike gave the Reds the perfect start in the sixth minute at Anfield.

Chelsea hit back when Enzo Fernandez’s 35th-minute free-kick evaded everyone to find the bottom corner.

Boos at full-time reflected the mood around Anfield but Arne Slot said he is convinced he can win back the faith of the Liverpool support next season.

“If we can have the summer that we are planning to have, then I’m 100 per cent convinced that we will be a different team next season than we are now.”

Bournemouth’s 1-0 win over Fulham cut Liverpool’s lead over the sixth-placed Cherries to four points with two

games remaining. Chelsea can no longer mathematically finish in the top five and remain in ninth.

Manchester United are already assured of Champions League football and a lack of jeopardy showed in the Red Devils’ uneventful 0-0 draw at Sunderland.

Bournemouth’s charge towards a first ever season in Europe continued as both sides were reduced to 10 men at Craven Cottage. Both dismissals came late in the first half as first Bournemouth’s Ryan Christie and then Fulham defender Joachim Andersen saw red after VAR reviews for rash challenges.

Brazilian teenager Rayan won the game for the visitors in the 53rd minute with a fine finish from just outside the penalty area.

Brighton climbed to seventh, just two points behind Bournemouth, with a 3-0 win over Wolves.

Jack Hinshelwood nodded the Seagulls in front after 37 seconds and Lewis Dunk’s header doubled their advantage in the fifth minute. Yankuba Minteh’s 86th-minute rocket completed the rout of already-relegated Wolves.

Sixth-place could still secure a place in the Champions League if Villa finish fifth and win the Europa League final against Freiburg later this month. — **AFP**



Liverpool’s Ryan Gravenberch celebrates scoring their first goal. — **Reuters**



Chelsea’s Wesley Fofana shoots at goal. — **Reuters**



BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES



Participating companies were introduced to credit insurance services provided by Credit Oman.

Credit Oman holds workshop for plastics exporters to US

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 10

Credit Oman, in collaboration with the Oman Business Office in the United States and OQ’s “Ladayn” programme, organised a specialised session for Omani plastic manufacturers participating in the Plastic Export Accelerator. This six-week, cohort-based programme is designed to empower Omani plastic firms seeking to enter or expand their footprint within the US market.

The session aimed to familiarise participating companies with the credit insurance services provided by Credit Oman. It highlighted the agency’s ongoing efforts to bolster Omani exports through insurance solutions that mitigate risks and facilitate entry into diverse global markets. The Plastic Export Accelerator provides export-ready Omani plastic manufacturers, polymer converters, and downstream companies with practical guidance on navigating US market entry requirements.

It focuses on leveraging the Oman-US Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and engaging effectively with American buyers and partners. Through structured training and professional mentorship, the programme converts theoretical knowledge into actionable strategies regarding market readiness, regulatory compliance, and networking.

During the session, Credit Oman showcased its credit insurance portfolio, which protects Omani exporters against the risk of buyer non-payment. These services provide the necessary confidence to offer competitive credit terms a critical factor in the American market. By utilising credit insurance, Omani firms are better positioned to offer open account payment terms, which are widely expected by US buyers.

Haitham bin Abdullah al Yaqoobi, Acting CEO of Credit Oman, stated: The US market represents a significant opportunity for Omani plastic manufacturers, especially given the Free Trade Agreement. However, entering a sophisticated and highly competitive market requires more than just product readiness; it demands the financial confidence to extend credit to buyers safely.

₹495 million real estate deals signed in Oman

PROJECT awards, agreements, and investment partnerships worth more than RO 495 million were announced on Sunday as the 21st Oman Real Estate, Design & Construction Exhibition and Conference 2026 opened in Muscat, underscoring the accelerating pace of urban development and growing investor confidence in the Sultanate of Oman’s real estate sector.

The four-day event, hosted at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, is organised by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning in partnership with the Oman Real Estate Association and Connect. The exhibition and conference have drawn broad participation from local and international developers, contractors, consultants, investors and urban planning specialists. The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance.

A key highlight of the opening day was the signing of a strategic partnership agreement between the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and Saudi-based Retal Urban Development for the development of residential neighbourhoods 3, 15 and 17 in Sultan Haitham City.

The project, covering more than 640,000 square metres, carries investments exceeding RO 320 million and represents one of the largest real estate development agreements announced during the event.

The agreement reflects increasing regional investor interest in Oman’s future city developments and integrated urban communities.

The conference also witnessed the award of several infrastructure contracts linked to Sultan Haitham City, highlighting the rapid implementation of the flagship urban project. Al Tasnim Group secured the first package for site



The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance.

A strategic partnership agreement was signed between the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and Saudi-based Retal Urban Development for the development of residential neighbourhoods 3, 15 and 17 in Sultan Haitham City. The project, covering more than 640,000 square metres, carries investments exceeding RO 320 million.

preparation and levelling works in the residential neighbourhoods and eastern boulevard, valued at RO 6.8 million.

Meanwhile, Strabag Oman was awarded the twelfth package, worth more than RO 40 million, for the construction of external roads, bridges, underpasses and utility infrastructure extending from Muscat Expressway to Sultan Haitham City.

Landscaping and pedestrian walkway works under package 9A, valued at more than RO 3 million, were awarded to GDC.

In Al Thuraya City, a consultancy services tender valued at more than RO 3 million was signed with Al Khatib & Alami to supervise developers’ construction works and strengthen technical governance standards across the project.

Another notable announcement was the signing of a memorandum of understanding with Turkish developer Artas Holding for the development of the Al Khuwair Central project, which is envisioned as a modern urban and economic hub in Muscat integrating commercial, residential and lifestyle components.

The event further saw the

signing of five agreements under the “Sorouh” initiative for the development of integrated residential neighbourhoods in Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Batinah South, Al Sharqiyah North and Al Sharqiyah South governorates.

The agreements, with a combined investment value exceeding RO 123 million, will deliver 2,167 housing units across multiple wilayats as part of efforts to create sustainable and diversified urban communities.

