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INBRIEF

HIS MAJESTY GETS
MESSAGE FROM
BANGLADESH PM



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from Tarique Rahman, Prime Minister of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, pertaining to the bilateral relations between the two countries. The message was handed over to Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, when he received Humayun Kabir, Adviser to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh for Foreign Affairs. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the bilateral relations and cooperation between the two countries. **DETAILS ON P2**

SAYYID KAMIL TO
PRESIDE OVER CAMEL
RACING FESTIVAL

At the behest of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, will preside over the closing ceremony of the 2026 Camel Racing Festival for the Cup of His Majesty the Sultan on Thursday. The event will take place at the Royal Camel Corps racecourse in Al Fulaij, Wilayat of Barka. The event is organised by the Royal Court Affairs, represented by the Royal Camel Corps. The final day of the festival will feature six races, including the fifth race, designated for yearling camels ‘Houl’, in which the winner will be awarded the Cup of His Majesty the Sultan. **SE ALSO P10**

APPLICATIONS
FOR MUNICIPAL
COUNCIL POLLS

The Ministry of Interior has announced that the application period for candidacy in the fourth-term Municipal Council elections will commence on Sunday (April 5), and will continue until Thursday (April 23). The ministry invites eligible candidates who meet the requirements for council membership to submit their applications via the ‘Intakhib’ application or the official election website (elections.om), by completing the designated electronic form.

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, APRIL 1

The Ministry of Social Development highlighted the ministry’s key achievements in 2025 and its future plans to advance the social development system in the Sultanate of Oman.

The ministry held an annual media briefing under the theme ‘Empowerment that Creates Impact’ at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat, in the presence of Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, and the under-

secretaries.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Laila reaffirmed the unwavering commitment of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to advancing the social sector and strengthening the comprehensive protection and care system. She noted that this commitment has brought about a qualitative transformation in social protection policies, evidenced by the continued disbursement of social security pensions to over 100,000 citizens at a cost of RO 178 million, as well as the directive to assess the status of households eligible for the

Oman condemns Israeli law on Palestinian prisoners

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has condemned the Israeli Knesset’s enactment of the so-called ‘Death Penalty for Prisoners Law,’ denouncing it as a breach of international humanitarian law, particularly the provisions safeguarding prisoners and detainees. In a statement issued on Wednesday by the Foreign

Ministry, the Sultanate of Oman reaffirms its categorical rejection of any measures that seek to sanction attacks on the lives of Palestinian prisoners or erode their fundamental human rights. It urges the international community to uphold international legal standards, ensure the protection of prisoners and detainees and avert

escalation in the interest of regional and global peace and stability.

Meanwhile, Palestinian shops and public institutions were closed across the occupied West Bank on Wednesday in protest of an Israeli law passed earlier this week permitting the execution of Palestinians convicted of deadly attacks.

In the Palestinian territory’s main cities of Hebron, Ramallah and Nablus, most stores were closed with their shutters down at midday.

Palestinian Fatah party had called for a general strike the previous day. In Ramallah, the seat of the Palestinian Authority, entire shopping centres were closed as well as the city’s main market.

US WILL BE LEAVING
IRAN ‘PRETTY QUICKLY’

Trump threatens to quit Nato as oil crisis escalates



Iranians attend a funeral ceremony for the Revolutionary Guards Navy Commander Alireza Tangsiri, who was killed in strikes, in Tehran, Iran, on Wednesday. — Reuters

THE United States will end its war on Iran fairly soon and could return for “spot hits” if needed, President Donald Trump said on Wednesday, hours before he was scheduled to make a primetime address to the nation.

Trump also said that he was considering withdrawing the US from the Nato alliance.

Asked when the United States would consider the Iran war over, Trump said: “I can’t tell you exactly... we’re going to be out pretty quickly.”

US action had ensured Iran would not have nuclear arms, he said: “They won’t have a nuclear weapon because they are incapable of that now, and then I’ll leave, and I’ll take everybody with me, and if we have to we’ll come back to do spot hits.”

Global oil supplies were expected to be hit twice as hard this month as in March, the International Energy Agency said on Wednesday, underlining the urgent need for an end to the conflict Trump began with Israel on February 28.

Trump said separately on social media that Iran had asked for a ceasefire but that he would not consider it until Tehran ceased blocking the Strait of Hormuz, a major fuel shipment route. Iran denied making any such request. Two security sources from Pakistan, which is mediating in the conflict, earlier said Islamabad had proposed a temporary

Omanis return
from Iran

In light of the current developments in the region, the Foreign Ministry, in coordination with the relevant authorities in the Sultanate of Oman, continued to implement the necessary arrangements to facilitate the return of Omani citizens currently abroad. In this context, a group of citizens arriving from the Islamic Republic of Iran safely reached the homeland on Wednesday. Travel arrangements were facilitated by land and air, in coordination with the Sultanate of Oman’s diplomatic missions in Tehran and Ankara, as part of the approved plan.

ceasefire to both sides but had not heard back from either.

US Vice-President JD Vance communicated with intermediaries from Pakistan about the Iran conflict as recently as Tuesday, a source briefed on the matter said on Wednesday. At Trump’s direction, Vance signalled privately that Trump was open to a ceasefire as long as certain US demands were met, including reopening the Strait of Hormuz, the source said.

SEE ALSO P6 & 7

Over 100,000 citizens getting social security pension



Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, addressing the media briefing on Wednesday.

Family Income Support benefit within the social protection system.

She said that the ministry has achieved 100 per cent of its 2025 performance targets as outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

Additional measures include the establishment of marriage funds across various governorates, the issuance of a Royal Decree regulating premarital medical examinations, and the allocation of RO 7 million for the construction of an Autism Spectrum Disorder Care and Rehabilitation Centre.

TURN TO P2

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SHORTTAKES



The meeting’s agenda focused on developing the system of joint Arab security action. — ONA

OMAN AT ARAB
INTERIOR MINISTERS
COUNCIL MEETING

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman on Wednesday took part in the 43rd meeting of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers. At the meeting, held via video-conferencing, the Sultanate of Oman was represented by Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior.

At the outset of the meeting, the ministers reviewed the latest developments in the region and the events’ related security implications. They stressed the need to enhance cooperation and unify efforts among Arab countries. The meeting was attended by Maj Gen Abdullah bin Ali al Harthy, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs for Operations. — ONA

SERVING THE COMMUNITY



The Omani Women’s Association in the Wilayat of Khasab plays a pivotal role in serving the community through the implementation of integrated social, developmental, and cultural programmes that contribute to enhancing social cohesion. — ONA



TENDER

PROVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, AND GOVERNANCE REPORTING CONSULTANCY SERVICES

Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (PWP) is responsible for procuring new capacity for power and water in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the requirements of the law for the regulation and privatization of the electricity and related water sector promulgated by Royal Decree 78/2004 as amended and the PWP license.

Tender Description	PWP seeks a proposal from interested parties to provide Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) consultancy services to support PWP in assessing ESG maturity, identifying gaps against the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) ESG Guidelines, and developing the required ESG policies, strategy, report, and implementation roadmap.
Tender Number	OPWP/2026/005
Tender Purchase Period	From 1 April 2026 to 16 April 2026
Tender Fee	﷼ 26.25 / Free of charges for (SME) with a valid Riyada card
Submission date	10 May 2026 at 12:00 PM Oman Time Zone
Collection & Payment Methods	The tender documents are available for purchase in an electronic format through PWP website (https://omanpwp.om/tenders). The payment is done electronically through PWP website. In case of any queries, please send an email to: procurement.officer@Omanpwp.nama.om
Bank Guarantee	A Tender Bond (in the form set out in the tender documents) or a bank certified cheque of not less than 1% of the tender value, to be valid for a period of 120 days from the submission deadline date referred to above. The tender bond or certified cheque shall be enclosed as part of the bid.



شركة الطاقة والمياه
POWER & WATER PROCUREMENT

السلطنة
Oman Power and Water Procurement Company S.A.O.C. PO Box 1388, Road PC112, Rasu, Sultanate of Oman | Tel: +968 36200400 | E: info@omanpwp.om | Fax: +968 36200401 | C.R. No: 12712316 | Tax Number: 1006311

Oman and Bangladesh review bilateral relations

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from Tarique Rahman, Prime Minister of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, pertaining to the bilateral relations between the two countries.

The message was handed over to Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Wednesday



when he received Humayun Kabir, Adviser to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh for Foreign Affairs.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the bilateral relations and cooperation between the two countries.

They also affirmed the joint keenness to enhance these relations in various spheres. — ONA

Be cautious of hidden dangers of water pools

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, APRIL 1

THE Royal Oman Police (ROP) has issued a warning to those who visit the newly formed water ponds after recent rains and flash floods in various governorates, highlighting the hidden danger of drowning in these natural pools. Due to the recent heavy rains, water ponds have emerged in valleys, plains and deserts across many governorates. Some of these pools cover large areas, attracting tourists and recreational visitors, especially on weekends.

Lt Col Mohammed bin Salam al Hashami, Director of Security Relations and Media at ROP, explained that swimming in valleys after rainfall is a popular activity among young people. However, the uneven surfaces of Oman’s mountains and valleys create pools of varying depths, increasing the risk of drowning, especially



Despite warnings, some visitors continue to dive into natural pools formed after recent rains

LT COL
MOHAMMED
AL HASHAMI



when unsupervised. “The varied topography of Oman’s mountains and valleys means that the valleys and their surfaces are uneven, contributing to the formation of pools of varying depths, even in the same location and it is crucial to be aware of the hidden dangers lurking behind these pools, dangers that are not readily apparent to the naked eye. This increases the risk of drowning, particularly when children and teenagers are not supervised and monitored,” Lt Col Al Hashami said.

He cautioned against swimming in

dams, open wells and springs, which pose a greater danger of drowning compared to pools in valleys. He also warned of potential injuries from slipping on surfaces near pools or jumping from heights onto rocks.

Visitors to tourist sites are advised to take precautions, avoid driving into dangerous areas, choose safe locations, be aware of flash floods, avoid swimming in deep water and supervise children near water bodies.

Despite these warnings, some visitors continue to dive into natural pools formed after recent rains. Lt Col Al Hashami urged caution due to the unpredictable depths, hidden currents and silt that could pose risks to swimmers.

He emphasised that stagnant water may contain hazards such as deep holes, debris, or sudden flash floods. He expressed concern about the recurring drowning incidents that could have been prevented by following safety guidelines.

Ministry of Social Development reviews prominent achievements and future plans

FROM P1

Shaikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development for Family Affairs and Community Development, explained the transition from the previous social security system to the new Social Protection Fund. He clarified that ongoing reviews and assessments were not a continuation of the former system but part of efforts to ensure fairness and sustainability in support mechanisms.

The ministry reported a 100-per cent completion rate of its 2025 targets under Oman Vision 2040, demonstrating the effectiveness of social programmes in economic empowerment, beneficiary satisfaction and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce.

Regarding disability services, the ministry operated 139 rehabilitation centres serving nearly 9,933



The ministry reported a 100-per cent completion rate of its 2025 targets under Oman Vision 2040.

beneficiaries. Assistive devices were provided to over 10,000 individuals, along with training programmes and initiatives to integrate persons with disabilities into the labour market.

Dr Abdullah bin Hamoud al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development for Persons with Disabilities Affairs, highlighted the ministry’s focus on early diagnosis, assessment, treatment, and rehabilitation to improve the quality of life for persons with disabilities and promote their active

inclusion in society.

The ministry also expanded family social assistance to more than 23,000 beneficiaries and supporting home-based businesses and job creation for low-income families.

In child protection, the ministry expanded early childhood services to 364 nurseries and addressed numerous cases of child abuse through specialised mechanisms like the Child Protection Hotline and regulatory frameworks.

The ministry provided services to around 6,996

elderly beneficiaries, including home care, assistive devices and family support programmes, with a decrease in institutional care cases due to successful community-based care approaches.

Private sector contributions to social programmes increased by 61%, and community participation benefited over 378,000 individuals.

Digital platforms like ‘Ayadi’ and ‘Jood’ played a significant role in enhancing volunteer and charitable work.

With an 87-per cent digitalisation rate and 60 e-services, the ministry improved accessibility and service efficiency.

The 2026 plan focuses on strategic projects like expanding rehabilitation services, enhancing women’s empowerment, developing elderly care programmes and launching initiatives to improve quality of life in line with Oman’s sustainable development goals.

SHORT TAKES



Burj Al Khamis Fort is a heritage site in Al Batinah South Governorate.

BURJ AL KHAMIS FORT ATTRACTS OVER 18,000 VISITORS

AL MUSANNAH: Burj Al Khamis Fort in the Wilayat of Al Musannah, Al Batinah South Governorate, attracted approximately 18,625 visitors during 2025. This turnout reflects the fort’s growing presence as a tourist destination and the success of marketing efforts in positioning it as a cultural and tourist landmark that blends authenticity with modernity, offering an interactive experience that embodies Omani identity.

Burj Al Khamis Fort is one of the heritage sites in Al Batinah South Governorate that the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has offered for investment to private sector institutions.

This initiative aligns with the Ministry’s efforts to leverage cultural heritage, ensure its sustainability and maximise its benefits by creating direct and indirect employment opportunities, enabling private sector entities — including small and medium enterprises and family businesses — establishing marketing outlets for artisans, enriching domestic tourism and revitalising cultural heritage sites across the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

WADI BANI KHALID MOUNTAIN ROAD 74% COMPLETE



The project costs exceed RO 13 million and spans 9 kilometres.

WADI BANI KHALID: The completion rate of the mountain road in Wadi Bani Khalid in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate has reached 74 per cent. The project spans 9 kilometres and is being executed at a cost exceeding RO 13 million. The road, being executed by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, starts in the Manakh area, near Wadi Bani Khalid Police Station, and concludes at the village of Muzayri in the centre of the wilayat.

The actual completion rate exceeds the planned target by over 20 per cent, with the road expected to open to traffic in the third quarter of 2026. The road serves as an alternative route for the Wilayat of Wadi Bani Khalid in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate and stands as one of the most prominent development projects implemented by the ministry in the wilayat.

It is designed to function as a vital route that enhances logistical movement from an economic perspective, while also facilitating user mobility between villages within the wilayat. — ONA

Oman at Inter-Civilisation academic conference

KUALA LUMPUR: The Sultanate of Oman on Wednesday participated in the Inter-Civilisation Academic Conference 2026, held in Malaysia.

Ahmed bin Saud al Siyabi, Secretary-General of the Fatwa Office at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs and head of the delegation, presented a scholarly paper titled ‘Islam and the Values of Global Coexistence: From Omani Roots to the Horizons of Civilisational Dialogue.’

In his paper, he highlighted the



Ahmed bin Saud al Siyabi presented a paper at the Malaysia conference.

strong interconnection between theory and practice that has characterised the Sultanate of Oman throughout its successive stages of development and civilisational advancement in the

realm of coexistence. He further elaborated on the contribution the Omani model can offer the world in terms of practical applications and theoretical frameworks for achieving coexistence among diverse communities.

The two-day conference aims to provide a dialogue-driven environment that addresses the integration of cultural pluralism, grounded in the recognition of others and mutual respect among members of diverse societies. — ONA

Nearly 12,000 benefit from RAM programmes

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 1

UNDER THE slogan ‘A Tangible Impact,’ the Royal Academy of Management (RAM) unveiled its record-breaking achievements for 2025 at its annual media briefing, showcasing a unique interactive experience across five main stations to highlight the Academy’s journey and initiatives. RAM reported that approximately 11,984 individuals benefited from its services, with 2,258 participants attending its programmes and activities, bringing the total number of participants since its inception to 4,006.

The Academy implemented 19 programmes and 13 intellectual sessions, alongside initiatives in local administration and research published in the journal Al Idari (The Administrator). Achieving a service satisfaction rate of 88.6 per cent, RAM reinforced its focus on quality, results measurement, and maximising institutional impact.

