

O M A N
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D A I L Y

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INBRIEF

OMAN CONDEMNS ISRAELI MOVE ON SOMALILAND

The foreign ministers of the Sultanate of Oman, the State of Kuwait, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Federal Republic of Somalia, the Republic of the Sudan, the State of Libya, the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, the Democratic People’s Republic of Algeria, the State of Palestine, the Republic of Türkiye, the Republic of Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan have strongly condemned Israel’s announcement of the appointment of a diplomatic envoy to what is called ‘Somaliland,’ considering it a flagrant violation of the sovereignty of the Federal Republic of Somalia and the unity and territorial integrity thereof.

4 NEW MUSEUMS AT BAHLA FORT



Four new museums have been inaugurated at Bahla Fort on Sunday under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, as part of efforts to enhance cultural offerings and strengthen the site as a comprehensive heritage destination. **DETAILS ON P5**

18 DEALS SIGNED FOR FOOD SECURITY

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning on Sunday signed 18 usufruct contracts for the implementation of investment projects in the sector of agriculture. The projects will be carried out in different governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. The contracts were signed in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources with the aim of enhancing food security in Oman. The total investment value of the contracts exceeds RO 1.9 million. The project, which will cover a total area of about 300 acres, will come up in the governorates of Al Buraimi, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Al Wusta and Dhofar. **DETAILS ON P15**

Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is home to approximately 6,000 rose trees

NIZWA: Al Dakhiliyah Governorate has reinforced its standing as a primary engine of tourism and local economic development through its integrated stewardship of the Spring of Roses 2026 season in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. The season, which concluded successfully, showcased exemplary planning and execution while enhancing the governorate’s appeal as a premier tourist destination during the first half of the year.

Guided by a strategic vision to transform seasonal events into sustainable economic platforms, the governorate capitalised on the region’s unique natural assets and deep agricultural heritage, most notably the mountain rose — a signature emblem of local identity and a growing catalyst for tourism and economic vitality. The governorate orchestrated a comprehensive ecosystem uniting tourism, agriculture and manufacturing industries



‘Rose Trail’ linking villages attracted participation from 400 contestants.

through a rich programme of cultural, artistic, sporting and tourist events. These included heritage performances, a cultural theatre, exhibitions of local products, visual arts initiatives and professional photography competitions designed to document the season’s beauty and amplify its media footprint. Ahmed bin Salim al Tobi, Director-General of Administrative and Financial Affairs at Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, said the Spring of Roses season represents a

sophisticated national model for advancing economic diversification. He noted that the governorate has evolved the event into a fully integrated platform empowering small and medium enterprises, productive families and rose-related industries, while generating direct and indirect employment. Speaking to the Oman News Agency (ONA), he added that local content indicators underscore the season’s direct economic impact. — ONA

OHRC’s restructuring promotes transparency

MUSCAT: In a legislative and human rights move of profound significance — reflecting the highest political will to enhance Oman’s human rights system and align it with international standards — Royal Decree No 47/2026 was issued to restructure the Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC). The decree represents a comprehensive restructuring and the foundation of a new phase characterised by broader independence, greater transparency and advanced oversight and field competencies. It positions the Sultanate of Oman among nations that adopt robust, independent national mechanisms closely aligned with the Paris Principles governing national human rights institutions. Among the most transformative changes introduced by the new statute is the absolute legal

guarantee of the commission’s independence — the most critical requirement for the success of any human rights body worldwide. Article 11 explicitly stipulates that the commission shall enjoy “full independence in the exercise of its human rights-related activities,” while providing objective immunity that prevents interference in its work or the prosecution of its members for opinions they express.

Article 9 grants commission members the exclusive right to elect the chairman and deputy chairman from among themselves at their first meeting, with the stipulation that both be drawn from outside government administrative units. This direction is reinforced by Article 18, which allows representatives of government entities to participate in commission meetings but without voting rights. — ONA

Vance to lead US team to Iran talks in Pakistan

TEHRAN SAYS NOT YET DECIDED WHETHER TO JOIN NEW TALKS

US Vice-President J D Vance will lead the US delegation for talks with Iran in Pakistan, a White House official said on Sunday - shortly after President Donald Trump said he would not make the trip. Early in the day, Trump announced he was sending negotiators to Islamabad for meetings with Tehran about ending the conflict that has raged in the Middle East, with a ceasefire soon set to expire. The president, however, said Vance - who led the last round of talks with Tehran in Islamabad, but came away with no deal - would not make the trip, citing security concerns. “It’s only because of security,” Trump told ABC News. “JD’s great.” But the White House quickly flipped the script when asked about those comments. Vance, special envoy Steve Witkoff, and Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner will attend the talks, a White House official said on condition of anonymity. Meanwhile, Iran local media reported, with the Irna state news agency that Tehran has yet to decide whether it will take part in a new round of talks with the United States as “there is no clear prospect of fruitful negotiations”. The Fars and Tasnim news agencies, quoting anonymous sources, said Tehran had yet to decide whether it would



A girl rides her bike at an unofficial camp for the displaced at Beirut’s waterfront area on Sunday. On April 17 a ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon took effect after the first direct talks between the two sides in decades. — AFP

participate and that “the overall atmosphere cannot be assessed as very positive”, with Fars citing one source as saying the lifting of a US blockade on Iranian ports was a precondition for talks. Irna, meanwhile, pointed to Washington’s “maximalism and unreasonable and

unrealistic demands, frequent changes of positions, constant contradictions and the continuation of the so-called naval blockade”, adding that “in these circumstances, there is no clear prospect of fruitful negotiations”. Earlier, Trump accused Iran of a “Total Violation” of the

countries’ two-week ceasefire with attacks on Saturday in the Strait of Hormuz - and threatened to destroy its power plants and bridges if no deal is reached. Trump said on his Truth Social platform that he was offering Iran “a reasonable deal,” and if Tehran refuses, “the United States is going to knock out every single Power Plant, and every single Bridge, in Iran. NO MORE MR NICE GUY!” “They’ll come down fast, they’ll come down easy and, if they don’t take the DEAL, it will be my Honour to do what has to be done, which should have been done to Iran, by other Presidents, for the last 47 years,” he wrote. Washington’s envoy to the United Nations, Mike Waltz, told ABC News that he believed the new round of talks would lead to an “incredibly consequential” outcome. The Strait of Hormuz remained closed on Sunday amidst the stand-off. Iran on Saturday declared it shut again to shipping - one day after saying it would reopen the strategic waterway. A UK maritime security agency said Iran’s Revolutionary Guards had fired at one tanker on Saturday, while security intelligence firm Vanguard Tech reported the force had threatened to “destroy” an empty cruise ship that was fleeing the Gulf. **SEE ALSO P6 & 7**

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MOH 4219410/2025

SHORT TAKES



The workshop targets 136 individuals working in the field of elderly care. — ONA

WORKSHOP SEEKS INTEGRATION OF ELDERLY

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Social Development organised a developmental workshop for the elderly sector, which will run for two weeks with the participation of a number of specialists and representatives from government entities, the private sector and civil society institutions. This initiative is part of national efforts to develop an integrated system of services for this demographic and to enhance their quality of life.

The workshop aims to bring together various relevant stakeholders through participatory meetings in order to assess challenges and gaps in the elderly sector; analyse them and identify opportunities for improvement, thereby contributing to the development of programmes and services through a comprehensive and integrated methodology. It also seeks to align visions among relevant entities, enhance institutional integration and build effective partnerships that support the implementation of high-impact initiatives aligned with the targets of Oman Vision 2040.

The workshop targets 136 individuals working in the field of elderly care and services, as well as representatives from the private sector, government entities and civil society institutions, thereby strengthening the integration of national efforts and contributing to achieving a sustainable impact in the development of this important sector. — ONA

RESTRUCTURING OF OHRC STRENGTHENS MECHANISMS

FROM P1



Regarding the commission’s structural composition, Article 1 establishes a membership of 14 individuals, with balance ensured by limiting government representatives to no

more than four. The selection process is to be characterised by transparency, pluralism, diversity and competition among candidates.

The Omani legislator did not overlook the importance of involving all segments of society. The same article mandates that the composition include “appropriate representation of women,” thereby strengthening the presence of Omani women in human rights decision-making and national policy direction. Article 3 sets precise professional requirements to guarantee member competence, including a minimum age of thirty years, possession of a university degree or equivalent, and no fewer than eight years of practical experience in fields relevant to human rights—ensuring that the commission serves as a national, specialised, and professional centre of expertise.

The commission has been granted the authority to conduct both announced and unannounced field visits to prisons, places of detention, health institutions and labour congregations to monitor human rights conditions. Additionally, the commission is tasked with receiving and studying complaints, monitoring any human rights violations or abuses in the Sultanate of Oman and working to assist in their resolution.

Article 16 charges the commission with monitoring observations and criticisms raised by foreign governments, international organisations and media outlets, coordinating with relevant authorities to verify, and responding systematically.

HIV TEST RULE FOR FILIPINOS TO OMAN UNDER REVIEW

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, APRIL 19

A negative HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) test certificate is required for Filipino nationals travelling to Oman under visa-free entry, according to airline sources. Oman Air said the measure is linked to entry screening procedures and rising HIV cases in

the Philippines, and is being applied for tourist arrivals regardless of point of departure.

The Philippine Embassy in Oman said the matter is under review, noting that the requirement does not apply to work visa holders. The Embassy has made representations to Omani authorities seeking its removal. Travel agents have advised passengers to verify requirements

with airlines before travel, as rules may change during the review process.

Airlines clarified that the rule applies only to adults and not to children. The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs expressed confidence that the issue will be resolved, citing strong bilateral ties between the two countries.

Agritourism draws visitors to Al Hamra

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 19

AGRITOURISM is gaining increasing attention in Wilayat of Al Hamra, particularly in the village of Misfat Al Abriyeen, where traditional farms and heritage landscapes are attracting both local and international visitors seeking authentic rural experiences. Renowned for its terraced farms, flowing aflaj irrigation systems and mud-brick houses, Misfat Al Abriyeen offers visitors a close glimpse into traditional agricultural practices and village life.

Content creator Saif al Zuheimi described agritourism in the village as one of the most appealing experiences for foreign tourists, noting that visitors are drawn to the opportunity to witness real farming practices, including aflaj irrigation and traditional techniques of climbing date palm trees.

Tour guide Hamad al Hattali highlighted the area’s agricultural diversity, explaining that crop characteristics vary according to environmental conditions. He noted that pomegranates grown in the village tend to be less sweet due to the elevation of around 900 metres above sea level, while mango cultivation is more concentrated near wadi channels where shade and



Heritage landscapes in Misfat Al Abriyeen is attracting both local and global visitors.

Agritourism is encouraging preservation of agricultural heritage and traditional irrigation systems

water availability support growth.

He added that local varieties of bananas are also cultivated and are traditionally consumed with honey, reflecting the region’s distinctive agricultural traditions.

Social media influencer Warda Shammari described Misfat Al Abriyeen as a destination that blends natural beauty with cultural heritage, pointing to its flowing water, lush farms and traditional stone-and-mud houses. She added that the village’s narrow pathways, along with locally styled cafés and restaurants, reflect a traditional

lifestyle that enriches the visitor experience. Observers note that this form of tourism is contributing to the local economy by creating opportunities for farm owners and small businesses, while also encouraging the preservation of agricultural heritage and traditional irrigation systems.

With growing global interest in experiential and eco-friendly travel, Al Hamra continues to position itself as a destination where visitors can connect with nature and explore Oman’s rural identity in an authentic setting.

Qualitative transformation in healthcare a priority

MUSCAT: The health priority under Oman Vision 2040 has witnessed qualitative transformations reflecting the scale of efforts exerted during the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan. Construction achievements have been coupled with legislative and technological updates to shape the contours of a pioneering, sustainable and inclusive health system, placing human beings at the core and as the primary objective of development.

Pursuant to Royal decree No 10/2024, the sector has undergone a comprehensive reformulation of its governance framework, culminating in a flexible organisational structure based on three specialised units that ensure enhanced decentralisation and grant governorates broader powers. As a strategic step to unify care delivery efforts under a single umbrella, the foundations of medical integration have been



Health sector has undergone a comprehensive reformulation. — ONA

laid through the establishment of the University Medical City and the Medical City for Military and Security Services, as well as the transfer of medical services from the Diwan of Royal Court to the Ministry of Health. This ensures alignment of strategic directions, expenditure efficiency, and the unification of national care standards.

In the healthcare delivery sector, four major hospitals have been opened and become operational, namely Al Suwaiq,

Khasab, Al Mazyouna, and Wadi Bani Khalid. Concurrently, strategic expansions have been undertaken at Suhar, Nizwa, and Sur hospitals, as well as the National Heart Centre. Primary care has also been strengthened through the establishment of two health complexes and seven new health centres, alongside the upgrading of nine local hospitals.

Specialised services of high impact have been launched, including an IVF centre, the National Centre for Virtual

Health, nine dialysis units, seven accident and emergency units, and the Central Public Health Laboratory.

Additionally, work is currently underway on the construction of 21 additional health facilities, with completion rates having reached advanced stages. Notable among these are Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah, with a completion rate of 83 per cent, and Samayil Hospital, with a completion rate of 71 per cent.

In keeping pace with the technological revolution, the Ministry of Health has achieved a qualitative leap by integrating artificial intelligence into diagnostic services. The National Programme for Diabetic Retinopathy Screening has successfully screened over 30,000 patients with an accuracy rate of 92 per cent, reducing waiting times by more than 80 per cent. Pioneering projects have also been launched. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani receives General Fabien Mandon.

AL NUMANI HOLDS TALKS WITH FRENCH ARMED FORCES CHIEF

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office on Sunday General Fabien Mandon, Chief of Staff of the French Armed Forces, and his accompanying delegation.

The meeting reviewed the historical relations between Oman and France. It further addressed means of promoting the joint cooperation in a manner that maintains the security of the two countries.

The meeting was attended by the Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces and the French Ambassador to Oman. — ONA



Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi with General Fabien Mandon. — ONA

SAF CHIEF OF STAFF RECEIVES FRENCH COUNTERPART

MUSCAT: Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Sunday General Fabien Mandon, Chief of Staff of the French Armed Forces, and his accompanying delegation. The meeting discussed a set of military topics of mutual interest.

Meanwhile, General Fabien Mandon and his accompanying delegation also paid a visit to the Maritime Security Centre.

