

O M A N
Observer
D A I L Y



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PAGES 20 BAISAS 200

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INBRIEF

OMAN WINS MEDALS AT GENEVA EXPO

The Sultanate of Oman secured one gold and two silver medals at the conclusion of its participation in the 50th Geneva International Exhibition of Inventions 2025, which saw global representation from over 45 countries and more than 1,200 inventors and innovators.

Innovator Muayid bin Samir al Balushi claimed the gold medal for his invention “Etienne - SOS Rescue Device,” a pioneering maritime safety device that sends distress signals to fishermen via satellite and radio waves.

Meanwhile, Mahmood bin Mohammed al Hinaï was awarded a silver medal for his “Air Conditioner Sterilisation and Cleaning System,” while Layyan bint Said al Rahbiyah also received a silver medal for her invention “Lugha” (Language), designed to assist the deaf and mute in communicating with society. **DETAILS ON P3**

OQ BOASTS RO 1.2 BILLION NET PROFIT IN 2024



OQ SAOC announced a net profit of RO 1.2 billion (\$3 billion) in its 2024 standalone financials, attributed to strong overall business performance and strategic divestments of certain assets.

OQ SAOC’s strong liquidity position enables further investment in growth initiatives across the energy value chain, aligned with its energy transition strategy, while also ensuring dividend distribution to its shareholders.

OQ Group posted strong results for 2024, achieving record revenue of RO 15 billion (\$40 billion) and RO 1.1 billion (\$2.9 billion) in consolidated earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA) and RO 513 million (\$1.3 billion) in consolidated net profit. These notable results reflect OQ’s disciplined portfolio management and its strategic vision to create sustainable value for its stakeholders. **DETAILS ON P13**

HUGE TURNOUT AT PAVILION



The Sultanate of Oman’s pavilion at Expo 2025 Osaka has begun receiving visitors from Sunday. The first day of the expo witnessed a large turnout by delegations and officials from participating countries, as well as Japanese and other nationalities.

His Majesty begins state visit to Netherlands today



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK will go on a state visit to the Kingdom of the Netherlands today.

A statement issued by the Diwan of Royal Court to this effect reads as follows: “Within the context of the advanced relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on a state visit to the Kingdom of the Netherlands during April 14-16. The visit aims at boosting areas of cooperation of mutual interest in a manner that meets the aspirations of the two countries. The visit will address a set of regional and international topics of common concern.”

The bilateral relations between the

VISIT TO BOOST
AREAS OF MUTUAL
INTEREST

TIES REINFORCED
BY BILATERAL
COOPERATION

VISIT UNDERSCORES
THE DEPTH OF
RELATIONSHIP

VOLUME OF TRADE
AT \$471.5 MILLION
IN 2024



King Willem-Alexander

Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of the Netherlands reflect significant diplomatic importance, demonstrating mutual and profound respect, as well as a shared commitment between the two friendly nations.

These ties are reinforced by advanced bilateral cooperation covering diverse fields, which both sides are working to expand further. The state visit of His Majesty the Sultan to the Kingdom of the Netherlands underscores the depth of the relationship and shared priorities, particularly in trade, investment, sustainable development and close collaboration for the benefit and stability of the international community.

The volume of trade between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of the Netherlands has seen notable growth in recent years, reaching \$471.5 million in 2024. Oman’s exports to the Netherlands in 2024 amounted to RO 41,441,629, while total imports from the Netherlands reached RO 125,871,705. Oman’s key exports to the Netherlands in 2024 included base metals and their products, while machinery, electrical equipment and related goods topped the list of imports from the Netherlands. Preliminary foreign investments from the Netherlands into Oman amounted to RO 390.5 million by the end of 2024, while Omani investments in the Netherlands reached RO 278.3 million by the end of 2023. — **ONA**

Israeli missiles strike Gaza hospital

GAZA: Two Israeli missiles hit a major Gaza hospital on Sunday, knocking out the emergency department and damaging other structures, medics said, in a strike which Israel said was aimed at Hamas fighters exploiting the facility.

Health officials at the Al Ahli Arab Baptist Hospital evacuated patients after a phone call from someone who identified himself as Israeli security shortly before the attack.

No casualties were reported in



Palestinians gather around a large crater following an Israeli strike on a workshop at the Zaytoun neighbourhood in Gaza City on Sunday. — **AFP**

the strike. The Israeli military said in a statement it had taken steps to reduce harm to civilians before it struck the compound.

The hospital - an institution of the Anglican Church - was knocked out of operation, according to Gaza’s health ministry. “Hundreds of patients and injured people had to be evacuated in the middle of the night, and many of them are now out on the streets without medical care, which puts their lives at risk,” said ministry spokesperson Khalil Al Degran. **SEE ALSO P6**

Nations hail Oman for hosting US-Iran talks

The US government has extended its deep appreciation to the Sultanate of Oman for hosting American-Iranian talks in Muscat. A statement issued by the White House affirmed that US Presidential Envoy Steve Witkoff held discussions in Muscat with Iranian Foreign Minister Dr Abbas Araghchi, hosted by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister.

The statement emphasised that the talks were highly positive and constructive, marking an important step

towards achieving a mutually beneficial outcome. Both sides agreed to hold another meeting next Saturday.

Iranian Foreign Minister Dr Abbas Araghchi extended his thanks to the Sultanate of Oman for hosting talks in Muscat and for its mediation efforts between his country and the United States.

He stated, “We held a constructive and promising round of talks with US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff in an atmosphere of mutual respect, hosted and mediated by Omani

Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy.”

He noted that both sides agreed to continue these efforts in the coming days.

Jasem al Budaiwi, Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), welcomed the Sultanate of Oman’s hosting of talks between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States of America.

He emphasised Oman’s wise approach to promoting dialogue and building bridges of understanding between nations, as well as its steadfast

commitment to supporting and enhancing security and stability in the region.

In a statement, he stated that the GCC member states consistently seek, through their firm and solid relations with other nations, to find peaceful solutions to conflicts and present initiatives that serve the interests of the region’s people and the world at large. He added that the council spares no effort in advancing regional and international peace and security.

TURN TO P6

OMAN



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SHORT TAKES

GULF TRAFFIC WEEK 2025 BEGINS

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef



LIEUTENANT COLONEL SAIF BIN AHMED AL RAMADHANI

The General Directorate of Traffic at the Royal Oman Police (ROP) launched the 37th edition of the GCC Traffic Week along with the rest of the GCC under the auspices of Issa bin Hamad al Azri, Secretary-General of the Supreme Judicial Council on Sunday.

The Week, themed ‘Driving Without a Phone’ will also be marked with a series of events and educational sessions including an intensive awareness exhibition on various aspects of traffic safety at the Mall of Oman ensuring the participation of the public from various quarters.

“This year’s Gulf Traffic Week is paying enormous attention to the fact that the majority of the accidents are caused by recklessness and usage of mobile phones while driving,” said Lieutenant Colonel Saif bin Ahmed al Ramadhani, Director, Executive Office, National Committee for Road Safety at the DG of Traffic Safety, Royal Oman Police.



APPLICATIONS OPEN FOR RESEARCH AWARD

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation on Sunday announced the start of registration for the 12th National Award for Research. Application to the award will be open until June 15, 2025.

The National Award for Research reflects the Sultanate of Oman’s commitment to supporting scientists, researchers and innovators, and encouraging them to conduct sound scholarly research that provides solutions to national and global challenges.

The award seeks to select and honour the best research published in scholarly journals, develop competitive research cadres, raise public awareness about scholarly research, support the publication of research in highly-rated scientific journals and review the outcome of national academic institutions with the aim of integrating them.

— ONA

Oman, Morocco determined to consolidate cooperation

THE Joint Omani-Moroccan Committee on Sunday held its 7th session under the co-chairmanship of Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Nasser Bourita, Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates.

Sayyid Badr underscored the depth of historic and fraternal relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Morocco. These relations, he affirmed, are based on trust and mutual respect as a result of the directions of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Mohammed VI.

He pointed out that holding the meeting comes in affirmation of the two sides’ keenness to conduct consultations and coordination, as well as expanding cooperation towards wider horizons especially, in economic, investment, trade, Industrial, tourism and educational fields. Both sides reiterated the importance of utilising technological solutions and empowering the private sector.

Nasser Bourita, Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates expressed his appreciation for Oman’s sincere and steadfast efforts to consolidate peace and stability at the regional and international levels. He praised Oman’s balanced and proactive foreign policy under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.



The two sides signed four MoUs in the fields of digital transformation, renewable energy, mutual recognition of maritime certifications and sports cooperation. — ONA

The Moroccan minister emphasised the importance of building on the achievements of previous sessions of the joint committee and activating signed agreements. He highlighted that Omani- Moroccan relations represent a model of exemplary bilateral coordination and cooperation, rooted in historical ties and mutual respect.

He further reaffirmed the Kingdom of Morocco’s commitment to expanding cooperation with the Sultanate of Oman in economic, developmental, and investment fields, as well as enhancing institutional communication mechanisms and exchanging expertise to serve mutual interests and

fulfil the aspirations of the two nations. The two sides signed four memorandums of understanding (MoUs) in the fields of digital transformation, renewable energy, mutual recognition of maritime certifications, and sports cooperation, alongside an executive programme in the tourism field.

In a joint statement issued at the conclusion of the session, both nations affirmed their determination to consolidate bilateral cooperation across various sectors of shared interest, particularly in economic, investment, trade, educational, cultural and logistical domains, paving the way for new horizons in future partnerships. — ONA

First-ever Haj, Umrah exhibition held at OCEC

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, APRIL 13

Oman inaugurated its first-ever Haj and Umrah Exhibition on Sunday at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), under the auspices of Shaikh Al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers. The event witnessed the presence of several dignitaries, including Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs; Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information; and Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health.

Organised by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA), the two-day event was opened by Ahmed bin Saleh al Rashdi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, along with several officials from various government



At this exhibition, we not only offer services - we share a vision of responsibility. We walk with our pilgrims on a journey of reassurance and spiritual peace

ALI AL HATTALI



The exhibition features ‘Nusuk’ activities engaging visitors through interactive displays using virtual reality

departments.

Marking a significant milestone, the exhibition brings together over 30 public and private entities from Oman and abroad, including Haj and Umrah service providers. It offers a unified platform to strengthen collaboration, encourage innovation and enhance service quality for pilgrims.

The exhibition also features

the 11th edition of the ‘Nusuk’ activities, which engage visitors through interactive displays using virtual reality, robotics, and other technologies to simulate pilgrimage rituals.

Ali al Hattali from the Ministry’s Haj and Umrah section shared insights, noting that last year’s virtual and physical engagements benefited over 11,000 people.

“At this exhibition, we not only offer services - we share a vision of responsibility. We walk with our pilgrims on a journey of reassurance and spiritual peace,” he said, expressing optimism for a higher turnout this year.

The Ministry has been proactive in improving systems for the 1446 AH Haj season. A recent agreement between Oman and Saudi Arabia aims to streamline pilgrimage arrangements, focusing on logistics, service quality and mutual cooperation.

Permit needed before planting outside your home: Municipality

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, APRIL 13

An administrative fine of RO 100 will be issued to anyone who plants trees outside the boundaries of a residential building in Muscat Governorate without a permit. This sparked a discussion on social media.

Muscat Municipality issued clear guidelines on Sunday, stating that it is essential to obtain official permits before undertaking any planting or landscaping work outside

residential boundaries. This is to maintain urban order and promote greenery within the regulatory framework. The municipality stated that residents who wish to beautify the areas surrounding their homes must first apply for a minor building permit.

While many people enjoy developing green spaces, now they will need a permit if it is outside their plot. The announcement caused a strong discussion on social media.

Rashid al Kalbani mentioned the



While many people enjoy developing green spaces, now they will need a permit if it is outside their plot.

required documents for the permit include the title deed, updated survey drawing from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, ID card, government approvals, flowchart from a consultant, request letter, and a pledge to remove trees if requested by the municipality.

He also suggested neighbour approval, telecom company approval, and a soil test for land suitability. Saif al Siyabi noted that sometimes trees outside a house can obstruct the road or affect cleanliness.

Some people intentionally plant trees to seize land, especially those whose lands are near valleys. Adnan al Busaidy tweeted about illegal land acquisitions and supported the municipality’s decision.

The Kuwaiti shrub tree is known to cause problems, destroying walls and reaching toilet pipes. The Municipality has issued guidelines to regulate planting activities, restricting planting to the sides of properties facing roads or wadis with specific distances to be observed.

SHORTTAKES



OMAN BAGS 1 GOLD, 2 SILVER AT GENEVA INVENTION EXPO

SIHAM AL SAIDI
MUSCAT, APRIL 13

The Sultanate of Oman secured one gold and two silver medals at the conclusion of its participation in the 50th Geneva International Exhibition of Inventions 2025, which saw global representation from over 45 countries and more than 1,200 inventors and innovators.

Innovator Muayid bin Samir al Balushi claimed the gold medal for his invention ‘Etienne - SOS Rescue Device,’ a pioneering maritime safety device that sends distress signals to fishermen via satellite and radio waves.

Meanwhile, Mahmood bin Mohammed al Hinai was awarded a silver medal for his ‘Air Conditioner Sterilisation and Cleaning System,’ while Layyan bint Said al Rahbiyah also received a silver medal for her invention ‘Lugha’ (Language), designed to assist the deaf and mute in communicating with society.

Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Balushi, Head of Oman’s delegation at the exhibition, emphasised that this marked the country’s first participation under the auspices of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

He highlighted the ministry’s commitment to supporting individual innovations and providing real opportunities for Omani inventors to compete on international platforms, showcase their projects to investors and entrepreneurs, and connect with global innovators.

Muayid al Balushi’s winning invention, Etian, is a cutting-edge smart device designed to enhance marine safety and rescue operations. The device enables distress calls and accurately pinpoints users’ locations in emergencies, even under harsh marine conditions and in areas with little to no network coverage. It is particularly aimed at safeguarding fishermen and maritime workers, ensuring timely and effective rescue efforts.

Reflecting on his achievement, Al Balushi described the experience as ‘extraordinary and enriching,’ noting that he qualified for the Geneva event after winning a national competition organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. He expressed his gratitude to the ‘Masarij’ team, his family and university professors for their support throughout the journey.

Dr Hilal bin Ali al Maqbali, Deputy of the Assistant Vice-Chancellor for Electronic Systems and Student Services at the university’s Sohar branch, remarked, “This global achievement reflects the innovation potential of our students and the university’s commitment to excellence in inventions and sustainability.”

Al Balushi’s triumph marks not only a personal milestone but also a proud moment for Oman’s advancement in technological innovation and humanitarian-driven solutions.

OMAN AT NEW YORK ECOSOC YOUTH FORUM 2025

NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, will take part in ECOSOC Youth Forum 2025, due to be held in New York City, from April 14-17. The event is organised under the supervision of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

This year’s forum, titled ‘Youth at the Forefront: Harnessing Science and Social Inclusion for Sustainable Development,’ aims to explore pathways for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in line with the UN’s 2030 Agenda. It will also highlight global experiences in key areas such as health, sustainable oceans, science and technology, and regional development.

The forum’s sessions will focus on strengthening sustainable economic growth and proposing recommendations to empower youth in actively shaping goals. — ONA

OMAN, UK REVIEW BILATERAL RELATIONS

MUSCAT: The 16th session meeting of the Oman-UK Working Group was held in Muscat on Sunday.

The Omani side was headed by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, while the British side was headed by Hamish Falconer, Minister of State for the Middle East.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed aspects of bilateral relations and explored means of



boosting them to achieve desired objectives.

Both sides discussed areas of joint cooperation in the cultural, tourism, educational, vocational training, environmental and renewable energy fields. They also exchanged

views on regional and international developments.

The meeting was attended by Munthir bin Mahfoudh al Manthiri, Head of the Europe Department at the Foreign Ministry, Abdullah bin Hamad al Riyami, Head of the Cultural Cooperation Department at the Foreign Ministry, Dr Liane Saunders, Ambassador of the United Kingdom to the Sultanate of Oman and several representatives of concerned government units. — ONA

535 programmes await students for 2025-2026

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 13

THE first phase of registration for admission into public higher education institutions, as well as internal and external scholarships for the 2025-2026 academic year, has officially opened and will remain open until June 1, 2025.

