

Observer



IN BRIEF

HM'S GREETINGS TO ERITREA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Isaias Afwerki of the State of Eritrea on the occasion of his country's Independence Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the president for continued health and happiness and further progress and prosperity for the friendly people of Eritrea.

82 DEAD IN CHINA COAL MINE BLAST

A gas explosion at a coal mine in northern China has killed at least 82 people, authorities reported on Saturday, revising an earlier death toll as they said preliminary findings showed the company involved had committed "serious" violations. The blast marked the country's biggest mining disaster in 17 years, with search efforts under way to find two people still missing late on Saturday evening, state broadcaster CCTV reported. A total of 247 workers were underground at the time of the blast, which occurred at Liushenyu coal mine in Shanxi.

Iran and US 'close' to deal

OMAN, IRAN CALL FOR FREE AND SAFE MARITIME NAVIGATION

SAYYID

SAYYID

**BADR BIN
HAMAD AL
BUSAYDI,
Foreign
Minister,**

received a telephone call from Dr Seyyed Abbas Araghchi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, on Saturday. They exchanged views on the latest developments in the region, the progress of ongoing diplomatic efforts and talks and the efforts being made to adopt political approaches to address the points of contention in a balanced and fair manner. They stressed the importance of resuming free and safe maritime navigation.

Meanwhile, senior US and Iranian officials said they could be close to a breakthrough in talks to strike a draft deal to end the war in the Middle East.



Iranian women walk on the beach of Bandar Abbas, Iran. — **Reuters**

Iran said gaps remain between the parties, and the dispute over its nuclear programme would not be part of the initial talks.

But US Secretary of State Marco Rubio expressed optimism, just as Pakistan's army chief, a key go-between between

the United States and Iran, left Tehran after two days of talks with senior Iranian leaders.

"There is a chance that, whether it's later today, tomorrow, in a couple days, we may have something to say," Rubio told reporters on Saturday.

during a visit to New Delhi, adding that he hoped that he would soon be able to announce “good news”.

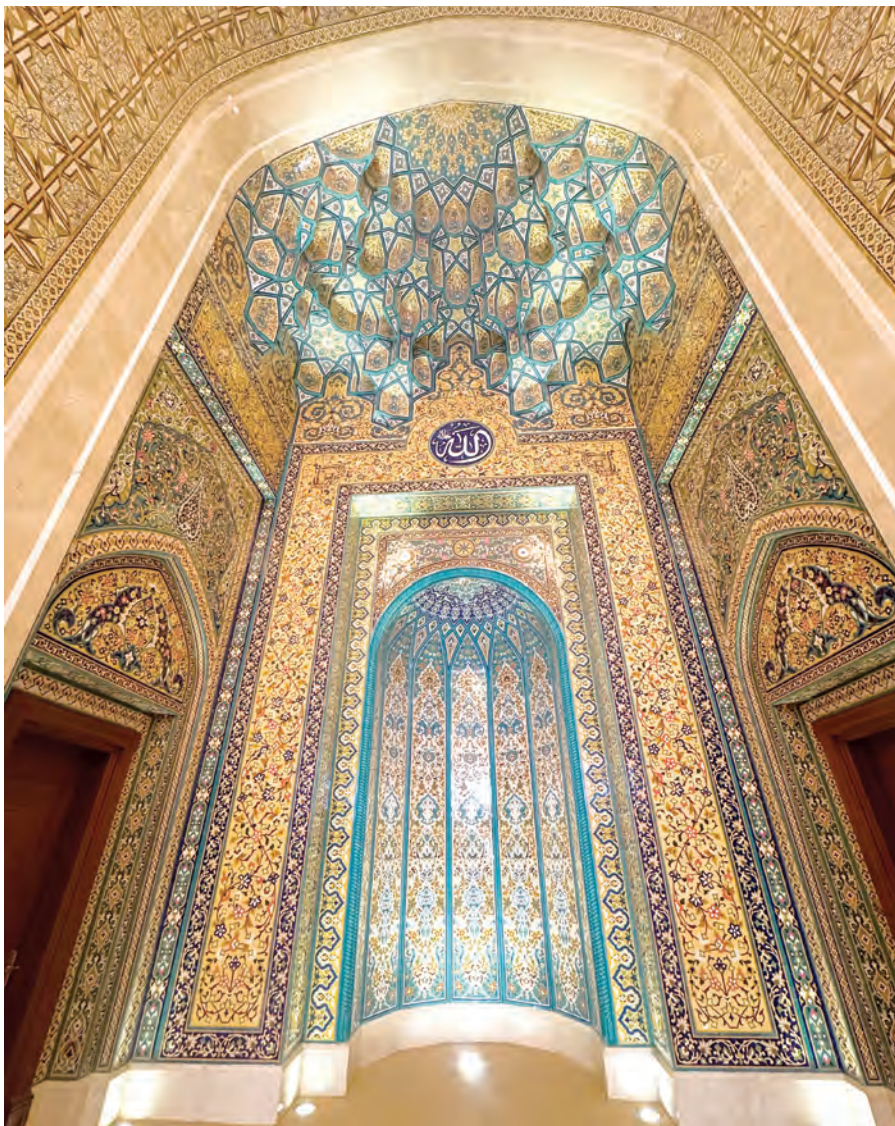
The Iranian foreign ministry also said that a draft deal might at last be close. "Our intention was first to draft a memorandum of understanding, a kind of framework agreement composed of 14 clauses," foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said on state television.

He noted what he called “a trend towards rapprochement” but said, “it does not necessarily mean that we and the United States will reach an agreement on the important issues.”

Iran's chief negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf had warned earlier that Washington would face a tough response if it resumes hostilities.

SEE ALSO P6 & 7

A SIGNIFICANT CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS LANDMARK



The Sultan Qaboos Mosque in Suhar represents a comprehensive cultural and educational landmark which goes far beyond its religious function to undertake a noble mission in shaping and building a balanced and faithful Omani character, proud of its identity and heritage. This edifice embodies the living link between the rich history of Suhar as an ancient commercial and cultural city and its current economic prosperity.

DETAILS ON P2

OIA achieves 10-fold return on investment in Crusoe

MUSCAT: Oman Investment Authority (OIA) announced that it has achieved strong returns from the partial exit of its investment in the American company Crusoe, which specialises in AI infrastructure.

OIA will continue to benefit from the company's future growth opportunities through its remaining stake, as part of OIA's flexible investment management and capital recycling strategy aimed at reallocating capital towards promising

investment opportunities.

This comes amidst the rapid global growth of the artificial intelligence sector and increasing demand for data centres, cloud computing and digital infrastructure supporting advanced technologies. Exit strategies are considered a global investment practice used when an invested asset becomes ready for sale, generating profits and returns exceeding the original investment amount. Through the partial exit, OIA

achieved: an annual internal rate of return (IRR) of 68 per cent; and a return multiple of 10.3x invested capital.

This reflects the success of OIA's strategy in investing in fast-growing technology startups and its ability to capture high-quality investment opportunities in future-focused sectors, especially with the global expansion of AI applications and cloud computing and the growing demand for its supporting applications.

DETAILS ON P13



Oman Arab Bank S.A.O.G. prices US\$400 million AT1 bond at 6.75% amid volatile market conditions

Transaction attracted over US\$1.1 billion in demand and was oversubscribed by 2.75 times with strong local and international investor participation

Oman Arab Bank Bank S.A.O.G. has successfully issued a US\$400 million Additional Tier 1 (AT1) perpetual non-call 5.5-year instrument with a fixed resettable coupon of 6.75 percent, reinforcing the Bank's capital position and supporting its long-term capital optimisation strategy.

The issuance was executed during a period of heightened geopolitical tensions and significant volatility across international capital markets, including uncertainty arising from the regional conflict and elevated supply conditions across the GCC debt capital markets space.

The pricing was established at 6.75 percent, surpassing the initial range of low seven percent by around 50 basis points.

Investor demand for the issuance was strong, with the transaction attracting an orderbook exceeding US\$1.1 billion and being oversubscribed by approximately 2.75 times. The issuance also attracted significant participation from international investors, reflecting continued confidence in the Bank's credit fundamentals, financial resilience, strategic direction and the broader Omani economy.

The issuance attracted interest from a diversified investor base across regional and international markets, further reinforcing the Bank's continued access to international debt capital markets despite volatile market conditions.



OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The festival is part of efforts to promote traditional sports.

OVER 300 JOIN HORSE, CAMEL RACING FESTIVAL IN BIDIYAH

BIDIYAH: The joint horse and camel racing festival was held on Saturday at the Al Muntarib racecourse in the Wilayat of Bidiyah, Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, with the participation of more than 300 owners of horses and camels from across the Al Sharqiyah South and Al Sharqiyah North governorates. The event drew a large public turnout from early morning hours to witness heritage displays and competitions.

Khaled bin Hamad al Hajri, Chairman of the Bidiyah Horse Racing Club, said this year’s edition was organised by the Bidiyah Camel and Horse Committee as part of an annual tradition coinciding with the sixth of Dhul Hijjah in the wilayat.

He noted that the programme included a parade of horsemen in traditional attire, showcasing purebred horses in a vibrant display of heritage and pride. — ONA

‘PIONEERS OF OMANI ART’ EXHIBITION OPENS IN RUSSIA



The exhibition at Moscow’s Tretyakov Gallery features 23 artworks by 17 Omani artists.

MOSCOW: The National Museum has opened an art exhibition titled ‘Pioneers of Omani Art’ at the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, as part of efforts to promote Oman’s cultural presence internationally.

The exhibition, which runs until August 16, features 23 artworks by 17 Omani artists, showcasing the richness and diversity of Omani fine arts across different generations and styles.

It highlights how Omani artists drew inspiration from their culture, heritage, history, natural environment, architecture, calligraphy, and daily life, reflecting the depth of Oman’s artistic identity.

The display traces the development of Oman’s modern art movement through works by leading pioneers who helped shape its foundations, with themes ranging from cultural identity and social life to human expression and abstract concepts.

Among the featured works are ‘The Shirt of Dreams 2’ by Musa bin Omar al Zadjali, ‘Faces’ by Alia bint Ali al Farsi, ‘Renaissance’ by Ahmed bin Saeed al Adawi, ‘Omanis’ by Rabha bint Mahmoud al Lawati, and ‘Formation’ by Iqbal bin Ramadan al Maimani.

The exhibition also includes pieces reflecting Omani landscapes and traditions, such as calligraphic compositions, village scenes, maritime life, and portraits of Omani women, alongside works exploring emotional and philosophical themes. The National Museum noted that Oman’s artistic roots date back to prehistoric rock art, later influenced by cultural and maritime exchanges, which contributed to the documentation of Omani life by visiting European artists.

The modern art movement gained momentum in the late 20th century, led by pioneering artists and supported by institutions such as the Youth Studio (1980) and the Omani Society for Fine Arts (1993), which helped nurture and develop local talent.

Today, Omani artists continue to gain international recognition across various disciplines, including painting, sculpture, photography, and calligraphy, reflecting the country’s growing presence in the global art scene.

The Tretyakov State Gallery, one of Russia’s most prominent art museums, is known for its extensive collection of Russian art spanning from the 11th century to contemporary works and remains a key institution for international cultural exchange. – ONA

Seeb’s seven day Eid Habta begins in largest venue yet

IDRIS AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 23

THE familiar rhythm of bargaining voices, livestock traders, incense sellers and children’s laughter returns to Al Seeb today as the wilayat’s annual Eid Habta officially begins in a new and expanded venue, ushering in seven days of festive preparations ahead of Eid Al Adha.

Running from 7 Dhul Hijjah until the fourth day of Eid Al Adha, the festival is being held behind the General-Directorate of Muscat Municipality building in Al Seeb — a site organisers describe as the largest venue yet for one of the wilayat’s most cherished seasonal traditions.

Final preparations for the festival were recently reviewed during a meeting chaired by Shaikh Ahmed bin Ali al Shihi, Wali of Al Seeb, as authorities completed arrangements for what remains one of the wilayat’s biggest seasonal gatherings.

For generations, the Habta has stood as one of Oman’s most cherished pre-Eid traditions, historically serving as a vibrant marketplace where families purchase livestock, clothing, sweets and household necessities ahead of the holiday.

More than a shopping destination, the Habta has long symbolised the anticipation and communal spirit associated with Eid celebrations.

In Al Seeb, the event was once centred around the old market before moving for several years to Al Maabela. Its new venue now offers larger open spaces for visitors and an expanded programme of activities designed to attract families and shoppers alike.

The festival features a heritage and consumer village, a theatre stage, children’s entertainment and stalls run by small businesses and productive families. The traditional



Habta is no longer only about shopping but also about preserving memories and traditions.

The Habta has long symbolised the anticipation and communal spirit associated with Eid celebrations

livestock market — closely tied to Eid sacrifices — remains at the heart of the gathering, drawing residents seeking animals for the annual observance.

For many residents, however, the Habta is no longer only about shopping but also about preserving memories and traditions.

University student Waleed al Balushi said the Habta has become more of a cherished ritual than a necessity for his family.

“We have malls, online shopping and modern boutiques everywhere now, but we still come every year because the atmosphere feels like the real Eid we grew up with,” he said. “It keeps the memories alive.”

Families say the appeal of the Habta lies in the experience itself — a rare opportunity for generations to gather together under one space in the final days before Eid.

Johka al Shiryani, a mother of four, described Al Seeb’s Eid Habta as “the perfect last-minute destination for families.”

“It allows us to finish everything before Eid in one place — from children’s clothes and perfumes to sweets and gifts — while also giving

the children a festive outing before the celebrations begin,” she said.

“It saves time, but more importantly, it creates excitement. The children feel Eid approaching the moment they walk through the market. Even adults reconnect with memories from older Eid celebrations.”

While deeply rooted in heritage, Habtas are also evolving to reflect changing lifestyles and wider economic opportunities.

Recently, Oman Airports launched ‘Habtat Al Matar’ at Muscat International Airport, transforming part of the departures terminal into an Eid marketplace supporting employee-led small businesses and entrepreneurs. Meanwhile, Madayn organised its own Eid Habta at Knowledge Oasis Muscat, bringing together perfume makers, bakhoor sellers, clothing vendors and home-based businesses under one roof.

These newer adaptations reflect how the traditional Habta has expanded beyond neighbourhood souqs into corporate and institutional spaces, while continuing to preserve its social and cultural essence.

Sultan Qaboos Mosque in Suhar stands as cultural and religious landmark

YOUSEF AL HABSI

SUHAR: The Sultan Qaboos Mosque in Suhar represents a comprehensive cultural and educational landmark which goes far beyond its religious function to undertake a noble mission in shaping and building a balanced and faithful Omani character, proud of its identity and heritage.

This edifice embodies the living link between the rich history of Suhar as an ancient commercial and cultural city and its current economic prosperity.

Khalid bin Rashid al Hamdi, Director of the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque Office in Suhar, said that the Sultan Qaboos Mosque in Suhar contributes to building a balanced Omani identity being an integrated religious, cultural and educational centre.

It embodies the connection between Suhar’s rich historical heritage as an ancient trading and cultural city and its current role as a vital economic hub.

The mosque reflects balanced development that links the past, present, and future by preserving Islamic identity alongside economic progress.

It has also become a prominent landmark attracting visitors and tourists. He noted



Sultan Qaboos Mosque is a prominent landmark attracting visitors and tourists. — Photo by Ahmed al Buraiki

that the mosque features a large garden with trees, flowers, and green spaces suitable for Suhar’s hot climate. It boasts several facilities including a multi-purpose hall, a council (Majlis) and a library. These facilities reflect the mosque’s role as a religious, cultural, and social centre in the Sultanate of Oman.

Among the most important additions are the high gates and main entrances for worshippers to enter from the parking areas

into the main courtyard.

Two gates were added on the north and south sides, along with arches on the facades, to soften the military character of mosques built in the Timurid architectural style. The mosque’s facilities, such as the multi-purpose hall, the council and the library, are open to the public to enjoy activities and events held regularly at the mosque.

The library, with 20,000 books, is open in morning and evening

shifts, he said. The multi-purpose hall can accommodate 365 people, and since the mosque’s opening in October 2016, it hosted more than 1,000 events including seminars, lectures and closing ceremonies.

Various organisations utilise the mosque’s facilities according to specific guidelines aimed at preserving the sanctity of the mosque, he said. The council it can accommodate 450 people and serves social purposes.

SHORT TAKES



The new framework seeks to align education and training outcomes.

OMSB TO LEAD UNIFIED HEALTH TRAINING

MUSCAT: Oman is taking a significant step towards unifying advanced medical education and training through the expansion of the role of the Oman Medical Specialty Board (OMSB), following the issuance of Royal Decree No 60/2026.

The Royal Decree abolishes the Higher Institute for Health Specialities and transfers all its specialisations, assets, rights, obligations, records and allocations to the OMSB, in a move aimed at strengthening and streamlining the country's healthcare education system.

