

OMAN

دولة عمان

DAILY

Observer

SUNRISE 05:25 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 04:02 AM

DHUHR 12:08 PM

ASR 03:31 PM

MAGHRIB 06:46 PM

ISHA 08:04 PM

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INBRIEF

HM GREETINGS TO PARAGUAY PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Santiago Peña of the Republic of Paraguay, on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments to President Pena. His Majesty also wished the people of Paraguay further progress and growth and the bilateral relations further development in all spheres.



DEALS SIGNED FOR SULTAN SAID BIN TAIMOUR ROAD

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology signed three agreements to implement the third, fourth and fifth sections of Sultan Said bin Taimour Road (Adam-Haima-Thamrait), spanning a total length of 400 km at a cost exceeding RO 258 million.

The agreements were signed on behalf of the ministry by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, who stated that the project's completion will enhance road connectivity across Oman, particularly between the north and south. He added that the project will boost economic and tourism activity.

DETAILS ON P2

TRUMP SECURES \$600 BILLION SAUDI INVESTMENT PLEDGE



US President Donald Trump and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman pose for a group photo during the Saudi-US Investment Forum, in Al Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on Tuesday. — Reuters

US President Donald Trump secured a \$600 billion commitment from Saudi Arabia on Tuesday to invest in the United States after the oil power accorded him a gala welcome at the start of a tour of Gulf states.

Trump punched the air as he emerged from Air Force One to be greeted by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, who later signed an agreement with the president in Al Riyadh on energy, defence, mining and other areas.

The agreement covers deals with more than a dozen US defence companies in areas including air and missile defence, air force and space advancement, maritime security and communications, the fact sheet said.

"Today we hope for investment opportunities worth \$600 billion, including deals worth \$300 billion that were signed during this forum," the Saudi Crown Prince said. SEE ALSO P6

Gulf-US Summit: Sayyid Asaad to lead delegation

MUSCAT: On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, will leave on Wednesday heading to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to lead the Sultanate of Oman's delegation at the Gulf-US Summit between the GCC countries and the United States. The summit is scheduled to be held in the Saudi



HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said

capital, Al Riyadh on Wednesday.

HH Sayyid Asaad will be accompanied by an official delegation comprising Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs, Sayyid Najib bin Hilal bin Saud al Busaidy, the Sultanate of Oman's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, its Permanent Representative to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and its

Permanent Representative to the Digital Cooperation Organisation in Riyadh, the Secretary-General at the Office of HH Sayyid Asaad and the Adviser at the Office of HH Sayyid Asaad.

The strategic partnership between the Gulf states and the United States rests on robust relations and mutual interests. This partnership has fostered enhanced cooperation across diverse political, economic, trade and investment sectors. — ONA



Palestinian children wait to receive food cooked by a charity kitchen amid shortages of food supplies in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip. — Reuters

FIFTY-SEVEN children have died from the effects of malnutrition during the ongoing blockade of the Gaza Strip, Rik Peeperkorn, representative of the World Health Organisation (WHO), said on Tuesday, citing the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

Peeperkorn, who represents the WHO in the Palestinian Territories, said in a video call that the UN organisation has not yet verified these figures. However, he noted that the WHO has observed an increase in malnourished children.

In connection with this, he reported many young patients with pneumonia and gastrointestinal diseases. "You normally don't die from starvation, you die from diseases associated with it," he said.

From the WHO's headquarters in Geneva, it was stated that in recent weeks, more than

57 children may have already died due to the food crisis. Since the beginning of March, the Israeli military has not allowed aid deliveries into the Gaza Strip.

The UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) warned at the beginning of the week of an escalating famine in the coastal strip, based on a recent analysis indicating that the entire population of the Gaza Strip - around 2.1 million people - is affected by acute food insecurity. Of these, 244,000 people are already suffering from famine, the FAO said.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the military will enter Gaza "with full force" in the coming days, despite ongoing ceasefire efforts and the release of a US-Israeli captive from the war-ravaged territory.

"In the very coming days, we are going in with full force to complete the operation," Netanyahu was quoted as saying in a statement from his office on Tuesday. "There will be no situation where we stop the war. A temporary ceasefire might happen, but we are going all the way."

The prime minister's comments followed the return on Monday of 21-year-old soldier Edan Alexander.

"The return of Edan Alexander is the result of serious communications with the US administration and the efforts of mediators, not a consequence of Israeli aggression or the illusion of military pressure," the Palestinian group said in a statement. Israel resumed major operations across Gaza on March 18 amid a deadlock over how to proceed with a January 19 ceasefire. — Agencies

Contracts signed for copper concentrate project

MUSCAT: Mazoon Mining, a subsidiary of Minerals Development Oman (MDO), has successfully secured RO 104 million in strategic financing from leading local and regional banks.

In parallel, the company signed a number of construction and service contracts with local contractors to commence the development of Oman's largest integrated copper concentrate project.

The agreements signing took place during the "Rawabet"

Forum, organised by the Oman Investment Authority (OIA), underscoring strong institutional confidence in the project's strategic importance and its pivotal role in advancing the Sultanate of Oman's mining sector.

Located in the Wilayat of Yanqul, Al Dhahirah Governorate, the project spans 20 square kilometres and aims to produce approximately 115,000 tonnes of copper concentrate annually, with a purity of 21.5 per cent, based on

confirmed reserves estimated at 22.9 million tonnes of copper ore.

The project's financing was arranged through strategic partnerships with several of the region's foremost financial institutions including Sohar Islamic, National Bank of Oman, Qatar National Bank, Bank Nizwa, ahlibank, and ahli islamic. The offer attracted substantial interest and was oversubscribed by more than two times, reflecting strong market confidence in the

project's long-term potential and financial resilience.

To support project execution, Mazoon Mining signed a number of key construction and service contracts, including transport and logistics services with ASYAD Group, Oman's national logistics arm; power line and substation construction with Oman National Engineering and Investment Company (ONEIC); and bulk earthworks with STRABAG Oman.

SEE ALSO P13

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



ROYAL OFFICE
MINISTER RECEIVES
EU AMBASSADOR

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received Christophe Farnaud, Non-resident Ambassador of the European Union (EU) to the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, both sides discussed several topics of mutual interest.

The ambassador expressed his appreciation for the Sultanate of Oman's firm stance in finding solutions through dialogue and peace, stressing the importance of strengthening areas of joint cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the European Union. — ONA

OMAN PARTICIPATES
IN GCC MUNICIPAL
OFFICIALS MEETING



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman took part in the 41st preparatory meeting of senior municipal officials from the GCC, held on Tuesday in the State of Kuwait.

The Omani delegation was headed by Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South.

The meeting addressed several topics related to GCC municipal action, including follow-ups on previous decisions and the approval of several guiding manuals on urban environment and strategic urban planning, among other topics.

Additionally, discussions covered the proposed establishment of a GCC Urban Research Center, urging member states to participate in the 6th edition of the GCC Municipal Award.

The meeting also underscored the importance of activating a mechanism for exchanging municipal experts and specialists among GCC countries.

— ONA

OMAN AND
JAPAN INK
MOC TO
ENHANCE
ENVIRONMENT
COOPERATION

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority and Japan Ministry of Environment on Tuesday signed a memorandum of cooperation (MoC) on environmental matters.

The MoC seeks to enhance cooperation towards the realisation of sustainable development and the implementation of environmental multilateral agreements, like the Paris Agreement. The MoC also aims to establish a framework for cooperation between the two sides based on equality, reciprocity and mutual benefits.

The MoC was signed by Dr



Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, and Matsuzawa Yutaka, Vice-Minister for Global Environmental Affairs in Japan. The signing ceremony

was attended by Kiyoshi Serizawa, Ambassador of Japan to the Sultanate of Oman.

The MoC provides for cooperation between the two countries in the mitigation of the effects of climate change, adaptation to related impacts, the management of waste and the conservation of biodiversity as nature-based solutions.

The two sides will conduct training courses, expert visits, research, interactive discussions and the exchange of information in areas of cooperation and joint projects.

— ONA

RO 258m pacts signed
for road dualisation

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, MAY 13

THE Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) signed three agreements related to the dualisation of the Sultan Said bin Taimour Road (Adam-Thamrait), which is already under implementation in various stages.

Agreements signed on Tuesday are for the third, fourth and fifth parts of the dual carriageway of Sultan Said bin Taimour Road (Adam-Haima-Thamrait), with a total length of 400 kilometres at a total cost of RO 258 million.

The agreements were signed on behalf of the ministry by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), who stated that the project's completion will enhance road connectivity across Oman, particularly between the north and south. He added that the project will boost economic and tourism activity.

"The project implementation period is 36 months, as the contractors have begun preparations that include housing for workers and delivering equipment. The road will contribute to raising the efficiency of logistical transport between the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman and between the border crossings in the north and the south, as well as to the concession areas," he said.

The first agreement was signed with an Omani-Saudi consortium comprising Al Sarooj Construction Company (Oman) and Rawaf Contracting Company (Saudi Arabia). The project involves constructing a 132.5-km dual carriageway with two lanes in each direction, to be completed within 36 months.

The second agreement was signed with an Omani-Saudi consortium comprising Galfar Engineering & Contracting (Oman) and Al Omair Trading & Contracting (Saudi Arabia). The 135-km dual carriageway project will take 36 months to complete.

The third agreement was signed with an Omani-Saudi consortium comprising Gulf



Agreements signed on Tuesday are for the third, fourth and fifth parts of the dual carriageway of Sultan Said bin Taimour Road.



Oman Company (Oman) and Koom Al Fahd Trading, Industry & Contracting (Saudi Arabia). The 132.5-km dual carriageway will also be completed in 36 months.

The three sections complement previously dualised stretches from Adam to Haima (317 km). Once completed, the road will form Oman's longest dual carriageway, linking



Muscat to Dhofar. The project will enhance road safety, reduce accidents, improve traffic flow and stimulate economic, social and tourism activity along the route. It will also boost logistics connectivity across Oman's governorates, extending to Dhofar in the south, while creating opportunities for new economic and urban development.

Book on evolution of cinema in Oman unveiled

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

A book that documents the evolution of cinema in Oman in comparison to the global cinema scene was unveiled by Mohammed al Kindi, a renowned film-maker, actor and member of the Board of Oman Film Society (OFS) on Sunday.

The 279-page book is the first of its kind to chronicle the journey of the film industry in the country over the past five decades.

It also delves into the highs and lows that cinema experienced during the five decades since the 1970s, with a special focus on the transformative years under the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. It also provides a detailed account of how various film-makers, directors,



Mohammed al Kindi

writers, actors and other technicians shaped a distinct art form called cinema despite various challenges, including limited resources.

Speaking to the Observer, Mohammed al Kindi expressed his expectation for the book to serve as a reference guide for future generations and emphasised the book's significance. "This book is an ode to the pioneers who ignited the cinematic flame in Oman. Their stories are not just about making films, but about building a movement, often against all odds. The book doesn't only highlight film-makers, but also pays tribute to journalists, theatre personalities and business leaders who played vital roles in supporting the growth of the medium," Al Kindi said.

The book shines a light on great

film personalities who strived for an authentic cinema culture in the country, including key figures of the Omani film industry such as cameramen Taghlib al Barwani and Mohammed al Zubair, OFS founding members Haitham al Tai and Dr Khalid al Zadjali, veteran journalist Shaikh Hamood al Siyabi, and the late actor-director Salim Bahwan.

The book includes dedicated pages for various film festivals that have taken place in the country, such as the Muscat International Film Festival (MIFF) and Oman Film Festival, emphasising their roles in nurturing local talent and fostering international collaborations to develop better film-makers.

The book also has a section dedicated to the history of OFS, from its early days as a meeting place for

film enthusiasts to its current iconic headquarters located in Al Seeb.

Al Kindi mentioned that the idea for the book was purely coincidental and first came to him while preparing a lecture for a book festival in France in 2019. "While researching for my speech, I discovered fascinating stories of film-makers across Oman.

That's when I knew this had to become a book," he said.

Over the next five years, Al Kindi travelled and met with different people from across the country, spoke to movie buffs, and collected stories and archives for the project. He also mentioned that he plans to release a second volume covering the period starting from 2020 onwards.

The book was recently showcased at the WAVES Summit in Mumbai.

SHORT TAKES

SYMPOSIUM ON AI IN JUDICIAL WORK TODAY

MUSCAT: The International Symposium on “Anticipating Artificial Intelligence in Judicial Work” will kick off today at the St. Regis Al Mouj Muscat under the auspices of Shaikh Ghosn bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of the State Audit Institution (SAI) and Deputy of the Supreme Judicial Council.

The event will be attended by ministers, dignitaries, representatives from government entities and the private sector, as well as researchers, academics and professionals interested in law and artificial intelligence.



DR SALEM BIN ZUWAID AL HASHMI

Dr Salem bin Zuwaid al Hashmi, Assistant Secretary-General for Planning and Digital Transformation, stated that the Supreme Judicial Council aims to create a platform for professional dialogue between legal researchers and AI specialists.

The goal is to emphasise the importance of anticipating AI applications in the judiciary amidst rapid digital transformation and modern legal challenges. This includes enhancing efficiency in justice, addressing legal and ethical issues, and promoting international cooperation, innovation and sustainable development.

Dr Al Hashmi highlighted that the symposium aligns with the Council’s strategic vision to adopt global best practices in the judiciary, particularly regarding the use of technology and AI in Oman.

Oman’s HR association, London Business School explore ties



MUSCAT: The Omani Human Resources Management Association and the London Business School discussed in Muscat on Tuesday a range of executive programmes focused on human resources management.

Dr Ghaleb bin Saif al Hosni, Chairman of the Omani Human Resources Management Association, stated that this meeting highlights global best practices and their adaptation to align with local realities. He noted that London Business School will provide educational programmes combining global excellence with a deep connection to HR opportunities and challenges.

On his turn, Prof Florin Vasvari, Dean of Executive Education for the Middle East at London Business School, said, “Collaborating with the Omani Human Resources Management Association is a key step in strengthening our longstanding relationship with Oman. — ONA

Opportunities matter as much as skills, says educator

KABEER YOUSUF @kabiyousef

Possessing the right skills is essential, so is creating opportunities for young people to explore and secure meaningful career paths, opines Dr Ali bin Saud al Bimani, who, drawing from his vast experience as both an educator and vice-chancellor at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and NU. He voiced a growing concern — the increasing challenge of youth unemployment in Oman.

The debate over job market success is far from straightforward. Some argue that a strong academic foundation is the key to securing employment, while others emphasise the importance of specialised skill sets tailored to 21st-century industries. Another



DR ALI BIN SAUD AL BIMANI

the sheer number of applications received for job vacancies.

“For a vacancy of 20, there are often over 1,000 qualified applicants. When only 20 are selected, does it mean the remaining 980 lack skills? Or is this simply a reflection of the limited job opportunities available?” Dr Al Bimani posed a thought-provoking question, highlighting the intricate web of factors that influence employment outcomes — qualifications, experience, industry

perspective champions vocational training as a viable and necessary alternative. This divide is further reflected in

demands, and, above all, the realities of a highly competitive job market.

Each year, the country produces approximately 50,000 high school graduates and around 25,000 university graduates — an impressive testament to the government’s strong commitment to education. However, despite this investment, the economy is not expanding at a pace that can absorb such a large influx of skilled individuals. He says, as a result, thousands of graduates find themselves struggling to secure positions in both the public and private sectors, leading to rising concerns over unemployment and underemployment.

Dr Al Bimani cautions against the tendency to assign blame, emphasising that the focus should

The campaign aims to empower consumers to make informed and safe purchasing decisions and combat commercial fraud and scams in e-commerce

BALQEES AL ORAIMI MUSCAT, MAY 13

CONSUMER

Protection Authority (CPA), which in the past launched an innovative initiative called the ‘Price Observatory’, a digital platform that empowers citizens and residents to make informed shopping decisions and strengthens price transparency across the market, has called for people to make good use of it.

The platform evolved significantly in 2023, with the rollout of an upgraded version that now covers more than 750,000 products across 21 commercial centres in Muscat Governorate.

The CPA has announced plans to expand the system nationwide. The observatory now includes data on both essential goods and non-essentials, offering a holistic snapshot of market pricing.

Beyond development and deployment, the CPA actively promotes the use of the Price Observatory through its official social media accounts, regularly reminding the public of the platform’s benefits. With the hashtag #ShopWisely, the authority encourages consumers to be proactive in managing their budgets and to use the tool to detect irregularities in pricing.

With the service, the message is clear. An informed consumer is not only protected, but becomes a vital part of broader market oversight. Nasser al Balushi, a government employee and father of three, shared: “I used to struggle with price differences between stores. But with the Price Observatory, I now plan ahead and choose the centre with the best prices. I save nearly RO 20 a month — it’s made a real difference for my family budget.”

AFRAH AL BALUSHI MUSCAT, MAY 13

With the global economy moving towards a digital economy, the ‘Safe Shopping Campaign’ will be launched today, Wednesday, organised by the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA), that aims to raise community awareness of the principles of safe online shopping, enhance knowledge of the rights and responsibilities of consumers and promote the legal awareness of providers in accordance with the governing laws and regulations.

The campaign is being held under the slogan ‘For Safe Shopping’ and was developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry

and Investment Promotion and several relevant authorities.