Among the projects, Al Masa Real Estate will develop a RO 62 million residential neighbourhood in Al Amerat featuring 1,006 housing units across an area exceeding 300,000 square metres.

Ejaad Engineering Consulting will develop a RO 16 million integrated neighbourhood in Al Hamra comprising 322 housing units, while Al Siraj Holdings will undertake a RO 15 million residential project in Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan with 312 units.

Additional agreements include a RO 6 million development in Wadi Bani Khalid by Sanaa Al Barq for Cement Products and Trading and a RO 24 million residential neighbourhood in Al Musannah by Al Raed Real Estate and Investments.

₹96 million Korean EV, battery plant planned in SEZAD

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 10

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has signed an investment usufruct agreement with South Korean company EL B&T to establish an electric vehicle and battery cell manufacturing project in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), with a total investment of around RO 96.2 million (\$250 million).

The agreement was signed by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ); and Dr Young Ill Kim, Founder and Chairman of EL B&T.

The project will be developed in two phases and is expected to produce up to 60,000 electric vehicles annually, in addition to 1.6 million battery cells, once the second phase is completed.

Eng Ahmed bin Ali Akaak, Chief Executive Officer of SEZAD, said the project forms part of wider



The agreement was signed by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Chairman OPAZ; and Dr Young Ill Kim, Founder and Chairman of EL B&T.

government efforts to localise advanced industries and attract major investments into Oman’s automotive sector.

He described the venture as a significant addition to Al Duqm’s industrial base and noted that it is the second automotive manufacturing project in the zone after Karwa Motors, which began operations several years ago.

He added that the agreement further strengthens Al Duqm’s growing green industries sector, particularly following the signing of several wind turbine manufacturing projects in recent years.

According to him, the zone aims to attract advanced

manufacturing industries linked to electric vehicles, renewable energy and clean technologies, in line with Oman Vision 2040 and the Sultanate of Oman’s net-zero carbon neutrality goals.

Akaak said the strategy also seeks to position Oman as a regional hub for green industries by developing sustainable and innovation-driven projects while creating opportunities for Omani talent in future-focused sectors such as electric mobility, renewable energy and green hydrogen.

The first phase of the project will occupy an area of around 467,000 square metres in Al Duqm, while an additional 429,000 square metres is expected to be allocated for the second phase.

Officials said the project is expected to support the development of an integrated electric vehicle ecosystem in Al Duqm by strengthening supply chains for batteries and related components, potentially attracting complementary industries in the

future.

Dr Young Kim said the company aims to begin commercial operations by March 2028. He added that EL B&T plans to rely heavily on green energy in its production processes, including the establishment of a dedicated renewable energy facility to power the plant in Duqm.

He also revealed that the company is studying, together with an Omani partner, the development of electric outboard motors for speedboats and fishing vessels as part of efforts to reduce carbon emissions in Omani waters.

In addition, EL B&T is exploring a joint venture to develop electric fishing boats for export to markets including Indonesia, India and South Korea.

Eng Ahmed al Rajhi, Acting Head of the Green Industries Department at SEZAD, said Al Duqm was selected for the project due to its strategic location, advanced infrastructure, investor-friendly regulations and integrated incentives framework.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The Bank has shifted from transactional relevance to habitual usage, positioning its cards as core enablers of daily financial activity.

Sohar International wins big at Visa Awards for growth and payment volume

MUSCAT: Sohar International has been awarded two prestigious recognitions from Visa — Fastest-Growing Debit Card Issuer in Oman and Payment Volume Leadership for the second year — marking a milestone that reflects the bank’s ability to design and execute a payments strategy that systematically drives behavioural change at scale.

This performance is not the outcome of product expansion alone, but the result of a deliberately structured model that integrates data-led insights, ecosystem partnerships and context-driven engagement to embed payment solutions within customers’ everyday lives.

By aligning credit proposition with real consumption patterns, the Bank has shifted from transactional relevance to habitual usage, positioning its cards as core enablers of daily financial activity.

Abdul Qadir al Sumali, Chief Retail and Wealth Management Officer at Sohar International, stated: “This recognition reflects the strength of a disciplined execution model that is anchored in how customers behave, not simply what they are offered. Our approach has been to move beyond traditional product-led growth and instead design a payments ecosystem that is embedded within the rhythm of everyday life.

A data driven and consumer behaviour led approach has enabled us to generate consistent growth in engagement, expand relevance across customer segments and translate strategy into measurable outcomes”.

From his side, Nasser Bdeir, General Manager & Country Manager, Visa in Oman, commented: “This recognition reflects Sohar International’s strong performance and its ability to deliver accelerated growth across the payments ecosystem, supported by a clear strategic vision and continued investment in digital infrastructure and customer experience. At Visa, we value this partnership and look forward to further collaboration in delivering innovative payment solutions that support the growth of Oman’s banking sector”.

The Payment Volume Leadership award reflects Sohar International’s success in driving sustained growth in total spend across Visa cards, supported by increased customer activity, broader merchant acceptance and deeper integration of digital payment solutions.

Meanwhile, securing the title of the fastest-growing Visa card issuer for the second consecutive year highlights the Bank’s ability to expand its customer base and strengthen debit cards as a primary payment method for everyday transactions. Sohar International continues to reinforce its position as a leading banking institution in innovation and digital services, leveraging its capabilities to deliver sustainable growth in the payments sector.

Land Cruiser Prado: First-class adventure

THE Toyota Land Cruiser Prado stands as a powerful testament to unyielding strength and modern innovation on Omani roads. Moving beyond its legendary reputation for durability, the Land Cruiser Prado is engineered for those who demand a premium, high-performance SUV that fits perfectly into a modern lifestyle.

Whether it is navigating the daily urban flow or conquering the most challenging terrains, this vehicle is built to ensure that every drive is an experience in total confidence and control.

