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4

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INBRIEF

HM GREETES NEW IRAQI PRESIDENT

WORLD AWAITS DEAL

IRAN WARNS OF ATTACK ON US WARSHIP AS PEACE TALKS OPEN IN PAKISTAN

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Nizar Amidi on his election as the new president of the sisterly Republic of Iraq and taking the constitutional oath. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings to the new president, wishing him success in leading his country's people towards continued stability, progress and prosperity.

HIS MAJESTY GREETES DJIBOUTI PRESIDENT

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Ismail Omar Guelleh of the Republic of Djibouti on the occasion of his re-election for a sixth presidential term. His Majesty expressed his best wishes to the president for continued success in leading the brotherly people of Djibouti and realising their aspirations for a stable and prosperous life.

UKRAINE AND RUSSIA SWAP 175 PRISONERS

KYIV: Ukraine and Russia exchanged 175 prisoners of war each on Saturday in their latest swap, officials from both countries said, as they prepare to start a ceasefire to mark Orthodox Easter.

President Volodymyr Zelensky said Ukraine had brought home 175 servicemen and seven civilians from Russian captivity. He said the Ukrainian servicemen had defended the country on different fronts from the east to the south and most of them had been in captivity in Russia since 2022.

Russia's Defence Ministry said the United Arab Emirates had mediated the exchange. Russia took back 175 servicemen and also seven civilians from the Kursk region, the ministry said.

MANGOS BRING QURAYAT TO LIFE



The mango season has begun in the Wilayat of Qurayat, particularly in Hail Al Ghaf village, known for producing some of Oman's finest mango varieties. **SEE P3**

PHOTO BY Mohamed Al Battashi

THE US and Iranian interlocutors on Saturday began their peace talks in Islamabad to seek a deal aimed at ending the conflict in the Middle East, Pakistani officials said, amid hopes of a permanent deal as a fragile ceasefire continued to hold. There are no details of the talk as the time of going to print.

The two delegations began face-to-face talks in the evening in the presence of Pakistani intermediaries after a day of doubts and secrecy that triggered speculations whether the US and Iranian officials would actually meet or not.

Rumours swirled throughout the day suggesting the Iranian delegation might not sit with the US negotiators and only messages would be exchanged through Pakistani mediators.

“But they have started well,” a Pakistani security source said, requesting his name not be mentioned.

The US delegation is led by Vice-President JD Vance while Special Envoy Steve Witkoff and President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner are assisting him.

Iran's Parliamentary Speaker Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf is heading the delegation from his country, assisted by Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and several other senior officials.

This is for the time that US and Iranian officials have held direct talks since the conflict began 40 days ago.

Earlier, US and Iranian delegations met separately with Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif of formal peace talks, officials said.

Sharif first met with the Iranian delegation led by the parliamentary speaker.

A meeting was also held with the US delegation led by Vance hours after he arrived in Islamabad for Pakistan-mediated talks.



A man walks past a billboard near the media centre in Islamabad on Saturday. — Reuters

Multiple sessions of talks may be held in a bid to reach a permanent agreement on Saturday and Sunday, Pakistan's intelligence officials said.

Pakistan brokered a two-week ceasefire this week as part of efforts to end the conflict that began with US and Israeli attacks on Iranian targets on February 28. Those initial strikes also killed the country's supreme leader, ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Up to 10,000 security personnel, including the army, paramilitary forces and police, have been tasked with safeguarding the talks in the Pakistani capital, alongside intelligence operatives.

A so-called red zone, including the hotel where the talks are expected to take place, has been sealed off for the duration of the negotiations.

Meanwhile, Iran's Navy has warned a US warship against transiting the Strait of Hormuz, threatening an attack if it proceeds, as Tehran and Washington opened peace talks in Pakistan, Iranian state media reported on Saturday.

Forces of the Islamic Republic were closely monitoring the US destroyer, the Tasnim News Agency reported. If the vessel continued on its course, it would face an attack, the report said. — dpa

THE WISDOM AND POSITIVE NEUTRALITY IN OMANI DIPLOMACY

MUSCAT: The Omani diplomacy has successfully championed peace and advocated for it as a firmly established strategic choice, rooted in its historical approach to resolving disputes and conflicts between nations.

The Sultanate of Oman has consistently reiterated its call for dialogue as the only path to resolution, sparing peoples the ravages of war and its security,

political, economic and social repercussions.

The Sultanate of Oman's stance rests on a legacy of political and diplomatic wisdom, capable of maintaining a balanced and measured approach to dealing with events with all parties, thus ensuring the independence of its decisions and preventing interference in the affairs of others, or interference by others in its own affairs. It called on the

world to intensify efforts to solidify the ceasefire and support the success of the negotiations, thus sparing the world further destruction and the consequences that have affected everyone without exception.

Diplomats, writers, and analysts affirmed that the success of the Omani diplomacy in adopting a clear and consistent approach of neutrality towards the war. **SEE ALSO P2**

After Artemis II, Nasa eyes Moon landings

WASHINGTON: With Artemis II successfully completing its historic lunar mission on Friday, Nasa is banking on billionaires Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk for the next step: landing astronauts on the Moon.

The Apollo programme — which sent the first and only humans to the Moon's surface between 1969 and 1972 — was designed so that only two astronauts could land on the lunar surface for a maximum of a few days.

More than 50 years later, American ambitions and expertise have grown, with Nasa hoping to send four people on a mission lasting several weeks and eventually building a lunar base.

For the second phase of its mission, the space agency is looking to commercial Landers designed by Musk's SpaceX and Bezos's Blue Origin to get its astronauts on the



Victor Glover and Christina Koch after splashdown in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of California on Saturday. — Reuters

Moon.

After Artemis II splashed down in the Pacific Ocean on Friday after its record-breaking journey, Nasa officials urged all hands on deck for a crewed landing in 2028.

“We need all of industry to work and come along with us, and they need to accept that challenge and come with us and really start the production lines that are going to be required in order to achieve

that goal,” Lori Glaze, the acting associate Nasa administrator, told a press conference.

The Apollo programme relied on a single rocket, the Saturn V, which carried both the lunar lander and the capsule carrying the astronauts.

Nasa has opted for two separate systems for Artemis: the first to launch the Orion spacecraft carrying the crew from Earth, and another to launch the lunar lander, which will be privately contracted.

The decision was driven by the technical limitations of the Apollo programme, Kent Chojnacki, a senior Nasa official in charge of lunar lander development, said.

Although spectacular, the Apollo missions were like “camping trips,” said Jack Kiraly, director of government relations at the Planetary Society, which encourages space exploration. — Reuters

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



SUSTAINABILITY, INVESTMENT CONFERENCE ON APRIL 13

MUSCAT: The first international conference on business sustainability and enhancing the investment system in the Sultanate of Oman will begin on April 13, Monday at the campus of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Muscat.

The two-day conference is being organised in partnership with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, bringing together policymakers, industry leaders, academics, researchers and investors to discuss key issues related to sustainability, innovation and investment development.

The event aims to support national efforts to strengthen Oman’s position as a competitive and sustainable investment destination in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Key topics include foreign direct investment, public-private partnerships, regulatory reforms, innovation and long-term economic sustainability.

Dr Khalid bin Salem al Abri, Assistant President of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Muscat, said the conference is designed as a platform for dialogue, knowledge exchange and partnership-building among stakeholders to generate practical ideas supporting Oman’s investment ecosystem.

He added that the event reflects the university’s commitment to its academic and societal role in advancing economic development and strengthening cooperation between academic institutions and the public and private sectors.

The conference is expected to provide opportunities for networking, knowledge sharing and reviewing global and local trends, challenges and opportunities in business sustainability and investment.

It also underscores the role of higher education institutions in shaping policies and practices that foster innovation, investment and sustainable development in Oman. — ONA

The wisdom and positive neutrality in diplomacy

SUHAIL BIN NASSER AL NAHDI
MUSCAT, APRIL 11

THE OMANI diplomacy has successfully championed peace and advocated for it as a firmly established strategic choice, rooted in its historical approach to resolving disputes and conflicts between nations.

The Sultanate of Oman has consistently reiterated its call for dialogue as the only path to resolution, sparing peoples the ravages of war and its security, political, economic and social repercussions.

The Sultanate of Oman’s stance rests on a legacy of political and diplomatic wisdom, capable of maintaining a balanced and measured approach to dealing with events with all parties, thus ensuring the independence of its decisions and preventing interference in the affairs of others, or interference by others in its own affairs.

With the ceasefire and negotiations taking effect between the warring parties in the nearly 40-day conflict between the Islamic Republic of Iran, the US, and Israel, and given its global repercussions, Oman reiterated its welcome of the parties’ return to the negotiating table.

It called on the world to intensify efforts to solidify the ceasefire and support the success of the negotiations, thus sparing the world further destruction and the consequences that have affected everyone without exception.

Diplomats, writers, and analysts affirmed that the success of the Omani diplomacy in adopting a clear and consistent approach of neutrality towards the war stems from the Sultanate of Oman’s unique wisdom in choosing peace, calm, and rationality amidst a world living under the shadow of wars.

Dr Ahmed bin Salem Ba’Omar, a political analyst and former ambassador, said that the Omani diplomacy has distinguished itself through its exceptional ability to manage international relations with balance and moderation.

This has enabled it to maintain balanced relations with all parties to conflicts without losing any of them. Its stance has been characterised by diplomatic flexibility and proactive engagement grounded in objectivity and the principle of positive neutrality.

This attitude is the product of



DR BIBI ASHOUR



DR HOSNI MOHAMED NASR



HELGA ZEPP LAROUCHE



HASSAN KHALED ADEL

Oman has called on the world to intensify efforts to solidify the ceasefire and support the success of the negotiations

accumulated experience that has made Omani diplomacy a school in its own right in the art of conflict management.

Thanks to this balanced and moderate approach, the Sultanate of Oman has been able to establish a unique diplomatic system based on steadfastness in principles and flexibility in methods.

This has earned it the respect of the international community and ensured the consistency of its positions throughout crises, he said, adding that Omani diplomacy has dealt with various events and wars in the region and the world according to firm principles and pillars that do not change with time and place, making it a distinguished model in crisis management.

This approach is based on the principle of active neutrality, which combines non-interference in conflicts with a positive pursuit of resolution through dialogue and negotiation.

Helga Zepp LaRouche, chairwoman of the Schiller Institute and editor-in-chief of the German magazine EIR, said, “In a world where the art of diplomacy has almost vanished, the Sultanate of Oman’s private, quiet, behind-the-scenes, and confidential mediation remains indispensable. It allows all parties to explore options and possibilities that would easily be exposed or undermined by adversaries if these discussions were held in the public eye.”

She pointed out that the exceptional diplomatic skills of Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, achieved an unprecedented breakthrough in the recent Geneva negotiations before the outbreak of war.

He was so accomplished that he announced on CBS’s ‘Face the Nation’ on February 27 that Iran had agreed to ‘not retain any stockpile’ of enriched nuclear material and to ‘full verification’.

He later wrote on the X platform, “I am grateful for their engagement and look forward to further decisive progress in the coming days. Peace is within our grasp.

” This made the behaviour of the parties that attacked Iran appear even more treacherous and deceitful.

Dr Hosni Mohamed Nasr, Professor of Journalism at Sultan Qaboos University, affirmed that the performance of Omani diplomacy during the US-Israeli war on Iran serves as a model of calm, measured and effective diplomacy.

Perhaps the first thing we notice is that the Sultanate of Oman, as it always does in major international and regional crises, has succeeded in maintaining balanced distances and positions from the main parties in this war.

Unlike other countries, it has not been drawn into siding with this or that party.

This success is evident in the continued effectiveness of Omani diplomacy as a trusted channel of communication, and its commitment to a rational political discourse aimed at de-escalation. This has strengthened its position as a reliable and trustworthy global and regional player in crisis management.

He added that Omani diplomacy, since the beginning of the Renaissance era, has maintained a set of interconnected and integrated pillars that form the foundation of its foreign policy. Among these pillars is the independence of Omani political decision-making, an independence based on a long-term strategic and political vision that is not influenced by external pressures.

Dr Bibi Ashour, head of the International Center for Development and Strategic Studies in Kuwait, said that the Sultanate of Oman has maintained a measured stance regarding the war between the Islamic Republic of Iran, the United States and Israel.

This attitude stems from the history of Oman’s foreign policy towards international and regional issues, which has always been characterised by neutrality, objectivity and conflict resolution with respect for all parties involved.

Hassan Khaled Adel, editor of the Bahraini newspaper Al Bilad, said that the Omani diplomacy is an extension of the GCC approach that is based on diplomatic easing of tension and prevention of further escalation.

In the midst of a complex and protracted war, Muscat emerged as an effective channel of communication, operating within a unified GCC vision that believes regional stability can only be achieved through dialogue.

He added that the success of Omani diplomacy is interpreted within the Gulf region as a reflection of a collective GCC policy that has contributed to opening the door to negotiation, in line with the positions of the GCC states, which have consistently called for restraint and prioritising political solutions.

OHRC inspects health, care facilities in Buraimi, Batinah N

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 11

MUSCAT: The Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) has conducted a series of field visits to healthcare and social institutions across the governorates of Al Batinah North and Al Buraimi, as part of its mandate to monitor and promote human rights standards in the Sultanate of Oman.

The delegation, headed by Prof Rashid bin Hamad al Balushi, visited several hospitals and care centres to assess services and engage with officials on strengthening human rights practices.

During the visit to Al Buraimi, the team met with Sayyid Dr Hamad bin Ahmed al Busaidy, Governor of Al Buraimi. Discussions focused on the Commission’s role, its statutory



OHRC delegation met health officials and reviewed presentation outlining medical statistics.

responsibilities and avenues for cooperation to support the protection and promotion of human rights. In Al Batinah North, the delegation visited Sohar Hospital, where they met senior health officials and reviewed a presentation outlining key medical statistics, service delivery, and healthcare provisions for all segments of society, including persons with disabilities and older persons.

The team also toured Al Salwa Health Care Center, a specialised facility offering medical, psychological and social rehabilitation services for individuals with substance use disorders. The visit highlighted the importance of ensuring patients’ rights to treatment and reintegration into society.

In Al Buraimi, the delegation

visited Al Buraimi Hospital, where they reviewed recent achievements in the health sector and discussed ongoing challenges, emphasising the need to ensure equitable access to healthcare services for both citizens and residents. The visit also included Al Wafa Center for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities, where the team assessed services related to education, rehabilitation and training for persons with disabilities, while noting key challenges and opportunities for development.

These visits are conducted in line with Article (11) of Royal Decree No 57/2022, which mandates the Commission to carry out field inspections of institutions such as hospitals and detention facilities, and to monitor human rights conditions within them.

SHORTTAKES

MoSD WARNS AGAINST UNAUTHORISED FUNDRAISING

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, APRIL 11



MAJED BIN SAID
AL FARAJI

Establishing associations, clubs or forums without prior approval from the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) is illegal in Oman, with violators subject to penalties under the country's Law on Non-

Profit Organisations.

The ministry has also reiterated that soliciting or collecting funds from the public — whether in person or through digital platforms — without official authorisation is a violation of the law.

Speaking to Observer, Majed bin Said al Faraji, Associations Specialist at the Department of Civil Society Organisations Development, said that forming non-profit entities, volunteer groups or expatriate community clubs without a licence constitutes a clear legal breach.

“Such activities require direct regulation and supervision by the competent authority, namely the Ministry of Social Development,” he said.

Al Faraji stressed that fundraising through WhatsApp groups and social media platforms also falls under prohibited activities unless conducted in line with approved regulations.

The Ministry clarified that donation campaigns are only permitted for officially licensed entities that have obtained prior approval and operate through authorised channels to ensure transparency and protect donors.

“These regulations require that the entity be licensed and obtain prior authorisation before collecting funds, while adhering to approved platforms,” Al Faraji added.

