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FOCUS ON BUILDING KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY IN OMAN

S A Y Y I D T H E Y A Z I N C H A I R S R E S E A R C H A N D I N N O V A T I O N A U T H O R I T Y B O A R D M E E T I N G

HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Research and Innovation Authority, presided over the first meeting of the Authority's Board of Directors for 2026, in the presence of the members of the board.

The meeting aligns with the board's mandate to outline the general strategic directions of the authority, monitor its performance, and enhance its contribution to the development of the research and innovation ecosystem. This reflects the integration between economic priorities, and

research and innovation as two vital enablers for enhancing the competitiveness of the national economy and building a knowledge-based economy, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

At the outset of the meeting, HH Sayyid Theyazin commended the efforts made to support the advancement of research and strengthen the innovation ecosystem, emphasising the authority's pivotal role in transforming knowledge and research into added value, enabling innovation to contribute to the development of economic sectors, and building a



HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said presided over the first meeting of the Authority's Board of Directors.

knowledge-driven economy founded on research and creativity.

The board discussed a number of executive tracks related to the authority's

plans and programmes for the upcoming phase. It also reviewed the authority's 2025 annual report, including its indicators, achievements, and initiatives that have

contributed to developing the research and innovation environment in the Sultanate of Oman.

The board was also briefed on the initiative

to launch the competition for the Sultan Haitham Research Chair at higher education institutions. This initiative serves as an important mechanism for stimulating scientific output and strengthening research capabilities.

In addition, the board received an update on Oman's successful bid to host the annual meeting of the Global Research Council (GRC) in 2028. Hosting this prominent international forum will enhance Oman's presence in global scientific circles and further solidify its position within the international research and innovation ecosystem. — ONA

SEE ALSO P2

Honourable Lady inaugurates 'Tranim Al Amal' band

MUSCAT: Under the auspices of Her Highness The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, the Ministry of Social Development inaugurated the 'Tranim Al Amal' (Melodies of Hope) Band. The event was held at the theatre of the Royal Guard of Oman Command.

This humanitarian and artistic initiative embodies the generous commitment to empowering persons with disabilities and special needs. It aims to open broader horizons for them to express

their talents and abilities. Furthermore, it seeks to showcase their passion and refine their creative energies through music and the arts.

Upon the arrival of The Honourable Lady, she was received by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, and Maj Gen Salim bin Ali al Hosani, Commander of the Royal Guard of Oman, alongside several senior officials.

At the beginning of the ceremony, the Royal Anthem of Oman was played. A visual presentation was screened,

illustrating the stages of establishing the 'Tranim Al Amal' Band. The film also highlighted the continuous training and rehabilitation efforts that accompanied the band's development. These efforts reflect the unwavering determination and sincere resolve of the band members. They also demonstrate the promising creative energies and capacity for contribution possessed by these individuals, provided they are given a supportive and nurturing environment.

TURN TO P3

TRUMP SAYS IRAN CEASEFIRE IS 'ON LIFE SUPPORT'

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump said on Monday that a ceasefire with Iran was "on life support" after he rejected Tehran's response to a US peace proposal, fuelling concerns of a resumption of hostilities in the 10-week-old conflict that has killed thousands and halted vital energy flows.

Days after Washington floated a proposal aimed at reopening negotiations, Iran on Sunday released a response focused on ending the war on all fronts, including Lebanon, where Israel is fighting Hezbollah. The response had been swiftly rejected by Trump. Asked where the ceasefire stands, Trump told reporters on Monday.

"I would call it the weakest right now, after reading that piece of garbage they sent us. I didn't even finish reading it," he said.

In its response, Tehran also demanded compensation for war damage, emphasised its



An Iranian woman walks past a mural painted on a wall in Tehran on Monday. — AFP

sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz, and called on the US to end its naval blockade, guarantee no further attacks, lift sanctions and remove a ban on Iranian oil sales. The US had proposed an end to fighting before starting talks on more contentious

issues, including Iran's nuclear programme. Tehran defended its stance on Monday.

"Our demand is legitimate: demanding an end to the war, lifting the (US) blockade and piracy, and releasing Iranian assets that have been unjustly frozen in banks due to US pressure," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said.

"Safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz and establishing security in the region and Lebanon were other demands of Iran, which are considered a generous and responsible offer." Brent crude oil futures traded 2.7 per cent higher at around \$104 a barrel, as the deadlock left the Strait of Hormuz largely closed. Before the war began on February 28, the narrow waterway carried one-fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas, and has since become a central pressure point in the conflict.

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SHORT TAKES

OMAN, IMO DISCUSS NAVIGATION



MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received in Muscat on Monday Arsenio Dominguez, Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The two sides held consultations on current challenges facing maritime navigation in the region and through the Strait of Hormuz. They also discussed efforts underway to address these challenges through amicable and peaceful means, in coordination with relevant parties. — ONA

Agreement signed for 45 social housing units worth 1.8m



The agreement was signed by Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili and Maryam bint Issa al Zadjali.

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and Dar Al Atta'a Association signed a cooperation agreement on Sunday to construct 45 social housing units at a total cost exceeding RO 1.8 million, as part of the 'Together We Build, Together We Achieve Impact' initiative. The agreement was signed on behalf of the ministry by Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, and on behalf of the association by Maryam bint Issa al Zadjali, Founder and Chairperson of the Board of Directors of Dar Al Atta'a. The signing took place on the sidelines of the 21st edition of the Oman Real Estate, Design & Build Exhibition and Conference 2026. Maryam bint Issa al Zadjali emphasised that this initiative aims to enhance family stability and social cohesion, noting that the association has successfully constructed more than 220 homes to date under the 'My Home, My Haven' (Maskani Mamani) programme. — ONA

ROP foils attempt to transfer \$6.6 million

MUSCAT: The Directorate-General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigation, in cooperation with the National Central Bureaus of the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), foiled an attempt to transfer funds estimated at \$6.6 million through a local bank. The funds, originating from an Asian country, were found to be proceeds of cyber fraud operations. The operation comes as part of ongoing efforts by the Royal Oman Police to combat cross-border cybercrime.

Sultan Haitham Chairs Programme a pillar for knowledge economy

MUSCAT: The Sultan Haitham Chairs Programme in Oman's higher education institutions stands as one of the most prominent national initiatives reviewed by the Board of Directors of the Research and Innovation Authority during its meeting, chaired by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Authority. This initiative, bearing the name of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, establishes a distinguished national research platform designed to address challenges through rigorous scientific methodology, supporting innovation and the development of a sustainable, knowledge-based economy in line with the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040. The Sultan Haitham Chair for Advanced Technologies is the first chair to be launched under this ambitious programme. It aims to serve as a research platform for which Omani universities compete, transforming national challenges into innovation opportunities while laying the foundations for excellence through the development of practical solutions that serve various development sectors. The designation of the chairs programme under His Majesty's name reflects remarkable attention to the status of research and innovation on the national priorities ladder, affirming their

qualitative role in guiding the economy and generating solutions, while enhancing specialised research and its effective linkage to Oman's development needs. The programme focuses on attracting the highest calibre of scientific expertise and building national capacities, alongside strengthening strategic partnerships locally and internationally to ensure knowledge transfer and technology localisation. This approach aims to empower decision-makers to formulate evidence-based development policies, thereby contributing to raising the global ranking of Omani academic institutions and enhancing the Sultanate of Oman's position in global innovation indicators. The programme's management adopts an integrated governance framework, including precise requirements for host institutions and high standards for selecting chairholders. Sustainable funding mechanisms ensure the continuity of scientific contribution, support for postgraduate students, and the provision of advisory services benefiting society and industry, ultimately maximising the economic and social impact of research. In the domain of knowledge dissemination and exchange of expertise, the chair is committed to publishing outstanding scientific outputs and managing data and intellectual property. — ONA

Food security focus of Shura discussions

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, MAY 11

THE Majlis Ash'shura discussions on Monday continued focusing on the statement delivered by Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, that saw interventions centring on issues concerning food and water security, sustainability of productive sectors, and the challenges faced by farmers, livestock breeders, and fishermen across the country. Dr Saud emphasised that the upcoming phase will concentrate on strengthening food and water security, enhancing resource management efficiency, accelerating technical and digital transformation, and maximising the economic impact of productive sectors in alignment with the goals of Oman Vision 2040. During the discussions, Mansour bin Zahir al Hajri, Deputy Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, underscored the significance of dam projects as crucial components for water and food security. He stressed the need to reassess implementation priorities and expedite projects related to water resource protection and sustainability, particularly in the face of recurring climate-related challenges. Meanwhile, Omar al Hosni, Member of the Majlis Ash'shura representing Al Khabourah, brought attention to challenges related to the degradation of agricultural lands due to salinity. He called for technical solutions such as water treatment and modern irrigation systems to maintain agricultural land and support local production. The session also included discussions and observations on agricultural support, land regulation, livestock development, agricultural product monitoring, dams, aflaj irrigation systems, irrigation systems, agricultural marketing, illegal fishing practices, and infrastructure related to agricultural and fisheries services and markets. Members further discussed the importance of strengthening field inspection systems regarding the use of pesticides and fertilisers, supporting livestock breeders through designated grazing lands, exploring the use of treated wastewater for fodder cultivation, and expanding the utilisation of modern technologies and artificial intelligence in water resources.



The session also included support and land regulation.

The session also included discussions and observations on agricultural support, land regulation, livestock development, agricultural product monitoring, dams, aflaj irrigation systems

Gastroenterology clinic launched in Al Buraimi

AL BURAIMI: The Ministry of Health on Monday launched the Gastroenterology and Endoscopy Clinic at Al Buraimi Hospital. This initiative is part of the ministry's ongoing efforts to enhance specialised services and expand the scope of healthcare provided in governorate hospitals. The gastroenterology and endoscopy service is a modern, specialised service newly introduced to the hospital. Previously, patients requiring such medical care were referred to Sohar Hospital and the Royal Hospital. The launch of this service aligns with the Ministry of Health's policy to support decentralisation in healthcare delivery. It facilitates patient access to specialised care near their places of residence, thereby contributing to reduced medical referrals and improved quality of healthcare services provided to the community. Since the service began operating in January 2026, the hospital has successfully performed over 110 endoscopy procedures. This achievement reflects the readiness of medical and technical staff. — ONA



The inauguration was held under the auspices of Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Affairs.

Awareness campaign on risks of climate and tsunamis begins

AL RUSTAQ: The national awareness campaign concerning the risks of climatic conditions and tsunamis began on Monday in Al Batinah South Governorate. Held under the slogan 'Your Awareness for Your Safety', the campaign is scheduled to run for three days. The launch was held under the auspices of Eng Masoud bin Said al Hashmi, Governor of Al Batinah South, in the presence of several officials from government and private entities within the governorate. The campaign is implemented by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), represented by the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre, in cooperation with the National Committee for Emergency Management, the Ministry of Information, and the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority. This effort is coordinated with the Office of the Governor of Al Batinah South, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and the Ministry of Health. The campaign aims to raise awareness among the community and stakeholders regarding weather hazards, climatic conditions and tsunami risks. Furthermore, it seeks to enhance public understanding of the multi-hazard early warning system. — ONA



The campaign aims to raise awareness among the community and stakeholders regarding weather hazards.

SHORT TAKES



The closing ceremony of the forum was held under the auspices of Dr Ahmed al Ghassani, who honoured the supporting institutions and participants in the forum's activities. — ONA

Youth forum reviews empowerment, qualification initiatives

TAQAH: A panel discussion titled ‘Together for Youth Development’, held as part of the conclusion of the Taqah Youth Development Forum, explored ways to enhance integration and cooperation between government entities concerned with supporting and empowering youth, with the participation of several government bodies and the private sector.

The session also discussed youth, entrepreneurial, and tourism programmes, initiatives, and projects, aimed at strengthening the role of youth as active partners in achieving national and developmental targets in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Asma bint Ali al Maashani, Supervisor of the forum’s organisation at the Planning and Wilayat Development Department at the Office of the Wali of Taqah, stated that the forum’s programmes were conducted from April 29 to May 11. These included several training courses in artificial intelligence tools, content design via Canva, and project management, in addition to a “Train the Trainer” programme aimed at qualifying job-seekers from the wilayat to enhance their opportunities to enter the labour market and engage in youth projects.

She added that 24 young job-seekers were qualified in the field of developing training skills, opening promising future horizons for them. She noted that the number of applicants for the training programmes exceeded 300 participants from the wilayat, featuring interaction and participation from various wilayats across Dhofar Governorate. She further explained that the forum showcased, through a visual presentation, the impact of previous editions on developing youth. — ONA

HONOURABLE LADY INAUGURATES ‘TRANIM AL AMAL’ BAND

FROM P1

The ceremony featured a variety of musical performances. These performances blended the spirit of authenticity with contemporary horizons. They also combined distinctive features of Omani art with masterpieces of global music. These artistic tableaux expressed the band’s message and its inspiring humanitarian meanings. The performances were delivered by the ‘Tranim Al Amal’ Band with artistic

and training support from the First Royal Band for Music and Folk Arts (affiliated to the Royal Protocols at the Diwan of Royal Court), the Royal Guard of Oman Music, and the National Autism Centre. The inauguration of the ‘Tranim Al Amal’ Band follows the directives of The Honourable Lady to support this cherished group within society. It aims to enhance their presence across various domains. The initiative also stems from the

Ministry of Social Development’s commitment to discovering and developing their abilities. It includes refining their artistic skills through specialised training programmes delivered in partnership with governmental and private sectors. Ultimately, this contributes to empowering these individuals, strengthening their active participation, and reinforcing the values of social responsibility among all institutions equally. — ONA

‘Confident Steps’ initiative seeks to develop students

AMAL AL RIYAMI
MANAH, MAY 11

THE Wilayat of Manah celebrated the conclusion of the ‘Confident Steps’ initiative on Monday at the Office of the Wali of Manah, under the auspices of Shaikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development for Family Affairs and Community Development. The ceremony was attended by officials, educators, parents and participating students. The event marked the end of a journey that began in October 2025 and continued until May 2026, with the goal of empowering students to build confident, balanced, and independent personalities capable of facing future challenges with awareness and self-assurance.

Shaikha bint Suleiman al Mahrouqi, head of the Omani Women’s Association in Manah, stated, “Today we celebrate the conclusion of the second edition of the ‘Confident Steps’ initiative, implemented in collaboration with social workers in Manah schools. The initiative aimed to equip students with the confidence and leadership skills necessary to move towards the future with determination and ambition. It focused on strengthening students’ self-confidence, communication skills and social interaction, while encouraging them to express their opinions, actively participate in school and community activities and develop leadership qualities



The event marked the end of a journey that began in October 2025 and continued until May 2026.

from an early age.” The initiative involved nominating selected students based on specific criteria, followed by guidance sessions, workshops, and programmes supervised by social specialists and educators. Students were then evaluated through continuous assessments to compete at the school level. Targeting male and female students from Grade 3 to Grade 11 in schools across Manah, the initiative aimed to develop dialogue and interpersonal communication skills, enhance teamwork and responsibility, and support students in building stronger and more confident personalities.

The ceremony included various performances, such as a welcoming dance and a theatrical operetta highlighting the history and cultural identity of the Wilayat Manah. An exhibition showcased student projects and creative works from different schools in the wilayat, reflecting students’ talents and innovative ideas. Abdullah bin Salim al Hashemi, a Social Worker at Malik Bin Fahm Boys School, stated, “The initiative had a noticeable impact on students’ personalities and their ability to communicate confidently both inside and outside the classroom. The continuous support and cooperation from parents significantly contributed to the programme’s success.” Several participating students expressed their happiness and appreciation for being part of the initiative. Aseel bint Hilal al Busaidy said, “The initiative helped me become more confident, improved my public speaking and communication skills and encouraged me to engage more actively with others. The experience allowed us to build friendships, discover our abilities, and take greater responsibility in school and daily life.” The initiative was carried out by social workers in schools across the Wilayat of Manah under the supervision of the Social Guidance Supervisors at the Department of Career Guidance and Student Counselling at the Directorate-General of Education in collaboration with the Omani Women’s Association in Manah.

