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20 DESCENT INTO HIDDEN PARADISE

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Oman reinforces vital role in regional stability

SAYYID BADR CONDUCTS SERIES OF DIPLOMATIC MEETINGS

SAYYID Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, conducted a series of high-level diplomatic meetings on Sunday, underscoring the nation's pivotal role in fostering regional dialogue and strengthening international partnerships.

He commenced his diplomatic engagements by receiving Hans Grundberg, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Yemen. The discussions centred on the critical efforts to support the Yemeni parties in committing to a negotiated path, with the ultimate goal of achieving a sustainable political resolution that ends the crisis and fulfils the Yemeni people's legitimate aspirations for peace and stability.

Subsequently, in a meeting with Musa al Koni, Vice-President of the Libyan Presidential Council, the two sides examined the evolving situation in Libya. They underscored the imperative of bolstering current endeavours to secure lasting political and security stability. The conversation also explored concrete avenues to enhance the fraternal cooperation between Oman and Libya, focusing on initiatives that serve mutual interests and advance the cause of national dialogue and reconciliation.

Further reinforcing regional collaboration, Sayyid Badr met Jassem bin Mohammed al Budaiwi, GCC Secretary-General. Their discussions provided a comprehensive overview of the robust cooperative ties between Oman and the GCC Secretariat General. A significant focus was placed on the strategic exchange of expertise to fortify joint Gulf action across the political, economic and social spheres. The conversation also encompassed the GCC's evolving role in strengthening dialogues and negotiations with international partners to best serve the collective interests of its member states.

Sayyid Badr also met Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al Khulaifi, Minister of State at the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The two sides undertook a thorough review of the enduring cooperative relations between their nations and identified promising opportunities for their further development across multiple domains. **TURN TO P8**

HM INVITED TO GCC SUMMIT

*His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain. The message includes an invitation to attend the 46th GCC Summit, scheduled to be held in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The message was handed over to Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, when he received Dr Juma bin Ahmed al Kaabi, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the Sultanate of Oman, at the General Diwan of the Foreign Ministry. — **ONA***

INBRIEF

HM'S CONDOLENCES TO KING OF BAHRAIN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolence to King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain, on the demise of Shaikh Ibrahim bin Hamad bin Abdullah al Khalifa. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere condolences and heartfelt sympathy, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the bereaved's soul in peace in Paradise and grant his family patience.

OMAN, AIRBUS SIGN PACT FOR OMANSAT-1

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has signed a cooperation agreement with Airbus Defence and Space (ADS) to design, manufacture and launch Oman's first communications satellite "OmanSat-1". The project forms part of national efforts to enhance the telecommunications ecosystem, strengthen digital sovereignty and build national capabilities in space and future technologies. The agreement was signed by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and Alain Fauré, Head of Space Systems at Airbus. ***DETAILS ON P13***

OFFICIAL LOGO FOR FIFA ARAB CUP

The organising committee for the Arab Cup (Fifa Qatar 2025) announced the launch of the official logo for the tournament, ahead of the start of the regional event which will be held in the State of Qatar from December 1 to 18. The mascot embodies the famous Juha character from Arab folklore, a literary and folkloric icon of the region known for his humour and witty wisdom.

Sultan Haitham City wins landscape award

ABU DHABI: *The Sultan Haitham City won second place in the Visions for the Future Under Development category at the 2025 Middle East Landscape Awards for its landscape design for the first phase. The awards ceremony was held in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with participation of prominent urban design and sustainable development projects from across the region.*

The project reflects an integrated urban vision developed in partnership between LWK + Partners and Meinhardt, specialised in urban and engineering design fields. It is based on repurposing the central valley and green circulation axes to create a vibrant ecosystem within the city, making nature an integral part of the city's infrastructure. The project is developed through an interconnected network of shaded pathways, open spaces, and pedestrian and cycle tracks, allowing for the use of public spaces throughout the day. The project also incorporates smart climate solutions, including tree canopies of up to 10 metres in height and cooling pathways that utilise wind and solar to create a thermally comfortable environment for daily use.

ECOSYSTEM

The city boasts a vast ecosystem encompassing the central park, community gardens, and a green corridor connecting neighbourhoods, protected natural areas, and biodiversity zones. According to the master plan, the city has 2.9 million square metres of green spaces making public spaces an essential component of daily life and a pivotal factor in enhancing the quality of the urban experience for residents.

The project also adopts a sustainable, low-operating-cost approach that extends for decades. Irrigation networks utilise low-consumption technologies, in addition to using treated water and powering part of the irrigation system with solar energy. This reduces water consumption by 40 per cent to 60 per cent compared to traditional systems. Furthermore, the valley was designed to accommodate rainwater runoff and increase soil permeability, thus reducing pressure on traditional drainage networks and promoting the management of natural resources within the site.

Hamas delegation in Cairo for talks amid escalation

CAIRO: A senior Hamas delegation met Egypt's intelligence chief in Cairo on Sunday to discuss the ceasefire agreement and the situation in Gaza, the group said, as both Israel and the Palestinian group continue to trade accusations of truce violations.

Egypt, Qatar and the US have been mediating between Hamas and Israel, securing the ceasefire that came into effect last month.

In a statement, the group said it reaffirmed its commitment to implementing the first phase of the ceasefire agreement in its meeting with Egypt's intelligence chief, but accused Israel of "continued violations" that it said threatened to undermine the deal.

Hamas, whose delegation included its exiled Gaza chief Khalil al Hayya, called for a "clear and defined mechanism" under the supervision of mediators to document and halt any breaches of the deal.

The movement said it also discussed with Egypt ways to urgently resolve the issue of Hamas fighters in Rafah tunnels, adding that communication with them had been cut off.

Displaced Palestinians wait for food at a shelter where families have been living, in Nuseirat, in the central Gaza Strip on Sunday. ***— AFP***

Reuters reported earlier this month that mediators were trying to address the fate of a group of Hamas fighters holed up in tunnel networks in Israeli-controlled areas of Gaza.

Meanwhile, President Tayyip Erdogan said Türkiye was still evaluating how to potentially deploy its security forces to an international stabilisation force being planned in Gaza, adding that a decision would be made after these discussions.

Nato member Türkiye has vowed to monitor its implementation and voiced a desire to join the planned stabilisation force.

Speaking at a press conference on Sunday after the G20 summit in South Africa, Erdogan repeated his view that the attacks in Gaza amounted to "genocide" and that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was responsible for these.

— Agencies

SHORT*TAKES*

Faia Younan, the popular Syrian-Assyrian singer, will be the guest of honour.

AL DIN THEATRE FESTIVAL BEGINS TODAY AT OAA

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, NOV 23

The fifth edition of the Al Din International Festival, under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, will be held at the Oman Automobile Association from Monday till November 30. Themed "Welcome World... to the Sultanate of Oman", the festival aims to enrich the cultural scene in Oman and attract international artistic talent, fostering cultural exchange and development in the performing arts.

Faia Younan, the popular Syrian-Assyrian singer, considered the first Middle Eastern artist ever to crowdfund her debut, will be the guest of honour. "Faia Younan is a voice that carries the stories of humanity and the longing of the land. Her presence brings to the stage a pulse of poetry and a horizon of beauty and she will be the guest of honour at the festival," said Mohammed al Nabhani, head of the festival.

The Al Din International Festival, held biennially, is a major theatrical event organised by the Al Din Theater Troupe for Culture and Art and artists from different parts of the world are part of the week-long event. On the sidelines, there will be workshops and other allied activities every day, according to the organisers. Throughout the seven days, the festival features theatre performances from local and international groups. The festival also includes competitions, workshops, and dialogue sessions, attracting participants from around the world. It enhances cultural tourism in Oman and has incorporated digital innovations to celebrate Omani heritage. Other activities of the festival include a diverse lineup of performances, art exhibitions, intellectual seminars, workshops and dialogue sessions.

Mohammed Hashim (Iraq) 'Improvisational Acting', Mohammed Zaki (Egypt) 'Spaces of Theatre Director', Robin Das (India) 'Dynamics of Theatrical Performance', Fatma al Shurouqi (Qatar) 'Theatrical Identity of the Child', Othman al Shatti (Kuwait) 'Creativity in Theatrical Communication', besides several stage plays will be held as part of the event.

Oman, Syria eye avenues of economic cooperation

GEN Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received at his office on Sunday Asaad Hassan al Shaibani, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic, who is currently on an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

The meeting reviewed bilateral relations and existing areas of cooperation between the two countries, and ways to support and develop them. It also touched on the developments in Syria and other topics of common interest.

In a separate meeting, Al Shaibani met Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

The meeting explored avenues to enhance economic and trade relations between the two countries and discussed opportunities for joint cooperation in the upcoming phase.

The two ministers addressed various joint cooperation files, including facilitating procedures for businesspeople and investors, discussing the operation of direct flights between the two countries, and exploring opportunities for Omani companies to contribute to reconstruction projects in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The ministers discussed means of enhancing the utilisation of the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA) and facilitating the movement of land and maritime transport

Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani with Asaad Hassan al Shaibani.

They also discussed means of enhancing the utilisation of the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA) and facilitating the movement of land and maritime transport, as well as customs and non-customs procedures.

Furthermore, the two sides emphasised the importance of activating the work of the Omani-Syrian Joint Committee to enhance coordination in commercial and investment affairs between the two countries, and dispatching technical delegations to the two nations to explore trade, economic and investment cooperation opportunities.

This meeting comes within the framework of the two countries' keenness to cement economic cooperation and exchange investment opportunities, serving common interests and opening new horizons for trade integration between them. **— ONA**

805 GRADUATE FROM NIZWA UNIVERSITY

*The University of Nizwa celebrated the graduation of 805 students from the 18th cohort of the Higher Diploma in Educational Qualification program, spanning various educational specialisations offered by the programme. The ceremony included a visual presentation highlighting the university's key academic, research, and community achievements and a poetic recital in honour of the occasion. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Professor Dr Ahmed bin Khalfan al Rawahi, Vice-Chancellor of Nizwa University. **— ONA***

Tender Notice for the sale of used materials
Tender No. AW/T/PH1/01/2025

Al Watanyiah United Engineering and Contracting Co. LLC hereby announce a Tender for the sale of used materials, as described in the table below, **on an "as is, where is" basis**. Those wishing to submit a Bid must obtain the Tender documents from the Company's Head Office (HO) in Ghala Industrial Area after paying the specified Tender Fee in the Company's Bank Dhofar account **01040605344006 (IBAN NO: OM080250001040605344006)**.

S. No.	Description	Location	Tender Fee (RO)	Earnest Money Deposit (RO)	Period for purchase of Tender	Last date for submission of offer
1	Used Porta Cabins and GRP Ablution, used safety items/Scrap materials, Used Furniture, UPVC, PVC, HDPE, GI Pipes and Project returned items.	Sohar, Haima, Barka and Ghala	25/-	10%. of the submitted offer	19/11/2025 To 03/12/2025	10/12/2025 5.00 PM
2	Aluminum Profiles (Random Lengths)	Ghala				

- The last date for submission of offers is on Wednesday, 5 PM, detailed date on the above table, accompanied by an Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) issued by any local bank in Oman (equivalent to 10%) of the total offered value.
- The EMD must be valid for 60 days from the last date of submission of offer and the original EMD along with the offer must be submitted in the tender box at the reception of our HO Ghala, Muscat, Oman on or before the last date & time indicated above.
- Contact details: 2450 2581 / 82 - Extn. 149 / 150, GSM: 9294 7637 / 7722 8166

MoHT supports restoration plans

Muscat: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) is lending support to citizens' initiatives to restore historical buildings and sites in different governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

The move encourages local community's engagement in protecting and reviving the traditional architectural heritage in villages and sites.

The ministry explained that, during 2024, it provided support for 22 heritage projects in different wilayats of the Sultanate of Oman. The projects included the restoration of boundary walls, old houses, forts, defence towers, ancient mosques and majlis (public halls).

In 2024, MoHT provided support for 22 heritage projects in different wilayats.

The restoration initiatives' support programme continued to receive applications this year (2025).

This coincided with the implementation of restoration projects that are underway in the governorates of Al Sharqiyah South, Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South.

The projects are part of the ministry's approach to revive heritage sites and enhance their presence in the tourism and cultural scene in a manner that contributes to providing a rich experience for visitors and tourists, strengthening the local community's attachment to its ancient heritage and supporting local sustainable development. **— ONA**

“In the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful“

“O satisfied soul return to your Lord wellpleased, wellpleasing.
Join My worshipers and enter My Paradise!”

With hearts filled with faith in God's will and decree,

and with profound sorrow and grief,

The Board of Directors and all employees of

Suhail Bahwan Group Holding mourn the passing of

Sheikh Suhail bin Salim Bahwan

Chairman

We pray to God Almighty to grant him a place in Paradise,
to shower him with His mercy, and to grant his family
patience and solace.

“Indeed, we belong to God, and to Him we shall return.”

Suhail Bahwan Group
Enriching... Enterprising...
مجموعة سهيل بهوان
عـــزم... إثـــراء...

مجموعة سهيل بهوان القابضة ش.م.م

Suhail Bahwan Group (Holding) LLC

Condolences

We extend our sincere condolences and prayers to

Ms. Amal Suhail Bahwan

Chairperson of the Board of Directors of NBO

&

The Bahwan Family

on the passing of the late

Sheikh Suhail Salim Bahwan

We pray to Allah Almighty to grant him eternal peace,
and to bless his family with patience, strength, and
solace in facing this profound loss.

Sheikh Abdulla Bin Ali Bin Jabor Al Thani,
Chairman

Board of Directors and all employees
of Commercial Bank

البنك التجاري
COMMERCIAL
BANK

Condolences

The National Bank of Oman's Board of Directors
and all employees extend their sincere condolences and prayers

to

Ms. Amal Suhail Bahwan

Chairperson of the Board of Directors of NBO

The Bahwan Family

on the passing of the late

Sheikh Suhail Salim Bahwan

We pray to Allah Almighty to grant him eternal peace,
and to bless his family with patience, strength, and solace in facing this profound loss.

البنك الوطني العماني
NBO

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

يا أيتها النفس المطمئنة ارجعي إلى ربك راضية مرضية فادخلي في عبادي وادخلي جنتي

«صدق الله العظيم»

With hearts full of faith in Allah's decree

The Board of Directors and all the employees of
Hind Bahwan Group extend their
sincere condolences

on the passing of

Sheikh Suhail Salim Abdullah Bahwan Al Mukhaini
Chairman of Suhail Bahwan Group

We offer our heartfelt condolences to the Chairperson
and her family members.
We pray that, Allah grants the departed soul His mercy,
admits him to Paradise,
blesses his family with patience and
solace during this time of grief.
Truly, to Allah we belong and truly, to him
we shall return.