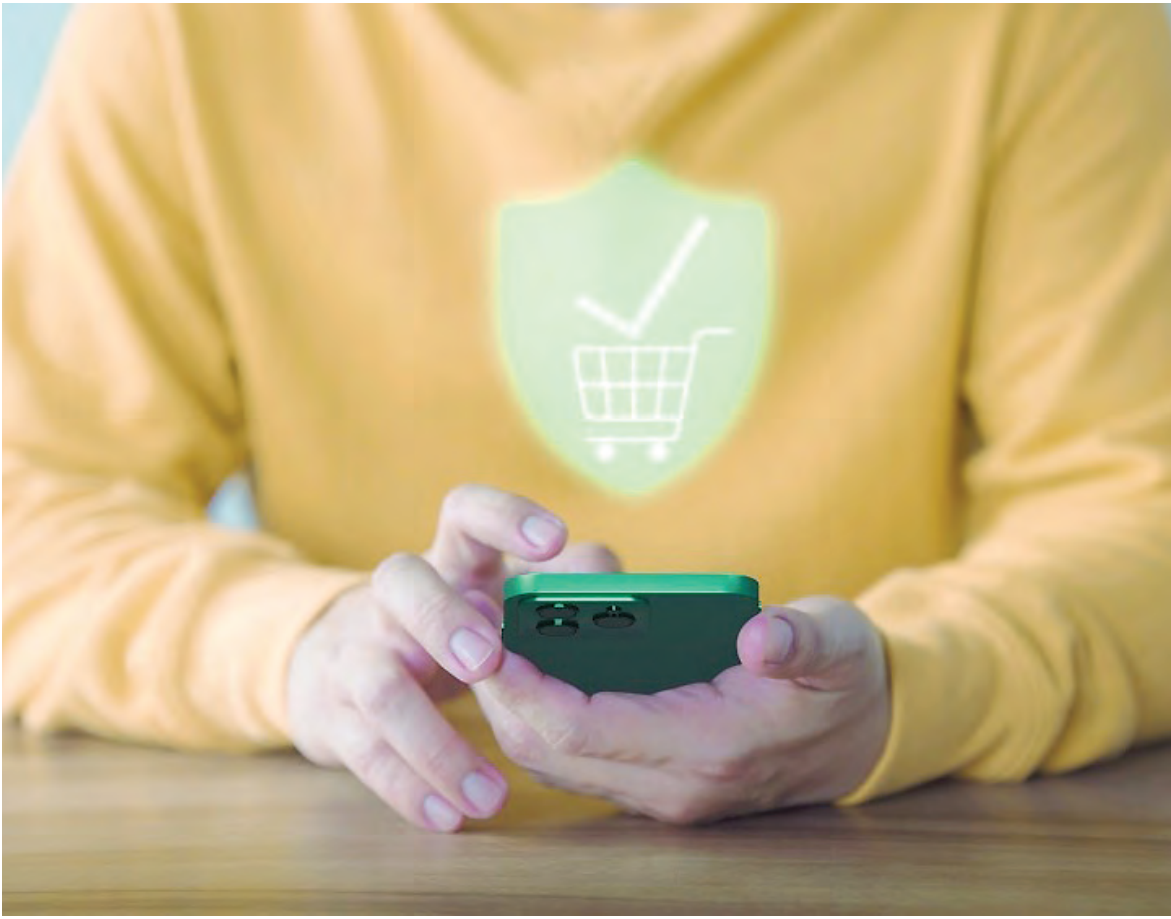
It aims to empower consumers to make informed and safe purchasing decisions and combat commercial fraud and scams in e-commerce.

According to CPA, the target audience includes service providers, online merchants, those working and influential in the consumer sector, relevant government institutions, legal professionals and specialists in electronic fraud.

The campaign addresses the concepts of the digital economy and e-commerce, consumer rights and responsibilities, suppliers’ duties and legal obligations, steps for safe online shopping, commercial fraud and e-fraud in the digital consumer environment, and the CPA’s role and

responsibilities in protecting online consumers.

CPA clarified that the campaign will be implemented through the preparation of various awareness-raising clips and publications, podcast episodes, the organisation of television and radio interviews, and the delivery of live and virtual awareness lectures and workshops. It will also provide lectures and knowledge meetings for consumers in various government, private and educational institutions, promote social media coverage and publish awareness publications on shopping mall screens. The campaign will also include organising a knowledge forum on consumer rights and supplier responsibilities in the context of online shopping.



Sameera al Rashdi, a school teacher, said: “I check the platform almost daily, especially when there are promotions. It helps me compare prices and even inform my friends when I notice major price gaps. I truly feel like I’m part of a larger system that protects consumers.” The platform’s impact extends beyond individual consumers. By fostering transparency and competition, it incentivises retailers to keep prices fair and consistent. It also discourages unethical pricing practices and promotes an overall healthier retail ecosystem.

The Price Observatory embodies

Oman’s forward-looking approach to digital governance and reflects the CPA’s commitment to citizen welfare. More than a service, it is a symbol of how digital tools can support public interest and economic balance.

By using the Price Observatory, consumers can not only protect their purchasing power, but also contribute to a more transparent and accountable marketplace. As the platform continues to evolve, its success depends on public engagement — because protecting consumer rights is a shared responsibility.

SPOTLIGHT

SUMMER PROGRAMMES NURTURE SKILLS, ENGAGE MINDS

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MAY 13

AS SCHOOL CHILDREN are gearing up for long summer holidays, various institutions across the Sultanate of Oman are set to launch a wide array of programmes. These initiatives, often hosted by educational institutions, youth centres and cultural organisations, provide a structured and enriching environment for participants to acquire new skills, discover their talents, and engage in meaningful activities.

Summer programmes have evolved into an integral part of Oman's educational vision, aligned with the broader goals of Oman Vision 2040, which places human capital development at its core.

The Ministry of Education, in a statement, said, "Our objective is to make summer programmes a natural extension of the academic year — but with a flexible and engaging approach. This year's focus is on creative thinking, robotics, arts, and life skills such as time management and teamwork. The ministry, in collaboration with both public and private sector partners, is overseeing several summer programmes across schools and youth centres, ensuring well-trained staff and safe learning environments."

From language courses and technology boot camps to visual arts workshops and sports sessions, summer activities cater to a broad spectrum of interests and age groups. In several wilayats, community-led initiatives supported by volunteers are helping make these programmes more accessible, especially in rural areas.

Ziyana al Balushi, supervisor of a summer centre in Al Seeb, stated: "We've noticed a growing interest among parents in recent years, particularly in programmes that focus on modern skills like coding, public speaking, and design. Our aim is to strike a balance between fun and



For our family, summer programmes are essential. They provide a safe environment and help our children explore their interests. We look for activities that combine knowledge with practical application — such as science workshops and robotics.

MOHAMMED AL HADHRAMI
Father of two middle school students

learning while encouraging children to explore their potential." She noted an increase in girls' participation, especially in creative workshops such as digital design, calligraphy, and photography. A significant driver behind the success and popularity of summer programmes in Oman is the rising awareness among parents of their value in shaping their children's futures.

Mohammed al Hadhrami, father of two middle school students, explained: "For our family, summer programmes are essential. They provide a safe environment and help our children explore their interests. We look for activities that combine knowledge with practical application — such as science workshops and robotics." He added: "Last year, my son became noticeably more confident after completing a public speaking course. This year, we've enrolled him in a robotics programme."

In addition to public initiatives, private training centres are also witnessing strong enrolment figures during the summer season. These centres offer a range of specialised courses in programming, languages, creative arts, and personal development.

Said al Busafi, director of a private training centre in Muscat, said: "We focus on high-quality, competitively priced programmes. This summer, we introduced a course on artificial intelligence for children, designed to make the concept accessible and engaging. It's been very well received." He highlighted that some programmes are based on internationally recognised curricula, which adds extra value for participants and prepares them for future academic

and professional pursuits.

In rural areas and smaller towns, local volunteer teams and community organisations are stepping up to offer summer activities that are both educational and culturally grounded. Saif al Mashani, a member of a youth team in Salalah, said: "We believe that every child deserves the chance to learn and grow, regardless of where they live.

That's why we organise free summer programmes in villages, including tutoring, arts and crafts workshops and cultural competitions."

He noted that the success of these programmes relies heavily on volunteer teachers and university students, as well as support from local authorities and the community.

Educators and youth specialists emphasise the importance of expanding and institutionalising summer programmes by enhancing public-private partnerships and providing more support to grassroots initiatives.

There are also calls for regular assessment of programme outcomes through feedback and performance tracking, to ensure that educational and developmental goals are being met.

Summer programmes in Oman are proving to be more than just a way to pass the time. They are a strategic investment in the next generation, offering children and youth the opportunity to explore, grow and thrive in a safe and stimulating environment. With growing parental interest and a diverse range of offerings, the future of summer education in Oman looks promising.

The objective of the Ministry of Education is to make summer programmes a natural extension of the academic year — but with a flexible and engaging approach. This year's focus is on creative thinking, robotics, arts and life skills such as time management and teamwork.



SHORT TAKE



The three-day event aims to nurture young artistic talents. — ONA

‘ARTS CHALLENGE INITIATIVE’ LAUNCHED

MUSCAT: The first edition of the ‘Arts Challenge Initiative’ for students in Muscat Governorate schools kicked off on Tuesday at Mazoon College in the Wilayat of Al Seeb. Organised by the Directorate-General of Education in Muscat Governorate, the three-day event aims to nurture young artistic talents.

Safia al Ghafri, School Activities Supervisor at the Directorate, stated that 240 male and female students from various schools across Muscat are participating. The participants have been divided into two colleges: Mazoon College for students from grades 4 to 8 and the Scientific College of Design for students from grades 9 to 12.

The initiative will conclude on Thursday at the latter venue. — ONA



SAF CHIEF OF STAFF RECEIVES UAE MILITARY OFFICIAL



MUSCAT: Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa the Head of the Authority for Military Operations and Strategic Planning of the United Arab Emirates. During the meeting, both sides exchanged views and discussed several military matters of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by Brigadier Hamid bin Abdullah al Balushi, Assistant Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces for Operations and Planning, and several senior officers of the COSAF. — ONA



Recall

TOYOTA
RAIZE

RECALL DATE: 14/05/2025

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production*	#Number of Affected Commodities
Toyota Raize	2021-2024	187

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

Recall consequences

The subject vehicles are equipped with a certain engine ECU. Due to improper programming of the engine ECU, under certain driving conditions, such as frequent braking operation in high altitude areas, there is a possibility that the negative pressure in the brake booster could not be maintained as designed. If this occurs, the brake pedal force could increase, resulting in longer stopping distance.

Recall action

To reprogram the Engine ECU



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



وزارة الداخلية
SAUDI MINISTRY OF INTERIOR

Contact details: Toll free - 80073000
Working days: Sunday - Thursday
Working time: 09:00 - 17:00 hrs





تويوتا
TOYOTA

التاريخ : ١٤٤٥ هـ / ٥ / ٢٠٢٥

الرجوع : ٠٩ - ١٧ هـ / ٥ / ٢٠٢٥

Oman’s Labour Law fully supports working women

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 13

OMAN’S new Labour Law has undergone significant reforms aimed at improving the rights and protections for workers, including women who get several provisions specifically designed to enhance the working conditions for them.

The new Labour Law has significantly improved the conditions for women, providing them with leave for maternity, pregnancy, breastfeeding, and more. This represents an achievement for the Sultanate of Oman, enabling women to fulfil their roles in society.

The Sultanate of Oman has been making progress in the field of women's empowerment for many years, recognising the active role of women in achieving Oman Vision 2040. This vision includes clear strategic directions for supporting women and families, achieved through the development of various policies that enhance women's participation.

The Labour Law affirms women's equality and their enjoyment of all rights without discrimination in the same job as men.

The Labour Law affirms women's equality and their enjoyment of all rights without discrimination in the same job as men.

The Labour Law affirms women's equality and their enjoyment of all rights without discrimination

With the introduction of the new Labour Law, working women are granted several privileges, including one hour per day to care for their child, 98 days of maternity leave and the option to take unpaid leave for one year to take care of children. During

this period, the female worker is responsible for all contributions to the Social Protection Fund, including her share, the employer's share and the government's share. Employers are also mandated to provide a designated rest area in establishments with more than 25 female workers.

Dawood bin Sulaiman al Hinai, Director of the Legal Affairs Department at the Ministry of Labour, said in an interview that the Labour Law addresses working women in both the public and private sectors. The law aims to unify benefits between the two sectors, including maternity leave. If leave is not specified in the employment contract, the Labour Law applies.

Recent statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) for 2023 show that the economic participation rate in the labour force for Omani women aged 15 and above in 2022 reached 32.1 per cent, compared to 27.7 per cent the previous year. 82 per cent of economically active Omani women aged 15 and above in 2022 were employed. The statistics also indicate that the distribution of working Omani women by sector in 2022 was 41 per cent in the government sector and 59 per cent in the private and civil sectors.



PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to notify that Jindal Shadeed Iron & Steel LLC, a company registered under Commercial Registration **No. 1777769**, has officially changed it is name to Jindal Steel Sohar LLC, effective **6 April 2025**, pursuant to the approval granted by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Sultanate of Oman (Reference No.: W.T.S/411/Certificate/2025).

All business operations and transactions will henceforth be conducted under the new name. There is no change in the company's Commercial Registration number or ownership structure.

For any queries or clarifications, please contact us at:
connect@jindalshadeed.com



P.O. Box 404, P.C. 322, Falaj Al Qabail, Sultanate of Oman



+968 26850403, 26850459



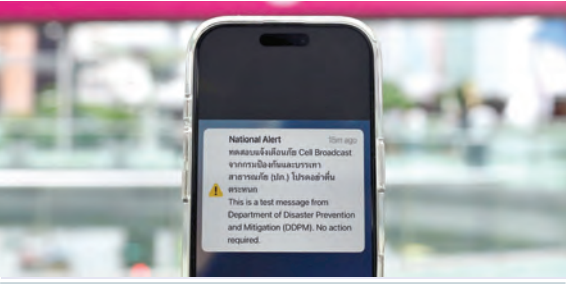
C.R. No.: 1777769



www.jindalshadeed.com

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A message from Thailand’s Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation is pictured on a smartphone during a test run for an emergency cell broadcast system in Bangkok on Tuesday. — AFP

THAILAND ENDS SEARCH AT QUAKE-HIT SITE

BANGKOK: Thailand has declared an end to search operation at the site of a partially constructed Bangkok skyscraper that collapsed during a March 28 earthquake and killed scores of construction workers, the city’s governor said on Tuesday. The 30-storey State Audit Office tower was the only building in the Thai capital that collapsed from the tremors caused by a 7.7 magnitude quake that struck central Myanmar about 1,020 km away.

An investigation is underway into why the building came down so easily while those in the rest of the city stood firm. Earthquakes and tremors of that scale are extremely rare in Thailand and the quake sparked panic in the city, which ground to a halt for most of the day.

Authorities have recovered 89 bodies from the rubble and seven are still missing from one of the deadliest accidents of its kind in Thailand, which killed 96 people.

In Myanmar, more than 3,700 people died. The six-week operation in Bangkok involved hundreds of personnel, including international rescue teams in an around-the-clock effort. — AFP

22 DIE AS STRIKES HIT MYANMAR SCHOOL

DEPEYIN: A Myanmar junta air strike hit a school killing 22 people, including 20 children, witnesses said, despite a purported humanitarian ceasefire called to help the nation recover from a devastating earthquake.

The strike hit a school in the village of Oe Htein Kwin — around 100 km northwest of the epicentre of the March 28 quake — at about 10:00 am (0330 GMT), locals said. The green school building was a shattered husk on Monday afternoon, its metal roof crumpled with gaping holes blasted through its brickwork walls. Over a dozen abandoned book bags were piled before a pole flying the Myanmar flag outside, as parents chiselled small graves out of the the hard earth to bury the shrouded bodies of their children.

“For now 22 people in total — 20 children and two teachers — have been killed,” said a 34-year-old teacher at the school, asking to remain anonymous. — AFP

STAND-OFF LEAVES KOSOVO UNABLE AGAIN TO ELECT SPEAKER

PRISTINA: Lawmakers in Kosovo on Tuesday again failed to elect a new parliamentary speaker, after 14 previous unsuccessful attempts that have plunged Europe’s youngest state into unprecedented political deadlock.

Political life has been at a standstill since February 9 elections, in which Prime Minister Albin Kurti’s Self-Determination (VV) party win only 48 out of 120 seats — not enough to form a majority government.

Opposition parties have, since mid-April, refused to vote for VV’s candidate for the post of speaker, former justice minister Albulena Haxhiu. Her appointment had been expected to be a formality but it has now turned into an impasse, with repeated votes — and failures — on the issue.

Several political leaders are now hinting at the possibility of fresh elections.

According to parliamentary rules, the parliament cannot be

considered inaugurated without a speaker, and without its inauguration a new government cannot be formed.

Several opposition parties now accuse VV of deliberately blocking progress by refusing to propose an alternative candidate. “VV is keeping Kosovo in an institutional crisis at all costs,” said Memli Krasniqi, president of the right-wing Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), whose party came second with 20.95 per cent of the vote. — AFP

Trump signs economic agreement with Saudi

US President Donald Trump signed a strategic economic agreement with Saudi Arabia on Tuesday as the oil power rolled out the red carpet for him at the start of a tour of Gulf states aimed at drumming up trillions of dollars in investments.

