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SPOTLIGHT

PRIVATE TUITION BOON OR BANE?

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IN BRIEF

HIS MAJESTY GETS MESSAGE FROM KAZAKH PRESIDENT



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a message from President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of the Republic of Kazakhstan, concerning the enhancement of cooperation and investment between the two countries across various fields. The message was received on His Majesty's behalf by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, during a meeting with Roman Sklyar, Head of the Presidential Administration of Kazakhstan. The two sides reviewed areas of cooperation and partnership and explored ways to develop them across economic, investment and commercial sectors. Both sides affirmed the importance of diversifying partnership and opening new horizons for mutual benefit. The meeting was attended by Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA); Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Hinai, Ambassador-at-Large at the Foreign Ministry; and Yarub bin Abdullah al Yarubi, Secretary-General of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs.

SAYYID BILARAB TO OPEN SYMPOSIUM

HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, will patronise the opening of the National Symposium on Enhancing Economic Development in the Governorates, titled "Economically Empowered Governorates," to be held on Thursday. The symposium is organised by the Ministry of Interior, with the participation of several government units and institutions concerned with the economy and investment. The symposium will feature a number of sessions and working papers aimed at enhancing economic development in the governorates. Key themes will include investment opportunities and the empowerment of small and medium enterprises. The event will also serve as a platform to discuss mechanisms for integration among investment-relevant authorities.

WHO AWARD FOR OMAN'S HIV FIGHT



The Sultanate of Oman received the World Health Organization (WHO) award in recognition of its sustained validation of the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and syphilis. This recognition is a new international health achievement added to Oman's public health record. The award was received by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, on the sidelines of the World Health Assembly in Geneva. During the event, the WHO commended Oman's sustained progress in maternal and child health programmes, as well as in early screening and treatment follow-up systems, reflecting the efficiency of the national health system and its adherence to international standards.

Council of Ministers and Shura Office joint meeting reinforces developmental work

MUSCAT: The Council of Ministers convened a joint meeting at the Council's premises in Muscat on Tuesday with the Office of the Majlis Ash'shura. The meeting was held under the chairmanship of HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs. The meeting sought to strengthen ongoing coordination between state institutions and to forge shared visions that would contribute to the advancement of economic, social, and developmental sectors. At the outset of the meeting, HH Sayyid Shihab lauded the efforts of the Majlis Ash'shura in serving the nation and its citizens, as well as



The meeting sought to strengthen coordination between state institutions.

its instrumental role in supporting the comprehensive development march of the Sultanate of Oman, thereby propelling its momentum towards ever broader horizons

while safeguarding its hard-won achievements. HH Sayyid Shihab affirmed that the Council of Ministers accords the utmost attention to the perspectives

of the Majlis Ash'shura and endorses its endeavours aimed at reinforcing comprehensive development and fulfilling the aspirations of the citizens. For their part, the Chairman of the Majlis Ash'shura and the members of the Office of the Council expressed their profound appreciation for the attentiveness and dedication demonstrated by the Council of Ministers in entrenching collective action and deepening the bonds of sustained coordination between the two councils. Such commitment, they noted, reflects positively on the integration of efforts marshalled in the service of the nation's development. — ONA SEE ALSO P2

TRUMP PAUSES IRAN ATTACK, SIGNALS NUCLEAR DEAL

IRANIAN OFFER FOCUSES ON ENDING WAR, REOPENING HORMUZ

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump said on Monday he had paused a planned attack against Iran after Tehran sent a peace proposal to Washington, and that there was now a "very good chance" of reaching a deal limiting Iran's nuclear programme. After Iran sent the US a new peace proposal, Trump said he had instructed the US military that "we will NOT be doing the scheduled attack of Iran tomorrow, but have further instructed them to be prepared to go forward with a full, large-scale assault of Iran, on a moment's notice, in the event that an acceptable Deal is not reached." No such attack had previously been announced, and Reuters could not determine whether preparations had been made for strikes that would mark a renewal of the war Trump started in late February. Under pressure to reach an accord that would reopen the Strait of Hormuz, Trump has previously expressed hope that a deal was close on ending the war, and similarly threatened heavy strikes on Iran if Tehran does not reach a deal. Speaking to reporters later, he said the United States would be satisfied if it could reach



A bride and groom attend a public mass wedding ceremony at Imam Hossein Square in Tehran on Tuesday. — AFP

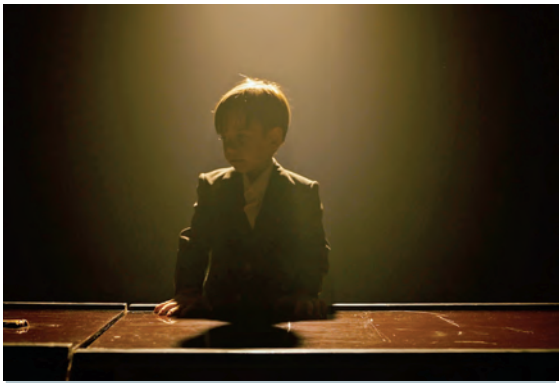
an agreement with Iran that prevents Tehran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. "There seems to be a very good chance that they can work something out. If we can do that without bombing the hell out of them, I would be very happy," Trump told reporters gathered for an unrelated announcement. Trump's post on calling off

an attack came after Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei confirmed that Tehran's views had been "conveyed to the American side through Pakistan" but gave no details. A Pakistani source confirmed that Islamabad, which has conveyed messages between the sides in the war in the Middle East since hosting the

only round of peace talks last month, had shared the latest proposal with Washington. But the source suggested progress had been difficult. The sides "keep changing their goalposts," the Pakistani source said, adding: "We don't have much time." Iran remained defiant in statements issued on state media after Trump's announcement, warning the US and its allies against making any further "strategic mistakes or miscalculations" in attacking Iran, while contending the Iranian armed forces were "more prepared and stronger than in the past." Iran's top joint military command, Khatam al Anbiya, said Iran's armed forces are "ready to pull the trigger" in the event of any renewed US attack, according to Iran's Tasnim news agency. "Any renewed aggression and invasion... will be responded to quickly, decisively, powerfully, and extensively," the commander of Khatam al Anbiya, Ali Abdollahi, was quoted as saying. It would focus first on securing an end to the war, reopening the Strait of Hormuz — a major oil supply route that Iran has effectively blockaded — and lifting maritime sanctions. SEE ALSO P6 & 7

Screening of documentary on Dr Thoms

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Information will premiere the documentary 'Dakhtar Thoms or Dr Thoms' on Wednesday with a screening at the ministry's theatre, attended by media figures, intellectuals, historians and cultural content creators. The documentary chronicles the life of American physician Wells Thoms, whose story is intertwined with the history of healthcare in the Sultanate of Oman. It blends historical narration, re-enacted dramatic scenes, archival materials and footage shot in Oman and the United States. The documentary traces the early journey



The documentary traces the early journey of the man locally known as 'Dakhtar Thoms'.

of the man locally known as 'Dakhtar Thoms' and key milestones in his medical and humanitarian work, documenting a chapter of Oman's social and health transformation. The Ministry of Information is working to strengthen national documentary production that offers a visual reading of modern Omani history, combining academic research, creative storytelling and contemporary digital techniques to help preserve national memory. Previous releases include the three-part documentary Beit Al Ajaib. SEE ALSO P3

OMAN

Council of Ministers, Shura Office seek to enhance coordination



MUSCAT: The Council of Ministers convened a joint meeting at the Council’s premises in Muscat on Tuesday with the Office of the Majlis Ash’shura. The meeting was held under the chairmanship of HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs. The meeting sought to strengthen ongoing coordination between state institutions and to forge shared visions that would contribute to the advancement of economic, social, and developmental sectors. — **ONA**



Oman reaffirms support for WHO’s international pandemic agreement

GENEVA: The Sultanate of Oman has reaffirmed its strong support for the adoption of the World Health Organization’s (WHO) International Pandemic Agreement during its participation in the proceedings of the 79th World Health Assembly (WHA79), held in Geneva from May 18 to 23.

Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Regulation, delivered the Sultanate of Oman’s statement to participants under agenda item 13 of the Assembly, regarding the Open-Ended Intergovernmental Working Group on the WHO Pandemic Agreement.

He expressed Oman’s appreciation for the intensive efforts undertaken by the World Health Organization and Member States to reach an international consensus on this agreement, including the annex on Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing (PABS).

He emphasised that the success of the agreement hinges on ensuring balance and equity in its implementation, in a manner that reinforces the principles of international solidarity and addresses the needs of countries, particularly low- and middle-income countries, in pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response.



*Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Regulation, expressed Oman’s appreciation for the efforts to reach an international consensus on this agreement. — **ONA***

Al Mandhari underscored the importance of respecting national sovereignty and aligning international commitments with national priorities and policies, calling for the provision of technical and technological support and capacity-building to ensure the effective and sustainable implementation of the agreement, without imposing burdens on countries that exceed their capabilities.

With regard to the PABS annex, the under-secretary emphasised the importance of reaching a practical and balanced framework that facilitates timely and transparent access to pathogens and related data, while ensuring the fair and equitable sharing of benefits, including vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics, and taking into account national regulatory and sovereignty frameworks, as well as promoting research and innovation.

He also highlighted the importance of strengthening international cooperation in developing laboratory infrastructure, exchanging epidemiological information and data, and supporting scientific research. He further noted the need to ensure coherence and alignment between the international pandemic agreement and the International Health Regulations (2005), to reduce duplication in implementation. — **ONA**

SHORT TAKES



The two sides reviewed the longstanding friendly relations and cooperation between the two countries. — ONA

SAYYID BADR RECEIVES MESSAGE FROM PHILIPPINE COUNTERPART

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received a written message from Theresa Lazaro, Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines. The message is related to the bilateral relations between the two countries. The message was handed over to Sayyid Badr by Noralyn Jubaira Baja, Ambassador of the Republic of the Philippines to the Sultanate of Oman, when he received her at the Foreign Ministry’s building on Tuesday. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the longstanding friendly relations and cooperation between the two countries and reaffirmed their mutual commitment to further developing and enhancing such relations across various domains of coordination and collaboration. — ONA

Sustainable project seeks to manage agricultural waste

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MAY 19

THE Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has successfully launched a new project to optimise the use of local resources by recycling agricultural and animal waste and transforming it into value-added products, with the aim of enhancing environmental and economic sustainability. The national project aims at managing agricultural and animal residues as these residues are utilised in the production of organic fertiliser, animal and fish feed, and the manufacture of environmentally friendly industrial products, such as wood alternatives and decorative items made from palm fronds. An agreement to this effect was signed with an Omani company, Zero Neutral Solutions, which focuses on developing natural solutions to reduce carbon emissions, improve soil quality, and enhance plant growth using organic extracts and materials. Speaking to the media, Eng Ali bin Salem Masoud Fadhill, Operations Manager at Oman



The national project aims at managing agricultural and animal residues.

Agriculture Development Company (Dhofar Fertilisers), explained that the organic fertiliser factory in Raysut Industrial City in the Wilayat of Salalah, which is supervised by Oman Agriculture Development Company in cooperation with be’ah, is one of the most prominent projects in the field of recycling agricultural and animal waste. “With this agreement, the company is able to produce organic fertiliser (compost) from green agricultural waste

with a production capacity of up to 25,000 tonnes annually. The project aims to transform agricultural waste into products of economic value, contributing to supporting local farms and promoting environmental sustainability,” he added. Similarly, the ‘Oman PVC’ project in the Wilayat of Ibra is the first factory specialising in recycling palm frond waste and transforming it into sustainable materials. The factory aims to convert accumulated agricultural waste

into environmentally friendly building and furniture products. The factory purchases palm fronds from farmers instead of burning or disposing of them in harmful ways, thus adding value and promoting a circular economy. This is achieved by grinding the palm fronds and mixing them with chemical materials and compounds to obtain a durable raw material. This material is then used to manufacture wooden panels and doors. “The project is considered a pioneering initiative in the region, incorporating state-of-the-art systems and advanced technologies for recycling and processing agricultural waste. It operates according to an integrated system and international standards that ensure operational efficiency and the quality of the final product.” He explained that the project utilises modern technologies to treat agricultural and animal residues through controlled biodegradation. This contributes to improving soil fertility, reducing reliance on chemical fertilisers, and lowering methane emissions resulting from waste accumulation.

Ministry of Information to release Dr Thoms documentary today



The documentary traces the beginnings of Dr Thoms’ medical profession who became known locally as Al Dakhtar Thoms. — ONA

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Information will celebrate the release of a documentary titled ‘Dr Thoms (Al Dakhtar Thoms)’ at a screening to be held today (Wednesday) at the Ministry of Information Theatre. The event will be attended by a select group of media professionals, intellectuals, historians and cultural content creators. The film documents the life of the American doctor, Wells Thoms, and his connection to the history of healthcare in the Sultanate of Oman. It combines historical narrative with reenacted dramatic scenes and archive footage. The filming took place in the Sultanate of Oman and the United States of America (USA). The documentary traces the beginnings of Dr Thoms’ medical profession, who became known locally as Al Dakhtar Thoms.



It highlights his significant contributions to medical and humanitarian work. It also documents a part of the history of the social and healthcare transformations that took place in the

Sultanate of Oman at the time. The Ministry of Information seeks to enhance national documentary production, which offers a visual interpretation of modern Omani history, combining academic research, creative storytelling and contemporary digital technologies. The ministry has launched a series of documentaries, books and programmes, including the three-part documentary series ‘House of Wonders’ and the programme ‘We Have a Legacy’ on Oman TV. The Ministry of Information’s Ayn platform also features a collection of audiobooks and audiovisual programmes about Omani history. The ministry is also working on a project to produce a feature film about the historic voyage of the Omani ship Sultana. — ONA

MedcoEnergi Marks 20 Years in Oman, Reaffirms Long-Term Commitment to the Partnership



PT Medco Energi Internasional Tbk (MedcoEnergi; IDX: MEDC) today marked twenty years of operations in the Sultanate of Oman and reaffirmed its long-term commitment to the partnership. The milestone was commemorated in the presence of **H.H. Sayyid Dr. Adham bin Turki Al Said, H.E. Eng. Salim bin Nasser bin Said Al Aufi**, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and other officials of the Sultanate of Oman, alongside the Company’s partners. Oman was MedcoEnergi’s first entry into the Middle East and remains one of the most strategic pillars of its international portfolio. Since 2006, the Company has operated the Karim Small Fields (KSF) under a Service Agreement with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO). Within its first decade, MedcoEnergi grew production approximately 2.5 times from initial level, demonstrating its capability to revitalise mature fields. In 2015, recognising MedcoEnergi’s proven

capability in managing the KSF, PDO extended the agreement by another 25 years through 2040. Over two decades, the partnership has rejuvenated mature fields, producing more than 100 million barrels of oil, drilling more than 500 wells, and delivering seven new field discoveries. The partnership has also built lasting Omani capability. Across its Oman operations, MedcoEnergi employs more than 200 people, 86% of them Omani nationals. In collaboration with the Oman Institute for Energy, the Company invests in developing young Omani graduates - preparing the next generation of national talent to lead MedcoEnergi’s future in Oman. MedcoEnergi’s operations in Oman are anchored in a strong safety record. As of March 2026, KSF has achieved six consecutive years without a lost-time incident (LTI) and surpassed 13 million LTI-free man-hours. MedcoEnergi has also grown its presence through partnership with OQ

Exploration & Production, acquiring in 2023 a 20% participating interest in both Block 60 and Block 48. In 2025, Block 60 delivered strong gross production performance, reaching new peak levels during the year, while appraisal activity continues at Block 48 toward a potential Declaration of Commerciality “Twenty years taught us one thing — when you build with Oman, you build to last,” said Hilmi Panigoro, President Director of MedcoEnergi. “We are deeply grateful to **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, H.E. Eng. Salim bin Nasser bin Said Al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals**, the Government of the Sultanate of Oman, and the Omani people for two decades of trust and partnership. We are not here as a company finishing a chapter. We are here as a partner ready to write the next one, and we intend to keep investing in the Sultanate for the long term.” “MedcoEnergi’s two decades in Oman reflect the kind of long-term, responsible partnership the Sultanate values, aligned with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, and we welcome its continued commitment to the country’s energy sector,” said H.E. Eng. Salim bin Nasser bin Said Al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals of the Sultanate of Oman. Looking ahead, MedcoEnergi intends to grow its presence in Oman over the next twenty years through continued investment at KSF, Blocks 60, 48, and 56, and through Omani capability development aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

SPOTLIGHT

PRIVATE TUITION BOON OR BANE?