Students who have completed their General Education Diploma (or its equivalent) for the academic year 2024-2025 can now register online via the Higher Education Admission Centre’s (HEAC) portal at www.heac.gov.om. Here, they can explore the wide variety of academic programmes available and select their preferred specialisations.

In an effort to improve the student experience and ensure equitable access to higher education opportunities, HEAC has introduced several updates.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al Azri, Director-General of HEAC, outlined some key changes, including a streamlined registration interface. The new ‘View and Select Eligible Programmes’ feature merges two previous screens, simplifying the process and making it easier for students to explore all the



AHMED BIN MOHAMMED AL AZRI
D-G of HEAC

HEAC is running a series of awareness sessions for career guidance specialists from all governorates of Oman, designed to update them on the new admission process and address any challenges from previous years

programmes they are eligible for, while also allowing them to sequence their preferences.

There have also been modifications to the admission process at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), particularly for the Muscat, Nizwa, and Al Musayfirah branches. Now, students residing in respective governorates can access local programmes, bringing higher education opportunities closer to home. A new personal interview requirement has been introduced for students applying to education-related programmes at UTAS, while the maximum age for admission to the Military Technological College has been raised to 23 years for those seeking academic programmes.

This year, HEAC is also focusing on inclusivity, with special initiatives aimed at supporting students with disabilities. A number of seats have been allocated at the Oman College of Health Sciences for students with physical disabilities, specifically in the Health Information Management specialisation. Additionally, a new programme for students with learning difficulties is available, as long as their specific learning challenges are officially recognised by the institution.

Among the 535 programmes being offered across various government and private institutions, students can choose from a broad spectrum of disciplines, including health sciences, natural and physical sciences, engineering, business management and more. Scholarships and grants are available to help students finance their education. To help students make informed decisions, HEAC will soon release a Competitive Admission Guide that offers suggested minimum scores for different academic programmes, enabling students to assess their chances of acceptance more realistically.

Furthermore, HEAC is running a series of awareness sessions for career guidance specialists from all governorates of Oman, designed to update them on the new admission process and address any challenges from previous years. The centre is also actively sharing information through its social media channels and engaging with participants at the GHEDEX 2025 (Global Higher Education and Training Exhibition).

Students and their families are encouraged to thoroughly review the Student Guide for Enrolment to ensure they understand the registration policies.

Sohar University VC presents paper at Beirut conference



Dr Hamdan al Fazari presented a research paper on ‘Artificial Intelligence and its Potential to Transform Higher Education in the Arab States’

SUHAR: Dr Hamdan al Fazari, Vice-Chancellor of Sohar University, participated in the 22nd International Conference of the Arab Academy of Sciences, held in Beirut, Lebanon, on April 11-12. He presented a research paper titled ‘Artificial Intelligence and its Potential to Transform Higher Education in the Arab States.’

The conference centred on the theme ‘Higher Education in the Arab World: Artificial Intelligence.’

In his presentation, Dr Al Fazari underscored the significance of the theme, emphasising the transformative power of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in reshaping the higher education landscape across the Arab world. He noted that AI holds immense promise for personalised learning,

improved student outcomes, enhanced teaching practices and a strengthened research ecosystem.

Dr Al Fazari’s paper explored how AI-powered tools and platforms can revolutionise teaching and learning processes, enabling adaptive learning environments, personalised feedback and support for educators in adopting innovative teaching methodologies. He examined the current integration of AI in higher education (HE), assessing the opportunities, ethical implications, labour market alignment and the overall readiness of Arab states to embrace this digital shift.

He pointed out that some Arab nations have already begun integrating AI into both academic programmes and administrative functions.

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

INTERNATIONAL TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee at Ministry of Information announces its Tender for the following work:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
1/2025 (123/2025) at E-Tendering	CONSTRUCTION AND TECHNICAL FIT-OUT OF A NEW FM TRANSMITTING STATION IN DUQUM.	Excellent First	28/4/2025	2/6/2025	100/-

1. All specialized companies in the field of the tender shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicated above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

2. Companies and institutions are exempted from providing a temporary insurance of 1% when submitting their bid, provided that they sign a document committing themselves to the submitted bid for a period determined when the bidding strategy is approved in accordance with the document attached to the Isnad platform. As for international companies that do not have a headquarters in the Sultanate of Oman, they are required to provide temporary insurance of 1%.

(For more information, please see the original circular issued by the Tender Board on the Isnad platform.)

Note that the last date for accepting bids as mentioned above is before 10:00 am . Any bid received after the time and date mentioned in the submission date will be rejected automatically.

You are requested to provide 2 hard copies for your offer after the submission in Projects Department at Ministry of Information.

3. The Ministry has the right to:

1) Add or Cancell some works in the tender if necessary.

2) Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:
Telephone : 24943785, 24943177, Email: (Moi.Tenders@omaninfo.om)

SPOTLIGHT

S E A S O N O F C U T I O N

PREVENTING
DROWNING
TRAGEDIES
AMONG
CHILDREN

BALQEES AL ORAIMI

AS THE SUMMER heat intensifies across Oman, families naturally gravitate towards beaches, wadis and swimming pools to escape the high temperatures and enjoy time outdoors. Yet, what should be a season of joy and relaxation has increasingly become one marked by concern. A troubling rise in drowning incidents - especially involving children and teenagers - underscores the urgent need for preventive action and public awareness.

According to the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA), Oman's water rescue teams responded to 521 drowning incidents in 2021, a sharp increase from the 361 cases recorded in 2020. While official figures for 2024 and 2025 are yet to be released, trends suggest a continued escalation, making it imperative to prioritise water safety measures - particularly for the younger population.

Several key factors contribute to these alarming statistics. Foremost among them is the lack of adequate swimming skills, especially in children who are more vulnerable in open or unmonitored water. Another contributing factor is the tendency to swim in undesignated or unsafe areas such as agricultural ponds, dams and unregulated water channels that often lack basic safety infrastructure.

In many tragic cases, well-intentioned but untrained individuals have attempted rescues, sometimes resulting in multiple drownings during a single incident. Moreover, the absence of adult supervision - particularly during family outings or school holidays - exacerbates the risk. Disregarding warning signs, swimming in prohibited zones, or attempting to cross flooded wadis are also common behaviours that lead to fatal outcomes.

Amid these challenges, teaching children how to swim properly is emerging as one of the most effective ways to reduce such accidents. Far from being just a recreational activity, swimming is a critical life skill. It not only fosters safety and awareness in aquatic environments, but also enhances children's physical fitness, motor coordination and confidence.

Promoting water safety requires a multi-pronged approach. Constant supervision by parents or guardians is non-negotiable, especially when children are in or near the water. Families should ensure they swim only in areas that are officially designated and equipped with lifeguards and safety equipment. Life jackets or floatation devices must be used - particularly by children who are still learning to swim or who lack confidence in the water.

Equally important is educating children about the dangers posed by water. Awareness campaigns, school-based swimming programmes and community outreach can play a vital role in fostering a culture of caution. Children should be discouraged from swimming alone or without adult presence, regardless of their skill level.

The steady increase in drowning incidents in Oman is a public health concern that calls for joint efforts by families, educators and authorities alike.

By instilling essential swimming skills, promoting water safety and raising awareness, we can collectively prevent future tragedies and ensure our children enjoy summer safely.



44%
INCREASE
IN JUST ONE
YEAR

SHORT TAKES



The event aimed to promote integration of children with autism spectrum disorders into society

Al Athaiba Centre hosts special events for autistic children

MUSCAT: The Association for Children with Disabilities at Al Athaiba Rehabilitation Centre organised a series of special activities for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to commemorate World Autism Awareness Day, which is observed on April 2 each year. The event was held under the theme 'Promoting Neurodiversity and Sustainable Development Goals'.

Saliha al Masoudi, Director of Al Athaiba Rehabilitation Centre, highlighted that the event aimed to promote the integration of children with autism spectrum disorders into society, emphasising the need for supportive and enriching environments for both the children and their families. She noted that such events are an expression of the spirit of community and human solidarity, reinforcing the commitment to neurodiversity and inclusivity.

The event featured a diverse and carefully curated programme designed to support the development of children with ASD. This included a range of educational, recreational and sports activities that were tailored to meet the specific needs of the children, offering both fun and learning experiences. — ONA

KOREAN MILITARY OFFICIAL VISITS MSC



MUSCAT: A senior military official from the Republic of Korea and his accompanying delegation on Sunday visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC).

The delegation was greeted upon their arrival at the MSC by Commodore Adil bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Head of the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). Members of the visiting delegation were briefed about the tactical roles and tasks carried out by the centre in the safety of the Omani maritime environment.

They also toured the centre's facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies used in carrying out its national duties. — ONA

سلطنة عُمان
وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات
Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

إعلان مناقصة
Tender Notice

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

TENDER NUMBER	TENDER NAME	DATE OF PUBLISHING	LAST DATE TO PURCHASE TENDER DOCUMENT	SUBMISSION DATE	COMPANIES WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THIS TENDER	DOCUMENT PRICE
MTGIT/ 65/2025	STUDY OF LOGISTICS MARKETS AND ENHANCING COMPETITIVENESS	10-04-2025	17-04-2025	01-05-2025	COMPANIES REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF TENDER BOARD (GRADES EXCELLENT, FIRST)	(300/-) THREE HUNDRED OMANI RIAL FOR INTERNATIONAL, REGIONAL & LOCAL COMPANIES (10/-) TEN OMANI RIAL (FOR SME) NON-REFUNDABLE

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

CORRESPONDANCE:

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

INTERNAL TENDERS COMMITTEE

@mtcitoman

www.mtcit.gov.om

Second emergency care workshop held in Muscat

THE Directorate-General of Health Services in Muscat Governorate, represented by Muttrah Health Centre in collaboration with Al Nahdha Hospital, successfully organised the second edition of the specialised workshop 'Bridging Emergency Care Across Muscat – Round 2', on Saturday.

The workshop brought together distinguished group of medical consultants and professionals from primary healthcare institutions to enhance their rapid response skills and improve the management of emergency cases.

The event covered vital aspects of emergency medicine practiced in clinical settings, with a focus on acute respiratory distress and its causes (such as heart failure, pneumonia and asthma), managing foreign bodies in the nose and ear, calming agitated patients, safe medication practices, assessing fever in infants under three months, and diagnosing limping in children.

Interactive sessions were held, providing hands-on training in airway management techniques for both adults and children, with advanced simulation tools. This included practical sessions on the insertion of laryngeal mask airways (LMA). Participants also engaged in clinical discussions on diagnosing



The workshop enhances skills of Muscat healthcare providers

The workshop is part of MoH's efforts to empower primary healthcare providers to deliver timely, safe, and high-quality emergency care

acute chest pain, interpreting ECGs and managing epistaxis (nosebleeds).

The workshop concluded with a feedback session, where participants expressed high satisfaction with both the scientific content and the organisation, underlining the significance of such programmes in enhancing clinical

skills and improving the readiness of frontline healthcare providers.

This workshop is part of the Ministry of Health's ongoing efforts to empower primary healthcare providers, ensuring they are equipped to deliver timely, safe and high-quality emergency medical services that save lives and enhance patient care.



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C invites interested companies to participate in the following tender

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Tender Price (OMR)
NESC/ 2025/011	Employees Competency Assessment for grades 6 to 9	23/04/2025	04/05/2025	Specialist	26.250

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -

Participation	- Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion may obtain Tender documents. - The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. - The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply). - To obtain the tender document and payment procedure, please visit www.supply.nama.om, under NESC VENDOR / E-Tender.
Enquiries	- Any inquiry can be sent to procurement@supply.nama.om, using the inquiry form found in the tender document (05) Five working days before bid submission date. - Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.
Tender Submission	Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER and supplier guidelines available at NESC Website www.supply.nama.om, under NESC VENDOR / E-Tender.
Guarantee	- The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of (1%) of the tender value valid for a period of not less than Ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF PROCUREMENT COMMITTEE, Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C. - The hard copy of the bid bond should be deposited in the Tender Box at the Nama Electricity Supply Company Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 10:00 AM on the day specified for bid submission or any extended deadline. - Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected.
Terms and Conditions	- The Tender shall be valid for a period of (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. - If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date. - NESC is not bound to accept the lowest Tenderer. - Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization - NESC gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.
Incentives and exemptions	- Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from Tender fees - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from bid bond requirements. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from registration fees on business opportunities platform and supplier registration with Nama Group.

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WORLD

NATIONS HAIL OMAN FOR HOSTING US-IRAN TALKS

FROM PAGE 1
CONSTRUCTIVE TALKS
Al Budaiwi expressed hope that these constructive talks would yield positive results, paving the way for new avenues of cooperation between Iran and the US in a manner that enhances security and stability in the region.

Meanwhile, Sayyid Badr and Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud, Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, held a telephone conversation.
The Saudi foreign minister expressed his appreciation for Oman's efforts in fostering an environment conducive to constructive dialogue, stressing the importance of these endeavours in promoting security and stability in the region.
Sayyid Badr also received a phone call from Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed expressed the deep appreciation of the UAE for the positive role and wise endeavours undertaken by the Sultanate of Oman. He values its constructive efforts aimed at fostering a climate conducive to understanding and building confidence among the parties, in a way that enhances security and peace in the region and the world at large.

CONCILIATION EFFORTS
For his part, Sayyid Badr appreciated the UAE's keenness to support the conciliation and peace efforts pursued by the Sultanate of Oman to strengthen the pillars of regional and global security, stability and peace.

Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani commended the positive role played by the Sultanate of Oman in promoting dialogue channels, affirming Qatar's support for efforts aimed at achieving security and stability in the region. A phone call took place between Sayyid Badr and Abdullah Ali al Yahya, Foreign Minister of the State of Kuwait.

The Kuwaiti foreign minister expressed his appreciation for Oman's efforts in promoting dialogue, reaffirming Kuwait's support for endeavours aimed at achieving security and stability in the region.

Sayyid Badr and Dr Abdullatif bin Rashid al Zayani, Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain, held a telephone conversation. The two sides discussed regional developments, including the talks in Muscat between the US and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Arab Republic of Egypt welcomed the Sultanate of Oman's hosting of the talks between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the US. Egypt commended Oman's constructive, vital, and ongoing role in supporting the pursuit of political and peaceful solutions amid the significant challenges facing the region, as well as its efforts to reduce political tensions.

The Arab Parliament has welcomed the Sultanate of Oman's hosting of the first round of indirect negotiations between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran, expressing hope that these talks would contribute to enhancing regional and global security and stability.

The Arab Parliament praised Oman's pivotal role and sincere efforts in hosting these discussions, which reflect its enduring commitment to supporting initiatives that promote peace and stability. It added that Oman's hosting of these talks aligns with its broader support for all efforts aimed at de-escalating tensions in the region and maintaining international security and peace.

The Kingdom of Jordan welcomed the Sultanate of Oman's hosting of high-level talks between the US and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Jordan affirmed its support for diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving conflicts through dialogue and enhancing regional and international security and peace while commending Oman's role in facilitating these talks, which contribute to achieving security and stability in the region.