Lecture highlights Omani maritime

AMSTERDAM: The Omani Village in the Nijmegen province of the Kingdom of the Netherlands hosted a lecture titled “Omanis: A Maritime Nation Connecting East and West – Omani-Dutch Relations as a Model,” presented by Shaikh Dr Abdullah bin Salim al Harthy, Ambassador of Oman to the Kingdom of the Netherlands. During the lecture, the ambassador addressed the historical and economic significance of Omani maritime passages, reviewing the most prominent seaports and their role in linking trade routes between the East and West. He also highlighted the Sultanate of Oman’s vision for diversifying income sources and enhancing the contribution of the maritime and logistics sectors to economic development. He further discussed Omani-Dutch relations and the growing cooperation across various fields. — ONA

Oman Qatar Insurance Co. SAOG Achieves Strategic Milestone with first Inaugural ‘A-’ S&P Global Credit Rating



OMAN Qatar Insurance Company SAOG announced that S&P Global Ratings, one of the world’s leading credit rating agencies, has assigned the Company its first long-term Insurer Financial Strength (IFS) rating of ‘A-’ with a Stable Outlook, underscoring OQIC’s solid financial position and strategic market standing. The rating reflects S&P Global Ratings’ independent assessment of OQIC’s financial strength, operating performance, risk-adjusted capitalisation, and its strategic integration with its parent company, Qatar Insurance Co. Q.S.P.C. (QIC), a leading insurance group in the region. The Stable Outlook further reflects S&P Global Ratings’ view that OQIC is well positioned to maintain a stable and resilient credit profile. Strong Support from Parent Company Strengthens Rating S&P Global Ratings cited the unconditional guarantee provided

by QIC to support OQIC’s obligations as an important factor in assigning this rating. This guarantee enhances OQIC’s financial resilience and capital strength, while reinforcing confidence in its ability to efficiently meet its obligations even under various economic challenges and conditions. The rating commentary noted the strategic and operational integration between OQIC and QIC, highlighting that the parent company’s financial commitment and governance oversight underpin the Omani entity’s robust credit profile. Capital Adequacy and Risk-Based Capital Metrics In its analysis, S&P Global highlighted the strength of OQIC’s capital adequacy, underpinned by its integration within the QIC group, whose capitalisation is assessed as remaining well above the 99.99% level under S&P’s riskbased capital model. This reflects a strong buffer against underwriting volatility, catastrophic losses, and market uncertainty, providing assurance to investors and counterparties about the Company’s financial stability. Capital adequacy remains a core pillar in credit rating assessments, as it signals an insurer’s ability to absorb unexpected losses without external support. A solid risk-based capital position can help protect policyholders, maintain regulatory compliance, and support strategic growth initiatives. Enhancing Competitive Position and Market Participation OQIC’s newly assigned A- rating is expected to significantly

strengthen its competitive positioning within the Sultanate of Oman’s insurance industry. This rating enhances the Company’s ability to pursue large-scale insurance mandates, participate in complex underwriting opportunities, and compete more effectively with established regional insurers. In this regard, Mr. Hasan Yaseen Ali Al Lawati, Chief Executive Officer of OQIC stated that the assignment of an A-rating by S&P Global Ratings represents a major milestone in the company’s corporate journey, reaffirming its financial discipline, operational strength, and commitment to sustainable value creation for clients and shareholders. He further noted that this achievement reinforces market confidence in OQIC’s ability to deliver strong long-term performance and maintain financial resilience. Investor Confidence and Shareholder Value An A- rating with a Stable Outlook not only reflects creditworthiness but also signals to investors, partners, and financial markets that the Company maintains sound financial fundamentals supported by prudent risk management and effective capital governance. Such ratings are essential for building trust and attracting long-term investment, particularly in a sector where financial strength directly impacts policyholder protection. The Chief Executive Officer further emphasised that the rating will serve as a benchmark for future strategic planning and investor communications, aligning with its long-term objectives of transparency, governance excellence, and sustainable growth.

AI Najd Agriculture Development Company

شركة النجد للتنمية الزراعية

Tender announcement for the Provision of Logistics Services

AI Najd Agricultural Development Company (SAOC), announces tender as following:

S/N	Tender No.	Tender Name	Tenders Submission Date
1	2/2026	Provision of Logistics Services	Last Day 1/6/2026

The companies and institutions operating in the Sultanate and specialized on the Provision of Logistics services can obtain tender requirements and documents, from the company’s offices at the addresses below: -

- The company head office is in Thumrait, Hanfit area, during official working hours from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM.
- The company’s office in Muscat, Bousher, Ghala area, during official working hours from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM.

For more information, please contact the following number: 98048123

We AI Najd Agriculture Development Company SAOC is an agriculture producing company based in Shasr, near Thumrait, Dhofar and we would like to request a quotation for trailer transportation services as per the following details:

- Pickup Location: Shasr (Thumrait, Dhofar region).
- Delivery Location: Silal Fruit and Vegetable Market, Muscat.
- Type of Cargo: Fruits and Vegetables.
- Estimated Quantity: 20 Tons per Trailer,
- Loading Period: June 2026 to July 2026

Kindly provide your quotation along with the following details:

- Freight charges (one-way only).
- Availability of trailers per day (2 to 5 required per day).
- Transit time.
- Terms of payment.
- Any additional charges.

OMAN

5 new investment projects unveiled at Real Estate Expo

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MAY 11

THE MINISTRY OF HOUSING and Urban Planning has affirmed that the 21st edition of the Oman Real Estate, Design and Build Conference and Exhibition 2026 marks a decisive shift from planning to implementation, reflecting the accelerating momentum within Oman’s real estate and urban development sector.

Speaking on the sidelines of the event, Nasser bin Khamis al Siyabi said the exhibition is being held at a time when the Sultanate of Oman is witnessing rapid progress in major real estate and urban projects aimed at enhancing investment attractiveness and supporting sustainable economic growth.

Al Siyabi revealed that the conference will witness the launch of five new real estate investment opportunities, adding to the 20 opportunities previously announced by the ministry. Several agreements and strategic partnerships are also expected to be signed during the event.

He noted that the conference is more than a platform for showcasing projects, describing it as an integrated hub that brings together investors, developers and companies operating across the real estate sector.

The event also features specialised workshops and dialogue sessions designed to facilitate the exchange of expertise and experiences among local and international participants.

“The primary objective of the conference is to strengthen cooperation within the sector and create new channels for investment and partnership opportunities, while promoting both domestic and foreign investment,” Al Siyabi said. He highlighted Sultan Haitham



Sultan Haitham City will be one of the exhibition's key focal points this year.



NASSER BIN
KHAMIS AL SIYABI

The event also features specialised workshops and dialogue sessions

City as one of the exhibition’s key focal points this year, reflecting Oman’s vision for future smart and sustainable urban communities. Spanning nearly 15 million square metres, the city has been designed according to modern urban planning principles that prioritise quality of life, green spaces and integrated services.

Al Siyabi added that residents are expected to receive their housing units during the final quarter of this year, underscoring the project’s steady implementation progress.

He stressed that such integrated urban developments contribute significantly to generating employment opportunities for Omani citizens across sectors linked to construction, infrastructure and services.

The Director-General also pointed to the ministry’s ongoing efforts in advancing several future city developments, including Al Thuraya City, which has reached advanced stages of completion, as well as the planned Salalah Future City and Sohar Future City projects currently under development.

In addition, he highlighted several landmark projects being undertaken by the ministry, including Downtown Al Khuwair and Al Jabal Al Aali, alongside integrated residential neighbourhoods across various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

According to Al Siyabi, these projects form part of a broader national development vision aimed at positioning the real estate sector as a key economic driver while enhancing its contribution to GDP and stimulating related sectors such as tourism, construction and logistics.

Concluding his remarks, Al Siyabi invited citizens, residents and investors to visit the exhibition and explore the latest projects, investment opportunities and innovations in real estate development, design and construction.

He described the event as a major platform for showcasing Oman’s future urban ambitions and the growing dynamism of the Sultanate’s property market.

21stEDITION



The event reflects Oman’s direction toward building integrated and sustainable cities in line with urban development goals and Oman Vision 2040.

Strong turnout at real estate expo

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, MAY 11

The second day of the 21st edition of the Oman Real Estate, Design and Build Exhibition and Conference 2026 showed strong participation from real estate developers, sector stakeholders, and both local and international investors. The event saw a package of agreements and qualitative projects announced, reflecting Oman’s direction toward building integrated and sustainable cities in line with urban development goals and Oman Vision 2040.

Ammar bin Habib al Lawati, Director of the Architectural Department for Future Cities Projects, stated that the government schools complex in Sultan Haitham City is a key development project. He explained that the complex comprises three schools: one for Cycle One and two for Cycle Two (boys and girls).

He said that the project has been designed according to modern standards that ensure separation of entrances and exits while providing an integrated educational environment, alongside multiple facilities such as playgrounds and parking areas, with dedicated access points for kindergartens and early grades.

Hussam Mansour, Sales Director at Al Ahly Sabbour, highlighted the strong demand for the ‘Wadi Zuha’ project in Sultan Haitham City, noting that it has reached its final stages approximately one year and three months after its launch. He said, during the exhibition, we introduced the final residential building within the project, alongside the launch of commercial retail units for the first time. These units witnessed significant demand, particularly with exhibition offers featuring zero down payment.

He added that the project has attracted investors from 41 nationalities, with Omani investors ranking first among buyers, reflecting growing confidence in Oman’s real estate sector.

In regards to urban planning, Eng Nawal bint Hamad al Numani, Planning Engineer at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning in Muscat Governorate, said that Al Thuraya City is one of the flagship projects, representing the heart of Muscat. She explained that the city consists of three main phases, with the first phase including eight residential neighbourhoods designed as an integrated city that respects the site’s natural topography.

She added that neighbourhoods Six and Eight have been offered for investment. Neighbourhood Eight includes a mix of villas and apartments with fully integrated services, while Neighbourhood Six focuses on villas. Infrastructure works are currently underway, including roads, water networks, sewage systems, and electricity.

Eng Al Muntasir al Abri, Architect at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and member of the Executive Office for Future Cities Projects, outlined the details of the ‘Al Jabal Al Aali’ project, which spans 12 million square metres and connects Al Dakhiliyah and Al Batinah South governorates. He said, the project consists of five main zones, including the main cable car area with its station, a five-star hotel, a market, and tourism facilities, in addition to residential areas featuring villas and townhouses.” He added that the project includes a Dark Sky Zone designed to minimise light pollution and provide a unique stargazing experience, as well as dedicated areas for high-altitude activities such as hiking and cycling.

He noted that the project also features recreational attractions such as zipline tracks and an iconic pedestrian bridge, in addition to a mountain museum and agricultural zones dedicated to cultivating mountain-specific crops.



TENDER NOTICE

The Internal Tender Committee of the Oman Authority for Quality Assurance of Education (OAQA) hereby announces the issuance of the following tender: -

Tender Number	Tender Title	Company Grade:	Tender Fee	Dates		
				Distribution Till	Last Day to receive Clarifications	Bid Submission Date
2/2026 General Tender	Preparation of the new office spaces on the ground floor of the Oman Authority for Quality Assurance of Education	Companies and institutions specialized in contracting, registered with the Projects, Tenders, and Local Content Authority, classified under Grades (First / Second / Third)	OMR 25	20 May 2026	26 May 2026	09 June 2026

The Oman Authority for Quality Assurance of Education (OAQA) is hereby inviting all local, specialized bidders to participate in this TENDER as per the following instructions, in addition to all terms of TENDER enclosed in the TENDER documents.

For project brief, please visit the below link:

<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

A. Purchase of Tender Documents

Companies specialized in this field and registered with the Projects, Tenders, and Local Content Authority under the grade specified above, and wishing to participate in the aforementioned tender, shall obtain the relevant Tender Documents through the Authority’s e-Tendering portal (Esnad) via the website below:

(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

no later than the date specified in the above table, subject to the payment of the prescribed document fee through the electronic payment gateway available on the website.

B. Submission

• All Proposals should be SUBMITTED ONLINE AT e-TENDERING System (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Proposals to be accepted for evaluation which will be submitted through the e-Tendering System ONLY.

• Tenders submitted shall remain valid for a period of ninety (90) days from the date of submission via the electronic portal.

• The Internal Tender Committee reserves the right to cancel or reject any tender without stating the reasons.

• Tenders must be submitted through the above-mentioned website no later than 10:00 a.m. on the specified closing date. Any tender received after this deadline shall not be accepted.

• The Internal Tender Committee shall not be bound to accept the lowest-priced tender or any other tender.

C. Correspondence Tender Inquiry:

All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online through the eTendering System ONLY.

e. Tendering System Inquiry:

All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200

All correspondence pertaining to the OAQA tender must be directed to the following email address and phone number:

tenders@oaaqa.gov.om and +968 24121706

OAQA Business Hours

Sunday – Thursday, 7:30 - 14:30 Oman Time, (+4 UTC)

OAQA Business Hours are to be considered in all correspondences.

OMAN

Oman at 35th Doha Intl Book Fair from May 14

THE Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is taking part in the Doha International Book Fair 2026, the 35th edition of the book exhibition being held in Qatar from May 14 to 23. The fair sees the participation of representatives of 36 countries, and it exhibits the publications of more than 500 Arab and international publishing houses.

The participation of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in the Sultanate of Oman's pavilion comprises publications from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and the National Records and Archives Authority, among other national entities.

The ministry's participation in the book fair stems from a keenness to promote cooperation and integration of efforts among institutions supporting Oman's cultural and tourism presence in international forums, said Naseem bint Abdullah al Balushi, Supervisor of the Book Fairs Section at the Department of the 'Journal of Oman Studies', Ministry of



The ministry is showcasing over 50 prominent titles.



NASEEM AL BALUSHI

Supervisor of the Book Fairs Section

Heritage and Tourism.

Naseem explained that the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has showcased more than 50 prominent titles featuring the Omani heritage over the past five years. These publications include research studies and books published by the ministry in cultural, natural, archaeological and geological heritage, she added.

She noted that these recent publications include the 26th edition of the 'Journal of Oman Studies' that celebrates its golden jubilee — marking 50 years since the publication

issued its first edition way back in 1975.

The ministry's exhibits also include Issue No 2 of a bulletin on relics titled 'Athar Bulletin', which publishes reports about surveys and excavations carried out by archaeological missions in the Sultanate of Oman.

The ministry is also exhibiting Book No 15 of the Omani Archaeological Heritage Series, which elaborates on the remains of trilithic stones in the ancient Bedouin regions of south-eastern Arabia.

Naseem affirmed that Oman's pavilions at various international book fairs serve as centres of attraction that draw visitors from different age groups.

Through such events, the ministry highlights Oman's heritage and cultural assets, landmarks, tourist styles and experiences, as well as tourist films, brochures, maps and promotional materials, said Naseem.

She pointed out that these publications provide information about Oman's most prominent destinations, events and tourist seasons.

— ONA



AL BATINAH SOUTH HONOURS HIGH ACHIEVERS

AL RUSTAQ: The Directorate-General of Education in Al Batinah South Governorate on Monday held a ceremony to honour high-achieving students for the 2025/2026 academic year.

The event recognised students from government schools, private bilingual schools, and special education programmes across the governorate. It took place at the Directorate's theatre in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Sayyid Sulaiman

bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Deputy Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers. Attendees included Dr Nasser bin Salim al Ghanbousi, Director-General of Education in the governorate, along with several other officials.

The recognition celebrates students who have demonstrated excellence in academic achievement. It also underscores a sustained commitment to raising academic performance levels.

— ONA

Al Najd Agriculture Development Company شركة النجد للتممية الزراعية

Tender announcement for the Provision of Agricultural Services

Al Najd Agricultural Development Company (SAOC), announces tender as following:

S/N	Tender No.	Tender Name	Tenders Submission Date
1	1/2026	Provision of Agricultural Services	Last Day 1/6/2026

The companies and institutions operating in the Sultanate and specialized on the Provision of Agricultural Services can obtain tender requirements and documents, from the company's offices at the addresses below: -

- The company head office is in Thumrait, Hanfit area, during official working hours from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM.
- The company's office in Muscat, Bousher, Ghala area, during official working hours from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM.

For more information, please contact the following number: 98048123

محافظة مسقط Muscat Governorate

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (12/2026)

Muscat Municipality invites Companies specialized in the field and registered with General Secretariat of Tender Board, to participate and obtain tender documents from the website via the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date
(PRE/26/005)	Design & Construction of Link Road at Mawaleh (11) (Re Call-1)	18/05/2026	26/05/2026
(PRS/26/013)	Supply of Labour Furniture for MM	31/05/2026	21/06/2026
(PRS/26/014)	Supply of Food Stuff for MM	31/05/2026	21/06/2026
(PRS/26/015)	Supply of Central Printers for MM	31/05/2026	21/06/2026
(PRS/26/016)	Supply of Batteries for MM	18/05/2026	26/05/2026
(PRS/26/017)	Tailoring & Supply of Uniforms & Personal Protective Equipment for MM (Unit Rate)	31/05/2026	21/06/2026
(PRE/26/022)	Consultancy Services for Seeb Seafront Development	31/05/2026	21/06/2026
(PRE/26/040)	Landscaping Works at Darsait	31/05/2026	21/06/2026
(PRE/26/058)	Supply of Road Bollards for MM (Unit Rate)	31/05/2026	21/06/2026
(PRE/26/059)	RFP for Redressing Remote Sites of MM	31/05/2026	21/06/2026
(PRE/26/060)	Supply & Installation of Lighting at Al-Jufinah	31/05/2026	21/06/2026
(PRE/26/061)	Design & Construction of Mountain Slope Stabilization Works in Darsait	31/05/2026	21/06/2026

1. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.
2. Clarification and Support:
• For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
• For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).