SIHAM AL SAIDI

PRIVATE

TUITION has become increasingly popular in recent years. As the education system becomes more competitive, parents are turning to private tutors to help their children excel academically.

One reason for this trend is the desire for personalised attention. In a classroom setting, teachers often have to divide their attention among many students, making it difficult to address each child's individual needs. Private tutors, on the other hand, can focus solely on the student, tailoring their lessons to suit their learning style and pace.

Additionally, private tuition offers a level of flexibility that is not always possible in a traditional school setting. Students can schedule sessions at a time that is convenient for them, allowing them to balance their academic commitments with other activities.

Another factor driving the popularity of private tuition is the desire for academic success. In today's competitive world, parents want to give their children every advantage possible. Private tuition can help students improve their grades, prepare for exams, and develop study skills that will serve them well in the future. While private tuition can be expensive, many parents see it as a worthwhile investment in their child's future. The benefits of personalised attention, flexibility and academic success make private tuition an appealing option for many families.

TEMPORARY TOOL

For some parents, tutoring is a temporary tool before exams. For others, it has become a year-round dependency driven by fear, competition, and the pressure to secure academic success at any cost.

"Sometimes I feel guilty if my children are not enrolled in private tutoring," says Rahma Jaber , a working mother of four. "Even if they are doing well, everyone around us has tutors. It creates pressure on parents more than students."

Rashid al Qutati, a father, believes tutoring has become essential because of time limitations within recent family life. "Both parents work, children are distracted by technology, and school lessons move quickly. The tutor helps us keep things under control," he explains.

However, there are different stories from many students. A Grade 10 student, Zainab al Ajmi, described her daily routine as "a non-stop cycle between school and extra lessons." She added, "I rarely have time to rest or enjoy anything outside studying. Sometimes it feels like my entire childhood is scheduled."

Educational specialists warn that excessive dependence on tutoring may weaken students' self-learning abilities and increase emotional exhaustion.

Some educators believe students are gradually becoming more dependent on memorisation and ready- made answers rather than critical thinking and independent problem-solving.

Zuwina al Saidi commented, "I have noticed my nephew is really dependent on the private classes. He never studies alone and just waits for the timing of the tutoring. " She added, "My sister is travelling most of the time and her big concern is to ensure is that her sons are going to the private lessons. What I noticed that her sons refuse to study alone.

Rajwa Salim , parent of 3 children , admitted, "Private lessons have become like another monthly bill. Sometimes we sacrifice family activities just to afford extra classes."

Despite the criticism, tutoring continues to expand because it answers a real demand.

WHILE PRIVATE TUITION CAN BE EXPENSIVE, MANY PARENTS SEE IT AS A WORTHWHILE INVESTMENT IN THEIR CHILD'S FUTURE. THE BENEFITS OF PERSONALISED ATTENTION, FLEXIBILITY AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS MAKE PRIVATE TUITION AN APPEALING OPTION FOR MANY FAMILIES.



RECALL DATE: 20/05/2026

Recall

TOYOTA
URBAN CRUISER

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production*	#Number of Affected Commodities
Toyota Urban Cruiser	2024-2025	101

*Not all vehicles in this production period, are affected.
#Subject to revision, based on the information received from the manufacturer, from time to time.

Recall consequence

Based on the information from Maruti Suzuki India, during the manufacturing process of combination meter, there is a possibility that the improper correction value of fuel indicator has been written in the memory of combination meter.If the improper correction value were stored in the memory, there is a possibility that the fuel level indicator on the combination meter indicates more fuel than actually remaining fuel, and the low fuel warning light does not turn on even as the fuel decreases, so the customer may not notice and run out of fuel, resulting in the engine stalling and the engine not starting. In some countries, this may result in non-compliance with regulations.

Recall Action

To inspect and replace the Combination Meter if necessary



To check the serial number of the affected items, please visit the recalls and warnings website by scanning the QR code.



Contact details: Toll free - 80073000
Working days: Sunday - Thursday
Working Time: 8:00 - 17:00 hrs



Consumer Protection Authority
80079909 • 80077997 خط المستهلك

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الرمز: 03-093-SOP

SHORT TAKES



The Scientific Day aimed to explore the critical intersections between clinical decision-making and the legal framework.

ROYAL HOSPITAL ORGANISES SCIENTIFIC DAY

MUSCAT: The Royal Hospital marked on Tuesday the Medical Ethics Scientific Day. The event was held under the auspices of Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Affairs.

The event was organised as part of the Ministry of Health’s direction towards strengthening evidence-based governance and integrating ethical and legal dimensions into daily medical practice, contributing to improved quality of care and enhanced patient safety.

Dr Rukaya al Dhahri, Chair of the Medical Ethics Committee at the Royal Hospital, emphasised that medical ethics is no longer a purely theoretical framework confined to committees, but has become an active practice that supports clinical decision-making in critical moments, and a key indicator of institutional performance quality.

Al Dhahri explained that the challenge in modern medicine no longer lies in limited resources but rather in the increasing breadth and complexity of available options, which calls for stronger ethical frameworks to ensure balanced decision-making that combines scientific accuracy with humanitarian considerations.

The Scientific Day aimed to explore the critical intersections between clinical decision-making and the legal framework. The sessions addressed several key themes, including the foundations of clinical ethics, medical decision-making in the Sultanate of Oman, covering capacity, surrogate decision-making, and Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) orders, as well as ethical lessons drawn from judicial rulings in medical cases and confidentiality in adolescent medicine.

The programme also included real-life case studies and ethical insights in organ transplantation, along with end-of-life decision-making in palliative care. — ONA

ACCREDITATION PROGRAMMES FOR NURSING RENEWED



The renewal reflects the College’s ongoing commitment to academic excellence. — ONA

MUSCAT: The College of Nursing at Sultan Qaboos University has announced the renewal of accreditation for its Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Master of Science in Nursing programmes for the period spanning from Fall 2025 to Fall 2033.

The renewal reflects the College’s ongoing commitment to academic excellence, adherence to international quality standards, and the fostering of a culture of continuous improvement in education, learning, research and community service.

This outcome follows an international external quality assurance review conducted by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), headquartered in the United States of America. The renewal was subsequently approved by the Oman Authority for Quality Assurance of Education on March 27, 2025.

The re-accreditation affirms the quality and efficacy of the Bachelor’s and Master’s programmes in preparing highly qualified nursing professionals equipped with the knowledge and clinical competencies necessary to meet the evolving needs of healthcare systems at both national and international levels. — ONA

Omani Women’s Academy wins Unesco award

MUSCAT: The Omani Women’s Academy has achieved a significant international milestone by winning the second edition of the Unesco Award for Sustainable Education for its pioneering project ‘Raiadat Incubator.’ The award, presented by the Regional Centre for Educational Planning affiliated with Unesco, recognises innovative initiatives that contribute to sustainable education and community development.

The achievement underscores the Sultanate of Oman’s growing leadership in women’s empowerment and sustainable entrepreneurship at both regional and international levels.

The Raiadat Incubator adopts an integrated ecosystem aimed at empowering women entrepreneurs through training, professional qualification, consultancy and capacity building.



The achievement underscores the Sultanate of Oman’s growing leadership in women’s empowerment. — ONA

The initiative also provides support in feasibility studies, digital marketing, financial management, innovation and technology, enhancing participants’ preparedness to confidently and

effectively enter the labour market and entrepreneurial sector. In its first phase, the incubator will target 90 Omani women, including job-seekers, productive families and women with

disabilities, within a supportive and motivating environment designed to foster growth and sustainability. The programme aims to create inspiring female success stories while strengthening women’s presence across diverse economic sectors.

Dr Fatima bint Yousuf al Balushi, CEO of the Omani Women’s Academy, described the achievement as international recognition of the Academy’s role in empowering Omani women and promoting innovation and sustainable entrepreneurship.

She noted that the Raiadat Incubator is more than a business incubator, describing it as a national platform for genuine empowerment that transforms women’s potential into sustainable and competitive ventures capable of delivering lasting economic and social impact.

National championship for design winners feted

IDRIS AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 19

THE Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry on Monday celebrated the winners of the 2025-2026 Adobe National Graphic Design Championship, marking a major milestone for young Omani creatives entering the global digital design arena. Out of 814 participants from universities, colleges and schools across Oman, nine finalists advanced to the concluding stage of the competition. Shaikha bint Mohammed al Yafai from Sultan Qaboos University claimed first place, followed by Firas bin Ahmed al Nuaimi from the Scientific College of Design in second place and Shaham bin Rashid al Shabibi, also from the Scientific College of Design, in third.

The three winners will represent Oman at the Adobe Certified Professional World Championship in the United States at the end of July, competing against participants from more than 80 countries.

In her speech, Dr Siham bint Ahmed al Harthy, CEO of Siham Investment & Development, OCCI Board Member and Head of Tourism Committee and Executive President of the competition, described the championship as a national platform dedicated to discovering and refining young talent in digital creativity and design. She said the achievements of



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the participating students reflected the immense capabilities of Omani youth and their ability to compete regionally and globally.

She added that the competition forms part of wider efforts to strengthen innovation and digital creativity while building a generation equipped with technical and artistic skills aligned with the future job market.

Zawan bint Khalfan al Akhzami, CEO of Vision and Achievements International, said the Adobe competition is considered the world’s largest arena for digital design creatives, bringing together top designers from more than 80 countries.

She noted that Oman is

participating in the global championship for the first time through a promising group of young talents.

Al Akhzami explained that participants underwent months of learning, challenges and development since the final quarter of 2025, eventually reaching the advanced stages of the championship. She highlighted that the nine finalists earned internationally accredited professional certifications at an early age. She also thanked supporting institutions from both the public and private sectors, stressing that investing in youth creativity represents “a real investment in national talents capable of shaping the future labour market.”

Meanwhile, Aisha al Saifi, Chief Transformation Officer at Sohar International, reaffirmed the bank’s commitment to supporting Omani youth and creative talent. She said that Sohar International believes its role extends beyond banking to empowering young Omanis capable of excelling on regional and international stages.

The ceremony featured visual presentations showcasing the journey of the competition and some of the standout creative works produced during the various stages of the contest. The event concluded with honours for supporting organisations, judging panels, organisers and finalists.

Riyada discusses SME culture, green finance

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, MAY 19

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (Riyada) continued its “Business Environment - Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM)” workshop on Tuesday, focusing on themes related to culture and social perceptions, education and training, and support services. These efforts are aimed at developing Oman’s entrepreneurship ecosystem and enhancing the sustainability of small and medium enterprises.

The workshop included discussions on entrepreneurship as a career choice, social perceptions surrounding entrepreneurs, and challenges related to fear of failure and limited willingness among some young people to pursue



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entrepreneurial ventures. The discussions also emphasised the importance of promoting an entrepreneurial culture within educational institutions and society, while highlighting local success stories.

Eng Majda al Hinai, a member of the National Programme for Fiscal Sustainability and Financial Sector Development

(Estidamah), told the Observer that the culture of seeking “guaranteed income” remains a significant factor affecting young people’s willingness to enter entrepreneurship.

She explained that many graduates and young people still see entrepreneurship as a high-risk career path due to the lack of financial stability compared to

conventional jobs in the public and private sectors.

Al Hinai added that some entrepreneurs face challenges related to obtaining personal loans, housing finance, and even starting families due to the nature of startup income and the absence of stable financial guarantees. These factors sometimes contribute to negative social perceptions toward entrepreneurs.

She also noted that the workshop discussed the importance of introducing incentive packages and support mechanisms for businesses capable of growth and delivering added value to the local economy, alongside raising awareness of sustainability concepts and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) standards.

IRAN WARNS AGAINST NEW US ATTACKS

IRAN'S army warned on Tuesday it would “open new fronts” against the United States if it resumes attacks, after President Donald Trump said he had held off launching a planned new offensive in the hope of striking a deal. The warning came with a shaky ceasefire in place since April 8 and after Washington and Tehran exchanged talks proposals through intermediaries in an effort to end the Middle East war, which began with US strikes on February 28.

In a post on his Truth Social platform, Trump said Gulf leaders had asked him “to hold off on our planned Military attack of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which was scheduled for tomorrow, in that serious negotiations are now taking place”. But Trump added he had instructed the US military to be “prepared to go forward with a full, large-scale assault on Iran, on a moment’s notice, in the event that an acceptable Deal is not reached”.

Iran’s Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi wrote on X that Trump’s comments meant the US leader was “calling a ‘threat’ a ‘chance for peace!’” On Tuesday, Iran’s army spokesman Mohammad Akraminia earlier warned the Islamic republic would “open new fronts against” the United States if it resumes attacks. He added that Iran’s military had used the ceasefire as an opportunity “to strengthen its combat capabilities”, without elaborating.

After the threat, the United Arab Emirates said a drone attack on its Barakah nuclear power plant on Sunday had originated from Iraqi territory, where Iran backs groups accused of launching attacks on Gulf nations in the Middle East war. “As part of the ongoing investigation into the blatant attack on the Barakah Nuclear Power Plant on May 17, 2026, technical tracking and monitoring confirmed that the three drones... all originated from Iraqi territory,” the Emirati defence ministry said. A top Emirati official had already suggested Iran or one of its regional proxies was to blame. Qatari foreign ministry spokesman Majed al-Ansari told reporters that “more time” was needed for the ongoing Pakistani-mediated efforts to push for Iran-US talks to reach a deal to end the war.

Since the ceasefire took hold on April 8, Tehran and Washington have held a single round of talks, which failed to culminate in a deal. All the while, Iran has maintained a tight grip over the Strait of Hormuz, a vital global energy conduit, while the United States has imposed its own naval blockade on Iranian ports.



An Iranian military personnel (C) educates women about how to use a gun at a booth in Haft-e Tir Square, in Tehran. — AFP

Trump said Gulf leaders had asked him “to hold off on our planned Military attack of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which was scheduled for tomorrow, in that serious negotiations are now taking place”

According to Iran’s ISNA news agency, military spokesman Akraminia reiterated that Iran would continue to manage the strait, saying that the US has little option but to “respect the Iranian nation and observe the legitimate rights of the Islamic republic.”

The Revolutionary Guards, the ideological arm of Iran’s military, also threatened to put the internet fibre optic cables passing through the waterway under a system of permits. “Following the imposition of control over the Strait of Hormuz, Iran, citing its absolute sovereignty over the bed and subsoil of its territorial sea... could declare that all

fibre-optic cables passing through the waterway are subject to permits,” the Guards said.

At the same time, Iran’s foreign ministry said it has responded to the latest US proposal which Iranian media had described as “excessive” and offering “no tangible concessions”. On Sunday, Iran’s Fars news agency said Washington had presented a five-point list, which included a demand for Iran to keep only one nuclear site in operation and transfer its stockpile of highly enriched uranium to the United States. The US had refused to release “even 25 per cent” of Iran’s assets frozen

abroad or pay any reparations for war damage, Fars added. The report said the US had also made clear it would only cease hostilities when Tehran engages in formal peace negotiations.