He was received upon arrival by Commodore Adil bin Hamoud al Busaidi, Head of the Maritime Security Centre (MSC).

During the visit, the guest and his delegation were briefed on the roles and responsibilities of the Maritime Security Centre, as well as its efforts to ensure the safety and security of the environment and navigation within Oman's maritime zones. They also toured the Centre's facilities and reviewed its advanced technologies and modern systems. — ONA

OMAN—FRANCE MEETING REVIEWS ADVANCED BILATERAL RELATIONS, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS



MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Sunday General Fabien Mandon, Chief of Staff of the French Armed Forces and his accompanying delegation.

The meeting reviewed the advanced relations between Oman and France. The two sides also addressed the regional and international developments and exchanged views on means of enhancing the joint interests, in addition to discussing a set of topics of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by the Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces and the French Ambassador to Oman. — ONA

Jobs, entrepreneurship ecosystems shape stability

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 19

IN A rapidly evolving world, young people's sense of stability is no longer shaped solely by social or educational factors; it is increasingly tied to the availability of meaningful economic opportunities that enable them to build a clear and sustainable future.

The expansion of job prospects, the strengthening of entrepreneurship ecosystems, and the presence of effective government support all play a decisive role in boosting youth confidence — ultimately influencing their engagement in society and contribution to national development.

Across various contexts, evidence shows that young people who secure employment or successfully launch their own ventures tend to be more optimistic and resilient. Employment is not merely a source of income; it provides a sense of purpose, belonging and personal achievement.

Conversely, limited opportunities or unclear career pathways often lead to uncertainty, discouragement and, in some cases, reduced civic participation.

Salim al Hatroushi, a young professional working in the private sector, said, "After graduation, I struggled to find a suitable job, but once I secured my current position, I began to see a clear direction for my future. Today, I am



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The expansion of job prospects, the strengthening of entrepreneurship ecosystems, and the presence of effective government support all play a decisive role in boosting youth confidence — ultimately influencing their engagement in society and contribution to national development.

focused on developing my skills and even considering starting my own business. Opportunities truly change your outlook on life."

Entrepreneurship, meanwhile, has emerged as a powerful driver of youth empowerment, particularly in economies undergoing diversification. By enabling young people to establish small and medium enterprises, entrepreneurship offers greater autonomy and reduces reliance on traditional employment pathways.

Zainab Mohammed , a young entrepreneur who transformed a home-based initiative into a growing local brand, said, "What started as a simple idea gradually evolved into a real business, thanks

to the financial and training support I received. Today, I feel more confident about my future and am even planning to hire other young people. Entrepreneurship has given me a strong sense of independence."

Government policies remain a critical pillar in this equation. Clear, consistent, and forward-looking strategies help build trust between youth and institutions.

When young individuals perceive a well- integrated system that supports them — from education and training to employment and funding — they are more likely to take initiative and actively contribute to society.

Abdullah al Harrasi, an economic development specialist, stated, "Youth confidence in the future is directly linked to the clarity and stability of economic policies. When young people see long-term plans that generate real employment opportunities and encourage innovation, they become more willing to invest in themselves and contribute to their communities."

He added that gaps between policy vision and implementation can create a disconnect between youth aspirations and reality, negatively affecting overall stability and satisfaction.

Economic opportunities also foster a stronger sense of belonging. Young individuals who find their place within the labour market or business sector are more likely to view themselves as active contributors rather than passive recipients.

Boosting support for children with disabilities reviewed

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education and the Association for Children with Disabilities (ACD) have explored ways to support educational initiatives and rehabilitative services for children with disabilities.

This took place during a visit by Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibani, Minister of Education, to the Association's headquarters.

The minister reviewed the Association's various programmes and activities, as well as its ongoing efforts in the fields of rehabilitation and training.

She emphasised the importance of integrating efforts between the Ministry and relevant associations to achieve the desired educational

and humanitarian objectives, expressing her appreciation for the Association's dedicated work.

Khadija bint Nasser al Saati, Chairperson, ACD, affirmed that the Association strives to provide the best possible services for children and their families, and to continue developing its programmes despite challenges, with support from both public and private entities, thereby contributing to enhanced social inclusion.

The ACD operates eight centres distributed across several governorates of Oman, providing services to 361 children with disabilities through integrated educational and rehabilitative programmes aimed at developing



Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibani during her visit to the Association for Children with Disabilities.

their abilities and enhancing their opportunities for social integration.

The Association for Children with Disabilities is a non-profit, voluntary charitable organisation dedicated to providing educational and rehabilitative services to children with disabilities in Oman.

Through its centres located across various governorates, it contributes to supporting social inclusion efforts and empowering this group to acquire life and educational skills.

The Association targets children with hearing, intellectual and motor disabilities, as well as autism spectrum disorder and Down syndrome, within the age group of 4 to 14 years.

It also offers pre-vocational preparation programmes for the age group of 15 to 23 years, tailored to their abilities and aimed at enhancing their integration into society.

The Association implements a range of integrated services, including educational, rehabilitative, psychological and social services, alongside community awareness programmes, physiotherapy, speech therapy, and vocational preparation programmes.

This is in addition to extracurricular activities designed to develop children's skills, discover their abilities and nurture their creative potential. — ONA

SPOTLIGHT

TRUST BUILDS FROM HOME

BALQEES AL ORAIMI

IN AN era marked by rapid transformation, social trust has moved beyond theory to become a cornerstone of stable and cohesive societies. Yet, despite its wide-reaching impact, trust does not begin in institutions or policies — it is first nurtured within the family.

The home is a child’s earliest space for learning how to build and sustain trust. Through daily interactions, children absorb values such as honesty, respect and accountability — principles that later shape their engagement with the wider world. This raises a pressing question: is the family still fulfilling this foundational role, or is its influence diminishing?

Traditionally, families were more cohesive, with strong intergenerational bonds enabling the direct transfer of values. Today, however, shifting lifestyles, demanding work schedules and the pervasive influence of digital platforms have altered this dynamic. Social media and online content increasingly compete with parents in shaping young minds.

“Trust is not built through words alone, but through everyday experiences at home,” says social worker Mariam bint Mohammed. “When children grow up in an environment of mutual respect and understanding, these values naturally extend into society. When that foundation is missing, the impact becomes evident early on.” The absence of trust-building at home often extends beyond the household. Individuals without this grounding may struggle to form stable relationships or engage constructively with others, contributing to a broader erosion of social trust.

When children grow up in an environment of mutual respect and understanding, these values naturally extend into society. When that foundation is missing, the impact becomes evident early on

MARIAM BINT MOHAMMED
Social worker

Younger generations also face the challenge of navigating an interconnected world filled with diverse — and often conflicting — information. Constant exposure can foster skepticism or caution, shaping how individuals perceive and interact with others.

Parent Abdullah bin Mahmoud al Mahroouqi reflects this reality: “We try to stay close to our children, but the challenge today is far greater. They are influenced as much by what they see outside as by what we provide at home. This requires greater awareness and a more active parental role.” These perspectives highlight the evolving demands of parenting. The family’s role now extends beyond traditional upbringing, requiring continuous

engagement and an understanding of the digital and social environments shaping children’s lives.

Despite these challenges, families can reclaim their central role in nurturing trust through conscious effort. Encouraging open dialogue, allowing children to express themselves and demonstrating integrity through actions are key to building lasting trust.

Importantly, trust does not mean the absence of conflict, but rather how disagreements are managed. Families that handle conflict with respect and constructive communication equip children with essential life skills.

Ultimately, social trust is shaped by a complex interplay of families, institutions and culture. However, the home remains the starting point. A strong foundation at home strengthens society; a weak one undermines even the best external efforts.

As societies continue to evolve, families face a critical choice: reaffirm their role as the cornerstone of values or risk leaving a gap that is difficult to fill.

Investing in trust at home is not just a personal responsibility — it is a societal necessity.



Strong home environments are vital for cohesive, trusting societies

Digital influence is reshaping traditional parenting roles

Family remains the primary foundation for building trust and values

SHORT TAKES



The hospital also offers social rehabilitation to support long-term recovery.

New addiction treatment hospital opens in Suhar

SUHAR: A ceremony was held in the Wilayat of Suhar, Al Batinah North Governorate, to mark the opening of Al Salwa Hospital for Addiction Treatment and Healthcare, under the auspices of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health.

The hospital will provide advanced therapeutic and rehabilitation programmes addressing the psychological, behavioural and social dimensions of addiction, with the aim of helping patients reintegrate into society and resume productive lives.

Following the inauguration, the minister and guests toured the facility, which comprises four main buildings.

The first phase includes a 30-bed inpatient ward, specialised clinics, group therapy halls and rehabilitation units. The second phase will see the addition of a 25-bed specialised detoxification department.

The hospital will offer a comprehensive range of treatment programmes, including individual and group psychotherapy, behavioural modification and relapse prevention, as well as social rehabilitation to support long-term recovery.

Treatment duration will range from a few weeks to six months, depending on each case. — ONA

New cultural initiative in Salalah bridges heritage, art

SALALAH: The launch of the ‘Mutawarith’ (Inherited) initiative as a cultural and artistic platform in Dhofar Governorate was celebrated on Sunday at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, and was attended by a number of officials and those interested in cultural and artistic affairs in the governorate.

The event’s programme included a series of introductory presentations showcasing the cultural and productive content of the platform, highlighting the symbolism and significance of the Dhofari incense burner (locally called Al Majmar), its chronological evolution through the ages, and the role of women in its production.



The ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said.

The programme also featured an artistic display depicting the nature of Dhofar, measuring 7 metres in width and 2.5 metres in height.

The launch event also featured accompanying training programmes and workshops aimed at teaching young people the techniques of traditional Dhofari ceramics, thereby contributing to the

transmission of this craft to future generations.

It is worth noting that the ‘Mutawarith’ initiative represents an artistic and cultural space in Dhofar Governorate offering a visual experience that blends the authenticity of Dhofar’s heritage with contemporary art, with the aim of supporting local talent and transforming cultural heritage into innovative works of art. — ONA

AL MULTAQA REAL ESTATE AND HOSPITALITY PROJECTS SAOC

INVITATION TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of Al Multaqa Real Estate and Hospitality Projects SAOC (the "Company") have the pleasure to invite the shareholders to attend the annual general meeting of the Company on the May 5 2026 at Mohammed Al Ruqaisi Law Firm, Office No. 401, Agar Square - Office 1991, Dohat Al Adab Street, Al Ghubrah South, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman at 11:00 am. If the required quorum for the first meeting is not met, the second meeting shall be held on 12 May 2026 at the same time and venue, and such meeting shall be valid regardless of the number of shares represented, in accordance with the Commercial Companies Law of the Sultanate of Oman, to discuss the following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the Board of Director's report for the financial year ended 31st December 2025.
2. To consider and approve the Board of Director's corporate governance report for the financial year ended 31st December 2025.
3. To consider the auditor's report and to approve the audited financial statements of the Company for the financial year ended 31st December 2025.
4. To approve the sitting fees, if any, paid to the Directors' for attending meetings of the Board and its subcommittees for the previous financial year and to determine the Directors' sitting fees for the upcoming financial year.
5. To ratify the transactions carried out with related parties during the financial year ended 31st December 2025.
6. To consider and approve the related parties' transactions that the Company will enter into during the financial year ending 31st December 2026.
7. To appoint statutory auditors for the financial year ending 31st December 2026 and determine their fees.

Shareholders are kindly requested to attend the venue half an hour before the meeting.

Each shareholder is entitled to give a written proxy to another person, who need not be a shareholder, to attend the meeting and vote on his/her behalf at the meeting.

If you wish to appoint a proxy, please complete and submit the attached Proxy Form to the Company's office.

For queries, please contact **Ms. Reem Ebrahim** at phone no. +973 39639034.

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FOUR NEW MUSEUMS OPEN AT BAHLA FORT

AMAL AL RIYAMI
BAHLA, APRIL 19

FOUR new museums have been inaugurated at Bahla Fort on Sunday under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, as part of efforts to enhance cultural offerings and strengthen the site as a comprehensive heritage destination.

The museums, launched in the first phase of development, are spread across different sections of the historic fort, leveraging its archaeological and architectural significance to enrich visitor experience.

The Archaeological Collections Museum, located in ‘Bait Al Hadith,’ showcases artefacts discovered during restoration works at Bahla Fort and within the Bahla oasis, with most items dating back to the third millennium BCE. The museum has been developed to high technical standards, with archaeological collections provided by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

The Meteorites Museum, housed in ‘Bait Al Jabal,’ presents three types of meteorites found in Oman, supported by scientific explanations that highlight their origin and composition.

The Omani Honey Museum,



Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy at the opening of new museums at Bahla Fort.

The initiative is expected to boost economic activity in Bahla Traditional Souq and strengthen tourism in the region

located in ‘Burj Al Jihadri,’ highlights traditional beekeeping methods and honey production practices. It is operated by a local investor from Bahla in cooperation with the fort’s management company.

The Doors Museum in ‘Al Qasaba’ features eight of the oldest wooden doors in Oman, including one estimated to be over 750 years old. Some pieces carry original craftsmen’s inscriptions, along with carvings linked to pre-Islamic civilisations and an Islamic inscription from the Nabahina era preserved in its original form.

Additional museums, including those dedicated to traditional

weapons and manuscripts, are currently under development, along with supporting facilities such as exhibitions, workshops, and interactive cultural spaces.

Eng Ali bin Ahmed al Shaqsi, Director-General of Al Marasim Tourism and Investment, said the initiative is part of a broader vision to diversify the visitor experience at the site.

He added that the project includes advanced display systems, upgraded visitor infrastructure, and cultural activity spaces, aimed at transforming the fort into an immersive heritage destination rather than a brief stopover. He also highlighted its contribution to community engagement through job creation, SME support and opportunities for productive families.

The initiative is also expected to boost economic activity in Bahla Traditional Souq and strengthen tourism in the region by increasing demand for hospitality services and supporting research in heritage and history.

Since taking over management of the fort, the operating company has organised 53 cultural, tourism and entertainment events, with further exhibitions planned, including themes on traditional mud industries, the Omani house and postal heritage.

Condolences

We, the Management & Staff of

Oman LNG L.L.C

deeply mourn the sad demise of

Mr. Sushilkumar Sunil

May Almighty God grant his family the courage

to bear this irreparable loss.

May his soul rest in eternal peace.