Sayyid Badr and Ayman Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates in the Kingdom of Jordan, reviewed regional developments during a telephone call. — ONA

SUDAN'S RSF KILLS 56 OVER TWO DAYS IN DARFUR TOWN

PORT SUDAN: Sudan's paramilitaries killed 56 civilians over two days of attacks on a town they seized on the road to El Fasher, the last major city in the Darfur region still in army hands, activists said on Sunday. The killings on Friday and Saturday targeted residents in Um Kadadah "on an ethnic basis", according to the local resistance committee, part of a network of volunteers coordinating aid across Sudan since the war between the army and the

paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) began on April 15, 2023. The attacks on Um Kadadah, about 180 kilometres east of El Fasher, came one day after RSF fighters said they took the town from army forces.
The RSF have stepped up attacks on North Darfur's besieged capital of El Fasher since the army last month recaptured the Sudanese capital Khartoum, around 1,000 kilometres to the east.
The local committee shared a list of those killed in Um Kadadah

and said that the RSF committed "widespread violations", "forcibly displaced" citizens from the town and shut down all telecommunications. As of Saturday evening, activists in El Fasher said the attacks on Zamzam camp since Friday had killed at least 46 civilians, including women and children, with many other victims yet to be identified. The army said on Saturday that 74 civilians were killed and 17 others wounded in El Fasher alone. — AFP

Gaza hospital hit as Israel intensifies brutal assault

AN Israeli air strike early on Sunday heavily damaged one of the few functioning hospitals in Gaza, with the Israeli military saying it had targeted a Hamas "command and control centre" operating within the facility. Since the outbreak of war, tens of thousands of Gazans have sought refuge in hospitals, many of which have suffered severe damage in the ongoing hostilities. The strike on Al Ahli Hospital in northern Gaza — also known as the Baptist or Ahli Arab Hospital — caused no casualties, but came a day after Israeli forces seized a key corridor in the territory and signalled plans to expand their campaign. It also came as aid agencies and the United Nations warned that medicines and related supplies were rapidly running out in Gaza as casualties surged. "The bombing led to the destruction of the surgery building and the oxygen generation station for the intensive care units," Gaza's civil defence rescue agency said.
The strike came "minutes after the (Israeli) army's warning to evacuate this building of patients, the injured and their companions", the agency said. Photographs showed massive slabs of concrete and twisted metal scattered across the site after the strike. The blast left a gaping hole in one of the hospital's buildings, with iron doors torn from their hinges.
Onlookers sifted through the rubble, while some retrieved equipment from a media van also damaged in the strike. Iraq's Aletejah TV said one of its live broadcast vehicles was hit by the



Palestinians gather at the site of an Israeli strike to remove casualties from under the rubble, in Jabalia. — Reuters

Photographs showed massive slabs of concrete and twisted metal scattered across the site after the strike. The blast left a gaping hole in one of the hospital's buildings, with iron doors torn from their hinges

strike. A separate air strike on Sunday on a vehicle in the central city of Deir Al Balah killed seven people including six brothers, the civil defence agency said. Mahmud Abu Amsha, who witnessed the strike, said those killed were distributing aid. "They do not care about children or people being killed... This aid was being provided to the displaced people," Abu Amsha said.

Israel has extended its offensive across much of Gaza. On Saturday, Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz announced that the military planned to expand its offensive as it completed the takeover of the "Morag axis" between the southern cities of Rafah and Khan Yunis. The corridor is part of what he called "the Israeli security zone". Patients, relatives and medical personnel evacuated the Al Ahli

Hospital in haste following the military's warning. Many found themselves stranded in the surrounding streets.
Naela Imad, 42, had been sheltering at the hospital but had to rush out of the complex.
The Israeli military asserted that Hamas fighters were operating from inside the hospital compound. Security forces "struck a command and control centre used by Hamas in the Al Ahli Hospital" for planning and executing attacks, the military said. Hamas condemned what it described as a "savage crime" committed by Israel "with blatant US cover and complicity". Qatar, which helped mediate a fragile ceasefire between the warring parties that fell apart last month, also denounced the strike, calling it "a heinous crime against unarmed civilians". — AFP

TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

Italy PM Meloni to host US VP Vance



Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni will host US Vice-President JD Vance in Rome on April 18, a day after she visits US President Donald Trump in Washington. Meloni will fly back and forth across the Atlantic within 48 hours to meet both the US president and his vice-president. Meloni declared herself in agreement with Vance's criticism of Europe as a continent where freedom of speech and democracy are both in retreat. — AFP

REASSURE PARTNERS

Syria's president meets UAE counterpart



Syrian President Ahmed al Sharaa met with his United Arab Emirates counterpart in Abu Dhabi, the Syrian leader's office said, making a second visit to a Gulf state as the country's new rulers seek to reassure foreign partners. Sharaa, who met President Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, was accompanied by Foreign Minister Asaad al Shibani. They were expected to discuss issues of mutual interest with Emirati officials. — Reuters

ARMED VIOLENCE

Gunmen claim attacks on Nigerian oil sites



Two groups in Nigeria's southern delta region claimed responsibility for recent attacks on oil facilities. The region is prone to armed violence and crude oil theft but until recently had remained relatively stable for years. The relatively unknown Liberation Army of the Niger Delta and Bakassi (L.A.N.D. & B) said it and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) attacked a main oil supply line running to a terminal in Bayelsa State. — AFP

SHORTTAKES



Pope Francis greets cardinals at the end of the mass for Palm Sunday in the Vatican. — AFP

RECOVERING POPE DELIGHTS CROWD IN VATICAN SQUARE

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis on Palm Sunday delighted worshippers with a tour of St Peter’s Square, against the advice of his doctors to avoid crowds while recovering from pneumonia. For the second Sunday in a row after the longest hospital stay of his papacy, the 88-year-old pontiff left his Vatican quarters, handing out sweets to children and shaking hands while doing the rounds of the Vatican landmark. The Argentine appeared in rather good form, without the nasal cannula used to help him breathe during his convalescence.

Since his release from hospital, the pope has ventured out on several occasions despite his doctors urging him to rest, with his surprise visits appearing on no official Vatican programme. On Thursday, he made an unscheduled visit to Saint Peter’s Basilica to inspect renovation work and to visit the tomb of Pius X, before making a trip to pray at his favourite basilica, Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. In his Sunday Angelus prayer, the pontiff thanked the flock for their prayers and issued his customary call for peace in the world.

— AFP

BULGARIA RECEIVES FIRST US F-16



Bulgaria on Sunday welcomed its first US-made F-16 fighter jet ordered as part of the eastern-flank Nato member’s landmark efforts to modernise its air force. To replace its Soviet-era MiG-29 jets, Bulgaria has ordered 16 American F-16s for a cost of around 2.4 billion euros (\$2.7 billion), in the largest contract to overhaul its armed forces since the fall of communism in 1989. At a ceremony marking the jet’s delivery at the Graf Ignatievo military base in central Bulgaria, Prime Minister Rossen Jeliazkov said those in attendance were celebrating “the inexorable and irreversible modernisation of the Bulgarian army.

— AFP

AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER’S PARTY LAUNCHES ELECTION CAMPAIGN

SYDNEY: The centre-left party of Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese pledged on Sunday to help more would-be home buyers as it launched a campaign for the May 3 election shaping as a tight race with the conservative opposition. Albanese’s Labor government, which is running neck-and-neck with the Liberal-National coalition, has promised to build 1.2 million homes by 2030, to ease cost pressures that have sparked dissatisfaction with a lack of affordable housing.

“In Australia home ownership should not be a privilege to inherit if you’re lucky,” Albanese said at the launch of Labor’s campaign in Perth, capital of the state of Western Australia.

His government pledged that, if re-elected, it would guarantee part of a first-home buyer’s home loan, allowing the purchase with a deposit of 5%. It would also spend A\$10 billion (\$6.29 billion) on grants and loans to build up to 100,000 homes to help would-be

home buyers get on the property ladder, it added. “If you are looking to buy your first time, Labor has got your back,” he added at the launch, televised by the Australian Broadcasting Corp.

Liberal leader Peter Dutton, the defence minister in the last Liberal-National government, has also been campaigning on the so-called housing crisis, that he says puts home ownership out of reach for many in the country of about 26 million. — Reuters

Russian missile strike on Ukraine’s Sumy kills 32

A Russian missile strike on Ukraine’s northeastern city of Sumy killed at least 32 people, including two children, and wounded dozens on Sunday, Kyiv said, in the deadliest attack in months.

European leaders expressed indignation at Moscow’s attack on Sumy’s city centre. French President Emmanuel Macron said it showed Russia’s “blatant disregard for human lives, international law and the diplomatic efforts of President (Donald) Trump”.

The strike came two days after US envoy Steve Witkoff travelled to Russia to meet with President Vladimir Putin and push Trump’s efforts to end the war. Sumy lies close to the Russian border and has come under increasing attack for weeks. The local emergency service said on social media that the latest toll was that “32 people died, including two children” and that “84 people were injured, including 10 children”. Trump has been pressing Moscow and Kyiv to agree on a ceasefire deal but has failed to extract any major concessions from the Kremlin, despite repeated negotiations between Russian and US officials. The US leader told NBC News last month he was “pissed off” with his Russian counterpart, while top US diplomat Marco Rubio warned last week that Washington would not tolerate “endless negotiations” with Russia over the conflict.

A reporter saw bodies covered in silver sheets strewn in the centre of the city, with a destroyed trolleybus. Rescuers were seen working on the rubble of a building. One woman said that she heard two explosions. “This second blow... A lot of people were very badly injured. A lot of corpses,” she said, struggling to speak. It was the second Russian attack with a large civilian death toll this month. Trump has voiced anger at Moscow for “bombing like crazy” in Ukraine.

Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky said Moscow launched a ballistic missile on Sumy and called on the world to put pressure on Russia to end the three-year war. He called for a “strong response” from Europe and the United States, saying: “Talking has never stopped ballistic missiles and bombs.” He added that the deadly attack occurred “on a day when people go to church: Palm Sunday, the feast of the Lord’s Entry into Jerusalem”.



Ukrainian law enforcement officers work at the site of a missile attack in Sumy. — AFP

Macron said the Russian attack showed what “everyone knows: this war was initiated by Russia alone. And today, it is clear that Russia alone chooses to continue it.” In a statement on social media, he added: “Strong measures are needed to impose a ceasefire on Russia.

France is working tirelessly toward this goal, alongside its partners.” European Council chief Antonio Costa condemned the “criminal attack”, saying that “this war exists and endures only because Russia chooses so”.

Local authorities in Sumy published footage of bodies strewn on the street and people running for safety, with cars on fire and wounded civilians on the ground. Russia has relentlessly attacked Ukraine in recent weeks, extending the violence wrought by its all-out attack that has gone on for more than three years. In early April, a Russian attack on the central city of Kryvyi Rig killed 18 people, including nine children.

Russia has refused a US-proposed

unconditional ceasefire and has been accused by Ukraine and its European allies of dragging out the war and seeking to stall efforts for peace negotiations.

Sumy has been under increasing pressure since Moscow pushed back many of Ukraine’s troops from its Kursk region inside Russia, across the border. The eastern Ukrainian city so far has been spared the kind of fighting seen farther south, in the Donetsk region. But Kyiv for weeks has warned that Moscow could mount an offensive on Sumy.

Russia in recent weeks has claimed the capture of a village in the Sumy region, for the first time since the early days of its 2022 attack.

Russia launched its attack partially through the Sumy region and briefly occupied parts of it before being pushed back by Ukrainian forces. Moscow has not yet commented on the strike. On Sunday, it said it captured another village in eastern Ukraine’s Donetsk region. — AFP

Ecuador votes in presidential race, with violence the top concern

QUITO: Ecuadoreans vote on Sunday in what is expected to be a close presidential race between incumbent Daniel Noboa, who says he needs more time to combat drug gangs and boost the economy, and leftist Luisa Gonzalez, whose election would mark a return to the socialist policies which governed the country for a decade. Murders, gun smuggling, fuel theft, extortion and other crimes carried out by local criminal groups allied with Mexican cartels and the Albanian mafia have spiked over the last five years as the economy has struggled to recover post-pandemic and unemployment has risen.

Noboa, who has been president for just over 16 months after beating Gonzalez in a 2023 race to finish out his predecessor’s term, finished just 16,746 votes ahead of his rival in a February first round and pollsters say either could win.

Both candidates, as well as

Gonzalez’s mentor, former President Rafael Correa, have urged their observers to guard against potential fraud.

They each have more than 45,000 polling place observers. Noboa, a 37-year-old business heir, says his ‘Phoenix’ security plan, including military deployments on the streets, beefed up port security and more seizures of drugs and guns, is paying dividends, including a 15% reduction in violent deaths last year. “Ecuadoreans want real change,” Noboa said at his final campaign event in Guayaquil on Thursday. “This Sunday we will teach a lesson to that failed revolution, to those bad officials who attack us, to all the mafias that have taken our peace and to all the corruption that has stopped us moving ahead.”

Noboa has predicted 4% economic growth this year if his policies - including an increase in tax take and some austerity measures - continue.



Ecuadorian soldiers stand guard at a polling station during the presidential runoff election in Quito. — AFP

He has pledged to prevent new energy cuts and boost the oil sector with private investment. He has

also taken recent measures — like distributing payouts to people affected by an oil spill and small

businesses hit by flooding — which seem geared toward winning votes.

“All the things other governments didn’t do, Daniel Noboa has shown can be done,” said Janeth Torres, 54, a campaign leader for Noboa in Esmeraldas province.

“He knows how to solve problems.”

But Gonzalez, who has promised to revive social programmes enacted by Correa during his decade in power beginning in 2007, as well as improve security, says Noboa has improvised his governance.

Gonzalez has pointed to a year-on-year uptick in killings in January and February as evidence Ecuadoreans remain unsafe and said she will deploy 20,000 new police if she wins.

She has secured the support of a significant part of the country’s Indigenous movement, though Indigenous groups in the Amazon say they will back Noboa. — Reuters

OPINION

Muscat talks cement Oman’s role as Mideast mediator



EDITORIAL

THE recent indirect talks between the United States and Iran in Muscat mark a significant step forward in addressing one of the most pressing geopolitical issues of our time: Iran’s nuclear programme. The constructive atmosphere and mutual respect displayed during the discussions have made Oman a crucial peacemaker in the ongoing negotiations between the two countries.

Oman has a long-standing tradition of neutrality and diplomacy, which has allowed it to maintain good relations with both the US and Iran. Historically, Oman has acted as an intermediary in various conflicts in the Middle East, leveraging its strategic location and diplomatic ties to facilitate dialogue. This reputation was solidified during previous negotiations, including those that led to the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers.

On Saturday, Oman hosted indirect talks between US officials and Iranian representatives aimed at preventing the weaponisation of Iran’s nuclear programme. The talks were described as ‘constructive’ by both sides. The involvement of Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, as a mediator was pivotal, allowing both parties to communicate effectively while maintaining their respective positions.

The US government has extended its deep appreciation to the Sultanate of Oman for hosting US-Iranian talks in Muscat. The official statement by the US emphasised that the talks were highly positive and constructive, marking an important step towards achieving a mutually beneficial outcome.

Both sides agreed to hold another meeting next Saturday with Iranian Foreign Minister Dr Abbas Araghchi saying the talks were constructive amid an atmosphere of mutual respect.

Oman’s approach to mediation is characterised by its diplomacy using the strategy that involves balancing relationships with various regional powers without taking sides. The Omani government emphasises dialogue over confrontation, which aligns with its broader goals of promoting stability in the region.

During the Saturday talks, both sides expressed a commitment to reaching an agreement quickly, indicating that they recognise Oman’s role as essential for facilitating discussions. The positive atmosphere created during these negotiations reflects Oman’s ability to foster communication even amid significant geopolitical tensions.

While Oman’s mediation efforts have been praised, challenges remain. But Oman continues to play a vital role in keeping lines of communication open. It is hoped that the upcoming meetings scheduled for April 19 will further bring constructive dialogue that can lead to tangible outcomes.

The success of these talks could have far-reaching implications beyond just US-Iran relations. With ongoing conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon and rising tensions involving Israel, any progress made could contribute to regional stability.

Oman serves as an indispensable peacemaker between the US and Iran by providing a neutral ground for dialogue and fostering an environment conducive to negotiation. Its historical experience in diplomacy combined with its strategic positioning allows it to navigate complex geopolitical landscapes effectively.

The hosting of US-Iran talks represents a significant diplomatic achievement. The constructive nature of these discussions offers hope for future negotiations aimed at curbing Iran’s nuclear ambitions while addressing broader regional concerns. As both sides prepare for their next meeting, it is essential that they maintain this momentum and work towards establishing a framework for lasting peace.

Oman has established itself as a significant peacemaker in the Middle East through its unique diplomatic approach, characterised by neutrality and constructive engagement. This role has been shaped by its historical context, socio-religious identity and strategic foreign policy decisions.

As the US and Iran prepare for their next meeting, it is essential that they sustain the current momentum and work towards establishing a framework for lasting peace

PHILIPPINES
SCHOOLS ADAPT
TO CLIMATE CHANGE

CECIL MORELLA

Kindergarten teacher Lolita Akim fires up five standing fans with three more at the ready as she fights to hold the attention of her pint-sized students in Manila’s soaring heat.

Last year, heatwaves forced millions of children in the Philippines out of school.

It was the first time that soaring temperatures had caused widespread class suspensions, prompting a series of changes.

