

OMAN

عمان

DAILY

Observer

SUNRISE 05:41 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 04:22 AM

DHUHR 12:11 PM

ASR 03:38 PM

MAGHRIB 06:35 PM

ISHA 07:49 PM

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INBRIEF

NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE GOES DIGITAL

Oman marked the official launch of the national health insurance platform 'Dhamani', a milestone accomplishment in the modernisation of the nation's healthcare and insurance industries.

Announced by the Financial Services Authority (FSA), the platform is technically and legislatively complete, offering integrated digital services to regulate the health insurance market. 'Dhamani' facilitates seamless data and claim exchanges between insurance companies and private healthcare providers, besides creating unified medical records accessible by policyholders across private institutions.

Shaikh Abdullah bin Salem al Salmi, CEO of the FSA, stated that the platform is a 'qualitative leap' for Oman's insurance market, in alignment with Oman Vision 2040 agenda to promote digital infrastructure and increase access to essential services. **DETAILS ON P13**

GAZA RESCUERS SAY ISRAELI AIR STRIKES KILL 25 PEOPLE

A displaced Palestinian boy stands in front of unexploded ordnance near a police station-turned-shelter in Gaza City on Sunday. — **AFP**

Gaza's civil defence agency reported that Israeli air strikes since dawn on Sunday have killed at least 25 people across the Gaza Strip, including women and children.

Israel resumed its aerial and ground assault on Gaza on March 18, reigniting fighting after a two-month ceasefire that had paused more than 15 months of war in the coastal territory.

"Since dawn today, the occupation's air strikes have killed 20 people and injured dozens more, including children and women across the Gaza Strip," Mahmud Bassal, spokesman for the civil defence agency said.

In a separate statement later, the agency reported that five people were killed in an Israeli drone strike on a group of civilians in eastern Rafah. Since Israel resumed its offensive last month, at least 1,827 people have been killed in Gaza, according to the territory's health ministry. The overall death toll in the Gaza war has reached 51,201, the majority of them civilians, according to the ministry, figures the UN considers reliable. **SEE ALSO P6**

HM BEGINS RUSSIA VISIT TODAY

STATE VISIT REFLECTS DESIRE TO ADVANCE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

President Vladimir Putin

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK will go on a state visit to the Russian Federation today.

A statement issued by the Diwan of Royal Court to this effect reads as follows: "In response to an invitation received by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik from President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation, His Majesty the Sultan will go on a state visit to the Russian Federation on April 21-22. The visit comes within the context of promoting relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Russian Federation in a manner that meets the aspiration of the two countries. The visit will discuss areas of cooperation between the two countries in various spheres and means of boosting them to serve the joint interests."

During the visit, the two leaders will exchange views on a set of current regional and international issues.

Under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Sultanate of Oman continues to develop areas of cooperation and partnership with various

countries around the world.

His Majesty's state visit to the Russian Federation is one such milestone aimed at maximising the common interests between the two countries, particularly in economic, trade, investment, energy and renewable energy sectors.

The summit between His Majesty the Sultan and President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin in Moscow reflects the desire of the two nations to advance their shared interests by developing strategic partnerships. This is especially significant as the two countries mark the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations on September 26, 1985.

The political relations between the two countries have been characterised by sincerity and transparency regarding several contemporary regional and international issues, reaching a level of mutual trust in consultations and exchanging viewpoints. This dynamic has been reflected through phone calls between the two countries leaders, visits by high-level official delegations and other

reciprocal official exchanges.

In addition to the ongoing political and parliamentary consultations held regularly in Muscat and Moscow, the foremost of which was the meeting between HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, and President Vladimir Putin in Moscow. During the meeting, President Putin emphasised promising areas of cooperation between the two countries, particularly in the energy and tourism sectors.

By the end of 2024, the trade volume between Oman and Russia exceeded approximately RO 133.108 million. Oman's key exports include metal products, nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium products, while Russian imports consist of iron products and food items such as vegetables.

As of 2024, the number of registered companies with Russian shareholding in Oman reached about 277, with a total capital exceeding RO11.6 million (84.6 per cent of the total invested capital in these companies). **SEE ALSO P2**

IAEA chief confident after second round of US-Iran talks

ROME: International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) head Rafael Grossi has expressed optimism on talks between the United States and Iran on Tehran's nuclear programme.

Both sides were "prepared to discuss concrete aspects with each other," Grossi told Italy's La Repubblica newspaper in an interview published on Sunday.

Talks between Washington and Tehran, which are being mediated by the Sultanate of Oman, are due to continue on Saturday. The venue is moving from the Italian capital to Muscat in Oman for the third round.

Grossi said he was satisfied with progress to date. "The talks really could have collapsed in this second round. Then everything would have come to a halt," he said.

"The risk was there. Instead the spirit of Rome showed it is possible to make progress," the IAEA head said without providing details.

Israel, the US and many western countries accuse Tehran of working towards a nuclear arsenal, while Iran denies this. Conversely, Israel is the only nuclear power in the region. The 2015 deal which Tehran struck with the US, Russia, China,

IAEA head Rafael Grossi optimistic of the outcome.

the United Kingdom, France and Germany provided for the easing of economic sanctions on Iran as long as it severely restricted its uranium enrichment and cut its stockpiles of enriched uranium. The deal was to be subject to a stringent inspection regime.

In 2018, during his first term, Trump announced the US was withdrawing from the deal and reimposed sanctions. Trump is now demanding a new agreement.

Meanwhile, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi cautioned against premature conclusions and

unrealistic expectations as talks with the United States on Iran's nuclear programme were set to continue in Muscat this week.

"There are no grounds either for optimism or for pessimism," he said following the second round of talks in Rome with US President Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff.

Tehran was taking a step-by-step approach to the talks, Araghchi said, according to the website of the Iranian daily Etemad. Expectations should remain realistic, and results would emerge only in subsequent rounds, he said. — **Agencies**



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OMAN-RUSSIA COOPERATION REPRESENTS CULTURAL TIES

THE cooperation between Oman and Russia has evolved significantly over the years, particularly in the realm of cultural exchange. This relationship is underscored by a mutual respect for each other's heritage and a commitment to fostering deeper ties through various cultural initiatives.

Jamal bin Hassan al Mousawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, expressed his pride in the cultural and museum cooperation between the National Museum; and various museums and cultural institutions in the Russian Federation, which reflects the depth of historical relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Russian Federation spanning centuries. He noted that this cooperation represents the culmination of both countries' efforts to strengthen cultural and civilisational ties.

He stated: "The National Museum maintains distinguished relations with leading Russian museums, foremost among them the State Hermitage Museum, one of the largest and most prestigious museums in the world. This cooperation began in 2014 when Professor Dr Mikhail Piotrovsky, Director-General of the State Hermitage Museum, joined the Board of Trustees of the National Museum. This was followed by the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the two parties in 2015, paving the way for numerous pioneering museum initiatives and culminating in the strategic relationship the two museums enjoy today." He pointed out that the qualitative initiatives

implemented in cooperation with the State Hermitage Museum include hosting the "Oman Day" initiative in the Russian Federation in 2018, establishing the first "Oman Hall" in 2020 and hosting the "Hermitage Day" exhibition at the National Museum in 2019 for the first time.

Additionally, the State Hermitage Museum has received several National Museum staff for training and qualification in various specialised museum fields, a collaboration that continues to this day.

He touched upon the second exhibition under the "Hermitage Corner" initiative, titled "Gifts from the Emirs of Bukhara and the Khans of Central Asia to the Russian Imperial Court," which opened this year (2025) at the National Museum. This coincides with the exhibition "The Omani Empire Between Asia and Africa" in the "Oman Hall" at the State Hermitage Museum.

He affirmed that these exhibitions enhance cultural exchange between the two friendly nations. He noted that the "Oman Hall" initiative at the State Hermitage Museum aligns with the National Museum's vision to introduce the world to Oman's civilisational, historical, cultural and scientific heritage at regional and international levels. This is one of the objectives outlined in Royal Decree No (62/2013) regarding the establishment of the National Museum and its system. The initiative includes signing long-term loan agreements with global museums to display Omani artefacts, most notably the

JAMAL BIN HASSAN AL MOOSAWI
Secretary-General of the National Museum

Omani artefacts abroad, the National Museum unveiled the original manuscript of a collection of maritime navigation poems (Al-Safaliya, Al-Mu'allaqiyya, Al-Ta'iyya) by the Omani navigator Shihab Al Din Ahmed bin Majid al Saadi, on loan from the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in St Petersburg in 2021

"Oman Hall" at the State Hermitage Museum, which opened in 2020 and will continue for three to five years.

He added that cultural initiatives include "Oman Day," an event lasting three to six months, featuring educational and cultural activities such as seminars, lectures and musical performances. Among its most notable recent events was the exhibition "Splendor of Silver: Treasures from the Omani Court," held at the Moscow Kremlin Museums in 2024, showcasing historical artefacts belonging to the Sultans of Oman in Muscat and Zanzibar. This reflects the National Museum's efforts to promote Omani civilisational and historical heritage globally.

He continued: "Strategic cooperation was evident in the tripartite framework for preserving Syrian cultural heritage damaged during the years of crisis, through hosting conservation experts from the Hermitage in Muscat to restore Palmyrene artefacts. These artefacts are part of the archaeological site of Palmyra, a Unesco World Heritage Site." He highlighted that, as part of displaying Omani artefacts abroad, the National Museum unveiled

the original manuscript of a collection of maritime navigation poems (Al-Safaliya, Al-Mu'allaqiyya, Al-Ta'iyya) by the Omani navigator Shihab Al Din Ahmed bin Majid al Saadi, on loan from the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in St Petersburg in 2021. This made the manuscript available to the public after more than five centuries, as the oldest maritime manuscript in the world written by the Omani navigator himself.

Al Mousawi mentioned that in 2023, three cultural cooperation agreements were signed with three museums: the Moscow Kremlin Museums, the Shchusev Museum of Architecture and the Tretyakov State Gallery, on the sidelines of the National Museum's participation in the 9th St Petersburg International Cultural Forum. Regarding cooperation with the Tretyakov State Gallery in Moscow, he announced ongoing efforts to organise an exhibition of Russian avant-garde art in the Sultanate of Oman, scheduled for late 2025.

He noted that this exhibition stems from the great interest in avant-garde and abstract art in Oman. For his part, Professor Mikhail Piotrovsky, Director-General

of the State Hermitage Museum and member of the Board of Trustees of the National Museum of the Sultanate of Oman, stated that cultural relations between the Russian Federation and Oman have seen significant enhancement and development in recent years. Major museums in both countries, particularly the State Hermitage Museum and the National Museum of Oman, play a pivotal role in this trajectory, he affirmed.

He added that cooperation between the Hermitage and the National Museum began with the latter's establishment in 2013. Since then, staff from the National Museum in Muscat, especially conservators, have regularly visited St Petersburg to participate in practical training programmes organised by Hermitage experts.

He noted that in 2018, the State Hermitage Museum hosted the first "Oman Day," featuring an exhibition and accompanying programmes. The following year, the National Museum of Oman hosted "Hermitage Day." In 2019, agreements were signed between the two museums to regulate artefact loans for temporary exhibitions in both Russia and Oman. — ONA

Russian citizens express admiration for Oman

MUSCAT: Beauty, diversity in its landscapes, a blend of history and progress, and the preservation of its cultural heritage, identity, reputation, security and justice — these are the qualities that have drawn visitors from various world countries to the Sultanate of Oman for many purposes, such as tourism, education, residence and investment.

In this context, some Russian citizens have highlighted these reasons for visiting Oman, a country located in the southeastern Arabian Peninsula with its warm waters overlooking the Arabian Sea and the Sea of Oman.

Marta Paramonova, a student at the Sultan Qaboos Institute for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers in the Wilayat of Manah, Al

Dakhiliyah Governorate, said: "I first learned about Oman while preparing a postgraduate research paper. I was amazed by how it keeps pace with modern advancements, especially in education and renewable energy. Later, some of my friends encouraged me to visit this country, which motivated me to learn the Arabic language there."

She added: "What stands out about Omani citizens is their deep connection to their history — something many nations have lost. My friends and I were impressed by Oman's restoration of heritage sites like Nizwa Fort and the old neighbourhoods and markets, which retain their historical spirit. Another marvel is Bahla, with its restored fort and markets,

and how these landmarks are economically utilised." Marta also spoke about the Omani national identity she experienced during her stay, including moral and social principles, mutual respect, tolerance and the preservation of customs and traditions.

In Dhofar Governorate, Oman News Agency (ONA) met two Russian tourists from St Petersburg.

Inna expressed her admiration by saying: "This is my first visit to Oman, and I am dazzled by everything in this truly remarkable country. But what impressed me most are the Omani people—their kindness, and cooperation that surpassed all expectations. I urge everyone to visit Oman." She described the breathtaking

sunsets on Dhofar's beaches, some overlooking historical landmarks like Al Baleed Archaeological Park, home to ancient South Arabian ruins, the Museum of the Frankincense Land, Sumhuram Park and the Zheng He Memorial.

On her turn, Yelena said: "This is my first time in Oman, though I have visited another Arab country before. But here — it's like a fairy tale. If you want an authentic Eastern fantasy, come to Oman."

She spoke about exploring Dhofar's tourist sites, including desert life and praised Omani cuisine. She said: "If you truly want to know a country, you must visit it — not just read about it online. Oman's hidden depths are fascinating, and I hope to keep visiting it every year." — ONA

SHORT TAKES



The programme to restart corneal transplant operations is aimed at localising the service.

HEALTH MINISTRY TO ESTABLISH EYE BANK

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

The National Organ Transplant Programme seeks to localise corneal transplant services in the Sultanate of Oman by setting up an eye bank for collecting and preserving corneas from donors to achieve self-sufficiency and provide the service in all governorates. A total of 115 corneal transplants have been performed so far.

A team from the Ministry of Health, in cooperation with the Military Medical City, visited corneal banks in the United States to study the establishment of a national bank in the Sultanate of Oman for collecting and preserving corneas.

The programme to restart corneal transplant operations is aimed at localising the service and achieving self-sufficiency in corneal tissue by national cadres experienced in corneal transplants and eye surgeries in general.

The Ministry of Health strives to develop the health system in the Sultanate of Oman, reduce the need to send patients abroad for treatment and save time and effort. In this context, the necessary requirements for restarting corneal transplant surgeries have already been identified and agreements signed with international eye banks to supply corneas to ensure the continuity of corneal transplant operations in the Sultanate of Oman.



OMAN OPENS UNEA-7 CONSULTATIONS

MUSCAT: Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority (EA) and President of the Seventh Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-7), opened the virtual consultations on the ministerial declaration for the UNEA-7. The Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Kenya and the Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), chaired the first informal consultation session on the zero draft of the ministerial declaration with the participation of the UNEA-7 working and preparation team and the presence of representatives of countries, groups and civil society organizations. — **ONA**

Science festival to raise awareness of agriculture importance

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

The 13th Scientific Agricultural Science Festival, organised by the Agricultural and Marine Sciences Group at the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences at Sultan Qaboos University, kicked off in the university’s Grand Hall on Sunday. The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Her Highness Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation at SQU. The festival will run until Tuesday, April 23.

This year’s festival is held under the theme “Mada: From the Depths of Roots to the Horizons”,

reflecting a renewed vision based on sustainability, innovation and a deep connection with nature and society. The festival is considered by students a prominent scientific and cultural platform aimed at raising awareness of the importance of the agricultural and marine sectors and their role in achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Festival activities include scientific exhibitions, workshops and various interactive stations that merge science and art, presenting agricultural and environmental information in an engaging manner using visual, auditory and olfactory elements inspired by the Omani environment. This edition focuses on key themes that represent



The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Her Highness Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation at SQU.

priorities in the agricultural and marine sectors, including food security, agricultural sustainability, modern agricultural technologies and biodiversity. These themes were

SAYYID BADR RECEIVES WRITTEN MESSAGE FROM SAUDI FOREIGN MINISTER

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received a written message from Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud, Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, dealing with bilateral relations between the two countries.

