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INBRIEF

OMANI, SAUDI FMS
AT EMPTY QUARTER



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), visited the Al Rub' Al Khali (Empty Quarter) Border Crossing which links two countries, on Monday.

During the visit, the two ministers were briefed on the existing facilities as well as the commercial, tourism and traffic services provided at the border crossing in light of enhanced cooperation and integration between the two countries in various fields which embody the strong fraternal ties and communication between the two brotherly peoples.

The visit comes within the context of the mutual keenness to boost logistic and economic cooperation to keep pace with the aspirations of the leaderships of the two countries in line with Oman Vision 2040 and the Saudi Vision 2030. — ONA

BOOK FAIR FOCUSES
ON TALENT, PASSION



The Muscat International Book Fair is not a meeting point for young and readers, but it also offers a platform for young and budding authors to showcase their master works.

According to the visitors, what is interesting is that some of these young Omani writers are not just writing in Arabic, but also quite efficiently in English. One such author is Amar al Naimi, who has been having a regular presence at the Muscat book fair over the last couple years, and now has his third book on display at one of the stores. Al Naimi said that there are a few young writers, such as Mohammed al Kindi and other youngsters who have come out with their projects.

DETAILS ON P4

‘Omani Cultural Laboratories’ team formed

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), has issued a decision to form the Omani Cultural Laboratories (OCL) project team.

The initiative constitutes a collaborative effort undertaken by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Cultural Club and Bait Al Zubair Foundation. The project seeks to encourage initiatives, partnerships and cooperation among various sectors to promote

cultural action locally and internationally.

The OCL project keeps pace with the Sultanate of Oman’s cultural strategy’s objectives, notably in terms of promoting innovation, studies and research that enhance creativity and development, and the extent to which these are linked to the pillar of cultural communication. This is envisaged through the exchange of expertise (in Oman and abroad), cultural dialogue with countries around

the world, partnership and integration with relevant local and international institutions. The OCL aims to strengthen the bonds of cultural and civilisational collaboration and to highlight Omani people’s efforts and accumulated knowledge through the implementation of research projects, cultural programmes, exhibitions, meetings and other events that explore shared cognitive values with nations through cooperation with cultural and academic institutions

abroad.

Through its direct supervision of the OCL project, the ministry affirms its commitment to support joint cultural initiatives, integrate institutional efforts and contribute to the effective representation of Omani identity and consolidation of the Sultanate of Oman’s presence on the regional and international cultural arenas, based on the concept of cultural diplomacy as a strategic tool for communicating with the world. — ONA

Israel kills 40 Gazans as
blockade crosses 50 days

GAZA’S CIVIL defence agency said Israeli strikes on Monday killed at least 40 people across the Palestinian territory, which has been under an Israeli aid blockade for more than 50 days.

Israel resumed its military campaign in the Gaza Strip on March 18. A ceasefire agreement that had largely halted the fighting for two months before that collapsed over disagreements between Israel and Hamas.

Civil defence official Mohammed al Mughayyir said that 40 people had been killed since dawn on Monday. They included eight people who were killed in an Israeli strike on the Abu Mahadi family home in Jabalia, in the north of the territory.

“They were sleeping in their homes, feeling safe, when missiles hit... this scene makes the body shiver,” said Abdul Majeed Abu Mahadi, 67, who added that his brother was killed in the attack.

“If a person looked at this scene, they would have seen children, women and elderly men cut into pieces, it makes the heartache, but what can we do?”

The civil defence agency reported that another 10 people were killed in an Israeli strike on the Al Ghamari family home in the Al Sudaniya area northwest of Gaza City.

A strike on the Al Agha family home killed eight others in an area of Khan Yunis in the south, it added. Fourteen others were killed in four separate strikes across the territory, the civil defence said, including one that hit a tent sheltering displaced people in the Al Shafii camp, west of Khan Yunis.

The health ministry in Gaza said on Monday that at least 2,222 people have been killed since Israel resumed strikes, bringing the overall death toll since the war broke out to 52,314. Meanwhile, a top Palestinian official told the International Court of Justice



A Palestinian woman mourns as she holds the blood-stained shoe of a loved one, who was killed during an Israeli strike earlier on Al Jalaa street in the central Gaza Strip on Monday. — AFP

that Israel was blocking humanitarian aid to Palestinians in Gaza as a “weapon of war”, at the start of a week of hearings at the UN’s top court. Israel is not participating at the ICJ but hit back immediately, dismissing the hearings as “part of the systematic persecution and delegitimation” of the country. The ICJ is hearing dozens of nations

and organisations to draw up a so-called advisory opinion on Israel’s humanitarian obligations to Palestinians, more than 50 days into its total blockage on aid entering war-ravaged Gaza. Top Palestinian official Ammar Hijazi told judges that “all UN-supported bakeries in Gaza have been forced to shut their doors”. SEE ALSO P6

Pacts for RO 217 million solar cell project at Sohar Freezone

MUSCAT: Leading Chinese solar development company JA Solar signed agreements on Monday for the establishment of a major plant specialising in the production of solar cells and panels at Sohar Freezone.

The project, set on an area of 32.5 hectares within the second phase of the Sohar Freezone, represents a total investment of RO 217.3 million. The pacts were inked with Invest in Oman, Sohar Port and Freezone, and Majis Industrial Services during the Advantage Oman Forum 2025, which concluded in Muscat on Monday.

JA Solar’s project is scheduled to commence operations in the first quarter of 2026, with an annual production capacity of 6 gigawatts of solar cells and 3 gigawatts of solar panels.

This agreement is expected to advance the goals of Oman Vision 2040 by supporting the country’s transition towards renewable energy and economic diversification, while also reflecting growing investor interest in the second phase of the Sohar Freezone.

Commenting on the agreement, Eng Khalid bin Salim al Qassabi,



Chinese solar development company JA Solar signing agreements on Monday.

Director General of Industry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said: “The agreements to establish a solar cells and panels manufacturing facility in the Sohar Freezone, with investments totaling RO 217 million, embody the ambitious directions of the Oman Industrial Strategy 2040, which focuses on nurturing future industries and enhancing value-added investments. Renewable energy industries are a top priority within the strategy due to their significant potential to create opportunities.” SEE ALSO P13



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SHORT TAKES



Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, with Mohammed Nakhira Al Dhaheri.

UAE AMBASSADOR BIDS GOODBYE

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office on Monday Mohammed Nakhira Al Dhaheri, Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to the Sultanate of Oman to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty as his country’s ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman.

Al Numani expressed his appreciation to the ambassador for the efforts he exerted in enhancing bilateral relations and areas of joint cooperation between the two countries, wishing the ambassador success in his future endeavours. In his turn, the ambassador expressed his appreciation for the cooperation extended to him. He also lauded the strength of relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates. — ONA

DEVELOPMENTAL PROJECTS ADDRESSED IN AL DHAHIRAH



IBRI: The Municipal Council in Al Dhahirah Governorate reviewed the topic of service centres for remote villages through a visual presentation delivered by the Directorate-General of Housing and Urban Planning in the governorate, along with a proposal to develop the facades of some commercial districts in the governorate’s wilayats.

During its meeting on Monday, chaired by Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah, the council also discussed several recommendations outlined in the minutes of the Social Affairs Committee meeting. — ONA

SAYYID SHIHAB CHAIRS SOCIAL PROTECTION COMMITTEE MEETING

MUSCAT: The ministerial committee entrusted with the Social Protection Scheme held a meeting on Monday under the chairmanship of HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs and Chairman of the Committee.

The committee began its meeting by reviewing the implementation status of the decisions issued in its first meeting this year. It discussed several agenda items and examined proposals submitted by relevant



The meeting evaluated the performance of the social protection system.

authorities regarding the social protection system, deliberating on all aspects and taking appropriate decisions.

It is worth noting that among the main objectives of the Social Protection Committee is evaluating and monitoring the performance of the social protection system to ensure fair, effective and sustainable insurance coverage for all segments of society, in line with the outlined goals of the social protection system. — ONA

Oman and Brunei sign MoU in media field

THE Sultanate of Oman and Brunei Darussalam on Monday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen bilateral cooperation in the media field. The MoU was signed at the general Diwan of the Ministry of Information in Muscat.

The MoU includes provisions for the exchange of radio, television, and news materials and programmes, sharing expertise in various media fields, training and exchange visits.

The agreement was signed on behalf of the Sultanate of Oman by Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, and on behalf of Brunei Darussalam by Yang Berhormat Pehin Dato Lailaraja Major General (Retired) Dato Paduka



Oman and Brunei ministers exchange the agreement details

Seri Awang Haji Halbi bin Haji Mohammad Yussof, Minister at the Prime Minister’s Office and Second Minister of Defence of Brunei Darussalam.

The visiting minister toured the Digital Studios Complex at the Ministry of Information. During his tour, he was briefed on the media and

news services provided by the ministry. He also observed the advanced tools and cutting-edge technical programmes that meet the requirements of modern media work. In a press statement, the Minister at the Prime Minister’s Office and Second Minister of Defense of Brunei Darussalam lauded the advanced technologies and modern digital means that reflect the comprehensive media development in the Sultanate of Oman. This advancement, he affirmed, is a qualitative leap in producing media content that aligns with the highest global standards. He expressed his hope that the MoU signed between the two sides would further enhance joint cooperation in media, training and the exchange of expertise. — ONA



EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES PROJECT REVIEWED

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) on Monday held a high-level meeting to discuss the national project for integrated early childhood development centres. Chaired by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, the meeting reviewed the final study results of the integrated early childhood development centres project. Discussions also covered the project’s legal framework and its national rollout plan. — ONA

1,088 offenders freed through Fak Kurba initiative

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

A total of 1,088 cases involving minor financial offences were successfully resolved, and the offenders acquitted, under the Fak Kurba initiative launched by the Oman Lawyers Association (OLA), organisers confirmed. The humanitarian drive, now in its 12th edition, commenced on February 25, under the auspices of Dr Hamad bin Hamdan al Rubaie, Chairman of the OLA Board, and concluded on a highly positive note.

Leading the tally, Al Batinah North Governorate recorded 334 releases, followed by Muscat Governorate with 242 cases. Other figures included 102 cases in Al



Dr Hamad bin Hamdan al Rubaie, Chairman of OLA Board, led the humanitarian drive.

Dakhiliyah Governorate, 95 in Al Batinah South Governorate, 67 in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, 65 in Al Dhahirah Governorate, 60 in Al Buraimi Governorate, 57 in Dhofar Governorate, 46 in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, 16 in Al Wusta Governorate, and 4 in Musandam

Governorate.

Dr Mohammed al Zadjali, General Supervisor of Fak Kurba, remarked, “Since its inception, the Fak Kurba Initiative has set an organised framework for humanitarian and social action in Oman. Over 12 years, we have alleviated the suffering of

many destitute prisoners and helped restore stability to their families.”

Speaking to Observer, Dr Hamad bin Hamdan al Rubaie, Chairman of OLA Board, explained that the initiative targeted insolvent individuals who were either imprisoned or had detention orders issued against them in commercial, civil, labour or Sharia cases, with claims not exceeding RO 2,000. Beneficiaries must not have previously availed the initiative.

“Priority was given to cases involving smaller claims, followed by larger claims and the oldest insolvent individuals,” he added, noting that cases were accepted solely via the Administrative Affairs Council for the Judiciary’s General-

Directorate of Execution.

Operating under the slogan “Because we believe that people deserve a second chance”, Fak Kurba has secured the release of nearly 10,000 individuals since its inception, offering hope and rebuilding lives across the Sultanate of Oman.

The organisers highlighted the active support received from individuals, government bodies, and private institutions, underscoring the spirit of solidarity embedded within Omani society.

“We aim to sustain and expand this impactful initiative in the future, forging more partnerships across sectors to support an even greater number of cases,” Dr Al Rubaie said.

SHORT TAKES



EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES DISCUSSED

SUHAR: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), Al Batinah North branch, held a meeting to address challenges related to recruiting and employing national talent, in the presence of Khalid bin Salim al Ghamhari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Labour.

The meeting, held on Monday with several representatives and owners of factories and companies in the governorate, reviewed the private sector's perspectives on Omanisation and replacement policies, along with proposals to enhance the effectiveness of these policies across various economic sectors.

Discussions also focused on strengthening public-private partnerships to create a stimulating work environment capable of efficiently and sustainably integrating national workforce.

The meeting was attended by MMohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North, alongside several officials from government and private entities in the governorate. — ONA

Iranian military delegation visits National Defence College



An Iranian delegation visited the NDC and Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies

MUSCAT: A delegation from the Supreme National Defence University of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Monday visited the National Defence College (NDC) at Bait Al Falaj. The guests were greeted upon their arrival at the college by Brigadier Mansoor bin Ali al Amri, Acting Commandant of the NDC.

Members of the visiting delegation were briefed on the college's facilities and its strategic curricula, which focuses on preparing national competencies capable of taking strategic decisions at various levels. They also toured the NDC's departments and various halls.

Meanwhile, Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies, received in his office at Bait Al Falaj a delegation from the Supreme National Defence University of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The two sides discussed several matters of mutual interest, notably in academic fields. The meeting was attended by Commodore Khalid bin Amir al Salti, Director-General of Studies and Academic Affairs and the Military Attaché at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Muscat. — ONA

MILITARY MEDICAL CITY SIGNS DEAL WITH JOANN MEDICAL GROUP

SHANGHAI: The Medical City for Military and Security Services on Monday signed a cooperation agreement with JoAnn Medical Group in Shanghai, China, to enhance cooperation and coordination with health institutions in the People's Republic of China.

The agreement covers research, transfer of medical technology, development of health services and exchange of expertise and training programmes.



The agreement enhances Medical City's objectives by expanding its network of international partnerships

The agreement was signed by Brig Dr Abdul Malik bin Sulaiman al Kharousi, Assistant Chairman of the Medical City for Supplies and Support Affairs, and Joanna Jiang, CEO of JoAnn Medical Group.

The agreement enhances the Medical City's objectives by expanding its network of international partnerships and attracting the best global practices to support the City's system of healthcare for military and security services. — ONA

Symposium highlights media's role in identity

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

THE Oman Journalists Association (OJA) organised a symposium on media and national identity under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs, bringing together a distinguished group of academics, researchers and specialists. The event aimed to develop recommendations for consolidating national identity and promoting values in the context of contemporary challenges.



The Oman Journalists Association (OJA) symposium on media and national identity was held in Muscat

Discussions at the symposium focused on the role of media in reinforcing Omani national identity and explored ways to leverage media platforms to document and safeguard the authentic values that form the foundation of Omani society. Participants emphasised that media remains one of the most vital tools for promoting traditional values, strengthening ties between generations, and balancing the preservation of heritage with engagement in modern advancements.