الشركة العمانية للغاز الطبيعي المسال ش.م.ع.
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WAR

TRUMP ACCUSES IRAN OF TOTAL VIOLATION OF CEASEFIRE



Motorists ride past a giant billboard of slain Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei at the Valiasr Square in Tehran. — AFP

US President Donald Trump accused Iran on Sunday of a “total violation” of the two countries’ ceasefire for firing on ships near the Strait of Hormuz, and renewed a threat to wipe out Iran’s bridges and power plants unless it accepted his terms. Trump said his envoys would arrive in Pakistan on Monday evening, prepared to hold more talks. “We’re offering a very fair and reasonable DEAL, and I hope they take it because, if they don’t, the United States is going to knock out every single Power Plant, and every single Bridge, in Iran,” he posted on social media. “NO MORE MR. NICE GUY!”

Iran, which has blocked off the strait to ships apart from its own since the United States and Israel attacked on February 28, announced on Friday it would reopen the strait. But it reversed that decision a day later after Trump refused to halt a US blockade of Iranian shipping. At least two ships reported they had been fired upon while approaching the strait on Saturday, and since then shipping data has shown no movement through the waterway.

“Iran decided to fire bullets yesterday in the Strait of Hormuz - A Total Violation of our Ceasefire Agreement!” Trump wrote in Sunday morning’s post. “That wasn’t nice, was it?” Still, despite Trump’s new threats to renew bombing, his announcement that US officials were returning to Pakistan was the first official confirmation that talks would resume.



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DONALD TRUMP



A first round of talks held a week ago had ended with no breakthrough. Iran’s chief negotiator, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, said the two sides remained far apart on nuclear issues and the strait, the two main sticking points.

STRAIT OF HORMUZ SHUT AGAIN Two liquefied petroleum gas tankers were seen on ship tracking sites moving eastbound towards the Strait early on Sunday morning but the semi-official Tasnim news agency reported that Iran’s armed forces turned them back. Marine traffic data showed no other movements after midnight.

Now in its eighth week, the war has created the most severe shock to global energy supplies in history, sending oil prices surging because of the de facto

closure of the strait, which before the war carried one-fifth of the world’s oil shipments.

Friday’s announcement that the strait would reopen caused one of the sharpest one-day drops in oil prices in history, and stock markets hit fresh all-time highs on the expectation that the disruption would soon end. That the reopening has yet to take place as anticipated could bring new volatility when markets reopen on Monday morning. Thousands of people have been killed by US-Israeli strikes on Iran and in an Israeli invasion of Lebanon conducted in parallel. Iran responded to attacks with missiles and drones against its Arab neighbours that host US bases.

Talks in Islamabad ended with no agreement last week but security measures were being taken in the Pakistani capital in preparation for potential further meetings. City authorities halted public transport and heavy goods traffic through the city and rolls of barbed wire were rolled out near the Serena Hotel where last week’s talks were held. The hotel told guests on Sunday to leave. In central Islamabad, there was a heavy police and army presence but the security protocols did not appear to be at the same level as they were before the first round, when Vice President JD Vance led the US delegation. Earlier, Iran’s deputy foreign minister, Saeed Khatibzadeh, said a framework of understanding would have to be agreed for further talks. — Reuters

1

US SENDS NEGOTIATORS

President Donald Trump said US negotiators will be in Pakistan on Monday to resume talks on ending the war with Iran.

2

IRAN ACCUSES US OF VIOLATION

Iran’s foreign ministry said, meanwhile, that a continuing US naval blockade on Iranian ports was a violation of the ceasefire.

3

LEBANON PM TO PARIS

French President Emmanuel Macron will on Tuesday meet with Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam in Paris.

4

IRANIAN AIRPORT REOPENS

Iran will resume international flights on Monday from Mashhad airport in the country’s northeast, its civil aviation said.

5

HORMUZ REMAINS CLOSED

The strategic Strait of Hormuz remained closed on Sunday, a day after Iran announced a new closure in response to a US blockade of Iranian ports.

6

IRAN SAYS DEAL IS ‘FAR’ OFF

Progress had been made in negotiations with the United States to end the war, Iran’s parliamentary speaker said.

7

PAKISTAN TIGHTENS SECURITY

Security in Pakistan’s capital Islamabad was stepped up visibly ahead of peace talks between the United States and Iran.

SYRIA FOILS
HEZBOLLAH
MISSILE-
LAUNCHING
OPERATION

Syrian state media said on Sunday that security forces thwarted a missile-launching operation by Lebanese group Hezbollah from its territory. Syria's official SANA news agency, quoting an interior ministry source, said security forces "thwarted a sabotage plot orchestrated by a cell linked to the Hezbollah..." It alleged the group "intended to launch missiles across the border with the aim of destabilising the country."

Last week, Damascus accused the group of being linked to a cell that attempted to plant an explosive device in front of a house belonging to an



Syrian security stands guard as a convoy of US military equipment is transported, in Damascus. — AFP

unidentified religious figure in the Bab Touma area of the Syrian capital. But the Iran-backed movement denied the ministry's claims on Sunday, saying they were "false and fabricated".

Hezbollah said it has "no activity, no ties and no relationship with any party in Syria, and has no presence on Syrian soil."

The group called on Syrian authorities "to conduct a thorough investigation before making accusations without evidence". It blamed "the presence of intelligence services" on Syrian soil that it said were "seeking to inflame tensions between Lebanon and Syria". — AFP

SHORT TAKES



PM Pedro Sanchez attend a press conference during a summit between Spain and Brazil in Barcelona. — Reuters

Spain urges EU
to end agreement
with Israel

Spain will ask the European Union to end its association agreement with Israel over alleged violations of international law, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said. Spain has criticised Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government over the Gaza conflict and Israel's attacks on neighbouring Lebanon. "On Tuesday, Spain's government will present a proposal to the EU that the European Union break off its association agreement with Israel", Sanchez told a political rally in Andalusia. He alleged that Israel "violates international law" and therefore "cannot be a partner of the European Union ... it's as simple as that".

The June 2000 association accord between the EU and Israel includes a clause requiring respect for human rights. Spain and Ireland first called for a review of the accord in 2024 amid concerns over tactics used in the war on Gaza in response to the Hamas attacks on Israel in October 2023.

Spain's recognition of a Palestinian state the same year infuriated Israel, and Sanchez has stepped up his criticism of Netanyahu's government since. Spain, Ireland and Slovenia sent a letter to the European Commission on Friday calling for the the accord with Israel to be discussed at the next meeting of EU foreign ministers. — AFP

Türkiye says
'optimistic' over
Mideast ceasefire

Türkiye said it remained "optimistic" that a two-week ceasefire between Iran and the United States that expires on Wednesday, would be extended, allowing more time for talks between the sides. "No one wants to see a new war break out when the ceasefire expires next week. We hope ... the parties will extend the ceasefire," Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said at the closing of a three-day diplomacy forum in the southern Antalya province. "I hope there'll be an extension. I am optimistic," he said. Fidan said he spoke with



HAKAN FIDAN

Pakistani officials on Sunday but would not give a date when new talks could be held.

"The continuation of negotiations is something the entire international

community wants. There is significant pressure in this regard," he said. "Under this level of pressure, I believe the parties should not see any obstacle to extending the ceasefire in order to continue peace negotiations," added the minister.

Fidan said unless the sides chose to pursue more confrontational measures, there was "a strong possibility that the ceasefire will be extended and negotiations will continue". "Hopefully, a more positive scenario will emerge. With some luck, by that time, the key issues in the negotiations may already have been resolved," he added. Despite the optimism and movement in negotiations, Iran said on Sunday a final peace deal was "far" off. "It is clear that the negotiations have reached a critical stage. Both sides are continuing the talks with a genuine sense of sincerity. They also have the will to keep the process going," Fidan said. — AFP



Displaced residents drive past destroyed buildings as they return back to the Lebanese city of Nabatieh. — AFP

Israel threatens to use 'full force' in Lebanon

BEIRUT: Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said on Sunday that the military had been instructed to use "full force" in Lebanon — even during the ongoing ceasefire — should Israeli troops face any threat. "Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and I have instructed the IDF to act with full force, both on the ground and from the air, including during the ceasefire, in order to protect our soldiers in Lebanon from any threat," Katz said at a function in the occupied West Bank. He said that the military had also been ordered to demolish any structure or roads that were "booby-trapped" and threatened soldiers. The aim is "to remove the houses in the villages near the border that served in every respect as Hezbollah threatened Israeli communities," Katz added.

An Israeli soldier was killed in southern Lebanon on Friday — the day a 10-day ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon came into effect — when he entered a booby-trapped building, the military reported. Katz has repeatedly said Israel would demolish houses along the border as part of efforts to establish a security zone in southern Lebanon.

On Saturday, Israeli forces carried out demolitions in the town of Bint Jbeil, the scene of intense fighting with Hezbollah prior to the recently agreed ceasefire. "The overarching goal of the campaign in Lebanon is the disarmament of Hezbollah and the removal of threat to northern communities, through a combination of military and diplomatic measures," Katz said. "If the Lebanese government continues to fail to uphold its obligations — the IDF will do so through continued military action." Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East war in early March when Hezbollah launched rockets towards Israel in support of Iran. Israel responded with massive strikes across Lebanon and an invasion of southern Lebanon.

Meanwhile, French President Emmanuel Macron will on Tuesday meet with Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam in Paris, his office announced, amidst a fragile 10-day truce between Israel and Hezbollah.



A displaced woman sits inside her tent at a makeshift encampment in Beirut. — Reuters

The visit highlights Macron's commitment to seeing "full and complete respect for the ceasefire in Lebanon" as well as France's support for Lebanon's "territorial integrity", the president's office said on Sunday.

The visit was announced a day after France blamed Hezbollah for an ambush on UN peacekeepers which left one French soldier dead and three others wounded. Macron is to urge Lebanese authorities to "shed full light on the incident" and "identify and prosecute those responsible without delay," his office added.

An initial assessment by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) found the attack was carried out by Hezbollah, according to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. "UNIFIL soldiers, who are carrying out their missions in difficult conditions and supporting the delivery of humanitarian aid to southern Lebanon, must under no circumstances be targeted," the Elysee said. Hezbollah denied involvement in the attack that killed the French peacekeeper. The fighting in Lebanon has seen UNIFIL positions repeatedly targeted by Israeli and Hezbollah forces. — AFP

OPINION

Memes emerge as powerful voice in digital culture



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is an Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

SOME OF the most engaging moments on the Internet during the present war in the Middle East are actually coming from the incessant barrage of short videos commenting on the war. Lego-inspired short reels offer brief moments of sarcastic fun amidst doom scrolling.

These sophisticated memes are taking on international powers in ways that actual arms may not. It is also giving us an opportunity to explore the world of memes.

The term ‘meme’ was coined by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, borrowing from the Greek ‘mimeme’, meaning that which is imitated.

Dawkins suggested that memes were little bits of information given through catchphrases and music that jump from brain to brain – think of that tune that just won’t go away.

Today, memes are digital images, videos, or text which spread rapidly on the Internet because of their contemporary relevance, humour and sarcasm. They are most common on TikTok, although they have now spread

across all social media.

While often dismissed as jokes, memes have become a powerful force that actually shapes trends and opinions, and now, even politics. We may think that they are tiny jokes taking up 30 seconds of our time, but they are actually snapshots of our culture. They say more than thousands of words and hundreds of pictures, even hours of debates.

For the more technically inclined, a meme is not any post that has gone viral. It is important that the original post has been re-created by many others with their own interpretation, localisation and variation before it becomes a meme. That may sound complicated, but in today’s interconnected world, all this happens within hours.

One of the most popular memes in 2026, for example, was the ‘Nihilistic Penguin’.

Part of a wildlife documentary, it was interpreted as showing an anti-conformist stand, with one penguin leaving his group to seemingly chart his own way. It became a symbol for brands, activists, and even educationists to aim for independence of thought.

Memes have become a powerful force that actually shape trends and opinions and even politics

The second popular meme early this year was ‘2026 is the new 2016’, highlighting the commonalities of the two years spanning a decade.

It worked into nostalgia for the beginning of viral social media, when filters and personal photos, not avatars, were doing the rounds, not AI. Although just a decade away, 2016 was seen as a more innocent, exciting time before the Internet became toxic.

Like everything else, memes can be used constructively, as agents for social change like climate activism.

But they also have a dark side, creating misinformation and cyberbullying which are difficult to control, mainly because of the anonymity of the source.

Memes are not just Internet humour. In fact, they are cultural forces that shape and interpret our world.

Whether they make us laugh, inspire change, raise concerns, or even comment on politics, memes are here to stay.

It is important to understand their power and impact so that we can remain intelligent consumers of social media.

RUSSIA TRAINS TEEN INFLUENCERS FOR PRO-WAR CONTENT

Russia is trying to produce more pro-war influencers through content creation camps, training teenagers to spread the Kremlin’s hardline, anti-West narrative to the next generation. Since attacking Ukraine in 2022, Moscow has ramped up control of the domestic information space, outlawing criticism of the offensive through strict military censorship laws, throttling foreign media outlets and pushing its agenda across society.

Schools and young people have been targeted – curricula and textbooks changed to include Russia’s justification for its war and soldiers dispatched to whip up pro-war enthusiasm in the classroom. At one content creation camp in early April, more than 120 teenagers, clad in green sweaters and red berets, gathered in Moscow for lectures from soldiers and state media reporters on how to produce videos, use artificial intelligence and build audiences.

“We have created a huge team of kids, who understand how to broadcast government values and our organisation’s values,” Vladislav Golovin, a former soldier and chief of the general staff of Russia’s Young Army cadets movement, said in a statement released by the group.

In a promotional video from the event, children were shown cheering a cadet racing against Golovin to see who could reload a sniper rifle the fastest. Another organisation, the Movement of the First, runs competitions offering rewards for teenagers with the best blogs and biggest followings.

The training camps are part of what Keir Giles, director of the UK-based Conflict Studies Research Centre, calls a “concentrated campaign to restore the prestige of the Russian military.”

“These 14-16-year-olds have grown up in an environment where they have never known anything other than Putinism. This is their reality, and so we should not be surprised if these new efforts to spread information reflect that reality,” he said. In 2023, Russian President Vladimir Putin quoted Otto Van Bismarck to summarise his approach.

“Wars are not won by generals, but by schoolteachers and parish priests,” Putin said in a televised press conference.

“Educating young people in the spirit of patriotism is crucial,” he added.

