

O M A N عَمَان D A I L Y

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Oman has a deep-rooted maritime history, which has not only shaped its international relations but also its diplomacy, including that of its prominent role as a mediator in geopolitics. See P 6 & 7

INBRIEF

40 PER CENT OF OMAN- UAE RAILWAY LINK COMPLETED



MUSCAT: Hafeet Rail, a joint venture between Etihad Rail, Oman Rail, and Mubadala Investment Company, has announced the completion of 40 per cent of the Oman-UAE railway project. This project is a leading strategic initiative in infrastructure, transport, and logistics. The 238-kilometre railway is designed to create a highly efficient and integrated logistics and transport system that will support trade, enhance the resilience of supply chains, and promote economic integration between the two countries. Construction is currently underway at key locations along the project route, including Al Ain, Al Buraimi, Wadi Al Jizzi and Sohar.

The railway passes through urban and industrial areas, mountainous terrain, and deep valleys, necessitating specialised engineering solutions. These include large-scale excavation work, the construction of engineering structures like bridges and tunnels, and integrated systems to protect against flood risks, ensuring safe and sustainable operations. Abdulrahman bin Salem al Hatmi, CEO of ASYAD Group, stated that the progress of the project reflects a strong commitment to operationalise and begin serving passengers and sector services as planned. Excavation and backfilling work are currently ongoing on a large scale, with 27 million cubic metres of earthworks and over 100,000 cubic metres of concrete works completed. Tunnel excavation is also progressing in tunnels 1 and 2. — ONA

GIC POSTS \$230M PROFIT FOR 2025

KUWAIT: The Gulf Investment Corporation (GIC) reported net profits of \$230 million for 2025, surpassing its target by \$20 million, while approving dividend distributions of \$192 million to shareholders. Turki bin Ibrahim al Malik, Chairman of the Board, said the corporation continues to strengthen its presence across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) through a strategic focus on direct investments.

He noted that GIC has contributed to major infrastructure projects across GCC countries, alongside launching new ventures and partnering with regional and international investors in existing companies.

Among its key achievements, GIC secured the bid for phases 2 and 3 of the Al Zour water and power project in Kuwait, in partnership with ACWA Power. The corporation also increased its stake in Rawabi Emirates. — ONA

ISRAELI FIRE KILLS 2 GAZA WATER TRUCK DRIVERS: UNICEF

The United Nations children's agency Unicef said it was "outraged" after two truck drivers it contracted to deliver clean water to families in the Gaza Strip were killed by Israeli fire.

The UN agency said in a statement the incident occurred during routine water trucking on Friday morning at the Mansoura water filling point in northern Gaza, which supplies Gaza City. Two others were injured in the attack. Unicef said it had suspended activities at the site and called on Israeli authorities to investigate, stressing that humanitarian workers, civilians and vital water infrastructure must be protected under international humanitarian law. —Reuters

Trade ships hit as Iran recloses Strait of Hormuz

NO DATE SET FOR NEXT ROUND OF IRAN-US TALKS: IRAN DEPUTY FM

COMMERCIAL SHIPS came under fire and threats from Iran's military as they tried to cross the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday, security monitors said, as Iran closed the crucial trade route again following a brief reopening.

Iran reversed its pledge to reopen the strait to commercial traffic during a ceasefire in the Middle East war in protest at an ongoing US counter-blockade of the route, a crucial passage for commodity shipments.

A UK maritime security agency said Iran's Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) fired at a tanker, while security intelligence firm Vanguard Tech reported the force threatened to "destroy" an empty cruise ship that was fleeing the Gulf after Tehran on Friday announced a brief respite.

A handful of oil and gas tankers crossed the strait early on Saturday during the brief reopening, tracking data showed, but others retreated and tracking platforms showed hardly any vessels crossing the waterway by the late afternoon.

IRGC gunboats fired on the tanker in the strait northeast of Oman, the UK Maritime Trade Operations Centre (UKMTO) said in an online statement, adding the vessel and crew were safe. Vanguard identified the tanker as the India-flagged tanker Sanmar Herald.

It cited the captain as saying two IRGC patrol boats approached it with no radio contact and "shots were fired, resulting in damage to the bridge windows".

Vanguard said separately that the Malta-flagged cruise ship Mein Schiff 4 reported a splash nearby while crossing near Oman, on the far side of the strait from Iran.

"The Master confirmed VHF (radio) traffic from IRGC



A family reunites after crossing the bridge linking southern Lebanon to the rest of the country, which was hit earlier in an Israeli strike, after a 10-day ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel went into effect. — Reuters

units stating 'we are carrying out operation, we will fire and destroy you,'" but no damage was reported, Vanguard said.

In a third incident, the UKMTO said that it also received a report of a container ship in the same area "being hit by an unknown projectile which caused damage to some of the

containers" but no fire.

SHIPS DASH THROUGH

Around a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas passes through the strait in peacetime, but traffic came to a near-standstill after the war erupted on February 28 with US and Israeli strikes on Iran.

During the reopening, at least eight oil and gas tankers crossed the strait early on Saturday after the Iranian announcement on Friday afternoon, data from tracking firm Kpler indicated.

Tracking platform MarineTraffic showed several other crude oil tankers approached the strait but turned back near Iran's Larak Island, a checkpoint for vessels seeking to exit the Gulf under the Iranian blockade of the passage.

US President Donald Trump on Saturday warned Iran not to "blackmail" Washington with its flip-flopping on the fate of the Strait of Hormuz, after Tehran declared the strategic waterway once again closed.

"We're talking to them. They wanted to close up the strait again — you know, as they've been doing for years — and they can't blackmail us," Trump said at a White House event.

Meanwhile, no date has been set for the next round of Iran-US peace talks brokered by Pakistan following the failure of an initial round, Iran's deputy foreign minister said on Saturday.

"Until we agree on the framework, we cannot set a date," Saeed Khatibzadeh told journalists on the sidelines of an annual diplomatic forum in Türkiye's southern Antalya province. "We do not want to enter into any negotiation or meeting that is destined to fail and could serve as a pretext for another round of escalation," he said. In Beirut, Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam said on Saturday that French United Nations peacekeepers had been attacked in southern Lebanon, ordering an investigation into the incident. "I condemn in the strongest terms today's attack on members of the French battalion in UNIFIL," Salam said, referring to the peacekeepers. — AFP

SEE ALSO P8 & 9

‘Emergency response for heritage in conflicts’

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman joins the world to mark World Heritage Day, celebrated annually on April 18, under the theme 'Emergency Response for Living Heritage in Contexts of Conflicts and Disasters'. The aim is to highlight international efforts to safeguard and protect living heritage of global cultural significance, given the increasing challenges it faces due to the escalating nature of disasters and conflicts within complex and multi-risk contexts.

Eng Ibrahim bin Said al Kharousi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage, said that the Sultanate of Oman has successfully engaged local communities as key partners in the management, operation, preservation, and conservation processes, in accordance with Unesco guidelines.

Al Kharousi explained that this season's research projects covered periods from the Palaeolithic era to the Islamic era.



World Heritage Day, celebrated annually on April 18, aims to highlight international efforts to safeguard living heritage of global cultural significance. — ONA

Among the most prominent projects was the implementation of seven research programmes in Al Dhahirah Governorate. At the Al Shakur site in the Wilayat of Dhank, the Italian mission from Sapienza University

uncovered a fortified settlement dating back to the third millennium BC, during the Bronze Age and the early Iron Age. This included a comprehensive analysis of the development of human settlement in the northwestern part of Oman, specifically in the Qumayrah region.

He added that the ministry, in cooperation with the Polish mission from the University of Warsaw, is working for the eighth season to complete excavations on a hill dating back to the Iron Age. The aim is to document the site more accurately using advanced methods. The French mission from the National Center for Scientific Research continues its work for the sixth season, excavating the Al Aardh archaeological site in the Wilayat of Ibri. He noted that this season's focus is on continuing excavation work and studying all the artefacts, including copper alloys and stone tools, discovered since the beginning of the excavations, in addition to ongoing geological and archaeological studies. — ONA

جهاز الضرائب
Tax Authority

إعلان



Announcement

The Tax Authority would like to draw the attention of taxpayers to file their VAT and Excise tax returns for the first quarter of the year 2026 in accordance with the tax return form which is available on e-service portal.

www.taxoman.gov.om

And attach all required documents to it no later than :30 April 2026.

We hope all taxpayers comply with filing their tax returns on the deadline.

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MoL to create 200 jobs for disability persons

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

PERSONS WITH disabilities will get more jobs in the government with the Ministry of Labour announcing 100 fresh openings this year and 100 more next year, a top official said.

Ammar bin Salim al Saadi, Director-General of the General Directorate of Labour and official MoL spokesperson, said that the initiative is based on the data on active job-seekers with disabilities.

Al Saadi highlighted that the MoL carried out extensive coordination with various government entities prior to announcing the positions.

These entities were formally approached to identify their needs based on qualifications and specialisations required in each governorate.

He added that priority was given to entities that demonstrate preparedness in terms of infrastructure and workplace



Ammar bin Salim al Saadi

environment, where employees with disabilities can perform effectively.

Beyond recruitment, the ministry will continue to support such candidates through the Employment and Training Support Centre. This includes on-the-job training contracts, salary coverage for one year, and continuous follow-up to ensure job stability and integration.

Al Saadi noted that, in coordination with the Ministry of Finance, employing entities will provide permanent financial positions upon completion of the support period, reinforcing employment sustainability and transitioning these



opportunities into long-term roles. Al Saadi acknowledged that certain challenges remain, including the readiness of some workplaces in terms of infrastructure and accessibility.

Nevertheless, he confirmed a positive outlook towards expanding the initiative in the coming years, with a gradual increase in opportunities in line with workplace readiness and labour market needs.

Regarding the inclusion of individuals with autism spectrum disorder, he noted that expansion within the public sector may currently be limited due to the nature of work

environments. However, the private sector offers greater flexibility in accommodating such cases and providing suitable employment opportunities.

Al Saadi said 519 jobs were provided to persons with disabilities between 2021 and 2025. He added that additional batches of job opportunities are expected to be announced in the near future, both within the public sector and in collaboration with the private sector, based on market demand and institutional readiness. He also emphasised that 2 per cent of all job announcements are allocated to persons with disabilities.

اوميفكو
OMIFCO

INVITATION TO
TENDER

Would like to invite all reputed & specialized companies, who have relevant experience to provide the required services mentioned against the below tenders for Fertilizer/Oil and Gas/Refinery/Petrochemical Industries to submit their best offer for the below Tender:

Tender No	03-16186-2026
Tender Description	Five years contract for the operation and maintenance of the entire omifco HVAC systems.
Brief Details	The HVAC system in the complex has advanced control systems fully integrated with building management systems (BMS). These are connected to the DCS of the plant. There are around total number of 50 units. These include: Chilled water systems, VRF, and DX systems, and other units including AHU, FAUs, Exhaust fans etc. The equipment's are mainly of YORK, TRANE & LG Make and the control systems are supplied by HONEYWELL. The information given for guidance only and the contractor shall be responsible for making assessment of the entire system and components involved.
Tender Collection	19 th April 2026 – 23 rd April 2026
Site Visit	26 th April 2026 – 28 th April 2026
Tender Fees (Non-Refundable)	OMR. 250/= (OMR Two Hundred Fifty, only)
Bid Bond	OMR. 5,000/= (OMR Five Thousand, only)
Minimum Experience	Five (5) Years of experience in the subject filed in similar scope of work and scale.
Bid Submission due date	Not later than 26 th of May 2026, 12:00pm (Oman time)

All bidders shall submit their offer in THREE (3) separate physical envelopes or Online Files as following:

- Technical Bid and Un-Priced Commercial Bid.**
- Commercial Priced Bid.**
- Bid Bond valid for 120 days, with total amount as mentioned above.**

All three envelopes shall be sealed and tagged with the Envelop Title, Tender Title and Tender Number. Also, the company profile, registration documents and latest audited financials should be submitted along with the Technical Bid. All three envelops/Files should be submitted at OMIFCO Head Office in Sur - Tender Box at the Main Gate or through email.

Further details can be obtained from OMIFCO Purchase and Contracts Department at Sur Industrial Estate

Tel: +968 2553 2174 / 2553 2077
E-mail: shayma.dhahlan@omifco.com
juma.alamri@omifco.com

P.O. Box: 67, PC 411,
Sur, Sultanate of Oman
www.omifco.com

Hundreds ride Mwasalat buses on World Public Transport Day



The initiative encouraged residents to experience the reliability of public transport.

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

Hundreds of citizens and expatriates across Muscat and Salalah made use of public transport on World Public Transport Day, as Mwasalat marked the occasion on April 17 in collaboration with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT).

To commemorate the day, Mwasalat offered a range of incentives, including free urban travel with unlimited bus rides across city networks in both cities.

While official ridership figures for the day are yet to be released, buses across major routes recorded steady passenger movement throughout the day, with families, women and children taking advantage of the free service to explore key city landmarks.

The initiative encouraged residents and visitors to experience public transport and highlighted its role in promoting sustainable mobility in Oman's growing urban centres. It also aimed to raise awareness on environmental benefits, including reduced carbon emissions and improved traffic flow amid increasing private vehicle usage, particularly in Muscat.

"Many people like me have never taken the bus before," said Alen, a European resident in Muscat. "The free day encouraged the public to leave their cars at home and see how easy it is to move around the city using public transport." Fatma Ansari, a homemaker, said: "The free ride for a day is a great idea. Public transport helps reduce traffic and protects the environment. I hope more people will try the buses."

As part of the campaign,

additional services were introduced, including a free electric bus operating on Route 4 between Ruwi and Al Alam Palace from 4 pm to 8 pm, free open-top sightseeing tours from Muttrah to the National Museum, and complimentary e-scooter rides at selected locations such as Muttrah Souq and Muscat Bay.

A Mwasalat official said the initiative was designed to reduce reliance on private vehicles and encourage residents to experience the convenience and reliability of public transport.

In 2025, Mwasalat transported over five million passengers across its network, with a daily average of 11,500 to 11,700 passengers. During major holidays such as Eid Al Fitr, ridership has previously surged to more than 100,000 passengers over short periods.

SHORT TAKES



Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar holds talks with Naima Ben Yahya.

OMAN, MOROCCO
REVIEW SOCIAL
COOPERATION

MOROCCO: Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, and Naima Ben Yahya, Minister of Solidarity, Social Integration and Family of the Kingdom of Morocco, held a meeting on Saturday.

During the meeting, they discussed ways to enhance joint cooperation in social and family fields and exchange expertise to support family issues and promote social development in both countries. They also reviewed several topics, including social welfare, the protection of children, families, and the elderly, programmes for empowering people with disabilities and mechanisms for women’s empowerment.

The Moroccan experience in organising and developing social welfare institutions, enhancing the skills of workers in the social sector, and strengthening partnerships with civil society organisations was also discussed. The meeting also addressed the disability sector and the programmes offered to people with disabilities to enhance their access to various services.

Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, also met with Abdeljabbar Rachidi, Secretary of State in charge of Social Integration in the Kingdom of Morocco. Discussions focused on social inclusion, the regulatory and legislative frameworks for protecting and supporting people with disabilities and the health and social services provided to them. — ONA

MEETING REVIEWS
DIGITAL EXCELLENCE
STRATEGY



MUSCAT: A meeting held via video conferencing reviewed the strategy and general framework for measuring digital excellence for the National Digital Transformation Programme for 2026–2030.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology.

During the meeting, the pillars for measuring digital excellence for the National Digital Transformation Programme 2026–2030 were addressed.