Authorities also warned against individuals personally soliciting donations, urging the public to verify the legitimacy of any fundraising appeals circulated online before contributing.

Civil society organisations in Oman are governed by the Royal Decree No 14/2000 and its amendments, which set out requirements for registration, governance and financial oversight.

The law mandates that organisations must be officially registered with the Ministry, have a defined constitution outlining objectives and structure, and operate on a non-profit basis serving social or charitable goals, while remaining subject to government supervision.

The Ministry emphasised that no civil society activity or charitable initiative may be undertaken without prior official approval, reinforcing the need for compliance to ensure accountability and public trust.

OMAN STRENGTHENS PUSH TO TACKLE CHILD OBESITY

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, APRIL 11

Children took the lead at a marathon held at Al Qurum Nature Park to mark World Obesity Day, highlighting growing efforts in Oman to address childhood obesity through community and school-based initiatives.

Organised by the Omani Diabetes Association in collaboration with the National Diabetes and Endocrine Center, the event underscored the importance of early intervention and awareness in tackling obesity among children.

Observed annually on April 4 and convened by the World Obesity Federation, this year's campaign placed a strong focus on childhood obesity. The federation notes that beyond physical health risks, children living with obesity often



Children living with obesity often face stigma, which can impact their academic performance.

face stigma, which can impact their academic performance and overall well-being.

Experts highlight that children affected by obesity are significantly more likely to experience bullying, while long-term impacts may include reduced employment opportunities and productivity in adulthood. Recommended national

responses include early detection programmes, taxation on sugar-sweetened beverages and bans on trans fats.

In Oman, targeted school-based interventions are showing encouraging results. Mariam al Rashdi, a health educator from the MoH's Department of Health Promotion, outlined a pilot

initiative implemented in two schools in Muttrah.

“We selected students through school nurses and enrolled them in a structured programme involving consultations with doctors, dietitians, nutritionists and lab technicians. Blood samples were analysed, and personalised nutrition plans were developed,” she said.

The programme, which ran for a year, also involved close engagement with parents. “We guided families on making healthier food choices, while schools monitored students' weight regularly and encouraged physical activity, especially during holidays,” she added.

“The transformation has been remarkable—not just among students, but across their families, who have embraced healthier lifestyles,” Al Rashdi said.

Mango season in Qurayat boosts farm trade, tourism

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 11

THE MANGO season has begun in the Wilayat of Qurayat, bringing a notable boost to economic and tourism activity, particularly in Hail Al Ghaf, renowned for producing some of Oman's finest mango varieties.

Running from April through the end of August, this year's season is witnessing strong demand, driven by both the quality and abundance of the harvest.

Yahya al Battashi, a local farm owner, said Qurayat has long been associated with mango cultivation, especially in Hail Al Ghaf and Daghamar. While Hail Al Ghaf historically led production, he noted that Daghamar has increasingly expanded in terms of cultivated land, number of trees, and overall yield.

He added that mango trees in the region are prized for their distinctive aroma and economic value, forming a vital source of income for farmers.

Lower-grade produce is also utilised for pickling, ensuring minimal waste and maximum return.

Al Battashi explained that mango cultivation in the area dates back to introductions from India and Africa. Today, modern grafting techniques have enhanced productivity, with some trees capable of producing multiple varieties. In certain farms, yields now extend beyond the traditional season, with fruiting occurring in both summer and winter.



Modern grafting techniques have enhanced productivity, with some trees producing multiple varieties.

Photographer Waleed al Nasri described Hail Al Ghaf as an agricultural landmark, crediting its fertile soil and traditional falaj irrigation system for the exceptional quality of its produce.

The season has also brought renewed vibrancy to the area. Content creator Abdulaziz al Akhzami noted that the village comes alive during this period, with local youth selling fresh mangoes and other fruits along roadside stalls, offering visitors a distinctive rural experience.

He added that the presence of century-old mango trees, coupled with lush farms and

scenic landscapes, attracts visitors seeking nature-based experiences. The nearby Wadi Dayqah Dam further enhances the appeal, with flowing wadis adding to the charm.

Local platform Qurayat live reported that the onset of the season has already triggered active commercial and tourism movement, with brisk sales of mangoes and other local products along the main road.

The annual mango season continues to support small-scale trade while boosting domestic tourism, offering visitors an authentic glimpse into Oman's rich agricultural heritage.

A trailblazer bridging boardroom strategy and sporting passion

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, APRIL 11

In the quiet, rhythmic thud of hooves against the sand at the Equestrian Club, the noise of the corporate world fades away. For Abeer Sultan, this is more than a pastime — it is a sanctuary.

As Executive Manager at Towell Group and a trailblazer in Omani showjumping, she embodies a rare duality, where the discipline of clearing a 1.20-metre jump mirrors the resilience required to steer a multi-sector conglomerate.

Abeer's rise in Oman's business landscape is rooted in rigorous academic and professional grounding. A graduate of the American University of Sharjah, she began her career as a management trainee before being awarded the prestigious Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Scholarship. She later completed a master's degree in

Equestrian Abeer Sultan who has carved a distinct identity in equestrian sport, is the first Omani woman to establish a stable dedicated to showjumping — the Horsera Equestrian Club



Abeer's journey reflects not just personal achievement but a broader narrative of progress.

Project Management with distinction from the University of Manchester.

Returning to Oman, she assumed key roles within the WJ Towell Group, where she now oversees strategic initiatives spanning automotive, real estate and FMCG sectors. Despite her achievements, her leadership philosophy remains

anchored in humility.

“I believe in staying grounded, no matter how high you climb,” she says. “Embracing mistakes is vital. Whether it's missing a jump in the arena or facing a setback at work, failures are opportunities for growth.”

Beyond the boardroom, Abeer has carved a distinct identity in equestrian sport. She is the first Omani woman to establish a stable dedicated to showjumping — the Horsera Equestrian Club — marking a significant milestone in the country's sporting landscape.

Her connection with horses began in childhood, but it was only after graduation that she fully committed to competitive showjumping. Within a year of leasing her first horse, her passion evolved into a structured business venture.

“The greatest challenge is that you're working with living beings,” she explains. “Horses have moods and personalities. It's a mental game as much as a physical one.”

For Abeer, the worlds of business and sport are not competing forces but

complementary ones. The focus and detachment she finds in riding provide a necessary counterbalance to the intensity of executive decision-making.

Maintaining this equilibrium, however, demands discipline — early mornings, long days and calculated sacrifices to ensure excellence in both arenas.

Abeer's ambitions extend beyond personal success. A strong advocate for community engagement, she has been actively involved in social initiatives, from volunteering during Cyclone Gonu in 2007 to serving as a board member of Dar Al Atta. She is particularly encouraged by the growing presence of Omani women across diverse sectors, including oil and gas and competitive sport.

Her message to the next generation is clear: “Own your ambition unapologetically. Don't wait for permission to lead.”

As Abeer Sultan continues to clear hurdles — both literal and metaphorical — her journey reflects not just personal achievement, but a broader narrative of progress.

SPOTLIGHT

DECODING
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TRUTH



MOHAMED AL BATTASHI

INFORMATION TODAY moves faster than thought, and certainty has become rare. Messages, videos and headlines shape opinions within seconds, triggering instant reactions. But behind this constant flow is a simple truth: not everything seen is accurate, and not everything believed is verified. Globally, misinformation has emerged as one of the defining challenges of the digital age. From manipulated visuals to AI-generated content, the boundary between truth and falsehood is increasingly blurred. Studies show that misleading information often spreads faster than verified facts — not because it is more credible, but because it is more emotional and easier to share. This shift has transformed individuals from passive consumers of information into active participants in its circulation. A simple share or forwarded message can amplify content far beyond its original context. In this

environment, critical thinking is no longer just an academic skill — it has become essential for everyday life. Young people stand at the centre of this transformation. Growing up in a highly connected digital world, they are exposed to vast amounts of information without always having the tools to assess credibility. Experts emphasise that the ability to question sources, verify claims and analyse content is vital not only for individual awareness but for the well-being of society. In Oman, these global challenges are being addressed through practical, community-focused initiatives. In the Wilayat of Bahla, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, the Media and Information Literacy initiative was launched to strengthen awareness and translate concepts into real-life practice. **BUILDING SKILLS** The initiative brought together teachers, students, and community members in an interactive training environment aimed at building skills in information handling, digital ethics, and responsible engagement

MISINFORMATION
SPREADS FASTER
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with modern technologies — particularly in the age of artificial intelligence. Ayoub bin Suwailim al Amri, Head of the Communication Development Section at the Department of Communication and Information Affairs of the Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, said, “In today’s fast-paced information environment, the ability to verify information has become an essential skill for every individual. This initiative seeks to empower society, particularly young people, to engage responsibly with media content and confront misinformation in a thoughtful way, based on a simple principle: verify before you believe and think before you share.” The initiative focuses not only on theory but on practical engagement. Participants explored how misinformation spreads, learned verification techniques, and developed the ability to question and analyse content. This reflects a broader shift in education — from delivering knowledge to cultivating awareness and responsibility.

Its significance is further highlighted by its community focus, reinforcing the idea that digital challenges are not confined to urban centres. Access to information is widespread — and so must be the ability to understand it. The participation of multiple institutions reflects a shared understanding that combating misinformation is a collective responsibility requiring coordinated and sustained effort. At its core, the initiative carries a clear message: empowering minds in the age of artificial intelligence is not about controlling information, but about understanding it. It is about nurturing individuals who do not simply consume content but engage with it critically and responsibly. In an era where truth can be shaped or distorted within moments, the ability to pause, question and verify remains one of the most important skills a person can possess. As technology evolves, this human capacity to think critically and seek clarity stands as the strongest defence against misinformation.

SHORT TAKES



AGREEMENTS
SIGNED TO DEVELOP
HISTORICAL SITES

IBRA: Al Sharqiyah North Governorate organised a meeting about a project to renovate historical neighbourhoods.

Mahmoud bin Yahya al Thuhli, Governor of Al Sharqiyah North, said that the meeting aimed to promote the sustainability of Omani heritage through the restoration of the historical neighbourhoods that reflect the Omani identity.

The project reflects integration between the public sector and private sector, said Al Thuhli, noting that the project encourages community initiatives that serve as a cornerstone for investing in heritage sites and turning them into sustainable economic and tourism resources, he explained.

The meeting included a presentation about successful community initiatives in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate. The initiatives are scheduled to contribute to the generation of employment opportunities without compromising the historical aspect of archaeological sites. — ONA

TREE-PLANTING
DRIVE PROMOTES
SUSTAINABILITY



AL MUSANNAH: In a hands-on initiative promoting environmental stewardship, Barceló Mussanah Resort organised a tree-planting drive at its on-site farm, emphasising sustainability, teamwork, and community engagement.

David Faull, General Manager, Barceló Mussanah Resort, said, “Sustainability is not just a concept, but a responsibility we actively live by. Initiatives like this reflect our commitment to creating a positive impact within our community and environment. We are proud of our team and the values we continue to cultivate, both within and beyond our workplace.”

As part of this commitment, the resort’s team spent the day planting in their on-site farm. Central to the activity was the planting of the Omani Ghaf tree, renowned for its resilience in harsh desert conditions. Staff members at the resort took part in the tree-planting campaign.

Clogged wadis raise safety concerns after Muscat rains

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 11

AFTER RAINS, an eyesore often resurfaces — wadis choked with waste. It reignites a deeper conversation about responsibility, safety, and respect for nature.

With every rainfall, wadis across Muscat come alive — carving paths through the land, carrying water that sustains ecosystems and replenishes underground reserves.

But alongside this natural renewal, another, less welcome pattern emerges: piles of plastic bags tangled in shrubs, discarded tyres lodged between rocks, and construction debris obstructing the natural flow of water.

What should be lifelines of nature are, in some places, being reduced to informal dumping grounds.

Muscat Municipality’s recent awareness message — “Wadis and watercourses are not dumping sites” — may read like a straightforward reminder, but it carries urgent weight. Behind it lies a growing concern: human behaviour is quietly reshaping natural systems, often with dangerous consequences.

When waste accumulates in wadis, it does more than spoil the landscape. It obstructs water



Wadis are not empty channels; they are delicate ecosystems.

Protecting wadis is no longer just about preserving beauty — it is about safeguarding communities

flow, increasing the risk of flash floods and forcing water to change direction unpredictably. In a country where seasonal rains can arrive with intensity, such disruptions are not merely environmental issues — they are matters of public safety.

“The problem is not the rain — it’s what we leave behind,” says Mohammed bin Abdulla, a citizen. “Wadis were once places of beauty and life. Today, some of them reflect carelessness. Protecting them is a shared responsibility.”

For residents who work close to these environments, the risks are even more tangible.

“Even small debris can build up and block water flow,” explains Ahmed Khan, a resident, who

works in the construction sector. “I’ve seen how quickly water can accumulate when something is blocking the path. Keeping wadis clean is not optional — it’s essential for everyone’s safety.”

Beyond immediate hazards, the environmental cost is equally significant. Wadis are not empty channels; they are delicate ecosystems.

Waste pollution contaminates soil, threatens wildlife, and creates conditions that attract pests and rodents. Over time, this degradation undermines the natural balance these systems are meant to maintain.

The municipality’s message is not only about enforcement — it is about awareness. It is a call to reshape habits, to see wadis not as forgotten spaces but as shared natural assets that deserve protection.

Real change, however, does not begin with regulations alone. It begins with everyday choices — where waste is disposed of, how public spaces are treated, and whether individuals see themselves as part of the solution.

Schools, media, and community initiatives all have a role to play in reinforcing this culture. Because ultimately, environmental responsibility is not a campaign — it is a mindset.

Results of Debating Championship qualifiers announced

MUSCAT: The results of the second round of the preliminary qualifiers for the ninth edition of the National Debating Championship were announced in Muscat, marking another competitive stage in one of Oman’s key youth platforms for dialogue and critical thinking.

Held as part of the second phase of the championship and hosted by the Arab Open University, the round brought together 40 teams representing universities, colleges and sports clubs from across Oman.

The competition witnessed strong engagement, with participants demonstrating advanced levels of persuasion, logical analysis and rhetoric. The intensity of the debates reflected the growing standard of participation in the championship year after year.

Following the second round, several teams



The intensity of the debates reflected the growing standard of participation.

secured their places in the final stage of the tournament. Qualifying teams from the Muscat round include Al Shabab Club, Sultan Qaboos University (Team 1), A’Sharqiyah

University (Team 1), the German University of Technology in Oman, Global College of Engineering and Technology and Al Rustaq Club. The final stage of the championship is scheduled to be held in May in Muscat Governorate, featuring top teams selected from across Oman.

Hamad bin Khalfan al Harrasi, Head of the Youth Awareness and Education Department at the General Directorate of Youth, said the second stage in Muscat was the largest in terms of participation in this edition, with 40 competing teams.

He noted that the championship, organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth in cooperation with the Oman Debate Center, plays a key role in equipping young people with structured debating skills based on argument, logic, and evidence.

— ONA

THE ROYAL GUARD OF OMAN

Tender Advertisement

The Royal Guard of Oman, invites tender for the following:-

Tender Reference	Subject	Grade	Tender Document Fee (Non-refundable)	Submission Date
01/2026	Supply of Vehicles for the Year 2026	I & above	SME R.O. 13/- L.O R.O. 65/-	17 th May 2026

Specialized companies registered in the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority with the above-mentioned Grade and the Procurement and Contracts Directorate of the General Directorate of Finance, Royal Guard of Oman, can collect the tender document from the Tender Committee Secretariat, Royal Guard of Oman, Seeb during working hours from **Sunday 12th April to Thursday 16th April 2026.**

Wax-sealed Tenders addressed to the Chairman - Tender Committee should be submitted to RGO before 1200 hours on the submission date along with a Tender Bond the name of the Royal Guard of Oman equivalent to 1% (One Percent) of the value of the Tender from any registered Bank in the Sultanate of Oman, The tenderer shall not reveal his identity other than the tender title and the address mentioned below.

