

INBRIEF

HIS MAJESTY ISSUES ROYAL DECREE

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Wednesday issued Royal Decree No 49/2026 on appointing a Secretary-General for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs. Article (1) appoints Yaarub bin Abdullah bin Saleh al Yaarubi as Secretary-General for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs with the special grade. Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

HM RECEIVES MESSAGE FROM BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from President Alexander Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus. The message was received on behalf of His Majesty the Sultan by His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, during a meeting on Wednesday with Viktor Aleksandrovich Lukashenko, son of the President and Chairman of Belarus Olympic Committee, who was dispatched as an envoy by the President. The meeting reviewed areas of cooperation and partnership between the two countries across various economic and investment sectors, as well as means to enhance them for the mutual benefit of the peoples of both nations.

SHURA TO HOST MINISTER OF HEALTH ON SUNDAY



The Majlis Ash-Shura will host Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, on Sunday and Monday. He will present the Ministry of Health's policy statement before the council members during the 16th and 17th regular sessions of the third annual sitting (2025-2026) of the tenth term (2023-2027). The statement is part of the ministerial briefings approved for the current sitting and will focus on the performance of the health sector, policy evaluation, and executive programmes.

Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis Ash-Shura, said that the statement comprises six main themes covering institutional performance, development projects, service quality, crisis management, health transformation and financial sustainability.

He said that the first theme addresses the ministry's projects under the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025) by reviewing institutional performance assessment methodologies, quantitative, qualitative, and benchmark measurement tools, and achievement indicators related to strategic projects and programmes, alongside an analysis of operational challenges and lessons learned, and their impact on strengthening the public health system.

A GLOBAL INITIATIVE TO CELEBRATE HUMAN CREATIVITY

Unesco-Sultan Haitham Prize for cultural heritage

NATURAL EXTENSION OF HM'S COMMITMENT TO CULTURAL SECTOR

REFLECTS OMAN'S ROLE IN PROTECTING CULTURAL HERITAGE

OBJECTIVES ALIGN WITH INTERNATIONAL APPROACHES

PRIZE IS SET TO BECOME A LEADING GLOBAL INITIATIVE

THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) has approved the establishment of the Unesco-Sultan Haitham Prize for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, a move that reflects international recognition of Oman's pioneering role in protecting intangible cultural heritage and elevating it as a shared human foundation.

The prize is the result of a joint initiative led by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, and in coordination with Oman's Permanent Delegation to Unesco. Its conceptual framework and objectives have been designed to align with international approaches to protecting intangible cultural heritage.

Oman was among the first countries to ratify the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, through Royal Decree No 56/2005 issued on June 22, 2005. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth plays a central role in implementing the convention by registering intangible cultural heritage elements on Unesco's three lists: the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the List in Need of Urgent Safeguarding and the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices. The prize is a natural extension of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's deep commitment



to the cultural sector. His Majesty took charge of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture in 2002, a period that saw significant progress in cultural development, culminating in Oman's accession to key Unesco conventions, most notably the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Among the distinguished cultural achievements realised in the Sultanate of Oman — in which His Majesty Sultan

Haitham bin Tarik has played a pivotal role and to which he has contributed significantly to the flourishing of the cultural movement within the country — are the establishment of the National Museum, the Oman Across Ages Museum, the National Archives (the National Records and Archives Authority), and the Sayyid Tarik bin Taimour Cultural Complex (currently under construction), in addition to the cultural centres and libraries dispersed

throughout various parts of the Sultanate of Oman and beyond.

The prize is expected to become a leading global initiative honouring outstanding contributions in the field of intangible cultural heritage. It aims to recognise individuals, institutions, organisations, centres, academic and cultural institutes, and governmental and non-governmental bodies that contribute to the safeguarding, preservation, documentation and sustainability of cultural heritage.

The prize seeks to realise a range of objectives that intersect with international cultural endeavours, most notably: rewarding the efforts of organisations that have contributed to the safeguarding and transmission of intangible cultural heritage — recognised by communities, groups, and in some cases individuals as an integral part of their heritage — in accordance with Article 2 of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Furthermore, the prize aims to protect intangible cultural heritage and amplify its role in fostering social cohesion, peace, equality and sustainable development, while also ensuring respect for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups, and individuals concerned. Additionally, it strives to elevate awareness at the local, national and international levels of the importance of intangible cultural heritage and to guarantee its mutual appreciation. — ONA

SEE ALSO P4

Iran seizes two ships seeking to cross Hormuz



Iranian women stand before a banner during a rally in Tehran. — AFP

monitors confirmed that three commercial vessels had reported incidents involving gunboats in the crucial strait, the international gateway for the Gulf oil and gas industry which US and Iranian forces are battling to control.

“The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps naval force this morning identified and stopped in the Strait of Hormuz two violating ships,” the Guards said in a statement.

“The two offending ships... were seized by the IRGC’s

naval forces and directed to the Iranian coast.”

They identified one ship as the Panama-flagged container ship MSC Francesca and the Liberia-flagged Epaminodas.

Earlier, the British maritime security monitor UKMTO said one container ship reported it was fired upon by a boat belonging to Iran's Revolutionary Guards, causing damage to the bridge but no casualties.

Separately, a third ship was fired upon and stopped in the water eight nautical miles west of the Iranian coast, UKMTO said, without identifying the attackers.

British Security firm Vanguard Tech identified it as the Panama-flagged container ship Euphoria, which it said was “transiting outbound of the Strait of Hormuz”. SEE ALSO P6 & 7

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The Tax Authority urges all taxpayers to comply with the legal deadlines for filing returns and paying due taxes.

PRIMARY COURT
AWARDS JAIL AND
RO 500 PENALTY
FOR TAX EVASION

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

The Criminal Circuit of the Primary Court in the Wilayat of Al Seeb has issued a judgment in absentia convicting a defendant in a tax evasion case.

The court found that the ‘principal officer’ deliberately refrained from submitting the mandatory tax returns as required under the Income Tax Law (Royal Decree No 28/2009) and its amendments. This ruling reaffirms the ongoing firm approach in enforcing tax legislation and safeguarding public funds.

The Court ruled to convict the defendant with one month of imprisonment and a penalty of RO 500. Additionally, the defendant shall pay RO 137,090 to the Tax Authority and is further held liable for all legal costs and court fees.

According to a spokesperson from the Tax Authority, the details of the case involve a ‘principal officer’ of a commercial establishment who intentionally abstained to file the tax returns required under the provisions of the Income Tax Law for the tax years (2020-2022). The total amount of tax evaded was RO 137,090.

After the completion of procedures, the case file was referred to the Public Prosecution at the Public Funds and Money Laundering Crimes Department. An investigation took place with the defendant, then he was referred to the competent court, which subsequently issued the conviction.

The Tax Authority urges all taxpayers to comply with the legal deadlines for filing returns and paying due taxes. It also reaffirms its commitment to pursuing legal action against violators and tracking non-compliance through reporting mechanisms, in order to ensure the safeguarding of public funds and the consolidation of the principles of tax justice.

COMET C/2025
R3 ‘PANSTARS’
SPOTTED IN
OMAN SKIES

AL DUQM: The Omani Society for Astronomy and Space was able to observe and photograph the comet ‘C/2025 R3 “PanSTARS” in the sky of the Sultanate of Oman, as part of its ongoing efforts to monitor and document astronomical phenomena.

Astronomical photographer Yahya al Kindi, a member of the association, said that this observation came after a series of field attempts and careful planning that lasted for several days, in light of weather challenges that affected the possibility of observing the



comet in a number of regions of Oman.

Al Kindi said he spent three days searching for suitable observation sites, given the comet’s extremely low position on the eastern horizon before sunrise, which requires a clear, cloudless sky. He noted that the first attempt was in the state of Mahout in the Al Ghadan area, but the flow of clouds at four o’clock in the morning prevented the comet from being clearly observed, which prompted him to continue monitoring the weather to choose an alternative location. — ONA

State Council wraps up
Mineral Law discussion

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

THE State Council concluded its discussion of the “Draft Law Amending Certain Provisions of the Mineral Wealth Law” during its eighth session of the third regular sitting of its eighth term, held on Wednesday.

The session was chaired by Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, in the presence of Council members and the secretary-general.

At the opening of the session, the chairman welcomed members, noting that the agenda included discussing the draft law and the report of the Economic and Financial Committee in accordance with Article (49) of the Oman Council Law.

During the session, the Council discussed the proposed amendments, where Dr Zafer al Shanfari, Chairman of the Economic and Financial Committee at the State Council, explained that the draft law aims to update the regulatory framework of the mining sector, ensuring alignment with the mandates of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, while enhancing the attraction of local and foreign investment. He added that the amendments also support sustainable economic

The amendments also support sustainable economic diversification in line with Oman Vision 2040, through improving transparency in licensing and supporting sector growth.



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Speaking to the Observer, Dr Zafer said Oman is rich in mineral resources, including copper and gypsum, noting expectations for increasing the sector’s contribution to the national economy, along with expanding supply chains and added value.

He added that the amendments aim to enhance the sector’s attractiveness to both local and foreign investment, improve transparency and competitiveness in offering mining projects, and introduce controls to address existing gaps in order to support sector development and serve the public interest.

Meanwhile, Dr Mohammed al Wardi, Rapporteur of the Economic and Financial Committee for the draft law at the State Council, said the proposed amendments aim to enhance the contribution of the mining sector to GDP and improve sector efficiency.

He noted that this includes expanding bidding to cover all mining sites, facilitating licensing procedures through coordination by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals with relevant entities, attracting foreign investment by offering additional incentives, and addressing regulatory gaps related to mining licences.

At the conclusion of the session, the Council reviewed a report by the Secretariat-General on the activities of the Council’s bodies.

HARAT AL AQUR TO GET
FACELIFT WITH NEW INITIATIVE

AMAL AL RIYAMI
MANAH, APRIL 22

A major heritage revitalisation initiative aimed at transforming Harat Al Aqur in Nizwa into a sustainable tourism destination was launched at the Oman Across Ages Museum in Manah on Wednesday. The project, part of the seventh edition of the “Shell Gift to the Nation” programme, was launched under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, in the presence of Ali al Janabi, Country Chairman for Shell in Oman, and other officials.

The project includes the restoration of several heritage buildings and pathways, including the rehabilitation of Al Aqur’s historic wall, which dates back more than 1,200 years. It also involves upgrading site facilities while preserving its authentic architectural identity.

In addition, a dedicated visitor centre will be established to enhance the visitor experience. It will be



The project was launched under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance.

powered by solar power to ensure a sustainable energy supply for the area.

The initiative also aims to empower entrepreneurs, productive families, and small and medium enterprises by enabling them to benefit from tourism development. It is also expected to generate both direct and indirect employment, contributing to local in-country value and economic activity.

Al Janabi said, “The seventh edition of Shell Gift to the Nation is rooted in the belief that the highest form of celebrating heritage

is to keep it alive within the community, valued and capable of generating sustainable economic returns.

The initiative seeks to strike a balance between preserving cultural identity and enabling community development through integrated sustainability practices.”

Dr Ishaq bin Hilal al Sharyani, Adviser to Al Aqur Endowment in Nizwa, said, “Al Aqur is not merely a historical site, but a living memory that reflects the essence of Omani identity through its architecture, crafts and way of life.

The partnership represents an important step towards balancing careful restoration with sustainable development opportunities for the local community.”

Al Ahnaf al Zubaidi, Social Investment Manager at Shell Oman, explained that the project aims at revitalising Al Aqur in a way that enhances sustainable tourism and preserves the cultural and social heritage of the area.

Tender Announcement

Financial Services Authority announces the following tender :-

Tender name	Tender Number	Release the RFP	Last date for Purchase of RFP	Last date of Submitting the proposal	Tender fees in OMR
Classification and Management Consultancy Services, Data Governance	FSA 006/2026	22 April 2026	29 April 2026 03:00 PM	13 May 2026 02:00 PM	30 Non Refundable

- Specialized companies interested in participating in the above tender must deposit the tender fee into bank account, and submit payment receipt of the tender along with a copy of the commercial registration certificate and the contact details of the authorized person to the Services & Public Relations Department e-mail : Tenders@fsa.gov.om, hence, we shall provide you with Tender document by e-mail.
- All participating companies must provide a bank guarantee, issued by locally registered bank not less than 2 % of the tender value addressed to FSA , the bond shall be valid for 90 days from the submission of the proposal.
- All bids shall be submitted in tender box at the headquarters of the Financial Services Authority, located in Airport Heights.
- FSA is not obliged to accept the lowest bid or any other bid without any justifiable reasons.

Bank account information :-

Name of beneficiary : Financial Services Authority

Account no : 0423019706330018

Bank : Bank Muscat- Corporate Branch- CBD

SWIFT code : BMUSOMRXXX

Please attach a copy of the deposit receipt

For inquiries, please contact :-

E-mail : Tenders@fsa.gov.om

Telephone Number : 24823299, 24823133

Timing : 8:00 am to 3:00 pm

Workdays : Sunday to Thursday.

SHORT TAKES



Oman continues to achieve a prominent presence in environmental action. — **ONA**

OMAN JOINS GLOBAL OBSERVANCE OF EARTH DAY

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Environment Authority, joins nations around the world in celebrating Earth Day, which falls on April 22 each year, as part of global efforts aimed at enhancing environmental awareness and embedding the concepts of sustainability and climate action.

The observance of this occasion, in which over 190 countries worldwide participate, underscores the importance of uniting efforts to protect natural resources, address growing environmental challenges, and encourage individuals and institutions to adopt responsible practices toward the environment.

The Sultanate of Oman continues to achieve a prominent presence in environmental action at both regional and international levels. In recent years, the country has recorded a number of accomplishments, most notably progress in the Global Environmental Performance Index (EPI) and ranking among the least polluted countries globally, in addition to achieving the targets of the national initiative to plant 10 million trees to enhance vegetation cover and increase natural carbon sinks.

Oman has also expanded its network of nature reserves to protect biodiversity and conserve endangered species, alongside strengthening climate change adaptation programs and supporting clean energy, green hydrogen, and blue carbon projects. Furthermore, the country has developed advanced digital systems for pollution monitoring and emergency environmental response with greater efficiency. — **ONA**

DUAL CARRIAGEWAY PROJECT IN SUR 75% COMPLETE



All works on the first section of the project have been completed. — **ONA**

SUR: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology continues its efforts to complete the remaining works of the dual carriageway project extending from the Gas Roundabout to Bilad Sur, which connects the Qurayat-Sur Road with the Sultan Turki bin Said Road, and to complete the dualisation of the Qurayat-Sur Road from the Gas Roundabout to the Bilad Sur Roundabout in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate.

The project has achieved a completion rate of approximately 75 per cent, with a total cost exceeding RO 6 million. All works on the first section of the project, spanning 11.4 kilometres, have been completed, including the installation of lighting and metal barriers. — **ONA**

FIRST HAJ FLIGHT TO LEAVE OMAN ON MAY 23

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

The first flight carrying Haj pilgrims to the holy land will leave the Sultanate of Oman on May 23 and return home on June 12, according to the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

Ahmed bin Saleh al Rashidi, Head of the Omani Haj Mission, will lead the group with members representing various ministries and the Royal Oman Police (ROP).

As many as 42,000 applicants registered online for the 14,000 seats for this year’s Haj which is expected between May 25 and



The total number of pilgrims comprises 13,500 Omanis, 250 Arab residents and 250 non-Arab residents.

May 30. However, applications submitted outside the official portal or after the deadline were not considered. The total number of pilgrims comprises 13,500 Omanis, 250 Arab residents and 250 non-Arab residents. The total number of women pilgrims will be around 49.9 per cent while men comprise 50.1 per cent.

The Omani Haj Mission was formed based on Ministerial Decision No 236/2004 which defined its competencies as well.

Speaking to the Observer, a representative from the ministry said that the online registration witnessed an enormous number of

people applying for this year’s Haj and many were rejected for lack of supporting documents.