This school year started two months earlier than usual, so the term ends before peak heat in May. Classes have been rearranged to keep children out of the midday heat, and schools are equipped with fans and water stations.

The moves are examples of how countries are adapting to the higher temperatures caused by climate change, often with limited resources.

As a teacher, Akim is on the frontlines of the battle to keep her young charges safe and engaged.

“In this weather, they get drenched in sweat; they become uneasy and stand up often. Getting them to pay attention is more difficult,” she said of the five-year-olds in her care at the Senator Benigno S Aquino Elementary School.

Some six million students lost up to two weeks’ worth of classroom learning last year as temperatures hit a record 38.8 degrees Celsius, according to the education department.

Schools reported cases of heat exhaustion, nose bleeds and hospitalisations as students struggled through lessons in classrooms without air conditioning.

Scientists say that extreme heat is a clear marker of climate change, caused largely by burning fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas.

Last year’s heat was further exacerbated by the seasonal El Nino phenomenon.

But even this year, nearly half of Manila’s schools were forced to close for two days in March when the heat index -- a measure of temperature and humidity -- hit “danger” levels.

“We’ve been reporting (the heat index) since 2011, but it’s only been recently that it’s become exceptionally warm,” national weather service specialist Wilmer Agustin said, attributing it to “El Nino and climate change”.

This year, conditions in most of the country will range between “extreme caution” and “danger” on the government’s heat alert system, he said, “especially in April and May”. — AFP

Why we forget things, and
how to remember better

HAVE you ever walked into a room and immediately forgotten why you were there? Congratulations!

You’re human. Memory is the incredible mental filing system that lets us recall birthdays, algebra formulas, and exactly where we left the last piece of cake in the fridge. But it’s also frustratingly unreliable. We forget passwords, where we park our cars, and sometimes even people’s names five seconds after they introduce themselves.

Memory works in three stages: encoding, storage and retrieval. Encoding happens when your brain processes sensory input and decides whether it’s worth saving. Storage determines if it stays short-term (like where you left your keys) or long-term (like your childhood best friend’s home phone number from 20 years ago).

Retrieval is when you try to recall information.

Forgetting isn’t just an annoyance; it’s how the brain stays efficient. Scientists have different theories on why it happens.

Decay theory says unused memories fade, like a dusty old treadmill.

Interference theory suggests new memories can overwrite old ones, or vice versa, which is why you remember your high school phone number but not your new one.

Retrieval-induced forgetting happens when recalling one memory blocks another, like when you can’t remember an actor’s name but recall all their movies. Cue-dependent forgetting ties memory to context, which is why you recognise a face but forget where you met them.



DR KHALFAN
AL HARRASI

The author is an
academic and
researcher

Age-related
forgetting happens
because neural
connections weaken
over time, but
research suggests
we can stimulate
memory by keeping
our brains active

While frustrating, forgetting is just your brain optimising what matters, sometimes a little too aggressively.

German psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus spent years testing memory to map out the Forgetting Curve, which shows that we forget most information within hours of learning it unless we reinforce it. Modern research builds on this with Bjork’s Desirable Difficulties, which proves that making learning harder actually helps memory retention. Basically, if you want to remember something, make it slightly annoying to learn.

Think of your hippocampus as the brain’s librarian, filing and retrieving memories.

Studies on London taxi drivers show that their hippocampus literally grows from all the navigation skills they develop.

Meanwhile, age-related forgetting happens because neural connections weaken over time, but research suggests we can stimulate memory by keeping our brains active.

Your brain does its best memory magic while you sleep, which is why pulling an all-nighter is like throwing your notes into a blender.

A Hong Kong study found that targeted memory reactivation (TMR) during sleep can strengthen or weaken memories. Meanwhile, exercise increases blood flow to the brain, improving recall. And emotions? Well, that’s why you remember embarrassing moments from middle school but not what you had for lunch yesterday.

Your brain has a flair for the dramatic.

Would you really want to remember every single detail of every single day? Forgetting

helps you prioritise what matters. AI research on catastrophic forgetting shows that when systems remember everything, they become overwhelmed. Your brain smartly prunes unimportant details so you don’t have to.

It’s a survival feature, not a flaw, so next time you forget someone’s name, just say you are optimising brain efficiency.

Could science one day help us selectively erase memories, like a real-life ‘Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind?’ Researchers think so.

Techniques like memory reconsolidation disruption and optogenetics (using light to edit memory) suggest that in the future, we might actually be able to erase painful or unnecessary memories. Ethical concerns aside, it’s a fascinating field, though it might also mean you would have to set reminders for why you erased something in the first place.

If you want to remember more and forget less, work with your brain, not against it.

Retrieval practice makes memories stronger, while mnemonic devices help by turning dull facts into memorable images.

Exercise and sleep also play a role, boosting blood flow to the brain and consolidating memories.

Contextual learning shows that studying in different places improves recall by reducing reliance on a single set of cues. Lastly, managing stress is key; too much cortisol can block memory retrieval, causing those dreaded blank-out moments.

So, test yourself, stay active, switch up your environment and get enough rest; your brain will thank you!

More than just a service... it’s satisfaction



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHANI

The writer is author,
translator and a
communications
professional

JUST imagine walking into a peaceful little café where the aroma of fresh coffee and warm bread wraps around you like a hug. The barista greets you with a genuine smile, remembers your name and even recalls your usual order. You take a sip of that coffee and a bite of your croissant, both are just the way you like them: warm, fresh and perfect. You leave happier than when you walked in. That feeling is what we call customer satisfaction!

Behind every successful business, big or small, lies that same kind of magic. It should not always be showy and recognised, but it is the reason people come back, the reason they recommend a place to friends, and ultimately, the reason a business doesn't just survive, but thrives.

Customer satisfaction is not just about making people smile - though that certainly helps. It is about trust, consistency and connection. It is about delivering on promises, and at times exceeding them. In a world where competition is aggressive and attention spans are short, satisfaction is the one thing that truly sticks to customers' minds.

Customer satisfaction is not a buzzword; it is the compass by which successful businesses navigate their strategies and actions. Businesses should think beyond simply serving or delivering to customers.

A satisfied customer is the best marketing ambassador, while a disappointed one can become the loudest critic.

When customers are truly satisfied, they don't just buy, but they believe in the brand or product. They will defend the brand in conversations, overlook the occasional hiccups, spread the word, and most importantly, keep coming back. In an age of endless options, loyalty is rare and incredibly powerful.

People love to talk about what they love. They trust recommendations from friends and family far more than commercial advertisements. A truly satisfied customer might tell a brand's story. A delighted one will post, tweet, vlog, and promote the product or service. That is why it often costs less to retain a happy customer than to acquire a new one.

Satisfaction creates a cycle: customers return, they spend more and they feel valued. Steve Jobs once said, "Get closer than ever to your customers. So close, in fact, that you tell them what they need well before they realise it themselves." So don't just aim to satisfy - aim to surprise. Customer satisfaction isn't just a strategy; it is the heartbeat of a brand's story. Every customer interaction is an experience by itself, and together, those experiences tell the story of a business. When customers are satisfied, that story is told with joy, excitement and pride of course.

Customer
satisfaction is
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consistency and
connection

It is true what they say: It takes 20 years to build a reputation and only five minutes to ruin it. So, how can a business create the magic of customer satisfaction and sustain it? Salespeople and service agents must treat customers like people, not transactions. They should strive to deliver more than expected by customers. Even the best product can't make up for poor service experience. That is why it is crucial to train staff to show genuine care, listen actively and use feedback as fuel for growth.

Sometimes, it is the small things - a handwritten note, faster delivery, or a personalised touch - that turn an ordinary experience into a memorable one. As Bill Gates wisely said, "Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning."

Customer satisfaction is not a one-time goal - it is an ongoing commitment. Companies that prioritise customer experience are the ones most likely to succeed long-term. It is not just about closing a sale; it is about building relationships, earning trust and turning first-time buyers into lifelong advocates.

In a world full of choices, satisfaction is what makes a brand stand out. Whether you are running a local business or managing a global brand, how your customers feel about your product or service can ultimately make or break your reputation.

MYANMAR QUAKE VICTIMS MARK NEW YEAR AMID RUINS

LYNN MYAT

Thousands marked the start of Myanmar’s water festival on Sunday in the ruins of last month’s earthquake, with the country’s most raucous holiday muted by the tragedy of the tremor.

The “Thingyan” festival typically celebrates Myanmar’s new year with water-splashing rituals symbolising cleansing and renewal, but the central cities of Mandalay and Sagaing lie devastated from the 7.7-magnitude quake.

Two weeks on from the disaster which killed more than 3,600, hundreds are still living in tent encampments peppered among pancaked apartment blocks, razed tea shops and demolished hotels. Early on Sunday, families were buying clay pots and plant sprigs customarily placed inside homes to welcome the new year -- even though some had nowhere to put them.

“My heart is heavy. Our neighbourhood used to come together to celebrate Thingyan but we cannot do it this year,” said 55-year-old Ma Phyu, camping with nine family members north of Mandalay’s quake-damaged Royal Palace.

Her grandchildren usually pester her to buy them squirt guns, but this year she has nothing to offer. “I don’t see any way that they can be happy,” Ma Phyu said.

More than 5,200 buildings were destroyed in the March 28 quake according to official figures, leaving more than two million people in need, the UN says. Many survivors in Mandalay and the neighbouring city of Sagaing still lack working latrines and need to queue for drinking water, while the weather forecast for heavy rains has them fretting over their makeshift homes.

Since the quake two weeks ago, temperatures have also soared to a parching 44 degrees Celsius while at night tent-dwellers are needled by mosquitoes before rising at dawn to line up for aid.

A fresh 5.5-magnitude aftershock hit Mandalay on Sunday, sending a shudder of fear through the city as buildings were evacuated. “I don’t want to stay like this,” wept 65-year-old Mar Tin, who was camped among broken concrete and twisted steel.

She said she usually spends Thingyan at a Buddhist meditation centre but this year it was shut. “I don’t have the strength to be happy. How could I be strong in such a situation?” she said.

The ruling military junta has commanded for the five-day festival — usually Myanmar’s most raucous holiday — to have no music or dance.

AFP reporters in Mandalay heard no music and saw only a handful of children playing with water pistols. “I wish to see my children splashing water and running around like I did when I was a child,” said Aye Aye Myint, 47, who was camped with her three children on an open market ground.

The UN has issued an emergency plea for \$275 million, following US President Donald Trump’s evisceration of Washington’s aid budget which has already hobbled some UN operations in Myanmar.

— AFP

Europe’s tech sovereignty needs competitiveness

AS part of his confrontational stance towards Europe, US President Donald Trump could end up weaponising critical technologies. The European Union must appreciate the true nature of this threat instead of focusing on competing with the US as an economic ally. To achieve true tech sovereignty, the EU should transcend its narrow focus on competitiveness and deregulation and adopt a far more ambitious strategy.

After passing several landmark tech bills in recent years, the EU is now seeking to boost innovation and enhance competitiveness. Building on former European Central Bank president Mario Draghi’s influential 2024 report, the European Commission recently published the Competitiveness Compass – its road map for implementing Draghi’s recommendations.

Europe’s growing anxiety about competitiveness is fuelled by its inability to challenge US-based tech giants where it counts: in the market. As the Draghi report points out, the productivity gap between the United States and the EU largely reflects the relative weakness of Europe’s tech sector. Recent remarks by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Tech Commissioner Henna Virkkunen suggest that policymakers have taken Draghi’s message to heart, making competitiveness the central focus of EU tech policy.

But this singular focus is both insufficient and potentially counterproductive at a time of technological and geopolitical upheaval. While pursuing competitiveness could reduce Big Tech’s influence over Europe’s economy and democratic institutions, it could just as easily entrench it. European leaders’ current fixation on deregulation – turbocharged by the Draghi report – leaves EU policymaking increasingly vulnerable to lobbying by powerful corporate interests and risks legitimising policies that are incompatible with fundamental European values.

As a result, the European



Tech Commissioner Henna Virkkunen suggests making competitiveness the central focus of EU tech policy.



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Commission’s deregulatory measures – including its recent decision to shelve draft AI and privacy rules, and its forthcoming “simplification” of tech legislation including the GDPR – are more likely to benefit entrenched tech giants than they are to support start-ups and small- and medium-size enterprises. Meanwhile, Europe’s hasty and uncritical push for “AI competitiveness” risks reinforcing Big Tech’s tightening grip on the AI technology stack.

It should come as no surprise that the Draghi report’s deregulatory agenda was warmly received in Silicon Valley, even by Elon Musk himself. But the ambitions of some tech leaders go far beyond cutting red tape. Musk’s use of X (formerly Twitter) and Starlink to interfere in national elections and the war in Ukraine, together with the Trump administration’s brazen attacks on EU tech regulation, show that Big Tech’s quest for power poses a serious threat to European sovereignty. Europe’s most urgent task, then, is to defend its citizens’ rights, sovereignty and core values from increasingly hostile American tech giants and their allies in Washington. The continent’s deep dependence on US-controlled digital infrastructure

– from semiconductors and cloud computing to undersea cables – not only undermines its competitiveness by shutting out homegrown alternatives, but also enables the owners of that infrastructure to exploit it for profit.

Even more alarmingly, Europe’s technological dependence gives a handful of corporations and the US government outsize power over its technological development and democratic decision-making. This power could be used to stifle the growth of Europe’s tech sector by restricting access to advanced chips, or by making access to cloud computing contingent on light-touch regulation of US tech firms.

Safeguarding Europe from such coercion will ultimately enhance its competitiveness. Strong enforcement of competition law and the Digital Markets Act, for example, could curb Big Tech’s influence while creating space for European start-ups and challengers to thrive. Similarly, implementing the Digital Services Act and the AI Act will protect citizens from harmful content and dangerous AI systems, empowering Europe to offer a genuine alternative to Silicon Valley’s surveillance-driven business models.

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SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



The School Sports Days event aims to promote sports participation within the educational system and utilise sports as an effective tool to support educational goals.

‘SCHOOL SPORTS DAYS’ LAUNCHED IN MUSCAT

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 13

The Oman School Sports Association (OSSA) launched the School Sports Days on Sunday and will run until Wednesday at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher and the Bowling Hall in Seeb. The event will target students born in 2008 and later, in accordance with the age-specific criteria set by the organising committee for each sport. Also, the event has attracted a large turnout, with 414 students advancing to the finals. Each of the governorates of Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah and Dhofar is represented by 42 participants. Al Batinah North Governorate is represented by 38, while Al Sharqiyah North and Musandam governorates each have 34 participants. Al Batinah South and Al Sharqiyah South governorates are represented by 33 each, and Al Wusta Governorate by 32 participants.

This nationwide initiative brings together over 400 male and female students, accompanied by 22 supervisors, under the technical direction of 109 coaches representing 11 educational directorates. Participants will compete in six sports disciplines: chess, athletics, badminton, bowling, cross-country, and table tennis. The School Sports Days event aims to promote sports participation within the educational system and utilise sports as an effective tool to support educational goals. The event also serves to instil ethical values, spread Olympic sports culture among students, and raise awareness about the importance of physical activity. Moreover, it acts as a platform to discover and nurture emerging student talent, guiding outstanding athletes toward national sports federations and future national team representation. The female competitions will take place on Sunday and Monday, featuring 253 students under the supervision of 55 coaches and supervisors. Female students will compete in athletics 86 participants, badminton 22 participants, table tennis 33 participants and bowling 20 participants.

‘Oman Rugby Sixes’ championship concludes

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 13

The Oman Rugby Six side Championship concluded successfully on Friday 11th April at The Sultan’s School field, organised by the Oman Rugby Committee in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), amidst an enthusiastic atmosphere and wide participation from local and international teams. The tournament featured 10 teams representing various sectors, including military and civilian squads. Among the participants were a team from Saudi Arabia, “Dhahran Scorpions”, a GCC based team in UAE “FFP”, two teams from the British Navy, and six teams from Oman. A Barbarian Team, Touch Tuesdays Muscat, Muscat Oryx, Dhofar Nomads, Dima



The tournament featured 10 teams representing various sectors, including military and civilian squads.