Dr Mohammed bin Mubarak al Araimi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of OJA, underlined the need to preserve national identity as a shared consciousness. He warned of increasing external influences seeking to reshape cultural beliefs and called for the strengthening of national belonging among future generations.

Dr Al Araimi stressed the importance of building a resilient national media capable of facing challenges, offering meaningful content and reinforcing societal values to make future generations more aware of the risks of cultural alienation. He further noted that globalisation, despite its advantages

in communication and openness, poses serious challenges to national identity, especially through Western media and digital platforms that promote lifestyles and concepts inconsistent with Omani heritage and values.

Throughout the sessions, participants presented working papers, sharing insights and experiences on preserving national identity amid global changes. The symposium concluded with comprehensive recommendations emphasising the need to fortify national media, nurture Omani family values, integrate identity-based elements into education, promote Omani identity both locally and internationally, enhance cognitive awareness among citizens, advance the local content industry, enact balanced legislation between conservatism and openness, teach Omani identity through creative digital means, and involve youth in achieving the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Dr Khalid al Adawi, Head of the symposium's technical and scientific team, emphasised that the recommendations form a roadmap for continued collaboration and joint action to protect and promote

national identity. He noted that the media's role in this regard is critical and must be strengthened across all channels.

Salem bin Hamad al Jahwari, Vice-President of the OJA, expressed hope that the symposium's recommendations would be effectively implemented, describing them as an important strategic framework for fostering a strong sense of identity and cultural pride among Omanis.

Dr Zakaria al Mahrami, a physician at Sultan Qaboos University and writer, highlighted that the fragmentation of national identities worldwide due to globalisation necessitates initiatives like this symposium. He emphasised the urgent need for Oman to define and develop a clear national strategy that preserves its authentic identity while remaining open to global engagement. The symposium was accompanied by a photo exhibition showcasing Omani national identity. The exhibition featured a rich collection of photographs that captured significant milestones in Oman's history, from the Islamic era to modern times, underscoring the depth and continuity of the nation's cultural heritage.

Oman, India eye stronger higher education ties

MUSCAT: The University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) on Monday received an academic delegation from the Republic of India, represented by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), currently visiting the Sultanate of Oman.

The visit aims to explore avenues of cooperation in higher education and scientific research, as well as to strengthen strategic



Dr Said bin Hamad al Rubaie, Vice-Chancellor, UTAS, addressing the Indian delegation

partnerships between academic institutions in both countries.

Dr Said bin Hamad al Rubaie, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, emphasised the importance of enhancing academic relations and expanding cooperation between the two sides to support efforts aimed at building knowledge-based societies founded on scientific research, innovation and entrepreneurship.

During the visit, several key topics were discussed, including opportunities for joint research projects in energy transition, decarbonisation, emerging technologies and artificial intelligence. The discussions also covered capacity-building through specialised workshops and training programmes, student and faculty exchange programmes, the establishment of joint research centres of excellence. — ONA

Wakan village sees surge in visitors, boosting tourism

NAKHAL: The number of visitors to Wakan village in Wadi Mistal, the Wilayat of Nakhal, Al Batinah South Governorate, has reached 19,270 since the beginning of January until April 2025, according to statistics released by the village's Tourism Guidance Office, affiliated to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

The village has seen a significant influx of visitors during this period, with statistics indicating that February is typically the peak month for tourism. This year, the village welcomed 7,888 visitors in February, compared to 6,499 in February 2024

and 4,974 in February 2023.

The Department of Heritage and Tourism in Al Batinah South affirmed that Wakan village is one of the governorate's key tourist attractions due to its moderate summer climate, similar to other high-altitude areas in the Western Hajar Mountains. This favourable weather allows locals to engage in year-round agriculture, particularly cultivating crops that thrive in temperate summer climates, such as apricots, pomegranates, peaches, walnuts and grapes.

Dr Al Mutasim bin Nasser al



Hilali, Director of the Department of Heritage and Tourism in Al Batinah South, stated that Wakan village in Nakhal has gained tourist prominence by offering unique experiences, such as stays in its high-altitude mountain lodges, hiking along agricultural trails and exploring ancient mountain paths that have become a draw for adventurers worldwide.

He explained that the diversity of attractions in Wakan has made it a sustainable tourism destination. During winter, it attracts international visitors, including

those from GCC countries, while domestic tourism peaks in summer due to the mild temperatures and harvest seasons. Key harvest periods include apricots in April, peaches in June, and pomegranates and grapes from June to September.

He added that the agricultural trail in Wakan is one of the most enriching experiences for visitors, offering adventure, discovery and immersion in the village's mountainous environment.

The trail requires ascending over 600 steps to reach its highest point. — ONA

A platform to showcase talent and passion



The cheerful spectacle of children browsing through colourful books across crowded stalls is heartening, especially considering the skepticism about youngsters not engaging with books anymore. Several bookstall owners noted that it is interesting to find that children have a liking for books and their parents play a key role in that, as they need their parents to bring them to such fairs.

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

THE MUSCAT INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR is not only a meeting point for young and budding readers, but it also offers a platform for young and budding authors to showcase their masterpieces.

According to observers, what is interesting is that some of these young Omani writers are not just writing in Arabic, but also quite proficiently in English.

One such author is Amar al Naimi, who has been a regular presence at the Muscat International Book Fair over the last couple of years and now has his third book on display at one of the stores. Al Naimi mentioned that there are a few young writers, such as Mohammed al Kindi, Ayesha Waheed, and other youngsters who have come out with their projects.

The cheerful spectacle of children browsing through colourful books across crowded stalls is heartening, especially considering the skepticism about youngsters not engaging with books anymore.

Speaking to the Observer, several bookstall owners noted that it is interesting to find that children have a liking for books and their parents play a key role in that, as they need their parents to bring them to such fairs.

“Also, they will get inspired by the presence of young writers or authors of their age doing well at such a level and being praised by everyone.” Some experts emphasised the essential role that libraries play in the literary movement and in preserving history through their collections.

The staff of Family Book Stores and Al Bhaj mentioned that despite addictions to screens and short videos, children are willing to look at books, and some even aspire to put their thoughts on paper instead of just expressing them in front of cameras.

Fifteen-year-old Ayesha Waleed already has five books under her name, with her latest also based on fantasy. The Book Fair also discusses serious topics such as ‘Human



Trafficking: Its Forms and Ways to Combat It’, with the participation of many specialists from authorities, especially focusing on efforts to protect and assist victims.

As part of its ongoing efforts to spread the culture of children’s rights and promote a safe environment that protects childhood, the Children First Association launched its awareness booklet “I am Aware”. This booklet uses a simplified and interactive approach to educate children about their rights and the boundaries of their bodies, which must be respected by all. It also clearly explains the steps to take when exposed to any inappropriate behaviour.

Calligrapher Saif al Kharousi held a specialised workshop entitled “Calligrapher’s Tools and Methods of Using Them” for those interested in the art of Arabic calligraphy to acquire practical knowledge of the tools of this ancient art and the techniques for using them.

The workshop covered various types of Arabic calligraphy and offered practical advice for beginners on how to avoid common mistakes and adopt best practices.

The German Embassy presented a celebration of the translation of an Omani novel that won an international award into the German language.



Sohar University’s Vice Chancellor Participates in the QS Summit Roundtable Discussions & Attends the Conference of the Association of Arab Universities held in the State of Kuwait



On the sidelines of the QS Higher Education Summit 2025 Middle East held in Kuwait in 20-22 of April 2025, Dr. Hamdan Sulaiman Al Fazari, Vice Chancellor of Sohar University, participated in the Presidents’ Roundtable discussions on building future-ready institutions and the challenge of aligning education with the goals of Society 5.0.

The discussion focused on student-centered education, the use of artificial intelligence, and the role of university presidents in leading transformation and linking it to the visions of their countries.

Dr. Hamdan Al Fazari contributed to the discussions on linking teaching and learning, scientific research and innovation to Oman Vision 2040 in terms of building people and society.

“University leaders in the Middle East must be architects of transformation by investing in people, having policies and platforms that prepare students not only for jobs, but to be creative, innovative and future leaders,” Dr Hamdan explained. “The challenge is not as technological as others see it, but philosophical; with that question, can we build institutions that see human well-being as the true measure of success?”

The Vice Chancellor of Sohar University also participated in the meetings of the fifty-seventh General Conference of the Association of Arab Universities, which was held at the International University for Science and Technology in the State of Kuwait. Sohar University recently gained membership of the Association of Arab Universities.



SHORT TAKE



ISC HOSTS ‘JASHN-E-DECCAN’, CULTURAL EVENING

MUSCAT: The Deccani Wing of the Indian Social Club (ISC) Oman hosted a vibrant cultural evening, Jashn-e-Deccan, at the CBFS Hall, captivating over 700 guests with a celebration of Hyderabad music, poetry and spirit.

The event was graced by G V Srinivas, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, along with ISC Chairman Babu Rajendran and Vice-Chairman Suhail Khan. Ghazal maestro Ustad Nizam Ali Khan headlined the evening with soul-stirring renditions of works by legendary Hyderabad poets Shaz Tamkinat and Amjad Hyderabad. His performance evoked the lyrical elegance of a bygone era.

He was joined by his sons, Faizan Ali Khan and Fareed Ali Khan, who added youthful charm and emotional intensity. Faizan's smooth vocals captivated the crowd, while Fareed energised the hall with powerful Sufi numbers.

A standout poetry segment featured Dawood Khan, who recited 'Nai Bole Toh Sunte Nai' by Ghouse Mohiuddin Khamakha, earning warm applause. Musicians Sikander Khan (tabla) and Mohammed Rafi (harmonium) added rich musical depth to the performances.

Omani guest Zaheer Al Din delighted the crowd with his presence, reflecting the strong cultural ties between Oman and India.

Health law to safeguard community well-being

THE Public Health Law, issued under Royal Decree No 44/2025, establishes an integrated system of scientific and practical regulations aimed at enhancing the health and safety of society.

As a national priority within Oman Vision 2040, the law seeks to provide comprehensive health services that ensure universal healthcare access while improving the quality of care through collaborative efforts between health sectors and relevant stakeholders. The legislation encompasses all aspects of public health, setting forth general principles to safeguard individuals' physical, mental, psychological and social well-being. It focuses on disease prevention and maintaining a healthy environment free from pollutants that could harm public health. The law serves as a unified reference for standardising public health concepts, defining the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved, and strengthening coordination mechanisms. It also promotes the development of health programmes for disease prevention, control and treatment, while enhancing public immunity and outlining legal and operational frameworks for public health.

Among its key provisions, the law defines preventive, curative and

The law serves as a unified reference for standardising public health concepts, defining the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved, and strengthening coordination mechanisms. It also promotes the development of health programmes for disease prevention, control and treatment, while enhancing public immunity and outlining legal and operational frameworks for public health.



rehabilitative health services for citizens, residents and visitors in Oman. It guarantees patient rights, protects vulnerable groups, and enhances cross-sector coordination in public health initiatives.

The law also addresses infectious disease control, border health measures, environmental health policies and bioethical issues such as cloning, organ transplantation and reproductive health. A central objective of the Public Health Law is to create a robust regulatory system that strengthens health protection and fosters local and international cooperation in addressing public health challenges. It also aims to raise public awareness about health risks and preventive measures.

The first chapter of the law ensures equitable access to healthcare services for all individuals through public, private and public-private partnership institutions, with explicit protections against discrimination in healthcare provision. The second chapter safeguards physical and mental health by prohibiting any actions that could harm an individual's well-being. Meanwhile, the third chapter mandates coordinated strategies to combat infectious diseases and epidemics, while the fourth chapter establishes policies for food safety, occupational health, and environmental protection, including standardised regulations for food production.

By clarifying obligations and safeguarding rights, the Public Health Law reinforces Oman's commitment to a sustainable and inclusive healthcare system, positioning the country as an attractive destination for health sector investment. — ONA

Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
86/2025 (Resubmission)	Supply of a paper recycling machine (for workshops) to Al Wafa Center for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities at Salalah	Companies specialized in supplying office and educational tools, materials and supplies, information and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree	Tuesday 13-05-2025 02:00 PM	Tuesday 27-05-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
170/2025	Construction work on a warehouse in the Department of Social Development at the Wilayat of Bahla	Companies specialized in construction contracting and maintenance and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the fourth degree	Tuesday 13-05-2025 02:00 PM	Tuesday 27-05-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
171/2025	Project to establish a water therapy unit at the Association for the Care of Children with Disabilities at Jalan Bani Bu Hassan	Companies specialized in construction contracting and maintenance and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, first degree	Sunday 11-05-2025 02:00 PM	Thursday 22-05-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
172/2025	Project to establish a hydrotherapy unit at the Association for the Care of Children with Disabilities at Al-Mudhaibi	Companies specialized in construction contracting and maintenance and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, first degree	Sunday 11-05-2025 02:00 PM	Thursday 22-05-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
173/2025	Project to establish a hydrotherapy unit at the Association for the Care of Children with Disabilities at Sur	Companies specialized in construction contracting and maintenance and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, first degree	Sunday 11-05-2025 02:00 PM	Thursday 22-05-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
174/2025	Consulting services for the expansion of the Al-Wafa Center at Al-Mudhaibi	Companies specialized in consulting offices and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board with an excellent or first degree	Monday 19-05-2025 02:00 PM	Tuesday 03-06-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
175/2025	Supplying building materials for the maintenance of the Ministry's General Diwan building	Companies specialized in supplying construction materials and equipment and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the fourth degree	Tuesday 06-05-2025 02:00 PM	Tuesday 13-05-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) . On **Tuesday 29/04/2025**.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

" The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry"

www.mosd.gov.om

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A Rafale fighter jet model is displayed during the International Bali Airshow at Ngurah Rai International Airport in Kuta, Bali. — Reuters

INDIA SIGNS DEAL WITH FRANCE FOR 26 RAFALE FIGHTER JETS

NEW DELHI: India has signed a contract to purchase 26 Rafale fighter jets from France, New Delhi's defence ministry said on Monday, with the multi-billion-dollar deal to include both single and twin-seat planes. When delivered, the jets would join 36 French-made Rafale fighters already acquired by New Delhi as part of its efforts to rapidly modernise its military hardware.

"The governments of India and France have signed an inter-governmental agreement for the procurement of 26 Rafale Aircraft," the defence ministry said in a statement. The jets made by French aerospace company Dassault Aviation are expected to operate from Indian-made aircraft carriers, replacing the Russian MiG-29K jets. "It includes training, simulator, associated equipment, weapons and performance-based logistics" as well as 22 single-seater and four twin-seater jets, said India's defence ministry. "It also includes additional equipment for the existing Rafale fleet of the Indian Air Force (IAF)."

