

OMAN
عمان
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12 SUNDOWNS
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HM’S MESSAGE TO KOREAN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to President Lee Jae Myung of the Republic of Korea, dealing with the bilateral relations between the two countries. The message was delivered by Shaikh Dr Zakariya bin Hamad al Saadi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Korea, when he was received by Chung Eui Hae, Deputy Minister for Political Affairs at the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at the ministry’s headquarters in the capital, Seoul.

EID AL ADHA HOLIDAY FROM MAY 26 TO 30

Eid Al Adha 1447 AH holiday for employees in the units of the State Administrative Apparatus and other legal entities, as well as workers in private sector establishments, will begin on Tuesday, 9 Dhul Hijjah 1447 AH, corresponding to May 26. Official work shall resume on Sunday, May 31. The Ministry of Labour pointed out that employers may agree on terms to engage employees on the said holiday — if deemed necessary due to the nature of their work — provided they compensate them for the holiday.

SAYYID THEYAZIN RECEIVES SPECIAL ENVOY OF FRENCH PRESIDENT



HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, received Gérard Mestrallet, Special Envoy of President Emmanuel Macron of the French Republic. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations between the two countries and areas of cooperation in various fields. The meeting also discussed ways to enhance economic cooperation between the two countries, particularly in logistics, opportunities to develop trade exchange and enhancing the role of Omani ports in supporting the smooth flow of maritime corridors and international trade, as well as ensuring the integration of supply chains between Asia and Europe. The meeting was attended by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and several officials from both sides. — ONA

HM issues Royal Decree on Postal Sector

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday issued Royal Decree No (57/2026) concerning the Postal Sector.

Article (1) stipulates that all allocations, origins, rights, obligations and assets related to the Postal Sector shall be transferred from the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority to the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

Article (2) states that employees of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority specialised

in the Postal Sector shall be transferred to the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, along with their financial grades. This shall be enforced in accordance with the mechanism to be agreed by the Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and the Chief Executive Officer of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority.

Article (3) says that the authority to regulate and licence courier and last-mile delivery services provided through digital

platforms (delivery applications) is hereby shall be vested in the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

Article (4) stipulates that the term ‘Authority’ shall be replaced by the term ‘Ministry’, the phrase ‘Chairman of the Board’ shall be replaced by the term ‘Minister, the phrase ‘Telecommunications Regulatory Authority’ shall be replaced by the phrase ‘Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology,’ and the phrases ‘Chairman of the Board of

Directors of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority’ and ‘Chief Executive Officer of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority’ shall be replaced by the phrase ‘Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology,’ wherever such terms appear in the Royal Decree No 71/2012 concerning the Postal Service Regulatory Law and in the relevant laws and Royal decrees.

Article (5) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

IRAN SENDS NEW PROPOSALS TO US

OMAN DENOUNCES ATTACKS ON UAE AND SAUDI ARABIA

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN has expressed its rejection and denunciation of the UAV attack that targeted Barakah Nuclear Energy Plant in Al Dhafra region of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, the Sultanate of Oman affirmed its solidarity with the UAE in measures that the country is undertaking to protect its security and territorial integrity.

The statement, which voiced Oman’s firm policy of rejecting all hostile and escalatory acts, also called for dialogue to address issues and challenges with the prime objective of preserving security and stability in the region, respecting the rules of international law and observing the policy of good neighbourliness and non-interference in the internal affairs of countries.

Oman has also voiced its strong condemnation and denunciation of the attempted unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) attack on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, reaffirming its firm stance against all hostile acts and practices.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, the Sultanate of Oman also expressed its full



Iranian women hold national flag and posters during a protest at the Haft-e Tir Square in Tehran on Monday. — AFP

support for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in all measures it takes to safeguard its security, safety and stability. Oman called for upholding the principles of wisdom and restraint in addressing all issues and challenges through dialogue and diplomatic and political channels.

Meanwhile, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, held a telephone conversation with Dr

Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs of the Republic of India. During the call, the two ministers discussed areas of bilateral cooperation and exchanged views on the current regional situation amid disrupted maritime navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, stressing the need to intensify diplomatic efforts to ease tensions and find lasting, sustainable solutions to the crisis.

Separately, the Foreign Minister received an evening call from Beate Meinl-Reisinger, Federal Minister for European and International Affairs of the Republic of Austria.

The two sides discussed developments and repercussions of the regional and global situation. Both sides affirmed the need to continue and intensify diplomatic efforts to achieve a breakthrough, allow the flow of maritime supply chains, and ensure freedom of navigation in line with international law.

NEW PROPOSALS

Iran sent a new peace proposal to the United States with terms that appeared similar to offers Washington has previously rejected, although a senior Iranian official said on Monday that the US had softened positions on some issues.

A Pakistani source confirmed that Islamabad, which has conveyed messages between the sides in the war in the Middle East since hosting the only round of peace talks last month, had shared the latest proposal with Washington. But the source suggested progress had been difficult. The sides “keep changing their goalposts,” the Pakistani source said, adding: “We don’t have much time.” SEE ALSO P6 & 7

OIA posts record RO 2.9 billion profit, ranks third globally

MUSCAT: Oman Investment Authority (OIA) reported exceptional 2025 financial results, posting historic profits of RO 2.9 billion and an investment return of 14.6 per cent for the year, reflecting the strength of its investment strategies and asset management.

The five-year average return stood at 10.4 per cent, earning the OIA third place globally among sovereign wealth funds, according to an SWF Global report — an achievement underscoring sustained growth and market confidence in its performance.

The OIA also ranked first globally

among sovereign wealth funds in public market investment returns for 2025.

Total assets reached about RO 23 billion, with performance exceeding annual targets by 105 per cent.

Oman Investment Authority contributed RO 800 million to the state budget, half of which was allocated to the Future Fund Oman. It also injected RO 2.4 billion in capital investments into local projects, supporting economic growth and stimulating key sectors.

On human capital, the OIA employed 438 staff with an Omanisation rate of 91 per cent,



The five-year average return stood at 10.4 per cent, earning the OIA third place globally among sovereign wealth funds.

while its subsidiaries employed over 41,000 people with an Omanisation rate of 79.4 per cent.

A total of 1,146 new jobs were created in 2025, surpassing the annual target of 800. The authority also directed RO 287 million to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in support of local content.

Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Investment Authority (OIA), said the authority continued throughout 2025 to support the national economy with efficiency and sustainability. Abdulsalam

bin Mohammed al Murshidi, OIA Chairman, said the exceptional achievements of 2025 reflect the institutional excellence of the authority and its subsidiaries, the competence of their national workforce, and their tangible role in sustaining outstanding performance while strengthening alignment with national priorities. The authority and its companies are moving with accelerating momentum to maximise returns on investments, thereby supporting economic development, contributing to national goals, and building a future for generations to come. SEE P13

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, stated that Oman's pioneering experience has been proven through the implementation of the Haj health card. — ONA

OMAN PRESENTS DIGITAL HAJ HEALTH CARD EXPERIENCE

GENEVA: The Sultanate of Oman on Monday presented its Digital Haj Health Card experience during the 2024 Haj season at the Digital Health Governance event, one of the most prominent side events accompanying the Seventy-Ninth Session of the World Health Assembly in Geneva.

This pioneering achievement rests upon an integrated ecosystem of digital enablers in the health sector, established by the Sultanate of Oman over many years. Foremost among them is the “Al Shifa” system, which today connects more than 85 per cent of health institutions in the Sultanate of Oman. This is in addition to the advanced national digital infrastructure and the role of the Health Command and Control Centre, which manages health services and monitors them during major seasons and mass gatherings. This embodies genuine readiness to lead digital health models at both the regional and international levels. Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, stated in his address that Oman's pioneering experience has been proven through the implementation of the Haj health card, noting that the International Patient Summary initiative is not merely a theoretical concept but a practical solution that changes people's lives.

He added that during the 2024 and 2025 Haj seasons, more than half a million pilgrims were able to carry their verified health records, enabling them to receive rapid and accurate medical care in the most critical moments.

The minister pointed out that Oman Vision 2040 is centred on building a health system supported by modern technologies, focused on the individual and characterised by interconnectedness with the world. The Sultanate of Oman proceeds from this vision in its belief in the importance of making the patient a central pillar of the digital healthcare system, thereby ensuring the accessibility of these services to all.

He explained that the ongoing collaboration with the World Health Organization concerning the Global Network for Digital Health Accreditation practically and realistically embodies these directions and future vision, affirming that the Sultanate of Oman continues its commitment to developing its health system through adopting innovation and advancing digital transformation pathways. — ONA

Oman at council meeting to end violence against children

GENEVA: The Sultanate of Oman participated on Monday in the first official meeting of the members of the Council of Champions to End Violence Against Children, held on the sidelines of the Seventy-Ninth Session of the World Health Assembly in Geneva. The delegation was led by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health and member of the Leadership Council.

This meeting is of exceptional significance, serving as the inaugural gathering of the Council's members, which included a select group of ministers, senior officials, and influential international figures. The high-level dialogue brought together



The high-level dialogue brought together decision-makers to address health and developmental issues deemed urgent humanitarian priorities. — ONA

decision-makers to address health and developmental issues deemed urgent humanitarian priorities.

The Council of Champions to End Violence Against Children focuses its efforts on two primary humanitarian concerns, namely advancing children's health and well-being, and combating violence against children. The meeting provided a platform for exchanging visions and approaches

designed to accelerate international action on these two vital fronts, while fostering solidarity among participating states in this shared responsibility.

Oman's participation in this meeting reflects its steadfast approach to supporting international initiatives with humanitarian and health dimensions, as well as its active engagement in United Nations platforms addressing childhood and sustainable development issues—an engagement rooted not only in diplomatic commitment but also in ethical and humanitarian responsibility. — ONA

Oman calls for integrated approach to global health

THE SULTANATE of Oman participated in the 79th World Health Assembly, which began on Monday at the United Nations headquarters in Geneva and will continue for several days. The World Health Assembly brings together health ministers and representatives of member states to discuss the most prominent global health issues and challenges.

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation to the meeting is headed by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health.

The minister of health delivered a speech in which he said that current health challenges, ranging from communicable and non-communicable diseases to mental health, antimicrobial resistance, health emergencies, and digital transformation, cannot be addressed through isolated or fragmented approaches. Rather, they necessitate an integrated approach based on four essential pillars: strengthening primary healthcare and prevention, investing in data and innovation, enhancing the readiness and resilience of health systems and ensuring their long-term sustainability.

He added that the Sultanate of Oman continues to implement



The Sultanate of Oman's delegation to the meeting is headed by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health. — ONA

comprehensive health reform and modernisation initiatives in line with Oman Vision 2040. These initiatives include developing the digital health infrastructure, enhancing data governance, expanding prevention and early detection programmes, supporting the mental health system, strengthening national immunisation, consolidating the One Health approach, and raising the level of preparedness for emergencies and health risks within an integrated system that places people at the centre of every decision and investment.

Al Sabti stressed the importance of developing the global health governance system to keep pace with the rapid changes the world is witnessing. This can be achieved by strengthening coordination among international initiatives, supporting national capacities, and facilitating knowledge exchange and technology transfer. This will contribute to a more equitable, efficient, and sustainable health response for all countries, regardless of their level of development.

Meanwhile, Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, participated as a guest of honour in the ‘High-Level Arab-Swiss Health Dialogue, organised by the Arab-Swiss Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CASCI) in Geneva, on the sidelines of the 79th World Health Assembly.

In his speech, Al Sabti affirmed that the world is currently at a pivotal historical

juncture, with healthcare systems undergoing radical restructuring under the pressure of escalating demand, the changing burden of disease, and an unprecedented technological revolution. He stated that the question is no longer whether to cooperate, but rather how to cooperate boldly and swiftly.

The minister of health noted that the Sultanate of Oman's strategic direction for healthcare in Oman Vision 2040 elevates healthcare from a mere service sector to a true pillar of national development.

He explained that the Sultanate of Oman is moving towards building a highly distinguished healthcare system, proactive rather than reactive, resilient to all fluctuations, and suitable for future generations.

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Health, also participated in the meeting of the Council of Arab Ministers of Health, held at the World Health Organization headquarters in Geneva, on the sidelines of the 79th World Health Assembly. The meeting was attended by ministers of health and heads of delegations from the Arab member states.

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation to the meeting was headed by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health. — ONA

Riyada discusses SME competitiveness

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, MAY 18

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority organised a workshop titled “Business Environment – Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM)” on Monday. The workshop brought together representatives from government and private entities, partners, stakeholders, experts, and entrepreneurs as part of efforts aimed at improving entrepreneurship environment indicators and enhancing the competitiveness and sustainability of small and medium enterprises in the Sultanate of Oman.

The first day of the two-day workshop focused on several themes linked to the entrepreneurship lifecycle, including governance, policies and legislation, financing, markets and opportunities, and infrastructure. Additionally, the workshop reviewed key challenges related to the business environment in Oman.

Discussions highlighted the importance of developing the business environment and



The first day of the two-day workshop focused on several themes linked to the entrepreneurship lifecycle.

formulating practical initiatives that support entrepreneurial growth. The workshop also addressed proposals related to simplifying procedures, improving access to financing, and strengthening support systems for startups and SMEs.

Moreover, the workshop addressed the importance of enhancing the legislative and regulatory environment for entrepreneurs. This includes strengthening digital infrastructure, accelerating licensing procedures, and improving access

to markets and financing in a way that supports the efficiency and competitiveness of SMEs.

In an interview with the Observer, Ammar al Hashmi, Research and Development Specialist in Local Content at the Tender Board and Local Content Authority, stated that the authority contributes to improving the entrepreneurship environment by allocating selected tenders and projects exclusively for SMEs holding the ‘Riyada’ card.

He also mentioned that the authority allocates 10 per cent of major development tenders to SMEs to help enhance their experience and enable them to undertake larger projects.

Additionally, government internal purchases valued below RO25,000 are also allocated to institutions holding the “Riyada” card.

Hamza al Tai, Head of Small Enterprises at Bank Muscat, mentioned that the bank continues to support SMEs through financing and advisory programmes.

The bank also offers specialised initiatives aimed at empowering entrepreneurs and improving their access to markets.

SALE

20% - 70%

Terms & Conditions apply

CLARKS

SHOEMAKERS SINCE 1825

Al Khamis Plaza, Qurum - Tel. 24560992 | Muscat Grand Mall - Tel. 24399930 | Al Hail South - Tel. 24558148
Al Khamis Shoes, Sohar - Tel. 26841178 | Al Khamis Shoes, Al Hail - Tel. 24543045 | 93894474

SHORT TAKES



ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVE AIMS TO PLANT TREES IN IBRA

IBRA: The Environment Department in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate launched an initiative to raise awareness about the ‘Plant Oman 2050’ project at Ibra Public Park on Monday.

The initiative is part of the national campaign aimed at planting 10 million trees, in line with the environmental sustainability goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The programme included planting a number of native and fruit-bearing saplings, a symbolic step to promote a culture of afforestation and environmental conservation. Several government agencies, private sector institutions, volunteering teams and members of the local community took part in the initiative.

Shaikh Hamed bin Khalifa al Abri, Wali of Ibra, stressed the importance of enhancing joint efforts to preserve the environment, saying that planting trees is a true investment for future generations.

Eng Said bin Nasser al Abdali, Director of the Environment Department in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, explained that the project aims to combat desertification, increase green spaces and raise awareness about the importance of native trees. — ONA



The programme included planting a number of native and fruit-bearing saplings. — ONA

OHRC HOLDS ORIENTATION MEETING



The meeting addressed the new legal frameworks of the Commission.