جامعة الشرقية A' SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

ASU's Tender Committee is pleased to invite specialized companies to participate in the following tender:
Tender details:

Tender No.	Description	Document Collection Deadline	Site Visit	Bids Submission Deadline	Document Fees	Degree
(ASU/25/ 25/26)	Tender for Providing Cleaning & Landscaping Service for A'Sharqiyah University (Ibra Campus, Sur Campus, ASU Muscat Office)	19/05/2026	Ibra 19/5/2026 (10AM) Sur 20/5/2026 (10AM)	03/06/2026	100 OMR	The Excellent Grade Company

- Specialized companies interested in participating in the tender should obtain the tender document during the official working days from Sunday to Thursday, between 9:00 AM and 2:00 PM.
- Tender collection process:** The interested companies shall follow the following steps:
1 - The payment should be made directly to ASU under the following bank account:

Account Name	AL SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY
Account Number	0423010693610011
SWIFT CODE	BMUSOMRX

2 - After payment, send the receipt to zayana.alaamri@asu.edu.om along with the reference number, title of the tender and CR of the company.
3 - Participating companies will receive the tender document via email.
4 - Companies that hold Riyadh certificate are exempted from tender document fees. Companies should send Riyadh certificate to zayana.alaamri@asu.edu.om, along with the reference number, title of the tender and CR of the company
- ASU general terms and conditions of tenders shall apply on all submitted bids. http://www.asu.edu.om/downloads/purchase_terms_conditions.pdf
- ASU is not bound to accept the lowest bid.
- For further details, please don't hesitate to contact us at: zayana.alaamri@asu.edu.om or Tel 25401116.

وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

إعلان مناقصة Tender Notice

The Internal Tenders Committee at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology invites for the Following Tenders:

TENDER NUMBER	TENDER NAME	DATE OF PUBLISHING	LAST DATE TO PURCHASE TENDER DOCUMENT	SUBMISSION DATE	COMPANIES WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THIS TENDER	DOCUMENT PRICE
(MTCIT 88/2025) Recall -1	SUPPLYING AND INSTALLATION OF SMART HIGH SPEED WEIGH IN MOTION AND TRUCK PORTABLE SCALE	10-05-2026	18-05-2026	08-06-2026	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE PROJECT, TENDERS AND LOCAL CONTENT AUTHORITY (ALL GRADES)	(105/400 ر.ع.) ONE HUNDRED AND FIVE OMANI RIYALS AND FOUR HUNDRED BAISAS (LOCAL AND REGIONAL COMPANIES) (21/100 ر.ع.) TWENTY ONE OMANI RIYALS AND ONE HUNDRED BAISAS (SMEs) NON-REFUNDABLE

Interested Companies registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents. Tenders should be submitted online on given website

CORRESPONDANCE:

- Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at e-Tendering System. (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
- E-Tendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the e-Tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number:
Tel: +968 24402200, e-mail: etenderhd@ptlc.gov.om

INTERNAL TENDERS COMMITTEE

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WAR

SHORT TAKES



Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan

TÜRKIYE FM TO VISIT QATAR FOR WAR TALKS

ANKARA: Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan will visit Qatar on Tuesday for talks on the Iran war, its impact on the Gulf and efforts to ensure navigational safety in the Strait of Hormuz, a Turkish diplomatic source said on Monday.

Nato member Türkiye, which neighbours Iran, has been in close contact with the US, Iran and mediator Pakistan since the start of the US-Israeli war with Iran. It has called for an end to the conflict, while condemning attacks on Iran and criticising Tehran's strikes on Gulf states as unacceptable.

Fidan, who last visited Doha in March and held two separate calls with Iran's foreign minister at the weekend, will repeat Türkiye's support for Qatar against attacks from Iran, the source said.

He will voice Ankara's expectation for navigational safety to be ensured on the Strait of Hormuz and point to the critical need of doing so for regional security and economic stability, the source said.

Fidan is expected to "state that permanently resolving the conflict in the Gulf is the most urgent priority and exchange views on diplomatic initiatives to achieve this," the source added.

Ankara and Doha have strong ties and cooperate on a wide range of issues, from energy to defence. Türkiye has a military base in Qatar and has been in negotiations with Doha about the procurement of Eurofighter Typhoon fighter jets, as part of an agreement with Britain.

A day earlier, Iran had sent its response to a US proposal to begin peace talks to end the war, the IRNA news agency reported on Sunday, as two carriers were allowed to pass through the blockaded Strait of Hormuz.

The IRNA report said the response to a US proposal to end fighting before starting talks on more contentious issues, including Iran's nuclear program, had been sent to Pakistan, which is mediating. But no details were immediately available.

After some 48 hours of relative calm following sporadic clashes last week, hostile drones were detected over several Gulf countries on Sunday, underlining the threat still facing the region despite a month-old ceasefire. Meanwhile, one of the border crossings between Turkey and Syria is to reopen on Tuesday, ending a 12-year closure, local officials said on Monday. — Reuters

IRAN DESCRIBES ITS PROPOSAL AS LEGITIMATE, GENEROUS

DUBAI: Iran's proposal to end war with the US and reopen the Strait of Hormuz was legitimate and generous, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei said on Monday, adding that the US continues to uphold unreasonable and one-sided demands.

"Our demand is legitimate: demanding an end to the war, lifting the (US) blockade and



Spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei

piracy, and releasing Iranian assets that have been unjustly frozen in banks due to US pressure," Baghaei said.

"Safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz and establishing security in the region and Lebanon were other demands of Iran, which are considered a generous and responsible offer for regional security." — Reuters

No end to deadlock as Iran, US reject talks

IRAN SAID on Monday it had demanded the release of its frozen assets and the end of a US blockade of its ports, after President Donald Trump angrily rejected Tehran's terms for ending the Middle East war. The sharp exchange of messages raised the spectre of a return to open conflict in the Gulf, dashed hopes of a quick negotiated deal to reopen the Strait of Hormuz to commercial shipping and sent oil prices higher.

Trump reacted with fury after Iran responded to the latest US proposed outline for peace talks with a counteroffer he deemed, in a brief social media post, "Totally Unacceptable."

The impasse unnerved global energy markets, with international benchmark Brent crude prices rising 4.65 per cent to \$99.95 a barrel during early on Monday trade in Asia.

The US leader did not say what had offended him in Iran's response, but Tehran's foreign ministry said it had called for an end to the US naval blockade and to the war "across the region" — implying a halt to Israel's strikes targeting Hezbollah in Lebanon. Crucially, ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baqaei told reporters, Iran demanded the "release

of assets belonging to the Iranian people, which have for years been unjustly trapped in foreign banks". This would suggest not just a return to the status quo before the United States and Israel launched the war on February 28, but a victory for the government's long-standing campaign against economic isolation.

"We did not demand any concessions. The only thing we demanded was Iran's legitimate rights," Baqaei said.

An end to international sanctions would also diminish Washington's leverage over Tehran as it tries to secure a lasting end to Iran's nuclear enrichment. The US, Israel and their allies have long accused



Rescuers work at the site of an Israeli strike in Kfar Jouz, Lebanon. — Reuters

Iran of seeking an atomic bomb, an accusation Tehran has repeatedly denied. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insisted the conflict would not end until Iran's nuclear facilities are destroyed.

"It's not over, because there's still nuclear material — enriched uranium — that has to be taken out of Iran," he told US broadcaster CBS's 60 Minutes.

"There's still enrichment sites that have to be dismantled," he said.

The Wall Street Journal, citing people familiar with the matter, said Iran's counter-proposal had included the possibility of diluting some of its highly enriched uranium, with the rest transferred to a third country.

Iran had sought guarantees that the transferred uranium would be returned if negotiations failed or Washington abandoned the agreement, sources told the Journal.

Trump is expected to press China's President Xi Jinping — a major buyer

of Iranian oil — on the Iran issue when he visits Beijing on Thursday, according to a senior US official.

The lack of a path to a resolution has focused concern on the Strait of Hormuz, where Iran is restricting maritime traffic and setting up a payment mechanism to charge tolls for crossing ships.

US officials have stressed it would be "unacceptable" for Tehran to control the international waterway — the export route for a fifth of the world's oil. The US Navy is also blockading Iran's ports, at times disabling or diverting ships heading to and from them. As diplomatic momentum appeared to dwindle, fresh drone attacks in the Gulf on Sunday rattled the ceasefire.

The United Arab Emirates said its air defences intercepted a drone attack launched from Iran, while Kuwait reported "hostile drones" in its airspace. — AFP

Strait of Hormuz standoff threatens food supply, says UN official

PARIS: Tens of millions of people could face hunger and starvation if fertilisers are not soon allowed through the Strait of Hormuz, the head of a UN task force aimed at averting a looming humanitarian crisis said on Monday.

Iran has had the strategic waterway — through which a third of the world's fertilisers normally pass — in a chokehold for months in retaliation for the war launched by the United States and Israel on February 28, disrupting a trade critical for farmers around the world in a race against the end of planting seasons.

"We have a few weeks ahead of us to prevent what will likely be a massive humanitarian crisis," Jorge Moreira da Silva, executive director of the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and leader of the task force, said in an interview in Paris.

The UN secretary general created the task force in March to spearhead a mechanism to allow fertilisers and related raw materials such as ammonia, sulphur and urea through the strait.

For weeks, Moreira da Silva has been



We may witness a crisis that will force 45 million more people into hunger and starvation

JORGE MOREIRA DA SILVA
Executive Director, UNOPS



A Palestinian woman prepares food on the rooftop of her house to distribute among displaced children as a charity in the northern Gaza Strip. — AFP

working to convince the belligerent parties to allow even a few ships through, and has met with "more than 100 countries" to rally UN member state

support around the mechanism.

A growing number of countries are showing support for the plan, he said, but the United States and Iran, as well as

WAR

WAR EFFECT

London's Heathrow Airport sees dip in April traffic



London's Heathrow Airport announced that passenger numbers dropped in April as the Middle East war disrupted global air travel. The airport handled 6.7 million passengers last month, down 5.3 per cent from one year earlier, Heathrow said.

Heathrow, Europe's busiest airport, said that the decline reflected "the ongoing impact of the Middle East conflict on some markets and short-term adjustments to travel plans." — AFP

COMBAT OPERATIONS

Soldier killed in fighting near border with Lebanon



Israel's military said on Monday that one of its soldiers had died in fighting near the border with Lebanon, bringing its losses to 18 personnel since the war with Hezbollah began in early March. Sergeant Major Alexander Gloyanov, 47, "fell during combat near the Israel-Lebanon border", the military said.

He was killed on Sunday. Since the war began, one Israeli civilian contractor has also been killed in addition to the 18 soldiers. Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East conflict on March 2 when it launched rockets at Israel to avenge the killing of Iran's supreme leader in US-Israeli strikes.

Israel responded with airstrikes and a ground invasion. — AFP

PROPAGANDA OPERATIONS

New UK sanctions against Russian 'info warfare'



Britain announced new sanctions targeting Russia's "information warfare campaigns" over its full-scale Ukraine attack, alongside those behind the alleged forced deportation and indoctrination of Ukrainian children.

The sanctions package hits 85 people and entities, two-thirds of them related to alleged Russian propaganda operations, including what London said were recent attempts to interfere in upcoming Armenian elections. — AFP

Lebanon urges US to pressure Israel amid strikes

BEIRUT: Lebanese leaders urged the US ambassador to Beirut to pressure Israel to halt its attacks as it pounded the country from the air on Monday despite a truce in the Israel-Hezbollah war. Lebanese authorities on Monday also raised the overall death toll from Israeli strikes since March 2 to 2,869 people.

That toll includes dozens killed since the truce went into force on April 17. Lebanese President Joseph Aoun and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam met separately with ambassador Michel Issa in preparation for a third direct meeting between Lebanese and Israeli representatives set to take place in Washington on Thursday and Friday.

Salam said he asked Issa to "exert pressure on Israel to stop the ongoing attacks and violations, in order to consolidate the ceasefire".

The appeal followed a weekend of intense Israeli strikes that stretched beyond the country's south and reached as close as 20 kilometres from the capital Beirut.

The Israeli military on Monday issued an



Smoke rising from the southern Lebanese area of Marjeyoun after an Israeli air strike that targeted the village of Zawtar al Gharbiyeh. — AFP

evacuation warning for nine Lebanese towns, seven of them in the south and two in the West Bekaa region in the east.

Israel and Hezbollah have been trading fire in southern Lebanon despite a ceasefire in place

since April 17 between Israel and Lebanon that aimed to halt the fighting.

Correspondents witnessed strikes across the south, with large plumes of smoke rising from the targeted locations.

Israel's military said earlier on Monday that one of its soldiers had died in fighting near the border with Lebanon, bringing its losses to 18 personnel and a civilian contractor since the start of the war. Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the wider Middle East war on March 2 when it launched rockets at Israel to avenge the killing of Iran's supreme leader in US-Israeli strikes.

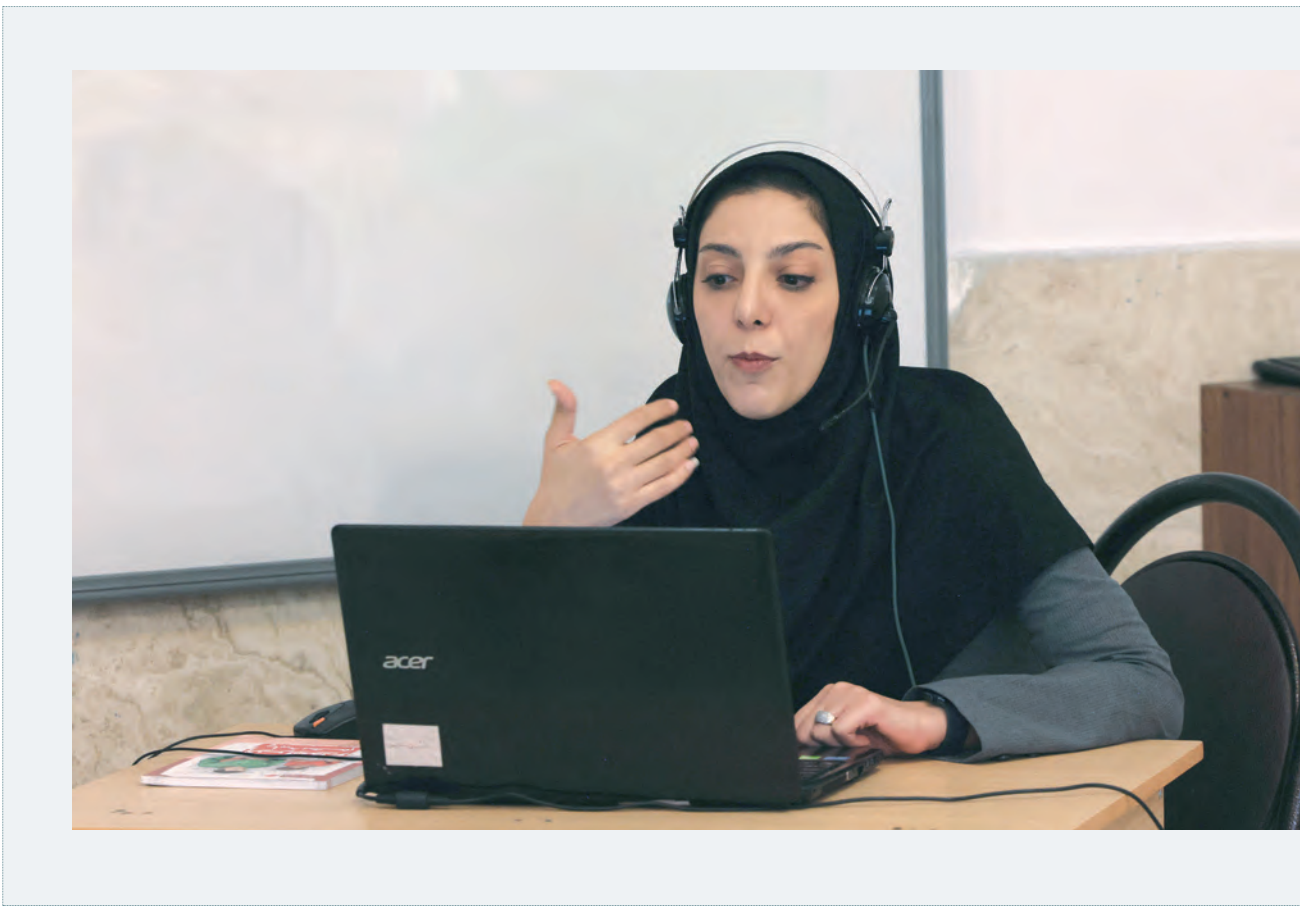
Israel responded with air strikes and a ground invasion. Its troops are operating inside an Israeli-declared "yellow line" that runs around 10 kilometres north of Lebanon's border.