إنا لله وإنا إليه راجعون

SHORT*TAKES*

Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani with Yassir Mohammed Ahmed.

Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani with Hrachya Poladian

ROYAL OFFICE MINISTER RECEIVES AMBASSADORS OF EGYPT, ARMENIA

Muscat: *Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received at his office on Sunday Yassir Mohammed Ahmed, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the Sultanate of Oman. Gen Al Numani welcomed the ambassador, wishing him success in his new tour of duties.*

The meeting reviewed the close bilateral relations and discussed ways to enhance cooperation and joint coordination in a manner that meets the aspirations of the leaderships and peoples.

*Gen Al Numani also received Hrachya Poladian, Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to the Sultanate of Oman. The meeting reviewed the existing relations between the two countries. It also discussed pathways of joint cooperation and ways to enhance them across various fields. The Armenian Ambassador expressed his appreciation for the development witnessed in bilateral relations, valuing the role undertaken by the Sultanate of Oman in advocating security and stability. — **ONA***

OMAN FM, LEBANON CULTURE MINISTER DISCUSS CULTURAL INITIATIVES

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy with Ghassan Salame.

Muscat: *Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received Ghassan Salame, Minister of Culture of the Lebanese Republic. The meeting took place on the sidelines of the Lebanese Minister's participation in the Human Dialogue Forum. The meeting featured a mutual emphasis on the importance of developing initiatives that support cultural and intellectual exchange, as well as dialogue among civilisations. The two ministers also discussed a set of regional and international developments and exchanged views on them, in line with ongoing endeavours to create opportunities for achieving security and just peace in the region. — **ONA***

Oman, Jordan forge deeper strategic partnership

SAYYID Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Sunday received Ayman Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Jordan.

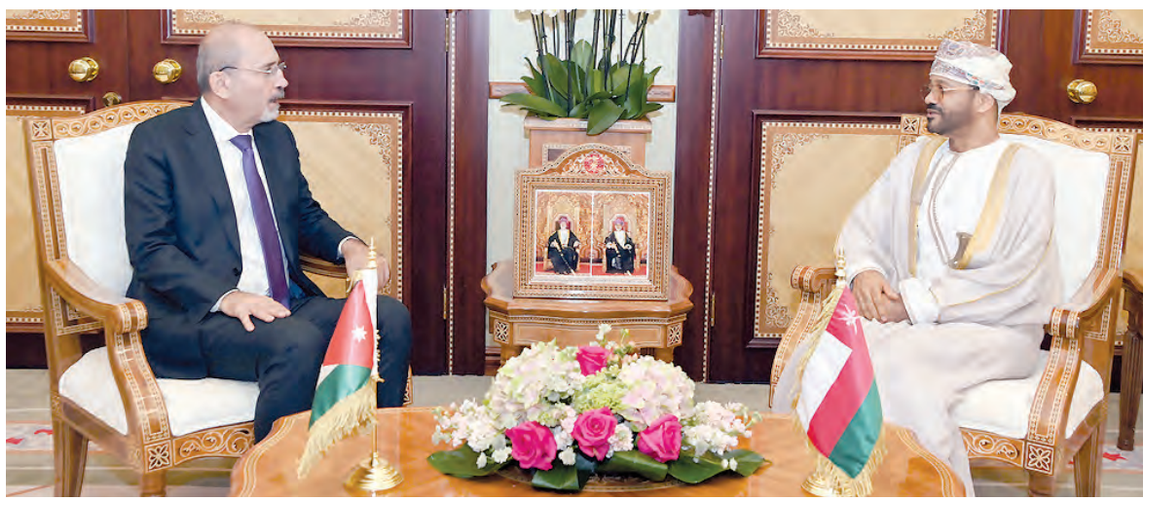
Sayyid Badr commended the profound and deeply rooted relations between Oman and Jordan. He highlighted the consistent support and high-level attention these ties receive from both nations' leadership, which serves to continually develop and enrich bilateral cooperation across a diverse range of fields.

The discussions featured a comprehensive review of the bilateral relationship and explored pathways to elevate this partnership to wider horizons, with particular focus on political, economic, educational, and tourism domains. The meeting also examined opportunities for expanding joint investments and strengthening collaborative efforts in vital sectors such as food security, logistics, and communications, in step with the shared aspirations of both countries.

The two ministers engaged in an exchange of perspectives on pressing regional and international developments, giving primary focus to the grave situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. They jointly underscored the critical imperative to cease escalation, ensure the protection of civilians, and redouble efforts dedicated to revitalising the political process.

This, they affirmed, is essential to achieving a comprehensive and just resolution that secures the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

Ayman Safadi conveyed his nation's deep appreciation for the steadfast and balanced diplomatic efforts of the Sultanate of Oman and its constructive role in bolstering regional security and stability. He further reaffirmed Jordan's steadfast commitment to enhancing cooperation and deepening coordination with the Sultanate of Oman on all matters of mutual interest. — **ONA**



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy with Ayman Safadi in Muscat on Sunday

RO 30m hospital coming up in Sultan Haitham City

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 23

IN Sultan Haitham City, Oman Vision 2040 is taking shape in tangible ways, projecting a digital future grounded in innovation and responsibility. Al Siyabi International Group laid the foundation stone for a pioneering healthcare project—the first of its kind in the Gulf region. The project introduces a hospital built on a unique model of partnership between the medical and urban development sectors, and between physicians and investors. With an estimated cost of RO 30 million, the hospital is designed according to state-of-the-art construction methods and equipped with the latest medical technologies, marking a milestone in the healthcare landscape of Oman and the wider region.

Coming up in Al Wafaa District — the first neighbourhood established in Sultan Haitham City — the project sits close to major roads for ease of access.

The hospital is based on a forward-looking concept that introduces a new dimension to investment in the healthcare sector -one rooted in partnership, ownership and collaborative administration. It reflects a new generation of projects that blend architectural precision with a deep human understanding of well-being.

An artist's impression of the project. The project introduces a hospital built on a unique model of partnership between the medical and urban development sectors, and between physicians and investors.

The investment model allows physicians to become true owners and administrative partners within the system. Each specialist can acquire a private clinic within a total of 130 clinics housed in a contemporary building that also includes 160 patient beds designed to meet global health standards.

Through this ownership structure, each clinic owner automatically becomes a member of the hospital's general assembly, granting physicians an influential voice in strategic decision-making and fostering long-term loyalty and partnership between doctors and the institution.

Yet at the heart of this ambitious project remains the patient and their family. The hospital's interior design embraces a "healing through nature" philosophy that extends beyond landscaped gardens and an artificial lake. "Hospitals have long been associated with fear and anxiety," says Shaikh Salim bin Ali al Siyabi, Chairman of the Group.

"We want them to become spaces of reassurance and hope. Every detail here was designed around a triad of psychological comfort, privacy, and quality service, creating a holistic healing experience".

A musical instrument representing maritime history

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, NOV 23

There is a musical instrument in Oman that symbolises Oman's maritime history, and that is the Tambūra.

The tambourah (also spelled tanboura, tambura, fann at-tanbura, or nuban) is a prominent string instrument (chordophone) in Omani traditional music, particularly associated with the rituals of Sur.

The instrument is the centrepiece at the exhibition titled 'Rhythm of Life,' an exhibition of richness and diversity in Oman's music, held at the Royal Opera House Muscat.

"This incredible exhibition showcases instruments that are really rare, and it shows the roots that contributed to the world of music. The timing of the exhibition is important because it coincides with the foundation day of Al Busaid State," said Umberto Fanni, Director-General of Royal Opera House Muscat .

The string instrument (chordophone) is made of wood, goatskin, and animal matter. The indicator of international influence is the peacock feather.

According to the National Museum of Oman, Tambūra is a stringed instrument believed to date back to the Mesopotamian civilisation and is used in the tambura rituals of Sur. The cultural significance of Tambūra and its associated musical style are deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of Oman, with influences tracing back to East Africa.

The tambourah displayed at the Royal Opera House Muscat.

Renowned musicologist of Oman, Dr Nasser bin Hamed al Taee, Executive Director of exhibitions and the Library at the Royal Opera House Muscat, explained, "This is a unique instrument that is used in Oman. It is historically from the eastern region of Africa. The Omanis obtained it and incorporated the musical instrument into the folklore music of Oman because of the long connection with Zanzibar and the coast of East Africa in general."

The Tambūra music evolved into a powerful expression of communal identity. The music plays an important role in specific rituals and ceremonies, particularly the tambura rituals of Sur. The music is often associated with trance-like rituals, spiritual healing, and a deep connection between music and movement.

"The instrument is used and associated with musical feeling and music therapy," noted Dr Al Taee.

The Tambūra is still used today. And at the exhibition a video recording of a live performance demonstrates how the instrument is played.

It blends African rhythmic structures with Oman's musical sensibilities, reflecting the diverse heritage and history of Oman.

Sometimes referred to as a 'bowl lyre', it is made of wood and has a sound box covered with goat skin. The instrument has five to six strings, which were made of camel intestines in the past, but metal or plastic wires are used now.

Traditional Omani artisans are skilled in its manufacture, selecting specific types of wood such as walnut or Sidr and animal skins to achieve a particular tone. The strings are plucked with a pick made of bull-horn, while the player's palm or fingers are simultaneously used to tighten or release the strings.

SHORT*TAKES*

Students captivated the audience with a vibrant dance drama titled 'Roots and Wings', a graceful depiction of the harmony between tradition and transformation

ISWK MARKS ITS 37TH FOUNDERS' DAY WITH A SHOW OF TALENTS

MUSCAT: *Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir (ISWK) celebrated its 37th Founders' Day on November 19, 2025, with grandeur and heartfelt gratitude, honouring the visionaries whose ideals shaped the institution.*

This year's theme, 'Roots and Wings', reflected the values that anchor the school and the aspirations that propel its students forward. The event seamlessly blended academic recognition with cultural vibrancy and was attended by distinguished dignitaries, parents and staff.

The Chief Guest, Hussain al Lawati, Member of the Majlis Ash'shura, and Member of the Youth and Human Resource Committee, was warmly received by members of the School Managing Committee, distinguished dignitaries, Principal D N Rao, Vice-Principals and special guests.

The programme began with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp, symbolising the triumph of knowledge over ignorance, followed by the national anthems of Oman and India.

In the welcome address, the significance of the theme 'Roots and Wings' was emphasised, highlighting ISWK's steadfast commitment to nurturing values while fostering creativity, confidence and innovation.

A major highlight of the evening was the felicitation of academic achievers of Grades 10 and 12. The Grade 10 school toppers, along with the Grade 12 toppers from the Science, Commerce and Humanities streams, were honoured for their outstanding performance in the CBSE Examination 2025.

Students and teachers who secured perfect centum scores in subjects such as Artificial Intelligence, French, Home Science, English, Mathematics, Accountancy, Entrepreneurship, Psychology, Chemistry and Informatics

Students captivated the audience with a vibrant dance drama titled 'Roots and Wings', a graceful depiction of the harmony between tradition and transformation.

The heartwarming performance beautifully portrayed how roots represent culture, ethics, and grounding, while wings signify aspiration and the courage to explore new horizons.

Expat hiring comes under new body set up by MoSD

VINOD R NAIR
MUSCAT, NOV 23

OMAN launched an association to regulate expatriate worker recruitment, which will resolve disputes and curb unlicensed recruiters.

Officially named the Association of Expatriate Worker Recruitment Offices, the entity will work alongside government agencies to standardise recruitment practices and ensure compliance of international norms.

Set up by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), the association, formed under the Civil Associations Law, will coordinate recruitment policies with government institutions both inside and outside Oman. It will represent licensed recruitment offices before authorities and safeguard their rights, ensuring operations comply with national legislation.

The association will liaise with foreign embassies through the Foreign Ministry. Its focus will be on using reconciliation mechanisms to resolve conflicts involving expatriate workers, preventing escalation and streamlining solutions.

The body will also assist government efforts to bring qualified workers into Oman through regulated channels. This includes validating memoranda of understanding with countries and expanding recruitment pipelines to include multiple nationalities, subject to government and diplomatic approval.

Tthe Association of Expatriate Worker Recruitment Offices aims to oversee recruitment agencies, enforce ethical standards, resolve labour disputes, and support efforts to bring qualified expatriate workers through regulated channels

New association will standardise hiring, resolve disputes, and curb unlicensed recruiters

In parallel, the association will collaborate with authorities to identify and eliminate unlicensed recruitment offices, a key priority in Oman's broader labour market reforms.

A 12-member Board of Directors will manage the association, with members serving two-year terms and eligible for one re-election. Founding members may run for the board during the first General Assembly meeting following the association's official declaration. Funding will come from membership fees, government subsidies, approved donations and gifts, revenue from activities, and other streams authorised by the ministry.

The association will work to protect the principles of recruiting expats in a manner that does not conflict with the provisions of the Basic Law of the State and other laws. The association will represent the offices affiliated with the association before government agencies and defend the rights and interests of the owners of offices for recruiting expatriates.

It will coordinate with relevant government agencies to bring suitable labour to Oman from countries with the help of embassies and consulates in the Sultanate of Oman and the Gulf countries.

Sayyid Badr holds talks with ministers and other officials

FROM P1

They also exchanged perspectives on a range of regional and international issues of common concern, jointly affirming their commitment to sustained coordination and consultation to enhance collective action and promote security and stability throughout the region.

These meetings were attended by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, alongside senior officials from the ministry.

Sayyid Badr received Andreas Kravik, State Secretary at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

They reviewed the extensive scope of existing cooperation between Oman and Norway, with particular emphasis on their collaborative work in the fields of mediation and dialogue facilitation.

They exchanged views on pressing regional and international developments, stressing the importance of enhanced coordination on matters of peace and security and reaffirming their support for peaceful conflict resolution.

Sayyid Badr al Busaidi with Hans Grundberg, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Yemen

The conversation also ventured into opportunities for expanding the bilateral partnership into areas such as education, culture, and sustainable development, thereby deepening the bonds of friendship and shared purpose.

Sayyid Badr met Dr Seyed Abbas Araghchi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran. They took stock of the positive trajectory of bilateral relations, noting the encouraging progress across various fields of cooperation that continue to yield mutual benefits. A substantive exchange of views on regional and international developments followed, with special attention given to ongoing efforts to de-escalate tensions and reinforce diplomatic channels for crisis management. Both sides emphasised the importance of continued coordination and consultation between their two nations. **— ONA**

Expatriates join Omanis in National Day celebrations

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, NOV 23

Hundreds of expatriates and their families in the Sultanate of Oman celebrated Oman's National Day along with their Omani counterparts by organising special celebrations.

