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12

SINNER SURGES INTO QUARTERS, ANDREEVA IN MADRID OPEN SEMIS

INBRIEF

OMAN CALLS FOR NUKE FREE ZONE

The Sultanate of Oman is taking part in the 11th Review Conference of Parties to the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which began at the United Nations headquarters in New York and will continue until May 22. Speaking on the occasion, Omar bin Said al Kathiri, the Sultanate of Oman's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, said that the establishment of a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East constitutes a strategic priority and an urgent bid to enhance security and stability in the region.

DETAILS ON P3

OVER 1,500 FREED UNDER FAK KURBA

The 13th edition of the Fak Kurba humanitarian initiative, spearheaded by the Oman Lawyers Association, has contributed to the release of 1,519 people imprisoned for non-criminal financial cases across various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. This brings the total number of beneficiaries since the initiative's inception in 2012 to 9,717 cases.

DETAILS ON P2

TRUMP WELCOMES KING CHARLES IN US

President Donald Trump said that the United States has no closer friend than Britain, as he welcomed King Charles III to the White House on a state visit shadowed by tensions over the Iran war. Speaking after a pomp-filled welcome on the South Lawn featuring a 21-gun salute, Trump's tone was a world away from his recent jibes at British Prime Minister Keir Starmer for failing to join in against Tehran. "In the centuries since we won our independence, Americans have had no closer friends than the British," said Trump.



AL SHARQIYAH SOUTH SURGING AHEAD IN DEVELOPMENT

Under the renewed Renaissance led by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Governorate of Al Sharqiyah South has witnessed numerous comprehensive development projects that translate the priorities of Oman Vision 2040 into action. These aim to achieve balanced development that enhances competitiveness with other governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

DETAILS ON P4

Oman, UK discuss Hormuz

SAYYID BADR BIN HAMAD AL BUSAIDY, Foreign Minister, met Lord Edward Llewellyn, Director General Political at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom (UK).

During the meeting in Muscat, the two sides discussed several issues of mutual interest, foremost of which were the latest developments in the region and their repercussions. They exchanged views on ways to enhance pacification and de-escalation, and to push towards sustainable political and diplomatic solutions.

The guest listened to the views of the foreign minister regarding the importance of safeguarding the security and safety of maritime corridors and strategic straits, most notably the Strait of Hormuz. The foreign minister emphasised the necessity



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy with Lord Edward Llewellyn in Muscat on Tuesday.

of ensuring the smooth flow of international navigation, which contributes to protecting global supply chains and enhancing economic stability.

The two sides affirmed the importance of enhancing joint cooperation and

coordination in the security and maritime fields. They also highlighted the significance of exchanging expertise in a manner that supports efforts aimed at maintaining security and stability in the region, and reinforces commitment to international law and the rules of freedom of navigation.

Meanwhile, efforts to end the Middle East war appeared at a standstill on Tuesday, with the US considering Tehran's latest offer to unblock the Strait of Hormuz, and Iran saying Washington could no longer dictate terms. Iran has blockaded the waterway - a vital conduit for oil and gas shipments - since the start of the US-Israeli offensive two months ago, sending shockwaves through the global economy.

CNN, however, reported that US President Donald Trump was unlikely to accept Iran's proposal to restore traffic in the strait.

SEE ALSO P6 & 7

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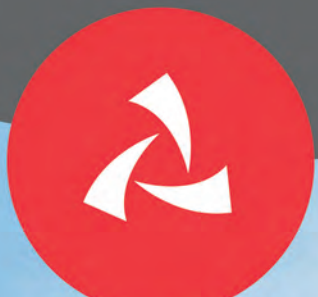
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OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The council discussed the causes of air pollution in certain residential schemes near industrial facilities. — ONA

Al Dhahirah reviews telecom services, infrastructure projects

IBRI: The Municipal Council of Al Dhahirah Governorate reviewed the follow-up on the implementation of previous recommendations and discussed a number of service-related and regulatory topics. These included hosting specialists from the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) to examine the status of communication networks across the governorate’s wilayats, as well as reviewing telecommunications and postal services completed in 2025 and those planned for implementation in 2026.

This took place during the fourth regular session of 2026, chaired by Tahir bin Mabkhout al Junaibi, Governor of Al Dhahirah and Chairman of the Municipal Council.

During the session, the council discussed the causes of air pollution in certain residential schemes near industrial facilities in the Wilayat of Ibri, and the necessary measures to be taken in coordination with the relevant authorities. — ONA

Al Sharqiyah South Municipal Council reviews project



The council also examined a proposal for the rehabilitation of Al Shamikhiya Camel Racing Track. — ONA

SUR: The Municipal Council of Al Sharqiyah South Governorate on Tuesday held its fourth regular session of 2026, chaired by Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South and Chairman of the Municipal Council.

The council reviewed the latest updates on development projects across the governorate, as well as a number of proposals submitted for the development of the ferry terminal waterfront in the Wilayat of Masirah. The council also examined a proposal for the rehabilitation of Al Shamikhiya Camel Racing Track in line with approved safety and quality standards, a step designed to support this authentic cultural heritage and enhance its presence as a promising cultural and economic asset.

The council also hosted representatives from Compass Company, who delivered a presentation on the experience of creating a pedestrian-friendly walkway for people with disabilities, along with a proposal concerning disability classifications within the Social Protection Fund. — ONA

OMANI-PAKISTANI MEETING EXPLORES AVENUES TO ENHANCE TRADE

MUSCAT: The Omani-Pakistani business meeting, organised on Tuesday by Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in Muscat, explored ways to enhance economic and trade cooperation between the private sectors of the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The meeting saw the participation of a number of business owners and investors from both countries.

The meeting focused on several vital sectors, most notably food security, agriculture, the retail



The meeting focused on several vital sectors, most notably food security, agriculture and retail sector. — ONA

sector, in addition to import and export activities. This reflects the significance of these domains in

supporting bilateral partnerships and expanding the horizons of joint investment.

The discussions examined means of developing trade and investment exchange between the two countries and underscored the pivotal role of the private sector in driving economic relations through the establishment of strategic partnerships, the exchange of expertise, and the exploration of promising opportunities across various sectors. — ONA

Over 1,500 minor offenders released via ‘Fak Kurba’

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

AS many as 1,519 people detained for various minor financial offenses or non-criminal financial disputes across various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman were released through the ‘Fak Kurba’ programme, an initiative of the Oman Lawyers Association (OLA) during the holy month of Ramadhan 2026.

The annual noble event that runs through the holy month of Ramadhan, currently in its 13th edition, has managed the release of nearly 9,717 citizens and expatriates who are unintentionally caught up in financial offenses since the initiative’s launch in 2012.

The statistics released by the OLA at a press briefing show that Muscat Governorate led all governorates with 567 cases, followed by Al Batinah North with 338 cases. Al Batinah South recorded 142 cases, followed by Al Sharqiyah South (115), Dhofar (108), Al Dakhiliyah (85), Al Buraimi (67), Al Dhahirah (66), Al Sharqiyah North (25) and Al Wusta (6).

‘Fak Kurba’ holds great humanitarian and social importance as it plays a vital role in releasing those imprisoned for minor financial claims. It has achieved widespread positive impact in previous editions, according to Dr Hamad bin Hamdan al Rubaie, Chairman of the Board



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of Directors of the Oman Lawyers Association (OLA).

Speaking to the Observer, Dr Al Rubaie stated that the initiative’s sustained success reflects the deep-rooted values of compassion and solidarity within Omani society.

“This is a great achievement and the fruit of collective efforts by individuals and institutions alike, driven by a firm belief in the importance of giving those in financial hardship a second chance to rebuild their lives and restore family and social stability,” he said.

Dr Mohammed al Zadjali, General Supervisor of the initiative, affirmed that ‘Fak Kurba’ has continuously fulfilled its humanitarian mission for over fifteen years, alleviating the suffering of hundreds of families through broad community support and active partnerships with all

relevant stakeholders.

“We at the Oman Lawyers Association, with the mission ‘Fak Kurba’, continue our humanitarian journey while affirming that every person deserves a second chance,” said Dr Al Zadjali.

The Oman Lawyers Association is committed to its humanitarian mission, restoring hope to those in financial distress and reuniting families by settling the financial obligations of eligible cases in accordance with strict criteria and standards.

The previous edition of the initiative, the 12th edition of ‘Fak Kurba’, successfully secured the release of 999 financially distressed individuals during Ramadhan 2025, making the total number of freed prisoners more than 8,000 individuals until last year.

Symposium mulls combating red palm weevil

BARKA: A symposium held in the Wilayat of Barka on Tuesday discussed key environmental and agricultural challenges facing plant life, namely through the spread of red palm weevil and mesquite trees.

The symposium was organised by the Directorate-General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Al Batinah South



The symposium sought ways to consolidate the role of community partnership. — ONA

Governorate.

The symposium sought ways to consolidate the role of community partnership in addressing challenges posed by plant pests and invasive species that endanger the ecological balance. It also elaborated on the National Campaign to Remove Mesquite Trees and the Programme to Contain Red Palm Weevil.

— ONA

New horizons for growth, prosperity of artisan industries

MUSCAT: The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development ‘Riyada’ continues its efforts to support and develop the artisan industries sector in the Sultanate of Oman through the Artisan Support Initiative. This initiative aims to empower artisans and craft enterprises while enhancing the sustainability of this vital sector, which is intrinsically linked to both cultural identity and the national economy.

The initiative offers a comprehensive package of support mechanisms, including funding

for the setup and maintenance of workshops, covering marketing and packaging costs, facilitating participation in exhibitions, providing training, and supplying support for the purchase of machinery and raw materials. These measures collectively contribute to raising production efficiency and improving the quality of craft products.

The Authority clarified that eligibility for the initiative extends to individual artisans holding permits for productive home-based activities, as well as craft



The initiative aims to empower artisans and craft enterprises while enhancing the sustainability of this vital sector. — ONA

enterprises registered with a valid commercial licence for licensed craft activities, in accordance with the approved terms and conditions.

The Authority encouraged prospective applicants to ensure they meet the core requirements, which include registration with the Authority, possessing a licence for the craft activity issued by the competent authority, and reviewing the eligibility criteria — such as not having received similar support during the previous two years, and having a suitable location to practice the activity.

The Authority also noted that it has published an instructional guide detailing the application process for the Artisan Support Initiative, including all necessary procedural steps, to assist beneficiaries in completing their applications accurately and with flexibility.

The initiative covers a broad spectrum of activities, encompassing 16 types of productive home-based crafts and 20 types of activities under commercial craft enterprises.

— ONA

SHORT TAKES



The two sides exchanged views and discussed a number of military matters of mutual interest.

SAF, RAO officials receive GCC military commander

MUSCAT: Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Tuesday Maj Gen Abdulaziz bin Ahmed al Balawi, Commander of the Unified Military Command of the GCC, accompanied by Maj Gen Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Ruwais, Commander of the Peninsula Shield Force.

During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views and discussed a number of military matters of mutual interest.

Furthermore, Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), received on Tuesday in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa the Commander of the GCC Unified Military Command, accompanied by the Commander of the Peninsula Shield Force. During the meeting, the two sides discussed several topics of mutual interest.



The meetings discussed several topics of mutual interest. — ONA

AL HALLANIYAT ISLANDS
PROTECTED MARINE BUFFER ZONE



While primarily a destination for specialised marine life tourism, the islands also boast a rich coastline.

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

Established as a Nature Reserve by Royal Decree No 96/2025, Al Hallaniyat Islands serve as a protected marine buffer zone in Dhofar Governorate. The reserve comprises five islands: Al Hallaniyat, Al Sawda, Al Hasikiyah, Al Qabliyah and Al Shunais. While primarily a destination for specialised marine life tourism, the islands also boast a rich coastline teeming with a diverse array of coral reefs, fish and turtles that frequent the beaches to lay their eggs.

Ali bin Mohammed al Shahri, a resident of the islands and head of the Fisheries Development Centre for Al Hallaniyat Islands, noted that tourists typically visit in September. He stated that tourists enjoy spending most of their day on boats, exploring Al Sawda Island (also known as Black Island) and Al Qabliyah Island, a hotspot for birds. Al Hasikiyah Island is home to both birds and animals, while Al Shunais is the smallest island in the group.



ALI AL SHAHRI

Dolphins and whales are commonly spotted in the area, and the islands serve as key nesting sites for seabirds like the Masked Booby, Socotra Cormorant and Sooty Gull.

The importance of Al Hallaniyat Islands as a nature reserve lies in its critical habitat for humpback whales, sea turtles and rare seabirds.

Located northeast of Dhofar, the islands are part of Wilayat Shaleem and Al Hallaniyat Islands, making them a premier destination for diving, whale watching, dolphin spotting and exploring diverse marine life, including coral reefs.

As of April 2026, special permits from the Environment Authority are required for entry to the islands. Non-resident fishing, unauthorised anchoring and pollution are strictly

prohibited. Local fishermen now exclusively fish in the area, refraining from using fish nets and adopting safe fishing practices.

“The best months for fishing are October, November, February and March,” Al Shahri advises. Conservation measures are in place to protect turtle nesting beaches, coral reefs, birds, and ensure sustainable use of fish resources. The reserve’s boundaries extend from the highest tide point on each island’s shores to a distance of five kilometres into the sea, covering approximately 667 square kilometres of diverse topography, including deserts, highlands, springs, bays and beaches.

According to Unesco, “A partial counting survey showed that the islands support one of the most important nesting areas in the world for Loggerheads. Green Turtles were observed in the sea, and local residents confirm the presence of two types of turtles laying their eggs on the island. Skulls found near the beaches indicate that Hawksbills also nest on the island.”

Oman affirms commitment to nuclear non-proliferation

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN is taking part in the 11th Review Conference of Parties to the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which began at the United Nations headquarters in New York and will continue until May 22.

Oman’s participation in the international conference assumes significance from the country’s designation as Chair of the 7th Session of the “Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction”. This reflects global confidence in Oman as an advocate of efforts for disarmament and consolidation of regional and international security.

Omar bin Said al Kathiri, the Sultanate of Oman’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations, gave a statement at the conference on behalf of member states.

He pointed out that the establishment of a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East constitutes a strategic priority and an urgent bid to enhance security and stability in the region. Such a move affirms international commitment which, he said, requires concerted efforts to turn the pledge into a tangible reality.

In his statement, Al Kathiri laid emphasis on the growing challenges posed to the scheme of disarmament



Oman is taking part in the 11th Review Conference of Parties to the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). — ONA

and non-proliferation, including the ongoing development of nuclear arsenals and escalating rhetoric on the use of nuclear weapons.

He cautioned against the negative repercussions of this stance on international peace and security.

He also stressed the need to consolidate multilateral action and reach a consensus that would restore vigour to the process of the NPT.

From its podium, the Sultanate of Oman urged all Middle East countries to constructively engage in this process and to enhance mutual trust that would pave the way for more sustainable regional arrangements.

Oman also affirmed its steadfast commitment to back international efforts to achieve disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, promote peaceful solutions based on dialogue and understanding and contribute to the establishment of a more balanced and secure international system. — ONA

Al Madina Takaful Wins Customer Service Excellence Award at Oman Insurance Summit & Awards 2026



Al Madina Insurance Company SAOG (Al Madina Takaful) has been recognised with the **Customer Service Excellence Award** at the Oman Insurance Summit & Awards 2026, marking a significant acknowledgement of the company’s continued focus on service delivery and customer engagement.

Held as part of the Oman Insurance Summit & Awards 2026, which marks its inaugural edition, the event brought together industry stakeholders under the theme “The Future of Insurance in Oman – Resilience, Regulation & Reinvention,” to drive dialogue on key priorities shaping the sector.

The recognition highlights Al Madina Takaful’s ongoing efforts to enhance customer experience by delivering consistent, reliable, and responsive service across its operations.

Commenting on the achievement, **Mr. Usama Al Barwani, Chief Executive Officer**, said: “Customer service lies at the heart of our business. This recognition reflects the efforts of our teams in consistently delivering service that meets

the expectations of our customers and stakeholders.”

Mr. Shakaib Mahmood, Deputy CEO, added: “This award underscores the importance of building customer relationships through reliability, transparency, and responsiveness. We remain focused on strengthening our service standards in line with evolving customer expectations.”

Mr. Aneesh Varghese, Head of Operations, noted: “Operational efficiency plays a key role in delivering a seamless customer experience. This recognition reinforces our commitment to maintaining consistency and quality across all customer touchpoints.”

This recognition reinforces Al Madina Takaful’s position as a customer-focused insurer, reflecting its continued emphasis on service excellence and operational consistency. The company remains focused on further strengthening its service capabilities in line with evolving customer expectations, while supporting the ongoing development of Oman’s insurance sector.

OMAN



The governorate enjoys comparative advantages in economic, investment and tourism domains. — ONA



Al Sharqiyah South enjoys surging development



UNDER THE renewed Renaissance led by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Governorate of Al Sharqiyah South has witnessed numerous comprehensive development projects that translate the priorities of Oman Vision 2040 into action. These aim to achieve balanced development that enhances competitiveness with other governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

The governorate enjoys comparative advantages in economic, investment and tourism domains, supported by an integrated logistical and infrastructural base, in addition to its cultural and artisanal heritage. This has positively reflected on key indicators, including improved institutional performance and service quality.