In an interview with Saudi Arabia's Al Arabiya channel on Sunday, Salam said the country is "facing the occupation of 68 Lebanese villages as a result of this war that was imposed on us". — AFP

WAR DISRUPTS EDUCATION

Teaching continues online in Tehran as insecurity prevents physical schooling. Faezeh Hasarakizad, an Iranian teacher, holds her class via webcam and online with students at a girls' school in Tehran.

With the outbreak of war and insecurity in Tehran, classes are being held without students in person and online. The United States and Israel launched strikes against Iran on February 28, killing Iran's supreme leader and top military leaders, prompting authorities to retaliate with strikes on Israel and across the Gulf. — AFP



ME conflicts threaten whales off South Africa

JOHANNESBURG: Conflicts in the Middle East are increasing dangers for whales off South Africa by shifting sea traffic into their habitats and heightening the risks of collision, researchers said.

The rerouting of shipping around South Africa and away from the Red Sea and Suez Canal since late 2023 has "substantially increased" the chances of ship strikes, they said in new research.

South Africa's southwestern coast supports globally significant populations of whales as well as increasingly busy shipping corridors, according to a paper presented to an International Whaling Commission (IWC) meeting this month.

This "extensive spatial overlap" amplifies the chances of collisions, said the paper, presented by University of Pretoria whale unit lead researcher Els Vermeulen.

Some global sea traffic was diverted from the Red Sea route following the November 2023 hijacking by rebels of a British-owned vehicle carrier, the Galaxy Leader, near Yemen.

Subsequent attacks and the US-Israel conflict with Iran, which has blocked transit through the Strait of Hormuz, have led shipping companies to reroute more of their vessels around the Cape of Good Hope.

Between March 1 and April 24 this year, an average of 89 commercial vessels sailed around southern Africa, compared with 44 over the same period in 2023, according to the International Monetary Fund's PortWatch monitor.

Environmental scientists,



activists and even social media posts have highlighted the dangers of maritime traffic for sea mammals, Vermeulen said.

"There have been videos of people on cargo vessels that were going through high densities of humpback whales," she said.

"Obviously, their social media post was all about, 'Wow, look how many nice whales we see,'" she said. "My heart stopped — you know that they're striking a couple of whales." In such cases, the creatures may be unaware of the dangers because they are preoccupied, for example, by feeding, she said.

"The fastest traffic, which poses the greatest strike risk, has increased by a factor of four," said Vermeulen.

"The animals haven't had time to adapt to shipping," said Chris Johnson, global lead of WWF's Whale and Dolphin Conservation initiative. Blue whales off Los Angeles, for example, merely sink

below the surface when they hear a ship, he said.

"You assume that, if you hear a loud noise, you leave. But that's not the case with some species," he said.

In some cases, changes in whale behaviour — possibly attributable to climate change — were putting them in harm's way.

Superpods of humpback whales started feeding seasonally off South Africa's increasingly busy west coast since 2011, said blue economy consultant Ken Findlay, who contributed to the report.

"That is a change that I think plays into an increased risk of ship strikes," he said.

Collisions, which are largely underreported, are a "major cause of mortality for whales," according to a 2024 paper in the journal Science.

However, there are few protection measures in place for the species trying to recover since the 1986 International Whaling ban. — AFP

OPINION

Charting a new era of sustainable urban growth



THE RECENT launch of the Greater Muscat Structure Plan marks a special moment in the history of Oman’s development.

It is not merely an ambitious blueprint designed to place the capital among the finest cities in the region, but a visionary document seen as being significantly ahead of its time.

By transcending traditional administrative boundaries, the plan reimagines the capital as a cohesive, sustainable, and hyper-connected powerhouse.

The scale of the ‘Greater Muscat’ vision is breathtaking. Stretching from the historic corridors of Muttrah in the east to the emerging hub of Barka in the west, the plan covers a total area of 137,218 hectares. This 80-kilometre expanse runs parallel to a coastal strip extending over 100 kilometres, creating a linear urban corridor that respects both the sea and the sand.

This expansion is a direct and necessary response to Oman’s demographic trajectory. Since the 1980s, Muscat’s population has doubled approximately every 20 years.

To manage this extraordinary growth, the structural plan pivots away from the fragmented, individual housing spreads of the past — which have long posed logistical nightmares for utility providers and law enforcement — and toward integrated

communities and waterfront destinations.

Perhaps the most radical aspect of the plan is its rewrite of the status quo of transportation. In a city where 70 per cent of the population is currently dependent on private vehicles — a statistic that, in the era of global warming, feels like a climate grievance — the new plan offers a lifeline of mobility.

The goal is to ensure that 80 per cent of residents have access to public transport within walking distance. This will be achieved through a 55-kilometre metro rail system, a water taxi system to leverage the city’s vast coastline.

Dedicated pedestrian pathways and cycling infrastructure, and by aiming to increase public transport usage by 20 per cent, the plan transitions Muscat from a car-centric grid to a ‘healthy and active’ city.

The Greater Muscat Area is blessed with a unique environmental tapestry, including the Al Hajar Mountains range, marine protected areas, and a complex network of wadis. The plan treats these not as obstacles, but as assets.

It envisions high-efficiency parks and nature reserves linked by integrated infrastructure prepared for the realities of climate change.

By blending urban control zones with green spaces, the city will finally achieve a unified planning vision that strengthens

The plan transitions Muscat from a car-centric grid to a ‘healthy and active’ city

economic and environmental integration.

The vanguard of this transformation is undoubtedly Sultan Haitham City. As a sustainable, smart, and inclusive urban development, it promises a high-quality lifestyle backed by eco-friendly solutions. With its first phase nearing completion, it will serve as the new standard for residential, educational, and healthcare integration.

Complementing this is the Al Khuwair Downtown project. Positioned as a strategic hub, it will bridge the gap between Muscat’s coastal and mountainous landscapes. By blending modern city life with Oman’s rich heritage near government and commercial centres, it will act as the heartbeat of the new metropolis.

The investment in this vision is already flowing. Five new agreements under the Sorouh Initiative, valued at over RO 123 million, will deliver 2,167 residential units across Muscat and neighbouring governorates.

This is more than just a plan for the capital; it is a ‘stepping stone’ for the rest of Oman.

The lessons learned in Greater Muscat will soon pave the way for similar developments in Salalah, Suhar and Nizwa. Oman is not just building a city; it is engineering a future where luxury, heritage, and environmental responsibility coexist in a single, seamless urban fabric.

UNDER-THREAT UK PM VOWS TO PROVE ‘DOUBTERS’ WRONG

PETER HUTCHISON & HELEN ROWE

Embattled British Prime Minister Keir Starmer vowed to prove his ‘doubters’ wrong, as he sought to quell a growing threat to his leadership following disastrous local and regional polls.

Starmer pledged his ruling Labour party would do ‘better’ as he tried to convince angry and restless lawmakers to back him in a crunch speech designed to reset his flagging premiership.

“I know that people are frustrated by the state of Britain, frustrated by politics, and some people frustrated with me,” he said during an address in central London.

“I know I have my doubters, and I know I need to prove them wrong, and I will,” added Starmer, who returned Labour to power after 14 years of Conservative rule in 2024.

Starmer has swerved from one policy misstep to another since then, and is engulfed in a scandal over the appointment — and sacking — of Peter Mandelson as UK ambassador to Washington.

The prime minister has failed to spur economic growth as British citizens continue to feel the effects of a years-long cost-of-living pinch, but has been praised for resisting US President Donald Trump over Iran.

Voters issued a damning indictment of Starmer’s 22 months in power in local elections Thursday, which saw huge gains for the hard-right Reform UK party and left-wing populists the Greens at Labour’s expense.

Starmer’s party also saw decades of dominance in Wales come to an end and failed to make up ground on the pro-independence Scottish National Party (SNP) in the devolved parliament in Edinburgh.

In his speech, Starmer acknowledged that ‘incremental change won’t cut it’ with an increasingly disgruntled public, promising ‘a bigger response’ in areas such as economic growth, closer European ties and energy.

He pledged to introduce legislation to fully nationalise British Steel and said his government would be defined by putting Britain “at the heart of Europe”, including through an “ambitious” youth experience scheme.

Starmer denounced Reform’s anti-immigrant leader Nigel Farage a “chancer” and a “grifter”, adding: “If we don’t get this right our country will go down a very dark path.”

He also said he would “block far-right agitators” from travelling to Britain for a march this Saturday. — AFP

When digital connection becomes community

AS A RESEARCHER OF DISABILITY, I have spent years emphasising the empowering role of social media and digital technologies. I have written about access, voice, and visibility — about how platforms can amplify marginalised perspectives and foster inclusion.

Yet there is a quieter affordance that receives far less attention, perhaps because it is more intimate than institutional: The way social media alleviates loneliness by creating spaces of shared experience for those who might otherwise remain alone.

I was reminded of this recently while watching a historic speech by King Charles III delivered to the United States Congress. The timing, inconvenient for someone living in Oman, meant that I was watching late at night.

More significantly, I had no one physically present to share the moment with. This was not new. In 2011, I watched the wedding of Prince William and Catherine, Princess of Wales, alone in my room.

It felt like an event that demanded collective witnessing, yet I experienced it in isolation. I later learned that some colleagues had gathered for a viewing party, to which I had not been invited.

At the time, even if I had wanted to host such a gathering, it would not have been possible. My mother controlled the household television, and communal viewing was simply not an option.

What has changed since then is not my solitary physical setting but the nature of presence itself.

As I watched King Charles’s speech, I was simultaneously part of a dispersed but connected audience. Through livestreams hosted by royal



Digital platforms offer a way to ‘find one’s tribe.’



DR NAJMA AL ZIDJALY

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

commentators on YouTube, I joined a community that had assembled before the event, remained active during it, and continued afterward with analysis and discussion.

Viewers commented in real time, exchanged interpretations, and reacted collectively. The experience resembled being at a gathering — one where conversation flowed, where anticipation was shared, and where the event extended beyond its formal duration into communal reflection.

This sense of belonging is not limited to royal events. A few weeks earlier, I watched the Artemis II coverage through Nasa’s Live YouTube Channel.

My nieces, who share my interest, followed the event from their own home. We exchanged messages through WhatsApp, creating a small,

private layer of interaction. At the same time, I was engaged with a broader audience online, reacting to the same moments with people I did not know personally but with whom I shared an enthusiasm that felt immediate and genuine.

There is a qualitative difference between simply consuming media and participating in a digitally mediated gathering. The latter produces a sense of co-presence that challenges traditional understandings of solitude.

For individuals who are geographically isolated, socially marginalised, or simply surrounded by people who do not share their interests, these platforms offer a way to ‘find one’s tribe.’

This is not merely about distraction or entertainment. It is about recognition — the feeling that one’s passions, however niche, are valid and shared.

For those of us who have experienced constrained social environments, whether due to family dynamics, disability, or circumstance, this affordance is profound.

It transforms moments that might otherwise reinforce isolation into opportunities for connection.

Watching an event alone no longer means being alone in the experience. The screen becomes a portal, not just to content, but to community.

As I look ahead to future events, I no longer anticipate solitude in the same way. I may still sit in my own living room, but I will not be alone.

Social media has not replaced physical gatherings, nor should it. But it has created an alternative form of togetherness, one that is particularly meaningful for those who have long been on the margins of collective experience.

China seeks ‘more stability’ as it confirms Trump-Xi meet



MARY YANG

The writer is China and Mongolia correspondent for AFP

BEIJING said on Monday it was ready to work with the United States in pursuit of “more stability” and confirmed that Donald Trump will visit China this week, the first US president to do so since 2017.

Washington and Beijing have been at loggerheads over key issues ranging from trade tariffs to the Middle East war.

Top trade negotiators from both countries will meet in Seoul a day before Trump’s summit with Chinese leader Xi Jinping to iron out details on trade and economic issues, a sign of the trip’s high stakes.

The White House announced Trump’s visit several weeks ago, and China’s foreign ministry has now confirmed it will go ahead from Wednesday until Friday.

The US leader was originally meant to visit in late March or early April, but postponed his trip to focus on the US-Israel war with Iran.

“Top-level diplomacy plays an irreplaceable strategic guiding role in China-US relations,” Beijing’s foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun told a regular news briefing.

“China is willing to work with the United States in the spirit of equality, respect, and mutual benefit, to expand cooperation, manage differences, and inject more stability

and certainty into a volatile and intertwined world,” he said. This is the first visit by a US president to China since Trump’s previous visit in 2017, and is expected to include a tour of the Temple of Heaven in Beijing and a lavish state banquet.

The White House has said it is of “tremendous symbolic significance”, and promised that Trump will “deliver more good deals” for Americans.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent will set up the visit during talks with Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng in Seoul on Wednesday.

Bessent and He have been the chief negotiators for the United States and China on all trade and economic issues.

Those talks are likely to put the finishing touches on any announcements that will be made during the leaders’ summit.

Bessent will arrive in Seoul after meeting Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi in Tokyo on Tuesday.

“Economic security is national security, and I look forward to a productive series of engagements as we work to advance President Trump’s America First Economic Agenda,” Bessent said as he announced both stops on social media.

Trump and Xi last met face-to-face in October on the sidelines of a regional summit in South Korea. They agreed then to a one-year truce in a blistering trade war that saw

This is the first visit by a US president to China since Trump’s previous visit in 2017, and is expected to include a tour of the Temple of Heaven in Beijing and a lavish state banquet

tariffs on many goods exceed 100 per cent.

The Middle East war is expected to dominate the agenda this time.

China is one of Iran’s biggest trading partners, with Tehran’s foreign minister visiting Beijing last week.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi told his Iranian counterpart that China would play a “greater role” in restoring regional peace.

Trump is expected to push Xi on Beijing’s position on the war, according to US officials.

Asked about US pressure on Monday, foreign ministry spokesman Guo said only that China’s position on Iran was “consistent” and that Beijing would continue to play a “positive role” in promoting a ceasefire and peace talks.

Adding to the tension, the US State Department sanctioned three China-based satellite firms on Friday for enabling Iran’s military operations. The foreign ministry said on Monday that Beijing “firmly opposes illegal unilateral sanctions”.

“China has repeatedly made clear its solemn position. The most urgent task is to do everything to avoid the resumption of conflict, not to use the conflict to... maliciously smear other countries.”

The US Treasury Department separately sanctioned several mainland China and Hong Kong-based firms for aiding Iran’s weapons supply.

CAN CHATGPT BE CHARGED IN A MURDER?

THOMAS URBAIN

Before he opened fire on the Florida State University campus last year, killing two people and wounding six others, Phoenix Ikner had a conversation. Not with a friend, a parent or anyone who might have talked him out of it - but with an AI chatbot.

According to evidence gathered by Florida’s attorney general, the student had asked ChatGPT which weapon and ammunition would be best suited for his attack, and when and where he could inflict the most casualties. The chatbot, investigators say, answered his questions.

Now Attorney General James Uthmeier wants to know whether that makes OpenAI a criminal.

“If the thing on the other side of the screen was a person, we would charge it with homicide,” he said, announcing a criminal investigation into ChatGPT maker OpenAI and leaving open the possibility of charges against the company or its employees.

The case surrounding the April, 2025 shooting has thrust a provocative question into the legal spotlight: Can the creators of an artificial intelligence be held criminally liable for the role their AI played in a crime - or even a suicide?

Legal experts say it’s a realistic, if deeply complicated, proposition.

Criminal prosecutions of corporations are possible under US law, though they remain relatively uncommon.

Late last month, Purdue Pharma was hit with more than \$5 billion in criminal fines and penalties for its role in fueling the opioid crisis.