The Toyota Land Cruiser Prado features a bold, action-packed design that honours its iconic history while embracing a futuristic, utilitarian look. From the classic Toyota lettering on the front grille to its strong, muscular silhouette, every detail is crafted to make a statement.

It is a vehicle designed for those who appreciate the path less travelled, offering a unique blend of rugged capability and sophisticated style that is equally at home on city streets as it is in the vast desert dunes.

REFINED PERFORMANCE

At the heart of the Land Cruiser Prado is a choice of two cutting-edge powertrains: the 2.4-litre Turbo Petrol engine and the 2.8-litre Turbo Diesel. Paired with a new 8-speed automatic transmission, these engines provide a smooth, responsive and exhilarating drive.

Built on the high-strength GA-F platform and featuring Electric Power Steering (EPS), the Land Cruiser Prado offers enhanced



The Land Cruiser Prado is engineered for those who demand a premium, high-performance SUV.

manoeuvrability and a refined balance of power and fuel economy, making it the most capable version of the model to date.

A SANCTUARY OF PREMIUM COMFORT

The interior of the Land Cruiser Prado is a masterclass in comfort and versatility. Designed to accommodate up to seven passengers, the cabin features soft, plush leather and ventilated seats to keep everyone cool during the Omani summer.

The driving experience is elevated by an immersive technology suite, including a 12.3-inch Full HD wide display, a 12.3-inch graphic metre and a Head-up Display (HUD).

With wireless charging and seamless connectivity through Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, your world is always within

reach.

INTELLIGENT SAFETY AND OFF-ROAD MASTERY

Peace of mind is a core part of the Land Cruiser Prado experience, thanks to the latest Toyota Safety Sense system. This advanced suite includes Dynamic Radar Cruise Control, Safe Exit Assist and Rear Cross Traffic Alert to protect what matters most.

For off-road enthusiasts, the vehicle offers specialised mastery through Crawl Control and a Multi-Terrain Monitor with under-body and side views. These features allow you to maintain a sharp eye on the terrain, ensuring total safety and thrill in every adventure.

Pact signed to finance Palm Hills project

MUSCAT: BankDhofar has signed a strategic agreement with Musandam WCT Development Company to provide financing solutions for investors in the Palm Hills project in Musandam Governorate, further strengthening its role in supporting homeownership and integrated community development across the Sultanate of Oman.

The agreement was signed on behalf of BankDhofar by Ahmed bin Said al Ibrahim, Chief Retail and Government banking officer, during a ceremony held in the presence of Eng Hamad bin Ali al Nazwani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning for Housing.

The partnership aligns with the Ministry’s Surooh initiative, which aims to promote integrated residential neighbourhoods through public-private collaboration.



The Palm Hills development represents an investment of over RO 70 million.

Located in Khasab, the Palm Hills development represents an investment of over RO 70 million and is being implemented under the Surooh programme.

Spanning approximately 650,000 square metres, the project will feature around 650 residential units, positioning it as one of the most significant housing developments in Musandam Governorate.

BankDhofar is among several Omani conventional and Islamic

banks that have partnered with Musandam WCT Development to offer structured financing solutions for prospective homeowners. The collaboration is designed to facilitate access to credit through coordinated banking frameworks, enabling citizens to secure housing finance with greater ease and flexibility.

Palm Hills is envisioned as a fully integrated urban development that combines residential, commercial and community elements. The masterplan includes a mix of villas, townhouses and apartments, alongside key amenities such as a public university, a business district, a medical centre, a mosque and other supporting facilities.

Construction is expected to commence this year, with participating banks offering a range of flexible financing options tailored to different customer segments.

All-new Nissan Kicks redefines compact crossover experience

MUSCAT: Nissan Oman presents the all-new Nissan Kicks, the brand’s popular compact crossover, reimagined with a striking design, best-in-class versatility and an array of advanced technologies. The new Kicks sets a new benchmark in its segment, making every journey truly epic.

The all-new Nissan Kicks redefines the compact crossover experience by blending bold design, advanced technology and dynamic driving performance. Powered by a 2.0-litre engine and paired with the latest Xtronic CVT, the Kicks delivers responsive performance and best-in-class fuel efficiency, offering a complete package for today’s modern drivers.

For the first time on the Kicks,



The Kicks delivers responsive performance and best-in-class fuel efficiency, offering a complete package for today’s modern drivers.

ProPILOT joins an array of cutting-edge safety features, enhancing confidence on the road.

Inside, the Kicks offers a more spacious and functional interior with premium touches such as the Panoramic Sunroof and Zero Gravity™ seating for superior comfort. Advanced technology, including dual 12.3-inch displays, wireless Apple CarPlay® and wireless Android Auto™; and a Bose® 10-speaker sound system, elevates connectivity and entertainment.

Toni Yazbeck, Chief Operating Officer of Al Hashar Automotive — Nissan Oman, said: “The all-new Nissan Kicks fully reflects the brand’s forward-looking direction, with its bold design, advanced technologies and dynamic driving

experience. It has been developed to meet the evolving expectations of customers in the Sultanate of Oman, while further strengthening its position in the compact crossover segment”.

EXPRESSIVE DESIGN INSPIRED BY ATHLETIC SNEAKER SOLES

The all-new Nissan Kicks makes a powerful statement with its progressive and dynamic styling, creating a bold and innovative look from every angle.

The commanding front face features sleek, low-profile LED projector headlamps that improve nighttime visibility, complemented by LED daytime running lights that double as amber turn signal indicators.

SHORTTAKES



The proposed merger is still at an early stage and remains subject to approvals and assessments.

AL SUWADI, AL BATINAH POWER STUDY MERGER

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 10

Al Suwadi Power Company SAOG and Al Batinah Power Company SAOG have announced that they have commenced a preliminary assessment of a potential merger, alongside a review of refinancing options linked to their existing financing arrangements and future capital expenditure requirements.

In disclosures issued on May 10, 2026 to the Financial Services Authority (FSA), the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) and the investor community, both companies said the proposed merger is still at an early stage and remains subject to multiple approvals and assessments.