Trump punched the air as he emerged from Air Force One to be greeted by Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman, who later signed an agreement with the president which Saudi state television said covered energy, defence, mining and other areas.

The White House said Saudi Arabia was set to invest \$600 billion in the United States, including the largest defence sales agreement between the allies, worth nearly \$142 billion.

“I really believe we like each other a lot,” Trump said during a meeting in Riyadh with the crown prince.

Trump, who is accompanied by a host of US business leaders including billionaire Elon Musk, will go on from Riyadh to Qatar on Wednesday and the United Arab Emirates on Thursday. He has not scheduled a stop in Israel, a decision that has raised questions about where the close ally stands in Washington’s priorities, and the focus of the trip is on investment rather than security matters in the Middle East.

“While energy remains a cornerstone of our relationship, the investments and business opportunities in the kingdom have expanded and multiplied many, many times over,” Saudi Investment Minister Khalid al Falih said as he



US President Donald Trump and Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed Bin Salman shake hands during a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signing ceremony at the Royal Court in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on Tuesday. — Reuters

The White House said Saudi Arabia was set to invest \$600 billion in the United States, including the largest defence sales agreement between the allies, worth nearly \$142 billion.

opened the forum.

“As a result... when Saudis and Americans join forces very good things happen, more often than not great things happen when those joint ventures happen,” he said before Trump’s arrival. In a meeting at the Royal Court, Trump called the Saudi crown prince a friend and said they have a good relationship, according to a pool report from the Wall Street Journal.

Trump recalled travelling to the kingdom in 2017 and said Saudi investment would help create jobs in the US.

He said jokingly that a \$600-billion investment pledge by Saudi Arabia could be \$1 trillion, repeating a figure he has cited before as he seeks investment from an important strategic partner.

Riyadh hosted a Saudi-US

investment forum as Trump visited, with attendees including Larry Fink, the CEO of asset management firm BlackRock, Stephen A Schwartzman, CEO of asset manager Blackstone, and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent.

Musk chatted briefly with both Trump and the crown prince during a palace reception for the US president. And joining Trump for a lunch with crown prince were top US businessmen including Musk, the Tesla and SpaceX chief, and OpenAI CEO Sam Altman. The crown prince has focused on diversifying the kingdom’s economy in a major reform programme dubbed Vision 2030 that includes “Giga-projects” such as NEOM, a futuristic city the size of Belgium. Oil generated 62 per cent of Saudi government revenue last year. — AFP

King Charles to host Macron

PARIS: King Charles III is to host French President Emmanuel Macron on a state visit to the UK from July 8 to 10, the French presidency and British monarchy announced, in a new step towards strengthening relations after Brexit.

Macron will also hold talks with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer during the trip, which follows the state visit by Charles to France in September 2023. The state visit to the UK is the first by a French leader in more than 15 years.

Macron and his wife Brigitte will be hosted by the king and Queen Camilla at Windsor Castle outside London where they will stay, Buckingham Palace said.

This visit “will demonstrate the depth of the ties that unite our two countries and our two peoples”, the French president’s office said.

Charles’s state visit to France in 2023 was widely regarded as a success that



Britain’s King Charles III reacts as he attends a ceremony to present the new standards and colours to regiment members of the Life Guards and the Blues and Royals at Windsor Castle. — AFP

helped boost relations,

Charles delivered an address to the French parliament in French and attend a glittering state banquet thrown by Macron at the Palace of Versailles.

There were severe political tensions between Paris and London in the immediate aftermath of Brexit under the previous right-wing

Conservative British government.

And neither side was able to find a strategy to halt the perilous small boat crossings across the Channel between the countries. But there has been a new warmth in relations under the centre-left Labour government led by Starmer.

The British premier and Macron now lead European efforts to find peace for Ukraine.

The importance of the France-UK relationship was again in evidence at the weekend when Starmer and Macron, joined by new German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, travelled by train to Kyiv for talks with President Volodymyr Zelensky.

The last state visit to the UK by a French leader was in March 2008 when the late queen Elizabeth II, Charles’ mother, hosted former president Nicolas Sarkozy and his wife Carla Bruni-Sarkozy at Windsor Castle. — AFP



Recall

KIA Telluride

RECALL DATE: 14/05/2025

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production*	#Number of Affected Commodities
KIA Telluride (ON)	Jan 26, 2019 - Sep 15, 2020	84

Recall consequence

On some Telluride (ON) model produced within specific production date range, the headlamp assembly can independently become damaged due to heat generated from the halogen bulb. If this occurs, the high beam is no longer working properly. This condition does not affect the operation of the low beams. The loss of high beams can reduce visibility in certain areas with limited surrounding lighting, thereby increasing the risk of a crash. The estimated defect ratio is 1%. However, Kia is conducting this recall as preventive measure to avoid the risk.

Recall Action

Verify effected vehicles as per the VIN list, Replace or Repair headlamp Assembly as per KMC recommendation

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

كيا موتورز

Confirmed details: Toll free : 80072222

Working days: Sunday - Thursday

Working time: 8:30 - 17:30 hrs

www.kia.com.sa

Consumer Protection Authority

80079009 • 80077997

الرقم: 093-03 SOP

التاريخ : فبراير 2025

الاصدار: 04

SHORTTAKES



A view shows people working at the world's first commercial e-methanol plant, on the day of its inauguration, in Aabenraa, Denmark. — Reuters

EUROPE’S BIGGEST ‘GREEN’ METHANOL PLANT OPENS

RODEKRO: Europe’s largest “green” methanol plant opened in Denmark on Tuesday, boosting the continent’s emissions reduction efforts — with customers ranging from shipping giant Maersk to toymaker Lego and pharmaceutical firm Novo Nordisk.

Sitting next to northern Europe’s biggest solar panel field and a large transformer station in the Danish countryside, the site will produce e-methanol, a synthetic fuel made from renewable energy and carbon dioxide.

The site, called Kasso, is only the third e-methanol plant in operation in the world after locations in China and the United States, according to the French Bureau of E-fuels.

“Our strategy is to scale up. The next plant will be three times bigger,” said Jaime Casasus-Bribian, head of projects at Danish company European Energy, which co-owns the plant with Japanese firm Mitsui. The facility will produce up to 42,000 tonnes of e-methanol per year, the equivalent of 50 million litres. — AFP

SPAIN PROBES HUGE IBERIAN BLACKOUT

MADRID: Spain’s competition watchdog announced on Tuesday its own investigation into the April 28 blackout that paralysed the Iberian Peninsula, heightening scrutiny on the crisis whose causes remain unknown.

The CNMC has begun collecting “all the necessary information” on the outage, which led to hours of chaos across Spain and Portugal, its president Cani Fernandez told a hearing at the Spanish parliament. The independent regulator will also study the efforts to restore power to the grid for “specific mistakes” potentially made during that process, she added. Investigations have already been opened by Spain’s top criminal court, which is probing possible “sabotage” on critical infrastructure, and the ecological transition ministry.

The European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity is also coordinating a separate investigation.

The CNMC brings “independent technical knowledge” and acts “on a different level from other actors, though in a complementary manner”, Fernandez said. — AFP

ALBANIA’S RAMA WINS HISTORIC FOURTH TERM

TIRANA: Albania’s prime minister Edi Rama has secured an unprecedented fourth term in power after his Socialist Party sailed to victory in Sunday’s election, official results showed on Tuesday, although the opposition claim the vote was stolen.

With 96 per cent of ballots counted, the Socialist Party (PS) had 52 per cent of the votes, ahead of the second-placed Democratic Party (PD) on 34 per cent, figures from the election commission showed. As it

stands, PS wins 82 seats in the 140-seat parliament while PD gets 52.

If confirmed, the result would extend PS’s four-seat majority and give Rama a comfortable margin to form a government. It would also enable him to continue working to honour his pledge to bring Albania into the European Union by 2030, although many experts say that timeline is optimistic given the reforms required, especially in eradicating corruption.

Doubts clouded the results,

however. International observers questioned the fairness of the poll and Albania’s special prosecutor said it was investigating 39 cases related to the election, mostly for vote buying. It did not say which parties were under suspicion.

PD’s firebrand leader, former president and prime minister Sali Berisha, dismissed the results and called for a protest on May 16, the day leaders from across Europe are scheduled to gather in the capital Tirana for a summit. — Reuters

Zelensky will attend talks only if Putin does: aide

PRESIDENT

Volodymyr Zelensky will attend talks on Ukraine this week only if

Russia’s Vladimir Putin is also there, an aide to the Ukrainian leader said on Tuesday, challenging the Kremlin to show it is genuine about seeking peace. US President Donald Trump’s senior envoys, Steve Witkoff and Keith Kellogg, will travel to Istanbul for the talks on how to end Russia’s war in Ukraine, three sources familiar with the plans said. Trump has offered to attend himself if necessary but a senior US official said it was unclear whether anyone from the Russian government would show up. President Putin, who has questioned Zelensky’s legitimacy, has not said whether he will take part.

“President Zelensky will not meet with any other Russian representative in Istanbul except Putin,” Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak said.

Asked who would represent Russia at the talks, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said: “As soon as the president sees fit, we will announce it.”

Both Moscow and Kyiv have sought to show they are working towards peace after Trump prioritised ending the war, which has raged for over three years since Russia’s full-scale war on Ukraine in February 2022, but have yet to agree any clear path. Putin on Sunday proposed direct talks with Ukraine, after ignoring a Ukrainian proposal for an unconditional 30-day ceasefire. Trump publicly told Zelensky to accept.

The Ukrainian leader then said he would be waiting for Putin in Istanbul on Thursday, though the Kremlin chief had never made clear he intended to travel himself.

Reuters reported last year that Putin was open to discussing a ceasefire with Trump, but that Moscow ruled out making any major territorial concessions and demanded that Kyiv abandon ambitions to join Nato.

Ukraine has said it is ready for talks but a ceasefire is needed first, a position supported by its European allies.

Zelensky’s chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, said on Tuesday the Ukrainian president’s planned trip to Türkiye showed Kyiv was



Women walk in Maidan Nezalezhnosti or Independence Square, amid Russia’s attack on Ukraine, in Kyiv, on Tuesday. — Reuters

ready for talks, but repeated Ukraine’s stance that any negotiations must come after a ceasefire.

“Our position is very principled and very strong,” Yermak told a conference in Copenhagen.

A senior Russian official, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, was quoted by Russian news agencies as saying Moscow was ready for serious talks on Ukraine but doubted Kyiv’s capacity for negotiations.

The agencies quoted him as saying realities “on the ground” should be

recognised, including the incorporation of what Moscow calls “new territories” into Russia - a reference to territory in Ukraine that is occupied by Russian forces. US officials hope Russia will agree to a comprehensive 30-day land, air, sea and critical infrastructure ceasefire, a senior US official said.

Kyiv has already agreed to abide by such a deal and a 30-day ceasefire is also backed by European nations, with the threat of more sanctions hanging over Russia if it does not also agree to a ceasefire. — Reuters

I thought I was going to die, Kardashian tells in robbery trial

PARIS: American celebrity Kim Kardashian told a Paris court on Tuesday she feared she was going to be killed by masked men who robbed her at gunpoint of millions of dollars of jewellery during the French capital’s fashion week. Ten suspects have been on trial since late April over the armed robbery in 2016, which saw jewellery worth some \$10 million stolen from the reality TV star and influencer.

“Hi! I’m Kim Kardashian and I just want to thank everyone, especially the French authorities, for allowing me to testify today and tell my truth,” she told the packed court as she began giving evidence, wearing a black suit. The trial has attracted huge media attention, with close to 500 reporters accredited, and crowds flocking around the courthouse on Paris’s historic Ile de la Cite early on Tuesday with fans hoping for a glimpse of the celebrity.

“I came to Paris for Fashion Week

and Paris is always a place I love so much,” Kardashian said as she gave the court her account of the night of October 2-3, 2016, when she was robbed while staying at an exclusive, discreet hotel in central Paris. She was in her hotel room — “with my best friend downstairs, my sister and my friend and my mom, they were all out for the night” — when she heard “stomping” up the stairs and people “who I assumed were police officers because they were in uniform” entered her room.

“Then I heard one of the gentlemen say ‘ring’ a few times over, ‘ring’, ‘ring’ and he pointed his finger with an accent,” she said, adding she didn’t at first “understand it was for my jewellery”.

The man then found what he was looking for, a diamond ring given to Kardashian by her then-husband, rapper Kanye West, and valued at 3.5 million euros (\$3.9 million).



US celebrity Kim Kardashian (L) speaks with her mother Kris Jenner (R) as she arrives at the Assize Court for the trial in Paris on Tuesday. — AFP

The attackers then began to look for more valuables, threatened Kardashian with a gun and tied her up with a zip tie, she said, visibly emotional. “I was certain that he was going to shoot me so I said a prayer for my family,” she said, adding she prayed “that they will have an OK

life after seeing what they saw”.

She added: “I thought I was going to die.” She also feared that she would be abused but the man with the gun “closed my legs and put a tape on my leg”.

In the robbery, dubbed by the French press as the “heist of the

century”, the masked men walked away with millions of dollars’ worth of jewels. Those on trial are mainly men in their 60s and 70s with previous criminal records. They have underworld nicknames like “Old Omar” and “Blue Eyes” that resemble those of old-school French bandits of 1960s and 1970s films noirs. Sixty-eight-year-old Aomar Ait Khedache, known as “Old Omar”, has admitted to tying up Kardashian but denies being the mastermind behind the robbery. Another suspect in the dock, 71-year-old Yunice Abbas, later wrote a book about the heist. In it he describes how his bag became caught in the wheel of his escape vehicle, a bicycle, causing him to fall off and have to scramble to shove the loot back in the bag.

Investigators said a man called Gary Madar, the brother of Kardashian’s driver in Paris, tipped the suspects off that Kardashian was “in French territory”. — Reuters

OPINION

The smile that hides the pain



KHALID ALSAFI
AL HURAIBI

The writer is an
innovator and an
insights storyteller

THERE are certain topics writers tend to avoid, and one of the most universally avoided is suicide. Across cultures, it remains a deeply sensitive subject, surrounded with stigma and silence. That silence was shattered for me recently when I listened to an Arabic-language private radio interview with a courageous Omani parent who had lost their teenage child to suicide. Their words were a call to all of us to do one of the most difficult things in the world - not to judge, but to ask whether we are truly “there” for those around us who may be silently struggling with despair.

We are fortunate to live in caring, peaceful communities where spirituality still matters. But even the most devout societies are not immune to mental illness. Depression, in particular, is a global epidemic. While around 800,000 suicide cases are recorder annually, less than 100 are recorded in the Sultanate of Oman, according to Dr Hamad al Sinawi, Head of Behavioural Medicine Department at SQU Hospital.

Yet, we must emphasise that even one life lost, is a life too many. Many faith traditions, including Islam, treat life as the most sacred of gifts. Suicide is considered a sin, not only because it ends that gift, but because it is seen as giving up without exhausting every effort to live fully and fulfil one's purpose. This belief can lead some to view compassion for suicide victims as dangerous, as if tolerance might tempt those with “weaker faith” to stop trying. However, this thinking risks ignoring

the very real suffering that often comes from external factors: Bullying, neglect, abuse, inadequate and unprofessional mental health services and systemic failures that push individuals towards the edge.

It was in that same interview that I first heard the term “smiling depression” a chilling phrase describing people who appear outwardly cheerful and functional, even as they wrestle with overwhelming inner darkness. It is a form of depression that hides behind achievement, politeness and a smile. It is particularly dangerous because it escapes detection until it's too late.

Some of the world's most beloved comedians, including Robin Williams, made millions laugh while privately enduring immense psychological pain. In the end, even their light couldn't save them.

From a public policy standpoint, we often categorise responses to complex issues like suicide into four types:

- Preventative measures focus on raising awareness, reducing stigma, promoting mental health education, and ensuring safe, open environments for dialogue. Schools, workplaces, mosques and other houses of worship, and families must be enabled to notice signs and respond early.
- Curative measures require proper access to professional mental healthcare, psychologists, counsellors, helplines and psychiatric treatment. We need to normalise seeking help, just as we would for physical illness.
- Alleviative measures address the

Depression, in particular, is a global epidemic. While around 800,000 suicide cases are recorder annually, less than 100 are recorded in the Sultanate of Oman

root causes: Emotional neglect, toxic environments, financial stress, or abuse. Social services, stronger family systems and youth engagement programmes are essential in healing the societal wounds that breed despair.

- Punitive measures apply to those whose actions directly contribute to another's psychological decline, bullies, abusers, and neglectful guardians. Accountability must exist to deter cruelty and protect the vulnerable.

Even the prophets faced unimaginable lows. The story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) peace be upon him, reminds us of that. Envied, betrayed, sold, imprisoned and neglected, he overcame his trials with resilience and faith. Yet at the end of his life, he famously prayed, “My Lord, You have given me of sovereignty and taught me the interpretation of dreams. Creator of the heavens and earth, You are my protector in this world and in the Hereafter. Let me die a Muslim/submitter to the Lord and join the righteous” (Quran 12:101). His prayer shows that longing for peace, even through death, can coexist with strength, spirituality and purpose.