The move forms part of broader efforts to re-engineer the health sector in Oman by establishing a unified national reference for advanced professional medical education and training. It is expected to enhance the readiness of national healthcare competencies to meet the evolving demands of the health system while improving the quality and efficiency of specialised training programmes.

The new framework seeks to align education and training outcomes with the priorities of the national healthcare system, support innovation and modern technologies, optimise government spending and improve resource utilisation. It also aims to strengthen sustainability in the health sector while contributing to the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The integration is also expected to improve coordination across medicine, nursing, pharmacy and allied health disciplines, creating stronger links between various medical specialities under one national umbrella.

— ONA

OMAN SECURES TOP 10 FINISH AT INT’L ROBOTICS CONTEST



Students from Indian School Bausher and United International Schools represented Oman.

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MAY 23

Oman has achieved a strong top 10 position at the 7th Codeavour International Competition focused on artificial intelligence, coding and robotics, held in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Recognised as one of the world's largest student competitions in AI and robotics, Codeavour 7.0 brought together more than 77,000 students from over 70 countries, with Oman making its debut appearance and securing a place among the top-performing teams.

Students from Indian School Bausher and United International Schools represented Oman at the global innovation event. The Indian School Bausher team participated in Track 1 and Track 3 categories, while United International Schools competed in Track 3.

The Track 1 team from Indian School Bausher presented a project titled 'Desert Heat Health Guardian,' while the Track 3 category featured Robo Soccer. The teams were guided by robotics educators Niveda Prem Kumar and Indira Gandhi Alex, along with student participants from Grades 4 to 9. From United International Schools, students Ibrahim Masood and Marwan Hamza participated under the guidance of mentors and faculty members, showcasing their skills in robotics and innovation.

All participating teams had earlier qualified through national-level competitions in Oman, where they secured gold medals to advance to the international finals.

MARKETS SEE STABLE SUPPLY OF FOOD PRODUCTS

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources continues monitoring the availability of agricultural products in central markets as part of its efforts to enhance market stability and ensure the availability of food products prior to Eid Al Adha.

The ministry confirmed the availability of various types of leafy green vegetables, fruit vegetables, and root crops, in addition to fruits. This, the ministry said, reflects the stability of supplies and continued



The ministry is making efforts to maintain market stability and ensure sufficient food supplies.

flow of products to local markets.

It noted that statistics show that the Salal market received more than 20,000 tonnes of vegetables and fruits between May 1 and 20, which enhances the readiness of markets to meet the increased consumer needs during the holidays.

The ministry pointed out that monitoring and field surveillance of central markets help maintain market stability and ensure the availability of food products before Eid Al Adha. — ONA

Grape season opens doors to sustainable economy

RUQAYA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MAY 23

THE MODERN grape farms project in the Wilayat of Ibra, located in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, is set to increase the total area cultivated with grapes in the Sultanate of Oman by 36 per cent, reaching 300 acres by the end of the current year, according to Dr Qais al Maawali, Director of Agricultural Development in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate.

Grape harvest seasons, held across multiple governorates at different times of the year, are gradually transforming into a significant economic driver, strengthening food security and contributing to a more diversified and sustainable agricultural sector in Oman.

He stated that the total cultivated area currently stands at approximately 220 acres, with an expected annual yield of 1,100 tonnes, representing 4.6 per cent of domestic consumption, and generating an estimated economic return of around RO 1.7 million, based on 2025 statistics. Projections indicate that grape cultivation could expand to 1,000 acres by 2040, with an estimated economic value of RO 5 million.

The annual Grape Festival, held in Al Sharqiyah North during the harvest season from the last third of May to early June, has further enhanced the sector by creating a platform for farmers, investors, and stakeholders to exchange expertise and promote agricultural investment.

The diversity of grape varieties showcased at the second edition of the festival in 2025 — featuring 51 varieties from Al Sharqiyah North, 21 from Al Dakhiliyah, and several from Al Dhahirah Governorate — highlights the crop's adaptability to Oman's environment and its growing investment potential. Successful introduction of international commercial varieties across the governorates of Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Al Dakhiliyah and Al Dhahirah further strengthens this momentum.



The current production is estimated at 220 acres yielding around 1,100 tonnes annually.



The Modern grape farms project in Wilayat of Ibra was launched following recommendations from the festival's first edition, introducing six commercially viable grape varieties suited for both fresh consumption and food processing. These varieties are competitive in global markets, offering strong storage and marketing

potential.

“These grapes are suitable for fresh consumption, drying into raisins, and are also used in traditional cuisine such as mahshi, as well as in jams, juices, and desserts,” Dr Qais noted, adding that they also have strong post-harvest durability.

He further emphasised the growing popularity of the festival, which attracted more than 10,000 visitors in 2025, including participants from across Oman and neighbouring countries. The exhibition featured over 52 varieties of grapes, reflecting the richness and diversity of local production. The expansion of grape farming, supported by national agricultural development initiatives, is encouraging more farmers to invest in commercial cultivation. The sector's growth underscores a broader transformation — where Oman's natural landscape is not only a source of beauty but also a foundation for a sustainable and diversified economy.

National Museum opens landmark Italian design exhibition, signs MoU with ADI Design Museum

IDRIS AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 23

The National Museum of Oman has launched a major international exhibition titled 'One to a Million: Italian Design Stories', opening under the auspices of HH Sayyidah Mayan bint Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Chairwoman of the Oman Design Association (Design Oman).

Developed in partnership with the ADI Design Museum in Milan and curated by Maria Cristina Didero, the exhibition presents a wide-ranging exploration of modern Italian industrial design. Running until November 1, it marks the first exhibition of its kind in Oman, offering visitors an in-depth look at how design shapes everyday life through the interplay of creativity and industry.

At the heart of the exhibition are landmark works recognised by the Compasso d'Oro Award, Italy's most prestigious design honour, founded in 1954 by architect Gio Ponti. Jamal bin Hassan al



The MoU between the National Museum of Oman and the ADI Design Museum underscores a growing cultural partnership between Oman and Italy.

Moosawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum of Oman, described the exhibition as a significant cultural milestone. He said it captures the evolution of design as a blend of creativity, innovation, craftsmanship and

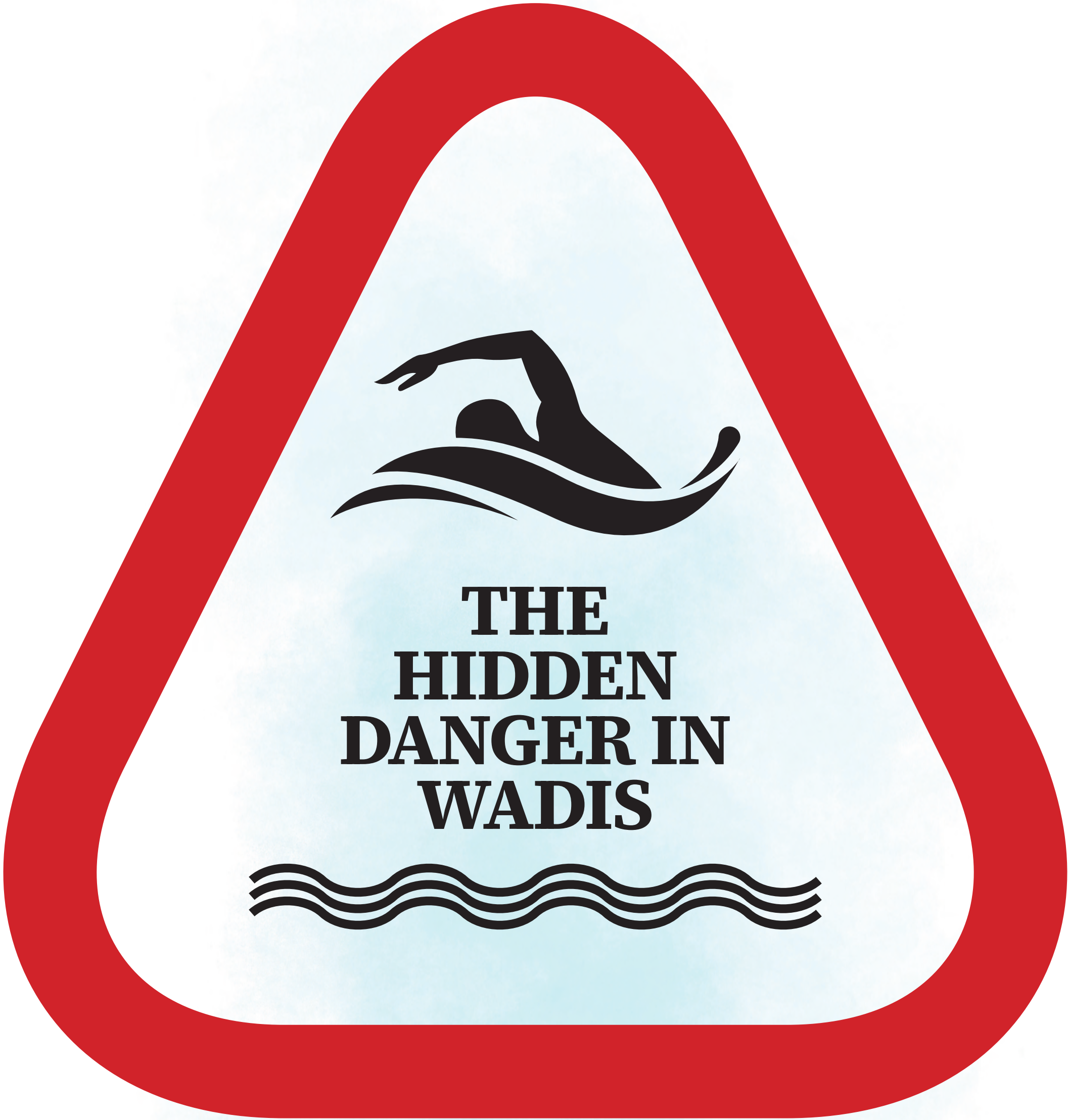
industrial development. Italian Ambassador to Oman, Pierluigi D'Elia, said the exhibition reflects the strength of cultural ties between the two countries, highlighting ongoing cooperation aimed at promoting dialogue, creativity and mutual understanding.

Dr Andrea Cancellato, Director of the ADI Design Museum, emphasised the dual nature of Italian design, shaped both by mass-produced functional objects and highly exclusive, performance-driven creations.

Curator Maria Cristina Didero noted that the exhibition explores themes of intuition, discipline and experimentation, presenting design as a human-centred practice shaped by both success and failure.

The museum also witnessed the signing of a MoU between the National Museum of Oman and the ADI Design Museum by HH Sayyidah Mayan bint Shihab bin Tarik al Said and Dr Andrea Cancellato. The agreement underscores a growing cultural partnership between Oman and Italy, with design serving as a shared platform for exchange and innovation.

SPOTLIGHT



KABEER YOUSUF

THE CIVIL DEFENCE and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) has issued a renewed warning against swimming in unsafe and undesignated water bodies, stressing that negligence around ponds, wadis, and open water sites is now contributing to a worrying rise in drowning incidents.

The advisory follows a recent case in Al Rustaq, where two individuals narrowly escaped death after being pulled from a pond in Wadi Al Hoqain. Both are currently receiving intensive care at Al Rustaq Hospital after being rescued in critical condition.

A CDAA official noted that drowning incidents tend to surge during summer months, when families and groups seek out natural water spots for recreation.

“Drowning incidents are on the surge at water ponds, especially during the summer season when people explore water bodies to spend time with family and friends,” the official said. “Dangers arise when individuals misjudge the depth of ponds, ignore warning

Drowning cases in Oman have surged sharply, with hundreds of incidents reported annually

Wadis, ponds, and unsupervised pools remain the most dangerous locations, especially during summer and rainfall

Authorities stress supervision, adherence to warning signs, and basic emergency preparedness to reduce fatalities

signs, or enter unmanned water bodies. Such actions lead to legal consequences, as they constitute negligence of safety measures.”

Authorities and health data indicate that drowning remains a significant public safety concern in Oman, with hundreds of cases reported annually, including fatalities. Incidents typically spike during summer and the rainy season, driven by unsupervised swimming, flash floods in wadis, and attempts to swim in undesignated or hazardous areas.

INCREASE IN DROWNING

Recent CDAA figures point to a sharp increase in drowning-related incidents, rising to 639 cases in a single year, compared to 166 the previous year. Paediatric emergency data from Ministry of Health hospitals further shows that children, particularly boys under the age of six, account for a significant proportion of hospital admissions related to drowning, often in pools and residential water facilities.

According to officials, many of the most severe cases occur when individuals venture into

wadis or natural streams during or after rainfall, when water flow can be deceptively strong and unpredictable. Lack of supervision, limited swimming ability and disregard for warning signs continue to be key contributing factors.

“People tend to ignore warning signs, and this ignorance is a major reason behind frequent fatalities,” the CDAA official added. “Failing to follow safety regulations — such as crossing flooded wadis, swimming in dangerous coastal areas, or open water tanks — is a serious risk and can amount to legal violations.”

The CDAA and health authorities continue to urge the public to prioritise water safety through clear preventive measures, including active supervision of children near water, avoiding undesignated swimming areas, ensuring proper safety barriers around pools, and learning basic CPR and water rescue skills.

Officials also advise residents to closely monitor updates from the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority and official media channels for weather alerts, particularly during unstable weather conditions.

SHORT TAKES



Nadira al Harthy being presented a memento by Dornath Aryal, Nepal ambassador to Oman.

MOUNT EVEREST DAY PROMOTES ADVENTURE TOURISM IN OMAN

MUSCAT: The Embassy of Nepal in Muscat organised a tourism promotion event to mark Sagarmatha Day (Mt Everest Day) at Nepal House on May 21, celebrating the spirit of adventure, mountaineering and Nepal’s rich tourism potential.

Among the distinguished guests was Nadira al Harthy, the first Omani woman to summit Mount Everest.

Dornath Aryal, Ambassador of Nepal to the Sultanate of Oman, who inaugurated the event by lighting the traditional Panas lamp, highlighted the historical significance of Sagarmatha Day, describing Mt Everest as a symbol of courage, perseverance and human determination. He also stressed the growing global challenge of climate change and its impact on the Himalayas and ocean ecosystems.

During the event, Nadira al Harthy shared her personal experiences of climbing Mt Everest, reflecting on the breathtaking beauty of the Himalayas and Nepal. She encouraged participants to pursue their ambitions with determination and to explore the Himalayas as a journey of self-discovery.

In recognition of her remarkable achievements in mountaineering and her contribution to promoting mountain adventure, Ambassador Aryal honoured Nadira al Harthy during the ceremony.

A promotional video showcasing Nepal’s mountains, landscapes, culture and traditions was screened, while specially designed photo frames highlighting Nepal’s scenic beauty and mountain ranges were distributed to attendees.

As part of the Sagarmatha Day celebrations, the embassy will organise an early morning peace walk and beach-cleaning event on May 29 at Qurum Beach.

The programme will begin in front of the W Muscat and will run from 5 am to 5:45 am.

MoCSY TO SHOWCASE KEY CULTURAL, YOUTH PROGRAMMES



The session will focus on efforts to strengthen Omani cultural identity.

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) will review its key achievements and performance indicators for 2025 during its media meeting today, while also outlining its strategic directions, programmes and projects for the next phase across the culture, sports and youth sectors.

The meeting will highlight the ministry’s major accomplishments over the past year, including qualitative programmes and initiatives implemented across Oman. It will also review progress in digital transformation, international partnerships, and major national projects aligned with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The session will further focus on efforts to strengthen Omani cultural identity, empower youth, develop the sports sector, and support cultural and creative industries. It will also highlight improvements in service efficiency, infrastructure development.

In addition, the meeting will unveil new programmes aimed at empowering young people and nurturing talent across various fields. Updates will also be shared on strategic initiatives, including the Sayyid Tarik bin Taimour Cultural Complex, the National Youth Strategy project, and expansion plans for youth centres across the governorates. – ONA

Umrah visa issuance to begin after Haj rituals on May 31

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MAY 23

As the holy lands of Mecca and Medina begin receiving Haj pilgrims, the Saudi Ministry of Haj and Umrah has announced that the issuance of Umrah visas and arrival of pilgrims will commence on May 31, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA) said.

According to the Umrah season

calendar for 1448 AH, pilgrims will be able to enter Mecca and obtain Umrah permits via the Nusuk application starting June 1. The calendar outlines key operational dates related to visa issuance, contractual procedures, and pilgrim reception as part of efforts to enhance service efficiency.

A representative from Nusuk stated that Umrah visas will continue to be issued until March 9,

2027, while the final entry date for pilgrims into the Kingdom has been set for March 23, 2027. The final departure date for Umrah pilgrims will be April 7, 2027.