W’attayeen and Al Dakhiliyah Club “Dakemons”. The variety of teams reflects the international scope of the championship and the growing popularity of rugby in the Sultanate of Oman. The participating teams were divided into two groups: Men’s

Group, consisting of five teams and Mixed Group (4 men and 2 women), also with five teams. At the end of the competitions, the GCC team “FFP” was crowned champion of the Men’s Group after a decisive 7-1 victory over “Dakemons”. In the Mixed Group, the Saudi

team “Dhahran Scorpions” clinched the title, defeating Muscat based Touch Tuesdays in the final with a 3-2 win. Mohammed al Hashmi, Director of the National Rugby Team, stated: “The organisation of this championship comes as part of



the matches and clinched the gold medal. Oman team players excelled an outstanding show in all ties as they defeated Bahrain by 5-1. Then, they stun Kuwait team 3-1 before securing a thrilling 1-0 over UAE in third game. Later, Oman thumped Saudi Arabia by 7-2 to seal the victory and gold medal. Oman, in their sixth appearance at the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup will face a tough challenge as they will take on World Champions Brazil and the runners up Italy beside El Salvador who crowned champions of 2025 Concacaf Beach Soccer Championship in group D. Oman will commence their campaign 2025 Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup with a match against Italy on May 2 in the opener and the match will kick off at 15:00 (Oman time) while they will meet El Salvador in the following game on May 4 and the match will start at 15:00 (Oman time). Two days later, Oman team will take on World Champions Brazil. The match will kick off at 19:00 (Oman time). All the matches will take place at the Paradise Arena.

Oman beach soccer team in final tune-up for WC



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 13

THE champions of GCC Beach Games in beach soccer will report back to training sessions on Tuesday as part of their final warm up for Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup Seychelles 2025 which will take place from May 1 to 11. The scheduled domestic camp will be the final tune up for the globe event and ahead of the team’s travel to Seychelles. Oman experienced head coach, Talib Hilal, announced the 14 man squad for the upcoming camp which will take place starting form Tuesday and will run until April 23. The squad included: Amjad al Hamadani, Younis al Owaisi, Said al Farsi, Abdullah al Souti, Nooh al Zadjali, Ahmed al Owaisi, Salim al Orami, Mundher al Orami, Sami al Balushi, Musallam al Orami, Al Yadhan al Hindasi, Yahya al Muraikhi, Khalid al Orami and Mashal al Orami. Oman national beach soccer team concluded recently a successful campaign at GCC Beach Games as they won all



SHORTTAKES



Athletes of all ages and abilities turned up in impressive numbers for the Barcelo Mussanah run

ENDURANCE
TAKES CENTRE
STAGE AT BARCELO
MUSSANAH RUNS

MUSCAT: The scenic grounds of Barcelo Mussanah Resort came alive with energy and enthusiasm as Sabco Sports and the Oman Athletics Association (OAA) successfully organised a day of competitive and fun-filled races, including the 10km, 5km, Fun Run and Kids Run.

Athletes of all ages and abilities turned up in impressive numbers. From seasoned runners to enthusiastic first-timers and young participants in the Kids Run, the event saw vibrant participation and cheerful support from spectators.

This run also marked a call to action for fitness lovers across Oman to register for the upcoming Governorates Marathon – Al Batinah South 2025. Those ready to take on the next challenge can sign up at <https://in.njuko.com/gm-batinah>.

Oman Broad was the title sponsor with Al Batinah South Governorate being the governorate partner. OAA and Sabco Sports were the organisers along with Barcelo Mussanah Resort being the venue partner. With clear skies, coastal views and a shared sense of accomplishment, the Mussanah run proved once again that the finish line is just the beginning.

MBAPPE SEES RED AS
MADRID BEAT ALAVES



VITORIA, SPAIN: Real Madrid superstar Kylian Mbappe was sent off for an ugly lunge but his side still beat Alaves 1-0 on Sunday to stay four points behind Barcelona at the top of La Liga. Mbappe's dismissal put his team-mates under pressure but Alaves were also reduced to 10 players in the second half when Manu Sanchez hacked down Vinicius Junior. Eduardo Camavinga's curling effort from the edge of the box was enough to split the teams as Madrid produced a gritty display to match Barcelona's single-goal victory over Leganes on Saturday. Assistant coach Davide Ancelotti took the place of his father Carlo Ancelotti, who was suspended, in the Madrid dug-out. — AFP



Sunrisers Hyderabad's Abhishek Sharma acknowledges fans as he walks after losing his wicket for 141 runs. — Reuters

Abhishek plunders 141
as Hyderabad pull off
second-highest IPL chase

ABHISHEK

SHARMA lit up the IPL on Saturday with a spectacular 141 off 55 balls to steer Sunrisers Hyderabad to the second-highest successful chase in tournament history of 246 as they downed Punjab Kings by eight wickets.

Earlier, Nicholas Pooran continued his incredible form with 61 to help Lucknow Super Giants end Gujarat Titans' winning streak of four matches, coming out on top by six wickets.

The 24-year-old Abhishek put on the best stand so far this season of 171 with opening partner Travis Head, who hit 66, in a chase achieved with nine balls to spare.

"We didn't talk (about) anything," Abhishek said of the mood ahead of the chase. "It was just natural play for us. The partnership boosted me up."

Punjab hold the record winning chase of 262 against Kolkata Knight Riders at Eden Gardens last year.

Abhishek's individual score is the third highest in IPL history behind Chris Gayle (175 not out for Bengaluru) and Brendon McCullum (158 not out for Kolkata) and the largest in 12 years.

"This one is very special, because I wanted to break that losing streak," added Abhishek. "Losing four matches back to back was very tough. But we never talked about it in the team."

Shreyas Iyer's 82 and a late blitz of 34 by Marcus Stoinis steered Punjab to 245-6, but the total proved inadequate as the Sunrisers openers took their team off the bottom of the 10-team table with just a second win in six matches.

Abhishek started as he meant to go on, reaching his fifty in 19 balls.

Australia's Head fell to leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal after hitting nine fours and three sixes in his 37-ball knock.

But Abhishek raised his century in only 40 balls as he roared, punched the air and waved a piece of paper with a message reading "this one for the orange army", referencing the Sunrisers fans.

Arshdeep Singh eventually dismissed Abhishek, who hit 14 fours and 10 sixes, with 24 to win and Heinrich Klaasen saw Hyderabad home with an unbeaten 21 off 14 balls.

PHENOMENAL' POORAN

Earlier in Lucknow, opener Aiden Markram, who hit 58, and the in-form Pooran set up the home team's chase of 181 before they secured victory over Gujarat with three balls to spare. Markram shared partnerships of 65 with fellow opener Rishabh Pant and 58 with Pooran, who struck his fourth half-century of the campaign to go past Gujarat opener Sai Sudharsan as the leading runscore this season with 349, at a remarkable strike-rate

of 215. "I think one thing is for sure is that we are happy to have Nicholas Pooran in our team," said Pant of the West Indies star.

"You want someone like him on your side and not batting against you. The way he is reading the game right now, the way he is batting is phenomenal."

Gujarat lost top spot in the 10-team table, with Lucknow behind in third with four wins from six matches.

South Africa's Markram stepped up in the absence of his in-form opening partner Mitchell Marsh, who missed the match due to the illness of his daughter.

Skipper Pant was promoted to open but failed to strike form despite an early reprieve when Gujarat wicketkeeper Jos Buttler dropped a catch down the leg-side.

Pant hit four boundaries before he lofted fast bowler Prasidh Krishna to deep third man, falling for 21 from 18 balls.

Pant is still waiting to justify his record auction price of \$3.21 million and has only managed 40 runs in five innings.

Pooran hammered his fifty in 23 balls before falling to Afghanistan leg-spinner Rashid Khan.

But he had already done the damage with one four and seven sixes in his 34-ball blitz.

Impact substitute Ayush Badoni hit an unbeaten 28 and sealed the win with a four and six after a late wobble. — AFP

Van Dijk's late winner edges Liverpool towards EPL title

LIVERPOOL: Virgil van Dijk spared Liverpool's blushes with a late winner to beat West Ham 2-1 on Sunday and edge to within six points of the Premier League title.

Andy Robertson's own goal four minutes from time had given the lowly Hammers a deserved equaliser after Luis Diaz put Liverpool in front early on.

Van Dijk, though, swiftly restored the lead to show Liverpool retain the mentality of champions, even if they are running out of steam in the closing stages of the season.

Liverpool's lead stretches to 13 points with six games remaining.

A record-equalling 20th English top-flight title could come as early as next Sunday if Liverpool win at Leicester and Arsenal lose away to

Ipswich. The stage was set before kick-off for Mohamed Salah to be the hero as the Egyptian was given a huge ovation just days after ending speculation over his future by signing a new two-year contract.

Salah started with the intention of making sure he was the focus of attention as young left-back Ollie Scarles struggled to cope with the Premier League's top scorer.

The 32-year-old has failed to score in seven of his last eight Liverpool games as his sensational early season form has failed off.

But he still managed to set a new Premier League record by registering his 45th goal or assist of the campaign, the most ever in a 38-game season.

Salah outmuscled Scarles on the



Liverpool's Virgil van Dijk celebrates scoring their second goal. — Reuters

touchline and sprinted clear before an inch-perfect cross for Diaz allowed the Colombian to tap in for his 15th goal of the season on 18 minutes. Defeat sees West Ham slip to 17th in the table, but they had a series of chances to take at least a point.

The fatigue that has seen Liverpool struggle in recent times was in evidence again as they had goalkeeper Alisson Becker to thank for moving another three points closer to the title.

Alisson brilliantly tipped Mohammed Kudus' attempted chip onto the bar with the visitors first serious attack.

Jarrod Bowen had West Ham's best chance to level when he failed to beat Alisson when one-on-one with the Brazilian before he turned away

another powerful drive by Kudus.

When West Ham did finally find the net, it was thanks to two of Liverpool's most experienced defenders.

Robertson and Van Dijk both went for the same ball and the Scotland captain diverted Aaron Wan-Bissaka's cross into his own net.

The goal suddenly sparked Liverpool into life after a listless second half as Diaz's deflected effort went over the bar.

Van Dijk took just three minutes to make amends for the equaliser as he powered in Alexis Mac Allister's corner. The Dutchman kissed the badge in celebration in a potential nod to him reportedly being close to following Salah in signing a new contract. — AFP



ALCARAZ COMES FROM BEHIND TO CLAIM MONTE CARLO TITLE

CARLOS ALCARAZ won his first Monte Carlo Masters title on Sunday with a 3-6, 6-1, 6-0 victory over the Italian Lorenzo Musetti. It marks a sixth Masters title for the 21-year-old Spaniard, a four-time Grand Slam winner, and his most prestigious title since winning Wimbledon last year. “I’m just really happy to have won Monte Carlo for the first time,” said Alcaraz who lost in his first match on his only previous appearance at the tournament in 2022. “It’s been a really difficult week with a lot of difficult situations. “I’m really proud of my myself how I’ve dealt with everything. It’s been a really difficult month for me on the court and outside. “Coming here and seeing how the whole hard work has paid off, I’m really happy.” Alcaraz, who will move up a place in the rankings and displace Alexander Zverev at No 2, had to come from behind to beat the Italian who had already taken down two Top 10 players, Stefanos Tsitsipas and Alex de Minaur, on his way to his first Masters 1000 final. Musetti dropped his opening service but then fought his way back into the first set as Alcaraz appeared at odds with his game.

The Spaniard bounced back, however, lifting his game as he galloped through the second set 6-1. That trend continued as Musetti began to have problems with his right leg, receiving treatment when he was 0-3 in the decider. He battled on but could not live with the intensity or physicality of Alcaraz’s game. “Lorenzo’s been through a really tough week, long and intense matches,” said Alcaraz. “I feel sorry for him, one of the best results he has done, to end like this is not easy. Hopefully it’s not serious and he’s 100 per cent soon.” Some consolation for Musetti is a rise to No 11 in the rankings and the promise of more to come on the clay as the season builds towards the French Open at Roland Garros next month. “It was probably one of my best tournaments so far,” he said. “I’m disappointed I couldn’t finish the match in the best way, for the crowd. You deserve it so I will keep going and try and come back for revenge.” — AFP



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NEWINITIATIVES

The newly signed contracts are aimed at enabling investors to develop high-quality agricultural and livestock ventures.

RO 1.8 MILLION
USUFRUCT DEALS TO
BOOSTAGRICULTURAL
AND LIVESTOCK
SECTORS

MUSCAT: In a strategic move to enhance food security and promote self-sufficiency, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, has signed 11 usufruct contracts for agricultural and livestock projects with a total investment value exceeding RO 1.8 million. The agreements cover an estimated 800 acres of land distributed across various governorates in Oman.

The newly signed contracts are aimed at enabling investors to develop high-quality agricultural and livestock ventures that will boost local production, improve land-use efficiency and integrate advanced farming technologies. These initiatives are expected to strengthen food supply chains while creating new economic opportunities in the targeted regions.

The projects span the governorates of Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Dakhiliyah and Musandam. They include a range of activities such as citrus cultivation and production, broiler poultry breeding, the development of an animal feed centre, greenhouse vegetable farming; and the production and marketing of golden onions.

The signing ceremony took place in the presence of Eng Hamad bin Ali al Nazwani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning for Housing and Dr Ahmed bin Nasser al Bakri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Agriculture. — ONA

Oman unveils \$200m wind turbine plant in Duqm

THE Sultanate of Oman marked a significant milestone in its clean energy transition with the launch of the first phase of a state-of-the-art wind turbine manufacturing facility in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

Developed by Mawarid Turbine Company, the plant is designed to produce wind turbines with a combined annual capacity of 1,000 megawatts (MW), catering to two advanced turbine models of 6.25 MW and 9.6 MW.

With an investment value exceeding RO 70 million (around \$200 million), the facility is expected to be commercially operational by 2026. Once completed, it will become the first wind turbine manufacturing hub in the region, aligning with Oman's broader strategy to localise renewable energy technology and bolster its clean energy infrastructure.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufer, Minister of Energy and Minerals, underscored the strategic role of the facility in supporting Oman's renewable energy goals.

but would also generate over 1,000 job opportunities and contribute significantly to Oman's ambitions to shift towards sustainable energy sources.

Mustafa bin Mohammed al Hinai, CEO of Mawarid Turbine, described the project as a game-

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufer, Minister of Energy and Minerals, underscored the strategic role of the facility in supporting Oman's renewable energy goals.

Once completed, it will become the first wind turbine manufacturing hub in the region, aligning with Oman's broader strategy to localise renewable energy technology and bolster its clean energy infrastructure.

changer and the first of its kind in the region. He said the plant represents a strategic move towards industrial integration, technological innovation and knowledge transfer, with a vision to serve both local and global markets.

Al Hinai highlighted that the project will help reduce logistical and production costs while delivering high-efficiency products and supporting Omani exports. He emphasised its potential to enhance local content, provide direct and indirect employment; and contribute to the broader value-added economy.

Shanghai Electric, a strategic partner in the project, will play a pivotal role in transferring advanced wind turbine technologies to Oman.

Wei Li, Chairman of the company's Board of Directors, lauded the collaboration as

a symbol of the strong and historic ties between Oman and China. He said the project reflects shared ambitions to strengthen energy security, attract high-quality investment and build a sustainable, innovation-driven economy.

According to Wei, Shanghai Electric remains committed to supporting Oman's clean energy targets through its expertise in renewable energy technologies.

The ceremony also witnessed the signing of several important agreements.

These included two cooperation agreements between Mawarid Turbine and Shanghai Electric Wind Power Group, covering technology licensing, the creation of a research centre, knowledge transfer, technical design and turbine supply for pilot wind farms.

Another agreement was signed with CID (Gulf) for the detailed design and construction of the turbine component manufacturing facility.

In addition, Mawarid Turbine and OQ Group signed a memorandum of cooperation to jointly develop the factory and promote local manufacturing capacity.

To further support Oman's workforce development, the Ministry of Labour, the Authority for Public Services Regulation and Mawarid Turbine signed a tripartite memorandum to train and equip 350 national jobseekers with the technical skills required for roles in renewable energy manufacturing. — ONA

Strong business performance gives OQ RO 1.2 billion net profit in 2024

MUSCAT: OQ SAOC announced a net profit of RO 1.2 billion (\$3 billion) in its 2024 standalone financials, attributed to strong overall business performance and strategic divestments of certain assets.