Its long coastal strip, extending from Tiwi in the north to Masirah Island in the south, is rich in marine wealth and comprises attractive sites for aquaculture, such as the Qaroon and Khawimah projects. These have an investment value of RO 41 million, with a total production of 5,366 tonnes. The governorate also features natural and historic ports, such as Sur Port, alongside areas amenable to industrial and tourism development, advanced road and communication networks, logistical hubs for supply chains and maritime exports, and several major industrial facilities, including Oman LNG and the Oman India Fertiliser Company.

On the tourism front, the governorate boasts attractive natural features and

beaches, such as Al Ashkharah and Ras Al Jinz. It also offers a number of hotels, resorts and tourist inns. In addition, the governorate is home to natural reserves, namely Ras Al Jinz, Al Saleel Natural Reserve and Jabal Qahwan, as well as archaeological and historical sites such as the ancient city of Qalhat, various forts, castles and traditional souqs (markets). It is renowned for traditional wooden dhow manufacturing. Tourist destinations such as Wadi Al Shab and Wadi Tiwi attract visitors year-round and host various adventure activities, including hiking.

Al Sharqiyah South Governorate spans approximately 12,039 square kilometres and comprises five wilayats: Sur, Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, Al Kamil W'al Wafi, and Masirah. The population numbers 375,853 people, of whom 251,764 are Omanis and 124,089 are expatriates. Sur leads in population with 130,226, followed by Jaalan Bani Bu Ali with 126,062, Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan with 55,827, Al Kamil W'al Wafi with 46,517 and Masirah with 17,221.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

In the field of digital transformation, the governorate has achieved advanced levels, with a digital proficiency rate of 81% in 2025.

Regarding development projects, the governorate implemented 27 projects between 2023 and 2025, with a total cost of RO 39.8 million. Actual disbursement amounted to RO 21.4 million. These projects include the construction of Al Ashkharah Waterfront, Al Nahda

Park in Masirah, the development of Al Suwaih Park, the construction of Falaj Al Mashayekh Park, the development of Al Ashkharah Park, the development of the Ras Al Hadd Eastern Waterfront and the improvement of parks across various wilayats. Additional projects include the construction of the Aseela Waterfront, the construction and improvement of internal roads, the installation of stormwater drainage networks, the construction of a central market and public facilities, the development of Siyq Park in the Wilayat of Al Kamil W'al Wafi (Souq Al Mashariq), and the development of the Friday Souq in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali.

Within the framework of public-private partnership, 41 projects were implemented with private-sector financing at a total cost of RO 4.6 million. These include Sur Public Park, Al Barr Waterfront pathway, the development of Al Rassagh pathway, the construction of an equestrian field and the Qahwan pathway in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, the establishment of the Cultural Centre for Youth in the Wilayat of Sur, and a multipurpose centre in the Wilayat of Masirah.

Al Sharqiyah South Governorate continues to implement its development plans in line with a vision aimed at enhancing competitiveness, developing economic sectors and investing in natural resources. These efforts contribute to achieving sustainable development that benefits the local community and supports the national economy. — ONA

Al Sharqiyah North boasts tourism, historical potential

IBRA: Al Sharqiyah North Governorate is undergoing comprehensive and sustainable development across all sectors under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

The governorate's seven wilayats — Ibra, Al Mudhaibi, Bidiyah, Al Qabil, Wadi Bani Khalid, Dima W'attayeen and Sinaw — boast significant tourism and historical potential, driving strategic investment in infrastructure and services.

Mahmoud bin Yahya al Thuhli, Governor of Al Sharqiyah North, stated that the development plan focuses on increasing investment opportunities through major developmental and service projects.

Last year, strategic projects totalling RO 183.9 million were implemented. Key highlights include the Al Namaa Hospital project



valued at RO 56.05 million, the Mawarid Market in Sinaw at RO 9.7 million and the Al Mudhaibi Industrial City funded with over RO 15 million.

The governorate is also prioritising modern infrastructure. The municipality completed

145 kilometres of roads, costing RO 25.5 million last year, with ongoing development projects currently valued at RO 54.2 million. These include the Bidiyah Entertainment Centre, multi-purpose halls, and various parks and water pond developments in Wadi

Bani Khalid. In the realm of technology and innovation, plans are underway for the Future Centre for Artificial Intelligence, the first project of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman.

Additionally, the governorate launched the Al Sharqiyah North Award

for Innovative Economy to stimulate creativity in architectural development, institutional excellence and community contribution.

The tourism sector remains a cornerstone of the local economy, with winter season occupancy rates reaching 100% during peak

periods. The governorate offers unique desert and mountain adventures, supported by over 97 accommodation facilities providing nearly 1,295 hotel rooms. In the industrial and mining sector, 35 mining licences are active, including the Al Washhi copper mine in Al Mudhaibi, which aims to produce 50,000 tonnes of copper ore monthly.

Economic indicators reflect this robust growth, with commercial registers reaching 19,328 by mid-2025. Agriculture also thrives, with an average annual production of 250,000 tonnes.

The social and educational sectors continue to expand, with 104 government schools serving over 62,000 students, alongside the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, A'Sharqiyah University, and Oman College of Health Sciences.

— ONA

Symposium on regional peace on May 10

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

The Chinese Embassy in Oman, with the approval of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, will be hosting a media symposium with the theme ‘Regional Peace’ on May 10.

Senior officials from Oman’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, think tank scholars, friends of China-Oman relations, as well as journalists from major Omani and Chinese media outlets, are expected to attend the event. It will be held under the auspices of Lyu Jian, Ambassador of the Republic of China, who will deliver the keynote address.

“Amid the ongoing turbulence in the Middle East, China and Oman have steadfastly advocated resolving



China and Oman have established a strong strategic partnership focused on promoting regional peace.

disputes through diplomatic negotiations and have actively worked to promote peace and facilitate dialogue. The Chinese Embassy is hosting the media symposium with the theme of ‘Regional Peace’ to unite and amplify the voice of peace, and to uphold the shared conviction that differences between nations should be settled through

diplomacy—especially when faced with the critical choice between war and peace,” a spokesperson from the Embassy said.

This new initiative stems from China’s appreciation for Oman’s role as a ‘peace builder’ and its ‘principled neutrality’ in mediating regional conflicts. “Oman acts as a mediator to ease

regional tensions and promote dialogue.” China has proposed a four-point plan for restoring peace and stability in the Middle East, which includes upholding mutual respect, ensuring equity and justice, achieving non-proliferation, and jointly fostering collective security, all of which are key principles of the Sultanate of Oman as well.

China and Oman have established a strong strategic partnership focused on promoting regional peace, stability, and development in the Middle East through quiet diplomacy, dialogue, and economic cooperation. The efforts of the two nations are characterised by a shared commitment to non-interference, upholding international law.

Barka Zakat Committee receives electric chairs



The handover ceremony was held in the presence of Eng Masoud bin Said al Hashmi, Governor of Al Batinah South.

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

THE Zakat and Charity Committee in the Wilayat of Barka received a significant community support contribution from Barka Desalination Company, comprising 21 electric wheelchairs designated for people with disabilities. The initiative reflects growing collaboration between the private sector and charitable organisations, aimed at enhancing the quality of life and independence of beneficiaries.

The handover ceremony was held in the presence of Eng Masoud bin Said al Hashmi, Governor of Al

Batinah South, and Sayyid Tariq bin Mahmoud al Busaidi, Wali of Barka, along with a number of officials and stakeholders. The committee stated that the distribution of the wheelchairs will follow a structured plan prioritising individuals from low-income families registered under its programmes, in coordination with the Social Development Department in the wilayat.

The initiative also aims to replace outdated manual wheelchairs with modern electric ones, enabling smoother mobility and easing daily challenges faced by beneficiaries.

Asim bin Ali bin Salem al Rashdi, CEO of Barka Desalination Company, said the initiative aligns

with the company’s commitment to strengthening its community engagement efforts in Barka. He noted that empowering people with disabilities remains a key priority, adding that providing smart electric wheelchairs will significantly improve mobility and independence.

Dr Saleh bin Hamad bin Khamis al Alawi, Director of Social Responsibility at the company, emphasised that teamwork and collaboration are essential to achieving meaningful social impact. He added that overcoming challenges faced by people with disabilities transforms shared goals into tangible outcomes, fostering a more inclusive and productive environment.

UTAS to host scout gathering for coastal sustainability

MUSCAT: The Rustaq College of Education will host the 17th Rangers Camp of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences from May 1 to 4, under the theme ‘Sifah, Towards Sustainable Shores’. The event will bring together more than 60 female rangers representing various UTAS branches.

This gathering reflects the university’s commitment to strengthening student activities as a platform for developing students’ leadership and social skills. It represents an important educational pathway that promotes teamwork, initiative, and community responsibility. The event also highlights the university’s support for empowering Omani women and encouraging their active participation across different fields, in line with national priorities that recognise women as key partners in development and leadership initiatives.

Request for Proposals (RFP): Residential Lease

Overview:

BGP Company seeks to lease a villa in Muscat for 30 staff.

Requirements:

Location:

Azaiba or Ghala

Type:

Standalone villa

Capacity:

30 persons

Facilities:

Prefer large yard and ample parking

Lease Terms:

• Long-term preferred.

• Provide monthly rent (specify inclusions).

• Ready to move in or minor renovation only.

• Compliant with Oman regulations.

Timeline:

Announcement:

29 April 2026

Deadline:

9 May 2026

Jumabgp@gmail.com

Sultanate of Oman

Ministry of Defence

ENGINEERING SERVICES

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Defence invites Contractors specialized in the under mentioned works and registered with the Govt. Tender Board and Ministry of Defence to participate in the following tender.

Tender No.	Tender Name	Contractors Grade	Last Date to Obtain Tender	Tender Submission Date	Tender Price (RO)
025/2025	HVAC system works - MAM	First and above - specialized in HVAC system	7 May 2026	8 June 2026	183/750 R.O
040/2025	HVAC system works - Al-Khouth	First and above - specialized in HVAC system	7 May 2026	8 June 2026	199/500 R.O
001/2026	HVAC system works - Salalah	First and above - specialized in HVAC system	7 May 2026	8 June 2026	131/250 R.O
005/2026	HVAC system works - Salalah	First and above - specialized in HVAC system	7 May 2026	8 June 2026	362/250 R.O
009/2026	Building works - MAM	First and above	7 May 2026	22 June 2026	911/925 R.O
010/2026	Building works - MAM	First and above	7 May 2026	8 June 2026	268/275 R.O
011/2026	Electro-mechanical maintenance works - SBSNB - WUDAM	First and above - specialized in maintenance work	7 May 2026	8 June 2026	222/600 R.O
012/2026	Building works - Salalah	First & above	7 May 2026	22 June 2026	333/375 R.O
013/2026	Building works - MAM	Excellent	7 May 2026	22 June 2026	220/500 R.O

*For more information about the above Tenders please visit gate number (14)

Tender Documents (Electronic Tender Document) can be obtained from the Tender office, Gate No: 14, Muaskar Al Murtafa'a after payment of the tender fee indicated above.

The Payment should be made electronically by using SMART CARD, VISA CARD and VISA ELECTRON. Sunday to Thursday (0900 – 1300 Hours).

Bidders shall present the Omanization certificate issued by the Ministry of Labour prior to purchasing the tender documents provide that it meets the approved that it meets the approved minimum Omanization percentage as stipulated by Ministry of Labour.

The Bid to be accompanied by Tender Bond in the value of (1%) of the bid value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank and addressed to HE the Chairman of the Tender Committee.

Bids are to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to HE the Chairman of Tender Committee and marked with Tender Number and Name. Name of Bidder or any other marks should not be printed on the envelopes.

Bids to be deposited in the Tender office at Gate No: 14 Muaskar Al Murtafa'a before 1300 hours on the assigned day for submission of the Tender.

We would like to draw your attention to the importance of adherence to the submission date, request and any queries related should not be submitted to MODES fourteen days prior to submission of offer & that queries must be on electronic (Microsoft word).

You are requested to submit the following items within your tender submission, failure to submit the required information may result a disqualification of your offer without any further notification.

1. Percentage of Omanisation within the company supported by an authenticated certificate from the Ministry of Labour (Updated Copy).

2. Detailed priced breakdown to be specified as per scope of works and drawings.

3. Tender Form and Tender Bonds to be submitted as hard copy and others documentation shall be as SOFT COPY (USB) in two separate files:

A. Financial (bill 1&2 separated file from bill3).

B. Technical files.

4. Confirmation of site visit.

5. All addendums and circulars.

6. List of sub-contractors/suppliers and their acceptance letter to this project.

7. List of current and executed projects for the last Five years.

8. Valid Registration Certificates from Tender Board.

9. Financial Statement for the last Three years.

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PEACE EFFORTS STALL AS US EXAMINES LATEST IRAN PROPOSAL

TRUMP MEETS ADVISORS

Trump met with top security advisors to discuss the Iranian proposal after Tehran passed “written messages” to Washington via Pakistan spelling out its red lines

IRAN SLAMS US DEMANDS

Iranian defence ministry spokesman Reza Talaei-Nik said that Washington must abandon its illegal and irrational demands. The United States is no longer in a position to dictate its policy to independent nations

CONFLICT AT IMPASSE

Trump said Iran had informed him it was in a “state of collapse” and was figuring out its leadership situation, as efforts to end the conflict appeared at an impasse



A man holds an Iranian flag during a rally in support of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, in Tehran. — AFP

EFFORTS TO end the Middle East war appeared at a standstill on Tuesday, with the US considering Tehran's latest offer to unblock the Strait of Hormuz, and Iran saying Washington could no longer dictate terms. Iran has blockaded the waterway — a vital conduit for oil and gas shipments — since the start of the US-Israeli offensive two months ago, sending shockwaves through the global economy. CNN reported that US President Donald Trump was unlikely to accept Iran's proposal to restore traffic in the strait, as Qatar warned of the possibility of a “frozen conflict” if a definitive resolution is not found. Trump met with top security advisors to discuss the Iranian proposal after Tehran passed

“written messages” to Washington via Pakistan spelling out its red lines, including on nuclear issues and Hormuz, Iran's Pars news agency reported. The proposal was “being discussed,” spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt told a White House briefing. The plan would reportedly see Tehran ease its chokehold on the strait and Washington lift its retaliatory blockade on Iranian ports while broader negotiations continue, including over the thorny question of Iran's nuclear program. But CNN, citing two sources familiar with the matter, said Trump had signaled at Monday's meeting that he was reluctant to take Hormuz off the table without resolving the nuclear question, though it was unclear what his next steps would be. Iranian defence ministry

spokesman Reza Talaei-Nik said on Tuesday that Washington “must abandon its illegal and irrational demands.” “The United States is no longer in a position to dictate its policy to independent nations,” he said, according to state TV. Asked about Iran's proposal, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio told Fox News “it's better than what we thought they were going to submit,” but questioned whether it was genuine. “They're very good negotiators,” he said, “and we have to ensure that any deal that is made, any agreement that is made, is one that definitively prevents them from sprinting towards a nuclear weapon at any point.” Mediator Pakistan previously hosted an initial, unsuccessful round of US-Iran peace talks, but hopes for a second over the

weekend ultimately came to nothing. Trump has said that if Iran wants talks, “they can call us.” Tehran would need guarantees that Washington and Israel would not attack again if it was to offer security assurances for the Gulf, Iran's envoy to the UN said. On a visit to Russia, where he met President Vladimir Putin, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said the war had shown “Iran's true power” and stability, but back home in Tehran, the mood was more sober. “Everything in the country is up in the air right now. I have not worked for a long time,” small business owner Farshad told Paris-based journalists. “The country is in complete economic collapse.” Tehran resident Shervin, a photographer, said he too was feeling the pinch. — Agencies

FIRST NATURAL GAS TANKER LEAVES GULF

PARIS: A ship fully loaded with liquefied natural gas (LNG) has passed through the Strait of Hormuz for the first time since the Middle East war virtually closed the route in early March, marine tracking firm Kpler said on Monday. The LNG carrier Mubarak, operated by the Emirati national oil company Adnoun, left the Gulf some time in April with 132,890 cubic metres of LNG on board, having loaded at Das Island in the United Arab Emirates on March 2, according to Kpler data. The Mubarak switched off its AIS transponder at the end of March for a month, before transmitting again off the coast of India on Monday. “It could be the case that the vessel managed to cross the strait during the weekend of 18-19 April, when multiple vessels attempted to cross the strait (including seven LNG tankers), however this is not yet confirmed,” Kpler analyst Charles Costerousse, said in a note. The LNG market, in which Qatar is

one of the main players, is among the hardest hit by the traffic restrictions in the Strait of Hormuz. Around 20 percent of global LNG trade normally transits the strait in peacetime. Trackers and media have in recent days reported several Iranian oil tankers stationary near the strait in a possible indication that the US blockade was preventing them from shipping oil out. Ship trackers identified the Nasha, an old Iranian oil supertanker recently brought back into service, stationary in the Gulf. News agency Bloomberg said the Nasha was loaded with two million barrels of oil. They also reported a cluster of other tankers off the Iranian port of Chabahar, west of the strait towards the US blockade line. Specialised site TankerTrackers said 20 Iranian tankers without cargo were available for loading but Bloomberg said the total number was not clear. — AFP