We must engage our network of homes, schools, playgrounds, houses of worship, workplaces and more significantly today - established and new media to be more present, more empathetic and more courageous in how we talk about mental health. The smiling faces around us may be carrying silent pain.

ELECTION RESULT
COULD TIP SCALES
FOR SARA DUTERTE

PAM CASTRO

As results were still being tallied in Monday's Philippine mid-term election, impeached Vice-President Sara Duterte released a statement just before midnight telling supporters the outcome was “not what we had hoped for”.

Analysts who spoke on Tuesday, however, suggested she may have emerged stronger than expected ahead of a Senate trial that will decide her political fate this summer.

Former president Rodrigo Duterte's daughter was impeached by the House of Representatives in February for “high crimes” including an alleged assassination plot against ally-turned-foe President Ferdinand Marcos, himself the son of a former president. The 12 senators elected on Monday will join 12 incumbents in serving as jurors at her impeachment trial, which could see her permanently barred from public office. As of Tuesday, with over 90 per cent of precincts reporting, five candidates aligned with the vice president's camp looked certain to secure seats.

“The chances of her being acquitted have just increased because of the elections,” said Aries Arugay, a visiting senior fellow at Singapore's ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute.

With a two-thirds majority required for a guilty verdict, Duterte needs nine votes to preserve any hope of a future presidential run. With three incumbent senators already considered firm allies, there was “a good chance that the vote will be for an acquittal rather than a conviction”, said Froilan C Calilung, an assistant political science professor at the University of Santo Tomas.

But the fact candidates were currently aligned with Duterte was no guarantee of how they would vote at her trial, said Jean Franco, assistant chair of the University of the Philippines' political science department.

Within little more than a month, two of the Marcos administration's top opponents had seemingly been removed from the Philippines' political chessboard.

After Sara Duterte's impeachment at a hearing overseen by House Speaker Martin Romualdez — Marcos's cousin — Rodrigo was arrested and transferred to The Hague to face charges tied to his deadly crackdown on drugs. — AFP

Reflections of an expat
living in Oman...

AS a British person who has lived in many places around the world, I can say with absolute sincerity that no country has ever welcomed me - or moved me - quite like the Sultanate of Oman. The experience of living here is not just a chapter in my life, it is a gift I never anticipated, one that continues to shape my perspective, my values and my sense of belonging.

Oman is often described by travellers as beautiful, peaceful and safe. While all these are true, what makes Oman truly exceptional lies beyond its breathtaking landscapes and modern achievements. It is the people - dignified, warm, generous - and the culture, rooted in humility, hospitality and grace, that set this country apart. From my earliest days here, I was struck by the effortless kindness shown by Omanis in every interaction, whether in cities or the most remote villages. Strangers greet you as a friend, and hosts treat you as family. There is a civility here that transcends mere politeness, it is part of the national character.

Omanis carry their traditions with quiet pride, and they share them not to impress, but to welcome. The famed Omani hospitality is no cliché - it is a living practice. Invitations into homes are sincere. Coffee and dates are offered not out of obligation, but as a gesture of connection.

You are never made to feel like a foreigner; you are made to feel like a guest, and often, a friend. It is this spirit that makes Oman, without question, the most civilised country I have ever visited. But for me Oman is not just a place to admire from the



I believe everyone should visit Oman at least once in their lives.



KARIM
EASTERBROOK

The writer is a
former Cambridge
School Principal
and an Interview
Skills Adviser

outside. It is my second home. I am honoured to be married to an Omani woman - an extraordinary person whose strength and warmth reflect the very best of her country.

Through her, I have come to know not just Oman's customs but its soul. Her family - now my family - has embraced me with a love and acceptance that is as generous as it is natural. They have shown me what it means to support one another, not out of duty, but out of deep familial devotion. Living within this extended family has been one of the greatest privileges of my life. It has taught me patience, compassion and the quiet strength of togetherness. Here, family is not just a unit, it is a way of life. It is in the shared meals, the community gatherings, the care shown to elders and the joyful inclusion of children in everything. There is wisdom here, passed from generation to generation and it exists

not in textbooks but in daily life.

As someone from a culture often defined by speed, independence and individualism, Oman has been a gentle and profound teacher. It has taught me to slow down, to listen and to value the richness of relationships. It has taught me that progress need not come at the expense of tradition, and that modernity can coexist with heritage when both are honoured.

I believe everyone should visit Oman at least once in their lives. Not just to see the mountains of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar or the sands of Rimal Al Sharqiya, or to explore ancient forts or vibrant souqs. Those are remarkable, of course. But the real treasure lies in the people. In their quiet dignity, their sense of honour, their humour and their generosity. A visit to Oman is not just a journey through a beautiful country - it is an encounter with one of the world's most gracious cultures.

Alarm over ‘inequities’ in global nursing



SAMUEL KUTTY

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

EVERY year on May 12, countries around the world come together to celebrate Nurses Day, recognising the profession’s significant impact on the economy, society, and culture. This day also promotes the acceptance, support and inclusion of nurses on a global scale.

Established formally in 1965, the observance was further solidified in 1974 when May 12 was designated as the fixed date to coincide with the birthday of Florence Nightingale, widely regarded as the pioneer of modern nursing. Over the years, this day has grown and evolved into a global event.

Not only did Florence Nightingale set standards for healthcare and nursing in medical camps and hospitals during the Crimean War, but she also established a nursing school in 1860 to provide training for aspiring nurses and healthcare workers.

This year, the day was observed under the theme “Our Nurses. Our Future: Caring for Nurses Strengthens Economies,” which highlights the importance of promoting the support to the patient’s family.

True to their calling, nurses stand by individuals during the most vulnerable moments of life. When a crisis occurs and the feelings strike and you can’t care for yourself, nurses are there to care for you. They dedicate themselves to those in greatest need, regardless of the risks involved.

Apart from their roles as health professionals, they also offer emotional support to the patient’s family. Frequently,

they assume the roles of a friend, sibling, neighbour or someone who is always available to address questions or concerns. They are usually the best cheerleader and support system patients have!

They listen to patients and assess their physical, emotional, cultural, mental and spiritual needs. In the current healthcare system, nurses are among the most trusted healthcare professionals and play a significant role in the treatment and medical care of the sick.

Nurses contribute immensely to our lives. As they assist in bringing new life into the world, we should celebrate them not only for their extensive skills and capabilities but also for the dedication and hard work they invest to make it all possible.

As the backbone of healthcare, nurses should be granted positions of greater influence - particularly in the areas of quality care, health policy planning and management, wellness promotion and efficiency improvement.

According to the State of the World’s Nursing 2025 report, published by the World Health Organization in partnership with the International Council of Nurses, the global nursing workforce has increased to 29.8 million in 2023, up from 27.9 million in 2018.

The report emphasises the critical importance of a healthy nursing workforce in delivering high-quality care, enhancing healthcare systems, and bolstering economic resilience on a global scale. The report suggests that the global nursing shortfall

Apart from their roles as health professionals, they also offer emotional support to the patient’s family. Frequently, they assume the roles of a friend, sibling, neighbour or someone who is always available to address questions or concerns

could approach 4.5 million practitioners by the year 2030. At the same time, the report reveals intricate disparities between and among countries, regions, and socio-economic contexts.

“Inequities in the global nursing workforce leave a significant portion of the world’s population without access to essential health services, which could jeopardise progress toward universal health coverage and health-related development goals,” the report states.

Mental health and workforce well-being continue to be significant concerns. Only 42 per cent of responding countries have established provisions for supporting nurses’ mental health, despite the increased workloads and trauma experienced during and since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. During this period of devastation, nurses constituted the majority of the medical workforce. They played a crucial role during the pandemic as frontline workers in patient care within hospitals and were actively engaged in evaluating and monitoring the community. They demonstrated remarkable courage, adaptability, and creativity in this battle!

Findings also suggest that one in seven nurses worldwide - and 23 per cent in high-income countries - are foreign-born, highlighting the reliance on international migration. In contrast, the proportion is significantly lower in upper middle-income countries at 8 per cent, lower middle-income countries at 1 per cent and in low-income countries at 3 per cent.

PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFULS IN POLAND TRAIN FOR WAR!

ALAN CHARLISH AND JUSTYNA PAWLAK

“Let’s shoot,” said Karol Nawrocki, before a heavy rock soundtrack kicked in and the camera switched to scenes of the presidential candidate backed by Poland’s main nationalist opposition party firing a variety of weapons.

The video shared on the historian and amateur boxer’s social media accounts was designed to contrast his tough-talking image with that of his more urbane opponent, Warsaw Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski from the liberal ruling Civic Coalition (KO), who had also taken part in voluntary military training.

The fact that both Nawrocki, who is backed by Law and Justice (PiS), and Trzaskowski felt compelled to show themselves preparing for a potential armed conflict underscored the importance of security for voters in a country that aims to more than double the size of its army to half a million to ward off what it sees as the threat from Russia. Trzaskowski is leading in opinion polls ahead of the presidential election first round on May 18, and is likely to face second-placed Nawrocki in a run-off vote on June 1.

Whether breaking a sweat in the boxing gym or getting his hands dirty helping a flood victim repair their house, Nawrocki has been at pains to cultivate the image of being both strong and down-to-earth.

Though he has faced a deluge of criticism from liberal media outlets, with his campaign being rocked by allegations that he acquired a second property from an elderly man in return for a promise of care which he did not provide, the strategy is working with some voters.

“He would be a better... leader of the army,” said Elzbieta Jozwiak, a 65-year-old retired teacher attending a Nawrocki rally in the eastern town of Garwolin. “Why? Because he is manly, strong, he fights off the attacks which are always targeting him.”

For others, Trzaskowski, who has previously served as a deputy foreign minister and member of the European parliament, would make a better leader in uncertain times due to his experience in international affairs. “The guy is intelligent... educated, he has international contacts,” said engineer Monika Kwasniewska as she walked through a food hall in central Warsaw.

Nawrocki met US President Donald Trump in the White House in early May, in a visit his supporters said showed that the candidate already had the ear of the leader of Poland’s most powerful military ally. “Such a gesture from the president of the United States says a lot,” said PiS lawmaker Michal Wojcik. “Karol Nawrocki from the perspective of strengthening Polish-American relations is the best candidate.” — Reuters

The world doesn’t need another climate fund

BRAZIL has announced plans to launch a \$125 billion fund for the protection of tropical forests.

It is a key element of the country’s plan to ensure the success of the next United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30), which Brazil will host. But, at a time when some of the world’s richest economies are slashing their foreign-aid budgets, and the United States is turning its back on climate action altogether, does the world really need another climate fund?

Over the past three decades, more than 60 multilateral funds have emerged to raise financing for climate action in developing countries. Most are small and obscure, leaving around 19 sizable entities – including the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Adaptation Fund (AF), and Climate Investment Funds (CIFs) – that publicly report on their activities.

In theory, each entity serves a worthy purpose, and a few have gained some traction. In particular, the GCF has emerged as the second-largest multilateral provider of grant-based climate finance to the most vulnerable countries (after the World Bank). But, overall, their contributions are underwhelming. In 2021-22, the 19 funds tracked by the UN’s Standing Committee on Finance delivered a mere \$3.7 billion – roughly \$195 million per fund. That is far less than the \$55.7 billion that multilateral development banks collectively provided for climate action, and nowhere near the trillions of dollars that developing economies need annually to close the climate-finance gap.

A key problem is that donors have not been stepping up to fund these entities. The US – the world’s biggest economy and largest historical greenhouse-gas emitter – committed to providing a measly \$17.5 million to the much-touted Fund for Responding to Loss and



At COP29 in Baku, the Adaptation Fund fell well short of its \$300 million funding target.

Damage (FRLD), agreed at COP28 in Dubai. At COP29 in Baku, the AF fell well short of its \$300 million funding target, leaving it struggling to bankroll even the projects that are already in its pipeline. Now, even these modest contributions are set to dry up. President Donald Trump’s administration has withdrawn the US from the Paris climate agreement, abandoned the FRLD and other funds, and dismantled the country’s foreign-aid apparatus. While not all wealthy economies are following in America’s footsteps, many – including Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, as well as the European Union – are also tightening their purse strings.

Together with the US, these donors accounted for 69 per cent of bilateral climate commitments to developing countries in 2021-22 and supplied 74 per cent of contributions to climate funds since 2003. In other words, raising climate finance – always a difficult task – is becoming a Herculean one, meaning that countries are going to have to figure out how to do more with less. The last thing the world

needs is for this limited capital to be funnelled into a fragmented, inefficient system composed of dozens of narrow climate funds.

Climate funds were created to address shortcomings of existing multilateral institutions like the World Bank. For example, they offer “direct access” funding to national and regional entities, thereby promoting country ownership and helping to build institutional capacity. Moreover, their smaller scale and larger numbers were supposed to foster healthy competition and give recipient countries more options.

But the fund landscape has become so crowded – with each entity possessing its own accreditation rules, approval processes, and compliance requirements – that recipients must navigate a bureaucratic maze to access any financing at all. All this red tape, which slows disbursements considerably, is especially burdensome for the most climate-vulnerable countries, such as small island developing states, whose institutional capacity is already stretched thin.

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GEORGIA HAMMERSLEY

The writer is a research associate at the Lowy Institute’s Indo-Pacific Development Centre

SPORTS

HOCKEYLEAGUE



Seeb achieved their first win with a convincing 4-0 victory over Al Nasr.

AHLI SIDAB, AMERAT CONTINUE WINNING RUN TO TOP TABLE

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 13

Ahli Sidab Club continued their positive run in the Oman Hockey League after securing a 4-2 win over Salalah Club at the Hockey Oman Stadium in Al Amerat on Monday.

The game started with excitement right from the opening minutes, as Ahli Sidab capitalised on their first real opportunity to take the lead in the fourth minute through Ammar al Shoaibi, who successfully converted a penalty corner. However, Ahli Sidab's celebration was short-lived as Salalah responded quickly in the same minute with an equaliser by Eisa Adel, who took advantage of a defensive error to level the score.

Ahli Sidab regained control and dominated midfield, with Haitham al Wahaibi restoring the lead with a powerful strike in the 16th minute, ending the first quarter with a 2-1 advantage for Ahli Sidab.

In the second quarter, Ahli Sidab maintained their dominance and extended their lead with a third goal by Talal Mohammed Salem from another well-executed penalty corner in the 23rd minute. Salalah made some timid attempts to get back into the game, but the quarter ended with Ahli Sidab leading 3-1.

The third quarter saw clear dominance from Ahli Sidab, who kept pressing and added a fourth goal in the 32nd minute through Mehna al Hassani, ending the quarter with a 4-1 lead.

In the final quarter, Salalah pushed to reduce the gap through counter-attacks, and Rashad Salem managed to score their second goal from a penalty corner in the 48th minute. Despite these efforts, Ahli Sidab's defence held firm until the final whistle.

AL AMERAT CRUSH AL NASR

Al Amerat secured a big 5-1 victory over Al Nasr in another match at the Hockey Oman Stadium.

Ahmed al Nofali opened the scoring for Al Amerat in the seventh minute from a penalty corner, followed by Adnan al Husaini adding the second goal in the 12th minute, ending the first quarter with a 2-0 lead.

In the second quarter, Suleiman al Nofali extended the lead with a third goal in the 16th minute. Al Amerat continued their dominance in the third quarter, with Osama Radhan scoring the fourth goal from a penalty corner, and Elyas al Nofali adding the fifth, closing the quarter at 5-0.

In the final quarter, Shahdi Salem scored Al Nasr's only goal from a penalty corner in the 56th minute, ending the match with a 5-1 victory for Al Amerat.

These results further solidify Ahli Sidab and Al Amerat share the top of the standings with nine points each, while Seeb and Salalah are tied in third place with 3 points each, and Al Nasr remain at the bottom with no points.



Al Amerat secured a big 5-1 victory over Al Nasr.

Oman edge Philippines to move into semis

OMAN LEADING MODEL IN HOSTING MAJOR BEACH HANDBALL EVENTS: IHF CHIEF

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 13

INTERNATIONAL HANDBALL FEDERATION (IHF) President Dr Hassan Moustafa was all praise for the hosts Sultanate of Oman for its excellent organisation of the underway AHF Asian Beach Handball Championship – Muscat 2025 which acts as qualifiers to the IHF World Championship.

“The Sultanate of Oman had improved and shaped up very well in their organising capabilities specially when it comes to the big events including the continental and global championships. Oman has once again demonstrated its exceptional capability in hosting continental and international tournaments with high efficiency and professionalism. Oman is no stranger to hosting global events. The Sultanate of Oman previously organised the IHF Beach Handball World Championship in 2012 successfully and it reaffirms these days its readiness and capability to host the world's largest handball events. The country offers an integrated infrastructure, qualified human resources, strong logistical and organisational capacities, and institutional support from the government and relevant stakeholders,” the IHF chief said.

“What truly distinguishes Oman is the presence of strong sports leadership, a passionate and loyal fanbase, and highly skilled players who bring both talent and spirit to the game. These factors strongly support the growth and future of handball in the country,” the Egyptian official said.

Speaking on the ongoing Asian Championship in Muscat, Dr Moustafa responded: “The Asian tournament has showcased a high technical level with exciting competition and the emergence of new talents across participating teams. The presence of an elite group of referees and coaches has positively contributed to the quality and credibility of the tournament,” he said.