Volkswagen was previously found guilty in the emissions cheating scandal, Pfizer over its promotion of the anti-inflammatory drug Bextra and Exxon for the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska.

But those cases all involved human decisions — executives, salespeople or engineers who made choices and cut corners.

The Ikner case is different, and that difference is precisely what makes it so legally treacherous.

“Ultimately, it was a product that encouraged this crime, that did the act of the crime,” said Matthew Tokson, a law professor at the University of Utah. “That’s what makes this case so unique and so tricky.”

Legal experts consulted by AFP say the two most plausible charges would be negligence or recklessness - the latter involving a deliberate choice to ignore known risks or safety obligations.

Such charges are often treated as misdemeanors rather than felonies, meaning lighter sentences if convicted. The bar, however, is high.

“Because this is such a frontier issue, a more compelling, more clear-cut case would probably involve internal documents recognising these risks and maybe not taking them seriously enough,” Tokson said.

“In theory, you could get liability without it,” he said. “But in practice, I think that’d be difficult.” — AFP

Eyeing migrant returns, EU pushes to revive Syria ties

THE European Union pushed for a revival of ties with Syria as it looks to bolster the war-ravaged country - with an eye on prospects for Syrian migrants in Europe to one day return home.

The bloc’s foreign ministers met in Brussels with Syrian top diplomat Asaad al Shaibani to kick off a high-level “political dialogue” 18 months after the ouster of Bashar al Assad.

An EU official said the aim was to back reconstruction of the country devastated by more than a decade of civil war that sent millions fleeing abroad, and where “the reality on the ground is still appalling”.

Some 13 million Syrians - nearly half the population - depend on food assistance, the official said. Needs are enormous, and the EU has already pledged 620 million euros (\$730 million) in aid for the 2026-2027 period.

But Syria’s stability also interests many EU countries because its nationals have made up the lion’s share of asylum-seekers in the bloc over a decade - and there is a push for large numbers to eventually go back home.

“We need the Syrian transitional government to succeed in bringing stability to the country, because that’s in our interest,” said one EU diplomat.

The 27-nation bloc launched a new chapter with Syria after Assad was swept from power in December 2024.

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen promised after meeting President Ahmed al Sharaa in Damascus in January that Europe would “do everything it can” to support Syria’s recovery.

Last month, the commission proposed that EU states fully reactivate the bloc’s cooperation agreement with Syria - a step expected to be approved on Monday.

The deal - abolishing duties on imports of most industrial products from Syria - was partially suspended in 2011 when



OLIVIER BAUBE

The writer is a journalist with AFP

Syria’s stability interests many EU countries because its nationals have made up the lion’s share of asylum-seekers in the bloc over a decade — and there is a push for large numbers to eventually go back home



European Commissioner for the Mediterranean Dubravka Suica and Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad Hassan al Shaibani hold a press conference in Brussels, Belgium, on Monday. — Reuters

Assad cracked down on protests at the start of the civil war.

Before, Syria-EU trade had peaked at more than seven billion euros (\$9.1 billion at the 2010 exchange rate) in 2010. By 2023, EU imports from the country had dwindled to 103 million euros, while European exports to Syria stood at 265 million euros.

Looking ahead, the EU wants a more ambitious association agreement, similar to those struck with other countries in the region such as Egypt, Israel and Lebanon - though officials say that goal remains a way off.

In the meantime, the EU wants to facilitate access to financing for Syrians - crucial to revive the economy - and to support farmers, for example, with irrigation pumps.

It is also on track to sign a deal to rehabilitate a major hospital in the western Homs region.

On the sensitive matter of Syrian migrant returns, Germany - home to the EU’s largest Syrian diaspora at more than a million - is on the front line.

Chancellor Friedrich Merz has embraced tougher migration policies as he seeks to counter the far right - and he triggered a backlash by declaring during a visit by Syria’s president last month that he hoped 80 per cent

of Syrian refugees would return home within three years.

He later clarified this was a figure put forward by Sharaa himself.

Danish authorities have been outspoken in pushing for Syrians to go home. But at the EU level there is no question of forcing Syrians to leave, a European official said.

There is a consensus that the conditions are not ready for large-scale voluntary returns, said Julien Barnes-Dacey, Middle East and North Africa director at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

“Most Europeans are cognisant of the reality that for the moment conditions on the ground are not improving fast enough, particularly in the economic sphere, to persuade Syrians to pack up their lives in Europe and head home,” he said.

An EU official said the focus was “working on stability, on Syria’s economic recovery - because that really is the path for people to be able to go home in sustainable conditions.”

But the commission also wants to establish a “straight and regular dialogue” on returns with Damascus, the official added, saying the matter “will obviously feature” in Monday’s talks.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Oman weightlifting team during the west Asian event.

OMAN WEIGHTLIFTERS READY FOR ASIAN CHAMPIONSHIP

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 11

Oman national weightlifting team are taking part in the Asian Weightlifting Championship which is currently underway in Gandhinagar, Gurat in India and will conclude on May 17. The prestigious continental event attracted nearly 200 elite weightlifters representing 31 countries from across Asia, making it one of the region’s strongest competitions this year. The championship features several Olympic medalists, world champions and top-ranked athletes. The official opening ceremony is scheduled to take place on Tuesday at the Mahatma Mandir in Gandhinagar.

Oman’s delegation featured three prominent national lifters including: Elyas al Busaidy, Amer al Kanjari and Murshid al Ajmi, who will compete in different weight categories against some of Asia’s finest athletes. Elyas will compete in Group A of the Men’s 71 kg category, while Amer will participate in Group A of the Men’s 88kg division. Meanwhile, Murshid will represent Oman in Group A of the Men’s 94 kg category.

The Omani trio is aiming to deliver strong performances during the championship and continue the positive progress achieved by the Sultanate of Oman’s weightlifting athletes in recent international participations. The technical and administrative staff accompanying the team expressed confidence in the athletes’ readiness and ability to compete at a high level despite the strong field of competitors.

Amer al Kanjari will enter the championship with impressive momentum following his remarkable achievement at the 6th Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh last November. The Omani lifter succeeded in winning two medals in the 88kg category after claiming silver in the clean and jerk event and bronze in the overall total standings.

Al Kanjari recorded a total of 354 points during the Games, finishing behind Uzbekistan’s Sarvarbek Zavarjonov, who secured first place with 363 points, while Iran’s Ilya Salehipour claimed second place overall with 359 points. His achievement was considered one of Oman’s notable accomplishments in international weightlifting competitions in recent years.



Oman U20 players during a training session as part of their recent internal camp in Muscat ahead of upcoming regional and Asian assignments.

Oman U20 begin Egypt camp

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 11

OMAN’S NATIONAL youth football team have entered an important phase of preparation with an overseas training camp in Egypt from May 11 to 18, as head coach Hamad al Azzani continues to assess his squad ahead of a busy period of international commitments.

The camp forms part of the technical programme designed to prepare the team for upcoming regional and continental competitions, including the Arab Cup, the West Asian Championship and the Asian qualifiers for the AFC U-19 Asian Cup.

Al Azzani has named a 24-player squad for the Egypt camp, which includes: Hassan al Hinai from Bahla; Yazan al Khaldi and Saad al Maamari from Saham; Ali al Alawi, Moath al Hinai, Mubarak al Amri and Ahmed al Rahbi from Seeb; Abdullah al Saadi, Ibrahim al Qasmi, Al Hassan al Qasmi, Ahmed al Amrani, Fahad al Mashaikhi, Ziyad al Faraji, Mazin al Hinai, Al Waleed al Buraidi and Ahmed al Rawahi from Al Amerat; Fahad Bait Rabee and Mohammed al Sameen from Al Nasr; Mohammed al Hashem and Abdulaziz al Manwari from Al Musannah; Issam al Mukhaini and Abdullah al Araiimi from Al Orouba; Ahmed al Fahdi from Izki; and Al Azhar al Saadi from Al Suwaiq.

During the camp, Oman is scheduled to play two international friendly matches against Egypt on May 14 and 17. The



Oman U20 players in action during their friendly match.



Oman U20 players during a training session as part of their recent internal camp in Muscat.

two fixtures are expected to provide the technical staff with a clearer picture of the players’ readiness, tactical discipline and ability to respond to match pressure against strong opposition.

Al Azzani will also use the camp to monitor the physical condition of the players, their understanding of tactical duties and the level of cohesion within the group, particularly as the squad continues to change ahead of the next stage of preparation.

The Egypt camp follows the team’s recent internal gathering in Muscat from April 20 to May 2, which featured 26 players. During that camp, Oman played two preparatory matches against military teams, losing 3-1

to the Royal Navy of Oman before drawing 1-1 with the Royal Army of Oman.

The technical staff have made several changes across recent squads, with a number of regular names and overseas-based players left out as Al Azzani continues to shape the group according to his current technical plans and long-term assessment.

That previous camp also reflected the coaching staff’s intention to broaden the selection base, with 15 new names brought into the setup. Seven players were promoted from the junior national team, while eight others earned their first call-ups after impressing in the 2025-2026 youth league season.

Nizwa strengthen grip on Basketball Centres League lead

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT MAY 11

Nizwa Club held on to top place in the Athletes Preparation Centres Basketball League for the 2025-2026 season after recording a deserved 53-42 win over Al Bashayer Club, while Seeb Club continued their strong run with a 53-36 victory over Al Amerat Club.

With the latest results, Nizwa remain at the top of the standings on 10 points, followed by Seeb on 9 points. Al Amerat are third with 7 points, while Al Bashayer remain on 5 points.

In the first match, Nizwa produced another solid display to overcome Al Bashayer 53-42 in a game

where they set the tone from the opening quarter. Playing with intensity at both ends of the court, Nizwa dominated early and prevented their opponents from scoring in the first period, racing into an 18-0 lead.

Al Bashayer improved significantly in the second quarter and managed to respond with 21 points, but Nizwa maintained their composure and added 14 points of their own to take a 32-21 lead into half-time. The third quarter was more evenly contested, with Al Bashayer edging the period 10-9, but Nizwa remained in control at 41-31 going into the final quarter.

Nizwa then finished strongly, adding 12 points against Al Bashayer’s 11 to



Action from the latest round of the Athletes Preparation Centres Basketball League. — Amar al Musafir

complete an 11-point victory.

Ahmed al Khusaibi led the scoring for Nizwa with 10 points, while Omar al Rashdi added 9, Moataz al Rashdi contributed 7, and Al Muthanna al Rashdi scored 5. For Al Bashayer, Redha al Riyami delivered an outstanding performance with 23 points, while Elyas al Busaidy added 9.

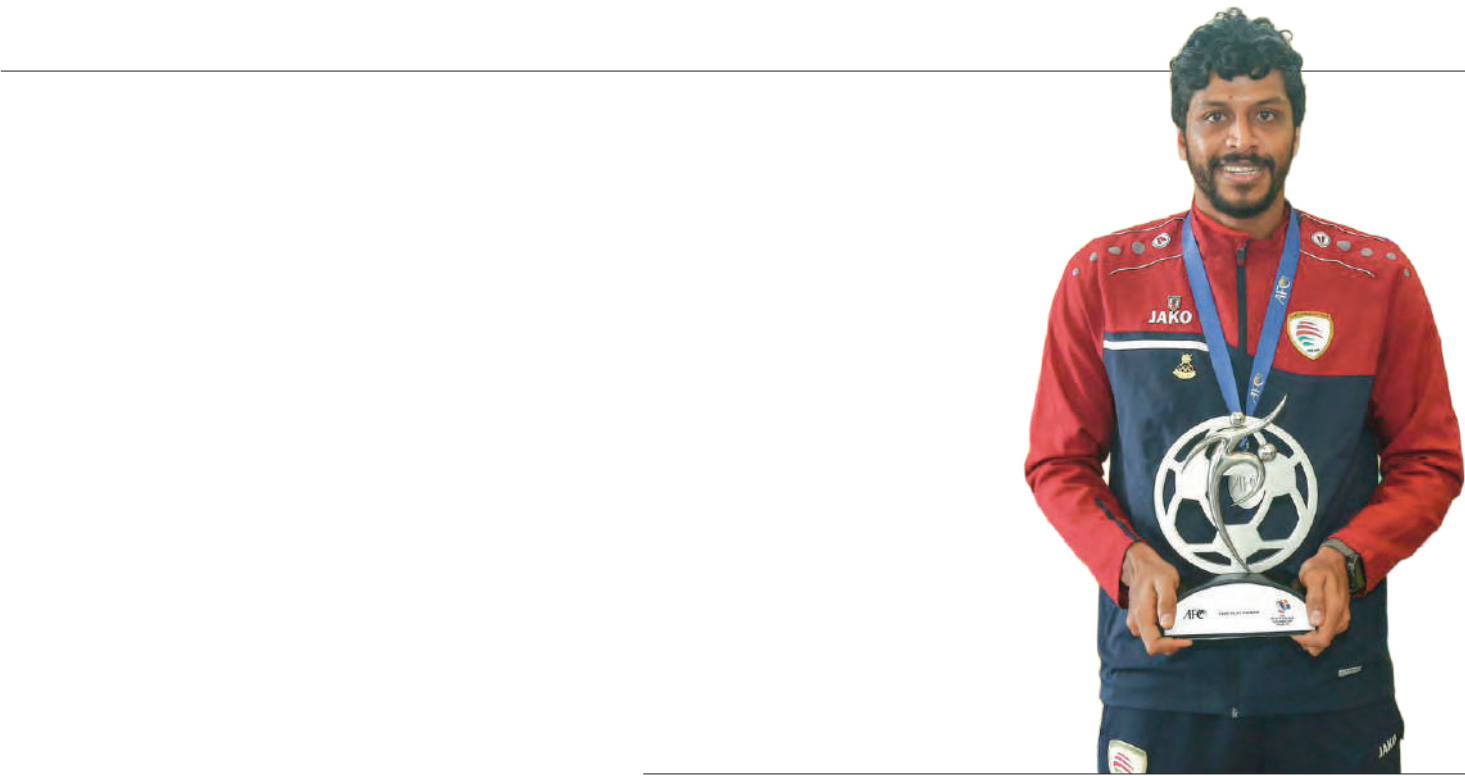
In the second match, Seeb secured a convincing 53-36 win over Al Amerat in a competitive encounter. Seeb were the better side in the opening two quarters, using quick transitions, accurate shooting and disciplined defending to establish control. They took the first quarter 15-8 and followed it with another strong period, outscoring Al Amerat 18-11

to lead 33-19 at the break.

Al Amerat showed improvement in the third quarter and narrowed the gap slightly by winning the period 11-9, but Seeb regained control in the final quarter, adding 11 points to Al Amerat’s 8 to seal a deserved win.

Saif al Mughairi was Seeb’s standout performer with 31 points, while Mohammed al Ajmi added 16 and Furqan al Balushi contributed 6. For Al Amerat, Moaz al Battashi scored 14 points, while Mulham al Owaisi finished with 7.

The latest round confirmed the strong form of both Nizwa and Seeb as the battle at the top of the table continues to take shape.



AL BALUSHI FROM BARKA SANDS TO OMAN BEACH SOCCER TEAM



RIYADH AL BALUSHI
@riyadhbaluch

OMAN national beach soccer player Sami al Balushi has described passion, determination and persistence as the key elements behind his rise from playing casually on the beaches of Barka to becoming one of the prominent names in Omani beach soccer, while continuing to dream of achieving global success with the national team.

In an exclusive interview, Al Balushi said his journey began like many young men in the Wilayat of Barka, where football was simply a hobby enjoyed on the beach during evenings before evolving into a professional path through talent, dedication and understanding of the sport.

“My beginnings were on the shores and beaches of Barka, just like many young people,” he said. “It started as a hobby and love for football and with talent, development and learning the rules of the game, my story with beach soccer began.”

Al Balushi revealed that his first real belief in his ability to represent Oman came in 2016, following Al Suwini Tournament in Salalah, where Al Shabab Club won the title, that experience fuelled his ambition to wear the national team jersey and represent Oman in regional and international competitions.

Although he also played traditional football, Al Balushi explained that beach



Do not rely only on training camps,” he advised. “Keep working on yourself because disappointment is the biggest enemy of any football player.

SAMI AL BALUSHI

soccer suited his abilities more due to its emphasis on shooting and aerial skills.

“I saw my talent, abilities, and skills stand out more in beach soccer,” he said.

He credited his family and friends as the first people who believed in and supported him throughout the early stages of his career.

Like many athletes, Al Balushi’s journey was not without obstacles. One of the toughest challenges he faced was understanding the tactical side and rules of beach soccer in his early years. However, the most difficult setback came after suffering an ACL injury, which he described as a major turning point.

