

Oman hosts US-Iran talks



Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in Muscat on Saturday. — **ONA**

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman on Saturday hosted a historic meeting in Muscat between Dr Seyyed Abbas Araghchi, Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs and US Presidential Envoy Steve Witkoff, to launch a process of talks between the two parties.

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, said: “I am proud to announce that today in Muscat we hosted Iranian Foreign Minister Dr Seyyed Abbas Araghchi and US Presidential Envoy Steve Witkoff and mediated to begin a process of dialogue and negotiations with the shared aim of concluding a fair and binding agreement.”

Sayyid Badr added that the meeting took place in a friendly atmosphere that helped bring viewpoints closer together, enhancing the chances of achieving peace, security and stability at the regional and international levels.

Sayyid Badr expressed his gratitude to both parties for their commitment to this positive step, stressing that the Sultanate of Oman will carry on with its efforts to support dialogue and understanding; and contribute to creating favourable conditions for achieving constructive and sustainable results.

“I think we are very close to a basis for negotiations and if we can conclude this basis next week, we’ll have gone a long way and will be able to start real discussions based on that,” Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi told state television.

Araqchi said the talks - a first between Iran and a Trump administration, including his first term in 2017-21 - took place in a “productive, calm and positive atmosphere”.

“Both sides have agreed to continue the talks... probably next Saturday... Iran and the US side want an agreement in the short term. We do not want talks for (the sake of) talks,” Araqchi added.

There was no immediate US comment on the talks. **TURN TO P3**

FULL-MOON DAY



The full moon rises over the skies in Muscat on Saturday. **PHOTO BY YOUSSEF AL HABSI**

HM VISITS NETHERLANDS ON MONDAY

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK will go on a state-visit to the Kingdom of the Netherlands on Monday.

A statement was issued by the Diwan of Royal Court to this effect. It reads as follows: “Within the context of the advanced relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on a state-visit to the Kingdom of the Netherlands during April 14-16, 2025.

“The visit aims at boosting areas of cooperation of mutual interest in a manner that meets aspirations of the two countries. The visit will address a set of regional and international topics of common concern.

“His Majesty the Sultan will be accompanied during the visit by a high-ranking official delegation comprising HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Dr Hamed bin Said al Aufi, Head of Private Office of His Majesty the Sultan, Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals and Shaikh Dr Abdullah bin Salim al Harthy, Ambassador of Oman to the Netherlands.

“May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan in his journeys and grant him good health and well-being!” — **ONA**



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on a state-visit to the Kingdom of the Netherlands during April 14-16

Oman shines as Expo 2025 Osaka opens

OSAKA: The Sultanate of Oman on Saturday participated in the official launching ceremony of Expo 2025 hosted by in the Japanese city of Osaka from April 13 to October 13, under the theme ‘Designing the Future Society for Our Lives’. The launching ceremony was held under the auspices of Emperor Naruhito of Japan in Osaka, Japan.

The Sultanate of Oman was represented by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Vice Chairman of the Main Committee for the Sultanate of Oman’s Participation in Expo 2025 Osaka; Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture and Commissioner-General of the Sultanate of Oman’s Pavilion at Expo 2025 Osaka and Dr Mohammed bin Said al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Japan.



Performers take part in the official opening ceremony of the 2025 Osaka Expo in the city of Osaka on Saturday. — **AFP**

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef stated that Expo 2025 Osaka, Japan, is a leading global platform organised since 1851 with the aim of promoting international understanding and enhancing cultural exchange by displaying

countries’ experiences and achievements in various sectors. The minister stated that the importance of this event lies in bringing together countries from around the world under one roof to showcase solutions and aspirations for a more

sustainable and integrated future. He added that, based on the Sultanate of Oman’s keenness to participate in international forums and enhance its cultural and economic communication with the world, its participation in this global event is another commitment to the principle of international cooperation and also showcases the Sultanate of Oman’s unique capabilities in various fields.

The minister noted that a main committee has been formed to oversee the Sultanate of Oman’s participation in Expo 2025 Osaka, Japan, under the chairmanship of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth. A technical committee has also been formed from representatives of various stakeholders, along with private sector partners, to ensure a distinguished and effective participation. **SEE ALSO P4**



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Evolving dynamic partnership



THE bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of the Netherlands reflect significant diplomatic importance, demonstrating mutual and profound respect, as well as a shared commitment between the two friendly nations. These ties are reinforced by advanced bilateral cooperation covering diverse fields, which both sides are working to expand further.

The state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Kingdom of the Netherlands underscores the depth of the relationship and shared priorities, particularly in trade, investment, sustainable development and close collaboration for the benefit and stability of the international community.

The volume of trade between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of the Netherlands has seen notable growth in recent years, reaching RO 181,272,683 (approximately \$471.5 million) in 2024.

Oman's exports to the Netherlands last year (2024) amounted to RO 41,441,629 while total imports from the Netherlands reached RO 125,871,705.

Oman's key exports to the Netherlands in 2024 included base metals and their products, while machinery, electrical equipment and related goods topped the list of imports from the Netherlands.

Preliminary foreign investments from the Netherlands into Oman amounted to RO 390.5 million by the end of 2024, while Omani investments in the Netherlands reached RO 278.3 million by the end of 2023.

The number of Dutch visitors to Oman in 2024 reached 18,207.

Meanwhile, the total number of registered companies with Dutch participation in Oman stood at 155 by the end of 2024, with a total investment value exceeding RO 147,637,000.

Shaikh Dr Abdullah bin Salim al Harthy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Kingdom of the Netherlands, stated that the official relations between the two friendly nations date back to 1670, when the Netherlands established an office in Muscat during the reign of Imam Sultan bin Saif to strengthen bilateral ties. Since then, the two friendly peoples have extended bonds of friendship, cooperation and trade for their mutual benefit, maintaining peaceful relations free from conflicts and wars.

He added that contemporary

diplomatic representation began with the Netherlands opening a non-resident mission in Oman in 1972, followed by the establishment of an embassy in Muscat in 1982. In 1990, Oman opened its embassy in The Hague.

He explained that bilateral relations have advanced across political, economic, cultural and other fields since His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik assumed power. His Majesty's directives and "Oman Vision 2040" have emphasised economic diplomacy, with both nations exploring investment opportunities through official delegations and private sector engagement.

The ambassador noted that the state visit of His Majesty the Sultan to the Netherlands will lay the foundation for a strong and enduring strategic partnership, significantly benefiting both nations. Preparations have focused on enhancing cooperation in political, economic, technological, logistical, educational, cultural and tourism sectors.

He affirmed that both sides are exploring the possibility of signing joint agreements and memoranda of understanding. His Majesty's state visit will serve as a cornerstone for lasting and robust relations, leveraging both nations' strategic locations, maritime heritage and historical ties to reposition Oman and the Netherlands as major hubs for trade redistribution — facilitating the flow of Asian and African goods to Europe via Oman; and European and American products to Oman via the Netherlands.

He highlighted the broad and multifaceted cooperation between the two countries, particularly in trade and economy. The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion is actively developing economic collaboration and exploring investment opportunities, while Oman's embassy in the Netherlands works to facilitate and promote these efforts.

He noted cooperation in oil and gas, water management, agricultural products, logistics, ports, technology, innovation and renewable energy, including green hydrogen.

Regarding tourism, the ambassador mentioned Oman's participation in the Dutch Travel Week in 2024 and 2025, as well as hosting prominent Dutch athletes in the Governorate of Dhofar, who later promoted Oman through media and social platforms. The popular Dutch TV programme "Wie is de Mol" also featured Oman, reaching a wide audience.



SHAIKH DR
ABDULLAH BIN
SALIM
AL HARTHY

Ambassador of the
Sultanate of Oman to
the Kingdom of the
Netherlands



STELLA
KLOTH

Ambassador of the
Kingdom of the
Netherlands to the
Sultanate of Oman

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He added that the Dutch Tourism Association held its 2024 annual conference in Oman, attended by over 200 Dutch companies. Oman's embassy in the Netherlands annually participates in the Embassy Festival, attracting 70,000 visitors and showcasing Omani products, cuisine and tourist attractions.

The ambassador emphasised the Netherlands' status as a knowledge and technology leader and the EU's third-largest economy, offering diverse cooperation opportunities. Oman looks forward to building a broad strategic partnership and has established an annual political consultation committee to discuss bilateral matters and future collaboration plans.

He concluded that Dutch factories opening branches in Oman would benefit the Netherlands amid the global shift towards clean energy and hydrogen, positioning Oman as a key partner in sustainable development.

Stella Kloth, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Sultanate of Oman, emphasised that the state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Netherlands holds special significance, as it builds upon a long history of cooperation between the two nations. The visit of former Queen Beatrix to Oman in 2012, along with various ministerial exchanges over the years, laid solid foundations for collaboration and reaffirmed the depth of bilateral relations and shared priorities in trade, investment and sustainable development.

The ambassador added that Oman and the Netherlands share deep-rooted historical ties dating back to the 17th century — nearly 400 years — when Dutch East India Company ships first sailed through the Gulf of Oman, followed by Dutch traders arriving at Muttrah Port in 1624. In 1651, the Dutch ship "Concordia" visited Oman, marking the beginning of formal trade relations. These early exchanges established the groundwork for a lasting partnership built on maritime trade and economic cooperation.

She noted that today, the two nations are bound by a dynamic and evolving partnership, rooted in a shared maritime heritage, mutual reliance on international trade and a joint commitment to dialogue and peace. This relationship continues to thrive, particularly in sustainable logistics, water management and energy transition.

The ambassador highlighted that Dutch companies such as the Port of

Rotterdam and Steinweg celebrated their 20th anniversaries in Oman last year, underscoring the enduring Dutch-Omani partnership. She stressed that bolstering commercial ties is crucial, as it enhances cultural exchange, fosters new partnerships and solidifies both nations' positions on the bilateral relations map. This vision, she affirmed, is vital not only for diplomacy but also for expanding business opportunities and deepening collaboration across sectors.

She stated that Oman and the Netherlands enjoy a multifaceted partnership spanning key areas such as energy transition — particularly green hydrogen — as well as water management and sustainable logistics. The long-standing collaboration between the Port of Rotterdam and SOHAR Port and Freezone, alongside the presence of Dutch company APM Terminals in Salalah Port, reflects a shared commitment to strengthening global trade networks and supply chain resilience.

The ambassador added that expanding trade and investment requires building on solid foundations by encouraging partnerships, trade missions and private-sector collaboration. Both Oman and the Netherlands possess strategic geographic advantages that can be leveraged to unlock new economic opportunities.

She explained, "Cooperation extends beyond economics to governance and knowledge exchange, which are pillars of bilateral relations. Partnerships between Dutch knowledge institutions and the Royal Academy for Management (RAM) contribute to institutional ties and expertise sharing — essential for long-term development." The ambassador noted that broadening cultural and educational exchanges deepens people-to-people bonds and ensures sustained collaboration across all fields. By continuing to invest in these partnerships, Oman and the Netherlands can drive innovation and contribute to a more sustainable and interconnected world.

She remarked, "A key aspect of this partnership is our shared belief in multilateral cooperation. Both nations recognise that the greatest challenges — whether geopolitical, climate-related, economic resilience, or sustainable development — cannot be tackled alone but through active engagement in international frameworks and a commitment to a rules-based global order that fosters stability and progress." — ONA

Oman hosts US-Iran talks; next round of talks likely on April 19

FROM PI

Saturday’s exchanges were indirect talks, as Iran had wanted, rather than face-to-face, as Trump had demanded. Each delegation had its separate room and exchanged messages via Oman’s foreign minister, according to Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei. Araqchi said his delegation had a brief encounter with its US counterpart headed by Trump’s Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff, after they exited the talks. “After the end of more than 2-1/2 hours of indirect talks, the heads of the Iranian and American delegations spoke for a few minutes in the presence of the Omani foreign minister as they left the talks. It (the encounter) was based on our political etiquette,” Araqchi said.



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, with Steve Witkoff, US Presidential Envoy, in Muscat on Saturday. — ONA

“The current focus of the talks will be de-escalating regional tensions, prisoner exchanges and limited agreements to ease sanctions (against Iran) in exchange for controlling Iran’s nuclear programme,” a source said. Tehran approached the talks warily, sceptical they could yield a deal and suspicious of Trump, who has repeatedly threatened Iran if it does not halt its accelerating uranium enrichment programme. While each side has talked up the chances of some progress, they remain far apart on a dispute that has rumbled on for more than two decades. “This is a beginning. So it is normal at this stage for the two sides to present to each other their fundamental positions through the Omani intermediary,” Baghaei said. Signs of progress could help cool tensions in a region aflame since

2023 with wars in Gaza and Lebanon, Ansar Allah attacks and the change of government in Syria. “There is a chance for initial understanding on further negotiations if the other party (US) enters the talks with an equal stance,” Araqchi told Iranian TV. Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has given Araqchi “full authority” for the talks, an Iranian official said. Later, Araghchi said negotiations with the United States will continue on April 19. He also said that the United States wants agreement on a new nuclear deal “as soon as possible.” “The American side also said that a positive agreement was one that can be reached as soon as possible,” Araghchi told state television after his talks with US envoy Steve Witkoff. — Agencies

‘FAJR INITIATIVE’ HONOURS YOUNG CHAMPIONS

KABEER YOUSUF
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The Fajr Initiative continues to inspire a generation towards disciplined, faith-filled lives. Marking the successful completion of its second phase, the award ceremony held on April 11, at Masjid Al Noor, Darsait, honoured over 100 children who completed a 40-day challenge of attending both Fajr and Isha prayers in congregation. Children were recognised in Gold, Silver and Bronze categories, celebrating their steadfastness and devotion. The event, attended by more than 200 community members, featured distinguished guests including Shaikh Salim al Ghammari, Shaikh Ibrahim Al Wahaibi and world-renowned Quran reciter Shaikh Saad Nomani Madani, whose soulful presence and speech deeply moved the gathering. The ceremony highlighted the efforts of children, supportive parents and dedicated volunteers who ensured the programme’s smooth execution. The Fajr Initiative team presented its growth — from five participants to hundreds — and encouraged replication of the model across Oman. The evening concluded with a heartfelt Dua for unity and peace, affirming the initiative’s greater mission: nurturing youth with purpose, values and a legacy of faith. During the ceremony, the Fajr Initiative team presented an updated project report, showcasing the programme’s journey from its humble beginnings with just five children to a flourishing movement involving hundreds. The team called on parents and local leaders across Oman to replicate the model in their own mosques and neighbourhoods. “We honoured all children who participated in the challenge and most consistent children were awarded with Gold category followed by Silver and Bronze. The evening witnessed more than 200 attendees and reflected growing momentum, community engagement and a shared vision to raise a generation grounded in the love of prayers and spiritual values which can keep the youth away from vices,” said one of the organisers.

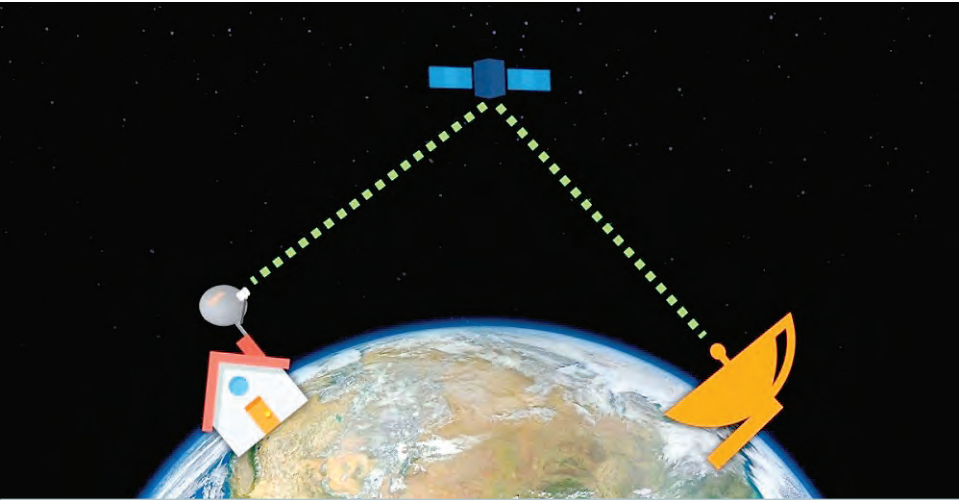
VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

THE Sultanate of Oman’s telecommunication services sector got a boost last week with a new competitor when Royal Decree 40/2025 issued a Category 1 licence to the Satellite Communications Technologies Company (OmanSat) to provide fixed public communication services. Under the licence, OmanSat will establish and operate satellite communication systems to provide fixed public communication services in the Sultanate of Oman, which include broadband Internet services, satellite connectivity services for communication stations and provide multiple options for beneficiaries in rural areas. Speaking to the Observer, Mahmood Omar al Zadjali, acting executive manager, Strategic Planning unit, Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), said, “This is a Class 1 licence building telecom infrastructure (networks) and providing services. This licence is similar to one provided to Omantel, Ooredoo, Vodafone, Awasar and Starlink recently.” Among other types of licences that are usually issued, Class 2 is provided to companies that do not build their networks, but provide telecom services based on resale. For example, companies such as Friendi, Renna and others. “They are licensed service providers, but they don’t build the network.” The Class 3 licence is issued



MAHMOOD OMAR AL ZADJALI

Satellite services are the latest trend because they offer better quality and high speed to the end-users



Under the licence, OmanSat will establish and operate satellite communication systems to provide fixed public communication services in the Sultanate of Oman.

through a decision of the On OmanSat, Al Zadjali said, “It is not a new company, but a government enterprise that was established in 2018 to spearhead the national satellite programme initiative by building satellite communications infrastructure and developing required capabilities to serve public and private sectors, coping with their immediate to long-term telecommunications needs. They did not have a licence before it was under the Oman Broadband Company, but now they have their separate licence and they can provide the satellite services, which include that they have the satellite or lease the satellite bandwidth and resell to other companies.” He added, “The significance of this particular is that satellite services are important because they can reach faraway and

inaccessible remote places, which is costly and sometimes impossible with the traditional infrastructure for terrestrial or fixed network.” “Satellite services are the latest trend because they offer better quality and high speed to the end-users.” Al Zadjali said that it is now up to the company or the operator (OmanSat) to announce the launch of products, including various services and packages. With regards to the pricing, he said, “The matter is totally up to the new operator and because this is a new company is not a dominant player in the market, they have flexibility in providing their own set of prices and tariffs.” On comparison with Starlink, Al Zadjali said that Starlink has its satellites, while the new company does not own any, but has agreements with satellites to lease the bandwidth from them.”