The Indian government announced its intention to procure 26 Rafales in 2023, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited France for the Bastille Day celebrations. Dassault said that the jets will provide India with "state-of-the-art capabilities" and an "active role in guaranteeing national sovereignty and consolidating India's role as a major international player". — AFP

NEPAL PLANS TO RESTRICT EVEREST PERMITS



KATHMANDU: Nepal will issue Everest permits only to climbers with experience of scaling at least one of the Himalayan nation's 7,000-metre peaks, according to the draft of a new law aimed at reducing overcrowding and improving safety. Nepal, which is heavily reliant on climbing, trekking and tourism for foreign exchange, has faced criticism for permitting too many climbers, including inexperienced ones, to try to ascend the 8,849-metre peak. This often results in long queues of climbers in the 'death Zone', an area below the summit with insufficient natural oxygen for survival.

Overcrowding has been blamed for the high number of deaths on the mountain. At least 12 climbers died, and another five went missing on Everest's slopes in 2023 when Nepal issued 478 permits. Eight climbers died last year. — AFP

MILLIONS IMPACTED

Massive blackout hits Spain, Portugal, France



A massive blackout hit Spain, Portugal and part of southern France on Monday, grid operators said, leaving millions of people impacted. The cause for the outage was not immediately reported. Spain's railway operator Adif said that the power cut halted trains across the entire country, while airports operator Aena said 'several incidents' occurred in Spanish airports. Mobile phone networks went down. — AFP

68 KILLED IN US STRIKES ON MIGRANT CENTRE

SANAA: Ansar Allah in Yemen said on Monday that US strikes hit a migrant detention centre in the movement's stronghold of Saada, killing at least 68 people.

The US military has hammered the Ansar Allah with near-daily strikes since March 15 in an operation dubbed 'Rough Rider', seeking to end the threat they pose to vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

The Ansar Allah launched strikes targeting Israel and Western vessels

in the Red Sea, in what they describe as solidarity with the Palestinians. On Sunday, the US said it had hit more than 800 targets in Yemen since mid-March, killing hundreds of Ansar Allah including members of the group's leadership.

Just hours later, Ansar Allah media said the latest barrage by US forces had hit a migrant detention centre.

"The civil defence has announced that 68 African migrants were killed and 47 others wounded in the US

attack targeting a centre for illegal migrants in the city of Saada," Al Masirah TV said.

The news agency could not independently confirm the veracity of Al Masirah's claim that the strikes had hit a migrant detention centre, or the toll.

According to a statement cited by Al Masirah from the Ansar Allah administration's interior ministry, the centre housed "115 migrants, all from Africa". — AFP

Palestinian official: aid used as ‘Weapon of War’

A top Palestinian official told the International Court of Justice on Monday that Israel was blocking humanitarian aid to Palestinians in Gaza as a "weapon of war", at the start of a week of hearings at the UN's top court.

Israel is not participating at the ICJ but hit back immediately, dismissing the hearings as "part of the systematic persecution and delegitimation" of the country.

The ICJ is hearing dozens of nations and organisations to draw up a so-called advisory opinion on Israel's humanitarian obligations to Palestinians, more than 50 days into its total blockage on aid entering war-ravaged Gaza.

Top Palestinian official Ammar Hijazi told judges that "all UN-supported bakeries in Gaza have been forced to shut their doors".

"Nine of every 10 Palestinians have no access to safe drinking water. Storage facilities of the UN and other international agencies are empty," added Hijazi.

"These are the facts. Starvation is here. Humanitarian aid is being used as a weapon of war," concluded the Palestinian representative.

Speaking in Jerusalem, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said the case in The Hague was "part of a systematic persecution and delegitimation of Israel".

"It is not Israel that should be on trial. It is the UN and UNRWA," he told reporters, referring to the United Nations aid agency for Palestinian refugees. Israel has banned UNRWA from operating on



Ammar Hijazi, ambassador and permanent Palestinian representative to international organisations in the Netherlands, speaks on the day of a hearing at ICJ in the ongoing case regarding Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories, in The Hague. — Reuters

“Nine of every 10 Palestinians have no access to safe drinking water. Storage facilities of the UN and other international agencies are empty”

AMMAR HIJAZI

Israeli soil, after accusing some of the agency's staff of participating in the Hamas October 7, 2023 attack that sparked the conflict. Independent investigations say it has not provided evidence for its headline allegation.

UNRWA Secretary-General Philippe Lazzarini urged Israel "as an occupying power" to "provide services or facilitate their delivery -- including through UNRWA -- to the population it is occupying".

In December, the UN's General Assembly asked the ICJ for an advisory opinion "on a priority basis and with the utmost urgency".

The UN asked judges to clarify Israel's legal duties towards the UN and its agencies, international organisations or third-party states to "ensure and facilitate the

unhindered provision of urgently needed supplies essential to the survival of the Palestinian civilian population". Israel strictly controls all inflows of international aid vital for the 2.4 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. It halted aid deliveries to Gaza on March 2, days before the collapse of a ceasefire that had significantly reduced hostilities after 15 months of war.

Supplies are dwindling and the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) on Friday said it had sent out its "last remaining food stocks" to kitchens. Footage from a community kitchen in Gaza City shows scores of boys and girls crowded outside the facility, pushing their pots and pans forward in a desperate attempt to secure whatever food they can. — AFP



BORDER REUNION TEARS

Robina, an Indian citizen, weeps as she waits for her brother Imran Ali, an Indian citizen, and her sister-in-law Giza, a Pakistani citizen, at the India-Pakistan Wagah border post, about 35 km from Amritsar. After the April 22 attack, New Delhi downgraded diplomatic ties, withdrew visas for Pakistanis, suspended a water-sharing treaty and announced the closure of the main land border crossing with Pakistan. — AFP

MIGRANTS ALL FOREIGNERS

8 migrants die off Tunisia, 29 rescued



Eight migrants from various countries died and 29 others were rescued after their boat capsized off the coast of Sfax in central Tunisia, the Tunisian National Guard said on Monday. The migrants were "all foreigners", including some from sub-Saharan Africa and others of different nationalities, said Houcem Eddine Jebabli, a spokesman for the National Guard. — AFP

HIGH TECH TIES

Japan, Vietnam sign 4 agreements



Japan and Vietnam agreed to deepen cooperation on semiconductors and clean energy as Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba visited Hanoi seeking to shore up ties. Ishiba and Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh signed four agreements including R&D in microchips and bilateral cooperation in energy transition. Japan agreed to support the training of around 250 Vietnamese doctorate students in the semiconductor industry.— AFP

SHORTTAKES



Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney at the Ottawa International Airport, during election day in Ottawa, Ontario. — Reuters

CANADIANS TO VOTE ON NEW GOVT AS TRUMP LOOMS

OTTAWA: Canada was voting on Monday for a new government to confront a trade war and annexation threats by President Donald Trump, who pushed for the United States to absorb its neighbour as polling stations opened.

The Liberal Party, led by new Prime Minister Mark Carney, looked set to lose to the Conservatives' Pierre Poilievre until the US president's attacks on the country sparked a sudden reversal in poll forecasts.

Trump forcefully inserted himself into Canadian politics on election day with a Truth Social post saying Canada would face "Zero Tariffs" if it "becomes the cherished 51st state." "It was meant to be!" he said.

Carney, 60, has never held elected office and only replaced Justin Trudeau as prime minister last month. He had a lucrative career as an investment banker before serving as the central bank governor in both Canada and Britain.

Carney has argued his global financial experience has prepared him to guide Canada's response to Trump's tariffs.

He has also promised to revitalise internal trade and expand Canada's economic opportunities abroad to cut reliance on the United States, a country Carney says "we can no longer trust."

The United States under Trump "wants to break us, so they can own us," he has warned repeatedly.

"We don't need chaos, we need calm. We don't need anger, we need an adult," Carney said in the campaign's closing days.

Poilievre, a 45-year-old career politician, has tried to keep the focus on domestic concerns that made Trudeau deeply unpopular toward the end of his decade in power, especially soaring living costs.

The Tory leader has argued Carney would continue "the lost Liberal decade," arguing that only a new Conservative government can take action against crime, housing shortages and other non-Trump issues Canadians rank as priorities.

"You cannot handle another four years of this," he said over the weekend. — AFP

CONCLAVE TO CHOOSE THE NEXT POPE BEGINS ON MAY 7

ROME: The papal conclave to elect a new leader of the world's 1.4 billion Catholics will begin on May 7, Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said on Monday. The cardinals set to participate in the conclave on agreed the date after consultations in the Vatican, exactly one week after Pope Francis died at 88 on Easter Monday.

The Argentine pontiff was buried at the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome on Saturday after a funeral ceremony in the

Vatican attended by global leaders and hundreds of thousands of onlookers. The Catholic Church stands at a crossroads, with some members hoping for the next pontiff to continue Francis' reformist course, while others seek a return to its conservative traditions.

In order to pick Francis' successor, the church's top dignitaries will retire to the Sistine Chapel in strict seclusion from May 7, with all contact to the outside world forbidden.

In total, 135 cardinals under the age of 80 from across the world are eligible to vote, although one is unable to travel due to health reasons.

Some 108 of them were appointed by Francis after he succeeded pope Benedict XVI in 2013.

A two-thirds majority of the 134 cardinals expected to be involved in the conclave is needed to choose Francis' successor in a process that could take days, if not weeks.

— dpa

Putin announces 3-day ceasefire from May 8-10

RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin on Monday declared a three-day ceasefire in May in the war with Ukraine to mark the 80th anniversary of the victory of the Soviet Union and its allies in World War Two.

The Kremlin said the 72-hour ceasefire would run on May 8, May 9 - when Putin will host international leaders including Chinese President Xi Jinping for lavish celebrations to commemorate victory over Nazi Germany - and May 10.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha, in response, said: "If Russia truly wants peace, it must cease fire immediately. Why wait until May 8th?"

A ceasefire should be "real, not just for a parade," he posted on X.

The White House said President Donald Trump wanted a permanent ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine.

Against a background of increasing US impatience, Putin's move appeared aimed at signalling that Russia is still interested in peace - something that Ukraine and its European allies dispute.

"All military actions are suspended for this period. Russia believes that the Ukrainian side should follow this example," the Kremlin said in a statement on the May 8-10 ceasefire.



Russian President Vladimir Putin delivers a speech during a meeting of the Federal Assembly's Council of Legislators in Saint Petersburg. — Reuters

the fighting.

Ukraine's Sybiha said Kyiv had been "constantly proposing" a ceasefire for at least 30 days. Russia has said it wants a full settlement, not a pause.

The Kremlin statement said: "The Russian side once again declares its readiness for peace talks without preconditions, aimed at eliminating the root causes of the Ukrainian crisis, and constructive interaction with international partners."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters earlier that the signal for direct talks should come from Ukraine, as it currently had a "legal ban" on negotiating with Putin.

He was referring to a 2022 decree in which Zelensky ruled out such negotiations after Russia had claimed four Ukrainian regions as its own in an action condemned as illegal by most countries at the United Nations.

Ukraine accuses Russia of playing for time in order to try to seize more of its territory, and has urged greater international pressure to get Moscow to stop fighting.

Russia accuses Ukraine of being unwilling to make any concessions and of seeking a ceasefire only on its own terms.

Trump on Sunday urged Russia to stop its attacks in Ukraine and suggested Zelensky was ready to give up Crimea, which Russia seized from it in 2014. — Reuters

Trial over 2016 gunpoint robbery of Kardashian opens in Paris

PARIS: A group of men dubbed the 'grandpa gang' were among ten suspects who went on trial on Monday on charges of robbing reality TV star Kim Kardashian at gunpoint and stealing jewellery worth millions of dollars during Paris Fashion Week in 2016.

Several of the accused are now in their late sixties or seventies. They spoke one after the other in the central Paris courtroom to confirm their identity and occupation - many of them saying they were retired.

Kardashian will travel to Paris in May to give evidence in the trial, her lawyer said. She is expected to speak on May 13. The verdicts could be announced on May 23.

The suspects, wearing ski masks and clothes with police markings, tied up the billionaire celebrity with zip ties and duct tape, before making off with a \$4 million engagement ring given to her by her then-husband, rapper Kanye West (now

known as Ye), and other jewels, according to investigators.

"They kept on saying 'the ring, the ring,'" Kardashian told David Letterman in a 2020 interview, during which she fought back tears as she recalled her fears of being beaten that night.

"I kept looking at the concierge," she continued, referring to the concierge of the exclusive building who had been forced at gunpoint to lead the gang to her apartment. "I was like, 'Are we gonna die? Just tell them I have children, I have babies ... I have to get home.'"

DNA traces found on plastic bands used to tie the wrists of Kardashian helped police make arrests the following January.

In total, nine men and one woman will be tried by the criminal court. Five of them - all men - face armed robbery and kidnapping charges and potentially risk being sentenced to life imprisonment. The others are



Chloe Arnoux, one of the lawyers of Aomar Ait Khedache, talks to journalists during a break on the first day of the trial of Aomar Ait Khedache and 9 other people at the Court of Appeal of Paris. — Reuters

charged with complicity in the heist or the unauthorised possession of a weapon.

One of the accused, Yunice Abbas, 71, has admitted his participation in the robbery - writing a book about his role. Abbas, who had spent 20 years of his working life in jail, told French television channel TF1 the "big job was to be the last".

He said he had been told a big diamond was the target but not the "The Kardashians" star.

Chloe Arnoux, a lawyer representing 68-year-old Aomar Ait Khedache - nicknamed "Omar the Old" and accused of being the group's ringleader - which he denies - said her client could end up spending the rest of his life in prison due to his age.

She said in an interview with BFM TV that he had written to Kardashian to apologise, but his letter had been intercepted by officials.

As the robbers escaped on foot or with bikes, they lost some of the jewellery, including a cross with six diamonds, which a passerby found in the street and brought to the police. But most of the jewels, including the \$4 million ring, were never found. One of the suspects is dead and another is too ill to be put on trial at this time, prosecutors said. — Reuters

OPINION

Oman steps up as key mediator in US-Iran nuclear talks



THE negotiations between the United States and Iran, facilitated by the Sultanate of Oman, mark a significant step towards potentially resolving longstanding tensions surrounding Iran's nuclear programme. As both nations prepare for a high-level meeting on May 3, Oman has emerged as a crucial intermediary in facilitating dialogue and fostering an environment conducive to peace.

The talks, which took place in Muscat last week, lasted several hours and concluded with both parties expressing a commitment to continue discussions this week. This diplomatic engagement is particularly noteworthy given the historical context of US-Iran relations, which have been fraught with conflict and mistrust for decades.