Dr Moustafa affirmed that the IHF's eagerness to further enhance cooperation with the Oman Handball Association in the near future, praising Oman's strategic vision and global commitment to the development and promotion of handball.

“I extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to the Government of the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth,



Oman player in action against the Philippines.



DR HASSAN MOUSTAFA
International Handball Federation President

the Oman Handball Association, and all public and private entities that contributed to the success of this important Asian championship, which also serves as a qualifier for the IHF Beach Handball World Championship. Oman has truly set a benchmark in excellence.”

OMAN INTO SEMIS

Oman advanced to the semifinals of the AHF Asian Handball Beach Championship following their thrilling 2-1 over Philippines in penalty shoot-out after a 1-1 draw. Oman Muhannad al Zarafi was named as best player of the match. This is the second time in the tournament that Muhannad was named as best player as he had previously earned the honour in the match against Hong Kong.

Earlier in the group stage, Oman's goalkeeper Hudhaifa al Siyabi received the Best Player award in the match against the Maldives. Furthermore, Oman's Asaad al Hasani took the Best Player award in Oman's match against Saudi Arabia in the concluding group fixture. In earlier quarterfinal matches, Pakistan overcame Saudi Arabia with a 2-1 win while Jordan beat Hong Kong 2-0. In the last quarterfinal clash, Iran secured a 2-0 victory over the Maldives. In the women's competition, Philippines defeated Hong Kong 2-0, and Vietnam continued their dominant form with a 2-0 win over India. Vietnam maintained the top position in the standings, followed by the Philippines in second, India in third and Hong Kong in fourth.

Meanwhile, the IHF has announced an expansion of the 2026 Beach Handball World Championship as the number of participating teams were increased to 32 including 16 men's teams and 16 women's teams. From the Asian continent, the top two teams in each category from the Muscat 2025 championship will secure the qualification.

OBA hosts ‘Fiba Plus’ development workshop

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 13

The ‘Fiba Plus’ workshop, organised by the Oman Basketball Association (OBA) in collaboration with the International Basketball Federation (Fiba), concluded on Tuesday at the Movenpick Hotel in Muscat. The workshop ran from May 11 to 13 and saw broad participation from representatives of government, sports and educational institutions.

The workshop aimed to develop a comprehensive strategic plan to advance basketball in the Sultanate of Oman. It focused on defining technical and administrative priorities and strengthening relevant institutional partnerships. The workshop programme included several sessions dedicated to analysing and assessing the current state of



basketball, providing data and insights to lay the groundwork for a national development strategy. It also outlined key performance benchmarks and operational standards to be implemented within a defined timeline.

During the opening session, Abubakar al Jahwari, OBA Vice-Chairman and Director of the Fiba Plus Project, stated that the workshop is one of Fiba's key initiatives to support the development

of national federations. He highlighted that the programme provides the OBA with high-level expertise, knowledge, and practical guidance at every stage of the strategic planning process. This, he noted, paves the way for creating a constructive road map for the future of Oman basketball, describing the workshop as a pivotal step in the sport's development journey. He further emphasised that having experts from Fiba present provides the association with an opportunity to draft a realistic and inclusive strategic vision tailored to Oman's unique sporting, educational, and cultural environment. He expressed hope that the workshop outcomes would help establish a more robust professional structure to elevate the game.

Hiba al Naabi, Programme Coordinator at the OBA,

remarked in her speech that the Fiba Plus programme serves as a strategic platform to support national federations in building their administrative and technical capacities and in long-term planning. She affirmed the association's commitment to maximising the benefits of this programme by engaging all relevant stakeholders, including government and educational entities, thereby enhancing the likelihood of achieving sustainable basketball development goals in Oman.

The workshop is part of a broader series of activities under the Fiba Plus programme, which also includes surveys and one-on-one interviews with representatives from various sectors, ensuring the broadest possible engagement of stakeholders in shaping the future of basketball in Oman.

SIXPACERS



Kagiso Rabada

RABADA LEADS SOUTH AFRICAN PACE ATTACK FOR WORLD TEST FINAL

JOHANNESBURG: Kagiso Rabada will lead a South African pace bowling attack weakened by injury in the World Test Championship final against Australia at Lord’s in London from June 11 to 15.

Coach Shukri Conrad on Tuesday named a 15-man squad which includes six pace bowlers. But three of South Africa’s fastest bowlers missed selection. Anrich Nortje, Gerald Coetzee and Nandre Burger have all been hit by injuries before and during the championship cycle. Rabada will be backed up by tall left-arm fast bowler Marco Jansen as well as right-arm seamers in Dane Paterson, Lungi Ngidi and all-rounders Wiaan Mulder and Corbin Bosch. Ngidi missed the home series against Sri Lanka and Pakistan in December and January because of a groin injury but played in the Champions Trophy in Pakistan and UAE in February and March.

“I’m particularly pleased to welcome Lungi back in the side,” said Conrad. “He’s put in the work and offers us an experienced option with the ball.”

Paterson, 36, is playing for English county Middlesex, who are based at Lord’s. There are two spinners in the squad, left-armers Keshav Maharaj and Senuran Muthusamy. Maharaj suffered a recurrence of a groin injury in March, which ruled him out of the rest of the South African domestic season, but has been passed fit to play. South Africa’s batsmen have also had injury problems.

Captain Temba Bavuma missed the domestic four-day final in April because of a recurrence of an elbow injury, while David Bedingham suffered a fractured toe while batting for Durham in an English county championship match in April. Conrad said playing in the final would be a “special moment” for his players. “Over the past 18 months, we’ve worked hard to build a competitive red-ball unit, and this achievement reflects that progress. A key part of our success has been consistency in selection, and we’ve stuck with the core group of players who have been part of this WTC cycle. We’ve selected a balanced squad for the conditions we expect at Lord’s.”

Seven of the squad are currently involved with the Indian Premier League and three in English county. The players will assemble in England on May 31 ahead of a warm-up match against Zimbabwe in Arundel from June 3 to 6. — AFP SQUAD: Temba Bavuma (captain), David Bedingham, Corbin Bosch, Tony de Zorzi, Marco Jansen, Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram, Wiaan Mulder, Senuran Muthusamy, Lungi Ngidi, Dane Paterson, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tristan Stubbs, Kyle Verreynne (wkt)



Atalanta’s Ibrahim Sulemana scores their second goal past AS Roma’s Mile Svilar. — Reuters

Atalanta secure CL spot with win over AS Roma

A SECOND-HALF goal by substitute Ibrahim Sulemana earned Atalanta a 2-1 home win over AS Roma in Serie A on Monday, securing Champions League qualification for Gian Piero Gasperini’s side. Sulemana sealed the three points for Atalanta in the 76th minute, scoring with a low strike from just outside the area, after Roma midfielder Bryan Cristante cancelled out an early opener by Ademola Lookman.

Atalanta, who fell behind in the title race, sit third in the standings on 71 points and have a seven-point cushion over fourth-placed Juventus and Lazio in fifth with two games left to play.

Roma, who failed to capitalise on Lazio and Juventus dropping points in a 1-1 stalemate on Saturday, are sixth with 63 points. Atalanta snapped the visitors’ impressive unbeaten league run of 19 games, with Claudio Ranieri’s side previously having been defeated mid-December at Como.

Things started off brightly for Atalanta as Lookman stroked in past Roma goalkeeper Mile Svilar to put them in front after nine minutes.

Charles De Ketelaere dribbled past the Roma defence to set the Nigerian up with a precise low cross inside the box and the striker controlled the ball to score inside the right post.

It was Atalanta’s 100th goal this season across all competitions.

De Ketelaere had two good chances to double the advantage but Roma midfielder Cristante levelled for the visitors instead,



AS Roma’s Devyne Rensch in action with Atalanta’s Ademola Lookman. — Reuters

netting with a flicked header after the half-hour mark.

Things slowed down significantly after a lively first half until Roma were awarded a penalty after an hour of play, following a clash between Atalanta’s Mario Pasalic and Manu Kone.

The referee, however, overturned his decision after consulting VAR. Sulemana eventually restored the lead for

Atalanta in the 76th minute, scoring with a low strike from just outside the area — a goal that stood after a VAR check for a potential offside. Roma host AC Milan next weekend before visiting mid-table Torino in their bid to qualify for Europe’s elite club competition for the first time since the 2018-19 campaign.

Atalanta travel to Genoa on Sunday before welcoming lowly Parma in their final fixture. — Reuters

Ancelotti to leave Real Madrid for Brazil job at end of season

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil: Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti will leave the club at the end of the season to take charge of the Brazil national team, the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) announced on Monday.

The 65-year-old Italian will become Brazil’s first foreign coach since 1965, with Xabi Alonso set to be appointed as the new Real Madrid boss after confirming his exit from Bayer Leverkusen last week.

“The greatest national team in the history of football will now be led by the most successful coach in the world,” said the CBF in a statement.

“He will lead Brazil until the 2026 World Cup and will coach them in their next two qualifying matches against Ecuador and Paraguay next month.”

Ancelotti will be the fourth non-Brazilian to coach Brazil. The last was Argentine Filpo Nunez who was in charge for one game 60 years ago.

Brazil sacked Dorival Junior after a 4-1 thrashing by Argentina in March and are fourth in the South American qualifying table for the tournament in the United States, Mexico and Canada.

“Bringing Carlo Ancelotti to lead Brazil is more than a strategic move — it’s a statement to the world that we are determined to regain the top spot on the podium,” said CBF president Ednaldo Rodrigues.

“He’s the greatest coach in history and now he’s in charge of the greatest team on the planet.

“Together, we will write glorious new chapters for Brazilian football.”



Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti during a press conference. — Reuters

Record five-time World Cup winners Brazil last won the trophy in 2002, enduring more than two decades of disappointment since then. Rodrigues had tried to lure Ancelotti to Brazil two years ago after Tite stood down as coach following a quarter-final exit at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

That bid fell apart in December 2023 when Ancelotti extended his contract with Madrid, forcing Brazil to turn to Dorival after the team struggled under Fernando Diniz in his brief spell at the helm. Eighteen months on from Dorival’s appointment, Ancelotti leaves Madrid with a year left on his contract as one of the club’s most successful managers, winning 15 trophies across two spells with Los Blancos, including

a La Liga and Champions League double last season. In his first spell at Real Madrid he led them to La Decima in 2014 — their 10th Champions League triumph.

He has won the competition three times with Los Blancos. After being sacked in 2015 he returned six years later when Zinedine Zidane resigned to lift the trophy again in 2022 and 2024. Ancelotti has also led Chelsea, Paris Saint-Germain and Bayern Munich among other teams, including AC Milan with whom he won the Champions League twice as a coach in 2003 and 2007.

The Italian is the coach who has won the European Cup most often, triumphing on five occasions — two more than Zidane, Pep Guardiola and Bob Paisley. — AFP

SPORTS

NBAPLAYOFFS



New York Knicks’ Jalen Brunson (11) makes a basket in front of Boston Celtics’ Derrick White (9) during game four of the second round for the 2025 NBA Playoffs at Madison Square Garden. — Reuters

NY KNICKS LEAVE CELTICS ON BRINK, WARRIORS FACE EXIT

NEW YORK: Jalen Brunson scored 39 points as the New York Knicks pushed the Boston Celtics to the brink of elimination from the playoffs on Monday while the Golden State Warriors were also left facing an early exit after a damaging defeat to the Minnesota Timberwolves.

In New York, Brunson spearheaded a sensational second-half rally as the Knicks overturned a 14-point third-quarter deficit before surging to a 121-113 win that gives the third seeds a commanding 3-1 lead in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference semifinal series.

In the Western Conference, the Timberwolves took a similar 3-1 stranglehold in their series against Golden State with a commanding 117-110 road victory in San Francisco.

Boston’s hopes of hauling themselves back into their series suffered a devastating blow in the shape of a serious injury to Jayson Tatum, who looked distraught as he was carried off the hardwood in the fourth quarter. Tatum, who had been magnificent to that point with a 42-point display, was later seen being ferried to the Madison Square Garden locker room in a wheelchair.

As the Celtics digested defeat and the brutal Tatum injury blow, the Knicks were left celebrating and eyeing a place in the Eastern Conference finals for the first time since 2000. “Just found a way to make plays and get us going,” Brunson said of the second-half revival that set up the Knicks win.

In San Francisco, Anthony Edwards took over in the third quarter to leave Minnesota needing just one more win over Golden State to book their place in the Western Conference finals.

Edwards finished with 30 points, with an electrifying burst of scoring in the third quarter that saw Minnesota rattle in 17 unanswered points to open up a decisive 85-68 lead. — AFP



Ryan Fox celebrates his playoff win at the Myrtle Beach Classic golf tournament. — [Imagn Images](#)

RYAN FOX EARNS FIRST PGA TITLE

SOUTH CAROLINA, US: New Zealand’s Ryan Fox completed a furious comeback on Sunday by prevailing in a three-man playoff at the ONEflight Myrtle Beach Classic in South Carolina to win his first PGA Tour event. “I always felt like my game was good enough to compete with the best in the world, and I got to show it a bit today,” Fox said. “To get that win is extra special.”

Fox fired a 5-under-par 66 on the day to finish at 15-under 269 at Dunes Golf and Beach Club, forcing a three-way tie with Canada’s Mackenzie Hughes and Harry Higgs. In the playoff, the 38-year-old chipped in from the edge of the green on No 18 to secure a birdie, knock Hughes and Higgs out of contention and earn a spot in this week’s PGA Championship in Charlotte.

“It changes the plans a little bit,” he said. “I might have a little bit of a hangover tomorrow.”

Fox had never finished in the top three on the PGA Tour — three top-10 finishes served as his career highlights — and he credited his ability to focus through his nerves and stick to his process. — Reuters



Italy’s Jannik Sinner celebrates winning against Netherland Jesper De Jong at the end of their Round of 16 match of the Italian Open at Foro Italico in Rome. — AFP



Belarus’ Aryna Sabalenka in action during her round of 16 match against Ukraine’s Marta Kostyuk. — Reuters



USA’s Peyton Stearns plays a backhand return to Japan’s Naomi Osaka. — AFP



Japan’s Naomi Osaka in action during her round of 16 match. — Reuters

Sinner, Sabalenka move on to next round in Rome

WORLD NUMBER one Sinner continued his Foro Italico comeback from a three-month doping ban by dealing with lucky loser Jesper de Jong 6-4, 6-2 and setting up a clash with Argentina’s Francisco Cerundolo on Tuesday. Sinner was knocked out in the last 16 by Cerundolo the last time he played here, in 2023, and he is under no illusions that the 17th seed will be a big step up after low-ranked opponents in his first two matches.

“Tomorrow will be a big day for me, because I’ll need to raise my game against him,” Sinner told reporters.

The over 10,000 fans crammed into the centre court stands hoped Sinner can end a 49-year wait for an Italian winner of the men’s tournament in the capital.

But Monday’s win was in reality another warm-up for the 23-year-old’s stated objective of arriving at the French Open in top form.

Sinner’s compatriot Jasmine Paolini cruised past Jelena Ostapenko and into the women’s quarterfinals, easing past her Latvian opponent in straight sets 7-5, 6-2.

Sixth seed Paolini will face Diana Shnaider in the last eight as she eyes another deep run in a 1000 series tournament after losing to world number one Aryna Sabalenka, who later takes on Marta Kostyuk, in the Miami semifinals. Fellow Italian Matteo Berrettini made a tearful exit as he retired with an abdominal problem while trailing sixth seed Casper Ruud 7-5, 2-0 in their clash.

Ruud next plays 66th-ranked Spaniard Jaume Munar for a place in the quarterfinals, where he could face Sinner.

SABALENKA THROUGH

Sabalenka again had to fight to beat Kostyuk 6-1, 7-6 (10/8) in the day’s final match, taking just half an hour to win the first set but then being truly tested before sealing a spot in the women’s last eight.

“I’m just thrilled with the performance today, I really enjoyed this fight and super happy to get this win,” she said.

Sabalenka will face eighth seed Qinwen Zheng next with a third 1000 series crown of the season just before the tennis world decamps to Paris for the second Grand Slam of the year.

Coco Gauff could be Sabalenka’s opponent in the semifinals after the American made short work of Emma Raducanu, winning 6-4, 6-2 in just over an hour to reach the last eight where Mirra Andreeva awaits.

Naomi Osaka’s struggle for form at the top level continued with her 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (7/4) defeat to Peyton Stearns.

In the quarterfinals Stearns will face Elina Svitolina, a 6-4, 6-2 winner over Danielle Collins, after coming through an attritional match which lasted the best part of three hours on a baking centre court.

OSAKA OUT

Naomi Osaka’s struggle for form at the top level continued with her 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (7/4) defeat to Peyton Stearns.

In the quarterfinals Stearns will face Elina Svitolina, a 6-4, 6-2 winner over Danielle Collins, after coming through an attritional match which lasted the best part of three hours on a baking centre court.

Osaka is another big name that American Stearns has beaten in Rome after also knocking out fifth seed Madison Keys in the previous round.

Former world number one Osaka has looked a long way from the player who won four Grand Slams. She returned last year from a 15-month break from tennis for the birth of her daughter.

Her comeback was also hampered by an abdominal injury that forced her out of the Australian Open, after which early exits at Indian Wells and Madrid highlighted how far she was from her best.