OQ SAOC's strong liquidity position enables further investment in growth initiatives across the energy value chain, aligned with its energy transition strategy, while also ensuring dividend distribution to its shareholders.

OQ Group posted strong results for 2024, achieving record revenue of RO 15 billion (\$40 billion) and RO 1.1 billion (\$2.9 billion) in consolidated earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA) and RO 513 million (\$1.3 billion) in consolidated net profit.

These notable results reflect OQ's disciplined portfolio management and its strategic vision to create sustainable value for its stakeholders.

Mulham al Jarf, Chairman of OQ, underscored the company's steadfast dedication to advancing its strategic vision, with 2024 representing a pivotal milestone in this ongoing journey. Central

These notable results reflect OQ's disciplined portfolio management.

to this progress has been the execution of its divestment strategy, designed to optimise its asset portfolio and elevate operational efficiency. In parallel, OQ has been proactively spearheading a series of renewable energy initiatives, aligning with global sustainability imperatives and expanding the diversity of its energy portfolio.

Additionally, OQ has laid the foundation stone for its strategic fuel reserves in Musandam and Dhofar governorates, positioning itself for long-term stability. A defining moment of 2024 was the historic inauguration of OQ8, marking another significant achievement in OQ's trajectory.

Ashraf al Mamari, Group CEO of OQ, stated: "Achieving these results in 2024 is a direct outcome of well-defined strategies focused on continually enhancing both operational and financial efficiency, even in the face of global challenges. This has strengthened our leadership position in Oman and the region, enabling us to turn challenges into opportunities, while delivering outstanding financial results."

On financial resilience, Al Mamari added: "Our results not only demonstrate robust financial performance, but are also driven by the implementation of our new operating model and highlight our consistent attention to long-term financial sustainability. Our targeted strategies focus on optimising resource allocation and maximising operational efficiency. This is further underscored by our rigorous approach to

transparency, effective cost control and disciplined capital management - core tenets of our financial strategy."

Al Mamari further highlighted OQ's commitment to local content: "Guided by our strong belief that investing in people and communities is central to our strategy, OQ Group has spent RO 346 million (\$900 million) locally in 2024."

"As for social investment, it remains a cornerstone of our approach with social investment projects targeting key themes all over the Sultanate of Oman. These include two major projects in Duqm and Ibri, aimed at establishing an emergency healthcare facility and a centre for science and innovation," he added.

In terms of national workforce development, Al Mamari highlighted: "OQ's Omanisation rate has reached 85 per cent, with more than 240 graduates joining the 11th cohort of the OQ Graduate Development Programme. We also trained over 890 trainees from various educational institutions, further investing in Omani talent and reinforcing our commitment to building a sustainable workforce." — ONA

ADVERTORIALS

NEWPILLAR



This recognition solidifies the Bank’s standing as a vital pillar of Oman’s financial ecosystem.

CBO DESIGNATES SOHAR INTERNATIONAL AS A DOMESTIC SYSTEMICALLY IMPORTANT BANK

MUSCAT: Marking a significant milestone in its journey of growth and resilience, Sohar International Bank SAOG (Bank) has been officially designated as a Domestic Systemically Important Bank (D-SIB) by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

This recognition solidifies the Bank’s standing as a vital pillar of Oman’s financial ecosystem, reinforcing its responsibility in upholding economic stability and national prosperity.

Commenting on the landmark designation, Abdulwahid al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of the Bank, stated, “Being designated as a D-SIB is a proud moment for Sohar International. This recognition is not just an acknowledgment of our growing influence but also a responsibility that we embrace wholeheartedly.

As we continue to evolve and expand, we remain dedicated to delivering innovative banking solutions, empowering businesses and individuals; and contributing to Oman’s long-term economic progress.”

A D-SIB designation is applied to banks that play a crucial role in a country’s financial system and their continued stability is paramount to the overall health of the economy. As a domestically systemically important financial institution, Sohar International will operate under an enhanced regulatory framework in relation to capital adequacy, risk management and governance designed to safeguard the banking sector from potential disruptions.

The designation reflects Sohar International’s exceptional growth and its pivotal role in shaping the future of banking in Oman.

With this recognition, the Bank is poised to further enhance its capabilities, drive sustainable growth and reinforce its position as a trusted partner in the nation’s financial progress.

Strong opening for Oman Pavilion at Expo 2025 Osaka

THE Sultanate of Oman Pavilion at Expo 2025 Osaka welcomed a large number of visitors on the opening day, drawing officials, delegations and guests from Japan and around the world.

The pavilion stands out for its creative blend of modern interactive technologies and natural elements that immerse visitors in Oman’s rich cultural and environmental story.

Sajida bint Rashid al Ghaithiyah, Director of the Oman Pavilion, said the team was well-prepared to receive guests from the start. She expressed confidence that the visual and audio experience would effectively convey Oman’s cultural identity, tourism appeal and investment potential.

Visitors enter the pavilion in timed groups – up to 40 at a time – through a series of immersive exhibition halls.

The journey begins with an introduction that explores the meeting of water and land through rainfall and reflections. This leads into displays of Omani wildlife, including the Arabian



The pavilion stands out for its creative blend of modern interactive technologies and natural elements that immerse visitors in Oman’s rich cultural and environmental story.

oryx and deep-sea creatures.

The main hall features an interactive story of water, land and humanity in Oman, showcasing traditional irrigation systems (aflaj), the evolution of Omani life and the country’s sustainable development goals under Oman Vision 2040.

A short film, starring Omani faces in traditional dress, ties the narrative together and aligns with Expo 2025’s central themes.

Visitors then pass through the “Water and Fragrant Land Corridor,” where aromatic Omani scents are diffused through water bubbles, developed in partnership with local SMEs.

Next, they enter the Wadi area, designed to reflect Oman’s mountainous landscapes and waterfalls. This space also features a retail shop and café.

The final section introduces

visitors to Oman’s investment and tourism opportunities across its governorates, emphasising sectors linked to economic diversification.

According to Al Ghaithi, the entire visit lasts about 15 to 20 minutes. “The response so far has been overwhelmingly positive,” she said, highlighting the strong engagement of visitors with each part of the experience. — **ONA**

BANK MUSCAT HONOURED WITH OMAN’S BEST BANK FOR FX AWARD

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has been awarded the Best Bank for FX in Oman title by Global Finance.

This recognition is a testament to the Bank’s excellence and leading role in providing innovative and integrated services to customers from corporates and institutions locally, regionally and globally.

Bank Muscat is a well-known banking services provider in the region and is trusted by various local and international institutions. It serves as a primary reference for a large number of customers benefiting from a wide array of innovative banking services and solutions offered by Bank Muscat’s Global Treasury Division.

This division boasts a highly skilled and experienced team capable of executing large transactions and managing long-term hedging operations.

The Bank provides corporate customers with diverse FX solutions, along with various



Bank Muscat is a well-known banking services provider in the region and is trusted by various local and international institutions.

hedging options that enable customers to systematically and thoughtfully manage market volatility.

This positions Bank Muscat among the leading banking institutions in the region, driving it to remain committed to delivering innovative banking solutions and services to customers.

The Bank operates across all global financial markets during official working days worldwide.

As part of its proactive efforts to keep customers informed about financial market developments and their future, the Bank regularly organizes seminars and workshops that serve as platforms to enhance customers’ understanding of market trends and provide opportunities for sharing experiences with specialists and interested parties.

Bank Muscat also offers its customers from corporates

exclusive market updates through daily newsletters, messages and notifications about financial market news and developments.

The Global Treasury Division team sends these updates daily via WhatsApp to decision makers with expertise in managing customer transactions in the foreign market and associated risk management. Notably, Bank Muscat has established strategic partnerships with several leading global banks to support the international business requirements of its corporate customers, enhancing the Bank’s capabilities to meet the needs of global financial markets.

Additionally, the Bank invests in the latest digital solutions to streamline and enhance treasury management operations, contributing to improved operational efficiency and saving time for customers while providing innovative services that meet their diverse needs worldwide.

BankDhofar introduces bespoke concierge service

MUSCAT: Continuing its commitment to excellence and best-in-class services, BankDhofar has partnered with Nuclei Technologies to launch ARISE, an exclusive concierge service tailored to the unique global needs of its growing base of high-net-worth individuals and business families.

Designed to redefine luxury and convenience, ARISE offers a suite of premium, complimentary services, including chauffeur-driven airport transfers, VIP meet-and-greet experiences and privileged access to some of the world’s most sought-after events spanning music, fashion and business.

Additionally, the travel concierge ensures that clients enjoy unparalleled VIP services unavailable through conventional channels. Eligible private banking clients will be assigned a dedicated concierge



The travel concierge ensures that clients enjoy unparalleled VIP services unavailable through conventional channels.

manager, providing round-the-clock access, seven days a week.

Clients can seamlessly avail themselves of services via a dedicated phone line or an intuitive online platform.

Speaking on the launch, Amjad al Lawati, Chief Retail Banking Officer, praised the bank’s forward-thinking approach: “The ARISE concierge service redefines accessibility and convenience for our private banking clients. With this service, clients can charter a private jet one day and receive expert consultation on the best universities for their children the next.

ARISE complements our private banking suite, which includes financial and wealth management solutions and enhanced onshore banking services. This initiative underscores our commitment to

delivering innovative, bespoke solutions that elevate our clients’ lifestyles while securing their legacies.”

BankDhofar has collaborated with Nuclei Technologies, a globally recognised IT firm specialising in intelligent ecosystems that drive deep customer engagement. The launch of ARISE marks a significant enhancement to BankDhofar’s Private Banking division, which was formally introduced in June 2024.

This division caters to high-net-worth and ultra-high-net-worth clients, offering an array of bespoke financial, wealth and advisory services. In addition to customised checking and savings accounts, clients benefit from tailored investment guidance, preferential pricing and access to alternative investment opportunities.

BUSINESS



Oman advances water security goals with national forum.

OMAN LAUNCHES WATER SAFETY FORUM TO DRIVE OMAN VISION 2040 GOALS

FAISAL AL AJMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 13

THE Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), opened a five-day Water Safety Forum here on April 13, 2025. The event, organised in association with the World Health Organization (WHO), attracted more than 40 registered water sector companies, government organisations and international experts.

Held under the auspices of Dr Mansour bin Talib al Hinai, Chairman of the Authority for Public Services Regulation, the forum is evidence of Oman's commitment to delivering on the vision outlined in Oman Vision 2040 specifically, in sustainable development, health security and efficient public service delivery.

Dr Al Hinai affirmed that the forum accords with the nation's drive to strengthen regulatory frameworks and empower service providers to adopt forward-looking risk management approaches. "Water safety is a cornerstone of national health security and sustainable development," he stated. "Ensuring the consistent delivery of high-quality water services not only eases pressure on the healthcare system but also underpins broader economic and social progress."

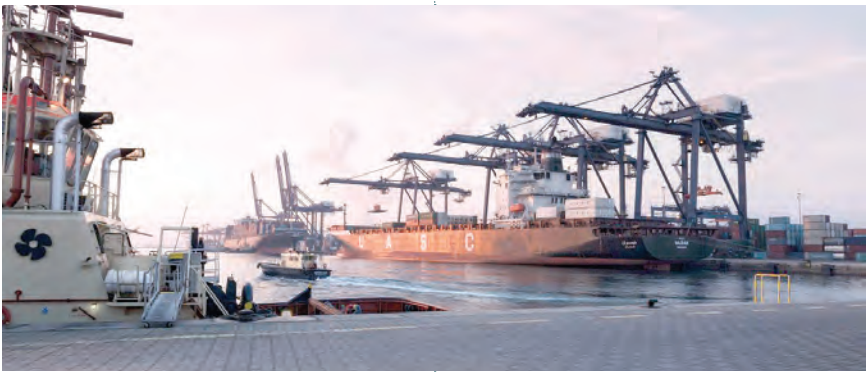
The forum aims at developing institutional readiness in water safety plan implementation and the assurance of improved water quality throughout distribution, storage and transportation. The forum facilitates WHO guideline compliance while strengthening Oman's water sector regulatory and operational capacity.

Oman mulls logistics hubs in Africa and Yemen

THE Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has invited qualified consultancy firms to submit proposals to conduct a comprehensive Logistics Market Analysis focusing on Yemen, East Africa and the Horn of Africa.

The objective is to evaluate competitive positioning and identify strategic actions to establish the Sultanate of Oman as a key logistics hub for these regions. The primary goal is to assess Oman's current logistics capabilities; and identify gaps and opportunities for improvement.

The last date to purchase



The primary goal is to assess Oman's current logistics capabilities; and identify gaps and opportunities for improvement.

documents is April 17 and to submit bids is May 1. With Oman's strategic location for global trade and well-developed infrastructure, the Sultanate of Oman's transport

and logistics sector is poised to drive economic growth and diversification in the coming years. A new report from global research and advisory company Oxford Business

Group, in partnership with Oman's Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), showed that Oman's transport and logistics sector is anticipated to contribute RO 14 bn to the national economy by 2040, positioning the sector as the second-highest economic contributor after hydrocarbons.

As of 2023, the logistics sector contributed approximately 7% to Oman's GDP. It contributed RO 1.7 bn, or 6.1%, to the Sultanate of Oman's GDP in the first nine months of 2024, as per the report.

The sector ,currently provides over 79,000 jobs, is seeking to create up to 300,000 new logistics jobs by 2040.

AUTO FUEL OUTPUT IN OMAN RISES, REFINERY PRODUCTION SLIPS

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman recorded a modest 0.9 per cent rise in auto fuel production by the end of February 2025, even as total refinery output declined by 2.6 per cent, according to preliminary data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Production of regular motor fuel (M-91) surged by 12.9 per cent, reaching approximately 2.69 million barrels compared to 2.39 million barrels during the same period in 2024. Sales of M-91 also rose slightly by 1 per cent to 2.26 million barrels.

In contrast, premium motor fuel (M-95) saw a 12 per cent drop in production to around 1.95 million barrels, down from 2.22 million barrels a year earlier. Interestingly, demand for M-95 remained strong, with sales increasing 3.3 per cent to 2.12 million barrels.

Diesel (gas oil) production slipped marginally



Production of regular motor fuel (M-91) surged by 12.9 per cent, reaching approximately 2.69 million barrels.

by 0.5 per cent to 4.53 million barrels. However, diesel sales rose by 1.5 per cent to 2.29 million barrels, reflecting steady local consumption.

Jet fuel production fell sharply by 13 per cent to

1.87 million barrels, while sales dropped 13.7 per cent to 641,400 barrels, indicating a slowdown in aviation fuel demand.

Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) output declined by 5.8 per cent to 1.12 million barrels. Despite the drop, domestic sales jumped 17 per cent to 629,100 barrels.

In the petrochemical segment, gasoline production edged up by 1.1 per cent to 28,700 metric tonnes. However, paraxylene and polypropylene production fell by 10.7 per cent and 6.5 per cent respectively. Paraxylene output stood at 89,400 metric tonnes, while polypropylene reached 54,500 metric tonnes.

Despite lower production, polypropylene sales surged by 88.3 per cent to 3,600 metric tonnes, indicating increased demand or clearance of previous inventories. — ONA

Sur desalination plant emerges as a model for eco innovation

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, APRIL 13

IN THE sun-soaked Al Sharqiyah South Governorate of Oman, the Sur desalination plant stands as a beacon of innovation and sustainability in the water sector.

Managed by Veolia, a global leader in ecological transformation, the plant is the first of its kind in the region — a cutting-edge seawater desalination facility powered entirely by renewable energy during daylight hours.

With a daily capacity of 131,837 cubic metres, the Sur plant supplies potable water to around 500,000 residents, addressing the growing demand driven by rapid population and economic expansion.

Since its commissioning in 2007, it has delivered over 400 million cubic metres of clean drinking water. But beyond sheer numbers, what sets Sur apart is its ambitious approach to sustainability and efficiency.

At the heart of the facility is a suite of advanced technologies designed to minimise environmental



ESTELLE BRACHLIANOFF
CEO of Veolia

seawater through sand, reducing the need for intensive chemical pre-treatment. This innovative intake method not only eases operational costs but also protects marine ecosystems.

Further supporting environmental goals are the plant's Energy Recovery Devices (ERDs), which slash energy consumption by 60%. This is crucial in a country where desalination accounts for a significant portion of water supply and where energy use has historically been a concern in such operations.