At the forefront was the Digital Leadership and Readiness pillar, which focuses on the ability of institutions to strategically direct digital transformation through clarity of vision, effective governance, and the integration of technical and human capabilities, alongside establishing a digital culture and ensuring investment sustainability.

The meeting also covered the Digital Operational Excellence and Efficiency pillar. This area is concerned with transforming operations and services into highly efficient digital models that contribute to reducing waste and enhancing performance quality through automation, process improvement, data utilisation and simplifying the user experience.

Furthermore, the meeting touched upon the Impact and Sustainable Value pillar, which aims to measure the actual return of digital transformation at the national, institutional, and beneficiary levels. Meanwhile, the Governance and Compliance pillar focused on monitoring the commitment of entities to applying information technology governance. This involves establishing clear organisational structures, defining roles and responsibilities, and adopting policies and procedures for data and information management. — ONA

SHURA PARTICIPATES IN IPU ASSEMBLY

ISTANBUL: Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash’shura, underscored the growing importance of parliamentary diplomacy as a strategic tool to support development and keep pace with rapid global transformations.

Speaking at the 152nd General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Istanbul, he noted that parliamentary engagement plays a vital role in enhancing cooperation between legislatures and exchanging expertise to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Al Maawali said the current global landscape requires unified policies that promote peace and stability, particularly amid accelerating technological and economic challenges that could reshape work patterns and widen social disparities.

He highlighted that the world is passing through a sensitive phase that could mark a turning point in the international system, especially in the Middle East, where escalating conflicts threaten global peace and security. He stressed the need for the international community to uphold justice and ensure stability.



Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash’shura, heads Oman’s delegation at the IPU.

Reaffirming Oman’s position, Al Maawali said the Sultanate of Oman supports the right of nations to self-defence in accordance with international law, while maintaining that dialogue and diplomacy remain the most effective means to resolve conflicts.

He also urged the global community not to overlook the Palestinian issue, describing ongoing

violations as a breach of humanitarian values and calling for collective responsibility to end violence and achieve a just and lasting peace.

He emphasised that implementing the principles of the United Nations Charter requires strong political will, multilateral cooperation, and partnerships among governments, institutions, and civil society to ensure justice for future generations. He reiterated Oman’s support for humanitarian efforts and for parliamentary initiatives aimed at promoting peace in conflict zones. The Assembly, held from April 14 to 19 under the theme ‘Promoting hope, consolidating peace and ensuring justice for future generations,’ brought together parliamentary leaders from across the world.

On the sidelines, the Omani delegation took part in Gulf, Arab and Asian coordination meetings, as well as sessions of the Union of Councils of Member States of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. Discussions focused on building a fair global economy and strengthening the role of parliaments in post-conflict recovery. — ONA

12 mothers honoured
at Ideal Mother Awards

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

TWELVE MOTHERS from across Oman were honoured at the launch of the ‘Ideal Mother Award for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities,’ recognising their dedication, patience and lifelong care for children with intellectual disabilities.

The humanitarian initiative also paid tribute to veteran social workers who have contributed for decades to awareness and support efforts in this field.

The ceremony, held under the auspices of HH Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation at SQU, brought together mothers from all governorates, from Musandam to Dhofar, highlighting inspiring personal stories of resilience and commitment. The award is part of the ‘Motherhood’ initiative under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and falls within the Youth Initiatives Support Programme aimed at empowering volunteer and non-profit efforts serving the community.

The event also honoured seven pioneering women in disability-related volunteer work dating back to the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s,



The award highlights the importance of social appreciation for caregiving roles.

recognising their long-standing contributions to society.

The initiative was supported by Al Yusr Charitable Foundation, whose chairperson Shaikha Amina bint Saud Bahwan al Mukhaini has played a key role in advancing community and humanitarian programmes. Ahood bint Khalfan al Siyabi, head of the “Motherhood” initiative, said the idea stemmed from a personal experience of growing up with a sister with intellectual disabilities, inspiring the launch of a national platform to honour mothers across Oman.

Omar bin Mohammed bin Abdullah al Farsi, General Manager, Al Yusr Charitable Foundation, said the support reflects the foundation’s commitment to empowering mothers who play a

vital caregiving role in supporting persons with disabilities.

He added that the initiative aims to ensure representation from all governorates and recognise both mothers and volunteers working in this field. The organisers said the award highlights the importance of social appreciation for caregiving roles and strengthens community awareness around support for persons with disabilities.

Speaking at the event, HH Sayyidah Hujaija bint Jaifer al Said, Chairperson of the Association for Children with Disabilities, said inspiring stories of dedication ‘deserve to be told with pride,’ adding that the initiative sends a message of gratitude to every mother who has shown exceptional patience and commitment.

The event is part of the Youth Initiatives Support Programme aimed at empowering volunteer and non-profit efforts serving the community

‘Nabd Nizwa’ highlights heritage at Nizwa Fort

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, APRIL 18

Nizwa Fort hosted the ‘Nabd Nizwa’ event last week, under the auspices of Falah bin Ahmed al Ruqaishi, Director of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry branch in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The initiative aims to strengthen the brand identity of Nizwa Souq and promote it as a cultural and tourism destination.

The event featured a range of cultural and interactive activities, in addition to competitions and interactions with audiences.

Exhibition sections displayed local products, including traditional foods and handicrafts, reflecting Omani heritage.

Al Ruqaishi said, “Nizwa Souq is a remarkable icon in Oman’s tourism landscape, where the authenticity of history meets the innovative ideas of youth-led projects. Such initiatives reflect the ambition



The event featured a range of cultural and interactive activities.

and determination of Omani youth. At OCCI, we continue to support these ideas and encourage their transformation into sustainable projects that contribute to enriching tourism and the broader economic sectors.”

The initiative is part of a graduation project by media management students at

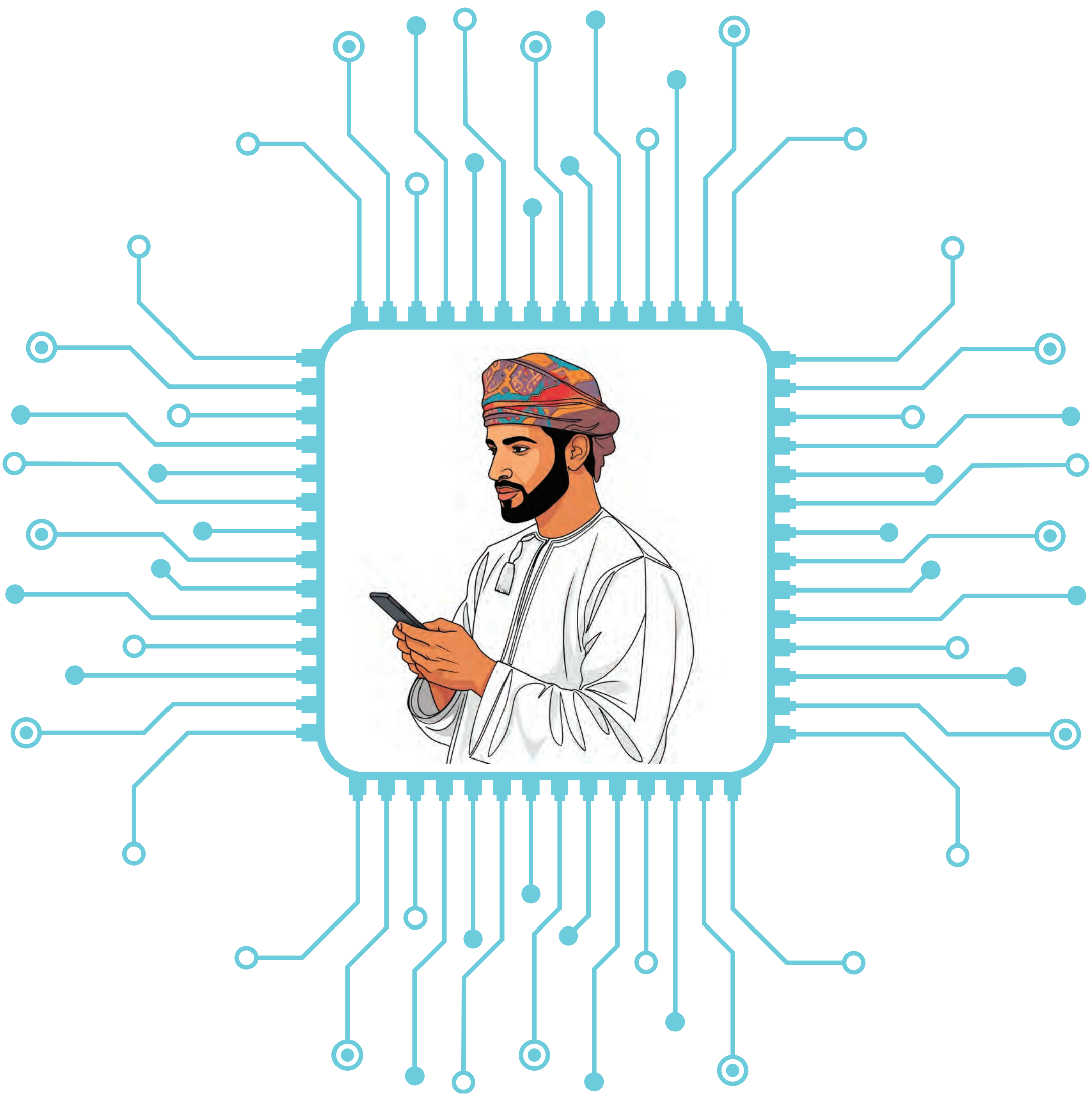
the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Nizwa, in cooperation with several entities, including the Directorate of Heritage and Tourism, public and private sector partners.

Organisers said the initiative seeks to present an integrated cultural experience that reflects Omani identity and supports engagement through modern media content.

Hiba al Riyami, one of the organisers, said, “Nabd Nizwa initiative aims to revitalise the brand identity of Nizwa Souq and strengthen its presence as a cultural and tourism destination at both local and international levels. Through this project, we seek to deliver an integrated cultural experience that reflects Omani identity and promotes cross-cultural engagement through modern media content aligned with audience expectations. We selected Nizwa Souq for its historical and cultural significance, as one of Oman’s key heritage landmarks and a major destination for visitors.”

SPOTLIGHT

IDENTITY
IN THE AGE
OF AI



MOHAMED AL BATTASHI

IN AN ERA of rapid technological acceleration, artificial intelligence is no longer merely a tool; it is a force reshaping language, knowledge, and even the way individuals perceive identity. Amid this transformation, a fundamental question arises: can national identity endure, or is it being irrevocably redefined? In the Omani context, this shift is viewed less as a threat and more as an opportunity — an invitation to rethink the relationship between people and their heritage. Identity is no longer something static to be preserved; it is a living experience that can be reimagined and enriched through modern tools without losing its core essence. Today, artificial intelligence can generate text, analyse language, and recreate visual and narrative forms. This places the Arabic language and cultural heritage at a critical

crossroads: either they actively shape this transformation or risk being subsumed into systems that fail to reflect their uniqueness. This underscores the importance of guiding technology to serve identity rather than replace it. The real challenge lies not in the existence of AI, but in its application: will it flatten cultural nuance, or deepen understanding and revive details that might otherwise fade with time? Cultural initiatives are emerging as tangible responses to this challenge. Among them is the 21st Cultural Season at the University of Nizwa, held under the theme ‘National Identity in the Age of Artificial Intelligence.’ More than a series of events, it serves as a dynamic platform for dialogue, experimentation and engagement. Maryam al Kimiani of the University’s Media and Marketing Department explains this vision: “The launch of the 21st Cultural Season reflects a conscious effort to

balance rapid technological advancement with the preservation of Omani cultural identity. Artificial intelligence is not merely a technical tool, but a driving force for strengthening identity through digitising heritage and enhancing the presence of the Arabic language in the digital space.” She further highlights that the initiative reflects a broader institutional commitment to integrating technology with cultural

preservation, encouraging innovative approaches that present heritage in ways aligned with contemporary realities. This responsibility extends beyond institutions to young people, who stand at the heart of this transformation. Their engagement forms a vital bridge between past and future, as they harness modern technologies to address questions of identity. Al Kimiani emphasises the pivotal role of youth: “Omani youth represent the bridge between the past and the horizons of the future. By harnessing modern technologies, they are transforming heritage into interactive models that engage society, proving that remaining rooted in identity is the true driver of innovation under Oman Vision 2040.” The Cultural Season has also fostered an interactive ecosystem that brings together thought leaders and technologists, connecting AI experts with heritage specialists. This

convergence ensures that technology evolves to preserve and enrich identity in an increasingly digital world. Equally important is its role in empowering students — showcasing innovative projects and encouraging the use of programming and digital tools to develop solutions that serve society, while advancing efforts to digitise cultural heritage for future generations. In her concluding remarks, Al Kimiani underscores that the initiative represents a practical step towards shaping Oman’s digital future — one that fosters collaboration, strengthens research and promotes the responsible use of AI in the service of societal values. Ultimately, the question is not whether identity will be influenced by artificial intelligence, but how people choose to use these tools to remain present within the narrative. Technology, however advanced, holds little meaning unless guided by a conscious vision rooted in human values and cultural depth.

SHORT TAKES



The plant is the first fully automated, integrated facility of its kind in Oman.

6.2M FISH PLANT OPENS IN MAHOUT

MAHOUT: The Gulf United Fish Products Factory was inaugurated in the Wilayat of Mahout, Al Wusta Governorate, under the auspices of Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The facility specialises in producing fishmeal, fish oil and soluble fish paste, along with a range of value-added marine by-products

The project marks a significant step in strengthening Oman's food security framework by supporting the production of key inputs for aquaculture and livestock feed, reducing reliance on imports and enhancing self-sufficiency.

used in aquaculture, agriculture and animal feed, adhering to high standards of quality, safety and sustainability. With investments of around RO 6.2 million, in addition to nearly RO 4 million in working capital, the plant is the first fully automated, integrated facility of its kind in Oman, built entirely using stainless steel.

The project marks a significant step in strengthening Oman's food security framework by supporting the production of key inputs for aquaculture and livestock feed, reducing reliance on imports and enhancing self-sufficiency. It also adds economic value to marine resources by transforming fish catch into higher-yield industrial products.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources continues to support such initiatives through sector regulation, investment facilitation and sustainable resource management, aligned with national food security and economic diversification goals.

The company noted that the inauguration signals the start of a broader expansion phase, with future investments estimated at RO 75 million. Planned projects include a seafood processing plant, a scientifically managed shrimp farming venture. — ONA

WHEAT HARVEST FIELD DAY IN NAJD BOOSTS FOOD SECURITY DRIVE

THAMRAIT: The Wilayat of Thamrait in Dhofar Governorate hosted a field day marking the wheat harvest in the Najd agricultural area as part of the 2025-2026 farming season.

The event was held in the presence of Ahmed bin Hamad al Maawali and reflects ongoing efforts to expand wheat cultivation and strengthen Oman's food security. This season has seen a diverse range of wheat varieties, including improved

strains such as Najd 1 and Najd 2, alongside Australian wheat and locally adapted varieties like Qurayat 110, Qurayat 226 and Qurayat 308, all noted for their resilience to local environmental conditions.

The harvest is expected to continue for two months, supported by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, which is providing modern harvesting equipment, technical supervision and field

monitoring. Coordination is also underway with Oman Flour Mills Company to facilitate the collection of produce.