Osaka warmed up for Rome by winning a minor event in Saint Malo in France earlier this month.

But she has failed to get past the last 16 of a tournament higher than the WTA 125 series since losing the Auckland final back in January.

Coco Gauff made short work of Britain’s Emma Raducanu, winning 6-1, 6-2 in just over an hour to reach the last eight where Mirra Andreeva awaits. — AFP



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The signing of the contracts ensures that the project remains on track for timely execution.

MAZOOON MINING SECURES \$270M FINANCING FOR YANQUL COPPER PROJECT

MUSCAT: Mazoon Mining Company, a subsidiary of Minerals Development Oman, has signed a series of construction and service agreements with local contractors to kick off the Yanqul Copper Concentrate Production Project in Al Dhahirah Governorate. The contracts were signed during the “Rawabet” Forum, organised by the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) for its affiliated companies.

The agreements include a transportation and logistics contract with Asyad Group, the national logistics provider; a contract for electricity grid and transformer station works with Oman National Engineering and Investment Company (ONEIC); and a site preparation contract with Strapec Oman.

These partnerships are expected to play a pivotal role in moving the project into the implementation phase.

In a major financial breakthrough, Mazoon Mining announced it had secured RO 104 million (approximately \$270 million) in funding from a consortium of local and regional banks.

The financing institutions include Sohar Islamic, National Bank of Oman, Qatar National Bank, Bank Nizwa, ahlilbank, and ahli islamic. According to company officials, the offering was more than twice oversubscribed, reflecting strong investor confidence in the project’s commercial and strategic potential. Eng Matar bin Salem al Badi, CEO of Minerals Development Oman, described the financing as a strategic milestone that will cover around 60 per cent of the total project value. — ONA

OIA companies repay RO 1.8 bn of debt in 2024

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 13

THE 9th Rawabet Forum, showcasing the many innovations and achievements of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and its subsidiaries, was held under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit. Also present were the board chairpersons and CEOs of OIA companies.

OIA highlighted its role in achieving the national agenda across various fields, with a particular focus on developing Oman’s human capital.

Over the past four years, more than 6,500 jobs have been created for Omanis within the Authority and its subsidiaries, achieving an Omanisation rate of 77.7 per cent out of a total workforce of 41,000 employees.

Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), stated that the Authority recognises its role not only in generating returns, but also in achieving the national agenda by contributing to economic diversification, maximising in-country value, transferring knowledge and technology, creating job opportunities for Omanis, and building an institutional framework that exemplifies good governance and sustainability.

The Authority also showcased some of its efforts

OIA highlighted its role in achieving the national agenda across various fields, with a particular focus on developing Oman’s human capital.

in ICV. Among those efforts are integrating it into the corporate performance scorecards of its subsidiaries, in addition to launching a social investment policy, which has been in effect since Q1 2024.

Additionally, the Authority highlighted its efforts to reduce its subsidiaries’ indebtedness, aiming to enhance their capacity for investment and growth, improve their credit ratings, and enable them to generate profits and drive economic development.

In 2024 alone, the Authority succeeded in repaying over RO 1.8 billion of its subsidiaries’ debt.

The Authority also presented the latest developments in the National Development Fund (NDF) and its newly launched strategy.

Since its establishment in 2021, the Fund contributed

over RO 3 billion to the state’s General Budget and exceeded RO 8 billion in capital investment spending across various projects in priority sectors aligned with Oman Vision 2040. In addition, the Fund focused on synergies between its subsidiaries, recognising the importance of collaboration to unify visions and promote collective efforts towards achieving the national goals.

Notable examples of this include the collaboration between be’ah and most of the other subsidiaries, where be’ah manages industrial and hazardous waste produced by the companies.

Another example is the cooperation between ITHCA and several subsidiaries to develop advanced technological solutions.

Furthermore, OIA launched the National Development Fund Strategy to enhance

its role in supporting Oman Vision 2040, a role it has played since its establishment.

The Authority recapped its focus areas for the first five years of its establishment, clarifying the future direction, which aims to maximise its role in achieving the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The strategy sets goals aligned with the vision, including leading the energy transition by relying on renewable energy sources and hydrogen to contribute to achieving Net-Zero by 2050, enhancing value-added downstream activities and localising sectors, boosting Oman’s competitive advantage, and exploring new areas to enhance community welfare.

These objectives align with the pillars of Oman Vision 2040, which are to create a sustainable environment, a competitive economy and a society of creative individuals.

Oman’s OQAE plans green hydrogen pilot in Duqm

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 13

OQ Alternative Energy (OQAE), a subsidiary of OQ Group, is developing a pilot-scale green hydrogen project designed to equip the company with practical experience essential to fulfilling its role as Oman’s National Champion for Alternative Energy.

The state-owned entity said the pilot, featuring an electrolyser capacity of 10–15 MW, is proposed to be established in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

“This initiative will provide hands-on experience in executing and operating green hydrogen projects, testing real-world applications and generating insights for future large-scale hydrogen developments,” OQAE revealed in the newly published 2024 Sustainability Report of parent holding company OQ Group.

The announcement comes as

The green hydrogen pilot, with an electrolyser capacity of 10-15 MW, will come up in Duqm SEZ.

OQAE presses ahead with the delivery of a substantive pipeline of green hydrogen projects, renewable solar and wind energy schemes, and a plethora of other clean energy initiatives entailing several billions of dollars in investments over the coming

years. On Monday, May 12, 2025, the company signed pacts to progress, finance and collaborate on an array of renewable and clean energy initiatives involving investments totalling around \$2 billion.

The list includes the 100 MW North Solar plant in Saih Nihaydah in northern Oman, and two 100 MW wind farms — Riyah-1 and Riyah-2 — located in the Amin and West Nimr fields in the south; a 700 MW renewable energy project to power United Solar’s polysilicon plant in Suhar, a 500 MW renewables scheme for Jindal; a 140 MW renewable energy project with Oxy Zero in Block 9, and a 105 MW renewable energy project with Vale.

They are part of a renewable energy pipeline of up to 7 GW across Oman.

Furthermore, OQAE has secured a commitment from Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (Nama PWP), the sole procurer and

offtaker of electricity generation and desalinated water capacity, to obtain up to a 25-per cent stake in future Independent Power Projects (IPPs).

“This has significantly expanded OQAE’s customer base, which now includes oil and gas operators, industrial clients and direct power demand through NPWP projects,” parent company OQ Group noted in its Sustainability Report.

Importantly, OQAE is positioned to play a leading role in the delivery of Oman’s long-term green hydrogen strategy. The company continues to work with key stakeholders in advancing three large-scale green hydrogen schemes, which will account for a significant share of the country’s target to produce at least 1 million tonnes per annum of green hydrogen molecules by 2030.

Key projects backed by OQAE thus far are: HYPOR Duqm, a joint venture with DEMA & BP featuring 1.3 GW of renewable

capacity in SEZAD; Green Energy Oman (GEO), a collaboration with InterContinental Energy, Enertech Holding Company, and Shell to supply approximately 4 GW of green power, with proposed downstream and export facilities in the SEZ at Duqm; and SalalaH2, a joint venture with Marubeni, Samsung C&T, and Dutco, bringing 3.8 GW of renewable energy capacity to Dhofar.

“Beyond production, OQAE is also diversifying market opportunities by exploring alternative vectors and downstream applications to drive demand.

This includes positioning Oman as a global hub for low-carbon bunkering, piloting e-fuel projects such as e-Gasoline and e-SAF, leveraging biogenic CO2 for e-Methanol, and developing an e-NG facility utilising green hydrogen and CO2 through methanation,” the company added in the report.

ADVERTORIAL

HIGH-VALUEPRIZE



The campaign reflects the growing popularity of Ford vehicles in Oman.

FORD OMAN RAFFLE: 8 WINNERS WIN IPHONE 16 PRO MAX

MUSCAT: Ford’s recently held Ramadhan campaign concluded on a high note, with customers driving home not just great vehicles, but also high-value prizes.

Arabian Car Marketing Company, the dealers for Ford vehicles in Oman, recently wrapped up its highly successful Ramadhan campaign with an exciting raffle draw that saw eight lucky winners take home the latest iPhone 16 Pro Max.

The campaign, which received an overwhelming response, reflects the growing popularity of Ford vehicles in Oman. Customers continue to choose Ford for its powerful performance, smart technology and dependable safety features, qualities that make Ford a trusted companion on Oman’s diverse terrains.

Speaking on the occasion, a representative from Arabian Car Marketing Company said, “We are thrilled with the incredible engagement we received during the Ramadhan campaign. Ford has always stood for performance, reliability, safety and innovation and this success reinforces the trust customers in Oman have placed in us. We congratulate all our winners and thank everyone who participated.”

Among the winners, many expressed their appreciation not only for the prize but also for what Ford represents.

One winner shared, “It is a fantastic surprise and a great gesture from Ford Oman. I recently chose the Ford Territory because of its advanced safety features and confident styling. It is reassuring to drive a vehicle that is both smart, bold and secure.”

Another winner added, “Ford vehicles inspire confidence. Whether planning family trips or daily drives, I can rest assured that I am in safe hands. Winning this iPhone was just the icing on the cake!”

With this Ramadhan campaign, Ford has once again underlined its commitment to rewarding its growing base of loyal customers in Oman. Ford Oman continues to keep customers excited, with value-driven offers, world-class vehicles and ownership experiences that inspire.

To make the most of future campaigns and offers, customers are encouraged to visit their nearest Ford showroom.

NBO INTRODUCES DIRECT DEBIT E-MANDATE

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) has launched its Direct Debit E-Mandate, a reliable digital solution that simplifies recurring transactions for businesses and individuals. Developed as part of CBO’s digital payment efforts, this innovative service provides customers with greater flexibility, effortless management and control over their payments through a user-friendly digital platform.

The Direct Debit E-Mandate enables customers to schedule

Efficient, reliable, automatic Upgrade to Direct Debit

1. No fees apply

2. Faster and less costly

3. Reduce administrative burden

4. Manage high-volume payments

5. Enhanced security and control

regular payments, eliminating the need for manual processing or cheque-based transactions. Available through NBO’s Corporate Internet Banking (for Businesses) and the NBO App (for Individuals), this service allows seamless and

scheduled payments, improving efficiency and reliability.

Mohammed bin Yahya al Jabri, Assistant General Manager - Head of Global Transaction Banking at NBO, commented, “The launch of the Direct Debit E-Mandate represents a major advancement in Oman’s financial ecosystem. By offering businesses and individuals a reliable digital solution to manage payments, we are driving efficiency, reducing administrative burdens and improving user convenience.”

Oman’s pavilion at Saudi Food Show 2025

THE Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Supervisory Team for Promoting Omani Products “OPEX”, continues its successful participation in the Saudi Food Show 2025, held in Al Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

The Sultanate of Oman’s pavilion has witnessed a remarkable turnout from visitors and industry experts, all eager to explore investment prospects within Oman’s growing food sector while discovering the exceptional quality of Omani products.

Lubna al Harthy, Export Development Director at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, highlighted that the participation at the Saudi Food Show 2025 aims at promoting the ‘Oman Exports’ initiative and platform, which focus on streamlining the process of exporting Omani products.

“Non-oil Omani exports play a vital role in strengthening the national economy and driving the economic diversification envisioned in the Sultanate of Oman’s future vision. Therefore, participation in the Saudi Food Show is a key step towards positioning the Sultanate of Oman as a leading hub in the F&B sector. By aligning the efforts



The ‘Oman Exports’ platform is prominently showcased at the Oman Pavilion.

Oman’s pavilion has witnessed a remarkable turnout from visitors and industry experts, all eager to explore investment prospects within Oman’s growing food sector while discovering the exceptional quality of Omani products.

of government bodies, businesses, and exporters, Oman advances its sustainable development goals and reinforces its presence in the global economy,” she pointed out.

Majid al Maqrashi, Director of Support Department at Ibri Industrial City, emphasised the significance of the Saudi Food Show as a platform for attracting investments to Madayn’s industrial cities in general and Ibri Industrial City in particular. He noted that with the 100% completion of the infrastructure and services at Ibri Industrial City, the city offers a

fully integrated environment for industrial, commercial and logistics activities. “Its strategic location, just 150 kilometres from Rub Al Khali border with Saudi Arabia, positions Ibri Industrial City as an ideal destination for businesses looking to expand their presence in the region,” Al Maqrashi said.

Omaima Bahajaj, Marketing and Communication Manager at Salalah Free Zone, highlighted that the free zone’s participation, alongside other key Omani bodies, reflects a shared commitment to promoting Sultanate of Oman’s presence at regional platforms.

She stressed that the Saudi Food Show is an excellent opportunity to highlight the competitive advantages offered by Salalah Free Zone to investors, and to continue attracting major investments that contribute to sustainable development and economic diversification in the Sultanate of Oman.

Abdullah al Zakwani, Senior Entrepreneurship Executive at the SMEs Development Authority, shared that the Authority’s third consecutive participation in the Saudi Food Show reaffirms its ongoing commitment to empowering SMEs in Oman’s food sector.

A TRIP TO LONDON AWAITS AHLIBANK CREDIT CARDHOLDERS

MUSCAT: Continuing its journey of offering exclusive value-additions that meet the expectations of its customers, ahlibank, one of the leading banks in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced the launch of a new promotional offer running throughout May 2025.

This offer provides its Al Nukhba and Exclusiv customers with the chance to enter a draw to win a luxurious trip to the British capital, London, as part of an all-expenses paid travel package. This campaign



aligns with the bank’s approach of delivering banking experiences that match customers’ lifestyles, enhanced with exclusive rewards and flexible options that offer them an exceptional banking experience.

Reinforcing its commitment to offering unique experiences that exceed expectations, ahlibank will announce two winners of the all-inclusive trip to London in mid-June, enabling the winners to take along one guest each. The prize also includes an exceptional driving

experience at the famous Goodwood Circuit in the United Kingdom.

The winners will be selected from among the holders of the Visa Signature and Infinite credit cards who met the participation condition, whether they were existing or new customers.

The campaign requires a minimum spend of RO 500 during the promotional period, with a chance to double the odds of winning for every additional RO 100 spent.

OQGN participates in Oman Sustainability Week 2025

MUSCAT: OQ Gas Networks SAOG (OQGN), the exclusive operator of Oman’s natural gas transmission network, participated as a strategic partner in Oman Sustainability Week from May 11 to 15, 2025, reinforcing OQGN’s commitment to driving Oman’s energy transition and supporting the goals of Oman Vision 2040. The event, held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in Muscat, began with an opening ceremony under the auspice of HH Sayyid Taimour bin Asaad al Said, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Central Bank of Oman, alongside other notable officials from both the government and private sector.

This participation further demonstrates OQGN commitment to sustainability, focusing on



OQGN is committed to its employees’ development through initiatives, comprehensive training programmes, and strong safety culture.

environmental stewardship, energy transition, workforce empowerment, local economic development and robust governance. OQGN remains resolute in its mission to decarbonise operations, enhance energy efficiency, and expand low-carbon fuel infrastructure, all in alignment with Oman Vision 2040 and the national Net-Zero targets.

Additionally, OQGN is committed to its employees’ development through initiatives, comprehensive training programmes and strong safety culture. The company also prioritises local procurement, actively supports community initiatives and maximises in-country value to foster Oman’s economic growth and social progress.

Upholding the highest standards

of ethics, transparency and risk management, OQGN embraces digital transformation and fosters a culture of continuous improvement.

Eng Mansoor al Abdali, OQGN CEO, said: “Our participation in Oman Sustainability Week reflects OQGN’s deep-rooted commitment to supporting Oman’s energy transition and Oman Vision 2040.

We are proud of the concrete progress we are making — whether it’s through reducing emissions, improving energy efficiency, or developing infrastructure for hydrogen and carbon management. Sustainability is embedded across our operations, and we are equally focused on empowering our people, investing in local communities, and upholding the highest standards of governance and transparency.

BUSINESS

REWARDINGEFFORTS



OIA Excellence Awards presented at the 9th Rawabet Forum on Tuesday.

FIVE OIA COMPANIES WIN EXCELLENCE AWARDS

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 13

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) announced the winners of the second edition of the OIA Excellence Awards. The awards recognise efforts to promote a culture of continuous improvement, celebrate outstanding companies that contributed to achieving national objectives and encourage competitiveness in performance enhancement.

‘Omantel’ won in the Growth and Job Creation category for achieving a revenue growth compared to last year and investing 18% of its assets in new projects — achieving 98% of its target.

The company also succeeded in creating job opportunities for Omanis and replacing expats with Omanis, raising its Omanisation rate to 94%.

‘ITHCA Group’ excelled in the Financial Sustainability and Performance category for leading the 2024 financial sustainability assessment by achieving the highest improvement in financial sustainability indicators among all companies and delivering a positive financial performance during 2024.

‘Oman Group’ was awarded the excellence award in Private Sector and SMEs Empowerment category for achieving a high growth rate in the development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). In addition, it exited from investments in favor of the private sector and reached a rate of 56% in total investment through the private sector.

‘OQ Group’ received the excellence award in the In-Country Value (ICV) and RDI category for achieving the highest average spending on ICV as a percentage of total supply chain expenditure during 2023 and 2024. The Group also excelled in the number of supplier development programmes, ring fencing initiatives; and research, development and innovation (RDI) projects.