The ministry urged Umrah service providers and overseas agents to strictly adhere to the approved timeline and regulatory guidelines.

Meanwhile, registered Haj pilgrims from Oman have already

begun arriving in the holy land since May 14 and are performing Umrah rituals on scheduled days.

A total of 14,000 Omani pilgrims are expected to join nearly two million pilgrims assembling in Saudi Arabia for the Haj season. The Omani Haj Mission, led by MERA, is deployed across Mecca and Medina to support pilgrims with medical, religious, and logistical services.

Wusta Investment Forum seals 29.6m in deals

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MAY 23

THE SECOND edition of the Wusta Investment Opportunities Forum commenced under the auspices of Shaikh Ahmed bin Musallam al Kathiri, Governor of Al Wusta, and was organised by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning in cooperation with the Governor’s Office.

The forum aims to highlight promising investment opportunities and strengthen Al Wusta’s position as an emerging economic destination with competitive advantages across key sectors including industry, energy, tourism, logistics, agriculture and aquaculture.

The event comes amid growing development momentum in the governorate, which is considered strategically located and well-positioned to support economic diversification and regional development objectives.

The forum featured panel discussions and working sessions focusing on the investment landscape in Al Wusta Governorate, ongoing projects, and future opportunities. It brought together government officials, private sector representatives, financing institutions and investment stakeholders.



The forum featured panel discussions and working sessions in Al Wusta Governorate.

The forum emphasised public-private partnerships and highlighted Al Wusta’s growing role as an emerging investment destination

One of the key sessions, titled ‘Financing, Empowerment and Investment Support,’ discussed financing mechanisms, investment incentives and the role of institutions in supporting entrepreneurs and improving the business environment.

Another session, ‘Al Wusta... Promising Economic Horizons,’ highlighted the governorate’s development vision and strategic projects driving its investment appeal.

The forum also witnessed the signing of usufruct agreements worth more than RO 29.6 million across multiple sectors, reflecting growing investor confidence in the region.

Among the agreements was an industrial project in Al Jazer valued at RO 5 million, covering 10,000 square metres in cooperation with Al Deham Holding. An agricultural project in Mahout valued at over RO 7.6 million was also signed with Al Ghadeer Dairy, spanning 208 acres.

In addition, infrastructure development agreements worth RO 15 million were signed with Nama Electricity Distribution over more than 12,500 square metres, along with a commercial project in Haima valued at over RO 2 million in partnership with Distinguished Professionals for Oil and Gas.

The forum underscored the importance of public-private partnerships in driving sustainable economic development and strengthening Al Wusta’s competitiveness as a rising investment hub in Oman.

OPS to host first int’l mental health conference

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: The Oman Psychiatric Society (OPS) will host its first international conference, OPS2026, on July 17–18, 2026, in Muscat, marking a major milestone in the advancement of psychiatric education, research and clinical practice in Oman.

Titled ‘The First Oman Psychiatric Society International Conference 2026’, the event will bring together psychiatrists, mental health professionals, researchers, academics, trainees, students and policymakers from Oman, the region and beyond. The conference will be held at the Sheraton Oman Hotel, featuring pre-conference workshops on July 17 followed by the main scientific programme on July 18.

Speaking on the significance of the event, Dr Tamadhir al Mahrouqi said the conference represents an important step towards strengthening psychiatric practice and mental health collaboration.

“This conference reflects the dedicated efforts of the Oman Psychiatric Society and its organising committee to establish a high-quality scientific platform for psychiatric education, professional exchange and collaboration,” she said. “We are honoured to welcome distinguished regional and international experts



DR TAMADHIR AL MAHROUQI

The conference represents an important step towards strengthening psychiatric practice and mental health collaboration in Oman

to Muscat to share knowledge, discuss emerging developments in psychiatry and support the advancement of mental healthcare in Oman and beyond.”

Organised by the OPS, OPS2026 aims to promote mental health awareness, advance psychiatric education and strengthen psychiatric services across Oman.

The conference will feature an international scientific programme with invited experts from Canada, the UAE and Qatar. Among the distinguished speakers are Prof Elisa Brietzke, an internationally recognised expert in mood disorders and biological psychiatry; Prof Claudio Soares, whose work focuses on women’s mental health and mood disorders; Prof Gustavo H Vázquez, an expert in treatment-resistant mood disorders; Prof Tarek Qassem; and Asst Prof Zerak al Salihi.

The scientific sessions will explore several contemporary psychiatric topics, including treatment-resistant depression and bipolar disorder, bipolar spectrum disorders, psychedelics in clinical psychiatry, neurocognitive disorders and complex depression across the lifespan.

Interactive pre-conference workshops on July 17 will focus on women’s mental health across the life cycle, metabolic psychiatry in

treatment-resistant mood disorders, modern pharmacotherapy of bipolar disorder and ADHD across adulthood and older age.

“These workshops were selected to address practical and clinically relevant topics encountered by mental health professionals in daily practice,” Dr Al Mahrouqi said. “Our goal is to provide evidence-based updates that can be translated into better clinical care.”

Dr Al Mahrouqi, who also serves as Chairperson of the Continuous Medical Education and Research Committee at the OPS and is a psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, said OPS2026 will also serve as a platform to highlight Oman’s growing contribution to mental health education and research.

“We hope this conference will foster collaboration between local, regional and international experts while inspiring trainees, students and young professionals to engage more deeply in psychiatry and mental health research,” she said.

The conference is open to psychiatrists, consultants, specialists, residents, trainees, nurses, psychologists, social workers, pharmacists, allied health professionals and students in medicine, psychology, nursing and related health disciplines.

WAR

IRAN VOWS ‘CRUSHING’ RESPONSE IF US RETURNS TO WAR



People walk past a billboard about the Strait of Hormuz, in Tehran, Iran. — Reuters

ISRAEL HITS SOUTH LEBANON <i>Israel struck south Lebanon on Saturday despite a ceasefire as Hezbollah said its backer Tehran had pledged not to abandon the group</i>	IRAN, US SEE BREAKTHROUGH <i>Senior US and Iranian officials said they could be close to a breakthrough in talks to strike a draft deal to end the war</i>	PAKISTAN PM ARRIVES IN CHINA <i>Pakistan’s Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif arrived in China on Saturday, kicking off a four-day trip overshadowed by the Iran war</i>	LEBANON HOSPITAL DAMAGED <i>Israel kept up strikes on Lebanon, hours after overnight raids on the country’s south and east, including one that damaged a hospital</i>	RUBIO SAYS “CHANCE” OF DEAL <i>US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said there was a chance Iran would accept a deal to end the Middle East war</i>
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IRAN’S CHIEF NEGOTIATOR Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf warned on Saturday of a “crushing” response if Washington resumes hostilities, after US media reports raised the prospect of new strikes. Pakistan’s powerful army chief — a key mediator in diplomatic efforts to convert an April 8 ceasefire into a settlement — left Tehran after talks with Iranian officials, who have accused the US of making “excessive demands”. “Our armed forces have rebuilt themselves during the ceasefire period in such a way that if Trump commits another act of folly and restarts the war, it will certainly be more crushing and bitter for the United States than on the first day of the war,” Ghalibaf posted on social media. US media outlets Axios and CBS News have reported that the White House is considering renewed strikes.

Ghalibaf made the warning after meeting in Tehran with Pakistan’s army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir, a leading figure in international efforts to negotiate an end to the war, which broke out after the US and Israel attacked the Islamic republic on February 28. Munir arrived in Tehran on Friday and left the next day, Iran’s official IRNA news agency said. Weeks of negotiations — including historic face-to-face talks hosted by Islamabad — have still not produced a permanent resolution or restored full access to the Strait of Hormuz, choking vast quantities of global oil supply.

US officials have repeatedly raised the prospect of renewed action against Iran if a deal is not reached. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said, on the

Ghalibaf made the warning after meeting in Tehran with Pakistan’s army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir, a leading figure in international efforts to negotiate an end to the war, which broke out after the US and Israel attacked the Islamic republic on February 28



Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf meets with chief of Defence Forces of Pakistan, Field Marshal Asim Munir, in Tehran. — Reuters

sidelines of a Nato conference in Sweden that there had been “some progress” towards a peaceful resolution but “things were not there yet”. The impasse has left ordinary Iranians in limbo. “The state of ‘neither war nor peace’ is far filthier than war itself,” 39-year-old Tehran resident Shahrzad said. “You can’t even plan something as simple as signing up for a gym, let alone bigger things... I’m about to start a new job, and I’m scared war might break out again — that I’ll end up leaving the job like before, running off to another city out of fear,” she said.

Iran’s Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in a call with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres that Tehran was engaged despite “repeated

betrayals of diplomacy and military aggression against Iran, along with contradictory positions and repeated excessive demands” by the United States. Araghchi held a bevy of diplomatic calls, speaking with his counterparts from Turkiye, Iraq, and Qatar. US President Donald Trump also spoke on Saturday with the Emir of Qatar Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, whose office said he had told Trump he supports “all initiatives aimed at containing the crisis through dialogue and diplomacy”.

Iran said on Saturday it was finalising a 14-point framework for a deal with the United States, signalling a convergence of views while noting that gaps still remain. “Our intention was first to draft

a memorandum of understanding, a kind of framework agreement composed of 14 clauses,” foreign ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baqaei said on state television. He noted what he called “a trend towards rapprochement” with Washington but said, “it does not necessarily mean that we and the United States will reach an agreement on the important issues”.

Iran said on Saturday it has included the ending of a week-long US naval blockade and arrangements on the strategic Strait of Hormuz in a draft framework for a deal with the United States. “The issue of the Strait of Hormuz is among the subjects addressed in this 14-point memorandum of understanding but more importantly, ending the piracy carried out by the United States against international navigation,” said Baqaei.

Iran added that the nuclear issue was not part of an initial framework it was drafting to end the war with the United States.

“At this stage, we will not discuss the details of the nuclear issue... we have decided to prioritise an urgent issue for all of us: ending the war on all fronts including Lebanon,” Esmaeil Baqaei told state television. He added that the nuclear file will be “subject to separate discussions” at a later stage.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio expressed optimism, just as Pakistan’s army chief left Tehran after two days of talks with senior Iranian leaders. “There is a chance that, whether it’s later today, tomorrow, in a couple days, we may have something to say,” Rubio said during a visit to New Delhi, adding that he hoped that he would soon be able to announce “good news”. — AFP

World Bank doc shows 27 countries seeking crisis funds over Mideast war

WASHINGTON: Twenty-seven countries have moved since the Iran war started to put in place crisis instruments that could quickly access funding from existing World Bank programmes, according to an internal document.

The World Bank document did not name the countries or the total amount of funds potentially being sought. The World Bank declined to comment. The document showed that three countries had approved new instruments since the Middle East conflict began on February 28 while the others were still completing the process.

The war and resulting

disruption of global energy markets have hit global supply chains and prevented vital fertiliser shipments from reaching developing countries. Officials in Kenya and Iraq have confirmed they are seeking rapid financial support from the World Bank to deal with the war’s fallout such as surging fuel prices hitting the African nation to a massive drop in oil revenue for Iraq.

The 27 countries are among 101 that had access to some form of pre-arranged financing instrument that they could tap in a crisis, including 54 that signed up to the Rapid Response Option, which allows countries to use



An atrium is seen at the World Bank headquarters in Washington. — Reuters file photo

up to 10% of their undisbursed financing. World Bank President Ajay Banga last month said the bank’s crisis toolkit would allow countries to draw on pre-arranged contingent financing, existing project balances and fast-disbursing instruments to access an estimated \$20 billion to \$25 billion.

He said the bank could also reorient parts of its portfolio to bring the total to \$60 billion over six months, with further longer-term changes possible to bring the total to around \$100 billion.

At the time, the head of the International Monetary Fund, Kristalina Georgieva, said she expected up to a dozen countries

to seek \$20 billion to \$50 billion in near-term assistance from the global lender. But few requests have been logged, according to three sources familiar with the matter. “Countries are definitely in wait-and-see mode,” said one of the sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Kevin Gallagher, director of the Global Development Policy Center at Boston University, said countries were more willing to seek World Bank funds than negotiate with the IMF because IMF programmes generally require austerity measures that could compound the social unrest already seen in countries like Kenya. — Reuters

MEDIATION EFFORTS



Pakistan PM Shehbaz Sharif

PAKISTAN PM ARRIVES FOR CHINA VISIT

BEIJING: Pakistan’s Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif arrived in China on Saturday, Chinese state media said, kicking off a four-day trip overshadowed by the Iran war. The Chinese foreign ministry has yet to confirm whether the pair will discuss the conflict in the Middle East, which Islamabad and Beijing have both sought to mediate in. US President Donald Trump has described the stop-start negotiations with Iran as teetering on the “borderline” between renewed attacks and a deal to end the war, which began with US-Israeli strikes on Iran in February and has engulfed the Middle East and roiled the global economy.

Sharif “arrived in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, on Saturday to begin a four-day official visit to China,” state news agency Xinhua said, without elaborating. Earlier in the week, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said only that “issues of common concern” would be discussed.

Guo has said that China would work with Pakistan to “make positive contributions to the early restoration of peace and stability in the Middle East”. “China supports Pakistan in playing a fair and balanced mediating role in promoting peace and ending the war,” he said.

Pakistan has emerged as a central mediator between the United States and Iran, hosting historic face-to-face talks last month that failed to yield a lasting agreement. Its army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir was due in Tehran on Thursday, Iranian media reported. China has played a quieter role, shepherding phone calls and meetings with officials of affected Gulf countries.

After high-profile talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing last week, Trump told Fox News the Chinese leader had offered Beijing’s help to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. — AFP

Israeli strike hits Lebanon army barracks

BEIRUT: Lebanon’s military said an Israeli strike on Saturday targeted an army barracks in the south, wounding a soldier, despite a ceasefire in the war between Israel and Hezbollah. Israel kept up strikes on Lebanon on Saturday, hours after overnight raids on the south and east, including one that damaged a hospital. It also issued two evacuation warnings covering 15 south Lebanon villages ahead of further strikes there. Israel’s military has been pounding Lebanon despite the April 17 ceasefire, which was recently extended for several weeks.

The Lebanese Hezbollah has kept up attacks on Israeli targets in south Lebanon and in northern Israel, including targeting Israeli air defence platforms across the border on Saturday. Lebanon’s state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported no-warning Israeli air strikes on around a dozen locations in the south. The army said, “A soldier was moderately wounded due to the hostile Israeli targeting of an army barracks in the city of Nabatieh”.

A day earlier, Lebanon’s military said its soldiers were loyal to the institution after the United States announced sanctions this week that included an officer accused of sharing information with Hezbollah. The NNA said an overnight strike in the southern city of Tyre that targeted a site near a hospital caused “severe damage” to the facility. A correspondent saw shattered glass, ceiling panels blown out and damaged medical equipment at the multi-storey Hiram hospital.

Israel’s military late on Friday had issued evacuation warnings ahead of strikes on two locations in Tyre. Accompanying maps advised people to leave areas within 500 metres (yards) of the target buildings, with the Hiram hospital shown within the advised evacuation area. The hospital’s CEO, Dr Salman Aydi, said that around 40 patients were in the facility at the time, including seven in intensive care. “We took the patients to a safer location” elsewhere inside the hospital, he



Mourners weep during the funeral of victims killed following an Israeli strike, in Deir Qanoun en Nahr village, southern Lebanon. — AFP

The NNA said an overnight strike in the southern city of Tyre that targeted a site near a hospital caused “severe damage” to the facility. A correspondent saw shattered glass, ceiling panels blown out and damaged medical equipment at the multi-storey Hiram hospital

said, adding that no patients were harmed but some 30 staff sustained minor injuries.

Aydi said the damage was being evaluated and the hospital remains operational, although the emergency department closed briefly.

He said it was the third strike near the hospital since the latest Israel-Hezbollah conflict erupted on March 2. Israel’s army said on Saturday it had targeted “Hezbollah infrastructure sites in Tyre” overnight, adding that “prior to the strike, steps were taken to mitigate harm to civilians”.

Another correspondent saw heavy damage at both targeted sites in Tyre. “I don’t know what happened, it felt like doomsday,” said Wisam Baroud, who lives near one of the sites. “We quickly got dressed, rushed outside, and started running,” said Baroud, showing

damage to her home including rubble on beds and damaged cupboards. Israel’s army also targeted east Lebanon overnight, saying it attacked a “Hezbollah underground compound” used to manufacture weapons.

Lebanon group Jamaa Islamiya and its armed wing the Al-Fajr Forces said on Saturday one of its members was killed in a strike in east Lebanon. Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East war on March 2 with rocket fire at Israel in retaliation for the killing of Iran’s supreme leader in US-Israeli strikes.