The two companies noted that they share similar assets, business operations and founders, with the merger aimed at exploring operational synergies and efficiencies. According to the disclosures, these efficiencies were already contemplated as part of the economics of the companies’ new 15-year Power Purchase Agreement (PPA).

Al Suwadi Power stated that it had begun assessing a potential merger with Al Batinah Power, while Al Batinah Power issued a parallel disclosure confirming the same initiative from its side. The announcements suggest a coordinated move by the two listed power firms to evaluate consolidation opportunities in Oman’s electricity generation sector.

The companies also revealed that they are studying potential refinancing options related to their current debt structures, as well as funding requirements tied to capital expenditure expected during the period of the new PPA. However, both companies stressed that the refinancing assessment remains in its preliminary phase and that there is no certainty any refinancing transaction will proceed or be completed successfully.

300m Musstir Heights unveiled at Al Jabal Al Aali

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 10

MUSSTIR, the real estate development arm of the Mohammed Al Barwani Group, has officially unveiled Musstir Heights, an exclusive residential destination set within the dramatic landscape of Al Jabal Al Akhdar, one of the highest and most distinguished locations in Oman and the wider Middle East.

With an investment value of approximately RO 300 million, the development forms a key component of the “Al Jabal Al Aali” masterplan, led by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning in Wilayat Al Jabal Al Akhdar.

The unveiling coincides with Musstir’s participation in the Oman Real Estate Expo & Conference 2026, taking place from May 10 to 13, bringing together leading investors, developers, government stakeholders, and global real estate experts to drive collaboration and unlock new investment horizons.

Musstir Heights embodies the Mohammed Al Barwani Group’s strategic commitment to Oman Vision 2040, aligning with national priorities to advance sustainable urban development, attract high-value investments, and position Oman as a world-class destination for lifestyle, investment, and tourism.

This comes at a time of increasing international investor interest, supported by progressive foreign ownership regulations and a rapidly evolving real estate landscape.

Spanning over one million square meters, the development is meticulously designed as a sanctuary for refined living, where nature, culture, and contemporary design converge. Positioned at an elevation of approximately 2,400 meters above sea level, the project enjoys a uniquely temperate climate, with temperatures typically 15–20 degrees cooler than Muscat, offering an unparalleled living environment.

The masterplan features over 750



The unveiling coincides with Musstir’s participation in the Oman Real Estate Expo & Conference 2026

luxury villas, carefully curated to deliver an exceptional standard of living that blends architectural sophistication with sustainability and wellness-oriented design.

Musstir Heights will offer a fully integrated lifestyle experience, incorporating premium residences, a signature wellness retreat, a vibrant retail boulevard, and a curated dining promenade.

Complementing this offering are thoughtfully designed wellness experiences and dedicated remote working spaces — enabling a seamless balance between living, working, and leisure in one cohesive destination.

Dr Mohammed Al Barwani, Chairman of the Group, stated: “Musstir Heights represents a defining milestone in our ambition to deliver globally benchmarked developments that seamlessly integrate sustainability with Oman’s authentic identity.”

He added: “We remain firmly committed to contributing to Oman Vision 2040 by driving economic diversification, attracting strategic investment, and enhancing quality of life. Our approach is centered on delivering future-forward

developments that harmonize innovation with a deep respect for nature and heritage.”

Harith al Brashdi, CEO of Musstir, commented: “Musstir Heights introduces a new paradigm of elevated living in Oman, a fully immersive destination defined by tranquility, wellness, and a deep connection to the natural and cultural richness of the Sultanate of Oman.”

He continued: “Through developments of this calibre, we are positioning Musstir as a globally competitive developer, shaping distinctive destinations that redefine expectations in tourism and real estate, while delivering enduring value aligned with Oman’s long-term strategic vision.”

Al Brashdi added: “We extend our sincere appreciation to our partners at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning for their continued collaboration and support in bringing this vision to life.” The launch of Musstir Heights marks a significant inflection point in Musstir’s growth trajectory, further reinforcing its position as a leading developer of premium, sustainable destinations both within Oman and on the international stage.

Oman joins Global Stocktake of National Circular Economy Roadmaps

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 10

Oman has joined the Global Stocktake of National Circular Economy Roadmaps, marking a significant milestone in the Sultanate of Oman’s efforts to advance resource efficiency, sustainable development and green economic transformation in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Announcing the development in a recent post, Dr Aisha al Sarihi, Economist at the Ministry of Economy, revealed that Oman is currently formulating a comprehensive national circular economy roadmap aimed at accelerating the country’s transition towards a greener and more sustainable economic model.

The Global Stocktake initiative, led by Chatham House Environment and Society, seeks to document and assess circular economy strategies being developed and implemented around the world, while promoting knowledge-sharing and international collaboration on sustainable economic practices.

Oman’s participation reflects the growing importance being attached to circular economy principles as a key pillar of national development planning.

The roadmap under development will help guide policies and investments focused on minimising waste, maximising resource productivity, encouraging recycling and reuse; and supporting low-carbon industrial growth.

The initiative is expected to deliver a range of economic and



Dr Aisha al Sarihi, Economist at the Ministry of Economy

environmental benefits for the Sultanate of Oman.

These include improving resource efficiency across key sectors, reducing environmental pressures associated with waste generation, supporting green

entrepreneurship and creating new employment opportunities linked to recycling, sustainable manufacturing and clean technologies.

The roadmap also aligns closely with Oman Vision 2040, which prioritises economic diversification, environmental sustainability and the transition towards a green economy. Circular economy principles are increasingly viewed as essential for enhancing long-term economic resilience while reducing dependence on finite natural resources.

Illustrative of Oman’s broader circular economy ambitions are a number of flagship sustainability initiatives already under implementation.

These include large-scale renewable energy and green

hydrogen projects, integrated waste management and recycling programmes led by the Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be’ah), wastewater reuse schemes, biodiversity conservation and desert greening initiatives, as well as sustainable agriculture and food security projects.