Crude back above \$110 on Strait of Hormuz stalemate fears

LONDON: Oil prices jumped on Tuesday, climbing back above \$110 per barrel, amid a lack of progress in reopening the key Strait of Hormuz. Meanwhile, tech stocks took a hit and investors turned their attention to corporate earnings and the outlook for interest rates. The White House has refused to say if US President Donald Trump is inclined to accept Iran's latest proposals to end the two-month-old conflict and reopen the crucial waterway, which would reportedly put off talks on Tehran's nuclear programme. Oil prices rallied, with Brent crude for June delivery rising 2.8 per cent to \$111.26 a barrel. The benchmark US contract, WTI for June delivery, rose 3.4 per cent to \$99.62 per barrel. Hopes for a deal had been

rising going into last weekend but Trump dashed them on Saturday by scrapping a planned trip by his envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner to Islamabad. “Right now, the market is not optimistic about the chance of a deal to reopen the Strait due to Iran's request to push discussions about nuclear disarmament into the future,” said Kathleen Brooks, research director at XTB trading platform. Meanwhile, the United Arab Emirates announced it will withdraw from the OPEC and OPEC+ oil cartels on May 1, calling it a strategic decision by the major producer. Rystad Energy analyst Jorge Leon said the UAE's move is significant as it is, alongside Saudi Arabia, one of the few nations with significant spare production



A view of the Phillips 66 Company's Los Angeles Refinery, at the Kinder Morgan Carson Terminal, California. — Reuters

capacity. “While near-term effects may be muted given ongoing disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, the longer-term implication is a structurally weaker OPEC” and potentially more market volatility. The tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite fell 1.2 per cent at the start of trading in New York, with shares in companies linked to OpenAI hit by a report in the Wall Street Journal that the ChatGPT maker had missed targets on the number of users and revenue. Shares in Oracle, which is building massive data centre capacity for OpenAI, fell more than five per cent. XTB's Brooks said that if OpenAI struggles to meet sales targets, it may be forced to spend on data centres needed to expand the use of AI. “This news may threaten the AI

investment theme that has driven US stock markets to record highs,” she warned. The news also means that AI spending by tech giants Amazon, Google, Meta and Microsoft will come under even closer scrutiny when they report results later this week. In Europe, shares were down in afternoon trading. Stock markets mostly fell in Asia, under further pressure after the Bank of Japan sharply raised its inflation forecasts for the current year and halved its growth projections owing to surging oil prices, while leaving its key interest rate unchanged. “This triggered profit-taking. A similar picture could emerge at the meetings of the US Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank,” said analyst Andreas Lipkow at CMC Markets. — AFP

Israel military issues new evacuation warning in south Lebanon

BEIRUT: Israel's military on Tuesday warned residents of more than a dozen villages and towns in southern Lebanon to immediately evacuate and head northwards, saying it would respond to Hezbollah's “violation of the ceasefire” there. The military “does not intend to harm you, and out of concern for your safety, you are required to evacuate your homes immediately and move away from the specified area towards the Sidon District”, Arabic-language spokesman Avichay Adraee posted on X. “Anyone present near Hezbollah elements, their facilities or their weapons is endangering their life,” he added.

All the areas listed in the post appear to be outside or on the border of the so-called “Yellow Line” — a strip of Lebanese territory around 10 kilometres deep along the border within which Israeli troops are operating. Israel and Hezbollah have traded blame over violations of the fragile ceasefire in Lebanon agreed earlier this month, and attacks by both sides have continued. In two incidents on Tuesday morning, the Israeli military said an interceptor was launched “toward a suspicious aerial target that was identified in an area where IDF forces are operating in southern Lebanon”. On both occasions, it said the target did not cross into Israeli territory.

The military also announced on Tuesday morning that one soldier had been severely injured and another lightly injured a day earlier “as a result of an explosive drone impact during operational activity in southern Lebanon”. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Monday that Hezbollah's rockets and drones remained a key threat requiring action by the Israeli military, adding that Israel was continuing to carry out strikes. Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East war on March 2 by firing rockets towards Israel to avenge the killing of Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei. Meanwhile, Israel on Tuesday said it was not seeking to take territory in Lebanon, as its military issued a wave of new evacuation warnings for towns and villages in the battle-scarred south. “Israel has no territorial ambitions

All the areas listed in the post appear to be outside or on the border of the so-called “Yellow Line” — a strip of Lebanese territory around 10 kilometres deep along the border within which Israeli troops are operating. Israel and Hezbollah have traded blame over violations of the fragile ceasefire



A man attends his brother and son funeral in Beirut, Lebanon. — AFP

in Lebanon. Our presence... serves one purpose: protecting our citizens,” Foreign Minister Gideon Saar told a news conference. “No country would be willing to live in such a way with a gun pointed to its head,” he said as the military pressed its operations in Lebanon against Hezbollah. Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said direct talks with Israel sought to end the Israel-Hezbollah war and that those

who dragged Lebanon into it were the ones committing “treason” — a jab at the Iran-backed group, which claimed several attacks on Israeli targets in south Lebanon on Monday. Hezbollah chief Naim Qassem called direct talks between the two countries a “sin”, while Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz warned the group's rejection of negotiations would bring catastrophic consequences for Lebanon.

Lebanese state media reported Israeli air strikes in multiple locations in south Lebanon, including around a dozen sites in the evening. The health ministry said Israeli strikes on the south killed four people on Monday, including a woman, and wounded 51 others. Israeli strikes have killed at least 40 people in Lebanon since the truce began, according to health ministry figures. — AFP

POLITICAL CONCERNS

Qatar warns against possible ‘frozen conflict’



Qatar cautioned against the possibility of a “frozen conflict” in the Gulf, as talks between the US and Iran for a peace deal appeared at an impasse. “We do not want to see a return to hostilities in the region anytime soon, we do not want to see a frozen conflict that ends up being thawed every time there is a political reason,” Qatar's foreign ministry spokesman Majed al Ansari said. “We are very keen to see an end to this war that is sustainable.” — AFP

COUNTERING UNCERTAINTIES

China pledges to strengthen energy security



China's top leadership pledged to strengthen the nation's energy security and respond to external shocks by continuing to pursue a policy of rapid technological development and greater control over supply chains to strengthen economic self-sufficiency. The Politburo, a top decision-making body of the ruling party, was cited as saying by state agency Xinhua that the economy got off to a better-than-expected start this year. — Reuters

NATIONAL INTERESTS

UAE decides to pull out of OPEC oil cartels



The United Arab Emirates will withdraw from the OPEC and OPEC+ oil cartels to focus on “national interests”, it announced. The UAE, one of the top oil producers, will pull out on Friday. “This decision reflects the UAE's strategic and economic vision and evolving energy profile,” the statement said. “During our time in the organisation, we made significant contributions and even greater sacrifices for the benefit of all,” it added. — AFP

OPINION

Voltaire, candide and the burden of caring deeply



KARIM
EASTERBROOK

The writer is a former Cambridge School Principal and Author

WHEN I was studying French at university I read Voltaire's Candide for the first time, and I have never quite forgotten it. Voltaire was a famous author and political analyst. I was struck by Voltaire's gift for writing outstanding French literature but what stayed with me was his refusal to soften the truth. He wanted to show that the world is not the best of all possible worlds, but a place where suffering is real, persistent and impossible to explain away with easy words. For me, the book still feels close to life. Voltaire had a deep awareness of human misery and the Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755 sharpened that awareness even further. He asked how anyone could witness such devastation and still insist that everything happens for the best? Candide is a protest against that kind of thinking — a protest against the comforting phrases people use when reality becomes too painful to face honestly. The older I get, the more I recognise that intelligence and empathy can be heavy gifts. Intelligent people often see more clearly than others and those with deep compassion feel more intensely. That combination can

be a source of moral strength but it can also make life more difficult. If you understand suffering and if you care deeply about those who endure it, then the world can become a place of almost unbearable sadness. There are people who manage to glide past such things, but others cannot. They notice too much. They feel too much. They carry too much. I do not think that is weakness. In many ways it is the burden of being awake. It means refusing to look away from injustice, cruelty and loss. It means being unwilling to hide behind shallow optimism. But it also means living with the knowledge that the world often falls far short of what you feel it should be. That knowledge can sometimes lead to despair. As I have watched innocent people being killed in the current conflict, I have felt that sadness very deeply. There is something especially painful about seeing children and other non-combatants caught in violence they did not create and cannot understand. Each new image, each report of another family shattered, seems to deepen a feeling that is both personal and moral. It is not only grief at what has happened to them, it is grief at what such events reveal about the world and about human beings.

Candide is a protest against that kind of thinking — a protest against the comforting phrases people use when reality becomes too painful to face honestly

At moments like these sadness is not an abstract emotion. It becomes a daily companion. It arrives in the morning, stays through the day and returns again at night. It can make the heart feel heavy and the mind restless. One watches, listens and reads and yet there is a terrible helplessness in the face of so much suffering. For me, the question is not simply why this is happening, but how can anyone witness it without being altered by it. Voltaire understood that tension better than most writers. Candide is funny, sharp and satirical, but beneath that wit lies a serious moral demand: do not lie to yourself about suffering. Do not dress up pain as fate. Do not confuse consolation with truth. That is why the book has remained with me since my university days. It speaks to a very human struggle — how to remain clear-eyed without becoming bitter, and how to remain compassionate without being overwhelmed. Perhaps that is the real lesson Candide offers. Not that life is meaningless, but that we have to face what is in front of us and not pretend it is something else. For those of us who feel the suffering of others deeply, that simple honesty may be the hardest thing of all.

BANGLADESH’S
TIGERS STALK
UNCERTAIN FUTURE
IN SUNDARBANS

SHEIKH SABIHA ALAM

Tigers are so feared in Bangladesh’s vast Sundarban mangroves that locals invoke spirits to protect against them. But experts say it is the big cats themselves that need defending. Abdul Goni Gazi was among the first to raise the alarm for the creatures struggling to grow their numbers under pressure from habitat loss, poaching and climate change. Known locally as “Goni Tiger”, the 45-year-old devoted his life to promoting coexistence between the big cats and the people living on the forest’s edge. Despite the danger, this activist claims to have saved 36 Bengal tigers from guns or traps - and 106 local residents from the animals’ jaws. He has pulled furious villagers back from the brink of killing tigers - and, in some cases, dragged home the dismembered bodies of others. “If we want the Sundarbans and the thousands of people dependent on it to survive, we need the Bengal tigers,” he said. Stretching 10,000 square km across sprawling mangrove forests and tidal rivers, the Unesco-listed World Heritage site straddles both Bangladesh and India. Tigers eat grazing animals in the forest, which has the knock-on effect of allowing mangroves to grow and thus help protect coastlines from erosion and storms. “If a tiger is killed in the Sundarbans, it creates a turmoil in the ecosystem,” said Mohammad Abdul Aziz, a zoology expert at Bangladesh’s Jahangirnagar University. The creatures’ power is also deeply embedded in people’s culture, prompting them to seek the blessings of dozens of spirits before entering the forest. “If someone chants the name of Mother Bonbibi, she will save his life from tigers, snakes, and crocodiles,” said villager Ashutosh Mandal, 63, referring to a deity whose idol is worshipped at temples. A blend of religious beliefs has long served as a conservation code, with supernatural guardians believed to punish anyone who plunders the forest for greed. “If the Sundarbans had 400-500 tigers, they themselves would safeguard the ecosystem - without the need for human intervention,” Goni said. The South Asian nation of 170 million people pledged in 2010 to double its tiger population, then placed at 414. But a more rigorous camera-trap census in 2015 revised the population down to 106, followed by counts of 114 in 2018, and 125 in 2024 — a rise of roughly two tigers per year. — AFP

Philippine museum brings
deadly galleon trade to life

CECIL MORELLA

A FULL-SIZE replica of a Spanish galleon stares out into Manila Bay, the centrepiece of a museum that will transport visitors back to the 17th century, when conscripted Philippine mariners hastened the era of globalisation. The Museo del Galeon, which focuses on the hulking Espiritu Santo, aims to tell the story of Spain's 250-year-long Pacific galleon trade from the perspective of the Filipinos who built and crewed the towering vessels. “This is a land with a great tradition of seafaring, but often under inhumane and degrading conditions,” the museum’s executive director Manuel Quezon said, noting Filipinos still make up a quarter of the world’s sailors. “And it is one that we don’t flinch from telling.” Built with forced labour in 1603, the Espiritu Santo was one of 181 treasure ships that made hundreds of trips between Manila and the Mexican port of Acapulco between 1565 and 1815 under harrowing conditions that historians say killed one in three crewmen. “It was the first global trade, connecting three continents,” said Francis Navarro, director of archives at the Ateneo de Manila University. “It made the world smaller.” Sailing west across the Pacific for three months, the ships brought silver coins from Spain’s American colonies to Manila, where they would be exchanged for luxury goods like silk, porcelain and jade from China. The return voyage lasted as long as a year, with cargo then transported across Mexico by mule before heading to Spain, completing a trade loop between the old and new worlds. The galleons brought more than silver to the Philippines.



This photo shows a woman visiting the Galeon Espiritu Santo, a full-scale representation of a 17th century galleon, on display at the Museo del Galeon in Manila. — AFP

They brought ideas, disease, food, religion, fashion and more - the things that “made us who we are”, Quezon said. The colonial trade also ravaged the archipelago’s forests and wrecked communities, with able-bodied men required to offer 40 days of unpaid service to fell trees and build ships under Spanish foremen. Others were forced into service as sailors for up to 10 years at a time. Cramped inside vessels overladen with precious cargo, crewmembers subsisted on a miserable diet of hardtack, an unleavened bread, and salted meat and fish that routinely spoiled and left many gravely ill. “You had an astounding mortality rate of about 30 per cent per voyage,” Quezon said. Deadly rebellions were sparked in some areas where galleons were built, Navarro added, including on the Cavite coast along Manila Bay. The multi-continent trade would only end with Mexico’s fight for

independence from Spain. Fourteen years after its conception, museumgoers will, starting from May 1, be able to walk the replica ship’s decks, immersed in a giant, wrap-around LED display of star-studded night skies. Artefacts from voyages line exhibits surrounding the vessel, including part of a Chinese tomb that once served as ballast in the hold of a galleon. “We’re filling the blanks in with this museum,” Quezon said on a tour ahead of its opening. “The child who comes through, we want them to realise that many of the things that they take for granted have absolutely amazing stories behind them.” Funding for the “billion-peso” (\$16.5 million) project came from the Philippines’ wealthiest families after bids to secure financing from the government and a Mexican billionaire faltered. But while the Espiritu Santo is a physical marvel, it will never set sail. Early in the process, Quezon, a historian and grandson of a former Philippine president, learned to his dismay that the local hardwood and water-resistant species used to build the galleons had long been wiped out. A wooden galleon of Espiritu Santo’s size would have required 800 trees that could now only be found in the forests of Myanmar, said Quezon. While the museum representation is scrupulously faithful to what is known of the original vessel’s design and dimensions, it was built largely with fibreglass and other man-made materials. “In those days, you would have levelled entire forests just to be able to produce a single galleon,” he said. “That would have been irresponsible, particularly because it wasn’t meant to float.” — AFP

Remembering a man behind many iconic images



SAMUEL KUTTY

The writer is a freelance journalist and author who worked in Oman and India

IN a scenario reminiscent of an apocalyptic story, people began to perish due to a toxic gas leak in the central Indian city of Bhopal during the early hours of December 3, 1984. I was in bed when my editor asked me to accompany a group of our journalists to report on the worst industrial disaster in central India.

Indore is nearly 200 km from Bhopal, from where we headed directly to Hamidia Hospital. Upon our arrival, we saw bloated corpses lying around and individuals being transported to the hospital. The scene was filled with death, devastation and sorrow.

To our surprise, we found a large group of national and international reporters had already flooded the city. To be honest, I did not fully comprehend the severity of the disaster at first when I expressed my eagerness to visit Bhopal.

On the hospital compound, we found people still wandering around in a daze, unable to find their loved ones and barely able to see or breathe. Defence personnel positioned to maintain a smooth the flow of people, preventing the usual pushing and shoving.

At the Union Carbide factory, where the methyl isocyanide gas leaked, dead bodies lay on the ground, being collected and loaded onto a waiting truck. Everywhere one looked, people were retching and wracked by violent coughing.

Cremation and burial sites were overcrowded, leaving little room for personal

preferences. For Hindus, large stacks of wood were prepared, and bodies were placed on them for cremation. For Muslims and others, the burial process involved a three-layered grave system, where a body was interred, followed by a layer of soil, then another body, and finally more soil.