Abdulaziz al Raisi, Assistant Head for Institutional Affairs, said, “The numbers and achievements are significant, but what matters most is feeling the impact — in your community, environment, home, colleagues and institutions. Our approach is always to identify where this impact is truly felt.”

Dr Fathia al Rashidi, Assistant Head of Programme Affairs, emphasised that impact measurement begins from day one of programme design, with initiatives carefully selected to meet real needs.

RAM also highlighted its international recognition, earning the LIFT certification from the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD), making it the only institution in the Middle East with this accreditation. LIFT measures impact and sustainability across the educational value chain — from planning and implementation to evaluation at individual, institutional and



RAM also launched the Certified Executive Learning Trainer Training programmes.

The Academy implemented 19 programmes and 13 intellectual sessions, alongside initiatives in local administration and research

community levels.

Further strengthening its global presence, RAM co-hosted the Future Readiness Award with Thinkers50, attracting over 300 international participants and positioning the Academy as a regional and international platform for leadership excellence and capacity building. In research, RAM presented a national future readiness framework in partnership with experts and in coordination with the Ministry of Economy. Strategic studies addressed the ‘tripartite partnership,’ economic enablers in governorates, AI road maps, decentralisation, and analytical insights for policy-making and local administration forums.

The 2026 operating model, aligned with Oman Vision 2040, focuses on three strategic tracks: executive learning, strategic initiatives and sectoral interactive units. This model includes high-quality programmes in artificial intelligence, international negotiation, leadership and logistics, supported by initiatives to measure participant experience, activate program impact and enhance digital services.

A new digital learning system

marks a milestone in leadership development, offering an integrated interactive platform that combines eight digital programmes with synchronous and asynchronous learning and a digital knowledge library, ensuring blended learning sustainability and long-term impact.

The Alumni Office continues to strengthen leadership networks through initiatives and knowledge-sharing meetings, while the National Initiative for One Government Team empowered 2,590 employees across 19 government entities in its first year, achieving a 95-per cent satisfaction rate and targeting 5,000 participants overall.

RAM also launched the Certified Executive Learning Trainer Training programme, aiming to qualify 25 participants as expert facilitators capable of delivering innovative, efficient learning solutions according to international standards.

The Academy stressed that this annual event reflects a sustainable institutional approach, unifying communications, strengthening media partnerships, and emphasising that true impact is measured by results, not effort alone.

New expansion of Sur Referral Hospital opens in Al Sharqiyah South

SUR: The new expansion of the Sur Referral Hospital in the Wilayat of Sur, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, was inaugurated on Wednesday under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, and in the presence of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health.

The expansion aims to enhance specialised health services and improve the efficiency of medical care provided, contributing to an

increase in the hospital’s total capacity to 206 beds — an addition of 58 beds — which supports efforts to develop the health system and achieve sustainability in therapeutic services.

The project was implemented through a partnership between the Ministry of Health and Al Jisr Foundation as part of supporting community partnerships aimed at contributing to the development of the health sector and enhancing the



quality of its services.

The new expansion includes 58 beds, comprising a dialysis unit with a total capacity of 28 beds and four isolation rooms with a total capacity of 10 beds.

It features an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) with a 30-bed capacity, distributed into an 8-bed paediatric ICU, a 12-bed adult ICU, and a 10-bed cardiac care unit, thereby strengthening the hospital’s ability to provide advanced specialised services with high operational efficiency.

This expansion represents a significant addition to the health services in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate due to the support it provides for vital medical specialities and the increase in capacity, which contributes to improving the level of healthcare. Dr Yahya bin Humaid al Masrouri, Director of Sur Hospital, stated that the Ministry of Health is continuing its efforts to develop health services in accordance with international standards. — ONA

SPOTLIGHT

NIZWA SOUQ COMES ALIVE AFTER THE RAINS

AS THE RAIN WATERS RECEDE, NIZWA SOUQ TRANSFORMS INTO A PEACEFUL STREAM WHERE CHILDREN PLAY AND ELDERS GATHER, CREATING A WELCOMING SPACE FOR ALL

AMAL AL RIYAMI

IN a scene brimming with life, the wadi in the heart of Nizwa Souq continues to stand out as a place where people gather — just as its waters converge — forming a natural space defined by simplicity and connection.

The wadi lies at the meeting point of several valleys descending from the Al Dakhiliyah mountains, including White Valley, Wadi Tanuf and Wadi Al Maidin.

When the rains arrive, these wadis flow, forming a deep channel that runs under the bridge, past the Nizwa Cultural Monument, and in front of the three gates of the market.

While authorities manage the area, people line up to witness the spectacle, a scene worthy of reflection.

As the waters recede, the space transforms into a tranquil, clear stream, creating a welcoming environment for all. Children run along the water, their laughter echoing across the square, while elders sit in quiet circles, sharing stories.

Visitors capture the beauty of the sunset reflecting on the flowing stream, freezing fleeting moments through cameras and phones.

“During the flow, we just stand back and watch, but once it calms down, it becomes one of the best places to sit and enjoy,” said Ahmed al Harthy.

Sami al Hinai adds: “What’s special about Nizwa Souq during rainy days is that you can find a place where everyone gathers, creating scenes worth capturing in photos and videos. It’s hard to leave.”

Fatima al Kindi shared: “This place has a different feel. You feel close to the people even if you don’t know them. You come for the view, but you stay for the feeling. There’s an indescribable comfort here.”

As visitors continue to arrive, Wadi Souq proves itself as more than just a scenic destination — it is a living space where paths cross, stories unfold, and communities connect.

Photos by
**SAMI
AL HINAI**



وزارة الإعلام
Ministry of Information



ELECTRONIC BIDDING ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Information shall be electronically bidding vehicles through on Mazad Oman (www.mazad.om) in accordance with the following statement:

Statement	Place of Inspection	Date and Timing of Inspection	Date of Electronic Bidding
Vehicles	Madinat Al Ilam	Monday 6/4/2026 Tuesday 7/4/2026 Between 8:00 am & 1:00 pm	From Wednesday 8/4/2026 To Thursday 9/4/2026

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■ For further details, you may reach us through info@mazad.om

SHORT TAKES



ROP ARRESTS
22 EXPATS FOR
VIOLATING LAW

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has successfully conducted a targeted operation resulting in the arrest of 22 expats in the wilayats of Al Mudhaibi and Sinaw.

‘The detainees, who are of various African and Asian nationalities, were taken into custody following reports of breaches concerning labour and residency regulations within the Sultanate of Oman,’ a statement from ROP said.

Following the arrests, the relevant authorities confirmed that the individuals were found to be in direct violation of the established Labour Law and Residency Law.

‘Necessary legal proceedings are currently being finalised against them to facilitate the appropriate judicial actions,’ ROP statement said.

NAMA COMPLETES
WATER NETWORK
PROJECT IN RUSTAQ



The project included implementation of a water network using HDPE pipes.



ENG BADR
AL RABAANI

Project Manager

AL RUSTAQ: Nama Water Services has completed the executive works for the water network construction project in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq. This step reflects the company’s continuous commitment to developing the infrastructure of the water sector and

enhancing the sustainability of supplies to keep pace with population growth and urban expansion across the wilayats of Oman.

The networks are currently undergoing quality testing and sterilisation in preparation for commercial operation, which will facilitate the supply of water through the network to beneficiaries in the near future. The project is considered a vital initiative aimed at improving the water distribution system in several areas of the wilayat, including Al Iraqi, Hai Al Sarah, and Al Dahas, in addition to the industrial area. It has significantly contributed to raising network efficiency, establishing new distribution networks and enhancing service reliability for subscribers in both existing and planned residential layouts.

Eng Badr bin Salim al Rabaani, the Project Manager, clarified that the implementation of the project began in September 2023 at a total cost of approximately RO 2.3 million. He pointed out that the project constitutes a qualitative addition to the local infrastructure through its integrated technical and engineering works.

Al Rabaani explained that the project included the implementation of a water network using High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE) pipes of various diameters, with a total length of approximately 61 kilometres.

He added that the project involved executing over 1,315 household connections, successfully extending the service to more than 6,500 beneficiaries. Furthermore, the work included the installation of fire hydrants, isolation and air valves, washouts and pressure monitoring points, ensuring the sustainable operation of the network in accordance with the highest safety and efficiency standards. Al Rabaani indicated that the scope of work also covered the construction of wadi crossings and internal road intersections, alongside the associated works. — ONA

‘TAMKEEN’
FORUM SEEKS
TO EMPOWER
HUMAN
RESOURCES
IN HERITAGE,
TOURISM

MUSCAT: A forum codenamed ‘Tamkeen’ (empowerment) kicked off in the Governorate of Muscat on Wednesday. The forum seeks to empower Omani human resources in the sectors of heritage and tourism. The forum is organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour (MoL) and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

The forum targets managers and personnel operating in the field of hospitality, tour operators and workers in hotel and tourism establishments. It seeks to promote effective communication between target sectors and related sectors,



The forum targets managers and personnel operating in the field of hospitality. — ONA

in addition to human resources departments and training departments.

The forum contributes to the realisation of strategic management in a bid to identify training

needs and promote employees’ cooperation in implementing development programmes. It reflects the ongoing cooperation between the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism towards the regulation of the labour market and the generation of jobs for Omani human resources. It also seeks to achieve a localisation plan in the sectors of heritage and tourism.

Tamkeen Forum will be organised in the governorates of Dhofar, Al Wusta, Al Dakhiliyah, Musandam, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South, Al Buraimi and Al Dhahirah. — ONA

‘Himma’ initiative to boost
consumer awareness

AMAL AL RIYAMI
ADAM, APRIL 1

THE Consumer Protection Department in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate launched the ‘Himma (Protection) Awareness and Safety Caravan’ on Tuesday, aiming to strengthen consumer awareness and foster a safe, sustainable commercial environment. The initiative, held in cooperation with the Wali of Adam’s Office and several government entities, began its journey in the Wilayat of Adam under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Ali bin Said Zaabanoot, Wali of Adam, and will continue across other wilayats in coordination with local authorities.

Targeting a broad segment of society — including suppliers, traders, government employees, students, sports clubs, associations, and volunteer groups — the caravan promotes responsible consumer practices and enhances preventive culture in both traditional and online markets. Wali of Adam highlighted the importance of the initiative: “Launching the caravan represents a key step in raising community awareness on consumer protection, especially with the rapid growth of e-commerce. These efforts educate individuals on their rights and responsibilities and support authorities in curbing improper

‘Himma Awareness and Safety Caravan’ aims to strengthen consumer knowledge, promote community partnerships



The caravan was held under the auspices of the Wali of Adam.

practices.” He noted that starting the caravan in Adam reflects a commitment to directly engage with society and foster trust-based commercial practices, supporting market stability and sustainable economic development.

The event featured an awareness seminar, including a speech by Ali bin Salim bin Marhoon al Hadhrami, Director of the Consumer Protection Department in Al Dakhiliyah, who shared the department’s achievements and ongoing projects. Specialised presentations covered safe online shopping by Radhya bint Abdullah al Riyami, cyber extortion risks by First Lieutenant Othman

bin Abdullah al Maamari of the Royal Oman Police and food safety standards by Ahlam bint Rashid al Maamari from the Municipality of Adam. Exhibition booths showcased services from participating entities and introduced the Himma platform, guiding consumers to make informed purchases and comply with market regulations.

Through these activities, the ‘Himma Awareness and Safety Caravan’ aims to strengthen consumer knowledge, promote community partnerships, and create a safer, more sustainable commercial environment for both consumers and businesses.

Safeguarding identity in an era of transformation

MUSCAT: Omani national identity remains a cornerstone of the nation, deeply rooted in the Sultanate of Oman’s rich history, religion, language and cultural heritage.

These enduring values serve as a powerful form of ‘soft power,’ helping Omani society maintain stability and coherence amid rapid global changes, technological advancement and the evolving digital landscape. The identity of Omanis not only strengthens social cohesion but also enhances the country’s standing as a model of moderation, balance, and ethical leadership internationally.

Dr Rajab bin Ali al Awaisi, an expert in social and educational studies at the State Council, observed that Omani society has navigated diverse global influences while preserving a sense of stability and insight.

According to him, the Omani character is defined by credibility, tolerance and adaptability, enabling citizens to embrace change professionally without compromising their cultural essence.



Omani youth have mastered the art of balancing global openness with strong cultural roots.

Munther bin Abdullah al Saifi, a researcher at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA), emphasised that adherence to these core values drives development, maintains social harmony, and fosters a sense of belonging.

He highlighted the importance of balancing digital engagement with ethical principles, warning against superficial pursuits in the online space, and urging youth

to uphold authentic values in every sphere of life.

Ahmed bin Obaid al Khaldi, a specialist in technological innovation, noted that Omani youth have mastered the art of balancing global openness with strong cultural roots. Identity, he stressed, is not a barrier but a foundation that gives confidence to engage globally while preserving the nation’s ethical model.

This balance allows Omanis

to contribute meaningfully to international platforms without losing sight of their heritage.

Dr Hanan bint Mahmoud Ahmed, a national identity and culture expert, added that the Omani identity is expressed through peace, tolerance, and constructive participation. She emphasised that families and institutions play a critical role in teaching digital ethics and cultural awareness, ensuring young Omanis navigate the modern world responsibly while maintaining pride in their heritage.

Employing cultural vocabulary in digital media, she explained, reinforces Oman’s civilisation as a source of soft power, which must be protected and passed on to future generations.

In conclusion, Oman’s identity thrives when centuries-old traditions meet modern openness. This integration gives Omanis a competitive edge, resilience and global presence while safeguarding the authenticity, wisdom and values that have long distinguished the nation. – ONA

WAR

1

UK TO HOST
HORMUZ MEET

Britain will this week host a meeting of about 35 countries to discuss how to reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

2

IRAN STEEL HIT

US-Israeli strikes have hit steel plants in central and southwest Iran, causing damage to production units.

3

STRIKES NEAR
EX-US EMBASSY

Strikes hit an area near the former US embassy in Tehran, damaging some of the building's walls.

4

AUSTRALIA WARNS
TOUGH MONTHS

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese warned the months ahead "may not be easy" because of the Middle East war.

5

KUWAIT BANK
SHUTS DOORS

A major Kuwaiti bank said it will close its headquarters for two days starting on Wednesday, as Iran carries out daily strikes.

6

CRUDE DROPS,
EUROPE STOCKS RISE

Oil prices tumbled and European stocks rose after US President Donald Trump said the war with Iran could end within weeks.

7

YEMENIS CLAIM
ISRAEL ATTACK

Yemen's Ansar Allah claimed a missile attack targeting Israel that they said was launched jointly with Hezbollah.

8

14 ISRAELIS
WOUNDED

Israel's emergency medical service said 14 people, including an 11-year old girl, were wounded by a missile attack.

9

BANGLADESHI
KILLED IN UAE

A Bangladeshi national was killed by falling shrapnel after a drone interception in the United Arab Emirates.

10

TEHRAN HUGE
EXPLOSIONS

Several huge explosions in the west of the Iranian capital Tehran on Wednesday afternoon.

UK'S
STARMER
CALLS FOR
CLOSER
EUROPE
TIES

LONDON: Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on Wednesday that the global instability caused by the Iran war means Britain should pivot to focusing on closer economic and defence ties with Europe, following repeated criticism from US President Donald Trump. Starmer said building stronger relations with Europe would be at the centre of a summit with the European Union in the summer, as he warned the consequences of the Iran war would last for a generation. "It is increasingly clear that as the world continues down this volatile path, our



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

long-term national interest requires closer partnership with our allies in Europe," Starmer told reporters at a press conference in Downing Street. Trump has repeatedly insulted Starmer, calling him cowardly because of his unwillingness to join the US war on Iran, saying he was "No Winston Churchill" and describing Britain's aircraft carriers as "toys". In a sign that British foreign policy was shifting away from the United States, traditionally its closest ally, Starmer said he saw his country's future being more aligned with Europe.