Under the terms of the ceasefire published by Washington, Israel reserves the right to act against “planned, imminent or ongoing attacks”. Israeli troops who invaded Lebanon are also operating inside an Israeli-announced “yellow line” running around 10 kilometres deep along Lebanon’s border. — AFP

SECURE TRANSITING

Third Qatari LNG tanker passes Hormuz



A Third Qatari liquefied natural gas tanker is transiting the Strait of Hormuz and heading to China, ship-tracking data showed, as a Qatari negotiating team arrived in Tehran to try to help secure a deal to end the war with Iran. The vessel, Al Sahla, with a capacity of 211,842 cubic metres, left Ras Laffan and is expected to arrive at China’s Tianjin LNG terminal on June 14, according to LSEG shipping data. — Reuters

PUNITIVE MEASURES

EU moves to sanction Iran over blockade



European Union nations moved towards imposing sanctions on Iranian officials and others responsible for blocking the Strait of Hormuz. EU governments took a technical step to extend the scope of its existing Iran sanctions regime allowing for more individuals to be targeted under it. “The EU will now be able to introduce further restrictive measures in response to Iran’s actions undermining the freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz”. — AFP

MISSION RETURN

Nato to consider resuming mission in Iraq



Nato’s mission to Iraq, which was entirely evacuated to a base in Italy due to the Middle East war, could return to Baghdad in the coming months, its former commander said. “The general staff is working on various options” to allow the mission to return to Iraq, said French General Christophe Hintzy. On March 18 and 20, three weeks after the first strikes by the US-Israel against Iran, all 1,300 personnel in the mission were brought back to Europe. — AFP

OPINION

The psychology of the missing ‘30 millilitres’



DR HAMED
AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

AT A RECENT family dinner, my almost 26-year-old was staring at his can of soft drink in amusement. His action annoyed me, so I said in a light joke, ‘someone is preoccupied today.’

With a big smile lighting his face, he announced his great discovery: “The amount of drink in this can dropped from 330 to 300 ml for the same price”.

We all looked at our cans more carefully. He was right. Thirty millilitres had quietly disappeared. Not enough to dramatically change the size of the can. Not enough for most people to immediately notice. Yet over time, multiplied across products and purchases, it adds up.

The marketing world calls this phenomenon: shrinkflation, which means rather than increasing prices directly, companies reduce the quantity of a product while keeping the price unchanged.

Consumers often react more strongly to seeing a higher number on a price tag than they do to a slightly smaller package. A few grams less here, a few millilitres less there, and many of us continue buying without questioning it.

What fascinated me was not the economics behind it, but the psychology.

Human beings are not as observant as we like to imagine. We assume we notice changes around us, yet our minds are surprisingly selective.

Psychologists have long studied something called ‘change blindness,’ our tendency to overlook gradual or subtle changes in our environment.

In classic experiments, people often fail to notice major alterations in scenes directly in front of them if those changes happen gradually or under distraction.

Perhaps this is because the brain is designed for efficiency rather than accuracy. If we paid attention to every detail around us, we would be overwhelmed. Instead, the brain filters information and focuses only on what appears immediately important. The downside is that many changes slip through unnoticed.

And this does not happen only with soft drink cans.

Many of the important changes in life arrive quietly. Stress does not usually appear overnight.

Relationships rarely collapse in a single dramatic moment. Burnout often develops through tiny daily adjustments; you start sleeping a little less, worrying a little more,

Psychologists have long studied something called ‘change blindness,’ our tendency to overlook gradual or subtle changes in our environment

spending a little less time with your family, and postponing rest because work feels urgent. One day, people suddenly say, “I don’t know what happened. I just feel exhausted.”

But often something did happen, but we simply did not notice it.

The same is true of happiness. We sometimes expect joy to arrive in grand moments such as promotions, achievements, or life-changing events. Yet much of life’s satisfaction also changes gradually.

We stop noticing simple pleasures like family dinners, conversations, routines, and familiar faces around us. Like the disappearing thirty millilitres, small things slowly fade from awareness.

My son eventually returned to his dinner, munching his kabab quietly and feeling pleased with his discovery. I smiled quietly, realising that perhaps he had noticed more than a marketing strategy. He had accidentally pointed toward an uncomfortable truth about human nature.

Sometimes life does not change through earthquakes. Sometimes it changes through missing thirty millilitres at a time. And perhaps psychological wisdom begins with occasionally pausing long enough to look more carefully at the can in our hands.

POPE RAISES ALARM OVER POLLUTION IN ‘LAND OF FIRES’

Pope Leo XIV made a visit on Saturday to Italy’s ‘Land of Fires’, where for decades the mafia has illegally dumped and burned toxic rubbish, poisoning both people and their land.

Hazardous waste - often from Italy’s wealthy north - has long been set alight or buried in the area around Acerra, a city near Naples, in the southern region of Campania.

For decades, the soil, groundwater and air have been contaminated by heavy metals, dioxins and asbestos.

Cancer rates among the area’s three million or so residents are higher than the national average.

Leo condemned “a deadly mix of obscure interests and indifference toward the common good, which has poisoned the natural and social environment”.

The US-born pope drew excited crowds when he arrived in his popemobile at a piazza in Acerra, a city of around 60,000 people.

“The pope is maybe the only person who can awaken the conscience a little bit of all the people who have harmed this territory,” local worshipper Giuseppina De Francesco, 60, said.

In 2025, Europe’s top rights court ruled that Italy had failed to protect residents and gave the government two years to fix the situation.

The pontiff’s visit coincides with the 11th anniversary of a landmark climate manifesto by Leo’s predecessor, Pope Francis.

The “Laudato Si” encyclical, which denounced mankind’s ruthless exploitation of the environment, was hailed by experts for its scientific grounding.

“In life, we understand that the more fragile beauty is, the more it requires care and responsibility,” said Leo in an address at the city’s cathedral to the clergy and families of the victims of environmental pollution.

“This land has paid a heavy price. It has seen many of its children buried. It has borne witness to the suffering of children and innocents,” added the leader of the world’s Roman Catholics.

He thanked the “pioneer” activists who had raised awareness with “their courageous commitment” to fight the “poisoning” of the land.

Italy’s “Land of Fires”, also known as the “Triangle of Death”, has served as a dump and illegal incineration site since the late 1980s.

Instead of paying exorbitant sums to have toxic substances disposed of legally, companies paid the region’s Camorra mafia a fraction of the cost to dump waste ranging from broken sheets of asbestos to car tyres and containers of industrial-strength glue. Since 2013, a host of parliamentary inquiries has found the authorities negligent and in some cases complicit. — AFP

Schools must teach students to protect the environment

THE BROADCASTER and documentary maker, Sir David Attenborough, who turned 99 on May 8, has spent a lifetime reminding us of a basic truth: every breath we take and every mouthful of food we eat depends on the natural world.

His message is that human life and nature are inseparable, and that when the natural world is damaged, we all suffer.

He has often described the oceans as Earth’s most vital ecosystem. Healthy seas support marine life, help regulate the climate and play a central role in feeding the world.

If the oceans fail, the effects will not remain at the shoreline. They will spread through weather systems, food supplies and economies. Protecting the seas is therefore not a narrow environmental concern. It is a matter of survival. Attenborough’s belief is simple: people do not protect what they do not understand. That is why schools have such an important role to play. If children study different animals, trees, insects, rivers and seas, they are more likely to value them later in life.



KARIM
EASTERBROOK

The writer is a Former Cambridge School Principal and Author



David Attenborough has long conveyed the message that human life and nature are inseparable, and that when the natural world is harmed, we all ultimately suffer.

Environmental care should not be treated as an optional subject or an occasional school project. It should be part of education from the start, alongside the other lessons that shape a child’s view of the world. This matters because the damage is already visible.

Climate change and the loss of rare wildlife are no longer distant warnings. They are realities we can see around us.

Yet Attenborough has never argued that the future is lost. Through initiatives such as the Earthshot Prize - an environmental award created by Prince William in 2020 - he has supported practical ideas that can be shared and expanded. His view is realistic but

Teach the next generation that the natural world is not separate from human life, but the foundation on which it depends

hopeful: the problems are serious, but solutions exist if people are willing to act.

There are encouraging signs in Oman. The government has taken steps to protect wildlife and preserve natural spaces, and those efforts deserve recognition.

Some time ago, I visited the Al Mouj golf course and was shown a small pond surrounded by reeds. It had been protected by law and several birds were nesting there, including some rare and endangered species.

As we walked towards the water, our guide mentioned that he had once seen an Osprey in the area. Almost at once as if on queue, the bird appeared overhead. It swooped down towards the sea with great speed, then rose again with a fish in its talons. It was a brief moment, but a memorable one. It showed how much beauty and balance can remain when people choose to leave space for nature.

That is the lesson: schools should help children learn about the

natural world. They need more than facts about pollution and climate change. They need to develop a sense of wonder when looking at their natural environment and a responsibility to protect it.

If young people grow up understanding that a healthy environment and wildlife are not simply an interesting distraction but a necessity, they are more likely to defend them as adults.

The task is straightforward to describe, though perhaps more difficult to carry out. Use less plastic. Reduce harmful chemicals. Waste less. Respect all living things.

And above all, teach the next generation that the natural world is not separate from human life, but the foundation on which it depends.

Equally important is the protection of plants and trees. Forests and green spaces are vital to maintaining clean air, healthy soils and a stable climate.

Deforestation in some countries, especially in South America, must be stopped before more damage is done.

Reputation... difficult to earn, but easy to lose



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

IT TAKES 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll often do things differently," said Warren Buffett, the scion of the remarkably successful Berkshire Hathaway finance house. Do you agree?

Reputation is the opinion held about a person, institution, or importantly in commerce, brand, built on performance criteria such as the quality, value, reliability in products and services; the ethics, vision, transparency, and accountability in governance; and, personally, trust, behaviour, and character. Over the years, many have fallen, unaware that 'good reputation is more valuable than money.'

Take cyclist Lance Armstrong, the seven-time 'Tour de France winner with a reputation as a 'man of steel,' but who was living an outrageous lie. He was outed by former team-mate Floyd Landis, and global drug enforcement agencies in 2012, for using erythropoietin (EPO), a human growth hormone. "It was just one lie, told a thousand times," Armstrong said. "But take me back to 1995, when I started, and I'd probably do it

again," thus showing that while reputation, as Abraham Lincoln said, "Is like fine china, once broken, can't be repaired," can be set aside, if you have a thick enough skin.

Theranos, the brainchild of Elizabeth Holmes, launched in 2003, became worth \$9 billion by 2014, touting portable blood-testing devices that used a pinprick of blood and were described as an "external point-of-care Blackberry."

However, it was fraud, an idea, nothing more, and Holmes is now serving jail time over it. To be fair, Holmes had many doubters, but she dazzled investors who were perhaps more blinded by 'believability,' than reputation.

Shakespeare, of course, enriches reputation with clarity, as the villainous Iago seeks to destroy Othello and Desdemona. Iago brutalises the threat of reputation, what others may think, to weaponise his words demeaning money, "Good name in man and woman, dear my lord, is the immediate jewel of their souls.

Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing; 'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands," while elevating

Reputation is the opinion held about a person, institution, or importantly in commerce, brand, built on performance criteria such as the quality, value, reliability in products and services

reputation thus... "But he that filches from me my good name, robs me of that which not enriches him, and makes me poor indeed." Lago sows doubt in Othello's mind. From then, Iago's cunning words, his tapestry of deceit, alongside a misplaced handkerchief, cunningly placed, draw rude consequences and from these seeds, reputations are questioned, trust is mislaid, and Desdemona perishes by Othello's hand, only for him to take his own life when he finds how Iago misled him.

Reputation then, can be devastating, behind closed doors, and in public, so I encourage a flagship carrier to respond positively to the appalling customer service ratings it currently holds with global review platforms Trustpilot and Tripadvisor, and on social media.

Yes, there are challenges and difficulties in regional air travel due to the Iran conflict, but that is even more reason to meet customer needs quickly, and efficiently. Don't put things in a 'too hard' basket.

In this current situation lies an opportunity to become better... to be the best. Remember, your reputation is your best advertisement.

WHO KILLED TRUMP’S AI ORDER? MUSK SAYS IT WASN’T HIM

ALEX PIGMAN

Speculation swirled over the last-minute collapse of President Donald Trump’s planned executive order on powerful AI models, with fingers pointing at the president’s allies in Silicon Valley who oppose government oversight of the technology.

A draft of the shelved order leaked to US media shows the White House had prepared new AI cybersecurity measures before Trump pulled the plug on Thursday. His former AI czar had reportedly called Trump directly to raise objections.

The collapse is the latest sign that Washington remains unable to agree on even modest guardrails for the technology - leaving the United States well behind Europe and Asia and far short of what many safety advocates say is needed.

If enacted, the dropped executive order would have given the federal government up to 90 days of access to the most powerful AI models before their public release, while establishing a coordinated response to AI-enabled threats to banks, hospitals and other critical infrastructure.

Politico and other media reported that David Sacks, the Silicon Valley venture capitalist who served as Trump’s AI and crypto czar, called the president on Thursday morning - blindsiding White House staff — to warn that the measure would slow innovation and hurt the US in its AI race with China. Officials believed Sacks supported the order, but the night before the planned signing, he began raising concerns that the voluntary review process could one day be made mandatory.

The Washington Post reported a broader account: Last-minute calls from Sacks, SpaceX and Tesla CEO Elon Musk, and Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg convinced the president not to sign.

Musk denied the claim on his social media platform X. "This is false. I still don't know what was in that executive order and the president only spoke to me after declining to sign," he wrote.

Meta also disputed the report, saying Zuckerberg had spoken to Trump only after the order was rescinded. To assuage concerns of government overreach, the draft explicitly stated that nothing in the order should be read as creating a mandatory licensing or approval requirement for AI models.

According to The Information and other media, tech companies also pushed to cut the pre-release access window from 90 days to just 14.

The order was triggered by concerns over Anthropic’s Mythos model, which the AI startup has refused to release publicly over its ability to expose vulnerabilities in computer systems — including those of banks, governments and hospitals. Sacks has said that concerns about Mythos and models of its power were legitimate and that defences needed to be put in place, but cautioned that Washington policymakers were trying to take advantage of the situation. Speaking on his "All-In" podcast this month, Sacks said pre-release government approvals were "solving a problem that didn't really exist," since Anthropic and other AI companies were already keeping Mythos-like models away from the public. — AFP

Now Norway goes ‘total defence’ mode

WAR IS now a possibility in Norway, by the prime minister's own admission. The country, which borders Russia, has gone into "total defence" mode, preparing its population for the worst in light of the fighting in Ukraine.

Dug beneath a peaceful park, the St Hanshaugen air raid shelter, one of Oslo's largest, can take in 1,100 people behind its heavy metal doors if ever the worst comes to pass.

The air is chilly, the lights dim and the toilets basic: it's far from cosy, but it is designed to protect against the threat of bombings and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) materials.

"Today we have about 18,600 shelters, (enough to protect) a little less than 50 per cent of the population" of 5.6 million people, the head of Norway's Civil Defence Oistein Knudsen said.

"Quite a few of them need to be upgraded. They were built during the Cold War. They are humid. They're old," he said.

Nato member Norway wants to reinstate the obligation for new large buildings to be equipped with air raid shelters, a requirement lifted in 1998 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The idea is not to build costly, top notch shelters, but basic protection against threats like drones, which now dominate battlefields.

"My Ukrainian colleagues are fighting an existential war on their own territory, and still they take time to share experiences," Knudsen said.

"And just listening to what they're experiencing, attacks on the civilian population, what it means to operate as a civil defence force in times of war, those experiences are invaluable."

Building shelters was among the 100 proposals included in a white paper. The government also wants to increase the number of men and women in the civil defence by 50 per cent to 12,000, require all municipalities to establish "local preparedness councils", and raise the food self-sufficiency rate to 50 per cent by 2030. Separately, households are urged to stock enough supplies to last seven days.

"We have enjoyed the luxury in Norway for many decades of being able to spend our resources on other things," said state secretary



A warrant officer in the civil protection service speaks on the telephone as he shows journalists around one of Oslo's largest bomb shelters in Hanshaugen. — AFP



PIERRE-HENRY DESHAYES

The writer is AFP's correspondent in Oslo

Nato member Norway wants to reinstate the obligation for new large buildings to be equipped with air raid shelters, a requirement lifted in 1998 after the collapse of the Soviet Union

Kristine Kallset at the public security ministry. "When the security situation deteriorated, we realised there are a number of things we need to do to ensure our preparedness also accounts for war in the worst-case scenario," she said in the government's new offices.

The buildings were recently inaugurated after they were destroyed by a bomb set off by right-wing extremist Anders Behring Breivik in 2011.

Ironically, they do not have an air raid shelter.

In his New Year's address, Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store warned fellow citizens that "war could once again come to Norway".