Omani biker blazes trail from Muscat to Iceland

LIJU CHERIAN
@lijucherianoman

In a remarkable feat of endurance and diplomacy, Omani adventurer Wael al Yaqoubi became the first Arab and Gulf national to reach Iceland by motorcycle overland, covering an epic 20,000 kilometres through 18 countries. His journey, launched from his hometown of Muscat in 2024, aimed not only to fulfil a personal dream but also to spotlight Oman as a premier travel destination. After traversing Gulf, Arab and European territories, Wael reached Denmark and boarded a three-day ferry to the Faroe Islands, before finally arriving on Iceland’s volcanic shores. There, he embarked on a 4,000-kilometre loop across the

legendary ‘Island of Fire and Ice,’ exploring its surreal landscapes and remote wonders. From the roaring frozen falls of Gullfoss and Seljalandsfoss to the geothermal marvels of geysers and hot springs, Wael’s journey was rich with dramatic encounters. He ventured to the stark black sands of Reynisfjara Beach, the shimmering Diamond Beach and trekked 18 kilometres on foot to summit Iceland’s highest active volcano — an expedition that offered sweeping views of an otherworldly land. In the vibrant capital of Reykjavik, where Nordic charm meets modern edge, he absorbed Iceland’s unique culture before retracing his route back through Denmark and Germany. Wael’s pioneering journey earned



Wael al Yaqoubi seen in Seyðisfjörður, east coast of Iceland with the ferry seen in the background

him a warm reception from Maitha bint Saif al Mahrouqiyah, Oman’s Ambassador to Germany, who lauded his bold venture. He was also congratulated by Ambassador Mahmoud bin Mahna al Kharousi in Iraq, underlining the pride his homeland felt at his achievement. Beyond the thrill of travel, Wael’s mission was deeply rooted in promoting Omani tourism and culture. By connecting with communities and fellow travellers, he painted a vivid picture of Oman’s scenic beauty, rich heritage and legendary hospitality. “Oman has everything a tourist dreams of — from desert dunes to lush wadis, ancient forts to modern cities,” he emphasised. The success of his expedition was the result of meticulous planning.

“I began preparing two years in advance,” Wael noted. “I studied the island’s weather patterns and terrain, selected the best season to ride and carried dehydrated food for the road.” From scorching heat across the Middle East and Europe to Iceland’s glacial chill, he faced extremes — but the toughest challenge was securing a ferry spot during the high tourist season. Despite logistical and environmental hurdles, Wael remained undeterred. His accomplishment is now seen as a landmark moment in Arab adventure tourism, a story of determination, cultural diplomacy and unyielding passion. “Dream big, plan well and let travel be the bridge that connects nations,” is his message to the youth.

Students in Japan play role in promoting Oman

OSAKA: The Sultanate of Oman underscores its position as a unique investment hub on the global investment map as well as a major tourist destination in the Gulf region.

A number of Omani students in Japan confirmed that the Sultanate of Oman's participation in Expo 2025 Osaka, Japan, provides multiple opportunities to promote the Sultanate of Oman as a prominent heritage, tourist and investment destination.

The Omani students on scholarship in Japan expressed their happiness and pride in meeting HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth. They also expressed their appreciation for their role in introducing the Sultanate of Oman and taking advantage of the Sultanate of Oman's participation in Expo 2025 Osaka, Japan, to introduce the Japanese to the Omani unique cultural identity, tourism potential, and investment opportunities in various fields.

The students expressed their willingness to contribute to promoting the country's tourism potential, distinguished cultural identity, rich cultural heritage and its promising



The Omani students on scholarship in Japan expressed their happiness and pride in meeting HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth. — ONA



investment opportunities.

Khalid bin Ahmed al Ajmi, an Omani student at the University of Tokyo explained that Expo 2025 Osaka, Japan, is one of the most prominent global events that attracts millions of visitors from around the world, with the number of visitors expected to exceed 28 million. He indicated that the Sultanate of Oman's participation with a national pavilion in this global event is a very important step as it will have an impact in highlighting the Omani identity and introducing the

Sultanate of Oman's history, culture and investment opportunities.

Al Ajmi added: "HH Sayyid Theyazin's keenness to meet with the students participating in this global event embodies his interest and sincere commitment to supporting and empowering Omani youth. Our meeting with HH Sayyid Theyazin was an exceptional moment that will remain forever in my memory due to his inspiring words, sincere feelings, and motivational messages that reinforced our sense of belonging and

responsibility." Munthir bin Ahmed al Maamari expressed his happiness over participating in the accompanying evening, which was held at the Osaka Museum of Contemporary Art under the auspices of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth. He expressed his happiness over their meeting with HH Sayyid Theyazin and exchanging views on the experience of studying artificial intelligence (AI) in Japan, adding that HH Sayyid Theyazin showed great interest in this field, stressing the

importance of joint work to build the future of the Sultanate of Oman in its renewed renaissance.

Aisha bint Hamoud al Hashimiyah from Waseda University in Tokyo stressed that the Sultanate of Oman's participation at Expo 2025 Osaka, Japan, holds a great opportunity to introduce Japanese companies and businessmen to the investment opportunities available in various economic sectors and to introduce the Japanese to the Sultanate of Oman's cultural identity, customs, and traditions as well as the tourism potential.

Fadwa bint Fahd al Rawahiyah from Hiroshima University said that the Sultanate of Oman's participation in Expo 2025 Osaka, Japan, is an opportunity to enhance cultural identity and promote investment opportunities through this global event. It also allows the Sultanate of Oman to showcase its rich heritage and ancient history as well as its tourist potential and investment opportunities. It will also provide an opportunity to exchange knowledge and expertise and attract international investors. — ONA

Oman at official launching ceremony of Expo 2025 Osaka

THE Sultanate of Oman on Saturday participated in the official launching ceremony of Expo 2025 hosted in the Japanese city of Osaka from April 13 to October 13, 2025, under the theme 'Designing the Future Society for Our Lives'. The launching ceremony was held under the auspices of His Majesty Emperor Naruhito of Japan in Osaka, Japan.

The Sultanate of Oman was represented by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Vice-Chairman of the Main Committee for the Sultanate of Oman's Participation in Expo 2025 Osaka; Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture and Commissioner-General of the Sultanate of Oman's Pavilion at Expo 2025 Osaka and Dr Mohammed bin Said al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Japan.

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Vice-Chairman of the Main Supervisory Committee of the Sultanate of Oman's Participation in Expo 2025, stated that Expo 2025 Osaka, Japan, is a leading global platform organised since 1851 with the aim of promoting international understanding and enhancing cultural exchange by displaying countries' experiences and achievements in various sectors.

The minister stated that the importance of this event lies in bringing together countries from around the world under one roof to showcase solutions and aspirations for a more sustainable and integrated future. He added that, based on the Sultanate of Oman's keenness to participate in international forums and enhance its cultural and economic communication with the world, its participation in this global event is another commitment to the principle of international cooperation and also showcases the Sultanate of Oman's unique capabilities in various fields.

The minister noted that a main committee has been formed to oversee the Sultanate of Oman's participation in Expo 2025 Osaka, Japan, under the chairmanship of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of



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QAIS BIN MOHAMMED AL YOUSEF
Minister of Commerce



Culture, Sports and Youth. A technical committee has also been formed from representatives of various stakeholders, along with private sector partners, to ensure a distinguished and effective participation. He said that the Sultanate of Oman's pavilion at Expo 2025 Osaka, Japan, is held under the theme 'Extended Connections. The theme highlights three components of people, land and water. It embodies the Sultanate of Oman's vision for cultural communication and showcases its contributions to innovation and sustainability.

The pavilion was designed with Omani innovative designers, under the supervision of the Belarab Bin Haitham Award for Architectural Designs, to reflect the national identity in a modern style that meets the requirements of the event.

The Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Vice-Chairman of the Main Committee for the Sultanate of Oman's Participation at Expo 2025, stated that the pavilion has several sections, highlighting the Sultanate of Oman's heritage, economic opportunities and development.

The minister explained that participation in Expo 2025 Osaka, Japan, is not limited to the pavilion alone, but also includes a wide range of accompanying events through which the Sultanate of Oman will showcase its economic, commercial, investment, tourism, and cultural development and potentials.

Next month, the Sultanate of Oman will organise the most important investment event within the framework of the expo to showcase the promising opportunities it offers across various sectors.

The Sultanate of Oman Pavilion at Expo 2025 Osaka, Japan, will start receiving visitors tomorrow (Sunday), under the slogan 'Sultanate of Oman - Extended Links' which is in line with the general messages presented by Expo 2025 Osaka, the minister said.

— ONA

SHORT TAKES



UTAS launches drone photography hackathon

IBRI: The University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) – Ibri has officially launched the third edition of its Drone Photography Hackathon under the theme “Soar Beyond Limits – The Sky is No Longer the Limit.” The event brings together 65 students and staff from multiple university branches to explore the future of digital content creation using drone and AI technologies.

The hackathon aims to harness modern tools of digital transformation to showcase Omani cultural and touristic landmarks through innovative visual storytelling. It focuses on drone photography training, AI-powered editing, and entrepreneurship in tourism and urban development.

Dr Al Ameer bin Nasser al Alawi, Assistant Vice-Chancellor of UTAS-Ibri, inaugurated the event and welcomed participants, emphasising the importance of integrating technology and creativity in education and development.

Workshops cover a wide range of topics including drone safety protocols, aerial photography techniques, AI editing tools, and creative content production. Participants are grouped into specialised teams and will produce short films at key tourist sites across Al Dhahirah Governorate over a 48-hour challenge period.

A panel of expert judges will evaluate the final projects based on drone operation, production quality, direction, and teamwork. Winners will be honoured in three main categories and four incentive prizes.

The hackathon reflects UTAS’s commitment to empowering students with future-ready skills, fostering innovation, and strengthening collaboration between academia and the wider community.

Initial phase of Muscat Area Traffic Study launched

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

THE initial phase of the Muscat Area Traffic Study is being carried out utilising advanced technology to gather precise data and take suitable actions to adapt to shifts in traffic patterns, according to the Municipality.

This phase is expected to last around 6 weeks and will cover all wilayats in the Muscat Governorate, and data will be collected using pneumatic rubber tubes (PRT), drones, cameras, mobile phone statistics, survey samples, and Google Maps. Automated traffic counts will be conducted at 45 locations, turning movement counts at 85 intersections and roundabouts, and 23 bridges Parking areas in selected congested areas will be surveyed to assess their rate of usage.

There are plans to resolve the traffic congestion in the capital with the implementation of some vital projects this year. Earlier speaking to the Observer, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, “There are a lot of road projects that will be implemented in 2025, which include the expansion of Muscat Expressway, the November 18 road, and the remodelling of Burj Al Sahwa roundabout. Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, said the Muscat traffic decongestion project will include the Al Mouj Street expansion.

“A government team specialised in addressing traffic congestion in Muscat Governorate is working in coordination and cooperation with the Muscat Governor’s Office to find solutions.” The remodelling of Burj



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ENG SAID BIN HAMOUD AL MAAWALI
Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

al Sahwa Roundabout will include bridges and tunnels in addition to the expansion of the lanes, and it is expected that the tender will be issued before the end of this month.”

Several questionnaires will be distributed among road users: An SMS-based origin-destination survey to understand the daily trips made by road users and the time taken for each. A direct interview-based stated preference survey to understand road users’ preferred modes of transportation and the time and cost involved What is PRT Pneumatic road tubes (PRT), also known as pneumatic road traffic counters, are devices used for traffic monitoring and data collection on roads.

These tubes are made of durable rubber or plastic and are typically placed across the road surface to measure vehicle movements, including traffic volume, speed, axle load, and classification. How does PRT work? The pneumatic road tubes work by detecting changes in pressure caused by vehicles passing over them.

They consist of flexible rubber or plastic tubes filled with air. When a vehicle’s tyres run over

the tube, it compresses, causing a pressure change that is recorded by a monitoring device. They are usually connected to a data collection device, such as a traffic counter or a data logger, which records the information collected from the tubes. The tubes are typically installed perpendicular to the direction of traffic flow, and multiple tubes may be used to gather data on different lanes or directions.

Muscat Municipality had earlier invited a tender for consultancy services to study the traffic situation in the capital from specialised international companies with experience in the field of road and public transportation to identify current traffic patterns, peak times, volume, weak spots in the existing road network, and areas most prone to traffic congestion. The study is expected to improvements to the existing road network, future connections, and the governorate’s needs for public transportation to keep pace with the growth of population and vehicles by taking into account development plans in urban and tourism sectors. The consultant will provide solutions to reduce traffic congestion in the short, medium, and long term on a priority basis. Muscat is the most densely populated governorate in the country with its six wilayats.

The Muscat Expressway project includes expanding the expressway from the Qurm traffic signal and will include new lanes, bridge widening, and upgrades at key interchanges, all within the existing right-of-way. The Muscat Expressway currently includes 15 interchanges. The Al Mouj and November 18th Street expansion project includes three lanes in each direction, traffic signals replacing roundabouts, and new service roads for commercial establishments located in the area.



MUSCAT GOVERNORATE

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (9/2025)

Muscat Municipality invites Companies specialized in the field and registered with General Secretariat of **Tender Board**, to participate and obtain tender documents from the website via the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date
PRE/24/219	Rehabilitation Works for Toilet Blocks at Muttrah Souq	29/04/2025	20/05/2025
PRE/24/109 (Re call 2)	Design and Construction of Balance Internal Roads in Boshier and Muttrah (Re call 2)	24/04/2025	11/05/2025
PRE/25/010	Construction of Public Park in Khariys Al Huboos	29/04/2025	20/05/2025
PRE/25/034	Construction of Public Park in Quriyat - Mihya Area	29/04/2025	20/05/2025
PRE/25/035	Construction of Public Park in Seeb - Al Mabela South	29/04/2025	20/05/2025
PRE/25/036	Construction of Public Park in Muttrah - Wadi Al Kabir	29/04/2025	20/05/2025
PRE/25/040	Providing Stray Dogs' Hunting team	17/04/2025	27/04/2025
PRE/25/055	Supply, Installation and Maintenance of Flag Poles in Muscat Governorate	29/04/2025	20/05/2025
PRE/25/053	Replacing Sound System of the Municipal Council in Muscat Municipality	29/04/2025	20/05/2025
PRE/25/057	Construction of Al Rawia Park in Muscat	29/04/2025	20/05/2025
PRE/25/060	Provision of Animal caregivers at the (Rafq) Service HQ	17/04/2025	27/04/2025
PRE/25/061	Supply and Installation of Surveillance Cameras in the Green Walk at Al seeb	29/04/2025	20/05/2025
PRE/25/063	Hire of Road Marking Dyeing Machinery with Crew	29/04/2025	20/05/2025
PRE/25/064	Beautification Works at Residential Area in Al Wadi Al Kabir (Second Phase)	29/04/2025	20/05/2025
PRE/25/066	Cleaning Works for Muscat Municipality Buildings	19/04/2025	30/04/2025
PRE/25/067	Structural Investigation of the Pedestrian Bridge Located in Al Sarooj Area	29/04/2025	20/05/2025
PRE/25/068	Operation, Maintaining and Cleaning of Public Toilets	29/04/2025	20/05/2025
PRE/25/069	Design, Supply and Installation of Lights Poles in Jal Walkway at Bousher	29/04/2025	20/05/2025
PRE/25/070	Consultancy Services for Supervision of Design and Construction of Water Stagnation Repair Works	29/04/2025	20/05/2025

1. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.

2. Clarification and Support:

- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).

ROP busts smuggling network

MUSCAT: The Directorate General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigations of the Royal Oman Police (ROP), in coordination with the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), arrested a resident of Egyptian nationality who was found to be involved with an international network in carrying out multiple migrant smuggling operations from various countries to European countries in exchange for financial payments.

ROP reaffirmed its efforts to combat transnational organised crime in cooperation with the international community to ensure public safety and security.

TENDER NOTICE



Sultanate of Oman

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tenders: -

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are Eligible to Participate	Tender Document Fee (R.O)
194/2025/ MAFWR/ HQ-21	Supply and Installation of Water Proof at Ware Houses in Rusail, Al Batinah North and Dhofar	Wednesday 26/3/2025	Tuesday 15/4/2025	Monday 5/5/2025	Specialized companies registered with Second, Third grades.	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies ----- (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
197/2025/ MAFWR/ HQ-22	Supply of Veterinary Preparations and Supplies for Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources - 2025	Thursday 27/3/2025	Sunday 20/4/2025	Sunday 11/5/2025	Specialized companies registered with Excellent, First Second, Third, Fourth grades	(50/-) Omani riyals for local companies ----- (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
198/2025/ MAFWR/ HQ-23	Supply Inspection Tools and Equipment for the Quarantine and Food Safety Sections at Borders	Thursday 27/3/2025	Sunday 20/4/2025	Sunday 11/5/2025	Specialized companies registered with, Fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies ----- (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.

- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.

- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration for local companies.

- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.

- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or etenderhd@gstb.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

TO ADVERTISE WITH OMAN DAILY OBSERVER - CONTACT: 71455532

WORLD

FAMINE ALARM



A truck with Afghan refugees waits to depart for Afghanistan near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. — AFP

UN WARNS US AID CUTS THREATEN AFGHANS

KABUL: Fresh US cuts to food assistance risk worsening already widespread hunger in Afghanistan, according to the World Food Programme, which warned it can support just half the people in need — and only with half rations. WFP’s acting country director Mutinta Chimuka urged donors to step up to support Afghanistan, which faces the world’s second-largest humanitarian crisis.

A third of the population of around 45 million people needs food assistance, with 3.1 million people on the brink of famine, the UN says. “With what resources we have now barely eight million people will get assistance across the year and that’s only if we get everything else that we are expecting from other donors,” Chimuka said. The agency already has been “giving a half ration to stretch the resources that we have”, she added. In the coming months, WFP usually would be assisting two million people “to prevent famine, so that’s already a huge number that we’re really worried about”, Chimuka said.

Already grappling with a 40 per cent drop in funding for this year globally, and seeing a decline in funding for Afghanistan in recent years, WFP has had to split the standard ration — designed to meet the daily minimum recommended 2,100 kilocalories per person. “It’s a basic package, but it’s really life-saving,” said Chimuka. “And we should, as a global community, be able to provide that.”

WFP, like other aid agencies, has been caught in the crosshairs of funding cuts by US President Donald Trump, who signed an executive order freezing all foreign aid for three months shortly after his inauguration in January. — AFP

Hamas expects ‘real progress’ in Cairo talks

PALESTINIAN

group Hamas expects “real progress” towards a ceasefire deal to end the war in Gaza, an official said, as senior leaders from the movement hold talks with Egyptian mediators in Cairo on Saturday. The meeting between Palestinian Hamas and Egyptian mediators comes amid ongoing violence in Gaza, as the Israeli military intercepted three projectiles fired from the territory and launched air strikes and artillery shelling on several areas. The scheduled talks in Cairo also come days after US President Donald Trump suggested an agreement to secure the release of hostages held in Gaza was close to being finalised.

A Hamas official said that the Palestinian group anticipated the meeting with Egyptian mediators would yield significant progress. “We hope the meeting will achieve real progress towards reaching an agreement to end the war, halt the aggression and ensure the full withdrawal of occupation forces from Gaza,” the official familiar with the ceasefire negotiations said on condition of anonymity, as he was not authorised to speak publicly on the matter. The delegation will be led by the group’s chief negotiator Khalil al-Hayya, he said.

According to the official, Hamas has not yet received any new ceasefire proposals, despite Israeli media reports suggesting that Israel and Egypt had exchanged draft documents outlining a potential ceasefire and hostage release agreement. “However, contacts and discussions with mediators are ongoing,” he added, accusing Israel of “continuing its aggression” in Gaza. The Times of Israel reported that Egypt’s proposal would involve the release of eight living hostages and eight bodies, in exchange for



Palestinians wait to receive their portion of a hot meal, at the Nuseirat refugee camp, Gaza. — AFP

The meeting between Palestinian Hamas and Egyptian mediators comes amid ongoing violence in Gaza, as the Israeli military intercepted three projectiles fired from the territory and launched air strikes and artillery shelling on several areas.

a truce lasting between 40 and 70 days and a substantial release of Palestinian prisoners.

President Trump said during a cabinet meeting this week that “we’re getting close to getting them (hostages in Gaza) back”. Trump’s Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff was also quoted in an Israeli media report as saying “A very serious deal is taking shape, it’s a matter of days”.

Israel resumed its Gaza strikes on March 18, ending a two-month ceasefire with Hamas. Since then, more than 1,500 people have been killed, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory to which Israel cut off aid more than a month ago. Dozens of these strikes have killed “only women and children,” according to a report by UN human rights office. The report

also warned that expanding Israeli evacuation orders were resulting in the “forcible transfer” of people into ever-shrinking areas, raising “real concern as to the future viability of Palestinians as a group in Gaza”.

On Saturday, Israel continued with its offensive. Gaza’s civil defence agency reported an Israeli air strike on a house in Gaza City on Saturday morning. Footage of the aftermath of the strike showed the bodies of four men, wrapped in white shrouds, at a local hospital, while several individuals gathered to offer prayers before the funeral. The Israeli military, meanwhile, said its air force intercepted three projectiles that were identified as crossing into Israeli territory from southern Gaza on Saturday.

— AFP



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA) TENDER

Tender Number	Tender Title	Company Grade:	Tender Fee	Dates		
				Distribution Till	Last Day to receive Clarifications	Bid Submission Date
1/2025 General Tender	Request for tender to provide cleaning and maintenance services for the headquarters of the Academic Accreditation Authority and Quality Assurance of Education	Excellent and First, Second, Third & Fourth	OMR 25	28 Apr 2025	1 MAY 2025	22 MAY 2025

The Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation & Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA) is hereby inviting all local specialized bidders to participate in this TENDER as per the following instructions, in addition to all terms of TENDER enclosed in the TENDER documents.

A. Project Brief and Purchase of Tender Documents
The Bidders may obtain the TENDER document by registering the company at eTendering System (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

B. Submission
All Proposals should be SUBMITTED ONLINE AT e-TENDERING System (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
Proposals to be accepted for evaluation which will be submitted through the eTendering System ONLY.

C. Correspondence Tender Inquiry:
All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online through the eTendering System ONLY.

e. Tendering System Inquiry:
All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200
All correspondence pertaining to the OAAAQA tender must be directed to the following email address and phone number: tenders@oaaaqa.gov.om

OAAAQA Business Hours
Sunday – Thursday, 7:30 – 14:30 Oman Time, (+4 UTC)
OAAAQA Business Hours are to be considered in all correspondences.
Head of the Internal Tender Committee.

COLD WINDS SWEEP BEIJING, DISRUP TRAVEL



A woman walks during a sandstorm in Yinchuan, in northern China. — AFP

BEIJING: China’s capital hunkered down on Saturday as rare typhoon-like gales swept northern regions, forcing the closure of historic sites and disrupting travel while bringing late snowfalls and hailstone showers in some areas. Windows shook and trees crashed onto footpaths and cars, rocked by gusts of wind driven by a cold vortex from neighbouring Mongolia that sent temperatures plunging.

The winds, which started on Friday, are set to continue, packing gusts of up to 150 kph, the official Xinhua news agency said. They brought late snowfalls in Inner Mongolia and hailstones in southern China. Beijing issued its second-highest gale alert this weekend, for the first time in a decade, warning 22 million residents to avoid non-essential travel as winds could potentially break April records dating from 1951. After earlier warnings, some residents said they were very nervous but still managed to get around. The winds dominated social media chats, with many people expressing concern for food delivery workers braving the conditions. — Reuters

The New York Times

FBI suspends employee on Patel’s so-called enemies list



ADAM GOLDMAN

The writer is a reporter who writes about national security

THE FBI has suspended an analyst on Kash Patel’s so-called enemies list after Patel told lawmakers that the bureau under his leadership would stay out of the political fray and not punish employees for partisan reasons. Last week, the bureau placed the analyst, Brian Auten, on administrative leave, according to people familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they feared retaliation. The reasons for the suspension remain unclear. The suspension is likely to raise questions about whether the move was retaliatory, and about how closely Patel would stick to his promise, made during his confirmation hearing in January, that the agency would rise above partisanship despite pressure from President Donald Trump’s allies to fire employees who took part in investigations that conservatives have condemned.

The suspension of Auten, who had already been disciplined and questioned in a criminal inquiry, will also likely intensify distrust of Patel among employees who have watched senior leaders forced out in recent months with no explanation. Auten worked on two major investigations that angered Trump and Patel, including the

FBI’s investigation into Russian meddling during the 2016 presidential election. He was also involved in analysing the information found on Hunter Biden’s laptop, a discovery that roiled the 2020 presidential campaign.

Patel has called the Russia investigation a hoax, and singled out Auten in his book, “Government Gangsters.” In the book, Patel claimed that the FBI was trying to “hide and spin” what he called “the Biden family corruption” buried in the laptop, even as agents investigated the matter. “Government Gangsters” also included a list of 60 names in an appendix called “Members of the Executive Branch Deep State.” Auten was among the names listed in the appendix. At his confirmation hearing, Patel denied that it was an enemies list. “It’s a total mischaracterisation,” he told senators. He later added: “There will be no politicisation at the FBI. There will be no retributive actions taken by any FBI, should I be confirmed as FBI director.”

The suspension of Auten came after he and others had been disciplined for serious mistakes found in the FBI’s applications for a secret surveillance warrant involving a former Trump campaign adviser. Auten

The suspension is likely to raise questions about whether the move was retaliatory, and about how closely Patel would stick to his promise, made during his confirmation hearing in January, that the agency would rise above partisanship despite pressure from President Donald Trump’s allies to fire employees who took part in investigations that conservatives have condemned.

played an important role in unmasking the primary source behind a dossier of rumours and unproven assertions about Trump. The surveillance warrant applications relied in part on the dossier that Auten had examined extensively.

In the wake of the Russia investigation, known as Crossfire Hurricane, Auten had been suspended for 30 days, people said. After Patel became director, Auten was moved out of the counterintelligence division, one of the people said. In his book, Patel denounced Auten. “Yet just like his superiors, Auten has faced no real accountability in light of these findings,” he wrote.

“The fact that Auten was not fired from the FBI and prosecuted for his part in the Russia Gate conspiracy is a national embarrassment.”

The Justice Department’s inspector general found that FBI officials had sufficient reason to open Crossfire Hurricane, and did not find evidence that the inquiry was politically motivated. “We did not find documentary or testimonial evidence that political bias or improper motivation influenced” officials’ decision to open the investigation, the report said.

Trump undergoes first physical since retaking office



MAGGIE HABERMAN

The author is a White House correspondent for The New York Times

President Donald Trump, the oldest man to be inaugurated as president, visited Walter Reed National Military Medical Center for a physical on Friday, the first of his new administration and one that he said included cardiology and cognitive tests. Trump, 78, said on Friday evening that the results would be released on Sunday. “I don’t know what to tell you other than I got every answer right,” he said.

“Overall, I felt I was in very good shape,” Trump said. “Good heart. A good soul. Very good soul.” He then mocked his immediate predecessor, Joe Biden, whose mental acuity he has long attacked, saying he “wanted to be a little different than Biden.”

The physical could offer the first glimpse of the health of Trump, who has often been guarded about even the most basic medical information since he was shot in an assassination attempt at a campaign rally in July. He has long been phobic about germs and disease. According to many of his former presidential and business aides, Trump has tried to avoid ever appearing sick.

In 2015, his personal physician at the time, Dr Harold Bornstein, wrote in a note to the news media that Trump, then a presidential candidate, had “extraordinary” strength and stamina. Bornstein told CNN in 2018 that Trump had personally dictated the letter.

But the president at times has offered few details about his health. He went for an unexplained visit to Walter Reed in 2019; aides said after his term ended that it was for a colonoscopy. In October 2020, Trump went to Walter Reed as he was battling a far more aggressive case of Covid than his advisers had revealed, one that had infiltrated his lungs. Public health officials from his administration later said privately that had Trump not been given monoclonal antibodies as a treatment, he may not have survived.

Biden was previously the oldest man to enter office, also at 78. Trump, who had a four-year gap between presidencies, was five months and six days older than Biden was when he was inaugurated. During his campaign in 2020, Trump became preoccupied with proving that his own mental acuity was fine, describing to an interviewer a sample of the kind of cognitive test he took and the words he said he had to remember and repeat in the right order: “Person. Woman. Man. Camera. TV.”

Trump has frequently mocked the age and mental acumen of Biden, who declined visibly during his term. Trump was more visible than Biden during the 2024 campaign and holds some form of an event in front of news cameras multiple days a week. But he has had his own verbal stumbles.

US, Ukraine reopen talks on contentious minerals deal

A Ukrainian delegation was in Washington on Friday for a new round of talks about a deal that would give the United States a major stake in Ukraine’s natural resources. The visit marked the latest twist in a monthslong saga that has seen Ukraine and the US haggling over a deal that President Donald Trump sees as a way to “recoup” past US aid to Ukraine, and which President Volodymyr Zelensky hopes can help secure defence guarantees for his country.

The talks will be the first in-person meeting since the White House presented a revised draft agreement that revived tough demands Ukraine had earlier rejected — effectively bringing negotiations back to square one. The talks in Washington, which were expected to start on Friday and last two days, will be mostly technical and will not involve top officials, officials in Ukraine said.

The Ukrainian delegation is led by Taras Kachka, a deputy economy minister in charge of trade, and includes representatives from the ministries of economy and justice. The White House has not provided details on the talks.

The new proposal reverts to Trump’s initial demand that Ukraine repay the United States for the billions it has received in military and financial aid since Russia’s attack three years ago. As in earlier proposals, Ukraine would have to contribute half its revenue from natural resource projects — including critical minerals, oil and gas, as well as related infrastructure such as ports and pipelines — to a US-controlled investment fund. Profits from the fund would be reinvested in Ukrainian natural resource projects, though the exact share of such profit remained unclear.

The new draft also echoes earlier versions by omitting any mention of security guarantees for Ukraine, a provision that Ukraine had long pressed for and managed to include in a draft last month — but one that Washington had long resisted. The new proposal includes stricter terms than earlier drafts: Washington would claim all profit from the fund until Ukraine repaid at least the equivalent of the US aid received during the war plus 4% annual interest.



President Donald Trump, right, meets with President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine in the Oval Office, Feb. 28.



CONSTANT MÉHEUT

The writer is a reporter, currently covering the war in Ukraine

The new draft also echoes earlier versions by omitting any mention of security guarantees for Ukraine, a provision that Ukraine had long pressed for and managed to include in a draft last month — but one that Washington had long resisted.

The United States also would retain a “right of first offer” on new projects and the power to veto sales of Ukrainian resources to third countries. And in the first year of the agreement, Ukraine would be prohibited from offering any investment projects to third parties with better financial or economic terms than those offered to the United States.

The fund would be controlled by the International Development Finance Corp., a US government agency responsible for investing in companies and projects abroad. The agency would nominate three board members — while Ukraine would have only two — and would oversee each project where earnings from the fund are invested.

The United States opened the negotiations in February with tough financial demands that Zelensky warned would take “generations of Ukrainians” to repay. After intense talks, Ukraine managed to soften some of Washington’s toughest demands and reached an agreement that it considered more acceptable. But the deal collapsed after a disastrous Oval Office meeting between Trump and Zelensky. The debacle prompted the US to briefly suspend military aid to Ukraine. Since then, Ukraine has treaded carefully to avoid angering the White House.

Now demands that Ukraine had previously succeeded in removing

— that Washington retains control of the fund and that Ukraine repays past US aid — have resurfaced in the latest proposal. The security guarantees also disappeared. Officials in Ukraine say they consider the new demands to be an opening bid for further negotiations.

Ukraine’s Foreign Minister, Andrii Sybiha, said any future agreement should be mutually beneficial and should not jeopardise Ukraine’s accession to the European Union by granting preferential treatment to US businesses.

“This is a key principle for the Ukrainian side,” Sybiha said this week. Still, Ukrainian officials have not rejected the new American demands outright, mindful that the past refusals strained US-Ukraine relations. Instead, they have framed the new round of talks as constructive discussions.

“This dialogue reflects the strategic interests of both nations and our shared commitment to building a strong, transparent partnership,” Yulia Svyrydenko, the Ukrainian economy minister, said. Ukraine is seeking consulting services to advise on the minerals deal and “protect Ukraine’s national interests.”

A government order published on Tuesday stated that \$2.7 million had been allocated for hiring consultants with experience in public debt management and lawyers.

OPINION

‘Adolescence,’ a drama about boys, screens, and society



DR HAMED AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

THE TV SERIES ‘Adolescence’ starts with a police squad raiding a house to arrest a 13-year-old Jamie who was sleeping in his bed. At the police station, we are shown CCTV footage of Jamie following a female classmate of the same age, arguing with her in the park then stabbing her with a knife. We are told that the girl is dead and Jamie is the killer.

As I watched this I kept thinking that the police made a mistake and someone else would turn out to be the killer, not Jamie. In the third episode, we see Jamie in custody being interviewed by a female psychologist who tries to explore the rage he has against the girl he murdered because she rejected him, calling him an incel, a term used to describe a man who is unable to attract women.

The series attempts to display the concept of ‘toxic masculinity’ and how it drives some young men to behave aggressively toward women. It makes references to popular social media influencers who spread such ideologies, making young boys believe that

dominance and emotional repression define manhood.

We learn how teenagers from Jamie’s school use coded language and emojis on social media platforms such as Instagram to bully each other in a way not noticeable to parents and teachers which makes its impact more devastating.

The final episode shows how Jamie’s family trying to find an answer to the question “How did they raise such a monster”? Did they turn a blind eye to the content he watched online? Did the father show disappointment that Jamie was not fulfilling the image of a ‘real man’ by not excelling in sports?

Psychologists often define toxic masculinity as a cluster of behaviours that foster the devaluation of women, homophobia, and violence. In many societies, boys are taught early that to be a ‘real man’ means to be tough, silent, assertive, and emotionally numb. Those who don’t fit that mould, or those who try and fail can become angry, ashamed, or destructive.

The series ‘Adolescence’ doesn’t offer

Psychologists often define toxic masculinity as a cluster of behaviours that foster the devaluation of women, homophobia, and violence

easy answers nor does it dive into the roots of toxic masculinity, Instead, it leaves the audience with the question of what is society teaching young boys, not through lectures, but through our silences, our screens, and our culture.

It was interesting to learn that ‘Adolescence’ received an excellent public reception including a positive remark from the UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer who described it as “a torch that shines intensely brightly on a combination of issues that many people don’t know how to respond to”.

While the fictional events in ‘Adolescence’ take place in the UK, the topics addressed are relevant to communities elsewhere, especially since social media content is consumed by young people across the globe.