Traders and workers at the Muttrah Souq had earlier decorated the streets along with their shops and premises with tricolour flags and other festoons and the like in preparation for the National Day.

The traders distributed 'kheer' at Muttrah Municipality Park as part of National Day celebrations to the passers-by.

"This day marks a great milestone in our lives too, and we spare no occasion to join our Omani friends in any celebration," said Navas Kasargode, a tradesman at the souq.

They also carried out a solidarity procession through the souq led by Faisal Happyland and Shafiq Edakkad before the sweet distribution, and hundreds of Omanis joined the festivities of National Day celebrations inside the Muttrah Souq.

Officials, traders and workers at the Silal market in the Khazaen Industrial City joined the rest of the country in commemorating the day. Nabil al Ruwaiti, CEO, and Othman bin Ali al Hattali, General Manager, joined the celebrations organised by Suhol al Fayha, a leading fresh fruits and vegetables supplier at Silal.

The special guests to the event expressed their great joy and pride in being able to participate in this important National Day celebration organised by the company.

Abdul Jabbar, Chairman, Abdul Wahid, Managing Director, and Abdul Latif, Director, expressed great joy and pride in being able to celebrate this important National Day celebration.

Officials, traders and workers at the Silal market celebrate Oman's National Day.

Everyone was warmly welcomed to the event with coffee and dates in the traditional Omani way followed by a cake-cutting ceremony with everyone in attendance. Members of the Business Network International Majan (BNI Majan) celebrated the day with their partners during its chapter meeting at Sheraton Ruwi. The BNI Majan was honoured to have over 35 business owners from across Oman.

"Together, we celebrated unity, growth, and the spirit of entrepreneurship that drives our nation forward. Long Live the nation," members reiterated in their joint pledge.

SHORTTAKES

Supporters of political groups gathering outside the Election Commission office in Kathmandu. **— AFP**

OVER 800,000 NEW VOTERS REGISTER FOR NEPAL POLLS

KATHMANDU: *Hundreds of thousands of new voters have registered to cast their ballot in Nepal's first polls since a mass uprising in September ousted the government, election officials said on Sunday.*

Election Commission spokesman Narayan Prasad Bhattarai said that there was "a total of 837,094 registered names" of first-time voters. Bhattarai said that by Friday, 123 established parties had registered to take part in the March 5 parliamentary polls, while another 40 new slates await further verification to be allowed to run.

Interest in participating in the elections has surged, especially among young people who see it as a critical test of whether the demands of protesters.

Dikshya Poudel, a 19-year-old student, said the uprising had encouraged her to register her name last week. "I am excited to cast my vote for the first time in the upcoming election. I will be voting for a new change-maker," she said. The protests were initially triggered by a brief ban on social media but quickly morphed into a nationwide anti-corruption movement.

At least 76 people were killed during the demonstrations, and parliament, courts and government offices were torched. **— AFP**

IRAN WARNS OF ATTEMPTS TO TARGET SUPREME LEADER

TEHRAN: *Iran's intelligence ministry has warned of attempts by foreign adversaries, including the United States and Israel, to target supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and destabilise the Islamic republic.*

The country's ISNA news agency reported that intelligence minister Esmail Khatib cautioned "the enemy seeks to target the supreme leader, sometimes with assassination attempts, sometimes with hostile attacks".

While it was not immediately clear if the minister was referring to a specific incident, and Iranian officials often allege foreign plots, statements on threats against Khamenei's life had been rare prior to a 12-day war between Israel and Iran in June. "Those who act in this direction, knowingly or unknowingly, are the infiltrating agents of the enemy," Khatib added, referring directly to Israel and the United States.

Earlier this month, Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian said he was particularly concerned for Khamenei's life during the war and feared that the country's institutions "would start fighting among each other." In July, Khamenei said Israel's attacks during the war were intended to weaken the Islamic republic, sow "unrest and bring people into the streets to overthrow the system".

A ceasefire between Iran and Israel has been in place since June 24, but both Israel and the United States have threatened new strikes if Tehran revives its nuclear programme. **— AFP**

G20 outcome renews commitment to multilateralism

JOHANNESBURG: *South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa said on Sunday that the Leaders' Declaration from this weekend's Group of 20 summit reflected a "renewed commitment to multilateral cooperation". Ramaphosa, host of the Johannesburg summit, pushed through the declaration addressing global challenges like the climate crisis despite objections from the United States, which boycotted the event.*

Addressing the summit's closing ceremony, Ramaphosa said the declaration showed that world leaders' "shared goals outweigh our differences". US President Donald Trump boycotted the November 22-23 summit because of allegations that the host country's Black majority government persecutes its white minority.

Trump had also rejected South Africa's agenda of promoting solidarity and helping developing nations adapt to worsening weather disasters, transition to clean energy and cut their excessive debt costs.

The summit document stressed the seriousness of climate change and the need to better adapt to it, praising ambitious targets to boost renewable energy.

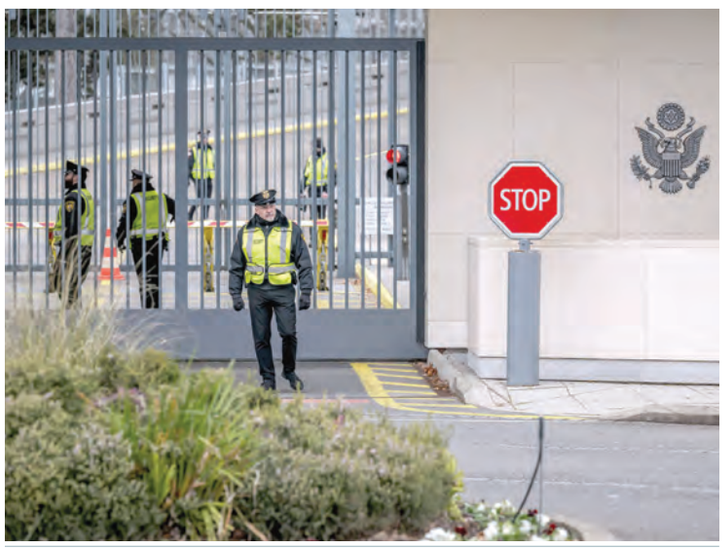
The US takes over the rotating G20 presidency, but South Africa rejected a US proposal to send an official for the handover, saying it was a breach of protocol. **— Reuters**

US, Ukrainian & European officials discuss peace plan

UKRAINIAN, US and European officials gathered in Geneva on Sunday to discuss a draft plan presented by Washington to end the war in Ukraine, after Kyiv and its allies voiced alarm over what they saw as major concessions to the aggressor Russia. On Friday, US President Donald Trump said Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy had until Thursday to approve the 28-point plan, which calls on Ukraine to cede territory, accept limits on its military and renounce ambitions to join Nato.

For many Ukrainians, including soldiers fighting on the front lines, such terms would amount to capitulation after nearly four years of fighting in Europe's deadliest conflict since World War Two. On Saturday, Trump said the current proposal for ending the war is not his final offer. Since the plan was announced, there has been considerable confusion about who was involved in drawing it up. European allies said they had not been consulted.

As the officials gathered in Geneva, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said the goal was to craft a plan acceptable to Ukraine which could be used in a negotiation with Russia. That would likely take time, he said. "Right now, I'm not yet convinced we're going to get the solution President Trump wants in the next few days," Merz said on the sidelines of a G20 meeting in Johannesburg. Before heading to Geneva, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio insisted in a post on X that Washington had authored the plan. He posted the remark after Republican Senator Mike Rounds said Rubio had called him and other senators and explained it was a proposal the US had received and passed on to Ukraine. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said on X that Ukraine's allies were ready to work on the plan, but that it was important to know how it had come together.



Officers of the US security stand guard at the Missions of USA in Geneva. **— AFP**

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Sunday that Ukraine's borders cannot be changed by force, its army cannot be left vulnerable to attack and that the European Union must have a central role in a Ukraine peace deal

Rubio and US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff arrived on Sunday for the hastily convened Geneva meeting. "We hope to iron out the final details...to draft a deal that is advantageous to them (Ukraine)," a US official said. "Nothing will be agreed on until the two presidents get together," the official said, referring to Trump and Zelensky. Zelensky welcomed the diplomatic efforts in Geneva, saying that he hoped they would lead to a result. Before the gathering, US and Ukrainian officials held constructive talks, a US official said. Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said he would speak to his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on Monday about Ukraine and share the outcome with European and US allies.

The draft plan, which includes many of Russia's key demands and offers only vague assurances to Ukraine of "robust security guarantees", comes at a perilous moment for the country. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Sunday that Ukraine's borders cannot be changed by force, its army cannot be left vulnerable to attack and that the European Union must have a central role in a Ukraine peace deal. Russia has been making gains on parts of the front, albeit slowly and, according to Western and Ukrainian officials, the advances have been extremely costly in terms of lives lost.

The transportation hub of Pokrovsk has been partially taken by Russian forces and Ukrainian commanders say they do not have enough soldiers to prevent small, persistent incursions. Ukraine's power and gas facilities have been pummelled by drone and missile attacks, meaning millions of people are without water, heating and power for hours each day. Zelensky himself has been under pressure domestically after a major corruption scandal broke, ensnaring some of his ministers and people in his close entourage. **— Reuters**

ISRAELI STRIKES TARGET LEBANESE CAPITAL

BEIRUT: *Israel said it had carried out an air strike on Sunday targeting Hezbollah's chief of staff in Beirut, leaving a smoking hole in the side of an apartment building and debris scattered in the street. Lebanon's health ministry reported at least one person killed in the strike, and 21 people wounded, calling it a "preliminary toll". The strike took place in Beirut's southern suburbs, a densely populated area where Hezbollah holds sway, and caused "injuries and significant damage", according to Lebanon's official National News Agency (NNA).*

A correspondent at the scene said the strike hit the third and fourth floors of a nine-storey building, with ambulances gathered around it and rescuers inspecting the apartments. NNA reported three missiles were fired at the building in the Haret Hreik area, damaging vehicles and other nearby structures. Sunday's strike was the first on Beirut's southern suburbs since June 5. **— AFP**

CRUCIAL POLLS

Bosnian Serbs vote to replace leader

Bosnia's Serb-majority entity cast ballots to pick a replacement for its banned firebrand president, Milorad Dodik, who was removed for defying Bosnia's international peace envoy. The winner will serve for less than a year before the general elections in October 2026. It is seen as a crucial test of support for Dodik's nationalist party, which has been in power for nearly two decades. Economist Brankica Dragojlovic voiced hope for better times. **— AFP**

SIGH OF RELIEF

50 kidnapped children have escaped

Fifty of the more than 300 children snatched by gunmen from a school in Nigeria have escaped their captors, a Christian group said. "We have received some good news as fifty pupils escaped and have reunited with their parents," said the Christian Association of Nigeria, adding they escaped between Friday and Saturday. The number of boys and girls kidnapped from St Mary's is almost half of the school's student population of 629. **— AFP**

PUBLICISED CRACKDOWN

Myanmar arrests 1,590 in scam hub raids

Myanmar's military said that it arrested foreigners in five days in a publicised crackdown on a notorious internet scam hub on the Thai border. The junta said "1,590 foreign nationals who entered illegally were arrested", according to state media. "Moreover, authorities seized 2,893 computers, 21,750 mobile phones, 101 Starlink satellite receivers, 21 Routers and industrial materials used in the online fraud and gambling activities," it said. **— AFP**

Oman's rich heritage meets Vision 2040

SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is an Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

AS Oman celebrates its National Day, the focus this year has shifted to interesting ways in which history is being showcased and narrated. Drawing direct lineage to the Al Busaid State, founded in 1744, creates a continuum that is rooted in the past in more ways than one. For one, it establishes a reminder of a legacy of rule that can be traced back centuries, giving the country a framework within which it realises itself and its identity.

Identity is a key feature of what makes a nation. In addition to tangible markers like a national symbol and a national flag, there are intangible representations of national identity. These include customs, traditions, shared beliefs and cultural mores.

Oman Vision 2040, the country's long-term development road map, exemplifies this blend of old and new. While prioritising innovation and sustainability, it also emphasises cultural preservation and community-led initiatives.

The vision recognises that modernisation must enhance Omani ways of life. This is why heritage sites, traditional crafts, and folkloric arts receive significant investment and protection. They represent more than historical artefacts as they are living expressions of identity, linking younger generations to their ancestors' wisdom.

In fact, Oman Vision 2040 outlines the importance of history in one of its clearly stated priorities, which is 'Citizenship, Identity and National Heritage and Culture'. In it, the strategic direction is said to be to build "A society that is proud of its identity and culture, and committed to its citizenship".

Education can contribute widely to creating these linkages between past and present. Encouraging a reading of history that connects a nation's past with its future could begin with strategies to make heritage engaging for students. This can be achieved by integrating historical themes across various subjects and going beyond textbooks.

Learners can be encouraged to see how traditional values like pride in craftsmanship and protection of the environment can inform modern challenges. In this way, history becomes a practical guide rather than a theoretical narrative.

Classroom projects that revive and inform on traditional arts, storytelling, or oral histories should be encouraged

This can be achieved through experiential learning. This includes visits to forts, aflaj systems and heritage villages to introduce students, particularly those living in the larger cities, to witness inventions and lifestyles established in earlier times.

Classroom projects that revive and inform on traditional arts, storytelling, or oral histories should be encouraged. Students should be given opportunities to explore projects on their own by interviewing artisans or community leaders, giving insights into cultural differences and similarities within different geographical spaces within Oman.

Encouraging an analysis of the past and the way in which historical knowledge and values inform future innovation can become a useful strategy to make younger generations cultivate an informed admiration of the past and its inevitable linkages to the future.

G20 GRAPPLES WITH SPLINTERING WORLD ORDER

MARC BURLEIGH

G20 leaders gathered on Sunday in South Africa hailed multilateralism — even as they struggled to adapt to a changing world order beset by go-it-alone US policies, wars and deepening geopolitical rivalries.

The final day of their weekend summit — boycotted by the United States — kicked off with a searching discussion on how the G20 can survive in a fragmenting world.

"We are not experiencing a transition, but a rupture," acknowledged Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney to journalists just before the summit session.

"Too many countries are retreating into geopolitical blocs or the battlegrounds of protectionism," he said, but added: "In every rupture resides the responsibility to build — nostalgia is not a strategy."

US President Donald Trump's government snubbed the event, saying South Africa's priorities — including cooperation on trade and climate — ran counter to its policies.