Oman has historically played a neutral role in Middle Eastern conflicts, often acting as a bridge between opposing parties. Its strategic location and diplomatic relations with both Iran and the United States position it uniquely to mediate discussions that have often been fraught with hostility.

During the last talks, officials described the discussions as ‘very serious and work-focused,’ and ‘positive and productive’ while acknowledging that significant work remains

to be done before any agreement could be finalised. The willingness of both sides to engage in such detailed discussions suggests a cautious optimism about the potential for reaching a new agreement.

Oman has positioned itself as a neutral ground for dialogue between Iran and the US, leveraging its unique geopolitical position and relationships with both nations. Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, has been playing a crucial role in these negotiations, emphasising the importance of mutual respect and enduring commitments from both sides. His mediation efforts have been recognised as vital in creating an environment conducive to serious discussions about Iran's nuclear ambitions.

The outcome of these negotiations could have far-reaching implications not only for US-Iran relations but also for regional stability in the Middle East. As tensions remain high due to various conflicts involving Iran's influence across the region, any successful diplomatic resolution could help de-escalate these tensions.

Furthermore, it may pave the way for broader discussions on security cooperation in the Gulf region. The ongoing dialogue represents an important opportunity for

The willingness of both US and Iran to engage in detailed discussions suggests a cautious optimism about the potential for reaching a new agreement

both nations to move towards a more stable relationship based on mutual interests and respect.

The geopolitical landscape of the Middle East has long been characterised by tension and conflict, particularly between Iran and the United States. However, Oman as a crucial mediator has leveraged its unique position to facilitate dialogue and promote peace. This editorial explores Oman's role as a peacemaker and the implications of its diplomatic efforts for both Iran and the US.

Oman's history of neutrality and diplomacy sets it apart from other nations in the region. Unlike other countries that have taken sides in regional conflicts, Oman has maintained a balanced approach, fostering relationships with both Iran and the US.

Oman's role as a facilitator of dialogue between Iran and the US underscores its importance in promoting stability in a volatile region. By providing a neutral ground for negotiations and fostering trust through careful diplomacy, Oman exemplifies how smaller nations can play significant roles in global peace efforts. As negotiations continue amid complex geopolitical challenges, Oman remains a beacon of hope for resolving one of the most pressing conflicts of our time.

MYANMAR HERITAGE FALLS VICTIM TO EARTHQUAKE

LYNN MYAT

When a massive earthquake hit Myanmar last month, centuries of sacred history tumbled down -- towering Buddha idols, sky-scraping stupas and the pure-white pagoda where 83-year-old Khin Sein has prayed for most of her life.

The magnitude-7.7 tremor razed Nagayon Pagoda in the central city of Mandalay, Myanmar's last royal capital where ancient heritage was decimated in the disaster which claimed more than 3,700 lives.

For around 200 years, the temple was adorned with a carving of a sacred serpent said to have shielded the Buddha from the elements after his enlightenment. The quake that struck one month ago on Monday reduced it to a heap of shapeless masonry, half burying the snake's bowing head.

"I cried out to pray that Nagayon Pagoda would save me when the quake started," said Khin Sein. "But my son told me that the pagoda was already gone."

"I don't think any bricklayer or architect could rebuild it the same as it once was," she said, her eyes welling with tears as she paced the perimeter of the temple where she had prayed for 51 years. "I want the original back but I know it's not possible."

The March 28 quake has left more than 60,000 people living in tent encampments, according to the United Nations, and pushed two million people into "critical need" in a country already devastated by civil war since a 2021 coup.

As the ground sheared up to 20 feet, more than 3,000 monasteries and nunneries were destroyed alongside more than 5,000 pagodas, the ruling junta says.

Myanmar's second city of Mandalay and the adjacent cities of Sagaing and Inwa, dotted around the quake's epicentre, are all ancient seats of power, steeped in history and now pockmarked with ruins.

Cultural capital Mandalay was where the British captured the country's last king in 1885, beginning colonial rule of the whole nation.

A one-kilometre colonial-era bridge has collapsed into the Irrawaddy River towards Sagaing, where the horizon was once prickled with pinnacles of pagodas and stupas now contorted or simply gone.

Inwa served as capital for nearly 360 years until it was abandoned after a magnitude-8.2 quake struck in 1839.

Three quarters of the historic buildings inside its ancient cultural heritage zone were damaged in this year's jolt, officials say. — AFP

Why the world looks away from Gaza

THE tragedy of the Palestinian people in Gaza is not only the horror of the genocide they endure, but also the systematic denial of their suffering. A more painful dimension has emerged: an active refusal by many global political forces to see the horror unfolding, to recognise the victims as human beings rather than collateral damage, and to allow their voices to be heard as victims of a terrifying humanitarian catastrophe.

Thus, the erasure in Gaza is twofold: the destruction of bodies, and the destruction of memory.

This massive silence surrounding the atrocities cannot be dismissed as mere indifference. It is the most agonising extension of the crime itself. Historically, the faces of victims have been selectively acknowledged. The suffering of colonised and marginalised peoples has often been reduced to distant echoes, unworthy of mainstream historical narrative. Today, in Gaza, this pattern repeats: the killings are visible, livestreamed to the world, and yet surrounded by a wall of silence — a silence born not of ignorance but of conscious denial.

In many modern political systems, it is no longer enough to defeat an enemy militarily. One must also strip them of their humanity, transform their death into an administrative footnote about 'security' or 'counterterrorism,' thus reducing human life to a disposable statistic.

Denial here is not an accident; it is a deliberate cultural and institutional practice. Sociologists describe this as 'dehumanisation' - a necessary tool for waging war. Through dehumanisation, mass violence is reframed as a legal procedure or a necessary evil, not as a humanitarian outrage.

This strategy includes even questioning the death toll itself, as



Palestinians wait to receive food cooked by a charity kitchen, in Beit Lahiya, northern Gaza Strip. — Reuters



ASIM AL SHIDI

The writer is Editor-in-Chief of Oman Arabic daily newspaper

if high numbers pose a threat to the dominant narrative. Recall former US president Joe Biden casting doubt on the figures reported by Gaza's Health Ministry, despite these figures being trusted for decades by the UN and international relief agencies. The US House of Representatives went further in June 2024, passing a measure banning the State Department from citing Gaza's death tolls — a move Democratic Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib called 'a systematic attempt to deny genocide.'

The rhetoric escalates horrifyingly in comments like those of Republican Congressman Max Miller, who said that "Palestine is about to become a parking lot," and called for war "without rules of engagement," dismissing Palestinian civilians as legitimate targets. Congresswoman Michelle Salzman went even further, suggesting openly that all Palestinians should be killed. Such statements are not accidental slips. They reveal a deep ideological system that sees

Palestinians not as a humanitarian cause but as a historical burden to be erased.

Denial, then, is not merely about rejecting facts. It is about reinterpreting the world — turning massacres into acts of self-defence, and stripping victims of the very right to be recognised as human.

Here, Edward Said's insights into 'the new Orientalism' resonate: Palestinians, like other Arabs, are not seen as individuals with rights but as obstacles to Western-defined moral order — obstacles to be neutralised or eliminated.

This denial often explodes into visible anger when those engaged in it are confronted with the stark reality of Gaza's suffering. Watching political figures grow furious or visibly shaken when challenged about the humanitarian catastrophe reveals a profound ethical wound they cannot easily conceal.

(Translated by Badr al Dhafari and the original version of the article appeared in Oman Arabic daily newspaper on April 27)

The festival of books... a feast for the mind



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior editor of Observer

THE 29th edition of Muscat International Book Fair being held at Oman Convention Centre is a happening place.

Over 674 publishing houses from 35 countries are participating in the 10-day book fair. More than 681,000 titles are available to choose from and the book lovers are having a feast.

There are speakers, art exhibitions and cultural activities to make it more exciting for the visitors.

Over the years, the exhibitors also have been finding innovative ways to make people relate to books. The Ministry of Education's pavilion has people dressed distinctly and when you strike up a conversation they reveal the identity of the notable historical personalities they represent. These personalities are in the Unesco's International Programme of celebration of historic events and influential persons. The personality we met at the book fair this year was the Omani navigator Ahmed bin Majid. The actor who is representing Ahmed bin Majid is bilingual and with ease he switched to Arabic and English as he spoke to the visitors.

Omani navigator, Ahmed bin Majid was added to the list of influential world personalities. The listing coincided at that time with the 600th birthday of the Omani navigator and he became the sixth

personality.

One can imagine the delight people experience when they meet the personality and hear him explain the various aspects of his life and achievements and show them the navigational tools.

This year many embassies are participating as well. As you walk through the lanes there is the sound of string instruments and at times a melody of the flute. There is a booth from Brunei Darussalam. Hafizam Sofian is an artist who plays the traditional string instrument and at times, the flute. There is a corner introducing the visitors to the sweets of Brunei and then the section of books. Hafizam politely informed the visitors who wanted to purchase the flutes that they were not for sale and that were his personal collection. He is also happy to explain about his string musical instrument - Sapeh.

"They used to traditionally have just three strings but in the recent three years three more strings were added and so now we have six strings in total," he noted.

Another person explained that there are two Arabic universities in Brunei.

As always the book fair is popular with students who look out for academic books as well. And a friend asked, 'Do you think in this digital world people still want physical books?'

The answer to that has to be seen at the

The Ministry of Education's pavilion has people dressed distinctly and when you strike up a conversation they reveal the identity of the notable historical personalities they represent

book fair that attracts readers and book enthusiasts of all ages. A book stall from Iraq has the best of bookmarks made of metal. It seems to attract a lot of attention because their designs catch the imaginations. There are book stands and posters aimed at young readers.

It takes 21 days to form a habit and the book fair in its 29th year, has become a tradition. A tradition the whole family participates in. It is a hub to gather and check out the new books, titles and publishers.

According to experts, reading can reduce stress, increase concentration, increase empathy, develop agile thinking, improve rationality, vocabulary, knowledge and creativity, etc.

The most important part of the book fair is the participation of the families. Young children accompany their families, and when they browse through the book stalls, it might be the characters of the stories that attract them and probably the posters and stickers as well as colouring books, but the significance is that the young ones are beautifully introduced to the world of words and books.

Here the family members are the influencers. With so many titles and topics to choose from, the place is a haven for readers and for the publishers a home it is home they like to come to every year.

The festival of books is a feast for the mind.

CONFLICTS SPUR ‘UNPRECEDENTED’ RISE IN MILITARY SPENDING

JOHANNES LEDEL

Worldwide military expenditure saw its steepest rise in 2024 since the end of the Cold War, reaching \$2.7 trillion as wars and rising tensions drove up spending, researchers said on Monday.

Military spending rose worldwide with particularly large increases in Europe and the Middle East, according to a new report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Several European countries had seen “unprecedented” rises in their military spending, the report noted.

In real terms, spending rose by 9.4 per cent globally compared to 2023, with 2024 marking the 10th year of consecutive spending increases.

“This was really unprecedented,” Xiao Liang, a researcher with the SIPRI Military Expenditure and Arms Production Programme, said. “It was the highest year-on-year increase since the end of the Cold War.”

While there may have been steeper increases during the Cold War, data for the Soviet Union is not available, Liang added. More than 100 countries, including all of the 15 largest spenders, increased their military budgets last year, said the report. “This really speaks to the heightened geopolitical tensions,” Liang said. The spending increase was likely to have “a very profound socio-economic and political impact”, he added.

“Countries have to make trade-offs in their budgetary decisions,” he said.

“For example, we’ve seen many European countries cutting other spending like international aid to fund the increase in military spending, and... trying to raise taxes or rely on loans or debt to fund the spending,” Liang said.

The main contributor to the rise in expenditure was the European region including Russia, where spending rose by 17 per cent to \$693 billion.

All European countries, except Malta, expanded their budgets, “pushing European military spending beyond the level recorded at the end of the Cold War,” SIPRI said.

Russia’s military expenditure reached \$149 billion in 2024: a 38-per cent increase on the previous year and a doubling since 2015. Ukraine’s military spending grew by 2.9 per cent to reach \$64.7 billion. While that sum only corresponds to 43 per cent of Russia’s arms spending, for Ukraine it is the equivalent of 34 per cent of its GDP. That means it is carrying the highest military burden of any country.

Germany’s spending increased by 28 per cent, reaching \$88.5 billion, overtaking India as the fourth largest in the world. “Germany became the biggest spender in Central and Western Europe for the first time since its reunification,” Liang noted.

The world’s largest spender, the United States, increased expenditure by 5.7 per cent, reaching \$997 billion. That alone accounts for 37 per cent of worldwide spending and 66 per cent of the military spending among Nato countries. — AFP

Can Trump-Zelensky talks bring peace?

DONALD Trump's meeting in the Vatican with Volodymyr Zelensky was hailed by both sides as historic. Whether it will help seal a peace deal between Ukraine and Russia will become clearer in the coming days.

Brought together by the funeral of Pope Francis, the US and Ukrainian presidents sat knee-to-knee on red and gold chairs in the giant nave of Saint Peter's Basilica, in their first meeting since their blazing televised row in the Oval Office in February.

"It was a beautiful meeting. I tell you, the nicest office I've ever seen, it's a beautiful, beautiful scene," Trump told reporters in Bedminster, New Jersey, the day after his return from Rome.

Trump said the meeting went well and played down the earlier row, saying "we had a little dispute because I disagreed with something he said and the cameras were rolling."

His National Security Adviser Mike Waltz said the meeting was "iconic."

"That meeting is going to go down in the history books," Waltz told Fox News's Sunday Morning Futures. "For President Trump to be a president of peace, to be talking peace and diplomacy in the Vatican, of all places."

Zelensky gave a similar verdict, saying it was a "very symbolic meeting that has the potential to become historic, if we achieve joint results."

French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer also turned up at the meeting, reflecting efforts by European powers to keep an often sceptical Trump singing from the same hymn sheet.

And whatever Zelensky said during the Vatican encounter, it appeared to work.

Hours afterwards, Trump appeared to turn against Vladimir Putin for the first time — a sharp reversal given his recent favourable tone towards the Russian leader. Trump reiterated on Sunday that he was "disappointed" that Putin's forces were still attacking civilian



President Trump and Ukraine's President Zelensky sat and met privately before Pope Francis' funeral at The Vatican on Saturday.

targets in Ukraine, adding: "I want him to stop shooting, sit down, and sign a deal."

Trump is nevertheless showing increasing impatience with both sides, as he tries to secure a peace deal he once bragged he could seal within 24 hours. He said he believed Zelensky was ready to give up Crimea, which Russia seized in 2014 — despite the Ukrainian leader repeatedly saying he would never do so.