The message was handed over to the Foreign Minister when he received on Sunday Ibrahim bin Saad bin Bishan, Ambassador of



The message was handed over by Ibrahim bin Saad bin Bishan, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Oman. — **ONA**

the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, both sides underscored the depth of the fraternal and historic relations between Oman and the KSA.

They also expressed their keenness to enhance joint cooperation and coordination in pursuance of the two countries’ leaderships’ directives. — **ONA**

Survey to identify skills needed in economic sectors

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

THE Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation on Sunday launched the Employers Survey 2025. The project, being implemented by the Ministry’s Department of Statistics and Information, seeks to study the compatibility of higher education outcomes with the requirements of the national labour market. In particular, the project will identify the skills and competencies required in various economic sectors.

The project deals with the collection of data on the first six months of the year (until June 30) from various establishments that have employed higher education graduates between 2018 and 2025.

Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, who patronised the event, said in comments about the project that it represents a fundamental pillar in devising educational policies and linking them to labour market needs in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040. This, she observed, will help enhance the competitiveness of the national economy.

She emphasised that the project is a pioneering national initiative reflecting the Ministry’s commitment to developing higher education policies closely aligned with labour market needs, thus achieving the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and keeping pace with leading global practices. Her Excellency highlighted the crucial role of private sector institutions in the success of this project, noting that the analysis of



The project, being implemented by the Ministry’s Department of Statistics and Information, seeks to study the compatibility of higher education outcomes with the requirements of the national labour market.

the survey data will contribute to guiding higher education policies, developing academic programmes and ultimately enhancing business sustainability and productivity by providing a qualified workforce that meets market demands.

Maitha bint Dawood al Lawatiyah, Assistant Director of the Statistics and Information Department, explained that the updated version of the survey targets approximately 4,400 companies across various economic sectors in the Sultanate of Oman.

She stated that the project aims to equip higher education graduates with the skills required by the labour market, reduce the gap between education and employment, and contribute to improving academic

curricula in line with current and future labour market demands.

Qais al Haji, Director of Career Counseling and Alumni at the University of Nizwa, affirmed the University’s continued support for such initiatives, expressing pride in the University’s role as the Golden Sponsor of the project. He said: “The University of Nizwa firmly believes in the importance of these surveys in enriching educational institutions with accurate data on labour market needs for various and evolving skills. Such efforts enable institutions to adopt modern strategies and adapt curricula to meet both local and global market changes, thereby contributing to the realisation of Oman Vision 2040.”

PRAYERS HELD FOR RAIN IN WILAYATS

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

The Istisqa prayer, a collective prayer where people gather to supplicate for rain, was performed during the weekend in different wilayats of Oman including Nizwa, Nakhal, Ibri and Dima W’attayeen. This prayer is also known as the drought prayer.

On Saturday morning, men, women and children gathered outdoors for the prayer next to the Sa’al Dam in the Wilayat of Nizwa. Another prayer is scheduled to be

held on April 25.

Khalsa al Abry, from the Wilayat of Al Hamra, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, explained that this winter has not seen any rain. “We depend on well water and not desalination. This is why rain is extremely important for us.”

Not everyone has a well, so others have to rely on the water supply provided by the well owners.

Oman is known for its irrigated agriculture, which has historically been a central feature of the nation’s economy.

According to a report by the UN Water,

irrigation is a fundamental component of the country’s agricultural activity, with over 80 per cent of cultivated land being irrigated using groundwater. This highlights the importance of rain.

Rainfall must take into account the evaporation rate, rainwater runoff to the sea, and direct infiltration to groundwater.

The International Water Management Institute reported that the northern parts of Oman receive the rainy season between December and April, which accounts for 58 to 83 per cent of the annual rainfall, with a focus on March and April.

SPOTLIGHT

THE SINK OF THE SEA

Mangroves act as buffer between the sea and land



Mangroves are known for their role in tackling climate change. Afforestation measures have been taken by the Environment Authority to expand the mangrove areas in Oman.

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

THE MANGROVES of Oman have a crucial role to play in the environment of the country. Oman has several marine-protected areas managed by the Environment Authority. One of them is right in the middle of the capital city in Al Qurum. The others include the Daymaniyat Islands, Bar Al Hikman in Al Wusta Governorate, and Jabal Samhan in the Dhofar Governorate which is partially terrestrial and the other half stretching into the sea. Also included in the protected marine areas are the creeks and Dhofar has nine of them. Mangroves are known for their role in tackling climate change. Afforestation measures have been taken by the Environment Authority to expand the mangrove areas in Oman. “The Environment Authority believes that mangroves act as buffer between the sea and land. Today we are also looking for carbon credits. So it has been an important step to encourage the local communities help the Environment Authority to transplant the seedlings

of mangrove trees,” said Dr Mona al Tarshi, Environmental Ecosystem Specialist, Environment Authority. The only mangrove species that is seen in Oman is *Avicennia marina*. “We have transplanted them in all lagoons after monitoring the health of the lagoons by taking samples of the water and sediments to check the hydrocarbon level, presence of heavy metals, salinity, pH, etc. If the status of the lagoon is good; we proceed with the planting of saplings,” explained Dr Mona. “The results can be seen in Haffri and Al Sawadi,” she added, “You can see in Al Sawadi and Harmul the afforested mangrove area. It is not natural like Al Qurum, Qurayat and Shinas. Harmul is just behind the industrial area of Suhar and is a perfect example of a man-made mangrove forest. In Al Sifa, it is a combination of both.” Sur is also known for its mangroves and Al Duqm has a large area of mangroves with 10 lagoons. Some of the mangrove trees in Al Sawadi are more than 10 metres high, with the width of the trunk being 4 to 5 metres. The habitat supports crabs, shrimps, snails and birds. The Environment Authority has established a list of birds living



“*The Environment Authority believes that mangroves act as buffer between the sea and land. Today we are also looking for carbon credits. So it has been an important step to encourage the local communities help the authority to transplant the seedlings of mangrove trees*

DR MONA AL TARSHI
Environmental Ecosystem Specialist

in the natural and man-made mangrove forests. “There is no difference between the natural and man-made forests, except maybe in the structure of the mangrove because in the natural ones we can see the canals are open to the sea, but in the areas of afforestation, we monitor to ensure there is a flow of water to the forest,” she pointed out. Dr Mona has published three papers on mangroves in Oman. One of the scientific papers had looked into determining the marine litter because mangroves are also known as a sink for the marine litter. “I found microplastic in the sediment and water. We consider the snails as the bioindicator for the microplastics because it could give the indication of microplastics over time,” she explained. The microplastics can be from land or the marine activities, but according to Dr Mona, “It is predominantly from the marine

activities because once the litter comes into the lagoons, due to the complex structure of the roots of the mangrove trees, the litter is trapped and can never go back to the sea.” She explained that this is why many campaigns have been held to clean the lagoons. These campaigns are between the Environment Authority and local communities, NGOs, schools, colleges and universities. As per the directives of the Environment Authority, it is completely forbidden to cut down mangrove trees. “We have observed that the local communities now understand the benefits of mangrove trees. When we have campaigns for transplanting seedlings, students from schools and colleges are eager to participate,” she said.

ARE THERE CHALLENGES? “The challenge, if any, is the cleaning part because of the structure of the mangrove roots. It is difficult to go through the roots and branches, but we have been successful,” Dr Mona said with pride. Most importantly, we have to protect the sea from litter.

SHORT TAKES



The regulation provides a structured framework to strengthen digital governance and coordinate digital transformation efforts across government entities. — ONA

MoTCIT enacts framework for digital transformation

MUSCAT: Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), on Sunday issued Ministerial Decision No (108 /2025), enacting the Regulatory Framework for Government Digital Transformation.

The framework aims to regulate governance and establish the organisational structure for the Government Digital Transformation Programme, ‘Tahawul’, while also defining the controls for implementation across the government sector. It sets out clear roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders involved in executing digital projects and initiatives.

The regulation provides a structured framework to strengthen digital governance and coordinate digital transformation efforts across government entities by clearly defining the roles, authorities and responsibilities of all concerned parties. It also promotes closer integration between the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and other government entities, enabling them to implement digital projects within a unified governance model.

The regulation outlines the ministry’s responsibilities in overseeing the Government Digital Transformation Programme. These include setting operational pathways for the programme, identifying priority initiatives, projects and services, and preparing and issuing relevant policies, frameworks, controls and guiding manuals. The ministry is also tasked with monitoring the compliance of concerned entities, providing support across all areas of digital transformation and following up on implementation plans by developing the necessary programmes to ensure progress.

The regulation also sets out the obligations of government entities in implementing digital transformation projects and initiatives. — ONA

MOH MEETING AIMS TO ENHANCE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH), represented by Centre for Emergency Management, organised the first meeting of the National Risk Register on Sunday. The meeting aims to enhance emergency and health risk management.

It also reviewed risk mitigation procedures and examined risk management mechanisms and methodologies in line with global standards.

In his opening remarks, Dr Mohammed bin Saif al Busaidy,



Director of the Centre for Emergency Management at the Ministry of Health, stated, “This strategic project represents a

significant step towards building an integrated national system for monitoring, analysing and assessing health risks.” — ONA

Historic monuments are proofs of human connect

Oman marks World Heritage Day, celebrates its cultural identity

KABEER YOUSUF @kabiyousef

THE Sultanate of Oman on Sunday celebrated World Heritage Day under the theme “Heritage Resilience in the Face of Disasters and Conflicts”. The event seeks to raise public awareness about the value of cultural heritage and the need to protect it against challenges that arise from natural factors or human activities.

Held under the auspices of Eng Ibrahim bin Said al Kharousi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage, the celebration programme included an operetta presented by students from the University of Nizwa, folklore performances by traditional Omani troupes, theatrical shows by students from schools in the governorates of Muscat and Al Dakhiliyah and an art exhibition.

From the delicate crafts that have been practiced until today, to the trade networks that played a major role in linking the ports of Dibba, Suhar, Qalhat, and Sumhuram with the ports of Cochin in India, Canton in China, and Mombasa on the African coasts, the Sultanate of Oman has always cherished bilateral relations built upon the exchanges that took place in the past.

For Oman, the various archaeological



sites, including the Unesco-listed ones, are not just static ruins, but rather tangible evidence of the ingenuity of the Omani people. The country is built upon such a rich culture and heritage, as stated by Eng Yusra bint Khalaf al Subhiyah, Director-General of Antiquities at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

According to her, the copper caravans that embarked from Dahwa, Safafir, Bat, Qamira and Maysar to civilisations in Sindh, the Mediterranean, Dilmun and Malukha during a time when roads were guided by the star

of Suhail, without digital maps or GPS, stand as testaments to the rich heritage that Oman enjoys today.

“Oman’s celebration of World Heritage Day is an opportunity to renew the national commitment to preserving cultural and human heritage. It is not just symbolic of the past, but a pillar of sustainable development and a motivation to promote cultural tourism and build bridges of understanding between peoples,” she said.

“This commitment is evident not only in the preservation of stones and inscriptions, but also in the preservation of the living memory embedded in the details of life. From folk tales shared by lantern light in mud lanes to grandmothers’ rituals, songs sung during harvest seasons, ships departing from seaports to architecture that harmonises with the sun and wind, the Sultanate of Oman affirms that heritage is not only what is seen in stone, but what is lived in the conscience and sung in the hearts,” she said.

The Sultanate of Oman has five historic sites on the World Heritage List, namely Bahla Fort (1987), archaeological sites in Bat, Al Khatam, and Al Ain (1988), five Omani aflaj, the traditional irrigation system in Oman (2006), the site of the Frankincense Land (2000), and finally the ancient city of Qalhat (2018).

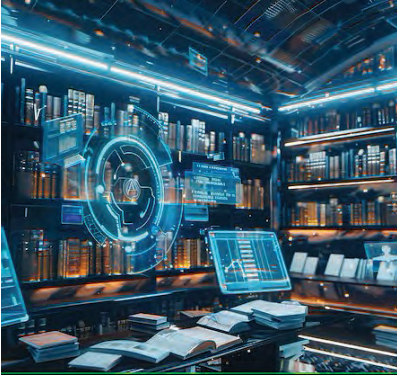
Forum on digital transformation today

AL MUSANNAH: The University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Al Musannah, represented by its university library, is organising a forum titled “Libraries and Information Institutions in the Digital Revolution Era: Revolution of the Present and Future” on Monday. The forum discusses the growing influence of digital transformation on the information and knowledge sectors. The event will bring together a group of distinguished specialists and professionals in the field of libraries from various public and private entities.

The forum aligns with the university’s efforts to keep pace with rapid digital transformations and to foster collaboration and knowledge exchange among information institutions.

Dr Nasser bin Salem al Baimani, UTAS-Al Musannah Assistant Vice-Chancellor, affirmed the university’s commitment to supporting digital transformation as a key pillar of its future strategy. He emphasised the importance of artificial intelligence in enhancing library services and improving user experience through smart systems that ensure accurate and quick access to information.

Halima al Balushi, Head of the University Library, stated



that the forum offers a dynamic platform for academic dialogue and interaction among experts and professionals. It aims to explore the future of libraries and information institutions in the digital age and contribute to shaping innovative visions for the development of this vital sector, in line with national goals towards building a knowledge-based digital society.

The forum will include several scientific papers discussing various themes related to the evolving role of information institutions in the digital era, the use of AI in information services, the presentation of successful local experiences, and ethical and security considerations in modern digital practices. A specialised exhibition will also be held to showcase the latest technologies and digital initiatives in the library and information sector.

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Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date
PRE/23/080 (Re Call)	Supply Chain Management System (Re Call)	11/05/2025	29/05/2025
PRS/25/003 (Re Call)	Supply of Gas for Muscat Municipality (Re Call)	27/04/2025	05/05/2025
PRS-25-004 (Re Call)	Supply of Building Materials for Muscat Municipality (Re Call)	27/04/2025	05/05/2025
PRE/24/328 (Re Call)	Roads Paving at Hay Al Sad in Al Khoud (Re Call)	27/04/2025	05/05/2025
PRE/25/028 (Re Call)	Renewal Licenses of Network Management System (Re Call)	27/04/2025	05/05/2025
PRE/24/312	Development of Al Mahaj Commercial Area	11/05/2025	29/05/2025
PRE/25/063	Hire of Road Marking Machinery with Crew	11/05/2025	29/05/2025

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

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A member of the M23 armed group holds position as civilians fleeing ongoing clashes in DRC. — AFP

CONGO SUSPENDS FORMER PRESIDENT POLITICAL PARTY

KINSHASA: Democratic Republic of Congo suspended former president Joseph Kabila’s political party and ordered his assets seized over accusations of supporting Rwandan-backed rebels in the east, the government said. The 53-year-old, who ruled from 2001-2019 and only stepped down after deadly protests against him, has said he wants to return to Congo to help seek a solution to the war.

But in statements late on Saturday, the interior ministry said his party was suspended for aiding the M23 rebels, while the justice ministry said his and other party leaders’ assets would be seized after acts amounting to high treason. Both statements said prosecutors had been instructed to initiate proceedings against him, but no details of the accusations were given.

There was no immediate response from Kabila. Ferdinand Kambere, secretary of his Party for Reconstruction and Democracy, called the suspension a flagrant violation of Congo’s constitution and laws in a statement. The M23 have taken two major cities in the mineral-rich east since the start of the year. — AFP

CHINA’S US ENVOY URGES END TO TRADE WAR



Xie Feng, China’s new ambassador to the US, addresses the media, in New York City. — Reuters

BEIJING: China’s ambassador to the United States, Xie Feng, has urged Washington to seek common ground with Beijing and pursue peaceful coexistence while warning that China stood ready to retaliate in the escalating trade war. Speaking at a public event in Washington, details of which were posted on the Chinese embassy’s web site, Xie said tariffs would devastate the global economy and drew a parallel between the Great Depression and tariffs imposed by the US in 1930.

Xie said harmony should guide relations between the world’s two largest economies. “A good traditional Chinese medicine recipe usually combines many different ingredients which reinforce one another and creates the best medical effect,” he said.