Starmer initially denied a request from the US to attack Iran from two British bases, but later agreed to allow what he calls defensive missions aimed at protecting residents of the region, including British citizens. Asked about Trump's criticism, Starmer said he would not give in to "pressure" from Trump to be dragged into the war. Starmer instead said the government was focused on deepening its relationship with Europe and it was necessary to undo some of the "deep damage" done by Brexit. — Reuters

Israeli strikes on Lebanon
capital area kill 7

BEIRUT: Lebanon's health ministry said on Wednesday that Israeli strikes on Beirut's southern suburbs and a nearby town killed at least seven people, as Israel's military said it had targeted senior Hezbollah members. The health ministry said an Israeli raid early on Wednesday in the Jnah area, which borders Hezbollah's stronghold in the southern suburbs of Beirut, killed at least five people and wounded 21 others.

A Lebanese security source said four cars parked on a street were targeted. A correspondent at the scene shortly after the attack saw the remains of a car and firefighters battling a blaze in the dark of night. The sound of several large explosions had been heard across the city, and a column of smoke was seen

rising from the Jnah area, which is home to apartment buildings, cafes and shops.

In the morning, correspondents saw a blackened, debris-strewn street with passersby coming to look. The state-run National News Agency (NNA) said the strike originated from a warship. A separate strike that hit a vehicle in Khaldeh, just south of the capital, late on Tuesday killed two people and wounded three, the health ministry said. A correspondent there saw a charred vehicle and paramedics taking a wounded person away on a stretcher. Israel's military said it had struck a "senior Hezbollah commander" and another member of the group in two separate strikes "in the Beirut area", without naming the targets or exact locations. — AFP



A passenger sits at the back of an overcrowded Jeepney, in Quezon City, Philippines. — Reuters

Philippines seeks passage
for oil in Iran meeting

MANILA: The Philippines has sought safe passage for desperately needed oil shipments in a meeting with Iran, a presidential spokeswoman said, as the import-dependent archipelago jockeys with other regional countries for fuel. President Ferdinand Marcos declared a state of national energy emergency last week, later saying that "nothing was off the table" as the country of 116 million tried to meet its need for fuel.

On Wednesday, Foreign Secretary Theresa Lazaro said she had explored "key avenues for cooperation" in a meeting with Iranian ambassador Yousef Esmaeilzadeh that included the Philippines' energy secretary. "Building on the momentum of our Political Consultations last November 2025, we are committed to deepening our cooperation across all fronts, particularly energy cooperation," she said in a post on social media platform X.

Presidential spokeswoman Claire Castro later told reporters that Lazaro had sought safe passage through the strait for oil shipments bound for the Philippines. "Secretary Lazaro requested that Iran formally designate (the Philippines) as a 'non-hostile country' and ensure safe passage for PH-flagged vessels and oil shipments," Castro told reporters via messaging app. "This is vital for the protection of our seafarers and our energy supply," She added the Iranian ambassador had been "awaiting our outreach and reaffirmed their strong willingness to assist the Philippines with our specific requests". — AFP

Qatar says missile struck
tanker in its waters

DOHA: Qatar said on Wednesday that a tanker leased to its state-owned energy company was struck by an Iranian missile in the Gulf country's territorial waters. "Qatar was targeted... by three cruise missiles launched from Iran," the Gulf state's defence ministry said in a statement. Qatar's military "intercepted two of the cruise missiles, while the third missile struck an oil tanker leased to QatarEnergy in Qatar's territorial waters," it said.

"Coordination was established with relevant authorities to evacuate the tanker, which had 21 crew members on board, without any human casualties," the defence ministry added. QatarEnergy said in a

statement the Aqua 1, a fuel oil tanker, had been "the subject of a missile attack in the northern territorial waters of the State of Qatar in the early morning hours of Wednesday". It confirmed no crew members had been injured and there was "no impact on the environment as a result of this incident". According to the British marine security agency UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO), the incident occurred 17 nautical miles north of Doha. The agency later said "the vessel was struck by two projectiles" north of Ras Laffan, the world's largest liquefied natural gas (LNG) hub. "One projectile caused a fire, which was extinguished, and another "remains unexploded within the vessel's engine room", UKMTO said. — AFP



TEHRAN was rocked by a fresh wave of explosions on Wednesday, as US President Donald Trump said the war with Iran could be over in two or three weeks. The conflict began when the United States and Israel launched air strikes across Iran that killed supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, quickly mushrooming into a regional war that has threatened to torpedo the global economy. Trump, whose statements on the war have swung from combative to conciliatory, said late on Tuesday that the fighting could be over in "two weeks, maybe three". The White House said he would give "an important update on Iran" to the nation.

President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that Iran has asked for a ceasefire but that the United States would only consider this once the Strait of Hormuz is clear for shipping. Iran's president "has just asked the United States of America for a CEASEFIRE!" Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform. "We will consider when Hormuz Strait is open, free, and clear. Until then, we are blasting Iran into oblivion or, as they say, back to the Stone Ages!!!" There was no independent confirmation of Trump's claim to the ceasefire request.

Journalist said strikes hit near the former US embassy — which now a museum known as the "Den of Spies" and has become a symbol of the decades-long animosity between Tehran and Washington. The Israeli military confirmed it had carried out strikes on the capital on Wednesday. Meanwhile, emergency services said an Iranian missile attack wounded 14 people including an 11-year-old girl. Israel also said its air defences had responded to a missile fired from Yemen — the third attack by the Ansar Allah group since they entered the war over the weekend.

WAR COST
Thousands of people have been killed throughout the region during the conflict, which has displaced millions more from their homes. In Lebanon, seven people were killed

in strikes around south Beirut, the health ministry said on Wednesday, while the Israeli military said it had struck a senior Hezbollah commander. "Nobody knows what's happening," resident Hassan Jalwan said, adding that "displaced people have been sleeping in the open" in the area. Lebanon was drawn into the war on March 2 when Tehran-backed militant group Hezbollah launched attacks on Israel. Israel responded with broad strikes and a ground offensive that the Lebanese health ministry says has left more than 1,200 dead.

The Gulf countries have also been pulled into the war, with Iran carrying out retaliatory attacks on nations it says have been launchpads for strikes. A Bangladeshi national was killed on Wednesday by falling shrapnel from an intercepted drone in the United Arab Emirates.

Meanwhile strikes in Kuwait caused a large fire in fuel tanks at its international airport, Bahrain's interior ministry said a fire broke out at a business facility, and Saudi Arabia said several drones were intercepted. Meanwhile a drone strike caused a massive fire at the storage facilities of an engine oil firm in Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan. "Everyday, we hear the sound of drones," Waad Abdulrazaq, a 31-year-old truck driver, said near Iraq's Erbil international airport. "We hear them in the morning, and we hear them at night. We can no longer sleep or live in peace."

ECONOMIC FALLOUT
Iran has maintained a chokehold on the vital Strait of Hormuz, through which one-fifth of global oil normally passes, sending shockwaves through global energy markets. Average US gasoline prices topped \$4 a gallon for the first time in four years this week, while European inflation spiked and governments around the world started to unveil support measures. "We're a small outfit," driver Nicolas Barthes said at a protest against soaring fuel prices in the French city of Toulouse. "The additional diesel cost for me this month is EUR15,000, and we're not managing to pass all of that on." — AFP



People hold portraits of Iran's slain supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (R) and Alireza Tangsiri (L), commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' navy during his funeral, at Enghelab Square in Tehran. — AFP

‘No negotiations’ over US plan, says Iran FM

TEHRAN: Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said there were no negotiations with the United States and that Tehran had not responded to a reported 15-point proposal from Washington to end the war. "We receive messages from the American side, some direct and some through our friends in the region, and whenever necessary we respond to these messages," Araghchi said in an interview with Al Jazeera aired on Wednesday and dubbed into Arabic from Persian. "There are no grounds for negotiations," he said, adding however that some messages had been exchanged directly with US special envoy Steve Witkoff.

Iran has been at war with the United States and Israel since February 28, when strikes killed the country's supreme leader and triggered a conflict that has spread across the region. Diplomatic efforts involving Turkiye, Egypt and Pakistan have recently been launched to try to end the war.

Last week, two senior Pakistani officials said Islamabad had conveyed to Iran a 15-point plan containing US proposals.

Iranian media had reported that Tehran offered a five-point counter-proposal calling for an end to what



We receive messages from the American side, some direct and some through our friends in the region, and whenever necessary we respond to these messages. There are no grounds for negotiations.

ABBAS
ARAGHCHI



People attend a funeral ceremony for the Revolutionary Guards Navy Commander Alireza Tangsiri, in Tehran. — Reuters

it described as "aggression" and for guarantees that neither the United States nor Israel would resume hostilities. Araghchi, however, said Tehran "has not offered anything in response" to the US plan and that reported Iranian responses were "merely guesses" from a media outlet.

The war broke out in the middle of negotiations between Iran and the United States over Tehran's nuclear

programme. The conflict echoes a 12-day war in June last year, when Israel launched strikes days before a planned round of talks between Tehran and Washington. The United States later joined those attacks, targeting Iranian nuclear facilities. Araghchi said there was "zero" trust in the United States and that Iran would not accept a ceasefire, instead calling for a "complete end to the war" and reparations. — AFP

Large fire as attack targets
Kuwait airport

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwait's civil aviation authority said that the Gulf state's international airport had come under an Iranian drone attack that led to "a large fire" at fuel tanks. "Kuwait International Airport has been subjected to blatant attacks by drones launched by Iran and the armed factions it supports," the official Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) quoted the spokesman of the General Directorate of Civil Aviation as saying. The spokesman, Abdullah Al Rajhi, said "fuel storage tanks... were targeted, resulting in a large fire at the site", reporting no casualties.

Iran has fired missiles and drones at Israel and US allies in the Gulf since the start of the war, which began with US-Israeli strikes against the Islamic republic on February 28. Elsewhere in the Gulf on Wednesday, Bahrain's interior ministry said a fire broke out at a business facility "as a result of the Iranian aggression". Saudi Arabia's defence ministry said several drones were "intercepted and destroyed".

On Tuesday, KUNA said



Smoke rises from an area of Kuwait's international airport after a reported drone strike. — AFP

an Iranian attack sparked a fire on a Kuwaiti oil tanker at Dubai Port, causing no injuries. The oil-rich Gulf has borne the brunt of Iran's attacks in response to the US-Israeli strikes that sparked the war. Tehran has threatened to target vital infrastructure across the Gulf, including energy sites. — AFP

WAR

OPINION

The work of staying and counting what is alive



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The writer is environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development

I CHOSE to run again for the board of the Environment Society of Oman this week. The election was held in the room, with live polls and the votes appearing on a screen at the front. Each number arrived with the strange weight of someone deciding that this work, specifically, is worth continuing. I had asked myself whether I should stand again. The answer came quickly. Even now, with the region under strain, this is where I want to be. The choice can look almost absurd if held at the wrong angle. The region is at war. Water infrastructure has come under attack in neighbouring countries. The Strait has narrowed into uncertainty. Oil prices are moving with the kind of force that can reorder the assumptions beneath long-term planning. A conservation board can seem, by comparison, like the gentlest corner of public life. Popular imagination still tends to place environmental work in peacetime, as though reef health, nesting seasons, and habitat loss belong to a calmer order of concern, something to be resumed once the serious business of security, diplomacy, and trade has been settled. I have spent much of my professional life inside that assumption, working within it and against it. Recent weeks have stripped

it of whatever credibility it once had. War reveals the environment with a harshness advocacy rarely can. A struck desalination plant teaches the public in hours what water professionals have spent years trying to explain. Manufactured water is a survival infrastructure. bound to energy systems, vulnerable to disruption, and far more fragile than most people ever need to think about in ordinary times. Flooded roads and closed schools reveal something similar. Adaptation leaves the language of strategy documents very quickly when parents begin asking whether distance learning needs to become part of normal life. Weather stops feeling episodic once family routines start reorganising around it. One truth has become harder to ignore. The environment is where all of this is playing out. Water, heat, infrastructure, weather, and human survival belong to the same system, even when institutions divide them into separate portfolios and separate conversations. Distinctions between natural disaster, infrastructure vulnerability, military strategy, and climate science may help organise our work, but do not change the reality of how tightly these forces are bound together. Society does what environmental

To keep watching, recording and returning is its own kind of discipline. It is a refusal to let rupture define the full terms of our attention.

organisations have always done. They monitor, convene, document, advocate and return to the same places over time in order to notice change before it becomes lost. Crisis moves fast. Institutional work does not. Slowness can feel badly matched to the present moment, though some responsibilities cannot be rushed without losing their meaning. The reef off Daymaniyat Islands does not pause for war. Turtles will return on schedule. Mangroves will still need measuring next season. Someone has to remain in the room deciding that these things still matter. Work like this is often mistaken for background work, as though it sits behind the real action of a region under pressure. I have come to think the opposite. To keep watching, recording and returning is its own kind of discipline. It is a refusal to let rupture define the full terms of our attention. It is a way of holding the line between damage and disappearance, between what is changing and what can still be protected, between the speed of events and the longer life of a place. I ran again because I believe that kind of fidelity matters. The moment we stop counting what is alive, we concede something we may never recover.

Supreme Court hears citizenship case — with Trump in audience

CHRIS LEFKOW

The US Supreme Court heard a politically explosive case on Wednesday over Donald Trump’s effort to end birthright citizenship — with the Republican president sitting in the audience. Trump’s decision is believed to be unprecedented for a sitting president. The birthright case is at the heart of Trump’s attempts to expand his presidential powers and to restrict immigration. Trump signed an executive order on his return to the White House decreeing that children born to parents in the United States illegally or on temporary visas would not automatically become US citizens. Lower courts blocked the move as unconstitutional, ruling that under the Citizenship Clause of the 14th Amendment nearly everyone born on US soil is an American citizen. Trump has spent the first year of his second term asserting extraordinary executive powers, while attempting to sideline Congress and routinely pressuring the courts. Just a week ago, he attacked two of the Supreme Court justices whom he had appointed during his first term because they voted against his tariff policies in another major case. The Republican president also called judges who did not side with him “rogue” and “criminal.” Wednesday’s Supreme Court case tests who gets to be a citizen in a country built on immigration. The constitution says those born on US soil are automatically Americans. The Trump administration argues that the 14th Amendment, passed in the wake of the 1861-1865 Civil War, addresses the rights to citizenship of former slaves and not the children of undocumented migrants or temporary visitors. Trump’s executive order is premised on the notion that anyone in the United States illegally, or on a visa, is not “subject to the jurisdiction” of the country and therefore excluded from automatic citizenship. Steven Schwinn, a law professor at the University of Illinois Chicago, said the court is likely to reject the challenge to birthright citizenship. “This is a court that has looked to history and tradition as a significant guide in understanding the Constitution,” Schwinn said. Conservatives have a 6-3 supermajority on the high court and three of the justices were appointed by Trump. If the Supreme Court does reject ending birthright citizenship, it would be the second major loss for Trump this term — the justices struck down most of his global tariffs in February. Trump called birthright citizenship one of the “great scams of our time” on Tuesday, a day after he took to Truth Social to denounce “dumb judges and justices.” — AFP

Trump has a way out of the war with Iran

IF IT wasn’t clear before, it is undeniable now. President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel started a war with Iran assuming that they would trigger quick and easy regime change. They vastly underestimated the staying power of Iran’s surviving leadership and its military capacity not only to inflict damage on Israel and America’s Arab allies but also to close off the most important oil and gas shipping lane in the world. This is imposing serious harm on the global economy, including the U.S. stock market, and Trump has no clue how to get out of the mess that he has created by starting a war without thinking through the implications. It is actually embarrassing to watch the American president flip-flopping around, from telling us that the surviving Iranian leaders have pretty much agreed to his every demand, that the war is close to being over and Trump won, to admitting that he has no idea how to get the Strait of Hormuz shipping lane out of Iran’s grip. If America’s Western allies, whom Trump never consulted before the war, won’t send their armies and navies to do the job for Trump, then it’s too bad for them, he says: We have all the oil we need. That is, unless Trump decides to “obliterate” — his favourite word — Iran’s industrial base and desalination plants until Iran says uncle. Trump is a man-child playing with matches — the world’s most powerful military — in a gas-filled room. What to do? Trump should set aside his 15-point peace plan — which would be ridiculously complicated to implement — and reduce it to two points: Iran gives up its more than 950 pounds of nearly bomb-grade highly enriched uranium, and in return the United States gives up on regime change.



THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

The writer is reporter, author and NYT columnist

America should extend assurances that we will end the war, leave the regime in place, stop destroying Iran’s infrastructure and even offer some relief from oil sanctions, if Iran turns over all its near weapons-grade fissile material and halts all hostilities from its side.

Both sides would then agree to end all hostilities. “We have to realise that what the Iranian regime wants most is to stay in power, and what the United States and Israel want most is for Iran not to have a bomb,” said John Arquilla, a former professor of defence analysis at the Naval Postgraduate School and the author of the forthcoming book “The Troubled American Way of War.” “Both sides can get what they want most if they are ready to give up what they want second most.” For America and Israel, second prize after eliminating Iran’s highly enriched uranium would be regime change. That doesn’t appear to be in the offing anymore, and Trump has begun laying the groundwork for abandoning that objective. He told reporters on Sunday that given how the United States and Israel have now killed several dozen of Iran’s senior leaders, “it truly is regime change.” Iran’s leaders were “a whole different group of people,” who he said have “been very reasonable.” Of course, this is ludicrous and a cover for the fact that the United States and Israel vastly overestimated their ability to topple Iran’s regime using air power alone. Yes, a million problems would remain unresolved, but that’s what happens when you try to use force without any long-term planning to solve a wicked problem. Broadly speaking, a wicked problem is defined as a problem that resists quick fixes or permanent solutions. It involves numerous interdependent variables. Outcomes are never final, just better or worse, or good enough. Every wicked problem is essentially one of a kind, meaning there is no perfect, preexisting template for solving one. And solutions often have irreversible consequences, meaning that you cannot easily undo a decision. That is about the best definition of

the Iran problem that I can think of. While he may have never spelled it out in so many words, if you look at President Barack Obama’s actions vis-à-vis Iran, he clearly understood that it was a wicked problem and therefore the wisest course of action was to focus on the core American interest, try to secure that and learn to live with the other features of the problem, mitigating them as best as possible. That was the logic of Obama’s 2015 deal with Iran, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which put internationally verifiable limits on the country’s uranium enrichment programme, and his decision to live with its growing ballistic missile arsenal and its cultivation of proxy militias in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Iraq — which did not threaten America. Obama’s Iran deal worked as designed. When Obama left office, the curbs on Iran’s nuclear enrichment capacities — verified by international inspectors — meant that Iran, if it broke out of the deal, would require at least a year to produce enough fissile material for a nuclear warhead, providing plenty of time for the world to react. It’s why we need to keep this as simple as possible. America should extend assurances that we will end the war, leave the regime in place, stop destroying Iran’s infrastructure and even offer some relief from oil sanctions, if Iran turns over all its near weapons-grade fissile material and halts all hostilities from its side. Everything else gets postponed for another day. (Meanwhile, a much-weakened Iranian regime would have to be more responsive to its people.) Trump will be a very lucky man if the surviving leaders of the Iranian regime say yes. It’s a measure of Trump’s incompetence that they now hold his fate in their hands. — The New York Times

April fuels’ joke and the irony of warfare



SONIA AMBROSIO

The writer is a journalist, academic and researcher in media studies

WHO needs a fool’s day when people all over the world are constantly fooled? It is a reality shaped by ongoing deceptions. Still, in the spirit of playful psychological warfare, imagine if we were to declare the US-Israel-Iran war over.

April Fool’s Day celebrates joy and laughter. We could use some light-hearted fun. I can foresee memes celebrating this April 1, marking an epic occasion stemming from Operation Epic Fury.

This conflict has produced layers of irony in contemporary geopolitics. Israel is conducting military actions in Gaza and Lebanon and against Iran with full reliance on US protection, while simultaneously undermining the image of American leadership and breaking the international order that US claims to defend.

While the war aims to weaken Iran, it is actually fracturing the West’s own sanctions front and exposing a breakdown as European states are forced to manage the economic fallout of a war they did not ask for.

Grown-up men with unchecked power have been playing with people’s lives. Like an amateur football match between friends, the goalposts can be adjusted to accommodate a partnership. In the meantime, a carpet of missiles sweeps through the sky.

While the US seeks to prevent a nuclear Iran, the ongoing conflict is leading to

discussions about Israel’s potential use of nuclear weapons against Iran. Starlink, Elon Musk’s private service, has become an arbiter of foreign policy from Ukraine to Iran, illustrating how critical infrastructure has moved from state control to private hands.

But April Fool’s Day doesn’t stop in the Middle East. The pranksters are tormenting the people of Cuba with an oil blockade. Terrorism or democracy? Cubans are experiencing psychological distress, and there is nothing humorous about their situation.

Colombia, Mexico, and Brazil are on the list for theatrical action. Ongoing economic and political collapses are leading to mass migration and poverty within nations such as Haiti. Venezuela is experiencing a political scenario characterised by oil exports managed by foreign agents, with neither a change in regime nor any dismantling of the drug trafficking infrastructure occurring.

Irony lies in our social and technological development. Society invests in cars for freedom, yet spends hours sitting in traffic while complaining about the lack of mobility. We enjoy connectivity but live in isolation; while claiming to value knowledge, we often fall prey to disinformation. People present a happy image on social media, while in reality, they are struggling to make ends meet.

The digital landscape is saturated with

April Fool’s Day doesn’t stop in the Middle East. The pranksters are tormenting the people of Cuba with an oil blockade. Terrorism or democracy? Cubans are experiencing psychological distress, and there is nothing humorous about their situation

AI-generated misinformation, satire, and propaganda. A battleground of memes exists, with both sides producing viral war footage that sometimes resembles entertainment from the ongoing conflict. Viral AI-generated content is the ultimate misinformation enterprise. The conflict is a serious event resulting in fatalities, and online pranks or memes often constitute propaganda or disinformation during wartime.

Ongoing tragedies possess a grimness, often absurd or ironic, that makes them deeply sad. With so much ridicule in our lives, these contradictions serve as a reason to consider every day as a fool’s day, 364 days a year.

People are in crisis. Countries are in crisis. The world is in crisis! It’s a never-ending situation. It is easy to be a genius when addressing the problems of others, yet we remain foolish when confronted with our own issues.

These ironies create a sense that reality itself has become a jester mirroring the chaos celebrated on Fool’s Day, where the line between wisdom and folly becomes blurred. In the era of fake news, it’s often hard on a normal day to work out when we’re being tricked into believing something that isn’t true, but on April Fool’s Day, we need to be even more alert.

Don’t believe everything you read. Except this...

WAR DRIVES UP COSTS FOR BEAUTY INDUSTRY

ELISA ANZOLIN

The Iran war is seeping into the cosmetics supply chain, pushing up the cost of everything from plastic jars and lipstick tubes to transport, and reminding the beauty industry that even a tub of face cream depends on fragile global trade routes.

Cost pressures were a recurring theme last week at one of the sector’s largest trade fairs in the northern Italian city of Bologna, as executives watched Iran’s blockade of the vital Strait of Hormuz shipping route approach a fifth week.

The Cosmoprof fair drew 3,100 exhibitors from 68 countries and 255,000 visitors from 150 nations, ranging from companies seeking packaging solutions to retailers scouting new products.

Cosmetics companies are primarily worried about higher raw material and transport costs due to rising oil prices and disrupted shipping, five industry executives said.

“We are beginning to see cost increases driven by energy price inflation, compounded by delivery delays,” said Simone Dominici, CEO of Italian cosmetics group Kiko, who estimates additional logistics-related costs of about 1.5 million euros (\$1.7 million) for the group over the year. Kiko, which sells lipsticks starting at 5 euros and mascaras from 7.5 euros, operates more than 1,000 stores worldwide.

“With so many containers stuck in the Middle East, there is a tighter container availability... and goods are not being moved efficiently”, Dominici said, adding that higher prices for some chemical components and packaging - much of it sourced from the Far East - would add further pressure.

As the Iran crisis upends supply chains, Yonwoo, a container maker for L’Oreal and K-beauty firms, said it was scrambling to secure stocks of plastic resin to manufacture the pots used for skincare and cosmetics.

Beyond higher costs, the industry could also face softer demand from consumers whose purchasing power is being eroded by inflation, Dominici said. “It’s the perfect storm,” he warned.

Milan-listed Intercos and privately owned Ancorotti Group, among Italy’s largest contract manufacturers in the sector, said they had not yet faced major supply shortages but cited higher logistics costs, longer delivery times and rising raw material prices as challenges.

“Lead times have lengthened as routes have become longer and ports more congested. What once took eight weeks now can take 12 to 14 weeks”, said Ancorotti Chief Executive Roberto Bottino.

Some clients have turned to rail transport to reach Asia, Bottino added.

Ancorotti Group makes around 220 million euros in revenues per year from selling products to beauty brands worldwide.

Bottino said it was difficult to imagine supply-chain cost increases not ultimately being passed downstream. — Reuters

Europe’s energy trap in the Iran war

THE US-Israeli war on Iran has exposed more than Europe’s diplomatic divisions. It has revealed a deeper structural truth: even when Europe refuses to own Washington’s war, it remains bound to its consequences by energy dependence, economic exposure, and limited strategic room for manoeuvre.

Europe’s response to the US-Israeli war on Iran has appeared divided, hesitant, and at times contradictory. Yet the deeper problem is not simply diplomatic disunity. It is a structural dependence. This conflict is exposing what may be called a double curse of oil: for Europe, dependence on imported hydrocarbons limits real strategic autonomy; for Gulf producers, dependence on hydrocarbon revenues and export routes turns wealth into vulnerability when access is threatened.

Oil itself is not the curse. It remains indispensable to transport, industry, petrochemicals, shipping, aviation, agriculture and much of the material basis of economic growth. The problem begins when an economy becomes so dependent on uninterrupted hydrocarbon flows that its political room for manoeuvre narrows under stress. Europe still operates within that constraint.

Eurostat reported last week that the EU imported €336.7 billion worth of energy products in 2025, amounting to 723.3 million tonnes. That is not a picture of post-oil independence. It is a picture of managed dependence.

This helps explain why Europe’s language on the war has been so carefully calibrated. At the EU level, the official line has stressed maximum restraint, civilian protection, respect for international law, and concern over escalation in the Gulf. But Reuters reported from the outset that this common position was, in reality, a compromise formula reflecting genuine disagreement within Europe over the US-Israeli strikes, the legal questions involved, and the limits of solidarity with Washington.



AHMED AL MUKHAINI

The author is a policy analyst

Europe’s public unity has therefore masked private divergence.

Spain has been among the boldest critics. Reuters reported that Pedro Sánchez argued global citizens should not pay the price of this war and that Madrid steadily hardened its line, culminating in Spain’s closure of its airspace to US military aircraft involved in the campaign against Iran. Germany has taken a different but still important position. Chancellor Friedrich Merz, hardly a natural anti-American dissenter, has said plainly that Germany would not participate in the war, and Reuters later reported that he also voiced doubts about its aims. Britain, by contrast, has tried to preserve alliance discipline without becoming a full military partner in the conflict. These are not identical positions, but they reveal a common instinct: distance from co-ownership, without a full break from Washington.

That caution is rooted not only in diplomatic calculation, but in material exposure. Europe is not the party most directly exposed to the Strait of Hormuz in volumetric terms. The International Energy Agency says that in 2025, nearly 20 million barrels per day of oil moved through the Strait, but only around 600,000 barrels per day of the region’s crude flows, roughly 4 per cent, were routed into Europe. Asia is far more directly exposed in oil terms.

Yet Europe remains highly vulnerable through prices, liquefied natural gas, refined products, insurance costs, and wider industrial confidence. The IEA also notes that just over 10 per cent of LNG passing through Hormuz goes to Europe. That is enough to make the continent economically sensitive even when it is not the main physical destination of Gulf oil.

That sensitivity is no longer abstract. Reuters reported this week that the EU has warned member states to prepare for prolonged disruption to energy markets due to the war. The same report says Europe’s crude oil and natural gas supplies have not been directly

affected by the closure of Hormuz, but refined petroleum products, especially jet fuel and diesel, are more vulnerable.

Earlier reporting also showed European officials already grappling with a sharp rise in gas prices and broader inflationary pressure as the war spread through energy markets. Europe may not be the battlefield, but it is well within the zone of economic consequence.

This is where the other half of the double curse appears. For Gulf producers, oil has long been a source of revenue, state capacity, strategic weight, and social spending. But heavy reliance on hydrocarbon exports and maritime routes can also become a trap. A producing state may possess energy wealth and still find itself constrained if shipping lanes are threatened, export volumes disrupted, or investor confidence shaken.

On one side of the system sit consumers who need steady access to imported energy. On the other sit producers who need steady access to markets and routes. War in the corridor between them reveals how quickly strength can turn into captivity. That is not a moral failing of oil. It is a structural consequence of overdependence.

Europe’s posture, then, should not be misread as mere weakness. It is better understood as dependency management under geopolitical pressure. Europe cannot fully endorse a war it did not design and does not control. It also cannot easily detach itself from the economic consequences of that war. Its largest powers are therefore trying to maintain alliance relations with Washington while refusing co-ownership of the campaign itself. This is a narrower and more revealing reality than either “European solidarity” or “European rebellion”. Europe is not breaking with America. It is trying to avoid being consumed by American choices.

The larger lesson is sobering. Europe’s strategic vocabulary often suggests autonomy, transition and resilience.

SPORTS

STATEMENT VICTORY



England's Elliot Anderson in action with Japan's Kaoru Mitoma. — Reuters

JAPAN BEAT ENGLAND FOR HISTORIC WIN AT WEMBLEY FRIENDLY

TOKYO: Coach Hajime Moriyasu cautioned it was only a friendly, but Japan's slice of history with a statement 1-0 win over England at Wembley shows they could go deep at the World Cup.

Japan strolled through Asian qualifying to become the first team to seal their place at the finals in North America and beat Brazil 3-2 in a friendly at home in October.

On Tuesday, they faced England, who like Brazil are among the favourites to win the showpiece this summer, and were full value for their victory.

Kaoru Mitoma's composed finish in the first half at Wembley condemned England to their first defeat by Asian nation.

Moriyasu has said that Japan want to win the 2026 World Cup, and on this evidence that does not seem quite so outlandish.

But Moriyasu struck a note of caution, especially with Thomas Tuchel's England missing the influential trio Harry Kane, Declan Rice and Bukayo Saka. "Coming to the World Cup, I know it will be a totally different team for England," said the coach, whose side beat Scotland 1-0 on Saturday in Glasgow.

"Also, for us, this game at the end of the day is just a friendly game, so we must keep that in mind as well."

Japan, Asia's highest-ranked side at 18 in the world, are in a testing group with the Netherlands, Sweden and Tunisia this summer.

But they should have more than enough to make it through, as they attempt to go beyond the World Cup last 16 for the first time.

At Qatar 2022, Japan beat Spain and Germany in the group phase, before losing on penalties to Croatia in the knockout rounds.

Following the England victory, Moriyasu again said that winning the World Cup was the goal.

Moriyasu has his side finely tuned and they know exactly what to expect from him, having been in charge since 2018. "I'm confident that we can win no matter who we face," he said. — AFP

Sohar, Al Nahda power into Jetour Cup final

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 1

SOHAR and Al Nahda booked their places in the final of the 2025-26 Jetour Cup after coming through two dramatic semifinal ties, setting up a title showdown next week.