In my opinion, the series should be screened for free to teenagers, parents and teachers so they can all benefit from the issues discussed. Parents and policymakers also need to be aware of the impact of social media and what can be done to protect youngsters from toxic content.

EU WOOS NEW PARTNERS FROM ASIA TO LATIN AMERICA

RAZIYE AKKOC AND CAMILLE CAMDESSUS

SHAKEN BY Donald Trump’s tariff blitz, the EU has embarked on a charm offensive to diversify its alliances in Asia and beyond, with summits lined up back-to-back and trade talks launched in all directions. When the US president unleashed his crippling “Liberation Day” tariffs on April 2, EU chief Ursula von der Leyen gave her first reaction, not in Brussels, but from Uzbekistan where she was in talks to bolster trade ties with Central Asia. Although Trump has since rowed back with a 90-day pause, the European Union still faces tariffs of 10 per cent on a vast majority of goods and higher on steel, aluminium and cars -- with an uphill challenge to negotiate a way out of the standoff.

Faced with Trump’s disruptive protectionism, Brussels is pulling out the stops to salvage its 1.6 trillion euro (\$1.8 trillion) relationship with Europe’s main trade partner the United States. But it is also trumpeting its mission to cultivate trade ties elsewhere. “Europe continues to focus on diversifying its trade partnerships, engaging with countries that account for 87 per cent of global trade and share our commitment to a free and open exchange of goods, services, and ideas,” Von der Leyen said last Thursday.

The following day China openly urged Europe to join forces -- as Beijing wages a trade war with the United States with tit-for-tat levies -- but while there are opportunities in the relationship, the path is also fraught with peril.

And the EU’s diversification efforts may hit roadblocks including the fact that the United States has a market power and demand unparalleled worldwide, experts say, which makes it hard to replace -- especially in the short term.

“Rerouting trade routes and flows will take time. It does not happen overnight,” said Varg Folkman, of the European Policy Centre (EPC).

The EU’s trade relations diary has been packed full since January. The bloc made a show of agreeing to strengthen trade ties with Mexico days before Trump was sworn in, and reopened commerce negotiations with Malaysia on his inauguration day. Then in February and March, the EU’s top officials met leaders of India and South Africa for talks on topics including trade, while actively pursuing closer Canada ties.

This week alone, the EU agreed to launch talks for a free trade deal with the United Arab Emirates and confirmed a high-level summit in China in July, hot on the heels of a meeting in Japan.

And top EU officials will meet with Latin American and Caribbean states in November, with trade high on the agenda. But before the EU starts striking new trade deals, the European Commission has previous agreements to get past member states including the Mercosur accord clinched in December. — AFP

What the West can learn from Oman...

DURING MY last visit to the United Kingdom, I realised I no longer felt fully British — or perhaps truly English. This unsettling feeling made me reflect on what it means to call oneself British, English, Omani, or even Chinese.

Is it the passport, the place of birth, ancestry, skin colour, sense of humour or mannerisms? Or is it something deeper? To identify with a country, I believe you must feel a sense of belonging.

Pride in a country’s history, traditions and achievements also plays a part, as does the willingness to defend it. But I don’t believe it has anything to do with race. With 99.9 per cent of human DNA identical and only 0.1 per cent determining external features like skin colour, the concept of race is scientifically and morally flawed. It is a social construct with no biological basis.

Last summer, though I was glad to see family, I felt no sense of belonging in England. Had I become ‘Omanised,’ or had England changed? Likely both.

For the first time, I saw that freedom of speech - once a cornerstone of British identity - had diminished. I could no longer freely express my views on political issues, especially about Palestine. Like many in Oman and the UK, I am appalled by the suffering of Palestinians and condemn Israel’s actions in Gaza as genocide. My moral philosophy is simple: if you harm the innocent, you are my enemy and if you defend the innocent, you are my friend - regardless of religion or nationality. I support those who defend Palestinians and condemn those complicit in their suffering, including my own UK government.

When I say I support groups involved in defending innocent Palestinians, it is not an endorsement of their broader political ideologies. Just as one could have supported Stalin’s Russia



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A general view of Muscat. — Reuters

in resisting Nazi Germany without supporting Stalinism, I support those opposing genocide without agreeing with all their views.

However, in today’s Britain, merely voicing support for these groups could result in arrest. I no longer felt safe criticising Zionism or articulating my moral stance. This was just one reason I no longer felt at home in England. Living in Oman has transformed my perspective. Being Muslim and married to an Omani has also changed how I see my birthplace. My wife feels uneasy wearing a hijab in England due to rising anti-Muslim sentiment, fuelled by irresponsible media. She now fears walking alone in public. Prejudice against non-white individuals or those with foreign accents has become more common, often seen as disqualifiers of being “truly English.”

In contrast, Oman has been a powerful force of inclusion in my life. I live in a community of over 5,000 people representing more than 80 nationalities. Although Oman is not free from racism, in 30 years, I’ve rarely experienced it. Here, mosques stand beside churches

and temples; Muslims worship side by side. Omanis live and work peacefully with people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Africa, and the West.

What sets Oman apart is not just its diversity but the absence of fear around it. In the West, immigration and ethnic differences are often framed as threats. In Oman, under His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and the legacy of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, a quiet civic ethos of respect has flourished. Ibadism, the dominant Islamic tradition in Oman, fosters tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Combined with Oman’s seafaring history of cultural exchange, it has created a society proud of its identity - without excluding others.

Oman offers the West a compelling example: national identity and pluralism are not mutually exclusive. Religious diversity can thrive within social harmony. Inclusion does not require assimilation. At a time when division is widening in the West, especially in the US, Oman offers a model worth studying - and emulating.

Wooooo Hooooo: It’s the Weekend!



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

STRANGE...

BUT THE ‘Black-Eyed Peas,’ a group of musicians with their origins in the mid 1990’s wrote a song that somewhat rearranges our week. ‘I Got a Feeling,’ launched in 2009 and was a stunning success, topping the Billboard Charts for 26 consecutive weeks, a record at the time. The group was originally put together by William Adams Jr, Alan Limbo, Mooky Mook, Dante Santiago and DJMotiv8, as a concept group, exploring musical diversity with jazz and rhythm; and blues influences. That first iteration, while having a loyal following, a distinctive, almost retro style, was very different from the ‘gansta-rap’ style of the day, but their first album was never released and they, in musical parlance, stalled. Of the originals, William Adams Jr, was to achieve prominence across the wider entertainment industry as ‘Will.I.Am;’ and Alan Pineda Limbo, re-identified himself as ‘apl.de.ap;’ To join the two were Jaime Luis Gomez, otherwise known as ‘Taboo.’ I guess ‘strange’ doesn’t really say it all, does it? Changing what appear to be perfectly good names, given by their parents, to a confusing litany of identifiers... oh well. However, the same sophistication that had earmarked their earlier venture, this time around found an appreciative audience, perhaps in the new social awareness of black

America and prominent soloists Macy Gray and Kim Hill were guest artists across several of their releases between 1995 and 2002. Then Stacey May ‘Fergie’ Ferguson joined them, offering her unique voice, the antonym to their diversity, the missing piece of their puzzle, and they went stratospheric! Fergie’s soulful ‘Where Is the Love,’ led the charge; ‘Shut Up,’ consolidated their musical ‘creds,’ culminating in a Grammy in 2005, their unique ‘Don’t Phunk With My Heart,’ and ‘Don’t Lie,’ and ‘My Humps,’ created a legacy that would endure until 2011. Anyway, back to ‘I Got a Feeling.’ It’s a cracking tune and everyone, if nothing else, can sing along to the repetitive words and melodies, not always at the right time, or in the right tune, but IGaF inspires smiles, joy and celebration, with its falsetto “Wooooooooh hooooooo,” and “tonight’s gonna be a good night.” But why has it always piqued my fancy? Because it restyles and remodels the week. Amidst all the repetition and “Tonight’s gonna be a good night-ing,” they sing, “Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, Friday and Saturday, Saturday to Sunday,” doing what many of us have always asked for... two Saturdays in a week, or a weekend! Apart from its catchy lyrics, its 100% weekend and party vibe, very few people know that it was inspired by David (Ravy Davy) Guetta, the French-born icon of dance-

Of the originals, William Adams Jr, was to achieve prominence across the wider entertainment industry as ‘Will.I.Am;’ and Alan Pineda Limbo, re-identified himself as ‘apl.de.ap

pop collaboration, whether as a producer or DJ, they say, “everything Guetta, turns to gold.” Guetta, in 2009, worked around several ‘beats,’ or unfinished tunes, with Will.I.Am and when the American came up with ‘tonight’s gonna be a good night,’ as the hook, Guetta immediately recognised its potential and the most downloaded tune in America’s history was born. Will.I.Am, for his part, recognised that young people were looking for, if not escape, then stimulation, joy, noise and dedicated it to “the party people, who just want to go out, to lose themselves, to escape and have fun.” He felt that with times being hard and drugs meaning trouble with a capital ‘T,’ here was something to embrace. He was surely right and even Guetta, who two years later was to release the greatest dance anthem ever, with Kelly Rowland, ‘When Love Takes Over,’ credits the Black-Eyed Peas collaboration with setting the standard, musically and socially. I’m no great ‘muso’ or music aficionado, but this tune has relevance to so many of us. It’s liberating! It helps us to understand that we can see our lives and our weekends, in different ways. We do have the power, not only to embrace change, but to make it happen, to work hard and play harder. So often, we do know what we want and where we are headed, but we are rarely bold enough to embrace the destination and so, the journey.

EU CONSIDERS DEFENCE FUND TO EASE DEBT CONCERNS

JAN STRUPCZEWSKI AND KAROL BADOHAL

European Union finance ministers started talks on Saturday over a joint defence fund that would buy and own defence equipment and charge members a fee for its use, as a way to spend more on defence without burdening national accounts with more debt. The fund, called the European Defence Mechanism, was proposed by the Bruegel think tank in a paper for the ministerial discussions as a way of addressing concerns about how highly-indebted countries could pay for costly military equipment. It is part of a broader European effort to prepare for a potential attack from Russia as EU governments realise they can no longer fully rely on the United States for their security. “It’s a good starting point for discussion,” Portuguese Finance Minister Joaquim Miranda Sarmento said. Several other EU countries also expressed initial support, noting that setting up such a fund could be technically relatively simple because it would be based on the model of the euro zone bailout fund, the European Stability Mechanism. “We’ll still have several issues in terms of the mandate, the finance, the contributions, the leverage in the market. There are several issues on the financing, but also on the military aspect,” Sarmento said. The EU is already looking to boost military spending by 800 billion euros (\$876 billion) over the next four years by loosening its fiscal rules on defence investment and jointly borrowing for large defence projects against the EU budget. But such options increase national debt — a worry for many high-debt countries — while the Bruegel idea would provide a way to keep some of the defence investment off national books. The fund would be established under an intergovernmental treaty and have substantial paid-in and callable capital, allowing it to borrow on the market. The EDM could admit members from outside the EU, such as Britain, Ukraine or Norway. Because the fund would own the equipment it buys, the debt incurred to pay for it would stay on the EDM’s books, rather than national accounts. The EDM would also promote a single European market for defence equipment to lower costs and pool resources. Defence procurement and production in the 27-nation EU is highly fragmented with at least seven different types of tanks, nine types of self-propelled howitzers and seven types of infantry fighting vehicles, which increases costs, reduces interoperability and hinders economies of scale. “We have to consider the possibility of creating new instruments... to reinforce the defence capacities of Europe,” Sarmento said. The fund could focus on “strategic enablers” — costly military infrastructure and equipment armies need to operate — now often provided by the United States. — Reuters

How Africa can respond to foreign-aid cuts?

A GLOBAL STORM is gathering — and Africa is directly in its path. Under President Donald Trump, the United States has frozen \$40 billion in USAID funding, slashing 83 per cent of grants. European donor countries are also drastically cutting their foreign-aid commitments, signalling a broader shift in priorities. The devastating effects are already being felt across Africa, particularly in sectors like health care, education and social services, which have long relied on external support. For decades, African governments have depended heavily on foreign aid, often at the expense of building sustainable domestic financing systems. But the current wave of aid cuts underscores an uncomfortable truth: foreign aid is inherently unreliable. It can be paused, reduced, or redirected at any time, without warning and is often subject to political shifts in donor countries. The current financial crisis, then, should serve as a wake-up call. African countries must reclaim control of their futures by adopting bold, innovative strategies to close funding gaps and build resilient, self-sufficient health systems. To this end, African governments must invest in homegrown financing solutions for essential public services. In the health sector, the main focus should be achieving universal health coverage through a robust, well-funded primary healthcare (PHC) system. Most donor-funded health initiatives — vaccinations, childcare, nutrition, sanitation and disease control — fall squarely within the PHC framework. According to the World Health Organization, up to 90 per cent of an individual’s healthcare needs can be addressed at the PHC level. Focusing on prevention and health promotion thus remains the fastest and most cost-effective way to improve health outcomes across Africa. Preventive PHC measures such as childhood vaccinations, hypertension screenings, prenatal care and nutrition services could significantly reduce mortality rates among mothers and children under five. Malnutrition alone contributes to nearly half of all deaths



African governments must invest in homegrown financing solutions for essential public services.



IFEANYI M NSOFOR

The writer is a public-health physician and behavioural-science researcher, serves on the Global Fellows Advisory Board at the Atlantic Institute

among children in this age group, underscoring the urgent need for early, community-based care. Unfortunately, more than four decades after the 1978 Alma-Ata Declaration defined PHC as the foundation of equitable healthcare, many of its goals remain unfulfilled. Consequently, African governments must develop independent health financing mechanisms to ensure long-term accessibility and accountability. Health insurance represents an opportunity for African countries to draw on their cultural traditions of collective responsibility and community-based support. South Africa’s Zulu people live by the principle of Ubuntu — “I am because you are” — while the Igbo people of Nigeria uphold Igwèbùiké (“strength in unity”). These deeply rooted values mirror the essence of health insurance: protect individuals by pooling resources. Rwanda and Morocco offer compelling models for strengthening PHC systems and expanding access. Rwanda’s community-based health insurance, rolled out nationwide in 2004, now covers more than 90 per cent of the population, making it one of Africa’s most effective health financing models. The scheme is funded through a combination of member premiums, government contributions, international donors and other mechanisms.

It is also supported by roughly 59,000 community health workers, who serve as vital links between households and formal services. Over the past two decades, the programme has reduced financial barriers and decentralised service delivery, bringing health care to the communities that need it most. In Morocco, the government introduced a dual national health insurance system in 2005: Assurance Maladie Obligatoire (AMO) for workers in the formal sector and (Régime d’Assistance Médicale) for informal workers. In 2022, these programmes were consolidated into the AMO-Tadamon programme, enabling beneficiaries to access both public and private facilities. This reform not only eased pressure on public-health facilities but also promoted equitable access through strategic financing, with insurance coverage surging from just 15 per cent in 2005 to nearly 80 per cent today. In 2023, the World Bank approved a \$450 million programme-for-results loan to advance universal health coverage in Morocco and increase access to quality care. The need for universal coverage in Africa is particularly urgent as the continent faces a surge in noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), including hypertension, heart disease, diabetes and cancer. Collectively, NCDs — driven by unhealthy diets, sedentary lifestyles and excessive alcohol and sugar consumption — claim 41 million lives annually, with 32 million deaths occurring in low- and middle-income countries. As foreign aid shrinks, African leaders must adopt bold policies that encourage healthier lifestyles and boost domestic revenue. One such solution is taxation. As the WHO’s Sugar Tax Report shows, taxing sugary beverages reduces consumption and lowers the risk of obesity and diabetes. Experts at the recent Global NCD Alliance Forum underscored the need for stronger excise taxes across Africa to curb the growing NCD epidemic and generate sustainable revenue streams for public-health investments. ©Project Syndicate, 2025

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



Manchester City's Kevin De Bruyne celebrates scoring their first goal. — Reuters

DE BRUYNE SHINES AS MAN CITY THUMP PALACE

MANCHESTER, UNITED KINGDOM: Manchester City stormed back from two goals down to thrash Crystal Palace 5-2 as Kevin De Bruyne’s masterclass kept alive their top five challenge on Saturday.

Pep Guardiola’s side were in danger of suffering a major setback in their bid to reach the Champions League after goals from Eberechi Eze and Chris Richards put Palace in control at the Etihad Stadium.

But, in his first home match since announcing he will leave at the end of the season, De Bruyne stole the show with the kind of dynamic display that made him one of the Premier League’s all-time greats before his recent injury-plagued decline.

The Belgian midfielder, who has been at City since 2015, netted to spark the revival before Omar Marmoush equalised late in the first half.

Mateo Kovacic converted De Bruyne’s assist to put City ahead after the interval and goals from youngsters James McAtee and Nico O’Reilly sealed the stirring escape act.

The only concern for Guardiola was an injury to Ederson that forced the City keeper to come off in the second half.

Guardiola said this week he was optimistic City would qualify for the Champions League because their “spirit” is back after a troubled campaign.

City had dropped out of the top five after Newcastle’s win at Leicester on Monday, but this much-needed victory lifted them into fourth place.

Although City are back in the Champions League places, they are still not in control of their own destiny.

Fifth-placed Chelsea will go back above them if they beat struggling Ipswich on Sunday, while sixth-placed Newcastle are only two points behind and have two games in hand.

Guardiola could have been in an even worse position however after his creaky defence was ruthlessly exposed in the sixth minute.

Daniel Munoz’s pass sent Ismaila Sarr racing down the flank to deliver a low cross that Eze finished with ease at the far post.

City were in disarray at the back and Oliver Glasner’s men punished them again in the 21st minute.

Ederson failed to make contact with his attempt to punch clear from Adam Wharton’s corner and Richards muscled in front of Ruben Dias to head home from close-range.