Iran however has said it insists on its own demands, including the release of the frozen assets, the lifting of long-standing sanctions on the country and war reparations. But later, the Tasnim news agency, citing an unnamed source close to the Iranian negotiating team, said the United States made one new step forward in the latest text by agreeing to waive oil sanctions while negotiations were underway. — AFP

IRANIANS STAGE MASS WEDDINGS

TEHRAN: Iranian authorities held mass public weddings in Tehran for couples who signed up to a state-sponsored scheme declaring their readiness to sacrifice their lives in the war against the US and Israel. The ceremonies involved hundreds of couples in several major squares in the capital, including more than 100 in the vast Imam Hossein square in central Tehran, according to reports in Iranian media. They were broadcast on state TV in a bid to boost wartime morale, with US President Donald Trump repeatedly threatening new military action against Iran amid a shaky ceasefire which halted the fighting that began on February 28.

Those involved had signed up, according to Iranian media, for the so-called “self-sacrifice” scheme where people pledged to put their lives on the line in the war by, for example, forming human chains outside power stations. Iranian authorities say millions of people, including top figures such as speaker of parliament Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and President Masoud Pezeshkian, have put their names forward. The stage was festooned with balloons and with a giant image of supreme leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, who has yet to appear in public since being elevated to the position after the killing of his father and predecessor Ali Khamenei on the first day of the war.

“Certainly, the country is at war, but young people also have the right to marry,” one young woman in a white Islamic bridal dress, who was not named, said beside her groom in footage published by the Mehr news agency. Mehr said 110 couples had taken part in the Imam Hossein square ceremony alone. — AFP



EU VOWS ‘EXCEPTIONAL’ SUPPORT FOR FARMERS OVER WAR



Farmers demonstrate in front of the European Parliament, in Strasbourg. — AFP

STRASBOURG: Brussels will provide “exceptional support” to farmers affected by soaring fertiliser costs caused by the Iran war, the European Union’s agriculture chief said on Tuesday. “The commission will provide targeted exceptional support to the most affected farmers,” EU agriculture commissioner Christophe Hansen told the European Parliament in Strasbourg, adding that the EU would seek to boost an agriculture crisis reserve fund by “a substantial amount”.

The European Union released emergency funds to help farmers deal

with soaring fertiliser costs caused by the Iran war, under plans to support the sector to be unveiled. Brussels has been under pressure to take action to blunt the impact of the Middle East crisis on agriculture, as the spike in fertiliser prices risks pushing up food costs across the bloc.

“European farmers are facing the wall and can’t wait any longer!” said the agriculture lobbying group Copa-Cogeca, which organised a small protest outside the European Parliament in Strasbourg, where the EU plan is to be presented. About a third of fertilisers shipped by sea reach

the global market through the Strait of Hormuz, which has been effectively closed by the US-Israeli war against Iran.

That sent prices up and the World Trade Organization (WTO) has warned that the blockade threatens global food security, particularly in Africa and South Asia. In Europe, the price of nitrogen fertilisers, which are derived from gas, has risen to about 500 euros (\$581) a tonne from 380 euros last winter.

It was a one-two punch for farmers already facing higher costs because of the war in Ukraine. — AFP

SANCTIONS LIST



US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent poses for a photo ahead of a G7 finance ministers and central bank governors meeting in Paris. — Reuters

BESSENT URGES MORE DISRUPTION TO IRAN’S FINANCING

PARIS: US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on Tuesday called on allies to more forcefully disrupt Iran’s financing networks and said the Treasury would scrub its sanctions list of outdated designations to make it easier for financial institutions to root out the most sophisticated financing schemes. In remarks prepared for delivery at financing conference after G7 finance leaders met in Paris, Bessent said that participants needed to “stand with us in full measure” against Iran.

“That will require, for example, our European partners to join the United States in taking action against Iran by designating its financiers, unmasking its shell and front companies, shuttering its bank branches, and dismantling its proxies,” Bessent said. “It will require those of you in the Middle East and Asia to root out Iran’s shadow banking networks.”

As the Trump administration tries to pressure Tehran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz to unlock vital oil flows disrupted by the US-Israeli attacks on Iran, the US Treasury has stepped up its sanctions efforts through a programme dubbed “Economic Fury.” It aims to disrupt Iran’s shadow banking networks, and has frozen nearly half a billion dollars worth of cryptocurrency linked to Iran. To make this more effective, the Treasury will modernise its sanctions architecture because “our adversaries adapt and innovate” by creating new shell companies.

Most US Treasury sanctions are imposed on individuals, companies and other entities that are added to its Specially Designated Nationals List, which contains tens of thousands of designees that are cut off from the dollar-based financial system and see assets frozen. Anyone that transacts with designated entities risks being sanctioned themselves.

“To sharpen national security outcomes, Treasury is tailoring our sanctions programme for the 21st century.

We are reviewing outdated and obsolete designations to help financial institutions focus on the most sophisticated financing and sanctions evasion schemes,” Bessent said. — Reuters

Israel military issues fresh evacuation warnings for south Lebanon

BEIRUT: The Israeli military on Tuesday warned residents of 12 towns and villages in southern Lebanon to immediately evacuate ahead of expected attacks against Hezbollah, the latest despite a ceasefire. “Hezbollah’s continued violations of the ceasefire compel the IDF to operate against it. The IDF does not intend to harm you. For your safety, we urge you to distance yourself from the area and immediately move at least 1,000 metres away,” the military’s Arabic-language spokesman Avichay Adraee posted on X.

Lebanon’s state-run National News Agency reported a new series of Israeli strikes targeting several locations in southern Lebanon on Tuesday. Meanwhile, Hezbollah said in a statement that it had targeted a gathering of soldiers and vehicles in northern Israel with “a swarm of attack drones.” The Lebanese group also claimed responsibility for new attacks against Israeli forces operating inside Lebanese territory.

The Israeli military said that following sirens in several areas of northern Israel, a drone “that crossed from Lebanon to Israeli territory was intercepted”. Since the start of the ceasefire on April 17, Israel has continued to launch strikes, carry out demolitions and issue evacuation orders in south Lebanon, saying it is targeting the Iran-backed armed group. Hezbollah has also continued operations against Israeli forces in southern Lebanon and northern Israel.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said on Monday he was ready to “do the impossible” to stop the war with Israel, as the health ministry said Israeli strikes have killed more than 3,000 people. Aoun’s comments came as the Israeli army carried out another series of strikes in south Lebanon, while Hezbollah said it had struck a military target in northern Israel.

Hezbollah has also continued operations against Israeli forces in south Lebanon and northern Israel, including what it said was a drone attack on Monday on “the vehicle of the commander of the 300th Brigade of the Israeli enemy army”. The health ministry said the death toll from Israeli strikes since the start of the war on March 2 had reached



A man assesses damage in the aftermath of an Israeli air strike in the village of Ma'shuq in the district of Tyre, southern Lebanon. — AFP

Hezbollah said in a statement that it had targeted a gathering of soldiers and vehicles in northern Israel with “a swarm of attack drones.” The Lebanese group also claimed responsibility for new attacks against Israeli forces operating inside Lebanese territory.

3,020, with 211 people 18 and under and 116 healthcare workers among those killed.

“The framework that Lebanon has set for the negotiations consists of an Israeli withdrawal, a ceasefire, the deployment of the army along the border, the return of the displaced, and economic aid,” Aoun said in a statement on Monday. “My duty, based on my position and my responsibility, is to do the impossible, and to choose what is least costly, in order to stop the war against Lebanon and its people,” he added.

Last week the truce was extended for 45 days following a third round of talks between Lebanese and Israeli representatives in Washington, discussions to which

Hezbollah is opposed. But the ceasefire has failed to stop the violence, with Hezbollah on Monday saying it had fired a drone at a military target in northern Israel.

Lebanon’s state-run National News Agency reported a series of Israeli strikes across the south. The attacks came a day after Israeli strikes killed seven people in Lebanon, including a member of the group Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the country’s northeast, far from the Israel-Lebanon border. Israeli soldiers have invaded and occupied part of south Lebanon, operating inside an Israeli-declared “yellow line” that runs around 10 kilometres north of the border. They have carried out large-scale demolitions in the area. — AFP

FUEL CRISIS

Kenya massive transport strike called off



A Kenyan public transport strike over fuel price hikes triggered by the Iran war was called off on Tuesday, after the government reached an interim agreement with associations representing bus and minibus owners. Four people were killed and about 30 injured, Interior Minister Kipchumba Murkomen said. Murkomen told a joint press conference with the transport groups that the strike had been suspended for one week to allow for more talks between the government and transport operators. — Reuters

MUNITIONS SHIPMENT

Kurds deny sending weapons to Iran



Three major Kurdish opposition parties exited from Iran said that they did not send weapons to the country, after Iran’s Revolutionary Guards said they struck groups smuggling American munitions from Iraq. Alhwan Chikako from the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK) said claims of “seizing weapons and ammunition have absolutely nothing to do with us”. “We did not send weapons. No arms or equipment belonging to us have been seized by Iran,” he said. — AFP

RESTORING COOPERATION

Russia plans to return staff to Bushehr plant



Russian state nuclear corporation Rosatom is confident that it will be able to return its staff to the Bushehr nuclear power plant in Iran in the coming weeks. Rosatom, which is building two new units at the Bushehr site, pulled out hundreds of staff after the United States and Israel launched a war against Iran in the end of February. Meanwhile, Russia will take the Nato military alliance’s “increased” nuclear potential into account. — Reuters

Your comfort zone isn’t peace, it’s familiarity



HYESHA BARRETT

The writer is a Master Life Coach and NLP Practitioner

MOST people do not stay in situations because they are happy. They stay because they know what to expect. There is a distinction buried in that sentence, and it is one many people spend years not noticing.

Comfort, in the way we commonly use the word, has become confused with safety. We call something comfortable when it no longer surprises us. When the outcome is predictable or when the emotional environment feels known. Familiarity and peace are not the same thing, and mistaking one for the other is one of the quietest ways we keep ourselves small.

The nervous system is at the heart of this. It is wired, above all else, for predictability. When something is known, even if it’s painful, limiting or unfulfilling, the nervous system registers it as “safe”. Not because it’s good for you, but because you have previously survived it. The body keeps a record of what it has lived through and uses that evidence as a map. The familiar path, however uncomfortable, is the one it trusts.

This is why people return to dynamics that do not serve them. Why certain patterns in relationships, work, or self-talk continue

long after someone has consciously decided they want something different. The mind may be ready for change; however, the body operating from a much older system, is still choosing what it knows.

Understanding this removes the shame. You are not weak for staying in what is familiar. You are human, with a nervous system doing exactly what it was designed to do. The work is not to blame yourself for the pattern. The work is to gently show your body that the unknown does not equal danger.

This shows up in parenting in ways that are easy to miss. When children resist something new: a school, a routine, a room full of unfamiliar faces, they are not being difficult. Their nervous systems are responding to the unfamiliar, exactly as it was built to. The parent’s role is not to push nor dismiss, but to become the bridge. To offer enough calm and steadiness that the child begins to associate the new with safety, rather than threat. We co-regulate children into expansion, we cannot simply talk them there alone.

As adults, however, this is often what we try to do with ourselves. We use logic to convince ourselves to change, while leaving the body entirely out of the conversation. We set intentions, make plans, then wonder why

Comfort, in the way we commonly use the word, has become confused with safety. We call something comfortable when it no longer surprises us. When the outcome is predictable or when the emotional environment feels known

the pull toward what is known, feels stronger than the pull towards change. Unfortunately, growth that does not include the nervous system tends not to last.

True peace is something different from what the comfort zone offers. Peace is not the absence of challenge. It is the presence of internal safety: a grounded stability that travels with you, rather than one that depends on everything remaining still. It is built through small moments of choosing differently and surviving them. Through discovering that the unfamiliar did not break you but shape you, and that you can feel uncertain and still stay intact.

Remaining in our comfort zones will always feel easier short term, as it asks nothing new of us. However, it cannot grow you, often merely maintaining you and will unfortunately keep you stuck. What many people call their comfort zone is simply the place where old pain has been made livable.

The question worth sitting with is not whether the familiar feels safe. It almost certainly does.

The question is whether it is still serving who you are becoming? Peace is not found in staying still. It is found in learning to trust yourself enough to move.

HANOI HITS THE BRAKES ON PETROL BIKE BAN

TRAN THI MINH HA AND LAM NGUYEN

Millions of exhaust-belching motorbikes zip through Hanoi’s narrow streets every day fuelling its chronic air pollution, but authorities have backtracked from an ambitious plan to ban them in favour of electric two-wheelers.

Vehicular emissions account for more than half of the capital’s pollution problem - some days it tops world rankings for hazardous air - but the city runs on two-wheelers, the vast majority of them powered by fossil fuels.

Vietnam’s Communist government last year announced a plan to bar petrol motorbikes from a 26-square-km area in Hanoi’s historic centre.

In the face of opposition from riders and delays in building charging stations, authorities have since whittled down the proposal to cover just 11 streets spread over 0.5 square km.

Even that much smaller “low-emissions zone” would bar petrol bikes only on Friday evenings and some of the weekend - and is itself in doubt. It is a remarkable climb-down, underscoring the difficulty of spurring the transition to electric vehicles. “I think almost everyone opposes the ban,” said Phuong Anh Nguyen, a 24-year-old Hanoi resident who works as a researcher and rides a petrol motorbike.

She agrees pollution is a major problem and suffers from chronic congestion she blames on the air, but does not want to switch, saying electric vehicles “require frequent maintenance while carrying risks I may not fully understand”.

This month, city officials declined to sign off on even the scaled-back ban - postponing the decision to June and throwing its planned July 1 implementation into question.

“It’s rare but it does happen,” Vietnam analyst Nguyen Khac Giang said of the decision by city authorities to reverse course.

“The government tends to back down when their legitimacy is threatened... and I think that is what drives the loosening of the petrol bike ban regulations.”

Motorbikes are ubiquitous in Hanoi, with nearly seven million used by commuters, families or weighed down by piles of goods, and they outnumber cars roughly seven to one.

Two-wheelers reign supreme across Vietnam, where public transport is limited and many cannot afford cars, making it the world’s fourth-largest motorbike market.

It is still dominated by internal combustion engine bikes, but the government has been gradually encouraging electric vehicle adoption, with Ho Chi Minh City also planning to phase out petrol bikes, although on a slower timeline. — AFP

Race to find vaccines as Ebola outbreak grows

AN escalating outbreak of a rare Ebola strain in the Democratic Republic of Congo has kicked off a race to find vaccines and treatments that can be quickly tested and rolled out to save lives and stem the crisis.

More than 130 people have died so far during the outbreak, the World Health Organization said on Tuesday, as the United States warned its citizens not to travel to the affected region.

It is the 17th Ebola outbreak in DR Congo, but just the third caused by the Bundibugyo strain, for which there are no approved vaccines or treatments. However scientists have developed numerous candidates for vaccines and treatments that have not yet been tested in humans.

The WHO has said it will examine the options, including a vaccine called Ervebo that targets the more common Zaire strain and has already been deployed in numerous countries.

Virologist Thomas Geisbert, who helped develop the Ervebo vaccine, has designed a similar, single-injection jab targeting the Bundibugyo strain that research on monkeys has found offers protection against the virus.

However trialling vaccines in humans and mass manufacturing doses is a lengthy and expensive process, Geisbert said, comparing the market for a Bundibugyo jab to that of the Andes hantavirus strain that recently sparked global alarm.

“There hasn’t been an incentive for big pharma to jump in, because it’s not a money-maker,” said the researcher at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston.

Geisbert first published a study about his Bundibugyo vaccine candidate back in 2013, but it has since “just sat there”, he said.

It was a similar story when he first published research in 2005 about



DANIEL LAWLER

Health & Science journalist at AFP

More than 130 people have died so far during the outbreak, the World Health Organization said on Tuesday, as the United States warned its citizens not to travel to the affected region



A health worker takes the temperature of an M23 rebel at the entrance to the Rodolphe Merieux Laboratory, as part of the response to the epidemic in Goma, North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo. — Reuters

what would eventually become the Ervebo vaccine.

It was only in 2014, during the biggest Ebola outbreak on record which killed 11,300 people in West Africa, when attention turned towards his vaccine.

It took US pharmaceutical company MSD around nine months to roll out the first doses of Ervebo, which research has found to be 84-per cent protective against Zaire.