“We received 42,000 applicants this year and this has been on the rise over the last few years. These figures are significant because they indicate the trust that the people reposed in the ministry,” he said.

Priority to perform Haj rituals was given to those who couldn’t make it last year, according to him.

“Additionally, high priority is given to those who are chronically ill, and that the priority for those who couldn’t make it last year doesn’t amount to guarantee their chance next year,” the official said.

Researcher wins award for wastewater treatment

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

AN INNOVATIVE study addressing industrial water pollution has earned Omani researcher Abrar bint Said al Ajmi, Lecturer at Sohar University, the 12th National Research Award, organised by the Research and Innovation Authority. She received the award in the Environmental and Biological Resources field under the Young Researcher category for her project titled “Biomass - metal oxide nanocomposite for the decontamination of phenol from polluted environment - parametric, kinetics and isotherm studies,” conducted at the Faculty of Engineering laboratories at Sohar University.

According to Al Ajmi, the study focuses on developing sustainable and effective methods for removing phenol, a hazardous pollutant commonly found in industrial wastewater. It introduces an innovative approach that utilises date palm biomass, derived from Phoenix dactylifera, combined with iron oxide to produce a nanocomposite capable of treating contaminated water. The research examined the key environmental conditions affecting phenol removal, including temperature, acidity levels and pollutant concentration. Under optimal conditions of 30°C and a pH of 7.8, the developed material achieved a removal efficiency of 80.30 per cent, demonstrating its strong potential as a practical solution for wastewater treatment.



The National Research Award is a proud and motivating recognition of my work as a young Omani engineering researcher in environmental pollution control. It affirms the relevance of my research to national sustainability goals and Oman Vision 2040

ABRAR BINT SAID AL AJMI



The study focuses on developing sustainable and effective methods for removing phenol, a hazardous pollutant commonly found in industrial wastewater.

“The National Research Award is a proud and motivating recognition of my work as a young Omani engineering researcher in environmental pollution control. It affirms the relevance of my research to national sustainability goals and Oman Vision 2040, and inspires me to pursue impactful solutions that contribute to a cleaner and healthier future for Oman,” she said.

Further analysis confirmed that the removal process is efficient and stable, with the nanocomposite showing promising reusability, making it a sustainable option for long-term application. The findings highlight the potential of transforming locally available agricultural waste into high-value materials that contribute to environmental protection and resource efficiency.

Through this research project, Al Ajmi recommends integrating the developed nanocomposite into industrial wastewater treatment systems, particularly in sectors such as petrochemicals, refineries and pharmaceuticals, as well as expanding its application through pilot-scale implementation. She also emphasises the importance of adopting circular economy approaches by utilising date palm waste to support sustainable and locally sourced treatment solutions.

The research has been published in Environmental Research, a leading international journal in environmental engineering. The project was carried out in collaboration with Subrajit Bosu and Prof Rajamohan Natarajan at Sohar University.

Oman showcases its potentials in Barcelona

BARCELONA: The Sultanate of Oman is taking part in the 32nd edition of the world seafood exposition (Seafood Expo Global), which is being held in the Spanish city of Barcelona and will continue for several days.

The Omani pavilion includes representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, and the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn). Oman’s participation in the expo is also realised through a strategic partnership with Sohar International Bank, along with 8 Omani factories specialised in processing and packaging fisheries products.

Eng Yaqoub bin Khalfan al



Oman is taking part in the 32nd edition of the world seafood exposition (Seafood Expo Global), which is being held in the Spanish city of Barcelona and will continue for several days. — **ONA**

Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Fisheries (Head of the Omani delegation), said, “Unifying Oman’s participation in the

exposition under one national pavilion symbolises integration between government units and the private sector and highlights the Sultanate of Oman’s great potentials.” He

pointed out that the fisheries sector in the Sultanate of Oman is experiencing remarkable growth. He added that total fisheries production in 2024 stood at about 900,000 tonnes, with approximately RO 580 million and that aquaculture production yielded an output of 5,507 tonnes worth RO 12.4 million. He noted that Omani fish products were exported to 84 countries around the world.

He observed that, by 2025, the fisheries sector earned the support of 110 factories that obtained global quality control certificates. This, he said, enhances the reliability of Omani fish products and raises their competitiveness in international markets and opens up vistas for export and investment in the sector. — **ONA**



Unesco-Sultan Haitham Prize celebrates heritage and creativity



THE UNESCO-SULTAN HAITHAM PRIZE for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage derives its significance from being both an invocation and an essential expression of human intellectual consciousness. It serves as a tool that consolidates the fundamental principles of thought and creativity, and acts as a genuine driver for preserving the essence of human history. The prize reflects the deep commitment of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to cultural heritage and recognises its importance as a symbol and reference point of human identity.

In its intrinsic value, the prize stands as one of the world's most significant global initiatives supporting outstanding cultural contributions at the international level. It will honour individuals, institutions, organisations, centres, scientific and cultural institutes, and governmental and non-governmental bodies working in the field of cultural and human heritage. The prize will acknowledge their efforts in intangible cultural heritage while advancing Oman's cultural mission on the international stage.

The prize will highlight Oman's civilisational and cultural role in the

field of intangible cultural heritage, foster international awareness of Oman's cultural standing and its engagement in cultural dialogue, and champion the first international initiative focused on intangible cultural heritage among Unesco's prizes to be led by the Sultanate of Oman. It will also enrich sustainable development projects in this domain, based on competition among institutions working in the field, thereby enhancing innovation and creativity.

HUMAN CREATIVITY

Furthermore, the prize will support scientific research, strengthen educational dimensions that raise awareness of the importance of intangible cultural heritage for successive generations, and ensure the sustainability and intergenerational transmission of human creativity.

Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, affirmed that the establishment of the Unesco-Sultan Haitham Prize for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage embodies international recognition of the role undertaken by the Sultanate of Oman in supporting global efforts to preserve intangible



The prize embodies international recognition of the role undertaken by the Sultanate of Oman in supporting global efforts to preserve intangible cultural heritage

SAYYID SAUD BIN HILAL AL BUSAIDY
Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth



This prize is Oman's gift to the world to safeguard heritage, and its invitation to embrace that heritage as a message of peace and coexistence among nations

DR AISHA BINT HAMAD AL DARMAKI
Member of the State Council



The Unesco committee is announcing the details of Sultan Haitham Prize in Paris on Wednesday.

cultural heritage, while further elevating its presence within the priorities of international cultural action.

He said that the prize constitutes a qualitative enhancement to the cultural framework of Unesco, contributing to the elevation of intangible cultural heritage as a cornerstone of human identity and a bridge for fostering rapprochement among peoples, in addition to supporting pioneering initiatives and strengthening community engagement in the preservation of this shared human legacy.

Dr Aisha bint Hamad al Darmaki, a member of the State Council, said: "The Sultanate of Oman has long worked to preserve and safeguard its cultural heritage, for it represents not only its civilisational history but also its present and future — the foundation from which human development springs, through which its modern principles are reinforced, and by which it maintains its openness to a changing world. Cultural heritage in Oman is a historical force, a civilisational glory and an intellectual depth upon which social development is built, and through which modern cultural patterns evolve, serving as the nation's window to the world."

She added: "Because cultural heritage is a resource for sustainable development and an authentic reservoir of creativity and innovation — the very drivers of the future — the establishment of a cultural heritage prize at Unesco bearing the name of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik reflects Oman's profound understanding and insightful awareness. This is evident in Oman's far-sighted vision of the importance of cultural heritage for nations and the necessity of preserving and protecting it, as well as the contribution heritage makes to human development, the potential it offers to knowledge and technology sectors, and the exceptional advantages it provides to promising fields such as tourism and creative industries."

Dr Mahmoud bin Abdullah al Abri, Secretary of the Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, explained that Unesco defines intangible cultural heritage as "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage." — ONA

SHORT TAKES



The team achieved first place globally last year in the field of oil and gas.

SQU STUDENT TEAM WINS IBA TITLE

MUSCAT: A team from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) secured first place in the Imperial Barrel Award (IBA) competition, retaining their title for the third consecutive year at the Middle East level. The team also received the Innovation Award, outperforming eight universities from Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan and Iraq.

Following this achievement, the SQU team will represent the Middle East region in the final round, to be held in Houston this August. Notably, the team achieved first place globally last year in the field of oil and gas.

The Imperial Barrel Award is an international competition organised annually by the American Association of Petroleum Geologists. It challenges students to study and analyse geophysical and geological data from various regions worldwide in order to identify potential oil and gas reservoirs within a given study area.

The team comprises Abdullah al Mahrooqi, Abdulrahman al Awaid, Sarah al Saadi, and Muzna al Qasbi from the Department of Earth Sciences, along with Jasim al Aradi from the Department of Petroleum Engineering.

Enabling communication for hearing disabilities

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

ON THE occasion of the Arab Week for the Deaf, the Sultanate of Oman on Wednesday launched the First Visual Communication Centre for People with Hearing Disabilities. The centre provides digital services for this segment of society via an application codenamed ‘Nafith’. The inaugural ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Hamoud al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development for Persons with Disabilities Affairs.

Sultan al Amri, CEO of ‘Nafith’ app, said that the project constitutes a pledge to empower people with hearing disabilities and remove barriers that obstruct their communication, thereby earning them independence and the ability to actively engage with society. “This step is the beginning of a greater strategy to redefine the concept of accessibility and make it more humane and comprehensive,” he added.

The project caters to the needs of approximately 17,000 people with hearing disabilities in the Sultanate of Oman.

The centre enables beneficiaries to communicate directly with government institutions and private sector establishments through sign language interpreters. This approach contributes to facilitating transactions and promoting the independence of the deaf.

During the ceremony, various presentations were made by a number of people with hearing disabilities who showcased their success stories with the ‘Nafith’ initiative. They



The project caters to the needs of approximately 17,000 people with hearing disabilities in Oman.

explained that the initiative contributed to facilitating their communication with society and gave them access to a variety of digital services that enriched their life experiences.

Raya bint Abdullah al Numani, Director-General of Nafith, described the initiative as a qualitative leap that enhances independence and enables direct communication with service providers, highlighting additional features such as the sign language news portal and interpreter booking services.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Director-General of Communication and Empowerment for Persons with Hearing Disabilities at the Ministry of Social Development, stated that the centre serves more than 17,000 individuals and offers a comprehensive platform delivering a wide range of services that facilitate daily life and strengthen community participation.

Asaad bin Hilal al Kharousi, Chief Operations Officer at Alizz Islamic Bank, expressed the bank's pride in supporting the initiative, noting that it reinforces the right to access and expression for a significant segment of society and reaffirms continued support through initiatives aimed at empowerment and inclusion.

The event also witnessed the signing of agreements with seven government and private entities, including the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, the National Unified Government Services Portal at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (Riyada), the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, Alizz Islamic Bank, the National Finance Company, and the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Investment literacy workshops launched

MUSCAT: The Financial Services Authority (FSA), in collaboration with the Khazna initiative of the Ministry of Education (MoE), hosted a series of interactive awareness workshops in the fields of insurance and investment. The workshops targeted Cycle 2 (basic education students) and were held under the theme ‘Smart Investment Decisions City’ on April 21 and 22 at the FSA’s premises.

It aimed to further embed fundamental concepts of financial literacy among young students by delivering simplified, interactive content that aligned with their age group. It also sought to strengthen their understanding of saving, investment and risk management, in addition to further developing financial thinking skills and informed decision-making.



The workshops included interactive competitions led by specialists in insurance and investment.

The workshops included interactive competitions led by specialists in insurance and investment, along with a range of practical and applied activities. These provided students with hands-on learning experiences through simulation exercises and group activities within specially designed interactive stations, helping to simplify financial concepts and connect them to real-life situations.

This initiative showcased the FSA’s continuous efforts to promote financial awareness across different segments of society and to reinforce its role as a knowledge enabler in the financial sector, alongside its regulatory and supervisory functions. Through such programmes, the FSA aimed to build a financially aware generation equipped with financial thinking skills from an early age.

Export ban of waste supports SMEs

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

The blanket ban on exporting recyclable waste materials, fully implemented earlier this year, has supported local SMEs, according to the Environment Authority (EA).

As a result of the ban on the export of waste, which first took effect in 2020, the number of recycling facilities in Oman has jumped from 27 to 85, supporting SMEs in a big way while accentuating the national goals of sustainability, said Dr Mohammed bin Saif al Kalbani, Director-General of Environmental Compliance at the Environment Authority.

“Since 2020, after we issued this regulation prohibiting the export of any kind of waste material from the country, there has been a surge in recycling facilities in the country, mostly SMEs. We now have nearly 85 recycling facilities across the country,



Mohammed bin Saif al Kalbani.

up from just over 27 facilities earlier for recycling plastic waste, which amounts to around 600,000 tonnes annually. We started with steel scrap in 2020 and expanded to include items like batteries, cooking oil and tires.

We have prohibited all kinds of waste export since then, and by restricting the outflow of these secondary raw materials, we aim to enhance the efficiency of resource use and promote a more robust circular economy

within the country,” he said.

On the sidelines of the third edition of the Aluminium Recycling Forum organised by Sohar Aluminium in collaboration with the Environment Authority, Al Kalbani said a comprehensive national legal framework for waste recycling is currently underway.

“We have issued several regulations in terms of handling waste management in the country as we focus on different kinds of waste. Recently, we finished the draft of the Waste Management Law and are in the process of the final review before we send it for cabinet approval and it becomes a law.” He added that in line with this, EA is working on the Oman National Strategy on Waste Management in the Sultanate of Oman, the outcome of which will bring more initiatives and projects on waste management.

Request for Proposals (RFP): Camp moving

Project Brief: BGP Oil & Gas Services LLC. company plan start camp moving at 7th May. We are looking for a company can transport skids and heavy vehicles (87 trip) from Adam to Thumrit (779 KM).

Requirements at a Glance:

Location: From Adam to Thumrit.

Date: Start at 7th May, complithe at 14th May.

Requirement: Need 9 Pcs 100T low bed, 21 Pcs high bed, 4 sets 50T crane, Supervisors and helpers for lifting service 8 days.

Timeline:

Announcement Date: April 22, 2026

Deadline for Submission: May 2, 2026

mihui2800@gmail.com

وزارة الصحة
Ministry of Health

Announcement

The Ministry of Health (Al Buraimi Hospital) invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tender:

Tender Ref.	Description	Last Date for Collection of Bidding Document	Last Date for Submission of Tenders	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non Refundable)
1470/2026	Tender for the supply of computer accessories at (Al Buraimi Hospital)	Before 2 PM On 02/06/2026	Before 10 AM On 07/06/2026	Specialized companies registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority	• 10 R.O Small & Medium Enterprises

Please note the following:

- Companies wishing to participate in the Tender can purchase the tender documents electronically through the website (etendering.tenderboard.gov.om), provided that they are registered in the system.
- Companies must submit their bids electronically via the above-mentioned website, provided that a **Bid Commitment Declaration**, and bids received without the required Declaration will not be considered.
- The ministry is not obligated to accept the lowest bid or any other bid.
- For inquiries related to the above tender, please contact through the website of the Esnad system for electronic tendering: (etendering.tenderboard.gov.om)

R E G I O N A L S I T U A T I O N R E M A I N S T E N S E

TRUMP SPEAKS
OF NEW TALKS

A second round of US-Iran talks could take place within the next three days, the New York Post reported, citing unnamed Pakistani sources and President Donald Trump.

IRAN SEIZES
TWO SHIPS

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said their naval forces stopped two ships attempting to pass through the Strait of Hormuz.

\$500 MN CASH
BLOCKED

The United States blocked a plane carrying nearly \$500 million in banknotes from delivering the cash to Iraq, piling pressure on Baghdad to fight Iran-backed militant groups.

OIL PRICES
FALL

Oil prices edged higher on Wednesday while Europe's main stock markets eased on uncertainty surrounding the prospect of resumed Mideast peace talks.

IRAN CARGO
SHIP TARGETED

A cargo ship leaving Iran was fired upon and stopped in the water, as the United States continued its blockade of Iranian ports.