The revival of Soviet-era youth organisations, like the Young Army, Yunarmiya in Russian, and Movement of the First - which says it has 14 million online members and 1,100 regional initiatives - has been integral to those efforts.

In their beige military uniforms with red berets, the rows of teenage cadets often resemble a bright poppy field at set-piece state events, like grand military parades dedicated to Soviet victory in World War II. — AFP

Fish deaths leave Iraqi farmers with no income

ON THE banks of Iraq’s Tigris River, Haidar Kazem mourned 300 tonnes of the fish he had carefully raised in ponds wiped out by a flood of polluted water.

Water supplies in Iraq, the eastern half of what is known as the region’s fertile crescent and which the United Nations ranks among the countries most affected by climate change, are in a dire state.

“In just two hours, my entire project was gone - fish I had spent a year-and-a-half raising. I am back to zero,” the 43-year-old fish farmer said.

Earlier this month, after yet another very dry season, a brief spate of rain led authorities to open the gates of the Hamrin Dam, sending water into the Diyala, a tributary that is choked with untreated sewage.

The flood then swept the contaminated water into the larger Tigris, and the pollution was so severe that it was visible in satellite images. Images from Copernicus Sentinel analysed show that, following the late-March rainfall, a noticeably dark stream flows from Diyala to the Tigris throughout the period from March 28 to April 12.

“No one told us that polluted water was headed our way,” Kazem said, adding that the contaminated stream reached his ponds on April 5, killed all his fish and caused losses exceeding a million dollars.

Kazem buried his stock — carp for Iraq’s beloved grilled dish masguf — and now spends his days cleaning their floating cages on the banks of the Tigris, haunted by the question: how will he save his livelihood? “I don’t know any other trade, and I don’t have the money to restart,” he said. Arkan al Shimari, the head of the agriculture department in Kazem’s province Wasit, said that the sewage stream has killed more than 1,000 tonnes of fish.

According to authorities, several water treatment plants discharge untreated sewage into the Diyala



An Iraqi fish farmer stands over dead fish floating in a tank at his farm in the town of Zubaydiya, near the city of Kut in southern Iraq. — AFP



CHRISTY-BELLE GEHA

The writer is AFP’s Iraq Correspondent

River, which years of drought in Iraq have left low and notorious for its foul odour. Environmental open-source investigator Wim Zwijnenburg said that the Diyala consistently appears darker than the Tigris due to wastewater discharge, its low depth and weaker currents.

Normally, it would gradually mix into the Tigris, but this time heavy rain created a stronger current in Diyala, sending a less-diluted polluted water into the Tigris, and “thus affecting downstream fisheries and potentially also water treatment plants”.

As the situation worsened, authorities restricted water supply — normally treated water from the Tigris — in several areas of Wasit, reporting 20 documented cases of poisoning and rash.

Declining rain over recent years, coupled with rising temperatures, has brought water levels in the

Tigris and Euphrates rivers to staggering lows, for which Baghdad also accuses upstream dams built by neighbouring Türkiye and Iran.

Following the recent fish die-off, authorities vowed they would take the necessary measures to treat wastewater before discharge.

Iraq’s new agency INA quoted a Baghdad official as saying that authorities will soon open seven more water treatment plants in the city.

In the town of Al Numaniyah, fish farmer Mazen Mansour, 51, gazed over the still water in his empty floating cages, which until recently held 38,000 fish he had been counting on selling next month.

Mansour said he did not realise polluted water had flooded the area until he saw his fish dying in the evening.

Discover the light sparking between storms



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author, translator and communications professional

THERE ARE moments in history when the world seems to lean towards darkness — when the language of war grows louder than the language of reason, and the space for dialogue narrows to almost nothing. The escalating tensions between Iran and Israel have brought the region to such a moment. And yet, not all voices have been raised in anger. Some have chosen to remain calm; Oman is one of them.

In the Sultanate of Oman, diplomacy is not an emergency response; it is a way of being. It is a belief, carefully nurtured over decades, that even the most complex conflicts can be softened — not through power, but through persistence, patience and trust. And in a time when escalation can feel predictable, that belief becomes a quiet act of courage. Muscat has become, once again, a place where the world can exhale.

While others draw lines, Oman erases the idea that those lines must be permanent. It keeps channels open when they are most at risk of closing. It speaks to all parties — not to take sides, but to ensure that dialogue itself does not become a casualty of war. In doing so, it preserves something essential: the possibility of a different outcome.

Because wars do not end when the fighting stops. They end when the conversation begins again. This is why that day when

leaders recently arrived in Muscat carries a meaning deeper than its headlines. On that day, they arrived not for a ceremony, but for a purpose. The leaders' meetings with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik were shaped by urgency but guided by wisdom.

In the quiet of those rooms, something powerful took place. A shared understanding that the region does not have to move blindly towards escalation, that there remains another path, however narrow, towards de-escalation and stability.

Oman has always understood that peace is not loud. It does not arrive with a parade or sudden victory. It grows slowly, often invisibly, in conversations that never make headlines and decisions that are felt long before they are seen. It is built by those willing to listen when it is easier to speak, to wait when it is easier to react, to believe when it is easier to surrender to certainty.

Oman's power lies in its refusal to be hurried by the speed of conflict. While others escalate in real time, Oman slows time down. It creates pauses — small, fragile, but essential. And in those pauses, options reappear.

Geography has given Oman a front-row seat to the crisis, positioned at the edge of the Strait of Hormuz, where every shake in the region is felt in global markets and maritime security. Hence, instead of turning that

Oman has always understood that peace is not loud. It does not arrive with a parade or sudden victory. It grows slowly, often invisibly, in conversations that never make headlines and decisions that are felt long before they are seen

position into leverage for pressure, Oman has transformed it into a platform for stability — engaging quietly, persistently, to ensure that the flow of trade does not become another casualty of war.

Oman has built something rare: a reputation for saying what it means and meaning what it says — without further explanation. It does not speak for effect; it speaks for outcome. And because of that, even opponents listen. Of course, there are no guarantees. The path from tension to peace is rarely straight, and the current ceasefire remains fragile, exposed to the smallest spark.

Oman builds corridors where none seem possible. It constructs quiet passageways between adversaries who no longer speak publicly, shaping conversations that move beneath the surface. And in a crisis where every public word can inflame, the unseen becomes powerful.

In a region often defined by its storms, Oman has become something else entirely: a source of light between them. Not a light that blinds or demands attention, but one that endures — steady, patient and unwavering. A light that reminds the region, and perhaps the world, that even in the most uncertain of times, peace is not beyond reach. It is simply waiting — for those with the courage to choose it.

CHINA SEEKS TO REIN IN RISKS FROM AI ‘DIGITAL HUMANS’

ISABEL KUA

After her father died from cancer, Zhang Xinyu had an artificial intelligence avatar made that looks and sounds just like him, part of a growing “digital human” industry that China is moving to govern more tightly.

Videos featuring AI digital humans are ubiquitous on Chinese social media, with their uncanny features and smooth, dexterous motions often used to tout products. The nation's cyberspace regulator issued draft rules this month on how these avatars are developed and deployed - seeking to stop them harming children, threatening social stability, or being created to resemble someone without their consent.

Zhang, 47, approached the company Super Brain two years ago, feeling depressed and lonely following her bereavement.

She can now converse online with her father's avatar, something that made her feel “fully recharged in an instant and filled with motivation once again”, she said.

Some friends worried Zhang would become too immersed in the virtual world and “never be able to move on”, calling it a form of “false comfort”, she added.

“But even if the comfort itself is simulated, the love behind it is real,” said Zhang, who is based in Liaoning province.

State news agency Xinhua reported last year that the country's digital human industry was worth around 4.1 billion yuan (\$600 million) in 2024, having grown by a huge 85 per cent year-on-year.

Chinese governance of new digital technologies has always followed the logic of “develop first, then regulate, and perfect in the process”, said Marina Zhang, from the University of Technology Sydney.

The regulations proposed by the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) require clear labelling on digital human content.

They also prohibit the use of personal information to create deepfake clones of individuals without their consent.

Super Brain's founder Zhang Zewei said he sees new laws and regulations on the sector as “inevitable”.

“I view this as a positive development, as it achieves a balance between standardised regulation and industry growth,” he said.

The company specialises in creating AI avatars of the dead for grieving families. A video clip of an elderly woman who unknowingly chatted with a hyper-realistic avatar of her dead son was widely shared on Chinese social media this month, with a related hashtag garnering over 90 million views on Weibo.

The avatar, created by Zhang's firm, mimicked her son's speech patterns and his movements so closely that she believed it was him on a video call. It sparked heated online discussion on the ethics of generative AI, with some people calling for more regulation to prevent bad actors like scammers from misusing powerful new tools. — AFP

As war strains ties with US, UK looks to Europe

BRITAIN'S GOVERNMENT is set to announce legislation next month to move the country closer to the European Union, as the Iran war sours the UK's so-called special relationship with the United States. President Donald Trump's unpredictability and stream of insults towards America's historic ally are adding impetus to Prime Minister Keir Starmer's bid to deepen ties with the 27-nation bloc, a decade after Britons narrowly voted to leave the EU.

“We have a government that is already eager to move closer towards the EU, and the events in Iran provide an opportunity to speed up that process,” Evie Aspinall, director of the British Foreign Policy Group think-tank, said.

Starmer's administration is preparing an EU “reset” bill that will give ministers powers to align UK standards with EU single market rules as they evolve - something called “dynamic alignment”.

King Charles III will announce the legislation on May 13 when he reads out Starmer's legislative plans for the coming months, a government official said on condition of anonymity.

Starmer has repeatedly called for a deeper economic and security relationship with Europe since his Labour Party won the 2024 general election, ousting the Conservatives, who had implemented the 2016 Brexit referendum.

He has upped those calls in recent days, telling Dutch leader Rob Jetten last Tuesday that “he believed the partnership between the UK and the bloc needed to be fit for the challenges we were facing today”.

The EU is Britain's biggest trading partner, while the International Monetary Fund warned last week that the UK will be the advanced economy hardest hit by the Iran conflict.

“Certainly Iran has made it (the reset) more prescient,” said the UK official. “We need to build economic resilience across the continent,” they added.

Starmer refused to involve Britain in the US and Israel's initial strikes



PETER
HUTCHISON

The writer is UK politics correspondent at AFP

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Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer reacts behind France's President Emmanuel Macron as he attends a joint press conference at the Elysee Presidential Palace in Paris on Friday. — AFP

on February 28, angering Trump, although he has since allowed American forces to use UK bases for a “limited defensive purpose”.

Under pressure at home for his disastrous decision to appoint former Jeffrey Epstein associate Peter Mandelson as ambassador to Washington, Starmer has received plaudits for standing up to Trump in the face of repeated taunts from the US president.

Days ago, Trump threatened in a phone interview with Sky News to scrap a US-UK trade deal that limited the impact on Britain of his tariffs blitz.

“There's no doubt that there is now momentum in the UK-EU relationship partly as a result of Trump's unreliable behaviour,” David Henig, an expert on the UK's post-Brexit trade policy, said.

“Independent UK trade policy looks much harder, the prospects of working with the EU much brighter.”

Starmer's administration hopes to table the EU legislation in the next few months, meaning it could come around the time of the 10th anniversary of the Brexit referendum, held in June 2016.

MPs will get to approve whether to provide the government with a mechanism to adopt EU rules - sometimes without a full parliamentary vote - in areas where it has already signed deals with the

bloc. They include a trade agreement designed to ease red tape on food and plant exports and plans for an electricity deal that would integrate the UK into the EU's internal electricity market.

Britain and the EU are also aiming to finalise negotiations on a youth mobility scheme in time for a joint summit in Brussels expected in late June or early July. Starmer has ruled out rejoining the single market or returning to free movement.

The Liberal Democrats, Britain's traditional third party, wants him to cross one of his other red lines by negotiating a customs union with the EU. “We need to be doubling down on relations with reliable partners who share our interests and values,” the Liberal Democrats' foreign affairs spokesman Calum Miller said.

Surveys regularly now show, however, that most Britons regret the vote to leave the EU, something Starmer hopes to capitalise on.

Rising cost-of-living pressures on family households, which UK Finance Minister Rachel Reeves has blamed on Trump for starting the war “without a clear exit plan”, could also influence minds.

“When the relationship with the United States is fracturing, it means there's reduced opposition to a closer relationship with the EU among the public,” said Aspinall.

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



Beach soccer team training session.

OMAN GEAR UP FOR ASIAN BEACH GAMES IN SANYA

SPORT REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 19

Oman’s national beach handball team has intensified its preparations in Sanya, China, ahead of the 6th Asian Beach Games. The team is competing in the preliminary round, opening against Mongolia, followed by matches against Qatar, Thailand, Maldives, Bangladesh, Jordan and concluding the group stage against Pakistan. In recent days, the team has played several friendly matches as part of its final preparation phase. Head coach Hamoud bin Salim al Hasani has focused on technical, tactical, and skill-based training, alongside detailed analysis of opposing teams to enhance performance and correct mistakes before competition begins.

Team manager Ishaq al Balushi emphasised that Oman’s participation represents an important step in strengthening the country’s sporting presence at the Asian level. He highlighted the fully integrated administrative and logistical setup, which has been designed to ensure optimal conditions for all national teams. This includes coordinated arrangements for accommodation, transport, nutrition, and continuous medical and recovery support, all managed in close cooperation with the event organisers.

Oman is competing in five sports at the Games, which feature 1,790 athletes from 45 Asian Olympic committees across 14 sports and 61 events. The national teams have also been training on the official sand venues to adapt to playing conditions that differ from those at home, aiming to maintain Oman’s strong reputation in beach sports.

Meanwhile, the host city of Sanya has confirmed full readiness to stage the continental event, which is regarded as Asia’s premier beach sports competition. The Games will feature extensive cultural and tourism programmes alongside the sporting events, as well as a large-scale opening ceremony showcasing artistic performances.

Organisers report strong public interest and high ticket demand, reflecting the growing popularity of beach sports in Asia and the significance of the event as a platform for sporting, cultural, and economic exchange across the continent.

Seeb hold firm at top; Khabourah, Bahla draw



Seeb battle Sur during their round 21 encounter at Seeb Stadium

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 19

SEEB CONTINUED their impressive run in the Jindal League with a 2-1 home win over Sur in round 21, while Al Khabourah and Bahla played out a goalless draw at Al Rustaq Sports Complex.