Indian and international newspapers provided extensive coverage, often featuring graphic images of the deceased and injured in special editions and headlines.

One of the most well-known and haunting images of the tragedy is a black-and-white photograph showing the body of a baby girl, almost completely covered by debris, with an unknown hand gently wiping dust from her face. Her eyes were swollen and cloudy due to gas exposure.

This chilling photo, which encapsulates the terror of the Bhopal gas disaster, was taken by none other than Raghu Rai, a name closely associated with Indian photography. He died at a private hospital in Delhi after a prolonged battle with cancer.

Even today, the child’s image resurfaces on social media whenever tragic events are mentioned. It is not just a picture but encapsulates profound pain and a complete story within itself. Upon seeing it, people around the world were deeply moved. For years, this photo remained the most poignant symbol of the tragedy.

I wrote all of this because I was beside him at a cremation ground in Bhopal while he was taking photographs, although I did not know much about him except that he

I wrote all of this because I was beside him at a cremation ground in Bhopal while he was taking photographs, although I did not know much about him except that he was a photographer working for India Today magazine

was a photographer working for India Today magazine. I only remembered it a week later when I saw the photograph on the cover page of India Today.

“At that moment, I wondered whether it was ethical to take this picture. But then I realised that if I didn’t capture it, the world would never know what truly happened there. Photography is a responsibility, and in that moment, my job was to document that injustice,” he later said in an interview.

Raghu Rai, the legendary photographer who shaped India’s visual memory for over five decades, passed away on Sunday. Today, as Rai is no longer with us, people are paying tribute to him by remembering this photograph.

From the aftermath of the Bhopal gas tragedy to capturing Mother Teresa in quiet reflection or the Dalai Lama in moments of calm, Raghu Rai’s work remains among the most enduring visual records of political power in India. Rai’s images have shaped how India perceives its most defining events.

As he explained in one of his interviews, photography was a form of spiritual engagement with the world for him. He said, “Once I pick up my camera, I am driven by the ever-changing energy of life and nature,” he said.

No doubt, his influence lives on through the individuals he guided and the enduring effect of his photographs. He depicted the photographer not as a commanding figure but as a channel through which reality briefly becomes evident.

ISRAEL USING WATER ACCESS AS ‘WEAPON’ IN GAZA

ALEXANDRE GROSBOIS

Israeli authorities are systematically depriving people in Gaza of the water they need to live, Doctors Without Borders warned on Tuesday, decrying a campaign of “collective punishment” against Palestinians.

The extensive destruction of civilian water infrastructure in Gaza coupled with obstruction of access constitutes “an integral part of Israel’s genocide”, said the medical charity, which goes by its French acronym MSF.

In a report entitled “Water as a Weapon”, MSF said the “engineered scarcity” was occurring alongside “direct killing of civilians, the devastation of health facilities, (and) the destruction of homes”.

Together, this amounted to “the deliberate infliction of destructive and inhumane conditions of life on the Palestinian population in Gaza”, warned the report, based on testimonies and data MSF collected in 2024 and 2025.

“Israeli authorities know that without water, life ends,” MSF emergency manager Claire San Filippo said in a statement.

“Yet they have deliberately and systematically obliterated water infrastructure in Gaza, whilst consistently blocking water-related supplies from entering.”

Despite an October ceasefire that largely halted the Gaza war that began after the 2023 attack on Israel, the territory remains gripped by daily violence as Israeli strikes continue and both the Israeli military and Hamas accuse each other of breaking the truce.

The MSF report pointed to data from the United Nations, European Union and World Bank indicating that Israel had destroyed or damaged nearly 90 per cent of water and sanitation infrastructure in Gaza.

“Desalination plants, boreholes, pipelines and sewage systems have been rendered inoperable or inaccessible,” it said.

The charity documented several incidents where its clearly identified water trucks and boreholes had been shot at or destroyed.

“Palestinians have been injured and killed simply trying to access water,” San Filippo said.

The charity said that besides the local authorities, it was the largest producer and main distributor of drinking water in Gaza.

Last month, it provided more than 5.3 million litres of water each day, which meets the minimum needs of more than 407,000 people, or a fifth of Gaza’s population.

However, throughout the war, “Israeli military displacement orders have locked our teams out of areas where we had provided water to hundreds of thousands of people,” the MSF statement said. — AFP

The cost of reporting a war

TO be a journalist in a war zone has always carried risk. But in today’s conflicts, that risk is no longer incidental, it is increasingly deliberate. Over the past three years, the war in Gaza and the wider region has become one of the deadliest periods for journalists in modern history. Those tasked with documenting events, verifying facts and showing the world what is happening on the ground have themselves become targets.

Since October 2023, Israel has killed more than 200 journalists and media workers in Gaza, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. Many of them were Palestinian reporters working for local and international outlets, often reporting from the very communities under attack. Among the most widely known cases is Shireen Abu Akleh, the veteran Al Jazeera correspondent who was shot and killed in the West Bank in May 2022 while clearly identified as press.

Investigations by outlets such as BBC News and The New York Times found that she was likely killed by Israeli fire.

Since then, the list has grown. Wael Dahdouh, Al Jazeera’s Gaza bureau chief, has not been killed but has endured unimaginable loss, his wife, children and other relatives were killed in Israeli strikes while he continued reporting. His son and colleague, Hamza Dahdouh, was later killed in January 2024 while travelling in a clearly marked press vehicle. Another Al Jazeera journalist, Ismail Abu Omar, was seriously injured in a drone strike in February 2024, losing a leg.

These are not isolated incidents. They point to a pattern in which journalists are not simply caught in crossfire but are repeatedly targeted and harmed while performing their duties. Journalists wear press vests, travel in marked vehicles and coordinate their movements precisely to avoid being mistaken for combatants. Yet they continue to be struck.

The situation is not only confined to Gaza. In Lebanon, where tensions have escalated alongside



A Palestinian girl takes pictures at the scene where Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh was shot dead during an Israeli raid, in Jenin, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, on July 3, 2022. — Reuters file photo



OMAN AL YAHYAI

The writer is a multilingual writer and media professional based in Paris. She specialises in human rights and immigration

the broader genocide, journalists are also paying the price. Lebanese journalist Amal Khalil was recently killed in a strike, becoming the ninth journalist killed in Lebanon this year alone. Her death prompted a strong response from Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, who stated: “Israel deliberately targets journalists in order to conceal the truth about its crimes against Lebanon,” calling such actions “war crimes.”

Reports surrounding Khalil’s death suggest that she had received direct threats prior to being killed. According to media accounts, she was warned to leave southern Lebanon or face decapitation. The implication of these warnings is clear: journalists operating in these regions are being pressured, intimidated and sometimes killed.

Israel has constantly denied the fact that they target civilians, schools, hospitals and journalists, stating that when civilians are killed, it is because Hamas uses them as human shields. However, as seen time and time again and with the amount of people killed since 2023, that is not the truth. Hospitals, schools and other civilian infrastructure have been and continue to be destroyed.

Information is power. When journalists expose civilian casualties, destruction of infrastructure or violations of international law, they challenge official narratives. The Israeli government seeks to control how their actions are perceived, both domestically and internationally. In this context, independent reporting becomes inconvenient and dangerous for the narrative they would like to portray.

Under international law, journalists are considered civilians and are protected as such. Targeting them is prohibited under the Geneva Conventions. Yet the repeated killing of journalists suggests that these protections are not being upheld in practice. Human rights organisations, including Reporters Without Borders, have warned that impunity for attacks on journalists is increasing, particularly in conflict zones.

The argument that such deaths are accidental becomes harder to sustain over time. Modern military technology allows for highly precise targeting. Drones, surveillance systems and advanced intelligence capabilities make it possible to identify individuals and locations with a high degree of accuracy. When journalists are repeatedly struck despite being clearly identifiable, the line between accident and intent becomes harder to believe.

Steve Sweeney, Lebanon bureau chief for the Russian news channel RT, who survived an Israeli strike last month, said: “This is what Israel is trying to do. It’s trying to prevent the truth from being reached by a much, much wider audience to see the war crimes that are being carried out (in Lebanon) on a daily basis.”

For journalists on the ground, the consequences are immediate and personal. Reporting becomes not just a professional duty, but a life-threatening decision. Each assignment carries the risk of injury or death. Yet many continue to work, driven by a commitment to truth and a belief that the world must bear witness to what is happening.

SPORTS

SCHOOLSFINALE



Muscat claimed the volleyball title after a straight-set victory over North Al Sharqiyah in the final.

MUSCAT SECURE VOLLEYBALL, BASKETBALL DOUBLE AT SCHOOL SPORTS LEAGUE

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
@riyadhbaluch

Muscat Directorate of Education asserted its dominance at the School Sports League for Team Games, clinching both the girls' volleyball and 3x3 basketball titles at the conclusion of the tournament, organised by the Oman School Sports Association. The finals were held at the sub-hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher under the auspices of Dr Aisha bint Hamad al Darmaki, Member of the State Council, in the presence of Nadhira bint Ahmed al Harthy, Chairperson of the Association.

Muscat secured the volleyball title after a deserved straight-set victory over Al Sharqiyah North in the final. The match witnessed strong competition and high-quality performances from both sides, with Muscat's players showcasing superior organisation and teamwork to seal the win. Al Batinah North claimed third place after defeating Al Dakhiliyah 2-1.

In the 3x3 basketball competition, Muscat continued their impressive run, defeating Al Dakhiliyah 6-1 in the final to complete a remarkable double. The team's consistent performances throughout the tournament highlighted their attacking strength and defensive discipline. Al Batinah North secured third place with a 4-1 victory over Al Batinah South.

The tournament featured intense competition, particularly in the 3x3 basketball event, which saw 25 matches played in a single day, reflecting a high level of competitiveness and showcasing promising young talent from across the educational directorates.

Following the matches, a closing ceremony was held, featuring a visual presentation highlighting key moments from the league, along with student performances. Sponsors and supporting partners were honoured, in addition to referees, organisers and technical and medical staff who contributed to the success of the event.

During the awards ceremony, Muscat received the gold medals and trophies in both competitions. Al Dakhiliyah finished as runners-up in basketball, while Al Sharqiyah North claimed second place in volleyball. Al Batinah North secured third place in both events.

This successful edition of the School Sports League once again underlines its importance as a platform for discovering and developing young sporting talent, while strengthening the role of school sports in supporting future national teams.



One of the medal winning team pose with their trophy.

Bahla held as Sohar claim key win over Al Nasr in JL

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

THE SECOND day of Round 22 in the Jindal League brought another shift in the standings, as Bahla were forced to settle for a 1-1 draw against Oman Club, while Sohar claimed a valuable 1-0 win over Al Nasr.

At Nizwa Sports Complex, Bahla dropped more points in a crucial stage of the season after being held by Oman Club, with the hosts only rescuing a point in the closing moments.

The match began cautiously, although Oman Club looked the more organised side in the opening half and managed to translate their discipline into a deserved lead. Their compact shape and close marking restricted Bahla's key players, and the visitors went ahead in the 34th minute when Waleed al Musalmi converted from the penalty spot.

Oman Club also produced several strong individual displays, while goalkeeper Faris al Ghaithi played a major role in preserving the lead with a confident performance between the posts.

Bahla improved after the break and created better openings, but a lack of cutting edge in front of goal prevented them from making their pressure count. Abdulsalam al Shukaili was denied by poor finishing on two promising opportunities, including one clear chance after Al Ghaithi had come off his line.

Oman Club remained balanced and continued to pose a threat on the counter-attack, while Bahla searched for a way back through late substitutions. The changes eventually brought a response, as Karl Winda struck in the 90th minute to salvage a point for the home side.

The draw left both teams level on 33 points, with Bahla in sixth place on goal difference and Oman Club just behind them on the same tally.

SOHAR EDGE AL NASR

At Al Saada Sports Complex, Sohar produced one of the day's standout results by defeating Al Nasr 1-0 in an important contest at both ends of the table.

Sohar started brightly and threatened early through foreign player Atikur Kena and Saud al Maqbali before making the breakthrough in the eighth minute. Atikur



Action from Sohar's 1-0 win over Al Nasr in Round 22 of the Jindal League.



Karl Winda rescued a point for Bahla in their 1-1 draw against Oman Club.

finished from close range after meeting a cross from Moayad al Abdul Salam to give his side an early lead.

Al Nasr tried to respond, but their task became harder after an enforced

substitution in the 25th minute, when Khalid al Sulaimi went off injured, and Awad al Shahri came on. Al Nasr continued to search for an equaliser and came close in the 38th minute when Awad sent a powerful effort over the crossbar.

The second half was more evenly contested, with both teams trading attacks. Al Nasr's best chance came when Mohammed Abdulhakim met a cross from Awad al Shahri with a header, only for Sohar goalkeeper Majdi al Ajmi to produce an important save. Sohar nearly doubled the lead in the 66th minute when Atikur struck the left post. Al Nasr pushed forward in the closing stages, and substitute Jasim al Nofli came close late on, but Sohar held firm to secure all three points.

The victory lifted Sohar to 35 points in fifth place, while Al Nasr remained on 46 points and risked slipping to third depending on the outcome of Al Shabab's postponed matches.

Oman 29er team heads to Lake Garda for Euro Series

MUSCAT: Oman Sail's High Performance 29er team of Tamim al Balushi and Saleh al Balushi and Saud al Shaqsi and Firas al Nabhani are ready to take to the crystal waters of Lake Garda in the coming days for the Euro Cup Series 2026. Racing begins on May 1 with 12 races scheduled, leaving the 71 registered teams competing for overall victory, as well as senior, under-19 and under-17 in men's, women's and mixed categories.

The team has recently completed a pre-event training camp in La Baule, France, in preparation for this event, as well as upcoming regattas as part of Kiel Week in June, 29er World Championship in July and training ahead of the 20th Asian Games in Gamagori, Japan, in September.

Joining the team at the Fraglia Vela Malcesine Yacht Club will be 29er coach Fabrice Jaunet from France, who boasts a proven track record in sailing, including more than 15 world titles, alongside assistant coach



Tamim and Saleh al Balushi during a training camp in Ras Al Hadd.

Zakariya al Wahabi. Hashim al Rashdi, Oman Sail's Head Coach Performance, said, "This is an exciting opportunity for the High Performance 29er team. Fraglia Vela Malcesine is a very well regarded, very well-equipped yacht club in spectacular surroundings where numerous World Championships have been held. To sail here, and to test ourselves against a

strong fleet primarily from Europe, will be invaluable in helping our sailors to develop, gain experience in a unique environment and perform at their best."

Assistant 29er coach Zakariya al Wahabi added, "Our training camp in France focused on equipping the team with the skills they need to navigate the type of wind and current Lake Garda is known for and how to

control the boats in changing conditions. We are excited for the week ahead and for a busy season this year. All four sailors have been dedicated in their preparation for this event, and we hope to show our quality on the water."

THREE DAYS OF RACING
Racing will be held over three days with two rounds of qualifying culminating in a medal series on the final day.

The team will return to Oman following the conclusion of the Euro Cup Series in Italy to begin preparations for Kiel Week in Germany, taking place from June 24-29.

This will be followed by the 2026 29er World Championship in Germany from July 2-7, and a training camp in France, in cooperation with the French national team, from August 15-25. The 2026 Asian Games will then get underway on September 19 and run until October 4 at Kaiyoh Yacht Harbour in Gamagori.

RABATATHLETICS



Oman's medal tally comprised one gold, three silver, and three bronze medals.

OMAN PARA TEAM WINS 7 MEDALS

RABAT: Oman para athletics team has secured seven medals at the International Athletics Championship, which was hosted by the Moroccan capital, Rabat. The competition, held at the Olympic Stadium, saw the participation of approximately 500 athletes representing 58 nations from April 23 to 25.

Oman's medal tally comprised one gold, three silver, and three bronze medals.

Athlete Saif al Muqbali claimed the gold medal in the 200m race and also earned the silver medal in the 100m race.

Meanwhile, Eman al Shamsi won two silver medals in the shot put and javelin throw events.

In the bronze medal category, Mohamed al Qasmi secured bronze in the shot put, Othman al Habsi earned bronze in the 400m race, and Sharifa al Hatmi obtained bronze in the shot put.

This participation is part of the athletes' preparation programme for upcoming competitions, foremost among them the Fifth Asian Para Games, scheduled to take place in Japan this October. — ONA

Stones to exit Man City after golden decade

LONDON: John Stones said he had lived "all my dreams out" as he announced on Tuesday he would be leaving Manchester City at the end of the season after 10 trophy-laden years at the Etihad.

The defender, 31, joined City from Everton in 2016, becoming manager Pep Guardiola's second signing, and has made 293 appearances to date, scoring 19 goals.