MUSCAT: Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) organised an extensive orientation meeting targeting civil society organisations, United Nations offices operating in the Sultanate of Oman, human rights experts, representatives of community initiatives, academics, and researchers, with the aim of introducing the Commission’s role, its new legal framework, and its independence.

Dr Rashid bin Hamad al Balushi, Chairman of the Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC), emphasised the importance of establishing a new and advanced phase of strategic partnership and integration between the Commission and civil society organisations.

He praised the pivotal role undertaken by civil society, which was demonstrated by the participation of its institutions in analytical workshops to draft the National Strategy for Human Rights in the Sultanate of Oman.

He explained that the reorganisation of the Commission comes within the framework of the Sultanate of Oman’s commitment to the provisions of the Basic Statute of the State as well as the international charters and conventions it has joined, pointing out that this step represents a qualitative leap in the course of the Commission’s work.

The meeting’s programme included the presentation of three main working papers that addressed the new legal frameworks of the Commission, ways to enhance the partnership with civil society organisations, and a review of modern mechanisms and technologies used in monitoring and receiving complaints in accordance with international standards.

MORE THAN 80 PARTICIPANTS TAKE PART IN TOURISM MARKET FORUM

MUSCAT: The third edition of the Tourism Market Forum 2026 commenced on Monday at Oman Tourism College in the Wilayat of Al Seeb. The event is organised by the Oman Tourism College. More than 80 participants, representing students from public and private universities and colleges, alongside professionals from the public and private sectors, took part in the forum.

The event featured working papers presented by speakers and representatives from various relevant authorities.

The forum’s agenda included



The forum aims to review the latest global trends and discuss the future of the tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

discussions between the presenters of the working papers and participants from various entities. These dialogues aimed to enrich the

exchange of expertise and visions regarding the future of the tourism industry, both locally and globally.

It is worth noting that this forum aims to review the latest global trends and discuss the future of the tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman. It also addresses future aspirations and key expectations for this sector in light of ongoing global events and fluctuations. Furthermore, the forum seeks to enhance strategic partnerships, support innovation and sustainable growth within the tourism industry, and facilitate the exchange of investment opportunities. — ONA

Screening system seeks to streamline visa procedures

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MAY 18

THE move to implement a new medical screening and visa processing system for workers arriving from the Philippines marks a significant step toward enhancing efficiency, transparency, and confidence in the recruitment process and is part of ongoing efforts by the Ministry of Labour to simplify procedures for employers and service beneficiaries while ensuring higher standards in medical screening for expatriate workers entering the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr Saif bin Mohammed al Busaidy, Adviser to the Minister of Labour for Labour Welfare, stated that the initiative is designed to facilitate procedures for employers and recipients of these services, while also strengthening health monitoring mechanisms related to incoming labour from the Republic of the Philippines.

He explained that the government, represented by the Ministry of Labour, remains committed to simplifying recruitment procedures and improving the overall quality of services provided to employers and workers alike.

“At the same time, health considerations remain a priority,” Dr Al Busaidy said, noting that health authorities observed a rise in certain diseases in the Philippines, prompting the ministry to tighten medical screening procedures for workers arriving from the country.

He pointed out that the Philippines is not currently covered under the



The Ministry of Labour remains committed to simplifying recruitment procedures and improving services provided to employers and workers alike.

The existence of multiple medical examination centres across the Philippines created challenges in monitoring and standardising procedures.

GCC-approved “Wafid” medical examination system used in several Gulf countries. In addition, the existence of multiple medical examination centres across the Philippines created challenges in monitoring and standardising procedures.

As a result, the ministry moved to regulate the process by specifying approved medical centres and establishing the Oman Medical Examination and Visa Centre to oversee these procedures instead of relying on numerous independent facilities.

Dr Al Busaidy described the initiative as a positive step that would enhance confidence in the credibility and accuracy of medical examination results. He added that having a unified centre would make monitoring and follow-up processes more efficient and effective.

Specialists in human resources and labour affairs believe the new system represents an important

development in expatriate recruitment procedures, particularly amid growing demand for stricter and more transparent health screening standards worldwide, noting that centralising medical examinations and visa procedures would help reduce inconsistencies between medical centres, minimise administrative complications, and improve the reliability of medical data related to incoming workers.

Employers have also welcomed the move, saying that a unified system could help reduce delays and procedural burdens associated with dealing with multiple entities, while also limiting the risk of discrepancies in medical screening reports.

Observers say the initiative reflects Oman’s broader commitment to balancing administrative efficiency with public health priorities. Oman has increasingly focused on developing integrated systems that support labour market sustainability while maintaining high standards of health protection and regulatory oversight.

The establishment of the Oman Medical Examination and Visa Centre also aligns with the country’s wider efforts to modernise government services and enhance digital transformation initiatives aimed at improving service delivery and user experience.

Analysts believe the success of this model could pave the way for similar systems to be introduced for workers arriving from other countries in the future, especially if the new mechanism proves effective in improving procedural efficiency and strengthening health safeguards.

Children display linguistic skills at ‘Chinese Bridge’

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 18

Students from Omani schools showcased Chinese language skills and a deep understanding of Chinese culture at the first ‘Chinese Bridge’ competition in Oman, held at the Oman Across Ages Museum in the Wilayat of Manah, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The audience cheered and gave warm, enthusiastic standing ovations to the performances, which took place in the presence of Dr Masouma al Ajmi, Adviser to the Minister for the Department of Development of Linguistic Skills at the Ministry of Education, and Lyu Jian, the Chinese Ambassador to Oman.

Over 200 people, including Directors General of the Education Directorates of Muscat and Al Dakhiliyah governorates, the Director-General of the Oman Across Ages Museum, students learning Chinese from four Omani high schools, and Chinese teachers dispatched by China, were present to support the contestants. Ten students from four Omani high schools studying Chinese advanced to the final round through a selection process. Despite studying Chinese for less than a year, they displayed excellent language skills that captivated the audience.



The event was jointly organised by the Chinese Embassy in Oman and the Ministry of Education.

“The Omani government places great importance on Chinese language education. Learning Chinese is essential for preparing for the future, and introducing Chinese language courses in high schools is a crucial step for Oman in embracing the future, opening up to the world, and implementing Oman’s ‘Look East’ strategy,” said Masooma. She added that the Ministry of Education is willing to collaborate closely with China’s Ministry of Education and the Chinese Embassy in Oman to expand Chinese language education in Oman and nurture talents who will continue the friendship between Oman and China for generations to come.

During the subsequent ‘Amazing China’ Chinese Camp event, 160 Omani students were recognised and immersed themselves in themed exhibition areas featuring Hanfu displays, Go matches, Chinese martial arts, intangible cultural heritage handicrafts, tea art and calligraphy, traditional Chinese musical performances, and ‘A Bite of China’ culinary experiences. At the BGP exhibition booth, students used VR headsets to experience China’s advanced exploration technologies and the company’s commitment to environmental protection.

“China has proposed the Global Civilisation Initiative, which aims to promote inclusiveness, coexistence, exchanges, and mutual learning among civilisations. Supporting the integration of Chinese language education into Oman’s national education system and organising colourful cultural exchange activities not only reflects the traditional friendship between China and Oman but also represents a valuable gift from China to Omani youth,” said Ambassador Lyu Jian. The event was jointly organised by the Chinese Embassy in Oman and the Ministry of Education, Oman, undertaken by BGP and China-Arab TV, and supported by the Across Ages Museum and overseas Chinese associations in Oman.

SPOTLIGHT

THE SILENT HERO OF SUMMER

25°C

BALQEES AL ORAIMI

WITH SUMMER temperatures continuing to soar across Oman, one silent companion once again emerges as the true 'hero of the season,' working tirelessly behind walls, inside offices, homes and vehicles to make daily life bearable. The air conditioner, once considered a luxury in many households, has now become an essential part of modern living, especially during the long, humid summer months across Oman.

As temperatures climb beyond comfortable levels and humidity intensifies in coastal areas, air-conditioning systems operate almost continuously throughout the day. From residential homes and schools to shopping malls, restaurants, and workplaces, cooling systems have become indispensable for maintaining comfort, productivity, and even public health during the summer season.

Across cities such as Muscat, Suhar and Salalah, life during midday slows noticeably as residents seek shelter indoors. Shopping centres and cafés witness increased crowds, not only for leisure and shopping but also as safe havens from the relentless outdoor heat. For many families, indoor air-conditioned spaces have become a practical solution for spending time together during the hottest months of the year.

Abdullah Nasser, an air-conditioning and refrigeration specialist, said the sector experiences one of its busiest periods during summer.

“As soon as temperatures begin to rise, requests for maintenance and installation increase dramatically,” he explained. “Air conditioners are no longer viewed as optional appliances. They are essential, especially in homes with children, elderly family members, or individuals with health conditions affected by extreme heat.” He added that many cooling systems are placed under enormous strain due to nonstop operation, which often results in breakdowns during peak summer periods.

“A large number of problems could be avoided through regular maintenance and timely cleaning of filters and cooling units,” he noted. “Unfortunately, many people wait until the unit stops functioning completely before seeking professional help.”

The growing dependence on air conditioning has also reshaped social habits and business operations. Employers across both public and private sectors recognise the importance of maintaining cool indoor environments to ensure employee comfort and productivity. Likewise, retail businesses rely heavily on comfortable indoor temperatures to attract shoppers during summer afternoons and evenings.

At a shopping mall in Muscat, Noura Musallam described how cooling systems have become central to her family’s daily summer routine.

“During the afternoons, it is almost impossible to spend long periods outdoors,” she said. “We usually head to indoor places with proper air conditioning, not just for shopping, but also to relax and escape the heat together as a family.”

She added that children especially prefer spending time in air-conditioned environments during school holidays, when outdoor activities become difficult due to intense temperatures. However, this heavy reliance on cooling systems also brings challenges.

Energy specialists note that electricity consumption reaches its highest levels during summer, largely because of continuous air-conditioner use. In many households, cooling systems account for a major portion of monthly electricity bills, particularly during heatwaves.

Experts continue to encourage residents to adopt more efficient energy practices, including setting air conditioners at moderate temperatures, insulating homes properly and conducting routine maintenance to improve performance. Modern cooling systems equipped with energy-saving technologies are also becoming increasingly popular in the Omani market as consumers seek ways to balance comfort with lower electricity consumption.

Meanwhile, businesses specialising in cooling systems have seen growing demand for advanced technologies that provide faster cooling while consuming less energy. Seasonal offers on air-conditioning units and maintenance packages have become common during

the summer months, reflecting the importance of the sector in everyday life in Oman.

Despite concerns about energy consumption and rising operational costs, air conditioners remain one of the most important tools for adapting to Oman’s challenging summer climate. Beyond simple comfort, they contribute to healthier indoor environments, better sleep and improved productivity during long periods of extreme heat.

Between the scorching temperatures outside and the cool air indoors, the ‘hero of the season’ continues to perform its role quietly yet effectively.

In homes, offices and public spaces across Oman, air conditioners have become more than machines — they are now an inseparable part of daily life during summer, ensuring that routines continue uninterrupted despite the unforgiving heat.

E-bikes to take the roads for greener delivery

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, MAY 18

A MEMORANDUM of Understanding was signed during Oman Sustainability Week 2026, by Stéphane Berton, Managing Director of talabat Oman, and Ammar Dalloul, Co-founder and CEO of BYOD, along with delegates from the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and Shell Oman.

The initiative marks a significant step toward decarbonising Oman's urban logistics sector and aligns with Oman's broader sustainability ambitions under Oman Vision 2040.

Under the pilot phase, 10 electric bikes will be deployed to assess performance, reliability, and operational feasibility. The programme will also evaluate environmental impact, rider experience, and the potential for scaling up the initiative across a wider delivery network.

Stéphane Berton, Managing Director at talabat Oman said, "At talabat, we believe the future of delivery should be smarter and more sustainable. Our partnership with BYOD reflects our commitment to innovation and Oman's Net-Zero goals." He added, "This initiative marks a positive step toward greener delivery solutions that help reduce our environmental



Under the pilot phase, 10 electric bikes will be deployed to assess performance, reliability, and operational feasibility.

footprint. It will directly benefit riders, customers and communities." As part of the project, a battery-swapping station will be installed at a location selected by talabat in collaboration with BYOD and Shell Oman, ensuring a reliable supply of clean energy for riders throughout the day.

Ammar Dalloul, Co-founder and CEO of BYOD, said, "This is a positive step towards a sustainable and greener future, and our partnership with talabat reflects that commitment. We at BYOD are building a smarter and more sustainable transportation ecosystem in Oman. Through innovative electric

mobility solutions, designed for modern cities and future generations, we strive to contribute to Oman's Net-Zero goals." Talabat's participation in Oman Sustainability Week further underscores its environmental initiatives, including the introduction of advanced recycling machines in collaboration with OQ, as well as showcasing EV bikes at its exhibition booth.

In addition to environmental efforts, the company highlighted its humanitarian initiatives through the "Give Back" section, offering visitors the opportunity to learn more about its community programmes and contribute to charitable causes.



جامعة السلطان قابوس
Sultan Qaboos University

TENDER NOTICE

The Investment & Revenue Department at Sultan Qaboos University would like to invite companies to submit their quotations for:

Type of Business	Completion of the Construction & Rental & Operation Commercial Building (Coffee Shop or Restaurant/ Minimart) With drive through service, located on the land opposite the University's Projects and Maintenance Department building.
Tender #	SQU.IRD.3 /26
Class	Specialized Companies
Date of site visit	25/05/2026 9:00 a.m.
The last date for collecting the document	04/06/2026
The last date for submission of the quotations	06/07/2026 before 11:00 a.m.

- Tenderers who wish to participate in this Tender may collect Tender Documents from The Section of Revenue and Expenditures at the Investment & Revenue Department, Sultan Qaboos University, during the working hours for an amount of OR.25 for each tender document (non-refundable).
- The Site Visit for the location is Necessary. It will be on the above-mentioned date and the assembly point will be at the Investment & Revenue Department.
- The last date for submission of the quotations is on **Monday, 06/07/2026**. The quotations should be submitted in a sealed envelope addressed to the Director of The Investment & Revenue Department, located on the first floor of the commercial building at Sultan Qaboos University and deposited in the Tender Box kept in the Department, **before 11:00 a.m.**
- The exterior of the envelope should be marked with the name and number of the Tender being presented and should bear no identification or mark of the Tenderer.

The Investment & Revenue Department
P.O. BOX 50, P.C. 123, ALKHOD, SULTANATE OF OMAN
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FOUR HELD IN SCHOOL BUS VANDALISM, THEFT CASE IN AL BURAIMI

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) arrested four individuals for their involvement in the vandalism and attempted theft of a school bus in the Al Buraimi Governorate. According to the Police Command of al Buraimi Governorate, initial

investigations revealed that the group vandalised the bus and attempted to steal it with the specific intention of dismantling the vehicle to sell its components illegally as spare parts.

The ROP confirmed that legal procedures and further

investigations are currently being finalised against them before they are referred to the judicial authorities.

The Royal Oman Police continues to urge citizens and residents to remain vigilant and report any suspicious activities.

ROYAL HOSPITAL CONGRESS IN DEC

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman will hold the 3rd edition of Royal Hospital International Congress 2026 from 14 to 17 December. The congress constitutes a leading global platform that brings together an elite group of international healthcare leaders.

The 3rd edition of the congress will feature 28 specialised conferences and 40 training workshops. This makes the event the largest medical gathering of its kind in the region.