“Likewise, the earth is big enough to accommodate both China and the US,” he said. “We should pursue peaceful coexistence rather than collide head-on, and help each other succeed rather than get caught in a lose-lose scenario.” Xie said China would retaliate to any country imposing tariffs on it. — Reuters

ATTACK CASUALTIES

New US strikes kill two in Sanaa



At least two people were killed in overnight US strikes in and around Yemen’s capital Sanaa in the latest such air raid. Al Masirah channel reported two deaths and 11 injured in the “US aggression on Sanaa, the capital, and the governorate”. The channel earlier said one person was killed in an air strike on the governorate’s Bani Matar area, where a deadly US raid was reported a week ago. — AFP

DISARMING HEZBOLLAH ‘DELICATE’, SAYS LEBANON PRESIDENT

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said on Sunday that disarming the Iran-backed Hezbollah group was a “delicate” matter whose implementation required the right circumstances, warning that forcing the issue could lead the country to ruin. His remarks came as Lebanon’s health ministry said two people were killed in Israeli strikes in the country’s south, the latest such raids despite a ceasefire between Israel and the Lebanese group.

Restricting the bearing of arms to the state is “a sensitive, delicate issue that is fundamental to preserving civil peace” and requires due “consideration and responsibility”, Aoun told reporters. “We will implement” a state monopoly on bearing arms “but we have to wait for the circumstances” to allow this, he said, adding that “nobody is speaking to me about timing or pressure”. “Any controversial domestic issue in Lebanon can only be

approached through conciliatory, non-confrontational dialogue and communication. If not, we will lead Lebanon to ruin,” he added. On Friday, Hezbollah chief Naim Qassem said the group “will not let anyone disarm” it, as Washington presses Beirut to compel the movement to hand over its weapons. Qassem said his group was ready for dialogue on a “defence strategy”, “but not under the pressure of occupation” by Israel. — AFP

Qatar voices frustration over pace of Gaza talks

QATAR’S chief negotiator says ‘frustrated’ by talks for a truce in Gaza in an interview, a month after Israel resumed its strikes on the Palestinian territory and another round of negotiations ended without a deal. “We’re definitely frustrated by the slowness, sometimes, of the process in the negotiation. This is an urgent matter. There are lives at stake here if this military operation continues day by day,” Mohammed al Khulaifi said.

Qatar, with the United States and Egypt, brokered a truce in Gaza between Israel and Hamas which came into force on January 19 and largely halted over a year of war triggered by Palestinians October 7, 2023 attack on Israel. The initial phase of the truce ended in early March, with the two sides unable to agree on the next steps. Hamas has insisted that negotiations be held for a second phase to the truce, leading to a permanent end to the war, as outlined in the January framework.

Israel, which had called for an extension to the opening phase, resumed air and ground attacks across the Gaza Strip on March 18 after earlier halting the entry of aid. Late on Thursday, Hamas signalled the group would not accept Israel’s newest proposal for a 45-day ceasefire.

Israel had wanted the release of 10 living hostages held by the Palestinian group, the militant group said. “We’ve been working continuously in the last days to try to bring the parties together and



Displaced Palestinian children sit on buildings rubble near a police station-turned-shelter in Gaza City. — AFP

“We’ve been working continuously in the last days to try to bring the parties together and revive the agreement that has been endorsed by the two sides,” the Qatari minister of state said. “And we will remain committed to this, in spite of the difficulties,” he added.

During the long mediation process, Qatar has been the target of direct criticism from Israel and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. At least two of Netanyahu’s aides are suspected of receiving payments from the Qatari government to promote Doha’s interests in Israel, prompting an Israeli criminal probe. Qatar has dismissed the attacks as a “smear campaign”.

Earlier in March, an investigation by Israel’s domestic security agency attributed funds from the Gulf state to an increase in Hamas’s military strength before the October 7 attack. Qatar has rebuffed the accusation as “false”. “We’ve been receiving

those types of criticism and negative comments since the early times of our involvement,” Al Khulaifi said. “Critiques without any context, such as the ones that we keep hearing from Netanyahu himself, are often just noise,” he added.

Al Khulaifi rejected recent remarks from Netanyahu to the US-based evangelical Christian channel Daystar that Qatar had promoted “anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism” on US college campuses. “His claims about Qatar’s educational partnerships have been repeatedly disproven. Everything we do is transparent,” the Qatari official added.

Meanwhile, Gaza’s civil defence agency reported that Israeli air strikes since dawn on Sunday have killed at least 25 people across the Gaza Strip, including women and children. — AFP



ANTI-TRUMP PROTESTS HIT CITIES

NEW YORK: Thousands of protesters rallied on Saturday in New York, Washington and other cities across the United States for a second major round of demonstrations against Donald Trump and his hard-line policies.

In New York, people gathered outside the city’s main library carrying signs targeting the US president with slogans like “No Kings in America” and “Resist Tyranny.”

Many took aim at deportations of migrants, chanting “No ICE, no fear, immigrants are welcome here,” a reference to the role of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency in rounding up migrants. — AFP

SPECIAL OPERATION

German police launch large manhunt



A large police operation was under way in Germany on Sunday to find one or more shooters who killed two men the day before in the centre of the country. The bodies of the two victims, both with gunshot wounds, were found in front of a residential address in Bad Nauheim, a town north of Frankfurt, Giessen city police said. Authorities said “a personal motive” seemed to be behind the killings. — AFP

COUNTRYSIDE DISPUTES

Gunmen kill dozens in central Nigeria



Gunmen killed at least 56 people in central Nigeria’s Benue state, the governor’s office said, sharply revising a previous toll of 17. Clashes between nomadic cattle herders and farmers are common in Nigeria. Governor Hyacinth Alia had earlier blamed the attacks in the Ukum and Logo local government areas on “suspected herdsmen”. The attacks in Nigeria’s so-called Middle Belt often take on ethnic dimension. The figure could rise as search-and-rescue operations continue. — AFP

HOLDINGCEASEFIRE



A Ukrainian serviceman carries his toddler during Easter service, in Kharkiv. — AFP

RUSSIA ‘REPELLED’ UKRAINE ATTACKS AMID TRUCE

MOSCOW: Russia said on Sunday that its forces had retaliated after Ukraine attempted attacks overnight despite an Easter truce announced by Russian President Vladimir Putin. The defence ministry said in a briefing that “despite the announcement of the Easter truce, Ukrainian units at night made attempts to attack Russian positions in the areas of Sukhaya Balka and Bogatyr in the Donetsk People’s Republic, which were repelled.” The ministry was referring to the villages of Sukha Balka and Bagatyr in the Russian-held part of the eastern Donetsk region. Moscow said Ukraine also attacked the Bryansk, Kursk and Belgorod border regions of Russia, saying that “as a result there are dead and wounded civilians”.

When announcing the truce on Saturday, Putin told troops to respond militarily to any violation of the truce. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Ukraine would comply with the truce but that troops would also respond “symmetrically” to any attacks. On Sunday Zelensky said Russian attacks were ongoing.

The Russian ministry said its own troops had from 1500 GMT on Saturday “strictly observed the ceasefire and stayed at the front lines and positions they previously occupied”. The Russian defence ministry accused Ukraine of launching “48 drones including one in Crimea”. Ukrainian units “444 times shelled... the positions of our troops and carried out 900 strikes with drones”, the ministry added.

Russia and Ukraine on Saturday held a large prisoner of war exchange, with each side handing back more than 240 prisoners, the Russian defence ministry said. “On April 19... 246 Russian soldiers were returned from territory controlled by the Kyiv regime. In return 246 Ukrainian prisoners of war were handed over. Also as a goodwill gesture, 31 wounded prisoners of war were handed over in exchange for 15 wounded Russian prisoners of war needing urgent medical help.

The 30-hour truce starting on Saturday evening to mark the religious holiday would be the most significant pause in the fighting throughout the three-year conflict. Putin announced the truce from 1800 Saturday to midnight, saying it was motivated by “humanitarian reasons”. — AFP

US AID CUTS STRAIN RESPONSE TO HEALTH CRISES WORLDWIDE

RIYADH: The United States slashing foreign aid risks piling pressure on already acute humanitarian crises across the globe, a World Health Organization official said on Sunday, also warning against withdrawing from the UN agency. Washington, which had long been the WHO’s biggest donor, did not pay its 2024 dues, and it remains unclear if the United States will meet its membership obligations for 2025. The agency, already facing

a gaping deficit this year, has proposed shrinking its budget by a fifth, likely reducing its reach and workforce, according to an earlier AFP report citing an internal email. “The WHO with its partners have a significant role in sustaining healthcare systems, rehabilitation of healthcare systems, emergency medical team training and dispatching, pre-placement of trauma kits,” Hanan Balkhy, the WHO’s regional director for the Eastern Mediterranean, said.

“Many of these programmes have now stopped or are not going to be able to continue,” she said. The funding cuts will likely hinder the ability to continue delivering robust aid to communities in desperate need of care. A US departure from the WHO will also undercut long established channels of communication with leading research facilities, universities and public health institutions that are based in the United States. — AFP

Frail Pope greets Easter crowd in the Vatican

POPE Francis called for freedom of thought and tolerance in his Easter Sunday address, as the weakened pontiff made a hoped-for holiday appearance, even circling St Peter’s Square in his popemobile. “Happy Easter,” said the 88-year-old Argentine pope in a weak voice from his wheelchair on the balcony of St Peter’s Basilica, to the delight of the crowd in the flower-filled square below. The pope’s convalescence from pneumonia has kept him away from most Holy Week events but Francis made a major effort on Sunday, waving at the crowd and blessing babies from his popemobile for nearly 15 minutes despite appearing listless.

After giving his Easter greetings to the crowd, estimated at more than 35,000 people, from the basilica’s balcony, Francis delegated the reading of his traditional “Urbi et Orbi” (“To the City and the World”) benediction to a collaborator. “There can be no peace without freedom of religion, freedom of thought, freedom of expression and respect for the views of others,” read his speech, which also condemned “worrisome” racism, and the “dramatic and deplorable” situation in Gaza. With his health still delicate following five weeks in hospital for pneumonia in both lungs, it had not been certain whether the leader of the world’s 1.4 billion Catholics would be present, or if so, in what capacity. Among the believers on Sunday was fellow Argentine Maria Repezza, 58, who was holding back tears. “I’m moved by the strength he puts out because he is sick and very old. He is an Argentine like us, he’s ours. We feel blessed,” she said.

Just ahead of the pope’s appearance at St Peter’s, he had a brief private meeting with US Vice President JD Vance, who was visiting Rome with his family. Video footage showed Francis in his wheelchair shaking hands with the vice president and his wife, with the Vatican writing later in a brief statement that the meeting “gave the opportunity



Pope Francis waves to the crowd from the popemobile after the Easter mass, at St Peter’s Square in the Vatican. — AFP

to exchange greetings on Easter Sunday”. Their encounter came months after a spat between Francis and the administration of US President Donald Trump over its anti-migrant policies.

The pope’s Easter message was one of tolerance towards others and respect for diversity — themes he has hammered throughout his 12-year papacy. But they are especially topical given the myriad conflicts around the globe, most of which were mentioned by the pontiff, including Sudan, Yemen and Ukraine. “On this day, I would like all of us to hope anew and to revive our trust in others, including those who are different than ourselves, or who come from distant lands, bringing unfamiliar customs, ways of life and ideas!” read the speech.

He appealed to the world’s leaders “not to yield to the logic of fear which only leads

to isolation from others,” and implored for humanity. Citing “defenceless civilians” and attacks on “schools, hospitals and humanitarian workers, the pope said “we cannot allow ourselves to forget that it is not targets that are struck, but persons, each possessed of a soul and human dignity”.

The pope said his thoughts were with the people of Gaza and repeated his calls for a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war. “The terrible conflict continues to cause death and destruction and to create a dramatic and deplorable humanitarian situation,” he wrote in the address.

Some 300 cardinals, bishops and priests attended Sunday’s Easter mass, while the crowd was larger than usual, organisers said, due to the Jubilee, a holy year designated by the pope that attracts thousands of pilgrims to the Eternal City. — AFP

NASA ’S OLDEST ASTRONAUT RETURNS TO EARTH



WASHINGTON: A Soyuz capsule carrying the American and two Russian cosmonauts landed in Kazakhstan on Sunday, the day of Pettit’s milestone birthday. “Today at 0420 Moscow time, the Soyuz MS-26 landing craft with Alexei Ovchinin, Ivan Vagner and Donald (Don) Pettit aboard landed near the Kazakh town of Zhezkazgan,” Russia’s space agency Roscosmos said. Spending 220 days in space, Pettit and his crewmates Ovchinin and Vagner orbited the Earth 3,520 times and completed a journey of 93.3 million miles over the course of their mission.

NASA images of the landing showed the small capsule parachuting down to Earth with the sunrise as a backdrop. The astronauts gave thumbs-up gestures as rescuers carried them from the spacecraft to an inflatable medical tent. Despite looking a little worse for wear as he was pulled from the vessel, Pettit was “doing well and in the range of what is expected for him following return to Earth,” NASA said in a statement. — AFP



Ministry of Health

Announcement

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref:	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Last Date for Submission of Tenders	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non Refundable)
1298/2025/ MOH/ DGHSBR-1	Provision of Cleaning and Pest Control Services to Mahdha Health Center at Directorate General of health Services Al-Buraimi Governorate	01/May/2025	Before 10 am on Thursday 29/May/2025	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	- SME : 10 R.O - LOCAL : 25 R.O

- Tenders should be submitted on line on: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200, Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

OPINION

A phase of Latin American literature ends with Vargas



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

MARIO Vargas Llosa, the famous Peruvian novelist, poet and activist passed away last week and with his death, a phase in Latin American literature seems to have come to an end.

The second half of the 20th century has seen revolutionary fervour in South America, with Fidel Castro and Che Guevera as the main leaders. In literature, this was reflected in the works of such giants as Gabriel García Márquez, Pablo Neruda and Mario Vargas Llosa. Together, they shaped Latin American literature into one where they explored the aspirations of the common people, and pride in their culture.

Born in 1936, Vargas Llosa was a graduate of the National University of San Marcos in Lima, Peru. He also studied in Spain and later moved to Paris. His early novels, ‘The time of the hero’ and ‘The green house’ both explored social inequalities and the troubles of people who were left with no space to voice their frustrations with society. Both novels were also an exploration of a continent in turmoil.

Vargas Llosa, along with his friend Gabriel

García Márquez, wrote about an entire continent of South America – reflecting its troubled politics, its colonial past and the hopes for its future. They both won the Nobel Prize for Literature – Márquez in 1982 and Llosa following him in 2010. Their ‘novels of protest’ remain a testament to the golden age of Latin American resistance.

Like many intellectuals and activists, Vargas Llosa supported the revolutionary zeal of Fidel Castro and other revolutionaries of South America but was also quickly disillusioned when they went after cultural icons like writers and artists who would criticise them. Often termed the ‘boom’ writers, these authors’ works are seen as subversive classics.

Vargas Llosa’s work primarily focused on the corruption of South American governments, the limitations of power and the everyday lives of the common citizens. In fact, the Nobel Prize committee commended his work for its attention on “images of the individual’s resistance, revolt and defeat”.

Technically sharp, Vargas Llosa believed in writing as a skill and not an inspiration. It

Vargas Llosa’s work primarily focused on the corruption of South American governments, the limitations of power and the everyday lives of the common citizens

is said that, in his work, “Not a single word is misplaced, nor a single loose end left hanging. They have the feeling, at times, of a taut short story sustained over 400 pages,” according to an article in ‘The Conversation’.

Even his essays are excellent works of criticism.

He approached difficult concepts in accessible language and made reading a joy that is being lost by younger readers today. Most of his essays are also true works of art in the field of literary criticism, both in their content and style.

The novelists of Latin America were tied together with the common purpose of understanding the continent in its post-colonial condition. Vargas Llosa, along with the other great writers like Fuentes and Borges, created new styles of writing, with Márquez’s magical realism being the most characteristic and innovative style.