Semi-automated offside technology — being used in the Premier League for the first time this weekend — disallowed a third goal for Palace after Eze had finished another flowing move.

De Bruyne is a shadow of the player who was so instrumental in City’s run of six titles in seven seasons.

But the 33-year-old rolled back the years to inspire City’s fightback, serving notice with a ferocious 25-yard strike that cannoned back off the post.

Unlucky not to score minutes earlier, De Bruyne reduced the deficit in the 33rd minute, lashing a thunderous free-kick past Henderson via the post.

City suddenly had all the momentum and Marmoush hauled them level in the 36th minute.

De Bruyne’s header from McAtee’s cross reached Ilkay Gundogan, whose sliced effort reach Marmoush to drive in his seventh goal since arriving from Eintracht Frankfurt in the January transfer window. — AFP

Seeb, Oman Club secure crucial wins in OPL

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

SEEB CLUB managed to achieve an important 1-0 victory over their guest Bahla in a postponed match from the 16th round of the Omantel League. The match was held on Friday evening at the Seeb Sports Stadium, allowing Seeb to continue leading the standings on their own.

The game began with both teams cautiously testing each other, but Seeb soon imposed their clear dominance over the proceedings, while Bahla retreated into a defensive posture. Al Seeb’s attempts created constant pressure on goalkeeper Salah al Handhali’s net, but the final touch was missing from the attackers. Seeb came close to opening the scoring in the 43rd minute when the referee awarded a penalty after a handball by a Bahla defender. However, Omar al Malki missed the spot kick his initial shot was saved by the goalkeeper and his follow up effort went off target ending the first half in a goalless draw.

In the second half, Seeb continued their attacking pressure and finally broke Bahla’s defence in the 60th minute through Arshad al Alawi, who met a cross and fired it directly into the net, scoring the only goal of the match.

Following the goal, Al Seeb’s coach turned to his bench, making several substitutions, while Bahla’s coach responded with two changes, bringing on Al Qassim al Salimi and Hamoud al Buraidi. The latter nearly scored an equaliser with a low shot inside the box, but it narrowly missed the post. Despite both teams exchanging attempts in the final minutes, Seeb held onto their lead until the final whistle, collecting three valuable points that raised their tally to 44, keeping them at the top of the league. Meanwhile, Bahla remained at 19 points in eighth place.

Oman Downs Al Shabab with Al Maashari’s Goal, Strengthens Hold on Third Place

Oman Club clinched a valuable 1-0 away win over Al Shabab in a postponed match from the 15th week of the 2024/2025 Omantel League season. The game took place on Friday evening at Al Shabab Stadium.



From the match between Oman Club and Al Shabab

The only goal of the match came early in the 16th minute of the first half, after a perfectly executed direct free kick by Mohammed al Maashari that found the back of the net, giving his team an early advantage.

Oman Club players delivered a strong performance both defensively and offensively, dominating most of the match and displaying clear coordination across

all three lines. In contrast, Al Shabab tried to get back into the game and push for an equaliser, but Oman’s defence stood firm, successfully closing the spaces and neutralising any threats.

With this victory, Oman Club raised their tally to 31 points, maintaining their position in third place in the league standings, while Al Shabab remained at 20 points in sixth place.

Oman U-17 hopes disappear to qualify for WC

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

OMAN U-17 team hopes to attend at Fifa U-17 World Cup Qatar 2025 were dashed after their 2-2 draw against North Korea in the concluding match of group D at AFC U17 Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2025. The draw result meant progressing of North Korea as group runners-up as they reached to five points while Oman team placed in third position with four points only from one victory against Iran 2-1 and a 2-2 draw with North Korea beside the loss against Tajikistan 2-1 in the opener. The group leaders Tajikistan stun Iran 3-1 in the concluding match of the group stage to confirm their top spot while Iran warped up their campaign at the last position with one point only.

Oman head coach Anwar al Habsi said post the match that the team’s midfield was one of



Oman player fights to head the ball

our negatives. “The deficiency of middle line of the team proved one of the defining factors. The players lost the ball in midfield were one of our key negatives,” he added

“In overall, attending in the Asian Cup finals was a good experience for the team and the boys. The players must trust themselves more and work harder in the upcoming matches. I am confident they

have more to provide in the forthcoming events” he ended.

On the other hand, the head coach of North Korea Thae Song expressed his happiness with the match result. “I am very pleased with the boys performance and more happy about this result. The team worked very hard and since very long to achieve this moment. The players are happy to have qualified for the World

Cup,” Coach Thae Song added

“Despite putting more emphasis in the defending line, we have received two goals. I believe we need to work harder in the coming days to strengthen the defending line in the upcoming match. For the main assignment at Fifa World Cup, we will need to analyse our strong and weak points ahead of the globe competition begin,” he concluded

North Korea will meet Indonesia on Monday at the King Abdullah Sports City Stadium in Jeddah while group D toppers Tajikistan will take on South Korea in the same day.

Back to Oman and North Korea match, Kim Yu Jin took the lead for his team in the 10th minute while Osama al Maarami scored the equaliser for Oman in the 64th minute. Ri Kang Rim managed to bring his team ahead once again in the 74th minute while Al Walid al Abdulsalam equalised for Oman to make it 2-2 in the dying minutes.

SHORT TAKES



Kolkata Knight Riders' Sunil Narine in action.

KOLKATA THRASH CHENNAI IN ONE-SIDED IPL CONTEST

CHENNAI, INDIA: Sunil Narine starred with both the bat and the ball as Kolkata Knight Riders thrashed Chennai Super Kings by eight wickets to regain their winning momentum in the Indian Premier League on Friday.

Narine picked up three wickets with his off-spin before hitting 44 off 18 balls with the help of five sixes and two fours to help Kolkata overhaul a below-par Chennai 103-9 with as many as 59 balls to spare.

Five-time champions Chennai crashed to their fifth defeat in a row, leaving their fans mighty disappointed. The total was Chennai's lowest at their home ground Chepauk and the third-lowest ever in the IPL.

Kolkata are now third in the points table with Chennai languishing in ninth position in the 10-team competition.

"We had our plans and that worked well for us tonight," said Kolkata skipper Ajinkya Rahane.

"We still have a long way to go in the tournament... Last game we lost by four wickets, it was about starting from scratch."

Openers Quinton de Kock and Narine gave Kolkata a flying start before Chennai got a breakthrough in the fifth over. Medium pacer Anshul Kamboj sent de Kock back for a 16-ball 23 but Narine carried on with aplomb.

Narine hit Ravichandran Ashwin for two sixes on the trot and by the time he was bowled by Noor Ahmad, victory was well within the sight of Kolkata.

"We need to look deep down inside. Challenge was there, but we needed to tackle," said Chennai skipper M.S. Dhoni.

"We didn't have enough runs on the board today."

Put in to bat, Chennai lost their openers Devon Conway and Rachin Ravindra early, with just 16 runs on the board. Chennai could have been in deeper trouble but Narine dropped a sitter at mid-off, offering a reprieve to Vijay Shankar.

Shankar, who was dropped again on 20 by Venkatesh Iyer at midwicket, went on to make 29 off 21 balls with two fours and a six.

Rahul Tripathi, coming into the squad in place of the injured Ruturaj Gaikwad, was bowled by Narine for 16 to leave Chennai tottering at 65-4.

The rest of the Chennai order buckled under the pressure, making their way back to the pavilion without making any impact.

Dhoni, named skipper on Thursday after Gaikwad was ruled out of the rest of the season, also failed to weave his magic, trapped leg before for one off Narine (3-13).

Shivam Dube, hit an unbeaten 31 off 29 balls, to take the side past the 100-run mark. — AFP



New York Knicks forward OG Anunoby (8) drives to the basket against Cleveland Cavaliers guard Darius Garland (10) during the fourth quarter at Madison Square Garden. — Reuters

Jokic triple double as Denver fight back for win

THE DENVER NUGGETS strengthened their playoff position with a triple double from history-making Nikola Jokic helping them to a 117-109 win over the Memphis Grizzlies on Friday.

The Serb put up 26 points, 13 assists and 16 rebounds, and his 34th triple double performance ensured he will finish the regular season as just the third player averaging a triple double across an entire season.

The 15-point comeback victory was the second straight win for interim head coach David Adelman, who took over when Michael Malone was fired on Tuesday in a surprise move.

Malone, who led Denver to the NBA championship in 2023, was dismissed after a four-game losing streak.

The win means the Nuggets improve to 49-32 on the season and have a real chance of grabbing fourth place and home court advantage in the playoffs.

Aaron Gordon top scored with 33 points for Denver while Jamal Murray, back from a six-game injury absence, played a key role down the stretch and ended with 15 points and seven assists.

The game was tied at 108 with 3:30 left but Murray and Jokic saw the Nuggets to the victory.

Adelman paid tribute to Murray for the

physical effort he put in after a lengthy absence with his ankle injury.

"You can tell he was exhausted. He hasn't played in a long time... but the harder it gets, the more tired he gets, the better he plays. To watch those guys play the two-man game at the end, I know I'd buy a ticket to watch that," he said.

Asked about Jokic's latest display and his place in the record books, Adelman said: "If he doesn't win the MVP then it is the greatest season of all-time not to win the MVP".

The loss leaves Memphis with a 47-34 record. They face Dallas in the final round of games on Sunday.

Elsewhere on Friday, the Los Angeles Lakers clinched third seed in the Western Conference with a 140-109 pounding of an under-strength Houston Rockets, who had already assured themselves of second seed in the West. Luka Doncic, who scored 45 points in his emotional return to Dallas on Wednesday, had another big offensive display with 39 points in a comfortable victory for the Lakers, who are on track to face the Golden State Warriors in the first round of the playoffs as things stand.

The Warriors, who blew past the Portland Trail Blazers 103-86 on Friday, currently occupy sixth place in the Western Conference.

The Oklahoma City Thunder, who have secured the top seed, convincingly beat

the Utah Jazz 145-111 with Aaron Wiggins scoring 35 points and Isaiah Joe adding 32.

The Thunder were without top scorer Shai Gilgeous-Alexander who missed a second straight game with a shin injury.

CAVS RALLY

In the East, the Cleveland Cavaliers, who have secured the top seed, rallied for a 108-102 win over third-seeds the New York Knicks. Darius Garland scored 26 points for Cleveland, half of them in the fourth quarter, as the Cavs fought back from 23 points down.

The Knicks secured the third seed when the Indiana Pacers, who sat out all their starters, lost 129-115 to the Orlando Magic.

The Boston Celtics, the second seed, collected their 60th win of the season with a 130-94 win over the Charlotte Hornets.

The New Orleans Pelicans suffered the heaviest regular season defeat in franchise history as they were crushed 153-104 by the Miami Heat. Bam Adebayo was only on the court for 22 minutes but still put up 23 points and 12 rebounds as Miami, who led by 52 points at one stage, ran rampant against an injury weakened Pelicans.

However, the victory did nothing to improve Miami's playoff position. With other results going against them, the Heat are locked into tenth place and will play at the Chicago Bulls in a play-in game on Wednesday. — AFP

Piastrri leads McLaren one-two in Bahrain practice

SAKHIR, BAHRAIN: Oscar Piastrri led Formula One-leading teammate Lando Norris in a dominant McLaren one-two in Bahrain Grand Prix second practice on Friday.

Norris had led the first session in the full heat of the afternoon with a time of one minute 33.204 seconds but Australian Piastrri bettered that in the cooler evening conditions with a 1:30.505.

That was 0.154 quicker than Norris, who played down the significance of the times and suggested McLaren might not be that much ahead of Mercedes if their rivals had turned down the engine power.

George Russell was third fastest for Mercedes, 0.527 off Piastrri's pace under the floodlights with Ferrari's

Charles Leclerc fourth and Mercedes rookie Kimi Antonelli fifth.

"They (McLaren) are a long way ahead in the middle sector, where the tyres are overheating," said Russell. "A bit of work to do but I think we're fighting for next best. I think it's going to be close between us, Ferrari and Max."

French newcomer Isack Hadjar continued to impress in sixth place for Racing Bulls, with Max Verstappen and Lewis Hamilton seventh and eighth.

"Our race runs were solid, but others seem competitive in all conditions, so we'll be working hard overnight to close the gap," said seven times world champion Hamilton.

Red Bull's four times champion



McLaren's Oscar Piastrri ahead of the race. — Reuters

Verstappen, winner in Japan last weekend but complaining about his car's brakes on Friday, is Norris's closest rival with one point between them after three races.

"The balance wasn't too bad, but we were struggling a lot with the grip," said the Dutch driver. "We had

a bit of a different approach to our Friday than our competitors, but the gap is quite big at the moment."

ALONSO FRIGHT

Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso suffered a fright when his car's steering wheel came off, the double world champion putting it back on and making it to the pits where mechanics were able to fix the problem.

The largely unrepresentative first session, in conditions that will not be replicated in Sunday's race, was packed with young drivers gaining experience. Verstappen sat out that session as the team gave Ayumu Iwasa time in the car.

Luke Browning took Carlos Sainz's Williams and was 13th fastest, Dino

Beganovic (14th) was at the wheel of Charles Leclerc's Ferrari and Felipe Drugovich (16th) stepped into Fernando Alonso's Aston Martin.

Ryo Hirakawa (17th) replaced rookie Oliver Bearman at Haas while Fred Vesti (18th) took George Russell's Mercedes.

Antonelli was last on the afternoon timesheets after reporting a loss of power early on and returning to the garage for mechanics to work on the car. Williams' Alex Albon, fourth fastest, and Browning almost collided on track after a miscommunication while the latter was on a fast lap and the former going slower.

Williams were fined 7,500 euros (\$8,490) for the misdemeanour (\$1 = 0.8833 euros). — Reuters



Oman secures top spot in GCC Beach Games

ADIL AL BALUSHI/AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

OMAN ATHLETES presented top show from the recently concluded GCC Beach Games (Muscat 2025) on Friday night in Muscat beaches after securing 45 medals and ending in the top spot of the overall order. Oman's medal tally ended with an impressive 45 medals including 20 gold, 18 silver, and 7 bronze. United Arab Emirates ended the games as runners up with 22 medals (8 gold, 8 silver, and 6 bronze) and it is followed by Saudi Arabia in third place with 18 medals (4 gold, 6 silver, and 8 bronze). Bahrain came fourth with 17 medals (4 gold, 4 silver, and 9 bronze) while Qatar ranked fifth with 7 medals (3 gold, 1 silver, and 3 bronze). Kuwait came sixth with 8 medals (2 silver and 6 bronze). The tournament ran for seven days and featured participation of all the six GCC countries.

On the final day of the tournament, Oman national beach soccer team was crowned champion for the third consecutive time after a resounding 7-2 victory over their Saudi Arabia counterparts in the match held on Friday night. The UAE team came in second place, while the Saudi team finished third in the overall tournament standings. The closing ceremony of the tournament was held under the auspices of Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, and attended by Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth. During the ceremony, the winning teams were honoured. The tournament flag was also lowered and handed over to Abdullah Hassan Hashem, head of the Qatari delegation participating in this edition.

UAE secures second place with commanding 5-1 win over Kuwait. Saudi Arabia settled for third place and the bronze medal with 6 points.

Oman's beach handball team also secured the gold medal after defeating Saudi Arabia 2-0 in the final match. Bahrain took the silver medal while UAE claimed the bronze. In beach volleyball, Oman's team (2), composed of pair Mazin al Hashmi and Hood al Jalbobi, earned the silver medal after losing in the final to Qatar's team (1) in straight sets. Oman's team (1) finished fourth after a loss to Bahrain's team (2) who took third place in the third and fourth playoff.

OMAN'S SWIMMER IMPRESS

Oman's open water swimmers delivered a successful campaign as they won the gold medal in the 5-kilometre race with Saudi Arabia taking second and Bahrain third. In the singles 5-kilometre race, Oman's swimmer Ayman al Qasmi won silver while his teammate Nidhal al Harrasi claimed bronze and Saudi Arabia swimmer Mohammed al Zaki took gold.

Oman had earlier won gold in the team 10-kilometre race and followed by Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. In the singles 10-kilometre event, Ayman al Qasmi again won silver and Nidal al Harrasi secured bronze while Mohammed al Zaki won gold.

TOP SHOW BY ATHLETICS TEAM

Oman's athletes concluded the tournament strongly on the track as they bagged five more medals on the concluding day of competition. Shaikha al Hinai delivered an outstanding performance to win gold in the women's triple jump, while her teammate Alaa al Zadjali secured silver. The bronze went to UAE's Abeer al Balushi. The men's 4x60 metre relay team worked hard as one team to clam gold with a strong and synchronised performance ahead of the UAE and Saudi Arabia teams. It was the same scenario by the women team in the women's 4x60 metre relay as Oman dominated once again by securing gold,

with the UAE in second and Bahrain third. In the women's high jump, Alia al Mughairi of Oman delivered an exceptional performance to claim gold, followed by the UAE's Alia al Hammadi and Saudi Arabia's Raghad Bouareesh.

On the second day of athletics, Oman added five more medals as Mazoon al Alawi grabbed gold in the women's long jump while her teammate Alaa al Zadjali took silver and Saudi's Maryam al Mutairi claimed bronze. In the mile race, Bahrain's Abdulghani Mohammed took first place, followed by Oman's Mohammed al Suleimani in second and Bahrain's John Kipet in third. In the men's high jump, Oman's jumper Salim al Rawahi won gold, and Salim al Yaarubi took silver, while Saudi Arabia's Yahya Majal secured bronze. In the women's mile race, Bahrain's Marta Herbato won gold, her compatriot Bontio Idaw took silver and the UAE's Ruqayya al Marzooqi came third.