ISRAEL CALLS FOR
LEBANON ACTION

Israel's foreign minister urged Beirut to make joint efforts to counter the Lebanese Hezbollah, ahead of new talks.

SECOND FRENCH
SOLDIER DIES

A second French soldier died on Wednesday from wounds suffered in a weekend ambush against UN peacekeepers in Lebanon.

STRIKES HIT KURDS
IN IRAQ

Drone strikes in Iraq's northern Kurdistan region wounded three Iranian Kurdish rebels, blaming the attack on Tehran.

ITALY TRIMS GROWTH
FORECASTS

Italy trimmed its 2026 and 2027 growth forecasts to 0.6 percent but said it hopes to bring its deficit within EU limits despite the turmoil caused by war.

LEBANON SEES WAR
TRAGEDY

More than 62,000 Lebanon housing units damaged, destroyed in Israel war. Attacks killed more than 2,400 people and displaced more than a million.

IRAN SEIZES SHIPS AS TRUMP HALTS ATTACKS



Iranians walk past a giant billboard reading 'The Strait of Hormuz remains closed' at the Revolution Square in Tehran. — AFP

The Revolutionary Guards also warned that any disruption to order and safety in the strait would be considered a "red line". Iran considers the US blockade an act of war and has said that as long as it continues it will not lift its closure of the strait, which has caused a global energy crisis

of defiance, Iran showcased some of its ballistic weapons at a parade in Tehran on Tuesday evening, with images on state TV showing large crowds waving Iranian flags and a banner in the background with a fist choking off the strait. Captions read: "Indefinitely under Iran's Control" and "Trump could not do a damn thing", referring to the waterway.

WORKING TO FOSTER TALKS
Pakistan, which has acted as a mediator, was still trying to bring the sides together for negotiations after both failed to show up for last-ditch talks on Tuesday before the two-week-old ceasefire had been due to expire. "We were all prepared for the talks, the stage was set," a Pakistani official briefed on the preparations told Reuters. "If you ask me honestly, it was a setback we were not expecting, because the Iranians never refused, they were up to come and join, and they still are."

Another Pakistani source who was involved in the talks said Pakistan was still "working very hard to bridge that conflict, talk to each side with their sensitivities in mind". There was no response early on Wednesday to Trump's ceasefire announcement from senior Iranian officials, although some initial reactions from Tehran suggested Trump's comments were being treated sceptically. Tasnim said Iran had not asked for a ceasefire extension and repeated Tehran's threats to break the US blockade by force.

SHIP REPORTED DAMAGED
Throughout the war, Iran has effectively shut the strait to ships other than its own by attacking vessels that attempt to transit without its permission. Around a fifth



A man reads a newspaper with a front page article referring to anticipated US-Iran peace talks, in Islamabad. — AFP

of global oil and liquefied natural gas normally passes through the waterway. On Wednesday, Britain's maritime security agency UKMT0 said that at least three container ships had reported being hit by gunfire in the strait. The master of one ship reported being approached by an Iranian gunboat on Wednesday, the agency said.

The vessel came under fire from guns and rocket-propelled grenades and its bridge was heavily damaged, although there were no reports of casualties or environmental damage. Two other ships had said they came under fire about eight nautical miles west of Iran with no reported injuries. Iran has condemned the US Navy intercepting Iranian ships at sea as part of its blockade, accusing the US of "piracy at sea and state terrorism".

DIFFERENCES ON KEY ISSUES
With his announcement on Tuesday, Trump again pulled back at the last moment from warnings to bomb Iran's power plants and bridges, a threat condemned by the United Nations

and others as potentially constituting war crimes. Iran had said it would strike its Arab neighbours if its civilian infrastructure was hit.

Oil prices reversed course to head higher after the shipping incidents on Wednesday, with Brent crude futures up 1.0 per cent at \$99.46 a barrel and US West Texas Intermediate futures up 0.85 per cent to \$90.43 in late morning trading in Europe. Before Trump's latest announcement, a senior Iranian official said that Iran's negotiators had been willing to attend another round of talks. But throughout Tuesday Iran said it had yet to agree to attend, while a US delegation led by Vice-President JD Vance ultimately never left Washington. A first session of talks 11 days ago produced no agreement. Washington wants Iran to give up highly enriched uranium and forgo further enrichment to prevent it getting a weapon. Iran, which says its nuclear programme is peaceful, wants an end to the war, the lifting of sanctions, reparations for recognition of its control over the strait. — Reuters

EU DOUBLES DOWN ON CLEAN ENERGY DUE TO WAR



European Commissioner for Energy Dan Jorgensen holds a press conference in Brussels, Belgium. — Reuters

BRUSSELS: The Iran war energy crisis should act as a wake-up call for Europe to redouble efforts to reduce reliance on fossil fuels, Brussels said on Wednesday warning the conflict's effects will be felt for years. The effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz has sent oil prices soaring and affected supply of jet fuel in Europe. "This must be a wake-up call and a turning point — when Europe steps away from fossil fuel dependence and steps towards clean energy autonomy," EU energy chief Dan Jorgensen told a press conference in Brussels. Even if a diplomatic solution to

the standoff between Iran and the United States was to be found, the effects of the crisis would be felt for years, he said. "Even a best case scenario is a pretty bad scenario for the next months to come and we will have effects for years," Jorgensen said. Damage to gas infrastructure in Qatar for example could take years to return be fully repaired, affecting prices of liquified natural gas, he noted. In response the European Commission laid out steps to help the 27-nation bloc navigate current and future straits. These included relaxed state aid rules, coordination on gas storage filling, and an "electrification

action plan" to further accelerate "the shift to homegrown clean energy". A "fuel observatory" to track EU production, imports, exports and stock levels of transport fuels would also be established. While the EU has said there is currently no evidence of "actual shortages", stocks are under pressure in parts of the bloc. "We can indeed end up in a situation where this will cause a real problem to us," Jorgensen said. "A lot of people are going on holiday this summer. A lot of cities and regions and member states are dependent on tourism. And of course, they are very worried". — AFP

Israeli strikes kill 3 in Lebanon amidst attempts for truce extension

BEIRUT: Israeli strikes killed three people in Lebanon on Wednesday, Lebanese state media said, despite an ongoing 10-day ceasefire, which an official said Beirut will request an extension for in the upcoming talks with Israel in Washington. Ahead of the talks on Thursday, Israel called on the Lebanese government to "work together" with it against Hezbollah.

The two governments, which do not have diplomatic relations with each other, are set to hold a second round of talks under US auspices on Thursday, in a bid to end more than six weeks of war between Israel and Hezbollah that began on March 2. Lebanon will request a one-month extension of the ceasefire during the meeting with Israel, a Lebanese official said.

"Lebanon will request an extension of the truce for one month, an end of Israel's bombing and destruction in the areas where it is present, and a commitment to the ceasefire," the Lebanese official said, on condition of anonymity given the sensitive nature of the talks. The ten-day ceasefire, which expires on Sunday, was announced after an initial meeting last week. Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, for his part, said on Wednesday that "contacts are underway to extend the ceasefire period". He said Lebanon seeks "a complete halt on Israeli attacks and the achievement of an Israeli withdrawal from Lebanese territory". Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said on Wednesday that Israel does not have any "serious disagreements" with Lebanon. Hezbollah — represented in the Lebanese cabinet and parliament — strongly opposes the direct talks with Israel pushed by Aoun and Prime Minister Nawaf

The two governments, which do not have diplomatic relations with each other, are set to hold a second round of talks under US auspices on Thursday. Lebanon will request a one-month extension of the ceasefire during the meeting with Israel



Mourners hold up portraits of killed ones during a mass funeral procession in the southern Lebanon. — AFP

Salam. Despite the truce, Israel is continuing its strikes in Lebanon, where one person was killed on Wednesday in the eastern Bekaa region, and two were killed in the country's south, according to state media.

Meanwhile, a second French soldier died on Wednesday from wounds suffered in a weekend ambush against UN peacekeepers in Lebanon blamed on Hezbollah, President Emmanuel Macron said. A first soldier, staff sergeant Florian Montorio, was shot dead in the Saturday ambush, for which Hezbollah has denied responsibility. "Corporal Anicet Girardin... brought

home yesterday from Lebanon, where he was badly wounded by Hezbollah fighters, died this morning of the consequences of his wounds," Macron posted on X.

One of three soldiers hurt in the same attack, Girardin, a member of a specialist dog-handling unit, was part of a mission "to clear a route booby-trapped with an improvised explosive device", Armies Minister Catherine Vautrin posted on X. "Coming under sustained fire from concealed Hezbollah fighters at very close range, he moved to aid his section leader who had just fallen, only to be seriously hit in turn," she added.

Macron and Vautrin offered their condolences to Girardin's family and loved ones. He is the third French soldier to die since the start of the fighting in the Middle East, after Montorio and the killing of Arnaud Frion by an Iranian drone in Iraq's Kurdistan region.

Both Macron and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres have blamed Iran-backed Hezbollah for the Saturday attack on peacekeepers belonging to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). French soldiers in UNIFIL "are working bravely and determinedly in service of France and peace in Lebanon," Macron wrote. — AFP

TRANSITIONING SITUATION

China warns Middle East at 'critical juncture'



China warned that the situation in the Middle East was at a "critical juncture" after US President Donald Trump extended a ceasefire to allow Iran more time to negotiate. "The current regional situation stands at a critical juncture transitioning between war and peace; the paramount priority remains to make every effort to prevent a resumption of hostilities," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said. — AFP

SUSPENDED CASH

US blocks \$500 mn cash shipment to Iraq



The United States blocked a plane carrying nearly \$500 million in banknotes from delivering the cash to Iraq, US media reported, piling pressure on Baghdad to fight Iran-backed groups. The Wall Street Journal reported that Washington has suspended cash shipments to Iraq and frozen funding for security programs following attacks on US interests in the country by groups showing solidarity with Iran. — AFP

EXCHANGING VIEWS

Türkiye, Pakistan discuss latest in peace talks



Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan discussed the latest developments in talks between the United States and Iran in a call with his Pakistani counterpart Ishaq Dar on Wednesday. The two ministers also exchanged views on efforts led by Pakistan and Türkiye to reach a compromise between the sides. Meanwhile, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan will make an official visit to London this week for talks on the war in Iran. — Reuters

OPINION

The weather inside the machine



RUMAITHA
AL BUSAIDI

The writer is an environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development

THE wind at Manah does not care about design standards. This kept coming back to me after moderating last week's Oman Climate Dialogue on renewable energy, where we had the regulator, the procurer, the private sector operator, and the institution responsible for accountability all on stage together.

We tend to talk about renewable energy deployment as if the main variables are financial and political. Can you secure the financing? Can you sign the power purchase agreement? Can you build the grid connection in time? These are real questions, and they shaped much of the evening. Renewables on the national grid went from just over 4 per cent to nearly 10 in a single year. A gigawatt of solar came online at Manah. Battery storage is being bundled into a project for the first time at Ibri. A wind turbine factory is under construction in Al Duqm. To reach 30 per cent renewable electricity by 2030, Oman needs to more than quadruple its current installed capacity in about four years. The pace is no longer speculative, and neither is the distance remaining.

What surfaced more gradually during the panel is the degree to which climate itself

is becoming a variable inside the planning of the energy transition meant to respond to it. Solar panels are designed and tested to international standards that assume a set of environmental conditions. The IEC 61215 standard tests panels against wind loads equivalent to roughly 130 to 150 km per hour. At sites like Ibri and Manah, wind speeds regularly approach or exceed the thresholds that affect panel performance, dust accumulation, and the stress on tracking systems. We assume weather patterns at a given site will behave the way the resource assessments predicted. We assume dust will respond to predictable cleaning schedules. We assume the wind at a solar site is a minor variable, when at some Omani locations it is more aggressive than the engineering specifications anticipated. These models were built for temperate geographies and stable weather baselines, and they travel poorly into an interior desert that is getting hotter, dustier, and less predictable.

This matters because Oman does not have the option of waiting for better-adapted technology before deploying at scale. The 2030 targets are four years away. The projects being planned today will operate for twenty years under conditions that the next two decades of climate change will continue to

The question is whether the planning system can learn fast enough from what Ibri and Manah are teaching it, and feed those lessons into the next wave of projects before contracts are signed and designs are frozen.

reshape. What gets locked into a feasibility study now, the performance curves, the degradation rates, the maintenance intervals, becomes the baseline against which an entire project is financed, contracted, and evaluated. If those baselines underestimate what the Omani environment actually demands, the gap will show up years later as underperformance that is difficult to attribute and expensive to correct.

During the dialogue, the panellists were direct about this. The things that surprise you at operational scale are rarely the things you modelled for. The question is whether the planning system can learn fast enough from what Ibri and Manah are teaching it, and feed those lessons into the next wave of projects before contracts are signed and designs are frozen.

Oman has made a credible start. The institutions are forming. The projects are generating. The workforce is beginning to take shape, with 321 Omani graduates now training to build wind turbines in a factory that did not exist a year ago. What the next phase requires is something feasibility studies are rarely designed to carry: the willingness to treat operational data from these first projects as planning intelligence for everything that follows.

FIJI VILLAGERS
REJECT PLAN FOR
‘PACIFIC ASHTRAY’ IN
BEACH PARADISE

KIRSTY NEEDHAM

An Australian billionaire's plan to burn rubbish for energy in Fiji amounts to "waste colonialism" and risks spoiling a "beach paradise", villagers and the Pacific nation's UN ambassador said.

Traditional landowner Inoke Tora boarded a bus to the capital Suva on Tuesday with a petition from villagers opposing the \$630 million waste-to-energy incinerator, which is forecast to consume 900,000 tonnes of non-recyclable rubbish each year.

The fashion entrepreneur behind the Paris-born Kookai label and an Australian billionaire who made his fortune in rubbish disposal want to build a port and waste incinerator within 15 km of Fiji's tourism gateway Nadi.

The Australian-based duo of Ian Malouf and Rob Cromb have told Fiji's government the project could meet 40 per cent of the small nation's electricity needs, cutting its reliance on diesel.

However, an environmental impact statement lodged by their company TNG shows it would also raise Fiji's national emissions by 25 per cent.

Residents say the emissions will spoil Fiji's eco-tourism reputation and pose a safety risk with hotels and schools nearby.

"There are hundreds of people living in villages in this place and they fish each day, eat fresh crabs. They call that beach paradise," Tora said by telephone on his way to petition Fiji's prime minister.

"Dial-a-Dump" founder Malouf spent seven years trying to get a similar waste-to-energy incinerator approved in Sydney before it was rejected as a risk to human health in 2018, planning and court documents show.

Stephen Bali, then mayor of Blacktown in Sydney, led opposition to the project in his suburb and urged Fiji to seek independent scientific data.

"Gathering up rubbish from Australia, driving it in a diesel truck to port, putting it on a diesel ship to Fiji to be offloaded -- it would be interesting to look at those emissions," Bali, now a lawmaker in the New South Wales state parliament, said.

Energy-from-waste systems "are widely used in jurisdictions with some of the world's highest environmental protections", he said.

"By diverting waste from landfill where it would otherwise produce methane, a significantly more potent greenhouse gas and reducing reliance on fossil fuel-based energy sources, energy-from-waste can contribute to broader lifecycle emissions benefits," he said. — AFP

Oman opens the door for
growth-mindset talents

THE cornerstone of every civilisation that has ever risen is talent. More than a millennium ago, the Islamic Golden Age offered the world a powerful demonstration of this truth. In the scholarly circles of House of Wisdom, Arab philosophers debated Greek logic, drawing on Mesopotamian science, translated by Jewish and Sabian scholars, refined by Persian and Turkish authors, and commissioned by Muslim rulers. That civilisation did not thrive because of its geography or its gold. It thrived because it gathered the brightest minds of its age and gave them the freedom and purpose to work together.