With the demise of Vargas Llosa, the boom of Latin America has ended but has left, in its wake, a rich array of literature which is both, public commentary as well as moving literature.

LESS SOVIET AND MORE INSPIRING... KYRGYZSTAN SEEKS NEW ANTHEM

ADINA ZHOROBKOVA

Kyrgyzstan is getting rid of its Soviet-inspired national anthem and has launched an unprecedented public contest to find an alternative. The mountainous Central Asian country adopted a new anthem in 1992 after independence from the USSR but it is largely based on the Soviet-era one.

The government says the anthem fails to accurately represent the young nation descending from the ancient history of the nomadic Kyrgyz people. The Kyrgyz were incorporated into first then Tsarist and then the Soviet empires and the country still retains a strong Russian influence. “Winning this competition would be a huge success,” said Balasaguyn Musayev, a 36-year-old composer and one of hundreds who have submitted entries for a new national anthem.

Speaking during a rehearsal at the music conservatory in the capital Bishkek, Musayev said it took him a month to find inspiration and then he “wrote the music in two days”. A poet friend wrote the text.

“The new anthem must be better than the previous one in every way. Otherwise people will wonder why we changed it,” Musayev said.

The winner of the contest was due to have been announced in April but the contest rules were modified and it is now unclear when an announcement could be expected.

Soliciting ideas from the public is a rarity in Central Asia, where Kyrgyzstan’s more competitive political system is an exception among its authoritarian neighbours.

On a global scale, a complete change of the national anthem without a radical change of the political regime is also exceptional. In recent years, Australia, Austria and Canada have replaced some words in their anthems to promote greater gender and ethnic inclusivity. Kyrgyzstan’s unusual decision is part of a series of measures to overhaul state symbols taken by President Sadyr Japarov, who has been in power since 2021. Following a constitutional reform in 2021 that strengthened his powers, Japarov changed the sun on the Kyrgyz flag at the end of 2023 so that it no longer resembled a sunflower, arguing that this would strengthen national sovereignty.

He has achieved a number of successes in his time in office including boosting economic growth and fighting corruption but rights groups are concerned about growing pressures on civil society.

Japarov has said that the anthem’s lyrics about the Kyrgyz people being “on the road to freedom” does not reflect the country’s historic reality after more than three decades of independence. — AFP

From Messi to Trump, AI action figures are the rage

THE latest Internet obsession is one impossible to escape on social media: images of well-known figures in plastic toy packaging alongside evocative props... welcome to the meme of AI action figures.

The figurines aren’t real, but thanks to ChatGPT’s new image generator they look genuine, and they are flooding platforms from TikTok to LinkedIn.

There, you’ll see a “toy” image of football star Lionel Messi alongside a ball and trophies, or a caricature of US President Donald Trump alongside a MAGA cap and a sign reading tariffs.

Some celebrities have done versions of themselves. For instance, actor Brooke Shields posted a doll version of herself with a miniature dog and needlepoint kit to her 2.5 million Instagram followers.

Many ordinary users have done likewise, posting packaged images of them as figurines -- after inputting photos of themselves into ChatGPT’s image generator.

While pervasive, and in most cases fun, the trend raises questions about copyright, and potential risks in handing biometric data over to a generative-AI company.

ChatGPT does the rendering for free, but requires users to sign up to the imaging platform used, adding to OpenAI’s renown as leader in consumer uses of artificial intelligence -- and also for sucking up massive amounts of user data.

Anais Loubere, an expert on social media and founder of the agency Digital Pipelettes, said the boom was riding on a “technological breakthrough” in AI image rendering.

Before the action figure meme, AI artwork inspired by famed Japanese animation outfit Studio Ghibli -- maker of Oscar-winning “Spirited Away” -- flooded the Internet at the end of March, posted by users subscribed to OpenAI’s paid service.

Ahlem Abidi-Barthe, an online marketing professor, said that the



You’ll see a ‘toy’ image of football star Lionel Messi alongside a ball and trophies, or a caricature of US President Donald Trump alongside a MAGA cap and a sign reading tariffs.



DAXIA ROJAS

The writer is a journalist with AFP

key to the success of the trends was that “they can be in personalised formats”.

“That tickles the egos of consumers,” she said.

The Ghibli and action-figure memes also tapped into childhood nostalgia, “which contributes to extreme virality”.

OpenAI’s boss Sam Altman boasted that the company picked up a million new users “in the last hour” the moment its imaging service became free.

ChatGPT in March became the most downloaded app in the world, overtaking TikTok and Instagram, according to data analysis firm Appfigures. But human artists are protesting the AI copying of their works with no payment nor credit. OpenAI, for example, had no licence from Studio Ghibli.

Several generative AI companies, OpenAI among them, are being sued for copyright infringement in the United States, but to date no judgment has been made.

The AI companies insist they are abiding by relevant laws but refuse to divulge what works have been

ingested in their training libraries.

“Behind the magic” there are also “environmental costs”, as French astronaut Thomas Pesquet has pointed out.

Each ChatGPT prompt for text output uses 2.9 Wh of electricity, or 10 times what a Google search uses, according to the International Energy Agency. And image generation requires more.

Then there is the risk posed by users uploading photos of themselves, and perhaps of people close to them, or acquaintances, as well as other personal data.

“When people upload selfies or prompts to these AI generators, they’re essentially handing over personal data to companies with unclear intentions. Your image is data, and data has value,” said Joe Davies, a tech expert at the British SEO agency Fatjoe.

The AI action figure meme will certainly fizzle out, predicted Loubere.

“These trends aren’t meant to last. By the time you see the 50th AI action figure on LinkedIn or Insta, you know it’s saturated,” she said.

Learning beyond the school walls



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author,
translator and a
communications
professional

In a constantly evolving world, our journey of learning remains timeless. From the moment we are born until our last breath, life presents itself as an unlimited classroom, offering lessons through every experience, conversation, success and setback. Learning is not confined to textbooks or classrooms; it is embedded in every corner of our lives. The beauty of life lies in its ability to teach us something new every single day.

Most of us grow up thinking that learning occurs in school, through lectures, homework and exams. Then, we graduate and are suddenly hit by the realities of life: bills, jobs, relationships, health and identity. It is a whole new curriculum, and there is no syllabus for it, of course. The truth is, real learning begins the moment we step out of the classroom. Schools and universities merely build the foundation of knowledge.

Formal education is just the beginning; the real growth often begins after we enter the world and comes from our experiences. Life teaches us how to communicate, how to fail, how to persevere and how to adapt. It fosters empathy through relationships, resilience through hardships and patience through challenges. These lessons can never be fully covered in a curriculum, yet they shape who we become.

In fact, learning doesn't always mean

gaining new information. Sometimes, it involves unlearning outdated beliefs or challenging long-held assumptions. Growth often requires us to question, to listen and to stay humble enough to admit we don't know everything. That is where wisdom begins, not with certainty, but with curiosity.

One of life's most effective, though painful, ways of teaching is through failure. Every mistake delivers a message. Every wrong turn, missed opportunity, or unexpected detour can be a powerful learning moment if we choose to reflect rather than regret. Many of the most successful people in history credit their failures as their greatest teachers. As Thomas Edison, an American inventor and businessman, famously said, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."

Sometimes, days pass quickly for those who fail to plan and manage their time wisely. It is crucial to accomplish something productive before the day ends since it cannot be reclaimed. This is where the importance of having a daily schedule becomes evident, ensuring you don't miss essential activities that need to be done.

However, many find it challenging to adhere to a daily schedule for various reasons. Some quit out of boredom, while others simply lack motivation. We should

Life teaches us how
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resilience through
hardships and
patience through
challenges

all be reminded that the success of a daily schedule relies primarily on commitment. Seek inspiration strong enough to urge you to strictly follow your daily routine.

Success is not about perfection; it is about taking action to correct even your greatest mistakes. There will come a time in your life when you need to choose whether to remain in failure or to seek renewal. It takes courage to step out of your comfort zone, so prepare yourself. Start by improving the skills you deem helpful as you embark on the path to success. Those who fail are usually the ones who disregard the importance of preparation.

We should all learn from our mistakes and take one sure step at a time. Success is not a one-night show, but an experience to enjoy for a lifetime. Motivation is one of the essential ingredients of success. Without it, you will lack the reason to move forward in your journey of learning. There are many sources of motivation out there. Some people reignite their motivation by reading the success stories of others, while others recall their past hardships and use them as inspiration to try harder.

Always remember that the moment we stop learning, we begin to fall behind, not just professionally, but personally. Never cease searching and learning, as it is the only way to fully enjoy the wonders of life!

SCIENCE CAUGHT IN CROSSFIRE OF TRUMP’S FIGHT WITH UNIVERSITIES

BRAD BROOKS

Harvard scientist Dr Donald Ingber, who works where medicine and engineering meet, saw federal funding for some of his projects frozen this week as his university clashed with the administration of US President Donald Trump.

While Trump and his advisers portray the freezes as a temporary measure employed to force Harvard to make policy changes and address antisemitism on campus, Ingber and other scientists see long-term negative impacts on a tradition of partnerships between the government and university researchers dating back to World War II that made the US the most technologically powerful country on earth. Scientists say the damage is already aiding competitive rivals like China. “We’re killing the Golden Goose of innovation that has let America be the scientific leader in the world,” said Ingber, the founding director of the Wyss Institute for Biologically Inspired Engineering. “This is destroying our competitiveness.”

He has seen two government research contracts worth over \$20 million halted since the Trump administration announced a \$2.3-illion funding freeze against Harvard this week. One focused on assessing and developing drugs to combat radiation damage in humans. The work can be the basis for drugs to help cancer patients cope with the side effects of radiation therapy, and it could be used to protect soldiers and civilians alike in the case of nuclear war or during a nuclear plant explosion.

The Harvard funding freeze came after the school rejected government-mandated reforms of its academic programmes, admissions process and hiring practices that are meant to stamp out what the Trump administration sees as the “radical left” at the school and other colleges across the country.

Trump officials point to the wave of pro-Palestinian protests at several schools last year following the 2023 war in Israel and Gaza as a rationale for its demands. However, critics among faculty and student groups say the measures are designed to chill speech and that campuses should be a place for freedom of speech and academic thought.

Ingber said he knows of post-doc applicants who are now turning down research positions in the US that they had accepted because they are afraid to live in America as foreigners. They are turning to China or Europe to carry out their work.

“We were the magnet for the best young scientists around the world to come and pursue innovation,” Ingber said. “It’s over. After three months of this administration, it is over.”

White House spokesman Kush Desai said that the funding freeze on Harvard and Columbia “is motivated by one thing and one thing only: tackling antisemitism.”

The Department of Education did not respond to a request for comment. — Reuters

Ukraine’s EU accession drive stumbles...

LAUNCHED

as a powerful statement days after Russia’s 2022 war, Ukraine’s bid for EU membership is stuttering in the face of hardening opposition from Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban.

The process for joining the European Union is long, complex and requires unanimous approval from all member states at dozens of different stages.

Now, as US President Donald Trump has upended the West’s support for Kyiv by reaching out to Moscow, Orban seems to be putting his foot down.

Since it lodged its application, war-torn Ukraine has surprised many by making fast progress and formally launching its membership negotiations in June 2024.

Orban, a nationalist who is Moscow’s closest friend in the bloc, has never hidden his hostility to Ukraine’s bid to join, throwing up a series of objections and obstacles.

But so far there has always been a way to talk him down -- with Orban even leaving the room in a diplomatic sleight of hand in December 2023 to allow fellow leaders to agree the opening of talks.

One year out from fraught elections at home and with his ally Trump in the White House, Orban now seems to be toughening his stance.

“Ukraine cannot win this war. And membership of the European Union cannot be an instrument of war,” he said recently.

Next week, Orban’s government plans to send out ballots inviting Hungarians to vote for or against Ukraine’s EU membership. The consultative vote carries no legal weight but it is similar to others he has used to legitimise his eurosceptic positions.

All this is fuelling fears in Brussels that the veteran of EU horse-trading may not be willing to budge this time round.

But Ukraine still has strong backing from much of the bloc.

Under the stewardship of Poland, which holds the EU’s rotating presidency, officials say they are still negotiating to make progress in the coming months. But to little



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen speak after a joint press conference in Kyiv. -- AFP file photo

avail, so far.

“We’re at a standstill,” one European diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations, said.

“We’re really stuck,” added a second diplomat, describing Hungary’s stance as “political blackmail.”

Ukraine, which has already seen Trump essentially close the door on its bid to join Nato, insists it still hopes Budapest can be brought around.

“We are continuing this active work, and believe me, it is really intensive behind the scenes,” said Ukrainian foreign ministry spokesman Georgiy Tykhy.

“We do not bring most of it out into the open, because some processes require so-called quiet diplomacy.”

The doggedness from Kyiv is echoed by the EU’s enlargement commissioner Marta Kos, who is in charge of the dossier in Brussels.

When Kos took office last

December, officials said they wanted to open the first “cluster” of negotiation topics with Ukraine in April.

“I think that the accession process with Ukraine is at high speed,” Kos said in a recent interview, adding that getting Ukraine fully into the EU by 2030 remained a “realistic perspective”.

Lukas Macek, a specialist on EU enlargement at the Jacques Delors think tank, estimates that a more likely timeframe for joining is usually “15 to 20 years”.

A string of candidate countries in the Balkans have already been treading water for years without much progress. But Ukraine -- as it has showed already -- may be able to exceed expectations again.

“There is an unprecedented context, with a state that is a candidate while it is at open war,” Macek said.

“All of this makes the situation much more complex.” And highly unpredictable.



CAMILLE
CAMDESSUS

The writer is
National Political
Reporter for AFP

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



The opening of the Omani Olympic Museum reflects the national commitment to documenting achievements

OOC INAUGURATES OMANI OLYMPIC MUSEUM

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

The Omani Olympic Museum inaugurated on Sunday at the headquarters of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki al Said in the presence of Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, Chairman of OOC, beside attendance of top dignitaries and officials. The Museum was established as a national platform to celebrate the achievement of Omani athletes and embody the Olympic values through inspiring, inactive experience that motivate future generations toward excellence and a strong sense of sportsmanship.

Opening the doors of the first Omani Olympic Museum marks a significant step in the Committee's efforts to highlight and document Oman's sports legacy, in collaboration with relevant institutions, and to promote Olympic culture and elevate the status of Omani sports both locally and internationally.

"I am very honoured to inaugurate Omani Olympic Museum which acts as a record for Oman's sports in the past years. It is an important milestone as it shows Oman's presence in Olympic Games in the past years beside the national sports figures and the athletes who participated and presented the nation in different major sporting events. This Museum will motivate the athlete to show their top efforts and it is a combination between Museum and tourism as all the people who are interested in this field will get to know more about Oman history in the sports filed" His Highness Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki al Said said after the Museum inauguration. The museum includes several specialised sections tailored to various interests including section narrating the history of the international Olympic movement. Also, a display of Olympic torches, a prominent symbol of the Games. In addition to that, there is a corner showcasing memorabilia from the Oman Olympic Committee. A dedicated section honouring Omani women's roles in sports, highlighting their outstanding contributions. Sections focusing on Paralympic sports and visual exhibits capturing exceptional moments in Games history. A gift shop offering products inspired by the Olympic identity.

Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, Chairman of OOC, delivered a speech during the opening ceremony: " We are proud to open the Omani Olympic Museum — a national monument that adds to Oman's sports system. It reflects our pride in our sports history, our appreciation for the pioneers of the sports movement, and our constant ambition for a brighter future. The idea to establish the museum stemmed from the Oman Olympic Committee's strong belief in the importance of preserving and documenting our national sports journey and honouring those who raised Oman's flag at regional and international events," he said.



Top 4 teams clash in First Division OVL semis

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

THE EXCITEMENT continues in the First Division Oman Volleyball League (OVL) with the kick off of the semifinal stage this evening, Monday, as fans anticipate two high-stakes matches featuring top teams that shined during the final qualifiers. At the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, Seeb who finished the previous round at the top of the standings will face fourth-ranked Al Bashayer in a clash marked by caution and ambition, especially with Al Bashayer having proven capable of challenging the top teams on several occasions.