Investments in waste-to-energy systems, carbon capture technologies, sustainable logistics and green finance frameworks are also helping lay the foundations for a low-carbon and resource-efficient economy.

Collectively, these efforts underscore Oman’s strategy to diversify its economy, reduce environmental impacts and position itself as a regional hub for sustainable industrial development and green investment.

TRADE EXPANSION

China trade growth accelerates



China’s foreign trade, measured in yuan, rose 14.2 per cent year-on-year in April, according to the General Administration of Customs. Total imports and exports reached 4.38 trillion yuan.

Exports climbed 9.8 per cent to 2.48 trillion yuan, while imports surged 20.6 per cent to 1.9 trillion yuan. During the first four months of 2026, China’s total foreign trade expanded 14.9 per cent to 16.23 trillion yuan. — Reuters

LABOUR MARKET

US jobs remain resilient



US employment grew more strongly than expected in April, reinforcing expectations that the Federal Reserve will keep interest rates unchanged despite inflationary pressures linked to the Iran conflict. The unemployment rate remained steady at 4.3 per cent.

However, economists cautioned that labour market strains persist, with part-time employment for economic reasons rising sharply. — Reuters

ENERGY MARKETS

Aramco profit jumps sharply



Saudi Aramco reported a 25 per cent rise in first-quarter profit to \$32.5 billion, surpassing market expectations amidst heightened regional tensions affecting energy supplies.

Revenue increased nearly 7 per cent to \$115.49 billion. It has ramped up crude flows through its East-West pipeline to the Red Sea as disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz continue to impact shipping routes. — Reuters

OPINION

Why good data leads to bad decisions



KAMLA AL RAHBI

The writer is a leadership and business strategist

IN today’s organisations, data is often treated as the ultimate authority. Dashboards are refined, metrics are tracked in real time and decisions are increasingly justified through numbers. The assumption is simple: better data leads to better decisions.

In practice, the opposite is frequently true. Some of the most flawed decisions in modern institutions are made not in the absence of data, but in its presence. The issue is not that the data is wrong. It is that the way it is selected, interpreted and used creates a false sense of clarity.

Data does not remove uncertainty. It often disguises it. One of the most common problems is what can be called measurement bias. Organisations tend to focus on what is easy to measure rather than what is important to understand.

Financial performance, utilisation rates and short-term outputs are tracked with precision. Less tangible factors such as team capability, decision quality, or long-term risk exposure are either simplified or ignored.

The result is a decision environment shaped not by reality, but by what fits neatly into a spreadsheet. This creates a dangerous illusion: that what is visible is what matters most.

A second issue lies in how data is framed. The same dataset can support multiple

interpretations depending on the question being asked.

Leaders often believe they are being guided by objective insights, when in reality they are being guided by the way the data has been structured and presented. A performance report can highlight growth or conceal decline, depending on the time frame selected.

A risk analysis can emphasise probability while downplaying impact. In each case, the data is technically accurate — but strategically misleading.

The problem is not the numbers. It is the narrative built around them. There is also the question of context. Data, by itself, does not explain why something is happening. It shows patterns, not causes. When leaders rely too heavily on quantitative outputs without understanding the underlying dynamics, they risk treating symptoms as solutions.

A drop in productivity may lead to tighter controls, when the real issue is capability or morale. An increase in demand may trigger expansion, when the surge is temporary or driven by external factors.

Good data, used without context, accelerates the wrong response. In many Gulf organisations, this dynamic is amplified by the growing emphasis on digital transformation and performance metrics. Systems are becoming more advanced,

Some of the most flawed decisions in modern institutions are made not in the absence of data, but in its presence. The issue is not that the data is wrong. It is that the way it is selected, interpreted and used creates a false sense of clarity.

data flows are increasing and reporting is more sophisticated than ever. Yet the human layer — judgement, interpretation and critical questioning — has not evolved at the same pace.

The presence of advanced analytics can create overconfidence, where decisions feel validated simply because they are data-backed.

But data-backed does not mean decision-ready. The real discipline of leadership is not in collecting more data, but in knowing how to challenge it. This requires asking uncomfortable questions: What is this data not showing? What assumptions are embedded in these metrics? Who decided what should be measured and why?

Without these questions, data becomes a tool of confirmation rather than insight. Strong decision-makers do not treat data as an answer. They treat it as an input — one that must be tested against experience, context and alternative perspectives.

The goal is not to reduce reliance on data, but to rebalance it. Decisions should be informed by data, not driven blindly by it. When leaders create environments where data can be questioned, reframed and challenged, they move closer to real clarity.

Because in the end, the risk is not that organisations lack data. It is that they trust it too easily.

Markets understate the scope for UK dysfunction

JON SINDREU

For weeks, the main reason international investors have tuned into British politics is to see whether Prime Minister Keir Starmer would get replaced by a more left-leaning, fiscally profligate alternative. Judging from the results of the May 7 local election, however, they may need to start thinking about whether the United Kingdom can be governed at all.

Based on a provisional count as of 12:30 GMT on Friday, anti-immigration Reform UK won 570 of the 1,648 council seats in England.

The Labour Party, which rules in Westminster having secured a 174 seat landslide just two years ago, got only 284 — already a loss of more than 300 seats.

Here’s the problem: the current Labour government’s travails already show that fragmented UK politics make it increasingly hard to align backbenchers and Westminster insiders to deliver any kind of coherent economic plan.

The Conservative Party, the other big traditional central faction in British politics, notched a similar tally and lost more than 200 seats.

Ten-year gilt yields slipped below 4.9%, having topped 5% only a few days ago and sterling edged up. Interpreting the move is tricky: trading has mainly been driven by expectations of inflation linked to the war in Iran and oil prices fell on the day.

Markets may also have been braced for a worse showing by centrist parties, with the Greens expected to make larger gains after winning a key by election in February.

Meanwhile, the next parliamentary election is probably very far away — maybe as late as August 2029 — and local results won’t easily map onto it.