Today, the Ministry of Health launched the Visual Identity of the 3rd Royal Hospital International Congress 2026. The launch ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, the Under-Secretary.

— ONA

CONDOLENCES

“Surely we belong to Allah and to Him shall we return”

The Management and Staff of
Rashid Al Kiyumi Trading Est.

extends their deepest and most heartfelt condolences to the family, relatives, and friends on the sad demise of:

HAJI RASHID HILAL NASSER AL KIYUMI

(Founder of Rashid Al Kiyumi Group)

Who passed away on 17.05.2026

We pray to Almighty Allah to grant the departed soul eternal peace in Jannat Al-Firdous, and to give his family the strength and fortitude to bear this irreplaceable loss.

IRAN SAID on Monday it had responded to a new US proposal aimed at ending the war, adding that diplomatic exchanges continue despite Iranian media reports describing Washington's demands as excessive. Washington and Tehran have been swapping proposals in an effort to end the conflict which the US and Israel launched on February 28, but they have held only a single round of talks despite a fragile ceasefire.

“As we announced yesterday, our concerns were conveyed to the American side,” foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei told a news briefing, adding that exchanges were “continuing through the Pakistani mediator”. Baqaei defended Iran's demands, including the release of Iranian assets frozen abroad and the lifting of long-standing sanctions. “The points raised are Iranian demands that have been firmly defended by the Iranian negotiating team in every round of negotiations,” he said. He also defended an Iranian stipulation that the US pay war reparations, describing the conflict as “illegal and baseless”.

STRAIT OF HORMUZ
On the possibility of another military confrontation, Baqaei said Iran was “fully prepared for any eventuality”. On Sunday, Iran's Fars news agency said Washington had presented a five-point list, which included a demand for Iran to keep only one nuclear site in operation and transfer its stockpile of highly enriched uranium to the United States.

The US had refused to release “even 25 per cent” of Iran's frozen assets or pay any reparations for war damage, Fars said. The report said the US had also made clear it would only cease hostilities when Tehran engages in formal peace negotiations. Iran's Mehr news agency said “the United States, offering no tangible concessions, wants to

“As we announced yesterday, our concerns were conveyed to the American side. Exchanges were “continuing through the Pakistani mediator”. The points raised are Iranian demands that have been firmly defended by the Iranian negotiating team in every round of negotiations.

ESMAEL BAQAEI

obtain concessions that it failed to obtain during the war, which will lead to an impasse in the negotiations”.

In an earlier proposal, which was sent last week, Iran had called for an end to the war on all fronts, including Israel's campaign in Lebanon, as well as a halt to a US naval blockade on Iranian ports in place since April 13. It also called for the lifting of all US sanctions on Iran and the release of its assets frozen abroad.

On Monday, Iran's Tasnim news agency, citing an unnamed source close to the Iranian negotiating team, said “contrary to previous texts, the Americans agreed in a new text to waive oil sanctions during the negotiation period.” Fars said that the Iranian proposal had emphasised that Tehran would continue to manage the strategic Strait of Hormuz, a vital energy conduit which Iran has largely kept closed since the start of the war. On Monday, Iran's Supreme National Security Council announced the formation of a new body to manage the Strait.

Separately on Monday, Iran's Revolutionary Guards said their forces had struck groups linked to the United States and Israel in the western Iranian province of Kurdistan, near the border with Iraq. In a statement carried by the ISNA news agency, the Guards said groups from “northern Iraq and acting on

IRAN RESPONDS TO NEW US PROPOSAL



An Iranian man walks past a huge billboard supporting Iran's national football team in the upcoming 2026 World Cup, installed on a building at Enghelab Square in Tehran. — AFP

behalf of the US and the Zionist regime were attempting to smuggle a large shipment of American weapons and ammunition” into Iran. They said the groups were hit in the Iranian city of Baneh in the Kurdistan region.

LIMITED NUCLEAR ACTIVITIES
The United States has shown flexibility on allowing Iran to maintain limited peaceful

nuclear activities under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency, a senior Iranian source said on Monday. The source said that on the issue of Iran's frozen assets, however, Washington has so far only agreed to free one quarter of those assets according to a phased timetable. Iran wants the US to reconsider both positions, the source said.

In its new proposal, the source said, Iran

has again focused on securing an end to the war, reopening the Strait of Hormuz, and lifting maritime sanctions.

The more contentious issues around Iran's nuclear programme and uranium enrichment, which remain the most difficult parts of the negotiations, have been deferred to later rounds of talks.

Meanwhile, oil prices turned lower in

afternoon trading on Monday and stock markets advanced after an Iranian media report said US officials had agreed to suspend sanctions against its crude while talks on ending the war continue. The conflict has led to an effective blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, through which around 20 per cent of global oil exports pass in peacetime, and sent oil prices soaring. — Agencies

Lebanon president vows the ‘impossible’ to stop Israeli war



A Lebanese girl looks through a fence at a school-turned shelter, near Sidon, Lebanon. — Reuters

BBEIRUT: Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said on Monday that he would do the “impossible” in order to stop the war with Israel, after a ceasefire and direct talks between the countries failed to end the fighting. Aoun's comments came as the Israeli army carried out a series of strikes in south Lebanon, while Hezbollah said it had struck a military target in northern Israel.

Since the start of the ceasefire on April 17, Israel has continued to launch strikes, carry out demolitions and issue evacuation orders in south Lebanon, saying it is targeting Hezbollah. Hezbollah has also maintained its operations against Israeli forces in south Lebanon

and northern Israel. “The framework that Lebanon has set for the negotiations consists of an Israeli withdrawal, a ceasefire, the deployment of the army along the border, the return of the displaced, and economic aid,” Aoun said in a statement Monday. “My duty, based on my position and my responsibility, is to do the impossible, and to choose what is least costly, in order to stop the war against Lebanon and its people,” he added.

Last week the truce was extended for 45 days following a third round of talks between Lebanese and Israeli representatives in Washington, discussions which Hezbollah is opposed to.

But the ceasefire has failed to stop the violence, with Hezbollah on Monday saying it had fired a drone at a military target in northern Israel.

The target was “an Iron Dome platform belonging to the Israeli enemy army” based in a military encampment in northern Israel, Hezbollah said, referring to Israel's air defence system. The attack was a response to Israeli “violations” of the ceasefire, it added.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported a series of Israeli strikes across the south.

The Israeli military also issued an evacuation warning for three southern Lebanese towns. The attacks came a day after Israeli strikes killed seven people in Lebanon, including a member of the group Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the country's northeast, far from the Israel-Lebanon border.

Israeli soldiers have invaded and occupied a swathe of south Lebanon, operating inside an Israeli-declared “yellow line” that runs around 10 kilometres (six miles) north of the border.

They have carried out large-scale demolitions in the area. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday his country was “facing the challenge of neutralising FPV (first-person view) drones”, as Hezbollah has increasingly made use of the tech to strike Israeli forces.

Israeli attacks have killed more than 2,900 people in Lebanon since the start of the war, including more than 400 since the ceasefire took effect on April 17, according to Lebanese authorities. — AFP

G7 finance chiefs seek common stance over war

PARIS: Finance chiefs from the G7 industrialised nations gathered in Paris on Monday for two days of talks aimed at forging a united front as the Middle East war roils economic prospects worldwide. France, which currently chairs the rotating presidency of the Group of Seven, faces the tricky task of keeping dialogue open as trade feuds spurred by US President Donald Trump's tariff blitz compound geopolitical tensions. Reducing reliance on China's vast holdings of rare earths is also at the top of the agenda.

“We are facing significant challenges — war in the Middle East, obviously, multilateral imbalances that are not sustainable, and the stakes regarding rare earths, critical materials and development aid,” French Finance Minister Roland Lescure told journalists on Monday. He noted in particular the surging US

budget deficit, a lack of technological innovation in Europe, and China's efforts to counter slumping consumer spending and industrial over-capacity that has pushed its companies to elbow into overseas markets. “I believe that today, we are going to show that multilateralism is useful, and it works,” Lescure said. “We have... to commit ourselves to figure out a return to a more sustainable growth model.”

Meanwhile, Fatih Birol, head of the International Energy Agency, said on Monday that commercial oil inventories were depleting rapidly with only a few weeks worth left due to the Iran war and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz to shipping.

Birol, who is participating in the Group of Seven finance leaders meeting in Paris, told reporters that the release of strategic oil reserves had added 2.5 million barrels of oil per day to the market. — Agencies



TRANSPORT PROTESTS HIT KENYA



Kenya's public transport system was paralysed on Monday, when protesters barricaded roads over fuel price hikes triggered by the Middle East war. One of many African countries dependent on fuel imports from the Gulf, Kenya has been heavily hit by Iran's effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil normally passes.

Protesters barricaded roads and lit bonfires on the outskirts of the capital, Nairobi, early on Monday and tried to stop cars and “boda boda” motorbikes. The usual congestion in Nairobi's central business district was missing, with schools closed and events cancelled. Thousands of commuters across the country were stranded after privately owned “matatu” minibuses, Kenya's main form of public transport, went on strike. The protests spread to other major towns, including Mombasa, Nakuru, Eldoret and Nyeri.

“The strike is completely uncalled for, even though the prices of petroleum products have risen,” said treasury and economic planning minister John Mbadi. “This is a war that we have not caused,” he told the NTV broadcaster. Critics argue that Kenya has high taxes on fuel that could be reduced, although it is also reliant on them to service high levels of debt and a strained budget. — AFP

1

IRAN TARGETS KURDISH AREA

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said that their forces had struck groups linked to the United States and Israel in the western Iranian province of Kurdistan, near the border with Iraq.

2

GLOBAL OIL PRICES DIP

Oil prices turned lower and stock markets advanced after an Iranian media report said US officials had agreed to suspend sanctions against its crude.

3

ITALY QUESTIONS ENERGY RULES

Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has asked the EU to loosen fiscal rules to help member states manage higher energy prices sparked by the Middle East war.

4

HEZBOLLAH DRONES TARGET ISRAEL

Hezbollah said it fired a drone at a military target in northern Israel, as Israel continued launching strikes on south Lebanon despite an extension of the truce.

5

NEW BODY TO MANAGE HORMUZ

Iran's top security body announced the formation of a new body to manage the Strait of Hormuz, which Tehran wants to charge ships to traverse.

6

IRAN RESPONDS TO US PROPOSAL

Iran said it had responded to a new US proposal aimed at ending the war, adding that exchanges were continuing despite describing Washington's excessive demands.

7

TRUMP MAKES FRESH THREATS

President Donald Trump issued a new warning to Iran, saying the Islamic republic had to move quickly to end the conflict that has shaken the energy prices.

8

ISRAELI STRIKES IN LEBANON

An Israeli missile strike on an apartment in eastern Lebanon killed an Islamic Jihad commander and his 17-year-old daughter.

9

SAUDI ARABIA INTERCEPTS DRONES

Saudi Arabia said on Sunday it had intercepted and destroyed three drones that had entered from Iraqi airspace.

10

FIRE OUTSIDE UAE NUCLEAR PLANT

A drone strike triggered a fire near a nuclear power station in the emirate of Abu Dhabi, authorities said, reporting no injuries or impact on radiation levels.

Standing firm... Oman making strides in economic landscapes



EDITORIAL

In a time when regional and global economic landscapes are marked by escalating geopolitical tensions, the Sultanate of Oman stands out as a resilient example of stability. Undeterred by external pressures and supply chain challenges, Oman continues to push forward with its economic reforms. Far from slowing down, the nation has accelerated its journey towards modernisation, anchored by groundbreaking initiatives like the International Financial Centre of Oman and a newly established Artificial Intelligence Special Zone.

The current global situation has only emphasised the wisdom of Oman's long-term strategy. As nations worldwide struggle with severe crude shortages and the volatility of high oil prices, the urgent need to diversify away from fossil fuels has shifted from a distant goal to an immediate economic necessity. Oman's response to this global energy shift has not been reactive, but rather a deliberate, steadfast execution of its sovereign road map.

The government's successful approach is clearly reflected in the financial performance of the Oman Investment Authority (OIA). In its 2025 financial results, the OIA achieved record profits of RO 2.9 billion, yielding an extraordinary single-year return on investment of 14.6 per cent. Over five years, the fund's steady return of 10.4 per cent elevates the OIA to third place globally among

all sovereign wealth funds. Remarkably, the OIA secured the number-one spot worldwide for returns on public market investments in 2025, outperforming its global peers and demonstrating elite fiscal stewardship during turbulent times. These impressive returns are being directly reinvested back into the domestic economy. The OIA contributed RO 800 million to the state's general budget, with half of that sum earmarked for the Oman Future Fund. Additionally, by injecting RO 2.4 billion into local project capital investments, the authority has successfully revitalised vital domestic sectors and sparked sustainable economic growth. This focus on the domestic market led to tangible social benefits in 2025: the government exceeded its annual employment target of 800 jobs by creating 1,146 high-value positions, while also directing RO 287 million towards small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to strengthen local content and supply chain independence.

Internationally, the OIA's Generations Portfolio continues to build long-term wealth. Tasked with securing sustainable returns in global markets, the portfolio expanded by incorporating new funds across diverse sectors, increasing its total number of active international investment funds to 210.

Complementing this financial hub is Oman's latest technological achievement: the Artificial Intelligence Special Zone in Muscat Governorate. Engineered to be the

Oman's response to this global energy shift has not been reactive, but rather a deliberate, steadfast execution of its sovereign road map

region's digital hub, the specialised zone aims to attract advanced AI-driven enterprises, tech startups, and innovation enablers from Oman, the wider Middle East, and Africa. By fostering a competitive environment for high-tech investments and focusing on nurturing local and regional tech talent, the zone provides startups with the resources needed to expand into global markets.

This digital leap is supported by a strong institutional foundation. The National Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Digital Technologies Programme, launched in 2024, has rapidly deployed the critical infrastructure required for a modern data economy. This includes a national open data platform for entrepreneurs and decision-makers, a national AI research and development centre for academia, and an AI Studio as a collaborative space for IT specialists and corporate enterprises.

Oman's visionary leadership has set clear goals for the benchmark year of Oman Vision 2040. However, the momentum from recent successes indicates that the current transformation extends far beyond a specific timeframe.

Through disciplined fiscal management, bold legal innovations and a proactive embrace of the fourth industrial revolution, Oman is systematically insulating its economy from global volatility and ensuring an improved quality of life for its citizens for generations to come.

CARRYING GAZA CHILDREN’S DREAMS TO THE TOP OF THE WORLD

PAAVAN MATHEMA

Climber Mostafa Salameh is carrying a kite scribbled with dreams of Gaza's children to the summit of Mount Everest, seeking to raise awareness of the war's toll on its youngest victims.

Tucked among his expedition gear is the kite in red, black, white and green of the Palestinian flag, marked with handwritten messages from children in the battered territory.

The war, sparked after the October 2023 attack on Israel, has killed more than 72,000 people in Gaza, according to the territory's health ministry. The simple wishes — shaped by loss, grief and displacement — reflect hope for a future beyond conflict. Palestinian-Jordanian Salameh, 56, also wants to raise \$10 million for the UK-based charity Al Khair Foundation, which provides nutrition, sanitation, shelter and psychological support to Gazans.

“We have all these dreams of the children of Gaza that're going to go up to the top of the world because they can't do anything now in Gaza,” Salameh said in a video interview.

“They don't have homes or education. Everything is being done in a tent. And they don't have access to clean water, proper food or proper medication,” said the mountaineer, who met the children at the Rafah border after they crossed into Egypt. The war has displaced nearly Gaza's entire population and reduced swathes of the Palestinian territory to rubble.