Today, while many analysts remain fixated on the race for rare earth mineral corridors and energy routes, a more decisive shift is underway. Institutions such as the World Economic Forum, alongside global research by McKinsey & Company, are converging on a far more consequential conclusion. The defining contest among nations will not be fought over land or resources. It will be fought over talent.

The data is increasingly difficult to ignore. According to the Boston Consulting Group, more than 2.4 million highly skilled professionals crossed borders in 2025 alone, reflecting an intensifying global competition to attract human capital. This is not simply migration. It is a strategic reallocation of capability, where nations are actively competing to host the individuals who will shape their economic futures.

The winners in this contest are no accident. Our neighbouring UAE has climbed to ninth place in the IMD World Talent Ranking, driven by fast visa processing, regulatory flexibility, and tax-free income structures. Singapore has taken a more targeted approach, introducing its Overseas



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The writer is an innovator and an insights storyteller

Nations that make themselves a home for exceptional minds consistently outperform those that do not. Talent compounds. It attracts more talent, generates innovation, and builds resilience in ways that no natural resource can replicate.

Networks and Expertise Pass, designed to attract elite professionals with monthly earnings exceeding approximately RO 8,400.

Against this backdrop, a quietly significant development has emerged from Oman. The completion of the foundational phase of the Promising Omani Startups Program which aims by 2028 to support an ecosystem of 500 startups through 100 investment rounds and more than 35 incubators and accelerators, alongside the introduction of the Startup Experts Visa and Residency Incentives by the Royal Oman Police, signals a deliberate and strategic shift. This is not a policy for its own sake. It is positioning.

The numbers from the programme's first phase offer a credible starting point. Oman now hosts 205 technology and innovation-based startups with a combined market value of approximately RO 152 million. These ventures have generated 549 jobs for young Omanis, while 78 companies secured investment across 2024 and 2025. Notably, 22 startups have reached valuations exceeding RO1.9 million.

The newly introduced visa initiative rests on three interconnected pillars. The first is attracting world-class experts in economic development. These are not individuals who merely generate ideas, but those capable of building systems, scaling ventures, and embedding a growth mindset across an ecosystem. The second pillar focuses on empowering startups through a flexible legislative framework that lowers friction and enables innovation to move from concept to commercialisation. The third pillar, and perhaps the most consequential, is positioning Oman as a destination of choice for venture capital and entrepreneurial investment, sending a clear signal to global markets that the Sultanate of Oman is open, competitive, and

serious.

This three-pillar approach mirrors the playbooks of nations that have already secured early advantages in the talent race. Singapore built its edge by combining long-term residential stability with professional flexibility, allowing top talent to operate across multiple ventures. The UAE complemented speed with economic incentives, issuing visas in days and aligning financial structures to make relocation an attractive decision. Oman's Startup Experts Visa borrows from both models, but adapts them to its own context by embedding them within a startup-driven framework.

There is a deeper historical parallel worth noting. When the Abbasid Caliph Al Ma'mun established the House of Wisdom, he was not merely investing in knowledge. He was investing in people. He created an environment where scholars from diverse cultures and disciplines could contribute, collaborate, and innovate. The result was not incremental progress, but a civilisational leap.

Oman's new initiative is not a replication of that moment, nor should it be. But it reflects the same underlying principle. Nations that make themselves a home for exceptional minds consistently outperform those that do not. Talent compounds. It attracts more talent, generates innovation, and builds resilience in ways that no natural resource can replicate.

The implications are clear. The global economy is shifting from a resource-based competition to a capability-based one. In such a landscape, policies that attract, retain, and empower talent are not optional. They are foundational.

The war for talent is not a future scenario. It is already underway and Oman with measured intent and growing clarity, has stepped onto the ring.

The day after.. who builds the peace?



AHMED AL MUKHAINI

The author is a policy analyst

WHEN THIS conflict ends, the world will rush to congratulate itself too quickly. There will be familiar statements about restraint, renewed diplomacy and the urgent need for reconstruction. Markets will look for calm. Governments will speak of de-escalation. But the day after a major war is never secured by relief alone. It is secured by what states decide to build before the memory of disruption fades and the system slips back into the same habits that produced the crisis in the first place. That is why the post-conflict moment should not be mistaken for the restoration of order. It is, rather, the moment when the world discovers whether order still has enough credibility to be restored at all. The phrase “international community” will no doubt return, as it always does after a catastrophe. Yet the phrase has grown thin from overuse. The world is not governed by sentiment, and it is not stabilised by statements of concern. It is managed by institutions, incentives, thresholds and memory. When those weaken, power fills the gap. When power acts selectively, disorder begins to look normal. The central question on the day after will therefore not be who claimed victory, who preserved deterrence, or who emerged less damaged. The real question will be whether enough states are prepared to act seriously enough to prevent the next rupture from rising out of the same unresolved structure. That is where a coalition of the serious

becomes necessary. Such a coalition would consist mainly of smaller and medium-sized states that understand fragility because they live with its consequences. These are not hegemonic powers, nor are they likely to dominate the language of victory. But they possess something increasingly important in international politics: an interest in continuity without domination, reform without upheaval, and stability without strategic vanity. This coalition should not define itself in opposition to one bloc or another. It should not be anti-American, anti-Western, anti-Chinese or anti-anyone. Its purpose would be narrower and more practical: to stabilise those parts of the international system where major powers have become too divided, too transactional or too selective to provide dependable order on their own. That task begins with monetary resilience. The conflict will have reminded the world again that excessive dependence on a single currency creates more than efficiency. It also creates vulnerability. A system concentrated around one monetary anchor is more easily exposed to geopolitical tension, coercive pressure and financial spillover. The post-conflict world will need a more shock-absorbent reserve and settlement order: wider use of composite reserve instruments, more practical resort to SDR-type arrangements, stronger regional swap lines, and more flexible cross-currency settlement frameworks for energy and strategic commodities. The aim is not

The world is not governed by sentiment, and it is not stabilised by statements of concern. It is managed by institutions, incentives, thresholds and memory. When those weaken, power fills the gap. When power acts selectively, disorder begins to look normal

monetary revolution. It is to reduce dangerous overconcentration. The second requirement is legal credibility. International law today does not mainly suffer from a lack of rules. The rules exist. The treaties exist. The institutions still stand. What has weakened is confidence that serious breaches will bring serious consequences regardless of who commits them. If that is not addressed after the war, then the ceasefire will be little more than an operational pause. Violence may stop, but the erosion of order will continue. The third requirement is strategic continuity in energy. This war will also have shown once more that energy security is not merely a matter of production. It is a matter of routing, storage, legal assurance and contingency planning. A world that remains vulnerable to disruption in a handful of corridors cannot honestly describe itself as strategically prepared. The day after a war is when exhausted powers rediscover the value of structures they previously dismissed as technical or secondary. That is precisely why serious states should act then, not later. Peace is not secured when the firing stops. It is secured when the system that follows is harder to break than the one that failed. That is the challenge of the day after. And that is why the future will not be stabilised by the loudest powers alone, but by those serious enough to build what the victors and the wounded alike will still need once the smoke clears.

AI-POWERED ROBOTS OFFER NEW HOPE TO GERMAN FACTORIES

CLEMENT KASSER

A blue-eyed humanoid robot carefully opens a box and places a tool inside as a crowd of visitors watches the demonstration of “physical AI” skills at a major industrial trade fair in Germany. Made by German startup Agile Robots, it was among a host of robots showing off their moves at the event, underlining hopes of a coming AI-powered boost for Germany’s long-struggling factories. Embedding the technology into industrial processes, where Europe already has deep expertise, is seen as a key route for the continent to catch up in the artificial intelligence race against the United States and China. Such AI-boosted robots make it possible to “actually solve industrial problems”, Rory Sexton, chief executive of Agile Robots, said in an interview. From next year, he added, the company plans to begin fitting out German factories, particularly those in the automotive industry, a crucial sector for Europe’s biggest economy. Artificial intelligence used for real-world, hands-on tasks - so-called physical AI - was in focus this year in Hanover at the world’s biggest industrial technology fair, which brings together more than 3,000 exhibitors. Chancellor Friedrich Merz visited the Agile Robots stand, where he talked to Zhaopeng Chen, the Chinese founder of the Munich-based startup. In a speech at the fair, Merz threw his support behind the drive to encourage German manufacturers, many of whom still rely on traditional techniques, to step up their use of AI. AI should be “embedded in the key sectors of our industry and especially” in small- and medium-sized firms, the backbone of the German economy, to create “industrial added value and high-quality jobs”, he said. But, like in many other industries, German manufacturers are playing catch-up against China when it comes to making humanoid robots. Merz witnessed China’s progress in the field first-hand during a visit to the country in February, when he saw displays of Chinese-made robots performing kung fu and boxing. The maker of those robots, Unitree, and other Chinese manufacturers were also out in force at the Hanover fair, as they have been in previous years. Still, Sexton of Agile Robots insisted that “we’ll soon be able to do what (Unitree) are doing”, and shrugged off such impressive public displays. Rather than dancing or martial arts, Agile Robots is focused on “value-added tasks for industry”, such as electronic wiring in cars or phone assembly, he said. He emphasised that Germany offers an “ecosystem of suppliers” and “very strong expertise in mechanical engineering and automation”, both crucial in the race for AI. — AFP

From paint to planes, war lifts costs, darkens outlook

COMPANIES

from consumer goods to travel and mining warned on Wednesday that the US-Israeli war with Iran is driving up costs, disrupting supply chains and hurting consumer confidence, clouding financial outlooks. The cautious tone so far in the quarterly earnings season highlights the pressure on businesses that were already grappling with punishing US tariffs, higher input costs and weak demand before the conflict erupted in late February. While some companies stuck to their full-year forecasts, executives flagged rising transport and raw material costs, particularly linked to disruption in the Strait of Hormuz, and sharply reduced visibility. Dulux paint maker AkzoNobel said the conflict was pushing up supply costs, though higher pricing and cost savings helped it beat market expectations. “Our raw material basket is going to go up by something like the high teens (percentage), given the disruption of the Strait of Hormuz,” CEO Greg Poux-Guillaume said, saying the full impact would be felt over the next two quarters. AkzoNobel sells branded products ranging from decorative paints to speciality coatings used on cargo ships and Formula 1 cars, giving it greater scope to pass on price increases than more commodity chemical-exposed peers. Its shares rose around 4 per cent in morning trade. Disrupted shipping routes and higher transport and input costs have emerged as a recurring theme of the earnings season, weighing most heavily on consumer goods groups with global supply chains. Investors and economists are watching to see whether companies can continue to absorb the shock, or if prolonged uncertainty over energy, transport and geopolitics forces more firms to raise prices further or rein in forecasts.



Cans ofDulux paint, an AkzoNobel brand, are seen on the shelf of a DIY retail store in Manchester, Britain. — Reuters file photo



DIMITRI RHODES

The writer is latest international news and views reporter for Reuters

Much hinges on how long the conflict lasts and whether the Strait of Hormuz — a conduit for about a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas flows — fully reopens, easing supply constraints that have pushed up prices. US stock futures rose and oil prices fell below \$100 on Wednesday after US President Donald Trump said he would indefinitely extend the Iran ceasefire. Optimism remained fragile, however, with the strait largely closed and no sign of renewed US-Iran talks. According to a review of company statements since the start of the war, 21 companies have withdrawn or cut financial guidance, 32 have signalled price hikes and 31 have warned of a financial hit from the conflict - a pattern echoed across sectors from consumer goods to aerospace. French food group Danone highlighted on Wednesday how the pressures are filtering through supply chains, reporting first-quarter sales growth that topped expectations but slowed sharply from late last year, citing war-related disruption alongside a baby-formula recall in Europe. Shipments of baby formula imported from Europe that transit

through the Middle East were affected. Even so, Danone kept its full-year guidance unchanged, saying its health-focused portfolio provided resilience in an environment that remained “volatile and uncertain”. Dettol soap maker Reckitt missed quarterly like-for-like net revenue expectations for its core business on Wednesday and warned of lower first-half margins, citing high oil prices and lower demand for its cold and flu products. Its shares fell 5 per cent to levels not seen since October 2024. Travel companies have been among the hardest hit, as higher jet fuel prices force airlines and tour operators to hike fares, add fuel surcharges or ground aircraft, while geopolitical tension dents consumer confidence. German tourism group TUI cut its full-year underlying operating profit (EBIT) forecast and suspended its revenue guidance, citing limited visibility due to the war. “The ongoing conflict in the Middle East and the uncertainty surrounding its duration continue to limit near-term visibility and drive consumer caution,” the group said in a statement. US carrier United Airlines also flagged pressure on demand, forecasting second-quarter and full-year profits below Wall Street estimates on Tuesday. Resource companies are feeling the strain, too. Diversified miner South32 cut its full-year forecast for its Australia Manganese unit after heavy rainfall and Tropical Cyclone Narelle disrupted operations, and warned that Middle East tensions were adding to cost pressures through higher freight rates and raw-material prices. “We have implemented measures across our operations to mitigate potential supply chain impacts arising from the conflict in the Middle East,” South32 said, adding that while it was not currently experiencing diesel fuel shortages, it was closely monitoring the situation.

SPORTS

SEASONENDER



Salalah, Masirah, Al Amerat, Al Ittihad and Sohar will compete in the league.

FIVE TEAMS SET FOR WOMEN’S HANDBALL LEAGUE OPENER

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
@riyadhbaluch

In a significant step toward empowering women’s sport in Oman, the Women’s Handball League for the 2025-26 season kicks off on Thursday evening with the participation of five clubs: Salalah, Masirah, Al Amerat, Al Ittihad and Sohar. The league marks the conclusion of the Oman Handball Association’s (OHA) season calendar, which began last August and featured a variety of competitions across different age groups.

The launch of the women’s league comes as the culmination of a busy and successful season that included youth and junior leagues, first and second division competitions, the Super Cup, the 15th edition of the Ministry Shield, and the beach handball youth league. These efforts reflect the Association’s ongoing commitment to expanding the sport and enhancing female participation.

The closing ceremony is scheduled for next Sunday at the main hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, under the auspices of Dr Ahood bint Said al Balushi, Member of State Council. The event will also be attended by Abeer bint Issa al Zadjali, OHA Board Member, and Chairperson of the Women’s Sports Committee, along with representatives of the participating clubs.

TWO MATCHES

The competition opens on Thursday with two matches, as Al Ittihad face Masirah, followed by Al Amerat against Sohar, both taking place at the main indoor hall of the complex.

Action continues on Friday with the second round featuring four matches. Two morning fixtures will see Sohar take on Masirah, followed by Salalah versus Al Ittihad. Evening matches resume with Al Ittihad facing Al Amerat, before Masirah meet Salalah.

The third round will be held on Saturday, with two morning matches at the secondary hall, where Salalah will meet Al Amerat, followed by Sohar against Al Ittihad. In the evening, two matches will be played at the main hall, with Al Amerat facing Masirah, followed by Salalah versus Sohar.

The league will conclude on Sunday with the semifinal matches in the morning session, while the final and the third place playoff will take place in the evening.

The competition follows a single round-robin format, with teams earning points to determine the standings. The top-ranked team will face the fourth-placed side, while the second will meet the third in the semifinals. Winners will advance to the final, while the losing teams will compete for third place.

Each team is allowed to register two professional players, with only one permitted on the court at any given time, including the option of deploying her as a goalkeeper.

BEACH SOCCER
TEAM TAKE ON PALESTINE
IN OPENER

MIXED RESULTS
FOR BEACH HANDBALL
TEAM

AL GHAILANI
AIMS TO MAKE IMPACT IN
AQUATHLON

Oman begin campaign in Asian Beach Games

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

OMAN’S NATIONAL beach soccer team will kick off its campaign on Thursday at the sixth Asian Beach Games, hosted by the Chinese city of Sanya from April 22 to 30, with an opening match against Palestine at 5 pm (Muscat time). The team aims to leave a strong mark in this edition by securing a place among the top three, a position it has consistently achieved in previous editions. Oman will then face China in its second match on Saturday. Speaking ahead of the match against Palestine, national team player Khalid al Araiimi emphasised the importance of a strong start, describing the opening match as a key factor in the team’s journey. “A positive result provides a strong morale boost for the rest of the competition. We are entering the match with high focus and determination to deliver a performance that reflects our readiness,” he said.