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Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are Eligible to Participate	Tender Document Fee (R.O)
798/2025/MAFWR/HQ-90 Recall	EPC for Detailed Design and Construction - Modification to the Existing Breakwater at Gamdah 'Marfa' in Musandam Governorate	Tuesday 07/4/2026	Sunday 19/4/2026	Monday 27/4/2026	Specialized companies registered with, Excellent and First grades	(60/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
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- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: **+968 24402244** or etenderhd@ptlc.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

M I D D L E

E A S T

W A R

D E V E L O P M E N T S

IRAN, US TALKS START <i>Iranian media said negotiations with the United States to end the Middle East war had begun in Islamabad, though the format of the talks remained unclear.</i>	LEBANON SAYS 10 KILLED <i>Lebanon's health ministry said 10 people including three emergency workers were killed by Israeli strikes on south Lebanon.</i>	VANCE MEETS PAKISTAN PM <i>Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met US Vice President JD Vance in Islamabad, the former's office said.</i>	IRANIAN'S MEET PAKISTAN PM <i>Iran's state broadcaster reported that "arrangements for the Iran-US will be defined at the conclusion of this meeting"</i>	PAKISTAN CALLS TO 'ENGAGE' <i>Pakistan's foreign minister called for the United States and Iran to "engage constructively" at the Islamabad talks.</i>	IRAN LACKS 'TRUST' WITH US <i>Iran's parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said that previous experiences negotiating with the United States had led to a lack of trust.</i>	ISRAEL WON'T DISCUSS CEASEFIRE <i>Israel's US ambassador Yechiel Leiter told his Lebanese counterpart in Washington that he refused to discuss a ceasefire with the Hezbollah.</i>	IRAN INTERNET SHUTDOWN HITS 1,000 HOURS <i>Digital monitor Netblocks said Iran's internet blackout has lasted more than 1,000 hours. While Iran's domestic intranet remains operational access to the global internet has been severely restricted.</i>	HORMUZ TO OPEN 'FAIRLY SOON' <i>US President Donald Trump vowed to have the Strait of Hormuz open "with or without" Iran's cooperation and said his top priority was to ensure Tehran cannot have a nuclear weapon.</i>	IRAN DEMANDS LEBANON CEASEFIRE <i>Iran's parliament speaker demanded a truce in Lebanon and the release of his country's blocked assets as Vance warned Tehran not to "play" Washington in the Islamabad talks.</i>
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SENIOR Iranian and American officials began negotiations in Pakistan on Saturday, Iranian media reported, in a bid to bring to an end the Middle East war which plunged the region into violence and sent shockwaves through the world economy. According to Iranian media reports, the Iranian delegation decided to begin talks with their US counterparts after meeting with their Pakistani host, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who also sat down with US Vice-President JD Vance. The Iranian delegation is led by parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and Vance was accompanied by White House envoy Steve Witkoff and President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner. "Commending the commitment of both delegations to engage constructively, the Prime Minister expressed the hope that these talks would serve as a stepping stone toward durable peace in the region," Sharif's office said.

Iran has previously said that any agreement on a permanent end to fighting must include the unfreezing of sanctioned Iranian assets as well as an end to Israel's war against Hezbollah in Lebanon, which Vance has said will not be up for discussion in Islamabad. But Iranian state television's correspondent at the talks said he understood that progress had been made on these issues, giving Iran the confidence to allow the talks to go ahead. A US official denied reports that Washington had already agreed to unfreeze Iran assets held in Qatar. Israel has agreed to talk to Lebanon, but ruled out ceasefire negotiations with Hezbollah.

The warring parties still appeared to be far apart on key issues — including sanctions, Lebanon and the opening of the strategic Strait of Hormuz — and made no attempt to hide their mutual suspicion. "Our experience in negotiating with the Americans has always been met with failure and broken promises," Ghalibaf said, shortly after landing in Pakistan.

Vance said before leaving the US that if the other side was "willing to negotiate in good faith, we're certainly willing to extend the open hand". But "if they're going to try to play us, then they're going to find the negotiating team is not that receptive", he added. The ceasefire is already under strain, notably from Israel's continued strikes in Lebanon, which Iran and Pakistan insist is covered under the current truce. — AFP

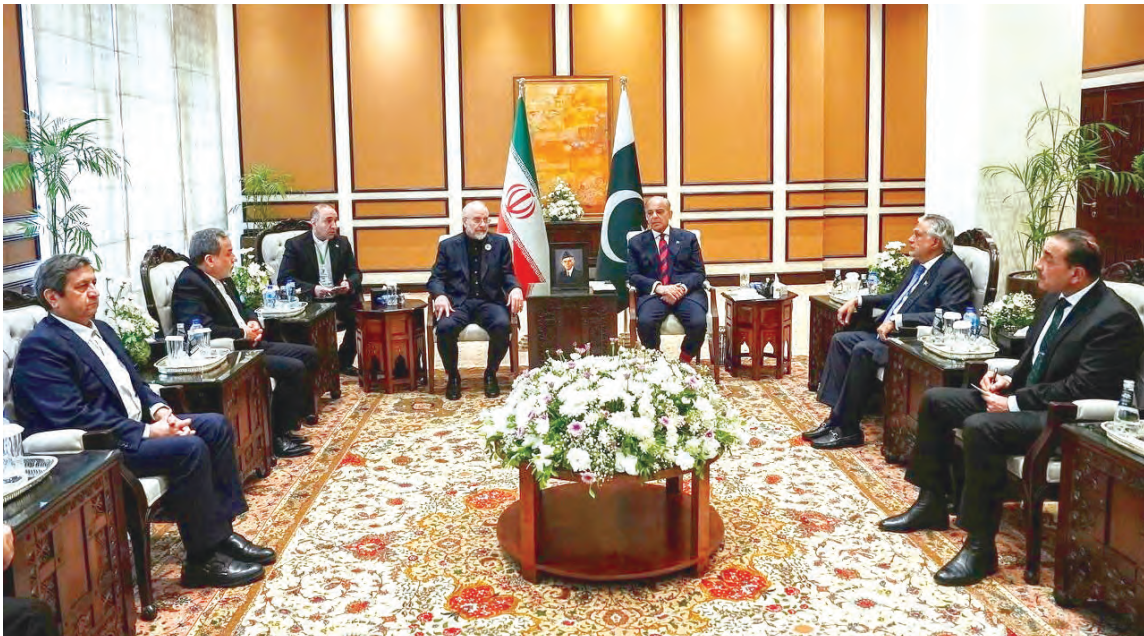
IRAN, US TOP OFFICIALS LAUNCH NEGOTIATIONS



Iranian FM Araqchi looks at damaged bags and shoes placed in an airplane cabin, along with pictures of four children from Minab. — Reuters



Pakistan's PM Shehbaz Sharif shakes hands with US Vice President JD Vance during their meeting, in Islamabad. — Reuters



Pakistan's PM Shehbaz Sharif meets with Iranian delegation, in Islamabad. — Reuters

US 'CLEARING OUT' THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ, SAYS TRUMP

WASHINGTON: The United States has started "clearing out" the Strait of Hormuz, US President Donald Trump said on Saturday, as US-Iran negotiations toward a deal to end the Middle East war got underway. The comment came as US media outlet Axios reported that several US navy ships had crossed the Strait on Saturday in a move not coordinated with Iran. A senior Iranian military official denied the report.

"We're now starting the process of clearing out the Strait of Hormuz,"

Trump said on his Truth Social platform, calling it "a favour" to countries such as China, Japan and France that "don't have the Courage or Will to do this work themselves." He insisted that Iran is "LOSING BIG!" in the conflict, while acknowledging that Iranian mines in the strategic strait — through which a fifth of the world's crude passes — still pose a threat. "The only thing they have going is the threat that a ship may 'bunk' into one of their sea mines," Trump wrote. In an earlier post, Trump said that empty tankers were headed to the United States



US President Donald Trump gestures after stepping off Marine One at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland. — AFP

from around the world to purchase oil, without providing details.

Meanwhile, two US warships have reportedly passed through the Strait of Hormuz, the first such transit since the war with Iran began. The US Navy guided-missile destroyers passed through the strait with no issues reported, The Wall Street Journal reported, citing three US officials. The operation was not coordinated with authorities in Tehran, US media outlet Axios said. US officials did not immediately respond requests for comments about the reports.

The key shipping lane off the coast of Iran has been virtually blocked by Tehran since the United States and Israel started bombing Iran on February 28, though reopening the strait was ostensibly a condition of the shaky ceasefire put in place earlier this week. Senior Iranian and American officials began negotiations in Pakistan on Saturday, Iranian media reported, in a bid to bring to an end a conflict that has plunged the Middle East into violence and sent shockwaves through the world economy. — AFP

UN DEMANDS ACCOUNTABILITY FOR VIOLATIONS OF RULES OF WAR



GENEVA: UN agency chiefs demanded an end to impunity for widespread international law violations in the Middle East, as casualties pile up six weeks into the war unleashed by US-Israeli strikes on Iran. In a joint statement, the heads of multiple United Nations agencies said they were "alarmed by the sustained violations of the rules of war and international

humanitarian law" in the region. "Even wars have rules, and these rules must be respected," the statement from the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee said.

The joint statement decried the soaring toll since the Middle East war erupted on February 28. "In just the last month across the Middle East, thousands of civilians have been killed and injured.

Hundreds of thousands have been displaced, many multiple times," it said.

"The numbers continue to rise and essential services are increasingly difficult to access. "Health workers, hospitals and ambulances have been targeted. Schools have been struck. Civilian infrastructure has been destroyed," it said. — AFP

Lebanon sees more Israeli strikes ahead of direct talks



Smoke rises following an air strike in Lebanon. — Reuters



An Israeli Apache helicopter releases flares as it flies over Lebanon. — Reuters

BEIRUT: Hezbollah lawmaker Hassan Fadlallah on Saturday reiterated his group's rejection of direct negotiations between Israel and Lebanon, where authorities reported 10 people killed in Israeli attacks in the south. The office of Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said that officials from his country, Israel and the United States would meet next week in Washington "to discuss declaring a ceasefire and the start date for negotiations between Lebanon and Israel under US auspices".

Beirut is seeking the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanese territory, while Israel has framed the talks as a step towards formally establishing peace with Lebanon, with which it has technically been at war for decades. Aoun had repeatedly expressed readiness for direct talks ever since Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East war on March 2 with rocket fire at Israel in support of its backer Iran,

In the coastal city of Sidon, hundreds of people attended a funeral procession for 13 State Security personnel who were killed the day before in Israeli strikes that hit their office in Nabatiyeh in the south. Lebanon's health ministry said 10 people were killed by Israeli strikes in the south on Saturday



Mourners react on the day of a reception ceremony for the bodies, in Sidon. — Reuters

sparking massive Israeli strikes and a ground invasion.

In the coastal city of Sidon, meanwhile, hundreds of people attended a funeral procession on Saturday for 13 State Security personnel who were killed the day before in Israeli strikes that hit their office in Nabatiyeh in the south. Loved ones grasped at the coffins,

each bearing the Lebanese flag, while others wept inconsolably. "Who will bring my husband back? Who will give my children their father back?" screamed the wife of one of the dead. Addressing the authorities, another angry, grief-stricken mourner said: "You left them there to die, and now you're holding ceremonies for them?"

Hezbollah MP Fadlallah said the decision to hold direct talks with Israel was "a blatant violation of the (national) pact, the constitution and Lebanese laws". The move "exacerbates domestic divisions at a time when Lebanon most needs solidarity and internal unity to face Israel's aggression and preserve civil peace", he added in a statement. He went on to say the government "has failed to protect its people and cannot be trusted to safeguard national sovereignty".

Israeli ambassador to the United States Yechiel Leiter has said his country "agreed to begin formal

peace negotiations" with the Lebanese government, but "refused to discuss a ceasefire with the Hezbollah". Ali Akbar Velayati, an adviser to Iran's supreme leader, said that Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam "should know that ignoring the unique role of the resistance and the heroic Hezbollah will expose Lebanon to irreparable security risks". "Lebanon's stability rests exclusively on cohesion between the government and the resistance," he said.

Lebanon's health ministry said 10 people were killed by Israeli strikes, with state media reporting Israeli raids on more than a dozen locations. The ministry said the dead included a member of the Lebanese civil defence and two paramedics from the Hezbollah-affiliated Islamic Health Committee, decrying Israel's "systematic" targeting of emergency workers. Authorities say more than 1,950 people have been killed. — AFP

SEVERAL INJURIES

Kuwait says attack wounded National Guards



Kuwait's defence ministry said that several members of its National Guard have been wounded, after the country's air defences responded to a drone attack the previous day. Kuwait's defence ministry said in a statement that "Iranian aggression" had targeted several vital installations belonging to the National Guard, injuring some members. It said that the armed forces had detected and intercepted, over the past 24 hours, seven drones. — AFP

CONTINUOUS ATTACKS

Iraq reports drone crash at Baghdad airport



A senior Iraqi security official said that a drone crashed near a group of US diplomats inside the grounds of Baghdad's airport earlier this week as they were escorting an American journalist freed after a recent kidnapping. The account shed light on a statement issued by the US State Department saying it had summoned According to the Iraqi official, "the diplomatic support centre was targeted on Wednesday by three drones". — AFP

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

UN warns war impact on fertilisers



Even as Gulf tanker traffic slowly resumes, the road back to normal food production will be long and arduous, given the war's impact on fertiliser supplies, the UN has warned. "If the Strait of Hormuz reopened immediately, i.e. not only a ceasefire but vessels moving, the impact would be significantly positive — but incomplete and uneven," the Food and Agriculture Organization's chief economist Maximo Torero said. — AFP

OPINION

Should we consider banning social media for under-15s?



DR HAMED AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

A few months ago, I came across a news post stating that members of the French parliament voted in favour of a landmark bill that would ban children under 15 from using social media platforms. This is a ‘major step’ to protect young people from inappropriate social media content. Around the world, children are exposed to a digital landscape that none of us experienced in our childhood. What began as a tool for connection has evolved into a system designed to capture attention, influence emotions and shape identity. Even adults struggle to navigate it safely. What, then, does it mean for a 12-year-old whose brain and personality are still developing? A number of published research studies have warned of the psychological risks facing young users. Such research showed that high social media use can lead to anxiety, decreased self-esteem, cyberbullying, addictive behaviours and sleep disturbances. Teachers frequently mention that some students have shorter attention spans, reduced patience and increased irritability among students heavily exposed to screens. Parents also expressed similar worries at home, noticing how their children withdraw

from family conversations or become distressed when separated from their phones. France’s proposed ban is not simply about blocking TikTok or Instagram; it is an attempt to buy time and delay children’s exposure to a world they are not yet equipped to navigate. Under the French proposal, platforms must verify users’ ages and deny accounts to children under 15 unless parents provide explicit approval. But such laws also raise questions. How will age verification work in practice? Would children discover ways around it? And could a ban push risky behaviours underground rather than eliminating them? These debates are healthy and necessary for any society to think about its own approach. In Oman, we often discuss the impact of social media on values, attention, family relationships and youth mental health. Many parents find themselves overwhelmed by the speed at which technology shapes their children’s behaviour. Some struggle to set boundaries, while others feel guilty enforcing rules because ‘everyone else is online.’ Schools, meanwhile, face a daily battle to keep classrooms focused and to protect students from cyberbullying and inappropriate content. Perhaps France’s bold move offers us an

High social media use can lead to anxiety, decreased self-esteem, cyberbullying, addictive behaviours and sleep disturbances.

opportunity, not necessarily to copy their law immediately, but to ask difficult questions about what childhood should look like in the digital age. Do young children truly need to spend hours scrolling through curated images of influencers? Do they need access to platforms that encourage comparison, instant gratification and sometimes harmful trends? And are we comfortable allowing algorithms, not parents, teachers, or communities, to shape their worldview? It may be time for a national dialogue among educators, mental-health professionals, parents and policymakers working together to create a healthier digital environment. This could include age-appropriate restrictions, digital literacy programmes in schools and stronger parental controls. More importantly, it requires modelling balanced behaviour at home, family time without devices, outdoor activities, reading and meaningful conversations that reconnect children to the real world. In my opinion, protecting the mental well-being of our children is a responsibility we all share, and it is time to take the right measures to do that.