“I really hope that somebody jumps in now and does something like that” for Bundibugyo, Geisbert said, estimating that it could be done in as little as six or seven months.

A spokesperson for MSD - known as Merck in North America - said that independent data on non-Zaire strains such as Bundibugyo is “limited, not from humans and not from evaluation of Ervebo”.

Just as the scale of the DRC outbreak was becoming clear on Monday, research about a newly developed vaccine candidate was published in the journal PNAS.

Chinese researchers used the

mRNA technology made famous during the Covid pandemic for their vaccine targeting the three main Ebola strains, including Bundibugyo.

Virologist Connor Bamford of Queen’s University Belfast welcomed the effort, but warned that such mRNA vaccines are expensive to make and need to be kept cold. “This could limit its use in Africa,” he said.

Geisbert pointed out that the vaccine was only tested on mice - and these results often do not translate to monkeys, let alone humans.

Scientists at Oxford University said they were working with the world’s largest vaccine maker, the Serum Institute of India, to get a viral vector vaccine called ChAdOx1 BDBV ready as soon as possible.

“We are working through the logistics at pace,” but cannot give a precise timeline yet, Teresa Lambe, head of vaccine immunology at the Oxford Vaccine Group, said.

A WHO-sponsored trial of two experimental Bundibugyo treatments could soon reportedly be launched in Ebola-hit areas.

Family as primary educator for growth and stability



SAMUEL KUTTY

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

THE world is constantly evolving, and values change within society. What holds significance for one generation may not for another. In this context, what about family – does its structure still hold significance in today’s society?

The family is recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as “the natural and fundamental group unit of society” and is “entitled to protection by society and the State.” However, many families face income insecurity, limited caregiving support, and unequal access to essential services.

Family is our first classroom, our safest harbour, and the invisible thread that ties us across generations. This is one of the reasons the United Nations established May 15, every year, as the International Day of Families.

While this international observance holds deeper significance than it may seem, it has unfortunately been overlooked, much like many other days with a satirical twist that “there is now a day for everything.”

But the fact is that international days have been established to serve as reminders that we are all members of a global family, united by a common past, present, and future. They promote awareness and provide opportunities to reinvigorate worldwide calls to action, such as achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

From Gaza to Sudan, from Ukraine to

Iran, the headlines continually remind us of a painful truth: children are always among the hardest hit during conflicts and wars. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, one in five children worldwide is living in or fleeing from conflict zones.

Families displaced from their native lands face the dual challenges of survival and cultural adaptation. In refugee camps, they often live in overcrowded and unstable conditions, where traditional family roles break down under the pressures of scarcity and dependence on aid.

Horrifying violence, hunger, displacement, and disease are tearing people’s lives apart – killing and maiming civilians, separating families, forcibly uprooting people from their land and livelihoods, fuelling the spread of diseases, and devastating their mental and physical health.

At the beginning of this year, a UN report indicated that over 239 million people worldwide were in urgent need of humanitarian assistance and protection due to entrenched violent conflicts that have caused unprecedented displacement and severe human rights violations.

In communities affected by genocide or civil conflict, storytelling becomes both a burden and a means of healing. Families share stories of endurance, grief, and resilience, ensuring that the memory of conflict remains alive while also risking the

In communities affected by wars or civil conflict, storytelling becomes both a burden and a means of healing. Families share stories of endurance, grief, and resilience, ensuring that the memory of conflict remains alive while also risking the perpetuation of fear and division

perpetuation of fear and division.

Recollections of conflicts are passed down through generations, influencing identities and narratives. Intergenerational trauma serves as an unspoken legacy, shaping family perspectives on trust, authority, and belonging.

When a family disintegrates, the effects on men, women, and especially children are extensive and severe. These impacts are felt throughout the community. Our leaders and governments should, therefore, to the greatest extent possible, support efforts to strengthen families in order to achieve the highest level of social security.

Authorities, as mandated by international law, should enact laws and policies that foster favourable conditions for family formation and stability. Governments must support individuals in exercising their right to marry and start a family, while also providing social protection for families.

Finally, all governments across the world need to recognise the importance of the family due to its vital role as the primary educator, economic engine, and social support system; only then can the objectives of the International Day of Families be achieved.

At the same time, one question still remains: do these global observances truly impact people’s lives by encouraging the world to refocus efforts and reaffirm commitments to critical issues?

AFTER MAYOR’S MURDER, MEXICO BATTLES FOR PEACE

YUSSEL GONZALEZ

The brazen murder of a small-city mayor shocked Mexico and forced President Claudia Sheinbaum to step up an offensive against all-powerful drug cartels. But even after a deployment totalling thousands of troops and the killing of a top cartel capo, she has struggled to impose peace in restive Pacific coast states. Residents of the state of Michoacan’s second city Uruapan, have resigned themselves to live with violence.

“You can’t be out on the streets too late anymore,” 24-year-old student Natalia Miranda said. “If you’re assaulted, you don’t make it out alive.”

Uruapan, a city of more than 300,000 people, is the centre of Mexico’s multi-billion-dollar avocado industry. It’s also a stronghold of several of the world’s largest cocaine and fentanyl trafficking cartels. In the town square, people chat amiably in the shadow of a memorial to slain cowboy-hat-wearing mayor Carlos Manzo.

The 40-year-old was shot multiple times during November’s Day of the Dead festival, allegedly by a 17-year-old drug addict working for the Jalisco New Generation Cartel.

After his death, protesters set fire to public buildings and clashed with police, resulting in over 100 injuries. Uruapan has a long history of violence. In 2006, armed groups tossed five human heads onto a club dance floor in the city.

In the 20 years since, there has been a cycle of intensifying violence.

“Michoacan was on the brink of becoming a failed state,” governor Alfredo Ramirez Bedolla said, recounting how farmers created self-defence militias just to survive. But the situation reached a point of inflexion with Manzo’s murder, as much for residents as for Sheinbaum’s government.

Around 20 people were arrested for Manzo’s killing, including seven of his bodyguards. The young gunman was killed by the mayor’s security team at the scene. “We can’t forget what happened,” said Manzo’s widow, Grecia Quiroz, who has been the mayor of Uruapan since her husband’s death. She has no political experience but took office as a symbol of resistance and to demand that Sheinbaum tackle the cartels.

“This awoke not just Michoacan, but all of Mexico,” she said while surrounded by bodyguards to keep would-be assassins at bay.

“We cannot ignore or turn a blind eye to the issue of security,” she said. “It is time for society to come together, for us to demand from the government what must be demanded, for us to raise our voices, for us not to remain silent, and for fear to no longer paralyse us.”

Following Manzo’s death, President Sheinbaum vowed “zero impunity” and sent additional troops to Michoacan. She also moved against Nemesio Oseguera, a Michoacan native and notorious leader of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel. — AFP

Spain showing Europe immigration not a threat



Spain's decision stands in contrast to the direction many other European countries are taking. - 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

Across the continent, immigration policy is increasingly shaped by fear-driven rhetoric and pressure from far-right movements

250,000 and 300,000 foreign workers per year to sustain its welfare state and labour market. Spain's economy, currently among the fastest growing in the European Union, has benefited significantly from immigration, particularly in sectors facing labour shortages such as hospitality, healthcare, agriculture and technology. The economic argument alone should already challenge anti-immigrant narratives. Immigrants pay taxes, consume goods and services, start businesses and fill essential jobs. Many European countries face ageing populations and declining birth rates, meaning that immigration is not only beneficial but also economically necessary.

But immigration contributes more than labour. Societies are meant to be living mixtures of cultures, traditions, languages and experiences. Immigration enriches food, art, music, education and public life. European cities themselves are shaped by centuries of migration and exchange. Yet despite this history, immigrants continue to be portrayed by some politicians and media outlets as burdens or threats. One of the most common anti-immigrant arguments is that migrants “steal jobs” or overuse social services. In reality, labour laws in most European countries prioritise the hiring of local workers. Migrants often end up taking jobs that locals are unwilling or unable to do,

particularly physically demanding or low-paid work. Agriculture, cleaning services, elderly care and construction across Europe rely heavily on immigrant labour. Without these workers, many sectors would struggle to function.

The idea that immigrants are responsible for economic hardship also ignores broader structural problems such as inflation, housing shortages and wage stagnation. Blaming migrants becomes an easy political distraction from failures in governance and economic management. France provides a particularly revealing example of the contradictions within European immigration debates. The country's largest immigrant-origin population comes from North Africa, particularly Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. This demographic reality did not emerge randomly, it is deeply tied to France's colonial history in the region.

Colonisation destroyed economies, political systems and societies across North Africa. Resources were extracted, local industries weakened and political instability entrenched over decades. In many cases, migration towards France happened not simply out of choice, but because colonial relationships created deep economic and social dependence. When people move to former colonial powers in search of opportunity or stability, it is often within a historical framework created by colonisation itself. This context is frequently ignored in modern political discourse. Immigration is discussed as though it exists separately from history, rather than as part of the long-term consequences of empire and global inequality.

What Spain is doing differently is recognising migrants not as temporary outsiders, but as part of the country’s future. Regularisation does not erase challenges related to integration or public services, but it creates stability, for migrants and for society itself. People who can work legally are less vulnerable to exploitation.

SPORTS

VETERAN STRIKER



Al Nassr’s Cristiano Ronaldo reacts during the AFC Champions League Two final against Gamba Osaka at Al Awwal Park, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on May 16. — Reuters

RONALDO, 41, LEADS PORTUGAL INTO HIS SIXTH WORLD CUP

LISBON: Veteran Portugal striker Cristiano Ronaldo will lead his country into the 2026 World Cup this summer after coach Roberto Martinez named the 41-year-old in his squad on Tuesday. The former Real Madrid and Manchester United star, now at Saudi Arabian side Al Nassr, is set to appear at a record sixth World Cup. Portugal and Ronaldo, the all-time leading men’s international goalscorer with 143 goals, have never won the competition. Ronaldo could face former Barcelona rival Lionel Messi, who is also set to play at a sixth World Cup after leading Argentina to glory four years ago in Qatar. The Portuguese forward avoided a three-match ban despite being sent off against the Republic of Ireland in their last qualifying match for an elbow. Spanish coach Martinez selected a 26-man squad with no major surprises, including Ronaldo’s Al Nassr team-mate Joao Felix, and also named goalkeeper Ricardo Velho as an extra player in the group. Paris Saint-Germain stars Vitinha, Joao Neves, Nuno Mendes and Goncalo Ramos are also included in a strong squad, along with Manchester United playmaker Bruno Fernandes and a contingent from Manchester City, including Bernardo Silva.

Martinez said he would not need to manage five-time Ballon d’Or winner Ronaldo in a special way because of his age. “In my experience, at a World Cup, a player doesn’t follow the pattern of club form, age-related performance or anything like that,” Martinez told reporters. “The focus is our group. All of them are focussed, they’re prepared for the demands of a World Cup and we just need to manage day by day.” Ronaldo said last year that this World Cup would be his last. He was left in tears last weekend after defeat by Gamba Osaka in the AFC Champions League Two final, but Martinez said an emotionally draining season would not affect him this summer. “I think that coming into the national team set-up brings new energy and allows you to completely switch off from what happened during the season,” said the coach. — AFP

PORTUGAL 27-MAN SQUAD LIST:
Goalkeepers: Diogo Costa (Porto), Jose Sa (Wolves/ENG), Rui Silva (Sporting Lisbon), Ricardo Velho (Genclerbirligi/TUR)
Defenders: Diogo Dalot (Manchester United/ENG), Matheus Nunes, Ruben Dias (both Manchester City/ENG), Nelson Semedo (Fenerbahce/TUR), Joao Cancelo (Barcelona/ESP), Nuno Mendes (Paris Saint-Germain/FRA), Goncalo Inacio (Sporting Lisbon), Renato Veiga (Villarreal/ESP), Tomas Araujo (Benfica)
Midfielders: Ruben Neves (Al Hilal/KSA), Samu Costa (Mallorca/ESP), Joao Neves, Vitinha (both Paris Saint-Germain/FRA), Bruno Fernandes (Manchester United/ENG), Bernardo Silva (Manchester City/ENG)
Attackers: Cristiano Ronaldo, Joao Felix (both Al Nassr/KSA), Francisco Trincao (Sporting Lisbon), Francisco Conceicao (Juventus/ITA), Pedro Neto (Chelsea/ENG), Rafael Leao (AC Milan/ITA), Goncalo Guedes (Real Sociedad/ESP), Goncalo Ramos (PSG/FRA)

Ibri stay alive, Sur climb to eighth in Round 25 of JL

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 19

THE penultimate round of the Jindal League delivered movement at both ends of the table, with Al Shabab holding on to second place, Al Nasr dropping points and the battle to avoid relegation left unresolved heading into the final round. At Al Buraimi Sports Complex, Ibri kept their survival hopes alive with a vital 2-0 victory over Dhofar. Abdulrahman al Yaqoubi opened the scoring in the 37th minute with a header, before Loic Paul sealed the result late on after rounding the goalkeeper. The win lifted Ibri to 23 points in 12th place, while Dhofar remained 11th on 24.

SAMAYIL HOLD AL NASR
At Al Saada Sports Complex, Al Nasr was forced to settle for a 1-1 draw against Samayil. After a cautious first half, the visitors broke the deadlock in the 81st minute through substitute Hazza al Mushaifri, who finished off a swift counter-attack. Al Nasr responded quickly and rescued a point through Essa al Naabi, ensuring they remained third on 50 points. Samayil, meanwhile, moved to 26 points in ninth place.

SEEB, AL SHABAB SHARE POINTS
At Seeb Stadium, champions Seeb and Al Shabab shared the points after a goalless draw. Seeb looked the more threatening side early on, while Al Shabab gradually settled and created chances of their own, but neither team could find the breakthrough. The draw took Al Seeb to 64 points and kept Al Shabab second on 51.

SURE EDGE IN THRILLER
At Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, Sur claimed an impressive 3-2 away win over Oman Club. The hosts went ahead early through Waleed al Musallami, but Sur responded strongly, with Axel May and Arseni Loko turning the game around before Yousef al Mukhaini added a third after the break. Al Harith al Mukhaini reduced the deficit from the penalty spot in stoppage time, but Sur held on to collect all three points. The win lifted Sur to 31 points in eighth place, while Oman Club remained seventh on 36.



Al Rustaq and Al Khabourah shared the points after a dramatic 3-3 draw in the penultimate round.

SIX-GOAL DRAW
At Al Rustaq Sports Complex, relegated Al Rustaq and Al Khabourah played out a dramatic 3-3 draw. Essa al Buraidi gave Al Rustaq the lead in the 22nd minute, but John Paul struck twice in the 27th and 33rd minutes to turn the match in Al Khabourah’s favour. Mohammed Fouad equalised for Al Rustaq before the break and Ibrahim al Harrasi made it 3-2 in the 74th minute. Al Khabourah responded immediately through Saeed Obaid a minute later to salvage a point. The draw moved Al Khabourah to 22 points in 13th, while Al Rustaq remained bottom on 15. **SOHAR DRAW WITH SAHAM**
Sohar and Saham shared a 2-2 draw in another important result in the lower half. Abdullah al Balushi and Mohammed Ithab scored for Sohar, while Mohsin Jawhar and

Mohammed al Maamari were on target for Saham. Sohar moved to 37 points in fifth, while Saham reached 26 points in 10th. **BAHLA BEAT AL NAHDA**
Bahla claimed a useful 2-1 victory over Al Nahda. Luki Vemki and Abdulsalam al Shukaili scored for Bahla, while Azzan al Tamimi netted Al Nahda’s only goal. The win lifted Bahla to 37 points in sixth, while Al Nahda stayed fourth on 44. With one round remaining, Seeb are already confirmed champions and Al Rustaq have already been relegated. But the battle for survival in the top-tier league remains unresolved. Al Khabourah are 13th on 22 points, Ibri are 12th on 23 and Dhofar are 11th on 24, leaving all three still exposed heading into the final round. Results on the last day will decide which side survives and which club follows Al Rustaq into the First Division.