Hundreds of thousands of people are still living in tents and conditions remain dire despite a ceasefire that took effect in October last year.

For Salameh, the expedition hopes to shine a light on the plight of the children and amplify their voices. “The whole world is closing their eyes when it comes to Palestine,” said Salameh, who hopes to make the summit before the spring climbing season wraps up in the next few weeks. “It's about awareness on what these children are going through and at the same time to raise money.”

The messages inscribed on the kite reflect both ambition and grief- children hoping to become doctors or engineers to rebuild their shattered homes, alongside stark reminders of loss. One girl, Munira, asked Salameh to write the number 47 on the kite. “I said, what is number 47? And she replied that it was the number of all her family members who have been killed,” he said. — AFP

Me, myself, and the neighbourhood cats

MY RELATIONSHIP with cats started in childhood while growing up in Muttrah. Back then, it felt normal for every household to be connected to an animal in one way or another. In my own house, my oldest brother kept dogs, the other took on every possible stray creature — dogs, cats, turtles, rabbits, birds — while I slowly became attached specifically to cats.

At first, I did not think much about it. Feeding cats was simply part of daily life. But over the years, I became more aware of the difficult lives stray animals face in Oman. I especially feel for stray dogs, although I have always been slightly afraid of them. Even now, I occasionally buy dog food and place it near garbage bins where stray dogs gather.

But with cats, I eventually accepted defeat: I am officially a cat lady.

The neighbourhood cats know me very well. They wait outside the gate at predictable hours every day. Most of the time, I feed them dry food, but occasionally I spoil them with tuna or store-bought grilled chicken. Of course, once they taste the better food, they refuse to appreciate the dry food again.

Recently, a mother cat settled outside my bedroom window with her four kittens. Every kitten looks completely different from the others. One is orange, another entirely black, another grey and white, and another a calico. Feeding their nursing mother has become part of my routine.

What caring for stray cats has taught me is that animals need more than food. They want affection and safety. Many of the cats I feed



What caring for stray cats has taught me is that animals need more than food.



DR NAJMA AL ZIDJALY

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

clearly want to become indoor cats. They enjoy being touched and spoken to gently. Still, I try to maintain boundaries. I feed them and help when necessary, but I do not fully adopt them because caring for indoor animals is a major responsibility.

That said, some cats force their way into your life. One of them is Ash, a kitten I found with serious eye problems. I immediately took him to the veterinary clinic near my house, and fortunately, his eyesight was saved. Helping Ash affected me emotionally because he looks very similar to another cat I once failed to save.

In many ways, helping him felt like correcting an old regret.

Then there is TebTeb, probably the closest I have come to owning a cat in my adulthood. She was never fully domesticated, but she spent most of her time inside the house and behaved as though she owned me personally. TebTeb disliked sharing attention with the growing number of stray cats in the yard. One day, she simply disappeared. I still hope she will eventually return.

Interestingly, my growing attachment to stray cats also pushed me towards thinking of writing a children's story based on the stray cats in my neighbourhood. I recently discovered that comedian and writer Ricky Gervais is involved in producing an animated Netflix series about stray cats, which I am looking forward to watching. This has encouraged me further to develop my own story rooted in Oman and the Arab world.

Beyond writing, I also hope to become involved in something more practical. Recently, my Pilates teacher told me about an Omani lady interested in establishing an NGO focused on stray cats. I immediately said, “Sign me in.” My hope is that such efforts will eventually include not only cats but also dogs and other abandoned animals across Oman.

For now, my role remains simple: feeding the neighbourhood cats, worrying about them during the summer heat or when I am on vacation or research leave, and accepting that my house yard no longer really belongs to me alone.

34 years of relations between Ukraine and Oman



OLGA
SELYKH

The writer is
Ambassador of
Ukraine to Oman

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS between Ukraine and the Sultanate of Oman were established on May 19, 1992, laying the foundation for the gradual development of cooperation between the two states that, while geographically distant, are united by a shared interest in maintaining a stable political dialogue and expanding cooperation across various fields.

The early years of bilateral relations were focused on establishing fundamental diplomatic contacts and launching political dialogue. An important milestone was the official visit of the Prime Minister of Ukraine, Leonid Kuchma, to the Sultanate of Oman in April 1993, which laid a practical foundation for further high-level engagement.

Subsequently, in January 2002, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Anatolii Zlenko, paid a visit that reaffirmed the mutual interest in advancing political dialogue.

In the following years, cooperation gradually expanded beyond the political dimension to include humanitarian engagement. In January 2010, a Ukrainian delegation visited Salalah to meet the crew of the vessel 'Faina,' who had been released from pirate captivity. In February of the same year, a delegation from Oman visited Ukraine to participate in the inauguration events of the President of Ukraine, underscoring the mutual interest in maintaining political dialogue.

International cooperation has also played an important role in the development of

bilateral relations. The Sultanate of Oman has repeatedly supported Ukrainian initiatives within the United Nations, including Ukraine's candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for 2016-2017. Oman's contribution to humanitarian efforts is also noteworthy, particularly its assistance in the evacuation of Ukrainian citizens from Yemen during the armed conflict.

The gradual development of institutional cooperation was complemented by consular mechanisms: in 2008, the Government of Oman approved the appointment of an Honorary Consul of Ukraine in Oman, which became an important step in supporting citizens and strengthening bilateral contacts.

A new phase of intensified dialogue began in 2019, when the first round of bilateral consultations between the foreign ministries took place in Muscat. In the following years, the parties maintained regular contacts at the level of ministries of foreign affairs, including telephone conversations and meetings on international platforms.

Bilateral relations gained particular momentum in the 2020s. In December 2021, a working visit of the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine to Oman took place, while in 2022-2023, contacts continued at the level of special representatives and diplomatic missions. In May 2023, a Special Envoy of the Sultanate of Oman visited Ukraine, further underscoring the mutual interest in strengthening political dialogue.

A significant milestone in bilateral relations was the opening of the Embassy

Oman's contribution to humanitarian efforts is also noteworthy, particularly its assistance in the evacuation of Ukrainian citizens from Yemen during the armed conflict

of Ukraine in the Sultanate of Oman. The official inauguration ceremony took place on October 23, 2024, with the participation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Andrii Sybiha. This step significantly strengthened Ukraine's diplomatic presence in the region and created new opportunities for expanding cooperation. Further consolidation of diplomatic engagement occurred on August 24, 2025, when the Ambassador of Ukraine to the Sultanate of Oman, Olga Selykh, officially commenced her duties. This marked an important stage in establishing a systematic diplomatic presence and expanding practical cooperation between the two countries.

During the first eight months of her tenure, Ambassador Olga Selykh conducted intensive and effective diplomatic activities that laid a solid foundation for building a long-term strategic partnership between Ukraine and Oman. A series of high-level meetings were held - ranging from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to key members of the government, heads of major state institutions, financial structures, and representatives of the business community.

As a result of these engagements, structured and practically oriented areas of cooperation were launched in sectors such as healthcare, education, energy, tourism, digital transformation, and culture. These directions are shaping a new quality of bilateral relations, opening real opportunities for investment, technological exchange, human capital development, and expanded economic interaction.

DISTANCE FROM DISRESPECTFULNESS

Distance proves to be the most effective way to respond to rudeness, prioritising your well-being over involvement in toxic conflict. By stepping



ISHWAR S
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back, you establish clear boundaries, showing that such behaviour falls short of acceptable standards — without fuelling the situation. Choosing to disconnect isn't an indication of weakness, but rather a deliberate choice that reflects self-respect and emotional maturity. By adopting this approach, you'll no longer feel the need to justify your value to others. Your sense of self-respect will remain steady, undisturbed by what people think or how they behave.

Over time, as you develop and mature, you'll come to see that creating space isn't merely a way to respond to disrespect — it's also a means of leading a life grounded in dignity, inner peace, personal resilience in society and work place.

In a situation that leaves you feeling disrespected, consider the value of creating some distance. Creating distance or stepping down from your position in the organisation isn't a way to escape; it's a way to gain control and clarity.

There will certainly be times when your affection and respect for your boss/superiors fades due to their indifference towards your feelings, disrespecting you, at times interacting in a rude manner and lowering down your position in the presence of your subordinates showing regardless of how close you once were. These are the times and situations you realise you're being taken for granted, misled, or exploited — and your emotions, position and seniority are consistently overlooked — it's necessary to step back and distance yourself. People lack respect for themselves and others are unlikely to show loyalty or honesty towards you. Protecting your emotional health means establishing firm limits as a form of self-care and self-respect. Individuals who communicate with you disrespectfully do not deserve your attention. By holding onto the past instead of embracing the present, we undermine our future. Challenges and decisions will always be part of life, but your responsibility is to pick the path that offers the most promising result. Breaking away from certain people can sometimes be the most difficult thing you will have to do in and also the most important. Stop being linked to those who no longer vibrate on the same frequency as you. Numerous individuals have left their positions due to ongoing disrespect and an unprofessional work environment, which hindered their ability to perform effectively.

UK leadership challenger reopens Brexit debate

THE UK looks set to reopen the divisive wounds of Brexit, after a senior Labour politician hoping to challenge Prime Minister Keir Starmer called for the country to rejoin the European Union.

Dozens of Labour MPs last week urged Starmer to quit after dire local election results, raising the prospect of a change in prime minister, just two years into the party's tenure. Starmer has so far refused to budge and on Monday vowed to “get on with the job”.

“I am focused on the job that I was asked to do, which is to serve my country and to carry out my duties as prime minister,” the embattled leader said on a visit to the Labour Party headquarters.

But Wes Streeting, who resigned as health minister last week and announced that he will run to replace Starmer, broke ranks with years of guarded silence on Brexit to call it a “catastrophic mistake”.

Britain's membership of the EU has long been a thorny subject, and 10 years ago, a narrow majority of the population voted to leave in a landmark referendum.

Since 2020, when Britain finally left the bloc, the subject has been toxic, with few prominent figures wanting to go back to the days of political paralysis and bitter division.

Starmer, a former Brexit spokesman while Labour was in opposition, wants to move closer to the EU but has stopped short of saying Britain should reapply for membership or rejoin the European single market.

Streeting's call, though, goes further, immediately sparking criticism from Brexit supporters - and the government.

Brexit figurehead Nigel Farage, who leads the hard-right anti-immigration Reform UK party, warned voters in an upcoming by-election in Makerfield, northwest England, that Labour would “drag you closer to the EU”.



AKSHATA
KAPOOR

The writer is
General News
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London

Dozens of Labour MPs urged Starmer to quit after dire local election results, raising the prospect of a change in prime minister, just two years into the party's tenure



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer reacts during a meeting in the Lambeth area of London on Friday. — AFP

Andy Burnham, the Greater Manchester mayor, hopes to stand in the seat before an expected challenge to Starmer for the Labour leadership.

Burnham distanced himself from Streeting's stance and said that while there was a case to rejoin the EU in the long-term, he was not campaigning on the issue in the by-election.

The Makerfield election could be a tight vote, with Reform UK running an anti-immigration campaign and dubbing the likely Labour candidate “open borders Burnham”.

Despite Burnham's hopes to challenge Starmer's leadership, the prime minister said he would “one hundred per cent” support whoever was named the Labour candidate for the by-election.

“A Labour candidate to beat Reform. That is the fight that we are in,” Starmer said.

The Times newspaper reported that Burnham's allies accused Streeting of trying to “derail” the by-election campaign in the

constituency, where a majority voted for Brexit in 2016, with the pro-EU comments.

Deputy Prime Minister David Lammy insisted that rejoining the EU was a “red line” for Starmer's government.

“Wes Streeting has left the government. He can have a debate, he can comment, that is not my position,” Lammy said.

Culture minister Lisa Nandy called Streeting's position “odd”.

Kemi Badenoch, who leads the main opposition Conservatives, said the Labour in-fighting showed the ruling party “does not have a plan for this country”.

Neither Streeting nor Burnham has formally launched a leadership contest, which would need the backing of at least 81 Labour MPs.

But four junior minister resignations and calls by lawmakers for Starmer to step down have rattled his premiership, exposing frictions in a party that has sought to differentiate itself from the chaos of the previous Conservative governments.

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



A group photo of the participants at the conclusion of the coaching course.

LEVEL 2 COACHING COURSE CONCLUDES IN OMAN

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT MAY 18

The Oman Hockey Association (OHA) concluded the FIH-AHF Level 2 Coaching Course on Sunday, following five days of intensive theoretical and practical sessions aimed at strengthening the technical capabilities of national coaches and supporting the development pathway of hockey in the Sultanate of Oman.

The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma, Chairman of the Oman Hockey Association, who honoured the participating coaches at the end of the programme.

The course was organised by the Oman Hockey Association in cooperation with the Asian Hockey Federation and the International Hockey Federation, with the participation of 26 coaches, including five female coaches. The programme focused on modern coaching methods, player development, training planning, match management, team values and standards, and strategies for developing players from grassroots to higher competitive stages.

International lecturer Ghazanfar Ali, who supervised the course, praised the participants' commitment and interaction throughout the five days. He said the course reflected the strong potential of Omani coaches, particularly at the grassroots level, adding that Oman Hockey's work in developing academies and training centres is an important step for the future of the game.

He also highlighted the strong presence of female coaches, describing it as a positive sign for the growth of women's hockey in Oman. He noted that the female participants showed enthusiasm, talent and a clear desire to learn, which would contribute to expanding the role of women in the sport.

Former Egypt national team player and Oman Club coach Islam Hassan al Wahsh said the course provided valuable knowledge that would help coaches support players at clubs and centres. He said the sessions focused on the details of skill development, how to follow up with players during training, and how to guide them both on and off the field.

Coach Hamoud al Wahaibi expressed his appreciation to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) and the Oman Hockey Association (OHA) for organising the course. He said the programme helped coaches update their technical knowledge, improve their approach to player development and understand the latest trends in international hockey.

Former national team player Ala bint Sulaiman al Balushi said completing the Level 2 course was an important step in her coaching journey. She said the course helped her understand how to work with young players, build a positive relationship with children, and guide them from the early stages of learning the game.

The course forms part of the Oman Hockey Association's efforts to prepare qualified national coaches, enhance the quality of training in clubs and centres, and support the long-term development of hockey in Oman.



From the practical side of the course.

Safeer top Oman Shooting Club Shield rifle contest



Competitors show focus and discipline as the Oman Shooting Club Shield Championship continues.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT MAY 18

THE Oman Shooting Club Shield Championship continued at Active Oman Centre with strong participation from teams and shooting enthusiasts, as Action Point organised another competitive stage of the event. The championship, which concludes on Wednesday, combines pistol and rifle contests at both individual and team levels, with the final standings decided through a combined points system. The close margins in the pistol competition and the entry of rifle results into the overall calculations have added further excitement ahead of the closing day.

In the rifle competition held on Sunday, Al Safeer topped the standings with 228 points, followed by Al Failaq in second place with 190 points, while Team X finished third with 82 points. The remaining contests will continue before the final results are officially approved.

Retired Lieutenant Colonel Nasser bin Abdullah al Gharbi, Director of Operations at Oman Shooting Club, said the championship is based on collecting points from individual and team events in both pistol and rifle competitions.

The team begins with the pistol contest, individually and collectively, before moving to the rifle range. After that, all points are combined to determine the final standings, he said.

Al Gharbi added that the current edition has reflected a good level of competition and growing interest in shooting sports. He said one of the main objectives is to spread shooting culture, introduce participants to the fundamentals of the sport, and enhance their knowledge of distances, firearm types, safety procedures and technical aspects such as mechanical stoppages.