He added that the team’s preparations have strengthened cohesion among players, noting that beach soccer demands mental discipline and concentration, with every match presenting unique challenges. “We respect all opponents, but we trust our capabilities. Our goal is clear: to go far in the tournament and deliver performances worthy of Omani football.”

Goalkeeper Younis al Owaisi echoed similar sentiments, stating that the team is determined to showcase a competitive spirit reflecting ambition and determination. “Opening matches are always difficult, especially in tournament formats. We have a balanced squad combining experience and youth, which gives us an advantage, particularly in crucial moments,” he said. He stressed that every match must be treated as a final, with the team aiming to compete for top positions rather than merely participate.

The squad includes Khalid al Araiimi, Salim al Araiimi, Abdulrahman al Fazari, Younis al Owaisi, Al Yaqdhan al Hindasi, Abdullah al Souti, Muslim al Araiimi, Khalfan al Ghazali, Ahmed al Owaisi, Majid al Afari, Sami al Balushi and Fahad al Mashaikhhi. The team is coached by Talib al Thanawi, with Yousuf al Khatib as goalkeeping coach, Hamoud al Touqi as fitness coach, Munthir al Barwani as physiotherapist, Abdullah al Saadi as team



Oman delegation takes part in the opening ceremony of sixth Asian Beach Games in Sanya, China. — ONA

manager, Khalid al Shehi as administrator, and Brazilian Wendal Da Silva as masseur. Beach soccer competitions run from April 22 to 30.

Meanwhile, Oman’s beach volleyball team will also begin its campaign on Thursday. The team, consisting of Mazin al Hashmi and Hood al Jalboubi, is coached by Badr al Subhi, with Abdullah al Alawi serving as team administrator. Volleyball competitions will take place from April 23 to 29.

HANDBALL TEAM FACES THAILAND

Oman’s national beach handball team continues its campaign on Thursday with a match against Thailand at 2 pm (Muscat time). The team is aiming for victory after a 2-0 win over Mongolia in its opening match, followed by a 0-2 loss to Qatar.

Player Hudhaifa al Siyabi described the win over Mongolia as an important one that boosted the team’s confidence. “We delivered a solid performance and successfully applied many of the tactical aspects we worked on during preparations,” he said. Reflecting on the loss to Qatar, he noted that it was a tough match against one of Asia’s strongest teams, but also a valuable learning experience. “Our focus is now fully on the Thailand match, and

we aim to deliver our best and achieve a positive result.”

AL GHAILANI READY FOR AQUATHLON

Omani athlete Mohammed al Ghailani confirmed his readiness to compete in the aquathlon event on Thursday, describing his participation as a valuable personal and professional opportunity. “This event allows me to test my abilities and gain experience against high-level competitors. It is an important event in my career, and I aim to deliver results that reflect positively on Oman,” he said.

Al Ghailani revealed that he completed a three-month overseas training camp in Spain, focusing on all aspects of triathlon — swimming, cycling, and running — through an intensive and integrated programme. “The camp significantly enhanced both my physical readiness and technical performance. I feel well-prepared heading into the competition,” he added. He also explained the difference between triathlon and aquathlon, noting that the latter includes only swimming and running, without cycling, making the transition between disciplines more demanding both physically and mentally. “We trained specifically to simulate race conditions and adapt to this format,” he said.

Oman set for Rabat 2026 World Para Athletics GP

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT APRIL 22

Oman’s national para athletics team will take part in the Rabat 2026 World Para Athletics Grand Prix, officially staged as the 10th edition of the Crown Prince Moulay El Hassan International Para Athletics Meeting, which will be held in Rabat, Morocco, from April 23 to 25. The event is expected to bring together around 500 athletes from 58 countries at the Olympic Stadium in Rabat.

Oman will be represented by a squad of nine athletes, divided into two groups. The first group includes Qusai al Rawahi, who will compete in the 100m and long jump, and 18-year old Othman al Habsi, who will also take part in the 100m and long jump. The group also features Maktoum al Mugbali and Sharifa al Hatmi in shot put and javelin, while Iman Taysir al Shamsi will compete in shot put, discus and javelin.

The second group comprises Taha al Harrasi, who will contest the 100m and long jump, Mohammed al Qasmi in shot put, Fawzi al



Oman will be represented by nine athletes.

Hubaishi in javelin and shot put, and Saif al Mugbali, who will race in the 100m and 400m events. The delegation is headed by Dr Mansoor bin Sultan al Touqi, Chairman of the Oman Paralympic Committee (OPC). The technical staff includes national team technical director and international coach Sami al Razili, national coach Abdullah al Anbari, who oversees running events for the visually impaired, and national coach Awf al Maamari, who supervises throwing events. The delegation also includes physiotherapy

specialist Hani al Shammakhi.

ASIAN PARA GAMES

The participation forms part of the Oman Paralympic Committee’s preparations to further develop the athletes’ competitive readiness and help them achieve qualifying standards for the fifth Asian Para Games, scheduled to take place in Japan in October this year. The Rabat event is also considered an important qualifying stop within the Grand Prix circuit, while offering athletes the opportunity to secure official classification or undergo reclassification where required.

In the lead-up to the event, the national team held intermittent training sessions at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, where the coaching staff worked to raise the athletes’ technical and physical readiness ahead of the Rabat challenge.

Dr Mansoor al Touqi said: “Our participation in the Moulay El Hassan Grand Prix represents an important technical stage in preparing our athletes for upcoming major events, especially the Asian Para Games.”

EXCHANGING EXPERTISE



OHA Chairman Dr Marwan al Juma speaks during the reception.

OMAN HOCKEY ASSOCIATION RECEIVES MINISTRY DELEGATION

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

The Oman Hockey Association (OHA), headed by Dr Marwan al Juma, OHA Chairman, on Wednesday welcomed an official delegation from the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) in a visit aimed at strengthening joint cooperation and exchanging expertise in the social and sporting fields in a way that serves the groups under the ministry’s care and reinforces the role of sports in comprehensive development.

The visit began with an official reception for the delegation, followed by a tour of the facilities at the Hockey Oman Stadium in Al Amerat, where the guests were introduced to the venue’s infrastructure and technical capabilities, as well as its role in hosting various local and international events and championships.

An official meeting was then held, starting with an introduction to the members of the Board of Directors of the Oman Hockey Association, alongside the presentation of the official delegation from the Ministry of Social Development. The programme also included a visual presentation highlighting the association’s background, its main activities and events throughout the year, and its efforts to develop and expand the game across different segments.

During the meeting, both sides discussed areas of possible cooperation, particularly in designing and implementing sports and community programmes targeting groups under the ministry’s care, as well as organising events and tournaments that provide them with opportunities for active participation. The discussions also focused on identifying sporting talents within these groups, nurturing their abilities and making the best use of their potential. The two sides underlined that such initiatives can deliver tangible social returns, most notably by promoting community integration, developing skills and improving quality of life.

The meeting also shed light on the programmes and competitions organised by the association for people with disabilities, orphans and children, as part of its continuing commitment to its social role and responsibility in empowering these groups and integrating them into sporting activities.

At the end of the visit, both sides expressed satisfaction with the exchange of ideas and views, stressing the importance of sustaining cooperation and joint efforts in the coming phase to launch initiatives that strengthen the role of sport as an effective tool in supporting social development efforts in Oman.



Sunrisers Hyderabad’s Abhishek Sharma plays a shot during the IPL match against Delhi Capitals in Hyderabad. — Reuters

Abhishek’s 135 powers SRH to 3rd straight win

OPENER

ABHISHEK SHARMA struck an unbeaten 135 to fire Sunrisers Hyderabad to their third IPL win in a row as they hammered Delhi Capitals by 47 runs on Tuesday.

The left-handed Abhishek struck 10 fours and 10 sixes in his 68-ball blitz to steer hosts Hyderabad to a mammoth 242-2 batting first.

Their bowlers did not disappoint either and Sri Lankan paceman Eshan Malinga stood out with his IPL best of 4-32 to help restrict Delhi to 195-9 as Hyderabad won for the fourth time in seven matches this season.

Hyderabad, the 2016 IPL champions, jumped to third in the table. Delhi remain in fifth after three wins and three defeats.

Delhi captain Axar Patel tipped his cap to Abhishek for a match-winning display.

“If someone bats that well, and their execution is not lacking, credit must be given for such a performance,” said Axar.

“I was telling the bowlers the same thing, that if you executed well, and after that he still hit a good shot, then you cannot do anything. You know, you have to move on.”

Nitish Rana and KL Rahul attempted to launch the chase in their second-wicket partnership of 86, but once both departed,



Sunrisers Hyderabad’s Abhishek Sharma celebrates after reaching his century against Delhi Capitals in Hyderabad. — Reuters

Delhi fell well behind the required rate.

Rahul went for 27 before Malinga struck twice in two balls to send back Rana (57) and big-hitter David Miller, for a golden duck.

South Africa’s Tristan Stubbs avoided the hat-trick and went on to score 27 in a 59-run partnership with Sameer Rizvi, who made 41.

The partnership kept Delhi in the hunt, if only by a whisker, until Malinga struck again to remove Stubbs and the chase fizzled out.

Earlier, Abhishek put on a 97-run opening stand with fellow left-hander Travis Head (37) and was ably supported at the end by Heinrich Klaasen, who hit an unbeaten 37 off just 13 deliveries.

“The way we started we had a plan, me and Heady wanted to make use of the powerplay,” said Abhishek. “But the wicket was slow, so we had to adjust and come up with different plans.”

Abhishek was dropped on 86 by Rana and made him pay for the spill with two straight sixes off the bowler to reach his second IPL century, with his father in attendance.

He kept up the entertainment alongside South Africa’s Klaasen, and is the leading run scorer in this season’s tournament with 323. Klaasen is second with 320 runs. — AFP

Third Al Dhahirah School Skate Ball Championship set for May 3

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

The Ibri Team, representing the Oman Committee for Skating Sports, in cooperation with the School Sports Committee at the Directorate of Education in Al Dhahirah Governorate, held a press conference at Tejan Al Majd School in Al Dhahirah Governorate to unveil details of the third Al Dhahirah School Skate Ball Championship 2026.

The press conference brought together around 45 participants, including educational staff and school representatives from both boys’ and girls’ schools, reflecting growing interest

in school sport and wider student participation in emerging games.

The meeting reviewed the organisational and technical framework of the championship, including the competition system and the participation of schools from Cycle One and Cycle Two. It also highlighted the most notable achievements of previous editions and officially announced details of this year’s event, which will run for four days starting on May 3 at the Ibri Club Indoor Hall.

Under the format outlined during the conference, the Cycle One competitions for boys and girls will be played on a group basis, with teams



Dignitaries at the press conference.

divided into three groups for boys and three groups for girls. The top two teams from each group will advance to the semifinals, along with the best two third-placed teams from the three groups. In the Cycle Two boys’ category, four teams will compete, with

the top two sides on points progressing to the final.

Organisers also confirmed that the championship will feature 28 teams, underlining the continued growth of the sport at school level in the governorate and the increasing engagement of

students in the competition.

The conference also featured positive discussions on improving organisation, strengthening school participation and raising the overall quality of competition in future editions. Plans were also presented to expand the championship’s reach and increase the number of participating schools, alongside a broader vision to organise regular sports competitions and events that help discover and nurture student talent.

Khalil bin Eid al Waili, from the tournament’s main organising committee, said the third edition marks a new step in the championship’s development following the

success of previous editions and the growing turnout from schools and students.

He said the organising committee is working to deliver a stronger edition both technically and organisationally by providing a suitable competitive environment that helps students develop their abilities and sharpen their skills. He added that the championship goes beyond competition, as it also aims to strengthen the culture of school sport and identify promising talent in the game.

Al Waili added that the next phase will focus on expanding participation and ensuring such events continue on a regular basis.

SPORTS

LATEGOAL



Players of UAE’s Shabab Al Ahli and Japan’s Machida Zelvia during their Asian Champions League semifinal in Riyadh. — AFC

SHABAB AL AHLI CRY FOUL OVER ASIAN CL SEMIFINAL DEFEAT

RIYADH: UAE side Shabab Al Ahli on Wednesday formally requested that their Asian Champions League semifinal against Japanese club Machida Zelvia be replayed, claiming that their late equaliser should have stood. The Emirati side were beaten 1-0 in Jeddah on Tuesday but a club source said that the referee made a technical error in disallowing a 93rd-minute equaliser. Machida Zelvia took the lead through Yuki Soma in the 12th minute and Shabab Al Ahli believed their Brazilian winger Guilherme Bala had levelled the scores as the seconds clock ticked towards the final whistle.

But Australian referee Shaun Evans disallowed the goal after consulting the Video Assistant Referee (VAR), which ruled that the Emirati side had taken the throw-in that led to the goal before the Japanese team had completed a substitution.

The Shabab Al Ahli source, who asked not to be named, said: “An official objection was submitted by the club before the team left the stadium.

“The objection includes a request to replay the match, and therefore it was decided to keep the team in Jeddah until a decision is made on our request.” The appeal will have to be considered rapidly because Machida Zelvia will face defending champions Al Ahli of Saudi Arabia in the final on Saturday. The UAE Football Association has pledged its support for Shabab Al Ahli “in any step it takes to safeguard its rights” and called on the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) to “select appropriate referee teams for the competitions it organises”.

Furious Shabab Al Ahli players protested to the referee at the end of the match, and goalkeeper Hamad al Maqbali received a red card.

Al Maqbali said: “The referee wanted us to be eliminated, and he succeeded in doing so.”

Shabab Al Ahli’s Portuguese head coach Paulo Sousa said: “The referee treated Shabab Al Ahli unfairly and disallowed a legitimate goal due to a serious technical error. He was the one who allowed play to resume, so why did he disallow the goal afterward?” He added: “Everyone’s level has improved at this stage of the tournament, except the refereeing.” — AFP



Machida Zelvia took the lead through Yuki Soma in the 12th minute. — AFC



Inter Milan’s Petar Susic celebrates scoring their third goal with teammates during the Italian Cup semifinal second-leg match against Como at San Siro. — Reuters

Inter roar back to beat Como, reach Cup final

INTER MILAN reached the Italian Cup final on Tuesday after coming back from two goals down to win 3-2 and go through by the same scoreline on aggregate. Trailing early in the second half at the San Siro to brilliant goals from Martin Baturina and Lucas Da Cunha, Inter looked as good as out, but Hakan Calhanoglu dragged the hosts level with a brace and then set up Petar Susic for a last-gasp winner.

Cristian Chivu’s team will face one of Atalanta or Lazio in next month’s showpiece in Rome, with the other semi-final delicately poised at 2-2 ahead of Wednesday’s second leg. Susic’s calm finish denied Como, who were in Italy’s third tier as recently as 2019 when they were acquired by tobacco giant Djarum, a first appearance in the cup final.

But Inter can still claim a league and cup double as they are almost certain to win Serie A due to a 12-point lead over AC Milan and Napoli with five matches remaining in the league season.

“I had a bit of luck but I’m pleased we managed to turn it around. Como make it difficult because they know how to play,” Calhanoglu told Mediaset, in an interview which was interrupted several times by a jubilant Marcus Thuram dancing along to fans chanting his name. “The league and cup are our two goals, we need to make sure we close out the Scudetto as soon as possible.”

Roared on by over 4,000 fans who made the short trip to Milan from their lakeside homes, Como were well on top by the time



Inter Milan’s Petar Susic celebrates scoring their third goal during the Italian Cup semifinal second-leg match against Como at San Siro, Milan, Italy. — Reuters

Baturina perfectly slid home Ignace Van Der Brempt’s cutback in the 32nd minute.

And once captain Da Cunha, who played for Como in Serie B, collected Nico Paz’s perfect through ball and slotted past Josep Martinez two minutes after half-time, Inter looked dead on their feet.