And while the Zelensky meeting may have bought some time, the White House reiterated its stance that without rapid progress, it will soon walk away from its role as a broker.

Trump indicated that he would give the process "two weeks."

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Sunday that "this is going to be a very critical week" for efforts to end the war. "We're close, but we're not close enough," Rubio told NBC's "Meet the Press" news programme.

Trump's comments about Putin reflected his frustration with Moscow's refusal to commit to a ceasefire, despite a series of meetings between Russian and US

officials.

US special envoy Steve Witkoff has held multiple face-to-face meetings with Putin in Russia in recent weeks.

Witkoff — who has been pictured warmly shaking hands with Putin and strolling with the Kremlin's economic adviser in a shopping district — has however faced accusations from Ukraine of echoing Russian talking points.

The US property developer-turned-negotiator — who is also Trump's point man on Gaza — insists that he is using his experience in making deals on a personal level to end the Ukraine war.

One other person in Trump's close circle gave a personal call for peace after the Rome trip: First Lady Melania Trump, who marked her 55th birthday on the day of the funeral.

"I had the honour of attending Pope Francis's funeral, on this day, where I prayed for the healing of those who are suffering and for peace in the world," she said on X on Sunday, along with a black-and-white picture of herself with eyes closed and a raised veil.



DANNY KEMP

The writer is White House correspondent for AFP

SPORTS

12 TEAMS



Ali bin Anwar al Balushi during the 100 metres heats in the Paris Olympics 2024.

OMAN ATHLETES GEAR UP FOR ARAB ATHLETICS IN ALGERIA

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

Oman athletes are gearing up to take part in the 24th edition of the Arab Athletics Championship in Algeria from Wednesday to Sunday. As many as 12 countries have confirmed their participation in the Arab meet including Kuwait, Palestine, Djibouti, Lebanon, Qatar, Egypt, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria and the Sultanate of Oman. The tournament will include many events including: men's and women's 100m, 200m, 400m, 800m, 1500m, long jump, javelin, relay team 100mX4, 400mX4, discus throw and other events. This event will act as a great opportunity for the national athletes to gear up for the forthcoming regional and international championships.

Oman's Olympian sprinters Ali bin Anwar al Balushi and Mazoon al Alawi will lead the Oman challenge in the meet. Recently, Ali managed to secure a slot at the 20th World Athletics Indoor Championships following his gold medal at the Meeting de Paris Indoor at the World Athletics Indoor (Tour Silver) as he ended first in the Men's 60m Final last February. Al Balushi managed to end the race in 6.53 seconds.

Oman's athletes delivered an outstanding show in their last presence at the GCC Beach Games in Muscat during April first week. On the opening day of athletics, Oman commenced their campaign strongly by winning six medals as Mulham al Balushi won gold in the men's 60-metre sprint. In the women's 60-metre sprint, Mazoon al Alawi took silver for Oman. In the men's high jump, Oman's Fatik Bait Jaboob took gold. In the men's long jump, Oman's Salim al Yarubi won gold, his teammate Salim al Rawahi earned silver.

On the second day, Oman added five more medals as Mazoon al Alawi grabbed gold in the women's long jump while her teammate Alaa al Zadjali took silver. In the mile race, Oman's Mohammed al Suleimani finished in second. In the men's high jump, Oman's Salim al Rawahi won gold and Salim al Yarubi took silver.

On the concluding day of the Games, Oman's athletes bagged five more medals. Shaikh al Hinai delivered an outstanding performance to win gold in the women's triple jump, while her teammate Alaa al Zadjali secured silver. The men's 4x60 metre relay team worked hard as one team to claim the gold. It was the same scenario by the women team in the women's 4x60 metre relay as Oman dominated once again by securing gold. In the women's high jump, Alia al Mughairi of Oman delivered an exceptional performance to claim the gold.

Mazoon al Alawi (#6) competes during the GCC Beach Games in Muscat.

Oman clinch first-ever AHF Cup honours



Oman players celebrate with the trophy.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

THE OMAN national hockey team clinched the 2025 Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) Cup title for the first time in its history after defeating Chinese Taipei 4-3 in the final on Sunday. Chinese Taipei finished as runners-up, while Bangladesh blanked Kazakhstan 3-0 to finish third.

With this triumph, Oman secured a spot in the Asia Cup finals, scheduled to be held next August in India. The AHF Cup competitions were hosted in Jakarta, Indonesia, from April 17 to 27, featuring 10 Asian teams competing over 10 thrilling days filled with high-level performances.

In the final, Chinese Taipei opened the scoring early through Cheng-Ze Wei, who capitalised on a through ball that penetrated the Omani defence and fired it beautifully into the net in the fourth minute.

Following the goal, Oman pushed forward in search of an equaliser, and Ayman nearly scored, but his attempt was unsuccessful. Chinese Taipei responded with a dangerous chance led by LI Chi-Hsuan, before Oman finally equalised through a successfully converted penalty corner by Rashad al Fazari. Oman continued to press for a second goal, with Elias al Noufali coming close, but the first half ended in a 1-1 draw.

At the start of the second half, Oman asserted clear dominance, creating several opportunities that were not fully capitalised on. Chinese Taipei, on the other hand, relied on quick counter-attacks and earned a penalty corner, which Cheng-Ze Wei squandered.

Oman's pressure paid off when Shafi al Shafai scored a brilliant goal in the 22nd minute, following up on a rebound from the defence and slotting it into the net.

Soon after, Oman extended their lead with a third goal from Elias al Noufali, who benefited from a precise cross by Talal from the right wing, finding himself unmarked to tap the ball easily into the goal.

Despite Oman's strong defence, Chinese Taipei's Tsung-Yu Hsieh managed to weave through the defence, bypassing goalkeeper Ibrahim al Farsi to pull one goal back, ending the second quarter with Oman leading 3-2.

In the third quarter, both teams exchanged chances early on. Elias al Noufali missed a clear opportunity for Oman, while Tsai Chang-Yu wasted a dangerous chance for Chinese Taipei. Oman then earned a penalty corner taken by Rashad al Fazari, but it was blocked by the defence.



Oman and Chinese Taipei players in action during the final.



Oman players celebrate a goal in the final.

In the 43rd minute, Huang Lin-Yu scored the equaliser for Chinese Taipei with a powerful shot, bringing the match level once again.

However, Oman quickly regained the lead when Ayman scored the fourth goal after a beautiful assist from Elias al Noufali, who broke through the right flank and delivered a precise ball into the box. Oman closed the third quarter ahead 4-3.

The fourth quarter saw no changes to the scoreline despite efforts from both sides, and the referee's final whistle confirmed Oman's 4-3 victory.

HISTORIC ACHIEVEMENT
Mohammed Bait Jandal, head coach of Oman's national hockey team, expressed his great joy after the team's historic achievement of winning the 2025 Asian Hockey Federation Cup for the first time in its history, stressing that this triumph is a

proud moment for every Omani, especially as it was the result of dedicated efforts by the technical and administrative staff.

Bait Jandal said: "The tournament was marked by a high level of play and strong competition, adding greater value to our victory. This achievement is not a coincidence but the result of collective effort and a sincere ambition to raise the nation's flag."

He noted that qualifying for the upcoming Asia Cup in India is among the most significant gains of this participation, extending his deep thanks to Dr Marwan Al Juma, Chairman of the Oman Hockey Association, the coaching and administrative teams, and the players who showed commitment and discipline throughout the tournament.

Meanwhile, Mohammed al Gharabi, team manager of the national team, said that winning the AHF Cup was the outcome of integrated efforts that started with an intensive training camp in Pakistan in early April, focusing on enhancing technical and physical aspects.

Al Gharabi added: "The camp significantly improved team coordination and players' fitness, which positively reflected on their performance during the tournament."

He affirmed that the team would continue its training programme in preparation for the Asia Cup, focusing on further developing players' skills and physical readiness, expressing confidence in the team's ability to achieve honourable results that reflect the progress of Oman hockey.

TOP OF TABLE



Mumbai Indians' Jasprit Bumrah celebrates after taking the wicket of Lucknow Super Giants' Abdul Samad. — Reuters

BUMRAH, KRUNAL STAR AS MUMBAI, BENGALURU WIN

NEW DELHI: Jasprit Bumrah returned figures of 4-22 to help Mumbai Indians defeat Lucknow Super Giants in the IPL on Sunday, while Krunal Pandya steered Royal Challengers Bengaluru to the top of the table in a victory over Delhi Capitals. India pace bowler Bumrah led five-time champions Mumbai to their fifth successive win with a 54-run hammering of LSG at the Wankhede Stadium. In the second match of the day, Krunal's unbeaten 73 helped RCB beat Delhi Capitals by six wickets to move above Gujarat Titans at the summit.

Chasing 163 for victory, Bengaluru slipped to 26-3 before Virat Kohli and Pandya put together a fourth wicket partnership of 119.

Tim David smashed 19 not out off five balls to secure the win with nine balls to spare at Delhi's Feroz Shah Kotla. "He (Pandya) can make that impact and we were just waiting for him to come into this tournament with the bat as well," Kohli said of player of the match Pandya, who also took 1-28 with his left-arm spin. "And today was his day completely and he was absolutely brilliant."

Kohli compiled a measured 51, while Pandya struck five fours and four sixes in an innings which took the game away from Delhi.

It was Bengaluru's sixth successive away win as they and Kohli search for their first IPL title since the league's inception in 2008.

Bhuvneshwar Kumar and fellow pace bowler Josh Hazlewood shared five wickets between them to restrict Delhi to 162-8.

In the chase, Delhi skipper Axar Patel opened the bowling with his left-arm spin and struck two early blows to send back England's IPL debutant Jacob Bethell, out for 12, and Devdutt Padikkal, for a duck, two balls later.

Bengaluru skipper Rajat Patidar was run out for six but Kohli and Pandya put Delhi under pressure with occasional boundaries mixed with quick running between the wickets.

Once set, Pandya unleashed his power and reached his fifty off 38 balls with a four off Axar.

Kohli completed his sixth half-century of the season as he edged past Mumbai Indians batter Suryakumar Yadav (427) as the leading run-scorer with 443. He finally fell to Sri Lanka fast bowler Dushmantha Chameera before Pandya and David took the team over the line.

In the first match, Mumbai posted 215-7 after South Africa's Ryan Rickleton hit 58 and Suryakumar Yadav hammered 54.

All the bowlers contributed, including England's Will Jacks who took two wickets in one over, as Mumbai bowled out Lucknow for 161. "I will always be a batter who bowls, my bowling is important," said player of the match Jacks. — AFP



Al Rustaq and Al Khabourah players fight for the ball.

Al Nasr, Al Nahda, Rustaq secure vital wins in OL

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

AL NASR secured a valuable 1-0 win over Bahla at Nizwa Sports Complex, marking the opening of the 20th round of the Omantel League on Sunday. Marwan Taib scored the only goal of the match for Al Nasr in the 43rd minute, granting his team all three points.

With this victory, Al Nasr raised their tally to 27 points, temporarily moving up to fourth place in the standings, pending the completion of the round's matches. Meanwhile, Bahla remained at 22 points, sitting in seventh place.

AL NAHDA HIT SOHAR FOR A SIX
Al Nahda recorded a sweeping 6-0 victory over Sohar at Al Buraimi Sports Complex.

Al Nahda entered the match strongly, completely dominating the midfield, relying on wing play and penetrating attacks through the centre. Their early pressure paid off with three well-deserved goals: Ahmed al Matrooshi opened the scoring in the 10th minute, Abdulaziz al Shammasi added the second in the 15th minute and Winda netted the third in the 39th minute.

In contrast, Sohar tried to match Al Nahda's pace by playing through the flanks, but their passes lacked precision, making it easy for Al Nahda's defence to intercept and close down spaces. Four minutes of injury time were added, but the score remained unchanged, with Al Nahda leading 3-0 at half-time.

In the second half, Al Nahda continued to



Al Nahda players celebrate their win against Sohar.

dominate the match amid a clear decline in Sohar's performance, who struggled to keep up with the pace. Al Nahda took advantage of this and continued their goal fest, with Winda scoring the fourth goal in the 55th minute. Near the end of the match, Mohammed al Ghafri further boosted Al Nahda's lead by scoring two quick goals in the 89th and 93rd minutes, sealing an emphatic victory.

With this win, Al Nahda raised their total to 43 points, maintaining their hold on second place in the league standings, while Sohar remained stuck at 21 points in ninth place.

AL RUSTAQ EDGE AL KHABOURAH
Al Rustaq secured an important 1-0 victory over hosts Al Khabourah at Sohar Stadium.



Al Nahda and Sohar players in action.

The first half saw cautious play from both sides, though Al Rustaq showed more attacking intent, wasting several clear chances through Ahmed al Adawi, Ibrahim al Harrasi and Mohammed Abdul Hakim. Despite multiple efforts, the first half ended in a goalless draw. In the second half, Al Rustaq continued their offensive pressure, and Ammar al Shiyadi managed to score the only goal of the match in the 65th minute with a powerful strike into the net.

Al Khabourah attempted to equalise through varied attacking plays, but Al Rustaq's defence held firm until the final whistle. With this victory, Al Rustaq climbed to seventh place with 23 points, while Al Khabourah remained at 25 points in fifth place.

Zverev, Sabalenka battle through in Madrid Open

MADRID: World number two Alexander Zverev was taken to the limit by Alejandro Davidovich Fokina in a gripping Madrid Open third round battle on Sunday, progressing 2-6, 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7/0).

The Spaniard, roared on by the partisan home crowd, broke in the first and third games to claim the first set with ease.

Zverev fought to get back on serve after falling a break behind at the start of the third, and saved two break points in the ninth game before a tie-break.

The German won it and was stronger in the third set, breaking for a 5-4 lead. However serving for the match, Zverev was broken to love by the in-form Davidovich Fokina, ranked 29th, but it was

his last hurrah as the top seed dominated the second tie-break.

"The first set wasn't my best tennis, but in sport it can change very quickly, I was down a set and a break but I kept fighting and I'm very happy for the win," Zverev said.

The two-time Madrid champion will face Francisco Cerundolo in the last 16, after the Argentinian overcame his compatriot Francisco Comesana in straight sets.

Zverev was warned by the umpire after he took a photograph during the match of a ball mark, debating an electronic line-call which said one of the Spaniard's shots was in.

Earlier, Andrey Rublev's Madrid Open title defence hit the rocks in a defeat by Alexander Bublik.

Bublik beat Rublev 6-4, 0-6, 6-4



Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik plays a return against Russia's Andrey Rublev during the Madrid Open. — AFP

for his 10th win over a top-10 player, although the Russian is set to sink to 17th after his surprise exit in the Spanish capital.