Still, given Reform’s monumental advances, it’s at least clear that investors aren’t scattering in panic at the prospect of Reform leader Nigel Farage eventually becoming prime minister.

As economists Kallum Pickering at Peel Hunt and Simon French at Panmure Liberum noted, perhaps they detect a structural shift towards a right-leaning, smaller-government agenda.

Here’s the problem: the current Labour government’s travails already show that fragmented UK politics make it increasingly hard to align backbenchers and Westminster insiders to deliver any kind of coherent economic plan.

It will probably get worse. The ‘new right’, of which Liz Truss and Donald Trump are also examples, is a mesh of ‘Thatcherite’ tax-cutting pledges, statist commitments and a pro-worker rhetoric tailored for deindustrialised constituencies — in the case of England, the former ‘Red Wall’ in the Midlands and the North of England, where Reform has made big inroads in this local election.

— Reuters

Consequence of wars: Human displacement

WHEN we talk of war and armed conflicts, we narrate the debacle with exasperated remorse and deep-rooted pain for lives lost by both soldiers and innocent civilians; and the unprecedented economic, financial and infrastructural damage.

Not to sound scathing, but the protracted wars led to a trudged process of recovery and restoration, with scarred memories.

But there is yet another ramification of tectonic proportions that leaves an indelible impact, piercing the very fabric of humanity for generations beyond borders and into faraway geographies. In today’s article, I write about the single biggest effect of war, forced human displacement.

Human displacement seems a lost cause, buried under the rubble of rifles, fear and geopolitical escalations, while the living grapple to live with scars of war that could be monetary, starvation, emotional trauma and physical pain. A glance at the wars the world has witnessed to date, though a story of the impression of actual human displacement might stir a leader to think before choosing war over peace.

World War I (1914–1918) broke out in 1914 and was expected to be short, but it turned into a prolonged war. The displaced exceeded 17.5 million across central and Eastern Europe. It uprooted millions who moved from Poland, Galicia, the Balkans, Anatolia, the Caucasus into the interior of Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary; others fled to Western Europe and the Middle East.

World War II (1939-1945), in the backdrop of the great depression and the rise of aggressive fascist regimes in Germany, Italy and Japan, began when Nazi Germany invaded Poland; and Britain and France declared war. The war uprooted tens of millions who were pushed to be expelled from World War II, which is known to have resulted in the largest human displacement the world has witnessed. People were pushed or



A general view of Al Hol displacement camp in Hasaka governorate, Syria, in this illustration photo. — Reuters



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The writer is an Assistant Professor at the Marketing and Management Department, CBFS

Human displacement seems a lost cause, buried under the rubble of rifles, fear and geopolitical escalations, while the living grapple to live with scars of war that could be monetary, starvation, emotional trauma and physical pain.

expelled from and within Poland, Germany, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, the Balkans and East Asia; post-war, many ethnic Germans went west into the two Germanies, while others were resettled across the Soviet bloc.

Vietnam War (and wider Indochina conflicts) (1955-1975), Millions of Vietnamese were forced to flee both within Vietnam and into nearby nations like Cambodia and Laos due to heavy bombardment and ground warfare. Following the “boat people” crisis in 1975, hundreds of thousands of people fled by water to Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and ultimately the US, Canada, Australia and France.

Since the US post-9/11 wars, the United States has fought eight wars since 2001 in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, the Philippines, Libya and Syria, which have forcibly displaced at least an estimated 38 million people in and from Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, the Philippines, Libya and Syria.

Iran-Iraq (1980-1988) and Iraq (Gulf War- 2003-2011), these wars are remembered for their casualties and geopolitics, but they must be remembered for the human displacement of enormous populations. In 1980, the war drove 1.5 million Iranians from the border provinces to safe provinces in the country. There were huge refugee movements from both Iran and Iraq; despite being massive, it was

less than World War II. 2 million Iraqi refugees fled to Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Türkiye and 2.7 million people were displaced internally.

Syria (2011-2024), Over half of Syria’s population was displaced during the domestic rebellion that resulted in a multi-sided civil and proxy conflict between 2011 and 2024. According to some reports, 77% of Syrians were internally displaced or became refugees. In particular, this conflict greatly increased the number of displaced people worldwide.

Russia-Ukraine (2014, full attack 2024), roughly 5-8 million people were internally displaced within Ukraine and about 6-8 million became refugees to neighbouring countries, like Poland, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Moldova; and then on to other European states like Germany, the Czech Republic and the UK. Hundreds of thousands of people fled Russia to countries like Georgia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Türkiye, Serbia, the UAE and some EU countries.

Israel-Palestine conflict (1948–present) and Gaza war (2023–present): Approximately 90% of Gaza’s 2.2 million inhabitants, or 1.9–2.1 million people, have been displaced at least once since the conflict started in October 2023. Millions of their descendants still reside as long-term refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and other countries, making Palestinians one of the biggest and longest-displaced stateless populations in the world.

US-Israel-Iran war (2026 to date): 3.2 million people internally displaced and tens of thousands more crossing borders from Iran into Afghanistan, Pakistan, Türkiye and Azerbaijan since the beginning of the war.

The readers need to pause and reflect on the magnitude of the term ‘human displacement’. These are not mere statistics; they are living people forced to leave their homes, shattered and broken, to start all over again in a foreign land. It is one of the world’s greatest humanitarian challenges. Let this article be a stark predicament of a leader’s choice of war over peace.

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ART/LIFE



RISEING CREATIVE VOICES

RIVIERASPOTLIGHT

CANNES FILM FESTIVAL OPENS WITH STAR POWER, AI DEBATE



John Travolta is expected to present his directorial debut, “Propeller One-Way Night Coach”. — AFP

The Cannes Film Festival opens on Tuesday, bringing two weeks of world premieres, red carpets, parties and high-fashion moments to the French Riviera.