At the same time, the Sohar Sports Complex will host an equally important match as second-placed Al Salam goes head-to-head with third-ranked Majees, in a game expected to be closely contested and intense, given the similar technical levels of both teams during the qualifiers.

END OF QUALIFIERS AND START OF THE DECISIVE STAGE

The final qualifiers concluded on Saturday with the last matches of the second round, which determined the teams advancing to the golden square and set the stage for the highly anticipated semifinal matchups.

In the highlight of the last round, Seeb secured a convincing 3-0 victory over Al Salam, reinforcing their top-seed status. They dominated the game from the start with precise serves and powerful spikes, especially from the left side, winning the first set 25-17. Although Al Salam improved in the second set, Seeb's experience gave them the edge in the critical moments, taking the set 27-25. They then sealed the match with a 25-22 win in the third set.

In the other match, Al Bashayer succeeded in defeating Masirah in straight sets with scores of (25-21, 25-23, 25-16), in a game held at the Sohar Sports Complex. Al Bashayer delivered a balanced performance from the start,



relying on strong serves and well-organised offensive plays, along with solid coordination between the front and back rows. Although Masirah attempted to keep up in the first and second sets, Al Bashayer maintained control during the crucial moments. In the third set, Al Bashayer's dominance became even more evident, especially as Masirah's focus declined and their errors increased, allowing Al Bashayer to seal the match comfortably and secure their place in the semifinals.

The final round results confirmed Seeb's place at the top with 19 points from 7 wins and 1 loss, having won 23 sets and

conceded 10 a clear reflection of their technical superiority and consistency.

Al Salam came second with 14 points from 5 wins and 3 losses, edging out Majees on set difference (18 won, 13 lost). Majees took third place with the same point total but lost out on second place by a single set (18 won, 14 lost). Al Bashayer finished fourth with 13 points, while Masirah exited the competition without a single win or set won, ending the qualifiers with 8 consecutive defeats.

Thus, Seeb, Al Salam, Majees and Al Bashayer have advanced to the semifinals, while Masirah exited the tournament after a disappointing run.

U-18 Hockey League kicks off with 14 clubs

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

THE HOCKEY League U-18 (Hockey5s) has officially commenced, featuring the participation of 14 clubs from various governorates across the Sultanate of Oman. The league targets the age group born in 2007 and is organised by the Oman Hockey Association as part of its efforts to broaden the game's base and promote competitive spirit among younger age groups.

The list of participating clubs includes Ahli Sidab, Seeb, Al Amerat, Ittihad, Salalah, Al Nasr, Al Salam, Al Nahda, Qurayat, Mirbat, Dhofar, Sohar, Masirah and Saham. The clubs have been divided into three main groups based on geographical distribution to ensure balanced competition and facilitate match scheduling.

The first group includes the clubs from Muscat Governorate: Ahli Sidab, Seeb, Qurayat, and Al Amerat. Matches for this group are held at the Oman Club Hockey Field in Al Amerat. The



The clubs have been divided into three main groups based on geographical distribution to ensure balanced competition and facilitate match scheduling.

second group is designated for clubs from the Al Batinah North and Al Buraimi governorates and includes Al Salam, Saham, Al Nahda and Sohar, with matches played at the hockey field in the Sohar Sports Complex. The third group consists of clubs from Dhofar Governorate: Al Nasr, Salalah, Mirbat and Ittihad, and their matches take place at the hockey field in the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Salalah.

Each group plays in a single

round-robin format, after which the overall standings are determined, followed by a playoff match between the top two teams in each group to decide the qualifying team.

EXCITING RESULTS

The first day of group one competitions witnessed intense matchups, with four games played at the Oman Club Hockey Field in Al Amerat, yielding major results that highlighted the teams' readiness and determi-

nation. Ahli Sidab began their campaign with a commanding 8-1 victory over Qurayat. Al Amerat followed with a well-earned 4-2 win against Seeb. Continuing their strong performance, Al Amerat defeated Qurayat once more with a score of 6-1. Ahli Sidab then closed the day with a dominant 6-0 win over Seeb.

With these outcomes, Ahli Sidab temporarily tops the group standings with two big wins and an impressive attacking display, closely followed by Al Amerat, who also have two wins. The upcoming matches will be crucial in determining the group leader and qualifier.

YOUTH BASE FOR HOCKEY:

The U-18 Hockey League is considered one of the core championships upon which the Oman Hockey Association relies to scout emerging talent and build a new generation of players capable of representing the national teams in the future. These competitions also serve as an important platform for reinforcing sportsmanship and expanding the sport's popularity across Oman's governorates.

SHORT TAKES



Minnesota Timberwolves forward Jaden McDaniels (3) dunks over Utah Jazz forward Kyle Filipowski (22) in the fourth quarter at Target Center. — Reuters

Wolves thump Lakers, Nuggets edge Clippers as play-offs start

LOS ANGELES: The Minnesota Timberwolves, fuelled by 25 points from Jaden McDaniels, cruised past LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers 117-95 on Saturday in game one of their NBA Western Conference play-off series.

Luka Doncic, playing his first post-season game with the Lakers after arriving in a stunning February trade, scored 37 points, and James, chasing a fifth title in his 22nd NBA season added 19 after shaking off a slow start that saw him go scoreless in the first quarter.

But the Lakers were no match for the T’Wolves, who trailed by seven after the first quarter, took control in the second and never let up to score the first blow in the best-of-seven series.

Naz Reid scored 23 points off the bench — drilling six of Minnesota’s franchise play-off-record 21 three-pointers.

Anthony Edwards added 22 points, eight rebounds and nine assists for Minnesota, who led by as many as 27.

A 10-0 Lakers run cut the deficit to 88-71 in the third quarter, but the Timberwolves had an answer for every Lakers run.

“I think we just came out ready to play,” said Edwards, who had advised his team-mates before the game to come out “ready to fight”.

“Everybody’s got to trust their work, trust themselves, and they did that tonight,” he said.

Lakers coach JJ Redick said his team was “mentally ready” but didn’t respond to Minnesota’s physicality.

“I thought our spirit was right,” Redick said. “I thought even when they made runs our huddles were great, the communication was great.

“(But) when they started playing with a lot of thrust and physicality, we just didn’t respond immediately to that,” he added.

The Lakers were the only home team to lose on the opening day of first-round action.

Nikola Jokic scored 29 points and Aaron Gordon added 25 as the Nuggets edged the Los Angeles Clippers 112-110 in an overtime thriller in Denver.

The New York Knicks put together a 21-0 scoring run in their 40-point fourth quarter to pull away for a 123-112 victory over the Detroit Pistons at Madison Square Garden.

The Indiana Pacers romped to a 117-98 victory over Giannis Antetokounmpo and the Milwaukee Bucks. Reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Jokic added nine rebounds, 12 assists and three steals for the Nuggets, who erased an early 15-point deficit to grab the win in game one of their Western Conference series.

Russell Westbrook came up big on both ends of the floor, his basket with 3:37 left in the fourth quarter giving the Nuggets their first lead since the first period. — AFP



Germany’s Alexander Zverev celebrates with the trophy after winning the Munich Open. — Reuters

Zverev marks birthday with third Munich title

GERMANY’S world number three Alexander Zverev celebrated his 28th birthday in style on Sunday easing to the ATP Munich title with a 6-2, 6-4 win over American Ben Shelton.

The top-seeded Zverev, appearing in his first final since losing to Jannik Sinner in the Australian Open title decider in January, had little trouble dealing with Shelton, ranked 15 in the world.

For Zverev it was the third time he had

won in Munich — equalling compatriot Philipp Kohlschreiber’s record — and his 24th ATP title overall.

Unlike in his quarterfinal win over the Netherlands’ Tallon Griekspoor, where Zverev needed to come from a set down to win, the German was in control from the outset against the 22-year-old second-seeded American.

Zverev forced Shelton into several mistakes, before converting his first match point after just 71 minutes. His victory means Carlos Alcaraz needs to win in Barcelona later on Saturday to remain

world number two. Zverev’s win on Sunday represents a welcome return to form for him. After losing to Sinner in Melbourne, Zverev failed to make it past the quarters at six successive tournaments, before coming to Munich. The German, most comfortable on clay, repeatedly said he was not concerned about his form and was focused on the French Open, which begins in late May.

Winners of the tournament pocket almost half a million euros (\$570 million), along with a luxury car from the sponsors and a pair of lederhosen, traditional Bavarian leather pants. — AFP

Kohli, Padikkal guide Bengaluru to win over Punjab

CHANDIGARH: Virat Kohli and Devdutt Padikkal hit half-centuries to steer Royal Challengers Bengaluru to a seven-wicket win over Punjab Kings in the Indian Premier League on Sunday.

Chasing 158 for victory, Bengaluru were propelled by a 103-run second-wicket stand between Kohli, who made an unbeaten 73, and Padikkal to reach their target with seven balls to spare at Mullanpur, near Chandigarh.

Bengaluru avenged their loss to Punjab at home on Friday and the two teams, both seeking their first IPL title, are level on points.

The in-form Kohli, 36, struck his fourth half-ton of the season and surpassed Australia’s David Warner for the most 50-plus scores in the



Royal Challengers Bengaluru’s Virat Kohli in action. — Reuters

popular T20 tournament.

Kohli has now made it past the 50-mark 67 times, including eight centuries.

Left-handed Padikkal made 61 off 35 balls, his first fifty of the season, after Bengaluru lost opener Phil Salt in the first over to Arshdeep Singh.

Padikkal fell to Harpreet Brar, leaving Kohli to play the anchor in a 54-ball knock laced with seven fours and a six. Bengaluru spinners Krunal Pandya and Suyash Sharma took two wickets each to set up victory as they helped restrict Punjab to 157-6.

Priyansh Arya and Prabhsimran Singh started aggressively in an opening stand of 42 before Pandya was introduced in the fifth over.

The left-arm spinner struck with

his second ball to send back Arya for 22. Pandya struck again in his next over to dismiss Prabhsimran, who hit 33 off 17 balls, and finished with figures of 2-25.

West Indies fast bowler Romario Shepherd, in his first Bengaluru outing this season, had skipper Shreyas Iyer out for six and Nehal Wadhwa was run out soon after.

England’s Josh Inglis attempted to hit back, smashing 29 off 17 balls, but was bowled by leg-spinner Suyash. Suyash hit the stumps again three balls later to remove Marcus Stoinis as Punjab slipped to 114-6.

Shashank Singh, who made 31, and Marco Jansen, who hit 25, put on an unbeaten stand of 43 to boost the total but it was not enough to challenge Bengaluru. — AFP

SPORTS



Denmark's Holger Rune holds up the trophy after winning the ATP Barcelona Open. — AFP



Denmark's Holger Rune (R) and Spain's Carlos Alcaraz hold up their trophies after the ATP Barcelona Open. — AFP

Rune defeats Alcaraz to win Barcelona Open title

HOLGER RENE beat world number two Carlos Alcaraz 7-6 (8/6), 6-2 on Sunday to win the Barcelona Open for the first time. Rune was nearly flawless as he became only the second player to beat Alcaraz in his last 23 matches on clay, although the Spaniard had some physical difficulties in the

second set. Four-time Grand Slam winner Alcaraz, gearing up for his French Open defence, was hunting for his third title in Barcelona but came up short as Rune claimed his first anywhere since April 2023. "It's a crazy feeling, it's been such a long time for me since I won a title, maybe a little bit more than a year, I'm so happy," Rune told TVE. "To beat Carlos in the final, a good

friend and an amazing player, means the world to me, I'm so proud to be in this moment. "I think I was very composed, I played very tactically well again. "Alcaraz, who won the Monte Carlo Masters last week, drew first blood with a break in the fifth game but Rune hit back immediately to level at 3-3. The Dane, ranked 13th in the

world, put his opponent under heavy pressure in the 10th game, with Alcaraz forced to save two set points on the way to a tie-break. Rune spurned two more in the tie-break before claiming the first set when Alcaraz went long. It was the first set the Spaniard had dropped all week and he came out roaring in the second. Rune saved two break points for

a tough hold in the second game and Alcaraz won the third on serve before taking a medical time-out. The 21-year-old rushed back out onto the court but ran into trouble, with the ruthless Rune breaking. The Dane saved two break points on his way to consolidating for a 4-2 lead. Rune broke again and served it out, triumphing when Alcaraz slapped a shot into the net. — AFP

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بنك ظفار
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Representatives of the Holland Hydrogen Hub sharing insights into their hydrogen ‘demonstration project’ during the recent State Visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Netherlands.

DUTCH H3 ALLIANCE SEEKS TO CAPITALISE ON OMAN’S GH2 VALUE CHAIN

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

HOLLAND Hydrogen Hub (H3), representing an alliance of private Dutch businesses with interests spanning the hydrogen value chain, recently showcased cutting-edge technologies that it hopes to leverage to unlock commercial opportunities from Oman’s emerging green hydrogen (GH2) economy.

A “demonstration project” encompassing these technologies was made to government officials and business leaders during the recent State Visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Netherlands.

Holland Hydrogen Hub’s primary mandate is to participate in green hydrogen projects in Oman, among other Gulf states, with the output earmarked for local use as well as export to the Netherlands. In the Sultanate of Oman, the alliance has been collaborating with Hydrom (the national orchestrator of Oman’s green hydrogen industry) and OQ (the integrated global energy group of Oman).

“At Holland Hydrogen Hub, we’re enabling cross-border business opportunities to accelerate the development of the clean hydrogen value chain,” commented Marcel Kooter, Co-Founder, in a post.

“This particular project — carried out in collaboration with Hydrom, OQ and our H3 partners — aims to showcase how an integrated suite of groundbreaking technologies can produce, store and transport hydrogen more efficiently and sustainably.”

Kooter added: “As part of the state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik of Oman to the Netherlands, we had the honour — together with William Janssen, Ted Straten and Robert-Jan Berg — to present our demonstration project to King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands and His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.”

Contributing to the innovative solutions promoted by the alliance partners are as many as six different tech companies focused on one or more aspects of the hydrogen value chain.

The list includes Desolenator, a Dutch tech startup credited with developing the world’s first solar thermal desalination solution that works at scale. The company, represented by William Janssen, Founder and Director, harnesses the power of the sun to sustainably transform seawater into drinking water or ultrapure water.

Following last week’s landmark Joint Development Agreement (JDA) on the establishment of the world’s first Liquid Hydrogen Corridor between Oman and Europe, the Netherlands has positioned itself as a first-mover in securing Omani green hydrogen for European markets starting from around 2030.

As many as 11 different companies from the Netherlands, Germany and Oman have signed up to this groundbreaking endeavour. They span the shipping, transportation, distribution, terminal operation, aggregation and end-user elements of the hydrogen supply chain.

National health insurance goes digital with ‘Dhamani’

FAISAL AL AJMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

OMAN marked the official launch of the national health insurance platform “Dhamani”, a milestone accomplishment in the modernisation of the nation’s healthcare and insurance industries.

Announced by the Financial Services Authority (FSA), the platform is technically and legislatively complete, offering integrated digital services to regulate the health insurance market.

“Dhamani” facilitates seamless data and claim exchanges between insurance companies and private healthcare providers, besides creating unified medical records accessible by policyholders across private institutions.

Shaikh Abdullah bin Salem al Salmi, CEO of the FSA, stated that the platform was a “qualitative leap” for Oman’s insurance market, in alignment with Oman Vision 2040 agenda to promote digital infrastructure and increase access to essential services.

During its trial phase, “Dhamani” settled nearly three million transactions during the first quarter of 2025, with 33 private hospitals and three

FSA officials speak about the significance of the Dhamani platform on Sunday.

health complexes already linked. All the insurance companies that are licensed are now part of the system, prior to full operational rollout across the remaining private clinics and healthcare facilities.

FSA Insurance Sector Vice President Ahmed bin Ali al Maamari said: “The recently launched “Dhamani” health insurance platform will significantly enhance the level of health care services in the Sultanate of Oman.