UK PUTS CHAGOS HANDOVER DEAL IN ‘DEEP FREEZE’

Britain indicated on Saturday it is shelving plans to return the Chagos Islands — which hosts the strategic Diego Garcia US-UK military base — to Mauritius, after US President Donald Trump strongly criticised the deal. Britain struck a deal with Mauritius last year to hand back the Indian Ocean islands to its former colony and pay to lease Diego Garcia, the largest island, home to the military base, for a century. Trump condemned the return agreement as “an act of great stupidity,” and on Saturday, British media reported that Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s government would drop legislation needed to put the deal into effect. A former top government official said London had been effectively forced to abandon the plan as a result of Trump’s opposition. “When the president of the United States is openly hostile, the government has to rethink, so this agreement... will go into the deep freeze for the time being,” Simon McDonald, previously the most senior civil servant in the Foreign Office, said. Downing Street said in a statement: “We have always said we would only proceed with the deal if it has US support.” Starmer’s office issued the statement in response to reports that legislation underpinning the deal to return the Indian Ocean archipelago to Mauritius was due to run out of time in parliament and that no new Chagos bill would be brought forward. The Mauritian foreign minister, Dhananjay Ramful, vowed on Saturday to reclaim the islands, which lie some 2,000 km northeast of Mauritius. “We will spare no effort to seize any diplomatic or legal avenue to complete the decolonisation process in this part of the Indian Ocean,” Ramful said at an Indian Ocean Conference. “This is a matter of justice.” The UK had still not received a formal exchange of notes from Washington — a technical step but a legal necessity for the treaty to be enacted, Britain’s PA news agency reported. Time has consequently run out to pass the legislation before parliament is dissolved in the coming weeks, it said, quoting a government source as saying the situation was “deeply frustrating”. Main opposition Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch said the agreement should now find its “rightful place — on the ash heap of history”. Downing Street said the government would continue to “engage with the US and Mauritius”. Trump had endorsed the deal after it was signed, but then launched a scathing attack on it in Truth Social comments in January. — AFP

Regional stability depends on strong Arab cooperation

TRUMP’S existential threats against Iran, together with Israel’s decision to launch this illegal and unprovoked war against Iran, have left diplomacy badly damaged and made an early end to the conflict far less likely. This war is already broader than when it began, with Iran and its allies now active across several fronts in the region. In Lebanon, Hezbollah remains a powerful force and has so far acted with relative restraint. What started with limited fire has now developed into sustained attacks and heavier retaliation, with the potential for major destruction inside Lebanon. Lebanon is already under severe economic and political pressure, and any wider escalation would deepen that crisis. In Iraq, Iran-aligned militias have attacked US bases in incidents that are difficult to attribute. Attacks of this kind can continue for long periods without a clear turning point, gradually increasing the danger of a broader confrontation.

Ansar Allah’s attacks on shipping routes in the Red Sea have demonstrated the damage these can do to the global economy, and once these attacks resume, the greater the risk that outside powers will become more directly involved. What makes the situation especially dangerous is the way these different fronts are unfolding at the same time. This is not one war in one place. It is a set of overlapping confrontations, each feeding into the others. That creates a far more difficult environment for military planners and diplomats alike. There is no single front that can be treated as decisive, and no obvious point at which the conflict can simply be declared over. The role of the United States has been central to the breakdown in



First responders rush to the site of an Israeli air strike that targeted the Lebanese State Security Centre in Nabatieh on Saturday. — AFP



KARIM EASTERBROOK

The writer is a Former Cambridge School Principal and Author

Israel’s unwillingness to compromise is a major factor in prolonging and escalating the conflict. The attacks on Iranian civilians and civilian infrastructure are war crimes.

trust. Trump’s threats to destroy Iran, combined with his duplicity during peace talks, have made any diplomatic settlement much harder to achieve. Iran is unlikely to accept further negotiations if it believes talks are being used as cover for another attack. That mistrust now stands as one of the biggest obstacles to any credible peace process. Regional intermediaries remain essential. Qatar has often played a useful role in sensitive negotiations. Oman, long known for quiet diplomacy, continues to be one of the few countries able to maintain working channels with Iran and other parties. Pakistan can also act as a bridge, though it has its own interests. China has expanded its diplomatic role by drawing on its economic influence. These countries cannot end the war on their own, but they can help preserve the possibility of dialogue at a time when direct communication is badly strained. Without such channels, the risk of miscalculation rises sharply.

The wider political consequences are also serious. If the conflict is eventually contained through negotiation, it could leave room for more flexible alliances and a calmer regional order. If it escalates further or ends only through force, the region is likely to harden into clearer blocs, with states aligning more firmly against one another. Major escalation in Lebanon, increased attacks in Iraq or Yemen, or direct confrontation between larger powers would make any settlement even more difficult. Israel’s unwillingness to compromise is a major factor in prolonging and escalating the conflict. The attacks on Iranian civilians and civilian infrastructure are war crimes. The Zionist aim is, and always has been, to achieve hegemony in the Middle East by creating divisions between Arab states. Arabs must stand shoulder to shoulder or risk becoming the vassals of foreign powers again. They must learn from history.

Iran has all the cards to threaten the petrodollar



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

NO MATTER where we are in the world, or what we are doing, I get the feeling that the most disappointment we would have about ourselves is how everything is almost indecently monetised, especially ahead of human loss. Whether it's expressed regularly as in the dollar or dollars, the pound, the euro, the peso, the dinar, the ruble, or the ringgit, the rial, riyal, lira, yuan, krona, krone, renminbi, yen, dirham, yuan and won. Apparently, currencies should not be capitalised in regular text or usage, but their capitalised codes should be entirely in capitals, whether in regular form, for example, GBP for British pounds, USD for American dollars, or as with the RO for Omani rials, the EUR for the European euros, and the AED for the Emirati dirham. This brings me to the crypto, or cryptocurrencies, of which I thought there were about a dozen or so. I was rudely awakened to find there are 130 listed on Etoro, which appears to be the primary marketplace for crypto trading, and to note that, of course, Bitcoin, Ethereum, Solana, Bittensor, Cronos and Ave seem to be the busiest, and the real-time trading is just madness! Speaking of madness, I still haven't grasped the concept of it or how it works. To be honest, it hurts my head to think about it, especially when I learn that one man, a

Satoshi Nakamoto, who owns almost 90 per cent, or 968,000 of the world's bitcoins, which are currently trading at close to \$69,000 each, in 20,000 different 'wallets,' making his stake worth an ever crazy, tens of billions of dollars. Trying to research Bitcoin, I fell off the 'understanding' wagon almost immediately after the word 'decentralised,' as other vocabulary such as node, blockchain, peer-to-peer, and repository left me reeling, and as soon as I read "black markets like the dark web Silk Road," I bailed out! It's scary! It could be some pimply-faced, 'I don't like Mondays,' weirdo computer genius, who can basically go online, putting a million 'Kryptons,' (my made up name, cynically because kryptonite was Superman's flaw) for you to buy, and when you pay for them, they make the half million I've kept, worth something... and so on and so on, until my half million coins are worth something. It's got to be a racket, hasn't it? Weirdly, any mention of Nakamoto, is prefaced by the fact that, as a platform requirement, he uses a sobriquet, and though he has hidden behind a Japanese identity, the currency was apparently created using British software, in English, so most investigations have started within the premise that he is, at least European, and the Japanese appellation is a 'red herring.' He developed the currency from

To almost paraphrase Neville Chamberlain, who sought "peace for our time," peace, at any price appears imperative. Without it... this conflict could widen, and at an inordinately greater cost.

2007 to 2010, and still traded through 2011; however, he has been inactive and unsighted since 2011. As I said earlier, everything gets monetised, and although people are perishing across Iran and the wider Middle East, nobody cares. Yet, they do care about rising oil, gas, and diesel costs, rising insurance costs, inflation, and the imperilment to global economics if Russia can pay for Iranian oil in rubles, India in rupees, Cuba in pesos, and China in yuan. Iran and the IRGC, though having few friends and little support, appear to hold more aces for now, and remain defiant and determined to make the Americans pay a hefty price. It would shake up the global petrodollar since 1974, when Saudi Arabia agreed to payment for their oil and gas to be paid in USD, with any surplus invested in the US financial system. wGiven that the United States is currently labouring under a \$37-trillion budgetary deficit, they need that Middle Eastern investment. In fact, the instability that scenario would create could cause the global financial crisis of the century. To almost paraphrase Neville Chamberlain, who sought "peace for our time," peace, at any price appears imperative. Without it... this conflict could widen, and at an inordinately greater cost.

MYTHOS AI ALARM BELLS: FAIR WARNING OR MARKETING HYPE?

Anthropic postponing the release of its new AI model Claude Mythos, said to be so skilled at coding it could be a wicked weapon for hackers, has encountered a mix of alarm and scepticism. The company is among several contenders in a fierce artificial intelligence race. Promoting the awe of Anthropic's own technology boosts business and enhances its allure in the event that it soon goes public, as is rumoured. "The world has no choice but to take the cyber threat associated with Mythos seriously," said David Sacks, an entrepreneur and investor who heads President Donald Trump's council of advisers on technology. "But it's hard to ignore that Anthropic has a history of scare tactics." Mythos has sparked fears of hackers commanding armies of AI agents able to break through computer defences with ease. At this week's HumanX AI conference in San Francisco, Alex Stamos of startup Corridor, which addresses AI safety, acknowledged a real threat from agentic hackers. And Stamos quipped about what he referred to as Anthropic's "marketing schtick." "They have these adorable cutesy cartoons about these products that are so incredibly dangerous that they won't even let people use them," Stamos said of the San Francisco-based startup. "It's like if the Manhattan Project announced the nuclear bomb within a cute little Calvin and Hobbes cartoon." The heads of America's biggest banks met this week with Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent to weigh the security implications of the yet-to-be-released Claude Mythos, according to reports on Friday. "Mythos model points to something far more consequential than another leap in artificial intelligence," Cato Networks co-founder and chief executive Shlomo Kramer said in a blog post. "It signals a shift that could redefine the balance between attackers and defenders in cyberspace." A tightly restricted preview of Mythos was shared with partner organisations this week, under an initiative called Project Glasswing. They include Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, Google, Cisco, CrowdStrike and JPMorgan Chase. According to Anthropic and partners, Mythos can autonomously scan vast amounts of code to find and chain together previously unknown security vulnerabilities in all kinds of software, from operating systems to web browsers. Crucially, they warn, this can be done at a speed and scale no human could match, meaning it could be used to bring down banks, hospitals or national infrastructure within hours. At HumanX, the apparent consensus was that it makes sense that AI agents already adept at coding will excel at finding weaknesses in software. "We're not in an era where human beings can write code when we have superhuman (AI models) that are then going to find bugs in it," Stamos contended. — AFP

Fly me to the moon

LIKE ANY great adventure, and especially one we can follow minute by minute, act by act, the flight of Artemis II has been gripping theatre. That cramped cabin cluttered with hoses, equipment and bolts, the glimpses of a small, blue-and-white Earth in the distance, astronaut Christina Koch's floating hair, the sense that a new era of grand and perilous space exploration has begun — all make for a feeling of wonder and exultation at a time when we badly need it. But try as I might, I cannot resist the voice that keeps whispering, Yes, but we've been there before. I am of a generation (read: old) for which the first landing on the moon, in July 1969, was a life-changing event with far different impact. Until Apollo 11, the notion of people stepping out onto a celestial body had existed only in Jules Verne novels or Marvel cartoons. "Fly Me to the Moon" was a Frank Sinatra love song, and home computers had not appeared. It's hard — impossible, really — to reprise that extraordinary event 57 years and generations of technological advances later. I can still feel the wonder staring up at the pockmarked moon on a hot, dry summer night in Oklahoma, trying to comprehend that there were actually two guys up there. Renowned news anchor Walter Cronkite recalled how he couldn't find words to describe it: "I think all I said was, 'Wow! Jeez!' Not exactly immortal. Well, I was nothing if not human." It's still hard to find the words. The context was so radically different. The elaborate computing required to reach the moon seemed almost mystically ingenious. I was being trained at Fort Sill at the time on an early military computer, a thing called a Field Artillery Digital Automatic Computer, or FADAC, that weighed about 200 pounds and required a dedicated generator to plot artillery targeting. Today, it could probably be replaced with an iPad, and even an ordinary car has at least 30 onboard computers. True, shooting people into space was not new — Yuri Gagarin's first spaceflight came eight years before Apollo 11 — but nothing could really prepare the world for seeing men actually standing on the moon, with



Reid Wiseman and Jeremy Hansen after splash down in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of California. — Reuters



SERGE SCHMEMMANN

The author, an Opinion writer, is a former Moscow, Bonn and Jerusalem bureau chief of NYT

The Artemis II mission is only the precursor of far greater feats, of a new era of space exploration, perhaps including a manned base on the moon and eventually a trip to Mars.

the little marblelike Earth in the background. In his dramatic lead story for The New York Times about the first moon landing, under the huge banner headline "MEN WALK ON MOON," science writer John Noble Wilford described the sense of incredulity many felt: "People back on Earth found the black-and-white television pictures of the bug-shaped lunar module and the men tramping about it so sharp and clear as to seem unreal, more like a toy and toylike figures than human beings on the most daring and far-reaching expedition thus far undertaken." (Conspiracy theories claiming that NASA faked some or all of the six crewed Apollo moon landings between 1969 and 1972 still circulate.) It's condescending, I know, and not fair to put on been-there, done-that airs. The Artemis II mission is only the precursor of far greater feats, of a new era of space exploration, perhaps including a manned base on the moon and eventually a trip to Mars. Artemis has already broken one record of Apollo, reaching the greatest distance from Earth ever ventured by human beings: 252,756 miles, compared with 248,655 miles for Apollo 13 in 1970. And after such a long hiatus in long-distance space travel, it's wonderful that new generations can experience the humbling thrill of seeing Earth as "a grand oasis in the big vastness of space," as Apollo 8 astronaut and Apollo 13 commander Jim Lovell put it, and the excitement of exploring distant worlds. None of

the four Artemis astronauts — Reid Wiseman, 50, Victor Glover, 49, Koch, 47, and Jeremy Hansen, 50 — were alive when Neil Armstrong uttered the legendary phrase "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." Nor, for that matter, when Eugene Cernan concluded the last mission of the Apollo programme, No 17, with a pledge for the future: "America's challenge of today has forged man's destiny of tomorrow. As we leave the moon and Taurus-Littrow, we leave as we came, and, God willing, we shall return, with peace and hope for all mankind." But there was a direct message from an Apollo veteran to the Artemis team. In words recorded before he died in August, Lovell said, "Welcome to my old neighbourhood." He added, "It's a historic day, and I know how busy you'll be. But don't forget to enjoy the view." Eloquent proclamations and quips were de rigueur for astronauts of that pioneering era, and the current team has been trying hard to revive the tradition. Before the Orion spacecraft entered a communications blackout as it passed behind the moon, Glover, the pilot, said: "As we prepare to go out of radio communication, we're still going to feel your love from Earth. And to all of you down there on Earth and around Earth, we love you, from the moon. We will see you on the other side." Koch spoke of a new era in which people would not only step on the moon again but live on it. "But ultimately, we will always choose Earth," she added. "We will always choose each other." But then, as if to underscore that choosing space is no longer so exotic an option, the Artemis II astronauts had a collegial chat on their way home with colleagues orbiting Earth on the International Space Station. The ISS has hosted people on board for more than 25 years, and the recent arrival of a Russian Soyuz spacecraft, largely unnoted, brought an American astronaut and two Russian cosmonauts, for a current total of 10 people on board. A Chinese space station is also orbiting out there with at least three crew members. Will they be visiting each other on the moon before long? On Mars? Will we find that amazing?