He described Oman Shooting Club as a distinctive sporting and tourism destination, noting that it is among the leading facilities in the Middle East in terms of its covered and indoor shooting ranges. The club includes specialised ranges for pistol and rifle shooting at different distances, in addition to a shotgun range, which supports the organisation of more competitions in pistol, rifle and shotgun disciplines.

Coach Arif al Hubaishi said the role of coaches begins with receiving shooters and reminding them of safety instructions before they enter the ranges, even if they have previous experience.

He explained that coaches' brief

participants on the championship rules, approved distances and competition procedures. He stressed that safety comes before the technical side of shooting, adding that coaches remain close to shooters inside the range, where lanes are separated by barriers and bulletproof and soundproof glass.

Shooter Khalil al Rashdi said the championship has witnessed strong competition, especially with the team format requiring higher scores to remain in contention. He said Oman Shooting Club's events give shooters an important opportunity to measure their progress and develop their skills.

He said Pistol shooting is difficult and requires strong focus and accuracy. Sometimes the difference is not only in points, but also in centre hits.

Shooter Azzam al Saeedi from Ibri said his participation comes from his passion for shooting and love of competition. He added that the team format has created a new challenge, as success now depends on the performance of all team members.

The championship continues with growing anticipation, as rifle results are expected to play a decisive role before the winners of the Oman Shooting Club Shield are announced on Wednesday.

20 coaches attend Oman Karate Committee's course

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroop_ath

Around 20 coaches representing clubs, academies and karate centres from various governorates took part in the Oman Karate Committee's Coaches Qualification Course on May 15 and 16 at the sports hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

The course aimed to enhance the technical and training capabilities of coaches and improve their coaching efficiency, contributing to the continued development of karate in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the latest approved technical methods.

Asian Karate Federation (AKF) coach Basil al Balushi from Shotokan Karate Centre said: "This course was an excellent opportunity to refine our foundational skills and align them with global standards. Now our mission is to transfer this high-level knowledge to our young trainees. Thanks to the Oman Karate Committee for organising this kind of a course."



Karate sessions during the course.

The course commenced with a specialised programme on karate fundamentals (Kihon), presented by coach Khamis al Siyabi, who focused on the correct execution of basic punches and blocks, in addition to explaining the important technical points of the first three Heian katas: 'Heian Shodan', 'Heian Nidan', and 'Heian Sandan', with the objective of unifying the fundamental technical performance of these katas among participating coaches.

During the second session of the first day, coach Said al Batrani delivered a practical explanation of the basic kumite techniques, including

'Kizami Zuki', 'Gyaku Zuki', and 'Mawashi Geri'. He also reviewed the 'Sen no Sen' technique and its application during combat, explaining how to utilise counter-attack timing effectively against opponents.

SPECIALISED SESSIONS
On the second day, Oman national karate team coach Captain Ali bin Said al Shabibi conducted a specialised technical session focusing on the 'Go no Sen' and 'Tai no Sen' techniques, along with practical demonstrations on their application in kumite competitions and their tactical use during matches. He also provided an overview of modern kumite strategies.

In the second session of the same day, coach Ali bin Talib al Raisi delivered practical training on the advanced katas 'Miekyo' and 'Sochin', with emphasis on the technical and movement aspects specific to each kata.

OKC member Ali al Raisi said: "This was a karate coaches qualification course in kata and kumite. It had two sessions of kata and two sessions of kumite. We spoke about the basics of kata and kumite and later went into details. This course is part of efforts from the Oman Karate Committee to raise the general level of karate in Oman. The OKC is also planning to host seminars and courses for referees and players as well in the near future."

The course witnessed excellent interaction from the participants, who praised the technical and practical content delivered by the lecturers, emphasising the importance of such courses in developing coaches and refining their technical skills, which will positively reflect on the future level of players and national teams.

SHORT TAKES



Elyas al Busaidy in action.

Oman weightlifters conclude participation at Asian Championship

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 17

Oman national weightlifting team concluded their participation at the Asian Weightlifting Championship in Gandhinagar, India, following competitive performances by the Sultanate of Oman’s three lifters against some of Asia’s elite athletes. The prestigious continental championship, which concluded on Sunday, featured participation of nearly 200 weightlifters representing 31 countries, including Olympic medallists, world champions and top-ranked Asian athletes.

Oman were represented by Elyas al Busaidy, Amer al Khanjari and Murshid al Ajmi in different weight categories. In the Men’s 71 kg category, Elyas al Busaidy delivered a determined performance after recording a total lift of 277 kg. Competing in Group A, Elyas lifted 121 kg in the snatch and followed it with 156 kg in the clean and jerk event. The category witnessed a very high technical level as North Korea’s Ri Won Ju dominated the competition to secure the gold medal with an impressive total of 351 kg, including 154 kg in snatch and 197 kg in clean and jerk. China’s Chen Jian claimed second place with a total of 335 kg while India’s Ajith Narayana finished third with 314 kg. Despite the tough competition, Elyas succeeded in gaining valuable experience while competing against some of the continent’s strongest lifters.

Meanwhile, Omani lifter Amer al Khanjari competed in the highly competitive Men’s 88 kg category, which witnessed outstanding performances and new world records from North Korea’s Ro Kwang-Ryol, who secured first place with a total of 387 kg after setting new world records in the clean and jerk event with lifts of 217 kg and 220 kg. China’s Pan Yunhua finished second with 369 kg while South Korea’s Lee Seongwon secured third place with 368 kg. Amur faced an unfortunate setback during the clean and jerk competition after timing errors by the coaching staff resulted in him failing to complete his attempts successfully despite showing promising performance during the snatch event.

In the Men’s 94 kg category, Murshid al Ajmi competed against a strong field led by China’s Tu Yi, who claimed first place with a total of 386 kg. Uzbekistan’s Mukhammadkodir Toshtemirov finished second with 373 kg while Turkmenistan’s Rustem Annaberdiyev secured third with 354 kg. Murshid recorded a successful 140 kg lift in the snatch competition but was unable to register a valid lift in the clean and jerk after unsuccessful attempts at 183 kg.



Oman Youth Handball Team . — Ammar al Musafir

Oman Youth Handball Team in Group A of AHF

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
@riyadhbaluch

OMAN’S NATIONAL YOUTH indoor handball team has been drawn into Group A of the 19th Asian Men’s Youth Handball Championship, set to take place in Chuzhou, China, from July 15 to 26, with the team aiming to make a strong impression while preparing a promising generation for the future. The draw placed Oman alongside hosts China, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Chinese Taipei and Hong Kong, while Japan, South Korea, Iran, Kuwait, Qatar, India and the United Arab Emirates make up Group B.

The tournament serves as a qualifier for the 26th IHF Men’s Junior World Championship (U-21), with the top four teams earning direct qualification to the global event scheduled in North Macedonia from June 23 to July 4.

As preparations continue, Oman’s youth team is undergoing intensive daily training sessions at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher under national coach Yahya al Maashari, with 22 players currently involved after the initial squad was reduced from 33 players.

Moosa bin Khamis al Balushi, President of the Oman Handball Association, described the championship as an important step in building a new generation for the senior national team.

“We are looking forward to a successful participation, Our



We are looking forward to a successful participation, Our primary goal is to build a strong team for the future.

MOOSA AL BALUSHI



an action at training trying to throw the ball.

primary goal is to build a strong team for the future, this tournament is not just participation, it is an important stage for developing young talent and strengthening the future of Omani handball.”

Team manager Anwar Mohammed al Balushi said preparations had been progressing well despite challenges related to school and university examinations.

“We began preparations around 20 days ago, and our ambition is to achieve an advanced position after finishing eighth in the previous edition,” he said. “We

have promising players capable of delivering a respectable performance.”

Player Said bin Mohammed al Hassani highlighted the tournament’s importance in building confidence and experience, emphasising the team’s focus on fitness, tactics and teamwork.

Meanwhile, player Abdulaziz bin Ali al Saifi stressed the sense of responsibility carried by the squad, “We represent our country and our supporters and we promise hard work, determination and a performance worthy of Oman.”

Oman U20 conclude Egypt camp with second friendly defeat

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT MAY 18

Oman U20 concluded their overseas training camp in Cairo with another valuable test against Egypt U20, going down 2-1 in the second international friendly played at the Sports Centre Stadium in 6th of October City.

The friendly formed part of Oman’s preparations for the upcoming international assignments, led by the Arab Cup scheduled for August, followed by the AFC youth qualifying campaign. Although the result went in favour of the hosts, the match offered head coach Hamad al Azzani and his technical staff an important opportunity to assess the squad under

competitive conditions.

Al Azzani used the two-match programme in Cairo to test several players, review their technical and physical readiness and monitor their response to the demands of international football. The coaching staff also focused on tactical discipline, match concentration and the players’ ability to adapt to different phases of play.

Oman had also lost the first friendly against Egypt by the same scoreline, 2-1, at the same venue last Thursday. Despite the two defeats, the camp was seen as an important stage in the team’s wider preparation plan. The Red Warriors youth squad gained match experience



Oman U20 players in action during their overseas training camp in Cairo.

against a strong opponent, while the technical staff came away with clearer observations on the team’s strengths, areas for improvement and possible squad combinations.

The camp also helped reinforce commitment and discipline among the players, with the administrative and technical staff working to ensure the programme achieved its main objectives.

The Oman Football Association (OFA) also provided the necessary logistical support throughout the team’s stay in Egypt.

The coming period is expected to witness close follow-up of the players through a focused preparation programme before the next national team gathering. Al Azzani is aiming to build a more settled and balanced squad capable of competing strongly in the team’s upcoming regional and continental competitions.

Meanwhile, Oman U20 player Ziyad al Farraji underwent a successful jaw surgery following the injury he sustained during the first friendly against Egypt. The medical staff also checked

on Mohammed al Sameen, who suffered a serious incident in the same match after a collision that required immediate medical intervention on the pitch.

The Egyptian youth team’s medical staff, led by Dr Haged al Antably, responded quickly alongside Oman’s medical team. Al Sameen was taken by ambulance to Zayed Specialist Hospital, where he underwent the required medical examinations and scans, which confirmed that his condition was stable.

The medical and administrative staff of Oman U20 confirmed that both players are in good health and are receiving continuous follow-up and care.

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



Alia al Mughairi on the podium with the winners of the other positions.

OMAN ENDS GCC GAMES WITH 24 MEDALS, TWO ATHLETICS GOLDS

SPORT REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 18

Oman’s national athletics team concluded an impressive campaign at the 4th GCC Games in Doha by securing two additional gold medals, raising the Sultanate of Oman’s total tally to 24 medals as the tournament continues until May 22.

The latest gold medals came through sprinter Ali bin Anwar al Balushi, who won the 200m race, and athlete Alia bint Faiq al Mughairi, who triumphed in the high jump event, capping a highly successful showing for Oman’s athletics squad.

Athletics emerged as Oman’s most successful sport at the Games, finishing with 11 medals, including seven gold, two silver, and two bronze medals. The achievement also featured a new national record by Muzoon al Alawi, who registered 5.72m in the long jump, highlighting the steady progress of Omani athletics at the Gulf level.

Oman’s athletics team began its campaign strongly by winning four medals on the opening day, including three golds and one silver. Gold medals came through Muzoon al Alawi in the long jump, Fatek bin Abdulghafour Bait Jaaboub in the high jump, and Ali bin Anwar al Balushi in the 100m sprint, while Mulham bin Darwish al Balushi earned silver in the same event.

On the second day, Oman added four more medals, highlighted by gold in the men’s 4x100m relay, while the women’s relay team secured silver. Bronze medals were claimed by Hanaa al Qasmi in the 400m race and Ahmed al Abdulsalam in the men’s 400m event.

Meanwhile, Oman’s shooting team returns to action on Tuesday in the 10m pistol individual and team events for men and women, aiming to add to its current tally of three medals — two silver and one bronze.

In volleyball, Oman’s national team will face the United Arab Emirates in its final match of the tournament, with both sides battling for the bronze medal after losing to Qatar and Bahrain, who will compete for gold.

Athlete Salim bin Saleh al Yaarubi, who recently won gold in the triple jump, expressed his delight at standing on top of the podium, crediting his coach and preparation for the achievement while praising the high organisational standards of the Games.

Officials in Qatar also praised the competitive level of the tournament, describing the GCC Games as an important platform for developing Gulf talent ahead of continental and international competitions.



Ali al Balushi



Mamelodi Sundowns’ Nuno Santos in action with AS FAR’s Ahmed Hammoudan. — Reuters

Sundowns beat FAR Rabat 1-0 in African CL first leg

A THUNDERBOLT FREE-KICK from Aubrey Modiba gave South African club Mameloldi Sundowns a 1-0 win over Moroccan visitors FAR Rabat on Sunday in the CAF Champions League final first leg. The full back struck his first goal of the African campaign on 37 minutes in Pretoria to earn the hosts a slender lead ahead of the return match in Rabat next Sunday.

Modiba used his left foot to unleash an angled shot that goalkeeper Ahmed Tagnaouti got his right hand to, but could not prevent entering the corner of the net.

Sundowns should have won by a wider margin as they missed three scoring opportunities in a purple patch around the hour mark at a packed 50,000-seat Loftus Versfeld stadium.

Colombian Brayan Leon, scorer of 16 goals in all competitions since joining Sundowns four months ago, was the culprit twice and Kutlwano Letlhaku once.

Leon fired a snap shot over from inside the box. Five minutes later his low drive finished well off target with only Tagnaouti

to beat.

The Moroccan goalkeeper foiled Letlhaku using his legs and FAR were lucky to remain only one goal behind midway through the second half.

Luck favoured FAR five minutes from time when the post prevented a Teboho Mokoena free-kick slipping into the corner of the net with Tagnaouti beaten.

VAR MALFUNCTION

The start of the second half had been delayed by 25 minutes because VAR was not working. Play eventually resumed without the system, which was restored midway through the half.

“It was a fantastic match between quality teams. We had to be careful as FAR are good at counterattacking,” said Sundowns’ Portuguese coach Miguel Cardoso.

“We will now face a difficult environment in the second leg. We must close our ears, ignore the pre-match noise and concentrate on winning the competition.”

Cardoso is desperate to succeed after

losing the last two Champions League finals. He failed with Tunisian club Esperance in 2024 and Sundowns last season.

Alexandre Santos, the Portuguese coach of FAR, promised his team would be more threatening in Rabat after failing to get a single goal attempt on target in Pretoria.

“Sundowns are a very formidable side with technically amazing players. They are also vastly experienced Champion League campaigners.

“But I expect we will win more possession next weekend and create scoring chances. I remain confident that FAR will be African champions.”

Both clubs to are seeking to become African champions a second time. FAR triumphed in 1985 and Sundowns in 2016. The South Africans have also been runners-up twice.

At stake is a record \$6 million first prize with the runners-up pocketing \$4 million. The champions will also play Confederation Cup winners USMA of Algeria for the CAF Super Cup. — AFP



MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
7,748.977

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$107.37
BRENT \$110.12
LIGHT \$106.31



SHORTTAKES



The corporate identity of Rikan unveiled at Oman Sustainability Week 2026.

“Rikan” to drive social responsibility in Oman’s energy sector

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 18

The opening events of the Oman Petroleum & Energy Exhibition and Conference 2026 and Oman Sustainability Week 2026 witnessed the official launch of the “Rikan” Development Foundation for Corporate Social Responsibility in the energy sector.