Through the platform’s streamlining of the approval process for treatment requests and enabling of electronic payment between hospitals and insurance companies, the Sultanate of Oman’s policyholders will be in a

position to obtain faster, more reliable services,” he stated.

“All 33 private hospitals licensed by the Ministry of Health are now fully integrated into the system. Authorities confirmed that efforts are underway to continue expanding the platform’s reach by including health centres, clinics and pharmacies, increasing supervision and the overall experience of healthcare in the private sector,” Al Maamari added.

The system also promises the possibility of faster settlement of claims to private hospitals, better fraud detection and access to a centralised database of diagnoses and treatments — vital tools for regulatory

control and healthcare planning.

It employs cutting-edge medical coding systems and cybersecurity protocols, with secure and efficient transmission of information.

With more than 650,000 policyholders covered at present and an average of 40,000 transactions occurring daily, “Dhamani” is expected to simplify administrative procedures, reduce healthcare costs and improve overall service delivery. The FSA developed the platform in coordination with the major stakeholders like the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour and Invest Easy.

This digitalisation is backed by new legislation, like Regulation No 83/2023, which governs electronic integration in the insurance sector. The FSA has amended the legal framework to provide rights, enforce compliance and permit faster, tech-enabled registration, claims and reimbursements.

By bridging gaps in the current system and providing one digital backbone, “Dhamani” is a beacon of innovation — a single system that will enhance transparency, improve efficiency and render Oman’s healthcare system more accessible and sustainable for generations to come.

CBO boosts digital banking with new direct debit system

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has rolled out significant enhancements to its Direct Debit service, marking a strategic milestone in the Sultanate of Oman’s broader push towards digital transformation in the financial sector.

The improvements aim to streamline transactions for individuals and businesses alike, reduce reliance on cheques and enhance the overall efficiency and security of banking operations.

The newly improved Direct Debit service enables the full digital processing of mandates — right from issuance and authorisation to execution — through electronic banking channels.

This transition from paper-based procedures to an electronic framework allows customers to approve mandates directly through their bank’s digital platforms, minimising the need for manual processing and physical documentation.

The CBO, in collaboration with commercial banks, has already launched a pilot phase for two core systems: the Direct Debit System and the Direct Debit Mandate Management System.

These platforms are expected to

The newly improved Direct Debit service enables the full digital processing of mandates — right from issuance and authorisation to execution — through electronic banking channels.

significantly improve user convenience and operational efficiency while expanding the adoption of automated financial services across the Sultanate of Oman.

A direct debit is a payment instruction that authorises a bank to deduct funds from a customer’s account in favour of a beneficiary, based on pre-agreed terms.

With the new enhancements, this process becomes more accessible and reliable for both individuals and corporate entities. In parallel with these technical upgrades, the Central Bank has also reinforced the legal framework surrounding the Direct Debit service.

Under the National Payment Systems Law No 8/2018, beneficiaries are granted legal protection in the event of a bounced direct debit, similar to the recourse available for dishonoured cheques.

This framework supports the enforceability of direct debit transactions and safeguards the rights of all parties involved.

Key benefits of the updated system include reduced operational costs, increased transaction speed and improved accuracy.

By cutting down on manual errors and eliminating paper-based documentation, the new platform not only enhances service reliability but also contributes to environmental sustainability.

Several banks have already integrated the electronic Direct Debit mandate service into their offerings, with others expected to follow suit by 2025. The move is part of Oman’s national agenda to modernise its financial infrastructure and encourage the development of a cashless, digitally empowered economy.

By upgrading its Direct Debit system, the Central Bank of Oman not only demonstrates its commitment to improving payment services but also reinforces its role as a key driver of financial innovation and digital adoption in the country.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The collaboration will focus on nurturing in-house talent and supporting pioneering digital projects.

AWASR PARTNERS WITH MADAREK TO INCUBATE INNOVATION PROJECTS

MUSCAT: AWASR, the leading provider of broadband internet services in Oman, has announced a strategic partnership with Madarek, an innovative ecosystem dedicated to fostering entrepreneurship, research and knowledge exchange.

This collaboration aims to incubate cutting-edge innovation projects within AWASR, reinforcing the company’s commitment to driving technological advancements and digital transformation in the Sultanate of Oman.

Through this partnership, AWASR will leverage Madarek’s extensive expertise in innovation management, research and strategic consulting to develop and implement forward-thinking initiatives that enhance connectivity and digital solutions. The collaboration will focus on nurturing in-house talent, supporting pioneering digital projects and fostering a culture of continuous innovation.

This collaboration aims to incubate cutting-edge innovation projects within AWASR, reinforcing the company’s commitment to driving technological advancements and digital transformation in the Sultanate of Oman.

Eng Adnan Mohammed al Alawi, CEO of AWASR, expressed his enthusiasm for this partnership, stating: “Our collaboration with Madarek represents a significant milestone in AWASR’s journey towards technological excellence. By integrating Madarek’s ecosystem with our innovation-driven approach, we aim to explore new frontiers

in telecommunications and digital services, ultimately providing our customers with state-of-the-art solutions.”

Aiman al Zakwani, CEO of Madarek, also commented on the partnership, saying: “At Madarek, we believe in empowering organisations with the right tools and knowledge to drive innovation. Partnering with AWASR allows us to contribute to the advancement of the telecommunications sector in Oman by facilitating research-driven, cutting-edge initiatives that align with the nation’s digital transformation goals.”

Eugen Comendant, Chief Commercial Officer of AWASR, added: “Innovation is at the heart of everything we do at AWASR. This partnership with Madarek allows us to accelerate our efforts in developing next-generation solutions that will redefine the digital landscape in Oman. By fostering a culture of creativity and forward-thinking, we aim to deliver exceptional value to our customers and drive sustainable growth in the telecommunications sector.”

BANK DHOFAR AND WESTERN UNION TO ENHANCE DIGITAL REMITTANCES

MUSCAT: By integrating Western Union’s global money transfer services into its digital banking platforms, Bank Dhofar is providing customers unparalleled convenience and efficiency through its advanced digital banking platforms.

The collaboration allows Bank Dhofar’s customers to easily transfer funds internationally with just a few taps on their smartphones.

With an emphasis on security, speed and customer convenience, the service has



The collaboration allows Bank Dhofar’s customers to easily transfer funds internationally.

rapidly gained popularity, driven by the combination of competitive exchange rates and a low transaction fee of just RO 1.500.

To further enhance the service and provide added value, Bank Dhofar has introduced a series of special promo codes for free international remittances.

This initiative, which allows customers to send money at zero cost, has been met with enthusiasm, significantly increasing the adoption of the service.

BYD’s stunning SUV Sealion 7 EV unveiled in Oman

IN an exclusive gathering of distinguished guests from both the public and private sectors, World Auto Business unveiled BYD’s trailblazing electric SUV – the Sealion 7 EV, at the BYD showroom in Wattayah.

This exclusive event attended by a select audience, emphasised BYD’s commitment to revolutionising sustainable mobility without compromising on power, elegance and cutting-edge technology.

The evening commenced with a warm and engaging welcome address setting the stage for an unforgettable showcase of the exceptional innovations behind the BYD Sealion 7 EV.

The BYD spokesperson articulated how the brand continues to redefine automotive excellence, with the Sealion 7 EV standing as a bold testament to innovation and confidence. Drawing inspiration from the ocean, its aesthetics seamlessly merge form and function, making every drive an immersive and exhilarating experience.



Guests viewing the all-new BYD Sealion 7 EV

Highlighting the vehicle’s technological advancements, he detailed how the Sealion 7 EV is designed to shape the future of transportation with BYD’s cutting-edge Platform 3.0. Engineered to eliminate range anxiety, this next-generation platform is complemented by fast-charging capabilities, ensuring seamless and efficient travel. He also emphasised the game-changing introduction

of BYD’s Blade Battery, an innovation that enhances the Sealion 7 EV performance, durability and dynamic driving experience. Following the welcome remarks, an insightful product presentation provided a deep dive into the Sealion 7 EV electrified performance, intelligent features and eco-conscious efficiency.

This presentation reinforced BYD’s leadership in the

electrification space and its role in making sustainable driving a mainstream reality.

The highlight of the evening was the momentous unveiling of the Sealion 7 EV, met with enthusiastic applause from the audience. This was followed by a ceremonial key handover to the first few owners of the Sealion 7 EV in Oman, marking the beginning of an exciting new era in the country’s electric SUV segment.

Guests at the event shared their perspectives on the Sealion 7 EV’s transformative impact. One attendee described it as a game-changer, recognising BYD’s mastery in crafting an electric SUV that seamlessly blends power, efficiency and space while setting a new standard in sustainable mobility.

Another guest lauded the Sealion 7 EV’s futuristic design and intelligent performance, acknowledging its role in redefining innovation and practicality while making sustainable driving more aspirational and accessible.

AL MOUJ MUSCAT, MUBASHIR TO UNLOCK BRANDING OPPORTUNITIES

MUSCAT: Al Mouj Muscat, Oman’s premier lifestyle destination, has partnered with Mubashir, a leading specialist in high-impact advertising solutions, to offer targeted advertising opportunities to Oman’s business community.

This collaboration aims to enhance brand visibility among Al Mouj Muscat’s affluent and diverse audience.

A vibrant hub of culture and commerce, Al Mouj Muscat is home to over 8,000 residents representing 85 nationalities and welcomes more than 4 million visitors annually.

With over 80 retail and dining outlets set against a backdrop of stunning



This collaboration aims to enhance brand visibility among Al Mouj Muscat’s affluent and diverse audience.

waterfront views and dynamic public spaces, brands have the opportunity to engage consumers in a setting designed for premium experiences and meaningful interactions.

Leveraging Mubashir’s expertise in seamlessly blending digital and physical advertising, businesses will benefit from strategically placed, high-quality advertisements across Al Mouj Walk, Al Mouj Marina and other key high-footfall locations.

Customised campaigns will further optimise advertiser reach and enhance meaningful brand interactions, ensuring maximum recall and audience engagement.

Specialised training initiative for students with disabilities launched

MUSCAT: Last week marked the launch of the “AI Journey Programme,” a specialised training initiative for students with disabilities, supported by Oman Qatar Insurance Company (OQIC), managed by Al Massa Marketing and held in partnership with the Association for Children with Disabilities in Al Athaiba.

The programme aims to foster an entrepreneurial spirit among participants, develop their creative skills and abilities using Artificial Intelligence tools and equip them with sustainable skills relevant to current community needs and the job market.

KEY AREAS COVERED IN THE PROGRAMME INCLUDE:

- Understanding AI Tools: Exploring their capabilities and responsible usage.
- Project Development Fundamentals.
- Cultivating Entrepreneurial Thinking. The programme provides an enriching training opportunity that blends theoretical knowledge with hands-on practical application for participants with various disabilities, including physical, hearing, autism spectrum and others.

The participants, aged between 16 and 27, include:



The programme aims to foster an entrepreneurial spirit among participants.

- 7 individuals from the Al Athaiba Rehabilitation Centre
- 7 individuals from the Al Seeb Rehabilitation Centre
- 6 students from the Omani

Association for People with Hearing Disabilities

- 4 individuals from the Omani Association for People with Physical Disabilities

Muna al Shukaili, CEO of Al Massa Marketing, commented on the initiative: “Through our Corporate Social Responsibility programmes, we consistently aim to introduce strategic, sustainable and measurable community development projects that directly contribute to human development and governance.

The idea for this programme aligns with that vision, seeking to equip our youth with disabilities with the essential skills needed to thrive and

meet the demands of the modern era.”

Omar al Shanfari, Senior Manager of Human Resources, Administration and Government Relations at OQIC, added: “Oman Qatar Insurance Company firmly believes in empowering all members of society, including individuals with disabilities, to keep pace with technological advancements.

This initiative underscores our commitment to social responsibility and our role in fostering digital transformation. It paves the way for these talented individuals to explore and unlock their potential within the field of Artificial Intelligence.”

BUSINESS



The Advantage Oman Forum will feature a distinguished lineup of speakers representing both regional leadership and global thought.

1ST ADVANTAGE OMAN FORUM TO SHOWCASE NATION’S INVESTMENT LANDSCAPE

MUSCAT: Oman is set to welcome global attention this April with the launch of the inaugural Advantage Oman Forum, an exclusive two-day business gathering taking place on April 27-28, 2025 at the St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort.

Organised by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, represented by Invest Oman, the forum will bring together senior figures from government, international business, financial institutions and strategic sectors to examine Oman’s rising profile as an investment destination and explore new economic frontiers. The forum is held under the strategic partnership of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Sohar International.

The Advantage Oman Forum is expected to play a central role in reinforcing Oman’s economic diplomacy efforts and its commitment to attracting high-quality, sustainable investments in alignment with Oman Vision 2040 and the country’s Net-Zero 2050 strategy.

Over the course of two days, the forum will present a comprehensive outlook on Oman’s investment opportunities, sectoral competitiveness and global relevance, particularly in light of its increasing integration within regional and international trade and investment flows.

The programme will feature a series of curated panel discussions, fireside conversations and strategic meetings addressing critical global megatrends and their implications for Oman’s future.

The discussions will explore how sectors such as clean energy, logistics, advanced manufacturing, mining, agri-food and tourism are being positioned to attract future-ready investment. With sustainability, resilience and innovation as key themes, the forum will also address how Oman is preparing for a world of heightened economic competition, climate transitions and rapid technological transformation.

The Advantage Oman Forum will feature a distinguished lineup of speakers representing both regional leadership and global thought. Among them are Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority; Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy; and Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism.

The sessions will be moderated by Dr Florian Klein, Co-Founder and Managing Partner of ananki ai GmbH, who will guide the conversation towards actionable strategies in an increasingly complex global economy.

One of the headline sessions will be led by CNN Editor-at-Large Richard Quest, titled “The Shape of Things to Come.” The session will explore the megatrends reshaping business and governance, including climate adaptation, renewable energy, AI and Industry 5.0. It will examine how technologies like edge AI and telemedicine are transforming industries and how businesses can build resilience amid geopolitical shifts. Framed by global insights and practical strategies, the session will offer a road map for thriving in a rapidly evolving world.

SIDELINE MOVE

S Korea, US to hold trade talks this week



South Korea and the United States will hold trade consultations this week in Washington at the suggestion of the United States, Seoul’s trade ministry said on Sunday.

Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok and Trade Minister Ahn Duk-geun will meet with Trade Representative Jamieson Greer and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on the sidelines of the spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. — Reuters

LATEST VICTIM

Boeing jet returns to US from China



A Boeing jet intended for use by a Chinese airline landed back at the planemaker’s US production hub on Sunday, a victim of the tit-for-tat bilateral tariffs launched by President Donald Trump in his global trade offensive.

The 737 MAX, which was meant for China’s Xiamen Airlines, landed at Seattle’s Boeing Field at 6:11 pm (01:11 GMT), according to a witness. It was painted with Xiamen livery. — Reuters

ATTRACTING INVESTORS

India to ease nuclear liability laws



India is planning to ease its nuclear liability laws to cap accident-related penalties on equipment suppliers, three sources said, in a move mainly to attract US firms that have been holding back due to the risk of unlimited exposure.

The proposal is the latest step to expand nuclear power production capacity by 12 times to 100 gigawatts by 2047 as well as provide a fillip to India in trade and tariff negotiations with the US. — Reuters

CEO TALK

Charting path to growth and people empowerment

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

FROM humble beginnings as a rig worker to the helm of a diversified energy group, Azzan Moghrob Rashid al Asmy’s journey to leadership is a powerful testament to determination, grit and vision. In 1998, Al Asmy began his career on the ground as a “roughneck” in a drilling rig, where he experienced firsthand the stark disparity in living and working conditions between junior and senior staff.

“We were four to a room in shared portacabins with limited showers and communal toilets. Even food was served differently. While senior staff had privacy and comfort, we had to queue for basic needs,” he recalled.