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



Oman Dentists' XI Captain Dr Haresh Basheer felicitating Dr Tanveer.

BRAVEHEART XI CLINCH NARROW WIN, TANVEER FELICITATED

MUSCAT: A spirited encounter marked the recent Ramadhan floodlight cricket tournament at the Maabela Cricket Ground, where Oman Dentists' XI faced Braveheart XI in an exciting match.

Batting first, Braveheart XI posted a competitive total of 112 runs. In response, Oman Dentists' XI fought hard in the chase but fell short by 8 runs in a closely contested finish, adding to the tournament's competitive spirit.

The Oman Dentists' XI was led by Captain Dr Haresh Basheer, with Dr Frank Wesley serving as vice-captain. The squad featured a strong lineup including Dr Mohit Soni (wicketkeeper), Dr Ashik Malik, Dr Nishant Anand, Dr Ismail, Dr Mujeeb, Dr Sanal Mohan, Dr Sijin, Dr Hasham, Dr Khader, Dr Vinay, Dr Amir, Dr Raziyyuddin, Dr Sai Mohit, Dr Anita, and Dr Kiran, among others.

The team also actively participated in a recently held box cricket tournament, further underlining their enthusiasm for the sport and camaraderie beyond their professional commitments.

On the sidelines of the tournament, a heartfelt felicitation ceremony was held for Dr Tanveer, who is leaving Oman after 15 years of dedicated service in Shinas. The memento was presented by Oman Dentists' XI captain Dr Haresh Basheer and vice-captain Dr Ashik Malik, in the presence of senior doctors and teammates.

The gathering included Dr Mujeeb, Dr Sanal Mohan, Dr Sijin, Dr Frank Wesley, Dr Hasham, Dr Ismail, Dr Mohit Soni, Dr Nishant Anand, Dr Khader, Dr Vinay, Dr Amir, Dr Raziyyuddin, Dr Sai Mohit, Dr Anita, Hasham and others, reflecting the deep respect and affection Dr Tanveer has earned over the years.

The evening thus blended competitive cricket with warm camaraderie, celebrating both sporting spirit and a colleague's remarkable journey in Oman.

Shabab hit seven as Seeb, Al Nasr win in round 20

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 11

ROUND 20 of the Jindal League produced another decisive set of results at both ends of the table, with Al Shabab recording the biggest win of the round, Seeb tightening their grip on top spot, and Al Nasr maintaining the pressure with another important victory.

At Nizwa Sports Complex, Al Shabab produced a ruthless attacking display to overwhelm Samayil 7-0 and strengthen their push for a top-four finish. The side imposed itself from the outset and effectively settled the contest before the interval with a four-goal first half. Maliko Kinyan opened the scoring in the 13th minute, before Hatem al Rushdi doubled the lead in the 28th. Kinyan then struck again in the 33rd minute and completed his hat-trick from the penalty spot in the 39th to cap a dominant opening half. Al Shabab maintained the same intensity after the break, adding three more goals through Halidi Luwalia in the 50th minute, Yousef al Shabibi in the 62nd, and Mohammed al Ghafri in the 86th. The victory lifted Al Shabab to 44 points in third place, while Samayil remained 10th on 19 points after another difficult outing.

SEEB EXTEND LEAD Leaders Seeb claimed a valuable 2-0 away win over Saham at Sohar Sports Complex, moving on to 51 points. Mohammed al Musalmi opened the scoring in the ninth minute with a header from a free-kick delivered by Ali al Busaidi. Seeb continued to look the more dangerous side, with Nasser al Rawahi going close before the break, while Saham were unable to make their attacking moments



Seeb celebrate after securing a 2-0 victory over Saham to stay top of the Jindal League.



Al Shabab players celebrate during an important result in round 20.

count. The result was secured in the 63rd minute when Ali al Busaidi made space near the edge of the area and fired home Seeb's second. Saham remained ninth on 21 points.

AL NASR STAY SECOND At Al Saada Sports Complex, Al Nasr kept up the chase with a 2-0 win over Al Khabourah in a match watched by Oman coach Tarik Sektioui. After a competitive first half, Al Nasr took control after the interval and finally broke through in the 56th minute when Abdulhafidh Hadid found the net. Substitute Abdullah al Musharafi sealed the points with a second goal in the 86th minute. The victory lifted Al Nasr to 45 points in second place, while Al Khabourah dropped to 12th on 16 points.

Karate refereeing course sharpens practical readiness

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT APRIL 11

The Oman Karate Committee organised the second foundation refereeing course at the training hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher on April 10 and 11, with the participation of a number of male and female referees. The programme came as part of the committee's efforts to raise the efficiency of national refereeing cadres and keep pace with the latest international updates in the sport.

The course was preceded by an expanded meeting between the committee, coaches and referees, during which the main amendments to the 2026 international refereeing law were reviewed. The programme combined theoretical and practical sessions, including

explanations of refereeing rules, discussions of different match situations, and field applications simulating real competition scenarios to enhance decision-making under pressure.

International referee Hilal al Abdali, member of the referees committee and technical committee, said the pre-course meeting, chaired by Dr Faisal al Maawali, Chairman of the Oman Karate Committee, marked an important step at the start of the committee's new term. He said the meeting introduced the new members, outlined the committee's plans and programmes for the 2026 season, and allowed coaches and referees to raise observations and questions.

Al Abdali added that the session also included a detailed explanation of the 2026 international



Practical action from the Oman Karate Committee's refereeing course in Bausher.

refereeing amendments, noting that such courses play an important role in refining referees and updating coaches and players on the latest rules, which in turn supports stronger participation in local and international events. He said the course attracted broad

participation from coaches, referees and some players, with many praising its technical value. Hilal al Kindi, coach at Shotokan Karate Centre, said the activities offered a valuable opportunity to understand the committee's future direction and

follow the latest refereeing developments. He noted that the second day focused on practical application after the earlier theoretical component, helping participants translate concepts into direct on-mat practice. He added that awareness of refereeing

changes also helps coaches better prepare athletes for competition.

Shaima Baamer, referee and coach at Shotokan Karate Centre, said the course strengthened her understanding of refereeing basics and gave participants a deeper view of bouts from the perspective of both referee and judge. She said the programme, which followed an earlier stage held in December, further boosted her ambition to leave a mark in karate.

For his part, referee Matar al Kindi said the course reflected the committee's efforts to develop both the technical and refereeing sides of the sport. He added that Omani karate has made visible progress in recent years, with the improvement reflected in results and medal achievements at the Asian level.



Al Seeb Beach Walkway

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 11

THE MINISTRY of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) recently feted four of Oman’s leading national coaches in recognition of their outstanding achievements during the 2025 season. The honouring of the coaches highlights the growing success and development of local coaching talent across different sports. The honoured coaches included volleyball coach Jamal al Maamari, football coach Hassan Rustam, hockey coach Mohammed Hobees and handball coach Khalid al Orami.

Speaking to Oman Observer, the coaches shared their thoughts on the recognition and discussed the key requirements for Omani coaches to reach international standards. The coaches thanked the MoCSY’s commitment to support the national coaches expertise and to encourage for the continued development of Omani coaches to compete at higher regional and international levels.

The volleyball coach Jamal al Maamari, who is leading Al Ain club currently, expressed his pride after receiving the award for the third time and for the second consecutive year. “This award means a lot to us as domestic coaches and motivates us to achieve more in the coming years.” he said.

Al Maamari also highlighted his achievements at the domestic level, noting that he has won multiple titles with clubs such as Seeb and Al Salam, reflecting his consistent success over the years.

Al Maamari, who led Al Ain’s senior volleyball team to the final of the UAE President’s Cup, described his overseas experience as a major step in his career. He noted that such exposure helps local coaches gain valuable knowledge and develop their technical abilities. “To become a successful coach at the international level, you need continuous learning, more training opportunities and participation in regional and global events.” he added.

SPECIAL MOMENT
In football, coach Hassan Rustam described the recognition as a special milestone in his coaching journey. “This is my first time

TOP FOUR DOMESTIC COACHES

IN 2025 SEASON



Hassan Rustam



Jamal al Maamari



Khalid al Orami

Speaking to Oman Observer, the coaches shared their thoughts on the recognition and discussed the key requirements for Omani coaches to reach international standards. The coaches thanked the MoCSY’s commitment to support the national coaches expertise and to encourage for the continued development of Omani coaches to compete at higher regional and international levels.

receiving such an award from the Ministry, and I am very proud of it.” he said.

Rustam enjoyed a successful season, guiding Al Shabab to major domestic achievements, including winning the HM Cup and the league title. He also played a key role in helping clubs earn promotion to the top-tier league including Al Shabab and Al Khabourah. “The Omani coach needs the right environment and proper exposure to continue progressing and achieving more success.” Al Khabourah head coach ended.

MOTIVATION FOR DEVELOPMENT
Handball coach, Khalid al Orami, highlighted the importance of the award in motivating him to continue his development. “This is a moment I will always remember. It encourages me to move forward and achieve more in my career.” he said.

Al Orami has played a significant role in developing handball at club

level, overseeing teams across all age groups, including junior, senior and women’s teams at Al Amerat club. His coaching journey began in 2010, and he continues to contribute actively to the sport’s growth.

HOCKEY SUCCESS
Meanwhile, the national Hockey team head coach Mohammed Hobees was unable to attend the ceremony due to international commitments, but his achievements during the season were widely praised.

Under his leadership, Oman clinched the title of the 2026 Asian Games Qualifiers in Bangkok with an unbeaten record. The team delivered impressive performances throughout the tournament as they secured victories against strong opponents including Thailand, Hong Kong, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Sri Lanka in the concluding match. Hobees also guided Al Amerat club to win the HM Cup title, further underlining his growing reputation as one of Oman’s promising coaching talents.



Mohammed Hobees

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



Oman's Hammad Mirza in action during his knock of 81 against Namibia in Windhoek on Friday.

NAMIBIA EDGE
OMAN IN LAST-OVER
THRILLER

Sulakshan Kulkarni's first tour as Oman head coach concluded on Friday as Men in Red return from ICC Men's Cricket World Cup League 2 tri-series in Windhoek with five points

MUSCAT: A gripping contest went down to the wire before hosts Namibia clinched a dramatic one-wicket victory over Oman with three balls to spare, handing the visitors their only defeat of the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup League 2 ODI tri-series in Windhoek on Friday.

Chasing 219, Namibia held their nerve to reach 223/9 in 49.3 overs, with Zane Green producing a match-winning unbeaten 40 off 35 balls. The wicketkeeper-batter finished the game in the final over with a six off leg-spinner Samay Shrivastava, capping a thrilling finale after Oman had fought back brilliantly through Muhammed Imran's career-best five-wicket haul (5/39). The result denied Oman a clean sweep but still marked a successful tour under head coach Sulakshan Kulkarni, who took charge only last month.

In his first assignment, Oman secured five points — registering two wins, one no result and one defeat — to move to 29 points from 24 matches and third in the overall standings, remaining firmly in contention for a place in the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Qualifier, with the top four sides from League 2 progressing to the 10-team event.

The World Cup Qualifier will determine the final teams for the 2027 ICC Men's ODI World Cup, to be held in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia. Earlier, Oman posted 218/9 after being reduced to 47/4, recovering through a composed and vital innings from Hammad Mirza. The right-hander struck 81 off 102 balls, hitting seven fours, anchoring the innings under pressure before being run out. Mirza rebuilt through key partnerships, adding 86 runs for the fifth wicket with Vinayak Shukla (39 off 67), followed by a 37-run stand with Wasim Ali (25) and a further 26 runs with Jiten Ramanandi (16).

Jack Brassell led Namibia's bowling effort with an outstanding 4/22 in his 10 overs, while Ruben Trimpelmann supported with 2/38.

Namibia's chase began cautiously, managing just 15 runs in the first 10 overs, but an 81-run second-wicket stand between Willem Myburgh (32) and Jan Frylinck (84 off 93 balls) steadied the innings. Frylinck then combined with Gerhard Erasmus (26) in a 52-run third-wicket partnership to keep the hosts on course.

Oman roared back through Imran, who produced a spell of exceptional quality in only his third ODI. The pacer claimed 5/39, ripping through the middle and lower order to reduce Namibia to 200/9 in the 48th over and swing momentum dramatically. However, JJ Smit's side found a way to hold on. Green, showing composure under pressure, stitched an unbroken 23-run last-wicket stand with Jack Brassell (1 not out) to guide the chase home, sealing victory with a six with three balls remaining. Hassnain Shah supported Imran with 2/38, while Shakeel Ahmed and Shrivastava picked up a wicket each, though the latter's 1/63 in 9.3 overs proved costly.

The tri-series began with Oman's match against Scotland being abandoned, before they defeated Namibia by three wickets and then beat Scotland by 12 runs on April 8. Namibia, however, had the final say in Friday's contest that fittingly delivered one of the most dramatic finishes of the series.

Following Oman's conclusion in the tri-series, with Namibia and Scotland to play on April 12, the United States lead the standings with 36 points from 24 matches, followed by Scotland (32 from 27), Oman (29 from 24), Netherlands (28 from 24), and Namibia (22 from 27). Canada (21), Nepal (12) and the UAE (10) complete the table.

Brief scores: Oman 218/9 (Jatinder Singh 28, Hammad Mirza 81, Vinayak Shukla 39, Wasim Ali 25, Jiten Ramanandi 16; Jack Brassell 4/22, Ruben Trimpelmann 2/38) lost to Namibia 223/9 in 49.3 overs (Willem Myburgh 32, Jan Frylinck 84, Zane Green 40*; Muhammed Imran 5/39, Hassnain Shah 2/38).



Arsenal's Viktor Gyokeres in action with AFC Bournemouth's Alex Scott and Tyler Adams as he shoots at goal Action. — Reuters

Arsenal face punch with
defeat to Bournemouth



Bournemouth's Alex Scott scores their second goal. — Reuters



Arsenal's Declan Rice looks dejected after AFC Bournemouth's Alex Scott scores their second goal Action. — Reuters

ARSENAL SUFFERED a huge blow in the Premier League title race on Saturday, losing 2-1 at home to Bournemouth to give Manchester City renewed hope they can catch the long-time leaders.

The visitors took the lead at a nervy Emirates through Junior Kroupi but Mikel Arteta's men levelled through a Viktor Gyokeres penalty later in the first half.

The Gunners made multiple attacking changes early in the second period but struggled to create clear-cut chances against Andoni Iraola's enterprising team.

Bournemouth were back in front in the 74th minute after a fluid move finished off by Alex Scott, who rifled the ball past David Raya.

Arsenal pushed for a leveller but slumped to just their second home defeat in the league this season.

With six games to go, Arsenal, chasing their first Premier League title since 2004, are nine points clear of second-placed City.

But Guardiola's men can close to within

three points of the top if they beat Chelsea on Sunday and overcome the Gunners in an Etihad summit meeting next week.

Arsenal came into the match lifted by their last-gasp 1-0 win in the first leg of their Champions League quarterfinal against Sporting Lisbon in midweek.

But they were sluggish against a bright Bournemouth team who played the more fluid football in the opening stages.

Iraola's team took a deserved lead in the 17th minute when Kroupi tapped in from close range after the ball fell to him following a wicked lopping deflection off William Saliba.