But Calhanoglu halved the deficit in the

69th minute with a deflected finish, sparking the crowd back into life and beginning a late siege which eventually broke Como.

Turkey captain Calhanoglu guided home a rare header from Susic’s inswinging cross in the 86th minute and moments later the roles were reversed for the goal which kept Inter’s double hopes alive. — AFP

Blazers stun Spurs after Wemby injury, Lakers down Rockets

LOS ANGELES: The Portland Trail Blazers exploited an injury to Victor Wembanyama to score an upset 106-103 victory over the second-seeded San Antonio Spurs in their NBA Western Conference playoff series on Tuesday.

San Antonio superstar Wembanyama — who had scored 35 points in the Spurs’ game one win on Sunday — exited in the second quarter at the Frost Bank Center in Texas after hitting his head on the court floor following a collision with Portland’s Jrue Holiday.

The 22-year-old looked groggy as he lay on the floor for several minutes before getting to his feet and jogging to the locker room.

The 7ft 4in (2.24m) forward was subsequently ruled out of the

remainder of the game after entering the concussion protocol.

San Antonio looked to have overcome Wembanyama’s injury as they pulled into a 14-point lead early in the fourth quarter, leading 93-79 with just over eight minutes left on the clock. But with victory seemingly in sight, San Antonio’s shooting went ice cold and the absence of newly crowned NBA defensive player of the year Wembanyama was keenly felt as a determined Portland snaffled victory, closing the fourth quarter with a 27-10 run.

Scot Henderson led Portland’s scoring with 31 points, while Holiday added 16. “Basketball is a game of runs, and the basketball gods are always gonna repay the ones that play the game right,” Henderson told



Portland Trail Blazers’ Scot Henderson drives between Julian Champagnie (30) and Devin Vassell (24). — Imagn Images

NBC television afterwards. Game three of the best-of-seven series takes place in Portland on Friday.

LEBRON SPARKS LAKERS

Elsewhere on Tuesday, the depleted Los Angeles Lakers produced another disciplined defensive effort to defeat the Houston Rockets 101-94 and take a surprise 2-0 lead in their Western Conference first round series. With Luka Doncic and Austin Reaves injured in the final weeks of the regular season, many had all but written off the Lakers chances of mounting a serious challenge in the playoffs.

But LeBron James, Marcus Smart and Luke Kennard combined superbly to carry the Lakers to a second straight win over the Kevin

Durant-led Rockets.

James finished with 28 points, while Smart added 25 and Kennard 23 to give the Lakers hope of advancing as the series heads to Houston for game three on Friday.

“As hard as we played in game one, we knew we had to double that in game two,” James said. “They were going to come in with desperation, so we had to be even more desperate. I thought we played a hell of a game. “Our own mindset now is focused on game three,” the 41-year-old NBA icon added.

In the Eastern Conference playoffs, Tyrese Maxey and VJ Edgecombe combined for 59 points as the Philadelphia 76ers scored a series-leveling 111-97 victory on the road over the Boston Celtics. — AFP



MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
8,193.238

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$99.26
BRENT \$98.96
LIGHT \$90.05



SHORT TAKES



The symposium highlighted the need for coordinated action to improve collection, processing and reuse of aluminium scrap.

ALUMINIUM RECYCLING PUSH GAINS MOMENTUM IN OMAN

MUSCAT: The third Aluminium Scrap Recycling Symposium has called for faster progress in building an integrated recycling ecosystem, underscoring its role in advancing circular economy ambitions in the Sultanate of Oman.

Organised by Sohar Aluminium in cooperation with the Environment Authority, the event brought together policymakers, industry leaders and technical experts to examine pathways for strengthening aluminium recycling across the value chain.

Held under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, the symposium highlighted the need for coordinated action to improve collection, processing and reuse of aluminium scrap.

Engineer Saïd bin Mohammed al Masoudi, CEO of Sohar Aluminium, said the sector has recorded encouraging progress, with the company recycling more than 8,000 tonnes of aluminium scrap to date. He noted that these efforts have contributed to enhancing both economic efficiency and environmental performance.

Al Masoudi emphasised that developing a robust recycling ecosystem requires collective engagement rather than isolated initiatives. He pointed out that an effective system must integrate all stages of the value chain — from collection and logistics to advanced processing and manufacturing — supported by strong collaboration between stakeholders.

He also called for more transparent dialogue on industry challenges and solutions, stressing the importance of maximising the value of national resources through partnerships involving regulators, service providers and end users.

The symposium featured contributions from regional and local experts, focusing on aligning international best practices with Oman's national priorities. Discussions centred on regulatory frameworks, technological innovation and cross-sector collaboration as key enablers of a more efficient and sustainable recycling sector.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

THE Sultanate of Oman has marked a significant step in strengthening national health security with the inauguration of the Izz Pharmaceuticals factory in Nizwa Industrial City, a project positioned to advance local drug manufacturing and reduce reliance on imports.

The facility was officially opened on Wednesday under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, in the presence of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, alongside senior officials and stakeholders.

The launch of the plant underscores Oman's strategic push to localise critical industries in line with Oman Vision 2040, particularly in sectors linked to supply chain resilience and public health preparedness. Located in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, the factory introduces advanced production technologies and quality control systems designed to meet international pharmaceutical standards.

Saif bin Khalfan al Hasani, Chief Executive Officer of Izz Pharmaceuticals, said the decision to establish the facility in Nizwa reflects both symbolic and strategic considerations.

“Choosing Nizwa was not incidental. It represents a city deeply rooted in Oman's heritage while embodying a forward-looking vision for industrial development”, he stated.

Al Hasani noted that the project emerged during a period of global disruption following the Covid-19 pandemic, which exposed vulnerabilities in international medical supply chains. “Pharmaceutical security is no longer optional; it is a national imperative. This facility is a direct response to that reality, aimed at strengthening self-



The facility was officially opened on Wednesday under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, in the presence of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, alongside senior officials and stakeholders.

“Pharmaceutical security is no longer optional; it is a national imperative. This facility is a direct response to that reality, aimed at strengthening self-sufficiency and safeguarding public health.**”**

SAIF BIN KHALFAN AL HASANI
CEO, Izz Pharmaceuticals

sufficiency and safeguarding public health”, he said. He added that the project signals a broader commitment to balanced regional development. “Establishing this complex in Nizwa sends a clear message that industrial growth is not confined to major urban centres. It creates high-quality employment opportunities and supports inclusive economic expansion across governorates”, he explained.

The CEO emphasised that the factory adheres to stringent quality and safety standards while prioritising investment in advanced technologies and human capital. “Our focus extends beyond production volumes to building trust in Omani pharmaceutical products and contributing meaningfully to national goals under Oman Vision 2040”, he added.

From a sector-wide perspective, Balqees bint Saud al Makhmari, Director of the Investment Empowerment Department at the Ministry of Health, highlighted the rapid expansion of Oman's medical industries. “The sector is witnessing accelerated growth, with 20 operational pharmaceutical and medical

factories producing more than 2,000 products, alongside 18 additional facilities currently under construction”, she said.

She pointed out that Omani pharmaceutical products are increasingly reaching international markets. “Exports now extend to more than 32 countries, reinforcing Oman's position as an emerging hub for medical manufacturing and a credible player in global supply chains”, she noted.

Al Makhmari stressed that these developments align closely with national economic diversification objectives. “The Ministry of Health continues to play a pivotal role in enabling investment through a supportive regulatory framework, strengthening public-private partnerships and facilitating industrial growth in this vital sector”, she said.

She further underscored the importance of an efficient medical supply system. “Enhancing centralised procurement, improving inventory management and ensuring cost efficiency are essential to sustaining healthcare services and maintaining readiness under all conditions”, she added.

PetroTel Energy poised to commercialise upstream discoveries in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 22



ANIL CHOPRA
Founder and CEO
PetroTel Energy

Having invested in excess of \$700 million across its upstream oil and gas assets in the Sultanate of Oman to date, US-based exploration and production firm PetroTel Energy says it is preparing to commercialise potentially sizable hydrocarbon discoveries trapped in complex formations.

In the Sultanate of Oman, Texas-headquartered PetroTel Energy's wholly owned subsidiary, PetroTel Oman LLC, operates Block 17, covering around 2,378 sq km of onshore and near-shore acreage in the Musandam Peninsula.

The block hosts oil and gas prospects, including the Tibat

and Ash Sham fields, which are being developed with supporting infrastructure such as processing facilities and a short offshore pipeline linking production to the existing Musandam gas plant.

Attention is now focused on commercialising previously underdeveloped hydrocarbon resources in the concession.

According to Anil Chopra, Founder and CEO of PetroTel Energy, a “major light oil discovery” has been made in the block following the drilling of five exploration wells, along with several sidetracks.

These include two wells drilled from onshore to offshore using extended-reach drilling technology, the first of which is the longest well ever drilled in Oman, reaching a measured depth of 24,767 feet (7,549 metres). Future wells in the area could potentially extend to 27,000 feet (8,230 metres).

Commenting on the discovery, Chopra said: “We have sustained flow rates of 44-degree API light



US-based PetroTel currently operates Blocks 17, 39 and 67 in Oman.

oil using nitrogen lift and ESPs [electric submersible pumps] and are ready to move to full-scale production.

The field development plan has been submitted to the government. We plan to increase output using high-hp ESPs or by

deploying an innovative artificial lift system that utilises associated gas”, he added in an interview with The Energy Year, a leading energy-focused online news portal.

In Dhofar Governorate, wholly owned subsidiary PetroTel Oman Onshore operates Blocks 39 and 67, covering a combined area of 13,379 sq km.

Leveraging US drilling technology, the company is reported to have made “seven discoveries and submitted three field development plans” following the drilling of 10 exploration wells, including two sidetracks.

“Our discoveries in Blocks 39 and 67 could be among the largest in Oman, both in terms of volume and surface area. While the terrain and tight formations will require sizable investment, similar fields are commercial in the US and account for 80-90% of production.

PetroTel has a strong resolve to commercialise these discoveries and we have built significant infrastructure in this area to reach our remote well locations”,

Chopra stated. Significantly, total investment across its activities in Oman now exceeds \$700 million, the Chairman noted. Of this figure, the lion's share — around \$490 million — has been invested in Block 17, while approximately \$235 million has been committed to Blocks 39 and 67, he said.

Going forward, PetroTel Energy is exploring opportunities for partnerships and farm-ins beyond its current upstream portfolio. “We always welcome partnerships.

Our priority is to accelerate towards full-scale production and to commercialise our discoveries in Block 17 and Blocks 39 and 67”, Chopra said.

“We have also been studying the geology of other blocks in Oman over the past 20 years and our technology has identified some very exciting prospects overlooked by other operators. We are discussing farm-ins with a number of companies as they seek to tap into our financial, technological and operational expertise”, he added.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The bank reinforces its commitment to powering the growth of Oman’s marine economy.

Sohar International sponsors Oman pavilion at Seafood Expo Global 2026

MUSCAT: From ocean to opportunity, Sohar International participates as a strategic sponsor of the Oman Seafood Pavilion at the 32nd edition of Seafood Expo Global, taking place in Barcelona, Spain, reinforcing its commitment to powering the growth of the Sultanate of Oman’s marine economy.

This participation is underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, represented by Eng Yaqoub bin Khalfan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Fisheries and Head of the Omani Delegation for Global Seafood Barcelona Exhibition; and Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, reflecting a shared commitment to advancing the fisheries sector and strengthening Oman’s position in global seafood markets.

Commenting on the occasion, Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, said: “Our participation as a strategic sponsor of the Oman Seafood Pavilion reflects Sohar International’s commitment to supporting sectors that hold strong potential for sustainable growth, investment and export development.

The marine economy represents a strategic opportunity for Oman and we remain focused on enabling businesses across this ecosystem by connecting capital, expertise and opportunity in ways that contribute to long-term value creation and align with the ambitions of Oman Vision 2040”.

The Sultanate of Oman’s participation in the exhibition is led by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, in collaboration with the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) and the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ).

The Omani pavilion features eight Omani companies specialising in various fisheries-related activities, including fishing, value-added industries and seafood packaging. This reflects the Sultanate of Oman’s ongoing efforts to connect its rich marine resources with global markets.

Held at Fira Barcelona Gran Via, Seafood Expo Global is recognised as the world’s largest seafood trade event, bringing together participants from more than 80 countries and featuring 62 national and regional pavilions across over 53,000 square metres of exhibition space.

The event serves as a dynamic platform for unlocking new opportunities, fostering global partnerships and showcasing advancements across fisheries, aquaculture and sustainable marine technologies.

NATIONAL FINANCE POWERS BUSINESSES WITH ROBUST CORPORATE FINANCE

MUSCAT: Committed to empowering businesses across the Sultanate of Oman, National Finance, the nation’s leading finance company, delivers a comprehensive suite of bespoke corporate finance solutions designed to support long-term resilience, sustainable growth and scalable expansion.

Complementing these offerings, the company provides attractive corporate fixed deposit options that enable clients to diversify

their investment portfolios and strengthen liquidity positions, equipping corporates with the financial agility needed to succeed in an increasingly dynamic economic environment.

Designed to address the diverse and evolving needs of businesses of all sizes, National Finance’s corporate finance suite includes guarantee facilities to support the fulfilment of financial obligations and equipment finance to enable the acquisition of critical machinery and assets.

To further enhance liquidity, the company provides debt factoring solutions with advances of up to 85% on receivables, alongside tailored working capital facilities.

Raize redefines standard for everyday SUV comfort

DESIGNED to meet the evolving needs of urban mobility and weekend escapes, the Toyota Raize continues to stand out as a compact SUV that delivers versatility, efficiency and confident performance.

Well suited to Oman’s city streets and open roads alike, the Raize offers drivers a balanced combination of style, practicality and reliability backed by Toyota’s trusted engineering.

With its compact proportions and agile handling, the Raize proves ideal for navigating busy urban environments while remaining equally capable of handling longer journeys. Its efficient design and responsive drive make it a dependable companion for daily commutes, family errands and leisure trips beyond the city.

Powering the Raize is a 1.0-litre turbocharged engine that delivers 96.5 horsepower and 14.28 kg-m of torque, offering smooth and responsive acceleration across a variety of driving conditions.

The engine is paired with a Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT) that simulates a seven-speed sequential shift, ensuring seamless power delivery at lower speeds and refined efficiency during highway driving.

A lightweight yet rigid body structure, combined with a well-tuned suspension, contributes to stable handling, ride comfort and confident road manners.



The Raize offers drivers a balanced combination of style, practicality and reliability.

The Raize also benefits from a tight 5.1-metre turning radius, making parking and manoeuvring effortless in urban settings.

Inside, the Toyota Raize has been thoughtfully designed to enhance driver comfort and visibility. The instrument panel layout provides a clear and commanding view of the road, while steering-mounted controls allow intuitive access to multimedia and vehicle functions. An illuminated centre console adds everyday convenience,

especially during night driving.

The spacious cabin further enhances practicality with features tailored for modern lifestyles. An 8-inch multimedia display with USB connectivity allows easy integration of external devices, while a four-speaker audio system ensures enjoyable in-car entertainment.

Powerful air conditioning keeps the cabin comfortable in Oman’s warm climate and the 60/40 split and foldable rear seats offer flexibility for passengers and cargo alike.

Abraj Energy reports record operational excellence

MUSCAT: Abraj Energy Services, Oman’s leading drilling and oilfield services provider, announced robust operational results for 2025, underscored by exceptional safety performance and technical efficiency.

The Company successfully fortified its market leadership, maintaining a 28% domestic share in drilling, 25% in cementing and 33% in hydraulic fracturing, reflecting the sustained confidence of global and regional partners in its integrated service delivery.

Throughout the year, Abraj



demonstrated its technical maturity by delivering 357 wells,

with 23 rigs exceeding their 2024 performance levels.

The Company’s fleet achieved a total drilling depth surpassing 900 kilometres, a testament to its operational scale.