Kazakh Bublik, ranked 75th, secured a break in the first game of the deciding set and held on to his advantage.

He will face Jakub Mensik in the next round after the Czech 19-year-old eased past 12th seed Ben Shelton 6-1, 6-4.

Third seed Taylor Fritz qualified after opponent Benjamin Bonzi retired with a back injury, tied at a set each.

Former world number two Casper Ruud claimed his 150th win on clay by beating USA's Sebastian Korda 6-3, 6-3, and will face Fritz for a place in the quarterfinals.

SABALENKA SAFE

In the women's draw, last year's defeated finalist Aryna Sabalenka fought back to beat Elise Mertens and reach the last 16. Women's world number one Sabalenka progressed 3-6, 6-2, 6-1 against Belgian Mertens.

There were surprise eliminations for world number three Jessica Pegula and Jasmine Paolini. Japan's Moyuka Uchijima, ranked 56th, earned the biggest win of her career with a 6-3, 6-2 win over the American, breaking her serve on five occasions.

Italian world number six Paolini was defeated in straight sets by Maria Sakkari, 6-2, 6-1. Ukraine's Elina Svitolina eliminated Elena Rybakina 6-3, 6-4, and will face Sakkari in the round of 16. — AFP

SPORTS

SERIE A



Napoli's Scott McTominay celebrates scoring their second goal against Torino. — Reuters

ROMA DOWN INTER, MCTOMINAY GUIDES NAPOLI TO TOP

ROME: Inter Milan's defence of their Serie A title was hit with a setback on Sunday as they lost 1-0 at home to Roma, while Scott McTominay netted a brace as Napoli beat Torino 2-0 to go top of the table. No fixtures were played on Friday or Saturday because of the funeral of Pope Francis in Rome, meaning the full round of Serie A matches take place on Sunday and Monday.

Matias Soule's first-half strike for Roma knocked Inter off top spot earlier in the day before new tabletoppers Napoli opened up a three-point buffer with victory in Sunday's late kick-off.

"Three defeats in one week hurts, and we're not used to such a run," said Inter coach Simone Inzaghi. "It was a very important game, but we lacked a clear head. We need to try and get our energy back, and we'll go to Barcelona with a lot of respect for this team, but without fear."

Argentinian Soule stunned the San Siro when he slotted home coolly as the ball ping-ponged around the Inter box in the 22nd minute.

The win moved Roma up to sixth place on 60 points, two off the final Champions League spot.

In another blow for Inter, they risk being without defender Benjamin Pavard for their upcoming Champions League semifinal first leg against Barcelona after the French international limped off in the 15th minute with an ankle issue.

McTominay lit the blue touch paper in the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona when he ghosted in at the near post to turn Napoli into the lead on seven minutes against Torino.

The former Manchester United midfielder repeated the trick four minutes before the break to send Napoli clear at the top of Serie A on 74 points.

The brace brought McTominay's league total to 11 goals, one behind Napoli's leading scorer Romelu Lukaku.

JUVE GO FOURTH

Juventus moved into the fourth and final Champions League qualification spot with a 2-0 victory at home to basement-club Monza.

First-half strikes from Nicolas Gonzalez and Randal Kolo Muani took the Old Lady to 62 points.

Third-placed Atalanta were held to a surprise 1-1 draw by relegation-threatened Lecce, dragging Gian Piero Gasperini's side further into the dogfight for Champions League football next season.

Fiorentina kept their European qualification hopes alive with a 2-1 victory against struggling Empoli. The Tuscany-based club sit in eighth place on 59 points, five ahead of Milan who beat lowly Venezia 2-0. Brazilian forward Gabriel Strefezza scored the only goal as Como beat Genoa 1-0 in the duel between former Arsenal players-turned-coaches Cesc Fabregas and Patrick Vieira. — AFP



Liverpool players celebrate after winning the English Premier League title. — Reuters

Liverpool smash Spurs to win record 20th EPL title

LIVERPOOL DEMOLISHED Tottenham 5-1 to clinch the Premier League title at an impassioned Anfield on Sunday, sealing a record-equalling 20th English top-flight crown.

Arne Slot's men stormed back after conceding a surprise early goal to dominate the match, feeding off the crackling energy from the 60,000-plus crowd.

Liverpool, who can no longer be caught by second-placed Arsenal, are now level with bitter rivals Manchester United as the joint-most successful club in English top-flight history.

It is just their second title of the Premier League era and the first they have celebrated in front of fans since 1990 — their 2020 triumph came at a near-empty stadium due to Covid restrictions.

Slot, who is in his first season in English football, said he had built on solid foundations left by Jurgen Klopp, who departed last year after a successful nine-year reign.

"Almost the whole season we were on the top of the league and had a team that could win it," he said. "We know how tough the Premier League is, but we always had the belief we could win it."

"The work Jurgen (Klopp) and (assistant) Pep (Lijnders) left, the culture, work-rate, quality, was outstanding. We started (the season) really well and maybe it helped that (Manchester) City had a difficult spell that they have not had in five years."

"When the season started we would have



Mohamed Salah takes a selfie with fans after beating Tottenham at Anfield. — Reuters

been happy with top four. But I don't think that is fair on the players as they are much better than that and they have shown it this season."

Slot's men started on the front foot at an expectant Anfield after a stirring rendition of club anthem "You'll Never Walk Alone" in the warm spring sunshine, but they were rocked by an early goal from Tottenham's Dominic Solanke.

However, Liverpool barely blinked and roared back with a Luis Diaz tap-in and a screamer from Alexis Mac Allister.

Now the party was well and truly started and Cody Gakpo made it 3-1, slamming a shot into the bottom corner after a much-changed Spurs team failed to clear.

The Liverpool fans ran through their full repertoire of songs as their team pushed for a fourth goal in the second half.

SALAH SELFIE

Top-scorer Mohamed Salah scored the goal the crowd craved, collecting Dominik Szoboszlai's pass before cutting in and blasting his shot into the bottom corner.

He celebrated by grabbing a fan's phone before taking a selfie in front of the Kop.

Deafening cheers of "We're going to win the league" and "We shall not be moved" rang out.

Liverpool had a fifth when Spurs defender Destiny Udogie poked the ball past his own goalkeeper from close range with 21 minutes to go. As the game went into added time the club's anthem rang out again as scarves were held aloft and the final whistle elicited a thunderous roar.

The win leaves Liverpool on 82 points, 15 clear of nearest challengers Arsenal with just four games remaining.

Tottenham are a miserable 16th in the Premier League table after their 19th defeat of the season, putting manager Ange Postecoglou under enormous pressure.

Tens of thousands of fans swarmed around Anfield in the build-up to kick-off in anticipation of Liverpool's coronation, setting off flares as the home team bus arrived.

Flags and scarves saying "Liverpool 20-time Champions" were on sale from stalls outside the ground.

"A lot of emotions before the game, during the whole week, but we got the job done and we are truly deserved champions of England," said Van Dijk. — AFP

Oman Rally Team's Al Rawahi resumes Merc challenge

JEDDAH: Oman's Abdullah al Rawahi resumes his quest for honours in the 2025 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (Merc) at this weekend's Rally Saudi Arabia (May 1-3), a new round of the regional series that has attracted 29 entries across the various categories.

The Kingdom returns to the regional championship for the first time in 15 years and the Oman Rally Team star will team up with Great Britain's Ross Whittock in an Autotek Skoda Fabia RS Rally 2 on the Jeddah-based three-day event.

Al Rawahi said: "Saudi Arabia is the third round of the championship and is a new rally for everyone. It's going to be very challenging but I don't really know what to expect so far. I haven't seen the stages. We

will try to adapt really fast. Ata (Al Hmoud) is not with me this time. Ross is going to join me. We have worked together in the WRC before so I think we can work around it and give the maximum.

"In terms of the car, we have been working hard to get the best out of it. Recently, we have been happy with it. I am hoping we can perform well with the right set-up. We can't make any changes until we see the stages. Then we will make up our mind and test a few things on the car in Saudi. Our plan is to push and try and secure the win. It won't be easy with the challenge from Nasser (Al Attiyah) and other good drivers in the line-up. We will do our best and hopefully come out with a good result."



Abdullah al Rawahi at the Qatar International Rally in February.

The new-look rally will also act as the Kingdom's official candidate event before it joins the FIA World Rally Championship for the first time at the end of November.

Al Rawahi, the joint 2023 regional champion, will be aiming to close the gap on Nasser al Attiyah in the points' standings after the opening two rounds in Oman and Qatar. Al Attiyah is bidding for a 20th regional title and leads the series with 70 points. Local driver Rakan al Rashed and Al Rawahi are his closest challengers with four rounds remaining.

The Oman Rally Team has received further backing from Al Manar Investments, the Oman Automobile Association, WMS, Zamakan, OQ, Strike, Size, the

Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture of Oman and National Finance.

The 29-car entry includes nine Rally2 cars, six SSVs and 21 crews registered for points in the Merc. They will tackle six brand new gravel stages that will be repeated twice over the weekend, parts of which are sure to be used in the inaugural WRC event later in the year.

Additional Rally2 competition comes from the likes of the defending regional champion Abdulaziz al Kuwari (Citroen C3), new FIA Master Merc Driver series leader Nasser al Atya (Ford), Jordan's Bader al Fayez (Skoda) and Toyota Gazzo Racing WRT's Juho Hanninen, who is not chasing points in the Merc.



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ANTI-DUMPING
ACTION AGAINST
CERAMIC IMPORTS



Oman has a thriving ceramics and porcelain tiles manufacturing industry.

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

LOCAL FIRMS have welcomed Oman's decision to impose anti-dumping duties on ceramic and porcelain tiles imported from India and China, describing the move as necessary to safeguard the local industry from the effects of underpriced imports.

"This is a significant positive development for our business," said A Suresh, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Al Anwar Ceramics, a leading Nizwa-based manufacturer of ceramic and porcelain products. "We expect to strengthen our market presence in Oman over the coming months," he added in a filing to the Financial Services Authority on Sunday.

The measure, announced by authorities on April 24, will take effect from May 29, 2025. It is designed to protect domestic manufacturers, who have raised concerns over the influx of competitively priced imports impacting their operations and market share. Authorities are currently finalising the details regarding the applicable rates and categories subject to the new tariffs. Globally, anti-dumping duties are recognised under World Trade Organization (WTO) rules as a legitimate means to counter unfair trading practices when goods are sold below fair market value, causing material injury to domestic producers. India and China, among the largest exporters of ceramic tiles worldwide, have previously faced similar measures in other jurisdictions, including the United States and the European Union.

RO 217m solar cell project
at SOHAR Port & Freezone

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

LEADING CHINESE solar development company, JA Solar signed agreements here yesterday for the establishment of a major plant specialising in the production of solar cells and panels at SOHAR Port and Freezone. The project, set on an area of 32.5 hectares within the second phase of the SOHAR Port and Freezone, represents a total investment of RO 217.3 million.

The pacts were inked with Invest in Oman, SOHAR Port and Freezone and Majis Industrial Services during the Advantage Oman Forum 2025, which concluded in Muscat on April 28, 2025.

JA Solar's project is scheduled to commence operations in the first quarter of 2026, with an annual production capacity of 6 gigawatts of solar cells and 3 gigawatts of solar panels.

This agreement is expected to advance the goals of Oman Vision 2040 by supporting the country's transition towards renewable energy and economic diversification, while also reflecting growing investor interest in the second phase of the SOHAR Port and Freezone.

Commenting on the signing, Eng Khalid bin Salim al Qassabi, Director General of Industry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said: "The agreements to establish a solar cells and panels manufacturing facility in the SOHAR Port and Freezone, with investments totalling RO 217 million, embody the ambitious directions of the Oman Industrial Strategy 2040, which focuses on nurturing future industries and enhancing value-added investments.

Renewable energy industries are a top priority within the strategy due to their significant potential to create promising



The signings were one of the main highlights of proceedings on the 2nd day of the Advantage Oman Forum.

industrial opportunities, support economic diversification and boost the industrial sector's contribution to the GDP, while strengthening Oman's energy mix."

Al Qassabi further highlighted that the project, once operational in early 2026, will not only contribute to the clean energy value chain but also attract related industries, positioning Oman as a regional hub for renewable energy and green industries. The two-day Advantage Oman Forum, organised by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, through Invest in Oman, brought together more than 250 senior officials, decision-makers; and regional and international investors, serving as a strategic platform that showcased Oman as a promising investment destination.

In her closing remarks, Ibtisam bint Ahmed al Faroojiah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion, emphasised that the forum was organised to support the country's economic diversification drive and to attract high-quality investments aligned with Oman's future vision.

She added that the forum provided an outstanding platform to connect

local and international investors with leading thought leaders and economic experts, facilitating the exchange of ideas and exploration of promising growth opportunities.

Al Faroojiah explained that the forum offered participants extensive opportunities to engage with leaders from both the public and private sectors, discuss key economic trends and explore the investment map across vital sectors.

She noted that the specialised panel discussions aimed to produce actionable, practical recommendations, inspired by regional and global success stories. She concluded by stressing the importance of the forum's outcomes and bilateral meetings, considering them a fundamental pillar in supporting Oman's efforts to achieve economic growth and transformation in line with national priorities.

The second day of the forum featured panel discussions with key decision-makers, opportunities to build high-value partnerships, success stories from investors and sector-specific round-table meetings focusing on tourism, logistics, mining, food security, renewable energy and information technology.

Advantage Oman Forum 2025 unveils guide on investment opportunities

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

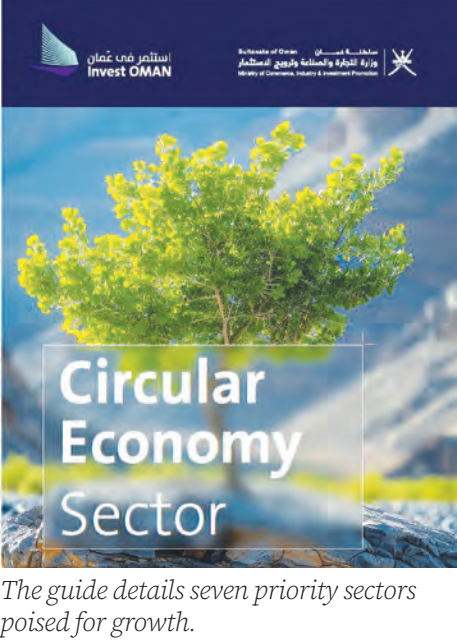
A COMPREHENSIVE investment guide, titled 'World of Opportunities', was launched against the backdrop of the Advantage Oman Forum 2025, which concluded at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort, here on Monday, April 28, 2025.