In fact, the facility is 100% solar-

impact and optimise performance. The plant uses the world's largest beach well water supply system, which naturally filters



The Sur desalination plant is 100% solar-powered during daylight hours.

powered during daylight hours — a milestone in green infrastructure that aligns with Oman's National Energy Strategy to derive 30% of electricity from renewable sources by 2030.

Veolia's proprietary digital tool, Hubgrade, plays a pivotal role in the plant's daily operations. By integrating artificial intelligence and machine learning, the system enables predictive membrane

analytics, real-time process optimisation and AI-driven maintenance planning.

This smart resource management boosts asset efficiency and ensures uninterrupted water supply, even under challenging conditions.

Estelle Brachlianoff, CEO of Veolia, emphasised the plant's significance in the region's water security strategy. "The Sur desalination plant is provided by green energy and solar panels — a sustainable source of energy for a very long time. We also highlight a Gen-AI tool to operate the desalination plant better.

Through to what we call the "barrel", which is a very unique patented solution... it's very modular, so you can have the construction being done in a much more rapid way and use less footprint on the ground. That's another innovation, which is quite disruptive," she said during an interview with the Observer.

The "barrel" technology — modular Reverse Osmosis units developed by Veolia — enables

quick deployment and compact installation. These units support low-footprint pre-treatment systems, including modular media and cartridge filters, as well as a compact Dissolved Air Flotation (DAF) system.

The result is a facility that is not only energy-efficient but also scalable and adaptable to different water demand scenarios.

The Sur desalination plant also pioneers environmental stewardship. Smart brine management ensures compliance with local regulations while minimising ecological harm and the facility uses minimal chemicals during operations. By reducing stress on groundwater resources and protecting marine biodiversity, the plant sets a benchmark for desalination sustainability.

<blockquote>Aligned with Veolia's GreenUp strategic programme and Oman Vision 2040, the Sur desalination plant is more than just infrastructure — it is a model for the future of water supply in arid regions.

PRODUCT EXCLUSIONS

Trump spares electronics from China tariffs



US President Donald Trump's administration granted exclusions from steep reciprocal tariffs to smartphones, computers and some other electronics imported largely from China, providing a big break to tech firms like Apple that rely on imported products.

In a notice to shippers, the US Customs and Border Protection agency published a list of tariff codes excluded from the import taxes, with retroactive effect from 12:01 am. — Reuters

OFFSETTING IMPACT

Xi courts SE Asia as Trump tariffs bite



Chinese President Xi Jinping will kick off a five-day, three-nation Southeast Asia tour on Monday as Beijing seeks to tighten regional trade ties and offset the impact of huge tariffs unleashed by his US counterpart Donald Trump.

Xi will visit Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia in his first overseas trip of the year, China's foreign ministry said. He will meet his counterparts on a tour that "bears major importance" for the broader region. — AFP

SUBTLE EFFECTS

IEA examines AI's impact on energy sector



The International Energy Agency (IEA) has released a new report analysing the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) and energy consumption.

As AI adoption expands, concerns grow over its electricity demands, particularly for data centres, while also recognising its potential to revolutionise the energy industry.

The report provides projections on AI's electricity consumption over the next decade. — ONA

Downward trend in insolvencies continues into 2025



ANDY JALIL

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

COMPANIES in Ireland — in the European Union — are proving resilient with insolvencies falling in the first quarter of the year, continuing a downward trend from last year, according to the latest research by PwC.

There were 192 insolvencies in the first quarter, 14 pc fewer than in the same period last year. This was also down 7 pc on the last quarter of 2024 when there were 207.

There were 852 insolvencies in total last year, well below the predictions of up to 1,000 made when Revenue closed the Covid debt warehouse last spring. The rate was almost identical to the pre-pandemic figure of 850 in 2019.

The Government had downplayed fears about a record number of companies going to the wall post-pandemic, when many were kept alive by state hand-outs. There was no “tsunami” of insolvencies after Covid, a senior official in the Department of Enterprise pointed out last May.

PwC is calculating the current annual insolvency rate as 29 per 10,000 businesses, well below the long-term average of 50. It says this ratio provides a more accurate picture than absolute numbers, due to the increase in the number of Irish businesses in recent years.

The current number of registered companies is 298,101, compared to about

160,000 near the height of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ (a nickname for Ireland during its boom years with great economic recovery and prosperity from the mid-90s).

Insolvencies were 25 in the retail sector in the first quarter, 40 pc down on the same period in 2024. Among them was the Irish arm of New Look, which went into liquidation in February. They employed 347 people at 26 outlets nationwide.

Hospitality had 43 insolvencies, which was in line with the rates recorded last year, when there were 154 insolvencies in total.

“This consistency suggests the sector is maintaining its current stability despite ongoing economic challenges,” PwC said. “Our analysis also shows that most of the insolvencies are predominantly small restaurants and cafes.”

It pointed out that high-profile closures of restaurants and pubs recorded by the media do not necessarily equate to insolvencies. Some of these businesses are sole traders and do not operate as companies, while others are still in the process of closing down and have not completed the process.

The sector is pleased that the government departments and companies are instructing staff to return to offices either full time or more days. Department of Social Protection informed staff they would be required to work from the office a minimum of two days, with senior staff due in for three days at least.

There were 852 insolvencies in total last year, well below the predictions of up to 1,000 made when Revenue closed the Covid debt warehouse last spring. The rate was almost identical to the pre-pandemic figure of 850 in 2019.

Staff in the Department of Finance have also been instructed to work onsite more often, according to the trade union Forsa.

“Restaurants will certainly welcome this,” said Adrian Cummins, chief executive of the Restaurants Association. “We would love to see it go to full time, but this is definitely a start.”

The number of rescue processes in the first quarter of 2025 was consistent with rates last year. There was one examinership and eight uses of the Small Company Administrative Rescue Process (Scarp), a rate that is regarded as an under-utilisation of the scheme which the Government set up during covid as a way of assisting firms in temporary difficulties with creditors.

Business recovery partner with PwC Ireland, Ken Tyrrell, said: “The continued year-on-year decline in insolvencies demonstrates the robustness and resilience of our economy.

However, with the prevailing economic uncertainties and geopolitical risks looming, it remains to be seen what the year has in store.

He added: “Nothing is certain and businesses will also need to deal with a higher cost base in 2025 driven by domestic and international factors. I would advise businesses to focus on their core strategies, cost base and actively manage their working capital to ensure that they are financially sustainable into the future.”

US-CHINA TRADE CLASH RISKS ALL-OUT FINANCIAL WAR

BY HUDSON LOCKETT

HONG KONG: In the end, Donald Trump both blinked and doubled down on tariffs. As the US president announced a 90-day pause on “reciprocal” levies for most major trading partners on Wednesday, he also raised those on China from 104% to 125%. The upshot? The world’s two largest economies remain locked in a retaliatory standoff that torches \$600 billion in bilateral trade and could yet spiral out of control.

Prior to the latest hikes, Goldman Sachs analysts had forecast that 104% tariffs would lop 2.4 percentage points off China’s GDP growth, implying Beijing would achieve barely half its headline goal for economic expansion this year. Higher US tariffs, the bank argued, would do diminishing damage, with the maximum hit topping out at 2.9 percentage points.

Trump’s delay to tariffs on other countries provides a reprieve to the People’s Republic as well because it allows Chinese intermediate goods and trans-shipments to continue flowing to the US via third countries like Vietnam.

Meanwhile, Hong Kong has imposed no levies on American goods, leaving a sizeable loophole through which imports can continue flowing to the mainland at pre-Trump prices.

It creates some breathing room but there are signs that further escalation could see the two countries weaponise their interconnected financial systems.

When asked by Fox News about possibly delisting of Chinese companies from Wall Street, Treasury secretary Scott Bessent said that “Everything is on the table”. On the China side, market access remains vital to America’s most valuable companies. Last year Greater China accounted for 17% of Apple’s worldwide sales and the People’s Republic for 21% of Tesla’s revenue.

Meanwhile fears that China might dump some of its \$760 billion holdings of US Treasuries exacerbated bond market anxiety this week.

Yet for all the bluster and fear, a white paper released by China’s State Council Information Office on the same day as Trump’s U-turn emphasised the benefits of bilateral trade. It concluded with a call to address both sides’ concerns “through equal-footed dialogue and consultation”.

Talks could begin with something as small as sorting out the ownership of social media platform TikTok or rolling back the latest round of tariff hikes.

As a first step, someone needs to extend an olive branch. Trump’s team says he is waiting for a call from China’s President Xi Jinping. While direct outreach from Chinese leaders is quite rare and Beijing didn’t start this fight, it has an opportunity to defuse a dangerous situation. — Reuters

AI redefines the education ecosystem

ARTIFICIAL Intelligence (AI) was not born yesterday; it all started in the 1950s with the work of Turing. Turing evaluated a machine’s ability to exhibit intelligent behaviour similar to or indistinguishable from human intelligence.

Research attempts to describe human intelligence as mechanic manipulations of symbols sowed the seeds of modern AI. The work done years ago opened up new avenues today in the 21st information era to comprehend the nature of intelligence and the capabilities of computational systems.

AI was created to perform tasks like identifying patterns, analysing vast amounts of data, making decisions, solving problems, comprehending languages and learning from experience. Artificial intelligence bracket (AI) has numerous real-world applications across various industries. It has transformed agriculture, healthcare, manufacturing, content creation, marketing and education.

Education is crucial to shaping and fostering individual growth and community progress and to arriving at innovative solutions to address pressing global challenges, mitigate risks of global warming, supply chain disruptions, cybersecurity threats and the digital divide; and work towards inclusive and sustainable global development.

Education, the cornerstone for a sustainable and equitable present and future, is at the cusp of transformation with the fusion and integration of artificial intelligence.

It has the potential to enhance learning experiences, expand the accessibility to remote locations, streamline administrative processes, revolutionise assessments and grading practices; and prepare learners for the future of work.

The education sector can integrate artificial intelligence for amplified learner growth with judicious, robust ethical frameworks and security architecture.

In society, we can observe a widespread concern towards artificial intelligence that will



With AI potential, educational institutions can create personalised learning environments. Image for illustration only.



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.

replace humans, but rather than replace it, it will redefine education.

With AI potential, educational institutions can create personalised learning environments with micro pathways, emotional intelligence integration and real-time feedback loop systems that enable learners to learn by providing targeted instructional strategies, receive instant feedback and improve simultaneously and consistently.

Singapore’s Ministry of Education has integrated AI tools like KooBits (a math learning platform) into classrooms to deliver personalised learning experiences. These tools analyse individual student performance and recommend tailored exercises to improve understanding and retention.

In the US, Georgia State University uses AI to identify at-risk students early and provide personalised interventions, improving retention rates significantly.

Integrating and leveraging AI for research has proved beneficial to researchers and scientists.

It generates hypotheses, creates accessible, collaborative research opportunities and significantly enhances scientists’ research predicaments and outcomes with predictive modeling. Universities in the USA and Australia use AI to predict the behaviour of complex systems in sciences, enabling them to design more efficient experiments.

AI is automating repetitive administrative tasks and offering human-centric automation. The University of California, Berkeley, uses AI-powered chatbots to provide personalised support to students

and help them navigate campus resources and services.

Chatbots and virtual assistants offer 24/7 support for students. UK schools use platforms like Century Tech, which employs AI to automate administrative tasks such as lesson planning and grading.

With AI now, educationalists can create content, seek virtual mentorships for learners and hone their skills through interactive simulations. In Australia, the University of Melbourne and Stanford use AI to develop interactive simulations for medical students, enhancing their surgical skills through virtual practice and improving learning experiences. AI tools can quickly generate high-quality content, freeing professors’ time to engage in interactive teaching.

In China, AI-powered platforms like Squirrel AI are replacing traditional teaching methods with adaptive learning systems.

Finland has adopted AI-driven formative assessments that adapt to students’ progress, moving away from standardised testing. Inclusion and accessibility are now a reality in emerging economies, with AI-powered tools identifying learners needing financial support and overcoming geographical barriers.

In Kenya, organisations like Eneza Education use AI-powered mobile platforms to deliver educational content to students in remote areas.

AI has supported international and native language-speaking students in navigating through universities and classroom learning through language access platforms.

However, it is pivotal to balance innovation with responsibility; robust and comprehensive governance frameworks must be implemented to detect and mitigate biases and transparency to ensure that all stakeholders of the education ecosystem are aware of their data usage and that their privacy is always protected. The world has to move forward with AI to embrace the new definition of an AI-human-centric approach and glean a future-ready educational ecosystem for the future of work.

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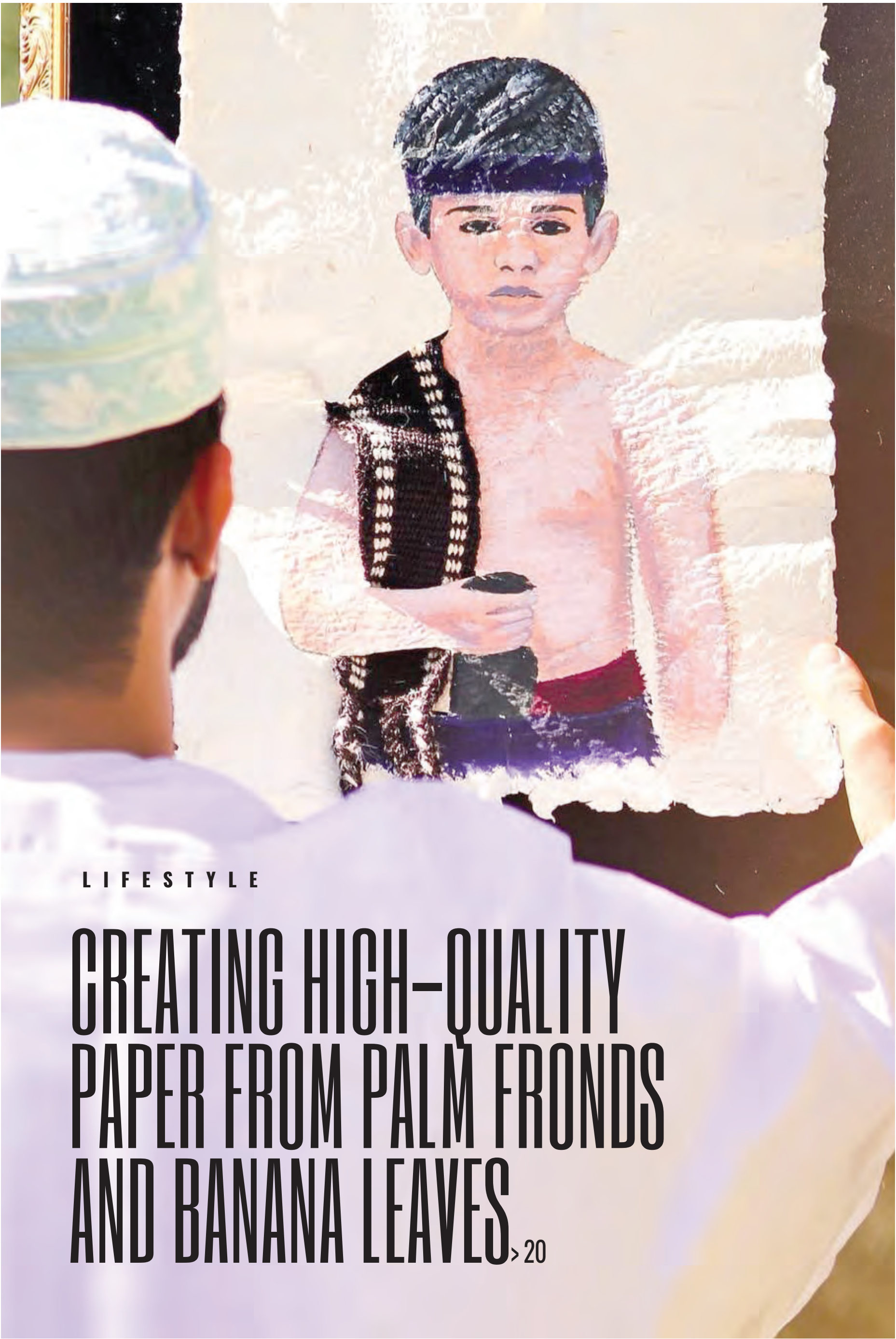
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SHOWS & EVENTS

Cartier jewellery worn by royalty and celebrities to go on display in London



AN EXHIBITION celebrating jewellery made by the prestigious French luxury goods company Cartier since the start of the 20th century, including watches and tiaras, opened at London's V&A Museum on Saturday.