The United States is retreating from multilateral forums as it stokes trade volatility with sweeping tariffs and reverses commitments to fight global warming.

Trump's officials have also made unfounded accusations of a "white genocide" in South Africa.

In a joint G20 statement issued on Saturday, the leaders present said they were meeting "against the backdrop of rising geopolitical and geo-economic competition and instability, heightened conflicts and wars, deepening inequality, increasing global economic uncertainty and fragmentation".

The leaders' declaration was issued despite Washington objecting to the summit making any statement in the name of the G20.

The UK-based Oxfam charity said "South Africa has set an example to the world in ensuring the G20 stood firm and collectively agreed on a leader's declaration — defending multilateralism — despite powerful opposition".

It needs to refocus its priorities on strategic economic issues going forward, he said, noting "difficulties" in the G20 finding common approaches to armed conflicts around the world.

That somewhat reflected a US intention to limit G20 discussions to just macroeconomic topics as it takes on hosting duties next year, when Trump plans to hold the summit at a Florida golf club he owns.

The G20 — comprising 19 nations plus the European Union and the African Union — was founded in the wake of the 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis as a forum to boost global economic and financial stability.

Over time, its discussions have broadened to also cover climate change, sustainable development, global health and conflicts. ***— AFP***

A win that bets on public good over private gain

OMAN AL YAHYAI

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

THE election of Zohran Mamdani in New York City is more than just a local change in leadership; it may signal a turning point in American politics. Mamdani, a 34-year-old self-described democratic socialist and the youngest ever victor of New York, won the 2025 mayoral race in the city.

In a nation typically defined by capitalism, and even when the Democratic Party wins, it is rare for a winner to present himself as a socialist rather than an ally of business interests; his ascendancy deserves deeper attention.

In the US, mainstream Democrats often pursue markets and corporate-friendly policies, campaigning for the "economy" and "jobs" in terms that reassure investors and large stakeholders. By contrast, Mamdani's campaign foregrounded affordability, housing and worker rights, issues reflecting deep strains in urban life. He ran on a platform of making New York more affordable, addressing the city's housing crisis in which skyrocketing rents are out of reach for many. New York has long suffered from extreme rents, a shortage of housing stock accessible to middle and lower-income residents, and growing inequality. Mamdani's message resonated with voters frustrated by a system that seems rigged in favour of landlords, developers and Wall Street.

His win thus matters for several reasons. First, it signals that even in the most market-driven of economies, there is room for a political platform that challenges pro-business policies. In an American context where the political elite often includes corporate donors and real-estate interests, a socialist mayor in the country's largest city is extraordinary. Second, it suggests that voters, especially younger, urban ones, may be ready to bite the bullet of deeper reform rather than incremental tweaks. Mamdani captured a broad coalition, especially among the young and less affluent.

Furthermore, voters may be signalling dissatisfaction with the current Republican-led national administration, a desire for change at the local level, where everyday costs and services bite hardest.

Mamdani's election matters not just for New York but for the US political landscape. It may reflect a broader shift,a repudiation of business-as-usual politics and a re-awakening of collective ambition for public good over private gain.

Donald Trump and Zohran Mamdani.

That dissatisfaction is corroborated by broader economic and political stressors. In the first year of President Donald Trump's return to office, Americans confronted surging grocery prices, inflation pressure, and in late 2025, the longest federal government shutdown in US history, which lasted 43 days, disrupting federal programmes including food-assistance benefits. This breakdown of governance, and the sense that business interests and the very wealthy are shielded while ordinary people pay the price (through inflation, tax cuts for the rich, education or cultural spending cuts) has broken trust in the status-quo.

Indeed, amid the Republican administration's tax cuts for the extremely wealthy and rhetoric prioritising business and deregulation, many voters may ask: who has our back? When education funding, arts and culture programmes and social services are trimmed, opportunity shrinks for the non-elite. In that vacuum, a candidate who says he stands with the "working people" becomes compelling.

Mamdani's win could therefore signify a shift in American politics: not towards overnight revolution, but towards a recalibration of what public service looks like. While "socialism" remains a loaded term in US political discourse, often weaponised by opponents, what Mamdani proposes is more akin to the social-democratic models of Europe: stronger public-education systems, universal-style healthcare, affordable housing, and public investment in culture and community. Those Western countries have long shown that high-quality education and healthcare need not lead to crushing personal debt.

In New York, the housing crisis poses both a moral and economic imperative. If rents continue to rise beyond what most can pay, the city risks hollowing out its middle class, decimating diversity and locking in inequality. A mayor who centres affordability and redistributive policy may just be the counter-force that the city, and by extension the country, needs.

In short, Zohran Mamdani's election matters not just for New York but for the US political landscape. It may reflect a broader shift,a repudiation of business-as-usual politics and a re-awakening of collective ambition for public good over private gain. If that shift deepens, the word "socialism" may lose its stigma and become, for Americans, a new pathway to shared prosperity.

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A day the heart never forgets...

ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author, translator and a communications professional

NATIONS, like people, live through cycles of becoming. They are shaped by memory, guided by choices and strengthened by the character of those who call them home. Oman's journey reminds us that progress is not always loud, and greatness does not always demand demonstration. Sometimes it emerges through quiet determination, through patient steps taken with purpose, and through the wisdom to grow without losing oneself.

There are days in a nation's life that feel larger than celebration — days that ask us not just to cheer, but to reflect. Oman's National Day is one of those rare moments. When dawn breaks on that day, its light does more than warm the mountains and shine across the sea; it invites every person in the country to stop, breathe and remember the journey that shaped this home we all love.

The flags that flutter on balconies are not only decorations. They are reminders of the hope, sacrifices and strength that carried Oman from its old days into its present. In the light of the morning, one can almost feel the heartbeat of a nation that has endured, transformed and risen with dignity.

And throughout the day, the streets fill with colours and celebration. Behind the fireworks and parades lies a silent reflection and profound feelings. Oman's story is not defined by loud successes, but by steady progress — by the minds that turned ambition into reality and the hearts that kept unity alive even in changing times.

Oman's story is one of courage without mess, ambition without arrogance, and growth without losing identity. Few nations have mastered this balance. Yet Oman has done so with a calmness that feels almost like its natural rhythm — stable, patient, unshaken. The beauty of this day is found not in the celebration, but in the spirit. It is in the soft pride of an elder watching children wave the flag. In the determination of a young graduate dreaming about the future. In the shared understanding that peace is a blessing and progress is a responsibility. Oman's strength has always been its ability to honour the past without being trapped in it, and to embrace the future without losing its soul.

This day invites us to think about what truly builds a country. Roads and towers rise from stone and steel, but unity rises from the soul. It comes from shared values, shared struggles and shared hopes. Oman's enduring peace — and the stability that many admire — is not an accident of history, but a reflection of a national character that understands the value of harmony in a world often taught to forget it. What inspires most about this day is not the flags and not the fireworks, it is the spirit and understanding that Oman's journey has been built not on noise, but on purpose and moving forward wisely. The nation's progress has always been measured, guided by vision and attached to values that refuse to fade. As the nation watches the colours of the flag wave in the wind, one is reminded that identity is not fabric. It is memory, responsibility and aspiration. It is the collective promise of a people who choose to carry their heritage forward instead of letting it fade behind them. It is the young minds shaping ideas that do not yet exist, and the older generations who offer wisdom shaped by time and disciplines.

The National Day is more than just an anniversary. It is a promise to cherish what brought us here. A promise to protect what holds us together and to rise proudly and bravely into the future we choose to build

The National Day is more than just an anniversary. It is a promise to cherish what brought us here. A promise to protect what holds us together and to rise proudly and bravely into the future we choose to build. This day marks a pause in time that asks us to consider what it means to belong to a place, to inherit its story and to shape its future.

SMALLER EU NATIONS PUSH FOR GREATER AFRICA ROLE

UMBERTO BACCHI

From Finland opening diplomatic outposts in Senegal to Czech instructors training Mauritanian security forces, a group of smaller European nations has joined a global scramble for influence in Africa.

Estonia, Romania and Malta are among European Union countries that have sought to boost their presence on the continent over the past five years, revamping diplomatic and trade links.

"There is a wave of second-generation Africa policy refreshes completed and... under way," said Alex Vines of the European Council on Foreign Relations. "It shows the growing importance of Africa across the EU, including for its smaller member states."

Africa has emerged as a renewed diplomatic battleground in recent years, with China, the United States and Russia competing for its minerals, energy potential and political support.

The EU styles itself as the continent's "leading partner" in areas ranging from trade to security, a role it will try to reinforce at a summit with the African Union in Angola on Monday and Tuesday.

Yet it has suffered setbacks at times, fuelled by resentment at the West's colonial past, with China securing strategic resources in some countries and Russia taking over as preferred security partner in others. Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali have, for example, turned to the Kremlin for support after cutting ties with France following a string of military coups. This has led to a strategic rethink in many corners of the 27-nation EU.

"We needed to somehow get back into the game," a European diplomat said.

Some EU nations with no former empires have sought to use their history - and in some cases their past domination by Russia - as an asset to establish relations seen as egalitarian, not top-down.

"We are not seen as the big oppressor from the past telling them to do this thing or the other," said a second diplomat. Estonia's painstaking transition from ex-Soviet republic to EU member has helped it find some common ground with African nations, said Daniel Schaer, the Baltic country's ambassador to Kenya and South Africa.

"In the '90s, we had all of these advisers coming to tell us how we should do things. So I think our advice is in some ways fresh," he said.

Similarly, Kaarina Airas, who is in charge of Africa policy at Finland's foreign ministry, said her country's struggle for independence has helped generate goodwill. "Our African partners want trade, they want political relations with us and not only development aid," she said.

*After a policy review in 2021, Finland opened a new embassy in Senegal, followed by Sweden and Denmark, and is aiming to double trade with Africa by 2030. Estonia has deployed its tech expertise to digitalise private and public services from Namibia to Uganda, while Hungary has gained a foothold in Chad, opening a humanitarian aid centre and a diplomatic mission in the capital, with plans to launch a military mission to train local forces. — **AFP***

The right way to rebuild Gaza's health system

DESPITE the ceasefire in Gaza, other conditions in US President Donald Trump's 20-point peace plan are not being met. Israeli attacks on Palestinians have continued, while the required aid of around 600 trucks per day has not materialised, owing to the Israeli blockade. As a result, Gaza's humanitarian catastrophe continues to unfold.

Moreover, Israel has not complied with the International Court of Justice's October 22 advisory opinion requiring the unhindered provision of humanitarian aid by the United Nations and its entities to civilians in the Gaza Strip. The famine that the World Health Organization confirmed in northern Gaza in August is spreading; more than a half-million people face starvation. The death toll – which has already surpassed 69,000, including at least 20,000 children – is set to rise.

Such a ceasefire does not bring peace; it prolongs suffering. Worse, Trump's 20-point plan calls for "technocratic governance", another barrier to recovery – particularly when it comes to reconstructing Gaza's healthcare infrastructure. Post-conflict recovery in Iraq, Bosnia and Rwanda has shown that rebuilding health systems requires engaging and strengthening local institutions, rather than relying on outside experts.

The sheer scale of institutional destruction in Gaza implies a far more formidable challenge than in other conflict-ridden territories. Consider that child mortality in Iraq more than doubled from 1984-89 to 1994-99, following damage to water and health infrastructure in the 1990-91 Gulf War, which was less ruinous in its effects. While UN sanctions compounded the damage in Iraq, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has warned that Gaza faces a health "catastrophe" that will last for "generations to come."

Global engagement in Gaza must be motivated by solidarity, not charity. The Gaza Health Declaration, signed by more than 40 prominent Palestinian health professionals, recognises the "long histories of complacency, complicity, and collusion by many international humanitarian and development actors and donors," and rightly calls for Palestinian sovereignty and agency to be at the centre of rebuilding efforts.

Global engagement in Gaza must be motivated by solidarity, not charity.

TURNWAIT MICHAEL

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ERIN MCCANDLESS

The writer is Professor of Politics and International Relations and Director of the Qatar-South Africa Center for Peace and Intercultural Dialogue in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Johannesburg

In practice, that means placing Palestinians in leadership positions to guide the recovery of Gaza's healthcare infrastructure at all stages, from design and planning to coordination and monitoring; ensuring that Palestinian organisations are the main administrators of health programmes; and refraining from establishing parallel systems that undermine national ones. It will also be important for the international community to provide flexible, long-term capital, rather than project-based funding that strips Palestinian institutions of their agency. Lastly, health sovereignty depends on political sovereignty, which will require ending Israel's blockade and occupation. Palestinians have already proven themselves capable of leading recovery efforts. Despite more than 800 attacks on medical facilities and personnel in Gaza since the war began, which have left 94 per cent of hospitals damaged or destroyed, the health system has demonstrated remarkable resilience. The Palestinian Medical Relief Society continues to provide mobile health clinics, nutrition centres and community-based care in the territory, while the Gaza Health Ministry has coordinated service delivery, medical logistics, and workforce planning. Al Shifa and Al Ahli hospitals in Gaza City are operating at nearly 300 per cent over capacity, with a constant influx of complex trauma injuries.

The question is whether the international community will support Palestinian leadership or continue to undermine it. The WHO's operational response and early recovery plan for Gaza offers useful starting points for addressing the population's health needs. But success will depend on linking immediate lifesaving interventions with long-term efforts to strengthen institutions and local governance.

Failure to do so would have serious consequences. In Bosnia, efforts to rebuild the health system faltered when donor-led projects eschewed local ownership. And in Iraq, the reconstruction of health infrastructure was not accompanied by measures to restore accountability, producing fragile institutions incapable of sustaining services. To avoid these pitfalls, emergency assistance in Gaza – including restoring access to fuel, water and medical supplies – should be designed and implemented in ways that reinforce institutional credibility and stability. Only then can policymakers devise broader strategies to rebuild clinics and sanitation systems, expand vaccine coverage, and integrate psychosocial and gender-based-violence care into community health. Over time, predictable and locally governed health-service delivery will strengthen public trust in institutions, bolster the national health system's legitimacy and help create the conditions for peace, as occurred in Rwanda, where early health programmes were tied to national systems.

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SPORTS

SHORT*TAKES*

Qurayat's win came due to the outstanding performance of the players. ***— Ammar al Musafir***

QURAYAT, AL AMERAT WIN IN JUNIOR BASKETBALL LEAGUE

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, NOV 23

Qurayat and Al Amerat secured important wins in Week Seven of the 2025–2026 Junior Basketball League, in matches played at Al Amal Club Hall in Ghala Heights.