Efficiency remained a hallmark of the 2025 fiscal year, as the Company maintained a remarkably low non-productive time (NPT) of 0.73%, ensuring reliable execution and cost-effective planning across its diversified project portfolio. Safety remained the defining pillar of Abraj’s corporate culture.

In a year of significant operational activity, 21 units maintained over five years without lost-time incidents (LTI), while an impressive 6 units exceeded 10 years of LTI-free performance.

This exemplary safety record was recognised through prestigious industry honours, including the OPAL Environmental and Sustainable Energy Excellence Award and the HSSE CEO Award in Kuwait, further affirming Abraj’s regional status as a benchmark for excellence.

Bank Muscat inspires future entrepreneurs through Rikaz award

MUSCAT: In a remarkable ceremony reflecting months of dedicated efforts, the Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate General of Education in Al Batinah North Governorate, organised the award ceremony for winners of the “Rikaz” Entrepreneurship Award.

The event was held under the auspices of Dr Intisar bint Abdullah Ambosaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Supporting Educational Programmes and was attended by officials and students.

The award seeks to transform ideas into viable business ventures and enhance innovation and practical thinking skills, in alignment with Oman Vision 2040’s



The award seeks to transform ideas into viable business ventures and enhance innovation and practical thinking skills.

objectives of building a knowledge-based economy and developing national capabilities.

Bank Muscat played a key role in supporting the Rikaz Entrepreneurship Competition, driven by its strong belief in the importance of such initiatives in empowering young talents and nurturing a culture of innovation among students.

These initiatives go beyond being competitive platforms; they provide an enabling environment that supports the development of ideas into sustainable and scalable projects, contributing to economic diversification and the creation of quality employment opportunities.

This support reflects the bank’s firm commitment to corporate social responsibility, strengthening its leadership position and reinforcing partnerships with both public and private sector entities, while complementing its long-term initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life across society.

Talib bin Saif al Makhmari, Head of Community & Media Relations at Bank Muscat, expressed his pride in this partnership, emphasising that the bank’s support for the Rikaz Award stems from its steadfast commitment to community service and to advancing impactful initiatives that empower individuals and develop their capabilities.

SHORTTAKES



The average monthly price of Omani crude for April delivery stood at \$68.15 per barrel.

Oman crude climbs to \$99.26 amidst geopolitical tensions

MUSCAT: The official price of Oman crude oil for June delivery rose sharply on Wednesday, reaching \$99.26 per barrel. The latest benchmark marks an increase of \$7.25 compared to the previous day's price of \$92.01, reflecting heightened volatility in global energy markets.

The uptick comes against a backdrop of escalating geopolitical tensions and supply concerns, particularly in key transit routes. Despite the daily surge, the average monthly price of Omani crude for April delivery stood at \$68.15 per barrel, up by \$5.98 from March levels, indicating a broader upward trend in recent weeks.

Globally, oil markets experienced mixed movements. Prices initially eased after early gains in Asian trading, as investors weighed the prospects of renewed negotiations between the US and Iran.

The decision by Donald Trump to extend a ceasefire with Iran added a degree of uncertainty, with questions remaining over whether all parties would commit to continued de-escalation.

However, prices rebounded strongly later in the day amidst fresh security concerns in the Strait of Hormuz, a critical artery for global energy trade.

Brent crude rose above \$100 per barrel, gaining \$1.59 to reach \$100.07, while US West Texas Intermediate advanced \$1.51 to \$91.18. Both benchmarks had already recorded gains of around 3 per cent in the previous session. Market sentiment was further shaken by reports of gunfire incidents targeting at least three container ships transiting the Strait of Hormuz. — Agencies

Oman, Thailand explore joint tourism initiatives

THE Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Thailand have explored avenues to deepen cooperation in tourism, with a focus on joint promotion, destination management and the development of integrated visitor experiences.

The discussions took place during an official visit by Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, to Thailand, where he met with Thapani Kiatphaipol, Governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand.

The meeting centred on strengthening bilateral ties in the tourism sector and facilitating the exchange of expertise in promotion and development strategies.

During the visit, the Omani delegation was briefed on Thailand's experience in building a globally competitive tourism industry, particularly its success in attracting international markets and adopting a high-value tourism model. Thailand's approach to leveraging digital technologies and embedding sustainability across tourism activities was also highlighted as a key area of interest.

Both sides underscored the importance of enhancing collaboration between public and private sector stakeholders, including travel and tourism companies, to unlock new opportunities for growth.

Discussions also covered



The two countries reaffirmed their commitment to fostering practical partnerships that enhance the global visibility of their destinations while improving the quality and competitiveness of tourism offerings.

sustainable tourism practices, community-based initiatives and mechanisms for managing and recovering from tourism-related disruptions.

The two countries reaffirmed their commitment to fostering practical partnerships that enhance the global visibility of their destinations while improving the quality and competitiveness of tourism offerings.

The visit forms part of a broader outreach programme by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to engage with leading global tourism markets and

institutions, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Al Busaidy participated in the World Sustainable Tourism Conference, organised by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council in Phuket.

The conference brought together policymakers, industry leaders and experts to examine the future of sustainable tourism.

Key themes included sustainable hospitality, enhancing the resilience of cities and tourism communities, and managing visitor flows to balance growth with resource

conservation.

Al Busaidy also held bilateral meetings with international tourism officials and experts, focusing on the adoption of global best practices in destination management, improving hotel efficiency and deploying smart solutions for visitor management.

The participation underscores Oman's commitment to advancing sustainable tourism and strengthening its position in international tourism platforms, while safeguarding its natural and cultural assets for future generations. — ONA

Omani startup secures \$10 million to drive regional expansion

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

Oman-based hospitality technology startup Fascano has raised \$10 million to accelerate its regional expansion and strengthen its cloud-based platform, as hotels and restaurants across the Middle East increasingly digitise reservations, menus and payments.

The funding underscores rising investor confidence in Oman's emerging technology ecosystem and the growing shift towards integrated digital infrastructure in the hospitality sector.

In an interview with the Observer, CEO and co-founder Ahmed al Kharusi said the newly secured capital will be deployed across expansion, product development and talent, with a measured approach to scaling.

"The recent round will be deployed in a balanced way across geographic expansion, product development and talent", he said. Founded in 2021 by Ahmed al Kharusi and Murak al Muairki, Fascano provides a comprehensive



The funding underscores rising investor confidence in Oman's emerging tech ecosystem.

cloud suite tailored for hotels, restaurants and cafés, integrating reservations, order management, digital menus and QR-enabled contactless payments into a single platform.

The solution is designed to address operational inefficiencies by digitising core workflows, enabling businesses to streamline operations while enhancing customer

experience.

The company has been steadily expanding its client base across the region, supported by increasing demand for digital tools in food service and hospitality.

Industry-wide adoption of cloud-based systems has accelerated in recent years, driven by the need for cost efficiency, real-time data and seamless customer interaction.

Al Kharusi emphasised that the company's immediate focus is on consolidating its position in existing markets before pursuing broader regional expansion.

"Our priority over the coming period is to strengthen the foundations of what is already working — deepening our vendor base in existing markets and carefully entering new markets where the conditions are right", he said, noting that performance will be assessed over the next 12 to 18 months.

The funding round includes participation from HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers; and Cyfr Capital, alongside a strategic partnership with the Oman Future Fund, backed by the Oman Investment Authority.

The involvement of sovereign-linked capital reflects broader institutional support for innovation and entrepreneurship aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

On competition, Al Kharusi highlighted the company's focus on

integration and accessibility as key differentiators in a crowded market.

"What we have tried to build is a platform that reflects the realities of our market — deeply integrated tools that work together as one ecosystem, with pricing that is accessible for small and mid-sized businesses", he said, adding that customer retention remains a critical measure of success.

Fascano's latest raise marks its third funding milestone, following an earlier round of over \$1 million and an undisclosed round in November 2024. The new capital will support further product development, enhance platform capabilities and expand the company's market presence across the region.

Al Kharusi reaffirmed Oman's central role in the company's growth strategy. "Oman is and will remain, central to Fascano — not only as our home market but as a credible launchpad for the region", he said. "Our intention is for Oman to continue serving as a hub for innovation, operations and talent development as we expand".

BILATERAL TRADE

Korea, Vietnam deepen high-tech cooperation



Vietnam's leader To Lam hosted South Korean President Lee Jae Myung in Hanoi on Wednesday to advance high-tech investment and economic ties.

The visit, accompanied by a business delegation, is expected to yield multiple agreements and reaffirm a \$150 billion trade target by 2030. Cooperation is set to expand across nuclear energy, infrastructure, innovation and supply chain resilience. — Reuters

TRADE BALANCE

Japan records fifth straight trade deficit



Japan reported a ¥1.7 trillion trade deficit for the fiscal year ending March 31, marking a fifth consecutive shortfall despite a 4 per cent rise in exports.

Imports edged up 0.5 per cent, while shipments to the United States declined, partly due to tariffs impacting key sectors. However, official March statistics showed improving export momentum and a widening monthly surplus. — Reuters

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold declines as dollar and yields rise



Gold prices fell sharply as a stronger United States dollar and rising bond yields reduced investor appetite for the metal.

Spot gold dropped 2% to \$4,724.31 an ounce, with futures also lower. Other precious metals declined, including silver, platinum and palladium, as markets reacted to currency strength and awaited developments in US-Iran negotiations. — Reuters

OPINION

The importance of financing small and medium enterprises



HAIDER AL LAWATI
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The writer is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI

OVER the past few years, some small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the country have faced various commercial and marketing challenges, which have led to difficulties in meeting their financial obligations to banking and financial institutions. At the same time, commercial banks, the Development Bank and the Inma Fund have continued to finance SMEs to help them regain stability and achieve new successes.

SMEs around the world, including in the Sultanate of Oman, are considered among the most important drivers of economic growth. Bank financing provided by commercial banks, the Development Bank and other institutions is a key element in strengthening their ability to sustain operations and expand. Such financing also represents a strategic tool for achieving the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, particularly in the areas of economic diversification, job creation and strengthening the role of the private sector in sustainable development.

Available local indicators point to the continued expansion of developmental financing programmes for these enterprises through the launch of operational initiatives and enhancements to lending programmes across more than 55 development initiatives

aimed at improving the sustainability of financing and supporting SMEs.

The Development Bank provides these enterprises with direct developmental financing at reduced interest rates of around 3%, along with appropriate grace periods for their projects under specialised financing programmes.

Data from the Development Bank indicate that the financing portfolio for SMEs exceeded RO 100 million by the end of September 2025. Operational indicators also show that the bank continues on a path of financing expansion within the framework of Oman Vision 2040 programmes, with approximately RO 110-130 million expected to be disbursed during the first half of 2026 to finance sectors such as manufacturing, professional services, fisheries, agriculture, livestock and mining. This financing policy reflects efforts to advance food security, industrial development and economic diversification.

In addition, the Inma Fund (the SME Development Fund) allocated approximately RO 25 million in 2025 to finance SMEs, complementing the facilities and loans provided by the Development Bank and commercial banks in the country.

Regarding the value of loans provided by commercial banks to SMEs in Oman during

SMEs around the world, including Oman, are considered among the most important drivers of economic growth. Bank financing provided by commercial banks, the Development Bank and other institutions is a key element in strengthening their ability to sustain operations and expand.

2025, total bank credit reached approximately RO 34.5 billion by September 2025. SME financing accounted for about 3.7% of the total banking loan portfolio, while the Central Bank of Oman aims to increase this share to 5% in the coming phase.

Accordingly, the estimated financing provided to SMEs amounted to approximately RO 1.27 billion within commercial banks' portfolios in 2025.

As is well known, loans directed to SMEs through the Development Bank and commercial banks serve several strategic goals under Oman Vision 2040, most notably diversifying the economy away from oil, given that SMEs represent a key pillar in strengthening non-oil sectors. These objectives also include supporting entrepreneurship and employment, directly contributing to job creation and the reintegration of laid-off workers and job-seeking youth into the workforce.

Additionally, they aim to increase the private sector's contribution to GDP, enhance local value addition and support innovation and economic transformation — particularly through financing directed towards technology projects, light industries, logistics, food security, tourism and the green economy, all of which are priority sectors under Oman Vision 2040.

From unipolar dominance to multipolarity: A global system at a crossroads

MURTADHA M J IBRAHIM AL JAMALANI

The United States is a constitutional republic founded, in principle, on the separation of powers and the rule of law. However, its conduct in certain international affairs is often interpreted as reflecting a tendency towards unilateral decision-making, supported by its political and military weight and its influential position within the United Nations Security Council and other international institutions.

This reality raises fundamental questions about the boundaries of legitimate influence and the distinction between global leadership and collective responsibility. While international institutions are expected to serve as inclusive frameworks ensuring balance and fairness, in practice some decisions appear to be shaped more by power dynamics than by strict adherence to international legal principles.

In this context, several real-world and widely discussed examples are often cited. These include proposals related to post-conflict reconstruction in Gaza, as well as arrangements concerning maritime security in the Gulf region, including insurance mechanisms designed to cover war risks for vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz.

While the objectives of stability and the protection of global trade are legitimate, such initiatives raise questions regarding inclusiveness, legal grounding and the balance of roles between international and regional actors — particularly coastal states such as Oman and Iran.

Another critical dimension is governance. International standards of good governance emphasise the necessity of avoiding conflicts of interest and ensuring full transparency in public affairs.

This includes scrutiny of arrangements that may raise concerns about the use of public office for private or familial advantage, or the involvement of close relatives in official or state-linked transactions that could generate personal benefit. Such issues, when raised, inevitably affect institutional credibility and public trust at both domestic and international levels.

On the international judicial front, enforcement remains one of the most persistent structural challenges. The International Court of Justice has issued several landmark rulings, yet their implementation has often been partial or politically constrained. A notable example is the case of Nicaragua v US, where the Court found the US in violation of international law; however, the judgement was not effectively implemented.

Similarly, the Avena and Other Mexican Nationals case highlighted the gap between legal rulings and domestic execution.

More recently, the provisional measures issued in South Africa v Israel have reignited debate over the capacity of the international system to ensure compliance in politically sensitive disputes, particularly in the context of divisions within the Security Council and the use of veto power.

DWP staff forced to quit UK due to visa reforms

HUNDREDS of civil servants at the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) could be forced to leave the UK due to “cruel” visa rule changes. At least 1,500 benefits and Job-Centre staff from overseas are no longer eligible for skilled visas, says the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union, which represents government workers.

Foreign nationals working at the DWP said they felt “heartbroken” and betrayed. They had expected to move on to skilled workers visas and settle in Britain once their current graduate visas had ended.

MPs criticised the “reckless and self-defeating” Home Office visa rules — warning of a staffing crisis at the DWP as the Government tries to implement changes to benefits and work schemes.

Prime Minister Starmer faces a back-bench rebellion on immigration although he hinted that some reforms could be watered down. Sir Keir Starmer and his Home Secretary, Shabana Mahmood, have angered MPs over plans to extend the time it takes for migrants to get settled status.

Foreign nationals working in relatively low-paid roles at the DWP — in customer support, benefits processing and as work coaches — have fallen foul of visa rules changes.

The increased salary thresholds made under the Conservatives in April 2024 had already caused some of the department's lowest-paid staff to leave the UK, the PCS said. However, further changes announced by the government in July 2025 have affected more staff from overseas.

The government raised the eligibility for skilled worker visas to degree-level jobs only. The visa category known as 4111, for low-level administration roles, was removed. Many of the foreign nationals started their DWP jobs on two-year graduate visas, expecting that they would be able to move on to skilled workers' visa later.

But they now face the prospect of having to leave the UK. The PCS has previously highlighted the case of one man. He had to leave his DWP admin job and return to Nigeria in



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

Foreign nationals working at the DWP said they felt “heartbroken” and betrayed. They had expected to move on to skilled workers visas and settle in Britain once their current graduate visas had ended.