The country has declared 2026 the year of "total defence", a concept aimed at preparing all facets of society — military, administrations, companies, etc — for a major crisis or war. "The current threat picture — whether it's the climate crisis, rivalry between superpowers, the war in Ukraine, the Middle East, or pandemics — is much more interdisciplinary than it was 20 years ago," said Jarle Lowe Sorensen, a crisis management expert at the University of Southern Norway. "We're on the right track in terms of preparedness... but

there are bureaucratic, legal and organisational mechanisms that often hinder the proper functioning of the system and prevent everything from fitting together in a truly optimal way," he said.

For instance, the geographic areas of responsibility for police, firefighters, health services and the national guard are not always the same, making coordination difficult.

"It's not something I think about in my day-to-day life, but I do have my own little emergency kit," said 51-year-old business owner Oystein Ringen Vatnedalen.

"I've got some cash set aside, I've thought through a few scenarios — where I'd go, who I'd look after — and I've got a DAB radio, water, and everything the authorities recommend."

By contrast, 48-year-old sustainability consultant Kathe Hermstad hasn't made any particular preparations. "The most important thing is to have a network and community around you" to help each other, she said.

According to a Civil Defence study, 37 per cent of Norwegians say they have boosted their preparedness over the past year, but only 21 per cent fear a war on the country's soil in the next five years.

SPORTS

OLYMPIC PROGRAMME



At the conclusion of the session, certificates were presented to the participants by the President of International Olympic Committee.

ISHAQ ATTENDS NATIONAL OLYMPIC ACADEMIES SESSION IN GREECE

OLYMPIA, Greece: Ishaq bin Ahmed al Balushi, Director of Oman Olympic Academy, participated in the 19th International Session for Directors of National Olympic Academies and Representatives of National Olympic Committees, organised by the International Olympic Academy in Olympia, Greece, from May 17 to 23, 2026, with the participation of representatives from various Olympic academies and National Olympic Committees from around the world.

The session featured a series of scientific lectures and specialised workshops focusing on several key themes within the contemporary Olympic Movement, most notably athlete empowerment, inclusion, integrity, and responsibility. The programme also addressed topics related to strengthening good sports governance, developing athlete safeguarding policies, and reinforcing the principles of Olympic education within national sports institutions.

In addition, the sessions discussed issues related to ethical leadership in sport and the role of National Olympic Academies in promoting Olympic culture and values.

Participants also reviewed mechanisms for developing educational programmes associated with the Olympic Movement and exchanged experiences and best practices in the management of sports and educational programmes.

The session also included presentations highlighting the experiences of several National Olympic Academies, focusing on institutional development and management of National Olympic Academies, enhancing awareness programmes aimed at promoting Olympic culture and values, and improving the efficiency of professionals working in the sports sector, contributing positively to the sustainability of Olympic work at the national level.

The programme concluded with a presentation of the key recommendations issued during the lectures and workshops, emphasising the importance of strengthening cooperation among National Olympic Academies, developing educational programmes, intensifying efforts in the fields of governance, integrity, and athlete safeguarding, and creating programmes within National Olympic Academies that align with the International Olympic Committee's vision of building a more inclusive and sustainable sports environment.

At the conclusion of the session, certificates were presented to the participants by the President of International Olympic Committee.



AHMAD BACK TO HISTORY-MAKING MONZA FOR GTWCE

Second event of GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup this weekend

Bronze Cup racer aims high with team-mates Sagrera and Williams

Oman Racing by Century Motorsport sixth in championship ahead of Rd2

OMAN'S NUMBER one racing driver, Ahmad Al Harthy, makes his return to the scene of one of the most sensational results of his successful motorsport career this week, when round two of the 2026 GT World Challenge Europe powered by AWS Endurance Cup takes place at Monza in Italy.

Following a competitive start to the new season at Circuit Paul Ricard in France last month with sixth place in the Bronze class with the No.42 BMW M4 GT3 EVO, Al Harthy and the Oman Racing by Century Motorsport squad are relishing the three-hour Monza race on May 31.

The world-famous Italian track, one of the fastest in the world, has long been a happy hunting ground for Al Harthy in his international motor racing career. No result, though, is more famous than the astonishing, headline-grabbing outright GTWCE Endurance Cup race victory he achieved in 2024 with then team-mates Sam De Haan and Jens Klingmann.

Becoming the first non-Pro class entry to claim an overall success in the category's history, the result was one of the proudest moments of the Omani's career and a sporting achievement of immense magnitude for the Sultanate and Al Harthy's many prestigious partners and supporters. Going into round two of this season's GTWCE, Al Harthy and his 2026 team-mates Calan Williams and Javier Sagrera are focused on building on the top six Bronze Cup result achieved in the campaign opening six-hour race in the south of France.



Al Harthy's performance was impressive, moving from ninth in Bronze at the start to take the class lead midway through the second hour of his double stint. Delivering strong pace, excellent racecraft and eye-catching overtaking, the Omani is determined to produce more of the same this weekend. Last week the team joined the other GTWCE contenders at Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium for the traditional two-day test prologue for this season's CrowdStrike 24 Hours of Spa – round three of the Endurance Cup campaign which will take place at the end of June. OQ, Omantel, Oman LNG, Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and BMW Oman supported Al Harthy was pleased with the work completed across the two days in the Ardennes, which has given additional confidence.

AHMAD AL HARTHY: "Monza is such an amazing track, there is so much history, and it's always a joy to race there so I'm very excited to be back. This will be my first time returning since the incredible win of 2024, I can still feel the exhilaration of that moment and the pride of standing on the top step of the

overall podium with the Omani flag flying high. Truly incredible memories!

"The Oman Racing by Century Motorsport guys made a good a start to this season at Paul Ricard, and after a good couple of days testing at Spa last week I know we're carrying some good confidence into this weekend. We'll all be putting in maximum effort as always."

The first track action for the GTWCE runners at Monza will come with the exclusive test session for Bronze graded drivers on May 28, ahead of more testing on May 29, and two free practice periods on May 30. Qualifying is scheduled for 09.50 local time on May 31, with the three-hour race following at 15.30 local time.

Qualifying and the Monza race will be streamed live online at <https://www.gt-world-challenge-europe.com/watch-live>.

- GTWCE ENDURANCE CUP – BRONZE CUP STANDINGS (AFTER RD1)**
1. Riccardo Pera/Antares Au/Loek Hartog, 33 pts (Rutronik Racing/Lamborghini Temerario GT3)
 2. Gabriele Piana/Rinat Salikhov/Marvin Dienst, 24 pts (Winward Racing/Mercedes-AMG GT3 EVO)
 3. Dries Vanthoor/Darren Leung/James Kelllett, 19 pts (Paradine Competition, BMW M4 GT3 EVO)
 4. Kiern Jewiss/Reece Barr/Charles Dawson, 15 pts (2Seas Motorsport/Mercedes-AMG GT3 EVO)
 5. Lorenzo Patrese/Dustin Blattner/Dennis Marschall, 12 pts (Kessel Racing/Ferrari 296 GT3)
 6. Ahmad al Harthy/Javier Sagrera/Calan Williams, 9 pts (Oman Racing by Century Motorsport/BMW M4 GT3 EVO)

‘Harakatik Baraka’ promotes active ageing among elderly women

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 23

The third edition of the women's sports and social programme 'Harakatik Baraka' began at the sub-hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, targeting women aged 60 and above as part of efforts to promote active ageing, community health and quality of life.

Organised by the Women's Sports Department at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, in cooperation with the Oman Association for Elderly Health, the programme is held every Monday, with four sessions per month, from May 11 until October 1.

The initiative supports national

efforts aligned with Oman Vision 2040 by encouraging healthier lifestyles, empowering women across different age groups and strengthening community participation. It also reflects the objectives of Oman's sports strategy to promote 'sport for all' and develop specialised programmes for senior citizens.

The programme combines sports, cultural and social activities. The sports segment includes fitness exercises, movement-based games and mental competitions, while the social and cultural components feature handicraft workshops, 'Stories from the Past' sessions and health awareness lectures.

Badria al Wahaibi, Head of Community Programmes at the



The trainer explains the 'Harakatik Baraka' fitness programme.

Women's Sports Department, said the programme provides elderly women with a safe and encouraging environment to improve their physical and psychological wellbeing.

She noted that the programme targets around 300 participants, with more than 60 women joining

during the first days of the launch.

She added the strong response reflects the desire among elderly women to take part in health and recreational activities that help them break their daily routine, build positive social relations and remain active. The programme is implemented with support from several partners, including Omani Women's Associations in Muscat Governorate, Sultan Qaboos University, the Directorate-General of Scouts and Guides, the Oman Association for Elderly Health and Ihsan Association.

Dr Saliha al Jadidi, Chairperson of the Oman Association for Elderly Health, said the initiative highlights the importance of cooperation between government

and community institutions in supporting senior citizens. She said regular physical activity helps improve mobility, balance, independence and protection against chronic diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

Farida al Balushi, a member of Ihsan Association, said the programme has a positive impact on the health, confidence and social interaction of elderly women.

Participant Aisha al Toubi described the programme as a valuable initiative that combines exercise, awareness and social engagement. She said the activities reminded participants of the active lifestyle of Omani women in the past.



The previous edition of the summer programmes achieved strong participation and positive outcomes.



This year's plan focuses on expanding training centres and open activities.



More than 16,851 participants took part in the previous edition across different governorates.

Parents call for smarter, diverse Summer Sports

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 23

AS THE SUMMER VACATION period approaches, parents across the Sultanate of Oman have called for the development and diversification of summer sports programmes organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth during the coming months of June, July and August.

Parents stressed the importance of introducing modern and innovative activities that align with global technological developments, particularly through the integration of artificial intelligence into sports-related programmes. They also emphasised the need to focus on physical fitness, technical skill development, ethical values and cultural awareness while helping students build stronger personal identities during the summer break.

The summer sports programmes have become one of the most important seasonal initiatives implemented by the Ministry through its departments and directorates across various governorates in Oman. The programmes aim to provide healthy environments for youth to invest their free time positively while enhancing their physical and personal development.

Speaking to the Observer, Ibrahim bin Khalfan al Shibli, Acting Director of the Sports Activity Department at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, said the previous edition of the summer programmes achieved strong participation and positive outcomes. “The summer sports programmes included a variety of activities such as training centres in different sports, open sports days, sports caravans and several awareness and community initiatives,” he said.

“The diversity of the programmes helped attract various age groups and segments of society. More than 16,851 participants took part in the previous edition across different governorates, while the number of programmes and activities reached 171 events,” he added.

Al Shibli highlighted several strengths achieved through the programmes, including promoting sports culture and encouraging physical activity as a healthy lifestyle, in addition to expanding sports services to communities located far from sports complexes and clubs.

“The programmes also contributed to making better use of national sports cadres and available facilities while activating public spaces, beaches, parks and open areas for sports activities,” he explained.

Regarding the challenges faced during implementation, Al Shibli pointed to the increasing demand for certain sports activities and the pressure placed on facilities and operational resources.

“Despite these challenges, the organising teams managed the situation efficiently by expanding some training centres and introducing additional periods to meet growing demand,” he clarified.

He confirmed that the Ministry is currently working on a more advanced version of the summer programmes for this year through workshops and evaluation sessions involving beneficiaries, organisers and related entities.

“This year’s plan focuses on expanding training centres and open activities while targeting different segments of society to achieve higher participation and satisfaction levels,” he said.

Al Shibli also stressed the Ministry’s commitment to keeping pace with technological developments in sports through digital platforms and artificial intelligence tools.

“Artificial intelligence has become an important element in developing organisational and promotional aspects of sports programmes. It can also be utilised in analysing data, measuring participant satisfaction, improving training plans and enhancing the overall experience,” he explained.

IMPROVING FITNESS

Meanwhile, Masoud al Shaqsi, parent and board member of the Oman Table Tennis Association, described the summer sports programmes as highly important initiatives for students during school holidays. “These programmes play an effective role in attracting large numbers of participants, helping them invest their free time positively while developing their abilities, improving fitness levels and promoting healthy lifestyles,” he said.

Al Shaqsi called for greater involvement of specialists in sports education and youth development to supervise the programmes while ensuring the availability of suitable facilities and infrastructure.

“It is important to provide air-conditioned venues due to the summer heat and expand the programmes to include all wilayats and remote villages,” he stated.

On the use of artificial intelligence, Al Shaqsi emphasised the importance of keeping pace with global technological progress. “Artificial intelligence can improve training efficiency, reduce injuries, analyse strengths and weaknesses scientifically and support smart management of sports facilities and activities,” he noted.

He suggested the use of smart robots, computer vision cameras, wearable devices and smart applications to monitor physical performance, analyse data and create customised nutritional and training recommendations for participants.

MODERN TOPICS

Basheer al Riyami, parent and former supervisor of summer sports programmes, also underlined the importance of introducing modern topics that reflect the changing needs of society. “Summer centres and programmes are a valuable investment for children during holidays, and parents are always pleased to involve their children in these beneficial activities,” he said.

Al Riyami stressed the importance of integrating artificial intelligence topics alongside sports, cultural and educational activities. “There are many fields where artificial intelligence can be utilised, including design, programming, translation and simulation. Introducing these technologies in summer programmes can help discover talents and create promising opportunities for youth in the future,” he explained.

ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES

Additionally, Ishaq al Harthy, parent and former international volleyball referee, expressed his support for integrating smart technologies and artificial intelligence into summer sports programmes, stressing that modern technology has become an essential part of sports development worldwide.

“Today, sports are closely connected with advanced technologies, and it is important for summer programmes to keep pace with these developments. Artificial intelligence and smart applications can help students analyse their performances, improve fitness levels and develop their sporting skills scientifically,” he explained.

He also emphasised the importance of balancing technological aspects with practical physical activities and competitions, noting that students should remain actively engaged in sports on the field. “It is important to encourage students to participate in physical sporting competitions and practical activities because this helps develop their confidence, technical abilities and competitive spirit,” he said.

Al Harthy pointed out that summer programmes can play a major role in preparing students for future official competitions and sports participation through well-structured training environments and continuous technical guidance. “The summer period is considered a golden opportunity to discover talented athletes who can later represent clubs and national teams,” he added.

Parents and officials concluded that future summer sports programmes should move beyond entertainment activities and evolve into sustainable developmental initiatives capable of building healthier, more skilled and technologically aware generations in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.



BASHEER
AL RIYAMI



IBRAHIM
AL SHIBLI



ISHAQ
AL HARTHY



MASOUD
AL SHAQSI



SPORTS

MAIDENCROWN



Naegohyang FC players celebrate with the trophy and the North Korea flag after winning the Asian Women's Champions League final with coach Ri Yu-il, in Suwon, South Korea. — Reuters

NORTH KOREA'S
NAEGOHYANG BEAT
TOKYO VERDY TO WIN
ASIAN WOMEN'S TITLE

SUWON, SOUTH KOREA: North Korea's Naegohyang won the Asian Women's Champions League with a 1-0 victory over Tokyo Verdy Beleza of Japan in the final on Saturday, with forward Kim Kyong-Yong netting the only goal of the match.

Naegohyang, who arrived in Suwon last Sunday and beat the hometown team 2-1 in the semifinals on Wednesday, are the first North Korean athletes to visit the South in eight years.

The rare visit comes as North Korea has in recent years labelled the South its "most hostile state" and ruled out reuniting the nation split by the 1950-1953 Korean War.

In Saturday's final, Tokyo Verdy struggled to deal with their opponents' pace and intensity throughout the contest at the Suwon Sports Complex and were repeatedly carved open by counter-attacks, one of which led to Naegohyang's goal.

Naegohyang scored on the cusp of halftime after attacker Jong Kum surged forward and outmuscled Tokyo Verdy defender Yuna Aoki on the left wing before sending in a cross for Kim, who netted with a deft finish in the 44th minute.

Tokyo Verdy desperately chased an equaliser in the second half, but the Japanese side were unable to break down a disciplined Naegohyang defence and failed to record a single shot on target.

The Asian Women's Champions League, which had its inaugural season in 2024-25, offers prize money of \$1 million to champions. Naegohyang captain Kim, who finished the tournament with joint-top four goals, was named the player of the tournament.

"I'm very honoured to win the MVP. However, this result does not belong to me alone. It belongs to the team and the coaching staff. We just kept pushing ourselves until the end," Kim said.

The victory also means that Naegohyang have qualified for next year's Fifa Women's Champions Cup as well as the inaugural Women's Club World Cup in 2028, with both tournaments featuring teams from around the world.