QURAYAT EDGE PAST AL BASHAYER IN A THRILLING CONTEST

Qurayat managed to snatch a valuable 38–34 victory over Al Bashayer after a closely contested game in which both teams exchanged the lead throughout the four quarters. Qurayat's win came thanks to the outstanding performance of Saeed Hussain, who delivered an exceptional game and scored 20 points, playing the biggest role in guiding his team to victory. He was supported by Mohammed al Ghazali, who added 7 points, while Tamim al Hadi contributed 6 points.

On the other side, Asid al Khasibi was the standout performer for Al Bashayer, carrying the team offensively and scoring 26 points despite the loss. The match began with clear dominance from Al Bashayer, who closed the first quarter ahead 8–6, capitalising on several offensive opportunities. In the second quarter, Al Bashayer maintained their slight advantage by scoring 12 points compared to Qurayat's 11, ending the first half leading 20–17.

The third quarter marked the turning point of the game, as Qurayat overturned the deficit and imposed complete control, scoring 14 points while limiting Al Bashayer to just 3, finishing the period ahead 31–23. Despite Al Bashayer improving in the fourth quarter and attempting to narrow the gap, Qurayat kept their composure and sealed the match 38–34.

AL AMERAT DOMINATE SALALAH WITH A BIG WIN

In the second match, Al Amerat asserted total control over their encounter against Salalah, earning a commanding 89–40 victory after a strong offensive and defensive performance across all quarters. Al Amerat showcased a powerful offensive display led by Nuh Brink, who scored 23 points and was the most influential player on the court. Sami al Busaidy delivered an impressive performance with 17 points, while Sultan Al Sinani added 13 points, and Ilyas al Junaydi contributed 6 points.

For Salalah, Fahad Bayt Sanjour was the most notable player with 20 points, supported by Murshid Bayt Sanasil, who scored 14 points despite the large score difference. Al Amerat started strongly, taking the first quarter 18–9, driven by speed and precision in finishing attacks. In the second quarter, Salalah tried to respond and showed improvement, but Al Amerat continued to extend the gap, scoring 20 points compared to Salalah's 13, ending the first half leading 38–22.

The third quarter saw Al Amerat maintain its dominance, scoring 26 points while Salalah added 15, closing the period at 64–37.

In the fourth quarter, Al Amerat widened the margin significantly, adding 25 points while limiting Salalah to just 3, sealing the match with a decisive 89–40 victory.

Felix lifts men's singles title at WTT Star Contender

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, NOV 23

WORLD NO. 7 Felix Lebrun from France defeated his brother and team-mate Alixes Lebrun, who ranked as World No.13, 4-3 in a thrilling final to clinch the title of Men's singles of WTT Star Contender Muscat 2025 on Saturday night and mark his second title for this season. At Main indoor hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, Felix commenced the match with a strong start as he ended the three first sets for him before Alixes bounced back and brought the match to the origin point. In the deciding set, Felix managed to win the set and sealed the victory. The scoreline ended at: (11-8, 11-8, 11-4, 5-11, 13-15, 10-12, 11-6).

Speaking after the podium ceremony, Felix said:" It was very tough match. Alixes did not give up during the match. He played better and better after the third set. I am happy to win this title and it was a great tournament. Now, I am focusing in my upcoming event as I am travelling to Chinese Taipei. I will keep the momentum high to win more titles in the upcoming events," he concluded

On the other hand, Alixes expressed his disappointment that he lost the deciding set. " I managed to return the match as it was a very tight encounter. I started after 3-0 loss but I disappointed that I lost the last set after a 3-3 draw. In overall, I made very top performance during the event and I am looking for the future to do much more better in the forthcoming events," he ended

KIHARA WOMEN'S SINGLES CHAMPIONS

In the Women's Singles final, Japan's Miu Kihara delivered a strong 4-1 victory over Korea's Joo Seohyung. Korea continued its success in the Men's Doubles where Lim and Oh Jonseong secured the title with a 3-0 win over Singapore's Pang and Quek Izaac. In Women's Doubles, Japan's Satsuki and Sakura emerged champions after edging Korea's Kim and Joo in a tight 3-2 match. Japan also claimed gold in Mixed Doubles as the duo Satoshi and Haitomi defeated Chinese Taipei's Lin and Cheng 3–0.

The six days championship concluded after it brought together nearly 300 athletes from 32 countries, competing for a total prize purse of $300,000. Organised by the Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) in partnership with World Table Tennis (WTT) and the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF), the event featured participants from around the world.

French Felix crowned with the men's singles trophy.

Crowning the winners of the women's singles.

From the men's singles final.

The chief guest, Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, delivered the trophies and awards to the top winners in the Men's and Women's singles categories. The participated players delivered high-intensity action in the tournament starting from the preliminary stages through to the main draw, with top global players battling fiercely for ranking points and international glory.

Abdullah BaMakhalaf, OTTA Chairman, expressed immense pride in Oman's successful staging of its first-ever Star Contender. "This event marked a new milestone for Oman. Hosting more than 300 international players from 32 countries, along with global media broadcasting across 15 TV channels, reflects the Sultanate of Oman's growing status as a world-class host for major sporting events. Oman will host another international event in January represented by WTT Contender and will again welcome the WTT Star Contender in November 2026," he said

> *I managed to return the match as it was a very tight encounter. I started after 3-0 loss but I disappointed that I lost the last set after a 3-3 draw. In overall, I made very top performance during the event and I am looking for the future to do much more better in the forthcoming events.*
>
> ***ALIXES***

French Ambassador to Oman Nabil HAJLAOUI praised the exceptional performance of the Lebrun brothers. "The final showcased world-class quality. Their presence here and the French victory coincide beautifully with Oman's National Day celebrations, and we extend our heartfelt congratulations to the Omani leadership and people," he stated.

Oman National Team head coach Omid Shams Shahbabaki said that the event provided valuable exposure for Omani players, who competed in both singles and doubles. "This tournament offered them direct experience against some of the world's best athletes, helping them develop technical skills and confidence for future international competitions," he said.

Bank Nizwa and Sports Makers sign a partnership

MUSCAT: In a national move that reflects the solidarity between the financial and sports sectors in the Sultanate of Oman, Sports Makers has announced the signing of a strategic partnership agreement with Bank Nizwa, the leading and most trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, to sponsor the participation of the Socca Oman team , represented by the Bank of Nizwa team, in the Socca World Cup 2025 to be held in Cancun, Mexico from November 28 to December 7, 2025.

The agreement was signed by Khalid al Kayed, Chief Executive Officer of Bank Nizwa, while Waleed al Obaidani, Chief Executive Officer of Sports Makers Company, signed on behalf of Sports Makers Company. The signing was attended by a number of officials, media professionals and those interested in sports affairs in the Sultanate of Oman.

This partnership comes within the framework of Bank Nizwa's commitment to supporting community, youth and sports initiatives, and enhancing the Sultanate of Oman's position in international forums. The participation of the "Socca Oman" team in the next edition of the global championship is an important national entitlement, especially after the historic achievement achieved by the team in the 2024 edition, which was hosted by the Sultanate of Oman on its soil, in which it was crowned the championship title for the first time in its history, amid widespread international praise for the organisation of the Sultanate of Oman and the level of the team.

The agreement was signed by Khalid al Kayed, Chief Executive Officer of Bank Nizwa, while Waleed al Obaidani, Chief Executive Officer of Sports Makers Company, signed on behalf of Sports Makers Company.

Commenting on the occasion, Khalid al Kayed, Chief Executive Officer of Bank Nizwa, said: "At Bank Nizwa, we are proud to support this national sports initiative that reflects the spirit of giving and competitiveness among Omani youth. The participation of the Socca Oman team represented by the Bank Nizwa team in the World Championship and its representation of the Sultanate of Oman after being the champion of the previous edition is an achievement that deserves all support and sponsorship."

He added: "We believe in the importance of partnering with national projects that build sustainable sports and economic achievements, and Sports Makers represents a leading model in the development of community and institutional sports, and we hope that this partnership will be the beginning of broader programs in the future that touch youth groups and enhance Oman's presence on the global sports map."

For his part, Waleed al Obaidani expressed his pride in signing this partnership with Bank Nizwa, noting that institutional support from the banking sector is a key element in the sustainability of the sports project. "We value Bank Nizwa's confidence in the Socca Oman team's project, which is not only a sports team, but an inspiring national story that started in Oman and reached the world. Our World Cup win last year was the result of everyone's cooperation, and today we are bringing the ball back with greater ambition and with stronger support.

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
5,598.445

BUSINESS

SHORT*TAKES*

Under the Sorouh initiative, 20 integrated residential neighbourhoods are under development across various governorates.

HOUSING, REAL ESTATE AND LAND INVESTMENTS GAIN STRONG MOMENTUM

***MUSCAT:** Oman's housing, real estate and land-use sectors achieved substantial progress this year as the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning advanced national programmes supporting homeownership, community development and productive land utilisation. These efforts complement the country's wider shift towards sustainable urban growth.*

Under the Sorouh initiative, 20 integrated residential neighbourhoods are under development across various governorates, covering more than 6 million square metres and valued at over RO 600 million. These projects are expected to benefit more than 10,000 Omani families.

Sales have reached 95 per cent in the first phase and 50 per cent in the second, supported by 57 financing agreements with local banks.

The Ministry awarded 44 infrastructure agreements for water, sewage, electricity and telecom networks, with the initiative set to expand to 30 projects by 2026. Social housing programmes continue to support low-income families, with RO 70 million allocated in 2024 and 2025, benefitting 2,400 households.

The Ministry also completed projects worth over RO 16 million, including the construction of 118 housing units, maintenance of existing homes and the development of community facilities such as mosques, a school and a health centre.

Government land utilisation recorded strong activity with 590 usufruct contracts signed across agriculture, commerce, industry and mixed-use developments, generating more than RO 6 million in fees. This growth reflects rising investor interest and expanding awareness of productive land development.

*The real estate sector performed robustly, with transaction values exceeding RO 2.3 billion by September 2025 and fee collections reaching RO 85.8 million. — **ONA***

Oman, Airbus sign pact for launch of OmanSat-1

SAEED AL MASHARFI
MUSCAT, NOV 23

THE Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has signed a cooperation agreement with Airbus Defence and Space (ADS) to design, manufacture and launch Oman's first communications satellite "OmanSat-1". The project forms part of national efforts to enhance the telecommunications ecosystem, strengthen digital sovereignty and build national capabilities in space and future technologies.

The agreement was signed by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) and Alain Fauré, Head of Space Systems at Airbus.

Airbus will design "OmanSat-1" with high capacity in the Ka-band frequency, covering the Sultanate of Oman — including its economic waters — as well as the Middle East, East Africa and Asia. The satellite will be based on Airbus's OneSat platform, offering full digital reconfigurability while in orbit.

As part of the agreement, the Ministry has assigned the satellite's operation to Space Communications Technologies (SCT), a company fully owned by Oman Investment Authority, to serve as the national operator after launch and to be the executive arm during the design and manufacturing stages.

In line with this role, the Ministry has also established a Project Management Office within SCT to oversee administrative and technical aspects of the project in collaboration with Airbus throughout the manufacturing process, ensuring infrastructure readiness for satellite operations and developing a fully integrated operational ecosystem in Oman for satellite management and service delivery to both government and private-sector entities after launch.

With "OmanSat-1", Oman is moving towards a sovereign and secure digital future powered by national space infrastructure: Eng Al Maawali.

With "OmanSat-1", Oman is moving towards a sovereign and secure digital future powered by national space infrastructure.

Al Maawali stated that "the project aims to strengthen Oman's digital sovereignty by establishing a national space-based infrastructure capable of providing independent and secure telecommunications and data services.

This will enhance national cybersecurity, ensure continuity of critical services under all circumstances, extend coverage to rural areas and improve the quality of telecommunications and internet services in alignment with Oman Vision 2040".

The project also focuses on building future national capabilities, as the Minister explained that "this project represents a major step towards localising technical knowledge, training and qualifying Omani talent across all project phases, empowering local companies, especially SMEs, and supporting scientific research through collaboration between local universities and Airbus Defence and Space".

As Oman takes a strategic leap into the space economy with its first national satellite programme, Airbus emphasised the importance of long-term cooperation in building sovereign capabilities.

Alain Fauré, Head of Space Systems at Airbus, said the contract will provide Oman with world-class, fully flexible satellite communications capabilities through its first geostationary satellite. He affirmed Airbus's commitment to working side-by-side with Space Communications Technologies to support the implementation of Oman's national satellite programme and the development of sovereign capabilities to serve future customers.

Oman is taking a strategic step towards building a future space-driven digital economy.

Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology; and Head of the Negotiation Committee, stated that "this project marks a transformational milestone in Oman's technological and space development journey, strengthening the national telecommunications ecosystem, enabling vital sectors and supporting digital transformation and smart services".

> *This project will enhance national cybersecurity, ensure continuity of critical services under all circumstances, extend coverage to rural areas and improve the quality of telecommunications and internet services in alignment with Oman Vision 2040.*
>
> **ENG SAID BIN HAMOUD AL MAAWALI**
> *Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology*

Oman accelerates development of smart and sustainable cities

MUSCAT: Oman is accelerating its transition towards smart, sustainable urban development through a series of major national projects aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

Led by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, strategic initiatives such as Sultan Haitham City, Al Jabal Al Aali City and A'Thuraya City are reshaping the country's future urban landscape.

Sultan Haitham City has achieved full completion of land preparation and levelling works, while progress continues on main roads, underpasses, utility networks and bridges.

Sultan Haitham City has achieved full completion of land preparation and levelling works, while progress continues on main roads, underpasses, utility networks and bridges.

Power station construction has reached 30 per cent and the city's Experiment and Control Centre — the core of its smart management system — is more than 85 per cent complete.

Investment opportunities have been announced for district cooling plants and additional infrastructure works.

More than RO 1.9 billion worth of partnership agreements were signed for residential neighbourhoods, with sales already exceeding 67 per cent of available units.

A'Thuraya City in the Wilayat of Bausher, Muscat Governorate, is progressing through its first phase, covering over 3 million square metres. The project will ultimately house more than 8,000 residents across eight integrated neighbourhoods.

Site preparation works are 20 per cent complete, supported by RO 38.2 million in infrastructure investments. Key development agreements include RO 25 million for Neighbourhood 8 and over RO 240 million for Neighbourhood 6, alongside consultancy contracts worth RO 6 million.

Al Jabal Al Aali in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate has also attracted strong investment interest, with agreements exceeding RO 600 million.

These include the development of a 600,000-square-metre health district featuring residential units, hospitality facilities and a five-star hotel.

The Al Alalan Hills project will offer 2,100 residences, two luxury hotels and a world-class golf course, backed by RO 400 million in investment.