SEEB OVERCOME SUR TO STAY ON TOP
Seeb Stadium, leaders Seeb extended their advantage at the top to 54 points with a deserved 2-1 win over Sur, who remained on 19 points in 11th place.

The hosts controlled much of the first half and looked the more dangerous side from the outset, with Abdulmajid al Balushi going close early on before Sur goalkeeper Bilal al Balushi denied him. Sur relied mainly on counter-attacks and threatened once through Axel Ndong, but Seeb gradually tightened their grip on the contest.

The match swung further in Seeb’s favour in the 31st minute when Sur’s



A moment from the Al Khabourah-Bahla clash, which ended 0-0.

Mutasim al Mihijri was sent off, leaving the visitors to play with 10 men. Seeb made the numerical advantage count late in the first half, with Omar al Maliki heading home from a set-piece in the 45th minute before Nasser al Rawahi added a second in stoppage time after reacting quickly inside the area.

Seeb began the second half with the same attacking intent and nearly added a third when Nasser al Rawahi found himself one-on-one with the goalkeeper,

only to send his effort wide. Despite the numerical disadvantage, Sur showed improved spirit after the interval and tried to push forward through Arseni Loko, Axel Ndong and Fahd al Hajri. Both coaches made changes as the match progressed, with Seeb introducing Fahd al Mukhaini and Mohammed al Hatmi, while Sur also reshuffled in search of a way back. The visitors were rewarded in the 88th minute when Waleed al Saadi converted from a well-delivered free-kick to reduce the deficit and set up a tense finish. Four minutes of stoppage time followed, but Seeb held firm to secure another important win.

AL KHABOURAH, BAHLA GOALLESS DRAW

In the other round 21 fixture, Al Khabourah and Bahla shared the points after a quiet 0-0 draw at Rustaq Sports Complex in a match that offered little in the way of clear-cut chances. The result moved Al Khabourah to 17 points in 12th place, while Bahla advanced to 32 points and stayed fifth in the standings.

Al Amerat Club sweeps Oman Women’s Chess Championship

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 19

The 2026 Oman Women’s Individual Chess Championship concluded at Al Amal Sports Club after attracting 41 players from various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, underlining the continued growth of women’s chess and the widening participation base among girls and women at club, educational and community levels.

The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Nadhira bint Ahmed al Harthy, Chairperson of the Oman School Sports Association, in the presence of Basma bint Said al Sudairi, Secretary-General of the Oman Chess Committee. The event featured strong competition and encouraging technical standards across the different categories.

The Championship was played

over seven rounds under the Swiss system, with each game contested over 45 minutes plus a 30-second increment per move, a format that allowed players to display both tactical and technical ability while maintaining a high level of competition throughout the event.

In the overall standings, Anat al Issai of Al Amerat Club secured first place, followed by Yumna al Nadabi of Al Amerat Club in second, while Kawthar al Maamari, also of Al Amerat Club, finished third to complete a clean sweep for the club on the main podium.

In the under-16 category, Maryam bint Yousuf al Balushi of Salalah Club took first place, ahead of Muzna al Balushi of Salalah Club in second, while Fatima al Ghafri of Masirah Club came third.

In the under-12 division, Noor bint Al Mutasim al Ghafri of Masirah Club claimed first place,



A group photograph showing winners of the Women’s Individual Chess Championship

followed by Shatha al Ghafri of Al Rustaq Club in second and Maryam al Ghafri of Al Rustaq Club in third.

Maryam al Balushi said the championship was highly competitive, with some closely matched levels making the battle for points more difficult,

adding that winning first place in her category will motivate her to keep progressing and target stronger results in upcoming events, including future overseas participation. Champion Anat al Issai described the tournament as one of the toughest editions she has played, particularly because of

the pressure of defending her title. Nadhira al Harthy said dedicating a championship to women reflects the importance of supporting women’s sport and providing the right platform for players across age groups, expressing hope that Omani players will eventually reach international podiums.

Basma al Sudairi said the tournament, which included under-12, under-14, under-16, and open categories, was aimed at encouraging greater female participation and helping prepare players for future international commitments, including the Chess Olympiad scheduled for September. She added that while the technical level varies due to inconsistent participation among some players, the championship remains an important step in strengthening the women’s game nationwide.



EXPERTS URGE SPORTS INJURY PREVENTION

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 19

SPORTS injuries remain one of the biggest challenges facing athletes as they often forcing them to stay away from competition for long periods that can extend from several months to over a year, depending on the severity of the injury. However, experts stress that many of these injuries can be prevented through proper preparation and awareness.

Dr Mahmoud Shehabullah, Senior Sports Medicine Physician at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, highlighted that sports medicine plays a crucial role in ensuring safe participation for both professional athletes and amateurs. Shehabullah described sports medicine as “the ultimate gateway” to maintaining athletes’ health and preventing unnecessary injuries.

“Strict sports medicine protocols must be followed at all levels. No training or sports activity should take place without proper warm-up and stretching. This is the basic



“Athletes must maintain good fitness levels, build strong muscles through strength training and develop correct techniques and skills. Weak muscles or poor conditioning significantly increase the risk of injuries, especially during high-intensity movements

DR MAHMOUD SHEHABULLAH
Senior Sports Medicine Physician at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth

principle has often been ignored despite repeated awareness efforts over the past decades,” he said.

One of the most crucial steps in injury prevention is proper physical preparation. “Athletes must maintain good fitness levels, build strong muscles through strength training and develop correct techniques and skills. Weak muscles or poor conditioning significantly increase the risk of injuries, especially during high-intensity movements,”the veteran expert added

Dr Mahmoud described core stability as the “powerhouse” of the human body. “Without a strong core, the body becomes more vulnerable to injuries, particularly during sudden movements or physical challenges. If the foundation is not strong, the body cannot withstand physical pressure,” he explained.

Pre-participation medical screening is another key factor. Dr Mahmoud noted that many athletes rely only on basic tests such as blood work or X-rays, while comprehensive screening over several days is necessary to detect potential risks early and prevent serious injuries.

Hydration and proper nutrition were also highlighted as essential elements. “Athletes are advised to drink between three to four litres of water daily to avoid cramps and fatigue. Poor dietary habits, which are common in the region, can also contribute to decreased performance and higher injury risk,” he added

“Another vital element to prevent the injures is an adequate sleep. Athletes should aim for at least eight hours of sleep per night to allow the body to recover and reduce the chances of injury,” he said

Many injuries in the region are linked to poor habits such as playing on hard or unsuitable surfaces, wearing inappropriate footwear, and neglecting proper warm-up routines. “ I warned about incorrect techniques in situations like aerial challenges and landing, which can lead to serious injuries. Major injuries such as ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) tears are often non-contact injuries caused by sudden movements, poor balance, or incorrect landing. Many athletes do not realise the pressure placed on their joints. When running, the

body can exert up to eight or nine times its weight on the knees or ankles,” he said.

Dr Mahmoud recommended internationally recognised injury prevention programmes such as FIFA 11+, which has proven effective in reducing injuries among football players.

“Injury prevention is always better than treatment. Sports medicine not only helps prevent injuries but also ensures accurate diagnosis, proper treatment whether conservative or surgical and a gradual rehabilitation process that allows athletes to return safely to competition,” Dr Mahmoud said

“Fitness remains the foundation of all sports,” he added.

“Athletes must maintain their physical condition throughout all phases of the season including from pre-season to off-season in order to ensure long-term performance and safety,” he highlighted.

Dr Mahmoud concluded suggesting that schools should include basic lessons on warm-up, stretching and injury prevention to build a stronger sporting culture from an early age.

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



Houston Rockets forward Jabari Smith Jr. (right) shoots the ball against Los Angeles Lakers guard Luke Kennard in the first half during game one of the first round of the 2026 NBA Playoffs at Crypto. — **Imagn Images**

LUKE KENNARD SCORES 27, LAKERS TAKE GAME 1 AGAINST ROCKETS

LOS ANGELES, United States: Luke Kennard scored 27 points and LeBron James added 19 points with 13 assists as the short-handed Los Angeles Lakers earned a 107-98 victory over the visiting Houston Rockets on Saturday in Game 1 of a Western Conference first- round playoff series.

Deandre Ayton scored 19 points with 11 rebounds and Marcus Smart added 15 points with eight assists as the fourth-seeded Lakers won with leading scorers Luka Doncic (hamstring) and Austin Reaves (oblique) watching from the bench.

In just his seventh start since joining the Lakers from the Atlanta Hawks at the trade deadline, Kennard went 9 of 13 from the floor and 5 of 5 from 3-point range while delivering a season high in points to fill the scoring void at guard.

Alperen Sengun scored 19 points while Amen Thompson and Reed Sheppard each added 17 for the fifth-seeded Rockets, who were playing without leading scorer Kevin Durant (knee).

Jabari Smith Jr. scored 16 points with 12 rebounds and Tari Eason also had 16 points for Houston, which has lost three consecutive road games to Los Angeles since the middle of March.

The Lakers shot 60.6 per cent from the floor and 52.6 per cent from 3-point range, while the Rockets shot 37.6 per cent and 33.3 per cent respectively.

Kennard helped put the Rockets away with three 3-pointers in the fourth quarter. His second of the final period capped a 13-3 run and gave the Lakers an 88-72 lead with 7:58 remaining.

James made a turnaround hook inside with 4:43 remaining to put Los Angeles up 96-80. The 41-year-old added a fadeaway jumper with 2:57 remaining for a 98-84 lead.

Houston was within 100-91 with 1:40 remaining on a dunk from Thompson before Ayton put the game away for Los Angeles on a three-point play with 1:04 left for a 105-93 lead.

The Lakers shot 70.6 per cent from the floor in the fourth quarter and 56.2 per cent in the second half.

The Rockets finished with a 44-35 rebounding advantage.

The Lakers got off to a fast start, leading by eight points in the first quarter, when James had eight assists, and took a 33-29 lead after the opening period. Los Angeles led 50-48 at the half on 64.7 per cent shooting from the floor as Ayton scored 12 points. Sengun had 11 at the half for Houston. — **Reuters**



Real Sociedad's players celebrate with the trophy at the end of the Copa del Rey (King's Cup) final football match between Club Atletico de Madrid and Real Sociedad at La Cartuja stadium. — **AFP**

REAL SOCIEDAD DEFEAT ATLETICO AT COPA DEL REY

DIEGO Someone tried to convey hope but his body language spoke for itself. The Argentine coach left Seville crumpled, wounded, by his team's Copa del Rey final defeat on Saturday by Real Sociedad, decided by the cruelty of penalties.

Someone led Atletico to the Spanish cup back in 2013, an eternity ago, and winning it again would have been the perfect springboard to send the club flying into the Champions League semifinals clash with Arsenal.

Atletico have never won that trophy and they had real belief they could do it this year, belief which was badly dented this weekend.

The last time they won silverware of any kind was La Liga in 2021, with Luis Suarez leading the charge in attack.

Winning the Copa would have ensured French star Antoine Griezmann could depart with a trophy under his arm, and end the club's drought. During the Simeone era, the club have started to escape the nickname they had — El Pupas, the jinxed one — given to them after they lost the 1974 European Cup final against Bayern.

Simeone said his team could pick themselves back up from the defeat, 4-3 in the shoot-out after the gripping 2-2 draw, with Alexander Sorloth and Julian Alvarez missing from the spot for the Rojiblancos.

"The way we competed makes me calm," said the coach, but it will take effort to get his players in the right place mentally to take



Real Sociedad's team-mates celebrate with the trophy after winning the Copa del Rey as Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone looks dejected. — **Reuters**

on Arsenal, with the first leg in the Spanish capital on April 29.

"I'm not thinking about Arsenal, what happens today hurts me a lot. We needed to win and we couldn't win," said Simeone.

"The fans don't need messages (from me), what they need is to win."

Over 30,000 Atletico fans travelled down to Seville and left downhearted.

Simeone had pledged the team were "ready" to win the Champions League after they eliminated Barcelona earlier in the week but they failed the litmus test against La Real.

"We still have the Champions League, we have a beautiful tie ahead of us," said Atletico midfielder Marcos Llorente, trying to raise spirits.

"We have to thank everyone, above all those who came to Seville, we're really hurting for them. We have to lift our heads up."

NOW THE GOOD PART

Llorente said the team could not wallow in defeat.

"When you lose, you have another competition coming quickly," he continued.

"There's no time to think about things. This is really tough for us, but we have to get up — now comes the good part."

In the immediate aftermath of the shoot-out, decided by two saves by Real Sociedad stopper Unai Marrero and Pablo Marin's winning spot kick, Koke wiped away tears before issuing a similar message.

The veteran midfielder is one of the wisest heads at Atletico and he told his team-mates to focus on what lies ahead.

"We tried everything, we left our souls out there and it wasn't to be," said the 34-year-old.

"That's life... it hurts, and we have to continue."

Atletico are a club that have bounced back from many blows to keep on moving forwards, including defeats by rivals Real Madrid in the 2014 and 2016 Champions League finals.

The Copa final loss stings but pales in contrast to those bitter blows. At least with Real Madrid eliminated, if Atletico can recover to find a way past Arsenal, that cannot happen a third time. — **AFP**

Al Shabab's comeback falls short in 5-3 defeat to Kuwait SC

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 19

Al Shabab Club bowed out of the AFC Challenge League 2025/2026 quarter-finals after a 5-3 defeat to Kuwait SC at Dolen Omurzakov Stadium in Bishkek, with the Omani side paying the price for a poor first-half display despite a spirited second-half response.

Kuwait SC made a brighter start and imposed themselves from the opening minutes, creating several early chances and repeatedly testing Al Shabab's back line. In contrast, Al Shabab looked short of identity and concentration in the first half, struggling to organise themselves and offering little in attack, with no real dangerous

chances created as the Kuwaiti side controlled possession and dictated the tempo.

The pressure eventually told in the 34th minute when Khalid Lwaliwa turned the ball into his own net, handing Kuwait SC the lead. The Kuwaiti side continued to press forward and almost doubled the advantage two minutes later when Mohammed Marhoon threatened after a cross from Amr Abd El Fattah. Their second goal arrived in the 39th minute as Taha Khenissi capitalised on confusion in Al Shabab's defence to make it 2-0 and leave the Omani side with a mountain to climb at the break.

Al Shabab returned for the second half with greater urgency and almost found a way back in the



An attempt to intercept the ball from one of the players of Al Shabab Club of Oman.