People walk through the financial district of Canary Wharf, London. Image for illustration only. — Reuters

May last year because he failed to meet the £30,960 salary threshold in place at the time.

In July 2025, the government raised the salary threshold for jobs on the immigration salary list to £33,400. It made it even more difficult for some DWP staff to meet the requirements. At least 1,500 DWP workers could be forced to leave the UK because of the removal of the 4111 visa code and raised salary thresholds, according to the PCS's estimate.

Relatively few will be able to move into higher-skilled jobs, union officials fear, leaving the vast majority at risk of exiting the UK when their graduate visas run out by the end of next year.

Dozens of foreign civil servants at the department have already had to leave the UK in recent months, said union officials.

“These staff members have studied in the UK, invested in their futures here and are already contributing to essential services”,

said the PCS general secretary Fran Heathcote. “Forcing them to leave is not only cruel, it’s a loss of talent and investment the UK can’t afford”.

A senior solicitor at Ashton Ross Law, Buket Erdogan, said the removal of the 4111 code is one of the “most notable casualties” of the government’s July 2025 visa rule changes.

Member of Parliament Kim Johnson, said the Government’s “reckless” rule changes “deepen an already severe staffing crisis”. She said the frontline DWP staff play a crucial role “yet ministers seem content to force them out, leaving services weaker, slower and with devastating consequences for the people who rely on them”.

The Government did not challenge the PCS union's estimate that at least 1,500 DWP staff could be affected by rule change. A spokesperson said: “We take staff welfare seriously and offer a wide range of support to colleagues working on time-limited visas”.

CLASSIFIEDS

SIT. WANTED

SALES professional with 5 yrs Experience in Medical sector. Graduate, Available in Muscat. akhilmanu777@gmail.com Contact: 76323324

INDIAN male, 10 year experience in Oman as Coordinator have Driving licence. 90789282

LOGISTICS Documentation Executive. Indian male, 25 years, BBA, PG Diploma in Logistics & SCM and have 2 years of experience in this field. Seeking a position in Logistics field Mob: +968 7506 9882 Mail: shafazhussain18@gmail.com

ACCOUNTS/ SALES Indian male (b com) having 2+ years of experience in India accounts sales looking for suitable placement, join immediately. Contact: 76324360

15+ experience in building material, project sales & Trade market, deal with corporate project customers, looking for a suitable job. Contact 78384283

INDIAN male MBA Graduate with 15yrs experience in Oman seek suitable senior position in finance office admin., sales DTC. Contact: 94158080

LOOKING for SUPPLY CHAIN / SALES jobs Indian male 24 years. Commerce graduate, Experience in logistics, procurement and sales in reputed company in Oman.Valid Oman D/L. Contact +96891121694, issacantony2002@gmail.com

OPERATIONS Support / Tendering / Contract Management / Procurement professional with 18+ years' Oil & Gas experience. NOC & driving license available. 96227272, jijilmathew@gmail.com

INDIAN electrical engineer more than 20 years experience in "MEP" construction field in Oman seeks suitable job. Contact: 92919281

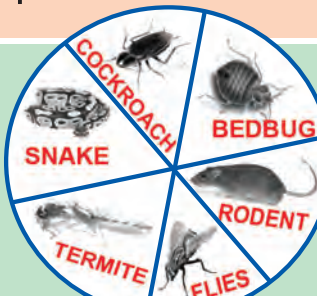
INDIAN male civil engineer with more than 30 years experience in different ministers, seek immediate suitable position. CONTACT: 94158080

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

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FOR SALE

Used vehicles, scrap telephone cable and steel item as-is-where-is basis. These can be inspected at NTS Camp in Ghala. Interested parties may contact on 99259157. Sealed offers with item-wise quote should be submitted on or before 26th April 2026 with security deposit.

SIT. WANTED

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

LOOKING for warehouse manager role. Indian male, 14 years GCC experience with driving licence. Available to join immediately. Please contact: 92991621

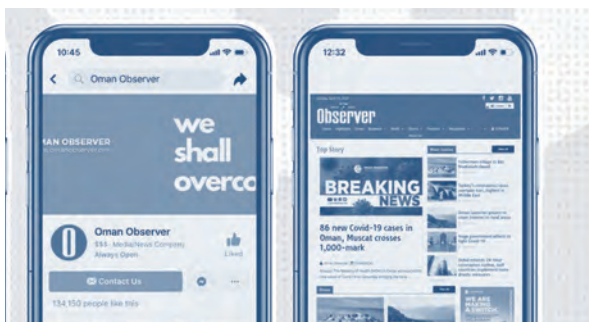
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PEUGEOT Traveller, 2019 model, in excellent condition. Interested buyers may visit the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran to inspect the vehicle and submit their offers. For inquiries, please contact: 95041480.

SIT. WANTED

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

SALES Executive required For working in oil and gas / building materials industry Vehicle Driving license preferred Email: kirit@bustaninternational.com Mobile: 95544641



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4 Ready made office space for rent in Bank Melli Iran building MBD area Ruwi, opposite Centre point. Contact: 99011352.

SIT. WANTED

PROJECT management professional with 20+ years' experience in tendering, business development, business systemisation, ISO QMS, planning and procurement. Possesses managerial and team lead skills. Seeking an opportunity. Contact: 91799438

SIT. VACANT

A CONSUMER goods distribution company FMCG headquartered in Muscat with several branches across the Sultanate of Oman is seeking qualified candidates for the following positions:
- National Sales Manger
- Marketing Manager
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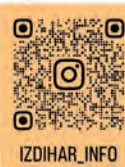
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CHANGING WORLD

SAVING TO INVEST IS THE NEW WAY OF LIFE IN OMAN



SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
The writer is a Senior Editor at Oman Daily Observer

There was a time when the surest sign of wealth in an Omani home was the size of the goat tied up before the festival. These days, walk into a living room of an Omani family and you'll hear a different flex: "Thank God, I closed my credit card". The older women nod like you just shared great news. The men put down their coffee and ask for details. Something's shifted. Omani families have quietly become financial hawks. Not the Wall Street kind — more the "my grandfather tracked every coin and we will too" kind. Except now it's on a spreadsheet, colour-coded.

It used to be that money talk was taboo. Now the group chat lights up every 25th of the month: "Salary landed?" followed by three screenshots — one for expenses, one for savings, one for charity. The 50-30-20 rule has been adapted into 50-20-20-10: needs, savings, family and that 10% that disappears into dates, Omani honey and emergency desserts for guests who "just happened to pass by".

For adults, oil made us comfortable, but nobody wants their future tied to one barrel. So families are experimenting. Real estate in Al Duqm? Discussed like it's a marriage proposal. Islamic bonds? The new gold, except they actually pay you back. Even the women who used to keep cash folded in a book or cloth are asking about the Muscat Stock Exchange and gold investment terms and conditions.

And then there's land. An Omani without a plot feels incomplete — technically possible, but why? Except now the plot comes with a five-year plan: "We'll build in 2029, rent the ground floor and the income pays the kids' university". That's not a house. That's a business plan with windows.

If you remember the old public service warnings on TV, debt is getting the same treatment. Car loans? "Brother, buy a used sedan and live free". Wedding loans? The new embarrassment. I went to a marriage ceremony last month where the dowry was modest, the hall was a farmhouse and the families bragged about it. The bride's father told us, "I'd rather give her a debt-free husband than a 3-day party". The whole room clapped. We've reached the stage where being debt-free is a love language. Even "buy now, pay later" gets side-eyed. As one uncle put it: "I already pay later for everything. It's called bills. I don't need more".

So why the change? Partly, it's the pinch. Prices don't climb, they leap. Partly, it's Oman Vision 2040 reminding us that the government can't carry everyone forever. But mostly, it's old values in new clothes. Our grandparents saved because the sea was unpredictable. We save because the future is. The result is a generation of Omani households who can quote both a religious teaching on wastefulness and their monthly expense ratio. They'll still prepare a feast when you visit, still send you home with fruit, still insist you're not "a guest". But ask them about a personal loan and they'll smile, pour you more coffee and change the subject.

That's not stingy. That's strategy. And if the new measure of a successful Omani family is zero liabilities, a plot in Barka and a son who knows return on investment before he knows how to drive — well, credit to them.

QUICK FEATURES



HISTORY

Britain's King Charles III views exhibits including outfits worn by his late mother Queen Elizabeth II, in the new Royal Collection Trust exhibition: Queen Elizabeth II. — **AFP**



MUSIC

A DJ plays music ahead of an organised event, involving mud races and wrestling matches, in Hong Kong. — **AFP**



PRESERVATION

Technicians work on the protection of skeletons before work that must be undertaken at the Natural History Museum in Paris. — **AFP**

INSTA PICKS



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CAKES OF THE FAMOUS



French pastry chef Bastien Blanc-Tailleur decorates a wedding cake at his studio. — AFP

Competing for attention with Jennifer Lopez is no easy task. But at a recent wedding in India where the American star performed in a sparkly leotard, it was arguably the cake that stole the show.

The towering multi-tier creation, several metres high and inspired by Rajasthani architecture, became a talking point among guests and featured widely in media coverage of the 500-guest celebration last November.

Its designer, French pastry chef Bastien Blanc-Tailleur, creates cakes that resemble haute couture: one-off, handcrafted pieces requiring significant time and expense.

"We rarely work on a wedding that has a budget of less than a million euros", the 34-year-old said from his studio outside Paris. His custom cakes start at 20,000 euros (\$23,500), with elaborate designs costing far more.

The Indian wedding featured five cakes, including a main piece decorated with orchids, elephants and domed pavilions in white sugar paste. Two additional cakes were made for the families, while another pair were lowered from the ceiling. Altogether, they required around 3,500 hours of work.

Blanc-Tailleur's clientele

includes Middle Eastern royals, American elites and European aristocrats. With a team of just 10, he produces only 20 to 25 cakes annually.

Recent geopolitical tensions have disrupted some plans, with weddings in parts of the Middle East postponed or relocated to France.

The job also comes with logistical challenges. At the Indian event, he had to source ingredients at the last minute, while on another occasion, a customs mishap in Saudi Arabia damaged delicate icing during transit.

Blanc-Tailleur began as a baker's apprentice and later worked at the George V hotel in Paris and alongside renowned chef Yannick Alleno. He credits a key lesson from his mentor: not limiting creativity by focusing too early on execution.

His designs are sketched by hand, rejecting digital renderings. A collector of natural and antique objects, he uses thousands of moulds to craft intricate details, with hand-sculpted flowers among the most time-consuming elements.

Despite his success, the demands of the craft leave little personal time. Engaged for four years, he has yet to set a date for his own wedding. — AFP



US singer-songwriter Jermaine Jackson and son US actor Jaafar Jackson. — AFP

Michael Jackson fans pack Hollywood for biopic premiere

HOLLYWOOD was clad in black and glittering sequins on Monday to host the Los Angeles premiere of Michael, drawing fans of the King of Pop to the iconic California boulevard.

The film chronicles Michael Jackson's rise from a child star to one of the world's most famous pop icons and arrives 16 years after his death. It was initially released in Europe and will hit US theatres on Friday.

"It's beautiful to see all these people here to support Michael Jackson and support the movie and to show love for Michael", the film's director, Antoine Fuqua said.

Its premiere in Los Angeles — the adopted home of the "Billie Jean" performer — also became a family affair, led by the film's star and the icon's nephew, Jaafar Jackson.

"(This) being the first time that I've ever got into acting and to be able to portray my uncle Michael, it's so surreal", Jaafar said.

"I'm still taking it in and not really realising how much it's going to hit me or when it's going to hit me. But, you know, it's incredible", he added.

Jaafar's performance won praise from his uncles, who highlighted the acting newcomer's "wonderful job" in portraying a figure they knew with an intimacy few others shared.

"When I watch the movie, I think I'm watching Michael on the stage... He did such a wonderful job. (It) brings tears to my eyes", Michael's brother, Jackie Jackson, said on the black carpet.

Marlon Jackson — another member of the Jackson 5, the youth group where Michael got his start — reflected on how the film might offer a window into the famous family's home life.

"I think people understand and realise that the Jackson family is



Jaafar Jackson portrayed his uncle, the King of Pop, in 'Michael', which hits US theatres on Friday. — AFP

no different than any family. We go through our trials and tribulations, ups and downs, but we learn to agree to disagree", he said.

Marlon, Jackie, Jaafar and La Toya Jackson — one of Michael's sisters — shared embraces on the black carpet, where they met the actors who portrayed them and their parents in the film.

Nia Long, who stepped into the shoes of Katherine — Michael's mother and close ally — remarked that, in a male-dominated world, the women of the clan "set the

baseline for how the family moved".

The actress hopes the film will allow audiences to view Michael Jackson as "an artist who was a master of his artistry" and someone who "cared deeply about humanity".

As for Colman Domingo, who portrays Michael's strict father, Joe Jackson: "Everyone has a story and everyone has something you can learn from — just like a great album.

"Hopefully this film is a great album for someone and if they could take something from it, then we did our job". — AFP

FEATURES



The pursuit of passion

Abdulaziz al Musallami’s journey in fashion



Abdulaziz during his college graduation



The designer creates unique handmade leather bags.

HIBBA AL KINDI

FOR 27 year old fashion designer Abdulaziz al Musallami, the path to fashion was anything but straightforward. After enrolling in a business programme after high school, he quickly found himself disconnected from his studies.

“The beginning of my university life was a failure because I wasn’t studying something I liked. I kept repeating courses five or six times. I just couldn’t accept studying at all”, he said.

“I reached a point where I felt like I lost myself, like I was walking in a desert and didn’t understand anything”.

However, Al Musallami decided to take a risk and start over.

“I’ve always had a love and passion for fabrics. I like looking at fabrics, I like clothes. I had this feeling that I should do what I believe is right and what I want”, he said.

In 2021, he dropped out of his business programme, took on a part time job and enrolled in a fashion programme at the Scientific College of Design, a decision that came with significant challenges.

“Studying wasn’t easy, especially since I was paying for my studies myself while working. It was a very tough period”, he said. “Sometimes I wouldn’t even see my mother for three or four days. I’d leave early in the morning, go to college, then go to work, then sit somewhere to finish assignments and return late at night”.

Despite the pressure, his efforts soon began to show results. During his studies, he participated in a craft exhibition showcasing handmade leather bags.



“On the last day, I was shocked. I made around twenty five bags over five days and by the last day everything was sold. That’s when I felt that people really liked my work”, he said.

Today, Al Musallami works across multiple mediums, with a core focus on handmade leather goods.

“I make unisex bags. My goal was to make men’s bags, but I noticed men don’t really buy them. Women

actually buy more from me”, he said.

His range includes everyday pouches, custom sized pieces and laptop bags, with options for personalised colours, materials and finishes.

Alongside his leather work, he designs abayas and dresses; and offers bespoke tailoring for both men and women.

“My concept is to create unique

pieces. I don’t like seeing someone wearing the same thing as me, so I try to make each piece one of a kind”, he said.

Attention to detail remains central to his work, particularly in abaya construction.

“With abayas, I always notice mistakes in tailoring in the market”, he said, explaining that many designs lack consistency in how they fall. “For example, the flare should be even all around, sometimes you’ll see it higher on the sides and lower in the front, which is incorrect”.

“So when I work with a tailor, I focus on these details and on fabric quality”, he added.

He also experiments with structure, including layered designs that balance form and movement.

Looking ahead, Al Musallami is continuing to develop his skills in leatherwork, while working towards a long term goal.

“My dream is to have a boutique specialised for men. I feel there is a gap in the market. There aren’t really boutiques for men”, he said.

“My goal is to create a space focused on appearance, style and grooming, a full concept where I personally style customers”.

“At the same time, I also like women’s fashion because it has more creative freedom. Ideally, I want both something for women like dresses and abayas; and even workwear”.

Al Musallami sells his work through his Instagram pages, @by_azooz for abayas and tailoring; and @by_azooz_leather for leather goods. He also accepts custom orders, with fittings arranged directly with clients. For women, fittings are done with a female family member present, while he takes measurements himself for men.