At Seeb Stadium, Sohar produced one of the biggest surprises of the competition by knocking out defending champions Seeb with a 1-0 victory in front of a good crowd, particularly from the home side's supporters.

Sohar started strongly and looked the more lively side early on, but Seeb's defence and goalkeeper Ahmed al Rawahi dealt well with the initial pressure. After Seeb grew into the game without making their chances count, Sohar took the lead in the 28th minute through Moayad al Abdulsalam, who finished off a fine individual effort. Sohar then stayed compact and protected their advantage until half-time.

Seeb improved after the break and applied sustained pressure in search of an equaliser, but Sohar defended resolutely and protected their narrow lead. Ammar al Rashdi nearly added a second for Sohar, while Seeb coach Nikola Darovic made attacking changes in a bid to rescue the tie, and Jose Gonzalez reinforced Sohar's defence. After a tense closing spell, including seven minutes of stoppage time, Sohar held on to secure a memorable place in the final.

The match also drew the attention of the national team coaching staff, with Oman head coach Tarek Sektioui watching from the stands ahead of the next squad selection.



Sohar and Seeb players fight for the ball at the Seeb Stadium.

AL NAHDA FIGHT BACK

In the other semifinal, Al Nahda came from behind to defeat Sur 3-2 in a thrilling contest at Al Buraimi Sports Complex.

Al Nahda opened the scoring in the 17th minute when Abdulaziz al Shamousi headed home from a cross delivered by Azzan al Tamtami. Sur responded well and levelled in the 23rd minute through Sameh al Hosni, whose direct free-kick beat the goalkeeper and found the net.

The contest opened up after the equaliser, with both teams exchanging attacks before Sur moved ahead in the 35th



Al Nahda and Sur players in action during the Jetour Cup semifinal.

minute through Badr al Jabri, who finished off a well-worked move from the right flank to give his side a 2-1 lead at half-time.

Al Nahda increased their attacking pressure after the interval and continued to search for a way back, while Sur looked to threaten on the counter. The equaliser eventually arrived in the 73rd minute, when Amir Alaa scored after a headed pass from Hamad al Habsi following a delivery from the right.

Al Nahda maintained their momentum in the closing minutes and continued to press, particularly through set-piece situations. With the game moving into stoppage time, the referee added five minutes, and it was during that spell that Ahmed al Kaabi struck the winner with a powerful effort from outside the penalty area to send Al Nahda through to the final.

Sayyid Kamil to preside over HM's Cup Festival closing today

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, APRIL 1

Under the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, will patronise the closing ceremony of His Majesty Cup Festival 2026 camel racing in the Wilayat of Barka on Thursday.



HH SAYYID DR
KAMIL BIN FAHD
AL SAID

owned by Issa al Touqi claimed the third car.

'Bainouna' owned by Humaid al Amri secured the top honours and first car of the Al Hawl category by recording the fastest time at 12 minutes 54.88 seconds, while 'Ghaziya' owned by Mohammed al Malki claimed the second car, and 'Mulfet' owned by Ghadeer al Rashdi secured the third car.

The morning competitions included four races for the Thanaya and Al Hawl categories over a distance of 8 km, offering cash prizes. In addition to four races for the traditional race (human rider) over 2 km, with



'Al Hurra' owned by Said al Wahaibi clinched the top honours by recording the fastest time and first car of the Thanaya category at 12 minutes 54.70 seconds.

prizes including a car, and cash for the top ten.

The morning competitions included 4 races for the Thanaya and Al Hawl categories over a distance of 8 km, offering cash prizes. In addition to four races for the traditional race (human rider) over 2 km, with prizes including a car and cash prizes for the top ten.

MORNING RESULTS ON WEDNESDAY
(Read as round, camel, owner, time)

Thanaya category over 8 km
1. Arsad, Mohammed bin Jasim al Saadi, 13:03.99
2. Al Mared, Said bin Maktoum al Malki, 12:58.27

Al Hawl category over 8 km

- 3. Al Zahia, Humaid bin Salim al Malki, 13:12.97
- 4. Al Azra, Said bin Humaid al Juhafi, 13:33.22

Traditional race (human rider) over 2 km
5. Al Rawdha, Amer bin Salim al Zarei, 3:11.64
6. Shaheen, Khalifa bin Mohammed al Owaisi, 3:07.78
7. Al Shahiniya, Amer bin Salim al Zarei, 3:16.46
8. Sayeb, Amer bin Salim al Zarei, 3:16.94

Final day schedule on Thursday
(Read as date, round, category, race distance, prize)
First race: Hagayeg, 4 km, Sultan's Cup and car
Second race: Laqaya, 5 km, Sultan's Cup and car
Third race: Jathaa, 6 km, Sultan's Cup and car
Fourth race: Thanaya, 8 km, Sultan's Cup and car
Fifth race: Al Hawl, 8 km, Sultan's Cup and car
Sixth race: Human rider, 2 km, car and trophy

NBA LEAGUE



Los Angeles Lakers' Luka Doncic (77) goes up for a dunk in the final minutes of the game against the Cleveland Cavaliers at Crypto.com Arena.

— Imagin Images

DONCIC RETURNS WITH 42 AS LAKERS DOWN CAVALIERS

LOS ANGELES: Luka Doncic returned from suspension to score 42 points as the Los Angeles Lakers defeated the Cleveland Cavaliers 127-113 to extend their impressive form with a fourth straight victory on Tuesday.

The Lakers, who have emerged as genuine title contenders after winning 15 of 17 games in March to climb up the Western Conference standings, took control with big quarters either side of half-time to cruise to victory.

The Lakers outscored Cleveland 33-19 in the second quarter and then erupted for 45 points in the third to put the game away.

Doncic finished with 42 points, 12 assists and five rebounds, shooting 6-of-13 from three-point range.

Doncic's latest virtuoso performance also saw him break Kobe Bryant's record for the most points scored by a Lakers player in a calendar month, which had stood at 578 set in 2006.

Doncic said extending the Lakers' winning run meant more than setting personal records.

"If you don't win, it doesn't really mean anything," Doncic told reporters.

"So the run that we've been on it really means a lot. We've got to keep playing like that."

Austin Reaves added 19 points while Deandre Ayton scored 18 as six Lakers players finished in double figures.

LeBron James finished with 14 points as the win saw him pass yet another statistical milestone.

The 41-year-old's 1,229th career win in regular season and playoff games breaks the record previously held by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

Lakers coach JJ Redick singled out James for praise in helping knit the team together during their recent resurgence.

"He's great on both sides of the ball," Redick said. "He's just doing a little bit of everything at a super high level for us."

"Luka may get the headlines here and there, AR (Austin Reaves) may get a headline. But really it's been every single guy, and LeBron has led on that."

The Lakers are now looking ahead to a blockbuster showdown with the Western Conference-leading Oklahoma City Thunder on the road on Thursday. — AFP



Punjab Kings' Yuzvendra Chahal celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Gujarat Titans' Shubman Gill, caught out by Cooper Connolly. — Reuters

Debutant Connolly guides Punjab to narrow IPL win

AUSTRALIAN

Cooper Connolly made a memorable Indian Premier League debut,

holding his nerve as wickets tumbled around him to haul Punjab Kings to a tense three-wicket victory over Gujarat Titans on Tuesday.

A tidy bowling performance, spearheaded by Vijaykumar Vyshak, had helped Punjab restrict Gujarat to 162-6 at the New Chandigarh Stadium after Shreyas Iyer opted to chase.

Last year's finalists Punjab appeared headed for a straightforward victory when opener Prabhsimran Singh and Connolly set about the bowling, adding 76 for the second wicket in only 49 deliveries.

Gujarat had struck only three sixes in their entire innings while Punjab had four in the first four overs alone as they mounted a blistering assault.

But the belated introduction of Prasidh Krishna, Gujarat's impact player, triggered a dramatic twist.

Prasidh, brought on by captain Shubman Gill only in the 13th over, took three for three in 10 deliveries to spark a collapse that saw Punjab lose four for eight in 16 balls.

"These things happen in the IPL, when you lose wickets back-to-back," said Punjab skipper Shreyas.

However, Shreyas need not have worried as the 22-year-old Connolly showcased a maturity that belied his age, keeping his

composure and eking out small but crucial partnerships with South African Marco Jansen and compatriot Xavier Bartlett.

"To put that performance in tonight, very happy. I'm just more of a tempo player, feel the flow of my hands, don't hit too many big sixes," said Connolly, the Player of the Match, two of whose sixes came off Afghanistan leggie Rashid Khan. "That was the first time I played Rashid, was nice to get the win." Fittingly it was Connolly, who finished unbeaten on 72 off 44 deliveries with five fours and as many sixes, who brought up victory with five balls to spare as he guided Punjab to 165-7.



Punjab Kings' Cooper Connolly plays a shot against Gujarat Titans at New Chandigarh. — Reuters

FRENETIC START

Earlier, Gujarat had got off to a frenetic start with Gill striking three fours in the second over from Bartlett.

Gill and Sai Sudharsan, last season's most prolific opening pair, added 37 before Jansen provided the breakthrough, having Sudharsan caught on the pull for 13.

Gujarat went at nine an over in the Powerplay but as the ball got older and softer, the scoring rate dipped.

Leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal, the leading wicket-taker in the tournament's history, led the charge, having Gill caught at deep mid-wicket for 39 with a well tossed-up delivery and following it up with the scalp of Jos Buttler, who battled through to 38.

Gill and Buttler had put on 46 to offset the loss of Sudharsan, and Glenn Phillips attempted to infuse some urgency, but Gujarat struggled to impose themselves. Vyshak, using the slower ball to great effect, cut a swathe through the middle order while Jansen was parsimonious, conceding just 20 in his four overs. Despite an 11-ball final over from Arshdeep Singh, Gujarat added only 34 in the last five. — AFP

Oman Cricket inducts 3 new board members amid strong growth

MUSCAT: Oman Cricket (OC) signalled a new phase in its administration with the unanimous election of Chaitanya Khimji, Damodar Katti and Varun Khimji as board members at its Annual General Meeting held at Oman Cricket headquarters in Al Amerat on Tuesday.

The three replace long-serving outgoing members Kiran Asher, Dilip Mehta and Maqbool bin Moosa al Lawati, as the governing body looks to build on a period of sustained growth for the sport in the Sultanate of Oman.

Chairman Pankaj Khimji underlined the progress made over the past year, calling it "a truly remarkable year for cricket development in Oman."

"We have witnessed participation from over 3,000 players across more

than 60 corporate teams, 40 junior teams and eight Omani teams, reflecting the growing strength and reach of the sport in the country," he said.

Highlighting the men's team's consistency on the global stage, he added: "Being the only Associate nation to qualify for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup four times in the last decade is a phenomenal achievement."

The OC chief said: "We are in the race for Qualifiers in the ICC Cricket World Cup League 2 for the 2027 World Cup, which highlights the consistent progress and competitive spirit of the team."

He paid tribute to former head coach Duleep Mendis and said: "His leadership over the past decade has been instrumental in shaping the team's success," and expressed



The Oman Cricket board members after the AGM at the Oman Cricket headquarters in Al Amerat on Tuesday.

confidence in his continued role as Chief Development Officer.

RISE OF WOMEN'S TEAM

The chairman also pointed to the rise of the women's team, which has climbed from 74th to 34th in the ICC Women's T20I rankings after winning

10 of its last 12 matches.

"This is a testament to their dedication and the growing momentum of women's cricket in Oman," he said.

Khimji extended deep gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and His Highness Sayyid Theyazin

bin Haitham bin Tarik, for their continued patronage, and thanked the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for their unwavering support.

On behalf of Oman Cricket, the chairman expressed thanks to the outgoing board members for their invaluable contributions, commitment and vision in guiding the organisation forward.

Khimji welcomed the newly elected board members and said: "Together, we move ahead with renewed determination to take cricket in Oman to even greater heights."

OMAN CRICKET BOARD: Chairman: Pankaj Khimji, Vice-Chairman: Paul Sheridan, Secretary: Madhu Jesrani, Treasurer: Alkesh Joshi, Members: Syed Anwar Ahsan, Ali Moosa Yousuf, Chaitanya Khimji, Damodar Katti and Varun Khimji.

SPORTS

THIRDTIME



Italy's defender #21 Alessandro Bastoni (C, bottom) receives a red card from French referee Clement Turpin in Zenica. — AFP

ITALY’S NIGHTMARE CONTINUES AFTER SHOOT-OUT DEFEAT TO BOSNIA

ZENICA, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Italy will miss out on a third straight World Cup after falling to Bosnia and Hercegovina in Tuesday’s breathless qualification play-off final, the Azzurri blowing their chance to reach this summer’s tournament in North America with a 4-1 penalty shoot-out defeat.

Esmir Bajraktarevic shot the winning spot-kick in Zenica where the Bosnians booked a place in Group B and matches against co-hosts Canada, Switzerland and Qatar, and plunged Italy into a new nightmare.

Four-time world champions, Italy took the lead through Moise Kean in the 15th minute but then folded under the weight of expectation at the Bilino Polje Stadium after having to play most of the match with 10 men.

Italy were already firmly on the back foot when Alessandro Bastoni was sent off for chopping down Amar Memic four minutes before half-time, and Haris Tabakovic poked home Bosnia’s deserved leveller in the 79th minute to take the match to extra time.

And the horror show continued in the subsequent shoot-out, with Pio Esposito smashing Italy’s first penalty over the goal, and when Bryan Cristante hit the bar and Bajraktarevic squeezed his effort under Gianluigi Donnarumma, the game was up. “I don’t think the boys deserved to suffer such a blow, for the performance, the effort and the heart that they showed tonight... I’m proud of the boys,” said a visibly shaken Italy coach Gennaro Gattuso. “It’s difficult to digest.”

Gattuso added that talking about his future “wasn’t important” but Gabriele Gravina, the head of the Italian Football Federation, later told reporters he had asked Gattuso to stay on as coach and he would not be resigning from his position.

Italy are the first World Cup winners to miss three consecutive editions of the tournament, and it was also a third straight elimination in the play-offs after Sweden in 2018 and North Macedonia four years ago. Bosnia meanwhile reached their second World Cup finals, and first since 2014, in front of a passionate crowd which invaded the pitch after a historic victory.

“They’re guys with character. We have guys we’re proud of,” said Bosnia coach Sergej Barbarez. “I’ve told them that we have to go to a tournament every two years.”

Some Italy players were filmed celebrating when Bosnia won their semifinal — again on penalties — against Wales, behaviour which looked even more foolish after the way Bosnia tore into their opponents. — AFP



Iraq's players celebrate after winning the 2026 Fifa World Cup qualifiers final playoff against Bolivia in Guadalupe, Nuevo Leon state, Mexico. — AFP

Iraq edge Bolivia to seal WC return after 40 years

COACH Graham Arnold challenged his players to “shock the world” after Iraq became the 48th and final team to qualify for the World Cup with a nerve-shredding 2-1 win over Bolivia in an intercontinental playoff in Mexico on Tuesday.

Iraq, whose preparations were disrupted by the war in the Middle East, sealed their first appearance at the finals in 40 years and will play in Group I against France, Senegal and Norway.

Goals from Ali al Hamadi and Aymen Hussein secured a famous win for Iraq, whose last appearance at the World Cup came at Mexico in 1986.

“With everything going on in the Middle East at the moment it made it harder for the players,” said the Australian Arnold, who had initially sought to have the fixture postponed due to the disruption caused by the conflict.

“Delighted for the players, very good boys, very happy for the 46 million Iraqis,” he added.

“Hopefully it will help change the perception of Iraq and the football in Iraq. Doing something in the World Cup nobody expects us to do.

“Let’s shock the world.”

Because of travel disruption caused by the US-Israel war on Iran, most of the Iraqi squad only reached Mexico after a gruelling three-day journey from Baghdad that began with an overland crossing into Jordan.