“After the injury, I worked hard to return as the Sami everyone knew,” he said. “It was a difficult setback, but thankfully I came back stronger.”

Among his most memorable achievements, Al Balushi highlighted winning the top scorer award at the 2019 International Friendly Tournament in Morocco, describing it as a significant moment that helped introduce his name to a wider audience.

He also pointed to the 2019 NEOM International Tournament in Saudi Arabia as a turning point in his career, particularly because of the strength of participating national teams.

“We delivered a performance that represented Oman honourably,” he said.

“With the national team and clubs, you truly experience teamwork and fight together to raise Oman’s name high,” he said.

Reflecting on the development of Oman’s beach soccer team, which achieved West Asia runners-up in 2023, two AFC Asian Cup bronze medals, and AFC Asian Cup runners-up in 2025, Al Balushi praised the steady progress of the squad and the emergence of talented young players.

He described winning the gold medal at the 2025 Gulf Olympic Championship in Oman as a particularly emotional achievement, especially in front of Omani fans.

“It is an honour to represent my country and dedicate such achievements to beach soccer supporters and Omani fans,” he said.

According to Al Balushi, Oman’s consistent qualification for the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup six consecutive times is driven by determination and the natural talent of Omani players, though he stressed that players still require support, motivation and proper guidance.

Looking ahead, Al Balushi believes Oman is capable of achieving a major international breakthrough following the team’s 2025 Asian silver medal and 2026 Asian Beach Games silver

medal.

“Why not?” he said. “We have the ability, but the difference against top teams lies in experience and small details during matches.”

His personal goal for the upcoming World Cup is to deliver performances that honour Oman and reach the semifinals, a dream he believes can become reality.

Al Balushi also confirmed he remains open to playing professionally abroad in the future, admitting he had opportunities before but did not feel ready at the time.

Addressing young players interested in beach soccer, he encouraged them to remain committed, improve constantly and avoid frustration.

“Do not rely only on training camps,” he advised. “Keep working on yourself because disappointment is the biggest enemy of any football player.”

Concluding the interview, Al Balushi said his ultimate ambition is to leave a meaningful legacy in Omani beach soccer.

“My goal is not only to say I played,” he said. “I want people to say Sami al Balushi made a difference, inspired a generation, played with passion, fought for his dream and left behind a legacy that will never be forgotten.”

SPORTS



FC Barcelona's Ronald Araujo lifts the trophy as he celebrates with teammates after winning the LaLiga. — Reuters

BARCELONA

CLAIM LA LIGA TITLE WITH CLASICO WIN OVER REAL MADRID

BARCELONA secured their 29th Spanish league title after beating Real Madrid 2-0 in the Clasico on Sunday. Marcus Rashford and Ferran Torres struck in the first half to help Hansi Flick's side clinch La Liga in consecutive years, while consigning Madrid to a trophyless season.

Barca moved an unassailable 14 points clear of second-place Los Blancos with three matches remaining.

This was only the second time the outcome of La Liga has been decided directly by the result of a Clasico, with record 36-time champions Real Madrid winning their first title in 1932 after a draw with Barca.

Madrid arrived at the match embroiled in chaos, after



Rashford

midfielder Fede Valverde was ruled out with a head injury following a training ground scuffle with team-mate Aurelien Tchouameni, who started.

Barca coach Flick received bad news before the game, with his father passing away, but took his place on the touchline regardless, to oversee his side's comfortable triumph.

The German opted for the energetic Rashford, on loan from Manchester United, on the right wing in place of injured teenage star Lamine Yamal.

The Catalans, who only needed to avoid defeat, came out with their eyes firmly locked on the prize, racing into a two-goal lead inside 18 minutes.

Rashford opened the scoring with a superb free-kick, whipping the ball into the top left corner from a position 20 yards out, right of centre.

Torres doubled the hosts' advantage at a jubilant Camp Nou, the 62,000-strong crowd enjoying the first Clasico back there since the stadium was reopened.

Dani Olmo produced a clever backheel to allow Torres to burst into the box and ram past Thibaut Courtois.

Gonzalo Garcia, playing in place of injured Madrid superstar Kylian Mbappe, prodded narrowly wide after racing in behind Barca's high defensive line.

Urged on by coach Alvaro Arbeloa on

the touchline, unlikely to be at the helm next season, Madrid battled to stem the bleeding.

Rashford could have added a third before the break but fired wide, with Fermin Lopez unmarked and well placed to finish.

Torres should have struck early in the second half but Courtois saved from the Spain international as he ran through.

Jude Bellingham put the ball in Barcelona's net but the goal was ruled out for offside, while Joan Garcia thwarted Vinicius Junior as Madrid threatened.

Barca fans batted inflatable beach balls around to taunt the Brazilian over his unfulfilled Ballon d'Or ambitions, and lapped up the party atmosphere.

Courtois saved from substitutes Raphinha, back after injury, and Robert Lewandowski as Madrid saw out the remainder of the match without taking further damage.

Flick's side remain on course to match the record of 100 points in a league season and can win all their home matches if they defeat Real Betis in the one remaining.

Meanwhile Madrid finish a second consecutive season without a major trophy, staring down the barrel of a

summer reshuffle, including former coach Jose Mourinho being linked with a potential return.

What is clear is that for now president Florentino Perez cannot seem to find the solution to end Flick's Barca's domestic domination. — AFP



Ferran

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
8,313.756

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$101.00
BRENT \$103.99
LIGHT \$97.66



SHORT TAKES



The initiative was discussed during a meeting between Tashgheel and Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development.

OMAN PLANS JOBS FRAMEWORK FOR CIVIL SOCIETY SECTOR

MUSCAT: The National Employment Programme has moved to establish a national employment governance system for the civil society and charitable sectors as part of broader efforts to strengthen their role in economic development and job creation in the Sultanate of Oman.

The initiative was discussed during a coordination meeting on Monday between the National Employment Programme, also known as Tashgheel and Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development.

The meeting focused on developing an integrated institutional and operational framework aimed at improving the contribution of civil society and charitable organisations to employment generation, local added value and sustainable economic growth.

Officials discussed linking community and charitable initiatives with national priorities, labour market requirements, value chains and promising economic sectors to maximise their developmental and social impact.

Specialists from Tashgheel reviewed strategic pillars for transforming the sector into a more sustainable and efficient operational model based on the integration of financing, initiatives and operations.

The proposed framework seeks to channel community resources and projects towards measurable economic and employment outcomes while supporting local content and stimulating initiatives capable of creating direct and indirect job opportunities. Participants also stressed the importance of establishing a national committee for employment governance in the civil society and charitable sectors.

The proposed committee would oversee the development of regulatory and institutional frameworks, strengthen cooperation between government entities, the private sector and community organisations; and establish indicators to measure the economic, social and employment impact of initiatives and programmes. — ONA

Major solar module maker launches in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 11

HAVING brought into operation its high-tech solar PV module manufacturing facility in Salalah Free Zone, the Advanced American Clean Energy Company (AACE) has unveiled plans for a major technological upgrade aimed at keeping pace with rapid advancements in the global solar industry.

According to a senior executive, AACE combines American engineering standards with advanced European automation to produce high-efficiency solar modules. The company is currently operating with an annual production capacity of 300 MW, with manufacturing focused on high-efficiency PERC (Passivated Emitter and Rear Cell) technology.

These advanced solar panels enhance energy output by improving light absorption and reducing electron loss, thereby delivering higher efficiency than conventional solar cells.

“As part of our technology roadmap, AACE is actively preparing to transition towards TOPCon technology by the end of 2026, further enhancing module efficiency and performance. In parallel, we are investing in next-generation innovations such as back-contact and busbarless designs to remain aligned with global industry advancements”, said Khalel Khanshali, Chief Operating Officer at AACE.

TOPCon technology improves solar cell efficiency through the use of a tunnel oxide and passivated rear contact that reduce energy loss and boost power output.

Meanwhile, back-contact designs relocate electrical



AACE's high-tech facility in Salalah Free Zone.

As an Oman-based manufacturer, AACE is fully committed to supporting the Sultanate of Oman's renewable energy transition. Our products are proudly manufactured in Oman and we stand ready to contribute to local solar projects aligned with national sustainability goals and energy diversification strategies.

KHALEL KHANSHALI
CEO, AACE

connections to the rear of the cell to maximise light absorption and improve performance, while busbarless configurations optimise current collection by reducing resistance and shading.

Together, these innovations are helping drive the next generation of high-efficiency solar PV modules.

The executive noted that AACE's operations are anchored by three core technological pillars designed to ensure Tier-1 quality standards. These include advanced Italian automation systems supplied by Italian manufacturer Ecoprogetti Srl for precision manufacturing and enhanced reliability, high-efficiency half-cut PERC solar cell technology for improved energy yield and heat performance; and stringent American engineering and quality-control standards backed by internationally recognised certifications for safety, durability and bankability.

“By combining American expertise, European manufacturing technology and Oman's strategic location, AACE delivers a globally competitive and reliable solar product”, Khanshali said.

The company's current product portfolio includes two high-performance photovoltaic modules — a 120 Half-Cut Cell Module rated at 455W and a 144 Half-Cut Cell Module rated at 545W — designed to meet a broad range of utility-scale and commercial solar project requirements.

While strategically positioned as an export-oriented manufacturer focused primarily on international markets, AACE also sees significant opportunities within Oman's domestic renewable energy sector.

“As an Oman-based manufacturer, AACE is fully committed to supporting the Sultanate of Oman's renewable energy transition. Our products are proudly manufactured in Oman and we stand ready to contribute to local solar projects aligned with national sustainability goals and energy diversification strategies”, Khanshali added.

“AACE represents a new chapter in Oman's industrial and clean energy landscape. Our presence in Salalah Free Zone reflects a long-term commitment to building local manufacturing capabilities to global standards.

As the world accelerates towards renewable energy, AACE is positioned to play a meaningful role — not only as a manufacturer, but also as a strategic contributor to the region's energy future”, he said.

Al Sharqiyah South expands investment partnerships with 27 projects

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 11

The Al Sharqiyah South Governorate is witnessing rapid economic and developmental growth through the implementation of 27 new development projects with a total cost exceeding RO 39 million.

These projects and initiatives encompass high-quality initiatives in the tourism, economic and service sectors, in addition to infrastructure projects, aligning with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

This developmental momentum relies heavily on strategic partnerships with the private sector, which contribute approximately 80% of the total investments in the planned projects.

At a media briefing, Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South, affirmed that these agreements represent a significant advancement in effective institutional partnerships and a strategic step towards maximising developmental impact through initiatives based on clear priorities and genuine needs of the



A total of 42 projects were funded by private sector companies by the end of 2025.

local community.

He noted that the diversity of projects reflects a comprehensive development vision that combines economic efficiency with a social dimension.

Hilal bin Hamad al Busaidy, Director General of Administrative and Financial Affairs in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, added that the Governorate's 2026 plan aligns with national priorities and Oman Vision 2040.

The projects and initiatives implemented during the period 2023–2025 included the development of internal roads, the digitisation of services and the implementation of several community initiatives and development projects in partnership with the private sector.

Statistics indicate that the number of projects funded by private sector companies reached 42 by the end of 2025, with a total cost of RO 91.6 million and total expenditures of RO 30.1 million.

The implemented projects

included several vital developments, most notably the Sur Public Park, the waterfront promenade in the Al Barr area, the multi-purpose centre in Masirah and the Qahwan Trail project in Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, in addition to the development of the Al Rasagh Trail and the establishment of the Youth Cultural Centre in Sur.

As part of strengthening institutional partnerships, the governorate signed a strategic agreement exceeding RO 200,000 with the Oman India Fertiliser Company to support and develop essential services in the governorate.

The agreement includes the implementation of development projects serving the fisheries sector and infrastructure, most notably the establishment of fishermen's equipment storage facilities in the Wilayat of Sur and the development and rehabilitation of mountain roads.

It also includes support for a training programme to preserve traditional shipbuilding and empower Omani youth to acquire craft skills related to maritime heritage.

Furthermore, with support

from the Oman LNG Development Foundation, the governorate signed a package of development and service agreements with a total funding of RO 391,000, in addition to a separate agreement to implement the “Qahwan Trail” project in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan with funding of RO 2 million.

The “Qahwan Trail” project represents a significant addition to the governorate's development landscape, through the development of an integrated tourism and entertainment destination that will contribute to stimulating economic activity, attracting visitors; and creating direct and indirect job opportunities, as well as supporting small and medium enterprises and maximising local added value in the tourism sector.

In the infrastructure sector, the project to rehabilitate and pave mountain roads aims to enhance geographical connectivity between population centres, improve access to services and raise traffic safety levels, in addition to supporting economic and tourism activities in mountainous areas, thus balanced development.

BUSINESS FEATURE

CONRAD
PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 11

NEWLY
LAUNCHED
JOINT
CREDITING
MECHANISM

(JCM) between Oman and Japan is expected to open the door to significant Japanese investment, advanced technologies and technical expertise across a broad spectrum of decarbonisation projects in the Sultanate of Oman, according to Kiyoshi Serizawa, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to Oman.

The framework, formally agreed last month by the two governments, establishes a mechanism for cooperation in implementing projects that reduce or remove greenhouse gas emissions while contributing to the climate goals of both countries under the Paris Agreement.

The agreement was signed in Muscat by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Auli, Minister of Energy and Minerals; and Ambassador Serizawa. Under the mechanism, part of the resulting carbon credits generated from approved projects in Oman can be counted towards Japan's nationally determined contributions (NDCs), while simultaneously helping Oman advance its own net-zero ambitions. In an interview with the *Observer*, Ambassador Serizawa described the JCM as a potentially transformative platform capable of accelerating Oman's transition towards a low-carbon economy.

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

"The new JCM is expected to significantly enhance Oman's attractiveness for foreign investment, particularly from Japanese companies with decarbonisation technologies", the Ambassador said.

“One of the main reasons is the availability of Japanese government subsidy mechanisms. If a project meets the subsidy requirements and is approved, it can receive financial support from the Japanese government, thereby reducing the initial investment burden on Japanese companies”.

He said this financial support, combined with the transparency and credibility of the JCM framework, creates strong incentives for Japanese firms seeking international opportunities in the clean energy and sustainability sectors.

"The framework is consistent with the Paris Agreement and involves both governments, making it highly credible and reliable for Japanese companies considering investments in Oman", he stated. "In my view, the two key merits for companies are government subsidies and a transparent, internationally aligned framework".

The mechanism is expected to benefit a wide range of sectors capable of delivering measurable emission reductions through renewable energy deployment and energy-efficiency improvements. These include green hydrogen, manufacturing, transportation, waste management and agriculture.

“Essentially, any sector capable of delivering measurable greenhouse gas emission reductions or removals could benefit”, the Ambassador explained, adding that no specific priority sectors have yet been identified under the framework.

The JCM is also expected to serve as a major conduit for the transfer of Japanese decarbonisation technologies and technical know-how into Oman. According to Ambassador Serizawa, the collaborative nature of the projects will naturally encourage knowledge sharing between Japanese and Omani partners.

JOINT OMANI-JAPANESE INITIATIVES

“JCM projects are expected to be joint Omani-Japanese initiatives, because it would be difficult for Japanese companies to implement projects independently in Oman”, he noted.

“Cooperation and engagement from Omani companies are essential, whether in dealing with local authorities or – with regulations. Through this collaborative process, technology, expertise, knowledge and know-how are expected to be transferred naturally from the Japanese side to the Omani side”.

He stressed that Omani private sector firms – including SMEs – would play a pivotal role throughout the JCM value chain. Local companies could contribute through engineering, construction, ICT services, digital monitoring systems, operations and maintenance, data management and equipment installation linked to decarbonisation projects.

Beyond reducing emissions, the framework is expected to generate broader economic gains for Oman, including job creation, industrial localisation, human capital development and new opportunities for green entrepreneurship.

“Carbon credits will also be distributed to local participants as an incentive for engagement”, the Ambassador said, adding that Japanese government support measures would encourage the participation



JOINT CREDITING MECHANISM (JCM)

JAPAN – OMAN PARTNERSHIP FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



SHORT TAKES



The co-location of OSW and OPES aligns with Oman's strategic direction to connect sustainability policies with practical implementation.

OPES, OSW 2026 TO ACCELERATE INTEGRATED ENERGY TRANSITION IN OMAN

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 11

Under the auspices of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Oman Sustainability Week (OSW) and Oman Petroleum and Energy Show (OPES) will take place from May 18 to 20, 2026 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in Muscat.