46th minute when Kenean Markneh came close, only for the Kuwait SC goalkeeper to deny him. However, Kuwait SC quickly punished the Omani side again, with Amr Abd El Fattah scoring the third goal in the 48th minute through a powerful strike from outside the box.

The Kuwaiti side remained in control and extended their advantage further in the 62nd minute when Mohammed Marhoon netted the fourth goal, again with a strong effort from long range. Despite the setback, Al Shabab refused to surrender and substitute Mohammed Al Ghafri reduced the deficit in the 71st minute with a header that briefly reignited hope.

Al Shabab continued to push forward, and Kenean Markneh

struck again in the 74th minute after a fine individual effort, beating the defenders before firing home to make it 4-2.

The Omani side kept up the pressure and were rewarded once more in the 88th minute when a defensive error from Kuwait SC allowed Markneh to pounce and finish superbly for his second of the match and Al Shabab's third.

Any hopes of a late comeback, though, were ended in the 90th minute when Faisal al Harbi scored Kuwait SC's fifth goal, sealing a 5-3 victory. While Al Shabab showed far more attacking intent after the break, their lack of focus and structure in the first half ultimately proved costly as their continental campaign came to an end.

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
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BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES



The symposium forms part of ongoing efforts to enhance efficiency in the aluminium scrap recycling sector in Oman.

ALUMINIUM RECYCLING FORUM SET FOR APRIL 22

SUHAR: The third Aluminium Scrap Recycling Symposium, organised by Sohar Aluminium in cooperation with the Environment Authority, will commence on Wednesday, April 22, at the JW Marriott Hotel Muscat, under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority.

The symposium forms part of ongoing efforts to enhance efficiency in the aluminium scrap recycling sector in the Sultanate of Oman. It will focus on advancing operational practices, refining regulatory frameworks and reviewing recommendations from previous editions.

More than 100 participants are expected to attend, representing government entities and private sector companies involved in aluminium production, scrap collection, recycling and industrial waste management.

The programme will feature technical papers, presentations and recent studies, alongside panel discussions with experts and representatives from leading industry organisations, including the Gulf Aluminium Council.

Discussions will address global trends and challenges in recycling, opportunities to enhance local value addition and investment prospects, particularly for small and medium enterprises, as well as best practices in sustainability, safety and governance.

Eng Said bin Mohammed al Masoudi, CEO of Sohar Aluminium, said the symposium reflects the company’s commitment to providing a platform that brings together stakeholders across the aluminium and environmental sectors. He noted that it will support the exchange of expertise and facilitate dialogue on sector challenges and opportunities.

He added that the initiative aims to strengthen frameworks for managing aluminium scrap and promote sustainable practices that improve recycling efficiency while supporting the transition towards a circular economy.

Al Masoudi said Sohar Aluminium continues to implement initiatives to advance recycling, contributing to national goals of reducing carbon emissions and achieving net-zero targets, in line with environmental, social and governance standards.

Oman gears up to boost silica sand exports

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 19

OMANI exports of silica sand — an increasingly important input for global solar panel manufacturing and electronics industries — are set to increase following a key logistics agreement signed by a leading producer to support the overseas shipment of the industrial mineral.

Earlier this week, the Earth Sciences Consultancy Centre (ESCC) announced the signing of a “logistics services agreement” with Asyad Terminals Duqm LLC, part of Asyad Group, to facilitate silica sand export operations through the Port of Duqm.

In a statement, the geo-consultancy firm said the pact also aims to streamline the export of silica sand being extracted by ESCC from the Mahout area, strengthening supply chains, maximising the utilisation of natural resources and supporting the growth of Oman’s industrial and logistics sectors.

Dr Mohammed bin Hilal al Kindi, CEO of ESCC, added in a post: “The agreement with Asyad at the Port of Duqm represents an important support to facilitate the export of silica sands and enhance the efficiency of supply chains.

It’s an important step for ESCC, helping streamline our silica sand exports and strengthen the supply chain”.

Last September, state-owned mining investment firm Minerals Development Oman (MDO)



The pact will help streamline silica sand exports and strengthen the supply chain: ESCC



The agreement with Asyad at the Port of Duqm represents an important support to facilitate the export of silica sands and enhance the efficiency of supply chains. It’s an important step for ESCC, helping streamline our silica sand exports and strengthen the supply chain.

DR MOHAMMED BIN HILAL AL KINDI
CEO, ESCC

announced the start of production at its Silica Sand Project in the Wilayat of Mahout within exploration Block F51.

ESCC is partnering with MDO on the development of silica resources across the 2,156 km² concession, beginning with a 5 km² development area. Initial output is targeted at 100,000 tonnes of high-purity silica annually, with total reserves estimated at around 47 million tonnes.

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals, together with MDO and ESCC, has also expressed interest in advancing local value creation from this strategic industrial mineral.

One proposal under consideration is the development of a silica-based industrial cluster at the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), aligned with Oman’s broader ambition to expand industries such as glass, ferrosilicon and solar panel

manufacturing in support of the national clean energy transition.

Leveraging Oman’s abundant high-purity silica resources, the proposed cluster is expected to strengthen industrial diversification and increase in-country value addition.

Glass and ferrosilicon production would convert raw minerals into higher-value inputs for the construction, automotive and metallurgical sectors, while solar panel manufacturing would directly support the country’s growing renewable energy programme and deepen its integration into global clean-tech supply chains.

Collectively, these developments could help catalyse downstream manufacturing ecosystems, attract foreign investment, create skilled employment, expand non-oil exports and reinforce Oman’s positioning as a regional hub for low-carbon, mineral-based industrial development.

WHEAT HARVEST BEGINS IN AL SHARQIYAH SOUTH

MUSCAT: Wheat harvesting has commenced in the Wilayats of Al Kamil W’al Wafi, Sur and Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, marking the start of the 2025/2026 agricultural season.

Ali bin Salim al Hashimi, Director of the Department of Agricultural Wealth and Water Resources in Al Kamil W’al Wafi, said the total cultivated area reached 41 feddans, with expected production exceeding 50 tonnes,



depending on seed varieties. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

continues to provide technical and advisory support to farmers, applying international standards to ensure quality and sustainability.

Efforts include promoting best agricultural practices, supplying improved seeds and modern machinery and facilitating post-harvest processes to maintain product quality for market delivery.

The Ministry has also supported farmers by providing harvesting equipment to streamline operations and improve efficiency. — ONA

Oman gains strategic ground as Gulf routes come under strain, IMF says

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 19

Oman is emerging in a stronger relative position than several of its Gulf neighbours as war-related disruption hits trade, energy and transport links across the region, the International Monetary Fund said in a new regional assessment.

The IMF said the conflict, which began on February 28, has darkened the outlook for the Middle East and North Africa, cutting growth forecasts and disrupting oil production, shipping and air traffic across the Gulf. Regional growth is now expected to slow to 1.4 per cent in 2026 under the Fund’s reference scenario.

But Oman appears to stand apart from some of the economies most exposed to the fallout. According



Geography is not just a matter of location, but of economic advantage: IMF

to the IMF, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and wider disruption to regional trade have hurt countries

that rely more heavily on the waterway for exports and imports. Oman, by contrast, has seen only

limited trade and production disruption because its sea access lies fully outside the strait.

That has given the Sultanate of Oman a degree of protection at a time when higher oil prices are lifting revenues.

The IMF said the rise in crude prices is expected to improve both Oman’s current account and its primary fiscal balance, setting it apart from some other producers where damaged output and export flows have offset the benefit of higher prices.

The report said Brent crude rose above \$100 a barrel after the outbreak of war, while maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz fell sharply and energy markets tightened as production and export capacity were hit across several Gulf producers.

Inflation pressures in Oman

are also expected to remain comparatively mild. The IMF projects only a small upward revision in inflation for the Sultanate of Oman, around 0.2 percentage points, compared with larger increases elsewhere in the region. Even so, the Fund stopped short of suggesting that Oman is immune. It warned that a longer or more intense conflict could deepen the damage across the region, weighing further on trade, tourism, logistics and investment, while increasing inflation and financial stress.

For Oman, the report points to a broader reality that could outlast the current crisis: geography is not just a matter of location, but of economic advantage. At a moment when key Gulf routes are under strain, that advantage is becoming more visible.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The bank has been steadily integrating sustainability into its core strategy.

BankDhofar advances Oman’s low-carbon transition through green finance

MUSCAT: As Oman accelerates its transition towards a low-carbon economy, the country’s banking sector is emerging as a critical catalyst, bridging national climate ambitions with real-world investment.

At the heart of this shift is the growing role of green finance and sustainable banking, which are increasingly shaping how capital is allocated across the economy.

Oman’s net-zero commitment by 2050, coupled with large-scale investments in renewable energy, green hydrogen, low-carbon industry and climate-resilient infrastructure, is creating unprecedented financing needs.

Meeting these requirements will depend not only on government spending and foreign capital, but also on the ability of domestic banks to mobilise, structure and channel funding into sustainable projects. This positions the banking sector as a central pillar of Oman’s decarbonisation journey.

Green finance instruments — including green loans, sustainability-linked loans, green bonds and transition finance — are gaining traction globally and Oman’s banks are increasingly aligning with these trends.

By embedding environmental, social and governance (ESG) criteria into credit decisions, banks can incentivise companies to reduce emissions, improve resource efficiency and adopt cleaner technologies.

In doing so, financial institutions help de-risk climate-aligned investments while supporting long-term economic resilience. BankDhofar, one of Oman’s leading financial institutions, is playing a particularly prominent role in this transformation.

The bank has been steadily integrating sustainability into its core strategy, recognising that climate transition is not a peripheral concern but a fundamental driver of future growth.

Through tailored financing solutions, BankDhofar is supporting projects across renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable logistics, clean manufacturing and environmentally responsible SMEs.

By deploying sustainability-linked financing, BankDhofar is also encouraging corporate borrowers to align business performance with measurable climate and ESG outcomes.

This approach ties financial incentives directly to emissions reductions, energy efficiency improvements or broader sustainability targets, creating a powerful mechanism to accelerate behavioural change across industries.

In parallel, the bank’s growing focus on digitalisation and fintech solutions enhances transparency, monitoring and reporting — key requirements for credible green finance.

All-electric iCAUR 03T officially debuts in Oman

THE automotive landscape in the Sultanate of Oman is set for a stylish transformation with the official debut of the iCAUR 03T. As a flagship in the electric SUV segment, the 03T arrives to redefine urban mobility, combining a bold, trend-setting aesthetic with the high-tech performance required for the Sultanate of Oman’s modern lifestyle.

Designed primarily as a sophisticated city-drive vehicle, the 03T bridges the gap between daily commuting and weekend escapades, offering a distinctive presence on the road. Supporting this versatility is the advanced Range Extended Electric Vehicle (REEV) technology, which utilises a high-efficiency engine as a generator to deliver a total driving range of over 750 km (under testing conditions), ensuring pure, uninterrupted exploration without range anxiety.

The iCAUR 03T makes an immediate impression with its “J-Style” design philosophy, featuring a distinctive, boxy silhouette tailored for style-conscious and youthful buyers.

It is a vehicle that focuses on “fun-to-drive” energy, making every city journey an experience rather than a chore.

EXHILARATING PERFORMANCE MEETS URBAN AGILITY

Beneath its rugged, futuristic exterior, the iCAUR 03T delivers performance typically reserved for high-end sports cars. With a staggering 429 HP and 505 Nm of torque, the 03T rockets from 0 to 100 km/h in just 4.8 seconds. This instant electric acceleration provides the agility needed for navigating city traffic and the power to command the open highway.

The intelligent i-AWD system further enhances the drive, dynamically adjusting power distribution to ensure optimum traction and stability across various road conditions.



The iCAUR 03T makes an immediate impression with its “J-Style” design philosophy, featuring a distinctive, boxy silhouette tailored for style-conscious and youthful buyers.

ADVANCED SAFETY AND STRUCTURAL INTEGRITY

Safety is the cornerstone of the iCAUR 03T experience. The vehicle is engineered with a pioneering all-aluminium multi-cavity cage body, which is 30% more rigid than traditional steel frames. This architecture includes a one-piece die-cast aluminium tower top structure — the only one in its class — providing a robust shield for all occupants.

Complemented by a comprehensive airbag system and armor-style battery protection, the 03T is built to exceed global safety expectations, offering total peace of mind for families and urban adventurers alike.

A HIGH-TECH SANCTUARY FOR THE CONNECTED DRIVER

The cabin of the iCAUR 03T is a fusion of futuristic intelligence and premium comfort.

At the centre of the driving experience is an L2+ Intelligent Driving Assistance System, supported by over 20 smart sensors, high-definition cameras and millimetre-wave radars.

Features such as full-speed range adaptive cruise control and traffic jam avoidance assistance make city driving effortless and stress-free. The interior is further elevated by a multi-function steering wheel with integrated voice and audio controls, ensuring the driver remains connected without ever losing focus on the road.

True to its innovative DNA, the iCAUR 03T offers a level of personalisation rarely seen in the segment.

The vehicle features standardised interfaces for over 100 plug-and-play accessories and LEGO-inspired components, allowing owners to adapt their SUV to their specific lifestyle needs.

NBO Muzn Islamic banking offers personalised service

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) Muzn Islamic Banking’s Priority and Privilege Banking continue to offer their customers a more tailored and convenient way to manage their finances, bringing together dedicated support and faster access to services, while also offering a range of lifestyle benefits.

Commenting on these services, Salima bint Obaid bin Issa al Marzooqi, Assistant General Manager and Chief Islamic Banking Officer at NBO, said, “Our focus is simple. We want our customers to feel supported, understood and valued at every stage of their



Muzn Islamic Banking continues to build on its commitment to delivering Sharia-compliant solutions.

financial journey. Priority and Privilege Banking are built around that idea, combining personalised service with benefits that make a real difference in everyday life”.

Customers enrolled in Muzn’s Priority Banking benefit from a dedicated relationship manager, along with access to exclusive banking and branch services that simplify everyday transactions.

The offering also includes chauffeur services, complimentary airport lounge access at over 1,000 locations worldwide; and a range of partner offers and lifestyle discounts, helping customers

save time while getting more value from their banking relationship.

From its end, Privilege Banking offers its customers with customised debit cards and chequebooks, preferential financing rates and access to exclusive offers. The segment is designed for customers seeking greater flexibility, tailored financial solutions and added convenience in their banking.

Through these segments, Muzn Islamic Banking continues to build on its commitment to delivering Sharia-compliant solutions that are practical, accessible and aligned with customers’ needs.