This year, 22 films are competing for the Palme d’Or, the festival’s top prize, which will be awarded on May 23. The main competition brings together major arthouse names including Spain’s Pedro Almodovar, Japan’s Hirokazu Kore-eda and Romania’s Cristian Mungiu, alongside emerging filmmakers such as Belgian director Lukas Dhont and France’s Lea Mysius.

No major US studio is using Cannes to launch a big commercial film this year. The shift reflects cost-cutting, changing marketing strategies and the risk of harsh Cannes reviews hurting a film before release

Among the most talked-about films is “Hope” by South Korean director Na Hong-jin, starring real-life partners Michael Fassbender and Alicia Vikander. Kore-eda’s “Sheep in the Box”, which explores artificial intelligence and technology, is also expected to draw strong attention. This year’s jury will be headed by South Korean director Park Chan-Wook and includes US actress Demi Moore.

One notable absence is Hollywood’s blockbuster machine. Unlike previous editions, which featured major

Tom Cruise-led productions such as “Top Gun” and “Mission: Impossible”, no major US studio is using Cannes to launch a big commercial film this year. The shift reflects cost-cutting, changing marketing strategies and the risk of harsh Cannes reviews hurting a film before release.

Still, the festival will not be short on star power. John Travolta will present his directorial debut, “Propeller One-Way Night Coach”, about a young boy’s journey during the golden age of aviation. Scarlett Johansson and Adam Driver are expected for James Gray’s thriller “Paper Tiger”, while Rami Malek stars in Ira Sachs’ “The Man I Love”.

Other expected names include Javier Bardem, Renate Reinsve, Kristen Stewart, Woody Harrelson, Julianne Moore and Cate Blanchett. Barbra Streisand and “Lord of the Rings” director Peter Jackson will receive lifetime achievement awards.

Russian director Andrey Zvyagintsev returns with “Minotaur”, his first film since 2017, tackling conscription during the Ukraine war. Steven Soderbergh’s “John Lennon: The Last Interview” is also likely to stir debate for its use of AI-generated images of the late musician. — AFP

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S H O T F E A T U R E S



FANS

Young fans of Eurovision Song Contest Contestant for Greece, Akylas at the Greek Embassy in Vienna. — AFP



ART

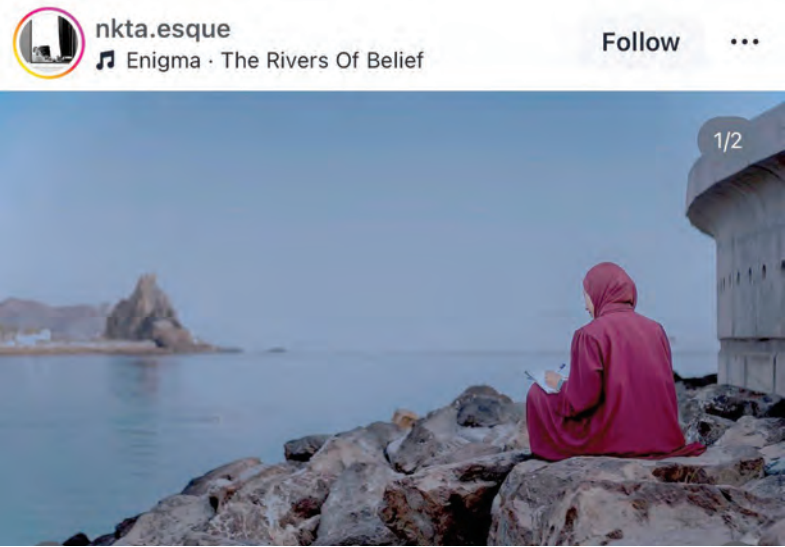
A visitor views rare archival photographs from the Cannes Film Festival at an Istanbul museum. — AFP



FESTIVAL

Fans pose behind a display of the Japanese manga and animation series ‘One Piece’ during the Mumbai Comic Con 2026 festival in Mumbai. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Life in movie stills



The purple heron in all its might

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MARILYN MONROE’S HIDDEN WORLD HEADS TO AUCTION



Among the most striking offerings are previously unseen documents shedding light on Monroe’s inner life. — Reuters

Memorabilia belonging to late model and movie star Marilyn Monroe is heading to auction, offering a rare glimpse into the private world of one of Hollywood’s most enduring legends. Items up for sale include pieces from her wardrobe, jewelry, letters, handwritten notes, paintings and poetry.

“Marilyn is just an icon”, said Brian Chanes, senior director of Hollywood and entertainment at Heritage Auctions, during a preview of the collection in Los Angeles. “People love and adore Marilyn to this day”.

Born Norma Jeane Mortenson in Los Angeles in 1926, Monroe became a renowned actress, model and singer known for her blonde hair and hourglass figure. She died in 1962.

The auction, opening to the public on June 1 to coincide with what would have been Monroe’s 100th birthday, features items from the estate of poets Norman Rosten and Hedda Rosten, close friends and confidants of the actress. The collection includes personal belongings dating from 1955 to 1962.

Among the most striking

offerings are previously unseen documents shedding light on Monroe’s inner life, including her romantic relationships, fears surrounding a lost pregnancy and reflections on mortality.

“It’s really special because this isn’t material that’s been bought and sold over the decades”, Chanes said. “This is something that’s a discovery”.

The auction also includes correspondence from Monroe’s ex-husband, playwright Arthur Miller, revealing the emotional complexities of their marriage, as well as a letter from Monroe’s psychiatrist describing the day leading up to her death.

Chanes highlighted one emotional piece written while Monroe was filming *Some Like It Hot*. Writing on stationery from the Hotel del Coronado, Monroe described feeling overwhelmed as her struggles threatened to derail production.

“You can feel the anguish in her writing”, Chanes said, noting that Monroe also sketched a stick figure submerged in water, an image reflecting the mental health struggles she faced throughout her career. — Reuters

INSIDE THE MAKING OF CANNES’ ICONIC PALME D’OR



THE Palme d’Or, the top prize at the Cannes Film Festival, takes more than 70 hours of meticulous craftsmanship to produce at Swiss jeweller Chopard’s workshops outside Geneva.