Hosted by Petroleum Development Oman and organised by CONNECT, the events reflect the Sultanate of Oman's accelerating progress towards an integrated energy transition, one that combines sustainability priorities with the continued advancement of the traditional energy sector.

Bringing together the full spectrum of the energy ecosystem under one roof, the events serve as a unified platform for major oil and gas companies, clean energy innovators, technology providers and decision-makers to shape the next phase of the energy transition.

This evolving phase is defined not by a divide between conventional and clean energy, but by their integration into a single, balanced system.

Oman Sustainability Week serves as an executive platform covering a wide range of sectors shaping the future of energy, including renewable energy and green hydrogen, water management, waste and environmental services, technology, sustainable transport, sustainable finance and logistics.

This integrated approach reflects the breadth of transformation underway across Oman's economic landscape. With strong participation from leading companies, speakers and experts, OSW continues to strengthen its role as a platform for knowledge exchange, strategic dialogue and the showcase of innovative solutions driving sustainable development.

Duqm EV hub targets green mobility ecosystem

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 11

SOUTH Korean clean technology firm ELB&T is positioning its upcoming Duqm project as more than just an electric vehicle manufacturing facility, with plans to build an integrated green mobility ecosystem covering electric boats, drones, batteries and renewable energy solutions.

The company recently signed a long-term usufruct agreement with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) to establish a \$250 million manufacturing hub in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

In an exclusive interview with the Observer, Rahul Pawar, President and Group CEO of ELB&T, said Al Duqm's strategic location and growing role as a gateway to the MENA region were key factors behind the company's decision to invest in Oman.

"Primarily, the connectivity of the Port of Duqm and its emergence as a gateway for the MENA region attracted us. The strong focus on green energy in Al Duqm also perfectly suits our vision", Pawar said.

He added that ELB&T's business model integrates battery manufacturing with electric vehicle technologies, describing it as a unique approach within the industry.

"We are the first company which has an integration of battery plant and electric vehicle technology.

The batteries are among the safest in the world and that supports the environmental requirements and sustainability



Actual Design – Conceptualized in Oman Sea



Actual Design in South Korea

The company sees strong opportunities in Oman's maritime sector, particularly through the introduction of electric propulsion systems for fishing boats.

direction that Oman is pursuing", he stated.

The project is expected to become one of the major clean technology investments in Al Duqm, covering more than 104 acres in its first phase.

Beyond electric passenger vehicles, the company plans to develop electric marine mobility systems, autonomous logistics drones and renewable energy-powered industrial operations.

Pawar said the company sees strong opportunities in Oman's maritime sector, particularly through the introduction of electric propulsion systems for fishing boats.

"We are not restricting ourselves only to cars. Boats are a niche segment and part of Oman's heritage.

We want to contribute to fishermen's livelihoods through affordable electric boats, which can also reduce operational costs and environmental impact", he explained.

According to the company, the integrated industrial

platform in Al Duqm will include electric vehicle manufacturing, advanced battery systems, charging infrastructure, smart energy storage technologies and drone applications for logistics and maritime use.

ELB&T also plans to strengthen local participation through in-country value initiatives, technology transfer and skills development programmes.

Pawar revealed that the company is exploring the establishment of a polytechnic university in Al Duqm as part of its long-term commitment to Omanisation and future technologies.

"Our focus is on in-country value and future talent development. We are not only focusing on research and development, but also on creating future-ready skills in Oman. The vision of our group chairman includes establishing a polytechnic university in Al Duqm", he said.

The company further indicated that it intends to work with local partners to build a broader electric vehicle supply chain in Oman, including potential collaboration in battery materials, renewable energy and green technology sectors.

"We are not just an electric vehicle company, we are building an ecosystem for green energy and future technologies", Pawar noted.

"Our focus is on collaboration, knowledge-sharing and supporting the transition towards carbon credits, sustainability and ESG-compliant industries".

ELB&T said the Duqm facility will operate using its proprietary Combined Technology & Safety (CTS) architecture, which integrates battery systems, marine charging infrastructure, autonomous aerial logistics platforms and renewable energy-powered manufacturing operations.

Oman launches Gulf gravity measurement initiative

MUSCAT: The National Centre for Measurement and Calibration has launched a new programme to establish a Gulf network for absolute gravity measurements aimed at improving laboratory accuracy and strengthening technical integration among GCC countries.

The three-day programme, organised by the centre under the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, focuses on building a precise regional network for terrestrial gravity measurements using the high-precision FG5-X instrument in accordance with international standards.

The initiative seeks to connect gravity measurements across GCC countries to the International System of Units (SI), supporting more accurate calibration and



The three-day programme focuses on building a precise regional network for terrestrial gravity measurements using the high-precision FG5-X instrument.

measurement systems.

The programme includes workshops and specialised lectures

covering the role of gravity values in measurement and calibration, calculation mechanisms using the

FG5-X instrument, factors affecting accuracy and the importance of gravity reference points in geological surveys.

Participants are also reviewing and analysing terrestrial gravity measurement results as part of efforts to exchange technical expertise and strengthen scientific cooperation among GCC states.

Ahlam bint Masoud al Marhoubi, Head of the National Metrology Laboratory at the Directorate-General of Standards and Metrology, said the initiative forms part of wider Gulf efforts to strengthen national infrastructure for reference measurements and reduce uncertainty in physical quantities linked to gravity, including weight, pressure, torque and viscosity.

She said the network would

support national laboratories, improve technical capabilities and align national standards more closely with international measurement systems.

Al Marhoubi added that the project is expected to support industrial, research and regulatory sectors by providing a reliable reference for absolute gravity values, enhancing the quality of measurements and calibration processes across the GCC.

Faiza bint Mohammed al Mushrifi, Director of the National Centre for Measurement and Calibration, described the initiative as a major step forward for Oman's national laboratory capabilities due to the high precision of the FG5-X instrument at microgal measurement levels. — ONA

TECH GROWTH

Chip demand lifts South Korea's exports



South Korea's exports surged 43.7% in the first 10 days of May compared with the same period last year, driven by strong semiconductor demand.

Exports reached \$18.4 billion, while imports rose 14.9% to \$16.7 billion, resulting in a \$1.7 billion trade surplus. Semiconductor exports jumped 149.8% to a record \$8.54 billion, supported by rising memory chip demand for artificial intelligence servers. — Reuters

ENERGY TENSIONS

Oil prices rebound sharply



Oil prices climbed on Monday after US President Donald Trump rejected Iran's response to a US peace proposal, heightening concerns over global supply disruptions.

Brent crude rose 2.67% to \$103.99 a barrel, while US crude gained 2.35% to \$97.66. Markets remain focused on tensions surrounding the Strait of Hormuz and Trump's upcoming talks with Xi Jinping in Beijing. — Reuters

AUTO INDUSTRY

US resists Chinese cars



US automakers, suppliers and lawmakers are urging President Trump not to grant Chinese carmakers access to the US market during his summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping this week.

Industry groups warned that Chinese electric vehicle manufacturers could undermine US production and jobs through lower prices, advanced technology and large-scale manufacturing capacity. — Reuters

OPINION

Will filmmakers and creatives lose their jobs to AI?



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker

WHILE I was in Dubai last weekend, an interesting discussion came up among a group of my creative friends: “Will filmmakers and creative professionals eventually lose their jobs to AI?” Some believed this was inevitable.

Others strongly argued that human creativity can never be replaced. As for me, I believe the real risk is not AI itself, but creatives who refuse to adapt. Those who learn how to leverage AI and make it part of their creative process may become even more powerful than before, while those who ignore it could find themselves struggling to stay relevant. Let me explain how reality is today.

A young filmmaker, whether here in Oman or anywhere else in the world, connected only by the internet, may be sitting alone in a small apartment with nothing more than a laptop, a few empty coffee cups scattered around the room and access to a powerful AI tool or LLM (Large Language Model). Yet with this simple setup, that filmmaker can now create things that once required an entire studio.

Twenty years ago, producing a cinematic scene of similar quality would have demanded a full production crew, expensive cameras, lighting rigs, editors, sound engineers and visual effects specialists. Today, that same young creator can simply type a few sentences into an AI platform and watch cinematic sequences appear within seconds.

Background music can be generated automatically. Dialogue can be refined instantly. Storyboards can be produced in minutes. Even visual effects that once took weeks can now be achieved with minimal resources.

Think about how significant that shift really is. It is no longer only large studios with massive budgets that have access to powerful creative capabilities. AI is democratising filmmaking and content creation at a speed few expected.

Which raises an important question: Why would an organisation invest in a filmmaker or creative professional who refuses to leverage AI when others are using it to work faster, smarter and more creatively than ever before?

Artificial intelligence is now changing filmmaking faster than many expected. What once sounded like science fiction has become part of real production pipelines in Hollywood and beyond.

AI tools are already helping with scriptwriting, voice cloning, visual effects, dubbing, editing, colour correction, scene generation and even digital actors. The question is no longer whether AI will impact filmmakers. It already has.

Today, AI is being used more as an assistant than a replacement. According to a recent Adobe survey involving over 16,000 creators worldwide, 86% of creators now use generative AI in some part of their workflow. Around 81% said AI helped them create content they otherwise could not make.

Artificial intelligence is now changing filmmaking faster than many expected. What once sounded like science fiction has become part of real production pipelines in Hollywood and beyond. AI tools are already helping with scriptwriting, voice cloning, visual effects, dubbing, editing, colour correction, scene generation and even digital actors. The question is no longer whether AI will impact filmmakers. It already has.

That number is the proof in the pudding as proof showing how quickly the industry is changing.

Major studios are already experimenting aggressively. Reports suggest companies like Netflix and Lionsgate are testing AI for visual effects, production planning and content creation. One AI-assisted production reportedly reduced timelines dramatically compared to traditional animation workflows.

Research from McKinsey suggests AI could significantly reshape film and TV production by automating parts of development, production and post-production. Meanwhile, market analysts estimate the AI filmmaking market could grow from around \$3.2 billion in 2024 to more than \$23 billion by 2033.

What does this all say? Yes, AI is impacting the filmmaking industry in a big way. Yet, creative people will not disappear, but creative jobs will evolve dramatically.

The filmmakers who refuse to adapt may struggle. The ones who learn how to combine creativity with AI tools may become far more powerful than before. Technology changes the tools.

Humans still create the meaning. AI may reduce some traditional roles, especially repetitive technical tasks. But truly original storytelling, emotional direction, vision and cultural authenticity still belong to people. So to conclude my article, filmmakers and creatives will not lose their jobs to AI but be amplified by it (as long as they choose to make it their companion).

FIFA RISKS A WORLD CUP OWN GOAL IN CHINA AND INDIA

KA SING CHAN

Gianni Infantino, head of soccer’s global governing body, has called this year’s men’s World Cup the “most inclusive” in history. Try telling that to fans in China and India, who at this rate might not even be able to watch.

TV rights stand-offs risk shutting nearly 3 billion potential viewers out, undermining Infantino’s welcoming rhetoric. It’s a wrinkle in the sport’s emerging-market growth hopes.

Fifa is expecting a blockbuster \$8.9 billion in revenue this year, as superstars like France’s Kylian Mbappé and England’s Harry Kane descend on North America. The biggest chunk, at \$3.9 billion, is supposed to come from selling the broadcasting rights.

That would be one-third higher than in the 2022 Qatar World Cup. The increase might seem puzzling: global viewership, as a percentage of the population, didn’t materially grow between 2014 and 2022, based on the number of people who watched at least 20 minutes on linear TV.

The tournament will expand to 48 teams from the traditional 32, as Fifa banks on more countries and matches to lift revenue. Yet China still didn’t manage to qualify for the expanded competition. India, which has never played at a World Cup, missed the cut as usual.

Worse, Fifa appears to have misjudged broadcasters’ demand in the world’s two most populous countries. Beijing Daily reported that the soccer body initially wanted up to \$300 million for the Chinese rights, which state broadcaster CCTV balked at; state-run news portal Sixthtone reported on May 8 that Infantino’s team has since lowered the asking price by half.

Many matches will kick off deep into the night in the People’s Republic. There’s also a deadlock in India, where a Reliance-Disney joint venture has offered \$20 million for the local rights.

That price was not acceptable to Fifa. Tycoon Mukesh Ambani’s Reliance may feel emboldened to make such a lowball offer given the limited competition following its deal with Disney, struck in 2024.

The stand-off will worry Chinese sponsors, including dairy giant Mengniu and TV maker Hisense, that have poured a combined \$500 million into the tournament.

Global brands like Adidas and Coca-Cola, meanwhile, risk missing the chance to reach two giant markets. China and India ranked first and ninth globally for linear TV World Cup reach in 2022, with 510 million and 84 million viewers, respectively.

The good news is that sports can be a diplomatic icebreaker. Think of China’s rapprochement with the NBA after years of tension, followed by Donald Trump’s meeting with Xi Jinping last year. — Reuters

How Oman is building a resilient economy

EVERY few decades, the global economy reorders itself and the countries that read the moment correctly emerge with positions they could not have secured at any price. The current reordering — driven by supply-chain risk, the energy transition and a renewed premium on reliability — is one such moment

The Sultanate of Oman has, for some time now, been preparing for it. The evidence is not in declarations but in arithmetic and the arithmetic deserves a closer look than it has so far received.

RESILIENCE AS AN OUTCOME, NOT A SLOGAN

Begin with the macroeconomic ledger. In 2020, Oman’s public debt stood at roughly 68% of GDP. By the start of 2026, that figure had fallen to about 35% — nearly halved in five years, without devaluation, without capital controls and while running budget surpluses for three consecutive years through 2024.

In late 2025, all three major rating agencies returned the Sultanate of Oman to investment grade. The IMF projects real GDP growth of 2.9% in 2025, accelerating to around 4% in 2026, with inflation through 2025 below 1% — among the lowest in the globally.

The structural shift behind those numbers is more striking still. In 2020, hydrocarbons accounted for roughly 65% of GDP. By 2024, the share had fallen to 30%. Manufacturing value-added rose from 2.4 billion rials in 2020 to 4.1 billion in 2024, growing a further 7.2% in 2025; the sector now employs 248,000 workers.

Non-oil exports more than doubled, from 3.4 to 6.885 billion rials, over the same period. Cumulative foreign direct investment rose from 14.2 billion rials in 2020 to 30.9 billion by Q3 2025, with manufacturing FDI alone growing 24.6% in a single year.

This is not a country waiting for the next oil cycle. It is a country quietly rewiring its productive



In late 2025, all three major rating agencies returned the Sultanate of Oman to investment grade.



DR YOUSUF HAMED AL BALUSHI

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

Halved public debt, doubled non-oil exports and a coastline of three thousand kilometres now functioning as economic infrastructure: the Sultanate of Oman is turning structural reform into one of the most useful platforms global trade can find.

base — and financing much of that rewiring through current revenue rather than debt expansion.

GEOGRAPHY THAT HAS MOVED FROM BACKGROUND TO FOREGROUND

That structural transformation is now intersecting with a global trend that gives it strategic weight. Oman’s 3,165 kilometres of coastline — most of it lying outside the Strait of Hormuz, opening directly onto the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean — was, for decades, a quiet feature of the map.

The events of recent years have changed how supply-chain managers interpret that geography. War-risk insurance premiums for vessels transiting Hormuz have risen by approximately 60%.

Disruptions in the Red Sea have forced major shipping lines to reroute around the Cape of Good Hope, adding ten to fourteen days to Asia-Europe voyages. Suez throughput remains below pre-2024 levels.

In every shipping boardroom across the world, the lesson is the same: a supply chain dependent on a single chokepoint is, by definition, an unhedged supply chain.

This is the context in which Al Duqm now reads differently. The Special Economic Zone covers an area three times the size of Singapore.

Its deep-water port, with berths of 16 to 18 metres, accommodates

the largest container vessels currently in service.

By mid-2027, the 303-kilometre, \$3 billion Hafeet Rail will link Suhar to the broader Gulf rail network. In 2024, Oman’s ports handled over 104 million tonnes of cargo and approximately 4.2 million TEU.

Salalah was ranked second globally on the World Bank’s Container Port Performance Index — ahead of every European port. Duqm’s cargo handling grew 152% in a single year. These are not aspirational figures.

They are operational ones and they describe a logistics platform designed for an era in which routing diversity has become an economic asset rather than merely a contingency measure.

THE ENERGY TRANSITION, IN MOLECULES

The same coastline now anchors something larger. Through Hydrom, Oman’s national orchestrator for green hydrogen, the Sultanate of Oman has allocated some 50,000 square kilometres for green hydrogen and ammonia development.

The first auction round attracted approximately \$30 billion in committed investment across five facilities, targeting one million tonnes of green hydrogen annually by 2030.