This step is considered one of the most prominent new corporate initiatives aimed at unifying the social responsibility efforts of energy and minerals companies in the Sultanate of Oman and enhancing the sector’s contribution to sustainable economic and social development.

The new entity aims to be a unified national umbrella that coordinates the social initiatives of companies in the sector, contributing to raising the efficiency of social spending and maximising the developmental impact of projects and initiatives, in addition to building more sustainable partnerships between the private sector and the local community.

Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Social Responsibility Development Foundation for the Energy Sector, affirmed that the launch of the “Rikan” corporate identity represents a significant milestone in the community work of the energy sector. It reflects a progressive national approach aimed at strengthening integration among sector companies to achieve a sustainable developmental impact that places people at the heart of the development process.

Al Hadhrami explained that the foundation’s launch stems from a growing conviction among energy sector institutions that economic development cannot be separated from social development and that true investment begins with people and returns to them through providing educational and training opportunities, improving quality of life and enhancing social stability.

OIA profit hits record RO2.9 billion in 2025

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 18

OMAN Investment Authority (OIA) posted historic profits of RO 2.9 billion in 2025, underlining the strong performance of the Sultanate of Oman’s sovereign wealth fund amidst continued efforts to diversify investments and strengthen financial sustainability. During the media summit held at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort on Monday, OIA outlined its financial performance, investment expansion and economic contributions during the year.

OIA achieved a return on investment of 10.4 per cent over five years, securing third place globally among sovereign wealth funds, according to Global SWF.

The authority also ranked first worldwide in returns generated from private market investments during 2025. Total assets reached approximately RO 23 billion by the end of the year, while OIA exceeded its approved annual key performance indicator targets by 105 per cent.

The authority contributed RO 800 million to the State’s General Budget, with half allocated to Future Fund Oman. OIA also deployed nearly RO 2.4 billion into local projects aimed at supporting economic growth and stimulating strategic sectors aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance and Chairman of OIA’s Board, said OIA continued supporting the national economy with efficiency and sustainability while advancing economic diversification and strengthening partnerships with the private sector. He noted that the authority continued improving the operational performance and efficiency of its companies while balancing economic and



OIA outlined its financial performance, investment expansion and economic contributions for 2025.

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strategic objectives through stronger governance and resource management practices.

Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), said the strong results reflected the institutional strength of OIA and the competence of Omani talent managing the authority and its subsidiaries.

OIA maintained a diversified investment footprint across 52 countries during 2025. Nearly two-thirds of investments remain concentrated in Oman, followed by North America at 19 per cent, Europe at 9 per cent and Asia-Pacific markets at 4 per cent.

The authority said the diversification strategy supports risk management, sustainable financial reserves and the transfer of advanced technologies and expertise to the national economy.

At the funds level, the National Development Fund (NDF), which oversees investments in state-owned enterprises and national assets, recorded assets worth around RO 13.09 billion by the end of 2025.

The fund generated profits of RO 1.8 billion and achieved a return on investment of 15.87 per cent. NDF also contributed to the

implementation of 14 national projects across several sectors with investments exceeding RO 450 million. These projects are expected to create more than 1,300 jobs upon completion.

Meanwhile, the Future Generations Fund (FGF), which manages OIA’s international investments, reached approximately RO 8.57 billion in value and generated profits of RO 1.041 billion during the year. The fund expanded its investment portfolio to 210 funds across diversified sectors and global markets. OIA also continued strengthening financial sustainability through the repayment of RO 912 million in debt obligations across its companies.

In the area of employment and human capital, OIA’s workforce reached 438 employees with an Omanisation rate of 91 per cent, while total employment across its companies exceeded 41,000 workers with Omanisation standing at 79.4 per cent.

More than 1,146 jobs were created during 2025, surpassing the target of 800 jobs. OIA also directed around RO 278 million towards SMEs and local content initiatives during the year.

Oman enters ‘intelligence-first banking’ era: CBO

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 18

Oman is entering a new phase of financial transformation in which artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and open banking will become central pillars of the banking system, Ahmed bin Jaafar al Musalmi, Governor of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), said on Monday.

Speaking at the New Age Banking Summit Oman, Al Musalmi said the financial sector was moving beyond the era of “digital-first banking” into what he described as “intelligence-first banking”, where AI increasingly shapes payments, supervision, compliance, risk management and financial decision-making.

“For the better part of a decade, the financial sector pursued one clear ambition: go digital”, he said. “We digitised payments, onboarding and customer experience; and we were right to do so.

But digitisation, as remarkable as it has been, was only the prologue. We are no longer

entering the era of digital-first banking. We are entering the era of intelligence-first banking”.

The remarks reflect a broader policy direction emerging within Oman’s financial sector as the Sultanate of Oman accelerates digital transformation under Oman Vision 2040 and the 11th Five-Year Development Plan.

The Governor described the development plan as more than an economic roadmap, calling it “an articulation of strategic ambition” in a period where technology is reshaping economies, institutions and global competitiveness.

“Oman is not waiting for the future to unfold. Oman is shaping it with clarity of vision and confidence of purpose”, he said.

The CBO chief revealed that digital transactions represented around 89 per cent of total transaction volumes across the Sultanate of Oman by the end of 2025, while Oman’s instant payment system now processes approximately 1.1 million transactions daily.

“These are not just operational achievements”, he said. “They are



Ahmed bin Jaafar al Musalmi, Governor of the Central Bank of Oman, addressing the New Age Banking Summit on Monday.

signals that trust has been earned, that the foundations are resilient and that the infrastructure we have built is capable of supporting the ambitions of the next economic era”. However, the Governor stressed that technology alone would not determine the future of finance, warning against innovation moving faster than governance and institutional oversight.

“Innovation without governance creates fragility, but innovation anchored in trust creates sustainable transformation”, he said. “The history of financial crises is a history of innovation that moved faster than the wisdom required to govern it”.

In his address, Al Musalmi repeatedly returned to the themes of trust, ethics and human judgement as AI systems become more deeply embedded within financial services.

“Intelligence without wisdom is not progress. It is risk wearing the mask of innovation”, he said.

The Governor also positioned open banking as a structural shift in the relationship between financial institutions and customers, arguing that consumers increasingly expect ownership, portability and transparency over their financial data.

“Institutions that will lead the next era of finance will not be those that resist change, but those with the foresight and courage to reinvent themselves before disruption compels them to do so”,

he said.

Cybersecurity, meanwhile, was framed as a national economic and strategic priority as banking systems become more interconnected.

“Cybersecurity is no longer a technical function”, he said. “It is financial security. It is economic security. And in an era of geopolitical volatility, it is national security”.

The Governor said Oman was building a financial ecosystem that is “digitally advanced, globally connected, innovation-driven and nationally sovereign”.

“The future belongs to institutions that anticipate change before it arrives, prepare for disruption before it strikes and lead transformation from a position of vision rather than reaction”, he said.

The summit brought together banking executives, regulators, fintech firms and technology companies to discuss the future of financial services, AI integration, digital infrastructure and regulatory transformation in Oman and the wider region.

BUSINESS FEATURE

HOW OMAN BUILT A SPACE ECONOMY IN 3 YEARS

HIBBA AL KINDI

OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS, the Sultanate of Oman has announced a succession of monumental and unprecedented space projects.

From the establishment of Etlaq, the MENA region's first commercial spaceport, Zone 88, a fully integrated space economic zone in Al Duqm that will include a space settlement centre and advanced technology facilities, or Spazers, a multinational satellite manufacturing joint venture in Oman which will localise the production of small satellites and other space-related technologies in country, Oman has undoubtedly maintained strong and steady momentum in the sector.

However, what makes this momentum particularly striking is how recent Oman's entry into this space has been. In just three years, since the unveiling of Oman's Space Policy in 2023, Oman has transitioned from laying the foundations of a national space sector to building an active and robust market.

NEW MOMENTUM

Earlier this year, government officials confirmed this momentum, announcing that investments within Oman's space sector, valued at RO 20 million between 2023 and 2024, had increased by 200 per cent. The sector had also created around 400 direct and indirect jobs in the country, while the number of companies operating in the sector also grew by 127 per cent, reaching 25 by the end of 2025. But how was the Sultanate of Oman able to achieve this in just under three years?

The answer lies primarily in strategic planning and in the way Oman positioned space not as a standalone ambition, but as part of a wider national economic transformation.

To understand the shift, it is necessary to go back to 2021, a year after the ascension of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to power. Under Oman Vision 2040, the National Programme for Digital Economy was introduced as a pathway for economic diversification.

The programme aims to raise the contribution of the digital economy to the local GDP from 2% currently, to 5% by 2030 and 10% by 2040, as part of Oman's efforts to reduce its dependence on hydrocarbons. As a result, a national space plan was introduced under this wider umbrella.

NATIONAL SPACE PLAN

In 2023, the government, represented by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, released the National Space Policy and Executive Programme, a 10-year framework designed to develop a commercially oriented and competitive Omani space sector.

The policy set a clear vision for Oman: to become the regional gateway for space applications to empower economic diversification and unlock future opportunities.

Built on four main pillars: economic diversification, capacity building, national security; and environment and natural resources, the framework crucially identified where Oman could compete.

Capitalising on Oman's strengths such as strategic geography, open diplomacy and regulations, while aligning with global market trends, the policy prioritised investments within the downstream space sector, declaring it the country's entry point into the global space sector. The downstream sector, which includes terrestrial space operations and services such as Earth observation, satellite communications and navigation, accounts for around 90 per cent of the global space market, contributing \$303.3 billion in 2021.

It is also expected to grow at around 6 per cent CAGR over the decade. By contrast, the upstream sector, which includes the manufacturing, launch and operation of space systems, accounts for a smaller share of the market, around 10 per cent.

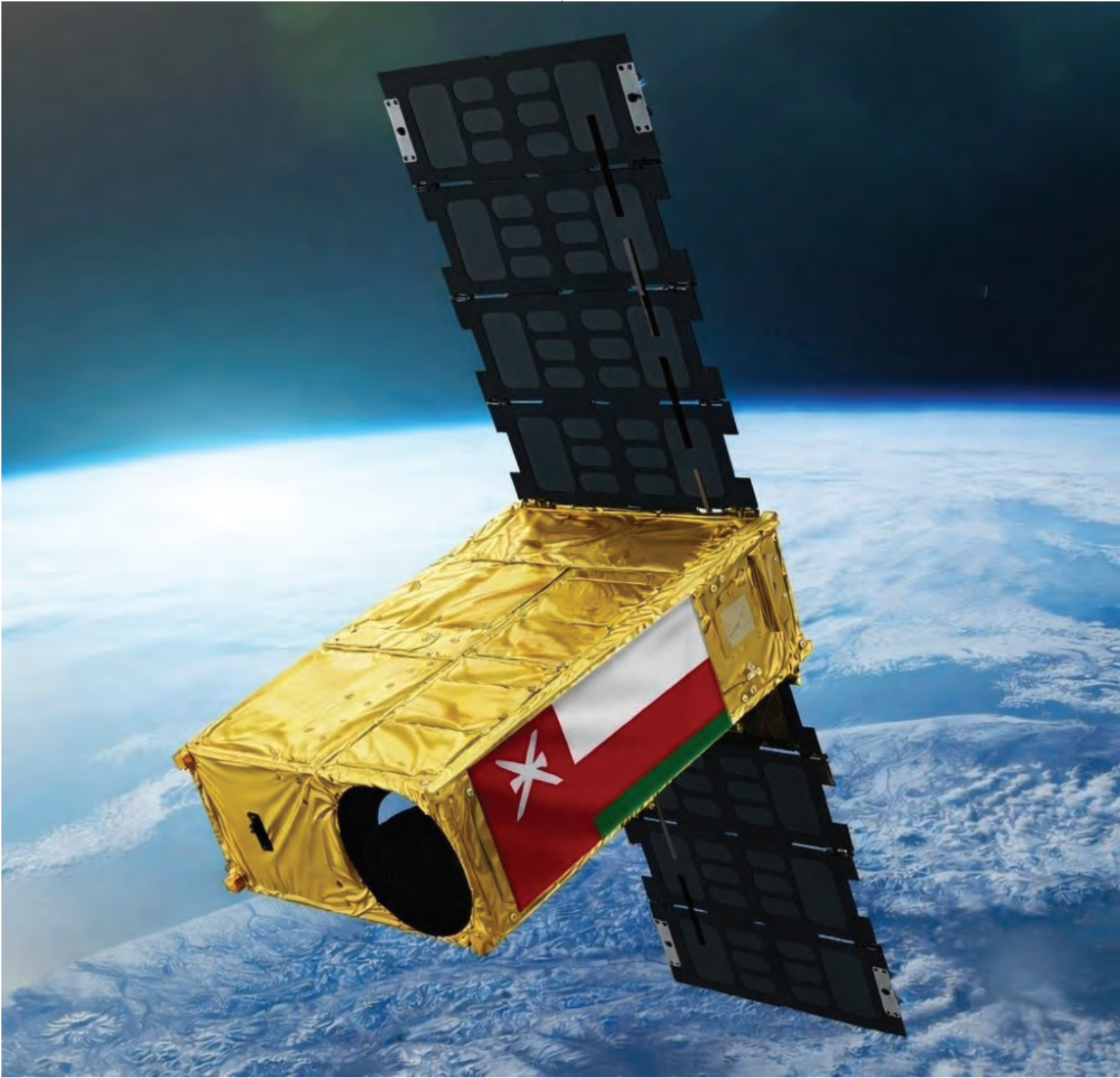
INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Furthermore, Oman's focus on the downstream sector was also rooted in the country's pre-existing market base. Prior to the launch of the policy, Oman's preexisting space sector was concentrated downstream, with satellite communication and navigation services representing 95% of total market value, contributing to 0.05% of the local GDP with a market value of \$155 million as of 2021.

As a result, the framework identified 14 investment opportunities, mostly concentrated in the downstream and application-led activities, aimed to fulfil the four main pillars of the programme. The opportunities were not only designed to create projects, but to support the growth of a wider local space ecosystem. According to the framework, this would be achieved by establishing conditions for a vibrant, sustainable and competitive space ecosystem, while providing sustained support for private sector establishments.

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At the same time, the framework places strong emphasis on attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) to accelerate the development of the national space sector, particularly through long-term collaborations that will allow for technology transfer and the building of local expertise.

The opportunities were divided into core and non-core projects, while 8 were labelled as quick-wins. Core projects were defined as must-haves to pursue Omani space sector development, while non-core projects were identified as opportunities that would accelerate Oman's space sector development.

However, the framework did not approach these opportunities in isolation, but instead placed them within a three-phase roadmap designed to gradually develop and build up domestic capabilities, starting with the development of downstream activities in an effort to move progressively upstream in the future.

THREE-PHASE ROADMAP

The first phase of the programme, "Ignition", ran from 2023 to 2026 and was designed as the sector's preparation stage. It focused on building capacity, legal frameworks and infrastructure while stimulating the national ecosystem of service providers and national market expansion.

The phase included several projects, including the end-user applications booster programme, national space data platform, incubation programme, world conference, centre of excellence for space applications, space cloud partnership, ground stations hub, direct receiving station and national CubeSat programme.

Meanwhile, the second phase "Lift-Off", running from 2026 to 2030, aims to develop the required infrastructure (in space and on the ground) to support expanding Oman's space sector capabilities and business opportunities. The phase includes the national Satcom initiative and the national space observatory projects.

Finally, phase 3 – "Orbiting" – running from 2030-2033, aims to prepare Oman's space sector for its next development cycle by starting investments in more complex systems and capabilities. This phase includes projects such as the regional Satnav augmentation system, launch site partnership and satellite R&D programme.