These projects reflect a unified national planning approach that positions Omani cities as centres of innovation, integrating environmental, economic and social priorities.

With expanding infrastructure, new investment partnerships and advanced smart-city solutions, Oman is establishing modern urban environments designed to boost competitiveness and quality of life. — **ONA**

SHORT*TAKES*

This year's edition placed a special focus on culinary exploration.

THE ST REGIS AL MOUJ MUSCAT RESORT CELEBRATES WORLD CHILDREN'S DAY

MUSCAT: *The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort, Muscat's best address for refined luxury and exceptional dining, proudly celebrated World Children's Day for the second year in a row. This year's event welcomed local school children for a special "Young Chefs of Oman" culinary takeover.*

Designed to inspire creativity, confidence and teamwork, the activation transformed the resort into a lively learning space where young talents discovered the art of gastronomy and hospitality.

This year's edition placed a special focus on culinary exploration. A total of 25 children, aged 6 to 13 and representing 13 local schools, were invited to take part in a full day of immersive activities that showcased both Omani flavours and international favourites.

Guided by expert Baristas, Chefs and Waitstaff, the participants learned how to craft delicious dishes and experienced the service culture that defines The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort.

The experience drew on the resort's diverse culinary portfolio, with signature venues opening their doors for the day. At Karibu, children explored flatbread making inspired by regional tastes. At The Lobby Lounge, they learned the basics of pastry preparation and dessert finishing.

At Hakkasan Muscat, they were introduced to the artistry of dim sum. At Roberto's, they discovered the fun of creating pasta. Zorba added a contemporary, lifestyle touch to the lineup, reinforcing the resort's position as a leading culinary destination.

"World Children's Day is a special opportunity to invest in the curiosity and potential of our young community", said Fatma Kurt, Director of Marketing at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort.

"Through this culinary and hospitality experience, we want children to feel proud of their culture, excited by new flavours and confident in their own abilities. The Young Chefs of Oman workshop brings families, schools and our team together in a meaningful way that reflects what St Regis Family Traditions stand for, which is connection, care and shared memories".

This meaningful initiative reflects The St Regis Family Traditions values of family bonding, community support and cultural appreciation.

By opening its kitchens and restaurants to young guests, The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort reinforced its commitment to nurturing future generations, strengthening community ties and promoting cultural understanding through diverse culinary traditions.

AHLI ISLAMIC OFFERS DISCOUNT FOR CREDIT CARDHOLDERS ON TALABAT

MUSCAT: *As part of its continued commitment to enhancing customer experience during national celebrations, ahli islamic continues its exclusive collaboration with Talabat, the leading food delivery platform in the Middle East and North Africa, to offer a special discount on food orders for its credit cardholders until November 26, 2025.*

This collaboration aims to provide ahli islamic customers with a distinctive celebratory experience that enhances the joy of gatherings and the spirit of national festivities. It also reflects the bank's ongoing commitment to delivering innovative offerings that enrich the banking experience in line with the principles of Islamic Sharia.

During the campaign period, ahli islamic credit cardholders can enjoy a discount of up to RO 5 per order by using the code 'Ahli50', with each card eligible to redeem the voucher twice during the offer duration.

This offer adds more ease and enjoyment to the National Day celebration experience.

ahli islamic credit cardholders can enjoy a discount of up to RO 5 per order by using the code 'Ahli50'.

Vodafone Oman expands retail presence by 75%

In a year marked by bold achievements from completing the nation's fastest 5G roll-out to surpassing one million users, Vodafone Oman is accelerating its retail footprint across the country, aiming to expand its presence by 75% before end of 2025.

This ambitious plan is part of Vodafone's broader growth strategy, focused on deepening market engagement through omnichannel experiences and bringing its services closer to customers across all governorates.

In 2025, Vodafone is expanding to serve communities and businesses in Muscat Governorate, Al Batinah North Governorate, Al Batinah South Governorate, Al Sharqiyah North Governorate and Al Dhahirah Governorate.

Nine new stores have already opened in the wilayats of Qurayat, Shinas, Al Musannah, Sinaw, Bahla, Ibra, Al Khabourah and Al Suwaiq which include Vodafone's first-ever Business Hub in Muscat.

The new stores follow Vodafone's digital-first retail format designed to deliver seamless client service, device access and product experiences. By end of 2025, Vodafone's retail footprint will include over 75 stores and eStores in addition to more than 4,000 sales points across the country.

> *Our strategy has always been about more than numbers. It's about reach, relevance and responsibility. Our growing retail presence reflects our commitment to expanding meaningful access to technology across the country.*
>
> **ENG BADER AL ZIDI**
> *CEO*
> *Vodafone Oman*

The expansion builds on Vodafone's hybrid engagement model, combining a strong digital core with an evolving physical presence.

Eng Bader al Zidi, CEO of Vodafone Oman, outlined the bold long-term vision of the company, saying: "Our strategy has always been about more than numbers. It's about reach, relevance and responsibility.

Our growing retail presence reflects our commitment to expanding meaningful access to technology across the country. We are not just adding new locations, we are reinforcing our promise to be present where it matters, with each store bringing us closer to the people we serve and enabling us to support their ambitions, personally and professionally".

The expansion builds on Vodafone's hybrid engagement model, combining a strong digital core with an evolving physical presence.

While the My Vodafone App continues to be the gateway for over 90% of customer interactions, physical stores remain a vital touchpoint for new customers, communities and enterprise clients.

Looking ahead to 2026, Vodafone Oman will continue building a future where connectivity is accessible and empowering.

Oman Air reintroduces Zurich summer service

MUSCAT: Continuing to expand its footprint in Europe, Oman Air has reintroduced its summer Muscat-Zurich service from May to September, ensuring year-round connectivity between Oman and Switzerland and in response to strong leisure and business demand.

Travellers can now enjoy the beauty of both destinations in every season; from Zurich's alpine charm and lakeside summers to Oman's year-round warmth and hospitality.

With a network that includes 11 European destinations, the airline provides seamless connectivity between Europe, Oman and beyond. Mike Rutter, Chief Commercial Officer, said: "Extending our Zurich service throughout the year demonstrates our commitment to meeting increased passenger demand while offering greater choice and connectivity.

Switzerland remains a key market for both inbound and outbound travel and an important part of Oman Air's growing European network".

Travellers can now enjoy the beauty of both destinations in every season.

From May to September 2026, Oman Air will operate three weekly flights from Muscat to Zurich on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays using the Boeing 737-8 aircraft, complementing its six-weekly winter service from November to April, operated by the Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner.

Tickets are already open for booking on Oman Air's website and mobile app, giving guests greater flexibility and convenience when planning their journeys.

Bank Muscat announces special offers on personal and auto loans

MUSCAT: In celebration of the National Day of Oman, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced special offers on personal and (Sayarati) auto loans featuring competitive interest rates and flexible repayment options, valid until the end of December 2025.

These offers reflect the bank's continued commitment to celebrating national occasions with its customers while supporting their diverse financial needs.

As a part of the National Day offer, customers can now enjoy extended auto loan repayment tenures up to 120 months for Omanis employed in government, quasi-government and approved private companies; and up to 84 months for Omanis in private sector approved companies of second category. Expatriates employed in government, quasi-government, approved private companies can also benefit from tenures up to 72 months. In addition to offering longer repayment flexibility, Bank Muscat is providing reduced interest rates across auto loans, eco-friendly vehicle loans and short-term personal loans.

The offer, available until December 31, 2025.

This initiative also includes employees from second category companies. The Bank continues to encourage environmentally responsible choices through its Eco-Friendly Vehicle Loan, in line with its commitment to promoting Green Key and sustainability. Auto Loan customers can enjoy attractive rates starting 4.25% annum, while Personal Loan customer can benefit from preferential rates.

Customers applying for auto loans can also enjoy free third-party insurance for used-car financing in collaboration with GIG Insurance, alongside quick approval, hassle-free documentation and flexible repayment options. Furthermore, employees in government entities with total loan exposure of RO 15,000 and below can avail this offer without the requirement of a salary transfer, making this offer more accessible to wider customer base. Commenting on the announcement, Abdullah bin Tamman al Maashani, General Manager — Products at Bank Muscat, said: "We are delighted to celebrate the National Day by introducing exclusive loan offers that reflect our ongoing commitment to meeting our customers' evolving financial needs.

SHORT*TAKES*

NEXT DUQM NOW SESSION TO EXPLORE PETROCHEMICALS OPPORTUNITIES

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 23

The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) will examine the changing economics of the petrochemicals sector at its upcoming Duqm Now session, on December 10, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Duqm offering business leaders a clear view of how the industry is developing across global markets and what that means for Al Duqm and Oman.

ENG AHMED AKAAK
CEO, SEZAD

Petrochemicals seldom dominate energy debates yet they form the backbone of many industrial supply chains. The IEA estimates petrochemicals accounted for nearly 12% of global oil demand last year, a proportion that has continued to rise even as other segments of the energy system become more efficient. That global picture is mirrored on the production side, where capacity additions have altered competitive dynamics, new ethylene capacity in the US and China now represents more than half of global expansion, influencing costs, trade flows and investment decisions in other regions.

At the same time, producers are rethinking how they operate, not just where they produce. Higher energy input costs in parts of Europe have put additional pressure on margins.

Eng Ahmed Akaak, CEO of SEZAD said the discussion comes at a time when the petrochemicals landscape is being reshaped from several directions.

"Petrochemicals are being pulled by energy markets, pushed by new technologies and increasingly judged through the lens of sustainability. With fresh capacity changing cost structures and trade flows, producers have choices to make. December's Duqm Now session will help us understand those pressures and think through what they mean for industrial growth in Al Duqm and across Oman".

Pilotless aircraft Laila ready for trials in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, NOV 23

US aerospace innovator Odys Aviation has announced the successful production of a prototype of Laila, a hybrid-electric, long-range, pilotless aircraft that will soon commence operational trials in the Sultanate of Oman as part of an Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) evaluation programme.

California-based Odys said the aircraft — a full-scale pre-production prototype built at its Long Beach facility — will be shipped to Oman upon completion of flight testing in the United States.

Once in the Sultanate of Oman, Laila will be at the heart of the Operational Launch Programme (OLP), designed to assess its overall performance by combining vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) capabilities with hybrid-electric propulsion and a range of around 725 km.

An agreement to this effect was signed last year between Odys Aviation, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

"Our Operational Launch Programme (OLP) will be the most comprehensive end-to-end Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) customer evaluation ever executed and Laila's robust capabilities are key", Odys Aviation said in a post.

"With hybrid propulsion that can deliver up to 450 miles (725 km) of range and transport 130 lbs (about 60 kg) of payload,

Laila will be part of operational trials in Oman as part of an Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) evaluation programme.

Laila will allow customers and partners to evaluate a wide range of mission profiles in commercial and defence environments", the US firm stated.

When eventually deployed, Laila is expected to support a range of air mobility solutions that align closely with the Sultanate of Oman's geography, infrastructure needs and Oman Vision 2040 priorities

. It can rapidly transport tools, spare parts and mission-critical equipment to remote desert oil fields and offshore platforms, reducing delivery times from more than 36 hours by road to under three hours while eliminating risks associated with long-distance desert travel.

The aircraft's long range, payload capacity and autonomous capabilities also make it ideal for inspecting and monitoring pipelines, ports, power facilities and other strategic infrastructure across remote or hard-to-reach regions.

For isolated communities in the mountains, desert and along the coast, Laila can reliably deliver medical supplies, humanitarian aid and essential cargo at operating costs significantly lower than those of traditional rotorcraft.

In emergency and civil defence scenarios, it can support disaster relief operations, accelerate the deployment of critical equipment and enhance national readiness.

Because it requires no runways or major infrastructure investments, Laila will enable flexible, point-to-point mobility across Oman's rugged landscapes, offering a scalable solution for both commercial and civil missions. "

Though Oman was the clear choice for our first Operational Launch Programme, the programme will ultimately go global. And with the completion of this build, we're one historic leap closer", Odys Aviation noted.

Oman's aviation sector powers tourism growth and investment

MUSCAT: Oman's civil aviation sector is playing a pivotal role in boosting tourism and attracting investment through the continuous development of airport infrastructure and the expansion of air connectivity to regional and international markets.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), working with airport operators and a growing number of national and international airlines, has opened new air routes linking Oman with key destinations across Asia, Europe and Africa.

This wider network has supported the movement of tourists, investors and business travellers while strengthening the hospitality, travel and logistics industries.

Leveraging Oman's strategic location on global air routes, the CAA has positioned the country's airports as vital hubs for passenger and cargo transport. Improved domestic connections have also encouraged inter-governorate tourism and enhanced regional mobility.

By the end of 2024, aircraft movements through Omani airspace increased by 14 per cent, reaching 530,300 flights compared with 465,100 in 2023.

By the end of 2024, aircraft movements through Omani airspace increased by 14 per cent, reaching 530,300 flights compared with 465,100 in 2023. The Authority's actual revenues also rose sharply, climbing 43 per cent to RO 105.31 million, demonstrating strong operational efficiency and growing economic contribution.

The CAA is advancing partnerships with the private sector across ground handling, maintenance, cargo services and catering.

These efforts support national goals to empower private operators, enhance service quality and adopt advanced technologies across airport operations. Such initiatives have helped attract new local and foreign investments to develop modern maintenance centres and logistics zones, generating job opportunities and added value for the national economy.

To improve the investment environment, the Authority continues to streamline regulatory procedures and apply competitive licensing standards. These measures encourage new entrants, including low-cost carriers and support the growth of inbound tourism.

Major upgrades have also been implemented in air navigation systems, including enhanced ground radar, communication stations and navigational aids to ensure safe and efficient air traffic flow.

The CAA's sustainability strategy covers infrastructure maintenance, energy-efficiency programmes and digital operational continuity, alongside stronger governance and performance monitoring.

Green initiatives at airports include the use of solar power, smart energy and lighting systems and the introduction of electric operational vehicles.

The Authority has also begun measuring airport carbon footprints and developing emission-reduction plans aligned with international standards.

Regulatory frameworks have been strengthened through updated licensing requirements, including certificates for air navigation training centres and improved operational and maintenance regulations.

A dedicated digital transformation programme aims to increase the number of digital services, enhance Oman's ranking in global e-services indices and build a sustainable digital infrastructure.

In aviation safety, the Authority has adopted predictive safety tools and implemented an integrated National Civil Aviation Security Programme. A smart inspection and monitoring system, supported by advanced digital technologies and cybersecurity protocols, is being rolled out, alongside continuous training for inspectors and aviation security personnel.