Ford Oman unlocks exclusive 3-day power deals

MUSCAT: Ford Oman is excited to announce the arrival of the Ford 3-Day Power Deals. This highly anticipated, limited-time flash sale offers customers an exclusive opportunity to own a legendary Ford SUV at exceptional value.

Starting from April 21 and running until April 23, Ford showrooms across the Sultanate of Oman will unlock special pricing on Ford’s most popular models, including the tech-forward Territory, the adventurous Everest, the versatile Explorer and the commanding Expedition.

The 3-Day Power Deals event is designed for those who demand more from every drive”, said a spokesperson for Arabian Car Marketing Company. “For just 72



April 21-23, Ford showrooms in Oman will unlock special pricing on Ford’s most popular models.

hours, we are making our iconic SUV lineup more accessible than ever, allowing our customers to experience the perfect blend of prestige, performance and innovation that defines the Ford legacy”.

FORD TERRITORY: URBAN SOPHISTICATION AND TECH-FORWARD DESIGN

The Ford Territory is designed with urban sophistication and everyday versatility in mind, featuring a refreshed exterior and a 1.8L EcoBoost engine that delivers 190hp.

The interior takes connectivity to the next level with a redesigned dual 12.3-inch display system and Arkamys 3D Audio, ensuring every journey is as entertaining as it is

comfortable. On the safety front, the Territory impresses with a comprehensive suite of advanced driver-assist systems including Lane Departure Warning and Lane Centering Control, providing peace of mind for the modern city driver.

FORD EVEREST: ADVENTURE AND ELEGANCE REIMAGINED

Engineered to elevate every adventure, the Next-Gen Ford Everest 4x4 SUV strikes the perfect balance between functionality and style.

Under the hood, it boasts a 2.3L EcoBoost® Turbo petrol engine delivering a best-in-class 296HP, paired with a highly efficient 10-speed SelectShift automatic transmission.

SHORTTAKES

OMAN’S ANNUAL HOTEL REVENUES IN 2025 HIT RECORD **₹297.3 MILLION**

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 19

Annual hotel revenues in Oman reached RO 297.3 million (\$772 million) in 2025 — a new annual record and a year-on-year increase of more than 22%, says leading real estate advisory and property consultancy, Cavendish Maxwell.



KHALIL AL ZADJALI
Head of Oman at
Cavendish Maxwell

Oman’s hotels welcomed 2.4 million guests last year, up nearly 11% compared to 2024. Average occupancy grew 13.6% to reach almost 57%, while average room rates reached almost RO 49 (\$127), an increase of 4.7%, according to Cavendish Maxwell’s latest analysis of Oman’s hospitality sector.

Oman opened 900 new hotel rooms in 2025, bringing the total room inventory to 36,800. Another 2,400 rooms are set to come to the market this year, followed by 900 more in 2027.

Khalil al Zadjali, Head of Oman at Cavendish Maxwell, said: “After a robust, record-breaking performance in 2025, Oman’s hospitality sector has entered this year with strong momentum. We are now in a phase of sustained growth, supported by a more diversified mix of source markets, rising domestic demand and higher occupancy levels.

“While regional geopolitical developments are an important consideration, Oman’s position as a culturally-rich destination, combined with proactive tourism campaigns and continued infrastructure investment is expected to support its appeal as a key destination for both domestic and international travellers”, he added.

Oman’s airport network welcomed just under 15 million passengers last year, up 2.8% on 2024. While traffic was steady throughout the year, the peak month for travel was August, with 1.66 million visitors descending on Oman during Khareef Dhofar Season.

Muscat International Airport remained the backbone of Oman’s air connectivity, with 13.2 million passengers and 88% of all traffic. Salalah International Airport stood out as the strongest performer among secondary air hubs, with passenger volumes rising almost 10% to 1.7 million.

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has launched field visits under the Joint National Team tasked with customs exemption procedures, as part of broader efforts to strengthen industrial competitiveness and improve the investment environment in the Sultanate of Oman.

Eng Khalid bin Salim al Qasabi, Director General of Industry, said the national industrial strategy places emphasis on maximising the benefits of incentives, particularly customs exemptions, given their role in reducing operational costs and enhancing the competitiveness of industrial enterprises in both domestic and international markets. He added that the strategy also seeks to enable Omani manufacturers to adopt Fourth Industrial Revolution



The strategy also seeks to enable Omani manufacturers to adopt Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies.

ENERGY CRISIS

Bangladesh raises fuel prices amidst war



Bangladesh raised retail fuel prices by 10% to 15% as global crude costs surged due to the Iran conflict. Petrol, diesel and kerosene prices were increased to reflect higher import, freight and insurance costs.

Authorities said subsidies and supply measures had become unsustainable, while rising fuel bills continue to strain foreign exchange reserves in the import-dependent economy. — Reuters

GLOBAL ECONOMY

IMF meetings highlight limits of response



Global finance leaders acknowledged limited ability to counter geopolitical shocks during IMF and World Bank meetings. While up to \$150 billion in support was pledged, worsening energy disruptions dampened optimism.

Officials warned against fuel hoarding noting reliance on US actions remains central as institutions struggle to influence conflict-driven economic outcomes. — Reuters

CURRENCY MARKETS

ADB warns yen may face pressure



The Asian Development Bank warned the yen could weaken further if Japan’s central bank delays tightening policy. Interest rate gaps with the United States continue to drive dollar demand, especially during global uncertainty.

Concerns over fiscal sustainability and continued government spending may also weigh on the currency, limiting gains even when market stress eases. — Reuters

Field visits begin to strengthen customs exemption procedures

18 farm contracts signed to boost food security

THE Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, signed 18 agricultural usufruct contracts for investment projects across several governorates in the Sultanate of Oman.

The agreements carry a combined investment value exceeding RO 1.9 million and cover an estimated 300 acres, distributed across the Governorates of Al Buraimi, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Al Wusta and Dhofar, reflecting a geographically balanced approach to agricultural development.

The projects span a range of activities, including the cultivation of wild trees, beekeeping and vegetable production using modern technologies, alongside grape farming in Al Sharqiyah North. They also include fodder and field crop cultivation, as well as the production of guava, sapodilla and onions.

In addition, a frankincense production project is planned in Dhofar, while Al Batinah South will host an industrial project focused on water purification

SANAD CENTRES PROCESS OVER 131,000 TRANSACTIONS IN Q1 2026

MUSCAT: Transactions completed through the e-portal of Sanad Service Centres exceeded 131,000 in the first quarter of 2026, underscoring improved operational efficiency and growing user confidence in the quality and reliability of services provided.

The performance reflects continued efforts to streamline procedures for citizens, entrepreneurs and investors through

and bottling.

The initiative underscores coordination between government entities and aligns with national priorities to optimise the use of agricultural land through sustainable investment.

These projects are expected to enhance domestic production efficiency, strengthen food supply chains and expand agricultural investment opportunities across the

governorates.

The agricultural sector has seen growing momentum, with more than 585 usufruct contracts signed last year, highlighting its increasing role in supporting food security and sustainable local production.

Officials said the latest agreements reflect continued investment activity in agriculture, contributing to economic diversification, empowering entrepreneurs and

promoting efficient utilisation of natural resources, while adding value to state-owned land.

The signing ceremony was attended by Eng Hamad bin Ali al Nazwani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning for Housing; and Dr Ahmed bin Nasser al Bakri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Agriculture, with several officials from the sector. — ONA



The agreements carry a combined investment value exceeding RO 1.9 million and cover an estimated 300 acres.



a network of 922 centres across the Sultanate of Oman.

These centres have generated 2,264 job opportunities and are operated by Omani entrepreneurs within the framework of small and

medium enterprises, delivering a wide range of e-government services.

Mohammed bin Salim al Mashaikhi, Director of the Sanad Service Centres Department at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said the results highlight the role of Sanad centres as a national initiative supporting public service delivery, SME development and enhanced customer experience. — ONA

OPINION

When everyone agrees, something is wrong



KAMLA AL RAHBI

The writer is a leadership and business strategist.

THERE is a particular kind of meeting that feels like success. Everyone around the table nods. The proposal moves forward without objection. The leader leaves with a sense of alignment, efficiency and momentum. No friction. No dissent. No awkward silences. That feeling is one of the most dangerous signals in institutional life. When everyone agrees, it is tempting to interpret consensus as validation as evidence that the decision is sound, the direction is clear and the team is unified.

In reality, unanimous agreement in a strategic setting is more often a signal to investigate than a result to celebrate. The question a leader should ask is not why is everyone agreeing? but what is preventing anyone from disagreeing?

The answer reveals far more about the health of an institution than the decision itself. Irving Janis, who studied some of the most consequential decision failures of the twentieth century, identified a pattern he called groupthink the tendency of cohesive, high functioning teams to suppress doubt, avoid conflict and converge prematurely on agreement.

From the Bay of Pigs invasion to the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster, major failures did not occur because people lacked intelligence

or information. They occurred because the environment made disagreement feel risky, disloyal, or simply not worth the cost. The irony is that the teams most vulnerable to this dynamic are often those that appear strongest.

High trust, shared history and strong leadership are genuine assets — but they also raise the social cost of dissent. The individual who questions the direction risks being perceived as disruptive, insufficiently committed, or out of alignment. Most people, reading those signals accurately, choose silence.

That silence is not agreement. It is calculation. In Gulf institutional environments, this dynamic carries additional weight. Cultural emphasis on hierarchy, harmony and collective face can widen the gap between what people think privately and what they say publicly.

A leader who interprets the absence of objection as genuine alignment is misreading the room. What they are observing is not agreement but a boundary of what is safe to express. This matters because decisions made without real challenge carry invisible risks. The assumption left untested. The alternative never raised.

The implementation risk someone recognised but chose not to voice. These are not exceptions they are the predictable

When everyone agrees, it is tempting to interpret consensus as validation as evidence that the decision is sound, the direction is clear and the team is unified. In reality, unanimous agreement in a strategic setting is more often a signal to investigate than a result to celebrate.

outcomes of environments where disagreement has learned to stay quiet.

Creating space for genuine disagreement is not about encouraging conflict for its own sake. It is about ensuring that the information leaders most need particularly the uncomfortable kind can reach them.

This requires something specific from leadership. Not a general invitation to speak freely, which is often interpreted as a formality. It requires consistent, visible proof that dissent is safe: that difficult questions are welcomed, not penalised; that slowing a decision is treated as discipline, not resistance; and that accuracy matters more than agreement.

Leaders who build such environments may find their meetings slower, more demanding and occasionally uncomfortable. They will also find their decisions more robust, more implementable and far less exposed to hidden risk.

Consensus is not the goal. Clarity is. And clarity rarely emerges without someone willing to say what others have chosen not to. The next time a meeting ends in full agreement, pause before concluding that it went well. Ask instead: who in that room knew something they did not say? That question asked seriously and followed through is where real decision intelligence begins.

CENTRAL BANKERS ARE JOINING TEAM INEVITABILITY

GABRIEL RUBIN

If the sudden stop-start of pandemic lockdowns proved anything, it's that central bankers can handle demand problems. Supply shocks are another matter. Central bankers visiting Washington, DC for the International Monetary Fund's Spring meetings grimly assessed that they could do little to prevent an immediate inflation spike from rising energy prices and would instead fight to contain secondary effects as input costs spread elsewhere in the economy.

After Covid-19, the debate centred over whether inflation would be a transitory phenomenon. Now, policymakers seem resigned to its inevitability. The question is whether they can tamp it back.

Following joint US-Israeli strikes on Iran, Gulf conflict has throttled the Strait of Hormuz, cutting 13 million barrels of oil per day from global markets, according to the International Energy Agency. The effect on energy prices cannot be entirely stemmed by interest rate policy: central bankers cannot themselves replace lost crude.

For countries with sufficient near- and medium-term reserves, like Japan or South Korea, rising prices for fresh supplies are the issue. For most low- and middle-income Asian nations, obtaining physical barrels is the most pressing concern, something monetary policy cannot solve, said Bank of Korea's departing Governor Rhee Chang-yong at a Peterson Institute event on the sidelines of the summit.

Initial price effects have shown up in consumer price indexes, but so far the damage has been limited to first-order effects on fuel. In the US, for example, the March consumer price index showed a 10.9% month-over-month increase in the energy index, but stable core prices, which exclude food and energy.

Second-order effects are expected to hit shipping costs and petrochemical-dependent industries like plastics. The worst case, as ever, is that rising prices lead to spiraling wages as workers clamor for cost-of-living increases, setting off a feedback loop.

New Zealand Reserve Bank Governor Anna Breman noted that consumers and businesses change their behaviours based on headline inflation, not core, so policymakers must work to lower expectations after the fact. Doing so can be painful and cause recessions, since the surest way to reduce anticipated prices is to suppress demand with lower interest rates.

"That's a dangerous, slippery spot to be in," Chicago Fed President Austan Goolsbee said who foresaw disruptions preventing what he viewed as "appropriate rate-cutting". At this point, Team Inevitability is only gaining members. — Reuters

The new world paradigm now is 'no normal'

DURING the Covid-19 pandemic, everyone started talking about the new normal. Researchers, the media and the corporate world stated that the 'new normal' was the new norm. It meant masks, social distancing, remote working, changes in social behaviour and digitalisation.

The Covid-19 pandemic was a significant, frightening event that brought about extraordinary worldwide transformations. The Covid-19 pandemic introduced unparalleled transformation early on and affected all facets of human existence. The 'new normal' included dependence on digital technology, substantial changes to global supply chains and shifts in perceptions of work, life, health and wellbeing.

By 2024, scholars and commentators began to observe that the world was becoming more unstable and less predictable. A world that is becoming permanently unstable could no longer be described by the term 'new normal', which referred to a single new event

A new paradigm of 'no normal' slowly emerged due to frequent shocks and persistent disruptions.

The world is no longer going through a single, large-scale upheaval; instead, the global economy is facing a complex set of structural shifts that go beyond growth models and traditional policy instruments.

Earlier growth was driven by globalisation and predictability, but the 'no normal' global landscape is now shaped by an intricate combination of artificial intelligence, frontier technologies and geopolitical factors that have reshaped global demand and investment patterns.

Despite economic wealth, the world will experience an increase in global debt. Climate change, climate pressures and climate science continue to impact people, planet and profit.