Oman drawn with Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Kuwait

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 19

Oman have been drawn in Group A alongside hosts Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Kuwait for the 27th Arabian Gulf Cup, following the official draw ceremony held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on Tuesday. Group B features the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Yemen, setting the stage for a highly competitive edition of the regional tournament, which will bring together all eight Gulf national teams. The draw ceremony took place at the Culture Square, Arts Centre building of the Red Sea International Film Festival in Jeddah, in the presence of Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al Thani, President of the Arabian Gulf Cup Football Federation, Yasser al Misehal, President of the Saudi Arabian Football Federation, senior officials, representatives of the participating teams and former Gulf football stars. The draw was conducted by former Saudi national team player Saleh al Mohammadi, former Qatar player Ahmed Khalil and Oman’s former international star Fawzi Basheer. The Oman Football Association was represented at the ceremony by Eng



Qutaiba al Gailani, Vice-Chairman of the OFA, Tarik Sektioui, head coach of the national team, Waleed al Numani, Director of the National Teams Department and Fawzi Basheer. The tournament will be staged in Jeddah at King Abdullah Sports City Stadium and Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Stadium, with the participation of Oman,

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain and Yemen. According to the competition regulations, the teams were divided into four pots based on the latest Fifa rankings issued on April 1. Qatar and Iraq were placed in Pot 1, while Saudi Arabia and the UAE were in Pot 2. Oman and Bahrain formed Pot 3, with Kuwait and Yemen in Pot 4. Under the draw mechanism, one team from each pot was placed in each group, meaning that teams in the same pot would not meet in the group stage.

STRONG GROUP
Oman’s group promises strong and demanding fixtures, with the national team set to face the hosts Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Kuwait — three teams with rich history and strong traditions in the Gulf Cup. The group is expected to attract major attention due to the competitive balance and the historical rivalry between its sides. The top two teams from each group will qualify for the semifinals, with the winners advancing to the final to contest the title. Khaleeji 27 will be the fifth edition held under the umbrella of the Arabian Gulf Cup Football Federation. Saudi Arabia has previously hosted the Gulf Cup four times, in 1972, 1988, 2002 and 2014.

SECOND TEST



Bangladesh's Taijul Islam celebrates after the dismissal of Pakistan's Babar Azam during the fourth day of the second Test at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium. — AFP

TAIJUL PUTS BANGLADESH ON BRINK OF TEST SERIES WIN OVER PAKISTAN

SYLHET, Bangladesh: Bangladesh are three wickets away from a famous Test series win at home after spinner Taijul Islam took 4-113 to rattle Pakistan despite a rearguard by the opposition batters on Tuesday.

Pakistan ended day four on 316-7, needing another 121 runs for victory in what would be a record chase of 437 on the fifth and final day in Sylhet.

Mohammad Rizwan, on 75, and Sajid Khan, on eight, were unbeaten at the close of play.

Left-arm spinner Taijul struck key blows, including Babar Azam for 47 and Salman Agha on 71, to keep Bangladesh in the hunt for their first-ever Test series win over Pakistan at home.

Bangladesh, who won the opener of the two-match series, also closed in on back-to-back Test series victories over Pakistan — having whitewashed them 2-0 on Pakistani soil in 2024.

Pakistan slumped to 162-5 and were heading towards a tame defeat before Rizwan and Agha put on 134 runs to raise hopes of Test cricket's highest chase. West Indies currently hold the record for the 418 they scored to beat Australia in Antigua in 2003, while Pakistan have never successfully chased more than 377.

Pakistan lost their overnight openers early before captain Shan Masood and Azam steadied the ship with a counter-attacking partnership that guided them to 101-2 at lunch.

But the afternoon session shifted the momentum back in the hosts' favour. Bangladesh removed Azam after wicket-keeper Litton Das took a stunning catch behind the stumps off Taijul.

Nahid Rana then cleaned up Saud Shakeel with a wide yorker for just six, and Taijul snared Masood for a determined 71, with Mahmudul Hasan Joy taking a sharp catch at short leg.

Pakistan slipped to 200-5 at tea, but it was the stubborn sixth-wicket stand between Rizwan and Agha that frustrated Bangladesh. — AFP

Hyderabad book playoffs along with Gujarat Titans



Sunrisers Hyderabad's Ishan Kishan plays a shot against Chennai Super Kings during the IPL match at MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai. — Reuters

SKIPPER

their playoff spot in the IPL with a nervy five-wicket win over Chennai Super Kings on Monday.

The result at Chennai's MA Chidambaram Stadium ensured a playoff berth for Gujarat Titans as well. Defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru were the first team to qualify for the playoffs.

Five teams now jostle for one remaining playoff place in the T20 tournament that will conclude with the final on May 31 in Ahmedabad.

Australia's Cummins struck key blows with his pace bowling to restrict the opposition to 180-7 in Chennai's last home game.

Hyderabad slipped to 56-2 in their chase before the left-handed Kishan and Heinrich Klaasen, who made 47, put on 75 runs to

guide the team home with six balls to spare.

"Really satisfying," said Cummins. "It was a bit different to how we'd normally play. It was a pretty tough wicket there to bat.

"I thought the way the guys, Klassy and Ishan, chased down, it was really gutsy, so very happy."

Chennai's Afghanistan spinner Noor Ahmad denied Klaasen his fifty and Hyderabad lost another key wicket of Nitish Kumar Reddy before Kishan, a wicketkeeper-batter, struck decisive shots.

He departed after his 47-ball knock laced with seven fours and three sixes, but the job was done and Ravichandran Smaran hit the winning four.

CHENNAI ON THE BRINK

Five-time champions Chennai's fate hangs by a thread.

"We lost a couple of games at home, but I think, compared to last year, we were still very much better this year," said Chennai captain Ruturaj Gaikwad.

"And definitely coming here next year will be a much more stronger unit."

Bowlers led by Cummins set the tone for Hyderabad's domination after the Australian quick struck first to dismiss Sanju Samson, caught behind for 27.

Cummins then took down Gaikwad, for 15, and Kartik Sharma, for 32, as Chennai lost regular wickets.

Dewald Brevis hit a 27-ball 44 and put on 59 runs with Shivam Dube to raise Chennai's hopes of a 200-plus total but it was not to be.

Sri Lanka's Eshan Malinga bowled Brevis and fellow quick Sakib Hussain rattled the stumps of left-handed Dube to hurt Chennai.

In reply, Hyderabad lost their attacking openers including Travis Head, for six, and Abhishek Sharma, for 26, before Kishan and Klaasen took charge.

The left-right batting combination of Kishan and Klaasen put the chase back on track and despite wickets at the end Hyderabad sealed the win and the ticket into the next stage. — AFP

Oman girls ice hockey team enters Guinness World Record

KABEER YOUSUF

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The Oman Committee for Skating Sports confirmed that the Sultanate of Oman's participation in this year's 'Global Girls Game' was officially recognised as part of the record for the 'Most host countries for the same Ice Hockey exhibition match event', a title awarded to the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) on March 9, 2026, entering the coveted list of Global Guinness World Records achievement.

Oman Girls Ice Hockey was among 43 countries worldwide that simultaneously hosted matches for the 2026 edition of the IIHF's Global Girls Game, an initiative designed to showcase female hockey and introduce the sport to new players.

Oman Girls Ice Hockey team members, captain Al Firdous al

Kindi, assistant captain Khulood Ambosaidi, and the rest of the squad, which include Dalal Ambosaidi, Zina al Jabri, Layal al Ajmi, Aysal Waheed, Erileck Cameron, Mariangel Delgado, Aya al Mahrouqi, Sara Bahkit, Khadija al Riyami, Fatma al Hajri, Ira Amit, Fajr al Amri, Mawadda, Nahla, Maryam al Siddiqi, Sharifa al Aupi, Savana al Alawi, Nawar al Busaidy and Lilas, along with their coaches and officials, celebrated the recognition as a milestone for team as well as for the country.

The achievement highlights Oman's dedication towards girls' sports, especially ice hockey, standing alongside leading hockey countries on a world record stage. It also reinforces the value of the IIHF's Global Girls Game, the vehicle for global unity and official recognition.



The Oman Girls Ice Hockey team was among 43 countries worldwide that simultaneously hosted matches for the 2026 edition of the IIHF's Global Girls Game.

PROUD MOMENT

Saud al Aupi, Chairman of the Oman Skating Sports Committee, the official governing body responsible for the development and oversight of the women's ice hockey team, extended his congratulations to the squad and the nation.

"This is a proud moment for Oman. To be counted among 43 nations in an official Guinness World Record is a testament to the dedication and spirit of our women's ice hockey team. They have shown that Omani women can compete, belong and be celebrated on the world stage."

The committee extended its sincere appreciation to head coach Gregory Cameron and assistant coach Ibrahim Mohammady, for their technical leadership and dedication to player development.

SPORTS

TESTINGTIMES



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz poses with the Wimbledon 2024 trophy at the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, London on July 14, 2024. — Reuters

2-TIME CHAMPION
ALCARAZ
WITHDRAWS FROM
WIMBLEDON WITH
WRIST INJURY

MADRID: Carlos Alcaraz's hopes of regaining his Wimbledon title have been dashed with the two-time champion announcing on Tuesday he is withdrawing as he recovers from a wrist injury.

"My recovery is going well and I'm feeling much better, but unfortunately I'm still not ready to play, I am obliged to withdraw from both Queen's and Wimbledon," said Spaniard Alcaraz, who lost to Jannik Sinner in last year's final in the All England Club. "These are two really special tournaments for me and I'll miss them a lot. We'll keep working to come back as soon as possible."

Alcaraz sustained the injury during the first round of the Barcelona Open last month and subsequently pulled out of tournaments in Madrid and Rome and then Roland Garros, where he is the reigning two-time champion.

The world number two became the youngest man to complete the career Grand Slam in January with his triumph at the Australian Open. The 23-year-old holds a 22-3 record this season and also won a title in Doha.

SINNER RIVALRY

Alcaraz's wrist injury has stopped him continuing his exciting rivalry with Italian world number one Sinner, 24, who is firm favourite to triumph in Paris and London.

He lost top spot following his defeat by Sinner in the Monte Carlo Masters final on April 12.

The seven-time Grand Slam winner triumphed at Roland Garros in 2024 and 2025. He saved three championship points against Sinner last year in the longest French Open final in history. The Italian, who has never won the French Open, may be able to capitalise on Alcaraz's absence. This year's tournament runs from May 24 to June 7.

Alcaraz won his first Wimbledon trophy in 2023, defeating seven-time champion Novak Djokovic in the final and successfully defended his title against the Serb the following year.

This year's Wimbledon championship runs from June 29 to July 12.

"It's sad news for all of us, me being a competitor you want to play against the best players in the world and he's definitely the best player on this surface," Sinner had said after Alcaraz's withdrawal from the French Open.

"Being that young, like he is and like I am, we need to look at our bodies first before worse things (happen)." — AFP



Anas al Riyami has represented Oman in multiple international appearances.

First Omani pro wrestler
Anas to make Saudi debut

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroop_ath

OMAN'S FIRST PROFESSIONAL wrestler Anas al Riyami, professionally known as 'Anas Rex', is set to make debut in Saudi Arabia on Thursday, taking on the top contender for the Arab Championship.

Anas' venture will also be a major milestone in Omani sports as he prepares to compete for a Saudi professional wrestling promotion. This appearance will make him the first Omani professional wrestler to compete in Saudi Arabia, while also marking the fourth different country in which he has represented the Sultanate of Oman in professional wrestling.

Anas Rex has become a pioneer in a field of sport that remains relatively new within the region. Throughout his journey, he has represented Oman in multiple international appearances, helping open doors for aspiring Omani talent passionate about professional wrestling.

His participation in Saudi Arabia will be far from ordinary, as Anas Rex is scheduled to compete against the number one contender for the Arab Championship, in what is considered one of the biggest challenges of his professional career and an opportunity to further showcase his abilities on a regional stage.

"This opportunity represents a major step in my professional wrestling journey and a historic moment for Oman. One of the biggest challenges is carrying the responsibility of being the first Omani professional wrestler to compete in Saudi Arabia and continuing to represent my country at the highest level. Competing against top talent, especially the number one contender for the Arab Championship, is never easy, but I see challenges as opportunities to prove myself and grow," Anas told Oman Observer.

CULTURE OF PRO WRESTLING

Beyond his in-ring career, Anas al Riyami (Anas Rex) has also played a major role in growing the culture of professional

wrestling in Oman, contributing to the development of a growing fanbase and encouraging young Omani talent to pursue the sport professionally. His long-term vision has been to establish a stronger presence for Oman in professional wrestling on both a regional and international level.

This latest achievement reflects the ambition, dedication and determination of Anas Rex, as he continues to break barriers and raise Oman's flag in professional wrestling across different countries and platforms.

The youngster hopes that his venture opens doors for aspiring professional wrestlers in Oman.

"As for expectations, my goal is not only to perform at my best but also to make Oman proud and open more doors for future Omani wrestlers. I hope this venture continues to build recognition for professional wrestling in Oman and inspires more young talent to believe that competing internationally is possible with hard work and dedication," Anas said.



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Guardiola set for Man City farewell

MANCHESTER, England: Pep Guardiola is expected to take charge of Manchester City for the final time on Sunday, drawing the curtain down on a decade that has reshaped not only his club but English football itself.

When the Catalan arrived in 2016, he was already regarded as one of the game's great innovators. What followed was something even more profound: a transformational reign that turned City from wealthy contenders into the defining team of an era.

Ten years on, Guardiola leaves City having won 15 major trophies, not including the Uefa Super Cup and Club World Cup.

His trophy cabinet includes six Premier League titles — including a record four in a row — and the club's first Champions League crown, a haul that places him among the most successful managers in English football history.



This season alone, he has guided City to both the League Cup and FA Cup titles, and pushed Arsenal right to the wire in the Premier League race.

His final match, expected to be Sunday's league game against Aston Villa, will close the book on a story of dominance, reinvention and influence that extended far beyond results.

And the Etihad Stadium crowd will surely soak up every second, singing their tribute song to their beloved manager: "We've got . . . Guardiola!" to the tune of The Dave Clark Five's 'Glad All Over'.

Guardiola's legacy at City is measured not just in silverware but in the scale of control his teams exerted. At their peak, they amassed points totals previously unimaginable, winning four straight league titles between 2021 and 2024 and forcing rivals into near-perfection just to keep pace.

In 2023, they completed the treble, joining Manchester United's 1999 side as the only English teams to hoist the league, FA Cup and Champions League trophies in the same season. — Reuters

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$106.45
BRENT \$109.09
LIGHT \$107.28

SHORTTAKES



Otech is expanding its cloud, data centre, cybersecurity and AI computing capabilities.

OMAN’S AI RACE
MOVES FROM APPS
TO INFRASTRUCTURE

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 19

Oman’s next phase of artificial intelligence growth will depend less on applications and more on the infrastructure needed to host, secure and scale them locally, a senior Otech official said.

Hassan al Lawati said Otech — the fully owned technology arm of Omantel — is expanding its cloud, data centre, cybersecurity and AI computing capabilities as government and enterprise demand for local digital infrastructure increases.

Speaking at a banking technology forum held here earlier this week, Al Lawati said Otech currently operates seven Tier-3-certified data centres with a combined capacity of 12 megawatts, including facilities in Muscat and Duqm, while expanding local AI computing infrastructure using NVIDIA GPU platforms.

“The cloud is built in layers,” Al Lawati said, describing a structure that includes data centres, infrastructure, software platforms and application data. “If you understand this structure, then you can plan and organise your applications in a better way.”

He said the company has evolved from traditional co-location and hosting services into a broader provider of cloud computing, managed services, cybersecurity and AI infrastructure serving sectors including telecoms, oil and gas, banking, healthcare and government.