The England international has won six Premier League titles and the Champions League among multiple trophies and there may be more silverware to come this season, with City chasing a domestic treble. Guardiola's men, who have already won the League Cup, are battling with Arsenal for the Premier League title and will face Chelsea in next month's FA Cup final. "It has been my home for the past 10 years and it will be my home for the rest of my life," Stones said. — AFP



Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Josh Hazlewood celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Delhi Capitals' KL Rahul, caught out by Jitesh Sharma. — Reuters

Hazlewood, Kumar spark Delhi collapse as RCB win

NEW DELHI: Josh Hazlewood and Bhuvneshwar Kumar wreaked havoc as defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru skittled out Delhi Capitals for 75 before romping to a nine-wicket victory in the IPL on Monday.

Kumar and Hazlewood took three wickets each in the first four overs to reduce Delhi to 8-6 and effectively end the game as a contest almost immediately.

Delhi avoided the tournament's lowest-ever total of 49 and also scraped past their own low of 66 before being bowled out in 16.3 overs.

"Even I don't know what happened," said Delhi skipper Axar Patel.

"That's why they say you have to be on your toes in cricket. We have to move on from this match."

Bengaluru veteran and Delhi's favourite son Virat Kohli, who was the star attraction in his home city, made an unbeaten 23 to guide the team home in just 6.3 overs.

Kohli, who passed 9,000 IPL runs during his innings, hit two sixes to wrap up the game, with Devdutt Padikkal at the other end on 34.

Bengaluru, who won their first-ever IPL



Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Josh Hazlewood in action against Delhi Capitals. — Reuters

title last year, consolidated second place in the table behind leaders Punjab Kings.

Kumar bowled opener Sahil Parakh for a duck with the second ball of the match after Bengaluru elected to field first.

Hazlewood struck with successive balls in the next over as he took down previous-match centurion KL Rahul, for one, and Sameer Rizvi before Tristan Stubbs avoided the hat-trick ball.

"I just followed Bhuvu," said Hazlewood, who finished with figures of 4-12.

"There was a little bit there in the first six overs. It was a little bit up and down."

Kumar dismissed Stubbs, for five, and Axar (0) in the next over to leave the Delhi dugout stunned by a disastrous batting performance on the same pitch they posted 264-2 in their previous match, albeit in a losing cause.

Abishek Porel and David Miller attempted to stop the rot in a stand of 35.

South Africa's Miller made 19 before he fell to Rasikh Salam.

A dust storm then halted play for around 10 minutes.

The storm settled and Delhi debutant Kyle Jamieson hit a six to send his team past Bengaluru's record low of 49 against Kolkata Knight Riders in 2017.

Jamieson's hit over the deep square-leg fence met with loud cheers from the home crowd but their joy was short-lived.

Hazlewood bowled Porel for 30 to wrap up Delhi's innings.

Delhi's South African quick Lungi Ngidi missed the game after he suffered a concussion on Saturday. — AFP

Thunder sweep Suns, Denver avoids ouster, Pistons on the brink

WASHINGTON: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 31 points and the defending champion Oklahoma City Thunder swept into the second round of the NBA playoffs on Monday with a 131-122 victory at Phoenix.

The top-seeded Thunder captured the Western Conference best-of-seven series 4-0, completing a third consecutive sweep in the opening round.

"We just came in ready," said Gilgeous-Alexander. "Love to play basketball, a group full of great kids that have fun together."

"We do it for each other. None of us are selfish. We all want the next man to succeed and when you have those three things and put them together you get success."

Oklahoma City will meet either the Los Angeles Lakers or Houston Rockets in a second-round series. The Lakers lead that matchup 3-1.

"Ultimately, we've got to get better in the days between our next opponent," Gilgeous-Alexander said.

The Thunder became the first

team to reach the second round on the same night the upstart Orlando Magic pushed Eastern Conference top seed Detroit to the brink of elimination with a 94-88 triumph to seize a 3-1 series advantage.

The Denver Nuggets avoided an early exit as Serbian center Nikola Jokic had a triple double with 27 points, 16 assists and 12 rebounds to spark the hosts over Minnesota 125-113, pulling Denver within 3-2 against the Timberwolves.

Gilgeous-Alexander, the reigning NBA Most Valuable Player who had a playoff career high 42 points in a game three victory, added eight assists to spark a visiting Thunder squad that boasts the top post-season scoring attack and defensive statistics.

Chet Holmgren added 24 points and 12 rebounds for the Thunder, who also had 22 points from Ajay Mitchell and 18 points and 12 rebounds from Isaiah Hartenstein.

Devin Booker led Phoenix with 24 points.



Oklahoma City Thunder's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander (2) attempts a basket against the Phoenix Suns during game four of the first round of the 2026 NBA Playoffs at Mortgage Matchup Center. — Imagn Images

At Orlando, Desmond Bane scored 22 points, hitting 5-of-10 shots from three-point range to lead the Magic, who can send off the Pistons with a victory on Wednesday in Detroit.

Franz Wagner scored 19 points for Orlando before being benched with a sore right calf while Paolo Banchero added 18 and grabbed eight rebounds.

The Pistons, whose 60-22 record topped the East, must win three in a row to avoid an epic ouster at the hands of eighth seed Orlando, which went 45-37.

Cade Cunningham led Detroit with 25 points while Tobias Harris added 20 for the Pistons, who committed 20 turnovers, twice as many as Orlando.

The Magic have not reached the second round of the playoffs since 2010, dropping six series in the first round and missing the post-season nine times.

The Pistons have not reached the second round since 2008, dropping four first-round matchups and missing the playoffs 13 times.

BANK OPEN FOR BANE

Bane banked in a three-point shot with 1:16 remaining to give the Magic a 92-86 lead and Orlando added late free throws to seal Detroit's fate, the Pistons going more than five minutes without a basket from the floor.

At Denver, the Nuggets forced a game six at Minnesota on Thursday with a blowout triumph thanks to three-time NBA MVP Jokic and his teammates.

Jamal Murray scored 24 points, Spencer Jones had 20 and Cameron Johnson added 18 for Denver while Julius Randle led Minnesota with 27 points.

"We did a good job of bringing the energy for 48 minutes," Murray said. "We've got to be poised and relaxed when we go to their building."

The T-Wolves were without two top guards. Anthony Edwards is out with a bone bruise and hyper-extended left knee while Donte DiVincenzo will miss the remainder of the playoffs with a ruptured right Achilles tendon. — AFP

SPORTS

PREMIER LEAGUE



Manchester United's Benjamin Sesko celebrates scoring their second goal against Brentford at Old Trafford. — Reuters

CARRICK HAILS CASEMIRO AND FERNANDES AFTER VITAL MAN UTD WIN

MANCHESTER: Michael Carrick saluted Casemiro and Bruno Fernandes after Manchester United's midfield stars inspired the 2-1 win over Brentford that moved them closer to Champions League qualification. Casemiro headed United in front in the early stages at Old Trafford after Fernandes's corner was nodded on by Harry Maguire. Fernandes helped United double their lead just before half-time with a surging run and pin-point pass to Benjamin Sesko, who fired home in clinical style. Carrick's side survived Mathias Jensen's late strike to secure a second successive victory, cementing their grip on third place in the Premier League.

Brazilian veteran Casemiro, who is set to leave when his contract expires at the end of the season, now has four goals in his last six games, underlining his enduring value to United. Fernandes is even more important, the United captain making his 19th assist of the campaign to move within one of the single-season Premier League record currently held by Thierry Henry and Kevin De Bruyne. Carrick knows the value of his midfield pair and the United interim boss said: "Casemiro has scored some big goals for us. Bruno and Casemiro have a good relationship. "We have scored nearly every game and Bruno is a big part of that. He could have maybe had one more assist and scored himself." United now need just two points from their last four games to seal their place in Europe's elite club competition for the first time since 2023-24. "It wasn't a given, at certain stages we weren't favourites. Now we are in a good position and want to finish as high in the league as we want to keep pushing for that," Carrick said. — AFP



Manchester United's Casemiro scores their first goal past Brentford's Caoimhin Kelleher. — Reuters



Italy's Jannik Sinner in action during his Round of 16 match against Britain's Cameron Norrie at the Madrid Open. — Reuters



Russia's Mirra Andreeva celebrates after winning her quarterfinal match against Canada's Leylah Fernandez. — Reuters

Sinner surges into quarters, Andreeva in Madrid semis

JANNIK SINNER suggested the Madrid Open organisers should reconsider their tournament scheduling to avoid late-night finishes like the one Rafael Jodar experienced in the third round on Sunday. In a rare 11:00 am start on Tuesday, Sinner moved past British 19th seed Cameron Norrie 6-2, 7-5 to reach the quarterfinals. He explained he was put on first on Manolo Santana Stadium so that Jodar, his potential next opponent, would be scheduled in the afternoon to give the Spaniard time to recover from his three-set win over Joao Fonseca that ended at 1:00 am on Monday morning. "It's quite unusual for me," Sinner told Tennis TV about his early kick-off. "I don't know the last time I played at 11. But for me it doesn't matter what time. I try to do my best. There was a question if it would be me or Jodar to play at 4. But I think it's right he plays at 4, because he finished very, very late. "But at the same time, I feel like we need to make some adjustments to the scheduling of the day. Two matches (starting) from 8 pm is very late. "Even though you have one day in between. But still it's very, very late. "You finish at 1:30 am, and you need to eat, you need to have treatment, so it's very late. But we try to adapt ourselves, our bodies, our minds, so from my side it was a

good performance today." In his first-ever meeting with Norrie, Sinner won 81 per cent of his first-serve points, and 63 per cent of the points behind his second delivery on his way to notching a 25th consecutive victory at the Masters 1000 level. Sinner, who is bidding to reach the semifinals for the first time in the Spanish capital, will next face 19-year-old Jodar in what will be a highly-anticipated last-eight showdown. The Italian world number one is just the second man in series history to win his first 20 Masters 1000 matches of the season, joining Novak Djokovic, who achieved that feat twice, in 2011 and 2015. Later in the day, Jodar's dream run on home soil continued with a convincing 7-5, 6-0 thumping of world number 66 Vit Kopriva. The Madrid-born wildcard advanced to the biggest quarterfinal of his young career, and improved to 12-1 on clay so far this season. "I'm super happy with my level today and with my level this in this tournament," Jodar said, who once again had Real Madrid footballer Jude Bellingham supporting him from the stands. "It's always special to play at home in front of many people that you know and they come to support you."

RUUD EDGES OUT TSITSIPAS
Casper Ruud fought back from the brink to

keep his title defence alive with a 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/2), 7-6 (7/3) victory over former finalist Stefanos Tsitsipas. In a high-quality three-hour contest, Tsitsipas led 5-3 in the decider, holding two match points, and served for the victory at 5-4, but Ruud, who was 0/11 in break points up until then, found a way to take down the Greek's serve and went on to clinch the tie-break. "I was on the brink of being on the way home already, so just really happy and proud the way I fought back," said the Norwegian 12th seed. Last week's Barcelona champion Arthur Fils advanced to the quarterfinals at the Caja Magica with a 6-3, 6-4 win over Argentine 25th seed Tomas Martin Etcheverry. Fils has made the quarterfinals in six of the seven tournaments he has contested so far in 2026. The Frenchman will take on Jiri Lehecka, who beat sixth-seeded Italian Lorenzo Musetti 6-3, 6-3, for a place in the last four. In WTA action, ninth-seeded Mirra Andreeva gave herself an early birthday gift, defeating Canadian Leylah Fernandez 7-6(7/1), 6-3 to reach her first Madrid semifinal. The Russian teenager, who turns 19 on Wednesday, awaits defending champion Aryna Sabalenka or American Hailey Baptiste, A recent champion in Linz, Andreeva improved her clay-court record to 11-1 this season. — AFP

Oman beach soccer team to face Iran in final

MUSCAT: Oman beach football team will face Iran on Wednesday in the final match of the Sixth Asian Beach Games, currently being hosted by the city of Sanya, China, from April 22 to 30. The match will kick off at 4:30 pm (Oman Time), preceded by the third-place playoff between Saudi Arabia and Palestine at 2 pm. Oman beach football team secured its place in the final after defeating Saudi Arabia 5-4 in the semifinal. Iran advanced to the final following a 9-1 victory over Palestine. In the match against Saudi Arabia, goals for Oman team were scored by Sami al Balushi (three goals), Abdullah al Salti and Khalid al Arami. The goals for the Saudi team were scored by Mohammed al Ajmi, Nayef Nakil, Waleed al Yaqubi and Majed al Shahrani.



OMAN BEACH VOLLEYBALL TEAM TO PLAY FOR BRONZE MEDAL
Meanwhile, Oman beach volleyball team lost to Iran 2-1 in a strong match in the semifinal. Oman will play for bronze medal now in the third and fourth place match. The scores of the sets were 21-17, 15-21, 15-13, in a match during which the national team players showed a distinguished competitive performance despite the difficult climatic conditions, so the team only had to play a match to determine the third and fourth place. The national team's technical staff is led by coach Badr bin Said al Subhi, while the team's roster includes players Mazin bin Sulaiman al Hashmi and Hood bin Rashid al Jalboobi, who continue to represent the Sultanate of Oman in this continental event. — ONA

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
8,228.198

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$103.41
BRENT \$104.64
LIGHT \$100.30



SHORTTAKES



OPAZ team has engaged with companies specialising in biopharmaceutical production and advanced storage infrastructure.

OMAN COURTS CHINESE PHARMA INVESTMENT

BEIJING: The Sultanate of Oman is intensifying efforts to attract high-tech pharmaceutical and medical device investments from China, as part of a broader strategy to localise advanced industries and strengthen its industrial base.

A delegation from the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) is currently visiting China to explore opportunities in biopharmaceuticals, medical technologies, logistics and petroleum storage.

The delegation, led by Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, includes officials representing economic zones, Khazaen Economic City and Sohar Port.

During the visit, the team has engaged with government entities and leading Chinese companies specialising in biopharmaceutical production and advanced storage infrastructure.

Field visits to industrial zones and state-of-the-art medical equipment manufacturing facilities have provided insights into China's technological capabilities and industrial ecosystems.

Discussions have focused on potential partnerships, technology transfer and the localisation of high-value manufacturing activities within Oman's economic zones and free zones.

Chinese firms have expressed positive interest in investing in Oman, particularly in light of the incentives offered across its economic and industrial zones.

These include competitive regulatory frameworks, strategic location advantages and integrated logistics infrastructure, which collectively position the Sultanate of Oman as a gateway to regional and global markets.

The visit underscores Oman's targeted approach to attracting quality investments in high-impact sectors, particularly those aligned with diversification objectives and knowledge-based economic growth. — ONA

Nama scales ~~£~~1 billion pipeline, cuts water loss

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

NAMA Water Services (NWS), the state-owned integrated water and wastewater utility of the Sultanate of Oman, has accelerated infrastructure delivery and operational efficiency, managing a project portfolio exceeding RO 1 billion in awards while completing projects worth RO 170 million in 2025, according to its latest annual report.

The utility's performance underscores a dual focus on asset expansion and service reliability, aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

The company reported measurable gains in network efficiency, including a 4.16 per cent reduction in water losses and 98 per cent network availability, reflecting strengthened asset management and leak mitigation strategies.

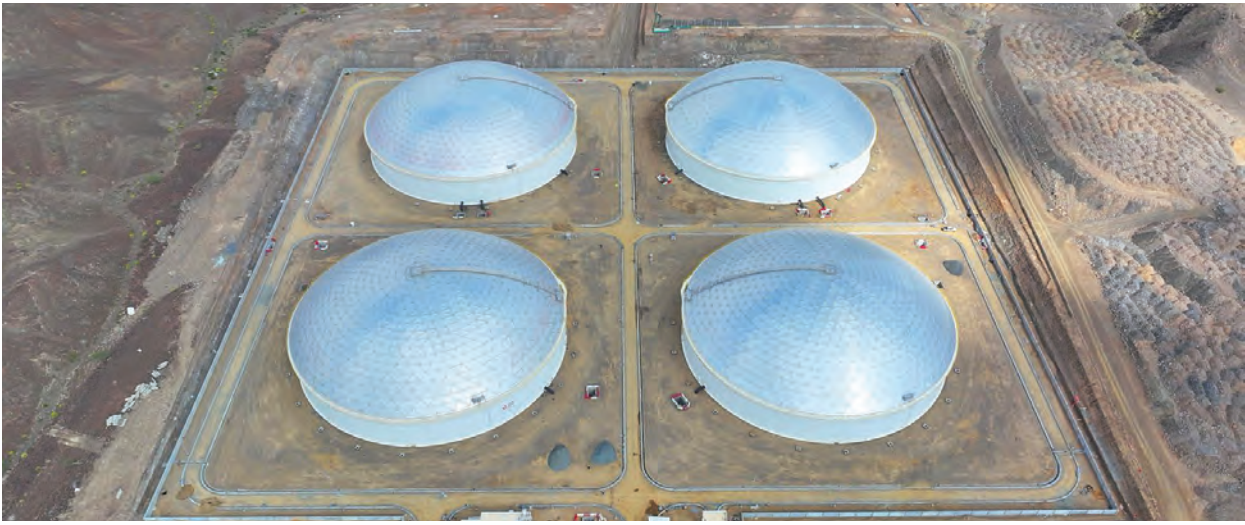
STRONGER ASSET BASE, EXPANDING NETWORK
NWS continues to oversee one of the Sultanate of Oman's largest utility infrastructure programmes. Its asset base now includes 49,633 water assets and 1,772 wastewater assets, supported by 25,900 km of water networks and 5,200 km of wastewater pipelines.