Naegohyang are the first women's club team from North Korea to compete at the continental level. North Korea have long been a dominant force in women's football and won three Women's Asian Cup titles in the 2000s. They were banned from the 2015 World Cup after five players tested positive for prohibited substances at the 2011 edition of the tournament. — Reuters



Kenya's Ferdinand Omanyala (C) reacts after crossing the finish line to win in the men's 100m event during the Diamond League Xiamen athletics in Xiamen, China's southeast Fujian province, on Saturday. — AFP

Russell gets closer to 100m
hurdles record in Xiamen

Russell clocks 12.14 seconds in women's hurdles, just 0.02 seconds off world record

China's Yan records second longest javelin throw by a woman with 71.74m

Omanyala wins men's 100m, Jackson prevails in women's 200m

AMERICAN OLYMPIC champion Masai Russell got closer to the women's 100m hurdles world record when she clocked 12.14 seconds at the Xiamen Diamond League on Saturday, while China's Yan Ziyi recorded the second longest javelin throw by a woman at 71.74m.

Brazil's Alison dos Santos prevailed over Karsten Warholm in a duel between Paris Olympics medallists in the men's 400m hurdles, while Kenya's Ferdinand Omanyala piped Gift Leotlela to win the men's 100. Russell, who became the world's second-fastest woman in 100m hurdles when she clocked 12.17 seconds last year, made good on Friday's promise to consistently build towards the world record this season, retaining a steady lead throughout the race.

Nigeria's Tobi Amusan, who clocked 12.12 seconds to set the world record in 2022, finished second, 0.14 seconds behind Russell.

"I don't know when (the world record) is going to come but I keep getting closer and closer. I'm blessed, I'm ecstatic and all the hard work is truly showing," said Russell.

Earlier in the day, 18-year-old Yan drew a wild cheer from the home crowd when she set the under-20 world record in her very first throw, falling just short of the 72.28m thrown by Czech Barbora Spotakova for the current



Masai Russell of the US celebrates after winning the women's 100 m hurdles. — Reuters

world record in 2008. Yan did not throw again, and easily won the competition, as Norway's Sigrid Borge finished second with a 65.00-metre throw.

"I came to this race with the goal for 65m, so it really blew my mind to see that result coming," said Yan.

"A flash in the pan is not what I want, I don't want this 71.74 to be just a one-time thing... I think I can push harder. I'll see how it will go for the next couple of years and prepare for breaking the world record."

OMANYALA EDGES LEOTLELA In the men's 100m, Omanyala picked up the pace halfway through. Last week's winner

Gift Leotlela got closer in the final moments but the South African had to settle for second place as the Kenyan pushed to victory with high knees in 9.94 seconds.

Jamaica's Shericka Jackson cruised to victory in the women's 200m for the second week straight, as did American Jamal Britt in the men's 110m hurdles, while his compatriot and world champion Cordell Tinch lost steam over the final metres to finish fifth.

In the men's 400m hurdles, two-time Olympic bronze medallist Dos Santos was neck-and-neck with Warholm, the former Olympic champion who took silver in Paris. But in the sprint to the finish line, Dos Santos pulled ahead, finishing in 46.72 seconds.

A final push also paid off for Ethiopia's Addisu Yihune in the men's 5000. He launched his attack just before the final turn and gritted his teeth to reach the finish line in 12 minutes 57.32 seconds, before collapsing clutching his knee. "It is good. It was all good," Yihune said, confirming he was not seriously injured.

Three-time Olympic shot put champion Ryan Crouser showed no sign of his long-standing elbow injury as he finished third with a throw of 21.41m in his first major competition since winning the World Championship last year. Jamaica's Rajindra Campbell threw 22.34m to secure his first Diamond League win. — Reuters

Klaasen powers Hyderabad past Bangalore in 55-run victory

HYDERABAD, India: A powerhouse batting display, headlined by three frenetic half-centuries, set up Sunrisers Hyderabad's comprehensive 55-run victory over Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Friday, though it wasn't enough to secure them a top-two finish as both teams completed their league engagements on 18 points apiece.

Abhishek Sharma, Ishan Kishan and Heinrich Klaasen extended their consistent run on a terrific batting surface at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium in Hyderabad, muscling the home side to 255-4 after Pat Cummins chose to bat.

Defending champions Bengaluru needed to score at least 166 to ensure that they finished ahead of Hyderabad on net run rate even in the event of defeat, and they got the

job done with clinical efficiency, finishing on 200-4.

Despite the defeat, Bengaluru (0.783) ended up table-toppers, ahead of Gujarat Titans (0.695), who also amassed 18 points, with Hyderabad occupying the third spot.

"I'm just happy about it, taking it one game at a time," said Kishan of winning the man-of-the-match award for the third time this year.

"I do feel confident when I am playing against them (Bengaluru). More than maturity, it's about shot selection.

You need to feel confident, know what shots to play and which bowlers to target."

Bengaluru seemed determined to have a go at the massive target through their new opening combination of Venkatesh Iyer and



Sunrisers Hyderabad's Ishan Kishan celebrates his half century with Heinrich Klaasen. — Reuters

Virat Kohli, who added 60 in just 27 deliveries.

After both fell in the space of 14 runs, Devdutt Padikkal kept up the momentum but when the left-hander was caught in the deep off the excellent Eshan Malinga, Bengaluru retrained their focus on achieving their primary objective of 166.

Where Hyderabad's bowlers used pace off the ball to great effect, Bengaluru had been punished earlier in the evening for being unidimensional, Travis Head and Abhishek setting the tone through their 45-run first-wicket stand.

Hyderabad, the 2016 champions, made sure wickets didn't fall in clusters, stringing together successive subsequent alliances of 52, a blazing 113 off just 48 balls for the third wicket between Kishan

and Klaasen, and 45 respectively to put on an exhibition for their home supporters in the last game of the season at this venue.

Abhishek's first fifty in six innings was the base from which Kishan and Klaasen cut loose.

Diminutive left-hander Kishan packed quite a punch while Klaasen, who was on five off nine deliveries at one stage, rediscovered his boundary-hitting touch with three sixes and a four off a Josh Hazlewood over that went for 27.

While Kishan brought up his fourth consecutive half-century against Bengaluru before being dismissed off the last ball of the innings, Klaasen's sixth score of more than 50 took him past the 600-run mark for the season on a run-soaked night of high-class entertainment. — AFP

BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES

Oman banks face trust test as AI reshapes financial services

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 23

Oman’s banks must move beyond digital transformation and build trusted, AI-enabled financial ecosystems as technology reshapes competition, customer behaviour and the delivery of financial services, the CEO of the Oman Banks Association (OBA) said last week.



MUSTAHIL AL MAMARI
CEO — Oman Banks Association

Speaking at the New Age Banking Summit Oman, Mustahil bin Ahmed al Mamari said the banking industry was entering a deeper phase of change, where the main challenge is no longer only how banks digitise services, but how the sector redefines its role in a real-time, interconnected economy. “This is no longer just about transformation. It is about redefinition”, he said. “The role of banking itself is evolving”. Al Mamari said financial services are increasingly being embedded into digital platforms, customer ecosystems and everyday experiences, rather than being accessed only through traditional banking channels.

The shift is already visible in Oman’s payments market. Citing Central Bank of Oman figures, he said transactions through local electronic payment gateways reached around RO 3.2 billion in 2025, reflecting rapid growth in digital financial services and rising confidence in digital banking channels.

QR-code payments recorded the fastest growth among digital payment channels last year, rising by more than 133 per cent to around RO 8 million, almost triple the previous year, he added. “This is more than payment statistics. It reflects growing public confidence in digital payment services and changing customer behaviour at scale”, he said.

He said artificial intelligence was becoming embedded in core banking systems, risk management and customer engagement, changing how financial institutions operate and make decisions. “We are moving into an era where systems are not only supporting decisions, they are increasingly influencing them”, he said.

But Al Mamari said the use of more intelligent and automated systems must be matched by stronger governance and accountability.

“Efficiency alone is not enough. Accountability must remain at the centre”, he said.

He said trust was becoming the defining issue for modern banking as customers increasingly expect transparency, reliability and seamless digital experiences across all transactions.

The expansion of digital banking, he said, was also increasing pressure on cybersecurity resilience, digital identity protection and data governance.

Citing global studies, Al Mamari said more than 70 per cent of organisations had experienced increased cyber threats, underlining the need to reinforce trust continuously across financial systems.

OIA achieves 10-fold ROI in US-based Crusoe

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 23

OMAN

Investment Authority (OIA) announced that it has achieved strong returns on investment (ROI) from its partial exit in the American company Crusoe, which specialises in AI infrastructure.

OIA will continue to benefit from the company’s future growth opportunities through its remaining stake, as part of OIA flexible investment management and capital recycling strategy aimed at reallocating capital towards promising investment opportunities.

This comes amidst the rapid global growth of the artificial intelligence sector and increasing demand for data centres, cloud computing and digital infrastructure supporting advanced technologies.

Exit strategies are considered a global investment practice used when an invested asset becomes ready for sale, generating profits and returns exceeding the original investment amount.

Through the partial exit, OIA achieved: an annual internal rate of return (IRR) of 68%; and a return multiple of 10.3x invested capital.

This reflects the success of OIA’s strategy in investing in fast-growing technology startups and its ability to capture high-quality investment opportunities in future-focused sectors, especially with the global expansion of AI applications and cloud computing and the growing demand for its supporting applications.



Crusoe’s valuation has reached nearly \$10 billion.

This reflects the success of OIA’s strategy in investing in fast-growing technology startups and its ability to capture high-quality investment opportunities in future-focused sectors, especially with the global expansion of AI applications and cloud computing and the growing demand for its supporting applications.

Founded in Denver in 2018, Crusoe specialises in developing AI and cloud computing infrastructure through a model that utilises renewable and underused energy sources to power data centres and energy-intensive applications. The company also develops solutions that reduce emissions from gas flaring and make use of stranded energy resources.

It later expanded into building specialised data centres to support AI applications and high-performance computing, benefitting from rapidly growing global demand for digital infrastructure. Crusoe’s valuation has reached nearly \$10 billion and the company has been selected by major global corporations such as Microsoft and Oracle to develop advanced AI infrastructure complexes.

OIA’s investment in Crusoe falls under the Future Generations fund, which focuses on long-term international investments aimed

at generating sustainable returns and diversifying risks across global markets. By the end of 2025, the portfolio’s assets had reached RO 8.57 billion, generating profits of RO 1.04 billion during the same year, with an annual return on investment of 13.9%.

The portfolio also continued expanding its specialised investments by adding new funds across various future-oriented sectors, bringing the total number of investment funds to 210, reflecting OIA’s strategy of building a balanced global portfolio capable of capturing promising investment opportunities.

OIA recorded a historic performance in 2025, achieving profits of RO 2.9 billion and a return on investment of 14.6%. Its average return on investment over the past five years reached 10.4%, ranking the Oman Investment Authority third globally among sovereign wealth funds, according to a report issued by Global SWF.

SUHAR INDUSTRIAL CITY ATTRACTS 105 MILLION IN NEW PROJECTS

SUHAR: The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) said Suhar Industrial City attracted 48 investment projects by 2025 with a combined investment exceeding RO 105 million.

The projects cover an area of more than two million square metres, reinforcing Suhar Industrial City’s position as one of Oman’s key industrial and manufacturing hubs.

Total cumulative investment in the industrial city has now reached

RO 2.3 billion, while the leased area has exceeded 11.4 million square metres out of a total area of 28.4 million square metres. Employment across existing projects has also risen to around 13,299 workers.

Eng Abdullah bin Ahmed al Mayasi, Director General of Suhar Industrial City, said Madayn is currently implementing several strategic infrastructure and development projects within the city. These include a consultancy

study for the rehabilitation of infrastructure and support services across phases one to six, as well as the completion of infrastructure works for phase seven.

The consultancy study is expected to be completed during the second quarter of this year.

Al Mayasi said Madayn is also preparing to roll out a package of strategic projects during the Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan (2026-2030). — ONA

Oman explores sand-based thermal energy storage

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 23

OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) — the Sultanate of Oman’s sole gas transmission operator — has engaged Omani renewable energy startup AB Energy to support the development of a thermal sand energy storage project, believed to be among the first initiatives of its kind in the country.

Majority state-owned OQGN, part of the OQ Group, announced that it has signed an engineering design contract with AB Energy for the sand-based thermal storage project, describing it as a “significant step towards advancing innovative and sustainable energy storage solutions”.

The agreement, signed during Oman Sustainability Week 2026, builds on an earlier MoU between the two parties to explore the development of zero-emission thermal heating systems using sand-based thermal energy storage technology.



Representatives of OQGN and AB Energy at the signing last week.

OQGN noted in its 2025 Annual Report that the initiative aligns with its commitment to advancing innovation and low-carbon solutions within its operations.

According to energy experts, sand-based thermal storage — often referred to internationally as a “sand battery” — is a form of thermal energy storage in which sand or silica-based materials are heated using renewable electricity and used to store energy as heat over long durations.

Rather than storing electricity directly, as in lithium-ion batteries, the system stores energy in the form of high-temperature heat, which can later be released for industrial heating, steam generation, or other process applications.

Sand is considered an attractive storage medium due to its low cost, wide availability, non-toxic nature and strong ability to retain heat with relatively low thermal losses over extended periods. Unlike electrochemical batteries, thermal sand systems are particularly suited to industrial applications that require continuous high-temperature heat rather than electricity.

Commenting on the agreement, Abdullah

al Saidi, Founder and CEO of AB Energy, said the contract marks “the transition from the proof-of-concept and basic design phase into detailed engineering for one of the region’s innovative thermal energy storage solutions”.

Founded in 2024, Muscat-based AB Energy focuses on mobile solar solutions, integrated microgrids and emerging thermal energy storage technologies.

At Oman Sustainability Week 2026, AB Energy also signed an agreement with Al Ghalbi Group to develop a 4-MWh solar power project in Mukhaizna, designed to supply a residential camp for more than 250 people with clean energy supported by battery storage systems.

Additionally, the company signed an agreement with National Finance to secure financing facilities for the development and deployment of solar power projects, supporting the acceleration of renewable energy adoption in Oman.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The recognition marks a significant milestone in Abraj’s 20-year journey of operational excellence.

ABRAJ STRENGTHENS SUSTAINABILITY LEADERSHIP WITH PLATINUM ESG RECOGNITION

MUSCAT: Abraj Energy Services, Oman’s leading integrated energy services provider, concluded a successful participation at Oman Sustainability Week 2026 and the Oman Petroleum & Energy Show 2026, receiving the Platinum Award in the ESG category at the Oman Sustainability Week Awards and reinforcing its commitment to responsible operations, long-term value creation and the sustainable development of Oman’s energy sector.

The Platinum ESG recognition marks a significant milestone in Abraj’s 20-year journey of operational excellence. It reflects the company’s continued progress in embedding sustainability principles across its business, strengthening governance practices, advancing operational responsibility and supporting national priorities under Oman Vision 2040.

Held alongside one of the Sultanate of Oman’s most prominent energy industry platforms, OPES 2026, Abraj’s presence further demonstrated the company’s role as a future-focused energy services provider.

During the three-day exhibition, the company highlighted its integrated drilling and well services capabilities, showcased digital transformation initiatives and contributed to sector-wide dialogue on innovation, performance and sustainable energy development.

Abraj also announced a series of strategic agreements and partnership initiatives to support operational growth, cleaner energy solutions, digital transformation and supply chain localisation.

These initiatives reflect the company’s commitment to strengthening local value creation while expanding collaboration with industry partners across Oman and regional markets. As part of its engagement programme, Abraj recognised the contributions of strategic service partners through dedicated appreciation initiatives.

This recognition underscored the importance of long-standing service-excellence partnerships that continue to support Abraj’s growth and performance.

In parallel, Abraj contributed to the technical programme of the SPE Conference through executive participation and technical paper presentations. This engagement highlighted the company’s technical expertise and its continued focus on knowledge-sharing, innovation and operational discipline across the energy services sector.

Oman Design & Build Week 2026 ends successfully

OMAN Design & Build Week (ODBW) 2026 concluded successfully at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, reinforcing its position as the Sultanate of Oman’s leading platform for the real estate, construction, infrastructure and project management sectors.

Held under the auspices of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the event brought together developers, investors, architects, engineers, contractors, consultants, project management professionals and government stakeholders for four days of high-level industry engagement, commercial exchange and strategic dialogue aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

ODBW 2026 integrated three major industry platforms under one umbrella: the Oman Real Estate Expo & Conference (OREX), held May 10-13; the Oman Design & Build Expo (ODBX), held May 11-13; and the ODBW Symposium delivered in collaboration with the Project Management Institute (PMI) MENA Chapter.

The opening ceremony was graced by Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, whose presence alongside senior government and industry representatives underscored the strategic importance of the built environment sector in supporting economic diversification, urban development and long-term national growth.

Oman Real Estate Expo (OREX) 2026 attracted strong participation from developers, investors, financial institutions and homebuyers, reflecting continued confidence in Oman’s evolving property market.

The exhibition showcased a wide range of residential, commercial and mixed-use



ODBW 2026 integrated three major industry platforms under one umbrella: the Oman Real Estate Expo & Conference (OREX), held May 10-13; the Oman Design & Build Expo (ODBX), held May 11-13; and the ODBW Symposium delivered in collaboration with the Project Management Institute (PMI) MENA Chapter.

developments, providing visitors with direct access to some of the Sultanate of Oman’s most significant real estate opportunities.