On the opening day of athletics, Oman's athletes commenced their campaign strongly by winning six medals as Mulham al Balushi won gold in the men's 60-metre sprint followed by his teammate Rashid al Asmi in second and Saudi Arabia's Mohammed Abdullah in third. In the women's 60-metre sprint, Bahrain's Layla Esbezar won gold, while Mazoon al Alawi took silver for Oman and Bahrain's Zainab Mohammed finished third. In the men's high jump, Oman's Fatak Bait Jaboob took gold, Qatar's Hamad Ali finished second and Kuwait's Khalid al Masaad came third. In the men's long jump, Oman's Salem al Yarubi won gold, his teammate Salim al Rawahi earned silver and Kuwait's Mohammed Ahmed took bronze.

SAILING CLAIM MEDALS

In sailing various events, Oman young sailors dominated with seven medals. In the Optimist general category, Khamis al Shammakhi won silver and teammate Tarteel al Husaini claimed bronze while UAE's Khalifa al Rumaithi won gold. In the girls' Optimist category, Tarteel al Husaini worked hard to claim won gold, Bahrain's Malak al Dosari took silver, and UAE's Madiya al Neyadi claimed bronze. In the Optimist juniors' race, Mohammed al Qasmi won silver, behind UAE's Zayed al Hosaini who took gold, and Qatar's Tamim Khalid took bronze. In the ILCA 4 girls' event, UAE's Marwa al Hammadi took gold, her teammate Al Yazzi al Hammadi silver, and Bahrain's Amina Al-Sadiq bronze. In the ILCA 4 boys' race, Oman's Abdul Latif al Qasmi won gold followed by UAE's Mohammed al Marzooqi and Bahrain's Khalifa al Dosari. In the ILCA 6 girls' event, UAE's Dohaa al Bashar won gold, Kuwait's Amina Abdullah took silver and UAE's Kamilia Khalifa won bronze. In the ILCA 6 boys' event, UAE's Othman al Hammadi took gold, Bahrain's Dawood Abdullah came second, and Oman's Mutasim al Farsi claimed bronze. In the ILCA 7 boys' category, Oman's Hassan al Jabri won gold, followed by UAE's Adil al Baskiti and Bahrain's Ahmed Sadiq. On the first day, Oman won silver in the team Optimist event, while the UAE took gold and Kuwait bronze. Bahrain and Qatar placed fourth and fifth respectively.

Oman's tent pegging team also excelled by winning two medals on the concluding day. In the singles lance, lemon, and relay events, Aahed al Balushi took silver, while Qatar's Rashid al Dosari won gold and Ali al Adhbah took bronze. In the team event, Oman won gold with riders Hamad al Riyami, Hamed al Raisi, Aahed al Balushi, Safwan al Maamari, and Mohammed al Siyabi. Saudi Arabia came second and Qatar third.

On the second day of tent pegging, Hamed al Raisi won gold in the singles sword event, Kuwait's Abdullah al Dehani took silver, and Saudi's Hassan al Asiri won bronze. In the team sword event, Bahrain won gold, Saudi Arabia took silver and Kuwait bronze.





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This expansion is anticipated to yield substantial economic benefits, including an impressive annual throughput exceeding 2.5 million tonnes.

SOHAR FREEZONE UNVEILS MAJOR EXPANSION PLANS TO MEET RISING DEMAND

SUJAR: SOHAR Port and Freezone, recognised globally as one of the fastest-growing port and freezone developments, has announced ambitious expansion plans to accommodate the surging demand from prospective tenants.

With the first phase nearing full occupancy, the urgency for additional space has become clear, as numerous businesses express keen interest in establishing operations in Oman's thriving economic hub.

This expansion is anticipated to yield substantial economic benefits, including an impressive annual throughput exceeding 2.5 million tonnes, over \$5 billion in investments, and the availability of 500 hectares of leasable land. Furthermore, it is projected to create between 300 to 700 jobs, increase revenue from land leases and stimulate local trade, thereby boosting the region's GDP.

Significantly, over 85% of the project components will be supplied by local contractors and suppliers, enhancing in-country value. The expansion will commence with the General Design Services Package, paving the way for construction to provide new leasable land for businesses and tenants.

Outlook favourable for Omani banks in 2025: Fitch

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

INTERNATIONAL

ratings agency Fitch Ratings says it expects Omani banks to benefit from supportive business conditions in 2025, bolstered by strong economic growth and relatively high oil prices.

The upbeat outlook for commercial banks in the Sultanate of Oman is set out in a newly published report, titled 'Omani Banks' Credit Metrics Stable as Operating Environment Improves'. According to the report, Oman's ongoing economic diversification is enhancing the country's growth prospects and creating new opportunities for the banking sector.

Real GDP growth is forecast to pick up pace, driven by both hydrocarbon and non-oil sectors. This momentum, along with the recent upgrade in Oman's sovereign outlook, supports the Positive Outlooks maintained on all rated Omani banks, said Fitch.

The agency also highlighted that improving operating conditions could boost some banks' core credit profiles.

Notably, the report indicates a continued recovery in asset quality next year, aided by loan write-offs and a stable macroeconomic



Most banks' capital buffers are supported by sound internal capital generation. Funding and liquidity conditions are stable. We expect oil prices to continue support growth in customer deposits, which accounted for 90% of total sector non-equity funding.

FITCH RATINGS



According to Fitch, Oman's ongoing economic diversification is enhancing the country's growth prospects and creating new opportunities for the banking sector.

environment. Stage 2 loans are expected to decline further, with limited risk of significant deterioration into Stage 3, even amid ongoing challenges in sectors like real estate, construction and hospitality, it said.

"We expect lower interest rates will have a limited impact on banks' net interest margins, and that loan impairment charges will remain moderate, along with reasonable cost discipline.

"Most banks' capital buffers are supported by sound internal capital generation. Funding and liquidity conditions are stable.

"We expect oil prices to continue support growth in customer deposits, which accounted for 90%

of total sector non-equity funding," Fitch further added.

Last December, Fitch Ratings revised its outlook on five Omani banks – Bank Muscat, National Bank of Oman (NBO), Bank Dhofar, Sohar International Bank and Ahlibank – to positive, while also affirming their Long-Term Issuer Default Ratings (IDR).

The revision, coming on the heels of similar ratings action by Fitch on Oman's sovereign rating, reflected the agency's view of "Oman's improving operating environment that is expected to benefit the banks' intrinsic credit profiles as well as the authorities' improving ability to support Omani banks."

What a 125% US tariff on China could mean for Oman and the GCC

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

IN RECENT weeks, a new economic shockwave has begun to ripple through global markets — not from oil prices, but from a looming escalation in trade tensions between the United States and China.

Prominent Omani economist Azza al Habsi warns that proposed US tariffs of up to 125% on Chinese imports — a policy strongly endorsed by President Donald Trump and increasingly discussed in Washington — could have significant and immediate consequences for Oman and its GCC neighbours.

To understand the impact, consider a basic example: a US importer recently paid \$1,000 for a Chinese-made kitchen appliance.

With a 125% tariff, that same product would now cost over \$2,250. US importers, faced with ballooning costs, will naturally seek cheaper alternatives — either domestically or from other trade partners such as Vietnam, Mexico, or India.

But what happens on the Chinese side of the equation? Manufacturers in China, having already produced goods for export to the US, suddenly find themselves without a buyer.



Spillover effects: In 2017, when the US and EU imposed anti-dumping measures on Chinese steel, surplus exports were rerouted to the Middle East, including Oman.

In a bid to maintain cash flow, these producers are likely to divert inventory to other markets, even at deep discounts.

ENTER THE GCC: A PRIME TARGET FOR DUMPING

The GCC, including Oman, is particularly vulnerable in such scenarios due to its open trade policies, relatively low tariffs and strategic location. Azza al Habsi

cautions that the region could become a dumping ground for excess Chinese goods — products sold below production cost to rapidly clear inventories.

This practice of dumping may temporarily benefit consumers through lower prices, but it carries long-term consequences for local industries.

Domestic manufacturers, already grappling with softening demand

US importers, faced with ballooning costs, will naturally seek cheaper alternatives — either domestically or from other trade partners such as Vietnam, Mexico, or India.

and global economic headwinds, would face unfair competition, threatening jobs, investments and the viability of key sectors such as manufacturing and logistics.

History provides a cautionary tale. In 2017, when the US and EU imposed anti-dumping measures on Chinese steel, surplus exports were rerouted to the Middle East, including Oman.

The influx of cheap steel caused regional prices to plummet, inflicting severe damage on GCC steel producers. In response, Gulf governments, including the Sultanate of Oman, launched anti-dumping investigations and enacted safeguard duties under the frameworks of the GCC Common Law on Anti-Dumping and the WTO.

POLICY RESPONSES

If the US does enact a 125% tariff, policymakers in Oman and across the GCC will need to prepare for the likelihood of redirected Chinese

exports. Options may include:

- Monitoring imports more rigorously for signs of dumping.
- Strengthening domestic industry support mechanisms, such as subsidies or tax relief.
- Implementing temporary safeguard measures, consistent with WTO regulations, to prevent market distortions.
- Accelerating diversification strategies to reduce dependence on vulnerable industrial segments.

As Al Habsi puts it, "This isn't about isolated trade policies between two giants. It's about the downstream ripple effects that reach all the way to our ports, our factories and our local businesses."

LOOKING AHEAD

While oil remains the bedrock of GCC economies, non-oil trade vulnerabilities such as dumping, protectionism and global supply chain shifts must be treated with equal seriousness. For Oman, the focus must be on resilience — balancing open trade with the imperative to safeguard national industries.

The global chessboard is shifting, and Oman must be ready to move decisively.

ADVERTORIALS

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REDEFINED LUXURY
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MUSCAT: Celebrate togetherness and unwrap blessings with Lexus Oman’s incredible offer. Lexus Oman offers you an amazing opportunity to become an owner of the premium Lexus RX.

Head to your nearest Saud Bahwan Automotive showroom to avail the offer and enjoy up to 7 years/70,000 km (whichever comes first) of stress-free service benefits along with free first-year registration. New Lexus owners can also enter a raffle draw to win the latest iPhone 16 Pro Max until the offer ends on April 24.

Buy the Lexus RX of your dreams for a confidence-inspiring drive. Built for those who seek perfection on the road, the RX with its advanced technologies and high-performance capabilities makes it one of Lexus’ best-selling utility vehicles. At first glance, the RX makes a bold statement on the road with its bold rear and bumper design seamlessly blending into the awe-striking L-shaped combination lamps and LED headlamps. The RX is available in three fuel-efficient trims: the gasoline-powered RX350, the hybrid-electric RX350h and the RX500h F Sport.

The RX350 is powered by a 4-cylinder, 2.4-litre turbocharged engine that produces 275 HP and 430 Nm of torque and is paired with a new 8-speed Direct-Shift automatic transmission. Whereas, the RX350h features a hybrid-electric system combining a 2.5-litre petrol engine and electric motor to produce 247 HP paired to an electronically controlled continuously variable transmission delivering an impressive fuel consumption of 20.7 km/L.

For a faster and fuel-efficient version, the RX500h F Sport version features a hybrid-electric system, pairing with a powerful 2.4-litre turbocharged engine with an electric motor generating a combined power of 366 HP. This trim is mated to a 6-speed automatic transmission. Inside, the Lexus RX feel welcomed with stunning leather-coated premium interiors, a multi-colour ambient lighting system, a comfortable 3-zone AC and a panoramic sunroof.

The driver-focused head-up display, panoramic view monitor and digital rear-view mirror take driving engagement to new heights. Experience seamless connectivity with wireless charging trays, the Mark Levinson premium surround sound system, a 12.3” rear seat entertainment system with 2 pieces of headphones, and the integrated e-latch system.

Lexus prioritises passenger safety and offers state-of-the-art safety features catering to minute details, such as headlamp cleaners for stark visibility during unstable weather conditions. It is equipped with six airbags for the drivers and passengers, side curtains, an auto-braking system (ABS), Lane Change Assist technologies, a Blind Spot Monitor Adaptive Variable Suspension Lane Keeping Assist, a Lane Tracing + Vibration Illuminated Entry System, Multi-Colour Lexus Safety Sense, a Pre-Crash System, Adaptive Cruise Control, Lane Departure Alert, and 4 Front and Rear Parking Sensors.

MUSCAT: Awasr, a leading provider of broadband Internet services in Oman, and Nool Delivery, a company specialising in express delivery services, have announced the signing of a strategic partnership agreement aimed at expanding Awasr’s services and products across the Sultanate of Oman.

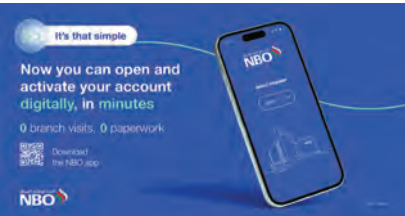
This partnership marks a significant step towards facilitating customer access to Awasr’s services and products. Customers can now benefit from Awasr’s services through Nool’s offices located in various governorates across the Sultanate of Oman, in addition to receiving services through Nool’s service representatives, ensuring greater convenience and ease in obtaining advanced telecommunications solutions.



NBO SIMPLIFIES
DIGITAL
ACCOUNT
OPENING
EXPERIENCE

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) has announced launching a complete digital account opening service through the NBO app. The new feature enables individuals to open an account at anytime and anywhere, without the need to visit a branch or submit physical documents.

Commenting on the launch, Dr Ali bin Salim al Shukaili, Assistant General Manager, Head of Digital and E-Channels at NBO, said: “Our new digital onboarding feature marks a major milestone in our mission to make banking more



accessible, convenient and secure. By eliminating the need for branch visits or paperwork, we are streamlining the way customers begin their relationship with NBO while aligning with our broader vision for customer-centric digital banking.”

This step reflects NBO’s digital-first strategy, aiming to provide

seamless everyday banking experiences. Customers can complete the onboarding process in minutes, receiving their account number instantly upon successful registration.

They can open various accounts — Savings (with or without interest), Current, Children’s, and Youth Accounts — and earn 600 welcome reward points (100 for app registration and 500 upon joining the NBO Rewards Programme).

Debit cards are delivered to their doorstep, and eligible customers can earn up to 3.25% profit on savings.

“Gift of Gold” offers from
Malabar Gold & Diamonds

MALABAR Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with an extensive retail network of over 390 outlets across 13 countries, has just unveiled their ‘Gift of Gold’ offers providing customers the chance to get free gold coins.

With this offer, customers can get assured gold coins with diamond jewellery purchases above RO 300.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds will also be showcasing an exquisite array of jewellery collections in gold, diamond and precious gems across their numerous sub brands such as Mine, Era, Precia, Viraaaz, Ethnix & Divine etc., which are assured to be favourites amongst their customers.

The limited period offer can be availed across all Malabar Gold & Diamonds outlets till April 30, 2025.

As part of the Golden Gift offers, for every diamond or precious gem jewellery purchase worth RO 700, customers will get free 1gm



Customers can get assured gold coins with diamond jewellery purchases above RO 300.

Gold Coin and for diamond and precious gem jewellery purchase worth RO 400 they will be eligible for ½ gm Gold Coin.

Additionally, customers will also get a 250mg gold coin for diamond & precious gem jewellery worth RO 300.

Furthermore, Malabar Gold & Diamonds is offering customers 8g gold coins at zero making charges as well as special buy counters across their showrooms, offering a incredible discounts on selected jewellery designs.

“The Gift of Gold offers from Malabar Gold & Diamonds will definitely be a great compliment to the prosperity that our customers usher in when they buy jewellery.

With the assurance of free gold coins on jewellery purchase along with many more offers, we are certain that connoisseurs of jewellery across the nation will flock to our showrooms.

Offering great value on purchase along with a wide host of trendy designs that are a treat for jewellery lovers, Malabar Gold & Diamonds is once again solidifying its position as the go-to place for jewellery shopping”, commented Shamlal Ahamed, Managing Director- International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

The Festive collection of jewellery that the brand has unveiled presents jewellery lovers

with an enthralling array of designs in gold, diamond and precious gem jewellery.

The special design has been made available across a wide range of sub-brands such as Mine, Era, Precia, Viraaaz, Ethnix and Divine, comprising of 22k gold, diamonds and precious gem jewellery. Enthralling designs in 18K collection has also been made available as part of the collection.

In light of the gold rate fluctuations, customers can take advantage of the Gold Rate Protection offer provided by Malabar Gold & Diamonds, wherein customers can block the prevailing gold rates by paying just a 10% as advance, valid till the April 30.

If the gold rate goes up during this period, customers can purchase at the blocked rate and if the rate happens to go down, customers can draw mileage from the lower rate.

The Gold Rate Protection offer can be availed by visiting any of Malabar Gold & Diamonds outlet, or online through their mobile app.

Al Ansari Group partners with Fuso Oman

MUSCAT: Al Ansari, a pioneering force in integrated infrastructure and engineering solutions, has chosen Fuso Oman with custom-modified Fuso FK units equipped with truck-mounted generators for one of their special projects. This strategic partnership reflects Al Ansari’s continued focus on adopting innovative and reliable solutions to strengthen their operations across the Sultanate of Oman.

Established in 1975, Al Ansari has grown into a regional leader with a presence in Oman, Qatar, KSA, UAE and India.

Established in 1949, Fuso is an integral part of Daimler AG and plays a significant role in advancing light-duty and medium-duty trucks like the Canter and FK/FM. Alongside Bharat Benz, Fuso represents Daimler Trucks Asia, emphasising reliability, durability and cutting-edge design.

The newly delivered Fuso FK units are a unique modification tailored to support Al Ansari’s customers’ wide-ranging needs. Outfitted with



This strategic partnership reflects Al Ansari’s continued focus on adopting innovative and reliable solutions to strengthen their operations.

advanced Truck-Mounted Generator systems, these units will play a critical role in ensuring uninterrupted power supply and greater flexibility at various project locations, from municipal services to smart infrastructure and hospitality

sectors. Chosen for their proven durability and superior engineering, Fuso vehicles are built to thrive in demanding environments.