Wheat cultivation in the Najd area is a key national initiative aimed at increasing local grain production, promoting sustainable agriculture and improving resource efficiency — aligned with Oman's broader goal of achieving greater self-sufficiency and long-term food security. — ONA

SQU study highlights rise of male nurses in Oman

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

A RECENT study conducted by Sultan Qaboos University has highlighted the experiences of Omani male nursing students, affirming that nursing is a deeply humane profession worthy of pride despite prevailing perceptions that it is predominantly female. The research sheds light on the motivations, challenges and aspirations of this underrepresented group within Oman's healthcare education system.

Nursing remains a cornerstone of the healthcare system, playing a central role in patient care and the promotion of public health. However, in many cultures, the profession continues to be viewed through a gendered lens, often limiting the visibility and participation of men. In Oman, male nursing students represent a clear minority, encountering a range of experiences that merit closer examination.

Dr Aziza bint Saleh al Sawafi from the College of Nursing at Sultan Qaboos University, together with her research team, conducted a qualitative descriptive study to explore these dynamics. The study was based on semi-structured interviews with 14 male nursing students at the university, providing valuable insights into their lived experiences and the pathways they



The SQU study concludes that the experiences of male nursing students present an opportunity to foster a more inclusive and equitable professional identity.

The study was based on semi-structured interviews with 14 male nursing students at the university, providing valuable insights into their lived experiences

navigate throughout their academic and professional journeys. The findings were organised into four principal themes.

The first theme, "Why Nursing?", revealed that students' motivations extended beyond job security or family influence. Many participants expressed a strong desire to serve others, alongside inspiration drawn from the efforts of nurses during the Covid-19 pandemic. These factors contributed to a growing conviction that nursing is a noble and meaningful profession.

The second theme, "From Doubt to Empowerment", traced a transformative journey. Students initially reported feelings of hesitation and uncertainty, often shaped by societal perceptions. Over time, however, practical training

and academic support helped to strengthen their confidence and reshape their professional identity, leading to a deeper appreciation of their role in healthcare.

The third theme, "Beyond Bias", highlighted the real challenges faced by participants, including social stigma and instances of discrimination during clinical training. While such experiences were demanding, they also served to reinforce students' resilience and determination to prove their competence within the field.

The fourth and final theme, "How Can You Support Us?", reflected the students' calls for sustained academic and psychological support, as well as institutional initiatives to enhance their integration within the educational environment. Participants also emphasised the importance of public awareness campaigns to challenge prevailing stereotypes and advocated for greater involvement in outreach activities that highlight the contributions of male nurses to society.

The study concludes that the experiences of male nursing students in Oman present an opportunity to foster a more inclusive and equitable professional identity. It recommends the development of university policies that encourage diversity, the provision of targeted mentoring platforms and the implementation of awareness campaigns.

INTL WELLNESS DAY MARKED WITH TRAIL HIKE



Organised by Nepal Embassy, the mass hiking campaign, witnessed men and women taking steps along the scenic Al Wadi Al Kabir trail

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

Scores of people joined Nadhira al Harthy, the first Omani woman to summit Sagarmatha (Mt Everest) and Sulaiman al Naabi, an Everest climber, to raise awareness on healthy living by hiking as part of the first International Wellness Day last week. The mass hiking campaign, organised by the Embassy of Nepal, witnessed several men and women taking steps along the scenic Al Wadi Al Kabir trail.

The hiking group included Dornath Aryal, Ambassador of Nepal, Lyu Jian, Ambassador of China, spouses of the ambassadors, embassy officials, media personalities and the Nepali community.

While addressing the group, Ambassador Aryal extended

thanks to Everest Climbers, diplomats, media people and all other participants for joining the hike. He stated that on March 10, 2026, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a historic resolution to declare April 15 as International Wellness Day.

Nepal had the honour of leading the initiative. Ambassador Aryal further stated that wellness is a holistic concept that includes our physical, mental, emotional, social and environmental well-being. The ambassador said, "Nepal aims to become a global centre for wellness. We are blessed with beautiful mountains, rivers, flora and fauna, pleasant weather, and rich traditions of yoga and meditation. These make Nepal an attractive destination for wellness."

SALE OF VEHICLE / EQUIPMENT

Leading Construction Company in Oman intends to dispose off their used Vehicles, Equipment and Crusher / Asphalt Plant in "as is where is" condition. The items identified are presently located in their Barka Khazaen Yard and will be offered for inspection to the public on 20/04/2026, 21/04/2026 & 22/04/2026 between 08:00 am to 12:00 pm and 03:00 pm to 05:00 pm.

Last date for submission of closed tender is 23/04/2026 at 05:00 pm at their Barka Khazaen Office.

Interested parties may contact at
Tel: (+968) 26983777 / 26983767
Mobile: (+968) 91354151



The Egyptian School in Muscat (Al Ansab) is seeking a licensed nurse certified by the Omani Ministry of Health.

Requirements:
Valid professional license from the Ministry of Health in Oman

Application:
Submit applications in a sealed envelope no later than May 3, 2026

Tel: +968 24202221
Email: info@egyptianschool.edu.om

Looking for job, car, flat and furniture? Check out the Observer classified page. It's where buyers meet sellers.



The Egyptian School in Muscat (Al Ansab) is seeking to contract with a specialized company to supply cleaning staff for the 2026–2027 academic year, under the following conditions:

- Workers must not exceed 35 years of age.
- Must be medically fit.
- Ability to perform various cleaning tasks and assigned duties.
- Ability to work under pressure.

Required staff:
• 3 Male workers.
• 8 Female workers.

Applications must be submitted in a sealed envelope at the school premises no later than May 3, 2026, clearly stating that the contract is for staff supply only (excluding cleaning equipment).
Tel: +968 24202221
Email: info@egyptianschool.edu.om



The Egyptian School in Muscat announces the rental of the school canteen for the 2026–2027 academic year, in accordance with the terms and conditions outlined in the tender documents.

Details:
Tender documents can be obtained from the school in Al Ansab
Deadline for document collection: April 23, 2026
Offers must be submitted in a sealed envelope with a copy of the commercial registration
Submission deadline: May 3, 2026
Tel: +968 24202221
Email: info@egyptianschool.edu.om

SAILS OF PEACE



VINOD NAIR

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN has a deep-rooted maritime history, which has not only shaped its international relations but also its diplomacy, including that of its prominent role as a mediator in geopolitics. Just as histories suggest, countries with huge and strong navies, aided by a long coastline for harbors and ports, managed to establish a global political and economic dominance.

It is also a given fact that while some coastal nations managed to emerge as global superpowers for centuries, several others succumbed to the emerging superpowers that first came as traders and then established colonies. In 1492, Christopher Columbus, sailing for Spain, reached the Caribbean, initiating sustained European contact with the Americas and launching the 'New World' era.

Historians may have divided opinions on the legacy of Columbus and the subsequent dominance of Spain in the parts of Americas, but his voyage wrote a new chapter in the world order.

In contemporary times, nations utilize navies not only for defense but also as a key instrument of international diplomacy, engaging in joint exercises, port visits, and maritime security operations to project influence and strengthen alliances. The United States, China, Russia, India, and the EU are the key players in shaping the International maritime order. Several international organizations play crucial roles in facilitating cooperation and managing maritime challenges.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), adopted in 1982 and in force since 1994, is the comprehensive international treaty establishing the legal framework for all marine and maritime activities. It defines rights, jurisdiction, and responsibilities regarding ocean space, including navigation, resource management, environmental protection, and dispute settlement.

Two key players in the world maritime diplomacy center on the Suez Canal in the Red Sea and the Panama Canal in the Caribbean.

Suez Canal diplomacy centers on managing the critical, 193-km waterway connecting the Mediterranean and Red Seas, which handles around 12 percent of global trade, while the Panama Canal is an 82-km maritime shortcut connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, reducing the travel time for shopping. The Panama Canal Authority manages it.



Maritime Navigation in Samahram during the Iron Age



Relations with the Ancient Civilizations. Majan ships during the Bronze age



Construction of the ship Majan



The Omani Fleet while liberating Basra



Muscat during the reign of Sultan Said Bin Sultan



Sultana anchored at Thames with the Omani Ambassador in 1842

Oman has known many types of boats and ships throughout history, each type is build to suit use in trade and military.

MOST FAMOUS TYPES

- The Sasha boat
- Majan ship
- Sultana ship
- Sanbooq
- Kambari sanbooq
- The Houri boat
- Bateel warwhip
- Bateel fishing boat
- Baqara fish
- Ghanja ship
- Baghla ship
- Zawarqah
- Galboat
- Shooi ships

BATEEL WARWHIP



BAGHLA SHIP



BATEEL WARWHIP



BOOM SHIP



OMAN AND MARITIME DIPLOMACY

The Sultanate of Oman has been playing a key role in maritime diplomacy due to its location on the Strait of Hormuz and a long history of maritime trade and cultural exchange. Oman ensures sustainable maritime navigation across the Indian Ocean.

Oman's maritime history dates back to 60,000 years BC, evident from the discovery of stone tools at Samahram of Dhofar, while the construction of boats and ships evolved to sail longer distances during 3000-1300 BC.

Oman, then known as 'Majan', became a maritime trading route and one of the most significant transit hubs in the ancient world. Since 5,000 BC, humans in Ras al Hamra used sugarcane and date palm fronds in building boats.

Sultan Said bin Sultan (1804-1856 AD) used his influence, and under his authority, the country expanded to form a large empire that included all areas from the northeast coast of the Gulf to the east coasts of Africa (from Bandar Abbas to Zanzibar).

The Omani Naval fleet was built in Omani docks in Muttrah, Muscat, Sur, and Shinas, and in Indian ports such as Bombay (now Mumbai). Sultana, one of the most famous ships in the Omani fleet during the reign of Sultan Said, was equipped with 14 canons weighing 312 tonnes. The first Omani Ambassador to the United States, Ahmed bin al Numan al Kaabi, arrived in the Port of New York on the ship 'Sultana' on April 30, 1840.

The ship 'Sultana' was sent on a second trip to London in 1842, carrying onboard Ambassador Ali bin Nasser al Busaidy, presenting the gifts of Sultan Saeed bin Sultan to Queen Victoria on the occasion of her coronation.

As the Sultanate of Oman oversees one of the most important waterways in the world 'Strait of Hormuz, the Omani Navy witnessed continuous development and military naval bases have been established along the coasts.

Oman sought to build and develop modern commercial and industrial ports and harbours to play a significant role in Oman's economic development, such as Port Sultan Qaboos, Port of Salalah, Port of Sohar, Port of Duqm, Port of Khasab, and Qalhat LNG Port, as well as many fishing harbors and traditional ships factories in Muscat, Sur, and Salalah.

In celebration of Oman's maritime history, in 2008, the Government of Oman and the Government of Singapore cooperated to rebuild 'The Jewel of Muscat' ship. In February 2010, the Jewel of Muscat started its historic journey and sailed from Muscat using the ancient trading routes to Singapore in 138 days.

Unesco organised a historic expedition after late Sultan Qaboos granted using the Royal Yacht Fulk al Salamah. The expedition named 'Pathways of

Dialogue among Civilizations' sailed more than 27,000 km from Venice in Italy to Osaka in Japan, and visited 27 historic ports, and carrying onboard around 100 scientists and 45 journalists from 34 countries. 17, Fulk Al Salamah started a voyage from Port Sultan Qaboos to the ports of Zanzibar, Darussalam, and Mombasa to strengthen the friendship relations of these countries.

The Royal Yacht Zinat al Bihaar sailed to may Arabian, Asian, and European ports, and it participated in many international forums. "The Secrets in Marine Science", one of the most important manuscripts in marine science and maritime navigation, by the Omani scientist Nasir bin Ali Al-Khuduri, was listed in the Unesco's Memory of the World Program in November 2017.

The acquisition of the Royal Navy of Oman's sailing ship, Shabab Oman, marked the inception of the Blessed Renaissance era witnessed by Oman since the 1970s. The ship was commissioned to serve as a mobile ambassador, navigating the world's seas while carrying the flag of love, peace, goodwill, and cultural dialogue.

In continuation of the noble mission carried by the sails of Shabab Oman to strengthen bonds of friendship and promote peace among nations, the ship Shabab Oman II was launched. Constructed by Damen Shipyards in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the ship was officially launched and named Shabab Oman II on May 8, 2014. On September 12 of the same year, the Royal Navy of Oman formally received the vessel, which then embarked on its maiden long-distance voyage to Oman, arriving at Said bin Sultan Naval Base on November 16, 2014.

In 2018, Indian Naval Ships INS Tarangini and INS Sujata participated in a joint sailing initiative celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), docking at Muscat alongside the Omani yacht Zinat al Bihaar.

Zinat al Bihaar had sailed to Kochi to represent Oman at IONS, and sailed back to Muscat with INS Tarangini, which will stay in Muscat for two days.

Indian Navy (2026): The sailing vessel INSV Kaundinya visited Port Sultan Qaboos in January 2026 to celebrate 70 years of diplomatic relations.

Italian Navy (2025): The training ship Amerigo Vespucci docked in Muscat from January 8-12, 2025, during its world tour, marking a historic first visit to the country.

Korean Navy (2025): The Chief of Naval Operations of the Republic of Korea visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC) in Muscat in February 2025.

These visits, along with regular delegations to the Maritime Security Centre (MSC) by Indian and other international officials.

1

IRAN SAYS REVIEWING 'NEW PROPOSALS'

Iran's top national security body said that the country was reviewing "new proposals" received from the United States.

2

FRENCH PEACEKEEPER KILLED

A French soldier was killed and three others wounded in an attack on UN peacekeepers in Lebanon.

3

ISRAELI 'YELLOW LINE'

The Israeli military said it had established a "Yellow Line" demarcation in the part of southern Lebanon it has invaded.

4

HEZBOLLAH 'NOT CONCERNED' WITH TALKS

Senior Hezbollah official Mahmud Qamati said his group was not concerned by Iran's planned direct talks with Israel.

5

NO DATE FOR IRAN-US TALKS

No date has been set for the next round of Iran-US peace talks brokered by Pakistan following the failure of an initial round.

6

GUNBOATS FIRE ON TANKER

The tanker's captain reported being approached by two gunboats of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corp (IRGC).

TRUMP WARNS AGAINST 'BLACKMAIL'

Iran tightens control of Strait of Hormuz

IRAN SAID it was tightening control over the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday, warning mariners the vital energy route was again closed, but President Donald Trump said Tehran could not blackmail the United States by shutting the waterway. Tehran said it was responding to a continued US blockade of Iranian ports, calling it a violation of their ceasefire, while Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei said Iran's navy was ready to inflict "new bitter defeats" on its enemies. Shipping sources said at least two vessels reported coming under fire and being hit while trying to transit the waterway. India later said the Iranian ambassador in New Delhi had been summoned and that it had expressed deep concern to him that two Indian-flagged ships had come under fire in the strait.

State media in Iran quoted the Supreme National Security Council as saying Iranian control over the strait included demanding the payment of costs related to security, safety and environmental protection services. State television also quoted the Supreme National Security Council as saying the US had put forward new proposals after talks mediated by Pakistan in recent days. Tehran was considering them but had not yet responded, it said. There was no immediate sign of direct US-Iran talks taking place at the weekend, despite Trump saying on Friday that negotiations would take place.

UNCERTAINTY AROUND IRAN CONFLICT
Tehran's renewed tough messaging caused fresh uncertainty around the Iran conflict, raising the risk that oil and gas shipments through the strait could remain disrupted just as Washington weighs whether to extend the fragile ceasefire. Trump said the US was having "very good conversations" with Iran but that Tehran wanted to close the strait again. Iran could not blackmail the US, he said. Maritime security and shipping sources said some merchant vessels had received radio messages from Iran's navy saying no ships were allowed through the waterway, reversing Friday's signs that traffic might resume.