The guide details seven priority sectors poised for growth, aligning with Oman Vision 2040 and the nation's commitment to economic diversification. Oman is rapidly emerging as a leader in the Renewable Energy Sector, particularly in green hydrogen production. The country has allocated 50,000 square kilometres for hydrogen projects, aiming to become a competitive low-emissions hydrogen supplier by 2030. Notably, the HyDuqm project, led by France's Engie and South Korea's Posco, anticipates attracting between \$7 billion and \$8 billion in investments to develop up to 5

GW of new wind and solar capacity and produce 200,000 tonnes of renewable hydrogen annually.

The Logistics Sector remains a cornerstone of Oman's economic development. Strategically located at the crossroads of global trade routes, Oman is enhancing its logistics infrastructure to serve as a regional trade hub. The country's major ports — Suhar, Salalah and Duqm — handled over 4.6 million TEUs and 63.1 million tonnes of cargo in 2023, reinforcing its status as a global logistics powerhouse. Recent collaborations, such as the expanded joint venture between Oman Rail and Etihad Rail, aim to enhance connectivity and boost trade volumes.

In the Manufacturing Sector, Oman is focusing on diversifying its industrial base by promoting sectors like petrochemicals, mining and technology-driven manufacturing. The Salalah Free Zone has attracted investments in pharmaceuticals, petrochemicals and mining, while the SOHAR Port



The guide details seven priority sectors poised for growth.

and Freezone has become a hub for mining, ceramics and construction materials.

Additionally, the country is venturing into semiconductor manufacturing, with plans to develop advanced AI chips,

enhancing its position in the global semiconductor industry.

The Tourism Sector is a major pillar under Oman Vision 2040, with the country targeting 12 million visitors by 2040. The government is investing RO 3 billion (approximately \$7.8 billion) to develop 13 integrated tourism complex projects, with 12 more in the pipeline. These complexes combine residential, hospitality, recreational and commercial facilities, offering comprehensive experiences to tourists and residents alike, further positioning Oman as a top regional destination.

Oman's commitment to building a digital economy is reflected in the country's broader investments in ICT infrastructure.

Oman is encouraging innovation in areas like artificial intelligence and cybersecurity, with its ICT market projected to grow from \$5.96 billion in 2025 to \$9.11 billion by 2030, at a CAGR of 8.88 per cent.

Initiatives such as the National Digital Economy Programme

are designed to enhance digital services, promote e-governance and support the growth of tech startups, contributing to a more sustainable and circular economic model.

In the Agriculture & Fisheries Sector, Oman is reinforcing its food security agenda. The government has launched 30 projects focusing on strategic crops, aquaculture and water resources, aiming to increase local production, reduce reliance on imports and create job opportunities for Omanis.

These initiatives are not only ensuring sustainable food production but are also enhancing Oman's exports in the fisheries sector. The Advantage Oman Forum 2025 showcased Oman's commitment to economic diversification and sustainable development. By focusing on these seven strategic sectors, Oman is positioning itself as a competitive and attractive destination for global investors seeking sustainable and diversified opportunities.

ADVERTORIALS



From Chinese New Year and the Russian Spring Festival to Layali Al Mouj and more, Al Mouj Muscat is a destination where the world comes together.

RECORD SETTING
Q1 SEES OVER 1
MILLION VISITORS
TO AL MOUJ MUSCAT

MUSCAT: Al Mouj Muscat, Oman’s premier lifestyle destination welcomed over 1 million visitors this season, drawn by a rich calendar of cultural celebrations at Al Mouj Walk. From international festivals to rich local traditions and engaging community attractions, the events underscored the destination’s commitment to creating memorable experiences that connect cultures, celebrated diversity and bring people together.

“At Al Mouj Muscat, we believe in the power of shared experiences,” said Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat. “Starting 2025 on such a high note, we are very proud of what we have been able to deliver. Its moments like these that highlight the responsibility we carry, not just to design well, but to create spaces that are inviting, enticing and inspiring for our residents and visitors alike.”

As the first quarter unfolded, Al Mouj Muscat embraced the spirit of renewal with a grand Chinese New Year celebration in partnership with the Chinese Embassy, inaugurated by Lyu Jian, Ambassador of the People’s Republic of China to Oman. Guests enjoyed traditional dragon and lion dances, the soothing strains of guzheng music and an engaging bazaar featuring authentic delicacies and artisanal crafts.

The festive calendar also featured Russia’s Maslenitsa Festival, organised in collaboration with Russian House Oman and under the patronage of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

Interactive workshops, spirited folk performances and the inviting aroma of freshly made Blini offered visitors a taste of enduring Slavic traditions.

As part of its celebrated Ramadhan initiative, Layali Al Mouj brought Qaranqasho to life, honouring Omani customs by gathering families over traditional cuisine from local food stalls, nostalgic folk music and engaging games that revived cherished local traditions.

In addition to the cultural festivities, a concurrent car show featuring an “extra drive experience” added a contemporary twist. This innovative showcase captivated automotive enthusiasts with an impressive display of supercars, sports cars, classics and 4x4s, broadening the season’s appeal. Looking ahead, Al Mouj Muscat remains dedicated to delivering experiences that bridge heritage with innovation, continually strengthening community connections and celebrating cultural diversity.

NBO ENHANCES
DIGITAL
PERSONAL
LOAN TOP
FEATURE ON
NBO APP

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) has announced an enhanced digital personal loan top-up feature through the NBO app, reinforcing its commitment to deliver simple, customer-centric banking experiences. The new feature allows eligible customers with existing salary-related loans to apply for additional financing seamlessly and securely without the need to visit a branch. Designed with ease and accessibility in mind, this fully



digital service enables customers to check their eligibility, apply for a top-up and receive approvals in significantly less time than traditional methods. By digitising key steps such

as insurance coverage and credit checks, the process removes the need for paperwork and manual verification, ensuring a smooth, end-to-end experience. Commenting on the feature, Dr Ali al Shukaili, Assistant General Manager — Head of Digital and E-Channels at NBO, said, “At NBO, digital innovation is not an add-on. It is embedded in how we reimagine banking for today’s customer. This upgrade reflects more than a technology enhancement.

Toyota honours SBA with
award for excellence

IN a distinctive achievement, Toyota Motor Corporation recently conferred the prestigious Gold Distributor Award on Saud Bahwan Automotive, for regional excellence in the Middle East and Central Asia. This honour celebrates SBA’s outstanding performance across core areas including sales & after-sales excellence, customer-centric initiatives, carbon neutrality efforts and engaging community activities that reflect the true spirit of Toyota.

At a special function, the Award was formally presented by Nobuyuki Takemura, Chief Representative T-LOSA/Middle East & Central Asia, Toyota Motor Corporation to Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan, CEO, Saud Bahwan Group. Accepting the honour, Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan shared his heartfelt thoughts, “We are deeply honoured to receive the Gold Distributor Award from Toyota Motor Corporation.

This recognition is a tribute to the trust and support of our valued customers, whose continued patronage inspires us every single day. Our teams across Oman share a deep-rooted passion for delivering experiences that go beyond expectations. We remain committed to enriching every stage of the Toyota ownership



Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan receiving the award from Nobuyuki Takemura.

journey.” Thanking Toyota Motor Corporation for their support and guidance, he further added, “We also extend our sincere gratitude to Toyota Motor Corporation for their enduring partnership and support. Their guidance has always been a beacon, helping us navigate forward with confidence and clarity.” Toyota enjoys a special place in the hearts of customers in Oman, an enduring bond built on decades of reliability, innovation and high levels of customer care. Saud Bahwan

Automotive has made sustained investments in advanced infrastructure and digital integration, establishing a robust and wide-reaching presence across Oman. No matter where customers are, they are always close to a Toyota facility powered by SBA’s customer-first philosophy. Saud Bahwan Automotive’s deep understanding of evolving customer needs and expectations has been instrumental in shaping its operational strategies. From offering quick service processes to integrating



Toyota’s prestigious ‘Gold Distributor Award’

advanced customer feedback mechanisms, the brand has gone the extra mile to ensure that customer delight is not just promised, but consistently delivered. Through dedicated teams trained to uphold the highest standards of professionalism, SBA ensures that each interaction with the Toyota brand is memorable and meaningful. Over the years, Saud Bahwan Automotive has proactively expanded its footprint with strategically located sales and service facilities across Oman. These expansions are more than just physical locations; they represent a passionate commitment to being present wherever customers need them.

Dhofar Islamic’s children account: Path to financial responsibility

MUSCAT: Dhofar Islamic offers Children Account aimed at introducing children to Sharia compliant financial services, the basics of banking, financial responsibility as well as to help families save and invest for short-term or long-term goals such as education. The Children Account is rooted in the Islamic concept of Mudarabah and promotes savings habit via its attractive profit rates. This Account is available for children up to the age of 13, ensuring that even the youngest members of society can begin their journey towards financial literacy. With no minimum balance required to open the account, it is accessible to a wide



range of families, making it an ideal option for those looking to create a secure savings plan for their children’s future. A key feature of the account is the monthly distribution of profits, calculated on the average monthly balance. This means that every deposit made in the account is earning a return, helping the savings grow over time. Moreover, the account facilitates the

seamless integration of monthly social protection programme benefits, ensuring that children receive essential financial assistance directly. Highlighting the significance of the Children Account, Amor Said al Amri ,DGM & Head of Dhofar Islamic Retail Banking stated: “This Account is designed to empower parents to start saving for their children’s future while simultaneously fostering financial responsibility from a young age. It serves as a solid foundation for important milestones, like education, while also introducing children to the concepts of money management, saving and financial planning.”

OAB powers cashless experience at Muscat International Book Fair 2025

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) is proud to announce its role as the Official Banking Sponsor of the Muscat International Book Fair 2025, taking place from April 24 to May 3 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC). One of the most anticipated cultural events in the Sultanate of Oman, the book fair attracts thousands of visitors annually, celebrating literature, learning and creativity. This year’s edition was inaugurated under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University, with HH Dr Shaikh Sultan bin Muhammad al Qasimi, Ruler of Sharjah and Member of the UAE Supreme Council, attending



The book fair attracts thousands of visitors annually, celebrating literature, learning and creativity.

as the esteemed Chief Guest. As part of its sponsorship, OAB is enabling a fully cashless shopping experience at the fair through the deployment of its innovative SoftPOS payment solution. All book stalls will be equipped with OAB’s tap-to-pay technology, offering visitors a seamless and secure way to complete their purchases using cards or smart devices. Commenting on the bank’s active role in the book fair, Sulaiman al Harthy, CEO of Oman Arab Bank, stated, “Our involvement with the Muscat International Book Fair reflects our continued commitment to supporting cultural initiatives while showcasing practical, customer-focused innovations. Through

SoftPOS, we’re creating a modern and convenient payment experience that matches the forward-thinking spirit of the event. We’re not only proud to sponsor the fair but to actively enhance how people interact with it.” In addition to powering payments, OAB will be hosting an interactive booth at the venue, where visitors can explore the bank’s innovative products and services. Key highlights include Idikhar, the intuitive monthly saving plan. Idikhar is a smart and flexible savings solution offering attractive returns of up to 4.5 per cent per annum, designed to help customers achieve their long-term financial goals.

BUSINESS

NEWQUEST

GCC ACCREDITATION CENTRE OPENS FIRST BRANCH IN OMAN



Oman strengthens quality infrastructure with the launch of the first regional branch of the GCC Accreditation Centre in Muscat

FAISAL AL AJMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

THE Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion officially launched the first regional branch of the GCC Accreditation Centre (GAC) in Muscat on Sunday, April 27, 2025. The launch was followed by the unveiling of the logo of the Omani Accreditation Centre.

The ceremony, which took place at the JW Marriott Hotel, was presided over by Jasem Mohamed al Budaawi, Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council and attended by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and senior public and private sector officials.

This move is consistent with Oman Vision 2040 and will further enhance the Sultanate of Oman’s accreditation and quality systems.

The new office will provide internationally recognised accreditation services, promote product and service conformity; and enhance regional trade integration.

Eng Moteb bin Saeed al Mezani, Director General of the GCC Accreditation Centre, said: “In a move which reinforces its steadfast commitment towards enhancing Gulf cooperation, the Sultanate of Oman has formally inaugurated a branch of the Gulf Accreditation Centre in Muscat.

The establishment of this Centre is a testament to Oman’s central contribution and strong support for common Gulf endeavours.”

Eng Al Mezani added, “The Centre will oversee the issuance of accreditation certificates to all types of goods to ensure they meet regional and international standards.

The drive is expected to establish a strong foundation to increase the quality and competitiveness of Omani products and create a proper environment for the goods to enter regional and international markets,” he added.

Emad bin Khamis al Shukaili, Director General for Standards and Metrology of Oman’s Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, commented: “We are celebrating today the official inauguration of the first branch of the Gulf Accreditation Centre at the regional level of GCC countries in the Sultanate of Oman.

This parallels the launching of our temporary programme, supplementing the Tenth Five-Year Plan by introducing the Omani Accreditation Centre.”

“The importance of operating both the Gulf and Omani Centres simultaneously is to achieve two primary objectives: First, to provide accreditation services, which have not been available in the Omani market for a very long time; Second, to enable the Omani National Accreditation Centre to obtain international acceptance during this period and the future period, God willing,” he further noted.

The Ministry further initiated the “Omani Competencies Programme,” which is designed to train a new generation of quality and accreditation professionals, thus furthering the nation’s quest for a knowledge-based economy.

FAST TRACK

US deep-sea mining order violates norms



France on Monday accused the United States of violating international law after President Donald Trump signed an order to fast-track deep-sea mining in the open ocean outside his country’s territorial waters.

Washington wants to spearhead mining for mineral-rich nodules in the deepest ocean floor, sidestepping a global effort to regulate such potentially damaging exploration. — AFP

FUEL DEMAND

Oil prices stable amid economic uncertainty



Oil prices were stable on Monday as investors weighed up uncertainty over trade talks between the US and China, clouding the outlook for global growth and fuel demand, as well as the prospect of Opec+ raising supply.

Brent crude futures were down 13 cents, or 0.19%, at \$66.74 a barrel, as of 09:02 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate crude shed 12 cents, or 0.19%, to \$62.90 a barrel. — Reuters

NEXT SPENDING

Euro zone edges up as traders await data



Euro zone government bonds edged higher on Monday, as the unusual absence of US tariff-related headlines left investors waiting for direction from economic data due later in the week

The euro zone benchmark is trading roughly where it was in March before the parties that are set to form the next German government announced a plan to massively ramp up borrowing and spending. — Reuters

Oman to study geothermal potential of hot springs

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

A stretch of northern Oman, home to some of the country’s best-known hot springs — currently popular for their tourist and therapeutic appeal — will soon be investigated for their geothermal potential, with the ultimate goal of harnessing their renewable energy capacity.