But rather than discouraging him, these early hardships became the foundation of a dream — to one day become a leader who could change the status quo. Inspired not only by his personal experiences but also by the career path of his father, who rose from junior staff to Well Engineering Director at PDO, Al Asmy committed himself to education and professional development, eventually earning a BSc in Mechatronics from Caledonian University in 2006.

In an exclusive interview with the Observer, Al Asmy traced his path through the energy industry, highlighting the pivotal moments that shaped his leadership philosophy. “I always asked myself — what do these people have that I don’t? That question became my driving force,” he said.

After rejoining the industry as senior staff, he quickly ascended through roles in well testing, business development, production



“The biggest challenge in leadership is managing people. You need to be part of the team. Praise in public, correct in private

AZZAN MOGHROB RASHID AL ASMY
Group Managing Director at Hema Energy Group

technology and asset management across companies like MBPS and Petrogas Rima. His career took a decisive turn when he accepted the role of General Manager at Hema Energy — a major shift he initially hesitated to take.

“But with guidance from wise mentors and lessons from past leaders like Ahmed al Kharousi, I took the leap,” he shared.

Today, he serves as Group Managing Director at Hema Energy Group, which now spans 11 companies across consultancy, manufacturing, services, green energy; and exploration and production. Among his proudest achievements at Hema Energy is the successful diversification of the company’s portfolio. “We have expanded our product lines, signed important agreements and localised key technologies,” Al Asmy noted.

He places significant emphasis on empowering his team, improving post-sales relationships and investing in market intelligence. Under his leadership, the company closed its 2024 financial year in the black — a milestone that brought smiles to shareholders and boosted team morale. “We’re already a year ahead in our strategy to

expand into Bahrain and Kuwait, with pilot projects expected this year,” he said, adding that the positive energy within the office is palpable even to visitors.

Al Asmy attributes much of this success to his leadership style, which is rooted in empathy and teamwork. “The biggest challenge in leadership is managing people. You need to be part of the team. Praise in public, correct in private,” he advised. He believes in leading by example and encourages employees to learn from their mistakes.

“Welfare is my top priority. We are one of the few service companies that allow one day per week of remote work. And if someone finishes their tasks early, they can go home. It’s about output, not hours.”

His early career highlight — a technical report praised by a GM as superior to the company’s own documentation — remains a reminder of the power of diligence. But Al Asmy is more focused on what lies ahead. “My vision is for Hema Energy to become a leading name in the regional energy sector and ultimately a globally recognised brand,” he said. He also offered advice for aspiring CEOs: “Nothing is impossible. Step out of your comfort zone. Once you become a leader, give your people the chances you didn’t get — and watch the magic happen.”

As for balance, Al Asmy lives by the mantra, “Make a life while you’re making a living.” Whether it’s a half-day break or time with family, he believes in recharging regularly to stay effective at work. In an industry known for volatility and complexity, Azzan Moghrob Rashid al Asmy’s journey is a compelling reminder that leadership isn’t just about rising — it’s about lifting others along the way.

PACT SIGNED TO DRIVE INNOVATION AND ADVANCED RESEARCH IN AI

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 20

AN agreement was signed to drive innovation and advanced research in AI and digitalisation in Oman. Vodafone Oman has signed a strategic partnership with Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) to advance research and innovation that will contribute to Oman’s digital economy.

As part of the agreement, the company will launch a Vodafone Innovation Award to recognise and encourage technological breakthroughs that solve real-world challenges.

In addition, Vodafone Oman will sponsor a PhD scholarship in Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and Digitisation, reinforcing its commitment to supporting academic research that strengthens Oman’s position in emerging technologies.

“Innovation is not just about technology. It’s about people, ideas and the right environment to turn potential into impact,” said Eng Bader al Zidi, CEO of



Vodafone will launch a Vodafone Innovation Award to recognise and encourage technological breakthroughs that solve real-world challenges.

Vodafone Oman.

“Our partnership with Sultan Qaboos University is a step towards building that environment, one where academic research meets industry expertise to create

meaningful advancements.

The Vodafone Innovation Award and the PhD sponsorship are designed to accelerate research in AI and emerging technologies, equipping the next generation with the knowledge

OPINION

US slaps new tariffs on phones and electronics



ANDY JALIL

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

WHILE the tariffs imposed by US president Donald Trump remain in abeyance for 90-days, US commerce secretary, HowardLutnick,saidlastweek that smartphones, computers and some other electronics, just exempted from steep tariffs on imports from China, would face separate new dutiesalongwithsemiconductorswithinthenext two months.

Lutnick's comments on ABC's, This Week, during which he flagged the incoming levies on critical technology products, mark the latest twist in Trump's tariff plans, which have upended the global trading order.

On April 11, the Trump administration granted exclusions from the steep reciprocal tariffs on smartphones and a set of other electronics products, a move seen as a big break for tech firms such as Apple and Dell that rely on imports from China.

Trump's back-and-forths on tariffs have kicked off a trade war with China and prompted the wildest swings on Wall Street since 2020. The benchmark Standard & Poor's 500 index is down more than 10 per cent since Trump took office on January 20.

Lutnick said the US president would enact "a special focus-type of tariff" on smartphones, computers and other electronics products in a

monthortwo,alongsidesectoraltariffstargeting semiconductors and pharmaceuticals.

He said those new levies would fall outside Trump'sso-calledreciprocartariffs,underwhich levies on Chinese imports climbed to 125 per cent.

"He is saying they are exempt from the reciprocal tariffs, but they are included in the semiconductor tariffs which are coming in probably a month or two," said Lutnick, who predictedthatthelevieswouldbringproduction of those products to the US.

"Those are things that are national security, that we need to be made in America." Lutnick appeared to gobeyond what was communicated the previous week when a White House official said to the media that Trump would launch a new national security trade investigation into semiconductors soon that could lead to other new tariffs.

Beijing increased its own tariffs on US imports to 125 percent, striking against Trump's tariffs. Last week China said it was evaluating the impact of the exclusions for the technology products implemented.

"The bell on the tiger's neck can only be untied by the person who tied it," China's Ministry of commerce said. Billionaire investor Bill Ackman, who endorsed Trump's run for president but who has criticised the tariffs,

Trump's back-and-forths on tariffs have kicked off a trade war with China and prompted the wildest swings on Wall Street since 2020. The benchmark Standard & Poor's 500 index is down more than 10 per cent since Trump took office on January 20.

called on him to pause the broad and steep reciprocal tariffs on China for three months, as he did for most countries — but Trump kept the 125 per cent on China.

US senator Elizabeth Warren, a Democrat, criticised the latest revision to Trump's tariff plan, which economists have warned could dent economic growth and fuel inflation. She said: "There is no tariff policy — only chaos and corruption."

In a notice to shippers on 11 April, the US Customs and Border Protection agency published a list of tariff codes excluded from the import taxes. It featured 20 product categories, including computers, laptops, disc drives, semiconductor devises, memory chips and flat panel displays.

For the Chinese imports, the exclusion of the tech products applies only to Trump's reciprocal tariffs. The US president's prior 20 per cent duties on all Chinese imports, which he said were related to the fentanyl crisis remain in place.

In an interview on NBC's Meet The Press, White House trade advisor Peter Navarro said the US has opened an invitation to China to negotiate, but criticised its connection to the lethal fentanyl (a synthetic opioid made in a lab that is 50 to 100 times more powerful than morphine) supply chain.

DEFIANCE OF US SUPREME COURT IS TRICKY TO PRICE

GABRIEL RUBIN

BEYOND advantages in geography, resources and demographics, the United States' economic might depends upon the predictable rule of law. Key to its function is the co-equal status of the executive branch, legislature and judiciary. By flouting a unanimous Supreme Court ruling that it return a wrongfully deported man, US President Donald Trump's administration threatens that framework.

If this pushes further, global investors holding trillions of dollars' worth of US assets face a grave capital quandary.

Federal Judge Paula Xinis lambasted government lawyers during a Tuesday hearing dedicated to the case of Kilmar Abrego Garcia, a Maryland resident whom prosecutors admitted was mistakenly deported to a detention centre in El Salvador. By a 9-0 vote, the Supreme Court largely upheld Xinis's order to "facilitate" his return. Yet the judge noted that "to date, what the record shows is that nothing has been done."

President Trump and Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele, in an Oval Office meeting on Monday, claimed that returning the imprisoned man was impossible. On Wednesday, a judge in a separate deportation case found "probable cause" to hold officials in contempt.

Officials assert that any directive must not overstep deference due to the president in foreign affairs. White House spokesperson Harrison Fields said that "these radical judges will soon learn that denying the Chief Executive his constitutionally granted authorities is a gross infringement of the law and will not stand on appeal." This is a crisis for US governance, where each branch is supposed to check the other's excesses. It's not clear how markets can price in fractures in that system. Court oversight guarantees the sanctity of contracts and protects property and people from arbitrary caprice.

The Trump administration has pulled back from white-collar prosecutions, discarded some regulatory enforcement and dismantled congressionally authorized agencies upon which businesses rely.

Foreign consumers already appear leery. Forecaster Tourism Economics now predicts a 9% decline in foreign visitors to the US, down from a projected 9% increase in December. Goldman Sachs estimates that, combined with boycotts of US exports, this could amount to a 0.3% hit to GDP.

A pullback among investors would be more material. Between equities, US Treasuries and corporate credit, overseas investors own \$30 trillion of the country's assets, according to Apollo Global Management's Torsten Slok.

Despite recent lurches, the S&P 500 Index still trades at a premium to its historical average, government debt auctions continue and global investors are highly allocated to the US.

There simply are not ready alternatives to markets of this scale and depth. Whether the administration will bend the law in a way that impairs this value is unclear, but no longer impossible to contemplate. — Reuters

The real impact of the trade war on China

CHINA has announced an increase from 34% to 84% in retaliatory tariffs on goods imported, effective April 10, 2025 and then a further increase to 125% effective from April 12, 2025, in response to the Trump administration's escalation of tariffson China.

The Chinese retaliation is in response to US tariffs on Chinese imports, first to 104%, then to 125%, with some sources and official statements indicating that the effective rate on many Chinese goods could reach as high as 145% when accounting for additional measures.

The world's manufacturing hub and the most crucial market are in a trade war with no signs of slowing down.

Many experts worry that the speed of tariff announcements and the retaliatory tariff response from nations is not giving governments and investors time to adjust to the new and different global economy. Most economists warn of a US recession and a global recession.

With the current tariffs, there is no market for US goods imported into China. The further increase in tariffs does not make economic sense.

President Trump stated that the most recent 21% increase was imposed due to what he described as a "lack of respect" from China.

Parallely, the US has announced a 90-day pause on tariff increases for most countries, maintaining a flat 10% tariff for those trading partners.

Still, this pause excludes China, which remains subject to the sharply elevated rates. The Chinese export smartphones, computers, lithium-ion batteries, toys, video game consoles and many goods, from screwdrivers to boilers.

The unprecedented escalation of tariffs and retaliatory tariffs between the US and China could render bilateral trade in many goods unviable.

The Chinese did not back off or remove tariffs unilaterally; instead, China has gone for a tit-for-tat tariff approach with retaliatory tariffs on US imports and wide-ranging restrictions on US businesses, including an anti-monopoly investigation on US firms, including Google.

China has also allowed the currency yuan to weaken, making exports more attractive.



The world's manufacturing hub and the most crucial market are in a trade war with no signs of slowing down. — Reuters



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The writer is an assistant professor at the marketing and management department of the College of Banking and Financial Studies in Muscat.

China's sluggish economy has rising unemployment and a prolonged property market crisis.

The tariffs will exacerbate China's economy, hitting the nation's exports for years; exports have played a significant role in China's explosive growth.

Though the country is diversifying into high-tech and high-value, aiming to boost low domestic consumption, experts believe exports remain a key growth driver.

Chinese firms are scrambling to search for alternative supply chains in this uncertainty. China believes that higher tariffs mean even less.

Exports contribute 20-50% of China's growth, which will now become much lower. Though China had shown economic growth in early 2025, most experts and top banks have forecasted a slowdown of 2% in the GDP.

According to experts, such broad, unprecedented, sweeping tariffs will only cause more harm than good to consumers, businesses and the economy.

Many Chinese manufacturers are already adjusting by shifting their supply chains to other countries like

Vietnam and Cambodia.

With millions of job losses, small and medium enterprises in China's manufacturing and export sectors will bear the brunt.

Despite these challenges, China has been preparing for such an eventuality for years by diversifying its trade relationships, strengthening supply chains for critical minerals and investing in high-tech sectors like semiconductors and AI.

The Chinese government plans to survive the external shocks by implementing monetary and fiscal stimulus measures to support growth and domestic demand.

China's resilience in the trade war and its emerging alternative supply chain could lead to developing a multipolar global trade ecosystem, with short-term disruptions.

Though the sluggish Chinese economy and the 145% tariffs could exacerbate the export-growth-oriented nation, it can survive with slow growth and structural changes.

The future of the US-China trade war depends on both countries' willingness to negotiate, the duration of the tariffs and the swift ability to change the global trade dynamics.

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INDIAN male MBA, 20 years experience in Oman & GCC in Project sales/ Dealer market in All construction materials including Cables & Accessories having D/L looking for the post of Sales Manager/ Assistant Manager. Contact: 00968 78099493

SRI LANKAN Male – (CGMA ACMA+ CPA+BBBA) Asst. Finance Manager/ Chief Accountant, 12+ Experience in Oman & GCC, Expert in Finan. Reporting (MIS), VAT, Audit, Cashflow, Budget, AR AP Recon, IFRS, Payroll, Banking. Contact: 78773250. Email: ali.mohamedown@gmail.com

INDIAN Male /CPA, CMA, CA Finalist & BCOM/ 10+ years of Experience/ Currently Working as Finance Manager, Looking for Senior Management Roles in Finance. Contact: 78611653. Email: jobcpacma@gmail.com

ACCOUNTANT with 5 years expertise in Accounts Payable, Receivables, Financial Reporting, VAT, Payroll, and Bank & Cash Reconciliation. Actively looking for new opportunities. Contact: 79791746 Email: lbrahimsaw52@gmail.com

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ACCOUNTS/ Finance: Indian male (MBA Fin) having more than 19 years of experience in Oman accounts & finance looking for suitable placement, NOC available and can join immediately. Contact: 92076716

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SENIOR accountant - Indian male above 11 years' experience (9years in Oman) NOC & D/L available. Contact: 78109909.Email: shinsjohn@gmail.com

29 years old Indian female, MBA holder with 2 years experience. Seeking a suitable position. Currently in Muscat on visit visa. Contact: 78641071, shazashakeel@gmail.com