According to Al Lawati, Otech currently serves around 1,200 customers and has expanded into AI and large language model (LLM) services over the past three years, including GPU-based workloads for healthcare imaging, computer vision and seismic analysis.

The company also provides multi-cloud services through partnerships including AWS, Oracle Cloud Infrastructure and Huawei Cloud, while additional agreements with global cloud providers are under development.

New platforms to advance
Oman’s Net Zero goals

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 19

IN a major push towards Oman’s net-zero ambitions, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals launched three digital platforms and signed two agreements under the first phase of its government buildings energy efficiency programme, advancing sustainability and digital transformation efforts across the Sultanate of Oman.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, stated that the Ministry launched three strategic digital platforms: the “Makman” platform for open data in the energy sector, the “Kawader” platform for attracting national talent to work in the sector and the “Meezan” national platform for monitoring emissions and managing greenhouse gas data.

These platforms enable companies to record emissions, track carbon reduction projects and manage their data according to international standards.

Al Aufi explained that the Ministry has also signed agreements with specialised companies to begin implementing energy efficiency projects in government buildings.

He emphasised that these projects represent a practical step towards enhancing electricity consumption efficiency and rationalising operational spending, while also supporting sustainability efforts and reducing carbon emissions.

He pointed out that the National Net Zero Strategy, in cooperation with the Oman Net Zero Centre, has laid out a clear roadmap for various economic sectors to achieve zero neutrality by 2050.

This will be accomplished through coordinating efforts and projects with regulatory bodies and companies; and providing technical, legislative and financial support for projects related to emissions reduction.

He added that Net Zero



A number of agreements were signed with companies to begin implementing energy efficiency projects in government buildings.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, stated that the Ministry launched three strategic digital platforms: the “Makman” platform for open data in the energy sector, the “Kawader” platform for attracting national talent to work in the sector and the “Meezan” national platform for monitoring emissions and managing greenhouse gas data.

projects represent an economic opportunity for the private sector through the development of new products and solutions, increased production efficiency and enhanced local content, as well as the creation of new jobs related to the green economy.

The first agreement involved signing an Energy Performance Contract (EPC) with Enova Facilities and Energy Management Company, while the second agreement included implementing energy efficiency measures in cooperation with Sultan Qaboos University, the owner of the targeted facilities.

For his part, Dr Amer bin Saif al Hinai, Vice Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University for Postgraduate Studies and Scientific Research, stated that the agreement is an extension of the university’s programmes to rationalise energy and water consumption.

He explained that the project includes implementing a package of technical measures, most notably upgrading air conditioning and lighting systems, applying energy management systems and introducing clean energy solutions to reduce consumption and achieve

sustainability in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The Oman Net Zero Centre oversees energy efficiency projects in government buildings according to the Super ESCO model, managing contracts and ensuring savings through specialised companies for up to 10 years.

The first phase of the programme includes 13 government buildings, 12 of which are at Sultan Qaboos University and one belonging to the Royal Court Affairs. This phase involves implementing an integrated system that includes replacing cooling and lighting systems with high-efficiency alternatives, installing smart building management systems (BMS) and adding renewable energy systems.

The projects aim to reduce electricity consumption by 27.53 per cent compared to the baseline, saving approximately 14.5 gigawatt-hours annually, in addition to reducing carbon emissions by about 6,300 tonnes of carbon dioxide annually over 10 years, with the implementation of precise mechanisms to measure and verify the savings.

The Ministry confirmed that this package represents the first phase of a series of annual packages aimed at the gradual expansion of energy efficiency projects in government buildings across Oman, thereby enhancing operational efficiency and reducing operating costs and energy consumption.

As part of expanding the national “Meezan” platform for greenhouse gas management and inventory, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, represented by the Oman Net Zero Centre, signed partnership agreements with a number of national companies and institutions from various sectors.

The goal is to build an integrated national emissions management system and strengthen public-private partnerships in low-carbon transition projects.

Rikan signs MoUs to boost social investment in Oman’s energy sector

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 19

In a move to strengthen social investment within Oman’s energy sector, the Energy Sector Social Responsibility Development Foundation (Rikan) signed three Memoranda of Understanding with the Jusoor Foundation, the Oman LNG Development Foundation and the Oman Energy Association (OPAL).

The agreements aim to enhance cooperation in knowledge sharing, data integration and the efficiency of social investment, while maximising the developmental impact of community initiatives.

The MoUs cover collaboration in exchanging expertise, coordinating initiatives, developing joint frameworks for measuring social impact and supporting the implementation of community projects in a way that promotes sustainability and improves investment efficiency



The pacts aim to enhance cooperation in knowledge sharing, data integration and the efficiency of social investment.

across the energy sector.

Eng Ismail al Sawafi, Director General of Social Responsibility at the Oman LNG Development Foundation, said the agreements mark an important step towards institutionalising community work and aligning efforts within Oman’s energy sector.

He emphasised that data sharing and integrated collaboration among partners are key to maximising sustainable development impact.

He also noted that the foundation aims to transform social responsibility into a sustainable economic driver

that supports national talent development and contributes to a knowledge-based economy aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

Eng Jaber bin Sulaiman al Busaidy, Executive Director of Jusoor Foundation, said the agreement strengthens integration between social responsibility institutions and translates partnerships into more structured and sustainable impact.

He added that it supports Jusoor’s approach of partnership-based development, joint initiatives and knowledge exchange in line with national development priorities and Oman Vision 2040.

He further stated that the cooperation expands opportunities in planning, financing and joint implementation of social responsibility programmes, while also supporting SMEs, improving impact measurement frameworks and enhancing data and expertise sharing to ensure more effective

and sustainable community outcomes.

Turkiya al Adawi, Director General of Strategic Projects and Local Content — OPAL, said the partnership aims to bridge industrial growth with social impact by establishing unified standards for community initiatives, launching training and skills development programmes for Omani talent and strengthening local value retention through procurement and workforce development.

She also highlighted the role of shared data and digital platforms in accelerating and coordinating social investment projects.

The signing coincided with the launch of Rikan’s visual identity during Oman Sustainability Week, marking a new phase of institutional collaboration focused on integration, execution and investment to enhance the efficiency and impact of social responsibility initiatives in Oman.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORT TAKES



Abraj signed a strategic cooperation agreement with OSHRM and with the Lahunna initiative.

ABRAJ SIGNS TWO STRATEGIC PACTS AT OPES 2026

MUSCAT: Abraj Energy Services marked a key milestone during its participation at the Oman Petroleum & Energy Show 2026 (OPES 2026) with the signing of two strategic agreements aimed at advancing digital workforce transformation and strengthening support for women-led entrepreneurship and SMEs in Oman.

As an Official Sponsor and Exhibitor at OPES 2026, held from May 18-20, 2026 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in Muscat, Abraj used the second day of the event to reinforce its role as a national energy services leader focused on innovation, local content development, community impact and strategic collaboration in support of Oman Vision 2040.

During the exhibition, Abraj signed a strategic cooperation agreement with the Oman Society for Human Resource Management (OSHRM) to support digital transformation and workforce development.

The agreement focuses on the adoption of AI-driven human resources solutions and advanced recruitment technologies designed to enhance operational efficiency, strengthen talent management practices and support the future readiness of Oman's workforce.

Abraj also signed a partnership agreement with the "Lahunna" initiative and launched the "Siraj" programme, a community-focused initiative designed to support and empower female entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized enterprises in Oman. The agreement reflects Abraj's commitment to sustainable corporate social responsibility programmes that create measurable social and economic impact while contributing to a more inclusive national business ecosystem.

Together, the two agreements highlight Abraj's integrated approach to value creation: investing in future-focused capabilities within the workforce while enabling broader participation in Oman's economic development through support for women entrepreneurs and SMEs.

These initiatives build on Abraj's continued progress in local content development and national value creation. In 2025, the Company achieved a certified ICV score of 28.2%, maintained a 93% Omanisation rate and recorded approximately \$125 million in local spend, reflecting its sustained commitment to strengthening the local economy and developing national capabilities.

Abraj also hosted a high-level delegation from Sonatrach Group, Algeria's national oil and gas company, headed by the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Sonatrach Group, at the Company's headquarters in Muscat. The visit reflected the continued strategic relationship between both companies and ongoing efforts to strengthen cooperation and explore future opportunities across the energy sector.

OAB APPOINTS LEAD MANAGERS FOR AT1 ISSUANCE

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank SAOG (OAB) announced on May 18, 2026, the mandate of a group of financial institutions in connection with a proposed benchmark fixed rate resettable US dollar-denominated Regulation S Additional Tier 1 perpetual non-call 5.5-year capital securities issuance, subject to market conditions.

The bank has mandated Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank, Arab Bank plc, Arqam Capital,



Citigroup, Emirates NBD, First Abu Dhabi Bank, Kamco Invest, Oman Investment Bank, Standard Chartered and Ubhar Capital

as Joint Global Coordinators, Joint Lead Managers and Joint Bookrunners to arrange a global investor conference call and a series of fixed income investor calls commencing on May 18, 2026.

The proposed issuance forms part of the bank's broader strategy to actively manage and optimise its capital structure, support long-term growth objectives and further strengthen its regulatory capital base.

Deepal launched in Oman

ARABIAN

Gulf Automobiles and Equipment (AGAE) has launched Deepal, Changan's new energy vehicle

brand, at a special event marking a major step in advanced electrified mobility solutions in the Sultanate of Oman.

The launch introduced a line-up of Range Extended Electric Vehicles (REEVs) that combine electric driving experience with extended range confidence, superior performance and intelligent technology.

Deepal has been introduced as a distinct new energy vehicle brand built around three key strengths including superior performance, superior comfort and superior safety. As REEV models, the vehicles allow drivers to enjoy smooth, responsive electric mobility for daily use, while the range extender supports longer journeys with added confidence.

This gives customers the benefit of electric driving without the usual concerns linked to range or charging availability, Deepal line-up are well suited to both city commutes and long-distance travel in Oman.

Deepal range therefore offers many premium class features in its model range as standard including:

Performance: REEV & Rear Wheel Drive for superior handling.

Design: Aerodynamic shape, frameless windows, 20" full spec wheels. Safety: IACC integrated Adaptive Cruise Control, Lane keep assist, Traffic Jam Assist. Technology:



The launch introduced a line-up of Range Extended Electric Vehicles (REEVs) that combine electric driving experience with extended range confidence, superior performance and intelligent technology.

Smart Voice Assistant, 540 degree camera, AR-HVD [S05, S07], Panoramic Sunroof

Comfort: Superior wheel base for extra leg room, Front Seats with excellent flank support for ultimate comfort.

The Deepal range in Oman includes the S05, S07 and G318, each developed to meet different lifestyle and driving needs. The line-up also includes the G318 all-wheel-drive SUV, which adds stronger traction, enhanced control and greater capability for customers seeking a more adventure-focused driving experience. The Deepal S05 is designed as a modern urban SUV with intelligent technology and extended electric freedom. Powered by a 1.5-litre naturally aspirated range extender and supported by a 27.28 kWh LFP battery, it offers a pure electric range of at least 160 km under NEDC

and a combined REEV range of over 1000 km under WLTC.

The S05 delivers a Combine Max Power of 214 hp and 320 Nm of motor torque, giving customers responsive everyday performance with the confidence of extended driving range.

The Deepal S07 offers a larger SUV experience with refined comfort and intelligent connectivity.

Powered by a 1.5-litre naturally aspirated range extender and a 31.74 kWh battery, it delivers a 160 km WLTP pure electric range and a WLTP combined range of 950 km. The S07 delivers a Combined Max Power of 235 hp and 320 Nm of motor torque, offering smooth acceleration, confident highway performance and long-distance driving assurance.

Ford Oman hosts Corporate Customer Connect 2026

MUSCAT: Arabian Car Marketing Company, the authorised distributor for Ford in the Sultanate of Oman, recently hosted the 'Ford Corporate Customer Connect 2026', an evening dedicated to expressing gratitude to its corporate partners.

The event served as a platform to strengthen professional ties and highlight the collective success achieved through long-term collaboration and mutual trust. The event opened with an insightful speech by Deenadayakaran Jeevamanickam, Business Head of Arabian Car Marketing Company.

He shared that the evening



Partners and industry leaders at Ford Corporate Customer Connect 2026.

was a tribute to the partners who have made the "Ready Set Ford" spirit a reality in Oman. He also noted that the brand's journey in Oman is deeply connected to the confidence placed in it by its corporate

clients. To showcase Ford's comprehensive support for businesses, an informative presentation was conducted by the senior management team representing sales, service, parts and pre-owned vehicle

divisions.

A key moment of the evening was the presentation of the Ford Corporate Partner Awards 2025, which celebrated the loyalty and performance of the brand's most consistent collaborators.

Deenadayakaran Jeevamanickam and Ravi Hejmadi, Head of Sales, presented the honours to the deserving recipients.

Budget Car Rental received the platinum category award for their long-term vision and outstanding loyalty.

The gold category award was presented to Rawasi Road Services for their consistent performance throughout the year.

OETC wins platinum award at Oman Sustainability Week 2026

MUSCAT: In recognition of its significant role through its operational projects alongside its profound commitment to sustainability principles, the Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) has been awarded the Platinum Award in ESG Category, during this year's Oman Sustainability Week Awards Ceremony.

The event was held under the auspices of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals on Sunday, May 17, 2026, with broad participation from local institutions across various sectors.

Oman Sustainability Week serves as a platform to celebrate and highlight national efforts in



OETC successfully met and exceeded the required evaluation criteria based on the framework adopted by the Centre for Sustainability and Excellence in Chicago, USA.

the field of sustainability, while supporting initiatives aimed at enhancing quality of life, protecting the environment and developing policies and frameworks aligned with Oman Vision 2040, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and global trends related to emissions reduction and environmental balance in accordance with internationally recognised standards.

OETC received the Platinum Award in the ESG category, amidst strong competition from both public and private sector institutions.

The company successfully met and exceeded the required evaluation criteria based on the framework adopted by the Centre

for Sustainability and Excellence in Chicago, USA.

This recognition reflects OETC's achievements and dedicated efforts and reaffirms its commitment to advancing sustainable targets at both national and international levels.

Commenting on the achievement, Eng Hisham bin Abdullah al Riyami, Acting Chief Executive Officer of OETC, emphasised the company's firm commitment to sustainability and its dedication to aligning all efforts and plans with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, which places sustainability at the forefront to ensure comprehensive and sustainable development across all sectors.

SHORTTAKES



The sukuk, which carries a profit rate of 5.14%, is set to mature in January 2036.

EDO raises additional international funding

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 19

Energy Development Oman (EDO) has successfully completed the tap issuance of its existing \$650 million, 10-year sukuk, raising an additional \$200 million and bringing the aggregate issuance to \$850 million.

The sukuk, which carries a profit rate of 5.14%, is set to mature in January 2036.

The tap issuance forms an integral component of EDO's broader funding strategy, designed to support a portion of the company's annual capital expenditure requirements while proactively managing its debt maturity profile and preserving a diversified mix of financing sources across the banking and international capital markets.

Amidst prevailing geopolitical headwinds in global financial markets, EDO maintained close surveillance of market conditions and investor sentiment, identifying an opportune execution window underpinned by Oman's demonstrated macroeconomic resilience.

The transaction priced at a credit spread of 77 basis points over the 10-year US Treasury benchmark, a significantly tighter level relative to the original issuance and reflecting robust investor appetite for both EDO credit and Omani sovereign exposure. HSBC acted as Sole Bookrunner on the transaction.

Commenting on the issuance, Eng Sultan al Mamari, Chief Financial Officer at EDO, said: "EDO is pleased to have successfully upsized our 10-year USD sukuk, securing attractive long-term financing amidst an environment of continued global uncertainty.

The strong reception from the international investor community is a testament to confidence in Oman's economic fundamentals and a clear endorsement of EDO's strategic direction and financial discipline".