Established by Louis-François Cartier in Paris in 1847, the family-run business went on to become a household name popular with royalty and Hollywood stars alike.

"It never goes out of fashion... we see it being worn by English aristocracy 100 years ago and Hollywood royalty practically today," Helen Molesworth, a senior jewellery curator at the V&A and exhibition curator, said at a private launch of "Cartier" on Wednesday.

She said the connection between Cartier and the British royal family dates back to 1902, when King Edward VII issued his first royal warrant, a certificate for providing goods and services to the royal family.

Making up some of the 350 jewels and objects on display is a flower brooch with a rare pink Williamson diamond that the late Queen Elizabeth II commissioned in 1953 and later wore at King Charles's wedding to Diana. A rose clip brooch made in 1938 and worn by Princess Margaret at her sister's coronation is also on display.

Meanwhile, items connected to celebrities include actress Grace Kelly's diamond engagement ring seen in the 1956 film "High Society" and a ruby necklace given to Elizabeth Taylor by her third husband, Mike Todd.

There is also a sapphire, yellow and rose gold wristwatch from 1962 owned by former U.S. first lady Jackie Kennedy and later owned by reality star and businesswoman Kim Kardashian, as well as a tiara from 1902 that was made for the Countess of Wessex and later worn in 2016 by singer Rihanna.

"As a jewellery historian, I see how they've used lots of wonderful elements to come up with brilliant new ideas," Molesworth said. "They've always pushed boundaries and at every new point in history they have a nod to their heritage today, yet they have come up with new jewels that really speak to the modern woman."

Around the turn of the 20th century, it was Cartier's grandsons who pushed the global prominence of the brand, opening branches outside France in cities such as New York and St. Petersburg.—Reuters

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



ART

People talk in front of the artwork titled "Self-Portrait with Cacti" during a press preview ahead of Ghanaian artist Amoako Bofo's first UK solo exhibition "I Do Not Come to You by Chance", at The Gagosian Gallery at London. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

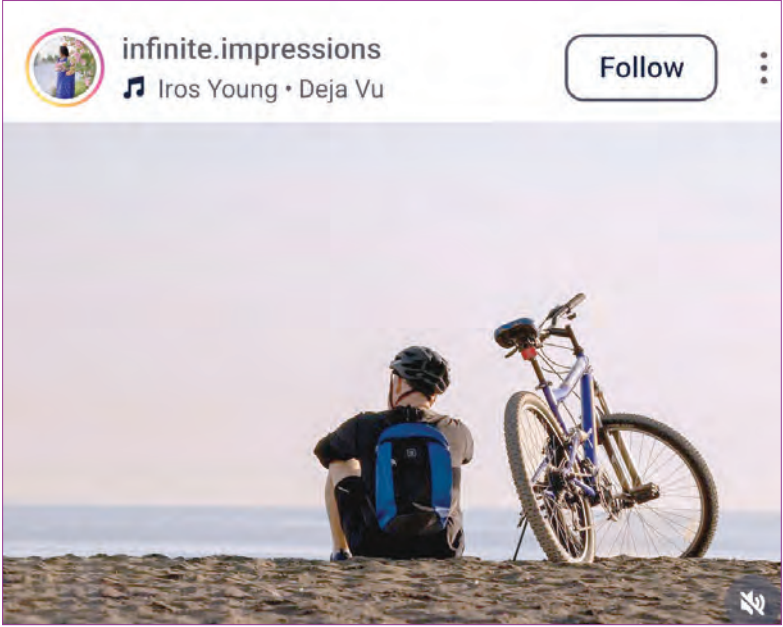
A full-scale model made with Lego bricks is seen during the inauguration of the Lego factory in Binh Duong Province. — AFP



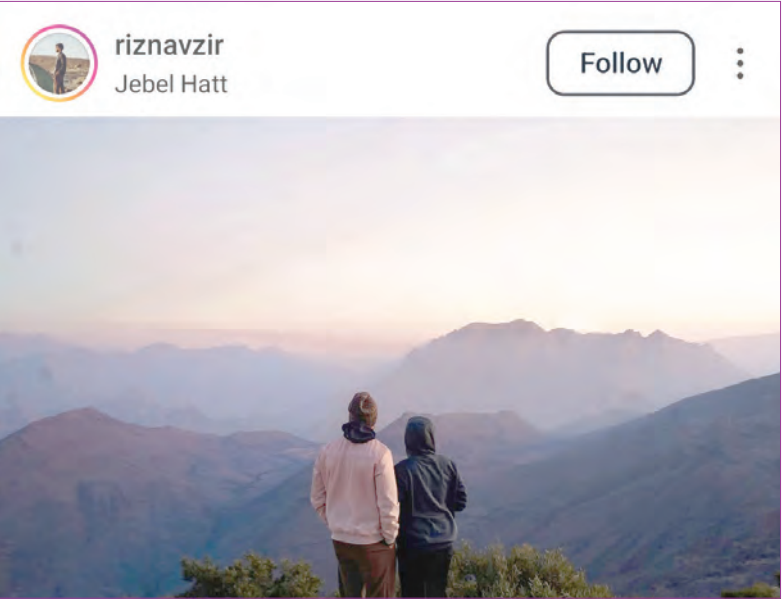
EVENTS

Visitors look up at a visual presentation highlighting space travel, at the USA pavilion during a media preview day for the 2025 Osaka Expo in the city of Osaka. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Taking a Break



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Night at the museum:
UK’s National Gallery
offering guest sleepover



A LUCKY VISITOR will soon become the first ever to sleep overnight at Britain’s National Gallery, after the 200-year-old museum launched a competition last week to mark the reopening of a wing housing celebrated European paintings. When the Sainsbury Wing reopens after a two-year refurbishment on May 10, the overnight guest — to be picked at random from a list of newsletter subscribers — will wake up to breakfast in bed and the chance to explore the gallery before the crowds arrive. The renovated wing will see some of earliest paintings in the collection rehoused — a chapel-like room for Piero della Francesca’s 15th-century “Baptism of Christ” and a new frame for Jacopo di Cione’s 14th-century “San Pier Maggiore Altarpiece” — while Paolo Uccello’s “Battle Of San Romano” will be back after a three-year restoration process. Western European paintings from the 13th to 20th centuries will be “completely redisplayed”,

the museum said, with dedicated rooms for works by artists including Monet, Titian, Rembrandt and Gainsborough. The guest will spend the night in a bed near the paintings and take a private late-night tour with a gallery curator, before being allowed to roam about the following morning. The gallery said the winner would be able to “see over 1,000 works of art, which trace the development of painting in the Western European tradition... from iconic masterpieces to paintings which have never previously been seen in the National Gallery”. “The carefully curated rehang will enable them to not only see their favourites returned to the walls, but also those paintings in the context of history,” it said, calling the prize a chance to “experience the wonder of art”. The Sainsbury Wing opens to the public on May 10, and the gallery’s competition is open until 1700 GMT on April 28. — AFP



Scarlett Johansson
to star at Cannes as
festival unveils line-up

SCARLETT JOHANSSON is set to star on-screen and behind the camera at this year’s Cannes Film Festival, organisers said on Thursday as they unveiled the line-up of films that will compete for honours on the French Riviera. Johansson will appear in Wes Anderson’s new movie “The Phoenician Scheme” alongside Benicio Del Toro and Tom Hanks, one of the films competing for the coveted Palme d’Or for best film. She will also present her directorial debut “Eleanor the Great”, about an elderly woman coping with the death of her best friend, in the secondary “Un Certain Regard” competition. Organisers stressed they were taking seriously the hard-hitting conclusions from a French parliamentary inquiry into the entertainment industry which concluded that sexual and psychological abuse, particularly of women, was “endemic”. President Iris Knobloch said the festival was “attentive” and was approaching MPs’ recommendations to improve the safeguarding of performers “with seriousness and determination”. “(Women) are no longer asking for their place, they are taking it,” Knobloch said. “We are honoured to amplify their voices, to shine a light on incredible talent that broadens our view of the world,” she added. Nevertheless, this year’s main competition was still overwhelmingly male-dominated, with only six films from women directors among the roughly 20 announced by festival director Thierry Fremaux. A little-known French female director Amelie Bonnin was given the honour of opening the festival on May 13 with her debut feature “Leave One Day”. “It’s the first time that a debut film will open the Cannes Festival,” Fremaux said. — HEAVY-HITTERS — The main competition this year includes some heavy-hitting



festival circuit favourites including Anderson, Iranian director Jafar Panahi, the Dardenne brothers from Belgium, and veteran American independent filmmaker Richard Linklater. Panahi, who has been repeatedly detained and banned from film-making, will present his latest production, “A Simple Accident”. He “asked us not say anything about his movie”, Fremaux explained, alluding to the pressures on him. Other directors in-competition include American horror director Ari Aster, who has cast Joaquin Phoenix in his “Eddington”, as well as a trio of leading French contenders, Cedric Klapisch, 2021 Palme d’Or winner

Julia Ducournau, and Hafsia Herzi. French screen legend Juliette Binoche will chair the jury, while Robert De Niro will also be on the Riviera to receive an honorary Palme d’Or. Tom Cruise is set to appear for the world premiere of the latest and last instalment in the “Mission: Impossible” series entitled “Mission: Impossible -- The Final Reckoning”. It releases worldwide from the middle of May. In the documentary section, the eye-catching entries include a film about U2 frontman Bono, “Bono: Stories of Surrender”, and another by Haitian director Raoul Peck about British writer George Orwell, entitled “Orwell”. - #METOO REPORT - The build-up to Thursday’s news conference was dominated by discussion of a French parliamentary inquiry into the entertainment industry. MPs concluded that “moral and carnal violence in the cultural sector is systemic, endemic, and persistent”, according to the inquiry’s chairwoman, Sandrine Rousseau, after six months of testimony from actors, agents and directors. “The Cannes Film Festival must be the place where this shift in mindset happens; the place where we say loud and clear... amid the glitter and the red carpets... that finally, we all want things to change: every one of us, at every level of the industry,” she said on Wednesday. The opening day of Cannes on May 13 is also set to coincide with the verdict in the first sexual assault trial of French film legend Gerard Depardieu, which gripped the country last month. Depardieu, a tarnished hero of French cinema, is the highest-profile figure to face criminal charges in France’s response to the #MeToo movement, which encouraged women to speak out against abuse. He is accused of having assaulted two women on the set of a film in 2021. He denies the allegations. — AFP

FEATURES

BY ARWA AL HASHIMI

AT THE PALM Centre in the Wilayat of Rustaq, entrepreneur Hiba Al-Hattali has launched a remarkable initiative to transform agricultural waste—including palm fronds and banana leaves—into high-quality natural paper suitable for calligraphers, artists, and educators.

Driven by a passion for sustainability and environmental preservation, Hiba's project has evolved into a pioneering model that blends creativity with authentic Omani craftsmanship. Her inspiration stemmed from her experience at the centre, where she attended a specialised workshop on making paper from palm fronds. After two years of intensive training and experimentation, she successfully expanded her techniques to include banana leaves, ultimately producing paper with a natural texture and an appealing earthy tone, which has become highly sought after in artistic and educational circles.

Hiba emphasises that her paper not only provides a sustainable alternative to tree-based options, but also stands out for its exceptional quality. Her growing enthusiasm for the craft led her to focus solely on this field. Through her participation in various exhibitions, she realised that the market demands more than just traditional palm products; there is an increasing interest in raw, locally made paper. This revelation encouraged her to specialise further.

In addition to production, Hiba obtained a certified trainer licence in paper-making and began passing on her skills to women and girls in Omani women's associations and schools, aiming to raise awareness about recycling and the value of natural resources.

She notes that while the paper-making processes for both palm fronds and banana leaves are similar, each material possesses distinct characteristics. The process begins by cutting the fronds into small pieces and boiling them for six hours. The mixture is then blended or pounded by hand before being placed into moulds and left to dry for 24 hours. In comparison, banana leaves require only one hour of boiling but yield a smaller quantity of paper.

During the cooking stage, a softening chemical is used, though the fibres are thoroughly washed afterward to remove any residue. Natural materials such as egg whites, starch, and alum are employed to preserve the paper's quality and extend its lifespan after the polishing process.

Hiba categorises her paper into two main types: polished paper (ideal for calligraphy) featuring a smooth surface suitable for writing, and unpolished paper preferred by artists for drawing, laser burning, embroidery, and crafting various paper-based products.

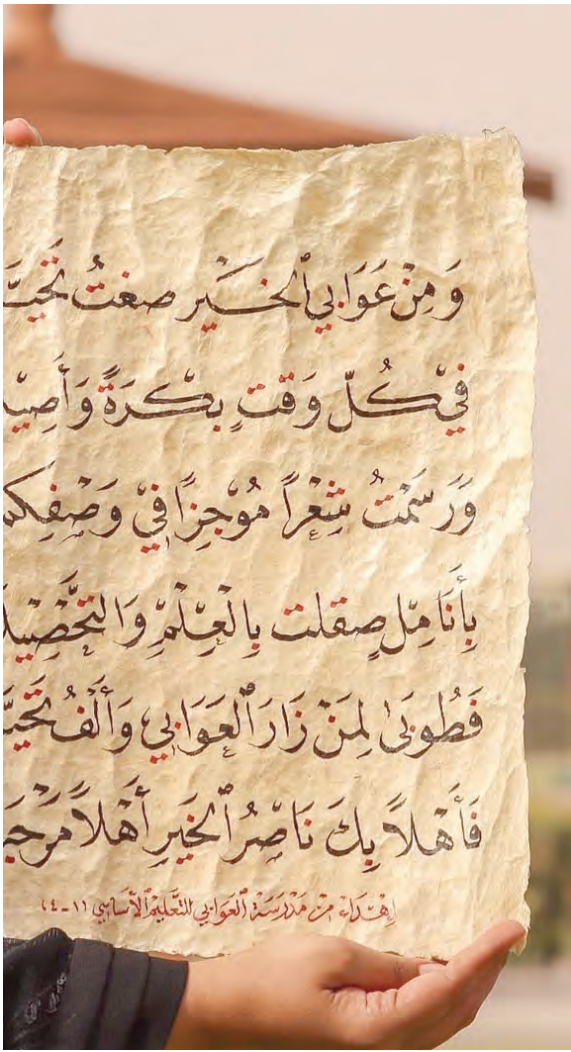
Regarding pricing, a polished A3-sized sheet is sold for approximately 7 Omani Rials. Smaller, unpolished sizes are also available, but demand is highest for the larger format. She observes that banana leaf paper currently surpasses palm frond paper in quality; however, she continues to refine her techniques to elevate palm-based paper to meet the expectations of artists.

Despite her achievements, Hiba faces significant challenges—primarily the limited space in her family home, which lacks a suitable workshop. This constraint complicates the cooking and drying processes, especially given the strong odours emitted during fibre softening. Additionally, her reliance on manual tools restricts production capacity, compelling her to explore technological solutions.

During a visit to the National Records and Archives Authority, she had the opportunity to test a specialised paper-making machine, which significantly improved the quality of her product. However, acquiring such



Creating high-quality paper from palm fronds and banana leaves



machinery comes at a steep cost, ranging between 5,000 and 10,000 Omani Rials, prompting her to seek financial support to realise her dream of establishing a fully equipped natural paper factory in Oman. Hiba asserts that the factory would not only enhance quality and productivity but also create job opportunities for Omani women. She plans to broaden her product line to include book and manuscript restoration, as well as the production of book covers, magazines, and Qur'ans—ultimately positioning Omani paper as a competitive and eco-conscious alternative in the market. Hiba relies on exhibitions as her primary

marketing platform, connecting directly with calligraphers and artists who champion her products. She also leverages social media to reach a broader audience and participates free of charge in exhibitions supported by the Small and Medium Enterprises Authority, covering the costs for other events herself. Hiba Al-Hattali's story is not merely one of personal success; it serves as a powerful example of how creativity can arise from palm trunks and banana leaves, transforming waste into premium paper that embodies the spirit of tradition and a vision for a more sustainable future in Oman.