But there was little sign of weariness



Iraq's forward #18 Aymen Hussein and Bolivia's defender #04 Luis Haquin fight for the ball at the BBVA Stadium in Guadalupe. — AFP

during a confident start by Iraq, who took the lead after nine minutes through Luton Town striker Al Hamadi — the 24-year-old who moved to Liverpool as a toddler following the outbreak of the 2003 Iraq war.

Iraq midfielder Amir al Ammari won a corner after a superb free-kick that was saved at full stretch from Bolivia goalkeeper Guillermo Viscarra.

From the subsequent set piece Al Ammari

curled a pinpoint corner on to the head of Al Hamadi who nodded home for 1-0.

Iraq were well worth the early goal and looked in control until Bolivia, who had gradually grown into the game, equalised after 38 minutes.

Ramiro Vaca’s shot from the edge of the area was controlled with one touch by Moises Paniagua and the Morocco-based central midfielder swept into the roof of the net.

The goal stunned Iraq and Bolivia looked likely to grab a second after dominating the remainder of the half.

Iraq regained the lead eight minutes after the break, when a long ball forward was nodded into the path of substitute Marko Lawk-Farji.

His cross found captain Hussein and the veteran striker clipped a first-time finish into the bottom corner.

Bolivia pressed frantically for a goal to force extra-time, but Iraq’s well-marshalled defence held firm during nine minutes of stoppage time.

The 62-year-old Arnold, who took Australia to the last 16 of the Qatar World Cup in 2022, said: “We have two months to get fit.

“For us to do something at this World Cup would be a miracle.”

Oscar Villegas, the Bolivia coach, was visibly distraught.

“Devastated, totally devastated because we believed we could be at the World Cup,” he said. — AFP

Türkiye, Sweden, Czechia and DR Congo clinch WC spots

PRAGUE: Czechia claimed their first World Cup berth since 2006 by winning penalty kicks 3-1 in Prague.

The teams were tied 1-1 going into extra time. Czechia took the lead on Ladislav Krejci’s score, but Denmark’s Kasper Høgh delivered in the 111th minute to force penalty kicks.

Czechia, who jumped from 43rd to 41st in the Fifa rankings with its upset of No 20 Denmark, collect a Group A spot. Mexico, South Africa and South Korea round out the quartet.

SWEDEN 3, POLAND 2

Viktor Gyokeres scored in the 88th minute to lift Sweden to the slight upset in Solna, Sweden, and the

accompanying World Cup berth.

Poland lost despite owning 66.7% of possession. Poland also claimed an edge in shots on goal (7-5) and corner kicks (9-2).

Sweden join Group F with Netherlands, Japan and Tunisia.

TÜRKİYE 1, KOSOVO 0

Türkiye will participate in the World Cup for the first time since 2004 thanks to their victory in Pristina, Kosovo.

Türkiye broke through in the 53rd minute when Kerem Akturkoglu one-timed a shot from close range.

With the win, the side moved up three spots in the rankings to No 22.

Türkiye advance to take the final spot in Group D alongside



Sweden's Viktor Gyokeres scores their third goal during the Fifa World Cup Uefa Qualifiers Finals against Poland at Solna, Sweden. — Reuters

the United States, Paraguay and Australia.

DR CONGO 1, JAMAICA 0

Axel Tuanzebe broke the deadlock in the 100th minute and sent DR Congo into the World Cup with an intercontinental playoff win over Jamaica in Guadalajara, Mexico.

Brian Cipenga’s low corner kick found the knee of a charging Tuanzebe, whose shot hopped into the far corner before Jamaica and Philadelphia Union goalkeeper Andre Blake could dive to stop it.

The nation has been to just one previous World Cup, 1974, when it was known as Zaire. DR Congo will compete in Group K against Portugal, Colombia and Uzbekistan. — Reuters

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
8,190.292

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$107.19
BRENT \$102.99
LIGHT \$100.03



SHORT TAKES



MSX30 Index closed the month at 8,168.396 points.

MSX POSTS 1.4 BILLION TURNOVER AS BANKING, ENERGY STOCKS DOMINATE

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, APRIL 1

Trading activity on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) remained robust in March 2026, with total turnover reaching RO 1.426 billion, driven largely by strong activity in banking and energy-related stocks.

Market data showed the benchmark MSX30 Index closed the month at 8,168.396 points, reflecting continued gains in the broader market. Total market capitalisation increased by RO 5.925 billion, while cumulative growth since the beginning of the year stood at 39 per cent, highlighting sustained investor confidence.

Banking stocks led trading by value, with Sohar International topping the list at RO 271,648,644, followed by Bank Muscat at RO 241,972,850. Energy and industrial counters also recorded significant activity, with OQ Base Industries reaching RO 210,815,475, OQ Exploration & Production at RO 197,949,272, and OQ Gas Networks at RO 165,469,858.

In terms of trading volume, Sohar International again led with 1,222,167,812 shares, underscoring strong liquidity in the banking sector. This was followed by OQ Base Industries with 797,328,750 shares, OQ Gas Networks with 654,109,323 shares, Bank Muscat with 533,755,679 shares and OQ Exploration & Production with 405,546,092 shares.

The exchange recorded its highest daily turnover of the month on March 9, when trading activity reached RO 112.7 million, indicating heightened investor participation during peak sessions.

Foreign investors also maintained a notable presence in the market, with total purchases amounting to RO 173 million, contributing to overall liquidity and supporting market performance.

Oman and Belarus deepen investment cooperation



The meeting underscored both countries' commitment to expanding bilateral cooperation and unlocking new partnership opportunities.

THE Oman-Belarus Joint Committee convened its inaugural meeting in Muscat, marking a significant step towards advancing economic and investment ties between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Belarus.

The Omani delegation was led by Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), while the Belarusian side was headed by Maxim Ryzhenkov, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The meeting underscored both countries' commitment to expanding bilateral cooperation and unlocking new partnership opportunities across key sectors, including industry, agriculture, healthcare and tourism.

Discussions focused on enhancing trade exchanges, facilitating investment flows and aligning efforts with broader economic diversification objectives.

Al Murshidi said the launch of

The Oman-Belarus Joint Committee for Cooperation and Investment, established in May 2025, is designed to advance collaboration across a wide range of sectors, including trade, energy, education and culture. It also aims to accelerate joint investment initiatives and foster the exchange of expertise, reflecting the steady progress in bilateral relations in recent years.

the Joint Committee reflects the depth of relations between the two nations and their shared ambition to elevate cooperation to more integrated levels.

He noted that the platform will serve as a structured mechanism to foster long-term partnerships grounded in mutual economic interests.

He further emphasised Oman's focus on strengthening global partnerships and attracting high-quality investments, highlighting Belarus as a strategic partner with strong potential to contribute to value creation across multiple sectors.

For his part, Ryzhenkov pointed to the complementary strengths of both countries, citing Belarus's industrial capabilities and Oman's competitive investment environment and advanced infrastructure. He stressed that this synergy creates tangible opportunities for building strategic partnerships that deliver mutual economic benefits.

He also highlighted the

importance of improving connectivity and business mobility, noting that initiatives such as facilitating travel, introducing direct air links, easing visa procedures and enhancing diplomatic presence would support deeper engagement between the two sides.

Both parties reaffirmed their commitment to expanding cooperation, promoting knowledge exchange and supporting sustainable development goals, while strengthening their presence in regional and global economic networks.

The Oman-Belarus Joint Committee for Cooperation and Investment, established in May 2025, is designed to advance collaboration across a wide range of sectors, including trade, energy, education and culture. It also aims to accelerate joint investment initiatives and foster the exchange of expertise, reflecting the steady progress in bilateral relations in recent years. — ONA

PTTEP expands footprint in Oman's energy sector

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 1

PTT Exploration and Production Public Company Limited (PTTEP), Thailand's national oil and gas exploration and production company, says it is continuing to consolidate its presence across key segments of Oman's hydrocarbon value chain as part of a longer-term strategy to grow its international business.

In the Sultanate of Oman, the integrated energy group has interests in key upstream assets, LNG capacity and even a gigawatt-scale green hydrogen project in partnership with a number of international players.

"PTTEP continued expanding its footprint in the Middle East and Africa through additional investment and development opportunities in the United Arab Emirates, alongside ongoing production in Oman.

These efforts will enhance the company's production capacity and strengthen business operations over the long term", Chatchai Phromlert, Chairman



PTTEP owns a 20 per cent interest in Block 61, a major source of gas production in Oman.

and Montri Rawanchaikul, Chief Executive Officer, stated in a joint message prefacing the company's newly published 2025 Annual Report. PTTEP's flagship investment is a 20 per cent participating interest in Block 61, a major gas licence in central Oman currently accounting for around a third of the country's aggregate gas output.

The operator is BP Exploration

(Epsilon) Limited, a subsidiary of BP.

Natural gas production averaged 1,476 million standard cubic feet per day (MMSCFD), while condensate output averaged 54,886 barrels per day from the block in 2025.

Also notable is PTTEP's 2 per cent participating interest in Block 6 — the largest producing onshore oil asset in Oman. Petroleum

Development Oman (PDO) serves as the operating consortium.

Crude oil output averaged 710,351 bpd in 2025.

Elsewhere in southern Oman is Block 53 with its heavy oil-bearing Mukhaizna field. PTTEP Group holds a 1 per cent participating interest in the project, with Occidental Petroleum serving as operator.

Crude oil output averaged 74,177 bpd last year. The project stakeholders also signed an Exploration and Production Sharing Agreement (EPSA) to extend the contract period by 15 years, through 2050.

Crude oil from these three blocks is sold under medium-term contracts, while natural gas produced from Block 61 is sold under a long-term contract to the Omani government.

However, the company exited Block 12 — an onshore natural gas exploration block in central Oman — in which it held a 20 per cent participating interest, with TotalEnergies serving as operator. PTTEP explained: "A petroleum potential evaluation

was conducted, with no prospects identified for commercial development. As the first exploration period ended on March 25, 2025, the project decided not to proceed to the second exploration period.

The relinquishment of the exploration block was completed and officially approved, effective January 6, 2026".

On the midstream front, PTTEP holds a 2 per cent interest in Oman LNG and an indirect 0.7 per cent interest in Qalhat LNG, which together have a combined capacity of 11.4 million tonnes per annum.

Marking an important foray into the clean energy sector, PTTEP was awarded a concession covering Block Z1-02 for the production of green hydrogen.

The project is being developed as a joint venture between FutureTech Energy Ventures Company Limited (FTEV), a wholly owned subsidiary of PTTEP Group and its consortium partners, namely POSCO Holdings, Samsung Engineering, Korea East-West Power, Korea Southern Power and MESCAT Middle East DMCC.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The Seongsu boutique is conceived as a fully realised articulation of Amouage’s creative identity.

AMOUAGE OPENS SECOND EPHEMERAL BOUTIQUE IN SEOUL

MUSCAT: Amouage, the independent Omani High Perfumery House, has unveiled its second ephemeral boutique in Seoul named “The Sand That Moves In”, further deepening its presence in Korea. Situated in Seongsu, a district shaped by its industrial past and creative resurgence, the new space reflects the House’s commitment to engaging each city through intentional architectural expression.

The Seongsu boutique is conceived as a fully realised articulation of Amouage’s creative identity. Rooted in Omani heritage and expressed through contemporary design language, the space creates a quiet dialogue between origin and place.

AN ODE TO THE OMANI DESERT

Drawing from the memory of an ancient Omani village, the boutique takes inspiration from Abu Fashighah, a settlement buried beneath sand following a violent sandstorm nearly three decades ago and only partially revealed today as the dunes continue to shift.

In this enduring dialogue between man and nature, it is nature that ultimately prevails, shaping, concealing and revealing in its own time.

This narrative unfolds spatially through an immersive architectural language, where sand is elevated beyond material into symbol.

At the heart of the boutique, a series of sculptural interpretations conceived by the multidisciplinary studio Karim + Elias reinterpret sand at a monumental scale.

In its purest form, the installation imagines spheres as grains of sand dispersed across the space: clustered, suspended and accumulated as if carried by unseen winds.

These spheres are crafted using compressed sand, developed through the age-old technique of rammed earth. A proportionate mix of earth, clay and water is hand-pressed in sedimentary layers, preserving a method that dates back thousands of years and has historically been used to construct habitable shelters from locally sourced materials.

Here, the material is drawn from desert sand and composed in varying densities, combining different granular sizes to create nuanced textures and structural integrity.

A central sculptural mound emerges as the base of an hourglass, rising in a pyramidal formation, evoking both the passage of time and the silent force of accumulation.

Elsewhere, screens of sand spheres form porous partitions, subtly shaping movement and perspective while introducing moments of opacity and lightness throughout the interior.

Chery Tiggo 4 Pro: The smartest compact SUV

THE Chery Tiggo 4 Pro is rapidly redefining the compact SUV segment across Oman, setting a new trend for drivers who demand a perfect fusion of global style, smart technology and rugged performance. As it continues to gain popularity on the Sultanate of Oman’s roads, the window is now closing on a special opportunity for new owners.

With the festive campaign officially ending on April 11th, 2026, this is the best and final chance to own the Chery Tiggo 4 Pro accompanied by a comprehensive package of exclusive festive benefits.

For those looking to stay ahead of the trend, the Tiggo 4 Pro is currently available with highly attractive monthly installments. To ensure a truly rewarding ownership experience, this final offer includes a free service package for 3 years or 30,000 km, free insurance (Oman only) for private vehicles and free registration.

Every new owner also receives three years of AAA roadside assistance and a RO 100 fuel card to help manage daily driving costs. Furthermore, every purchase during this period provides a grand opportunity to win the flagship 2026 Tiggo 9 PHEV in an exclusive raffle draw.

(Terms and Conditions Apply) The trend-setting appeal of the Tiggo 4 Pro begins with its “global” design concept.

Its exterior features an avant-garde starry diamond front grille and sleek automatic headlights that create a dynamic presence.

The muscular body is accented by 17-inch



The Tiggo 4 Pro is currently available with highly attractive monthly installments.

five-spoke mirror dynamic wheel hubs, while the rear is finished with a stylish three-dimensional light band and chrome dual exhaust styling.

Inside, the vehicle offers a wide-body wrap-around layout featuring a 10.25-inch ultra-clear floating LCD screen and a digital instrument cluster, providing a seamless blend of communication and entertainment.

Performance and safety are equally central to its success. The Tiggo 4 Pro offers two advanced power options: a 1.5TCI engine delivering 115 kW for those seeking a spirited drive and a highly efficient 1.5L version that achieves an impressive fuel consumption of

just 6.9 litres per 100 kilometres.

Built with an integrated cage-type body using ultra-high-strength steel, the vehicle also comes standard with advanced safety features including Cruise Control and Blind Spot Monitoring (BSM).

With the April 11th deadline approaching, this is the definitive moment to join the growing community of Tiggo 4 Pro owners in Oman.

Interested buyers are encouraged to visit their nearest showroom today to experience this trend-setting SUV firsthand and secure these exclusive festive benefits before they conclude.

National Finance posts strong financial performance

MUSCAT: National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman’s leading finance company, announced the successful conclusion of its Annual General Meeting (AGM), underscoring its continued strength in delivering on its ‘Partner for Growth’ promise.

The company reported strong financial results, reflecting the effectiveness of its disciplined execution, operational efficiency and prudent risk management framework.

During the meeting, shareholders approved the Board of Directors’ report on the company’s activities and financial position for the year ended December 31, 2025, along with the corporate governance report, the statutory auditors’ report and the audited financial statements.

The AGM also approved a cash dividend of 15 baisas per share, in addition to a 7% bonus share issuance of the company’s issued share capital, reinforcing National Finance’s commitment to delivering sustained value to its shareholders. Furthermore, shareholders approved directors’ remuneration, board-related matters and allocations for corporate social responsibility initiatives for the coming year.