The demographic shifts pose major challenges and opportunities for economies, with some countries facing an aging population and



Despite economic wealth, the world will experience an increase in global debt. — Reuters



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

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

The world is no longer going through a single, large-scale upheaval; instead, the global economy is facing a complex set of structural shifts that go beyond growth models and traditional policy instruments.

others a growing youth population.

This will further exacerbate the existing income and wealth inequalities across the global economy.

Most of the present literature perceives AI as a productivity tool and job displacer, geopolitics as a power game and debt as a macro constraint, but in reality, the intersection of these forces will create few actors who can actually afford to subsidise AI infrastructure through state spending, cheap credit, tax breaks and loose debt constraints; this in turn would lock in geopolitical influences for decades.

Another intersection is a world where climate shocks, such as droughts, floods, heatwaves and rising seas, will increase climate migration both within countries and across borders. Digital borders govern movement based on AI-driven risk scores, migrant "desirability" rankings and climate-credit passports.

By 2035, the ability to move, study, work, or escape climate-damaged regions could depend less on your paper passport and more on opaque data profiles that combine health, education, carbon footprint and financial history.

By 2035, many heavily indebted countries may not be able to afford their own large scale AI and data systems, so they will have to rent foreign platforms that run everything from digital IDs to credit

scoring and visa processing and access to jobs, finance, or migration will be mediated by AI systems that are educated, owned and governed by a few fiscal and technological superpowers.

In the new global paradigm, 'no normal', comprehending the future as a single outcome is inconsequential; the context demands the ability to read between the intersections of various forces.

Artificial intelligence and frontier technologies do not act in isolation; they accelerate geopolitical competition and surveillance over data, standards and governance.

The geopolitical fragmentation and ensuing wars are not only redirecting trade routes but also reorienting international trade and redefining global power dynamics.

The demographic shifts of young and aging populations will begin to alter production, consumption, savings and migration patterns.

We must develop an integrated lens that continually considers how technology, geopolitics, demography, climate and finance interact in a given decision to navigate and make sense of this period of upheaval.

The challenge for academics, leaders and citizens is to become learners of interconnection, mapping feedback loops, stress-testing presumptions and maintaining intellectual agility as we move, rather than looking for stability towards 2035 and beyond.

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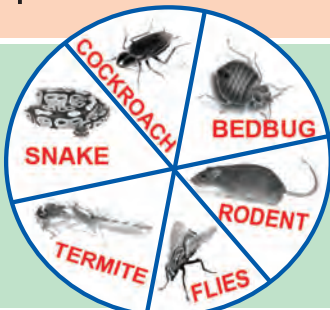
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BIGHONOUR

EDDIE MURPHY RECEIVES AFI LIFE ACHIEVEMENT AWARD



Eddie Murphy after winning at the 51st AFI Life Achievement Award tribute gala at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles, California. — Reuters

Eddie Murphy received the American Film Institute’s (AFI) Life Achievement Award on Saturday night in Los Angeles, honouring a career that has shaped comedy and film for more than five decades.

Accepting the trophy with his trademark humor, Murphy joked about its size. “Have these always been this size? It seems like this one is smaller”, he said, drawing laughter from the crowd.

Murphy, who turned 65 on April 3, said he was grateful to receive the honour while he was still young enough to enjoy it.

“Sometimes they make you wait until you’re real old to get this award”, he quipped, noting that Mel Brooks and Francis Ford Coppola were honoured in their 80s, while Lillian Gish received the accolade at 90.

Striking a more reflective tone, Murphy told the audience he wished they could feel what he felt standing onstage. “I almost teared up”, he said. “I’ll go backstage and cry”.

The ceremony featured tributes from across the entertainment industry, including a high-energy performance of songs from the movie musical “Dreamgirls” by Jennifer Hudson, who starred in the film alongside Murphy.

Speeches from fellow comedians including Martin Lawrence, Dave Chappelle and Kenan Thompson underscored Murphy’s influence on comedy and his role as a trailblazer for generations of Black performers.

“He was proof that you could come in young, take big swings, trust your voice and leave a mark that lasts decades”, the “Good Burger” actor added.

Echoing Thompson’s appreciation for having Murphy as a mentor, Da’Vine Joy Randolph said she learned a great deal from Murphy while filming the 2019 movie “Dolemite Is My Name”.

“The greatest gift he ever gave me was the opportunity to learn by watching him”, said Randolph, a Golden Globe winner. “These are lessons no drama school can teach”.

Murphy first rose to fame on “Saturday Night Live” (SNL) from 1980 to 1984, where characters like Buckwheat and Gumby launched him to stardom.

He went on to define iconic roles in “Beverly Hills Cop”, “Coming to America”, “The Nutty Professor” and “Norbit”, earning critical acclaim for “Dreamgirls”.

— Reuters

QUICK FEATURES



TRIBUTE

French actress Nathalie Baye poses during a photocall for the film “Juste la fin du monde” at the 69th Cannes Film Festival. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

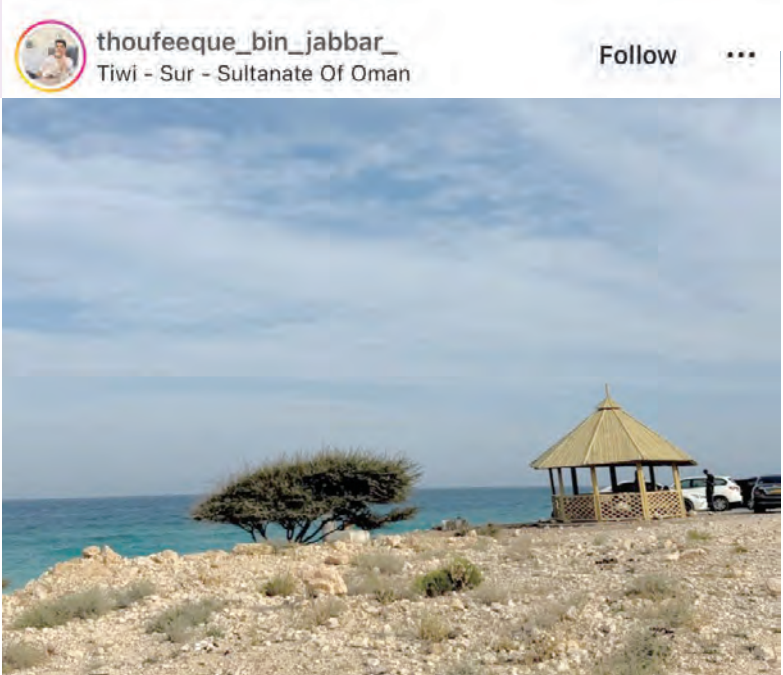
US actress Anne Hathaway attends the 12th Breakthrough Prize Ceremony at Barker Hangar in Santa Monica, California. — AFP



FESTIVAL

A woman films with her mobile phone during the 39th International Kite Festival at the beach of Berck-sur-Mer, northern France. — AFP

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GUCCI-OWNER TO LAUNCH LUXURY GOOGLE GLASSES



Gucci brand, in partnership with Google, aims to become potentially the first major luxury brand to enter the AI-powered eyewear sector

Kering aims to launch smart glasses under the Gucci brand next year, CEO Luca de Meo said, becoming potentially the first major luxury brand to enter the AI-powered eyewear sector.

That will pit it against Italian-French eyewear leader EssilorLuxottica, which produces Ray-Ban smart glasses in partnership with Meta.

“Probably next year, 2027”, de Meo said when asked about the timeline for the smart glasses’ launch during an interview on Thursday on the sidelines of Kering’s capital markets day in Florence.

The move is part of de Meo’s broader strategy to scale up Kering’s eyewear and jewellery divisions — which account for a fraction of the group’s overall revenues — and help shield the luxury company from the shift in fashion tastes that has hit star brand Gucci.

De Meo said he aimed to more than double Kering’s operating

profit margin to put the group back into the same league as other major luxury players and revamp Gucci after years of flagging sales.

He said the Italian brand needed to return to its most recognisable classics.

“I think that throughout the 105 years of Gucci’s history, they have basically nailed down a few aesthetic codes that are immediately recognisable. And sometimes we haven’t used them and sometimes we have abused them”, he said.

De Meo also said the conflict in the Middle East, which has dented luxury sales in the Gulf and curbed travel, underscored the need for large corporations to adapt to a more fragmented world and improve how they sell products in different markets.

“I really believe that we need to adapt our model in many dimensions to a multipolar world. It’s a different game”, he said.

— Reuters

CinemaCon charm offensive triggers lukewarm reception

PAULA RAMON

PARAMOUNT Skydance was on a charm offensive at CinemaCon, trying to convince theatre owners that its megabucks deal to swallow Warner Bros. would be good for the industry.

A glitzy promotional film narrated by Tom Cruise ended with the world’s most bankable movie star sitting atop the company’s water tower, gazing over Hollywood.

“The future is Paramount, and the future looks pretty great from here,” said Cruise.

The firm’s chief executive David Ellison, attuned to fears that the \$111 billion offer for a rival studio would result in cuts, bounded onto the stage at Caesars Palace to insist it would not crimp production.

“I came here today... to look every single one of you in the eye and give you my word. Once we combine with Warner Brothers, we’re going to make a minimum of 30 films annually,” he told the audience, pledging 45-day theatrical windows before any film is available to stream.

“Long live the movies!”

The response from theatre owners was lukewarm, and maybe for good reason: they’ve been here before.

“Disney said a lot of similar things when they were acquiring 20th Century Fox. They committed to maintaining the level of output,” Matthew Hoopfer of Michigan-based cinema chain Studio C said.

“20th Century Fox was a major studio; they had 10, 12 movies a year. I think in the Disney showcase (this year) between 20th Century and Searchlight, there were five or six movies.”

Cinema United, the umbrella group that organises CinemaCon, has declared itself sceptical about the takeover.

“While recent pledges attempt to address the threats of consolidation to our industry, they are not yet sufficient in addressing our concerns,” organisation president Michael O’Leary said.

“We remain open to tangible commitments that will ensure a vibrant global theatrical exhibition industry for years to come.”

Cinema owners are not the only ones who are worried.

An open letter signed by thousands of Hollywood luminaries — from acting heavyweights Jane Fonda and Joaquin Phoenix to directors J J Abrams and Denis Villeneuve — opposed the consolidation and fretted it would mean “fewer jobs... higher costs, and less choice for audiences.”

For cinema owners, much depends on what happens with Warner Bros and whether Paramount Skydance can keep its promise to maintain a steady stream of films.

A decade ago, annual spending at the North American box office frequently topped \$11 billion.

But the Covid-19 pandemic and the explosive growth of streaming put a hole in that, with yearly revenues dropping to less than \$9 billion. Signs are good, however, for 2026. A strong first quarter, aided by crowd-pleasers like ‘Project Hail Mary’ and ‘The Super Mario Galaxy Movie,’ has some industry-watchers predicting this year could be one of the best in a while. — AFP



Rising Star of 2026 Award recipient Australian actress Catherine Laga during the CinemaCon 2026 Big Screen Achievement Awards at OMNIA Club at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, Nevada.



CinemaCon Vanguard Award recipient US actress Zoey Deutch.



Star of the Year award recipient US actor LaKeith Stanfield speaks on stage at CinemaCon 2026 Big Screen Achievement Awards at OMNIA Club at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. — AFP



Star of Tomorrow award recipient US actor Noah Centineo.



Cinema United Spirit of the Industry award recipient Canadian film-maker James Cameron.



Award of Excellence in Acting Award recipient US actor Adam Scott.

What began as a story shared 20 years ago turned into a gripping climb through steep descents and narrow ridges, as one explorer finally uncovers the legendary Saab Al Khashab route



DR KHALED ABDUL MALAK

AROUND 20 years ago, when I met my late old friend Musabbah, he told me about the ‘Saab Al Khashab’ trail that he used to search for wild honey in the mountains. Despite many trips to the area, I was unable to find it.

About 5 months ago, I decided to go on an expedition with a couple of friends, equipped with our climbing gear, to try and locate this hidden trail. Prior to our journey, I reached out to my good friend Khamis, who was familiar with the area, for some guidance on the trail.

On our first trip, accompanied by Rami and Hamoud, two fellow adventurers, as well as Françoise, Rami’s wife who was responsible for logistics, we drove to Maabit, a small village in the mountains above Tanuf and began our hike with all the necessary climbing gear to reach a wide ledge where the hidden trail was said to be.

We started our descent by securing our first anchor and completing our first drop of around 40 metres, followed by two additional drops of 20 metres each.

We agreed that Hamoud would remain at the bottom of the first abseil, Rami would wait after the second and I would descend to reach the ledge we intended to reach that day.

Upon reaching the wide ledge, we decided to climb back up and return another time to continue our exploration.

On February 3, Rami contacted me to propose continuing our search. We agreed to go on February 6, accompanied by Nadhira and Thomas (a young French man and the son of Rami’s colleague).

We planned to meet at my place and drive together to Maabit in Rami’s car.

The day before, I contacted my friend Khamis for more information about the trail and he provided valuable insights to help us locate it.

THE CLIMB THAT HONoured A FRIEND’S MEMORY



We set out at 6 am and arrived at our destination at 8:30 am. The weather was perfect for this time of year, about 10 degrees cooler than our previous visit.

Equipped with our climbing gear, we began our hike, following the trails used by goats.

It took us around 30 minutes to reach our first 40-metre drop, where we had previously placed an anchor.

After setting up our rope, I was the first to abseil, followed by Thomas, Rami and finally Nadhira. We successfully descended the other two drops from our previous trip and proceeded to hike along the ridge of the 250-metre cliff.

The view of the canyon bed was simultaneously stunning and intimidating. At times, the trail was narrow, requiring us to proceed with caution to avoid a 200-metre drop.

After navigating the ridge for a couple of hundred metres, we encountered a fault in the mountain filled with stones to aid in climbing, which proved to be the most challenging part of our journey.

Following this ascent, my friends decided to stop, but I continued to climb down to the ground 200 metres below. It was a fulfilling moment to complete Musabbah’s legendary trail, where I constructed a small cairn to mark my passage.

Climbing up proved to be easier than climbing down and I rejoined my fellow climbers in about 15 minutes. We retraced our steps back to the start of our ascent, using the ropes we had left behind and made our way back to the car.

After a 2.5-hour journey, we reached our vehicle, where we enjoyed some snacks before heading back to Muscat.

On our way home, I called Khamis to express my gratitude for his invaluable information and to inform him that our expedition had been a success. I was delighted to have completed this trail as a tribute to my old friend Musabbah!