Maritime trackers had earlier shown a convoy of eight tankers transiting the narrow passage in the first major movement of ships since the US-Israeli war on Iran began seven weeks ago. Hours earlier, Trump had cited "some pretty good news" about Iran, declining to elaborate. But he also said fighting might resume without a peace deal by Wednesday, when the two-week ceasefire expires. Iran had announced its temporary reopening of the Strait of Hormuz following a separate US-brokered 10-day ceasefire agreement on Thursday between Israel and Lebanon. Israel invaded parts of southern Lebanon after the Iran-allied Hezbollah militant group joined the fighting in early March.

But on Saturday, Iran's armed forces command said transit through the strait had reverted to a state of strict Iranian military control, citing what it described as repeated US violations and acts of "piracy" under the guise of a blockade. The spokesperson said Iran had earlier agreed, "in good faith," to the managed passage of a limited number of oil tankers and commercial vessels following negotiations, but said continued US actions had forced Tehran to restore tighter controls on shipping through the strategic chokepoint. US Central Command said in a statement that American forces were enforcing a maritime blockade of Iran, but did not comment on the latest Iranian actions.

DIRECT PEACE TALKS
The war with Iran began on February 28 with a US-Israeli attack on the Islamic Republic. It has killed thousands, spread to Israeli attacks in Lebanon and sent oil prices surging because of the de facto closure of the strait. Despite the initial movement of ships, Iran's deputy foreign minister, Saeed Khatibzadeh, said no date had been set for the next round of negotiations, adding that a framework of understanding must be agreed first.

Pressure for a way out of the war has mounted as Trump's fellow Republicans defend narrow majorities in Congress in



A woman walks past windows covered with plastic at Golestan Palace, a Unesco World Heritage site, in Tehran. — Reuters

the November midterm elections with US gasoline prices high, inflation rising and his own approval ratings down. "The main thing is that Iran will not have a nuclear weapon. You cannot let Iran have a nuclear weapon, and that supersedes everything else," Trump said on Friday.

Trump also said he might end the ceasefire with Iran unless a long-term deal to end the war was agreed before it expires on Wednesday, adding that a US blockade of Iranian ports would continue.

A Pakistani source aware of mediation efforts had said a meeting between Iran and the US could produce an initial memorandum of understanding, followed by a comprehensive peace agreement within 60 days.

Separately, a senior Iranian official said Tehran hoped a preliminary agreement could be reached in the coming days. Oil

prices fell about 10% and global stocks jumped on Friday on the prospect of marine traffic resuming through the strait. Despite that, hundreds of vessels and about 20,000 seafarers remain stranded in the Gulf awaiting passage through the waterway, shipping sources said. At last weekend's talks, the US proposed a 20-year suspension of all Iranian nuclear activity, while Iran suggested a halt of three to five years, according to people familiar with the proposals. Two Iranian sources have said there were signs of a compromise that could remove part of the stockpile.

The head of Russia's state atomic energy company, Rosatom, Alexei Likhachev, said on Saturday that Rosatom was ready to help with the removal of enriched uranium from Iran, and that the company was closely following the progress of US-Iran talks.

— Reuters

NO DATE SET FOR NEXT ROUND OF TALKS, SAYS IRAN DEPUTY FM

ANTALYA: No date has been set for the next round of Iran-US peace talks brokered by Pakistan following the failure of an initial round, Iran's deputy foreign minister said on Saturday. "Until we agree on the framework, we cannot set a date," Saeed Khatibzadeh told journalists on the sidelines of an annual diplomatic forum in Türkiye's southern Antalya province. "We hope that as soon as we can finalise that, then we can move on to the next step".

Khatibzadeh said both sides were currently focused on finalising a framework of understanding before proceeding with further negotiations.

"We do not want to enter into any negotiation or meeting that is destined to fail and could serve as a pretext for another round of escalation," he said. "I can assure you that Iran is very much committed to diplomacy."

Iran dismissed US threats of fresh military action, with the senior Iranian official saying that



Iranian Deputy FM Saeed Khatibzadeh speaks to reporters in Antalya, Türkiye. — Reuters

Washington's statements were inconsistent. "The American side tweets a lot, talks a lot. Sometimes confusing, sometimes, you know, contradictory," Khatibzadeh said, referring to US President Donald Trump and his frequent social media posts. "It is up to the American people to decide whether these statements are consistent and in accordance with international law," he added.

Khatibzadeh said Iran's position was clear and vowed resistance to

pressure from Washington. "What we are going to do is quite clear. We will defend heroically and patriotically (our country)... as the oldest civilisation on earth," he said. The deputy minister also rejected US accusations that Iran was threatening freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, a critical route for global oil shipments, after Iran's military again declared the waterway closed. "Americans cannot impose their will to do a siege over Iran while Iran, with good intention, is trying to facilitate safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz," Khatibzadeh said.

He said Iran had announced safe passage for commercial vessels for the duration of the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire, provided there was prior coordination with Iranian maritime authorities. However, Khatibzadeh accused Washington of attempting to "sabotage" those efforts. "If ceasefire terms are violated and Americans do not honour their commitments, there will be repercussions for them". — Reuters

Lebanon discusses readiness for Israel talks

BEIRUT: Lebanon's president and prime minister discussed on Saturday preparations for the first direct negotiations with Israel in decades, as southerners headed home after the ceasefire in the Israel-Hezbollah war. In a statement, the office of President Joseph Aoun said he and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam conducted "an assessment of the post-ceasefire phase and the ongoing efforts to consolidate it", and discussed "Lebanese readiness for the anticipated negotiations" with Israel.

Their meeting came a day after a strongly-worded speech to the nation from Aoun stating that the country was entering a new phase to work on "permanent agreements" with Israel and insisting that direct talks were not a "concession" — an apparent rebuttal of Hezbollah criticism.

The 10-day ceasefire seeking to end more than six weeks of war between Hezbollah and Israel has been in place since midnight on Thursday after being announced by US President Donald Trump. More than 2,300 people have been killed in Israeli attacks and more than a million displaced since Hezbollah dragged Lebanon into the Middle East conflict last month. Hezbollah and its supporters strongly oppose the negotiations and have rejected several government decisions over the past year, including Beirut's commitment to disarming the group in 2025. Addressing Aoun at a press conference in Beirut's southern suburbs, senior Hezbollah official Mahmud Qamati said the president "does not respect" Lebanon. "Defeated, you go to the Israelis and Americans, let's see what you will get out of it."

As the truce entered its second day, displaced people were still flocking to the south, which saw the brunt of the fighting, with roads packed with cars. Lebanon's military and other local bodies are



Displaced people make their way back to their homes, in Qasmieh, Lebanon. — Reuters

working to open roads that were blocked due to Israeli strikes. In the heavily bombed southern suburbs of Beirut, families came to inspect their homes and grab belongings, though neighbourhoods in the area remained largely empty, with people hesitant to return. Among the residents briefly visiting was Samah Hajoul, who is currently staying in a tent on Beirut's seafront.

"We do not feel safe to return, for fear that something might happen at night and I would not be able to carry my children and flee with them," she said.

"We will wait and see what happens during the days of the truce. If the ceasefire is consolidated, we will return to our homes," she added, saying that dozens of families staying

in nearby tents were doing the same.

During his meeting with Aoun, Salam expressed hope that "the displaced will be able to return safely to their homes as soon as possible after the ceasefire holds". He stressed that the government was working to "facilitate this return, especially by repairing the destroyed bridges, opening roads, and providing supplies in the areas where the return will be safe and possible".

Meanwhile, the Israeli military said Saturday it had established a "Yellow Line" demarcation in southern Lebanon, similar to the one separating its forces from territory still held by Hamas in Gaza, adding that it had already struck suspected militants approaching its troops along the line. — AFP

7

SUPREME LEADER'S WARNING

A statement said to have been issued by Iran's supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, warned that Tehran's navy was ready to defeat US forces.

8

TRUMP 'TALKS A LOT'

US President Donald Trump "tweets a lot", Khatibzadeh also said, after Washington threatened fresh strikes if no deal was reached with Tehran.

9

EGYPT HOPEFUL OF PEACE

Egypt and Pakistan are working "very hard" as mediators to bring about "a final agreement between the United States and Iran".

10

HORMUZ CLOSED AGAIN

Iran's central military command said it would resume "strict management" of the Strait of Hormuz, reversing a decision to unblock the strategic channel.

11

TÜRKİYE SLAMS ISRAEL

Türkiye's foreign minister accused Israel of using security as a pretext to acquire "more land".

12

US MILITARY TO BOARD IRAN-LINKED SHIPS

The US military is preparing in coming days to board Iran-linked oil tankers and seize commercial ships in international waters.

Waving the Flag: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

FLAGS HAVE caught my attention this week, with one reason being that the Shropshire Council, in the United Kingdom, has banned the flying of the nation's flag, the 'Union Jack,' thus refusing its citizens, in the words of the late John Wayne, to be, "old-fashioned, honest-to-goodness, flag-waving patriots."

How strange, when what they have particularly objected to is the flying of the flag, as they consider it "provocative at a time when national tensions over immigration are running high." What a load of old codswallop! It must be just another example of the 'woke' element of local body politicians venturing into a realm that is drawing a very long bow from their remit.

They are just one of more than 10,000 Local Authorities, Town and Parish Councils, examples of democracy at its intrusive and profligate worst. In fact, local authorities spent GBP 91.8 billion, from a public purse of GBP 450 billion, in 2023-24. These apotheoses of service and virtue receive annual allowances dependent upon responsibilities which range from GBP 7,000 pa to GBP 40,000 plus expenses, while their mayors are paid between GBP 63,000 and GBP 170,000 per annum plus expenses.

But it's okay, apparently, to have Palestinian flags waved in your face, when, accompanied by disruption to travel and free movement, chanting, bullhorns, wearing balaclavas and masks, nothing is

more likely to 'turn off' support, no matter how humanitarian. Such protests are not an avenue of 'freedom of expression,' but of intimidation, and in the manner of civilised democracy, totally amoral.

Al Jazeera's Feyzi Ismail, a lecturer in Global Policy and Activism at the University of London, active in Anti-War and Trade Union movements, takes issue with the UK's need to 'suppress' protests, writing that it is "an affront to civil liberties... reliant upon perception of risk rather than actual harm." The Public Order Acts, which seek to limit the possibility of disruption to the general public and their freedom of movement, "have a chilling effect" on those with a right to protest. However, it's not suppression, it's care and concern about the disruptions to the tens of thousands who just want to get to work, go home, or go 'out' Ismail was referring specifically to a Palestinian protest that sought to be antagonistic, provocative, and ensuring media coverage, by assembling adjacent to the Central Synagogue on London's Portland Street. You could not be more confrontational, could you? And it was notable that the BBC HQ was also adjacent, meaning cameras, microphones and media, which is cynically exploitative, isn't it? Maybe their inspiration for belligerent protest aligns with Palestine leader Yasser Arafat's vision that the flag should wave "until it flies in Jerusalem," rather than the implied dignity of prominent Gazan spokesman Tawfiq Abu Khousa, that "Palestine is where echoes of

Patriots, loyalists, and enthusiasts demonstrate their allegiances by flying the flag with dignity and respect. Those who fly their flag from behind a mask are malicious Trojan horses

the past resonate with hopes for the future," which demonstrates far more respect for the process of finding peace, particularly after decades of confrontation have brought only frustration.

Protests of confrontation, chanting, bellringing, trumpeting, drumming, and disruption achieve nothing for their cause, because 'normal,' 'ordinary' folk don't want to be 'told' what to do, but to be engaged with, and make their own decisions, in their own time. Aggressive protests, however, tend to be a vehicle for those who have their own agenda, who feign empathy, while having ulterior motives. These individuals are the loudest, most confrontational, while the television cameras are about, and who are always there for soundbites and interviews. You know them... and their all too familiar faces.

It's only last week too that major cities within the UK were subject to demonstrations by flag-waving Iranians protesting the UK's involvement in supporting America against their homeland. The only problem being that the UK is not 'involved,' and only Iran is raining death and destruction on anyone they can reach with their missiles. It's not Oman, not the UAE, not Qatar, not Bahrain, not Saudi Arabia, not Kuwait, and for sure, no-one in Europe or the UK! Patriots, loyalists, and enthusiasts demonstrate their allegiances by flying the flag with dignity and respect. Those who fly their flag from behind a mask are malicious Trojan horses.

KEY ATLANTIC CURRENT COULD WEAKEN MORE THAN EXPECTED: STUDY

ANTOINE AGASSE

A key Atlantic Ocean current system that helps regulate the planet's climate could weaken more than expected by 2100, with potentially devastating consequences worldwide, a new study has found.

Known as the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC), this conveyor belt of currents plays a crucial role in redistributing heat by transporting warmer waters from the tropics northward.

An AMOC collapse could lead to harsher winters in northern Europe, droughts in South Asia and the Sahel region in Africa, and higher sea levels in North America, among other consequences.

Previous climate model projections have estimated an average slowdown of around 32 per cent by the end of the century due to climate change.

The latest study, published on Wednesday in the journal Science Advances, estimates that the system could slow by 51 per cent by 2100 under a mid-range scenario for greenhouse gas emissions, with a margin of error of plus or minus eight percentage points.

"We obtained an estimate of a future AMOC slowdown that is more severe than we expected," climate scientist Valentin Portmann, the paper's lead author, said.

Predicting what will happen to AMOC in the future is a topic of debate in the scientific community.

"There is a kind of consensus on the fact that this circulation will slow down. But there is still quite a bit of debate about the intensity of this slowdown," said Florian Sevellec, research director at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) in Brest, France.

In its 2021 report, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said AMOC will "very likely decline" over this century.

But the panel of international experts also expressed "medium confidence" that a collapse of AMOC would not take place before 2100.

The latest study, conducted by researchers from the CNRS and the University of Bordeaux in southwest France, seeks to "refine this estimate of the future slowdown" and "reduce uncertainty", Sevellec said.

While nearly all climate models predict an AMOC slowdown by 2100, the projections range widely: from as little as three per cent to as much as 72 per cent, depending on varying emissions scenarios.

Portmann said the new study seeks to narrow that uncertainty using "observational constraints" - a statistical approach that combines real-world observations with results from climate models.

— AFP

Oman's principled approach to Middle East war

THERE ARE times when world events stop feeling distant and affect your personal life. War does that.

Political loyalties do too. And you may have to reconsider friendships which conflict with your moral principles or even choose which country you call home.

Oman is now my home: Oman's principled approach to this war makes it a bright candle in a region darkened over by violence.

But on a personal level, what happens when someone you know chooses to support, excuse, or ignore something you know is wrong?

Or worse, befriends someone who supports the murder of children? This is a serious moral issue. The kind that forces you to ask whether you can continue as before.

You may have shared years of friendship. He may be family. You may remember who they were before their views changed or before you became aware of them.

People are complicated. Your friend or family member still has good qualities. He may not fully understand the consequences of befriending the supporter of an evil ideology or of choosing to look the other way.

People can be wrong without being immoral. But there comes a point where giving someone the benefit of the doubt becomes a way of avoiding a difficult truth.

If a person continues to support, defend, or fails to condemn supporters of an evil ideology such as Nazism or Zionism, one that intentionally kills children, their position is not neutral. Choosing to overlook wrongdoing, to excuse it or plead ignorance, is unacceptable. "The friend of my enemy is my enemy" is relevant.