Reinforcing its strong financial performance, National Finance reported a profit before tax of RO 18.20 million for the year ended December31, 2025, compared to RO 14.25 million in 2024. Profit after tax



The company reported a profit of RO 18.20 million.

increased to RO 15.21 million from RO 12.11 million in the previous year, supported by sustained momentum across its core financing activities.

Net investment in finance leases reached RO 652.72 million, reflecting a solid growth of 12.76%, driven by robust demand across key segments and the company’s continued commitment to disciplined and sustainable expansion.

As a result of its sustained financial and operational performance, National Finance achieved a Return on Equity (ROE) of 11%, the highest in the Omani non-banking financial sector, further reinforcing its position as a market leader.

This milestone reflects the company’s ability to translate disciplined execution into enduring value creation.

Anchored by clear strategic direction,

National Finance continues to deliver resilient growth and strong profitability, while upholding the highest standards of governance, oversight and institutional integrity.

Commenting on the company’s stellar performance, Tariq Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer of National Finance, commented, “These outstanding results reflect the strong alignment between our strategy, governance framework, and people. They stand as a cornerstone of National Finance’s role in supporting national development.

At National Finance, sustainable growth is defined by empowering diverse customer segments, enhancing lifestyles, strengthening business competitiveness, and contributing to the nation’s socio-economic progress. We forge on, guided by a unified commitment to creating long-term value for our clientele and the country.”

National Finance’s performance is built on institutional strength, anchored by a resilient balance sheet, disciplined capital allocation, and a governance framework that enforces transparency, accountability, and rigorous risk stewardship. These foundations provide the resilience to navigate market dynamics with confidence while delivering consistent, sustainable returns for shareholders and stakeholders over the long-term.

Al Omaniya Financial Services posts 3.958 million net profit

MUSCAT: The Annual General Meeting of Al Omaniya Financial Services SAOG was held on March 31, 2026 and presided by Chairman of the Board of Directors, Khalid bin Said bin Salim al Wahaibi.

Al Wahaibi stated that the shareholders have given their approval for the audited financial statements of the company as well as for the 16% dividend comprising of 11% cash dividend and 5% unsecured compulsorily convertible bonus stock bonds.

The Board of Directors appreciated the measures taken by the Central Bank of Oman and the Financial Services Authority with a view to



The shareholders approve the audited financial statements of the company.

strengthening the financial sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

Aftab Patel, CEO, added that the company’s loan book stands at RO 147.245 million at the end of 2025. The total revenues of the company stood at RO 15.962 million.

The pre-tax profit stands at RO 4.620 million and the net profit is RO 3.958 million. The earnings per share is RO 0.0125 and net worth of the company for all regulatory purposes stands at RO 69.744 million. The book value of the share is RO 0.213.

He further added that the company has a well-diversified portfolio of assets with the lowest NPA ratio of 2.58 % in the industry (As per IFRS9).

The cumulative ECL provisions towards Instalment Finance receivable including special reserve for nonperforming assets stand at RO 20.17 million which covers 530% of the non-performing assets.

Patel stated that the company has been at the forefront of issuing innovative financial instruments and that the company has pioneered the issue of Bonus Stock Convertible bonds as dividends over several years. The company has been paying consistent dividends and has the unique distinction of paying dividend every single year since inception. The cumulative total dividend paid so far is 521.83%.

SHORTTAKES



Farmland protection wall in Yanqul.

Protection walls to safeguard farmland from flood risks

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 1

New flood protection walls for agricultural lands in the Wilayat of Yanqul, Al Dhahirah Governorate, are part of projects aimed at enhancing agricultural stability in areas near wadi beds, reducing financial losses and supporting farmers to continue cultivating their land, thus contributing to food security in the Sultanate of Oman.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has completed the construction of the protection wall project in the Al Buwayridah area of Yanqul. Also, work continues on the protection wall project in the Al Bilad-Al Madam area, with a completion rate of 30%. These projects are part of efforts to mitigate flood risks and protect agricultural lands.

Eng Salim bin Suhail al Alawi, Director of the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources in Yanqul, explained that these projects reflect the level of cooperation between the Ministry and the local community in preserving agricultural resources. He emphasised that the concrete walls contribute to reducing the impact of wadi water, especially in light of climate change.

He added that the department provides technical and engineering supervision of the implementation phases to ensure adherence to approved specifications and the achievement of the highest quality standards, thereby enhancing the efficiency and sustainability of the protection.

The two projects were implemented through a community partnership, with residents contributing 80% of the total cost and the Ministry covering the remaining 20%. The aim is to protect agricultural holdings from soil erosion and the effects of flash floods.

Regarding the technical specifications, the protective wall in the Al Buwayridah area is 150 metres long and three metres high and its construction has been completed according to approved engineering standards.

Asyad Shipping reports strong ESG gains in 2025

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, APRIL 1

ASYAD Shipping Company (ASCO) has reported measurable progress across its environmental, social and governance (ESG) metrics in 2025, underpinned by operational efficiency gains, sustained investment in decarbonisation, and a landmark public listing on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

The company disclosed that it has invested more than \$64 million in decarbonisation initiatives since 2019, targeting improved fleet efficiency and emissions management.

In 2025 alone, Scope 1 emissions declined by 3 per cent, while Scope 2 emissions dropped by 24 per cent, reflecting enhanced energy management in shore-based operations. Emissions intensity per employee improved by 26 per cent, signalling broader efficiency gains across the organisation.

Dr Ibrahim al Nadhairi, Chief Executive Officer of ASCO, said the company's sustainability strategy remains central to its growth trajectory.

"Sustainability continues to guide how we operate, invest and create long-term value for our stakeholders. 2025 marked an important milestone in our journey as Asyad Shipping Company (ASCO) successfully listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), strengthening transparency, governance and investor confidence as a publicly listed company.

Operationally, ASCO continues to expand its fleet capacity, with new vessels under construction to support global trade routes. At the same time, environmental initiatives such as recycling programmes



Sustainability continues to guide how we operate, invest and create long-term value for our stakeholders. 2025 marked an important milestone in our journey as Asyad Shipping Company (ASCO) successfully listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), strengthening transparency, governance and investor confidence as a publicly listed company.

DR IBRAHIM AL NADHAIRI
Chief Executive Officer of ASCO



Operationally, ASCO continues to expand its fleet capacity, with new vessels under construction to support global trade routes.

and waste management efforts are being scaled, with 20 per cent of vessels now participating in circular resource practices.

On the social front, the company delivered 9,455 training hours in 2025, averaging nearly 39 hours per employee, alongside full compliance with mandatory safety training requirements. ASCO also invested approximately \$230,000 in community and corporate social responsibility initiatives, reinforcing its commitment to workforce development and community engagement.

From a governance perspective, ASCO reported revenues of \$895.2 million in 2025 and generated \$74.6 million in in-country value (ICV), supporting Oman's economic diversification goals.

Notably, the company recorded zero corruption and zero material cybersecurity incidents during the year, underscoring robust internal controls and risk management systems.

Khalil al Hooti, Vice President of Sustainability, highlighted the

company's integrated approach to ESG. "We continued to advance our sustainability management practices by strengthening emissions monitoring across the fleet and aligning our operational performance with evolving international maritime regulations.

This includes closer monitoring of efficiency indicators and continued efforts to optimise vessel operations while maintaining compliance with emerging regulatory frameworks shaping the future of shipping", he said.

ASCO has expanded cybersecurity coverage across 22 vessels, strengthening digital resilience as part of its broader operational strategy. It is also advancing a comprehensive sustainability roadmap aligned with international maritime decarbonisation targets and Oman Vision 2040.

The company aims to further optimise fleet performance, enhance environmental stewardship and reinforce its position as a responsible global shipping operator.

Skills gap, work culture shape labour market: expert

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 1

Structural gaps in skills alignment and work culture — not simply job availability — are shaping Oman's labour market outcomes, a training and development specialist said, calling for a more integrated approach linking policy, education and enterprise growth.

Saif al Zaabi, Training and Development Consultant at Efficiency Training Institute (ETI), said labour market performance depends on how effectively regulations support business expansion — particularly among small and medium enterprises — while ensuring that education and training systems deliver market-relevant skills.



Job availability depends to a large extent on policies and legislation and whether they support the growth of institutions, especially SMEs.

SAIF AL ZAABI
Consultant, ETI

"The issue is not one-dimensional", Al Zaabi said. "Job availability depends to a large extent on policies and legislation and whether they support the growth of institutions, especially SMEs. At the same time, there is a real gap between the specialised skills required by the labour



Strengthening work culture is central to improving labour market efficiency.

market and the outputs of academic education".

He said many graduates enter the market with strong theoretical knowledge but lack the practical skills needed for immediate application in the workplace, limiting their ability to adapt quickly

to employers' needs.

Al Zaabi said training programmes also often fail to deliver real employment outcomes because they are not consistently linked to actual institutional demand.

"Training can succeed when it is based on a real need within institutions, rather than being treated as an isolated event", he said. "If it lacks a practical dimension or is not connected to a clear hiring, replacement or expansion plan, it remains an addition to a CV rather than a bridge to a job".

He added that strengthening work culture is central to improving labour market efficiency.

"The bigger challenge is not simply providing a desk or an office, but shaping the right mindset and work environment", he said.

"We need to move from a culture of waiting and entitlement to one based on initiative and value creation".

Asked about priorities, Al Zaabi said improving work culture should come first, with education and training acting as enabling tools.

"Education and training are important tools, but work culture is the engine", he said. "Without a culture that values productivity, quality and continuous learning, these investments risk becoming underutilised".

He said progress would depend on supportive legislation that enables institutional growth, alongside education and training systems focused on practical, market-relevant skills suited to current and future labour demand.

ENERGY SHOCK

LPG prices surge on supply disruption



Saudi Aramco and Sonatrach raised April LPG prices by 38 to 80 per cent amidst tightening global supply caused by Middle East tensions. Damage to Gulf production and suspended shipments via the Strait of Hormuz have constrained exports.

Aramco lifted propane to \$750 per tonne and butane to \$800, while Sonatrach raised prices to \$850 and \$900, respectively. — Reuters

MARKET REACTION

Gold rises on de-escalation hopes



Gold prices rose modestly on Wednesday, supported by a weaker US dollar and renewed hopes of easing Middle East tensions. Spot gold climbed to \$4,685 per ounce after touching a near two-week high.

The rebound follows a sharp March decline, when stronger dollar demand and expectations of tighter monetary policy weighed heavily on the metal's performance. — Reuters

TRADE SURGE

South Korea exports hit record \$86 billion



South Korea's exports surged to a record \$86.13 billion in March, marking a 48.3 per cent year-on-year increase driven by robust semiconductor demand. Imports rose 13.2 per cent to \$60.4 billion, resulting in a trade surplus of \$25.74 billion.

Semiconductor shipments jumped 151.4 per cent to \$32.83 billion, surpassing the \$30 billion mark for the first time. — ONA

OPINION

The strategic role of industrial zones during regional conflict



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

THE world continues to closely monitor the political and military developments unfolding across the region following the outbreak of the recent conflict targeting the Islamic Republic of Iran by the Zionist-American alliance, which has now persisted for more than a month.

Amidst global shortages in petroleum derivatives, natural gas, food commodities, agricultural products and other essential supplies — largely driven by disruptions and slowdowns in maritime shipping routes to the region — the strategic importance of economic and industrial zones in the Sultanate of Oman has become increasingly evident.

These zones play a vital role in accelerating operational and production activities to ensure the availability of essential goods required by local and the regional markets.

This position was recently reaffirmed by the officials of the Public Authority for Special Economic and Free Zones, who emphasised the need for industrial cities and zones to intensify their operational efforts in order to maintain stability in supply chains and logistics services that support both local and regional needs.

Accordingly, they have urged companies, factories, investors and executive leadership operating within industrial zones to prioritise the provision of essential products.

At the same time, the Authority continues to ensure a secure investment environment

by facilitating business operations and safeguarding the continuity of energy supplies and logistics chains under prevailing geopolitical conditions.

It is widely recognised that supply flows and commercial activities within Oman remain stable and uninterrupted across industrial zones through integrated land, sea and air transportation networks.

Import, export and cargo-handling operations at Omani seaports and airports continue to function normally. Government institutions are also actively monitoring regional developments to support the national economy and assist neighbouring countries affected by the ongoing conflict.

Furthermore, the Authority continues to assess challenges facing industrial enterprises and manufacturing firms through established communication channels to address any potential impacts resulting from a possible escalation in order to enhance political and economic stability.

Naturally, periods of geopolitical tension are often accompanied by increased operational challenges for institutions and companies, including rising shipping, insurance and production costs, as well as general price increases.

However, such pressures can be mitigated through effective market monitoring mechanisms and the prevention of monopolistic practices that may emerge during times of crisis. The Sultanate of Oman maintains a strong commitment to openness

Amidst global shortages in petroleum derivatives, natural gas, food commodities, agricultural products and other essential supplies — largely driven by disruptions and slowdowns in maritime shipping routes to the region — the strategic importance of economic and industrial zones in the Sultanate of Oman has become increasingly evident.

in trade and industrial cooperation at both regional and international levels.

This openness is reflected in the continued development of industrial zones across most governorates of the country, which have successfully attracted substantial domestic and foreign investment in recent years.

These achievements are largely attributed to long-term industrial incentives, regulatory facilitation measures and the government's consistent policy of economic openness and international engagement.

In light of ongoing geopolitical transformations and repeated disruptions to global trade routes, Oman's geographic location continues to demonstrate exceptional strategic importance.

The country's proximity to the Strait of Hormuz — over which it shares maritime oversight with the Islamic Republic of Iran — positions it as a critical gateway linking Eastern and Western markets. The strategic significance of this vital maritime corridor becomes even more pronounced during periods of political and military tension, as disruptions in navigation through the strait directly influence global oil prices and contribute to inflationary pressures across the international economy.

Within this context, industrial zones within the Sultanate of Oman will continue to strengthen commercial activity and support resilient supply chains, thereby accelerating the movement of goods and reducing logistics costs.

ENERGY WINDFALL TAXES REQUIRE NUANCE AND REALISM

SHRITAMA BOSE

Each energy shock bears lessons for the next one. To protect consumers from surging gas bills, Australia and Germany are considering slapping windfall taxes on any Iran war-fuelled super-profits enjoyed by oil and natural gas drillers.

TotalEnergies, for instance, has already made as much as \$1 billion trading Middle Eastern oil, the Financial Times reported on Monday.

But previous iterations of the levy often undershot estimates. That makes the case for a more nuanced, realistic approach to the latest crisis.

Canberra and Berlin are considering whether to reprise the fiscal tool that was tried most recently in 2022 after Russia's war in Ukraine sent energy prices soaring worldwide. The European Union, the UK and India were among jurisdictions that slapped levies on natural gas producers' supernormal profits.

The levies can be hit-and-miss. EU member states had success collecting roughly 29 billion euros (\$33.33 billion) in "solidarity contributions" from oil and gas companies, exceeding a 25 billion euro target. But a scheme to tax utilities that charged more than 180 euros per megawatt hour looked set to miss, opens new tab an initial 50 billion euro estimate.

The UK versions of taxes on excess receipts and profits, which will remain in force until 2028 and 2030, respectively, have so far secured less than a quarter of the government's forecasts. That's because energy prices dropped sharply after an initial spike in 2022.

Which type of tax works for a country is tied to its position in the energy value chain. India, a crude-oil and natural gas-deficient nation grappling with a supply shortage, has little incentive to tax oil producers or refiners whose earnings get redeployed in the local market. To maximise domestic availability, New Delhi last week slapped fresh levies on exports of diesel and aviation turbine fuel.

It may make sense for Australia, one of the world's top-three natural gas producers, to follow suit. Another option is to target a tax at output from its wells, as production does not fluctuate as much as prices do.

So far, though, the only measure Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's government has implemented to ease the hit to consumers is halving the fuel excise tax drivers pay at the pump.