Major projects featured during OREX included Yenaier and Hay Al Naseem by Adante Realty, Wadi Zaha by Al Ahly Sabbour, Jood and Yamal by TMG Muscat, Hayy Majd Bazaar Salalah and Bazaar Sohar by MAJD, alongside landmark national developments such as Sultan Haitham City, Al Khuwair Downtown and Uptown Muscat by Wujha.

Collectively, these developments highlighted the scale of investment and transformation currently shaping the Greater Muscat Master Plan and the wider Sultanate of Oman, reinforcing the country’s long-term vision for integrated urban growth, modern communities and sustainable real estate development.

OREX officially concluded with a closing ceremony held on May 13, marking the

successful completion of four days of investment-focused discussions, project showcases and strategic engagement across the real estate sector.

Meanwhile, Oman Design and Build Expo (ODBX) brought together leading companies and solution providers across construction, engineering, architecture, infrastructure, building materials, smart technologies and sustainable design. The exhibition floor served as a focused environment for business networking, procurement discussions, technology exchange and regional collaboration.

Leading exhibitors including Oman Cement Company, Jindal Steel, Funoon and Dubai Investments highlighted the growing regional and international reach of the event while demonstrating the technologies and solutions shaping the future of Oman’s construction and infrastructure sectors.

Iconic 212 off-road SUV brand launched in Oman

MUSCAT: Towell Auto Group officially introduced the legendary 212 4x4 SUV brand to Oman, bringing with it a heritage of true off-road capability engineered for enthusiasts who demand far more than conventional urban SUVs.

Purpose-built to conquer Oman’s diverse landscapes, from towering mountains and rugged wadis to deep desert terrain and rocky trails, the 212 arrives as a serious body-on-frame off-road SUV designed for adventure-seekers who value uncompromising capability, durability and adventure.

The launch introduces two distinct models to Oman — the 212 Adventurer and the flagship 212 Navigator, both engineered to deliver robust 4x4 performance with advanced off-road technologies and inspiring mechanical engineering.

Sharing her thoughts at the launch, Abeer Riyadh Sultan, Executive Manager,



The launch introduces two distinct models — the 212 Adventurer and the flagship 212 Navigator.

MD’s Office, Towell Group, said, “The 212 represents authentic off-road engineering at its core. With its military-inspired heritage, advanced 4x4 technologies and exceptional capability, the 212 is purpose-built for Oman’s adventurous driving culture.

We are proud to introduce a vehicle that delivers true off-road performance without compromise. We are confident that true off-road enthusiasts will thoroughly enjoy every driving experience”.

Speaking at the occasion was Bruce, Sales Director — Middle East Market, 212. He said, “The history of Beijing Auto Works and the 212 brand goes back to 1961, when the original 212 became one of the most recognised off-road vehicles built for durability, strength and capability. Today, that legacy continues with a modern generation of vehicles designed for both adventure and everyday driving.

Oman is a very important market for us. Its diverse landscapes, outdoor culture and passion for exploration make it the perfect environment for the 212. Together with Towell Auto Group, we are excited to bring this iconic brand to the country and begin a strong long-term journey in the market”.

Kia Oman announces ‘Onward, Together’ campaign

MUSCAT: Kia Oman announces the launch of the ‘Onward, Together’ campaign, an initiative dedicated to supporting drivers as they move towards a new and rewarding chapter.

Recognising that the past few months have been a difficult journey for many, Kia is committed to making the next drive a more positive experience by offering significant value and financial ease. Valid from May 6 until July 5, 2026, these benefits focus on providing individual retail customers with industry-leading interest rates and substantial price savings across a wide range of popular models.

A major highlight of this campaign is the highly competitive financing structure, offering a special interest rate of 1.99% for



Kia is committed to making the next drive a more positive experience by offering significant value and financial ease.

deals up to four years and 2.99% for five-year agreements. These exclusive rates are available for the 2026 Sonet, 2026 Seltos and the 2026 Sportage L 1.5T Alpha.

These special interest rates are provided only to Individual Retail customers, subject to credit approval

and clearance by select finance companies. Any other models and deals with tenure higher than specified above will have normal interest rates as applicable.

Beyond these financing advantages, customers can save big with Kia through direct price savings of up to RO 2,600. The Savings amount for applicable models is being directly adjusted in the price of the vehicle as a special discount. To ensure a seamless start, one year of complimentary registration is included on most models, providing immediate benefits from the moment of purchase (Terms & Conditions Apply).

Ownership peace of mind is further strengthened through a comprehensive service package of 30,000 km or three years, whichever

is earlier. In a dedicated effort to reward brand loyalty, existing Kia owners who upgrade to a new model will receive an enhanced, exclusive service benefit of up to 50,000 km or five years.

Specialised service terms are also extended to Kia’s award-winning electric vehicle line-up, including the EV6 and EV9, ensuring that those transitioning to sustainable mobility receive the highest standards of manufacturer support throughout their ownership journey.

The current Kia line-up delivers a balance of modern design and advanced technology to suit every lifestyle. From the compact and efficient Sonet to the spacious and high-performance Sportage L, every vehicle is engineered for comfort and reliability.

GALFAR LAUNCHES ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ASPHALT PAVING

TECHNOLOGY AS PART OF THE DUALISATION OF SULTAN SAID BIN TAIMUR ROAD PROJECT — PART 4



GALFAR Engineering & Contracting SAOG has launched Artificial Intelligence Asphalt Paving Technology, in partnership with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, as part of the Sultan Said bin Taimur Road Dualisation Project – Part 4 in Dhofar Governorate.

This step reflects the company’s direction towards employing modern technologies in infrastructure projects and enhancing the quality of execution, while also highlighting the Sultanate of Oman’s position in attracting the latest technologies and benefiting from the artificial intelligence revolution.

The launch, held under the title “Artificial Intelligence Asphalt Paving Technology”, took place under the auspices of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Economic Advisor at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs.

It affirms the transition of the construction sector into a more advanced phase of project execution, through an intelligent system that contributes to improving work accuracy, coordinating the movement of equipment used in projects, and reducing manual intervention in operational areas. This supports the delivery of government projects, such as road projects, with greater quality, efficiency, and sustainability.

Dr Said Al Saqri said: “The launch of Artificial Intelligence Asphalt Paving Technology represents an important step

in the development of the road sector in the Sultanate of Oman and the automation of construction projects. It embodies the national direction towards employing modern technologies in infrastructure projects to achieve several economic objectives.

The adoption of such solutions contributes to raising the quality of execution, improving project efficiency, and enhancing safety at worksites, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 in innovation, digital transformation, and improving infrastructure efficiency.”

Al Saqri added: “Road projects are not only important for geographic connectivity; they also support economic development, facilitate the movement of people and goods, empower governorates, and enhance the competitiveness of the national economy.

Therefore, introducing smart technologies in the execution of these projects represents an investment in a more efficient and sustainable future.”

Reflecting the Ministry’s continued efforts to advance innovation and adopt modern technologies across the transport sector, Eng Khamis al Shamakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, said:

“The Ministry is currently working on testing many advanced technologies, a journey that in fact began several years ago. What we are witnessing today may represent the first step towards the adoption of autonomous tools and equipment.

At the same time, we have also worked

on technologies that have been used in this project. These include technologies such as smart recycling, and the use of renewable energy.”

This launch is being implemented within a strategic project: the Sultan Said bin Taimur Road Dualisation Project – Part 4. It is an important national project that reinforces the role of infrastructure in supporting development and connectivity between governorates.

Project data indicates that it is not merely a strategic road package, but a platform for creating tangible local value through employment, local procurement, subcontracting, and the participation of Omani enterprises in the supply chain.

For his part, Dr Hamoud bin Rashid al Tobi, Chief Executive Officer of Galfar Engineering & Contracting, said: “Today, we are not merely celebrating the launch of a modern technology; we are shaping a new chapter in the future of road and infrastructure project execution in the Sultanate of Oman.

This reflects a transformation in the way we think and deliver — towards smarter projects, higher quality, greater safety, and enhanced efficiency.

Galfar’s adoption of Artificial Intelligence Asphalt Paving Technology in this project is considered the first of its kind in the Sultanate and across the region, further strengthening Galfar’s leadership in road and infrastructure projects.”

Dr Hamoud al Tobi added: “At Galfar, we believe that modern infrastructure is not measured only by the length of roads or the scale of works, but also by its ability to

employ technology, support local supply chains and small and medium enterprises, and enhance the contribution of national competencies, thereby maximising In-Country Value. Through this project, we continue to translate this commitment into tangible reality.”

This initiative further strengthens the company’s broad commitment to In-Country Value. Galfar is considered one of the largest employers of Omanis in the private sector, with approximately 5,000 Omani employees, and the company takes pride in providing them with employment opportunities. As part of its operating model and various strategies, the company also strongly supports local supply chains and small and medium enterprises.

More than 95% of the purchase orders issued by the company in 2025 were awarded to local companies and SMEs, and the number of Omani companies contracted by Galfar has exceeded 1,300 local companies, thereby expanding the base of beneficiaries from Galfar’s projects and supporting domestic commercial activity.

Dr Hamoud bin Rashid al Tobi concluded his statement by saying:

“This step is not the end of an experiment, but the beginning of a broader path towards smarter and more sustainable projects. At Galfar, we will continue to adopt solutions that raise the quality of execution, enhance safety, support the national economy, and make the construction sector more attractive to national talents through the adoption of the latest technologies.”

OPINION

Why trade fairs matter to Oman’s economy



DR HILAL
AL SAWAI

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert

THE Oman Petroleum & Energy Show (OPES) and the Oman Sustainability Week (OSW) are two of the most notable global events helping to develop Oman’s capability as a leader in the region for energy and industrial innovation and sustainable development.

These annual exhibitions in Muscat are attended by government leaders, investors and multinationals, as well as technology providers and other related stakeholders.

The combined economic impact runs well beyond the boundaries of the exhibition halls and contributes to the development of tourism, investment and job creation and promotes the diversification of the economy in the future.

The oil, gas and energy sectors use the OPES as the key exhibition for that market in the region. As Oman upgrades its energy infrastructure, OPES provides an equally vital function in linking the local sector to international providers of both contact and capital.

The exhibition draws hundreds of exhibitors and thousands of industry professionals and that means a direct impact on the economy through spending on hotels, transport, restaurants, logistics and services. The increased demand for services also benefits local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Probably the greatest single economic

advantage to Oman of hosting OPES is the inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI).

Many of the international exhibition participants are on the lookout for new business opportunities in Oman, especially in the fields of new partnerships in the domains of exploration, refining and petrochemicals; and particularly in areas of renewable energy and digital energy.

In this way, OPES helps Oman attract to the country both potentially large amounts of foreign capital as well as advanced technologies and skills, thereby enhancing Oman’s competitiveness in the global energy arena. Further, it also supports Oman Vision 2040 in terms of the formation of new and innovative high-value industries and new forms of work.

The OPES conference also offers numerous sessions and workshops. These sessions and workshops focus on developing skills for the future. Omani engineers, students and others working in the oil and gas sector are offered the latest technology in the field of energy efficiency, automation, carbon management and artificial intelligence. The experts in the field of oil and gas have the ability and resources to teach global standards to the local workforce.

At this time, the Oman Sustainability Week (OSW) is the primary event focused on promoting sustainable economic development and environmental concern in the Gulf region in addition to OPES.

The combined economic impact runs well beyond the boundaries of the exhibition halls and contributes to the development of tourism, investment and job creation and promotes the diversification of the economy in the future.

The OSW illuminates Oman’s efforts for sustainable development in clean energy, sustainable water management, sustainable waste management and sustainable climate development.

The OSW also provides a platform for Oman’s advancements in renewable energy and sustainability while the rest of the world is making the efforts for their countries in developing green economies.

OSW provides opportunities for new and sustainable infrastructure projects to entice foreign investors in sustainable development for solar power and green hydrogen initiatives. New markets being developed provide tools for human and financial capital to move from oil-based resources to diversified markets, thus creating sustainable sectors.

The events host thousands of delegates and exhibitors, which brings opportunities for the tourism and hospitality sectors.

Both businesses and the government experience an increase in the demand for domestic services and international activities. Oman is also known for being the top business tourism centre in the Gulf region.

Another major advantage is the support these events extend to local entrepreneurship and innovation. Oman-based start-ups and SMEs get the opportunity to connect with international markets, investors and strategic partners.

24/7 RENEWABLES
RESHAPE GLOBAL
ENERGY DEBATE AS
STORAGE COSTS FALL

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

The long-standing argument that renewable energy cannot provide reliable electricity around the clock is beginning to weaken as falling battery costs and hybrid energy systems reshape the economics of power generation.

A new report by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), titled “24/7 Renewables: The Economics of Firm Solar and Wind”, argues that solar and wind energy combined with battery storage can now deliver stable, continuous electricity at costs increasingly competitive with fossil fuels in high-resource regions.

The report marks an important shift in the global energy conversation. For years, renewable energy critics pointed to intermittency as one of the sector’s biggest weaknesses, arguing that solar and wind could not replace conventional baseload power because they depend on weather conditions and daylight hours.

IRENA now says advances in battery storage, hybrid system design and falling technology costs are rapidly changing that equation.

According to the report, utility-scale solar and battery systems in strong solar regions can now provide firm electricity at costs ranging between \$54 and \$82 per megawatt-hour, compared to significantly higher costs for new gas-fired power generation in many markets.

Battery storage has played a major role in this shift. Since 2010, solar photovoltaic costs have fallen by around 87%, while battery storage costs have declined by approximately 93%, allowing developers to store excess renewable electricity and release it during periods of low generation or peak demand.

The report also points to growing demand from industries requiring uninterrupted electricity, including artificial intelligence infrastructure, advanced manufacturing and data centres. These sectors increasingly require stable power supplies that traditional solar or wind projects alone could not guarantee in the past.

For Oman, the findings arrive at a particularly relevant moment. The country has been steadily expanding its renewable energy ambitions through large-scale solar projects, green hydrogen plans and new energy storage initiatives linked to Oman Vision 2040 and industrial diversification goals.

Oman’s strong solar irradiation levels and growing investment in clean energy infrastructure position the country favourably within the emerging economics described in the IRENA report.

Earlier this year, Oman moved to strengthen its energy storage strategy through collaboration between IRENA and the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, focusing on battery storage systems and grid flexibility.

From food projects to
real production system

OMAN’S DECISION to establish the Omani Livestock Association may appear, at first glance, to be a routine administrative step. It is not.

The timing reflects a much larger shift taking place inside the country’s economic and food-security strategy at a moment when global supply chains are becoming more fragile, food inflation remains volatile and geopolitical uncertainty continues to reshape international trade.

For Gulf economies that have long relied heavily on imports, food security is no longer simply an agricultural issue. It has become part of a broader conversation about economic resilience, strategic stability and supply-chain security. Oman is increasingly moving in that direction.

Over the past few years, the country has quietly accelerated investment across the food-production chain, from dairy and poultry to feed manufacturing, food processing and agri-industrial infrastructure.

Official figures show that Oman implemented around 494 food-security related projects during the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021–2025), with investments exceeding RO 1.9 billion. The scale alone signals that food production is no longer viewed as a secondary development sector, but as part of the country’s wider economic transformation under Oman Vision 2040.

Projects such as Mazoon Dairy have significantly expanded domestic dairy capacity, while investments including A’Namaa Poultry and Sohar Poultry continue strengthening local poultry production.

At the same time, industrial integration is accelerating. Madayn recently reported more than 121 food-sector projects across its industrial cities with investments exceeding RO 272 million, highlighting the growing link between agriculture, manufacturing and logistics.



Over the past few years, Oman has quietly accelerated investment across the food-production chain.



QASIM
AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of the Business and Politics department at Oman Observer

Over the past few years, the country has quietly accelerated investment across the food-production chain, from dairy and poultry to feed manufacturing, food processing and agri-industrial infrastructure.

There are already visible results. Egg self-sufficiency levels have surpassed 95 per cent, while poultry production continues to improve domestic market coverage. Red meat production, however, remains more challenging, with local supply still below total demand.

That partly explains the strategic importance of projects such as Al Bashayer Meat Company, which aims to strengthen local meat production through modern livestock systems and industrial-scale processing facilities.

Recently, Brazilian food giant JBS committed \$150 million towards the expansion and operational rollout of A’Namaa Poultry and Al Bashayer Meat Company as part of a strategic partnership aimed at strengthening the Sultanate of Oman’s food security.

But the bigger story is not the number of projects being announced.

The real test is whether Oman can turn these investments into an integrated and commercially sustainable production system rather than a collection of isolated projects operating independently from one another.