The FK model offers exceptional payload capacity, robust performance and advanced safety features, making it an ideal platform for such custom applications. With this specialised addition, Al Ansari’s customers will further benefit from its operational efficiency, project readiness and ability to respond swiftly to market needs.

This collaboration also marks a significant milestone for Fuso Oman, showcasing the brand’s flexibility and capability in offering tailored mobility solutions to meet complex industry demands.

As a trusted automotive partner, Fuso Oman continues to empower forward-thinking local businesses through versatile commercial vehicles that combine strength, innovation and long-term value.

Awasr and Nool Delivery sign pact to expand services across Oman



This partnership marks a significant step towards facilitating customer access to Awasr’s services and products.

Eng Adnan bin Mohammed al Alawi, CEO of Awasr, said: “We are pleased with this partnership with Nool Delivery, as this step will contribute to enhancing customer experience and strengthening Awasr’s presence in different governorates. We believe that the integration between telecommunications and delivery services will enable us to provide a more efficient and seamless experience for our customers.”

Eugen Comendant, Chief Commercial Officer of Awasr, also shared his thoughts on the partnership, saying: “This collaboration between Awasr and Nool is a testament to the power of strategic alliances in improving service accessibility and customer satisfaction.

“By leveraging Nool’s robust delivery network,

we are ensuring that Awasr’s cutting-edge telecommunications solutions reach more customers efficiently and conveniently.”

Nooh al Hamdani, CEO of Nool Delivery, expressed his enthusiasm about this partnership, stating: “At Nool, we are committed to providing advanced logistical services that make life easier for individuals and businesses. Our collaboration with Awasr reflects our shared vision of delivering comprehensive services that meet our customers’ expectations in the Sultanate of Oman.”

Through this partnership, Awasr will be able to expand its service reach to a broader customer base while offering flexible options for receiving products and accessing services conveniently and securely.

BUSINESS

OMAN’S FIRST
RO MEMBRANE
MANUFACTURING
PLANT LAUNCHED



DR SALIM BIN
ABDULLAH AL
WAHIBI
Founder and CEO of
Tasnee

This homegrown achievement marks a turning point in the Sultanate of Oman’s water treatment sector, aligning with Oman Vision 2040’s goals of economic diversification, technological advancement and reduced import dependency.

“It’s easy to assume membrane production is straightforward, but the reality was full of challenges,” shared Dr Salim bin Abdullah al Wahibi, Founder and CEO of Tasnee. “We had to build everything from the ground up — from the right formula and raw materials to performance testing and field trials.”

The journey began at the Masirah Island desalination plant, where Tasnee trialled prototypes under extreme conditions. High salinity, fluctuating temperatures and component degradation tested the membrane’s resilience at every stage. “Sometimes parts were damaged, and we had to go deep into root cause analysis — asking why it happened, what needed to change and how to fix it. We revised formulas, changed materials, even redesigned parts. It was a huge learning curve,” Dr Salim recalled.

After numerous iterations and continuous fine-tuning, the final membrane formula was stabilised over a nine-month success streak. Tasnee’s team not only improved performance, but also exceeded their initial targets. The membrane now demonstrates strong rejection rates, durability in harsh conditions and optimal efficiency for seawater desalination, municipal and drinking water applications.

NAJAH AL RIYAMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

IN A significant stride towards industrial self-reliance and water sustainability, local start-up Tasnee has successfully developed Oman’s first locally manufactured reverse osmosis (RO) membrane — the result of four years of dedicated research, real-world testing and innovation.

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is intensifying its efforts to position Oman as a premier global tourism destination through strategic partnerships, robust marketing campaigns and targeted market development.

Central to these efforts is a series of international promotional campaigns and media initiatives, which have significantly boosted Oman’s visibility across Arab, Asian and European markets. Between 2021 and 2024, the ministry implemented 235 promotional campaigns that generated financial returns estimated at RO 95.65 million.

During the same period, 88 media campaigns yielded additional returns of around RO 202.56 million — highlighting the success of the ministry’s integrated marketing approach.

According to Saada al Harthy, Director of the Market Development Department, the ministry’s campaigns are designed to strengthen collaboration between local tourism players and international stakeholders, spotlight Omani tourism experiences and heritage, and unlock new visitor markets.

“These campaigns reflect our commitment to growing Oman’s tourism economy in cooperation with both local partners and international promotional offices. We aim

Veolia Oman aims for global benchmark in sustainable desalination

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, APRIL 12

VEOLIA OMAN, in a significant stride towards sustainable water production, is positioning itself as a global leader in desalination efficiency and renewable energy integration. In an exclusive interview with the Observer, Erwan Rouxel, CEO of Veolia Oman, underscored the company’s commitment to innovation, energy performance and community development — particularly through its flagship plants in Barka and Sur.

“These two plants are not only important for Oman — they are flagships for the entire desalination industry,” said Rouxel. “Barka 4 is the largest desalination plant in the country and among the most efficient in the world.”

He highlighted a milestone achievement: the Barkar plant’s energy consumption has been reduced to below 3 kilowatt-hours per cubic metre of water produced — an elite benchmark in the global desalination market, where the



ERWAN ROUXEL
CEO of Veolia Oman

achievement,” Rouxel noted, emphasising the advanced technology and operational discipline that made this possible.

Meanwhile, the Sur plant has broken new ground in renewable energy.

“Sur is the first desalination plant of its size in the world fully powered by solar energy during daylight hours,” said Rouxel. The facility showcases what’s possible when water infrastructure is designed with sustainability at its core.

Resilience is also a core strength of Veolia Oman’s operations. Both plants are equipped to handle local environmental challenges

industry average remains above that threshold. “Being able to go below 3 kilowatt-hours is quite an



The facility showcases what’s possible when water infrastructure is designed with sustainability at its core.

such as high salinity and algal blooms, particularly frequent in Barka. Rouxel stated, “We have the pretreatment stages required to remove all solids and components from seawater. We’re well-equipped

to respond to algal blooms, which are quite common on Oman’s coasts.”

He further emphasised Veolia’s preparedness in supply chain disruptions, especially when it comes to water treatment chemicals.

“We closely monitor the global chemicals market and have framework agreements with suppliers. Because of our scale, we’re often given priority,” he said. This proactive approach ensures continuity of water services even during global or regional crises. Beyond operational excellence,

Veolia Oman demonstrates a strong commitment to in-country value and community development. The company maintains high levels of local procurement and workforce nationalisation.

“We’re not just serving communities — we live among them. It’s part of our DNA.” Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is more than just a compliance metric for Veolia. It is deeply embedded in its long-term



Between 2021 and 2024, the ministry implemented 235 promotional campaigns that generated financial returns estimated at RO 95.65 million.

to showcase Oman’s unique offerings and deepen ties with global tourism institutions,” she said.

To enhance its global reach, the ministry has expanded its network of international tourism representative offices, which now number 11 and cover 26 key tourism markets. Recent developments include tenders for new offices in Madrid, Spain and Singapore — strategically chosen to tap into the European and Southeast Asian tourism corridors.

The Singapore office will oversee tourism promotion in



SAADA AL
HARTHY
Director of the
Market Development
Department

Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand as well, with both offices expected to launch by mid-2025.

These representative offices are tasked with implementing annual marketing plans, facilitating joint promotional programmes with foreign tour operators and maintaining a consistent brand presence for Oman in their respective markets.

The ministry also reactivated offices in key source markets. In 2024, a tourism office in Moscow helped bring over 44,000 Russian visitors to Oman.

Similarly, an office in China was activated at the beginning of 2025, following a strong inflow of more than 73,000 Chinese tourists in 2024.

The Gulf region remains a vital market as well.

A highlight of 2024’s promotional calendar was the “Marhaba Dhofar” event, held in cooperation with Saudi Arabian tourism stakeholders. The event showcased the Dhofar Governorate’s seasonal attractions, including the “Sarb” season and winter tourism experiences, deepening bilateral tourism cooperation.

In 2025, the ministry plans to roll out 84 joint promotional campaigns, 46 media campaigns, 19 outdoor advertising initiatives (including buses, taxis and billboards) and over 90 familiarisation trips for companies and media personnel.

It will also launch a new digital platform to support partners in targeted markets and offer training programmes in e-marketing, sustainability and artificial intelligence.

Al Harthy further noted the ministry’s role in preparing market research, developing databases of foreign tourism operators and sharing timely statistics and insights with local stakeholders to guide marketing decisions and strengthen the sector’s competitiveness. — ONA

VOLATILE WEEK

China retaliates again in Trump’s trade war



Beijing increased its tariffs on US imports to 125% on Friday, hitting back against President Donald Trump’s decision to raise duties on Chinese goods and increasing the stakes in a trade war that threatens to upend global supply chains.

US stocks ended a volatile week higher, but the safe haven of gold hit a record high during the session and US 10-year bond yields posted their biggest weekly increase since 2001. — Reuters

CAPITAL ACCESS

Argentina seals \$20 billion IMF deal



Argentina sealed a \$20-billion, 48-month Extended Fund Facility deal with the International Monetary Fund on Friday and, in a major policy move ahead of the deal, dismantled key parts of its years-long currency controls and loosened its grip on the peso.

The deal is expected to help Argentina “catalyse additional official multilateral and bilateral support, and a timely re-access to international capital markets,” the IMF said. — AFP

MORE CAUTIOUS

US bank executives raise more tariff alarms



Executives at big US banks warned on Friday of economic turbulence from tariffs that could weigh on economic growth, even as their profits beat forecasts in the first quarter.

Industry executives said consumers and corporations were becoming more cautious about United States President Donald Trump’s sweeping tariffs, which have roiled markets, could spur inflation and may tip the economy into recession. — Reuters

OPINION

Oman labour policy and structural trends



QASIM AL MAASHANI

The writer is the new head of business and politics section of Oman Observer

OMAN'S latest labour data (February 2025) reflects notable structural shifts in the workforce. In particular, the distribution of Omani vs expatriate workers by sector and occupation has changed in ways that underscore the impact of Oman's Omanisation policies. There has been a modest rise in Omani employment in the private sector alongside a slight reduction in government jobs, signalling a deliberate policy drive to transition citizens into private employment. At the same time, certain occupations have seen sharp growth (e.g. agriculture and technical fields), revealing areas of expanding labour demand. These trends offer insight into the Sultanate of Oman's workforce development efforts and long-term economic planning.

SECTORAL SHIFTS AND OMANISATION PROGRESS
One clear trend is the growth of Omani employment in the private sector coupled with a decline in government employment. According to official data, the number of Omanis working in private companies has increased by about 1.3%, whereas the number of Omanis in government jobs fell by roughly 1.3% (as of February 2025). This suggests that more Omanis are finding opportunities outside the public sector. In fact, as of late 2024, the private sector employed over 413,000 Omani workers compared to about 378,000 in the government. This

crossover indicates progress towards a key Omanisation goal: reducing reliance on public-sector employment for citizens. The policy of encouraging Omani talent into private businesses is gradually bearing fruit, with private firms now absorbing a growing share of Omanis. Meanwhile, the slight drop in government employment could be due to hiring freezes or natural attrition as the state aims to curb public payrolls and promote efficiency. These sectoral shifts align with Oman's strategic vision to have a more balanced labour market. Notably, the overall expatriate workforce has been kept in check by design – Oman's authorities have been regulating the foreign labour influx to prioritise Omanis in jobs. This is in line with the ambitious goals of Oman Vision 2040, which calls for empowering Omanis in the economy. Omanisation policies are central to understanding these changes. The slight uptick in Omani private sector workers and reduction in expats across many sectors reflect ongoing efforts to replace expatriates with trained Omanis in various roles. For example, Oman has imposed quota targets for local hiring in many industries and even banned new expat work visas in certain professions to create vacancies for citizens. The data suggests these measures are slowly making an impact: private businesses are hiring more Omanis (even if the growth is gradual), and the public sector – traditionally a major employer of Omanis – is no longer growing as before.

There has been a modest rise in Omani employment in the private sector alongside a slight reduction in government jobs, signalling a deliberate policy drive to transition citizens into private employment. At the same time, certain occupations have seen sharp growth (e.g. agriculture and technical fields), revealing areas of expanding labour demand.

This policy-driven rebalancing is crucial for long-term sustainability, as it reduces dependence on foreign labour and ensures more jobs for Omani youth entering the market.

OCCUPATIONAL TRENDS AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
Beyond the public-private sector split, the February 2025 statistics show sharp increases in specific occupational categories, pointing to structural changes in the economy. In particular, employment in “agriculture and fisheries” occupations jumped by about 10.0%, and the number of “scientific and technical technicians” rose by approximately 6.0%. These are significant spikes that outpace the overall labour growth rate. They suggest that certain fields are expanding rapidly, either due to economic diversification or targeted initiatives. The agriculture and fisheries sector's 10% growth stands out because agriculture has historically been a small employer in Oman's economy (which is dominated by oil, services and industry). A double-digit increase could indicate renewed emphasis on agricultural projects – possibly driven by food security goals and rural development programmes. It might also reflect that previously understaffed farming activities (often reliant on expatriate labour) are scaling up. However, this surge raises questions for Omanisation: are these new agriculture jobs being filled by Omanis or mostly by expatriate workers?

GLOBAL TRADE MORASS CALLS FOR AN AGGRESSIVE ECB

BY PIERRE BRIANCON

DONALD TRUMP'S erratic policy decisions give the European Central Bank a chance to stop equivocating over whether it should cut rates. The US president on Wednesday delayed the full implementation of his “reciprocal” tariffs. Yet Europe will still be slapped with a 10% tax on US exports, and the threat of a global slowdown remains. That calls for a strong response. Before the tariff brouhaha, ECB President Christine Lagarde had avoided committing to cut the bank's key rate, currently 2.5%, at its next meeting on April 17. Trump's April 2 shocker appeared to settle the matter, with most analysts now expecting a 25-basis point decrease. Yet the trade fallout justifies a more ambitious cut twice that size. Even before Trump's tariffs, the ECB was expecting the euro zone economy to grow by a meagre 0.9% this year. Trump's 10% tariff on EU exports could lower GDP growth by a third, or 0.3% percentage points, according to Nomura. This doesn't factor in the risk of lingering uncertainty caused by Trump's policies, which could lead investors and companies to stall decisions. Fears of an inflation spike caused by tariffs, on the other hand, are overblown. They would only materialise if the EU were to retaliate with its own strong measures, but the European response so far has been moderate. Moreover, China, still subjected to steep tariffs from Trump, could try to flood Europe with cheap exports, driving down prices. The second argument for a pause looks equally weak. It hinges on the impact of increased defence spending and Germany giving up on decades of budget discipline. The problem is that the fiscal boom may take years. As argued by AXA Chief Economist Gilles Moec, “tariffs are now, fiscal stimulus later”. The ECB also needs to reckon with the euro's strength. The common currency has risen by 10% against the US dollar since Trump's inauguration, and global investors' worries about the US economy are likely to linger on. That makes imports cheaper, further lowering inflation. And, while the ECB has slashed its rate by 1.5 percentage points since June last year, it is still using one other tool to fight inflation. It has steadily allowed the portfolio of bonds acquired under its quantitative easing programmes between 2014 and 2022 to run off, with the balance now 2.7 trillion euros. As detailed by executive board member Piero Cipollone, this balance sheet shrinkage, known as quantitative tightening, runs counter to rate cuts, by pushing up bond yields and borrowing costs. A 500 billion euro reduction of the portfolio translates into 75 billion euros less of bank lending, according to ECB estimates. — Reuters

Health sector ICV: Pillar for sustainable development

WITH the new Vision 2040, Oman's ICV has evolved into a cornerstone of sustainable growth, enabling further progress. Historically focused on the oil and gas industry, the ICV initiative aims to enhance local employment, job creation, national capacity, and localise production and services. Alongside the global economy, the Covid-19 pandemic showcased the growing need for Oman to develop a self-reliant healthcare system. Oman's health sector, which is still undergoing reform and expansion, stands to benefit from the integration of ICV principles. Oman strives to achieve a robust economy while enhancing the health outcomes of its citizens. Health services are very crucial to any government as it is tangentially linked to the stability and productivity of the nation. In Oman, the investment in health infrastructure is of economic value and useful from a humanitarian perspective. ICV ensures in healthcare: Improved health security of a nation; Reduced dependence on imported medical services, equipment and consumables; Increased access to healthcare that is cost-effective and regionally available; Stimulated local R&D for innovation; and Employment opportunities for Omanis in the medical and paramedical professions. In addition, with the increase in spending on health worldwide, having a competitive health economy within Oman will help reduce the outflow of foreign currency and allow reinvestment into the country. Development of Local Workforce: One of ICV's primary initiatives is providing employment and facilitating training for Omanis. In healthcare, this means investing in: Healthcare related universities and colleges; Professional development



The use of technology in healthcare is vital for providing quality services.