You are not being aggressive or unreasonable. You are recognising that principles matter in serious situations. The unprovoked attack on Iran and the murder of 170 Iranian schoolgirls were immoral. Their suggestion that the missile



Zahra Eid who was displaced in Byblos district, inspects her house destroyed by Israeli strikes, following the ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel, in Tayr Debba, south Lebanon. — Reuters



KARIM EASTER-BROOK

The writer is a Former Cambridge School Principal and Author

strike was a mistake deepens the pain of their parents and further demonstrates the perfidy of those responsible.

We know that the majority of those being murdered in Gaza and Lebanon are children and women. The Zionist aim is transparent: kill the children and women to prevent them from having children and make the creation of a Greater Israel a reality.

It is nothing less than a policy of extermination. Ironically, the same Nazi policy used to exterminate Jews, 'their final solution.' This does not mean you stop recognising the person's humanity. It does mean accepting that relationships are shaped by values.

In peaceful times, it is easier to maintain friendships despite disagreement. In times of conflict, those differences become harder to ignore.

If someone supports or aligns themselves with people or ideas that cause harm, then they are not supporting you or what you stand for.

That has consequences for your relationship. You may distance yourself from people you once

trusted. There will be a sense of loss.

Ending or limiting a friendship is painful.

However, there is also a cost in choosing to ignore the problem. Continuing as if nothing has changed can mean compromising your own principles.

Your values are not just abstract beliefs; they guide your decisions and define what and who you are. It is about recognising that some positions are incompatible with your own.

History has repeatedly shown the consequences of ignoring harmful ideologies or treating them as acceptable, or turning a blind eye.

Sometimes staying true to your principles means distancing yourself from people you once felt close to.

It means choosing discomfort rather than avoiding conflict. It means recognising that not all relationships can continue unchanged.

Your decision is grounded in principles rather than in maintaining a relationship at any cost. That is a difficult but honest conclusion.

SPORTS

41PLAYERS



Players in action during the opening round.

STRONG START TO OMAN WOMEN’S INDIVIDUAL CHESS

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

The 2026 Oman Women's Individual Chess Championship got underway at Al Amal Sports Club with the participation of 41 players from across the Sultanate of Oman.



BASMA AL SUDAIRI
Secretary-General of the Oman Chess Committee.

The tournament has attracted players from different age groups and competitive levels, including national team members as well as emerging talents from clubs and educational institutions. The championship is being held under the seven-round Swiss system, with each game played over 45 minutes plus a 30-second increment per move. The format is designed to test both tactical ability and consistency, while ensuring balanced pairings throughout the competition. The opening day produced several competitive encounters. In the first round, Noor al Ghafri defeated Wafiya al Ghafri, while Anata al Issai overcame Shatha al Ghafri. Kawthar al Maamari also opened strongly with a victory over Noor al Ghafri, while Yumna al Nadabi beat Dana al Hamrashdi. The intensity continued in round two, with Mariya al Balushi defeating Nasra al Khanbashi and Maryam al Balushi overcoming Ahlam al Kharousi. Yumna al Nadabi maintained her fine start with another win, this time against Fatima al Ghafri, while Kawthar al Maamari strengthened her challenge by defeating Reem al Ghabshi. Basma al Sudairi, Secretary-General of the Oman Chess Committee, said the championship forms part of ongoing efforts to enhance women's presence in chess and provide a more professional competitive environment for players to sharpen their skills. She noted that the event is not only a competition but also an important platform for discovering and nurturing promising female talent capable of representing Oman on bigger stages.



NEW MOU TO BOOST OMAN ESPORTS

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

As part of national efforts to advance the digital economy and empower young people, the Oman Gaming & Esports Committee signed a memorandum of understanding with Active Oman Centre in a step aimed at strengthening the esports ecosystem in the Sultanate of Oman and supporting the goals of Oman Vision 2040. The memorandum was signed by Eng Saba bint Said al Busaidy, Chairperson of the Oman Gaming & Esports Committee, and Nawfal bin Salem al Khanjari, General Manager of Active Oman Centre. The two sides underlined the importance of institutional collaboration that can nurture national talent in esports and provide professional competitive platforms aligned with international best practices. The partnership aims to launch and organise a range of tournaments and specialised events, alongside the development of training and qualification programmes.

Al Nahda rally past Sohar, Samayil edge Ibri in JL

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

THE second day of Round 21 in the Jindal League delivered two lively encounters, as Al Nahda came from behind to beat Sohar 2-1, while Samayil secured a hard-fought 3-2 victory over Ibri in a match full of attacking moments and quick swings in momentum. At Sohar Sports Complex, the home side made the brighter impact and went ahead in the 31st minute following a swift counter-attack. Al Mutasim al Maqbali moved forward and delivered a cross that confused Al Nahda's penalty area, allowing Saud al Maqbali to pounce and fire home for the opening goal. Al Nahda, however, responded at an important moment just before the break. Deep into first-half stoppage time, Mohammed Faraj rose to meet a corner with a powerful header after a delivery from Azzan, sending the visitors into the interval level at 1-1.

The turnaround was completed almost immediately after the restart. In the 47th minute, Amjad al Harthy sent in a cross that was met by Mohammed al Ghafri, whose header found the net to give Al Nahda the lead. From that point, the visitors managed the game well and held on to secure a valuable away victory. The result lifted Al Nahda to 35 points in fourth place, strengthening their position in the race for the upper places, while Sohar remained on 32 points in fifth.

SAMAYIL EDGE IBRI
At Nizwa Sports Complex, Samayil and Ibri served up one of the most entertaining matches of the round, with the visitors eventually emerging 3-2 winners. Samayil made a dream start in just the third minute after Ibri defender Khalid al Yaqoubi made an error at the back. Hazza al



Al Nahda and Sohar players in action.

Al Nahda, however, responded at an important moment just before the break. Deep into first-half stoppage time, Mohammed Faraj rose to meet a corner with a powerful header after a delivery from Azzan, sending the visitors into the interval level at 1-1.



Samayil secured a valuable win over Ibri in the Jindal League.

Mushaifri reacted quickly to win possession and squared the ball for Musab al Lamki, who finished calmly to put Samayil in front. Ibri responded almost immediately and were back on level terms in the sixth minute. Foreign player Loic Paul provided the assist, and Abdulhamid al Mundhiri applied the finish past Alaa al Hamdani to make it 1-1.

The match remained open, with both sides looking to score another goal, but it was Samayil who regained the advantage in the 23rd minute through Ahmed al Farsi. The forward produced a fine individual effort, moving past defenders before finishing confidently to restore his side's lead and give Samayil a 2-1 advantage at half-time. Samayil extended that lead in the second half when Hazza al Mushaifri once again played a decisive role, breaking through the defence before setting up Ahmed al Farsi for his second goal of the night in the 60th minute. Ibri refused to give up and reduced the deficit in the 70th minute through Loic Paul, setting up a tense finish. Ibri pushed for an equaliser in the closing stages, but Samayil stayed composed and preserved their advantage until the final whistle. The victory moved Samayil to 22 points in eighth place, while Ibri remained on 17 points in 12th.

Oman U21 probables named ahead of Asian tourney

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
@riyadhbaluch

Oman U21 national handball team head coach Yahya bin Khamis al Maashari has announced a preliminary squad of 30 players as part of preparations for the 19th Asian Men's Junior Handball Championship, scheduled to take place in China in July. The selected players will take part in a three-day intensive training camp from April 23 to 25 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. The camp aims to assess the players' technical and physical levels as the coaching staff begins evaluating the best options for the final squad. This phase marks an important step in the team's preparation plan, as the technical staff seeks to identify the most capable players to represent Oman at the continental level. The team is aiming for a strong showing following its participation in



The selected players will take part in a three-day intensive training camp from April 23 to 25 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

the 18th edition of the championship, which was held in Jordan in 2024. The squad selection reflects a diverse representation of clubs, highlighting the depth of emerging talent across the domestic



YAHYA BIN KHAMIS AL MAASHARI

scene. Seeb lead the list with 11 players, followed by Muscat and Nizwa clubs with seven players each, while Al Oruba Club contributed five players. The next phase is expected to see the squad gradually

reduced, with the final roster to be selected for overseas training camps and friendly matches, as the team aims to reach peak readiness ahead of the Asian championship. **OMAN U21 PRELIMINARY SQUAD**
Issam bin Asim al Balushi, Said bin Mohammed al Hassani, Ghassan bin Najeeb al Maashari, Fahad bin Ayad al Maashari, Fatek bin Mahmood al Balushi, Essa bin Mubarak al Qasmi, Omair bin Ali al Balushi, Maitham bin Talal al Owaisi, Waleed bin Nasser al Balushi, Al Aws bin Ali al Balushi and Wahaj bin Mohammed al Balushi (Seeb); Al Maamoon bin Adel al Hassani, Ziyad bin Essa al Hassani, Munther bin Suwaid al Daghishi, Mohammed bin Suleiman al Yamini, Mohammed bin Badr al Hassani, Al Khattab bin Nasser al Hassani and Bashar bin Ibrahim al Wahbi (Muscat); Abdulaziz bin Ali al Saifi, Hood bin Yaqoub al Amri, Hamad al Zaidi, Ahmed al Shukaili, Al Moatasim bin Nasser al Zaidi, Yousuf Ambusaidi and Luay al Sulaimani (Nizwa); Ahmed al Mukhaini, Ahmed al Alawi, Hamad al Mashaikhi, Imad al Ghailani and Salem al Araimi (Al Oruba).

TRI-SERIES TRIUMPH



Sulakshan Kulkarni handed over an award to Hammad Mirza, who emerged as the tri-series top run-getter. Also seen is assistant coach Ashim Narang.

KULKARNI’S EARLY IMPRINT LIFTS OMAN IN WINDHOEK

MUSCAT: “The boys showed a lot of character and self-belief,” said Oman head coach Sulakshan Kulkarni, summing up his maiden tour that not only delivered a tri-series triumph in the Namibian capital Windhoek but also marked an encouraging reset for the national side.

Having taken over on March 1, 2026, Kulkarni’s first assignment — the ICC Cricket World Cup League 2 tri-series — arrived at a crucial juncture for Oman cricket. The campaign followed on the heels of a forgettable T20 World Cup outing in Sri Lanka, leaving the squad in need of direction and renewed confidence. “We all were downcast after the T20 World Cup show, but it was very important to lift the boys’ morale,” Kulkarni said. “We had good training sessions for the tri-series

at home, and I am quite impressed by the boys’ application to the game situation.”

The response in Namibia was emphatic. Oman returned with 5 points from a possible 8, posting two wins, one no-result and a narrow defeat in a last-over thriller against the hosts. The effort not only secured them the tri-series but also lifted them to third place in the eight-team League 2 standings with 29 points from 24 matches — firmly in the race for a top-four finish and a spot in the 2027 ODI World Cup Qualifier.

Yet, for Kulkarni, the significance of the tour extends beyond results. “Conditions were not conducive for the players, but they adapted very well,” he noted. “We had batters and bowlers come up with their career-best performances.”

Leading that charge was Hammad Mirza, whose unbeaten century and a fluent half-century marked him out as one of the tour’s standout performers as he finished as the top run-getter with 201. “Mirza was the standout batter and has displayed a lot of potential,” Kulkarni said. Valuable contributions also came from skipper Jatinder Singh, his opening partner Ashish Odedare, Wasim Ali and Mujibur Ali, underlining the team’s growing depth, while the bowling unit delivered with equal impact through Hasnain Shah, Muhammed Imran and Shakeel Ahmed.

Shah and Imran produced their career-best efforts, with the former ending the tri-series as the top wicket-taker with nine wickets. Kulkarni, 59, also singled out the team’s fielding as a decisive factor in their resurgence. “There has been big improvement in fielding, and that played a big role,” he said.



A rider in action during one of the rounds at the Al Rahba Racecourse in Barka. — ONA

RB Yas Man claims Final Cup glory in Barka finale

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
@riyadhbaluch

AL RAHBA

Racecourse in the Wilayat of Barka hosted the season’s closing horse racing event in a vibrant and festive atmosphere under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Minister of Economy, on Saturday. The event featured five competitive races for purebred Arabian and Thoroughbred horses, drawing strong participation and a notable crowd of racing enthusiasts.

The opening race, the ‘University of Nizwa Cup’ for three-year-old purebred Arabians over 2,000 metres, was won by the colt ‘Ibraz Malik’, owned by Mohammed bin Abdullah bin Abdulrahman, trained by Mohammed bin Suleiman al Balushi, and ridden by Hamad bin Sultan al Malki.

In the second race, the ‘University of Sharqiyah Cup’ over 2,000 metres for purebred Arabians, ‘Gillian’ secured first place for owner Saleh bin Ali al Ghanboosi, under trainer Amer bin Salem al Ghanimi, with jockey Al Moatasim bin Said al Balushi.

The third race, the ‘Muscat University Cup’ for Thoroughbreds over 2,000 metres, saw ‘Ode to Duty’ claim victory. The horse is owned by Majid bin Ali al Maamari, trained by Mousa bin Mohammed al Balushi, and ridden by Amer bin Ali al Rasbi.



A winner being awarded the trophy. — ONA

SOHAR UNIVERSITY CUP

The highlight of the event came in the fourth race, the ‘Sohar University Cup – Final Cup’ for purebred Arabians over 2,000 metres, where ‘RB Yas Man’ delivered a standout performance to take first place. The horse is owned by Saud bin Harib al Said, trained by Ahmed bin Ibrahim al Balushi, and ridden by Saif bin Hamad al Balushi.

The fifth and final race, the ‘Sultan Qaboos University Cup for Local Production’ over 1,600 metres, was won by ‘Madmoon’, owned by Majid bin Ali al Maamari, trained by Hussein bin Ali al Snaidi, and ridden by Amer bin Ali al Rasbi, marking his second win of the day.

The event also featured a range of inter-race entertainment, including traditional tent pegging displays, equestrian acrobatic performances showcasing riding balance and position changes, and a live musical band performance.

Spectators were also treated to a special appearance by ‘Falah’, the winner of the prestigious Dubai Kahayla Classic in the United Arab Emirates, who was paraded during the event. Notably, the horse is trained by Ahmed bin Ibrahim al Balushi, the same trainer who captured the final cup.

CAREFUL PREPARATION

Speaking after the race, trainer Ahmed bin Ibrahim al Balushi expressed his satisfaction with winning the main title, saying, “This victory is the result of careful preparation and a well-structured training programme. We focused on bringing the horse to peak physical and tactical readiness, and we are proud to secure the final cup.”

Jockey Amer bin Ali al Rasbi also highlighted the competitive nature of the event, stating, “The races were highly competitive, and achieving two wins reflects the strong teamwork and preparation. We aim to continue delivering strong performances in the upcoming races.”

The closing event marked a successful conclusion to the racing season, reflecting the continued growth and organisation of horse racing in Oman, as well as its cultural and sporting significance.

Omani coach Jamal al Maamari leads Al Ain to UAE Cup title

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

Omani coach Jamal al Maamari produced a landmark moment in his coaching career after leading UAE side Al Ain to the UAE Cup volleyball title with a 3-1 win over Bani Yas in the final at Al Ain Club Hall on Friday. The triumph marked Al Ain’s return to the podium after a long absence, with the club lifting the trophy for the first time since the 2017-2018 season.

Al Maamari’s success came as the culmination of an impressive spell since taking charge, during which he quickly built a balanced and disciplined side capable of competing on the biggest stages. The achievement also underlined

his status as one of Oman’s most prominent coaching names on the Gulf scene.

Al Ain took the opening set 26-24 before Bani Yas levelled the match with an identical score. Al Ain then raised their level to claim the third set 25-17 and the fourth 25-19, sealing a deserved victory and highlighting the clear impact of Al Maamari’s technical work on the team.