‘ASYAD Group’ won in the Project Excellence category for the ‘Duqm Container Terminal’ project. The project scored high efficiency in adherence to budget, timeline and safety standards. The project also achieved a high Omanisation rate exceeding 70%, and maximised in-country value by sourcing 43% of project expenditures through local suppliers and companies.

Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), said the Excellence Awards recognised the significant improvement achieved by OIA companies in their revenues in 2024 compared to 2023. They also implemented new investments through approved projects and expanded operational initiatives that supported the local market. In addition, there was a consistent focus on employment and raising Omanisation rates.

The companies also increased their strategic partnerships with the private sector and supported small and medium enterprises (SMEs) through various initiatives, contract allocations; and development and training programmes. They maximised their local impact by increasing local procurement spending and supporting local suppliers through supplier development programmes and initiatives to localise products and services.

LOW-VALUE ITEMS

US slashes tariff on small China parcels



The United States will cut the “de minimis” tariff for low-value items imported from China, a White House executive order said on Monday, further de-escalating a potentially damaging trade war between the world’s two largest economies.

The tariff relief follows a deal between Beijing and Washington to unwind most of the duties imposed on each other’s goods since early April. — Reuters

OFM ADOPTS AI RECRUITMENT WITH ELEVATUS PARTNERSHIP

MUSCAT: Oman Flour Mills (OFM), a leading player in the Sultanate of Oman’s food manufacturing industry, has partnered with Elevatus, a renowned provider of AI-powered recruitment solutions, to modernise its hiring processes.

The strategic collaboration will streamline OFM’s recruitment operations by automating workflows and enhancing the candidate experience, in line with the company’s innovation-driven vision. Through Elevatus’ all-in-one platform, OFM’s HR team will be able to manage every stage of recruitment — from job postings to onboarding — with greater efficiency and precision.

“Our partnership with Elevatus is a major step toward building a future-ready recruitment process,” said Safiya Adam, Human Resources Director at Oman Flour Mills. “By eliminating manual bottlenecks and introducing intelligent automation, we’re not only optimising internal efficiency

but also ensuring a professional and engaging experience for every candidate.”

Using Elevatus’ tools, OFM can now send real-time, personalised updates to applicants, boosting transparency and enhancing engagement throughout the hiring journey.

“We are proud to partner with Oman Flour Mills — a national icon in food manufacturing,” said Nadin Zureikat, Chief Revenue Officer at Elevatus.

PDO commits RO 4.4m to social investment projects



The agreements span sectors including education, health, environment and community infrastructure.

MUSCAT: Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has signed 14 landmark agreements worth around RO 4.4 million to fund a wide range of social investment projects, reinforcing its role as a key partner in Oman’s sustainable development agenda.

Signed on the sidelines of Oman Sustainability Week and the Oman Petroleum & Energy Show (OPES) 2025, the agreements span sectors including education, health, environment and community infrastructure — directly supporting Oman Vision 2040 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

“These projects reflect PDO’s deep-rooted commitment to social responsibility and its ongoing efforts to create lasting impact in communities,” said Dr Aflah bin Said al Hadhrami, Managing Director of PDO.

“They also exemplify how strategic partnerships can drive development that is inclusive, innovative and future-focused.”

Education took centre stage in PDO’s new investments. A key agreement with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation will fund 150 full scholarships for students in PDO’s concession area for the 2025–2026 academic year — 85 for diploma-level and 65 for bachelor’s programmes.

PDO is also co-financing the establishment of the Emerging Technologies Unit at Sultan Qaboos University — an initiative expected to benefit over 20,000 students annually and support 3,000+ graduation projects in fields such as artificial intelligence, big data, blockchain and cybersecurity.

Five additional development programmes — Ma’rifa, Ta’zeez, Tamayouz, Work Experience and Engineering Village Camp — will be rolled out with the Ministry of Education to guide students’ career paths and foster innovation. Two kindergarten classrooms will also be built in schools within the concession area.

In partnership with the Ministry of Health and Daleel Petroleum, PDO will help expand the emergency department at Ibri Hospital, which serves over 50,000 patients annually. Another health facility will be built in Andat, Dhofar Governorate, improving access to care for residents and energy sector workers in the area.

Environmental sustainability is also on the agenda. PDO will work with Nama Water Services to construct a desalination plant and distribution network in southern Ghubrah, Al Jazir, benefitting more than 300 residents.

A camel cheese production facility will be established in Rakhyyout through a partnership with Al Jisr Foundation; and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), aimed at empowering over 4,000 camel owners and developing a new income-generating activity. PDO is also supporting upgrades to the camel racing track in Maqshin, Dhofar.

PDO will fund defensive driving courses for 580 ambulance drivers in collaboration with the Royal Oman Police, provide high-tech equipment for SQU’s Water Technology Laboratory and help complete the final phase of the Bahla Cultural Centre in Al Dakhiliyah.

To nurture young talent, PDO will support 20 skills development programmes at the Youth Centre, reaching over 4,000 Omani youth.

VALE, OQAE PARTNER TO POWER OMAN OPERATIONS WITH RENEWABLES



The agreement sets the stage for developing renewable energy solutions to power Vale’s pelletising plant in Sohar Port.

MUSCAT: Global mining giant Vale has signed a Head of Agreement (HOA) with OQ Alternative Energy (OQAE) to accelerate the decarbonisation of its operations in Oman.

The agreement, signed during Oman Sustainability Week, sets the stage for developing renewable energy solutions to power Vale’s pelletising plant in SOHAR Port and Freezone; and support future energy needs of the Green Metallic Mega Hub planned in Duqm.

The partnership aims to integrate clean energy into Vale’s industrial operations through collaboration on energy supply, land coordination and long-term planning. The agreement is expected to drive the shift towards renewable energy while laying the foundation for sustainable industrial development in Oman. “Achieving large-scale decarbonisation requires more than ambition — it demands strong partnerships and robust infrastructure,” said Saleh al Muslahi, Chief Executive of Mega Hubs–Middle East and North Africa at Vale.

“Through this agreement with OQAE, we are aligning on key elements such as demand aggregation and long-term supply models to transition Sohar operations and unlock Al Duqm’s green potential.”

Najla bint Zuhair al Jamaliyah, CEO of OQ Alternative Energy, emphasised the broader significance of the collaboration. “This partnership reflects OQAE’s mission to support the industrial sector’s shift to clean energy. Beyond reducing emissions at a single site, we are helping create a new blueprint for renewable-powered industrial development in Oman.”

Vale has committed to transitioning its Sohar pelletising plant to 100 per cent renewable electricity by 2030.

SURVEY SHOWS

German investors cheered by tariff talks



German investor sentiment has jumped, buoyed by rollbacks of US tariffs and the formation of a new national government, a closely-watched survey showed on Tuesday.

Market expectations for Europe’s biggest economy over the next six months rose 39.2 points to sit at plus 25.2, clawing back much of the ground lost in a calamitous April fall, according to the release of the ZEW survey. — AFP

YELLOW SLUMP

Gold falls amidst optimism over trade talks



Gold prices on Tuesday fell as optimistic signals from US-China trade talks alleviated market fears, leading investors to shift from safe-haven assets towards riskier investments. Spot gold fell 1.1% to \$3,277.68 an ounce. US gold futures lost 1.6% to \$3,291.60.

The US and China ended high-stakes trade talks on a positive note, with US officials touting a “deal” to reduce the US trade deficit. — ONA

OPINION

Crunch week in US Congress for Trump’s divisive tax cuts



FRANKIE TAGGART

The writer
US politics
correspondent in
Washington for AFP.

REPUBLICANS in Congress raced on Monday to put the final touches on US President Donald Trump’s sprawling domestic policy mega-bill, which would slash social safety net programs to pay for \$5 trillion in tax cuts. Lawmakers in the House of Representatives are aiming to usher into law Trump’s pledges to widen and extend his 2017 tax relief programme, while boosting border security and defence; and shrinking the government. But independent analysts have warned that the proposals could see millions of low-income Americans losing health insurance, while Democrats say the tax reforms will largely benefit the ultra-wealthy. “This is not trimming fat from around the edges, it’s cutting to the bone,” said Frank Pallone, the top Democrat on the powerful House Energy and Commerce Committee. “The overwhelming majority of the savings in this bill will come from taking health care away from millions of Americans.” Republicans have scheduled committee votes on Tuesday on the much-touted “big, beautiful bill” encompassing most of Trump’s

domestic agenda, with final House passage before May 26 and Senate approval by July 4. The process will test Trump’s sway over his party, with lawmakers determined to help the Republican leader cement his legacy but queasy over big cuts ahead of the 2026 midterm elections. The president took to social media on Monday to call on Republicans to unite behind the chairman of the three committees crafting the legislation. “Remember, these are men that truly strive to do what is RIGHT for America,” he posted on Truth Social. “The Democrats, on the other hand, want to DESTROY our Country... The Bill is GREAT. We have no alternative, WE MUST WIN!” The Republicans do not need Democratic support to pass the package, but their slim majorities in both chambers of Congress mean they will have to demonstrate almost perfect unity. Already facing fury over sweeping federal cuts led by tech billionaire Elon Musk and blowback over Trump’s tariffs regime, they are deeply divided over how much further to squeeze spending. Democrats released an analysis by the

Lawmakers in the House of Representatives are aiming to usher into law Trump’s pledges to widen and extend his 2017 tax relief programme, while boosting border security and defence; and shrinking the government.

Congressional Budget Office (CBO) on Sunday stating that \$715 billion would be cut from health spending over a decade — resulting in 8.6 million more Americans being uninsured. On the conservative flank, more than 30 House Republicans signed a letter to House Speaker Mike Johnson warning that the package cannot add to the deficit and must include \$2 trillion in savings. The House Ways and Means Committee is expected to release full details of the tax proposals later on Monday, on the eve of a marathon session on Tuesday to finalise the text. The price tag is expected to swell to \$5 trillion over a decade, according to the nonpartisan CBO, exceeding the \$4.5 trillion permitted by a budget resolution Republicans adopted earlier this year. Trump has suggested raising taxes to 39.6 per cent on individuals earning more than \$2.5 million a year, but Republicans are seen as unlikely to be on board with creating new burdens for the ultra-rich. And it remains to be seen whether the legislation will seek to make good on some of the president’s headline election campaign pledges, including eliminating taxes on tips and overtime. — AFP

APPLE’S CHINA DETOX IS PAINFUL AND OVERDUE

ROBYN MAK

Apple’s success rests on the iPhone. The profitable pocket device helped turn it from a niche player in the personal computer industry into one of world’s largest companies, with a market capitalisation of almost \$3 trillion. Much of that was due to its supply chain in China. Now geopolitical tensions and trade wars are calling that dependence into question. The role the People’s Republic played in the company’s rise is the focus of “Apple in China: The Capture of the World’s Greatest Company”. The book by Patrick McGee, who covered the company for the Financial Times, draws on more than 200 interviews with former executives and engineers — as well as other material — to provide a riveting account of how Apple came to depend on Chinese suppliers for most of its products and Chinese consumers for 17% of its sales last year. Now that it is scrambling to develop other manufacturing bases, its history holds important lessons for the two economies – and for other big manufacturers like Tesla. Apple’s entry into the People’s Republic would not have been possible without Taiwan’s Foxconn, formally known as Hon Hai Precision Industry. Founded by entrepreneur Terry Gou, the contract manufacturer and its peers were instrumental in shaping China’s export-driven model in the mid-1990s by establishing factories on the mainland. They were able to do so by working “hand in glove” with local officials, benefitting from subsidies, infrastructure, and critically, flows of cheap migrant labourers from rural areas. “Uncle Terry”, as Apple came to know Gou, stood out due to his political savvy, McGee writes. “They subsidised the shit out of him”, he quotes one senior Apple executive at the time anonymously. Apple says the claims in the book are untrue and full of inaccuracies. The company first started working closely with Foxconn in 1999, outsourcing production of iMacs and then, a few years later, the iPod. Thanks to Foxconn’s ability to assemble products at speed and scale, Apple shipped 22.5 million of the portable music players in 2005, up from less than 1 million in 2003. Apple’s arrival in China differed from that of other large companies. Multinationals from South Korea’s Samsung Electronics to German automaker Volkswagen had previously set up wholly-owned foreign enterprises or local joint ventures. Beijing’s bet was that this would facilitate the transfer of technology to local partners - though that rarely happened. Apple had neither a joint venture nor established its own operations. Instead, it invested in and taught many local companies how to supply parts for and make its products. This allowed it to avoid being too dependent on a handful of key suppliers, improving its bargaining power. — Reuters

Muscat: The bridge between East and West

In an increasingly fragmented world, where mistrust and rivalry often dominate international headlines, the Sultanate of Oman, with Muscat at its helm, offers a striking counter-narrative, one of quiet diplomacy, cultural coexistence and strategic connectivity. Nestled at the crossroads of the Arabian Peninsula, Oman has long played a pivotal role in facilitating trade and dialogue between East and West. Today, this historical legacy is reflected in Muscat’s role as a modern capital that connects regions geographically and brings together diverse cultures, economies and political ideologies. Muscat is not merely the administrative centre of Oman; it is a symbol of the country’s enduring ethos of moderation and balance. Oman’s foreign policy, shaped by the visionary leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, has consistently focused on neutrality, non-interference and bridge-building. Upon assuming power in 2020, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik explicitly reaffirmed the nation’s commitment to these guiding principles, pledging to preserve Oman’s peaceful and constructive regional actor role. These principles have enabled Muscat to be a trusted venue for high-level dialogue, often behind the scenes. For instance, Oman was key in facilitating talks between the United States and Iran over the latter’s nuclear programme. This is a testament to the trust it commands in both geopolitical divides. In a region often marked by competing interests and shifting alliances, Muscat’s ability to maintain equidistance and promote diplomacy positions it uniquely as a capital of quiet influence. Oman’s diplomatic credibility is further supported by its commitment to regional stability, particularly in conflict zones such as Yemen. Muscat has served as a backchannel and peace broker to end the humanitarian crisis there, working discreetly with international actors and local factions. Such efforts are not driven by self-interest, but by a deep-rooted belief in the power of dialogue,



Muscat transforms into a gateway city where East meets West in commerce and investment.



DR UMAIR WAQAS

The writer is Assistant Professor-Supply Chain Management at the College of Commerce and Business Administration, Dhofar University.

mutual respect and peaceful coexistence. This principled foreign policy approach has made Oman a preferred interlocutor for global powers seeking to navigate complex regional challenges without adding to the volatility. However, Muscat’s role as a bridge between East and West is not confined to geopolitics alone. Oman’s ambitious national strategy, Oman Vision 2040, positions the country as an emerging hub for global trade, sustainable development and technological innovation. Under this blueprint, Muscat transforms into a gateway city where East meets West in commerce and investment. The government’s progressive reforms, including 100% foreign ownership in various sectors, streamlined business regulations and public-private partnerships, attract interest from Asian and Western investors. Economic zones like Duqm, Sohar and Salalah reinforce Oman’s role in global supply chains, making Muscat a diplomatic capital and a business-friendly epicenter for East-West collaboration. Furthermore, Oman’s unique cultural identity is another layer of its bridging role. Rooted in a centuries-old maritime heritage, Omani society has long been shaped by interactions with Africa, India, Persia and the Arab heartland. This heritage has fostered a tolerant and pluralistic ethos proudly upheld today. Muscat embodies this spirit of inclusivity, reflected in its harmonious coexistence of diverse religious and ethnic communities. The

government’s proactive promotion of interfaith dialogue, notably through initiatives like the “Message of Islam” exhibition, which has toured over 30 countries, clearly reflects Oman’s soft power. These cultural engagements dispel stereotypes and serve as diplomatic tools that build bridges where political discourse sometimes fails. In a global context where misinformation and cultural misunderstanding fuel division, Oman offers a living example of moderation and respect. Surveys indicate high satisfaction levels among expatriates living in Oman, many of whom cite the country’s safety, openness and tolerance as key reasons for their contentment. Muscat, in particular, has become a multicultural hub where global citizens can live, work and thrive in an atmosphere of mutual acceptance. This openness, combined with Oman’s stable governance, makes it an ideal venue for international conferences, educational partnerships and cultural exchanges. Looking forward, Muscat’s role as a connector between East and West will likely grow significantly. As the world navigates a new multipolar order, smaller states like Oman find increased space to contribute meaningfully to global affairs. By investing in education, green energy and digital innovation, Oman is preparing its youth for the future and setting the stage for international collaboration. Muscat’s emerging sectors — from logistics to clean energy — offer immense potential for joint ventures with partners from both Eastern and Western economies. In conclusion, Muscat is far more than the political heart of Oman. It is a living embodiment of the Sultanate of Oman’s identity as a nation of peace, pragmatism and partnership. Whether through diplomacy, economic policy, or cultural engagement, Muscat continues to link continents, ideologies and civilisations in ways few cities can claim. In a time when building walls has become a common impulse, Oman stands out for building bridges. As such, Muscat deserves global recognition — not only as a capital city, but as a capital of connection.