The Authority also places strong emphasis on meteorology and early-warning systems. **— ONA**

WHEN APPROPRIATE

Canada open to resuming US trade dialogue

Canada will restart trade talks with the United States "when appropriate", Prime Minister Mark Carney said at the G20 summit in Johannesburg.

*He noted no urgent matters required immediate discussion with President Trump, who paused the talks last month over an anti-tariff advert from Ontario. Carney said new partnerships are a priority but expects conversations with Trump within two weeks. **— Reuters***

CUTTING RELIANCE

UK to reduce mineral dependence

Britain has unveiled a critical minerals strategy aimed at cutting reliance on foreign suppliers by 2035.

*The plan targets sourcing 10% of domestic demand from production in the United Kingdom and 20% from recycling, supported by up to £50 million in funding. Prime Minister Keir Starmer said these resources underpin national security and living-cost stability. **— Reuters***

TARIFF REDUCTION

US set to cut Swiss tariffs to 15 per cent

Swiss Economy Minister Guy Parmelin says the United States could reduce its general tariff on Swiss imports from 39% to 15% by early December.

He said that Switzerland is ready, while the United States requires more time to implement the change.

*Parmelin previously indicated it could take 10–12 working days for the lower tariff to be integrated into the US system. **— Reuters***

The rise of algorithmic human resource strategy

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THE modern human resources (HR) department is undergoing a seismic shift, moving from a role defined by intuition and paperwork to one driven by data analysis and automation. Across the globe, corporations are making strategic talent decisions, from hiring to retention, by prioritising algorithms and people analytics over traditional 'gut feeling' and process/conceptual-driven approaches.

At this crucial juncture, a vital question arises for leaders: Are companies inadvertently prioritising metrics over people in their pursuit of workforce optimisation?

At the core of this transformation is people analytics, which uses employee data to inform strategic decisions. This shift is transforming HR from a transactional cost centre into a powerful, data-driven partner to the business. IBM, Unilever and other companies leverage advanced HR analytics tools.

Turnover prediction models analyse factors such as commute time, manager-employee interaction scores and last promotion date. Algorithms can flag employees most likely to leave, enabling HR to implement targeted retention efforts proactively.

Global organisations such as Tesla, Nestlé and Schneider Electric use leading predictive recruitment analytics platforms to enhance hiring strategies and improve candidate matching. Today, automated systems screen resumes, analyse interview performance against success metrics and even predict the quality of hire (a metric linking a new hire's performance to the cost of acquisition).

This reduces time-to-hire and minimises costly bad hires. Performance optimisation connects training investments in data links to tangible productivity improvements and identifies skill gaps across the organisation.

This guarantees that development spending results in a clear return on investment (ROI). Predictive modelling identifies future skill needs, helping companies organise their workforce for growth or transformation in advance.

Automation handles repetitive administrative tasks, such as generating letters or managing benefits enrollment, freeing up HR professionals to focus on strategic insights gleaned from data.

While the efficiency gains of a data-first approach are undeniable, ethical dilemmas, such as algorithmic reductionism (the tendency to view a complex human being as merely a collection of data points) and bias, challenge the human-centric approach in HR.

Data-driven decisions are often hailed as bias-free, yet this is a fallacy. The algorithms are trained on historical data, which may inadvertently perpetuate and even amplify past biases in hiring, promotion and compensation.

If a company has historically promoted a certain demographic, the algorithm may learn this bias and downgrade qualified candidates from other groups, creating an illusion of objectivity.

Turnover prediction models analyse factors such as commute time, manager-employee interaction scores and last promotion date. Algorithms can flag employees most likely to leave, enabling HR to implement targeted retention efforts proactively.

The increasing collection of granular employee data from email sentiment analysis to keystroke logging and badge swipe data crosses a critical line, often referred to as "the creepy line".

This invasive monitoring erodes employee trust, creates a culture of fear and can ultimately lead to a less engaged and innovative workforce. Employees are not cogs; their personal data, when mismanaged, can lead to serious ethical violations.

Data tells us what is happening (like turnover is increasing), but it often fails to capture the necessary why. A high-performer flagged as a flight risk might not be looking for a new job, but merely struggling with personal issues or an unsupportive manager.

A reliance on metrics alone risks creating a performative culture where employees focus on activities that boost their scores rather than those that deliver genuine value or foster genuine collaboration.

The optimal future for HR is not a total surrender to data, but a strategic integration. Data and automation should augment human judgment, not supplant it. For HR to truly be a strategic partner, it must synthesise quantitative insights with qualitative, human-centric context.

The goal is to leverage data's predictive power without sacrificing the fundamental human element that drives creativity, loyalty and true organisational value. Companies must remember talent is not a mere resource to be optimised; it is the intellectual capital that gives a business its competitive edge.

JAPAN PM'S BIG FISCAL SPLURGE LOOKS SELF-DEFEATING

HUDSON LOCKETT

Economic theory *suggests large-scale government spending is more likely to boost than dampen inflation. Sanae Takaichi seems determined to prove otherwise. Japan's new prime minister and her cabinet on Friday announced a 21.3 trillion yen ($135 billion) stimulus package to provide relief to households squeezed by higher costs.*

The proposed supplementary budget, which is more than a quarter larger than last year's outlay and equivalent to 3.5% of Japanese economic output, has a clear purpose: more than half of it is earmarked for measures that provide consumers with relief from rising prices. These include subsidies for electricity and fuel, cash handouts to families with children, abolishing the gasoline tax and raising the level at which workers begin paying income tax.

The Cabinet Office reckons the energy subsidies and scotched levy on petrol will lower headline inflation, which hit 3% last month, by 0.7 percentage points from February to April next year. Even if that calculation is accurate, that overall stimulus is more likely to have the opposite effect on prices.

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The chief culprit is a likely hit to Japan's currency from government bond issuance needed to fund the extra spending.

The yen has already fallen 6.7% against the US dollar since the ruling Liberal Democratic Party elected Takaichi as its leader. Finance Minister Satsuki Katayama on Friday said the government was "alarmed by recent one-sided, sharp moves in the currency market", a veiled threat of fresh intervention in the foreign exchange market to combat the effects of a cheaper yen pushing up the cost of imported goods.

Such inflation would not only hit households at the checkout but also pummel Japanese utilities which overwhelmingly rely on overseas oil and gas. Indeed, pricier energy imports might cancel out the effects of the proposed subsidies.

A sharp pickup in growth could conceivably support the yen but looks unlikely, especially now that Beijing is throttling flows of cash-rich Chinese tour groups to Tokyo following Takaichi's recent comments about Taiwan. ***— Reuters***

UK start-ups risk being outpaced by competitors

ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

Britain has four of the top 10 universities in the world, more unicorns than Germany and France; and the largest hub for venture capital and start-up investment outside the US.

AS the UK faces up to the economic challenges it confronts as a country, it should remain optimistic about its ability to thrive in an uncertain world.

Britain has four of the top 10 universities in the world, more unicorns than Germany and France; and the largest hub for venture capital and start-up investment outside the US. But, as pointed out by Gregor Poynton MP, even in Britain's areas of greatest strength, the rest of the world is not standing still.

France, for instance, in recent years has been catching up with — and has in some cases overtaken — the UK with the introduction of a series of policies and initiatives to help ambitious businesses to scale-up.

France is home to the world's largest 'start-up campus' — Station F in Paris, which was established with support from Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft in 2017. Station F has fostered an ecosystem that has raised over 1 billion euros per annum for the past three years, equating to 15 per cent of the annual total raised by start-ups in France.

Expanded Business creator share subscription warrants (BSPCE) enable start-ups established less than 15 years ago to offer employees and certain managers the option to subscribe for shares at a price set in advance. As of January 2020, foreign companies may also offer BSPCE to employees of its French subsidiary.

The introduction of the Tibi scheme to increase engagement and participation of French institutional investors like large insurance companies and private pension schemes has positioned France as a leading technology investment hub.

Given the UK government's focus on increasing UK DC pension scheme investment into UK-based companies and infrastructure, alongside this welcome development Britain must look to match and improve on similar initiatives that could help accelerate investment and foster innovation.

In Britain, only about 80 companies utilised R&D (Research & Development) tax credits in 2023/24 — out of thousands of potential applicants. By contrast, France offers a more generous scheme for research-intensive companies which employ fewer than 250 people with a turnover of less than 50 million euros, or a total balance sheet of less than 43 million euros to qualify for R&D tax credits.

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France's R&D tax credit offer not just tax breaks but also social exemptions for companies under 11 years old. That might be controversial in a UK context, but in a country with strong social protections it shows a willingness to think holistically — where employees understand both the risks and the rewards of working in a start-up. There are clear steps the UK could take in response.

Recent efforts, for example, to simplify the R&D tax system are welcome, but Britain could go further and merge the existing schemes into a unified system that offers higher rates for the most R&D-intensive SMEs and provides clearer, faster advance assurance that works better for more companies.

Internationally, portfolio companies of venture capital firms are often recognised as independent entities, making access to R&D tax credit schemes more straightforward. The UK should learn from this too.

The Enterprise Management Incentive (EMI), which is the UK's closest equivalent to the French BSPCE scheme, has been extremely effective in allowing SMEs compete with larger firms by giving their employees a stake in the company. But it hasn't been reformed in 12 years and later stage companies could be supported better.

Scale-up is a problem across the UK economy and raising the limit of the seven-year rule relating to the EIS (Enterprise Investment Scheme) and VCT (Venture Capital Trust) funds, would provide more opportunities to scale-up and grow across nations and regions.

With the right commitment and support for STEM-based (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) start-ups and scale-ups, the UK can harness its economic strengths, unlock new opportunities and not just survive turbulent times but emerge stronger from them.

OETC unveils RO 248 million projects

MUSCAT: The Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) has announced the launch of eight major electricity transmission projects worth more than RO 248 million, reinforcing the nation's shift towards clean energy and supporting Oman Vision 2040. The projects, spread across several governorates, aim to boost grid reliability, meet rising power demand and accelerate the integration of large-scale renewable energy into the national network.

Eng Hisham bin Abdullah al Riyami, Acting CEO of OETC, said the investments reflect a long-term commitment to building a smarter and more resilient national grid. He stressed that the projects will create local economic opportunities, strengthen system performance and support Oman's plan to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

ENG HISHAM BIN ABDULLAH AL RIYAMI

Acting CEO, OETC

All awarded projects will contribute 30% to In-Country Value by supporting local industries, creating job opportunities for Omanis and stimulating innovation in the power sector.

Once completed, they will enable the reduction of more than 1.9 million tonnes of CO_2 emissions annually through the integration of major wind and solar power projects and the gradual phase-out of diesel-based generation.

The strategic projects include new grid stations and transmission lines such as the Al Jazir, Ras Madrakah, Sadah, Sarab (Mahout), Al Kamil W'al Wafi, Al Misfah, Wadi Latham and Al Safa stations, along with expansion works at SOHAR Port and Freezone. These facilities will connect upcoming renewable energy plants — totalling over 1,700 MW of wind and solar capacity — as well as a 1,600 MW gas-fired plant to support demand growth. Al Riyami said these investments form a vital part of OETC's long-term strategy to reinforce energy security, enable economic expansion and support sustainable value creation across the Sultanate of Oman.

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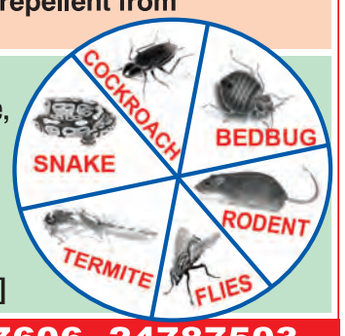

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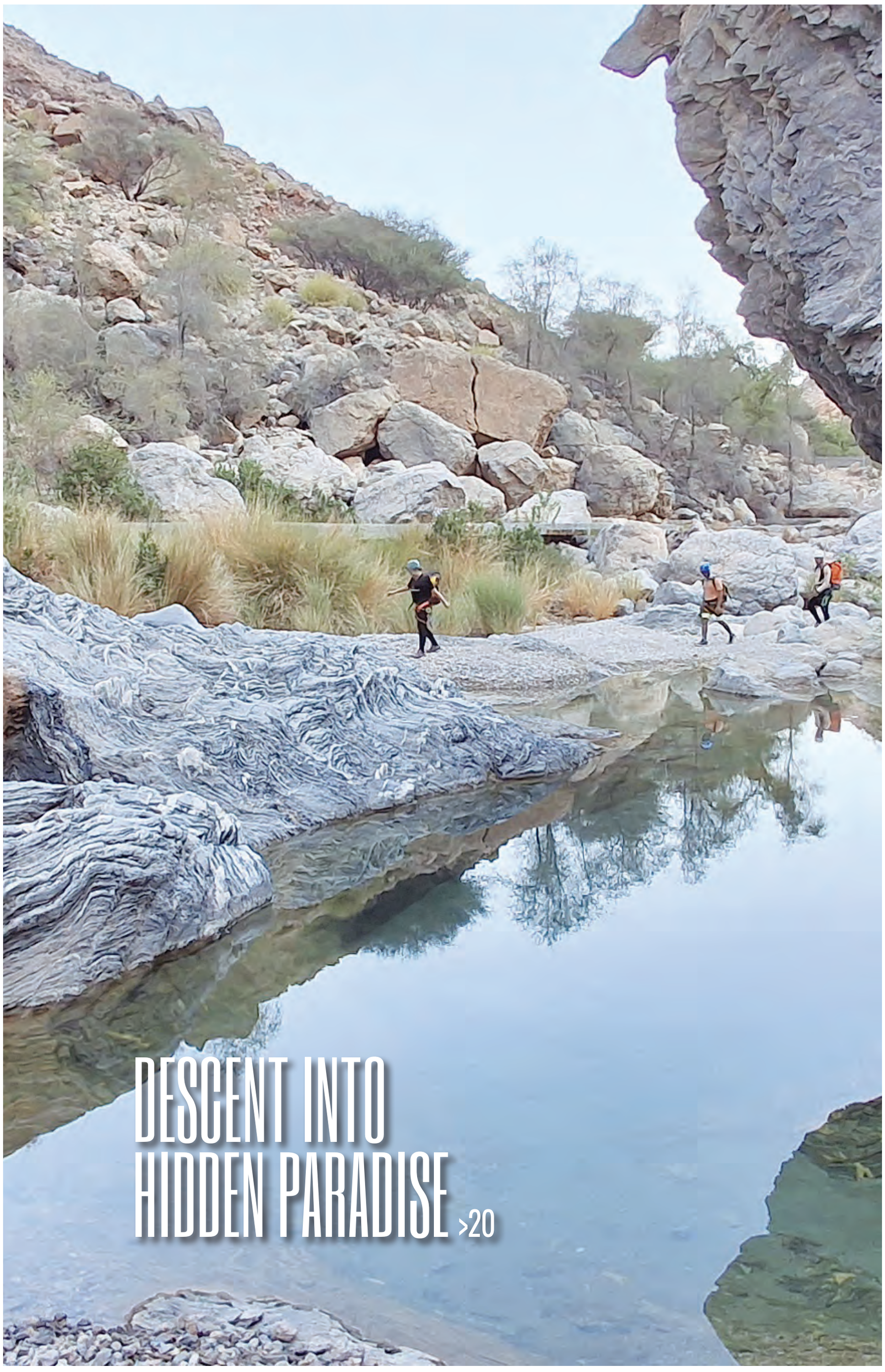

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TRIBUTE

'Black Panther' star Chadwick Boseman gets Hollywood star

"Black Panther" star Chadwick Boseman was posthumously honoured on Thursday with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Ryan Coogler, who directed Boseman in the 2018 hit, actress Viola Davis and Boseman's widow, Simone Ledward-Boseman, led the emotional ceremony in the heart of Tinseltown.