The company floated contracts valued at RO 544 million during the year, reinforcing its role as a key driver of capital expenditure in the utilities sector.

Network coverage remained broadly stable for water at around 72.4 per cent, while wastewater coverage increased to 31.7 per cent, indicating gradual expansion in sanitation services.

Operationally, NWS exceeded several key performance indicators. The value of work done reached 112 per cent of target, while milestone execution stood at 108 per cent, signalling accelerated project delivery.

A central pillar of NWS's strategy has been the integration of advanced technologies. During



NWS asset base now includes 49,633 water assets and 1,772 wastewater assets, supported by 25,900 km of water networks and 5,200 km of wastewater pipelines.

The utility's performance underscores a dual focus on asset expansion and service reliability, aligned with Oman Vision 2040. The company reported measurable gains in network efficiency, including a 4.16 per cent reduction in water losses and 98 per cent network availability, reflecting strengthened asset management and leak mitigation strategies.

2025, the company expanded smart meter deployment, strengthened leak detection using satellite-based tools and noise loggers, and intensified preventive maintenance programmes.

These initiatives contributed to improved billing accuracy and reduced commercial losses, alongside enhanced visibility over network performance.

The report also highlights rehabilitation works across ageing pipelines, particularly in high-leakage zones.

Water supply reliability improved further, with continuity rising to 98.53 per cent, while compliance with Omani drinking water standards reached 99.79 per cent, reflecting high-quality output across the network.

WATER DELIVERY TRENDS
Despite efficiency gains, total water supply volumes declined to 445.57 million cubic metres in 2025, compared with 488.78 million cubic metres in 2023, indicating tighter resource management and reduced losses.

Conversely, water delivered increased to 287.58 million cubic metres, pointing to improved distribution efficiency and system optimisation.

WASTEWATER SEGMENT SHOWS MIXED PERFORMANCE

In wastewater operations, treatment plants maintained strong performance, with efficiency levels around 98 per cent and high compliance with environmental standards.

Treated wastewater utilisation rose modestly by 3 per cent, while the number of beneficiaries using recycled water increased by 36.4 per cent, from 228 to 311 users.

However, inflows declined to 95.11 million cubic metres in 2025, compared with nearly 100 million cubic metres in previous years, suggesting variability in demand or inflow patterns.

Treated wastewater delivered also fell to 92.93 million cubic metres, although utilisation volumes improved to 49.22 million cubic metres, reflecting better reuse efficiency.

SUSTAINABILITY AND ESG ALIGNMENT
Nama reported greenhouse gas emissions of 286,028 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent, alongside ongoing efforts to improve energy efficiency and reduce environmental impact.

The company emphasised its alignment with ESG principles, highlighting contributions to national water research, carbon reduction initiatives and sustainable infrastructure planning.

PET waste recycler targets 10,000 tonnes annually in Oman by end-2027

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

Green Muscat Sustainability Solutions, an Omani-British venture, has announced the successful launch of its PET waste recycling facility at Al Rusayl Industrial City in Muscat Governorate — the latest in a growing wave of resource recovery initiatives supporting the Sultanate of Oman's expanding circular economy.

According to Yasha Vassell, CEO of Green Muscat, the PET waste stream primarily comprises post-consumer beverage bottles, including water and soft drink containers, along with secondary components such as caps and labels, which are separated during processing. Currently, around 15 tonnes of PET waste per day is processed into valuable secondary raw materials that can be reintroduced into Oman's production cycle. This initiative,



To ensure a sustainable supply chain, Green Muscat is working with hotels, businesses and small-scale collectors to establish a unified PET waste collection system.

he said, not only reduces environmental pressure but also supports the development of a domestic circular economy. "Our vision is to transform waste into a strategic asset for the national economy. By the end of 2027,

Green Muscat aims to process up to 10,000 metric tonnes of recyclable waste annually — material that would otherwise end up in landfills or the ocean — and channel it back into productive use".

To ensure a consistent and sustainable supply chain, Green Muscat is working with hotels, businesses and small-scale collectors to establish a unified PET waste collection system.

"We have reduced recyclable waste sent to landfill from these hotels by over 80 per cent", said Ceyhan Iltas, Chief Marketing Officer. "In total, we have collected more than 170 tonnes of recyclable materials, with an average segregation rate exceeding 90 per cent. These figures place our partner hotels among the most sustainability-focused operators globally".

At the same time, the company is building local capacity to retain the economic value of recycling within Oman, according to Reza Hassani, Chief Operating Officer. "We have established a network of 43 small collectors across the country, ensuring that recyclable materials gathered locally are also processed locally", he noted.

In parallel, Green Muscat is collaborating with leading facilities management firms to recover PET from mixed waste streams, further improving resource recovery rates.

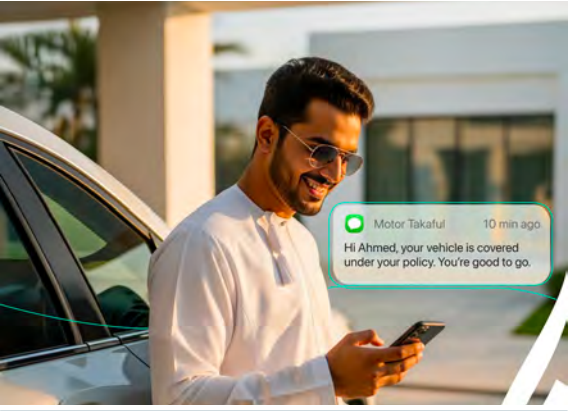
Secondary waste such as caps and labels made from polypropylene (PP) and polyethylene (PE) is currently being stored. "We have ordered machinery to convert this into value-added products for the Omani agricultural sector, which will be announced soon", Vassell added.

While initiatives like Green Muscat's mark important progress in waste recovery and environmental protection, they currently account for less than 2 per cent of PET waste generated nationwide.

The bulk still ends up in landfills, underscoring the need to scale up collection, segregation and processing efforts to fully harness this valuable resource.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



Offered in partnership with Takaful Oman, the portfolio includes Himayati My Health Plus, Motor Takaful and Takaful Elite Life.

MUZN ISLAMIC BANKING SUPPORTS EVERYDAY LIFE WITH BANCATAKAFUL PROTECTION

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman’s (NBO) Muzn Islamic Banking continues to strengthen its range of Sharia compliant solutions with its suite of Bancatakaful plans, designed to support customers across their health, life and motor protection needs.

Offered in partnership with Takaful Oman, the portfolio includes Himayati My Health Plus, Motor Takaful and Takaful Elite Life. Together, these plans address different aspects of everyday protection while remaining aligned with Sharia principles. The plans are available across the Sultanate of Oman, with a focus on making protection more accessible through simple enrolment, flexible payment options and coverage that fits naturally into customers’ lives.

Commenting on the offering, Salima bint Obaid bin Issa al Marzoqi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer at NBO, said, “At Muzn Islamic Banking, we understand that protection is not just about financial security, but about supporting people in their daily lives and responsibilities. Through our Bancatakaful plans, we continue to offer solutions that are practical, accessible and aligned with the values that matter to our customers”.

Each plan is built around a specific need while maintaining a consistent standard of Sharia-compliant protection. Himayati My Health Plus offers comprehensive health coverage with 24/7 global access, designed to support individuals and families with easy enrolment and flexible premium payment options on a monthly or annual basis.

Motor Takaful provides reliable, comprehensive protection at competitive rates, covering both drivers and passengers. The plan includes medical treatment, family compensation and protection against natural disasters, offering reassurance for everyday mobility.

Takaful Elite Life is designed for customers seeking broader, long-term protection, with 24/7 worldwide coverage and a wide range of benefits, including personal accident protection, medical emergencies, travel-related risks and personal liability. The plan also includes complimentary travel coverage, adding an extra layer of convenience and security.

Across all plans, customers benefit from straightforward enrolment and flexible payment structures, ensuring that protection remains accessible and easy to manage. This reflects Muzn Islamic Banking’s continued focus on developing solutions that respond to real customer needs, combining Sharia-compliant principles with practical, everyday relevance.

Sohar International enters new partnership with Riyada

MUSCAT: Sohar International announced a strategic cooperation agreement with (Riyada), SME Development Authority, under the “Ta’awn” programme launched by the Authority. The initiative aims to empower this vital sector through an advanced ecosystem of financial and non-financial solutions, designed to accelerate the growth, expansion and sustainability of enterprises.

Sohar International’s partnership with the public sector reinforces its commitment to supporting the core pillars of the national economy, in alignment with Oman Vision 2040 objectives.

It also reflects the bank’s targeted initiatives and services dedicated to empowering Omani entrepreneurs



Sohar International enters a new partnership with ‘Riyada’ to accelerate SME growth under a collaborative programme

Toyota Fortuner: A masterclass in excellence

THE Toyota Fortuner continues to stand as a definitive icon of versatility, seamlessly bridging the gap between rugged off-road capability and sophisticated urban style.

As a vehicle built to excel on all levels, the Fortuner remains the preferred choice for those who seek a reliable partner for both their professional success and their personal adventures across the diverse landscapes of the Sultanate of Oman.

DYNAMIC PERFORMANCE TAILORED TO EVERY TERRAIN

The driving experience of the Toyota Fortuner is defined by its impressive engine lineup, designed to meet the specific needs of every driver. For those focused on efficient city commuting and smooth weekend getaways, the 2.7-litre four-cylinder engine offers a responsive 164 HP and 25.0 Kg-m of torque.

Meanwhile, the formidable 4.0-litre V6 engine provides a more exhilarating performance, delivering 235 HP and 38.3 Kg-m of torque to conquer harsher terrains and open highways with ease.

Both engines work in perfect harmony with a sophisticated 6-speed automatic transmission, ensuring that gear shifts remain seamless while optimising fuel economy across every drive, from coastal roads to desert dunes.

A PREMIUM CABIN DESIGNED FOR COMPLETE COMFORT

Inside the Fortuner, occupants are greeted by a refined environment where every detail has been thoughtfully curated. The cabin features plush leather seating and a leather-wood finished steering wheel equipped with paddle shifters, putting both luxury and control directly into the driver’s



The Fortuner remains the preferred choice for those who seek a reliable partner.

hands.

Practicality is woven into the sophisticated design through convenient features like the power back door system for easy loading and a cool glove box to keep beverages refreshed.

This sense of first-class comfort is further enhanced by an intuitive navigation system and a 6-speaker audio system that provides an immersive sound experience, ensuring that every journey is as entertaining as it is comfortable.

COMPREHENSIVE SAFETY

Safety remains a cornerstone of the Fortuner’s enduring popularity, backed by a comprehensive suite of advanced protection systems. The vehicle is engineered with a robust SRS airbag system that includes

driver, passenger, side, curtain and knee airbags to provide a protective shield for all passengers.

Stability and control are maintained through features such as the Anti-lock Braking System (ABS) and Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), while the Tyre Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS) constantly tracks wheel performance for added peace of mind.

Whether navigating busy urban intersections or exploring remote mountain paths, the Fortuner ensures that safety and confidence are always part of the adventure.

With its unique blend of strength, elegance and intelligent technology, the Toyota Fortuner remains more than just an SUV; it is a companion for those who dare to explore and strive to excel in every aspect of their lives.

Abraj posts record ICV, talent development in 2025

MUSCAT: Abraj Energy Services, Oman’s leading drilling and oilfield services provider, announced a year of transformative impact regarding its In-Country Value (ICV) contributions and national workforce development for the 2025 fiscal year.

By prioritising local economic integration, Abraj continues to solidify its role as a cornerstone of the Sultanate of Oman’s energy sector and a key driver of the objectives set forth in Oman Vision 2040.

Reflecting a consistent upwards trajectory in local participation, the Company achieved a certified ICV index of 28.2% in 2025, a strategic advancement from the 27.9% recorded in the previous year.

This growth is anchored by a robust local procurement strategy, with spending on Omani goods and services reaching approximately \$125 million. This capital injection has been instrumental in cultivating a resilient local supply chain and empowering Omani enterprises to compete



Abraj achieved ICV index of 28.2% in 2025.

at a global standard.

Beyond financial investment, Abraj has deepened its engagement with the local business ecosystem through a rigorous supplier development Programme.

In 2025, the Company conducted over 40 structured vendor visits and site engagements designed to optimise

performance and foster long-term technical partnerships with Omani suppliers. These initiatives ensure that the value generated within the energy sector remains within the national economy, supporting the growth of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

Eng Saif al Hamhami, Chief Executive Officer of Abraj, stated: “Our commitment to In-Country Value is a strategic imperative that transcends mere compliance.

By investing in local capabilities, strengthening our partnerships with Omani suppliers and creating high-tier opportunities for national talent, Abraj is building a sustainable foundation for long-term value creation that supports Oman’s broader economic diversification goals”.

A primary pillar of this strategy is the development of a world-class national workforce. Abraj successfully maintained a distinguished Omanisation rate of 93% throughout 2025, reflecting a deep-seated investment in specialised training and career progression for Omani professionals.

and amplifying their impact across the economic landscape.

The agreement was signed by Halima bint Rashid al Zari, Chairperson of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (Riyada) and Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International.

The signing ceremony took place at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Muscat Governorate, under the auspices of Ahmed bin Jaafar al Musalmi, Governor of the Central Bank of Oman. The event was attended by a distinguished group of leaders from the Omani banking sector, along with senior officials.

Commenting on the partnership,

Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, stated: “As one of the partners in economic empowerment, we closely follow the developmental journey of SMEs, which now exceed 270,000 enterprises.

This has firmly embedded their importance within Sohar International’s approach, where their impact extends beyond expanding the economic base to broader social dimensions as well. Our partnership with ‘Riyada’, a key governmental enabling framework, represents an integrated approach that provides growth enablers within a supportive legislative environment.

SHORTTAKES



The month-long initiative will train more than 50 participants aged between 25 and 34.

SOHAR programme targets youth skills in clean energy

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

SOHAR Port and Freezone has launched a Sustainability and Renewable Energy Programme in collaboration with the Youth Centre, aimed at equipping young Omanis with the skills required for the global energy transition.

The month-long initiative will train more than 50 participants aged between 25 and 34, including graduates, professionals, jobseekers and entrepreneurs, with a focus on building capacity in the clean energy sector.

The programme combines theoretical instruction with practical application through workshops, scenario-based learning and real-world case studies.

Aligned with Oman Vision 2040, the curriculum covers renewable energy fundamentals, green hydrogen applications, energy storage, value chains, integration strategies, efficiency measures, carbon markets, carbon capture utilisation and storage (CCUS), fuel cells and sustainable mobility.

Participants will develop the ability to assess energy systems from technical, environmental and economic perspectives, while strengthening their understanding of carbon management and innovation in scalable clean energy solutions.

Said al Balushi, Administration and Government Relations Manager at SOHAR Port and Freezone, said the initiative represents a targeted investment in national capabilities to support the energy transition. He noted that providing hands-on exposure to renewable energy and carbon management will help strengthen the talent pipeline for sustainable industries and economic diversification.

Oman explores economic zone ties with Saudi Arabia

BUSINESS REPORTER
RIYADH, APRIL 28

Qais bin Mohammed Al Yousef, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), is currently visiting the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to explore opportunities to enhance economic cooperation between the two brotherly countries in the fields of economic zones, as well as the industrial and logistics sectors.

During the visit, Al Yousef and the accompanying delegation met with Eng Khalid bin Abdulaziz al Falih, Minister of Investment and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Economic Cities and Special Zones Authority (ECZA), with Mazen al Saleh, Acting Secretary General of the ECZA, in attendance as well.

The meeting reviewed ways to enhance economic and investment cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, particularly in the areas of special economic zones, free zones, and industrial cities.

Both sides also reviewed the latest developments of the Economic Zone at Al Dhahirah (EZAD) Governorate, located near the Oman-Saudi border, which is witnessing significant progress in infrastructure works.

They emphasised the expected role of the zone in boosting economic activity between the two countries, as efforts continue to position it as a key logistics and industrial hub.

Al Yousef also met with Bandar bin Ibrahim Al Khorayef,



Qais bin Mohammed Al Yousef, OPAPZ Chairman, is currently visiting the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to explore opportunities for enhanced economic cooperation between the two countries.

Minister of Industry and Mineral Resources and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Saudi Authority for Industrial Cities and Technology Zones (MODON), where discussions focused on enhancing joint cooperation in the industrial sector. He also met with Sultan Al Marshad, CEO of the Saudi Fund for Development, to explore cooperation in development projects financed by the Fund.

Additionally, Al Yousef met with Abdullah bin Mohammed Aal Sadhan, Vice Governor of Operations at the Zakat, Tax and Customs Authority.