Several of these projects have already begun taking shape. Etlaq, the MENA region's first commercial spaceport, is expected to begin full-scale commercial operations by the end of 2027, marking a major step in Oman's move towards developing launch capabilities

from within the Sultanate of Oman. Oman's first satellite, Aman-1, has also moved into practical use, with its data being used to monitor and track the country's gas networks operated by OQ Gas Networks. Meanwhile, Oman Lens launched OL-1, an AI-powered Earth observation satellite designed to monitor landscapes, infrastructure and natural resources, while also announcing plans for another advanced satellite in 2026. Zone 88 has also moved into construction in Al Duqm, further strengthening the Sultanate of Oman's efforts to create a fully integrated economic space zone. At the same time, Oman has hosted the Middle East Space Conference twice, turning Muscat into a regional platform for dialogue, partnerships and investment in the sector.

ARTEMIS ACCORDS

This momentum was further reinforced by Oman's signing of the Artemis Accords with the United States during the second Middle East Space Conference in Muscat, marking a step towards deeper international cooperation in civil space exploration.

Simultaneously, Oman was building the legal and regulatory foundations needed to support the emerging market. This began taking shape in 2024, when Oman Lens became the first company to obtain a Telecommunications Regulatory Authority licence to establish a satellite ground station in the Sultanate in Oman.

In 2025, the regulatory track advanced further with the Civil Aviation Authority's introduction of Civil Aviation Directive (CAD 5-01), a commercial spaceflight framework setting out the approval process for launch activities from Oman. Officials have also pointed to the forthcoming Omani Space Law, expected in 2026, as the next step in strengthening the sector's legislature.

Taken together, these developments show that Oman's space economy was not built through isolated announcements, but rather through a gradual and carefully calculated strategy. This phased approach in turn explains how Oman was able to record rapid growth in a short period.

As the programme moves from the "Ignition" phase into "Lift-Off", the coming years will test how far this early momentum can be translated into commercial value. Nonetheless, as it stands, it is clear that Oman is ushering in a monumental new era for its space economy, one that carries significance not only for the Sultanate of Oman, but also for the wider region and the global space sector.

SHORTTAKES



The programme, launched in 2022, completed 24 divestments by the end of 2025.

OIA divestments exceed OMR 2.8 billion

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 18

Oman Investment Authority’s (OIA) divestment programme generated returns exceeding RO 2.8 billion by the end of 2025, reflecting the sovereign wealth fund’s strategy to recycle capital, attract private investment and redirect resources into higher-value opportunities. The details were presented during OIA’s media summit held at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort on Monday.

The programme, launched in 2022, completed 24 divestments by the end of 2025, with proceeds redeployed into new investment opportunities aimed at supporting economic diversification and financial sustainability.

During 2025 alone, OIA completed six divestments, exceeding its annual target of five assets and highlighting the authority’s active portfolio management strategy. The transactions included initial public offerings, direct exits and strategic partnerships across several sectors.

Among the most prominent deals was the IPO of a 20 per cent stake in Asyad Shipping Company aimed at broadening the investor base and increasing market liquidity.

OIA also fully divested its 10 per cent stake in Oman Tower Company and exited 69 per cent of Sohar Sulphur Fertiliser Company as part of efforts to reallocate investments towards sectors capable of generating stronger long-term returns.

The programme also included the partial sale of Oman Flour Mills Company through the divestment of 20 per cent of Oman Food Capital’s total 51 per cent stake. In addition, OIA partially divested 11.4 per cent of its stake in Asyad Container Terminal to improve asset efficiency and strengthen private sector participation.

Another major transaction involved a strategic partnership in the Shuwaimiyah Project, which included the partial divestment of 49 per cent in the quarry and 51 per cent in the port to attract quality investments and maximise value-added economic impact.

OIA said the divestment programme forms part of broader efforts to empower the private sector, attract foreign capital and strengthen economic diversification.

OSW, OPES 2026 highlight Oman’s green transition

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 18

THE Sultanate of Oman has reinforced its commitment to sustainable development and energy transition with the launch of Oman Sustainability Week (OSW) 2026 and Oman Petroleum & Energy Exhibition (OPES) 2026 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The twin events have drawn government leaders, international energy companies, sustainability experts, investors and technology providers from across the globe, highlighting Oman’s growing role as a regional platform for dialogue, innovation and investment in sustainability and energy transformation.

This year’s Oman Sustainability Week is being held under the theme “Sustainability in Action: Innovation, Investment, Impact”, focusing on translating sustainability ambitions into measurable outcomes through technology, investment and international collaboration.

Meanwhile, OPES 2026 is themed “Success through collaboration: Achieving a sustainable energy future”, emphasising partnerships and innovation in navigating global energy sector transformation.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, said Oman continues to advance a sustainability-driven development strategy that balances economic growth with environmental protection.

He noted that renewable energy contributed around 9 per cent of Oman’s total electricity generation last year, coinciding with the launch of the Manah 1 and Manah 2 solar projects, which together have a combined



Government dignitaries at the opening of Oman Sustainability Week 2026.

capacity of one gigawatt.

Al Aufi highlighted several national initiatives supporting Oman’s low-carbon transition, including the National Net Zero Strategy, a regulatory framework for carbon markets and the National Energy Transition Plan. He said these initiatives are designed to strengthen Oman’s competitiveness through innovation, sustainability and technological advancement.

The minister also underscored efforts to promote electric mobility, expand waste management and recycling projects; and achieve “zero routine flaring” by 2030.

According to him, the energy sector has already reduced flaring by 50 per cent.

He added that integrating renewable energy, water management systems and green spaces within oil and gas concession areas is helping Oman strengthen climate action while preserving natural resources.

Mohammed bin Ali al Aghbari, Director of External Affairs, Government Relations and Communications at Petroleum Development Oman, said the events reinforce Oman’s position as a leading regional destination for responsible energy development and sustainable innovation.

He noted that the platforms enable knowledge exchange, investment attraction and strategic partnerships that will shape the future of the regional energy sector.

Pierluigi D’Elia, Ambassador of Italy to Oman, highlighted the Sultanate of Oman’s growing importance as a regional centre for strategic dialogue and innovation, noting opportunities for cooperation between Italian and Omani institutions in renewable energy, circular economy solutions, sustainable infrastructure and industrial technologies.

Meanwhile, Ashraf bin Hamed al Maamari, Group CEO — OQ Group, said the company is leveraging innovation to reduce emissions across existing operations while investing in green energy infrastructure to support Oman’s transition towards a net-zero future.

The events feature extensive regional and international participation across the energy, sustainability, infrastructure, technology and mobility sectors.

Activities include exhibitions, technical workshops, executive networking sessions, field programmes and accredited Continuing Professional Development initiatives.

A key feature of OPES 2026 is the “OPES Talks” platform, which hosts high-level discussions on energy transition, the future role of oil and gas, carbon reduction strategies and the integration of renewable and conventional energy systems.

Sessions are also exploring Oman’s ambitions in green hydrogen development and renewable energy expansion.

Advanced technologies form another major focus area, with discussions examining the role of artificial intelligence, big data analytics, industrial automation, digital transformation and predictive maintenance in improving operational efficiency and reducing emissions.

MedcoEnergi’s investment in Oman upstream sector surpasses \$1.4 billion

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 18

Indonesian oil and gas company PT Medco Energi Internasional Tbk (MedcoEnergi) marked on Sunday, May 17, 2026, two decades of operations in Oman’s upstream oil and gas sector, underscored by cumulative investments exceeding \$1.4 billion.

The anniversary ceremony was attended by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, alongside senior Omani government officials and industry executives.

Commenting on the milestone, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals

noted that since 2006, the company has expanded its portfolio from 9 to 25 producing fields, drilled over 500 wells and delivered seven new field discoveries.

“Cumulative investments of approximately \$1.4 billion have reinforced a strategic partnership that drives national economic growth and advances the objectives of Oman Vision 2040”, the statement said.

MedcoEnergi’s footprint in Oman expanded significantly in late 2023 following its acquisition of key stakes in Blocks 48 and 60 operated by OQ Exploration and Production (OQEP), the upstream arm of OQ.

Block 60, spanning 1,485 km², is



Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, with key officials of MedcoEnergi Oman at the anniversary celebrations.

OQEP’s flagship producing asset, with output exceeding 70,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day (boepd) by end-2025. Key assets include the Bisat oil field and the Abu Butabul gas and condensate field.

The block contributed notably to MedcoEnergi’s 2025 performance, with the Bisat-C water handling facilities completed and gross production reaching a record 77,000 boepd, before stabilising at around 73,000 boepd, according to the company’s annual report.

Block 48 remains in the exploration phase, with its Exploration and Production Sharing Agreement (EPSA) extended to 2029. OQEP holds a 60% participating

interest, while MedcoEnergi Oman and Medco Daya Oman each hold 20%, mirroring the ownership structure of Block 60.

MedcoEnergi first entered Oman in 2005 through a 58.5% operating interest in a service contract for the Karim Small Fields within Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) concessions.

The company provides infill drilling, workover and enhanced oil recovery services, with production averaging about 9,000 barrels of oil per day in 2025.

In Block 56, MedcoEnergi holds a 5% interest alongside ROC Oil Company (65%), Biyaq Oilfield Services (25%) and Intaj LLC (5%).

GLOBAL BUSINESS

Iran war hits companies hard



The US-Israeli conflict with Iran has already cost global companies at least \$25 billion. Businesses across the United States, Europe and Asia are facing higher energy costs, disrupted supply chains and shipping constraints.

More than 270 companies have introduced measures including price increases, production cuts and cost-saving initiatives to reduce financial pressures. — Reuters

ENERGY MARKETS

Oil rises after UAE attack



Oil prices climbed to two-week highs on Monday after an attack on a nuclear power plant in the United Arab Emirates intensified concerns stability. Brent crude rose to \$110.12 a barrel, while US crude reached \$106.31.

Markets remain focused on supply disruptions, with analysts warning that continued attacks on energy infrastructure and shipping routes could push prices higher. — Reuters

FINANCIAL MARKETS

G7 weighs debt concerns



G7 finance ministers meeting in Paris expressed growing concern over rising public debt and volatility in global bond markets amidst inflation fears linked to the Iran conflict.

Bond prices extended losses as investors anticipated interest rate hikes driven by higher energy costs. French Finance Minister Roland Lescure said markets were undergoing a correction rather than a collapse. — Reuters

OPINION

The sad reality behind the perfect photo



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker

LAST week, I sat down over a celebratory dinner with three friends. It was one of those rare evenings where the conversation flowed naturally on topics that included life, technology, culture, ambitions, memories and the strange pace of the modern world. We laughed, debated, shared stories and before leaving, we took a group photo to capture the moment.

A few days later, one of the friends left the country. Naturally, she wanted the photo shared to preserve the memory of that evening. But then something interesting happened. One of the three friends refused to share it because she felt she did not look good enough in the picture.

The second suggested using one of the AI tools and filters in order to “improve” the photo before anyone saw it on social media. The third one said, “Ok with me”. I finally said, “The memory matters more than the perfection. Please go ahead”. However, in the end, the photo was never used at all. And honestly, that small incident says a lot about the world we live in today.

We are slowly entering an era where memories are no longer enough. They now need approval from filters, AI enhancement tools, beauty algorithms and digital validation systems before they are considered worthy of sharing. The scary part is not the technology itself. Technology has always evolved. The

real issue is how it is quietly changing our relationship with reality. Today, many people no longer want to look “good”. They want to look digitally optimised. AI-powered beauty filters can now reshape faces, smooth skin, alter jawlines, whiten teeth, enlarge eyes, slim bodies and even completely recreate facial structures within seconds.

A recent study I read reported that appearance-enhancing social media network filters are directly associated with increased facial dissatisfaction and body image concerns. Another study on young adults linked heavy photo filter usage with symptoms connected to body dysmorphia and unhealthy self-image.

Think about that carefully. For the first time in human history, millions of people are comparing themselves not to celebrities, but to AI-modified versions of ordinary people. That changes everything.

Even more concerning is how normalised this has become. Filters are no longer occasional enhancements. They are now default settings. Many young people have reached a point where they feel uncomfortable posting unfiltered photos because their real appearance no longer matches their digital identity.

I like taking photos for memories but always ask people for their confirmation before posting. Why? Because they get sensitive and very angry if the photo is shared without a filter applied.

Today, many people no longer want to look “good”. They want to look digitally optimised. AI-powered beauty filters can now reshape faces, smooth skin, alter jawlines, whiten teeth, enlarge eyes, slim bodies and even completely recreate facial structures within seconds.

Social media platforms have unintentionally created a dangerous cycle where AI creates unrealistic perfection, people compare themselves to it and confidence drops. More filters are used and then finally reality feels “less attractive”.

Research continues to show strong links between heavy social media use and appearance anxiety. And the consequences go beyond self-esteem. We are raising a generation that may struggle to distinguish authentic beauty from algorithmic beauty. A generation where natural imperfections such as wrinkles, skin texture, tired eyes, aging, etc are slowly being treated like software errors instead of human traits.

What worries me most is that future generations may grow up believing they are “not enough” before AI edits them. That is a dangerous psychological shift. Even relationships may eventually suffer from unrealistic digital expectations.

When people spend years consuming perfected AI-generated faces and filtered appearances, real human beings may begin to feel “less impressive” simply because reality cannot compete with algorithms trained to maximise attractiveness.

In the end, maybe the real question is not whether AI and filters are good or bad. The real question is whether we are slowly losing comfort with being naturally human. Technology should help us capture memories, not make us insecure about them.

PRU INDIA FIX DIALS UP RISK — AND POTENTIAL REWARD

KATRINA HAMLIN

Prudential has a punchy plan to shake up its life insurance business in India: it’s buying a controlling stake in Bharti Life Insurance. Tapping its new partner’s telco and asset management customers is a risky alternative to the tried-and-tested model of distributing products via a bank but could be an ingenious way to kickstart growth.

The \$38 billion group agreed to acquire 75% of Bharti Life from Bharti Life Ventures and 360 ONE Asset Management for \$389 million, it said.

That means Prudential CEO Anil Wadhvani is doing a switcheroo: the transaction requires Pru to reduce its stake in an existing venture with

The Indian business is in need of a reboot. New business sales there fell 2% last year and its ranking among private life insurers fell to fifth from third a year earlier.

ICICI Bank to under 10%, from 22%, per the company. It could well go on to divest what remains, leaving Bharti as its key partner. The Indian business is in need of a reboot. New business sales there fell 2% last year and its ranking among private life insurers fell to fifth from third a year earlier. That

was a disappointing result for what ought to be a high-growth market. The world’s most populous country has only 3% penetration in the life insurance space, Prudential reckons.

Wadhvani’s solution is a creative one. Insurers often lean on large banks like ICICI to reach potential policy buyers. But the target’s main attraction is Bharti Airtel’s nearly 300 million smartphone customers in India, compared with ICICI’s roughly 80 million retail banking clients, per data from Bharti and BCG Matrix.

Overlapping markets in Africa could also open up other emerging markets, while the telecom company’s asset management arm could help Pru reach India’s high net worth individuals.

But making it work could be tough. JioBlackRock, a joint venture between BlackRock and Jio Financial Services, is tapping additional distributors to sell its products after trying a digital direct model that leaned on its connections to Reliance Jio, India’s largest telecoms group.