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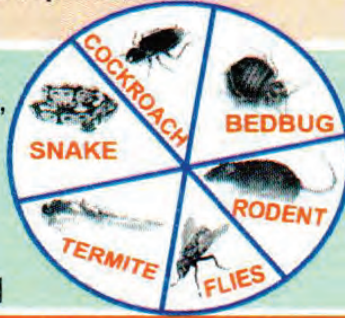
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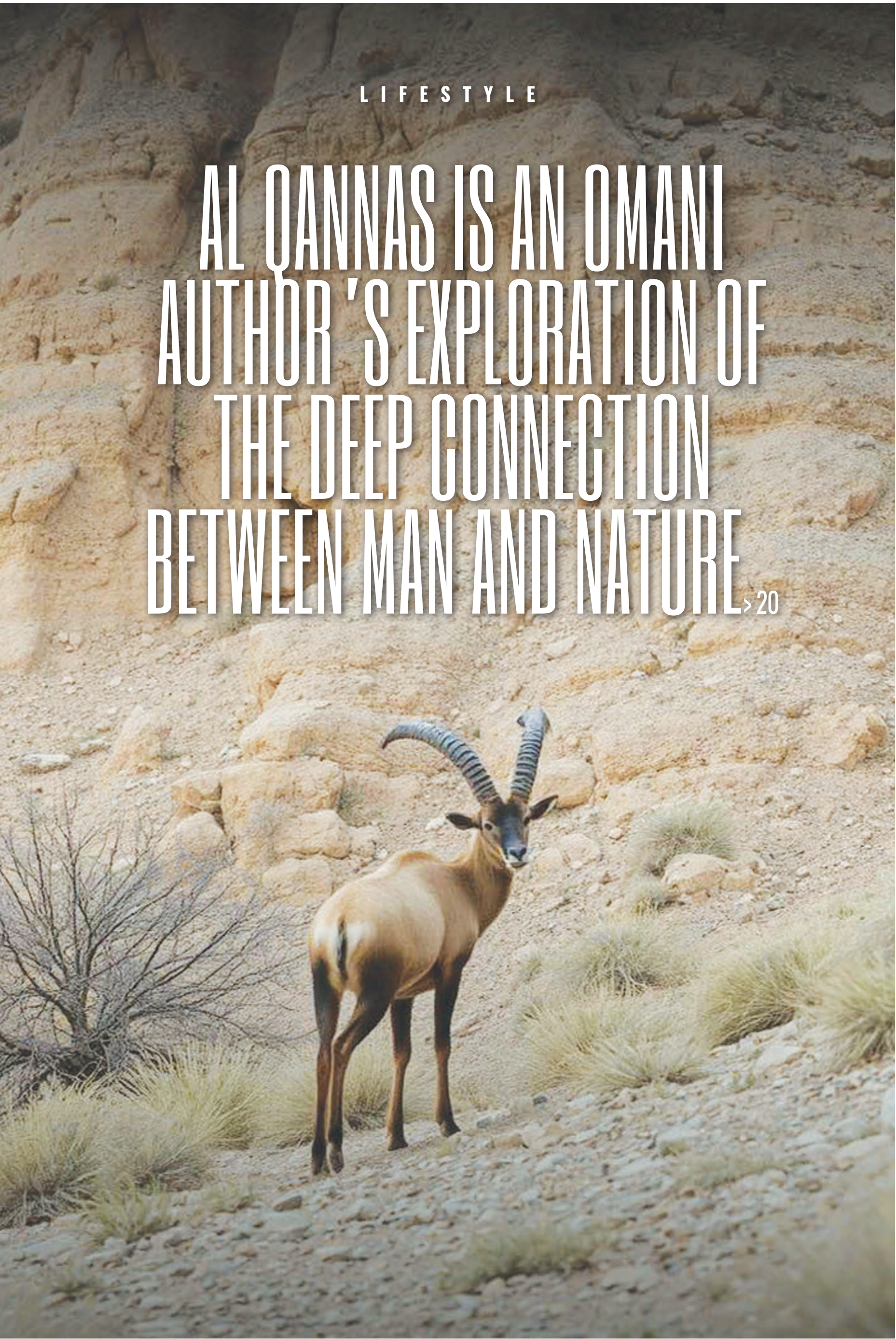
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ART/LIFE



ENTERTAINMENT

Stanley Tucci says hosting tougher than acting as he launches culinary travel series



STANLEY TUCCI is no stranger to hosting a television series, but when asked how it compares to acting, the Oscar nominee is clear: “Hosting is harder because you have to be yourself.”

“And the reason actors become actors is they probably don’t want to be themselves all the time,” he said, laughing.

Known for films like “Conclave”, “Julie & Julia”, “The Devil Wears Prada” and “The Hunger Games”, Tucci embarks on a culinary journey across Italy in his new show, “Tucci in Italy”.

From sampling traditional knödel in Trentino Alto-Adige to tucking into succulent porchetta in Lazio, the five-episode series sees him talking to chefs, farmers, shopkeepers and everyday Italians about their food and traditions.

He describes it as “an exploration of what makes up Italy through the prism of food”.

“(Italians) live to eat and everybody else eats to live... You can talk to a cab driver and you can talk to someone of the aristocracy... and they’ll talk about food in the same way,” Tucci said in an interview with Reuters.

“And were they to meet, they would talk about food in the same way and they would talk in-depth about it. I don’t know another culture that would do that, where it just breaks down all boundaries.”

In the show, Tucci travels to five regions — Tuscany, Lombardy, Trentino Alto-Adige, Lazio and Abruzzo.

While not a fan of spice, Tucci said he was willing to try anything: “I sort of did, I think, on this trip. There was lots of offal, which I love.”

“When I was watching the episodes again, I was like, there really is a lot of offal in these episodes... but that’s just a part of what Italy is and that’s what they eat.”

Tucci, the author of several cookbooks, has Italian origins and has lived as well as visited the country before — including for his previous travel and food show, “Stanley Tucci: Searching for Italy”.

“The more I travel through Italy, the more I see... reminders of people in my childhood,” he said.

“You might see somebody who looks like your aunt or your great aunt or your grandfather... and it makes you feel connected to the people that you’ve lost.”

“Tucci in Italy” streams on Disney+ from May 19 and premieres on National Geographic on May 21. — Reuters

QUICK FEATURES



FESTIVAL

Visitors watch hot air balloons being prepared for launch during celebrations to mark Vesak Day at Ngawen Temple complex in Muntilan, Central Java. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Pritika Swarup, CEO, Prakti Beauty, speaks during the Milken Institute Global Conference in Beverly Hills, California. — AFP



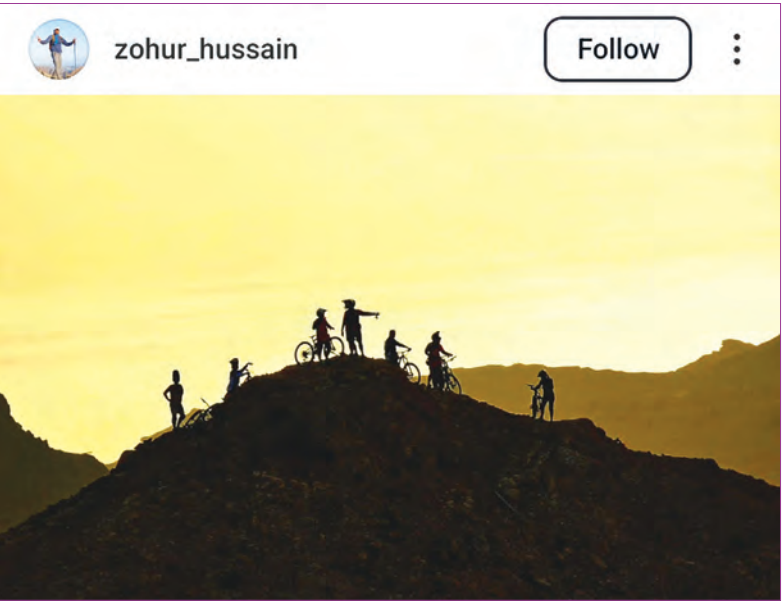
MUSIC

Members of the Rastafari community, dressed in Rastafari colours, play drums and sing songs as they march during a collective parade in tribute to Bob Marley in Goma. — AFP

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Confidence takes centre stage at Oman’s School of Confidence event



A WAVE OF enthusiasm and confidence swept through Hotel Muscat Holiday on Saturday as the School of Confidence (SOCO), Oman, hosted its 3rd Annual Speech and Drama Competition. The full-day event showcased nearly 200 solo performances, spanning speeches, stories, monologues and comedy acts, with a large and supportive audience cheering every participant.

Students of all ages, from young children to teenagers, took the stage, demonstrating impressive stage presence and speaking skills. A highlight was a humorous skit, “Welcome to the SOCO Gala,” where Bollywood, Hollywood and Tollywood personalities debated “Confidence over Language,” eliciting laughter and applause.

Parents expressed their amazement at their children’s transformations. One shared, “We had never heard our child speak with such confidence at home.” Another heartfelt comment came from a parent whose daughter moved from stage fright to becoming an award-winning speaker, calling it “a truly transformative experience.” Some parents

praised SOCO for nurturing their children’s talents, noting the growth under the guidance of founder Shadaf Bhamla.

Every participant received recognition, with certificates and gold medals honouring their courage. About 75 students went home with trophies for exceptional performances and poise on stage, celebrating their hard work and confidence building.

Shadaf Bhamla, SOCO’s founder and director, addressed the audience, emphasising the importance of resilience and effort over superficial praise. “When we recognise effort and improvement, we help children develop genuine confidence rooted in achievement,” she stated.

The event was judged by a panel of experienced educators and mentors, including Rachana Somayajula and Fariha Abbas, who praised the talent and professionalism on display. Guests also included Muscat-based bloggers and influencers such as Sherin Siddiqui, Afra Afsal; and the duo Vibitha and Sudheesh, who expressed admiration for the students’ confidence and expression.



Basel: A city at the heart of European culture

BASEL WILL be in the international spotlight for a week of festivities surrounding the Eurovision Song Contest but the Swiss city has been at the heart of European culture for centuries.

With a population of 180,000, Switzerland’s third-biggest city after Zurich and Geneva straddles the River Rhine and sits right on the northern border with both France and Germany.

Basel’s location played a major role in its growth and continental importance through the ages.

From May 11 to 17, it will be centre-stage in Europe again as it hosts Eurovision 2025, the pop music extravaganza that has become one of the world’s biggest annual live television events and a giant international party.

The influence of the Rhine can be felt in Basel’s historic centre, dominated by the twin towers of Basel Minster, where the Dutch thinker Erasmus is buried.

But Basel’s modern emblems are the two Roche Towers, Switzerland’s tallest buildings. Completed in the last decade, standing 205 metres and 178 metres (673 and 584 feet) high, they are the headquarters of the eponymous giant pharmaceutical firm.

The chemical and pharmaceutical industries now drive the city’s economy.

CARNIVAL AND THE ARTS
Basel is one of Europe’s great centres of culture.

The first edition of Sebastian Brant’s “Ship of Fools”, one of the bestsellers of the European Renaissance, was printed in the city.

The Rhine spirit is vividly expressed every spring at the three-day Basel Carnival, which transforms the city streets into a river of painted lanterns, colourful masks and creative costumes, flowing to the sound of pipes and drums.

The world’s biggest Protestant carnival features on Unesco’s intangible cultural heritage list and attracts thousands of tourists.

The city has world-renowned museums — none more so than the Kunstmuseum, the oldest public art collection in the world dating back to 1661.

In a referendum in 1967, citizens decided to buy two paintings by Pablo Picasso, who, moved by the vote, would later donate several more works to the city.

Across the Rhine, the Museum Tinguely draws in thousands of visitors with its kinetic art sculptures, while just outside the city, the Beyeler Foundation hosts an outstanding collection of modern and contemporary artworks.

And every year, art lovers and gallery owners from around the world flock to Art Basel, one of the world’s top contemporary art fairs.

In sports, Basel is home to tennis all-time great Roger Federer, while FC Basel are on the verge of winning their 21st Swiss football championship.

CHEMICALS AND QUAKES
Besides its culture, Basel is now synonymous with the chemical and pharmaceutical industries, home to globally important groups such as Roche, Novartis, Sandoz and Syngenta.

The psychedelic drug LSD was created at the Sandoz laboratories there in 1938.

Pharma and chemicals make Basel a major player in the Swiss economy, attracting researchers and students as well as cross-border workers.

Around 35,000 people cross over from France and Germany, attracted by higher Swiss wages.

Basel is the home of the Bank for International Settlements, considered the central bank of central banks.

The city is left-leaning, perhaps due to the influence of its university, the oldest in Switzerland, founded in 1460. It has approximately 13,000 students from 100 countries, around a quarter of whom are studying for their doctorates.

The city has also lived through major disasters: the great earthquake of 1356 and the Sandoz chemical spill 630 years later.

The biggest quake in central Europe in recorded history and the fires it caused, destroyed a city already ravaged by the Black Death.

The 1986 fire at the Sandoz chemical plant on the outskirts of Basel also left its mark due to the ecological disaster caused by toxic chemicals leaking into the Rhine, killing wildlife as far downstream as the Netherlands. — AFP



AL QANNAS IS AN OMANI AUTHOR'S EXPLORATION OF THE DEEP CONNECTION BETWEEN MAN AND NATURE

BY ARWA AL HASHIMI

IN THE evolving landscape of modern Omani literature, Zahran al Qasmi stands out as one of the most prominent voices capable of blending narrative beauty with the unique character of place. His novel *Al Qannas* is not merely a story of a man chasing a mountain goat, but rather a literary tapestry that reflects the authentic Omani spirit and reveals the profound relationship between man and nature in mountain communities that still hold the scent of history and the details of traditional life.

The novel transports us to the mountains of Al Dakhiliyah, specifically the rocky ranges of Al Tayyin, where alleys, valleys and stone paths intertwine with the life of the protagonist, the old hunter Saleh bin Shaikhhan. He has spent a lifetime pursuing an endless dream: to capture the elusive ibex. This chase is not just about hunting; it is an existential journey soaked in patience, reflection and meaning. Here, hunting becomes a symbol for an eternal pursuit, an internal obsession that shapes the protagonist just as the silent mountain shapes its stones over time.

Al Qasmi masterfully weaves his fictional world from the fabric of the Omani environment. Every tree, every wadi, every breath of mountain air pulses with the spirit of place. He doesn't overlook the smallest details that lend flavour to the scene — names of plants, traditions of hunters, grandmothers' tales and folk beliefs that paint the ibex as a near-mystical creature protected by unseen forces. Through this, Al Qasmi presents a purely Omani scene, unadorned, unpretentious and real in all its gravity and beauty.

The novel is written in precise poetic language, rich in expressive grace and narrative fluidity. Al Qasmi doesn't seek cheap thrills or intricate plots but instead builds his tale on quiet reflection and the hidden tensions of the soul. We hear Saleh's voice, both as narrator and protagonist, speaking to us in the first person and the reader feels as though they are sitting beside him, hearing his whispers and seeing, through his eyes, a harsh yet tender nature. This tone, with its honesty, simplicity and warmth, extends from Al Qasmi's poetic background, giving the novel a uniquely emotional depth.

Al Qannas bears similarities to the work of acclaimed international writer Peter Matthiessen, who was known for his poetic, contemplative narratives rooted deeply in the natural environment. Like Al Qasmi, Matthiessen's storytelling often explores the internal worlds of his characters through their relationship with landscape, blending detail, emotion and philosophical musings with a subtle, lyrical touch. His books, such as *The Snow Leopard*, reflect a meditative engagement with nature and humanity — an approach that aligns with Al Qasmi's gentle yet profound narration of Saleh's solitary quest.

From the Middle East, there is Haidar Haidar, a Palestinian author whose storytelling similarly marries the personal with the political within the context of landscape and tradition. Haidar's works often delve into the soul of his characters by depicting their interactions with the environment — whether war-torn landscapes or tranquil rural settings — highlighting a shared sense of cultural



rootedness and introspection. Like Al Qasmi, Haidar employs simple yet powerful language, relying on evocative descriptions that ground his characters within their physical and cultural landscapes.

Yet *Al Qannas* is not merely a tale of man, mountain and prey. It probes the depths of universal human questions: what happens when we finally achieve what we've spent our lives pursuing? Do we attain fulfilment, or does emptiness begin? This reflection is central to Saleh's story — after finally capturing the long-sought ibex, he is overwhelmed by a profound sense of finality, as if his life has lost its purpose post-achievement. The novel explores the space between longing and accomplishment, between man and his shadow; and between nature and its echo within us.

The influence of Omani society is woven throughout the narrative — customs, connection to the land, reverence for elders, oral myths, and a communal silence in moments of pain and patience. The characters do not speak much but act, endure and live quietly — visuals of life in remote villages, where words are sparse yet meaningful. There are no violent conflicts or sudden twists, only a tender, quiet flow of daily existence that, in its simplicity, holds a profound wonder. This reflects Al Qasmi's identity as a writer born from his environment, deeply aware of the power of storytelling to capture the struggles and resilience of ordinary people.

Al Qannas is quintessentially Omani — not only in the setting but in its soul, style and message. It is a profound literary work that speaks softly yet leaves an indelible mark on the reader. The novel's understated beauty invites slow and contemplative reading, much like a long poem woven with the ink of the mountains and the heartbeat of its people. Through Saleh's solitary journey and the lush yet restrained language, Al Qasmi crafts a story that resonates universally while remaining deeply rooted in the specific landscape and traditions of Oman.