Marquee projects are contracted and proceeding: HyPort Duqm is on track to deliver some 330,000 tonnes of green ammonia a year in phase one; ACME’s Duqm facility is moving into construction with a 30-year offtake agreement; a 4.5-gigawatt renewable project in Salalah targets 178,000 tonnes of green hydrogen annually.

Within five years, Oman’s Indian Ocean coastline will host one of the world’s largest concentrations of green-molecule production capacity.

Industrial buyers in steel, chemicals, fertilisers and shipping — sectors that cannot readily electrify — need exactly this: certifiable, geographically diversified supply at scale.

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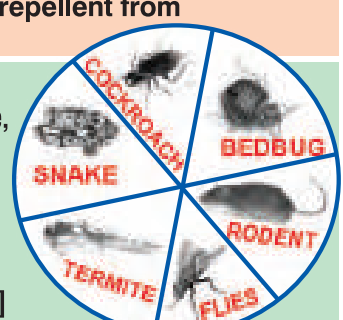
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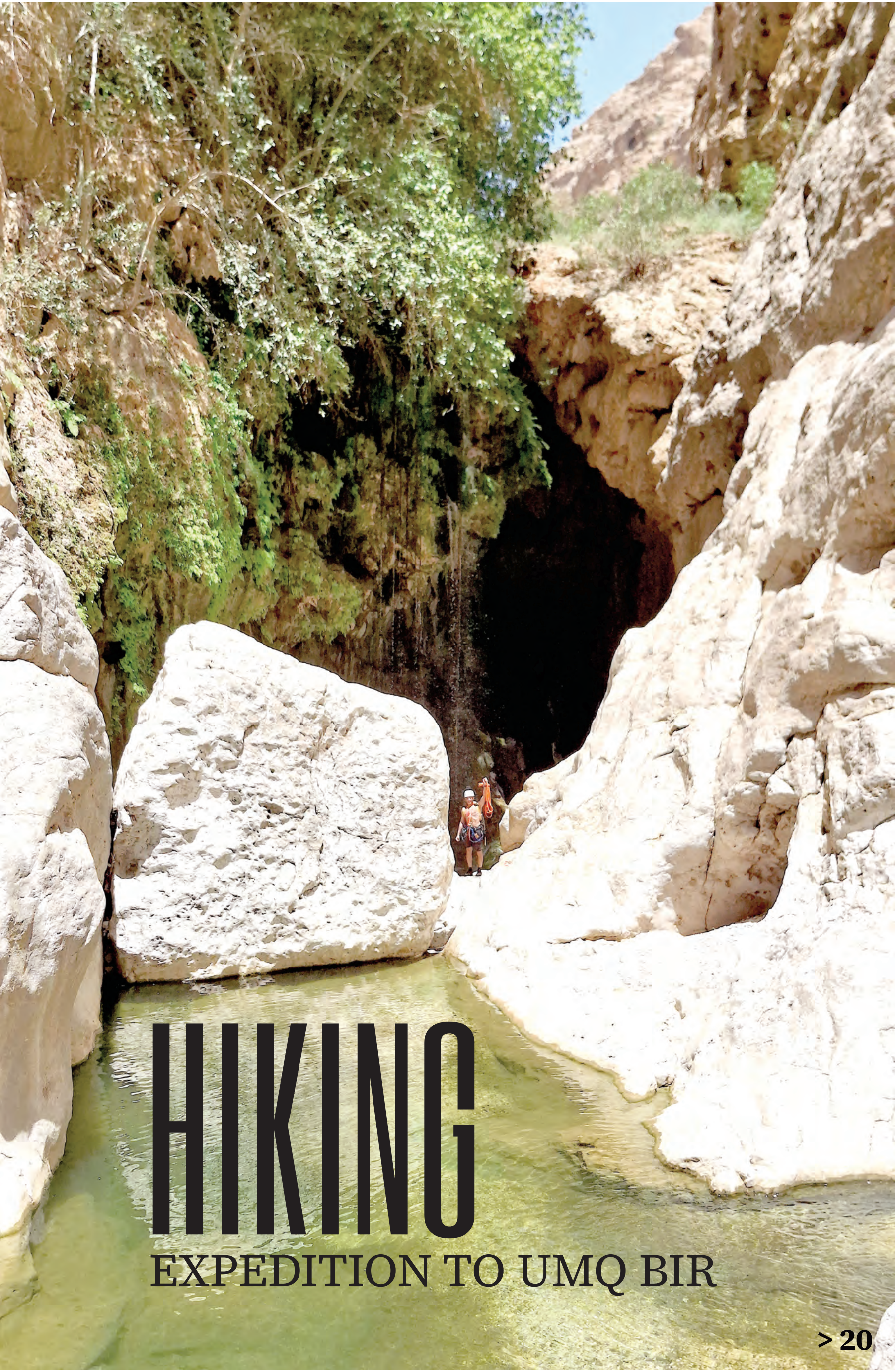
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ART/LIFE



FRAGILECOMAPNIONS

SUMMER IS COMING. DON'T FORGET THE ANIMALS



Deidre Harvey
BA, MBA
Hypnotherapist & Counsellor

This little bird is sitting on the wicker chair outside my patio door staring at me as though it is trying to make a decision. Perhaps we both are. I am sitting inside with the door open, pretending I am not watching it every second. The mosquitoes are pouring in now, humming around my head and biting my ankles, but I cannot bring myself to close the door.

I am afraid if I look away, even for a moment, something will happen. A cat. A bigger bird.

And yet I am equally afraid it will leave. Strange, how quickly we bond. A few weeks ago, there were two of them.

Tiny creatures just lying in a basement gutter, featherless and trembling, eyes still closed, their bodies so small they barely seemed possible. One did not survive. To this day, I suspect we fed it to death with our panic and overenthusiastic care.

The other lived. Now this tiny bird rules the house like a moody teenager with wings. I have learned more from this creature than I expected. Birds, it turns out, have enormous personalities. This one despises egg with theatrical outrage.

The first time I offered it a carefully mashed spoonful, it spat it out in disgust and turned its head away from me as though deeply offended by my lack of culinary awareness. And still refuses any. It also knows exactly when bedtime is approaching. A few minutes before I try to settle it into its little box, it suddenly becomes energetic and rebellious, flying across the room like a child refusing sleep. Yes, it can fly now. That should make me happy. But freedom is complicated when something still depends on your hands to eat. It will only eat if I hand-feed it carefully, patiently, bit by bit.

So every day I wonder if it is ready for the world, or if the world is ready for something so trusting.

Some days it squawks endlessly from dawn until sunset. Other days it sits quietly observing life with solemn little eyes while systematically destroying the cleanliness of my home. There are damp patches everywhere now.

This bird has become, in every sense, a baby. And somewhere in the middle of disinfecting floors and arguing with a bird about eggs, I realised how quickly the heart rearranges itself around small living things.

Soon, I know, this bird will leave. One morning the wicker chair will be empty and the patio silent except for ordinary wind. And I will miss the chaos terribly. But perhaps that is the purpose of these fleeting little connections. To remind us that gentleness still matters. As the hotter months approach, please leave water outside if you can. A shallow bowl on a wall or windowsill may become life itself to something small and thirsty.

And if a strange little bird lands in your garden one day, be gentle. You may discover it came carrying something for you too.



QUICK FEATURES



FILM FESTIVAL
A pedestrian carrying an umbrella walks along the “Croisette” before the start of the 79th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, south-eastern France.
—AFP



AWARDS
A guest poses on the red carpet as guests arrive for the 12th Africa Magic Viewers' Choice Awards (AMVCA) in Lagos, Nigeria.
— Reuters

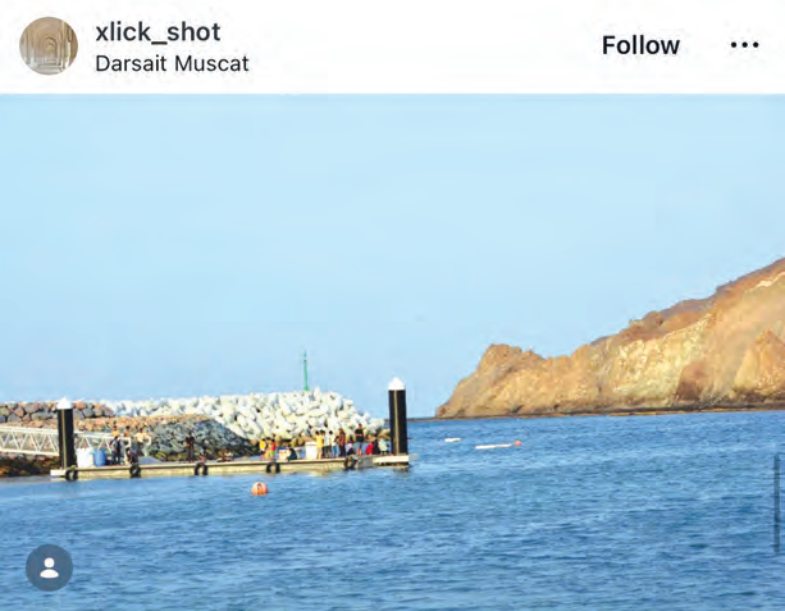


DOG FAIR
A West Highland terrier dog is prepared for a presentation at a breed show as part of the 'Dogs and Fun' fair at the Westfalenhallen congress centre in Western Germany.
— AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Vixen and baby fox



Darsait Pier during summertime

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WHO’S A GOOD BOY? AI CAN’T REPLACE DOGGIE ACTORS, DIRECTOR SAYS

Director Robert Vince believes no artificial intelligence can replace the authenticity and emotional warmth that real animal actors bring to cinema, as he prepares for the release of *Air Bud Returns* in 2027.

Speaking to AFP during the CinemaCon convention in Las Vegas, Vince recalled filming scenes with Roscoe, the golden retriever starring in the latest instalment of the beloved *Air Bud* franchise. During one emotional scene, the dog naturally reacted with concern when two human actors began crying, something Vince described as completely genuine rather than trained behaviour.

Having worked on more than a dozen productions featuring dogs, Vince said he remains impressed by the realism and emotional connection animal performers create on screen. While technological advances and visual effects continue transforming Hollywood, he believes audiences eventually look beyond spectacle and return to stories driven by authentic emotion and character connection.

The new film marks the return of the iconic basketball-playing dog first introduced in the original *Air Bud*. The franchise later expanded into football, soccer and baseball-themed sequels, becoming a defining childhood favourite for many millennials. Vince said audience excitement surrounding the new movie has been overwhelming, especially among fans who grew up



watching the original films and are now introducing them to their own children.

A major focus of the production, according to Vince, was preserving the practical and real-life performances that made the earlier movies special. He emphasised that Roscoe’s basketball skills and on-screen moments were achieved without relying heavily on CGI, maintaining the franchise’s long-standing promise of authenticity.

As Hollywood continues debating the growing influence of artificial intelligence in filmmaking, Vince remains confident that technology cannot fully replace the emotional presence of real performers, whether human or animal. “You don’t get any emotion out of that”, he said, insisting that genuine connection remains at the heart of memorable cinema. — AFP



NOCHES FLAMENCO REVIVES THE SPIRIT OF SPAIN AT ROHM



PHOTOS BY: KHALID AL BUSAIDI

STAFF REPORTER

THE Royal Opera House Muscat welcomed audiences to two memorable evenings of flamenco with the Antonio Andrade Flamenco Company in Noches Flamencas, a captivating performance that celebrated the passion, history and artistry of one of Spain’s most treasured musical traditions. Filled with energy, emotion and musical brilliance, the production transformed the stage into a vibrant journey through the soul of flamenco, inviting audiences to experience a tradition shaped by centuries of storytelling, rhythm and cultural expression.

Led by acclaimed guitarist Antonio Andrade, the performance brought together exceptional flamenco dancers, powerful vocalists and a vibrant live flamenco music ensemble, alongside pianist Diego Suarez, creating a rich and deeply expressive musical experience. Every movement, note and rhythm carried a sense of authenticity, reflecting the emotional intensity that has long defined flamenco as both a musical form and a cultural identity. The dancers’ precise footwork echoed across the theatre with striking intensity, while the singers conveyed stories of longing, joy and resilience through deeply emotional performances.

Through rhythm, movement and melody, the production offered audiences a moving reflection on the passing of time, the stories carried through music and the enduring



language of love and human connection.

The interplay between the musicians and dancers created moments of both dramatic power and quiet intimacy, allowing the audience to fully immerse themselves in the spirit of flamenco. Rich lighting and atmospheric staging further enhanced the performance, adding depth and emotion to each scene.

The performance was warmly received by audiences, who responded enthusiastically to the emotion and artistic expression presented on stage.

Noches Flamencas highlighted both the enduring traditions of flamenco and its remarkable ability to connect cultures and generations through music and performance.

The production served as a reminder of how artistic traditions can transcend language and geography, speaking directly to universal human emotions.

Umberto Fanni, Director General of the Royal Opera House Muscat, said: “It is always a pleasure for the Royal Opera House Muscat to share the beauty of different cultures with our audiences.

Performances such as Noches Flamencas allow us to celebrate artistic traditions that speak to people across borders through history and human connection”.

The evening formed part of the Royal Opera House Muscat’s ongoing commitment to presenting world-class performances that foster cultural dialogue, artistic exchange and greater appreciation for the diversity of global artistic heritage.

FEATURES



DR KHALED ABDUL MALAK

IT was the Saturday of last week when four friends of mine and I went to Umq Bir, a small hamlet nestled in a huge ‘amphitheatre’ at the source of Wadi Tiwi in the mountains at around 1,000 metre altitude. The journey would take you around 4 hours from Muscat.

I joined Rami and Hamood in Al Amerat at 6:30 am and we all drove with Rami’s car to meet Marco, who was camping near Qalhat where we started our drive into the mountains to Umq Bir.

The weather was already hot, reaching 38 degrees at 9 am in Qalhat where Marco was waiting for us with his delicious Italian coffee.

After a short break to savour Marco’s exquisite drink, we started driving into the mountains towards the small village of Hallut.

Abdullah, the last thrill-seeker, was supposed to meet us in the mountains where we were planning to set up our camp after our new exploration of one of the tributaries of Wadi Tiwi.

It was already 10:30 when Abdullah arrived at our meeting point. From there, we drove another 1.5 hours to reach Umq Bir.

The sun was already very high when we started our hike, following a trail I had partially walked in 2014 along with Marta, my wife and my dear friend ‘Mismar’.

The plan was to reach a tributary of Wadi Tiwi that pours just before ‘The Cave’ of the wadi.

I estimated the time we needed to finish our exploration around 6 hours.

The hike was extremely exhausting during this period of the year.

When we finally reached the tributary we were looking for, we realised that we had consumed almost the whole quantity of water, so we decided to head back because continuing our plan would be risky.

It was around 6 pm when we reached our vehicles and we decided to change our plans for the next day.

We all agreed to camp in Umq Bir to enjoy the Wadi with all its fresh, crispy, clear water pools and splendid ‘cave’.

After dinner, we were all tired



A group of friends embarks on an expedition to Umq Bir in the mountains of Wadi Tiwi, navigating challenging terrain, before returning with lasting impressions of one of Oman’s most stunning natural landscapes

HIKING EXPEDITION TO UMQ BIR

and keen to get a few hours of sleep before our early start the next day.

The night was quite short and we were all up at 5:30 am. Rami was already preparing the coffee as usual.

This guy has everything you need if you go camping with him! After coffee, he prepared scrambled eggs for everyone and even opened the bonnet of his car to make us shade while having our breakfast!

When we finished our royal meal, we packed up the camp, prepared our bags with our climbing gear, ropes, snacks and drinks.

It was almost 9 am when we started walking. Luckily, we came across Khamis on the trail.

It was in 2004 when I first came to Umq Bir and met him and we became good friends.

Every time I came to Umq Bir, I paid him a visit.

He also helped us in 2016 with

his two donkeys to carry the equipment we needed for the shooting we did in Umq Bir for the documentary I made about Oman.

He insisted on offering us coffee and dates, but I promised him to visit him when we come back from the canyon.

It was the first visit for Hamood and Marco; and they were stunned by the beauty of the place.

It took us around 1.5 hours to reach the cave where we decided to stop to enjoy one of, if not, the most beautiful spots of the wadi.

It took us another 1.5 hours to come back to Umq Bir, where we had a long halt to enjoy the delicious Qahwa and dates of Khamis.

We hit the road back to Muscat and it was 7:30 pm when we reached Al Amerat.

For me, it was perhaps the twentieth time I had gone to Umq Bir and every time I enjoyed it like the first time.