Oman advances water, circular economy agenda

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 19

THE Sultanate of Oman is accelerating efforts to strengthen water security and environmental sustainability as the country advances projects aligned with the goals of Oman Vision 2040. Growing investments in desalination, wastewater reuse and circular economy initiatives are expected to support long-term resilience while reducing environmental impact across key sectors.

In an exclusive interview with the Observer on the sidelines of Oman Sustainability Week 2026, Erwan Rouxel, Chief Executive Officer of Veolia Oman, said Oman has significant potential to become a regional benchmark in sustainable water and environmental management through the expansion of circular water solutions and low-carbon infrastructure.

"Oman has a strong foundation to become a regional benchmark by accelerating circular water solutions, decarbonised desalination and resource recovery from waste and wastewater", Rouxel said.

He noted that projects involving renewable-powered desalination and biogas-to-energy solutions could help embed sustainability into critical infrastructure while preserving natural resources and strengthening climate resilience.

Water scarcity continues to pose a major challenge across the Gulf region as demand rises due to population growth, urban expansion and industrial development. Oman has responded through strategic investments in desalination facilities, wastewater treatment plants and water infrastructure designed to secure reliable supply for communities and industries.

Rouxel said the next phase of



Oman has significant potential to become a regional benchmark in sustainable water and environmental management.



Oman has a strong foundation to become a regional benchmark by accelerating circular water solutions, decarbonised desalination and resource recovery from waste and wastewaters.

ERWAN ROUXEL
CEO, Veolia Oman

Oman's water strategy should focus on scaling up wastewater reuse, improving network efficiency and digitalising water management systems to optimise performance across the water cycle.

"Sustainable water management must continue evolving from supply security to resource optimisation", he said.

Desalination remains central to Oman's water supply system, particularly in coastal areas where dependence on non-conventional water resources continues to increase. However, rising energy demand linked to desalination has also intensified the need for more energy-efficient and lower-carbon solutions.

Rouxel stressed that the future of desalination would depend on combining operational efficiency with sustainability through advanced technologies, renewable energy integration and digital innovation.

"The future of desalination must combine performance with sustainability", Rouxel said. "This

means deploying more energy-efficient technologies, integrating renewable energy and optimising operations through innovation and digital solutions", he added.

He pointed to Veolia Oman's Al Sharqiyah Desalination Plant in Sur as an example of this transition, noting that the facility incorporates a solar energy project aimed at reducing the carbon footprint associated with water production while ensuring reliable supply for local communities.

Oman is also making progress in circular economy initiatives linked to wastewater reuse, waste recovery and sustainable industrial operations. Environmental projects focused on converting waste into energy are increasingly being viewed as part of Oman's wider decarbonisation strategy.

Among the initiatives highlighted were landfill gas-to-energy projects at Barka and Al Multaqa, developed by Veolia Oman in partnership with be'ah. The projects capture methane emissions from landfill sites and convert them into usable energy, contributing to lower greenhouse gas emissions and improved waste management efficiency.

Looking ahead, Rouxel said sustainability is expected to become more deeply integrated into Oman's urban and industrial development model over the next decade. Greater adoption of low-carbon infrastructure, circular resource management and smart environmental technologies is anticipated to improve efficiency, resilience and quality of life while supporting economic diversification goals.

The shift also aligns with Oman Vision 2040 objectives aimed at building a more sustainable and resource-efficient economy while ensuring responsible management of the Sultanate of Oman's natural assets.

National Gas advances plan for mini-LNG project in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 19

Leading Omani LPG distributor National Gas Company has taken a significant step towards realising its proposed mini-liquefied natural gas (LNG) project in Oman, signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Abraj Energy Services to collaborate on the initiative aimed at decarbonising oilfield operations.

As an initial step, the two companies will jointly implement a pilot project to evaluate the use of cleaner fuels as a substitute for diesel in generators powering drilling rigs and other oilfield installations.

"The objective of the pilot is to assess the technical feasibility, operational performance, safety parameters and commercial viability of the proposed alternate



The pilot project will evaluate the use of cleaner fuels, such as LNG, as a substitute for diesel in generators powering drilling rigs and other oilfield installations. (Picture for illustration only)

energy solution", said Dr Rachid Majjad, CEO of National Gas.

"Data and operational outcomes generated from the pilot will

be evaluated to determine the feasibility of establishing an LNG plant for long-term implementation, subject to satisfactory technical and safety results", he said in a filing to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Tuesday, May 19, 2026.

The MoU, signed on the sidelines of the Oman Petroleum & Energy Show, advances a proposal first unveiled earlier this year under which National Gas is evaluating investments of around \$100 million in the development of a small-scale LNG production facility in the Sultanate of Oman.

If realised, the venture would mark a major diversification for the publicly traded company, whose current portfolio is centred on LPG distribution and related energy solutions, including synthetic natural gas (SNG) systems.

Speaking earlier to UK-based

energy publication *The Energy Year*, Dr Majjad said the project envisages converting diesel-powered generators at Abraj's rig sites into dual-fuel systems operating on LNG.

The conversion is expected to lower carbon dioxide emissions by around 30 per cent while reducing operating costs by approximately 15 per cent.

"We plan to invest \$100 million to build our own LNG production facility", Majjad said. "It will source gas from OQ, liquefy it and distribute it to rig sites. Since rigs change locations, the regasification units, cryogenic tankers and associated equipment will all be mobile".

He added that Abraj – which controls around half of Oman's rig market – is expected to serve as the anchor off-taker for the project, with an initial target of supplying

around 85 rigs. In Tuesday's filing, Majjad emphasised that the pilot project aligns with Oman's sustainability agenda and national decarbonisation objectives.

"The pilot project forms part of both parties' initiatives to support sustainability and reduce carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, in alignment with Oman's strategic objective and national initiatives towards achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2040", he noted.

He stressed, however, that the MoU relates solely to the pilot phase and does not constitute a binding commitment by either party to proceed with the LNG plant or associated investments.

Should the project eventually prove commercially viable, the mini-LNG plant would pave the way for the first regular domestic distribution of LNG within Oman.

TRADE POLICY

EU nears tariff accord



European Union negotiators were expected to finalise an agreement to remove import duties on US goods under last year's trade deal with the US. The move aims to avoid higher tariffs threatened by US President Trump.

In return, the United States would maintain tariffs of 15 per cent on most EU products, while granting preferential access for selected agricultural and industrial goods. — Reuters

ENERGY MARKETS

Oil drops on Iran talks



Oil prices fell more than 2 per cent in early Asian trading after US President Donald Trump announced the suspension of a planned military strike on Iran to allow negotiations aimed at ending the conflict.

Brent crude dropped to \$109.09 a barrel, while US crude fell to \$107.28. Markets responded positively to prospects of easing tensions in the Middle East. — Reuters

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold steadies after pullback



Gold prices were little changed as investors monitored Middle East developments following the cancellation of a planned US attack on Iran. Spot gold slipped 0.1 per cent to \$4,560.39 per ounce, while US gold futures edged slightly higher.

Falling oil prices helped ease inflation concerns, reducing support for bullion. Other precious metals also declined, all posting losses in spot trading. — ONA

OPINION

When the sea becomes statecraft: The Gulf and the world



DR UMAIR WAQAS

The writer is Assistant Professor in Supply Chain Management, College of Commerce and Business Administration, Dhofar University

TWO charts crossed my desk this week. The first showed Brent crude at \$109.23 a barrel, nearly double its January level. The second, published by the International Monetary Fund, plotted vessel transits through Bab Al Mandeb and the Strait of Hormuz alongside regional flight activity since 2023. Together, they describe a structural shift: the global trading system is being repriced around the assumption that strategic sea-lanes are political instruments and the Gulf is paying the cost in real time.

The data first forces us to confront that the GCC is not a single bloc of risk. Qatar, whose entire LNG programme transits Hormuz, faces the most concentrated exposure of any Gulf state.

Kuwait has already declared force majeure amidst the tightening of the blockade. Saudi Arabia's East–West Petroline to Yanbu offers a partial bypass but routes its exports through a Bab Al-Mandeb corridor that has been degraded since the Ansar Allah attacks of late 2023. The UAE's Habshan–Fujairah pipeline bypasses the strait in part, but the UAE's decision to leave Opec signals just how hard the crisis is testing traditional alliances. Bahrain has few independent levers and Oman's Indian Ocean ports are the only genuine geographic bypass in the bloc.

Geography has become strategy.

Within that asymmetry lies a set of opportunities the GCC has discussed for two decades and never fully executed. Pipeline diversification, inland rail connectivity,

sovereign-grade insurance markets, regional refining and petrochemical value-add and integrated maritime security have all been on the agenda since the 1990s.

The 2026 crisis converts them from policy aspirations into existential necessities. Long-term LNG and crude contracts will be repriced on resilience, not merely volume and producers who can credibly guarantee delivery routes will command premiums that did not exist two years ago.

Sovereign wealth funds, holding roughly four trillion dollars in combined assets, gain new leverage to invest downstream in importing markets and secure long-term offtake. And the regional workforce is being upgraded by operational pressure no business school can simulate.

The costs, however, are immediate and severe. The fiscal models behind Saudi Vision 2030 and the other Gulf transformation programmes were calibrated on assumptions of stable export volumes, predictable prices and a steadily de-risking investment environment. The current crisis breaks all three. Foreign direct investment is quietly recalculating its geopolitical premium upwards. Marine insurance markets are quoting Hormuz cover at multiples of last year's rates, if at all.

Regional aviation has fallen by roughly half on IMF and Flight Radar data, a signal to millions of expatriate workers and their employers that regional connectivity is contingent. Internal GCC cohesion is also under strain. Crises of this magnitude either

Within that asymmetry lies a set of opportunities the GCC has discussed for two decades and never fully executed. Pipeline diversification, inland rail connectivity, sovereign-grade insurance markets, regional refining and petrochemical value-add, and integrated maritime security have all been on the agenda since the 1990s.

consolidate blocs or shatter them; the next twelve months will reveal which. The global ripple is wider than oil. Roughly one-third of China's crude imports flow through Hormuz, with Japan, South Korea and India even more exposed in percentage terms. Twelve to fourteen per cent of European liquefied natural gas comes from Qatar through this single corridor.

The Gulf produces nearly half of the world's urea and 30 per cent of its ammonia and fertiliser prices in markets from Pakistan to sub-Saharan Africa are already climbing, with food-price effects to follow within three to six months.

About one-third of global helium, irreplaceable in semiconductor manufacturing and medical imaging, transits the same strait and sulphur disruption has forced China to ban exports, hitting Chilean copper output. The IEA has released 400 million barrels from member reserves, but reserves are finite. IMF modelling suggests sustained closure raises global inflation by between two and four percentage points over a 180-day window.

The strategic question for the GCC is no longer whether to invest in resilience, but who will lead it. The states that emerge strongest will be those that translate the asymmetry of geography into the symmetry of institution-building: shared insurance pools, integrated logistics corridors, joint investments in alternative routes and credible long-term commitments to delivery reliability that command premium pricing.

Towards private sector empowerment and a balanced economy

MURTADHA M J IBRAHIM AL JAMALANI

THE Sultanate of Oman is undergoing a pivotal phase of economic transformation under the wise guidance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik as part of the national path of “Renewed Omani Renaissance”, aiming to build a more diversified, sustainable economy based on partnership between the state and the private sector.

Clear signs of economic restructuring are gradually emerging through the development of regulatory frameworks and economic governance systems, as well as the redefinition of the relationship between the state and the market. This includes the management of the Product Lifecycle across financial, commercial and investment sectors, in alignment with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

In this context, the role of the state is increasingly evolving not only as a regulator, but also as a strategic driver of development and an investor in key sovereign sectors. This ensures market stability and protection of national interests, while maintaining a balanced relationship with the private sector.

One of the most important strategic challenges, however, lies in building a strong middle economic class of entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

This is essential to establish a sustainable productive base and reduce reliance on a rent-based economy. Achieving this requires genuine empowerment of the private sector as a development partner rather than merely an executor of economic activities.

The role of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry is also critical. It should evolve from a traditional representative body into a comprehensive development platform, serving as a national hub for the business sector.

Its functions should include capacity building, training, export support and strengthening the integration of local businesses into regional and international markets. At the same time, the success of this transformation requires strengthening governance and transparency within the financial and banking sector.

This includes ensuring fair protection for borrowers and investors, improving disclosure of financial risks and preventing practices that may lead to unexpected financial burdens — particularly through clearer and more transparent structuring of credit products.

Strategic Recommendations: (i) Accelerate the empowerment of the private sector as a genuine development partner in non-strategic sectors. (ii) Support the growth of SMEs to expand the national middle-income economic base. (iii) Enhance financial transparency and regulatory oversight of banking products to ensure fairness in financing.

Energy storage powers Oman’s renewable drive

OMAN is no longer just planning for its green energy future; it's making it happen. Massive solar and wind projects are reshaping the nation's power landscape, turning Oman into one of the most promising renewable energy destinations in the MENA region.

However, the intermittency in supply and poor energy density of these resources hinder their wider applications. Therefore, as this green power surge accelerates, a critical strategic question looms: Can Oman's national grid maintain stability and efficiency without the integration of large-scale energy storage systems?

The answer will define not only the reliability of the network but also how fast, affordable and seamless this renewable energy transition truly is.

A RENEWABLE BOOM IN THE MAKING

In just five years, Oman has made remarkable progress. By 2026, renewables are expected to supply nearly 10% of the electricity flowing into the main grid, thanks to pioneering projects like the 50 MW Dhofar wind farm and 1500 MW solar plants, including those in Ibri and Manah. Experts predict that installed renewable capacity will reach 8.8 GW by 2030, which is a substantial rise from the current level.

This quick expansion reflects strong policy momentum towards energy security, economic diversification and the National Strategy for Net Zero targets. Crucially, Oman recognises that this boom cannot be sustained by generation alone; therefore, the strategic deployment of energy storage is now integrated directly into this growth trajectory to manage the inherent intermittency of solar and wind power.

As their share climbs past the critical 20% threshold, grid flexibility and resilience —



Oman's transition requires a diversified portfolio of technologies tailored to different discharge duration and grid needs.



MARYAM AHMED YOUSEF AL NOFLI

The writer is a researcher and academic faculty at UTAS-Musandam

Can Oman's national grid maintain stability and efficiency without the integration of large-scale energy storage systems? The answer will define not only the reliability of the network but also how fast, affordable and seamless this renewable energy transition truly is.

underpinned by advanced storage solutions — become the primary drivers of the nation's energy transition.

WHY STORAGE IS NO LONGER OPTIONAL

Without energy storage, surplus renewable energy generated during off-peak hours is frequently curtailed or wasted. While gas-fired plants still shoulder peak demand and balancing services, they undermine emissions goals, squeeze project economics and increase the operational complexity of the grid.

However, storage is not a monolithic solution; Oman's transition requires a diversified portfolio of technologies tailored to different discharge durations and grid needs.

The Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) offer a primary solution for short-to-medium-term stability. Several technologies, including Thermal Energy Storage (TES) for industrial heat integration, are currently being developed.

Furthermore, green hydrogen and green ammonia storage are highly attractive for long-duration seasonal buffering and energy transport.

Technologies such as Compressed Air Energy Storage (CAES) and supercapacitors, applicable for high-power, rapid-response frequency regulation, are becoming essential components of a modern, multi-

layered storage strategy.

By storing excess power and releasing it when demand spikes or renewable output dips, this mix of technologies stabilises the grid, optimises asset use and reduces reliance on expensive fossil fuel backup. Global experience is clear: high-renewable systems cannot thrive without such a diversified storage framework. Oman is now at that pivotal tipping point.

BEYOND IBRI III: BUILDING A MULTI-LAYERED STORAGE ECOSYSTEM IN OMAN

The shift from strategy to action became real with Ibri III, Oman's first utility-scale solar project to fully integrate battery storage. Combining 500 MW of solar capacity with a 100 MWh battery system, Ibri III marks a significant milestone in the nation's energy evolution.

This project signals a new mindset: from simply adding renewables to actively optimising their integration. Storage is no longer a niche technology; it's a critical infrastructure asset.