The goal followed a well-worked move, with Bournemouth captain Ryan Christie playing a sweetly measured ball into the path of Adrien Truffert, whose cross was deflected into his path by Saliba.

Kroupi, 19, is the first teenager to score 10 goals in his debut Premier League season since Robbie Keane for Coventry City in 1999/2000.

Moments later Kai Havertz squandered a

clear chance to level, putting a header over the bar and the crowd became increasingly edgy as the home side struggled to settle.

But Arsenal were level in the 35th minute when Gyokeres blasted home from the penalty spot after the ball struck Christie's outstretched hand.

Arteta, who has been criticised for being over-cautious this season, made three attacking changes early in the second half, bringing on Eberechi Eze, 16-year-old Max Dowman and Leandro Trossard for Havertz, Noni Madueke and Gabriel Martinelli.

But the changes failed to lift the Gunners, who looked short of attacking ideas beyond long balls to Gyokeres, who fired wide in added time when well placed.

Just weeks ago Arsenal were on track for a unique quadruple before defeat to City in the League Cup final and a shock loss to Southampton in the FA Cup.

They remain favourites for the Premier League title but City, with two games in hand, will travel to Stamford Bridge with renewed hope. — AFP

BUSINESS

SHORT TAKES



Shinas Port cargo volumes reach 813,155 tonnes in 2025, with imports dominating trade flows.

LOW-SULPHUR FUEL PROJECT PLANNED FOR SHINAS PORT

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 11

An agreement for the establishment of a low-sulphur marine fuel project is expected to be signed this year at Shinas Port, marking a step beyond the port's current role as a cargo handling facility and into higher-value maritime services.

The move comes as activity at the northern port continues to grow. The company operating Shinas Port said the port handled 813,155 tonnes of cargo in 2025, including 798,785 tonnes of imports and 14,369 tonnes of exports.

Officials say the port has also seen growth in ship-to-ship transfer operations, with cargo including petroleum products, bulk commodities and general goods moved between vessels within the port or nearby waters. Such activity can ease pressure on berths, reduce waiting times and improve the flow of shipments.

For Shinas, that also means an opportunity to build service revenue without having to rely only on cargo growth or immediate expansion in port infrastructure.

At the same time, officials stressed that these operations remain under strict regulatory and security oversight, with regular coordination in place with the relevant authorities.

Alongside the marine fuel project, a second investment linked to ship recycling and processing is also under consideration in Shinas. If it goes ahead, it would add an industrial dimension to the port's activity and could help create jobs.

Taken together, the two projects suggest that Shinas is beginning to develop a broader role in Oman's maritime economy, extending beyond cargo handling into fuel, logistics and related industrial services.

Plans for the low-sulphur fuel project underscore Shinas' progress towards a more specialised position in the country's port and logistics network.

FDI surpasses ~~RO~~ 31 billion in 2025; UK is top investor

THE Sultanate of Oman's foreign direct investment (FDI) stock rose by 8.1 per cent to RO 31.38 billion by the end of the fourth quarter of 2025, according to preliminary data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information, underscoring continued investor confidence in the economy.

The increase compares with RO 29.02 billion recorded during the same period in 2024. However, annual inflows declined to RO 2.36 billion from RO 3.56 billion a year earlier, indicating a moderation in new capital entries despite the expansion in total investment stock.

Sectoral data shows that oil and gas extraction continued to dominate, accounting for 80.9 per cent of total FDI, equivalent to RO 25.41 billion, with inflows of RO 2.53 billion. The manufacturing sector ranked second with investments of RO 2.67 billion, although it registered a decline in inflows of RO 127 million.

The financial intermediation sector followed with total investments of RO 1.50 billion, recording a drop in inflows of RO 69.1 million. Other sectors posted mixed performance, reflecting varied investment dynamics across the economy.

Investments in real estate, rental and business activities reached RO 584.3 million, with a decline in inflows of RO 14.4 million, while the transport,

Sectoral data shows that oil and gas extraction continued to dominate, accounting for 80.9 per cent of total FDI, equivalent to RO 25.41 billion, with inflows of RO 2.53 billion. The manufacturing sector ranked second with investments of RO 2.67 billion, although it registered a decline in inflows of RO 127 million.



The increase compares with RO 29.02 billion recorded during the same period in 2024.

storage and communications sector attracted RO 312.5 million, supported by modest inflows of RO 2.5 million.

The electricity and water sector recorded investments of RO 318.7 million, with inflows increasing by RO 25.8 million. The trade sector saw investments of RO 281 million, with inflows rising by RO 4 million, signalling steady activity in domestic commerce.

Meanwhile, the hotels and restaurants sector accounted for RO 112.8 million in investments, with a marginal decline in inflows of RO 700,000.

The construction sector registered RO 99.1 million, supported by an increase in inflows of RO 9.9 million. Other activities collectively attracted RO 85.7 million, with inflows rising by RO 2 million.

By country of origin, the United

Kingdom remained the largest investor, accounting for 52.3 per cent of total FDI, valued at RO 16.42 billion. The United States ranked second with investments of RO 8.45 billion, followed by Kuwait at RO 1.36 billion.

Other key contributors included China (RO 887.3 million), Qatar (RO 763 million), United Arab Emirates (RO 626.2 million), Bahrain (RO 528.5 million), Netherlands (RO 525.1 million), Switzerland (RO 329.7 million) and India (RO 275.2 million). Investments from other countries combined reached RO 1.21 billion.

The data reflects Oman's continued ability to attract long-term foreign capital, supported by sectoral diversification and an evolving investment environment, even as inflow levels fluctuate in response to global economic conditions. — ONA

29 MILLION INVESTMENTS ADVANCE FOOD SECURITY PROJECTS

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources reported that investments implemented in food security projects reached approximately RO 29.04 million by the end of March 2026, representing a completion rate of 4.3 per cent.

Khalid bin Salem al Amri, Head of Contracts Management and Investor Relations, said 85 opportunities have been offered

via the Tatweer platform out of 138 submitted, achieving 21 per cent of the target to present 400 opportunities.

A total of 33 projects have been executed across plant, animal and aquaculture sectors. Dhofar Governorate led in investment value at over RO 20.55 million, followed by Al Sharqiyah North Governorate with RO 4.64 million, while other governorates recorded modest progress.

In terms of opportunity rollout, Al Buraimi Governorate achieved the highest completion rate at 70 per cent, followed by Al Batinah South Governorate at 62 per cent.

Sector-wise, the plant segment accounted for the largest share of opportunities, followed by animal and fisheries sectors. However, implemented investments were led by the animal sector at RO 21.33 million, ahead of plant and aquaculture. — ONA

Oman economy shows resilience amid markets risks, slowing trade

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Economy has highlighted improving economic prospects for the Sultanate of Oman, supported by resilient domestic indicators and gradual recovery in global conditions, despite persistent uncertainties linked to international trade and energy market volatility.

According to the ministry's latest quarterly bulletin, the International Monetary Fund revised its global growth forecast upwards to 3.3 per cent in January 2026, compared to 3.1 per cent projected in October 2025.

The upgrade reflects the global economy's ability to absorb trade disruptions witnessed last year, aided by easing tariff pressures and continued investment momentum, particularly in artificial intelligence and advanced technologies.

The IMF maintained its 3.3 per cent growth outlook for 2025, while cautioning that evolving geopolitical tensions and rapid technological shifts could pose



The IMF revised its global growth forecast upwards to 3.3 per cent in January 2026, compared to 3.1 per cent projected in October 2025.

downside risks.

Global trade growth is expected to slow to 2.6 per cent in 2026 from 4.1 per cent in 2025, indicating moderating external demand. Inflation is projected to ease to

3.8 per cent, while global debt is anticipated to climb to a record \$348 trillion by the end of 2025, driven largely by higher public borrowing in major economies.

Within this global context,

Oman's fiscal position recorded a shift in 2025, with the state budget posting a deficit of RO 480 million compared to a surplus of RO 540 million in 2024.

The reversal was primarily attributed to a decline in oil and gas revenues, which resulted in a 7.99 per cent drop in total public revenues, while public expenditure remained broadly stable over the same period. Despite these pressures, Oman's credit profile strengthened, reflecting improved fiscal management and economic stability.

Fitch Ratings upgrade Oman to investment grade (BBB-) with a stable outlook, while Standard & Poor's reaffirmed its BBB- rating with a stable outlook. Moody's also raised Oman's rating to Baa3 with a stable outlook, underscoring confidence in the country's capacity to meet its financial obligations.

External trade data showed mixed performance. Total merchandise exports declined by

7.14 per cent to RO 23.26 billion in 2025, largely due to a 15.21 per cent drop in oil exports. However, non-oil exports posted solid growth of 7.48 per cent, reflecting ongoing diversification efforts. Imports rose by 2.72 per cent to RO 17.17 billion, resulting in a trade surplus of RO 6.10 billion.

Economic activity remained on a growth trajectory. Gross domestic product (GDP) at current prices expanded by 2.3 per cent to RO 42.14 billion in 2025, driven by a sharp increase in natural gas activity, which surged by 56.94 per cent, alongside a 3.71 per cent rise in non-oil sectors.

At constant prices, GDP grew by 2.4 per cent, supported by a 3.11 per cent expansion in non-oil activities, including agriculture, industry and services. Oil sector value added also recorded a modest increase of 1.09 per cent. Inflation remained contained, rising slightly to 0.99 per cent in 2025 compared to 0.60 per cent in 2024, staying within manageable levels. — ONA

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The dual awards underscore the bank’s balanced approach to growth.

OAB HONoured
FOR LEADERSHIP
AND WORKFORCE
TRANSFORMATION

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has been recognised with two prestigious accolades at the OER Business Summit 2026, reinforcing its position as a forward-looking institution shaping the future of banking in the Sultanate of Oman.

The bank was awarded the OER Award for Leadership in Banking & Financial Services and the OER HR Award for Workforce Transformation in Financial Services, marking a significant milestone in its growth journey.

The OER Business Summit is widely regarded as one of Oman’s leading platforms for dialogue on economic progress and sectoral innovation. Bringing together senior leaders, policymakers and industry experts, the summit highlights organisations that are not only delivering strong performance but also contributing meaningfully to national development priorities.

OAB’s recognition reflects its continued alignment with these ambitions, particularly in advancing innovation and building resilient, future-ready institutions.

The dual awards underscore the bank’s balanced approach to growth, where financial performance is matched by a deep commitment to people and culture. Through ongoing investments in digital capabilities, customer-centric solutions and talent development, OAB has been steadily evolving its operating model to meet the changing expectations of customers and the wider market.

This integrated strategy has enabled the bank to strengthen its market position while fostering an environment that empowers its workforce to thrive.

Commenting on the achievement, Sulaiman al Harthi, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Arab Bank, said: “This recognition reflects the direction we have chosen as a bank. We believe that sustainable success comes from combining strong business performance with a genuine investment in people.

These awards are a reflection of what we have achieved, embodying the mindset we continue to pursue across the organisation. A mindset that embraces innovation, values collaboration and remains focused on delivering meaningful impact for our customers and the communities we serve”.

As Oman continues its journey towards economic diversification under Oman Vision 2040, OAB remains committed to playing an active role in shaping a more dynamic and inclusive financial sector. The recognition at the OER Business Summit 2026 further reinforces the bank’s ambition to drive progress through innovation, strengthen its human capital and contribute to the long-term development of the Sultanate of Oman.

Kia Oman announces
three-day flash festival

KIA Oman has announced an exciting 3-day amazing flash festival, offering customers in the Sultanate of Oman an exceptional opportunity to own a new Kia with big savings. Running from April 14-16, 2026, this limited-time event features significant price advantages across Kia’s most popular sedans and SUVs.

BIG SAVINGS ACROSS THE KIA LINEUP
The flash sale features impressive savings designed to make Kia ownership more accessible than ever. Customers can avail savings up to RO 2,200 on specific Kia range of vehicles, ensuring a diverse range of options for every budget and lifestyle.

KIA SELTOS & SPORTAGE L: SAVE MORE ON KIA’S HERO MODELS
The stylish Kia Seltos offers savings of RO 2,200. Kia Seltos continues to be a symbol of urban energy, particularly popular with young executives who appreciate its commanding view and modern technology.

Under the hood, a refined 1.4L turbo engine provides a spirited driving experience with excellent fuel efficiency. The tech-forward cockpit includes an 8-inch display with seamless smartphone connectivity and a wireless charging tray, ensuring that drivers stay connected and comfortable throughout every journey.

The versatile Kia Sportage comes with remarkable savings of up to RO 2,000. The Kia Sportage L is designed to transform the SUV experience by offering an extended wheelbase that provides superior legroom and a large 543-litre cargo area.

It is perfect for families who need space without sacrificing performance, featuring a powerful 1.5T turbocharged engine and a stunning dual 12.3-inch integrated display. With its premium presence and panoramic sunroof, the Sportage L sets a new benchmark for comfort and convenience on the road.



The flash sale features impressive savings designed to make Kia ownership more accessible than ever.

THE KIA PEGAS AND KIA K4: ECONOMICAL FOR FAMILIES, FLEET & SME’S
Savings on the efficient Kia Pegas RO 300. The Kia Pegas remains a top choice for those who value practicality and ease of use in busy urban environments. Its compact exterior allows for effortless parking in tight spaces, yet the interior offers surprising legroom and a generous 475-litre trunk capacity.

Powered by a highly efficient 1.4-litre engine, the Pegas delivers an impressive fuel economy of 17.8 km/L, making it a smart and economical partner for daily commuting. On the all-new Kia K4 sedan savings of RO 1,500.

For drivers seeking a more progressive experience, the Kia K4 sedan breaks traditional boundaries with its sleek fastback silhouette and bold design. The interior is a fusion of technology and comfort, featuring a driver-focused cabin equipped with a Harman Kardon sound system and a convenient Head-up display.

Every detail of the K4 is engineered to

deliver a responsive and engaging drive, supported by a suite of advanced safety features like forward collision-avoidance assist, blind-spot collision-avoidance assist, reverse parking collision-avoidance assist, etc.

THE ULTIMATE TIME TO SAVE BIG WITH KIA
The Kia Flash Sale represents the most exciting time to join the Kia family and enjoy the prestige and reliability that define the brand.

These exclusive offers are available for a very limited time, making it the perfect opportunity for car buyers to upgrade to a vehicle that matches their ambition and lifestyle.

Interested customers are encouraged to visit their nearest Kia showroom between April 14 and 16 to experience these models firsthand and take advantage of these significant savings before the event concludes.

First female GM of Mysk Al Mouj appointed

MUSCAT: Mysk by Shaza has appointed Meenu Singh as General Manager of Mysk Al Mouj, Muscat, marking a significant milestone as she becomes the first woman to hold a GM position within the group.

A seasoned hospitality professional, Meenu’s rise reflects the brand’s commitment to nurturing talent and promoting leadership from within.

Her appointment underscores both her proven capabilities and Mysk by Shaza’s people-first philosophy. In her new role, she will lead the continued growth and positioning of Mysk Al Mouj



Meenu Singh: New General Manager of Mysk Al Mouj.

as a leading lifestyle destination in Muscat, recognised for its contemporary hospitality, vibrant experiences and strong community focus.

“I am truly honoured to take on this role and to be part of a group that believes in empowering its people”, Meenu said. “My journey with Mysk by Shaza has been one of continuous learning and growth.

The organisation has provided me with the platform, trust and opportunities to evolve both personally and professionally”.

She added that she hopes

her journey will inspire more women to step into leadership roles within the hospitality sector.

“Mysk Al Mouj holds a special place within the community and I look forward to building on its success by creating meaningful guest experiences, strengthening our team culture and driving innovation across all touchpoints”, Meenu said.