Since its creation in 1955, the Palme d’Or has constantly evolved. Its current form was conceived in 1998 by Caroline Scheufele, co-president of Chopard.

The luxury watchmaking and jewellery house makes all the trophies awarded by the jury during the world’s most prestigious film festival, which takes over Cannes on the southwest French coast, this year from May 12 to 23.

“What we brought to the table, which is very different from the original, is that the stem of the Palme d’Or ends in a small heart shape, which is a bit of a nod to cinema, the love for cinema”, Scheufele said, adding that she designs “a lot of jewellery with hearts”.

At the workshop in Meyrin, a Geneva suburb on the French border, creating the Palme d’Or begins with the casting technique.

This involves creating a model of the stem with its leaves in wax within a rubber mold, which is then immersed in liquid plaster.

The plaster is heated to 760°C, causing the wax to melt away, leaving an impression into which molten metal is injected.

Once solidified, the piece is extracted by dissolving the mold, then cleaned and treated to remove any impurities.

Next comes the assembly. The various parts are reworked, hand-polished and carefully attached: each gold leaf is fitted and soldered onto the stem.

After a final polish, the Palme d’Or is mounted on a precisely-drilled rock crystal cushion and then secured, creating a display-ready piece.

The Palme d’Or is made of 118 grammes of yellow gold which rests on the crystal cushion, shaped like an emerald-cut diamond.

“The appeal of rock crystal is that... the base is always slightly different, so each year the Palme d’Or has a slightly different look”, said



Scheufele.

Chopard makes two Palme d’Or awards for Cannes each year — in case of a tie or unforeseen circumstances.

The prize goes to the director of the best feature film.

Chaired by South Korean director Park Chan-wook, the festival jury will award this Palme d’Or on May 23, at the end of the Cannes fortnight.

Last year, the award went to “It Was Just an Accident” by dissident Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi.

Previous winning filmmakers include Luis Bunuel, Jane Campion, Federico Fellini, Francis Ford Coppola, Akira Kurosawa, Emir Kusturica, David Lean, David Lynch, Lars von Trier, Quentin Tarantino, Martin Scorsese and Orson Welles.

— AFP



FEATURES



M E E T A N O U S H K A N A R A Y A N A N

ONE OF OMAN’S RISING CREATIVE VOICES



Narayanan says storytelling and emotion play a central role in her illustration process.



Omani-based illustrator and mixed media artist Anoushka Narayanan during a recent art event in Muscat.



The artist works across illustration, painting, printmaking and mixed media art.

HIBBA AL KINDI

At nearly any art event in Muscat, chances are that 28-year-old Anoushka Narayanan will be there! Whether exhibiting her work, creating live art pieces, or simply supporting fellow artists within Oman’s growing creative scene, Narayanan has become one of the driving creative forces behind Oman’s new generation of artists.

“My name is Anoushka Narayanan. I go by Local Ghost Art or Local Ghost Illustration. I grew up in Oman for most of my life before moving to London to study illustration at the University of the Arts London”, she said.

“I work across mixed media, printmaking, painting and illustration. I enjoy layering different forms of media together to create the right feeling and effect in my work”.

Narayanan said her interest in art began early.

“It sounds cliché, but being an artist is one of the earliest things I remember wanting to become as a child”, she said.

She explained that she only began taking art seriously towards the end of high school while deciding what

Beyond illustration, Narayanan is also deeply involved in Oman’s growing art community through exhibitions and live art events. “I think art thrives when people create together. Ideas bounce off each other and inspiration inspires more inspiration”, she said. “It’s been amazing to see how much Oman’s art community has grown over the years.

to pursue after graduation.

“My high school art teacher suggested illustration because she thought it suited me.

Originally, I had considered graphic design, but I’m really glad I chose illustration instead”, she said.

“I love taking a concept, visualising it and turning it into something fun and story-driven”.

Narayanan’s artistic journey further developed when she enrolled in a foundation year programme at the University of the Arts London.

“I did a foundation year at university because I wanted to develop my skills further.

A lot of people think talent is enough to become an artist, but it takes skill, dedication and practice as well”, she said.

Although much of her university experience was disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, Narayanan believes much of her artistic growth came later through creating outside the structure of grades and academic critique.

“When you’re making art because you genuinely want to, it becomes easier to discover what you actually enjoy”, she explained.

Speaking about her creative process, Narayanan said she often focuses on capturing emotions and atmosphere rather than illustrating concepts literally.

She added that research and experimentation play a major role in her work, drawing inspiration from magazine covers, film posters, textures and visual styles before developing multiple rough concepts and sketches.

Beyond illustration, Narayanan is also deeply involved in Oman’s growing art community through exhibitions and live art events.

“I think art thrives when people create together. Ideas bounce off each other and inspiration inspires more inspiration”, she said.

“It’s been amazing to see how much Oman’s art community has grown over the years.

When I first returned from the UK, it felt much quieter. Now there are more events, more artists and more people interested in engaging with art”.

Narayanan added that she believes art has become increasingly accessible to wider audiences in Oman, encouraging more people to engage with creative spaces and events.

The artist also credited several

local creatives as major sources of inspiration, including Ali Waqar, Shahad al Hamdi, and Mohammed al Attar.

Speaking on the challenges of working as an artist, Narayanan said one of the biggest struggles has been being taken seriously professionally.

“A lot of people don’t see art as a viable profession and for a long time I internalised that belief myself”, she said.

“But art is everywhere. It’s part of everything we interact with daily and I think people underestimate how important creative work really is”.

Looking ahead, Narayanan said she hopes to continue exploring different forms of illustration and storytelling.

“I’m interested in editorial illustration, album covers, book covers, packaging design, honestly, everything”, she said.

“I’d love to create work that exists in the real world, whether that’s packaging, posters, or large-scale visual projects”.

You can follow Anoushka’s artistic journey on Instagram through @localghostart or contact her at localghostillustration@gmail.com