However, Oman's storage strategy extends far beyond centralised utility-scale projects. A critical component of this transition is the rapid development of decentralised renewable energy storage and utilisation, spearheaded by Hydrom. Through its ambitious green hydrogen auctions, Hydrom is facilitating projects that use hydrogen as a long-duration storage medium, effectively decoupling energy production from immediate consumption.

Furthermore, decentralised storage initiatives in industrial zones and rural areas are emerging as essential tools for local grid stability. These projects, along with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals' new storage project with Nama Group and the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), show a comprehensive strategy for energy security. While technical details are still under evaluation, the message is clear: storage is now part of the country's energy DNA.

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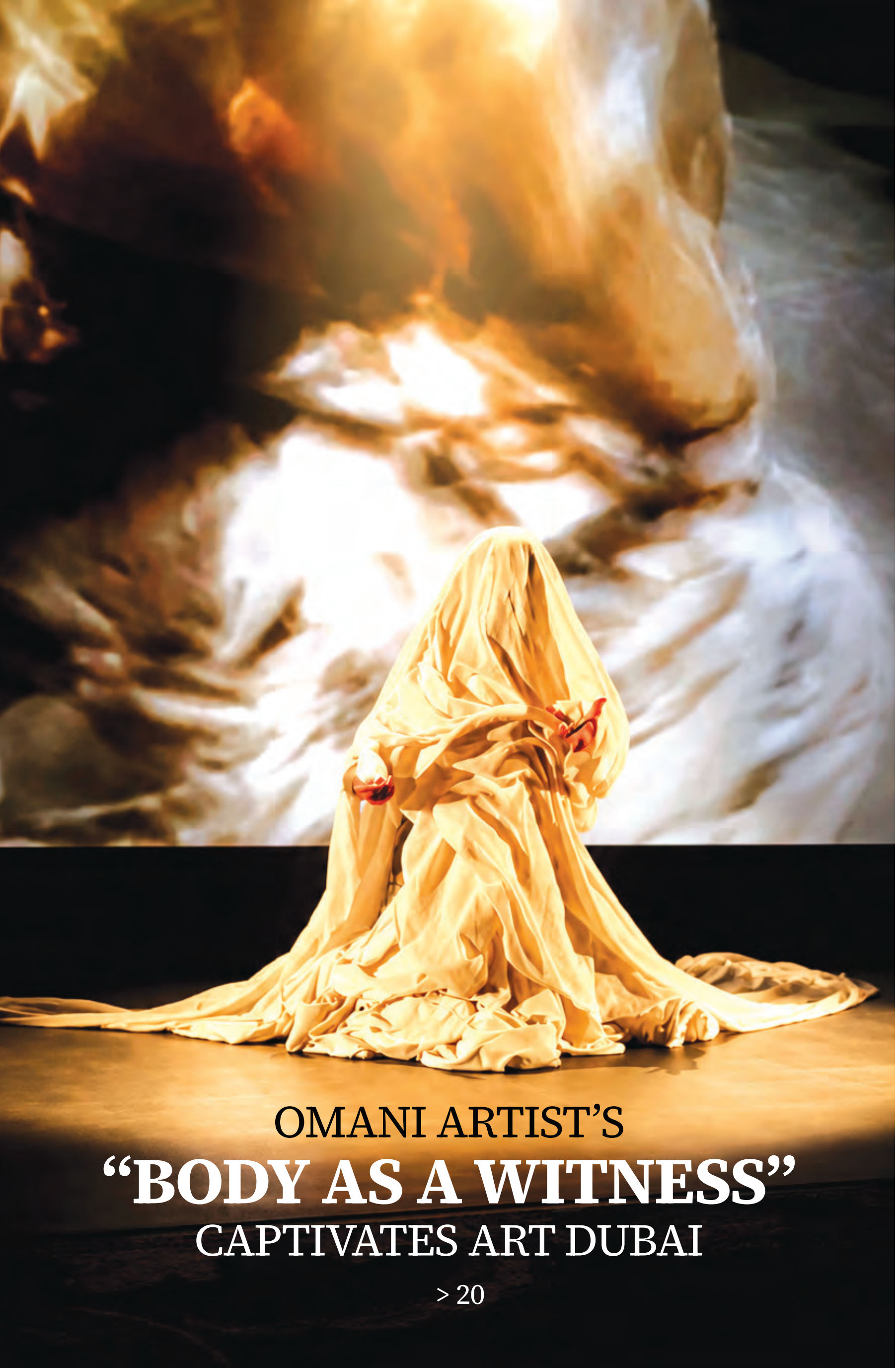
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ART/LIFE



ON SECOND **THOUGHT**

OMAN IS WINNING BY STAYING AUTHENTIC



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

For years, Oman’s lifestyle and tourism story is unique in the region. This week, scrolling through social media, travel pages and even regional headlines, it became increasingly clear that Oman is quietly carving out something many travellers now seem to want more: calm.

That shift was everywhere this week. Instagram reels were flooded with drone shots of the Daymaniyat Islands, where impossibly turquoise waters and sea turtles suddenly became the Gulf’s latest obsession. Meanwhile, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar once again reclaimed its annual role as the region’s unofficial summer escape, with travellers escaping rising temperatures in search of mountain air, terraced farms and slow mornings overlooking the cliffs.

What stood out, however, was not simply where people were going, but how they were talking about Oman itself.

The phrase “quiet luxury” kept appearing repeatedly across travel content and lifestyle discussions. Unlike the polished excess often associated with Gulf tourism, Oman is increasingly being positioned as something softer and more grounded. Less about performance and more about experience. Less about being seen and more about feeling present.

In many ways, that shift reflects the type of traveller emerging today. People are tired of travelling simply for spectacle. Increasingly, they want places with texture and personality. They want villages where life still moves slowly. They want landscapes that feel untouched. They want food that still belongs to the place they are visiting.

This week, Omani cuisine became another unexpected star online.

Reels featuring mishkak sizzling over charcoal, traditional breakfasts, halwa preparation and roadside tea stops circulated heavily across TikTok and Instagram. What resonated was not fine dining or imported trends, but authenticity.

In a region where many cities are beginning to look increasingly similar, Oman’s strongest asset may actually be the fact that it has resisted over-curation.

Even Oman’s hospitality industry appears to be recognising this. Conversations surrounding luxury tourism this week were not centred around mega attractions, but around resorts and experiences blending into the landscape rather than overpowering it. The country’s tourism direction increasingly feels aligned with its identity rather than in competition with others.

At the same time, cultural spaces continue to gain momentum. The Royal Opera House Muscat remained a backdrop for fashion shoots, performances and luxury content creators this week, while rural villages and heritage districts found new life online through younger storytellers reframing traditional Oman for a modern audience.

Taken together, this week’s stories revealed something larger happening beneath the surface. Oman is no longer trying to compete in the Gulf’s race for spectacle. Instead, it is slowly becoming the region’s alternative to it.

And perhaps that is exactly why people are paying attention.

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



CINEMA

Cast members and real-life spouses Alicia Vikander and Michael Fassbender pose during a photocall for the film “Hope” in competition at the 79th Cannes Film Festival in Cannes. — Reuters



MUSIC AWARDS

Cody Johnson poses with the Male Artist of the Year and Entertainer of the Year awards during the 61st Academy of Country Music Awards in Las Vegas, Nevada. — Reuters



GASTRONOMY

A staff member prepares delectable food for customers at Nanjichang Night Market in Taipei, Taiwan. — Reuters

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Scenic sunset at Al Qurum Water Front



Diederik Cuckoo heralds the arrival of Khareef Dhofar Season

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STAR JULIANNE MOORE HATES ‘GUNS AND EXPLOSIONS’, WARNS WOMEN ARE LOSING OUT

The Hours star Julianne Moore said she did not like “explosions and guns” as she bemoaned the drop in leading roles for women in Hollywood on Saturday, saying women were being squeezed out everywhere.

The Oscar-winner said women have to band together with the number of women and girl leads in top-grossing movies down to 37 per cent — a 10 per cent drop in one year.

The fall comes after the study earlier this year also by the University of Southern California Annenberg Inclusion Initiative found that only nine of the 100 biggest US movies last year were directed by women.

“It’s not endemic just to the film industry, it’s global”, Moore said at the Cannes Film Festival, after getting a Women In Motion award from the luxury group Kering.

“There’s not representation in the media, there’s not representation in higher education. There are lots of places where we don’t have the representation we deserve”, the actor added.

“How do you change that? You do it slowly, steadily, speaking up, using your privilege, hiring more, talking about alliances”, Moore said.

“I feel like women are each other’s greatest allies and that’s the secret sauce”.

Moore, 65, said progress has been made, saying “I can remember being on a set not too long ago where the only women



were me and the third AC”, who takes care of the focus on the camera.

“I said (to her), ‘Look around the room. We’re the only ones here”.

“It’s when Hillary Clinton lost the election and we were both devastated”.

Moore, who broke through in Robert Altman’s film “Short Cuts” in 1993, said it was “unusual when I was coming up to see women on a crew. There’s more female directors and writers now”.

Moore, who won her Oscar for “Still Alice” in 2015 and has four other nominations, said she gives gratuitously violent or shocking films a wide berth.

“When things are rough globally... I don’t like someone being murdered”, said the “Magnolia” star.

“I don’t like explosions and guns. I don’t like histrionics. I don’t like things that raise the stakes without real feeling underneath... I don’t want to watch it”. — AFP



AMERICAN ARRESTED OVER MONKEY PUNCH ZOO STUNT



TWO American nationals were arrested in Japan after a stunt in which one entered the monkey enclosure at a zoo where a baby macaque named Punch became a global internet sensation this year, police said on Monday.

One of the men, who identified himself as a 24-year-old college student, was arrested on Sunday after climbing over a fence and dropping into a dry moat surrounding the monkey exhibit at Ichikawa City Zoo outside Tokyo.

The other man, who was filming the act, identified himself as a 27-year-old singer.

Images on social media showed a person scaling the fence in a costume that included a smiley face head with sunglasses, prompting the monkeys to scatter.

The men did not come close to the animals and were quickly apprehended by zoo officials, said an official at Ichikawa Police who spoke with AFP on a traditional condition of anonymity.

The two men face charges of forcible obstruction of business, which they refute, the police official said. The duo did not have formal identifications with them and initially tried to lie to police about their names, he added.

The arrests follow a massive



surge in domestic and international visitors to the zoo, driven by Punch’s viral fame.

The baby monkey became an internet star this year after the zoo posted photos of Punch clutching an IKEA plush orangutan for comfort after being rejected by his mother.

Punch was raised in an artificial environment after being born in July and began training to rejoin his troop earlier this year.

Punch’s predicament sparked huge interest online, spawning a devoted fanbase under the hashtag

#HangInTherePunch.

An unprecedented number of tourists are flocking to Japan, but some residents have become fed up with unruly behaviour.

Last year, a Ukrainian YouTuber with more than 6.5 million subscribers was arrested after livestreaming himself trespassing in a house in the Fukushima nuclear exclusion zone.

And a US livestreamer known as Johnny Somali was arrested in 2023 for allegedly trespassing onto a construction site. — AFP

FEATURES

OMANI ARTIST’S “BODY AS A WITNESS” CAPTIVATES ART DUBAI



YERU EBUEN

A single light cuts through the silence, casting its spotlight on an Omani artist standing alone at centre stage. Slowly, she began to move. Slow at first until she eventually disappeared into a cocoon of fabric, folding herself into layers that felt both protective and imprisoning. Behind her, a luminous screen flickers to life, revealing pre-recorded movements of the artist herself, ghostlike echoes that deepen the performance’s emotional weight. The soundscape swells into something unsettling: raw, suffocating, almost intrusive, amplifying the tension that hangs in the room. What unfolds is not simply a performance but an arresting meditation on confinement, identity and transformation.

For about half an hour, Muscat-based interdisciplinary artist Safa Baluchi moved with ritualistic slowness. The performance began quietly, centred on the belly. Not merely as anatomy, but as archive. A place where memory settles long before language does.



The audience watched as she disappeared beneath layers of textiles that seemed to embody generations of memory, grief and survival. The space itself became suffocating. Yet from within that darkness, Baluchi emerged again. Rebirth, perhaps. But not release. Because the question at the centre of *Body as a Witness* was never whether the body can escape memory. It was whether a body can ever fully reclaim itself again. In describing the work, Baluchi explained that the performance grew from conversations about “the moments that the body goes across and records”. The fabric itself became a measuring tool. “How do you measure your body?” she asked. “It’s through what it encounters and its journey through these experiences”.

As the work intensified, the lights sharpened into dizzying flashes while the music rose into an overwhelming pulse. Baluchi’s movements became increasingly fractured. It was here that the meaning of the work became impossible to ignore: the body remembers everything. Even after survival. Even after rebirth. Baluchi stood as the only Omani artist participating in Art Dubai’s landmark 20th anniversary edition, a detail that carried particular weight within a fair increasingly shaped by global conversations around identity, displacement and representation.

The performance itself unfolded through a deeply collaborative process. Long before the artist stepped onto the stage, Rayane Haddad had already begun shaping the emotional architecture of the work through both its visual world and lighting design, crafting the atmosphere that would ultimately hold the performance together. Presented alongside Haddad’s immersive visual and lighting direction, as well as an original musical arrangement by Amro Zidan, the piece emerged as one of the most quietly devastating performances of this year’s fair.

A SUPPORT TO EMERGING VOICES For two decades, Art Dubai has positioned itself as more than a commercial fair. According to Executive Director Benedetta Ghione and Curatorial Director Alexie Glass-Kantor, this year’s Art Dubai is less a conventional art fair and more a reflection of cultural resilience during a difficult moment for the region. Reimagined within just seven weeks due to ongoing regional tensions, the fair’s 20th anniversary edition focuses on collaboration, community and curiosity rather than spectacle alone.

Ghione described the edition as proof of the cultural scene’s resilience and the importance of bringing artists, galleries and institutions together “at a time when that role of convening feels more important than ever”.



Meanwhile, Glass-Kantor framed the fair around “things we do together”, emphasising performances, installations, conversations and shared experiences that invite audiences to spend time, engage deeply and encounter art in unexpected ways. Speaking during a walkthrough of the fair, Glass-Kantor described the edition as one shaped by collaboration and resilience. “We didn’t want to compromise on ambition”, she said.

She also said that Baluchi’s inclusion within the Sharjah Art Foundation’s performance programme is an example of how Art Dubai continues to support emerging voices across different artistic forms, referring to Baluchi as “a young groundbreaking Omani choreographer premiering a work”.

Perhaps that is why Baluchi’s work resonated so strongly within this environment.

SITTING INSIDE DISCOMFORT Born in Oman but working between Muscat, Berlin and beyond, Baluchi’s practice moves between performance, textiles and visual arts. Much of her work is rooted in questions of identity, belonging and inherited memory. During the interview, she described her artistic journey as one of “discovering and unlayering” what identity means beyond fixed definitions.

“I work a lot with the body”, she said. “There’s always fabric



in my work”. That relationship with material traces directly back to childhood memories. Baluchi recalled growing up surrounded by women who sewed and cared deeply about fabric, particularly her mother and grandmother. Even her grandfather worked constantly with materials through traditional craftsmanship.

“I was obsessed with conserving what he does”, she said of her grandfather. “A lot of what they do is performative in action”.

There is a quiet significance in seeing an Omani performance artist occupy a stage as visible as Art Dubai, particularly within a region where performance art still remains relatively rare. Baluchi herself acknowledged that most of her performances have historically taken place in Europe or the Levant rather than close to home. “I think it’s really nice to bring it home”, she said.

Watching Baluchi move through *Body as a Witness*, it became clear that the performance was not trying to provide answers. Instead, it asked audiences to sit inside discomfort. To recognise how trauma can shape a person long after visible wounds disappear.

And in a region overwhelmed by images of conflict and displacement, that question lingered long after the performance ended: If the body becomes a witness to life, can it ever truly forget?