Al Yousef and the accompanying delegation also visited several Saudi companies. The delegation met with Prince Turki bin Abdullah bin Abdulrahman al Saud, Founder and Chairman of Board of Directors of Dar Al Riyadh, in the presence of the Abdullah al Mustaneer, CEO of the company.

During the meeting, Al Yousef shed light on the OPAPZ's role in attracting investments to special economic zones, free zones, and industrial cities in the Sultanate of Oman, as well as the incentives offered to investors, the competitive environment, and the diversity of investment sectors across the zones under its supervision.

The accompanying delegation included officials from the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), Oman Investment Authority, the General Administration of Customs, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Oman Logistics Center at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

In 2025, the OPAPZ launched tenders for the implementation of the dry port and veterinary quarantine facility (Package 3), as well as the administrative and commercial complex (Package 4) within the Economic Zone at Al Dhahirah.

The Economic Zone at Al Dhahirah, established under Royal Decree 87/2025, spans an area of 388 square kilometres.

The zone was developed to stimulate cross-border trade between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, support economic development and diversification, open new opportunities for the Omani and GCC economies, and leverage the zone's competitive advantages and strategic location, situated approximately 20 kilometres from the Rub Al Khali border crossing between Oman and Saudi Arabia.

Oman and Russia trade surges as cooperation deepens

MUSCAT: Economic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Russian Federation have gained notable momentum, underpinned by a sharp rise in bilateral trade and expanding sectoral cooperation. Trade exchange has accelerated significantly, with volumes quadrupling in the early months of 2026, while Russian exports to Oman have increased tenfold, signalling a rapidly evolving commercial partnership.

Maxim Reshetnikov, Minister of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, described Oman as one of Russia's most promising partners in the Middle East, highlighting the growing complementarity between the two economies.

He noted that Russian exports, particularly wheat and barley, are contributing to strengthening Oman's food security, alongside a broader range of products that have enabled Russian firms to establish a stronger foothold in the Omani market.

At the same time, Russia continues to import chemical products and petroleum derivatives from Oman, while high-quality Omani



Trade exchange has accelerated significantly, with volumes quadrupling in the early months of 2026.

perfumes are gaining traction among Russian consumers.

Reshetnikov emphasised that Russia remains an attractive economic partner with a competitive and open economy, pointing to IMF data indicating that the country ranked fourth globally in 2025. Despite external challenges, Russia recorded GDP growth

exceeding 10 per cent between 2023 and 2025, outperforming many G20 economies and reinforcing its position as a reliable partner for long-term cooperation.

He added that Oman has emerged as an important investment partner, with joint projects spanning logistics, finance, information technology and agriculture. Russia is also prioritising the development of its technology sector through a comprehensive support framework that includes startup grants, tax incentives, accessible financing and support for initial public offerings.

Energy remains a central pillar of cooperation, encompassing both hydrocarbons and renewables. Reshetnikov underscored Russia's technical expertise in energy infrastructure development and modernisation, noting opportunities for collaboration as Oman advances solar, wind and green hydrogen projects. He pointed to the potential application of artificial intelligence in areas such as urban planning, water management and climate monitoring.

In food security, Russia aims to expand

exports of grains, poultry and other food products, while strengthening ties in fisheries and fish processing. He also highlighted prospects for cooperation in education, with Russia offering internationally recognised programmes at comparatively lower cost, creating opportunities to attract more Omani students.

In healthcare, Russia is positioning itself as a partner in advanced treatment and medical research, with scope for joint centres and medical tourism initiatives. Tourism, meanwhile, is emerging as a key growth sector, supported by government plans to invest more than 450 billion rubles by 2030.

The visa-free travel agreement introduced last July has already contributed to a 13 per cent rise in Russian visitors to Oman, while the number of Omani tourists travelling to Russia has doubled.

Cooperation is also expanding at the regional level, including the launch of direct flights between Muscat and Sochi and the promotion of tailored tourism offerings under the "Discover Russia" brand. — ONA

OIL PRICING

Saudi may cut June oil prices



Saudi Arabia is expected to lower June crude prices to Asia as spot premiums ease and demand softens following recent supply disruptions. Arab Light differentials could fall significantly from May levels, reflecting shifting market sentiment.

Uncertainty persists among Asian buyers as supply conditions and pricing expectations fluctuate after prolonged geopolitical tensions. — Reuters

MONETARY POLICY

BoJ keeps rates steady amidst pressure



Bank of Japan (BoJ) held its key interest rate at 0.75 per cent following its latest policy meeting, in line with expectations.

However, some board members called for tightening amidst rising inflation risks linked to Middle East tensions. The decision underscores a cautious approach as policymakers balance economic stability with emerging price pressures. — Reuters

CURRENCY MARKETS

Dollar edges higher against yuan



The US dollar strengthened slightly against the Chinese yuan, rising to 6.8589 in trading as currency movements remained within official limits.

China's exchange rate system allows the yuan to fluctuate within a 2% band around a daily reference rate. The modest shift reflects ongoing market adjustments amidst global currency and economic developments. — Reuters

OPINION

Dr, Eng and BA: The quiet rise of credentialism



AZIZA AL MUGHAIRY
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The writer is a Muscat-based independent researcher

WE have developed a curious habit in our professional circles. It has become increasingly common to see “Eng”, “BA” or “Dr” prefixed to names on business cards and social media, almost as if these titles were etched onto one’s birth certificate.

Such an alphabet soup of credentials has evolved into a potent form of social signalling; a performance of competency that extends beyond professional astuteness and into our personal lives. Within the framework of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of institutionalised cultural capital, titles often function as a form of symbolic credit. They are used to claim authority and enforce professional closure, effectively creating a barrier that excludes those without the title, regardless of their actual competence.

Countries classified as late developers, or those that industrialised relatively late, refer to economies that began their industrialisation and economic modernisation significantly later than the original nations that led earlier waves of industrialisation.

In these late-developer economies, the expansion of education has been one of the most remarkable aspects of this transformation. Near-universal literacy and widespread access to higher education stand as clear markers of progress; yet such rapid advancement can also bring unintended consequences. One such consequence is that when a state’s education system expands too rapidly and the labour market is unprepared

to absorb all these individuals, competition intensifies, driving people to acquire more credentials in order to differentiate themselves and signal employability. Ronald Dore, an English sociologist, famously wrote The Diploma Disease. He observed decades ago that an increasing emphasis on credentials can point to something deeper than ambition, often leading to structural imbalances within the education-labour market nexus.

There is a fine line between schooling and education; and the faster this is understood at scale, the better our society will be. Schooling refers to the formal structures (ie degrees, certificates, examinations) through which knowledge is delivered and assessed.

Education, by contrast, is the deeper process of acquiring understanding, reasoning, critical thinking and transferable skills. In rapidly expanding systems, the former can begin to overshadow the latter. Over time, this creates an environment in which credentials become proxies for competence rather than reflections of it.

It is within this context that we find ourselves in what might be described as a qualification spiral. Roles that once required only a secondary school certificate now demand undergraduate degrees and increasingly postgraduate ones. This escalation is not always driven by the complexity of the work itself, but by the practical need for employers to filter large volumes of applicants.

Degrees, in this sense, function as a signalling mechanism in an increasingly

Such an alphabet soup of credentials has evolved into a potent form of social signalling; a performance of competency that extends beyond professional astuteness and into our personal lives.

competitive labour market. As sociologists have noted, this is a classic manifestation of credentialism, where there is growing reliance on formal qualifications as indicators of ability, regardless of whether they correspond to real-world skills.

In parallel, the cultural dimension of credentials has become more pronounced.

The prestige of institutions — particularly the preference for transnational over national education — often supersedes the knowledge acquired within them. Titles such as “Dr” or “Eng” are no longer merely professional designations; they are also social markers embedded in identity and perception. In a society that has experienced rapid upwards mobility, credentials can come to symbolise achievement, security and status.

This dynamic has only intensified with the rise of platforms that issue certificates and credentials without necessarily ensuring deep learning or understanding. Online courses, certificates and badges are now more accessible, especially through short and lifelong learning programmes offered by top business schools and universities (eg HBS, LSE, Stanford).

Such developments allow individuals to accumulate credentials at unprecedented speed. While this democratisation of learning is, in many ways, positive, it also contributes to the saturation of the credential landscape. When qualifications become abundant, their ability to differentiate individuals naturally diminishes. For the state, the labour market and employers, this presents a growing challenge.

BERLIN’S FUEL SNAFU MAY OUTLAST PUTIN’S THREATS

PIERRE BRIANCON

The interruption of Kazakh oil flowing through Russia to a key German refinery has raised the spectre of yet another sneaky ploy of Russian president Vladimir Putin to punish Europe. But this should only be a secondary concern to Berlin commuters worrying about their ability to drive their diesel-fuel SUVs on the six-lane highways that criss-cross the city.

The main problem of the Schwedt refinery — which provides 90% of the German capital city’s needs in petroleum products — is that it is stuck in an ownership limbo triggered by the government’s incomplete nationalisation four years ago.

The massive refinery situated 140 kilometres north of the German capital once only processed Russia’s Urals crude oil transported through the Druzhba (“Friendship”) pipeline. It is still legally owned by Russian oil giant Rosneft, but the German government took over the facility after Russia’s war in Ukraine in 2022. Schwedt was placed in trusteeship and not fully nationalised, because of Berlin’s fears that Putin might retaliate by expropriating Russian assets of

German companies. Russian oil is no longer refined in Schwedt, but Germany struck a deal with Kazakhstan in December 2022 to keep crude flowing through the same pipeline.

Kazakh officials have hinted that the pipeline interruption may owe more to Ukraine’s effectiveness in crippling Russian oil facilities than to any ploy from the Russian leader. In that case it should not be lasting. But even if it were, the 1.2 million tonnes of Kazakh oil processed annually only account for less than 20% of Schwedt’s output. Berlin truckers and drivers may not be affected much in the short term.

Of higher concern is the strategic paralysis of the company operating the refinery. Rosneft controls a 54% stake in the facility, Shell another 37.5% and Italy’s ENI a little over 8%. Shell has tried in vain to offload its stake as buyers worry about the legal uncertainty. And Rosneft for now has shown no interest in selling out, sticking to the stance that Germany is violating property rights and international treaties.

The refinery is now processing oil coming from the sea ports of Rostock and Gdansk, but needs sizeable investments to adapt its equipment and processes. — Reuters

Asyad’s Ligentia deal signals logistics shift

AT a time when geography and economics are becoming deeply intertwined, the acquisition of Asyad Group by Ligentia Group should not be seen as a routine business deal. It reflects a deeper shift in how global supply chains are managed, especially under growing pressure from disruptions around critical routes such as the Strait of Hormuz.

The Strait of Hormuz remains one of the most important trade passages in the world. Around 20% of global oil flows through it, along with large volumes of gas and industrial materials. In recent years, however, the importance of the Strait has changed. It is no longer just a physical route. It has become a risk point. Any tension, political, security, or even perceived risk, can immediately affect shipping costs, insurance premiums, and supply chain decisions worldwide.

Because of this, logistics is no longer only about moving goods from one place to another. It is now about managing uncertainty.

To understand where Asyad is heading, it helps to look at how logistics models have evolved. At the simplest level, known as 1PL, a producer delivers directly to the customer. In 2PL, transport companies such as shipping or trucking firms move the goods. In 3PL, companies outsource storage, packing, and delivery to logistics providers.

But the real transformation comes with 4PL, where one company manages the entire supply chain, coordinating multiple logistics providers and using digital systems to control and optimise operations.

The diagram clearly shows this progression, from a simple direct delivery model to a complex system managed through technology and data. This is where Ligentia becomes important. Through its platform, Ligentix, Ligentia provides what is known as a “control tower”.

It allows companies to track shipments in real time, predict delays and make faster decisions. It also



To understand where Asyad is heading, it helps to look at how logistics models have evolved.



DR ZIAD ALZAIDI

The writer is a strategic management & organisational transformation consultant

Asyad’s acquisition of Ligentia is therefore a move into this higher-value layer. It is not only expanding its network; it is upgrading its role, from moving goods to managing supply chains.

connects directly with company systems, making supply chains more transparent and efficient.

This is not just a technical upgrade. It changes how value is created in logistics. In the past, value came mainly from owning assets, ports, ships, warehouses. Today, value is moving towards those who control information.

Asyad’s acquisition of Ligentia is therefore a move into this higher-value layer. It is not only expanding its network; it is upgrading its role, from moving goods to managing supply chains.

This strategy becomes clearer when we consider Asyad’s earlier acquisition of Skybridge Freight Solutions in 2024. That deal strengthened its operational reach in freight forwarding across key global markets. In simple terms, Skybridge improved Asyad’s execution capabilities (3PL), while Ligentia adds management and control (4PL).

Together, the two acquisitions form a logical sequence. One builds scale. The other builds intelligence.

For Oman, this shift carries important economic meaning. The country has long positioned itself as a stable and strategic logistics gateway, especially because it sits

outside the Strait of Hormuz while still being close to it.

Ports such as Sohar, Duqm and Salalah already provide strong physical infrastructure. However, global companies are now looking for more than location. They want visibility, reliability and risk management.

This creates a new opportunity for Oman, not just to be a transit point, but also to become a place where supply chains are managed.

If Ligentia’s capabilities are properly integrated, Oman could host a regional control centre for supply chains.

This would allow companies to plan, monitor and adjust their logistics operations from Oman, especially when dealing with risks around the Strait.

However, this outcome is not guaranteed. Many acquisitions fail to deliver their full value because of weak integration. If Ligentia’s technology remains separate from Asyad’s operations, the benefit will be limited. If key talent leaves, the knowledge advantage could be lost.

And if the system is not connected to Oman’s wider trade and economic environment, the national impact will remain small.

There is also strong global competition. Major players have already invested in digital logistics and supply chain platforms.

This means Asyad is entering a competitive space, not an empty one. This leads to an important strategic question: Is Asyad leading. Or is it catching up?

The answer will depend on execution. If Asyad can combine its strong infrastructure with real digital capability, it can create a clear advantage. If not, it risks becoming one of many similar players in a crowded market.

In conclusion, the acquisition of Ligentia shows that Asyad understands where the logistics industry is heading. The future is not only about moving goods, but about controlling and managing how those goods move.

CLASSIFIEDS

SIT. WANTED

SALES professional with 5 yrs Experience in Medical sector. Graduate, Available in Muscat. akhilmanu777@gmail.com Contact: 76323324

INDIAN male, 10 year experience in Oman as Coordinator have Driving licence. 90789282

LOGISTICS Documentation Executive. Indian male, 25 years, BBA, PG Diploma in Logistics & SCM and have 2 years of experience in this field. Seeking a position in Logistics field Mob: +968 7506 9882 Mail: shafazhussain18@gmail.com

ACCOUNTS/ SALES Indian male (b com) having 2+ years of experience in India accounts sales looking for suitable placement, join immediately. Contact: 76324360

15+ experience in building material, project sales & Trade market, deal with corporate project customers, looking for a suitable job. Contact 78384283

INDIAN male MBA Graduate with 15yrs experience in Oman seek suitable senior position in finance office admin., sales DTC. Contact: 94158080

OPERATIONS Support / Tendering / Contract Management / Procurement professional with 18+ years' Oil & Gas experience. NOC & driving license available. 96227272, jjijlmathew@gmail.com

INDIAN electrical engineer more than 20 years experience in "MEP" construction field in Oman seeks suitable job. Contact: 92919281

INDIAN male civil engineer with more than 30 years experience in different ministers, seek immediate suitable position. CONTACT: 94158080

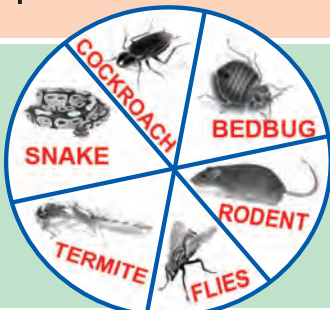
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LOOKING for Pipeline Engineer with 8 Years Experience offer salary: 200 OMR Phone : +96896965333 Email : sultanalhabsi701@gmail.com

SALES Executive required For working in oil and gas / building materials industry Vehicle Driving license preferred Email: kirit@bustaninternational.com Mobile: 95544641

LOOKING for SUPPLY CHAIN / SALES jobs Indian male 24 years. Commerce graduate, Experience in logistics, procurement and sales in reputed company in Oman.Valid Oman D/L. Contact +96891121694, issacantony2002@gmail.com