The title capped an impressive run by Al Ain in the competition. The team had advanced from the quarterfinals by overcoming Shabab Al Ahli before producing an emphatic 3-0 victory over Al Jazira in the semifinal to book their place in the decider against Bani Yas.

The title carries added significance as it ended years away from major



Al Ain’s Omani coach Jamal al Maamari with the UAE Cup.

honours and restored Al Ain to the spotlight. It also highlighted the success of Al Maamari’s first professional coaching experience outside Oman, a stint already filled with notable results and silverware.

Speaking after the final, Al Maamari described the title as a major milestone in his coaching journey, especially as it came in his first overseas assignment and with a club of Al Ain’s stature. He said the achievement was the result of collective effort across the club, from the board and administrative staff to the technical and medical teams, as well as the players, who rose to the occasion.

Al Maamari added that one of the most striking aspects of the experience was the passion shared by

everyone at the club, something that was clearly reflected in the team’s performances, particularly in the final played on home court in front of Al Ain supporters.

He also said the technical staff had carefully studied Bani Yas from all angles, analysing the opponent’s strengths and weaknesses before putting in place a game plan that the players executed with discipline and determination. He stressed that their commitment and fighting spirit proved decisive in the final.

Al Maamari concluded by thanking everyone who supported him during the experience, expressing hope that the achievement will open the door for more Omani coaches and players to pursue successful professional opportunities abroad.

BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES



The Authority launched 10 financing programmes covering a broad range of sectors and needs.

RO45.4 MILLION FINANCES 521 SME PROJECTS IN OMAN

MUSCAT: The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (Riyada) reported that 521 financing applications were approved from its loan portfolio by the end of December 2025, with a total value of RO 45.4 million, while 25 loans were repaid, supporting the creation of 2,002 jobs across various projects.

The Authority launched 10 financing programmes covering a broad range of sectors and needs. These include the In-Country Value (ICV) programme, financing for industrial and service projects, working capital support, funding for incubated businesses and accelerators, as well as

Additional schemes include contract financing, support linked to companies under the OIA, emergency financing for SMEs, export financing and funding for projects in Khazaen Economic City.

programmes targeting handicrafts, home-based businesses, productive enterprises, street vendors and mobile commercial activities.

Additional schemes include contract financing, support linked to companies under the Oman Investment Authority, emergency financing

for SMEs, export financing and funding for projects in Khazaen Economic City.

Riyada has also strengthened integration with financing entities across the Sultanate of Oman, including commercial banks, the Oman Future Fund and government funds, through partnerships aimed at expanding financing solutions available to entrepreneurs.

These efforts form part of a broader strategy to enhance the entrepreneurship ecosystem and facilitate access to diversified funding sources.

The Authority conducted 1,471 field visits to financed projects to assess progress and identify the needs of business owners, enabling enterprises to scale operations, expand and improve their economic contribution.

It continues to streamline support mechanisms through innovative programmes while offering financial, technical, training and advisory services. These initiatives are designed to strengthen SME growth, expand market reach locally and regionally, and ensure long-term sustainability. — ONA

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 18

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), the sole owner and operator of the country’s national grid, is placing battery energy storage systems (BESS) at the centre of its long-term strategy, Fitch Ratings announced on Friday.

According to the international ratings agency, of OETC’s expanded 2026–2030 capex programme of RO 1.285 billion, around RO 376 million — nearly a third of total investment — is earmarked specifically for BESS projects.

“OETC views BESS as a strategic project that should support renewables penetration and enhance system reliability, in line with the Oman Vision 2040,” said Fitch. “The Authority for Public Service Regulation (APSR) has



‘OETC views BESS as a strategic project that should support renewables penetration and enhance system reliability.’

approved much quicker asset recovery terms for OETC’s battery projects, at 10 years of asset life instead of the typical 35 years. BESS is the main driver of Fitch-forecast revenue growth at an average 24 per cent a year in 2026-2027.”

Fitch also announced an

upgrade of OETC’s Long-Term Foreign — and Local-Currency Issuer Default Ratings (IDRs) to ‘BBB-’ from ‘BB+’, with stable outlooks. Additionally, Fitch upgraded OETC’s senior unsecured rating to ‘BBB-’ from ‘BB+’.

According to market experts, the prioritisation of battery energy

Private sector value added tops RO8.6 billion

THE number of active private establishments in the Sultanate of Oman rose marginally by 0.2 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2025 to reach 268,286, compared with 267,734 in the same period of 2024, according to data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Medium-sized enterprises recorded the strongest growth, increasing by 5.6 per cent to 1,972 establishments, up from 1,867 a year earlier. Small enterprises followed with growth of 4.5 per cent, reaching 31,000 establishments.

Large enterprises also expanded by 3.6 per cent to 751, compared with 725 in the corresponding period.

By contrast, micro-enterprises declined slightly by 0.4 per cent to 234,042, compared with 234,979 in the fourth quarter of 2024. Total value added across all enterprises reached RO 8.6774 billion in the fourth quarter of 2025, up from RO 8.2844 billion in the same period of 2024, reflecting growth of 4.7 per cent.

The contribution of these businesses to GDP rose to approximately RO 11.0619 billion, compared with RO 10.5743 billion a year earlier, marking an increase of 4.6 per cent.

Micro-enterprises posted the fastest growth in value added

Small enterprises recorded growth of 4.7 per cent, with value added increasing to RO 748.2 million from RO 714.8 million, while medium-sized enterprises expanded by 2.7 per cent to RO 700.5 million, compared with RO 682.2 million in the same period of 2024.



Medium-sized enterprises recorded the strongest growth, increasing by 5.6 per cent to 1,972 establishments, up from 1,867 a year earlier.

at 5.6 per cent, reaching RO 903 million compared with RO 855.2 million.

Large enterprises followed with growth of 4.9 per cent, with value added rising to RO 6.3257 billion from RO 6.0321 billion.

Small enterprises recorded growth of 4.7 per cent, with value added increasing to RO 748.2 million from RO 714.8 million, while medium-sized enterprises expanded by 2.7 per cent to RO 700.5 million, compared with RO 682.2 million in the same period of 2024.

Employment in private sector establishments reached 1,824,477 in the fourth quarter of 2025,

representing a modest increase of 1 per cent from 1,806,518 a year earlier.

Medium-sized enterprises led employment growth, rising by 7.9 per cent to 163,771 employees, compared with 151,846 in the fourth quarter of 2024. Small enterprises followed with a 6.7 per cent increase to 573,530 employees, up from 537,313.

Large enterprises also expanded their workforce by 4.4 per cent to 451,491 employees, compared with 432,452. In contrast, employment in micro-enterprises declined by 7.2 per cent to 635,685, down from 684,907 in the same period of 2024.

— ONA

IoT subscriptions rise 14% in Oman

MUSCAT: Total mobile subscriptions in the Sultanate of Oman reached approximately 8,290,149 by the end of February 2026, marking a 4 per cent increase compared with the same period in 2025, according to figures released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Postpaid mobile subscriptions grew by 4 per cent to 1,287,418, while prepaid subscriptions recorded a more modest increase of 1 per cent to 5,349,044.

Internet of Things (IoT) subscriptions registered notable expansion, rising by 14 per cent to reach 1,653,687 by the end of February 2026, reflecting increasing adoption of connected technologies across sectors. Internet services also



Postpaid mobile subscriptions grew by 4 per cent to 1,287,418.

showed continued growth, with active mobile broadband subscriptions reaching 5,486,364. Fixed broadband subscriptions rose by 2 per cent to 598,912.

Fibre optic subscriptions increased by 8 per cent to 360,164, while fixed 5G subscriptions edged up by 1 per cent to 218,909.

In contrast, fixed 4G subscriptions declined sharply by 63 per cent to 8,192, while DSL subscriptions fell by 28 per cent to 9,785. Satellite subscriptions, however, recorded a significant rise of 195 per cent to 1,125. Other connection types, including power lines, Ethernet and leased lines, decreased by 8 per cent to 737 compared with the same period in 2025. — ONA

OETC to invest RO376 million in battery energy storage projects

storage signals a broader evolution in OETC’s operational model — from a traditional “wires-only” transmission utility to one that incorporates system flexibility as a key function.

By embedding BESS into its grid, OETC is effectively adding a new layer of capability that enables energy balancing across time, not just geography.

This is particularly critical as Oman accelerates the deployment of solar and wind capacity and strengthens long-distance interconnections such as the North–South grid link, both of which introduce variability and stability challenges that batteries are well suited to address.

OETC, which is 51 per cent-owned by Nama Holding – part of part of Oman Investment Authority – is a pivotal player in the country’s energy transition.

“Fitch expects OETC to play

an important role in the Oman Vision 2040, supporting Oman’s renewable energy objectives and providing the infrastructure to facilitate a competitive business environment,” the rating agency noted.

At the annual media briefing hosted by the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), officials listed battery energy storage, alongside renewable energy generation and demand response management, as strategic initiatives prioritised by the regulator for implementation over the 11th Five Year Plan (2026-2030).

The goal is to use advanced batteries to store excess electricity — particularly from renewable sources — during periods of low demand, and discharge it back into the grid during peak periods, improving load management and overall grid stability.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The duo rescued two Indian nationals who were trapped inside a vehicle amid rising floodwaters.

TWO EXPATS
FELICITATED FOR
SAVING LIVES DURING
BARKA FLOODS

MUSCAT: Global Money Exchange Company LLC (GMEC) honoured two expatriates, Shahzad Khan and MD Sagor, in recognition of their extraordinary bravery and selfless efforts during the recent flooding in Barka. The duo rescued two Indian nationals who were trapped inside a vehicle amid rising floodwaters.

The felicitation ceremony was held at the company’s head office in Ruwi, where both individuals were presented with certificates of appreciation and cash awards.

Speaking on the occasion, Subromoniyam KS, Managing Director of GMEC, commended the honourees for their courage and humanitarian spirit. He emphasised that the company takes pride in acknowledging individuals who demonstrate exceptional acts of kindness and bravery. He noted that such actions, carried out at great personal risk, serve as a powerful inspiration for others in the community. He further added that, in recognition of such exemplary acts, GMEC has introduced Bravery Awards.

The event was attended by several senior officials and community leaders, including Sonam Dorje, General Manager; Adv R Madhusoodanan, Executive Adviser; and Simranjit Singh, Chief Manager, among others.

FINANCIAL INDEX
TOPS 13,200 POINTS

MUSCAT: The Financial Sector Index on the Muscat Stock Exchange advanced by 425 points last week, breaching the 13,200-point level, supported by gains in banking and investment stocks alongside the release of preliminary first-quarter results.

The index closed the week at 13,294 points, its highest level since August 2008. It had first crossed 13,000 points on January 6, 2008, before climbing above 16,000 points in June of that year, only to retreat sharply and end 2008 at 6,620 points.

Market activity remained broadly positive, with 48 securities posting gains, while 37 declined and 14 remained unchanged. The main index rose by 174 points to close at 8,336 points.

In contrast, sectoral indices showed mixed performance, with the industrial index easing by 29 points to 10,073, the services index falling by 23 points and the Sharia-compliant index declining by 13 points to 654. — ONA

Lexus LX 600: Ultimate expression of luxury

LEXUS Oman is proud to showcase the iconic LX 600, a flagship SUV defined by its commanding presence and masterclass in craftsmanship.

As the ultimate expression of the Lexus brand, the LX 600 offers an unparalleled blend of power, sophistication and a refined driving experience, allowing automotive enthusiasts to step into the very pinnacle of luxury.

The LX 600 is engineered to deliver a seamless ownership experience, focusing on long-term value and peace of mind. Every element of the vehicle is designed to ensure it remains in peak condition, providing a stable and prestigious journey for those who demand the highest standards of automotive excellence.

The Lexus LX 600 is powered by a formidable 3.5L Twin-Turbocharged V6 engine, delivering a muscular 409 HP and 650 Nm of torque. This powerhouse is paired with a sophisticated 10-speed automatic transmission, ensuring smooth yet responsive acceleration across any terrain.

For those who demand versatility, the LX 600 features advanced performance tech including Active Height Control, Adaptive Variable Suspension, and a Multi-Terrain mode with four integrated cameras, providing a balanced and stable drive whether navigating city streets or rugged landscapes.

Step inside the LX 600 to find a cabin that redefines the standard for automotive indulgence. The interior is a blend of premium leather and wood finish,



The Lexus LX 600 is powered by a formidable 3.5L Twin-Turbocharged V6 engine, delivering a muscular 409 HP and 650 Nm of torque.

highlighted by a driver-focused Head-Up Display (HUD) and an immersive 25-speaker Mark Levinson sound system.

For the comfort of all passengers, the SUV is equipped with heated and ventilated seats, a four-zone climate concierge, and a Dual Rear Seat Entertainment system featuring 11.6-inch screens.

Practicality is also prioritised with the hands-free “Kick Sensor” for easy access to the cargo area.

Safety is expertly integrated into every detail of the LX 600 through the Lexus Safety Sense suite. Drivers are supported by a Pre-Collision System, Lane Departure Alert with steering assist and a Blind Spot

Monitor to ensure total awareness on the road. The vehicle is also equipped with a comprehensive 10-airbag system, including knee airbags for both the driver and front passenger. This robust protective shell ensures that every family journey is as safe as it is luxurious.

Lexus Oman invites you to experience the bold spirit of the LX 600 firsthand. Visit any Saud Bahwan Automotive showroom to take a test drive and discover how this flagship SUV can elevate your lifestyle.

Our professional team is ready to guide you through the features of this exceptional vehicle and help you choose a model that truly surpasses expectations.

Oman Air resumes flights and boosts network

MUSCAT: Oman Air has announced the resumption of flights to Dubai, Bahrain and Khasab, as of April 18, 2026.

The latest update follows the reinstatement of the airline’s services to Dammam and Amman earlier this month, as it continues its phased return to regular regional operations. The national carrier will initially operate five weekly flights to Bahrain, four weekly flights to Khasab and daily flights to Dubai, with frequencies expected to increase in line with demand.



The recent resumptions are complemented by a series of frequency enhancements across the network.

supporting strong domestic demand.

Elsewhere in the region, flights to Riyadh will increase from 21 to 24 per week starting April 23, while services to Amman will increase from four

to six weekly flights from the beginning of May.

Oman Air has also expanded services to the Indian Subcontinent, increasing frequencies to Calicut from six to ten weekly starting from April

21, alongside added capacity to Mumbai and Dhaka. These adjustments reflect growing demand across both passenger and cargo segments.

Looking ahead, the airline recently announced plans for further network expansion in 2026, with new routes to Singapore, Taskhent and Sochi, as well as the introduction of a direct Salalah-Dubai service, all anticipated for the summer schedule

Oman Air is also progressing on a number of product and service initiatives including onboard connectivity, future cabin configurations and loyalty programme enhancements, due to be rolled out from Q2 2026 onwards.

Flights can be booked through Oman Air’s website, mobile application and authorised travel agents.

Nissan launches ‘Mobility Intelligence for Everyday Life’ vision

MUSCAT: Nissan Motor Co, Ltd announced its long-term vision, “Mobility Intelligence for Everyday Life,” defining a customer-centric strategic direction.

The vision integrates mobility intelligence into everyday life through Nissan’s focus on AI-Defined Vehicles (AIDV), offering a choice of electrification technologies to meet diverse customer and market needs.

Ivan Espinosa, President and CEO, said: “This is the right moment to articulate Nissan’s long-term vision as we look beyond the Re:Nissan plan and set a clear path for the future. Our vision defines where Nissan is headed, with customer experience as our guiding priority. By advancing mobility intelligence, we will deliver products and technologies that are safer, more intuitive and more accessible with



Nissan’s new long-term direction, guided by its vision, is designed to drive sustainable competitive advantage across next-generation technologies.

outstanding value and a more rewarding overall experience.”