And while the deal price seems fair, it’s not a bargain, valuing the company at just over \$500 million, or around 1.5 times its embedded value as of September. That’s in line with the average for rivals SBI Life Insurance, HDFC Life Insurance and the Life Insurance Corporation of India, per Visible Alpha and just below 1.6 times for ICICI Prudential Life Insurance.

Shareholders sent Pru’s stock down 2% in morning trade in Hong Kong. That’s probably because Wadhvani’s punt for better rewards in India comes with higher risks. — Reuters

PDO’s next leap... from oilfield to nation-builder

ON May 12, in a glass-and-steel building overlooking Mina Al Fahal, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik unveiled a plaque. The building is Bait Al Haitham — the “House of Haitham” — and it is far more than a new corporate facility.

It is the digital command centre of Oman’s energy system, where young Omani engineers now monitor hundreds of oil and gas fields, production stations, power plants and more than 13,000 active wells in real time.

A generation ago, such a system would likely have been imported, operated by expatriates and treated as a technical black box. Today, it is being run largely by Omanis, with a 95% Omanisation rate at the centre.

The visit, PDO’s first by His Majesty in the company’s 89th year, was therefore not merely ceremonial. It was also a moment of institutional assessment. And the conclusion was clear: Petroleum Development Oman has ceased to be simply an oil company. It has become one of the country’s most important institutions.

That distinction matters. A company optimises a balance sheet. An institution shapes a society. A company reports production. An institution produces habits, standards, skills and confidence.

PDO still extracts hydrocarbons, but its greater importance lies in what it multiplies: industrial capability, engineering discipline, local enterprise, national talent and, increasingly, the enabling foundations of Oman’s energy transition.

Start with the barrel. PDO remains central to Oman’s economic stability. In 2024, it produced nearly 680,000 barrels per day, its highest level in two decades. In 2025, it surpassed that performance again, with revenues of \$22.5 billion.

Oil and gas continue to account for roughly 30% of Oman’s GDP and around 70% of government revenue, with PDO contributing the lion’s share. These figures are impressive, but they tell only half the story. The deeper question is not how much PDO produces, but



PDO remains central to Oman’s economic stability.



DR YOUSUF
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The writer is founder and CEO, Smart Investment Gateway, economist, board adviser & business transformation mentor

Petroleum Development Oman has ceased to be simply an oil company. It has become one of the country’s most important institutions. That distinction matters. A company optimises a balance sheet. An institution shapes a society.

how much economic value Oman is increasingly able to capture and retain.

Here, the company’s In-Country Value programme deserves more serious attention than it usually receives. It is not glamorous. It does not lend itself to slogans. Yet it may be one of the most consequential instruments of industrial policy in modern Oman.

Through local procurement, supplier development and targeted capability-building, PDO has helped generate an estimated \$4.3 billion in cumulative economic impact, supported 83 manufacturing facilities and channelled RO 1 billion of supply-chain spending into the Omani economy in 2025 alone.

Of that, RO 350 million went to small and medium-sized enterprises and RO 273 million to Omani-made products. The programme also created 2,552 jobs for Omanis last year. This is what industrial strategy looks like when it leaves the conference hall and enters the workshop. It is valves, cables, logistics firms, software providers, welders, engineers and entrepreneurs. It is the slow conversion of national spending into national capability.

Each barrel, in this model, does double duty: it funds the state and strengthens the broader industrial ecosystem that must eventually outgrow dependence on the barrel itself. PDO’s second achievement is human capital. Its Omanisation rate of 92.7% is not the product of

administrative pressure alone. It reflects decades of investment in training, scholarships, technical pathways and leadership development. Programmes such as Masar, Ma’rifa, Ta’ziz and Ruwwad have helped create something rare in the region: a deep bench of national technical and managerial talent formed under demanding operational conditions.

The appointment of Dr Aflah al Hadhrami in 2024 as PDO’s first Omani Managing Director in its 88-year history was therefore more than a symbolic milestone.

It was institutional proof that the pipeline had matured. Under Omani leadership, the company has entered one of the most difficult periods in its history: expected to maintain high production, reduce emissions, improve safety, develop local industry and prepare for a lower-carbon future. By most measures, it has responded with discipline. Production has reached two-decade highs. Exploration has recorded ten consecutive years without a lost-time injury. Serious operational incidents have fallen sharply.

This is the kind of performance culture that institutions and countries often spend decades attempting to cultivate. Then comes the paradox at the heart of the energy transition. Oman’s largest hydrocarbon producer is also one of its most important decarbonisation platforms. PDO has committed to halving emissions by 2030 from a 2019 baseline of 12 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent and to reaching net-zero by 2050. It is already moving down that curve.

The Riyah-1 and Riyah-2 wind farms, due online this year, are expected to become the first wind projects developed specifically to power an oil and gas operator anywhere in the world, reducing emissions by 740,000 tonnes annually.

A 100MW solar plant in the north is expected to save a further 220,000 tonnes. In Dhulaima, PDO is piloting CO₂ injection, using carbon capture as an operational capability rather than a branding exercise.

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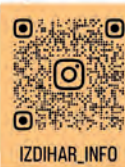
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‘BEYOND THE OSCAR’: TRAVOLTA GETS SURPRISE CANNES PRIZE



The man who became an icon overnight with “Saturday Night Fever” was visibly moved as he accepted the honorary Palme d’Or before the screening of “Propeller One-Way Night Coach”, which is based on a book about his first experience in an airliner.

“I just can’t believe it. This is beyond the Oscar, really”, he said as he accepted the tribute.

The festival has been laying on the love for Hollywood legends this year despite the big studios staying away, with honorary Palmes for Barbra Streisand and Peter Jackson as well as a gala screening for Vin Diesel and the stars of “The Fast and the Furious” franchise to mark its 25th anniversary.

Travolta — who has never won an Oscar — revived his flagging career with his iconic turn as hitman Vincent Vega in Quentin Tarantino’s “Pulp Fiction”, which won the festival’s Palme d’Or top prize in 1994.

Many critics hailed it as his greatest performance, one that has since gone down in cinema history.

“My favourite movies in the history of my life have always been the winners of the Palme d’Or”, Travolta said.

Behind the camera

Cannes had kept the award under wraps until the actor walked on stage for the premiere wearing a black suit and a white beret.

The 72-year-old said he had been hugely surprised to have his directorial debut, which stars his daughter Ella Bleu as an air hostess, accepted at the world’s most prestigious film festival.

When Cannes director Thierry Fremaux told him in November that “it would be the first film ever accepted that early I cried like a baby”, he said. “I had no expectation my film would be accepted”, he added.

“Propeller One-Way Night Coach” is a one-hour self-financed autobiographical tale about Travolta’s flight as an eight-year-old with his actress mother from New York to Los Angeles in 1962. “This is the blueprint of my life”, said the actor, a lifelong aeroplane nut, who narrates the story. “What you’ll see in the movie is completely my perspective on what I witnessed people go through. “Everyone that was in the movie is sitting in the audience right there, my family”, he added.

Asked if he would direct again, he said he had watched all sorts of directors as an actor.

“I really believe that I can navigate around all of that and anything I would choose to do, but I really feel I have to have passion about the material to do again what I’ve done here”, he said.

— AFP

QUICK FEATURES



CULTURE

A fire dancer performs during the Surabaya Vaganza street night parade, part of celebrations marking the 733rd anniversary of Surabaya, Indonesia’s second largest city. — AFP



FILM FESTIVAL

US actress Kristen Stewart arrives for the screening of the film “Full Phil” at the 79th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP



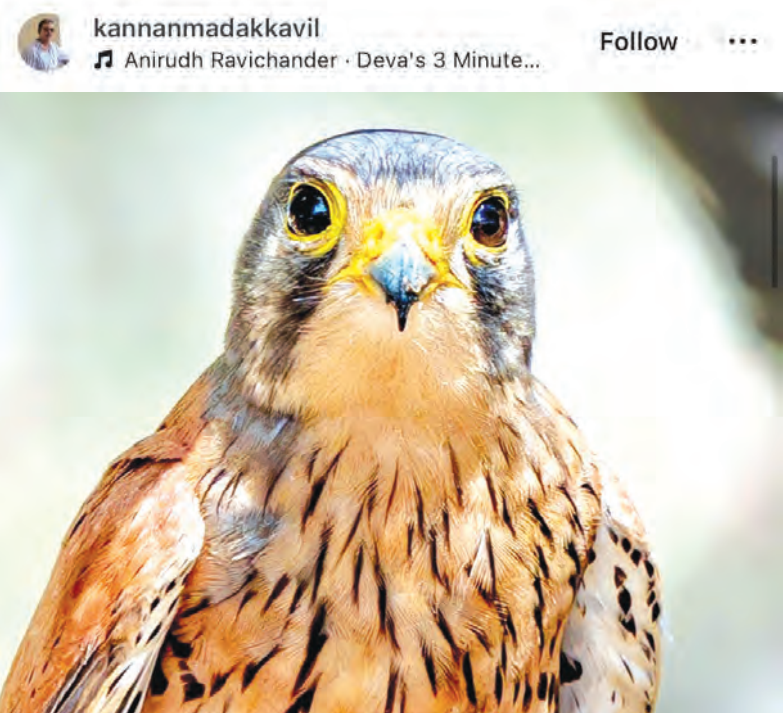
TOURISM

Pedestrians cross the world-famous Rue de Rivoli during the ever-so enchanting golden-hour sunset in Paris. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Camel racing in Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, Oman



Eagle with a razor-sharp stare

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NEW YORK’S METROPOLITAN MUSEUM SET TO MERGE WITH NEUE GALERIE IN 2028



The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Neue Galerie New York, known for its collection of German and Austrian art, are set to merge in 2028, the museums said on Thursday.

The Neue Galerie will operate as a branch of the Met, located diagonally opposite the museum on Fifth Avenue and will be officially renamed “The Met Ronald S Lauder Neue Galerie”, after its entrepreneur founder, the museums said in a press release. Max Hollein, the Austrian-born director of the Met since 2018, said ahead of the announcement that “for the art world, this means that one of New York’s most beloved and distinctive cultural institutions — the Neue Galerie, built by Ronald Lauder — will not only be preserved, but will continue exactly as the museum it was always meant to be”.

The merger will also bring the Met a collection of “icons of art history”, Hollein said, including works by Egon Schiele, Gabriele Münter, Oskar Kokoschka, Max Beckmann, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Wassily

Kandinsky, Franz Marc and Paul Klee. According to Hollein, the acquisition will fill “a significant gap” in the Met’s collection in “an incredibly impressive way”. Founded in 1870, the Met boasts a comprehensive collection from around the world spanning from antiquity to the modern era and attracts around 6 million visitors per year. The Neue Galerie will not be the first additional branch of the Met.

The Met Cloisters branch in northern Manhattan shows medieval art, while the Met Breuer previously displayed a collection of modern and contemporary works until its closure in 2020. The star of the Neue Galerie is the painting “Adele Bloch-Bauer I” by Austrian Art Nouveau artist Gustav Klimt (1862-1918), which Lauder purchased at auction in 2006 for a then-record price of \$135 million.

The so-called Lady in Gold became a crowd favourite, attracting long queues of people, with some paying up to \$50 to see the work upclose. — dpa



‘Dance all night’: Harry Styles kicks off World Tour in Amsterdam



STÉPHANIE HAMEL with rhinestones bejewelling her eyes and star-shaped clips in her hair, 23-year-old Mathea Ndawula was all set on Saturday for the first show of pop superstar Harry Styles’ new world tour.

“My goal is to dance all night”, said the psychology student, who had travelled from Mons in Belgium to Amsterdam early to secure a good spot.

The typical Dutch weather of lashing rain and wind failed to deter fans of the British star, who turned out in droves from all corners of Europe, huddling in ponchos covered with pink hearts.

The 32-year-old singer will perform for 10 nights at the Johan Cruyff Arena in Amsterdam, usually home to Dutch football giants Ajax, who have been displaced during the tour.

The residency-style “Together, Together” tour will take root in seven cities for a total of 67 concerts from May 16 to December 13.

A record 12 concerts are scheduled for London’s Wembley Arena in June and New York’s Madison Square Garden will host 30 shows at the end of August.

Styles burst onto the pop scene at the age of 16 from the talent show X-factor, later fronting boy band One Direction.

His new album “Kiss All The Time. Disco, Occasionally” came out on March 6, four years after his last



work “Harry’s House”, which won the Best Album award at the Grammys.

With a more electronic and experimental sound, although still unashamedly full of dance tracks, the new album is seen as taking a new trajectory.

- ‘I’m so excited’ -

“Every album is like a new chapter in his life, something different that he wants to do”, said Jessica Denovan from Manchester in Britain, who has been a Harry Styles fan since One Direction days.

“We have no idea what the intro is going to be. It’s all going to be different. I don’t even know what to expect... I’m so excited”, said the 21-year-old who works in a kindergarten.

In a rare interview given to New Zealand presenter Zane Lowe, Styles said a residency-style tour would offer fans improved staging for the show. “I think it makes the show better. I think you can build something that doesn’t have to travel every night”, he said.

“I think there’s something in this that allows me to stay in my life while I’m doing it and therefore... to take care of myself better which I think makes me better at doing the thing”, he said.

For Tom Fusaz, a 22-year-old Belgian gardener, the switch to the residency format was an interesting gamble.

“It’s a risk that he’s taking, but I can’t wait to see how it plays out live”, Fusaz said. — AFP

FEATURES



KABEER YOUSUF

PHOTO exhibitions assume one thing, that you have eyes that work and get you the feel of the image that often takes your breath away. On the other hand, the display of a set of photos is becoming the eyes of the visually-impaired people and turning the assumption of ‘tactile light’ inside out.

Here, visually-challenged people can see, feel and enjoy the intricate details of a painting without sight inside a photo exhibition built for touch, sound and memory and are traversed to a world hitherto unknown to the blind and becoming the light within.

Emmy CULIANEZ, a French photographer was saddened by the fact that the visually-challenged fellow beings can’t enjoy her photographs that she has been voraciously clicking away during her life in the Sultanate of Oman. Her “Touch the Image, Hear the Colors” which got underway at the Rozna Restaurant in Muscat is such an attempt where she is keeping the less-abled together.

The vernissage of her inclusive photography exhibition saw scores of visually disabled men and women from the Al Noor Association for the blind enjoying the exhibition of photos nailed on the fortified walls of Rozna.

The show features 5 photographs of different landscapes and buildings of Oman, depicting five fingers to indicate ‘touch and feel’ and viewers can not just view them, but can read them with their hands, hear them with their ears and reconstruct them in their mind.

“The idea of such a photo exhibition came into my mind after I thought of exploring ways to engage those who are visually challenged without the eyesight and enough of telling what photos ‘looked like’ to my friends. That’s not seeing”, she says.

“That’s a summary and I wanted them to have the full feel of the photos through their inner sight and here I am”, she says that was the beginning of such an exhibition and she built an exhibition that refused to summarise.

Each photo is reprinted using UV embossing and layered resin. Edges become ridges, textures become actual texture. A photo of an Arabian leopard isn’t just labelled ‘furry’, instead, you feel the individual strands radiating outwards, the contrast between the coarse outer hair and the soft undercoat. A cracked wall of a dilapidated building in Yiti becomes a topography of destruction you can trace with your finger.

Her noble initiative is an eye-opener to the world of sightfulness. Sighted people tend to consume photos fast, they scan, judge and move on. Removing vision forces a slower engagement. You spend 4-5 minutes on one image, building it piece by piece. Several sighted visitors said it was the first time they ‘understood’ a photo rather than just recognised it.

SEEING THE COLOURS WITHOUT SIGHT