Crucial, too, is the use of proceeds. New Delhi pumped its takings of 440 billion rupees (\$4.64 billion) between 2022 and 2024 into expanding households' access to liquefied petroleum gas.

Those gains are now being reversed as a shortage of LPG cylinders forces Indian kitchens to return to dirtier coal and firewood. — Reuters

Paris a quant powerhouse amidst Middle East rush

DESPITE senior money managers increasingly head to Dubai and Abu Dhabi, experts say Paris has strengthened its position as a global hub for quantitative talent. Among the biggest names currently hiring quantitative researchers and developers in Paris are Millennium, Citadel and Qube Research.

Managing Director at Dubai-headquartered hedge fund recruitment firm CW Talent Solution, Sean Sweeney said: "Paris has become Europe's quant laboratory. While it may not overtake London as the continent's primary capital markets engine, it remains highly competitive in attracting researchers and systematic teams due to its depth of intellectual capital".

He added: "Paris attracts the architects of models and infrastructure, even if capital allocation decisions are made elsewhere".

Millennium, the world's biggest multi-strategy hedge fund with almost \$87 billion in assets under management, is hiring quantitative researchers for its Paris office.

Citadel, which manages \$66 billion in assets, is also hunting top quant researchers in the French capital. It uses a multi-manager platform to invest in equities, fixed income, commodities and quantitative strategies, consistently delivering high returns.

Qube Research & Technologies, which manages around \$38 billion in assets, is also hiring quant developers in the French capital. It deploys a diverse range of investment strategies, across geographies, asset classes and time frames. Quantitative experts are an integral part of the multi-strategy hedge fund model. Money managers build a team of analysts, quantitative researchers and developers who work together from different locations.

"In practice, we see Paris increasingly used as a research



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

France produces a high concentration of professionals trained in probability, optimisation and abstraction, precisely the skill set systematic hedge funds require. This pipeline is embedded in the education system rather than being cyclical.



Tourists walk around Trocadero Square near the Eiffel Tower in Paris. — Reuters

and recreational hub, while portfolio management or trading entities are located in more flexible jurisdictions", said Martin Planes, Paris based co-founder of crypto hedge fund Eltican Asset Management.

Hedge funds have relocated portfolio managers to cities such as Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Milan to cash in on lower taxes, but their quest to find the next quant genius remains in France thanks to the country's supply of Maths experts.

"France's edge in hedge funds starts in the classroom", said Sweeney. France is home to some of the world's top schools, including Ecole Normale Supérieure, Centrale-Supelec and Ecole Polytechnique which are known for their strength in Maths and engineering education.

"France produces a high concentration of professionals trained in probability, optimisation and abstraction, precisely the skill set systematic hedge funds require. This pipeline is embedded in the education system rather than being cyclical.

The French quant pipeline is structural, not seasonal", Sweeney said. "This concentration of talent is difficult to replicate elsewhere in

Europe, which explains why major hedge funds have established teams in Paris", said Tommy Grandjean, a Paris-based head hunter at Aptic Groupe.

While Paris continues to produce top quant talent, it has failed to mirror the success of Dubai and Abu Dhabi in attracting senior portfolio managers, due to its high taxes, according to industry experts.

"If France wants senior portfolio managers, fiscal reform is the lever", said Sweeney. "To compete directly for hedge fund founders and senior managers, France would need a more competitive tax regime".

France has one of the highest tax rates in the world, up to 45 per cent for individuals earning more than 180,648 euros per year.

Meanwhile, the UAE has a zero-income-tax regime. The country has attracted some of the biggest hedge fund managers in recent years, including Brevan Howard co-founder Trifon Natsis who relocated to Abu Dhabi in 2023. Last year, hedge fund Pharo relocated partner Nicolas Sagna to Abu Dhabi.

"The high tax regime is one of the biggest downsides in France, if not the biggest", said a Paris-based quantitative trader.

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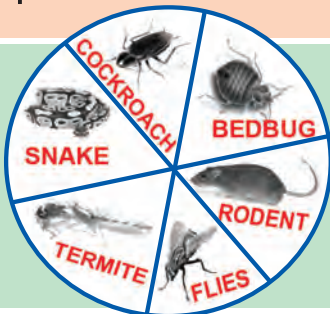
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SIT. WANTED

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

NAME:Dr.Priyanga
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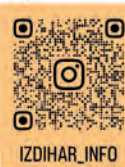


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CHANGING WORLD

A HEARTFELT ‘THANK YOU’ TO ROYAL OMAN POLICE



SHADDAD AL MUSALMY

The writer is a Senior Editor at Oman Daily Observer.

As the recent rains brought much-needed relief to our lands, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) has been working tirelessly to ensure the safety and wellbeing of citizens and residents alike. Their selfless efforts deserve our utmost gratitude and appreciation.

From clearing roads and responding to emergency calls to providing assistance and support, the ROP has been the backbone of our community’s resilience in the face of nature’s fury.

Their dedication to duty, often putting themselves at risk, is a testament to their unwavering commitment to our safety and security. As we navigate the aftermath of the rains, it is clear that the ROP’s efforts have been instrumental in minimising disruptions and ensuring that life returns to normalcy as soon as possible.

Their professionalism and compassion in the face of adversity are qualities that we should all strive to emulate. However, as citizens and residents, we too have a crucial role to play in ensuring our collective safety.

Cooperation with the ROP is key to preventing accidents and minimising risks. However, as citizens and residents, we too have a crucial role to play in ensuring our collective safety. Cooperation with the ROP is key to preventing accidents and minimising risks.

By following their instructions, adhering to traffic advisories and reporting any hazards or concerns, we can significantly contribute to a safer environment for everyone.

Let us take this opportunity to express our heartfelt thanks to the Royal Oman Police for their tireless efforts in keeping us safe. Your dedication and service are truly commendable; and we are grateful for your presence in our community.

As we move forward, let us also pledge to work hand-in-hand with the ROP, taking responsibility for our own safety and that of those around us. Together, we can build a more resilient and secure society for all.

Let us also acknowledge the unsung heroes — the traffic officers directing us to safety, the paramedics providing medical aid, the search and rescue teams working to evacuate those stranded and the municipality workers who are doing their best to keep our country clean always. Their dedication to service is an inspiration to us all.

As we move forward, let us continue to support them. Simple actions like following traffic rules, reporting hazards and being mindful of our surroundings can make a big difference.

To all, we say thank you — thank you for being there when we need you most. Your service is a beacon of hope and security in our community and we are forever in your debt. Let’s keep Oman safe, together!

QUICK FEATURES



EVENTS

US actor James Marsden attends the red carpet event for Apple TV+ “Your Friends & Neighbors” Season 2 at The New-York Historical Society. — AFP



HOLLYWOOD

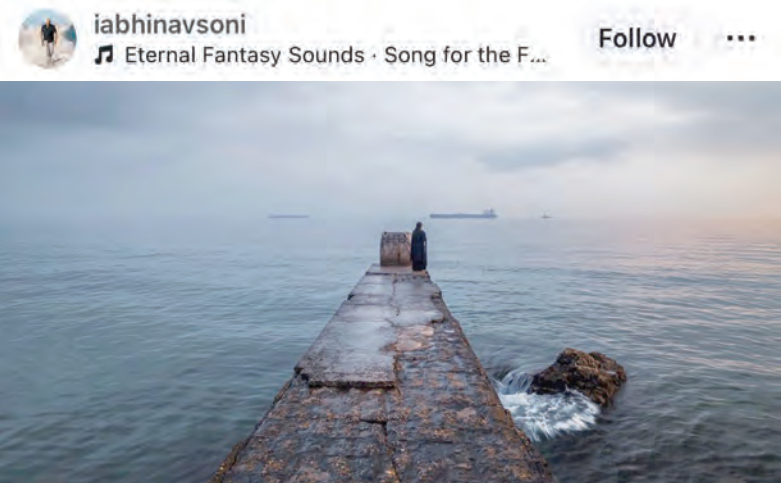
US singer and actress Brandy poses with her newly unveiled Walk of Fame star in Hollywood. — AFP



GASTRONOMY

Preparation of a chocolate mousse by chocolate maker Ralph Leroy in the workshops of Makaya Chocolat. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



Darsait pier, a well-kept hidden gem



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CHINA’S 1,400-YEAR-OLD MOSQUE MANIFESTS PLURALITY

KABEER YOUSUF

A mosque that is believed to have been built over 1,400 years ago in China’s Guangzhou province is standing as a testimony of the nation’s plurality and mutual understanding between various classes and sects of the society.

The mosque, which can host more than 5,000 believers for prayers, was built by Sa’d ibn Abi Waqqas who was a companion of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who introduced Islam to China and is now fast becoming a major site of pilgrimage.

The historic mosque and tomb of Saad bin Abi Waqqas, also known as Xinjiang Mosque, is an iconic Islamic landmark amidst a leafy, tranquil garden park and is hosting tourists from across the continents on a daily basis with Friday being the busiest day.

Located in the vast and serene gardens of Yuexiu District, this mosque features a prayer hall, the tomb of Sa’d ibn Abi Waqqas, a beautiful pathway surrounded by indigenous plants and flowers. It also has a 14-century-old well and serves as a peaceful spot with traditional Chinese and Islamic architectural elements

“The Saad bin Abi Waqqas, also known as Xinjiang Mosque is a key religious site which is an accessible site for Muslims and thousands of people from across the world assemble here daily with a massive crowd visiting the mosque to offer Juma prayers on Friday”, said a representative from the Chinese diplomatic mission in Muscat.

While traditionally associated with the 7th-century companion of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), it serves as an active place of worship and a significant pilgrimage site for



believers from across the world.

“The mosque and tomb are considered to be a significant pilgrimage site and people recite the Holy Quran here besides people from across the world stand in unison offering prayers in the vast main area for prayers”, adds Shamsudheen Kunjiparambath, a long-time china resident in Guangzhou, who added that the mosque and the surroundings are a rendezvous for people to touch base very often.

In China, there were approximately 39,135 registered mosques, according to statistics. While older data cited over 24,000 mosques in Xinjiang alone, there are roughly 70 mosques in Beijing. Recent studies suggest thousands have been altered or renovated since 2018 as part of government policy, though many remain functional in diverse regions.

The majority of mosques are located in Xinjiang, Ningxia, Gansu and Qinghai while Xinjiang boasts of the highest density, with roughly 24,100 mosques, often cited as one mosque per 530 Muslims.

The mosques in China combine traditional Islamic features with Chinese architectural styles. The Niujie Mosque in Beijing and the Id Kah Mosque in Kashgar are among the most prominent.



During Cherry blossom season, Japanese families and friends flock together for traditional “hanami” or flower viewing gatherings.

JAPAN’S CHERRY BLOSSOM SEASON DAZZLES LOCALS AND TOURISTS

JAPANESE locals and tourists packed the country’s most stunning cherry blossom spots to enjoy the dazzling flowers at full bloom.

The tiny white and pink petals of cherry flowers, known as sakura, herald the start of spring in Japan and full bloom ushers in a brief period of boisterous outdoor parties held by residents.

Across the nation families and friends rolled out blankets and tarpaulins at parks, temples and even cemeteries over the weekend to eat and drink under cherry trees for traditional “hanami” or flower viewing gatherings.

Japanese people hold “very special feelings for sakura”, said Tokyo resident Akiko Nyman, 48, as she admired flowers in crowded Ueno park in the centre of the capital.

“We love it, because it is so short... it doesn’t last long, it comes every year, something very special”, she said.

At this time of the year, weather forecasters are laser focused on when the blossom will peak in each city and they advise excited residents on the best weather days for picnics and how long the flowers might last.

In the ancient capital of Kyoto, officials on Monday declared full bloom after examining a sample tree within the grounds of Nijo-jo Castle, a world heritage site.

‘Good photo opportunity’ “We observed the cherry blossoms in full bloom on March 30”, Kyoto Local Meteorological Office said.

Cherry flowers at ancient temples and shrines in Kyoto are particularly popular among visitors and locals.

Australian tourist Olivia Martell-Groves went all in for the seasonal experience and donned a flower-printed kimono while marvelling at the flowers.

“We wanted to see them because they’re really pretty, good photo opportunities and something you can only see in certain times of the year... and also it just feels so peaceful and nice”, she said.

In Tokyo, the flowers reached full bloom during the weekend, entering a brief period of stunning beauty,



before the petals will fall like flurries of snow.

The flowers symbolise both the youthful energy and the fragility of life in Japanese culture as full blooms only last about a week.

The season marks the start of the new business year when university graduates join the work force.

It is also a time of farewells, when school graduates leave their hometown while many corporate professionals receive assignments in new cities. — AFP



FEATURES

H A W K S O V E R O M A N



THE SILENT
MIGRATION
SHAPING THE NATION'S SKIES

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

HIGH above Oman's mountains, deserts and coastlines, a quiet but extraordinary movement unfolds each year. Hawks, often overlooked in conversations about the country's wildlife, are among the many birds of prey that pass through Omani skies, using the Sultanate of Oman as a critical bridge between continents.

Positioned along one of the world's major migration routes, Oman lies at the intersection of Africa, Europe and Asia. According to global ornithological estimates, billions of birds migrate annually along these flyways, with raptors forming a significant share. In Oman, species such as the steppe buzzard and long-legged buzzard are among the most commonly observed hawk-like birds, particularly during the autumn migration season.

Field observations indicate that thousands of raptors can pass over parts of northern Oman within just a few weeks. These birds rely on thermal air currents rising from desert landscapes and mountain ranges, allowing them to travel vast distances with minimal effort.

By gliding on thermals rather than flapping continuously, hawks can cover hundreds of kilometres in a single day, making long-distance migration both efficient and sustainable.

Despite their seasonal presence, hawks remain largely absent from mainstream narratives about Oman's biodiversity. Conservation efforts have traditionally

focused on flagship species such as the Arabian oryx, green turtles and the critically endangered Arabian leopard. Yet birds of prey play a vital ecological role. As apex aerial predators, they serve as indicators of ecosystem health, relying on balanced food chains and stable habitats across multiple regions.

Globally, the picture is mixed. The Middle East hosts more than 50 species of raptors, many of which pass through the Arabian Peninsula during migration.

However, studies suggest that nearly 18 per cent of raptor species worldwide are now classified as threatened or near threatened. Habitat loss, illegal hunting and climate change are among the primary pressures, with shifting wind patterns and rising temperatures beginning to alter migratory timing and routes.

In Oman, growing interest in eco-tourism and birdwatching is beginning to bring these aerial travellers into focus. Areas such as Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, the Musandam Peninsula and coastal plains near Masirah Island are emerging as key vantage points. The country's varied terrain offers both ideal soaring conditions and important stopover habitats, reinforcing its role within the global migration network.

There is increasing recognition that Oman's geographic position gives it strategic importance in regional conservation efforts.

Protecting migratory birds requires coordination across borders, as these species depend on ecosystems spanning continents. Local initiatives and

Positioned along one of the world's major migration routes, Oman lies at the intersection of Africa, Europe and Asia. According to global ornithological estimates, billions of birds migrate annually along these flyways, with raptors forming a significant share. In Oman, species such as the steppe buzzard and long-legged buzzard are among the most commonly observed hawk-like birds, particularly during the autumn migration season.

environmental organisations are gradually building data on migration patterns, the groundwork for more informed conservation strategies.

As Oman advances its environmental priorities under Oman Vision 2040, the seasonal passage of hawks offers a compelling, if understated, narrative.

These birds are not permanent residents, nor are they deeply embedded in cultural identity like falcons. Yet their annual journey highlights Oman's role as a natural corridor linking distant ecosystems.

Each season, as warm air rises from the earth and currents form over rugged terrain, hawks return to the skies above Oman.

Their passage is swift, silent and easily missed, but it carries a powerful message: the Sultanate of Oman's environmental significance extends far beyond what is seen on the ground, reaching into the vast, interconnected pathways of the sky.