Her promotion also highlights Mysk by Shaza’s continued focus on diversity, inclusion and leadership development, reinforcing its vision of creating an environment where talent can thrive.

Sohar International concludes Ramadhan contest with grand prize draw

MUSCAT: Reinforcing its commitment to delivering meaningful experiences and celebrating the true spirit of Ramadhan, Sohar International has successfully concluded its highly engaging Ramadhan Contest, which witnessed participation from over half a million people.

The campaign culminated in a grand draw featuring 60 qualified participants, selected as 20 winners each week, competing for the grand prize, with one lucky winner driving away in a brand-new Jetour Dashing.

Designed to embody the values of generosity, gratitude and togetherness that define the holy month, the campaign stood as a testament to the bank’s ability to create impactful initiatives that resonate widely and bring



The campaign stood as a testament to the bank’s ability to create impactful initiatives that resonate widely and bring communities together.

communities together. Over the course of the campaign, participants engaged with weekly social media questions, reinforcing the campaign’s strong engagement and widespread appeal. The grand draw, held after the Eid holiday, was attended by Eng Aisha al Saifi, Chief Technology Officer and Dr Mazin al Raisi, Chief Marketing Officer.

Dr Mazin al Raisi, Chief Marketing Officer at Sohar International, stated, “The Ramadhan contest embodies the heart of what Sohar International strives to achieve — celebrating meaningful moments that connect people and nurture the values of generosity, gratitude and unity.

Through this campaign, we were able to create moments of genuine joy, not only for our lucky winner

but for all participants who engaged. We believe that initiatives like these transcend banking, they are about touching lives, fostering connection and expressing appreciation in ways that are heartfelt and lasting. At Sohar International, we remain committed to designing experiences that leave a positive mark, strengthen social bonds and celebrate what truly matters in life”.

The initiative emphasised the bank’s ability to create memorable experiences that celebrate special occasions. By thoughtfully combining entertainment, participation and reward, the Ramadhan contest became more than just a competition — it was a celebration of community, festivity and shared enjoyment during the Holy month.

SHORTTAKES



The city aims to attract 100 new projects worth RO 100 million and generate around 2,000 jobs.

RAYSUT INDUSTRIAL CITY ATTRACTS RO 38 MILLION INVESTMENTS

SALALAH: Raysut Industrial City attracted 36 investment applications in 2025, resulting in the establishment of 20 projects valued at RO 38.2 million, primarily in manufacturing, food and pharmaceutical industries.

The projects span more than 151,000 square metres, while eight stalled ventures were replaced with higher-quality investments aligned with targeted sectors.

Eng Abdul Qadir bin Salim al Balushi, Director General of the industrial city, said cumulative investments exceeded RO 641 million by the end of

2025, marking 4 per cent growth year-on-year. Employment reached 3,283 workers, including 1,281 Omanis, with 180 new national jobs created during the year.

The estate, covering over 4 million square metres, has achieved a 97 per cent occupancy rate across developed areas, with expansion plans set to increase total space to 5 million square metres.

Under the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2026–2030), the city aims to attract 100 new projects worth RO 100 million and generate around 2,000 jobs for citizens, while strengthening its position as a regional hub for food and pharmaceutical industries.

Infrastructure upgrades are ongoing, including expanded water and sanitation networks and master planning for new zones. Upcoming projects include the Madayn Pioneer Complex, enhanced security systems and further infrastructure expansion to support rising investor demand.

Strategically located in Salalah, the city offers access to markets in the Horn of Africa and Asia, alongside logistical advantages linked to proximity to Yemen, reinforcing its export potential. — ONA



ENG ABDUL QADIR BIN SALIM AL BALUSHI
Director General

3 oil supertankers exit Gulf via Strait of Hormuz

THREE SUPERTANKERS passed through the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday, shipping data showed, marking what appeared to be the first vessels to exit the Gulf since the US-Iran ceasefire deal and as peace talks got under way in Pakistan.

Tehran's blockade of the strait, a chokepoint for about 20 per cent of global oil and liquefied natural gas shipments, since the start of the Iran war at the end of February has disrupted global energy supplies and sent oil prices soaring. The Liberia-flagged Very Large Crude Carrier (VLCC) Serifos and China-flagged VLCCs Cospearl Lake and He Rong Hai, entered and exited the "Hormuz Passage trial anchorage" that bypasses Iran's Larak Island on Saturday, LSEG data showed. Each vessel is capable of carrying 2 million barrels of oil. Serifos, carrying crude loaded from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in early March, is expected to arrive at Malaysia's Malacca port on April 21, data from LSEG and analytics firm Kpler showed.

Cospearl Lake is laden with Iraqi oil and He Rong Hai is carrying Saudi crude, the same data showed.

Both VLCCs are chartered by Unipet, the trading arm of Chinese energy giant Sinopec, the data showed. Sinopec did not immediately



Cargo ships in the Gulf, near the Strait of Hormuz, as seen from northern Ras al Khaimah. — Reuters file photo

respond to a request for comment outside office hours.

US President Donald Trump said on Saturday that many tanker ships are en route to the United States to transport oil and gas to other countries.

"Massive numbers of completely empty oil tankers, some of the largest anywhere in the World, are heading, right now, to the United States to load up with the best and "sweetest" oil and gas anywhere in the World," Trump said in a Truth Social post.

His post came as senior US and Iranian officials met on Saturday in Islamabad with Pakistani intermediaries for talks about the war that

started on February 28 with US-Israeli attacks on Iran and subsequently expanded as Iranian forces began striking nearby countries.

Trump said earlier this week Iran should not charge fees to tankers going through the Strait of Hormuz, which has been mostly closed to shipping since the war began, causing the worst disruption to global energy supplies in history. Crude oil futures have spiked since the start of the war and the closure of the strait. US oil now trades at a premium to the global benchmark, Brent. U.S. crude oil settled at \$96.57 a barrel on Friday, while Brent was at \$95.20.

Jake Dollarhide, chief executive officer of Longbow Asset Management in Tulsa, Oklahoma, said while he cannot comment on whether empty tankers are heading to the United States for oil, the ongoing Hormuz closure could generally boost demand for US oil.

"We're producing so much more oil than we were 10 years ago," he said. "The situation with the Strait of Hormuz, even with the peace talks, could take months in a best-case scenario to work out, so absolutely U.S. oil will be higher in demand as a result. Whether that plays out to fruition with actually people sending their empty tankers our way, I have no idea." — Reuters

OMAN AIRPORTS SIGNS RWANDA AVIATION MOU

KIGALI: Oman Airports has signed a memorandum of understanding with ATL Aviation, Travel & Logistics Limited to explore strategic cooperation in aviation and related infrastructure.

The agreement, signed in Kigali, covers collaboration in airport city development, cargo and aviation infrastructure, logistics, human



capital development and feasibility studies for future projects.

The MoU underscores Oman Airports' strategy to expand its international footprint, enhance connectivity and support sustainable aviation sector growth through partnerships, consultancy services and operational expertise. — ONA

EOR technologies strengthen Oman oil output

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Energy and Minerals is advancing the optimisation of hydrocarbon resources through the deployment of advanced technologies and innovation aimed at improving production efficiency and sustainability, within a framework aligned with stringent health, safety and environmental standards.

Enhanced oil recovery (EOR) has emerged as a central pillar of this strategy, particularly in maximising output from mature fields. These technologies enable additional extraction beyond the limits of conventional methods, reinforcing long-term production stability. Dr Saleh bin Ali al Anbouri,



EOR enables additional extraction beyond the limits of conventional methods, reinforcing long-term production stability.

Director General of Oil and Gas Exploration and Production,

said Oman has established itself as a global benchmark in EOR

deployment, converting geological complexity into opportunities for innovation and improved recovery rates.

He noted that many of the country's fields, discovered between the 1960s and 1980s, present challenges such as reservoir heterogeneity and high oil viscosity.

Oman has addressed these constraints through advanced solutions grounded in reservoir analysis and continuous optimisation of production techniques.

A wide spectrum of EOR methods is in use across sandstone and carbonate reservoirs, including steam, gas and polymer injection.

EOR's contribution to total oil output is projected to rise to around 20 per cent in 2026, up from 15 per cent in 2021, underlining its growing strategic importance.

More than 680 million barrels have been produced through continuous steam injection, while polymer technologies have enhanced fluid mobility and recovery efficiency.

Advanced applications in complex carbonate reservoirs — including steam-assisted gravity drainage and sour gas injection — have delivered incremental recovery gains of between 10 and 20 per cent, highlighting the scale of untapped potential. — ONA

INVESTMENT SHIFT

Chinese firms pivot to Brazil consumers



Chinese investment in Brazil is shifting from large infrastructure projects to consumer-focused ventures, highlighted by Mixue's entry into São Paulo.

The move reflects Beijing's strategy to expand overseas markets amidst rising US trade barriers. Chinese investment in Brazil doubled to \$4.2 billion in 2024, targeting the country's vast consumer base and strengthening bilateral economic ties. — Reuters

INFLATION SURGE

US inflation jumps on fuel spike



US consumer prices recorded their largest increase in nearly four years in March, driven by a sharp surge in gasoline and diesel costs linked to the Iran conflict. While core inflation rose moderately, economists expect broader price pressures ahead.

Strong job growth signals labour market resilience, reinforcing expectations that the US Fed will likely delay interest rate cuts. — Reuters

LEGAL CHALLENGE

US court questions global tariff basis



A US trade court panel has questioned the legal basis of President Donald Trump's 10 per cent tariffs on most imports, citing doubts over using trade deficits as justification.

Lawsuits from states and businesses argue the move bypasses prior court rulings. The tariffs, introduced in February, have disrupted trade flows despite limited impact on the overall deficit. — Reuters

OPINION

Board members’ role in supporting the economy



DR HILAL
AL SAWAI

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert

AN executive board member’s responsibilities extend beyond the perimeter of the firm. The crucial role board members of government companies play in corporate governance, accountability and direction is multidimensional and impacts socio-economic development in both the vertical and horizontal dimensions.

With the power of innovative decision-making and responsible economic leadership, the board is poised to be the epitome of economic stimulation, which is sustained in the long run, as well as the provider of quality and diversified employment opportunities.

The local economy is sustained through the long-term strategy of executive board members, which is one of the most effective means. Government companies are and should be, the leading players in the economy’s pivotal domains, namely, energy, transportation, telecommunications and the backbone of all government companies, which is infrastructure.

Board economic decisions, such as strategic partnerships, mergers and acquisitions; and fostering vertical and horizontal integration, have an immediate economic multiplier effect.

The government company board members should place a high premium on investments that provide economic benefits to the least developed, as well as the developing, local economies through uplifting and aligning small, medium and large public and private sector member businesses.

In addition to the above, board members of government companies are stakeholders

in public procurement which drives the local economy. The board members advocate for public company supply chain governance, which permeates integrated subsystems of local governments and SMEs.

This primary business purpose drives both supply business and service to the local economy. The integrated supply system’s primary business purpose generates expenditure in the local economy. The public company supply procurement system strategy is more integrated and complex than just the local economy.

Another dimension where board members can make a significant difference is employment. Hiring practices at government companies, which are usually big employers, affect the labour market. Boards can promote policies that focus on hiring local people, investing in training and developing work-building training programmes.

This helps to decrease the number of people who are unemployed, empower the available employees and help the economy grow stronger.

In addition, board members should ensure that the companies they work for are committed to sustainability and ethical practices. This involves supporting activities that provide good governance and corporate social responsibility and are environmentally beneficial.

Sustainable governance protects resources, attracts more investments and improves the reputation of government companies. Good governance improves popularity, increases investments and provides a sustainable economy.

Another very significant role of board

With the power of innovative decision-making and responsible economic leadership, the board is poised to be the epitome of economic stimulation, which is sustained in the long run, as well as the provider of quality and diversified employment opportunities.

members is to build functioning partnerships between the private and public sectors. Government companies can collaborate with private organisations, universities and foreign companies to gain more funding and knowledge and foster innovation. This can provide the economy with new industries, good jobs and knowledge.

Risk management and financial oversight are two additional areas of responsibility for board members. Good financial governance guarantees that government companies are profitable and operate with efficiency, which is important for the economy.

Profitable government companies can reinvest in national initiatives, provide dividends to the state and lessen the fiscal burden on governments. This enables the government to spend more on public services, such as education, health and infrastructure.

Board members are also public trustees. Government-owned companies are a public resource and board members’ decisions need to be in the interest of the public. To the extent board members are transparent, accountable and act with integrity, they ensure the government company serves the community. This is particularly important to maintain community order and enhance economic activity.

In conclusion, board members of government companies have a diverse range of responsibilities in relation to the local economy. They have the potential to foster economic growth and sustain local businesses and employment through their strategic leadership and responsible governance.

Desert-optimised solar technologies reshape renewable energy deployment

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

As solar energy expands globally, attention is shifting from capacity to performance in extreme environments. In desert regions, where solar potential is among the highest in the world, operational challenges are driving the development of technologies specifically designed for heat, dust and long-term durability.

Dust remains the most immediate constraint. In arid conditions, soiling can reduce solar panel efficiency by 20 to 30 per cent and significantly more if panels are left uncleaned over time.

Fine particles accumulate quickly on panel surfaces, forming a layer that blocks sunlight and reduces output. In regions prone to dust storms, this effect can intensify rapidly, making regular cleaning and surface protection essential to maintaining performance.

Temperature presents a second challenge. Solar panels lose efficiency as heat rises, typically declining by around 0.4 to 0.5 per cent per degree above optimal operating temperature.

In desert climates, where panel temperatures can exceed 60°C, this can translate into consistent daily losses during peak summer months. Over time, prolonged exposure to heat can also accelerate material degradation, affecting long-term reliability and increasing maintenance costs.

In response, desert-optimised technologies are evolving rapidly. Anti-soiling coatings are being engineered to reduce dust adhesion and make it easier for particles to be removed by wind or minimal cleaning.

At the same time, robotic cleaning systems are becoming more widely adopted, allowing panels to be maintained without water, a critical advantage in water-scarce environments such as Oman and across the Gulf. These systems can operate autonomously, often at night, ensuring panels remain clean without disrupting power generation.

Material innovation is also playing a key role. Manufacturers are developing panels with improved thermal tolerance and more durable protective layers to withstand sand abrasion and prolonged exposure to ultraviolet radiation. These enhancements are helping to extend the lifespan of solar installations while maintaining consistent output under harsh conditions.

Tracking systems are being refined to suit desert environments. Modern solar arrays can adjust their positioning not only to maximise sunlight capture, but also to reduce exposure during sandstorms or periods of extreme wind.

Oman telecom’s challenge is growth, not price

OMAN’S telecom debate is becoming increasingly disconnected from the reality of the market it is trying to describe.

While public discussion remains focused on monthly bills, the sector itself has already moved into a different phase. By February 2026, mobile subscriptions had reached 8.29 million, with active mobile broadband subscriptions at 5.49 million and fixed broadband nearing 599,000.

More tellingly, machine-to-machine (M2M) subscriptions had climbed to 1.65 million — a clear sign that growth is no longer centred on consumers alone, but increasingly on systems, infrastructure and industry. In that context, the real question is no longer whether telecom services are affordable.

It is whether the sector can still generate meaningful growth. For years, telecom operators in Oman have competed in familiar ways: wider coverage, faster speeds, larger data bundles and sustained pressure on prices. That model delivered real gains. Connectivity improved, digital access expanded and competition became more visible.

But maturity changes the economics. When a market reaches this level of scale, traditional growth from core connectivity begins to slow. Yet the investment burden does not ease. Operators must continue spending on network quality, capacity and next-generation infrastructure even as consumers become more price-sensitive and competition intensifies.

In such a market, price competition alone is not a strategy. It is a cycle. That is why the current debate is too small for the moment the sector is in. If telecom operators remain tied mainly to consumer



The future of telecom in Oman lies in turning networks into measurable economic value.