As Nissan looks ahead, the Re:Nissan plan remains on track in

its final year of execution, delivering a competitive cost base, improved capacity utilisation and strong new-product momentum that lays the

groundwork for future growth. Nissan’s new long-term direction, guided by its vision, is designed to drive sustainable competitive advantage across next-generation technologies, a streamlined product portfolio, a redefined global market approach, and an industrial model organised around clearly defined vehicle families.

NEXT-GENERATION TECHNOLOGIES: AI-LED INTELLIGENCE AND ELECTRIFICATION

Artificial Intelligence is central to Nissan’s approach technology innovations, enabling the Nissan AIDV, which will combine Nissan AI Drive Technology and Nissan AI Partner technology to enhance mobility and optimise time spent in transit.

Building on real-world deployment of advanced driver assistance technologies, Nissan is integrating AI with vehicle control and safety systems. Nissan aims to deploy Nissan AI Drive technology across 90 per cent of its line-up over the long-term.

The new Nissan Elgrand, scheduled for launch in summer 2026 will adopt next-generation ProPILOT with end-to-end autonomous capability by the end of fiscal 2027.

Alongside the introduction of Nissan AI Drive technology focused on advancing autonomous driving, the company will enhance the customer experience using Nissan AI Partner technology that connects intuitively to support everyday activities and integrate vehicle naturally into everyday life.

SHORTTAKES



Activity was further underpinned by dividend distributions and the announcement of new projects across several firms.

MSX TURNOVER SURGES TO 3.5 BN

MUSCAT: Trading value on the Muscat Stock Exchange climbed sharply to RO 3.5 billion in the first quarter of this year, compared with approximately RO 434.1 million in the corresponding period last year and RO 2.6 billion in the fourth quarter of 2025.

The first quarter saw stronger liquidity flows into the bourse from domestic institutional investors and individuals, supported by improving economic indicators, higher earnings among listed public shareholding companies and stronger financial disclosures. Activity was further underpinned by dividend distributions and the announcement of new projects across several firms.

Monthly trading values reflected a steady upward trajectory, beginning at RO 836.8 million in January, rising to RO 1.2947 billion in February and reaching RO 1.4264 billion in March. The number of executed transactions surged to around 335,000 during the quarter, compared with 57,000 transactions recorded in the same period of 2025.

The benchmark index posted three record highs over the quarter, crossing 6,000 points on January 5, 7,000 points on February 11 and 8,000 points on March 29. It closed the quarter at 8,168 points, representing a gain of more than 2,300 points over three months.

Foreign ownership in public shareholding companies stood at 14.2 per cent at the end of March. Non-Omani investors recorded purchases worth RO 418.7 million, accounting for 11.7 per cent of total trading value, while sales reached RO 395.2 million, or 11.1 per cent.

Sohar International led with RO 656.3 million, followed by Bank Muscat at RO 575.8 million. OQEP ranked third with RO 522.5 million, ahead of OQ Base Industries at RO 472.4 million, while Omantel recorded RO 333.3 million. — ONA

Nama Water expands treated water reuse drive

NAMA Water Services is advancing treated water reuse as part of a broader strategy to enhance water security and support the green economy, focusing on maximising the economic value of every cubic metre of treated water under its Manhal Nama initiative.

The company said the approach reflects a shift from traditional resource management to value-based water management, contributing to operational efficiency and environmental sustainability in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Efforts are centred on enabling optimal utilisation of treated water across sectors.

Eng Issam bin Munir al Ismaili, Chief Officer of Digital and Commercial Services, said Manhal Nama has evolved into an integral component of the water economy, helping sectors manage demand more efficiently and cost-effectively.

He added that treated water is positioned not merely as a service, but as a practical solution delivering efficiency, sustainability and ease of use.

The company relies on advanced treatment systems to enhance water quality and operational performance, enabling safe reuse in agriculture, industry and irrigation of green spaces in compliance with national and international standards.

These processes also reduce environmental impact and support sustainable resource use.

Data for the end of 2025



Manhal Nama beneficiaries increased by 36 per cent by end of 2025.

shows that the number of Manhal Nama beneficiaries increased by 36 per cent compared with 2024, indicating rising demand and growing confidence in treated water solutions.

This trend reflects a broader shift towards more efficient and sustainable water consumption patterns.

Nama Water Services is also developing flexible operational models that align water quality with specific usage requirements, enabling customers to maximise efficiency and economic value.



ENG ISSAM BIN MUNIR AL ISMAILI
Chief Officer of Digital and Commercial Services.

The company continues to promote adoption of treated water as a reliable alternative source.

As part of its expansion strategy, the utility is investing in treatment networks and infrastructure while introducing automated monitoring systems to enhance service quality and operational efficiency.

Key projects include a treated water distribution scheme in Al Shakhakhit in the Wilayat of Barka, currently serving around 60 farms, with more than 100 additional connection requests received.

A new strategic pipeline in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate is also set for commissioning in the coming months, linking the wilayats of Nizwa and Manah over a distance exceeding 12 kilometres, improving access to sustainable water resources.

The company highlighted multiple benefits of treated water use, including reduced reliance on freshwater, preservation of natural reserves, lower operational costs and improved allocation efficiency.

It continues to encourage wider adoption of Manhal Nama, underscoring its role in building a more efficient and sustainable water system that supports long-term development.

Knowledge Oasis Muscat draws 8.5 million in new projects

MUSCAT: Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM) , the technology arm of Public Establishment for Industrial Estates, recorded positive growth in 2025 after attracting projects valued at more than RO 8.53 million, with leased space exceeding 21,000 square metres, reflecting sustained investor interest in technology and knowledge-based sectors.

Eng Jaafar bin Ali al Ajmi, Director General of Knowledge Oasis Muscat, said cumulative investment in the oasis reached approximately RO 276.88 million by the end of 2025.

The facility employs 1,671 Omani nationals and 716 expatriates. Its total area stands at around 759,566 square metres, of which 494,832 square metres are leasable, with total leased space reaching about 381,312 square metres.

He noted that the oasis hosts more than 100 government, semi-government and private entities operating in information



Cumulative investment in the oasis reached RO 276.88 million by the end of 2025.

and communication technology, innovation and digital services, reinforcing its role as a specialised hub for the knowledge economy and advanced technologies.

The site also accommodates national and regional data centres serving government entities, financial institutions and technology firms, alongside specialised cybersecurity and cloud service centres, positioning it among

the largest data hosting clusters in the Sultanate of Oman.

The total value of projects currently under implementation is estimated at RO 30.8 million, underscoring ongoing efforts to strengthen infrastructure and enhance the investment environment to attract high-value projects.

Among the key developments is a multi-storey parking facility designed to provide around 1,500 parking spaces in addition to office and service areas, with an estimated cost of RO 8.4 million. The project is 10 per cent complete and is scheduled for completion in May 2027.

Another project involves the maintenance and rehabilitation of Building No. 2, aimed at improving operational efficiency through comprehensive upgrades. Valued at RO 1.2 million, it is 40 per cent complete and expected to be

delivered in August.

Work is also progressing on a mixed-use investment building, which will include office and commercial space. The project, valued at RO 12 million, is 55 per cent complete and targeted for completion in the first quarter of 2027.

Al Ajmi highlighted a solar energy project as one of the oasis's most significant initiatives. Designed to generate 1.5 megawatts of electricity, it aims to enhance sustainability and reduce reliance on conventional energy sources.

The project, with an estimated cost of RO 1 million, is currently about 40 per cent complete and is expected to be finished by September 2026.

In parallel, the Knowledge Oasis Muscat International School project, being developed by an investor, is nearing completion at over 95 per cent. — ONA

ENERGY POLICY

OIL MARKETS

GLOBAL TRADE

US renews Russian oil waiver



The US renewed a one-month waiver allowing countries to purchase sanctioned Russian oil loaded at sea, effective until May 16.

The move follows pressure from Asian economies facing energy price shocks linked to the US-Iran conflict. The waiver excludes Iran and Cuba and aims to stabilise markets despite criticism from lawmakers over a perceived soft stance on Moscow. — Reuters

Oil drops after Hormuz reassurance



Oil prices fell sharply by about 9% after Iran confirmed the Strait of Hormuz would remain open during a ceasefire and pledged not to block it. Brent and WTI recorded their steepest declines since April 8 as risk premiums eased.

Market sentiment shifted towards supply normalisation, while vessel traffic resumed steadily under coordinated passage arrangements with Iranian authorities. — Reuters

China signals upgrade to Swiss trade pact



China signalled readiness to advance negotiations on upgrading its free trade agreement with Switzerland during talks in Bern. The Commerce Ministry said a higher-standard pact would strengthen bilateral cooperation in trade, investment and innovation.

The move reflects efforts to deepen ties and expand collaboration between the two countries amid evolving global trade dynamics. — Reuters

OPINION

AI for prosperity: How civic leadership shapes futures in Oman



DR HILAL AL SAWAI

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert

AI is creating new opportunities worldwide, but in Oman, AI is being developed collaboratively alongside civic leadership and Oman's long-term national vision.

Instead of viewing AI simply as a technological tool, Oman has subsumed it into a wider structure of governance, social and economic frameworks. This integrated, divergent approach, which is a hallmark of Oman Vision 2040, shows how civic leadership can cultivate integrated prosperity and shape the futures of an entire region.

Oman's transformation is centred on an astute decision to eliminate its dependency on oil and pursue a varied and knowledge-driven economy.

At the centre of Oman Vision 2040 is innovative thinking, creating value through human capital, and the digital transformation that foster economic growth. With Vision 2040, AI is not an independent industry, but rather the centrepiece of cross-disciplinary collaboration within education, governance and industry.

One of the significant milestones on this path is the National Programme for Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Digital Technologies (2024 -2026), which is a clear innovative attempt to develop a proactively constructive AI ecosystem and a demonstration of civic leadership.

This programme focuses on three key areas: integration of AI into various sectors, localisation of advanced technologies and the governance of AI with an ethical framework.

Civic leadership is demonstrated in the establishment of AI governance framework that prioritises the needs of the community, preserves social order and stability and prevents social disruption by AI technologies.

AI has potential major impacts on the economy. The Omani government has modelled how important AI is for the economy and how important the economy is for AI. Oman's goal is for the digital economy to grow from 2 per cent to 10 per cent of the GDP. The government has bolstered innovation by funding infrastructure and collaborating with other nations. Oman's innovation driven economy aims to prosper AI.

Omani leaders have created and enforced policies. The government has set up a digital economy to promote services and retention of public services. The digital economy causes civic engagement and decreases the digital divide. Oman gained civic engagement due to the trust citizens have in the government to implement the economy and pay for services.

Investment in the economy will also assist with education and the fostering of the economy. The government has aligned the University of Technology and Applied Sciences with national goals to assist in the state driven AI innovation. The government has reduced its reliance on foreign nations for highly trained professionals by fostering talent and education.

Oman's goal is to have AI, technology, innovation and the economy reflect the

At the centre of Oman Vision 2040 is innovative thinking, creating value through human capital, and the digital transformation that foster economic growth. With Vision 2040, AI is not an independent industry, but rather the centrepiece of cross-disciplinary collaboration within education, governance and industry.

Omani culture and values. The government understands that technology and the economy must reflect the values of the society and the economy. Civic leaders have fought for AI and the economy to improve the daily lives of the citizens and provide services to improve the quality of life.

Furthermore, a variety of digital initiatives implemented with an emphasis on decentralisation are shaping regional development. The intent to build digital transformation units across the governorates demonstrates a commitment to balanced growth, ensuring that the advantages of Artificial Intelligence (AI) are not only available to the metropolitan areas.

In the interest of sustaining other regional communities, such development is critical as it decreases the gap between the regional communities and the capital and other metropolitan areas, while also strengthening and providing self-sufficiency to the regional communities.

Oman's case provides important insights for other countries. Firstly, an AI system is best adopted when there is a clear and well-defined framework for the country's national vision.

Secondly, the civic, visionary, and selfless leadership is fundamental to constructing the ecosystem through the right policies, interventions and laws. Lastly, it is worth noting that the convergence of the technology and the society during the AI era is equally important as the technology apart from the other socio-economic developments.

EVS IN OMAN: THE GRID QUESTION NO ONE IS ASKING

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

As electric vehicles (EVs) gain global momentum, much of the conversation has focused on adoption rates, charging infrastructure and consumer readiness. In Oman, these discussions are beginning to take shape, often centred on when the shift will happen and how quickly it can scale. Yet, one critical question remains largely overlooked: is the grid ready?

The transition to electric mobility is not simply about replacing petrol engines with batteries. It represents a fundamental shift in how energy is consumed, distributed and managed. Every EV added to the road becomes part of a wider energy ecosystem, drawing power from a grid that must be capable of handling new patterns of demand.

In countries with high EV penetration, the pressure on electricity networks is already becoming evident. Peak demand periods are shifting, and in some cases, intensifying as more users plug in their vehicles during the same hours.

For Oman, where electricity demand is already shaped by extreme summer cooling needs, the introduction of large-scale EV charging could add a new layer of complexity.

This raises important considerations around timing and infrastructure planning. If unmanaged, clusters of high-speed chargers could place strain on local distribution networks, particularly in densely populated or high-traffic areas. At the same time, long-distance travel routes, which are central to Oman's geography, would require reliable fast-charging corridors supported by stable grid connections.

However, this challenge also presents an opportunity. Unlike more mature markets where systems are being retrofitted, Oman is still at an early stage of EV adoption. This creates space to design smarter, more resilient systems from the outset.

Managed charging, for example, allows energy demand to be distributed more evenly by encouraging users to charge during off-peak hours. Similarly, integrating renewable energy sources into charging infrastructure could reduce pressure on the grid while supporting national sustainability goals.

Battery storage is another critical piece of the puzzle. By storing excess energy during periods of low demand and releasing it when needed, storage systems can act as a buffer, helping to stabilise the grid while supporting EV charging networks.

In a country already investing in renewable energy, this integration could become a defining feature of Oman's approach to electric mobility. Policy will play a central role in shaping this transition. Clear frameworks around charging infrastructure, energy tariffs and grid management will be essential to ensure that growth in EV adoption does not outpace the capacity to support it.

In Oman's banking sector, bigger is not the real story

At first glance, the debate seems simple: fewer banks, bigger institutions, stronger system.

But Oman's banking sector is not that simple — and reducing it to size alone risks missing the real story.

As the economy moves deeper into diversification under Vision 2040, the role of banks is quietly becoming more demanding. This is no longer just about financing traditional sectors or maintaining stability.

It is about funding new industries, supporting private sector expansion, and keeping pace with a faster, more complex economy.

That shift changes the question entirely. It is no longer: Do we need more mergers?

It is: Are we building the right kind of banks for what comes next? There is a strong argument, often made by market analysts, that consolidation is part of the answer.

Larger banks, they say, can absorb shocks more effectively, deploy capital at scale, and invest in technology and talent in ways smaller institutions cannot. In a market where some banks still operate below optimal scale, this argument carries weight.

Oman's own experience reflects part of this logic. Consolidation over time has contributed to the emergence of stable institutions capable of anchoring the financial system.

More recently, the merger between Sohar International and HSBC Bank Oman has reinforced the view that scale remains a strategic consideration in the market — even as further consolidation discussions have shown that not every deal is straightforward.

But there is another side to this debate — one that is often underplayed. A different group of analysts takes a more cautious view. For them, the problem is not mergers themselves, but the expectations placed on them. Globally, many banking mergers fail to deliver what they promise.