DR HILAL AL SAWAI

A specialist in local content/In-country value, the writer is the Acting Director-General of Local Content, previously assigned to the General Secretariat of the Tender Board

programmes for healthcare personnel; Doctor residency and specialisation programmes; and International scholarships and exchange study programmes with foreign universities. Efforts such as those of the Oman Medical Specialty Board (OMSB) aid in the development of Omani healthcare professionals. Procurement and Manufacturing of Goods: The Covid-19 pandemic has shown the world the weaknesses of global supply chains. Oman is able to: Decrease its dependence on imported prescription medicines, consumables and equipment; Attract foreign businesses to set up production facilities within the country; Encourage the formation of local manufacturing facilities for IV fluids, syringes, PPE, and other generic medications. National Pharmaceutical Industries Co (SAOC) is example of this localisation strategy. Infrastructure Development: The construction of hospitals, clinics and medical cities gives opportunities to local construction companies, architects, engineers and IT service providers. The development of health infrastructure under ICV incorporates: Giving preference to local companies for construction and facility management of the

buildings; and engaging local workforce, materials and services. Projects such as Medical City for Military and Security Services in Muscat incorporate ICV concepts by requiring local content participation at multiple developmental stages. Research and Development (R&D): Research and development within the healthcare sector is essential for fostering innovation and improving disease management and treatment regimens. ICV in R&D covers: Supporting initiatives related to health research in the country, accelerating local biotech firms and establishing facilities for clinical trials in Oman. Some of the efforts are led by SQU's College of Medicine alongside Oman's Ministry of Health Research Centre. Digital Health and ICV Technology Transfer: The use of technology in healthcare is vital for providing quality services. ICV can be executed in: Upholding local telemedicine and e-health platform development, engaging with foreign technology companies for knowledge transfer, educating Omanis on health informatics and establishing tech accelerators. The national digital health strategy does not contradict with the ICV objectives and helps foster local digital creators. Oman Vision 2040 and Health Sector Reform: Placing an emphasis on enhanced healthcare services as a core strategic objective in the Vision 2040 blueprint is key. The main reforms aligned with ICV include: Establishment and expansion of Public-Private Partnerships (PPP), infrastructural development bid for Omani companies, and employment of Omanis within health institutions. Medical City for Military and Security Services: This flag healthcare project incorporates ICV requirements in its tendering and operation models. It supports local construction, services, employment, supply and maintenance of equipment.

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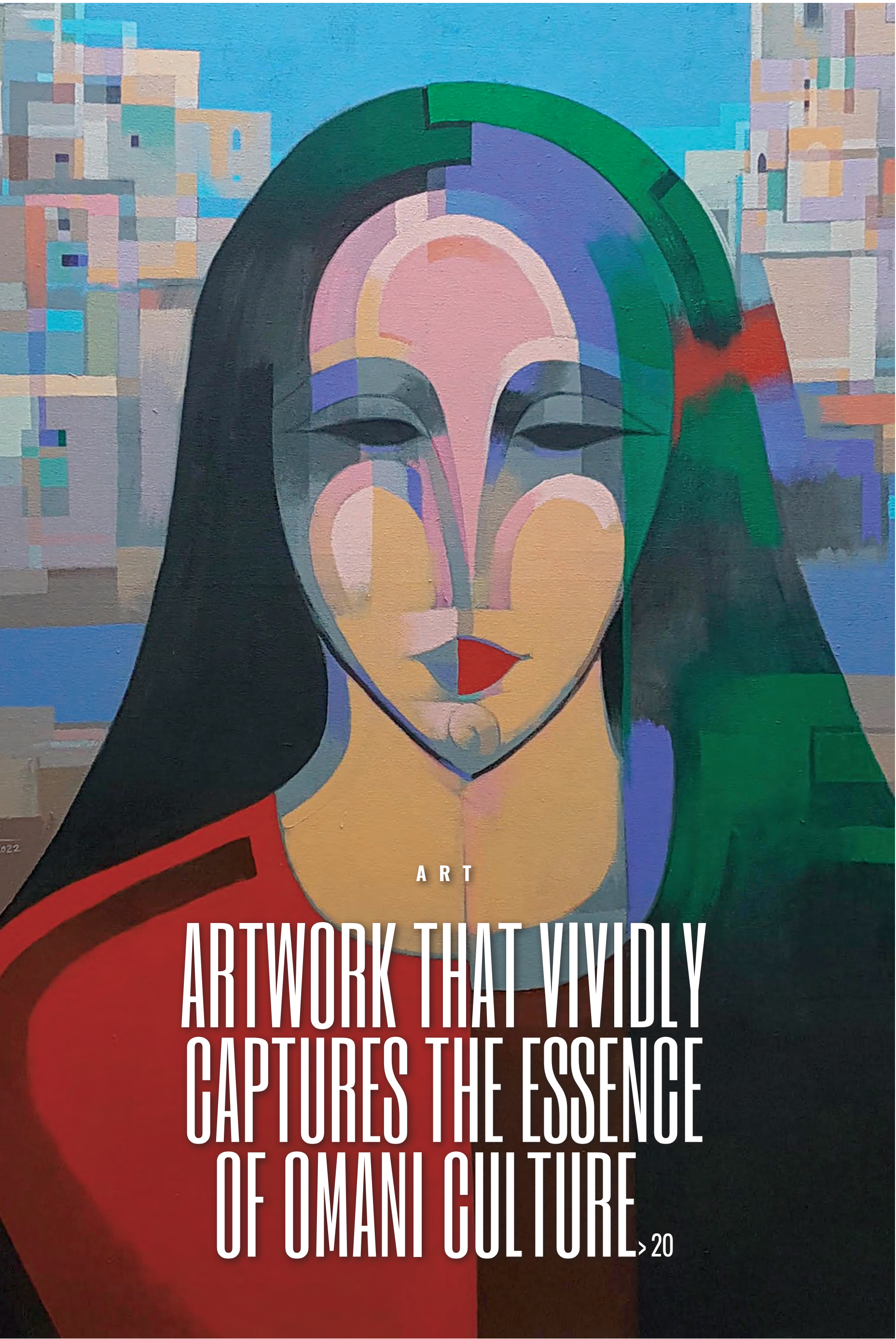


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ENTERTAINMENT

British film ‘Ballad of Wallis Island’ builds story of human bonds



FOR PRODUCER, actor, writer and composer Tom Basden, the British comedy film “The Ballad of Wallis Island” leans into the complexities of relationships rather than high-risk action scenes or life-threatening situations. “There were never going to be massive stakes, murders and car chases kind of thing, but I think we sort of knew tonally the kind of film we wanted it to be,” he said.

“We’re confident that people will really invest in that story,” Basden added. “The Ballad of Wallis Island”, distributed by Focus Features, arrived in theatres on March 28.

The film’s origins date back to 2007 when comedy duo, Tim Key, who is known for working with British comedy personality Alan Partridge, and Tom Basden, who starred in the series, “After Life”, wrote, produced and starred in the short film “The One and Only Herb McGwyer Plays Wallis Island”, which “The Ballad of Wallis Island” is based on. The short went on to be nominated for a BAFTA and won the best British short at the Edinburgh International Film Festival.

Both the short and feature film have the same plot, following aging folk singer Herb McGwyer, portrayed by Tom Basden, who gets paid an enormous sum of money to play a one-off gig on a remote Welsh island.

However, when Herb arrives at the gig, he discovers that he’s only performing for one man, a lottery winner named Charles, played by Tim Key.

The difference between the short and the feature film is that Carey Mulligan is in the feature as McGwyer’s ex-girlfriend and former musical partner Nell Mortimer, adding a different layer of interpersonal relations.

The film focuses on the bond between Herb and Charles.

“Maybe in some films it’s really clear what you want to happen to the two people,” Key said. “In our one it’s more generally, I really want him (Herb) to like me, as a people pleaser,” he added.

Music is a major part of the film, as Charles continuously plays hits from McGwyer Mortimer. Basden wrote all the songs of the fictional folk band.

“It’s really important that you believe that throughout the film that this is a musician, and these are musicians, and that was all his compositions,” Key said. — Reuters

Q U I C K F E A T U R E S



ENTERTAINMENT

French comedian Axel Auriant poses during a photo session on the set of theatre play “Numero 2” at the Tristan Bernard theatre in Paris. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

The Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala composed by the Patiala necklace and the choker necklace, both a special order dated of 1928 are displayed during a photocall for the forthcoming Cartier exhibition at the V&A (Victoria and Albert) museum in London. — AFP



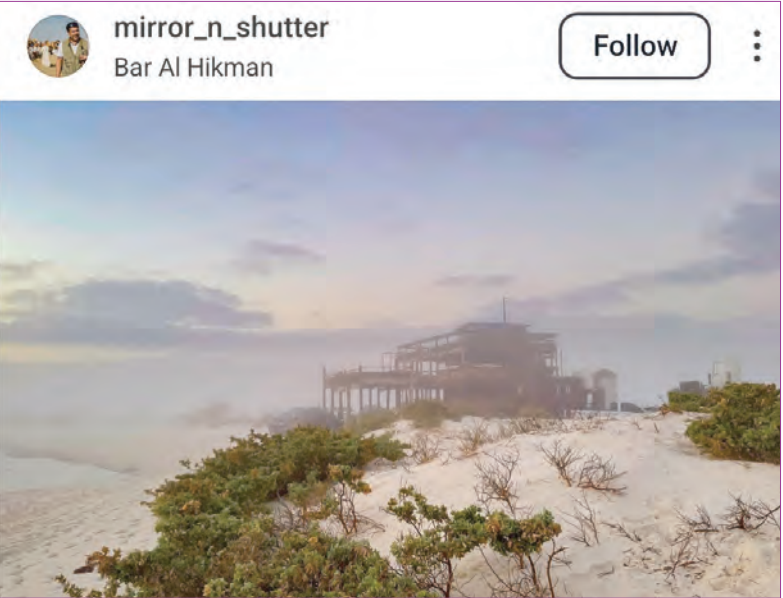
FILM FESTIVAL

Festival General Delegate Thierry Fremaux gives a press conference to announce the official selection of the 78th edition of the Cannes Film Festival, at the UGC Montparnasse cinema in Paris. — AFP

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‘Rembrandt to Vermeer’ exhibition marks Amsterdam’s 750th anniversary



A LARGE PRIVATE collection of Dutch Old Masters is making available 75 of its works, including 18 Rembrandts, for the celebration of Amsterdam’s 750th anniversary this year.

The “From Rembrandt to Vermeer, Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection” is on show from Wednesday to August 24 at the H’ART Museum in the city centre.

The museum describes the exhibition as “a unique and intimate glimpse into the 17th-century Netherlands through the eyes of the great Dutch Masters.”

Other artists include Frans Hals, Jan Steen, Ferdinand Bol, Gerard Dou and Frans van Mieris.

The exhibition includes the only Vermeer still in private hands — “A Young woman Seated at the Virginals.”

The exhibition sketches many facets of Amsterdam life, highlighting everything

from food, drink, reading and music to aging, parenting and the art of portraiture and self-portraiture.

It includes character studies of people from various backgrounds, at the market or in their homes.

The focus is formed by 17 paintings and one drawing by Rembrandt, who moved to Amsterdam from Leiden in 1630.

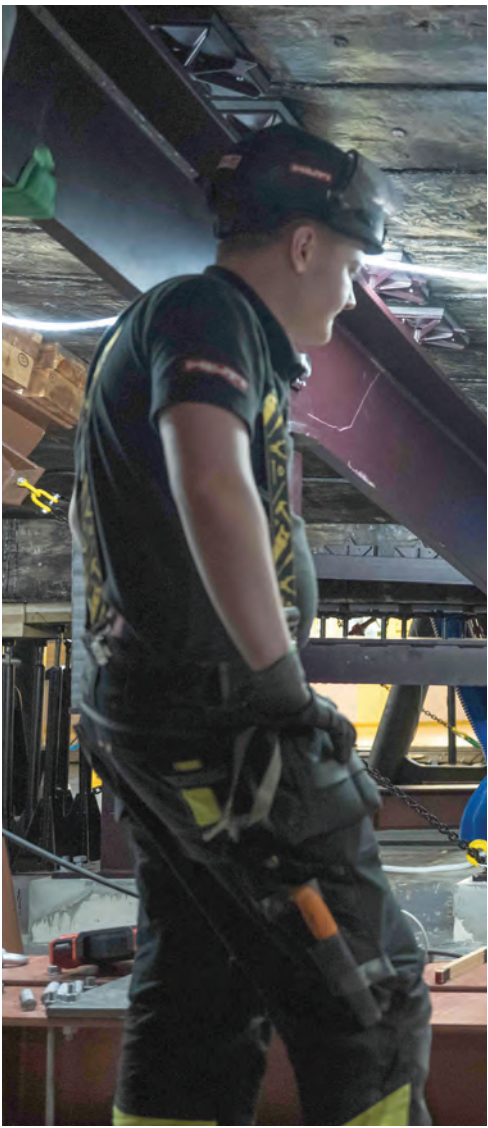
The US-French art collector Thomas Kaplan has been fascinated by Rembrandt since childhood and has assembled “The Leiden Collection” in the artist’s honour.

The H’ART website notes that the exhibition depicts many women, from wealthy matrons to goddesses to ordinary citizens.

“Particularly noteworthy is the inclusion of a painting by Maria Schalcken, one of the few women in her time known to be working as a painter,” it adds. — dpa



Race to save Sweden’s 17th century warship in preservation project



A SWEDISH museum has launched a massive four-year project to preserve the sagging hull of the Vasa, a majestic warship that sank nearly 400 years ago and is now one of Sweden’s most popular tourist attractions.

Experts have begun putting in place a complex metal structure to support the hull, which more than 60 years after its salvage has begun to sag in the Stockholm museum custom-built for it.

“Today we put in a part of the new support structure, one cradle, and it’s needed because the ship needs better support, because the old one from 1961 doesn’t cut it anymore,” said project leader Peter Rydebjork, showing off the new structure around the 17th century warship.

Due for completion in 2028, in time to mark the 400th anniversary of the shipwreck, the cost of the project is estimated at up to 17.7 million euros (\$19.5 million).

Originally intended to sail to the southern Baltic, the three-masted Vasa — a symbol of a rising Swedish kingdom — sank only a few hundred metres into its maiden voyage in 1628.

After just fifteen minutes at sea, it capsized and sank in Stockholm’s harbour due to a design flaw. The incident claimed the lives of several dozen crewmembers.

Well-preserved in the cold mud and low-salinity waters of the Baltic for more than three centuries, the Vasa was brought to the surface in 1961 after a delicate salvage operation.

Since then, the ship, which is largely intact, has been exhibited at the popular Vasa Museum.

But preserving the wreck is complex: the wood has shrunk over the years and the hull is sagging due to gravity.

It is also listing to one side.

Rydebjork said the old support structure “doesn’t really do the work that it should be doing, because the Vasa needs to be supported in the right places.”

“The new support structure will actually support the ship where it’s strongest on the inside,” he added.

The first phase of the project involves stabilising the exterior of the wreck, while a second phase will stabilise the interior.

A third and final phase will right the ship so it no longer lists. — AFP

FEATURES

BY NAJAH AL RIYAMI

IN A QUIET studio in Muttrah, where the past lingers in the curve of an old archway and the rhythm of the sea echoes through narrow alleys, Omani artist Idris al Hooti continues to paint stories that capture the soul of a nation. Known for his vibrant, mosaic-like compositions and deeply rooted cultural themes, Al Hooti is widely regarded as one of Oman's most prolific and influential artists — often described as “the Omani Picasso,” though he humbly resists the label.

Born in 1975, Al Hooti grew up in a family steeped in artistic expression. While many of his brothers turned to music, Idris found his voice in drawing and painting. Since joining the Youth Art Studio at 17, he has spent over three decades building a dynamic body of work that spans traditional media and modern techniques. His creative output includes painting, illustration, digital art, calligraphy, video art, and even public design installations. From book covers in Oman to gallery walls in Switzerland, Spain, South Korea and Morocco, his art has become a visual ambassador for Omani culture on the global stage.

At the heart of his work is a quiet reverence for heritage. Much of Al Hooti's art centres on the figure of the Omani woman — covered, mysterious, dignified. Though he admits he is still unpacking the reason this motif recurs so often, it has become a powerful symbol of identity and introspection in his visual storytelling. Through texture, contrast and form, he explores how Omani women carry both the weight of tradition and the pulse of modernity.

His artistic practice is equally grounded in place. Drawing inspiration from his surroundings, Idris creates works that harmonise with local architecture and landscapes. His portrayals of old Muttrah — the arches, alleyways and intimate details — echo with memory and atmosphere. In some pieces, palm trees become poetic forms, blending with Arabic calligraphy to represent the inseparable bond between language and landscape. These symbols of Omani life — both natural and architectural — are woven into a unique visual language that speaks to heritage, identity and continuity.

He has also shown a rare versatility across media. From oil and watercolour to charcoal, pastel, cardboard and digital video, Idris approaches each new material with curiosity and care. His passion for experimentation continues to shape a style that resists being pinned down — part traditional, part contemporary, and entirely his own.

Over the years, Al Hooti has participated in more than 100 exhibitions around the world, including notable appearances in Germany, Bangladesh, Belgium, India and the GCC. Yet, what he values most are not the venues but the conversations. “The experience of meeting artists from different countries and cultures has shaped me deeply,” he says. “It helps me understand the artistic directions that others are taking, and where we fit in.”

His influence in Oman extends far beyond the gallery. As a former graphic designer and calligrapher at Sultan Qaboos University, he brought creative thinking into institutional spaces. He has conducted over 20 workshops for beginners across Oman, nurturing a new generation of artists with patience and insight. His work has appeared on numerous book and magazine covers, quietly embedding art into everyday Omani life.

When asked about advice for young artists, Al Hooti shares: “Don't stop drawing. Keep experimenting. Don't rush into claiming an artistic identity. Let it grow naturally through research, reflection and time.” He also cautions against the



Artwork that vividly captures the essence of Omani culture



distractions of social media. “Many focus on followers and likes. But true growth comes from consistent practice and honest critique.” Despite his success, Al Hooti remains grounded. He is critical of how some local art events are organised and calls for better curation, greater government support and more strategic efforts to showcase Omani art internationally. “We have great potential,” he says, “but we must also push ourselves to improve, to organise better and to maintain a high level of quality in what we present.” Currently, Idris is preparing for a solo exhibition in coordination with Stal Gallery, expected by the end of the year. While he

remains active on Instagram and Facebook, sharing sketches and experiments that might not appear in formal exhibitions, he values in-person engagement and dialogue most. “Social media has allowed me to connect with people and artists across the world, but real interaction is still the most meaningful.” After more than 30 years in the art world, Idris al Hooti remains as committed to curiosity as he was at 17. Whether he is painting a covered woman, stylising a calligraphic palm tree, or sketching memories from Muttrah, he continues to shape the visual identity of a nation, one brushstroke at a time.