QASIM
AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of the Business and Politics department at Oman Observer

For years, telecom operators in Oman have competed in familiar ways: wider coverage, faster speeds, larger data bundles and sustained pressure on prices. That model delivered real gains.

tariffs, promotions and incremental upgrades, they may preserve market share, but they will struggle to create the next wave of value. The more important question is what telecom companies in Oman should become over the next decade.

If they remain providers of connectivity only, growth will stay constrained by pricing cycles and mature demand. But if they evolve into broader digital services and solutions platforms, the sector opens a different and more durable path.

That is where the real opportunity lies. At the consumer level, the future is not simply about selling more data. It is about offering more useful digital services — cyber protection, device security, cloud storage, smart-home applications and more tailored solutions for different user groups. The point is not to charge more for the same service. It is to move from volume to relevance.

The larger opportunity, however, lies in business, government and industry. As Oman pushes ahead with logistics, ports, manufacturing, tourism and digital public services, demand is rising for practical digital solutions, not just internet access. Businesses increasingly need

managed cybersecurity, cloud services, Internet of Things applications, asset tracking, private networks and sector-specific tools that improve efficiency.

This is where telecom operators can move up the value chain — from selling connectivity to supporting productivity.

That shift matters not only for growth, but for resilience. A sector that depends too heavily on traditional consumer revenues is more exposed to discounting cycles, margin pressure and short-term competition.

A broader revenue base makes it easier to sustain investment, improve quality and support innovation over time. This is not merely a commercial issue. It is a national economic one.

Under Oman Vision 2040, the country is working to build a more diversified, technology-enabled economy. Telecom infrastructure already underpins that transition. The next phase is for the sector to become more directly integrated into it — not just connecting users, but enabling industries, institutions and public services to operate more efficiently.

That also raises the importance of regulatory strategy. The challenge is no longer only to preserve competition and protect consumers. It is to support sustainable competition — the kind that encourages investment, enables innovation and allows the sector to develop new business models without losing market balance.

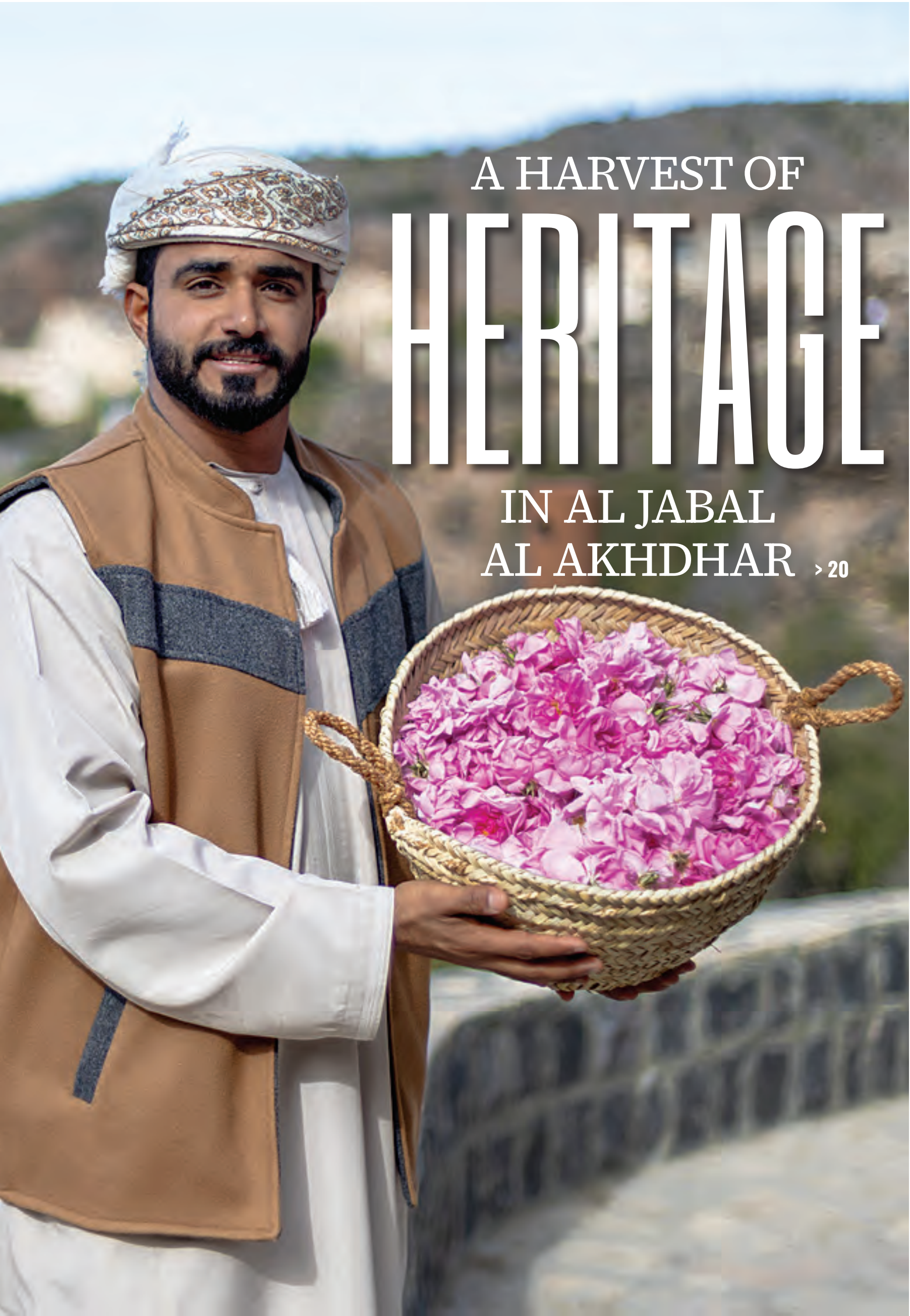
Ultimately, the future of telecom in Oman will not be decided by who offers the cheapest bundle.

It will be decided by which operators become most useful to the wider economy — and most capable of turning networks into measurable economic value.

The infrastructure is already there. What matters now is whether the sector can build real growth on top of it.

ART/LIFE

RHYTHM OF LIFE



A HARVEST OF HERITAGE IN AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR > 20

NEWBENCHMARK

INDIAN PAINTING SELLS FOR RECORD \$17.9 MILLION



'Yashoda and Krishna' painting by 19th century artist Raja Ravi Varma. — AFP

An Indian oil painting by celebrated 19th century artist Raja Ravi Varma has sold for a record \$17.9 million at auction in Mumbai, the highest price ever paid for a modern Indian artwork.

Mumbai-based auction house Saffronart said the painting, "Yashoda and Krishna", depicting the Hindu god Krishna with his mother while she milks a cow, was also the highest price achieved for a Varma artwork at auction worldwide.

The oil-on-canvas work was put up for sale on Wednesday and far exceeded its estimated range of \$8.6 million to \$12.9 million. According to Saffronart, the final price sets a new benchmark not only for the artist but also for Indian art in the global auction market.

"It is the highest value work by an Indian artist sold at auction globally", the auction house said in a statement, underscoring the growing international demand for historically significant Indian artworks.

The Times of India reported that the painting was acquired by industrialist and vaccine tycoon Cyrus Poonawala. Speaking to the newspaper, Poonawala described the artwork as a "national treasure" and said he intended to make it accessible to the public from time to time.

"This national treasure deserves to be made available for public viewing periodically", he said, adding that he would "endeavour to facilitate this".

Varma, born in 1848, is widely regarded as one of India's most influential painters. He is known for blending European academic painting techniques with themes drawn from Indian mythology and culture, helping to shape modern visual interpretations of Hindu deities.

Saffronart noted that the painting was created in the 1890s, during the peak of Varma's career. It described "Yashoda and Krishna" as one of the artist's most accomplished works, highlighting its technical mastery and emotional depth.

The auction house added that the piece had been part of a private collection and is officially listed as a "national art treasure". It also emphasised that the work exemplifies Varma's pioneering naturalistic portrayal of Indian deities, a style that has had a lasting influence on how sacred narratives are visually represented in modern India. — AFP

The painting was acquired by industrialist and vaccine tycoon Cyrus Poonawala who described the artwork as a 'national treasure' and said he intended to make it accessible to the public from time to time

QUICK FEATURES



ART
A giant interactive cat art installation is seen at the arrivals hall at Hong Kong International Airport. — AFP



PROMOTION
US actress Meryl Streep attends a press conference to promote the film 'The Devil Wears Prada 2' in Seoul. — AFP



PREMIERE
US actor Bryan Cranston attends Hulu's 'Malcolm in the Middle: Life's Still Unfair' premiere at the DGA theatre in New York. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



Fisherman of the skies



Picturesque Nizwa

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‘THE TESTAMENTS’ FOLLOWS A NEW GILEAD GENERATION



The show is based on Margaret Atwood’s 1985 novel “The Handmaid’s Tale”.

Actor Lucy Halliday says the bonds formed between young girls in times of adversity are at the heart of what makes the Hulu drama series “The Testaments” compelling. “We see that in our show and it’s a really beautiful thing that friendship can flourish even in the darkest of places”, Halliday said of the coming-of-age drama, which continues the story of “The Handmaid’s Tale”. “Sisterhood and community have always been important and they’ve always been a means of survival”, she added. Created by Bruce Miller and based on Margaret Atwood’s 1985 novel, “The Handmaid’s Tale” depicts the totalitarian society of Gilead, a religious extremist regime ruled by powerful men who subjugate women following war and collapsing fertility rates. Some women, known as handmaids, are forced into reproductive

servitude for elite families. “The Testaments” is set years later and follows two teenage girls, Agnes, played by Chase Infiniti and Daisy, portrayed by Halliday, as they come of age within the same system. Agnes has spent most of her life in Gilead, raised to be pious and obedient, while Daisy arrives from Canada as a recent convert. The girls meet at a Gilead preparatory school for future wives, overseen by Aunt Lydia, played by Ann Dowd, reprising her role from “The Handmaid’s Tale”. Dowd said viewers will see a subtly changed Lydia compared to her earlier portrayal. “I think we see a gentler Lydia, someone who has changed inwardly”, she said, adding that the character takes on a new role as headmistress of a school for daughters of the regime’s most powerful families. — Reuters

AI-GENERATED ARTISTS BREAK THROUGH IN COUNTRY MUSIC



A song by Cain Walker featuring Cade Winslow which is one of many AI-generated country music tunes. — AFP

AI-GENERATED singers are now ranking among the most-streamed country music artists in the United States, highlighting a growing trend in a genre some observers say has become increasingly formulaic. Acts like Breaking Rust, Cain Walker, Aventhis and Outlaw Gospel share more than cowboy hats, denim and leather. They are entirely computer-generated, from their vocals to their melodies, yet they are producing hit songs. “That’s a phenomenon I didn’t see coming”, said Jennie Hayes Kurtz of the band Brother and The Hayes, noting she once thought AI would be used for scientific breakthroughs rather than music. Many AI-generated songs rely on classic country themes, particularly the lone cowboy, a rugged, reserved man who refuses to apologise for simply existing. The lyrics are delivered in gravelly voices that sound authentic.

For songwriters, the trend is concerning. Kassie Jordan of the duo Blue Honey said tools that generate songs from simple prompts could undermine credibility. “We are starting to see a lot of people just putting words into these chatbots and it is writing songs for them”, she said. “As a songwriter, it’s kind of like, is anyone going to even think I really wrote this?” Joe Bennett, a professor at Berklee College of Music, said many AI songs appear to be created from simple prompts. He said modern country music’s shift since the early 2000s towards a polished, pop-influenced sound with repeated melodic patterns has made it easier for AI to replicate.



AI-generated country singer Breaking Rust

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Country music has staged a comeback in recent years after being overshadowed by rap and Latin music. A new generation of artists with pop influences has broadened its appeal, following the path of Taylor Swift. Artists such as Beyonce and Post Malone have also drawn new audiences through crossover projects. Last year, Morgan Wallen and Zach Bryan were among the most streamed artists on Spotify, reflecting the genre’s revival. However, some in the industry say the genre’s mainstream success has reduced its depth, making it easier to imitate. “The lyrics aren’t as deep as they used to be”, Jordan said, adding that much of

popular country music has become “shallow”, making it easier to duplicate. Bennett said the industry should do more to identify AI-generated music, noting that Deezer is the only major streaming platform that clearly labels such content. He said there is growing demand for transparency. Hayes Kurtz said some listeners may not care whether music is AI-generated, but dedicated fans who attend concerts and support artists value authenticity. Jordan said she remains optimistic, pointing to a new wave of artists focused on traditional storytelling and emotional depth, which she believes will be harder for AI to replicate. — AFP



Local tour guide, Mahmoud bin Said bin Hamood al Toobi



A HARVEST OF HERITAGE IN AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR

Each spring, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar’s famed Damask roses transform the highlands into a fragrant hub of tradition, tourism and local livelihood

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HIGH in the cool mountains of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, the annual rose season is drawing visitors to terraced gardens alive with colour, fragrance and tradition. For a few fleeting weeks between March and early May, the highland region transforms into a tapestry of pink as farmers harvest the prized Muhammadi — or Damask — roses, sustaining livelihoods while boosting Oman’s growing agri-tourism appeal. From hand-picking blooms at dawn to age-old distillation practices, the season offers a rare glimpse into a way of life that has endured for centuries. Upon arrival in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, visitors including Bavish Kizhakoodan Balan were received by local guide Mahmoud bin Said bin Hamood al Toobi, whose warmth and deep knowledge of the region enriched the experience. As he explains, “The rose here is more than a flower — it is a symbol of continuity and craftsmanship”. Mahmoud notes that rose cultivation in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar dates back to the 17th century, with harvesting beginning in the early hours when the flowers are at their most fragrant. The blooms are then taken for traditional distillation, where, using clay ovens and earthenware pots, farmers simmer the petals for hours, producing just 250 to 300 millilitres of pure brown rose water — a labour-intensive process that underscores its value. While modern techniques have introduced white rose water, oils and perfumes, the traditional brown extract remains central to Omani culture, flavouring coffee, sweets and even used in traditional remedies. For Bavish Kizhakoodan Balan, a Muscat-based network and security engineer and photography enthusiast, the journey offered more than scenic beauty. “Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is not just a destination — it’s a feeling”, he says. “There’s something incredibly

special about seeing nature, tradition and community come together so naturally”. Travelling with members of the Friday Shootout Muscat photography group, Bavish arrived before dawn, just as the first light touched the terraced slopes. “The shift in temperature and atmosphere is immediate”, he recalls. “You leave behind the city’s warmth and step into crisp air surrounded by clouds and greenery”. At the heart of the experience is the harvest itself — a practice shaped by both tradition and necessity. “We watched local farmers carefully gather the roses by hand”, Bavish says. “It’s not just agriculture — it’s a rhythm of life passed down through generations”. Inside traditional distillation houses, visitors witness the painstaking transformation of petals into one of the region’s most prized products. “It was fascinating to see how much effort goes into producing such a small amount”, he adds. “You need kilograms of fresh roses for just a little extract — it really makes you appreciate its value”. This year’s bloom, supported by recent rainfall, is expected to be particularly strong, offering renewed optimism for farmers who rely on the short harvesting window. Beyond the fields, it is the warmth of Omani hospitality that leaves a lasting impression. Visitors are often welcomed with qahwa delicately infused with rose water — a subtle yet memorable expression of local culture. “That moment stood out for me”, Bavish says. “It wasn’t just the taste, but the gesture — the way people here make you feel welcome”. As Oman continues to promote sustainable tourism, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar stands out as a compelling example of how cultural heritage and natural beauty can work hand in hand to support local communities. For those who make the journey, the memory lingers long after the Mawsim Al ward — the season of roses — has passed.



Pictures by **Bavish Kizhakoodan Balan**