As the economy moves deeper into diversification under Vision 2040, the role of banks is quietly becoming more demanding.



QASIM AL MAASHANI

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

As the economy moves deeper into diversification under Vision 2040, the role of banks is quietly becoming more demanding. This is no longer just about financing traditional sectors or maintaining stability.

Costs do not fall as expected. Revenues do not rise in a meaningful way. Systems take years to integrate. Cultures clash. And what was presented as a transformation ends up being little more than a structural adjustment. In such cases, the result is familiar: a bank that is larger, but not better.

This is where the conversation in Oman needs to become more disciplined.

From a technical perspective, specialists tend to agree on a simple benchmark. A merger only creates real value if it delivers measurable outcomes — typically a clear reduction in operating costs, a stronger funding position, genuine complementarity between business lines, and the ability to integrate systems and organisational cultures without prolonged disruption. Without at least some of these, scale becomes cosmetic.

At the same time, focusing only on size creates another risk — one that is equally important in a market like Oman.

Too much concentration can weaken competition. A sector dominated by a small number of large institutions may reduce pressure to innovate, limit

pricing competition and narrow choices for customers. Over time, that can quietly erode efficiency rather than strengthen it.

This is why the real challenge is not choosing between consolidation and competition. It is managing both at the same time.

Oman's banking sector sits in a narrow space between two risks. On one side, a fragmented system of smaller banks that lack the scale to compete or invest effectively. On the other, a highly concentrated market that risks becoming less dynamic. The answer lies in balance.

Banks must be strong enough to support economic growth, but not so dominant that they stop competing. They must have the capital to finance major projects, but also the discipline to operate efficiently. And above all, they must be able to adapt — because the nature of banking itself is changing faster than before.

Technology is reshaping customer expectations. New financial players are entering the market. Costs are under pressure. Speed matters more. In this environment, size alone offers no protection.

Execution does.

This is where leadership becomes decisive. A well-managed bank can use a merger to become leaner, faster and more capable. A poorly managed one can become slower, heavier and more complex.

The transaction does not determine the outcome — the execution does.

That is why the focus should now shift away from the number of banks and towards the quality of the institutions that remain.

Oman does not need consolidation for its own sake. Nor does it benefit from preserving fragmentation.

What it needs is a banking sector that is fit for purpose — one that can finance growth, support diversification and remain competitive in a changing financial landscape. In the end, the real test is not how big banks become. It is how well they perform.

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‘BEEF 2’ TACKLES GENERATIONAL CONFLICTS



Creator Lee Sung Jin says ‘Beef’ season 2 explores intergenerational conflict and the gap between those who have wealth and those who never will. — AFP

After winning awards for his groundbreaking dark comedy *Beef*, creator Lee Sung Jin struggled to find a compelling premise for a second season — until a dispute in his own neighbourhood revealed the dramatic potential of generational conflict.

“The incident itself wasn’t that interesting, but it was everyone’s reactions to it”, Lee told a press conference about his Netflix series.

While younger friends reacted with alarm to the fight, those over 40 dismissed it.

“Gen Z peers... were all kind of like aghast... ‘did you call 911?’ ‘Is everyone okay?’” he said.

“Whereas my millennial and Gen X peers were like: ‘Big deal.’ That juxtaposition... was very interesting”.

The first season of *Beef* starred Ali Wong and Steven Yeun as strangers whose escalating conflict stemmed from a road-rage incident.

Beef 2, which premieres on Thursday, shifts focus to tensions between couples from different generations in an elite country club.

Oscar Isaac plays the club’s manager, with Carey Mulligan as his wife — a couple frequently at odds behind a polished exterior for appearances.

When younger employees, played by Charles Melton and Cailee Spaeny, capture video of the pair fighting, it sparks intergenerational tension, blackmail and corruption.

Their own relationship is also tested in a storyline exploring the widening gap between the haves and have-nots in modern society.

Lee drew inspiration from observing generational divides at a club in Montecito, a wealthy California enclave home to Hollywood figures and Britain’s Prince Harry and Meghan Markle.

While most members were older, the staff were largely millennials and Gen Z, reflecting a broader social divide.

“I found that to be a great microcosm for society”, Lee said, noting that no matter how hard employees work, they are unlikely to join the elite ranks they serve.

Mulligan, who previously worked with Isaac on *Drive* and *Inside Llewyn Davis*, said their established rapport helped shape their performances.

“That shared past... and having so much trust already... means everything”, she said.

“He’s very bold in all his choices, but none of it feels forced. It feels very natural”. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



ARTEFACT

Close-up view of the recovered golden helmet of Cotofenesti. — AFP



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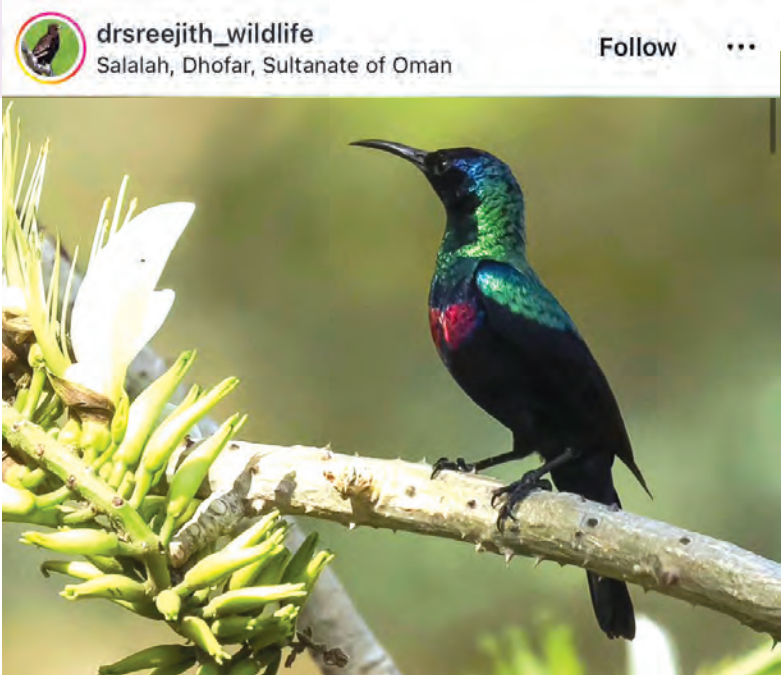
US writer director Aaron Sorkin promotes the movie “The Social Reckoning” onstage. — AFP



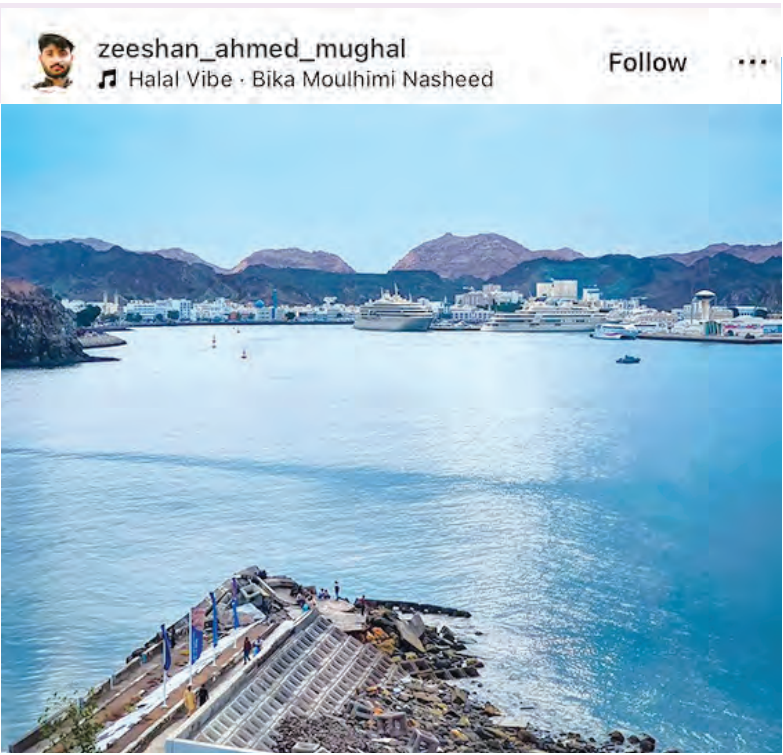
TOURISM

Visitors stroll through the grounds of Nezu Shrine during the annual Azalea Festival in Tokyo. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



Jewel of sunlight



Muttrah Corniche shines against the waves

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PARIS ENGINEER WINS
PICASSO PAINTING



TV producer Peri Cochin talks via video call with the winner of the Picasso painting for 100 euros. — Reuters

An art-loving engineer from Paris was the lucky winner of an original Picasso painting worth over a million euros at a charity raffle in Paris on Tuesday.

Ari Hodara, 58, who only bought his ticket at the weekend, was picked at a ceremony in Paris that was livestreamed from auction house Christie's, with the funds raised from the event to be donated to research into Alzheimer's disease.

A total of 120,000 tickets were sold at 100 euros (\$118) apiece, with a portrait of Dora Maar, one of Picasso's muses, up for grabs.

Titled "Tête de femme" ("Woman's head"), the inky grey and blue gouache work was painted in 1941 and was purchased from a private art dealership, Opera Gallery.

"How do I know this isn't a prank?" Hodara asked when called from the auction house after being picked from a list of

ticket-buyers in 52 countries.

Organisers, led by French journalist Peri Cochin with backing from the painter's family and foundation, put on two similar raffles of the Spanish master's work in 2013 and 2020.

A 25-year-old American from Pennsylvania won the first, while an accountant from Ventimiglia in northwest Italy claimed the second after being given a ticket as a Christmas present by her son.

The 12 million euros raised will be donated to the Alzheimer's Research Foundation.

"The funding for research is ridiculous", head of the foundation, Olivier de Ladoucette, said on Tuesday. "In our developed societies, we still haven't understood that this is a major public health issue and that absolutely everyone needs to get involved. — AFP

ROSALIA RETURNS
TO BARCELONA AS
GLOBAL STAR



Rosalía performing live

SPANISH singer Rosalía spent her early years training in classrooms, rehearsal spaces and small venues across Barcelona as she developed the voice and style that would define her career.

She has now returned to the city where she honed her craft as a global star with her "Lux" tour, marking a full-circle moment in her artistic journey.

"Barcelona, I love you madly", she said in Catalan on Monday night, opening the first of four sold-out shows at Barcelona's Palau Sant Jordi arena.

The concerts are part of the rollout of her fourth album, "Lux", a sweeping work that retains flamenco rhythms from her earlier records while also exploring more experimental and spiritual themes.

"Thanks for carrying me", the 33-year-old added before breaking into tears as the audience erupted into applause, highlighting the emotional connection she maintains with her hometown crowd.

The tour, which began last month in France, will also take her to the United States and Latin America, underlining her status as an international performer with a wide and devoted fan base.

Fans packed the arena to see Rosalía, who grew up in the nearby commuter town of Sant Esteve Sesrovires, perform in the city where she first began attracting attention as a student and emerging artist.

"There was already an intention there, a very flamenco way of moving through life", said Luis Cabrera, founder of Taller de Musics, where Rosalía enrolled in 2010.



Fans packed the arena to see Rosalía, who grew up in the nearby commuter town of Sant Esteve Sesrovires, perform in the city where she first began attracting attention as a student and emerging artist.

Rosalía, hailed for her genre-defying versatility, studied flamenco singing with mentor Chiqui de la Linea, who early on recognised her ability to blend traditional styles with a modern sound.

Hard-working and deeply engaged, she had a clear sense of direction and ambition even at a young age.

"She used to ask a lot of questions, always restless. And when she said 'I want my music to reach millions of people' I was shocked", Cabrera said.

That same determination was noted by music journalist Luis Troquel, who followed her early years in Barcelona's music scene.

"She told me she wanted to be a diva... an artist who sings, dances and pays close attention to image", he said.

"And she achieved that, even better than expected".

Her 2018 breakthrough album El mal querer began taking shape during her time at Barcelona's ESMUC

conservatory, where she completed a degree in flamenco singing.

Her final project, inspired by the medieval novel "Flamenca", later became the basis of the album, which would go on to define a new phase in contemporary Spanish music.

"Everyone still remembers that concert", said ESMUC director Nuria Sempere, describing Rosalía as focused and self-assured.

Rosalía now funds a scholarship at the school and has returned to give a masterclass on creativity, continuing to support the next generation of artists.

"It doesn't matter, just go for it. You'll fix it later, but you have to jump in", Sempere recalled her telling students.

With two Grammy awards, 11 Latin Grammys and millions of followers, Rosalía has become one of the most influential figures in modern Spanish music, with an impact that extends far beyond Spain. — AFP



HIBBA AL KINDI

A fashion pop up addressing the waste produced by the global fashion industry took place on April 9 to 10 at Local Parks in Muscat, bringing together artists, designers and sustainability advocates.

The event, titled “Atlad”, was organised by local artist Shahad al Hamdi and aimed to encourage visitors to rethink fast fashion through upcycling, thrifting and creative reuse.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Al Hamdi said, “Atlad is a sustainable fashion pop-up where we aim to find creative ways to upcycle and opt for more sustainable fashion options”.

“I started this pop up because I wanted to encourage people to thrift more because we have a different mentality towards it”, she said. “I’m hoping that this makes a change where people find it more acceptable to thrift and wear pre loved clothing”.

She added that sustainability can be approached in creative and accessible ways. “There are so many creative and fun ways to be more sustainable. You just have to think outside the box”.

The event featured 14 local vendors showcasing a mix of slow fashion stalls, thrifted pieces and hands on activities focused on giving clothing a second life, including handmade designs and limited run collections by local creatives.

The *Observer* spoke to Isra al Kindy, a member of the Global Shapers Muscat Hub, which organised the clothing swap booth at the event.

“We’re here as an initiative to do a clothes swap where people bring their clothes and swap them with other clothes”, she said.

Al Kindy noted that the initiative aims to encourage more conscious consumption by extending the lifespan of garments.

“Clothes sustainability is really important to Muscat Hub and to me personally”, she said. “With today’s world where fast fashion such as Shein and Temu is used a lot, we need spaces like this where we appreciate clothes and recycle and reuse”.

The *Observer* also spoke to Tasneem al Balushi, founder of Dollies, who hosted a fabric painting activity at the event.

“The whole purpose of this activity is to give clothes that you no longer wear a transformation”, Al Balushi said.

She noted that participants



Art installation created by Al Hamdi using piles of discarded garments, offering a visual representation of the scale of textile waste generated by the fashion industry.

POP UP TACKLES FASHION INDUSTRY WASTE



The event featured 14 local vendors showcasing a mix of slow fashion stalls, thrifted pieces and hands on activities focused on giving clothing a second life



experimented with fabric painting and bleaching to give new life to garments that might otherwise be discarded.

Al Balushi, who is set to launch her own sustainable clothing line, said the event provided an opportunity to connect with the local community ahead of her brand launch.

Moreover, the event also featured an art installation created by Al Hamdi using piles of discarded garments, offering a visual representation of the scale of textile waste generated by the fashion industry.

“This art installation speaks about the dangers of the fast fashion industry and how consumerism causes a lot of fashion waste”, she said.

The clothing used in the piece had been collected over a short period of time, highlighting how quickly unwanted garments accumulate.

“I had piles and piles of clothes given to me and I segregated them; and this is from a short period of time collecting some”, Al Hamdi explained. “So imagine how much there is in larger quantities across the world”.

Through art, community initiatives and creative workshops, the pop up highlighted a growing shift towards more conscious fashion choices in Oman, encouraging visitors to reconsider how clothing is worn, reused and ultimately valued.