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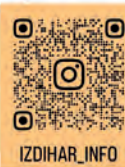
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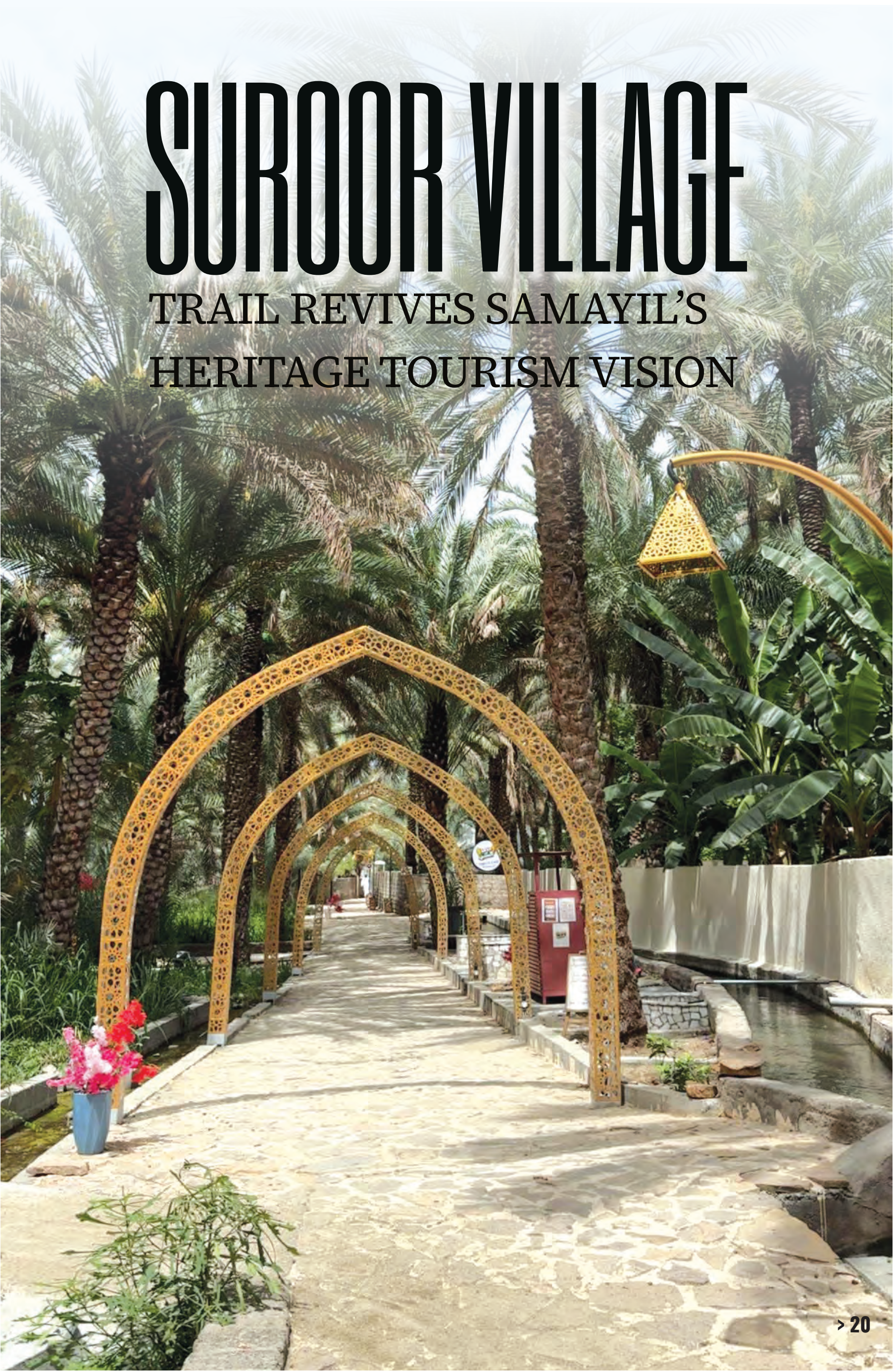
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ART/LIFE



SUROOR VILLAGE TRAIL REVIVES SAMAYIL’S HERITAGE TOURISM VISION

ON SECOND **THOUGHT**

WHAT THE RED SHORE IN MIRBAT IS TRYING TO TELL US



Yeru Ebuén
The writer is a luxury
media strategist and
a creative director

A stretch of beach in Mirbat turned an uneasy shade of red, coated in what at first glance could be mistaken for algae or sediment. But closer inspection revealed something else entirely: thousands — possibly millions of tiny shrimp and krill washed ashore, lifeless, their bodies forming a dense, rust-coloured layer against the sand.

It is the sort of scene that invites immediate conclusions. Pollution. A spill. Something gone wrong offshore. In a country where the sea is both livelihood and memory, the instinct is to assume the worst. But the explanation, in this case, is quieter.

Officials from Oman’s Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources indicated early on that there was no sign of contamination. Instead, the cause appears to lie in natural marine changes. The species involved are highly sensitive. Even minor fluctuations in temperature or dissolved oxygen can be enough to overwhelm them.

That phrase, minor fluctuations, does more work than it seems.

What happened off Mirbat is not the result of a single dramatic incident, but a convergence of small imbalances. A drop in oxygen levels beneath the surface. Subtle shifts in water temperature. Currents that move not only water, but everything within it, including organisms already weakened or dying.

There is precedent for this in Oman. A similar wash-up in Rakhout was linked to comparable environmental changes. Globally, the pattern is familiar. In parts of the world’s oceans, so-called “dead zones” — areas with critically low oxygen — have led to large-scale die-offs of marine life.

To describe the Mirbat event as natural is not to dismiss it. If anything, it places it within a more complex system, one that is constantly adjusting, often in ways that are not immediately visible.

Researchers in Oman have long noted that species like these act as early indicators. They respond quickly to environmental stress, making them less an anomaly and more a signal.

There is, for now, no evidence of wider ecological damage. No reports of fish dying in similar numbers. No confirmation of toxins. The system, by all visible accounts, remains intact.

But the margin for stability is not fixed. The Arabian Sea is shaped by monsoon systems that can alter marine conditions with surprising speed. Layered onto this is a broader pattern of climatic variability, where small shifts accumulate over time.

What happened in Mirbat is, on one level, a contained and explainable event. On another, it is a reminder of how quickly the sea can translate small changes into visible consequences.

It is easy to look at a beach covered in red and search for a single cause, something definitive and assignable. But the reality is less direct. The ocean rarely works in singular narratives. It operates through accumulation of heat, of movement, of imbalance.

And sometimes, all it takes is a slight shift for that accumulation to surface. Not as a headline-grabbing disaster, but as a quiet disruption that asks, in its own way, to be noticed.

Q U I C K F E A T U R E S



DANCE

Fans of Colombian singer Shakira learn to dance the choreography of her song “Waka Waka (This Time for Africa)” at the Copacabana promenade. — **AFP**



HOLLYWOOD

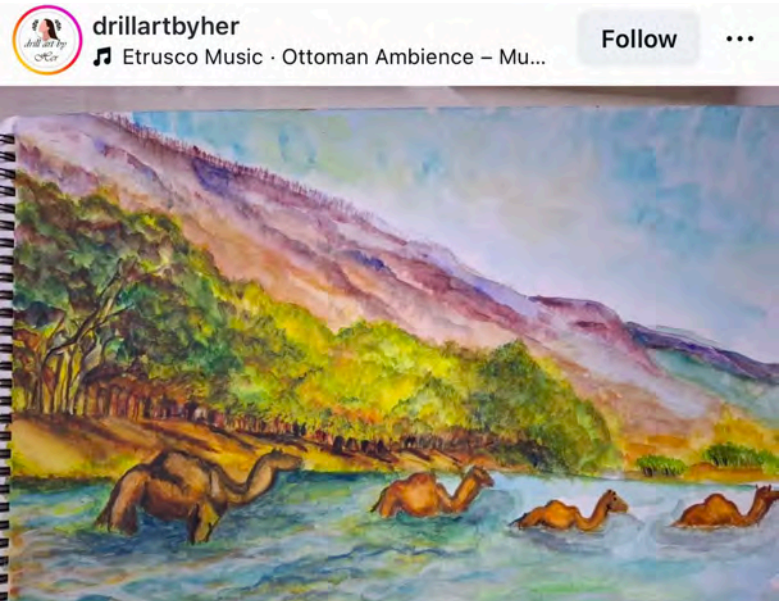
Actors Ben Affleck and Matt Damon attend non-profit organisation event Bring Change to Mind’s in California, US. — **AFP**



PEOPLE

Festival-goers dressed in orange attend the Radio 538 King’s Day celebration in Netherlands. — **AFP**

INSTA PICKS



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ANCIENT MUGHAL TRADITION OF PIGEON-REARING THRIVES IN INDIA’S CAPITAL

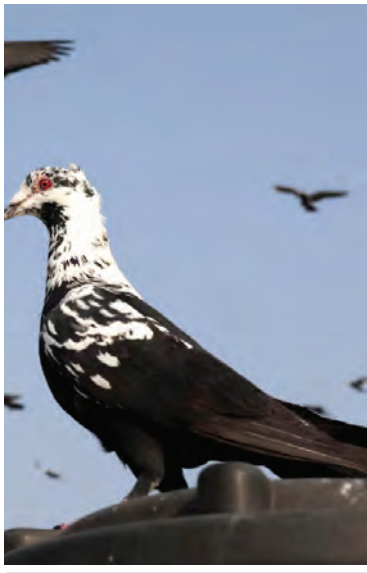
In the heart of New Delhi, a small group of enthusiasts continues to practise kabootarbaazi, an ancient pigeon-rearing tradition dating back to the era of the Mughal Empire. The practice, once patronised by emperors, is now kept alive by dedicated trainers who pass the skill down through generations.

In the bustling lanes near Jama Masjid, 30-year-old Azhar Udeen gathers daily with his younger brother and friends on a rooftop terrace. Together, they release more than 120 pigeons of various breeds from their cages, watching as the birds circle the sky in coordinated formations above the dense neighbourhood.

The pigeons are carefully fed and trained to fly in patterns, often competing in informal races as onlookers cheer from nearby rooftops and balconies. For Udeen, the tradition is deeply personal. “I saw my grandfather doing this when I was a child, and as I grew up, I learned from my ustad (teacher)”, he said, describing years of observation and practice.

Kabootarbaazi derives from the Hindi and Urdu word for pigeon and has roots in a time when birds were trained not only for sport but also to carry messages across long distances between cities and battlefields. Today, while their role as messengers has faded, the discipline and patience required to train them remain unchanged.

Training typically takes up to four months. Handlers teach pigeons to fly against the wind, maintain formation and return



A pigeon sits on a rooftop in the old quarters of Delhi, India. — Reuters

home after covering significant distances. Trainers sometimes create loud sounds — such as striking a whip against a hard surface — to encourage the birds to fly farther and build endurance during practice sessions.

Beyond the technical skill, practitioners say the tradition offers something more intangible. Rooftop gatherings have become a social ritual, where friends and students come together in a shared space of calm amidst the city’s intensity and noise.

For many, kabootarbaazi is as much about community as it is about the birds. “We sit together and all the tensions from work or home disappear”, said fellow pigeon-keeper Kahlifa Mohsin. “That sense of peace is the true purpose behind pigeon keeping”. — Reuters



The newly installed Serpentine Gallery Pavilion, by Burkina Faso architect Diebedo Francis Kere, is pictured during its press preview in Kensington Gardens in west London. — AFP

FRANCIS KERE: SUSTAINABLE ARCHITECT GOES GLOBAL



A general view of a baobab tree in the middle of the courtyard at the Goethe-Institut German cultural centre in Dakar. — AFP

THE bricks are local, the ventilation is open-air and a towering baobab anchors the space: architect Francis Kere’s new building in Dakar is both sustainable and distinctly African. A dual national of Burkina Faso and Germany, Kere is the only African to have won the Pritzker Prize (2022), architecture’s highest honour. His Berlin-based firm’s latest project, the Goethe-Institut cultural centre in Senegal’s capital, reflects his signature approach: simple, local materials paired with designs that are both functional and visually striking. Kere’s work began in Africa using bioclimatic principles that respond to climate and local resources. As his portfolio expands to Europe and the Americas, with projects planned in cities such as Las Vegas and Rio de Janeiro, he remains committed to those roots. “If you give me sand, mud and bamboo, I can guarantee you I will create a project for you”, he said during the building’s inauguration. “If you add steel, I will go further”. Originally from the village of Gando in Burkina Faso, Kere moved to Germany on a carpentry scholarship before studying architecture. His first project, the Gando Primary School completed

in 2001, involved local labour and materials. Using clay bricks and an elevated roof for ventilation, the design offered thermal comfort in a hot climate. Those same principles guide his Dakar project, a \$4 million facility where passive cooling reduces reliance on air conditioning. Perforated walls made from West African red clay enable cross-ventilation, while a central baobab tree — a traditional gathering point — serves as the building’s focal space. “I told myself, the baobab should be the centre, it is where everyone will meet”, Kere said. He argues that modern construction has become overly dependent on glass and concrete, overlooking sustainable alternatives. With support from policymakers and designers, he believes bioclimatic architecture could play a key role in reducing energy consumption, particularly amidst global energy challenges. “Rethinking how we build our cities can significantly reduce energy use”, he said, noting that even large-scale projects can integrate efficient material choices. Kere’s global reach continues to grow. In Burkina Faso, he recently completed a mausoleum for Thomas Sankara, part of a wider memorial



Architect Francis Kere (centre) gives a tour of the building to guests. — AFP

park. Despite ongoing insecurity in the region, he remains active, building schools and community structures. Elsewhere, his firm is designing a museum in Las Vegas using local materials and in Brazil he has planned the Biblioteca dos Saberes, a cultural centre he describes as a “house of wisdom”. Reflecting on his expanding international work, Kere remains mindful of his origins. “The only thing I worry about”, he said, “is being taken away from Africa”. — AFP

FEATURES



The project forms part of an integrated development vision aimed at transforming environmental and heritage elements into value-added tourism products.



SUROOR VILLAGE

TRAIL REVIVES SAMAYIL’S HERITAGE TOURISM VISION

BALQEES ALORAIMI

THE first phase of the Suroor tourism trail in Samayil has come into operation, marking a further step in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate’s ongoing efforts to strengthen domestic tourism and develop sustainable routes that draw on the rich natural and cultural assets of Omani villages.

The project forms part of an integrated development vision aimed at transforming environmental and heritage elements into value-added tourism products. This approach is designed to stimulate local economic activity, create employment opportunities and enable local communities to directly benefit from tourism-related initiatives implemented across the governorate.

Winding through Suroor village, the trail offers an immersive experience that blends nature and heritage. It passes through lush agricultural plantations and along traditional aflaj irrigation channels that have long sustained life in the area, before leading visitors through narrow alleys and traditional houses that reflect the essence of Omani vernacular architecture. In doing so, the trail presents a model of rural tourism that integrates landscape and heritage while highlighting agricultural and social practices that have shaped the village’s identity over generations.

More than a pathway, the trail functions as an interactive cultural experience, allowing visitors to engage closely with aspects of daily village life — from traditional irrigation systems and construction techniques to enduring social customs preserved in local memory. This reflects a growing shift towards experiential tourism that prioritises participation and engagement over passive observation.

A broader rehabilitation and development project is also underway in Suroor village, focusing on preserving its architectural identity and safeguarding its cultural heritage. The initiative includes the restoration of traditional mud and stone houses, improvement of internal pathways, regulation of movement within the village and enhancement of the overall visual landscape in a manner consistent with its historical character.

The project also covers the restoration of several heritage homes, upgrading of pedestrian routes, partial road paving, allocation of parking areas and the provision of safety requirements, in addition to organising community-based activities. Around 50 heritage houses have been identified within the project’s scope, while

a specialised consultancy has been engaged to conduct technical surveys and complete ownership procedures in preparation for issuing formal title deeds to residents.

This approach underscores a sustained commitment to preserving the village’s historic urban fabric while simultaneously creating a visitor-friendly environment. It also opens space for local participation through small-scale initiatives linked to rural tourism, helping to reinforce the project’s long-term sustainability.

Officials overseeing the initiative say the development of Suroor forms part of a wider programme targeting heritage villages across Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, with the aim of transforming them into sustainable tourism destinations that contribute to the local economy, generate direct and indirect employment; and strengthen the role of local communities as active partners in development.

Within this framework, emphasis is being placed on encouraging small-scale economic activities rooted in local identity, including the sale of agricultural produce and traditional crafts, as well as the use of heritage homes as guesthouses.

Such initiatives are intended to create an integrated local economy built on indigenous resources.

The trail also adds to the governorate’s expanding network of tourism routes, which has seen significant growth in recent years in line with national priorities under Oman Vision 2040, particularly in relation to sustainable tourism development, heritage preservation and balanced regional growth.

In this context, local citizens and residents have welcomed the initiative, noting its potential to revitalise the area.

One citizen, Salim bin Hamood al Rwahi, said such projects “bring life back to old villages and offer young people opportunities to benefit from local resources instead of moving to urban centres, while strengthening our connection to authentic heritage”.

Meanwhile, expatriate tourism worker Omar Khan noted that the project adds considerable value for visitors, saying: “The area already has remarkable natural and heritage appeal; and with the development of the trail the visitor experience has become more structured and attractive, encouraging us to include it in our tourism programmes”.

Taken together, the initiative reflects a broader effort to reimagine heritage villages not merely as historical sites, but as living cultural landscapes — spaces where memory, identity and everyday life converge to offer visitors a deeper and more engaged encounter with Oman’s rural heritage.



The trail offers an immersive experience that blends nature and heritage.