"Today was a beautiful day", Ledward-Boseman said.

"Everyone was just so full of love and joy. And we're all so proud of this person that we knew, that we shared".

Coogler remembered Boseman as an "incredibly generous" person.

"Even when he knew his days were limited and his moments were numbered, he still gave to the art form. He still threw himself into the fire", he said.

Chadwick Boseman began his career in theatre and television before making the leap to film.

Boseman's most famous character T'Challa/ Black Panther was introduced in "Captain America: Civil War" (2016).

Two years later he reprised the role in the hugely successful standalone "Black Panther", becoming the first Black actor to take the lead in the sprawling Marvel franchise.

Boseman died in 2020 at the age of 43 after suffering from colon cancer for four years.

The debilitating disease did not keep him from making movies or from fully committing to his craft, Coogler said.

"Even though he was going through what he was going through, he would do his own stunts, he would be there for off-camera dialogue readings. It was incredible".

Viola Davis, with whom he shared the screen in 2020's "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom", which would be his final outing, said Boseman's work "reminded us that we are less alone".

"That was Chadwick, more than just an actor who you can observe on screen doing wonderful work".

*Disney CEO Bob Iger, actor Michael B Jordan and the late actor's brothers, Kevin and Derrick Boseman, also attended the ceremony. — **AFP***

QUICK FEATURES

ANIMAL RIGHTS

*People hold placards during a protest in Chennai after India's Supreme Court ordered states and union territories to remove stray dogs from educational institutions, hospitals, bus stands and railway stations. — **AFP***

FORMULA 1

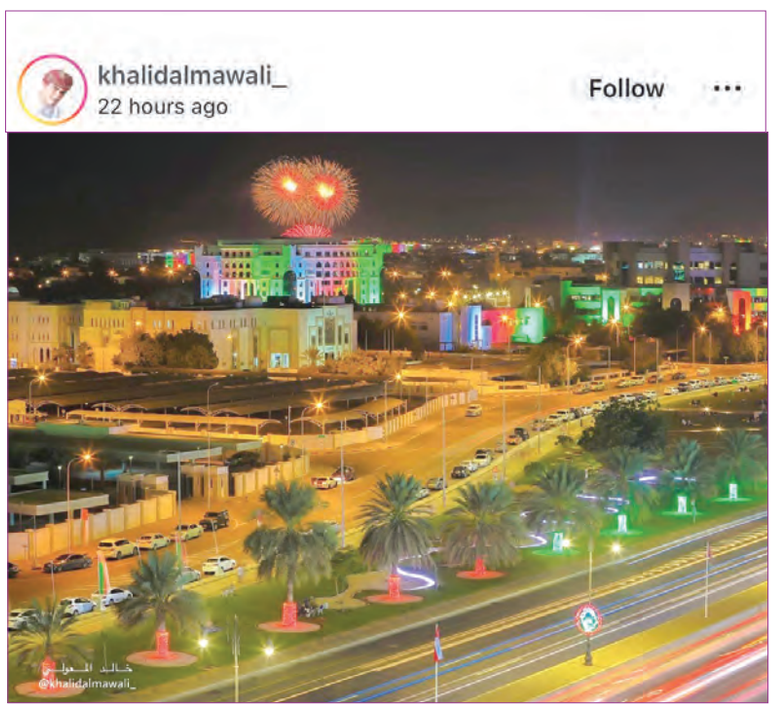
*Red Bull Racing driver Max Verstappen (1) celebrates his victory of the Las Vegas Grand Prix at Las Vegas Strip Circuit. — **Reuters***

GASTRONOMY

*Michelin star chef Jay Fai (L), a longtime icon of Thai street food culture, cooks at her restaurant in Bangkok. — **AFP***

INSTA PICKS

A Mirror Made by Nature



An Epic Shot of the National Day Festivities

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PRINCESS DIANA ENTERS PARIS WAXWORK MUSEUM IN 'REVENGE DRESS'

The Grevin waxwork museum in Paris unveiled a new star attraction on Thursday: Princess Diana in the "revenge dress" she wore after public revelations about her then-husband Prince Charles's infidelity.

The Grevin Museum in central Paris, similar to Madame Tussauds in London, already has models of Charles, who is now King Charles III and his late mother, Queen Elizabeth II. But Diana was a notable absentee, despite her tragic association with the city where she died in a car crash in August 1997.

She is displayed wearing a copy of the black gown by designer Christina Stambolian that she wore for a public appearance in 1994 amidst a media frenzy about the breakdown of her marriage to Charles.

She stepped out in the dazzling off-the-shoulder dress on the same day as an interview was broadcast in which Charles admitted to being unfaithful.

"More than 28 years after her tragic death in Paris, Diana is still a major figure in global pop culture, celebrated for her style, humanity and independence", the Grevin Museum said in a statement.

"The gown became a statement of reclaimed self-assertion, a powerful image of determined femininity and renewed confidence", it added.

Her waxwork is displayed far from King Charles and Queen Elizabeth, who are in a gallery for heads of state, with the late "Lady Di" standing alongside fashion and entertainment figures such as Jean Paul Gaultier and Franco-Malian singing star Aya Nakamura.

The date chosen for the unveiling — November 20 — was also a "sly reference" to a bombshell interview she gave to the BBC on the same date exactly thirty years ago in which she said "there were three of us in this marriage, so it was a little bit crowded".

That was a reference to Camilla Parker-Bowles, whom Charles has since married.

The high-pressure waxwork commission — which will be highly scrutinised by defenders of Diana's memory — was handed to Paris-based sculptor Laurent Mallamaci.

*The Grevin Museum had been in contact with Diana at the end of her life but abandoned the idea of making a figure of her after her death, a spokesperson said. — **AFP***

*Kerim Akbaygil, member of the Board of Directors of the Iznik Tile Foundation. — **AFP***

Rediscovering lost art of Vibrant Turkish tilemaking

*Women sketch before painting tiles in a workshop in Iznik. — **AFP***

*Traditional Turkish patterns painted on tile in Iznik. — **AFP***

HAZEL WARD

FOR over 300 years, the closely-guarded secrets of the Ottoman Empire's luminous tilework was lost, but its rediscovery has revived a key part of Türkiye's cultural heritage.

Renowned for intricate designs and lustrous colours, Iznik tiles are considered the pinnacle of Ottoman art, gracing monuments such as Istanbul's Blue Mosque and Topkapi Palace.

The tiles come from Iznik, a small town near Istanbul with a ceramics tradition spanning two millennia also known as Nicaea, which hosted a landmark Christian gathering in 325 AD that Pope Leo will celebrate when he visits this month.

Under the patronage of the Ottoman Empire, Iznik's artisans flourished, obtaining "remarkable achievements" by the mid-16th century, said Professor Ezgi Yalcinkaya, head of traditional Turkish arts at Usak University.

They developed a high-quartz stonepaste, known as fritware, yielding a bright white background ideal for decorating, transparent glazes and vibrant colours, including a "coral red" for floral designs which "created a distinctive new style", she said.

But when the Ottoman Empire began to decline in the 17th century, the workshops started to close and the artisans, mainly Greeks and Armenians who knew the formula for the stonepaste, the colours and glazes, died off.

"Knowledge was passed entirely through master-apprentice relationships. The specific formulas — especially for the coral red and fritware composition — were oral secrets", she said.

"Without documentation, the expertise died with the last masters. By the 18th-19th centuries, the technical knowledge was largely lost". Centuries later, an economics professor called Isil Akbaygil with a passion for Ottoman art set up the Iznik Foundation in 1993.

Her research project brought together experts and academics to rediscover the lost secrets of Iznik's prized ceramics.

'No Recipe Left'

"What was forgotten about isn't so much the raw materials themselves as how they're combined... the firing temperatures and methods to achieve the distinctive coral red", said Kerim Akbaygil, a foundation board member and one of her sons.

"The foundation spent almost two years trying to get the right recipe, working with different universities like MIT, Princeton and Istanbul Technical University", he said.

"It was trial and error but we finally got it right", he said at the foundation's headquarters, a rustic red-tiled building set in lush gardens lined with richly-coloured tile paths.

Decorated with metal oxides whose colours are rendered vivid through the firing process, they are then coated with a quartz-based glaze known as "sur" — Turkish for "secret".

'The Beauty of Surprise'

Jars of colours — from vibrant cobalt blues and emerald greens to coral reds — line the shelves inside a large upper room where a dozen women sit painting tiles or transferring designs onto plain white tableware.

Many are painting an enormous mural for a train station — one of the foundation's trademark commissions, its stunning tile facades a distinctive feature of the Istanbul metro and beyond.

Adding shadow to a giant fig leaf, Yasemin Sahin, 42, admits she's captivated by the transformation that occurs with firing.

Three decades on and Iznik tiles are now seen on buildings across Türkiye, from colleges to coffee shops, with the foundation's international reach spreading from Japan to Canada.

"Back in the day, Iznik tiles were sponsored by the palace, so the only place you could see them was inside the palaces or mosques. Now that taboo is broken", Akbaygil says.

Yalcinkaya said the collective significance of rediscovering the lost formulas was "tremendous" and the result of extensive research by many academics and scholars.

"These efforts revived a living tradition", she said.

"Ottoman ceramicists continuously innovated from the 14th-20th centuries. Today's work continues this spirit, ensuring the tradition remains alive and relevant, which is the most authentic way to preserve cultural heritage". — **AFP**

DESCENT INTO HIDDEN PARADISE

DR KHALED ABDUL MALAK

LAST WEEK, my friend Rami invited me to join him and four of his friends for an overnight camping trip in Wadi Al Mazra, followed by an adventure crossing Wadi Manjal, one of its tributaries.

Due to prior commitments, I couldn't make it on the first day, so I decided to meet them early the next morning to explore Wadi Manjal together. I set off at 5 am on Friday, driving towards Wadi Dayqah and then on to Wadi Al Mazra, where the group had camped overnight. By 6:45 am, I reached their campsite.

Our team of six included Jenny — a British adventurer who once lived in Oman and now frequently returns from Qatar for such excursions — along with Rami, Ahmed, Sultan, Hussain (an Emirati friend) and myself. After enjoying a freshly brewed cup of aromatic coffee prepared by our Emirati companion, we packed our climbing gear, food and supplies before starting our hike upstream along the wadi bed.

SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES

About 45 minutes later, we left the wadi floor and began a steep ascent along the right bank, following a local trail. The climb was tough and required care; a single misstep could have had serious consequences.

After nearly two hours, we reached a plateau scattered with ancient graves — a fascinating historical site.

From there, we descended into the canyon to begin our journey down the wadi.

The view was spectacular, with the distant ocean visible from our vantage point. After a brief pause to take in the scenery, we continued down to our first abseil point, anchoring the rope to a sturdy tree.

The first waterfall drop, around 30 metres high, was stunning. Ahmed went first, followed by me. Midway through the descent, I passed a spring gushing from the rock face and landed in a pristine, crystal-clear pool of water — refreshingly cool but not cold.

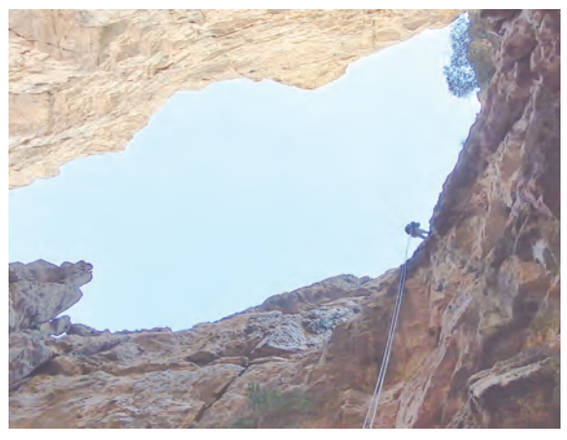
One by one, the rest of the group joined us. Jenny descended last and once she reached the bottom, we retrieved the rope and pressed on.

Soon after, we encountered another waterfall of similar height. We abseiled again into a calm pool and took a short break. Sultan impressed us by producing his portable espresso machine, brewing steaming coffee that we enjoyed with delicious dates brought by Ahmed and another friend. The spot, a quiet flat stretch surrounded by towering cliffs, felt almost enchanted.

After soaking in the tranquillity, we continued our descent through the wadi until we reached the final and tallest waterfall — a dramatic 130-metre drop ending in a large pool I had visited before from the opposite direction. We secured our rope and I descended first, stopping midway at a large cave carved into the rock wall, just as Ahmed had advised. He came next and Jenny followed.

Once at the bottom, we re-secured the rope for a final abseil into a wide pool nearly 35 metres across. Each visit to this remarkable spot fills me with a deep sense of fulfilment; descending this magnificent waterfall had always been a dream of mine.

The hike back to our cars took about an hour. Along the way, I marvelled at the wadi's extraordinary geology — layers of rock twisted and folded in every direction, silent witnesses to immense pressures and intense heat buried deep within the Earth millions of years ago. Another curiosity of Wadi Mazraa was a huge boulder in the wadi bed with a fragment of an ancient falaj built atop it.

By 3:15 pm, we reached our vehicles. Sultan once again brewed his signature coffee and we savoured delicious club sandwiches generously offered by our Emirati friend. It was another unforgettable day spent with wonderful companions in the breathtaking landscapes of Oman — truly a land of endless adventure and beauty.

A team of hikers explored Wadi Manjal's towering cliffs and hidden pools, discovering the raw beauty of one of Oman's most spectacular wadis