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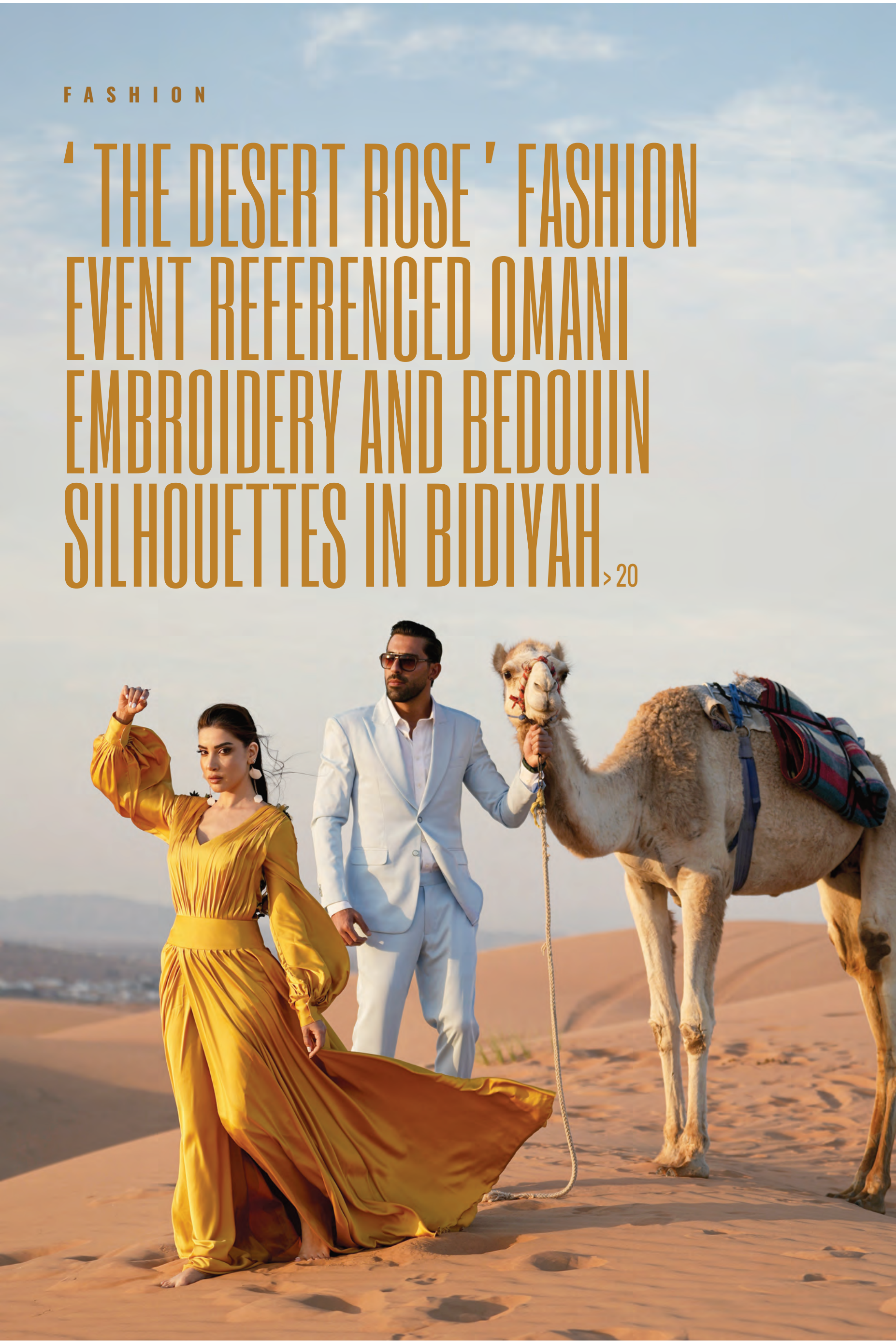
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ART/LIFE



LIFESTYLE

Sagrada Familia architect Gaudi on path to sainthood



POPE FRANCIS has approved the first step towards sainthood for Antoni Gaudi, the modernist architect behind Barcelona's "Sagrada Familia" basilica, the Vatican said on Monday.

Gaudi was a pious man who worked for more than 40 years on the Sagrada Familia, the largest unfinished Roman Catholic church in the world, a Unesco world heritage site and one Europe's biggest tourist draws.

Francis approved a decree recognising Gaudi's "heroic virtues", the Vatican said in a statement.

For him to be beatified, the next step in the process of becoming a saint, a miracle would have to be attributed to Gaudi. After that, a second miracle would be required for him to be declared a saint.

Construction of the Sagrada Familia began in 1882, but the project, known for its soaring Gothic spires, remains unfinished even after Gaudi devoted the last 12 years of his life exclusively to the project.

It was meant to be completed by 2026, the centenary of the death of Gaudi, whom the Vatican's media outlet, Vatican News, has referred to as "God's architect".

The the target date was postponed indefinitely after the Covid-19 pandemic reduced tourist revenues used to fund construction.

Gaudi is celebrated for his unique style that harmoniously blends organic forms with vibrant colours and intricate details. In recognition of his monumental contributions, several of Gaudi's works have been designated Unesco World Heritage Sites, solidifying his place as one of the most influential architects in history.

Other than the Sagrada Familia, an awe-inspiring basilica that remains under construction more than a century after it was initiated Park Guell, a colourful public park adorned with whimsical structures and vivid mosaics, is another highlight of his legacy. Casa Batllo and Casa Mila (La Pedrera) are further exemplars of Gaudi's genius, featuring wavy stone facades and ornate wrought-iron balconies that defy conventional architecture. Each of these works reflects his passion for geometry and his deep religious faith, leaving a lasting imprint on the city's cultural landscape.

— Reuters

QUICK FEATURES



ENTERTAINMENT

Mexican actor Diego Luna attends the launch event for the second season of Lucasfilm's "Andor" at El Capitan theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP



FASHION

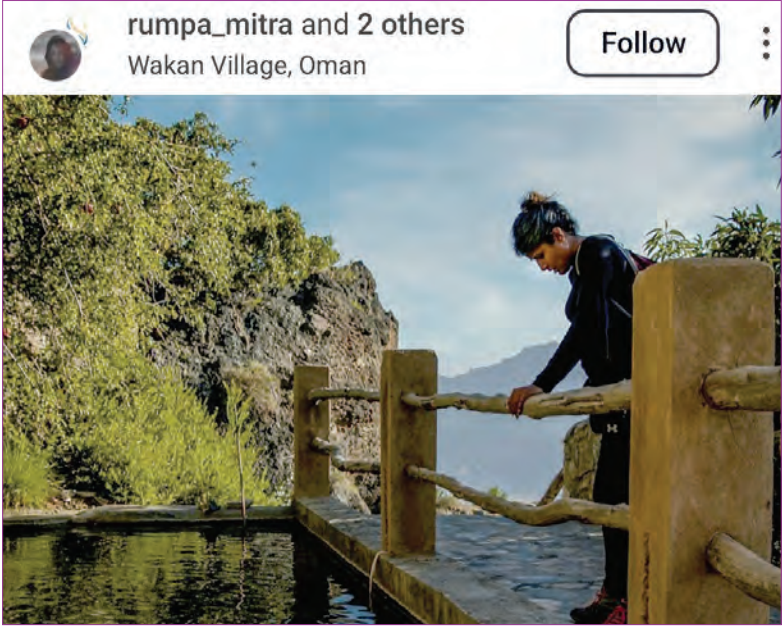
Designer Ralph Lauren greets his guests at the Ralph Lauren Collection Fall/Winter 2025 fashion show in New York. — AFP



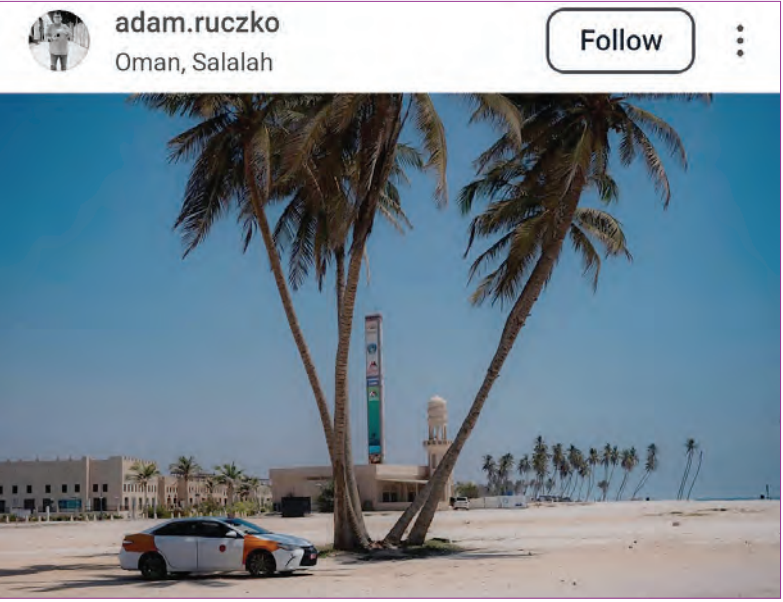
LIFESTYLE

French DJ named Perceval performs on stage during the 49th edition of the Printemps de Bourges music festival in Bourges, central France. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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Titanic victim’s pocket watch set to fetch £50,000 at auction



A LADIES’ POCKET watch found among the belongings of one of the passengers who drowned on the ill-fated maiden voyage of the Titanic could sell for up to £50,000 at auction.

Danish second-class passenger Hans Christensen Givard, 27, was among the 1,500 who died when the vessel struck an iceberg in 1912. Givard was travelling to the United States with two of his friends, who also perished in the disaster.

The watch was recovered when Givard’s body was found in the North Atlantic and he was later buried in Halifax, Canada. In his pockets were a savings book, keys, some cash in a wallet, a silver watch, a compass and a passport.

Also recovered was the gilded ladies’ pocket watch, which bears traces of saltwater corrosion. All his belongings were returned to his brother in Denmark and it is his

descendants who are selling the watch. The tragic story of Givard directly inspired curator Jesper Hjerminde and his niece, journalist and US resident Mette Hjerminde McCall, to write the book “Titanic — De Danske Fortællinger (Titanic — The Danish Stories),” in which the pocket watch is mentioned. It was also exhibited by Claes Goran Wetterholm, the leading authority globally on the Scandinavian aspect of the Titanic story, in Copenhagen in 2012.

The watch is going under the hammer at Henry Aldridge and Son, of Devizes, Wiltshire, on April 26. Auctioneer Andrew Aldridge said: “This piece is documented in the official list of Hans’s effects compiled by the authorities in Halifax, Nova Scotia in the weeks following the Titanic disaster and has remained in his family ever since.”

— PA Media/dpa



Where Local Meets Global in a Creative Fusion

VISITORS ARE immediately swept up in a whirlwind of creativity and innovation. The anticipation is palpable as artists, collectors and art enthusiasts converge in this sprawling showcase of contemporary art, set against the stunning backdrop of Dubai’s modern skyline.

For newcomers, the fair offers a captivating glimpse into the evolving world of art, simultaneously celebrating the digital sphere while highlighting the diverse voices of regional artists. As attendees arrive, the cascading visual experiences unfolding at every turn create an immediate sense of excitement.

From the stunning installations in the Art Dubai Digital section to the dynamic presentations of contemporary works, the fair proudly bears witness to the rapid rise of digital artistry. Curated under the theme “After the Technological Sublime,” the digital segment invites visitors to engage with artworks that challenge traditional perceptions of form and medium.

Walking through these spaces, one can feel the buzz of energy as spectators marvel at immersive installations that transport them into new realms of experience. For many newcomers, this is their first encounter with art that anxiously dances between reality and virtuality, provoking thoughts about our relationship with technology and its impact on our lives. Artworks like Krista Kim’s digital landscapes are not just pieces to be observed; they are transformative experiences that spark conversations and reflections about the world we inhabit.

THE PULSE OF REGIONAL ARTISTRY

As the fair unfolds, visitors quickly learn that Art Dubai is not solely a celebration of digital art. It is also a powerful platform for artists from the Middle East and South Asia, particularly female artists who bring fresh perspectives to the contemporary art scene. Walking through the halls, one might encounter Faiza Butt’s thought-provoking pieces, where representations of masculinity are explored through a distinctly Pakistani lens. The boldness of her

work resonates deeply, prompting discussions about identity and cultural narratives. Nearby, Sana Arjumand’s exploration of Sufism and nature invites viewers to reflect on the interconnectedness of human experience and the natural world. Her artworks radiate warmth and vibrancy that captivate passers-by, allowing them to connect with themes that transcend geographical boundaries.

For many newcomers, witnessing this confluence of ideas and

section, showcasing works created specifically for the fair, demonstrates how regional artists continue to address pressing current issues while pushing the boundaries of creativity.

In recent years, the Gulf has transformed into a veritable melting pot of creativity. Gone are the days when local artists quietly toiled away in anonymity; today, they are stepping onto the global stage, ready to showcase their unique talents and narratives.



perspectives can be a transformative experience. It serves as a reminder of the struggles and triumphs of artists, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds seeking visibility on a global stage.

A MEETING GROUND FOR ARTISTS AND ENTHUSIASTS

The camaraderie among artists and collectors fosters an atmosphere of shared passion and discovery. Conversations flow freely as those new to the art scene engage with seasoned collectors and gallery representatives alike.

Art Dubai creates an inviting environment that encourages questions and exploration, making it an accessible space for anyone interested in the art world. Attendees find themselves examining the rich diversity of artistic expressions, from digital formats to traditional techniques. The “Bawwaba”

Artists from Oman and across the region are finding new avenues for expression and collaboration, placing them firmly on the global stage. This year’s fair showcased not only a diversity of artwork but also a burgeoning sense of community among artists, collectors and institutions — all eager to celebrate their local talents.

Benedetta Ghione, in her opening speech at Art Dubai, encapsulated the essence of Dubai’s artistic evolution.

“Dubai has positioned itself as a global centre for business, trade and increasingly, culture,” she declared, noting the strong partnerships between local galleries and international talents. With supportive entities like AIM Holding leading five years of educational programmes, there’s a palpable sense of momentum building in the Gulf.

FEATURES

BY LIJU CHERIAN

UNDER THE amber glow of a setting sun and the haunting silence of endless dunes, Sahar al Aufi unveiled ‘The Desert Rose’ — a fashion presentation that was less a runway and more a revelation. Over two transformative days in the Bidiyah desert, the celebrated Omani designer fused the raw majesty of nature with the grace of couture, offering the Arab world a bold new chapter in fashion storytelling.

“This wasn’t just a show. It was a feeling, an emotion, a movement,” Sahar said, standing barefoot on the sands where models had just sashayed in her flowing creations. “The desert didn’t just serve as a backdrop — it became part of the narrative.” The setting was as bold as the vision.

The Desert Dome Resort was reimagined into a surreal canvas where elegance met elemental beauty. Thirty meticulously crafted garments swayed in the desert breeze, their soft silks, chiffons and tulle echoing the muted palette of dunes, twilight skies and desert winds.

Fluid silhouettes mirrored the landscape’s rhythm — gentle, sweeping, alive. Pulling off such a production without an external event planner, with a team of over 100 creatives, was no small feat. From sunrise prep calls to navigating windstorms that threatened to unravel entire sets, the team leaned into the chaos with grace.

“Every stitch, every seam was born of intention and love,” said Sahar. “It was creatively fulfilling, but it also tested every ounce of our stamina and faith.”

The garments themselves carried deep cultural references — revived Omani embroidery styles, subtle Bedouin silhouettes and symbolic desert motifs embroidered with metallic threads and crushed stone appliqué. The production involved hours of hand-finishing and certain dresses were sewn on-site during the final hours. “There’s something sacred about creating in the very environment that inspires you,” she said.

The spiritual connection to the land resonated deeply. “There was a moment during the shoot,” Sahar recalled, her voice catching slightly, “when the light hit just right, the models moved in unison and I realised — we’d done something historic, something rooted in our soil.”

Through her brand Melis and its Arabic line Melis Arabia, Sahar is on a mission to elevate Arab design to global consciousness. “Arab fashion isn’t a trend — it’s a legacy,” she affirmed. “It’s storytelling in motion. And it’s time the world took notice.”

Collaboration fuelled the vision — makeup artist Hajar Sami, hairstylist Hassna and the creative team at 7 De Studio co-created an aesthetic that honoured both nature and heritage. “They didn’t just support me,” Sahar said. “They elevated the entire experience.”

Looking forward, The Desert Rose is just the beginning. Sahar’s team is already working on an immersive fashion film that captures the desert project for a global digital audience. International showcases in Europe and Southeast Asia are in development, aiming to position Oman not only as a fashion muse but also as a luxury destination for weddings and honeymoons.

She’s also in active discussions with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to create collaborative campaigns that merge fashion with national identity. “I want people to discover Oman’s soul through my fabrics — the elegance of our embroidery, the curves of our dunes, the softness of our skies,” she said.



‘The Desert Rose’ fashion event referenced Omani embroidery and Bedouin silhouettes in Bidiyah



“This is about fashion, yes — but also about inviting the world into our story.” The trends are shifting. As the global fashion industry leans towards eco-consciousness and authentic storytelling, Oman’s emerging designers like Sahar are well-positioned to lead.

“This is slow fashion, rooted fashion,” she explained. “And people are craving that more than ever.”

As the final sun dipped behind Bidiyah’s dunes, a collective hush fell over the audience. In that golden silence, it was clear — The Desert Rose wasn’t just a show in the sand. It was the beginning of a movement.