That distinction matters. Many countries have invested heavily in food-security initiatives only to discover that production alone does not guarantee resilience. Without integration across feed supply, logistics, processing, storage,

veterinary systems and market access, even large investments can become financially difficult to sustain over time.

There is also a risk that some food-security projects evolve into showcase investments without creating a fully connected national value chain capable of delivering long-term economic returns.

This remains one of the livestock sector’s biggest challenges. Feed costs continue to place heavy pressure on breeders and producers, particularly in a region facing climate and water constraints.

Oman’s investment in feed manufacturing projects, including developments in Khazaen Economic City, reflects growing recognition that feed security itself has become strategically important.

At the same time, many small-scale breeders continue to face structural difficulties ranging from financing and productivity to disease management and fragmented access to larger markets.

This is where the Omani Livestock Association could become genuinely important.

If the association develops into a serious professional platform capable of representing breeders, supporting technical development and improving coordination with policymakers, it could help bridge the longstanding gap between traditional livestock activities and Oman’s modern food-security ambitions.

However, if it remains largely ceremonial, its long-term impact is likely to be limited. The reality is that Oman’s livestock sector can no longer operate as a fragmented traditional activity disconnected from the country’s wider economic transformation.

Globally, modern livestock industries are deeply integrated with food processing, biotechnology, logistics, retail and industrial supply chains. The real economic value no longer lies only in raising animals, but in the broader ecosystem built around production.

INDIAN male, 10
year experience
in Oman as
Coordinator have
Driving licence.
95645241

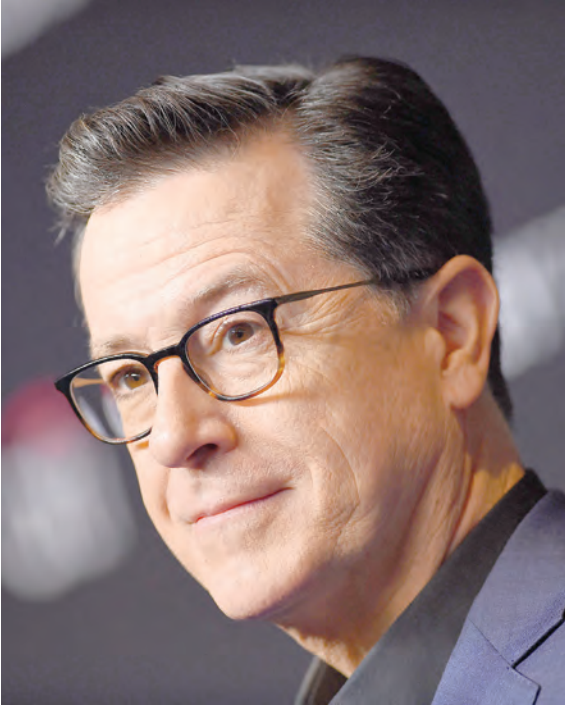
IZDIHAR.INFO

ART/LIFE



CURTAIN CALL

‘FIRED AND FESTIVE’: ‘LATE SHOW’ HOST STEPHEN COLBERT BOWS OUT



CBS is set to air the final episode of *The Late Show* on Thursday, ending a 33-year run of the iconic US late-night institution. The cancellation comes after CBS faced criticism for a \$16 million settlement with President Donald Trump over allegations of misleading editing in an interview with his political rival Kamala Harris. Host Stephen Colbert called the payment a “big fat bribe”, intensifying speculation about the network’s motives.

CBS maintains the decision is purely financial, despite the show’s strong ratings in its time slot. The move also comes as CBS parent company Paramount seeks approval for its \$8.4 billion merger with Skydance Media. Around the same period, CBS appointed journalist Bari Weiss to lead its news division, drawing attention to shifts in editorial direction.

Colbert, who has hosted the program since 2015, appeared increasingly reflective in recent weeks. Accepting an Emmy last year, he remarked that “you only truly know how much you love something when you get a sense you might be losing it”. Fellow late-night hosts Jimmy Fallon, Jimmy Kimmel, Seth Meyers and John Oliver visited the show to pay tribute during its final stretch, underscoring Colbert’s influence in US comedy.

Tensions between late-night television and political figures have been high, with President Trump frequently attacking comedians and media outlets. He has repeatedly targeted Colbert personally, calling him a “pathetic trainwreck” who should be “put to sleep”. Meanwhile, ABC briefly suspended Jimmy Kimmel in 2025 following controversy over remarks about conservative activist Charlie Kirk, further fuelling debates about media pressure and free speech.

Colbert rose to fame through *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart and *The Colbert Report* before becoming host of CBS’s flagship late-night show, where he shed his satirical persona for a more personal style. In recent weeks, he has auctioned show props to support charity and hinted at future creative work, including writing for a new *Lord of the Rings* film.

The final broadcast remains tightly guarded, though former host David Letterman returned for a special segment. Standing on the Ed Sullivan Theatre roof, Letterman summed up the moment: “You can take a man’s show. You can’t take a man’s voice”. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



PERFORMANCE

French cellist Sary Khalife performs during a concert in support of Lebanon at the Institut du Monde Arabe — IMA (Arab World Institute) in Paris. — **AFP**



FASHION

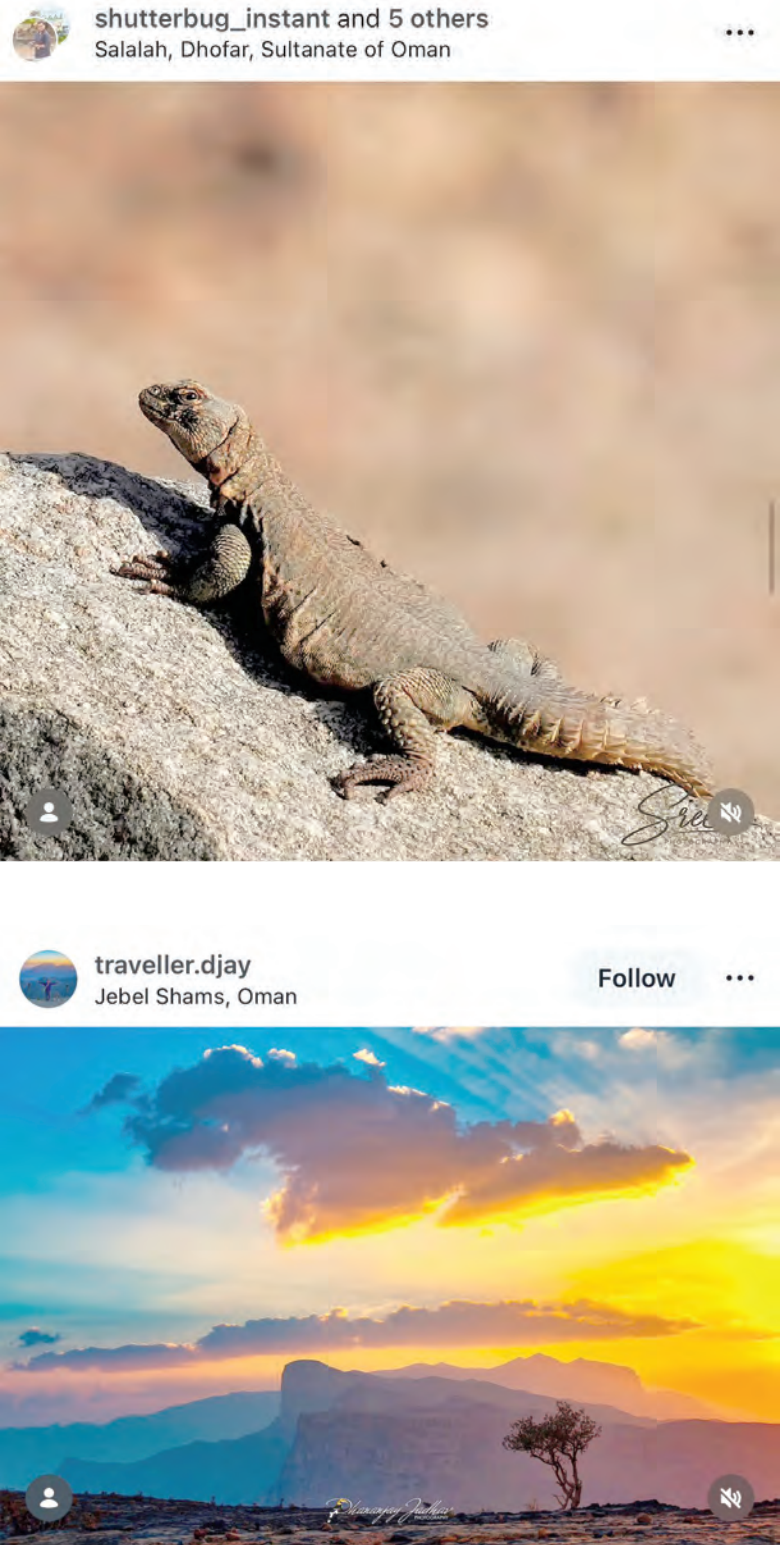
A senior year student at St Julian High School holds a decorative umbrella while walking the red carpet at their prom party themed “A Night in Italy” in Gayaza. — **AFP**



LIFESTYLE

A Palestinian equestrian man rides a magnificent Arabian horse in the agricultural town of Al Nasariya, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. — **AFP**

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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MATTHEW PERRY
MEMORABILIA TO BE
AUCTIONED FOR CHARITY

From artwork by Banksy to scripts from the smash TV series “Friends”, dozens of Matthew Perry’s personal belongings are up for auction in the United States.

Perry, who played the neurotic and sarcastic Chandler Bing, died in 2023 at the age of 54 after decades of battling addictions.

Now, the executors of his estate have put some 130 lots up for auction, including his favourite watch and childhood mementos, to raise money for the Matthew Perry Foundation, an organisation dedicated to helping people with addiction.

“It’s a combination of all kinds of things from the actor’s lifetime”, said Roberta Kramer, of Heritage Auctions, who are handling the sale.

“Things relating to his work on ‘Friends’ and other television shows and films, but a lot of very personal things too, all the way from childhood to adulthood”.

Items include Perry’s treasured Memorigin watch with a Batman emblem, as well as artwork he collected during his lifetime, including “Girl with Balloon” and “Nola”, by street artist Banksy, which are expected to fetch around \$1 million.

There are also a number of scripts from the decade of “Friends”, a series about six young people navigating adulthood, relationships and



careers in New York that made Perry and his co-stars multi-millionaires and household names.

Kramer said Perry started the foundation with the aim of using his “celebrity and his experience in life with substance abuse to help other people”.

“We know that he would be happy that all of his things went to help the mission of the foundation”.

Six people have been convicted in connection with Perry’s ketamine overdose death.

Five of them have already been sentenced, including a woman dubbed the “Ketamine Queen” who styled herself as a dealer to the stars. A sixth person is expected to be sentenced next week.

The auction will take place in Dallas and online on June 5. — AFP



Winston Churchill’s
‘playful’ paintings go
on show in London

AS BRITAIN’S wartime leader, Winston Churchill was known for his stirring speeches, but a new London exhibition explores another side to his creativity — as a passionate and prolific artist.

The exhibition opening Saturday at the Wallace Collection will be the most significant display of the statesman’s paintings for more than 60 years, including over 50 canvases, many of them rarely seen in public.

Churchill first tried painting during World War I after he resigned from the government over the 1915 failed Dardanelles naval attack.

This was a “very difficult time in his life” when “he suddenly finds himself with all this unwanted leisure time”, said Lucy Davis, co-curator of the exhibition.

“And he discovered painting as a way of releasing the stress, the anguish that the situation had caused him”.

The museum presents a chronological survey starting with his first paintings, created with advice from renowned artist John Lavery, then canvases painted in the 1920s at Chartwell, the country house where Churchill lived with his family.

Largely self-taught while associating with well-known painters, Churchill quickly became interested in landscape painting and drew inspiration from holidays in the south of France to create brightly coloured canvases dominated by blues and ochre.

‘Loved the light’

Churchill “saw painting as a spur to travel” and “just loved the light and warmth and atmosphere, which he captures so beautifully”, said Davis.

A whole room is dedicated to canvases inspired by trips to Morocco, including “The Tower of the Koutoubia Mosque”, the only painting that Churchill did during World War II. A gift to US President Franklin D Roosevelt, the painting recently belonged to Hollywood star Angelina Jolie.

The exhibition ends with the postwar period when Churchill, defeated in a general election, began painting again and continued until his death in 1965, with some of his works going on display at the Royal Academy.

Churchill had previously shown paintings at various galleries, but always under an assumed name.

As a statesman, Churchill went down in history for his wartime leadership, but as an artist, he had little interest in depicting current world events, the curator stressed.

“He was a wartime leader. He was known for these very stirring



Winston Churchill discovered painting as a way of releasing the stress, the anguish that the situation had caused him.



wartime speeches. But in these paintings, you really see his joie de vivre, his witty side, his playful side.”

One painting at the exhibition is an exception: “The Beach At Walmer”, painted in 1938 as fears grew of imminent war.

It shows a sandy beach in southern England with bathers paddling. But in the foreground, a black cannon points at the sea, suggesting a looming threat. — AFP

FEATURES



This Eid, clients are choosing natural beauty with a refined finish.



Cat eye, ombre, chrome and 3D nail art are also trending for clients who want something more creative.

EID BEAUTY TRENDS TO KNOW THIS SEASON



Clients are moving away from heavy looks and choosing fresh, wearable styles.

HIBBA AL KINDI

AS EID APPROACHES, salons across Oman are entering one of their busiest seasons, with women booking their beauty appointments early in preparation for the celebrations.

From glowing skin to natural waves and clean nails, this year's Eid beauty trends are leaning towards looks that feel fresh, polished and practical for long days of visits, gatherings and family occasions.

We spoke to Asila Mardas al Harthy, founder of Waw Beauty Lounge in Al Khuwair, to learn more about this year's beauty trends and the services clients are requesting ahead of Eid.

According to Al Harthy, skincare remains one of the strongest beauty priorities this season, especially in Muscat's hot weather.

"The latest trend related to skincare is that most clients ask for a glowy and bright skin that looks fresh", she said, noting that heat, dryness and sun exposure often leave the skin looking uneven or tired. At Waw Beauty Lounge, popular options include acne and oily skin facials, deep facial cleansing and treatments that focus on giving the skin a healthier, brighter appearance.

For hair, Al Harthy said clients are not necessarily choosing dramatic styles, but are instead focusing on maintenance and softness. Root colour, trims, highlights and treatments are among the most requested services before Eid.

"I noticed most of the clients love to dye their hair roots as maintenance and maybe add some highlights and take care with treatment more than a hairstyle on Eid", she said. "But I think the most popular is wavy and something more natural".

Nails are also expected to be a major part of Eid beauty this year. Al Harthy said French nails and classic colours remain favourites, while cat eye, ombre, chrome and 3D nail art are also trending for clients who want something more creative.

"Most of the clients ask for French and classic colours on Eid", she said. "But in the lounge, our nail specialist is very skilled in nail art with 3D drawings, in addition to chrome and cat eye nail looks".

She added that bright red, maroon, baby pink and off-white

are among the colours expected to stand out this Eid.

Among the top services clients usually book before Eid are mani-pedi treatments with whitening or paraffin for hands and feet, facials, hair root colour and trims; and nail extensions with French tips or basic colours. At Waw Beauty Lounge, one of the special treatments offered is "Detoxigen", which Al Harthy said is good for deep pore cleansing and gives a glowy result.

For those who want to look polished without doing anything too heavy or uncomfortable, Al Harthy's advice is to start with the skin.

"My advice is to take care of your skin", she said, adding that clients should not think of facials only as a quick fix before an occasion. "We treat the skin as cycle care".

She also warned against common beauty mistakes before Eid, including applying masks only to the ends of the hair while ignoring scalp buildup, dandruff or oil imbalance.

"A clean scalp improves volume, freshness and long-lasting styling", she said.

Other mistakes include booking keratin or protein treatments too close to Eid, applying acrylic or gel nails on weak natural nails without treatment, using dark polish on damaged nails, or cutting cuticles too aggressively.

To make beauty looks last throughout Eid visits and gatherings, Al Harthy said the look should be practical for Muscat's weather and the movement between indoor and outdoor spaces.

"In places like Muscat, heat, humidity and frequent movement between outdoor and indoor spaces can quickly affect beauty looks during Eid", she said. "People move between family homes, restaurants, gatherings and photos for many hours. Heavy layers often melt, crease or feel uncomfortable".

Her top tips include using anti-humidity hair spray, avoiding touching the face often, booking hair treatments several days before Eid, doing brows or threading two to three days before and booking nails one to two days before. She also recommends carrying a small touch-up kit with compact powder and a hydrating mist.

For Al Harthy, the perfect Eid look is simple: "Clean nails with glowy and healthy hair and of course a bright and boosted skin".