The initiative is being spearheaded by Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (Nama PWP), the sole procurer and offtaker of new power and water desalination capacity in the Sultanate of Oman.

On Sunday, the state-owned entity — part of Nama Group — invited suitably qualified consultancy firms to bid for its contract to provide ‘Techno-Economic Consultancy Services’ for a first-ever Hot Springs Geothermal Project in Oman.

The scope of the consultancy study is set out in a Request for Proposals (RfP) document that is being made available to interested bidders in this regard.

“The selected bidder will be responsible to conduct a feasibility assessment of geothermal energy potential in specific pre-identified locations within the area between Fanja (Wilayat of Bidbid) and



Hot water springs at Al Rustaq.

Al Ansab (Wilayat of Bausher) as Phase I and in compliance with the specifications, terms and conditions detailed in the RFP,” Nama PWP added in a brief introduction to the landmark initiative.

The delineated area corresponds to a part of northern Oman that hosts some of the country’s well-known hot pools.

These springs are linked to the movement of groundwater through deep faults and fractures, where it gets heated by geothermal gradients.

The springs are rich in minerals, especially sulphur compounds; and are popular for their tourism and health-promoting benefits.

Within the capital city of

Muscat, the most notable hot spring is in Bausher. The hot springs are thought to be part of minor thermal seepages, more seasonal and dependent on rainfall influencing underground flow.

On the outskirts of the city are the Fanja Hot Springs in the Wilayat of Bidbid. Though smaller and less developed than other thermal pools in the country, Fanja’s hot springs feed into wadi systems in the vicinity.

The biggest, however, is Al Rustaq Hot Springs in Al Batinah South Governorate. Better known as Ain Al Kasfah, they refer to a cluster of hot springs with water temperatures sometimes exceeding 45°C.

Finally, a short distance

from Al Rustaq are Nakhal Hot Springs (Ain Al Thowarah), located near Nakhal Fort.

The spring emerges from a lush oasis and flows through a manmade canal system, irrigating date plantations and local agriculture.

Submissions for the Hot Spring Geothermal Project study are due in by May 22, 2025, according to Nama PWP.

Thus, while the proposed study is linked to the geothermal potential of hot springs per se, global technology company SLB (formerly known as Schlumberger) is currently assessing the broader potential of geothermal resources across Oman. An agreement to this effect was signed between SLB and the Ministry of Energy and Minerals in 2022. Also collaborating in this endeavour is Oman Investment Authority (OIA).

The exercise will lead to the formulation of a national strategy to develop the potential of the country’s geothermal resources.

According to studies by Sultan Qaboos University, Oman hosts at least a handful of geothermal reservoirs — described as mainly low (70 — 90 degree C) and medium (100 — 174 degree C) enthalpy type reservoirs — that have not been suitably explored.

Rollout of urban air mobility strategy in Oman

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, APRIL 28

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), hosted a forum here on April 28 to support the formulation of a national advanced air mobility strategy in Oman.

Held in partnership with Al Ankaa Space Technologies and GUAMobility, the “Urban Air Mobility Forum” was attended by key industry stakeholders from the government, the private sector, academia and international organisations.

In his keynote address, Assistant Director of the Oman Logistics Centre, Eng Awadh Salim al Sudairi, highlighted the significance of the event: “This event represents a national strategic platform that highlights one of the most promising and innovative sectors — the Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) sector, which involves the use of drones and flying taxis to transport people and goods within cities at altitudes of less than 1,000 feet, aiming to reduce congestion in a smart and sustainable manner.

It forms an essential part of the aspirations of the Sultanate



Key officials at the Urban Air Mobility forum.

of Oman and is aligned with the goals of Oman Vision 2040,” he shared.

“Today, we gather with you to explore the opportunities and challenges; and to discover the potential of urban air mobility technologies within the national transportation ecosystem.

Together, we aim to shape the future of our communities based on innovation, partnership and sustainability,” he added.

According to Al Sudairi, the forum aims to achieve five primary objectives, including the formulation of a cross-sectoral national strategy for the

Advanced Air Mobility sector, the development of an integrated sectorial infrastructure and enhancement of the logistic sector’s readiness for modern transportation model adoption.

Additionally, the forum aims to promote investment and entrepreneurship in the field; and empower Omani youth by building competitive national capacities.

Officials noted that the forum also aims to support Oman’s candidacy to host the International Civil Aviation Organization’s (ICAO) Global AAM Symposium in 2026.

The two-forum also features key workshops spotlighting various aspects of the urban air mobility ecosystem including: governance and regulation, infrastructure for urban air ports (Vertiports), airspace management and low-altitude aviation, financing and investment models, cybersecurity and aviation safety, uses of air mobility, capacity building, employment and vocational training.

Additionally, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology announced its intention of launching a national experimental “Geozone” which will be used to test AAM applications and technology in a safe environment.

According to officials, the zone will allow startups and research institutions to develop industry solutions within the country.

Furthermore, officials from the Ministry unveiled that the forum will announce five key pilot projects, including: urban inter-city transport, air cargo and logistics services, emergency medical services (EMS), airborne security and surveillance; and the development of national innovation incubators.

OPINION

Emerging markets gain from tariff shake-up



R
MADHUSOODANAN

The writer is the Executive Advisor to the Board, Global Money Exchange Muscat

THE TRUMP administration has now deferred the reciprocal tariff for three months with the exception of China. However, enormous tariffs will remain on China, the world's second-largest economy, which also Trump may reconsider in due course.

The decision to pause the tariff may be an acknowledgement of the fact that the policy would be economically unsustainable and would harm the US economy. Economists noted that there could be a downturn in the US economy, which they would find it difficult to reverse easily.

The world economy to learn from the broad tariff agenda and the tactics of the US. It may be noted that President Donald Trump announced his tariff plan against all countries of the world, citing that the US is being treated unfairly in global trade, creating an imbalance in tariffs. His stance was that if they charge us, we charge them.

OPPORTUNITIES

The Emerging Market (EM) economies of the world may find opportunities in the medium to long term horizon in several areas due to the tariff threats. The short term impact will be very high as this can have far reaching consequences on economies, business entities and consumers. It is a fact that it has already created uncertainties in the global

trade. Undoubtedly, the move applicable to most goods imported to the US would have adversely impacted all countries of the world and in particular the emerging market economies like India, Brazil, Indonesia, Thailand, Türkiye, Vietnam, South Africa etc.

The impact would have been minimal in GCC, particularly Oman.

US would be imposing a tariff of 10 per cent on goods imported from Oman, while other nations at substantially higher rates. The GCC have an advantage of their currency being pegged to the US Dollar and therefore the strengthening or weakening of the USD has little impact on the exchange front.

Countries like China started imposing retaliatory tariffs on imports from the US, adding fuel to the fire, which irked the Trump administration, in not revoking the tariff on China. Truly speaking, the uncertain situation evolved due to the US administration's announcement may be treated as an opportunity for all world economies to be self-sufficient in goods and services, wherever possible and also to diversify trade relationships.

The world economies, particularly the emerging market economies, to focus on self-sufficiency plans to reduce their dependence on major economies of the world taking cues from the current scenario. These economies to encourage diverse industries, stimulate

The decision to pause the tariff may be an acknowledgement of the fact that the policy would be economically unsustainable and would harm the US economy. Economists noted that there could be a downturn in the US economy, which they would find it difficult to reverse easily.

investments in domestic infrastructure; and make the goods and services available at internationally competitive rates. Support the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), startups and other export-oriented activities by making available all infrastructure facilities, including cheaper and affordable finance, besides tax sops.

Innovations in manufacturing processes and the development of new industries, as is happening in China, may be followed.

Invest in research and development; and skill upgradation areas to meet global demands. The economies that are heavily dependent on crude oil imports to focus on non-conventional energy to reduce the import bill.

In short, while tariffs can pose significant threats to emerging market economies, they also can offer opportunities for growth and innovation. No doubt, the tariff move will negatively impact the GDP growth of all economies of the world in the short term.

A solution in the medium to long term horizon will be strengthening regional trade agreements and enhancing economic cooperation among the emerging market economies. The global trade landscape is evolving and therefore it is essential for them to remain agile and proactive in addressing the challenges and opportunities created by the reciprocal and retaliatory tariffs.

CK HUTCH PORTS SALE CAN BE GOOD FOR BEIJING TOO

BY KA SING CHAN

LI KA-SHING'S ports deal is shrewd in all respects except for the timing. Beijing has warned the Hong Kong tycoon's CK Hutchison against bypassing its antitrust probe on the \$23 billion disposal to a group including BlackRock and Swiss-Italian shipping giant MSC.

Officials may want to use the assets as leverage in US trade talks. Poor timing aside, China has good reason to like this sale. China's antitrust watchdog sent a rare warning to the Hong Kong group and potential buyers on changing the terms of the sale without its approval.

The Wall Street Journal reported that two Panama port assets may be carved out from the rest of the deal. The official warning effectively scuppers any attempts to fast-track the transaction spanning 43 ports in 23 countries.

Blame the unfortunate escalation on US President Donald Trump's trade war with China.

After unveiling the deal in March, CK Hutchison had hoped to sign "definitive documents" regarding the Panama disposal by April 2.

That date coincided with Trump's infamous Liberation Day when he unleashed a barrage of tariffs on US trading partners including China, which now faces additional levies of 145%. No wonder state-linked newspapers accused the Li clan of betraying Chinese national interests.

Intriguingly, CK Hutchison shares have given up large gains but remain 11% above their pre-deal price, while the benchmark Hang Seng index has fallen, implying investors think at least part or all of the transaction could go through sooner or later. There are good reasons for this enduring optimism.

First is that BlackRock and MSC are exactly the type of foreign investors Beijing wants to court. Both have strong ties with the country and are heavily invested in China's economic growth.

Funds of BlackRock, which in 2021 became the first foreign asset manager to receive a licence to operate a wholly-owned onshore mutual fund business, own more than 5% in 89 listed firms in Hong Kong, ranging from Alibaba to Bank of China.

Similarly, MSC has 28 offices in China; late last year, it placed a \$2 billion order with Chinese shipyard Rongsheng, per TradeWinds.

Moreover, there aren't that many willing buyers for such a diverse portfolio. A Chinese state-owned entity like China Merchants will face even greater political and antitrust scrutiny, even if port operators have little say on policies like docking fees.

And for the state to dictate what companies can and can't sell will send a chilling message to the private sector. Ultimately, there is reason to believe some of this logic will eventually prevail; and hand CK Hutchison and its shareholders a big payday.

— Reuters

Advantage Oman: Forging global partnerships

THE ADVANTAGE Oman Forum 2025, concluding on April 28, continues to resonate across the Sultanate of Oman, fostering economic dynamism and strategic anticipation through insightful dialogues and new collaborations. This landmark event has ignited a robust catalyst for future economic expansion, positioning Oman as a vibrant and stable hub for global investment.

Against the backdrop of Oman Vision 2040 under His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's leadership, the forum showcased remarkable progress and vast potential for international collaborators seeking sustainable growth and mutual prosperity.

The palpable energy, tangible outcomes and clear strategic direction underscore a pivotal moment in Oman's journey towards economic diversification, global integration and a prosperous future, extending a compelling invitation to the global community to participate in Oman's unfolding success story built on stability, strategic foresight and mutually rewarding partnerships.

In the five years leading up to Advantage Oman 2025, strategic groundwork by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, with domestic and international partners, cultivated an attractive ecosystem for foreign investment.

This forward-thinking approach is validated by robust economic indicators: foreign investment surged 75.7% (RO 20.6 billion in 2019 to RO 36.2 billion by end-2023), with FDI, the engine of sustainable growth, increasing by 90.3% (RO 13.4 billion in 2019 to RO 25.5 billion by end-2023, projected to reach RO 30 billion by end-2024).

This over 100% FDI growth within five years underscores strong investor confidence in Oman's resilience and future. Annual FDI inflows also steadily climbed (RO 718 million in 2019 to RO 4.5 billion in 2023, projected RO 5 billion for the current year).

Advantage Oman 2025 effectively highlighted these achievements and the compelling narrative driving Oman's economic growth.



Oman's strategically vital agri-food & fisheries sector demonstrates a commitment to sustainability and burgeoning potential as a regional and global provider.



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A closer examination of Oman's increasingly diverse economic sectors, a central focus of discussions at Advantage Oman 2025, reveals a landscape brimming with untapped opportunities for strategic investment and sustainable engagement.

Oman's strategically vital agri-food & fisheries sector demonstrates a commitment to sustainability and burgeoning potential as a regional and global provider.

Sustainable fishing practices have yielded growing exports, reaching \$489 million in 2023.

The modernising agricultural sector contributed \$1.4 billion to the national economy. Oman aims for 100% food security by 2040, a key pillar of national resilience.

Oman's global ranking of 17th in the 2024 Global Fisheries Index underscores its commitment and presents attractive investment opportunities in sustainable aquaculture, advanced food processing and agricultural technology.

In the crucial logistics sector, Oman stands as a regional leader in trade compliance, a result of streamlined processes and advanced infrastructure.

With world-class deep-water ports, modern international airports and a growing national rail network, Oman is strategically positioned as a global logistics hub.

This vital sector aims to contribute \$36 billion to the national GDP by 2040, aspiring to be a top-10 global logistics centre, offering compelling investment prospects in advanced warehousing, transportation infrastructure and logistics management.

Oman's strategically important mining sector presents significant untapped opportunities for international investors.

As a leading global exporter of gypsum and the GCC's foremost producer of ferrochrome, the sector is undergoing modernisation, encompassing a diverse array of metals and minerals, with a target of contributing nearly \$800 million to the national GDP by 2030.

The forum highlighted the progressive regulatory framework and attractive investment incentives designed to foster sustainable development in this resource-rich sector.

Oman's commitment to a sustainable future is evident in the dynamic renewables sector.

With abundant solar and wind resources; and vast suitable land, Oman aims to become a global leader in renewable energy generation and export, targeting 100% clean power by 2050 and producing over 8.5 million tonnes of green hydrogen annually by mid-century.

The forum showcased Oman's ambitious green hydrogen projects and the significant investment opportunities within this transformative sector.

Oman's rapidly expanding tourism sector, attracting increasing numbers seeking authentic and responsible travel experiences, welcomed 4 million visitors in 2023 and aims for 11.7 million annually by 2040.

Strategic investments are being made in diverse tourism offerings, including luxury accommodations, adventure tourism and eco-friendly options, targeting the GCC region, India and Europe, presenting compelling investment opportunities across the tourism value chain.

The diverse geographical origins of Oman's FDI, a key topic at Advantage Oman 2025, illustrate a growing network of international partnerships.

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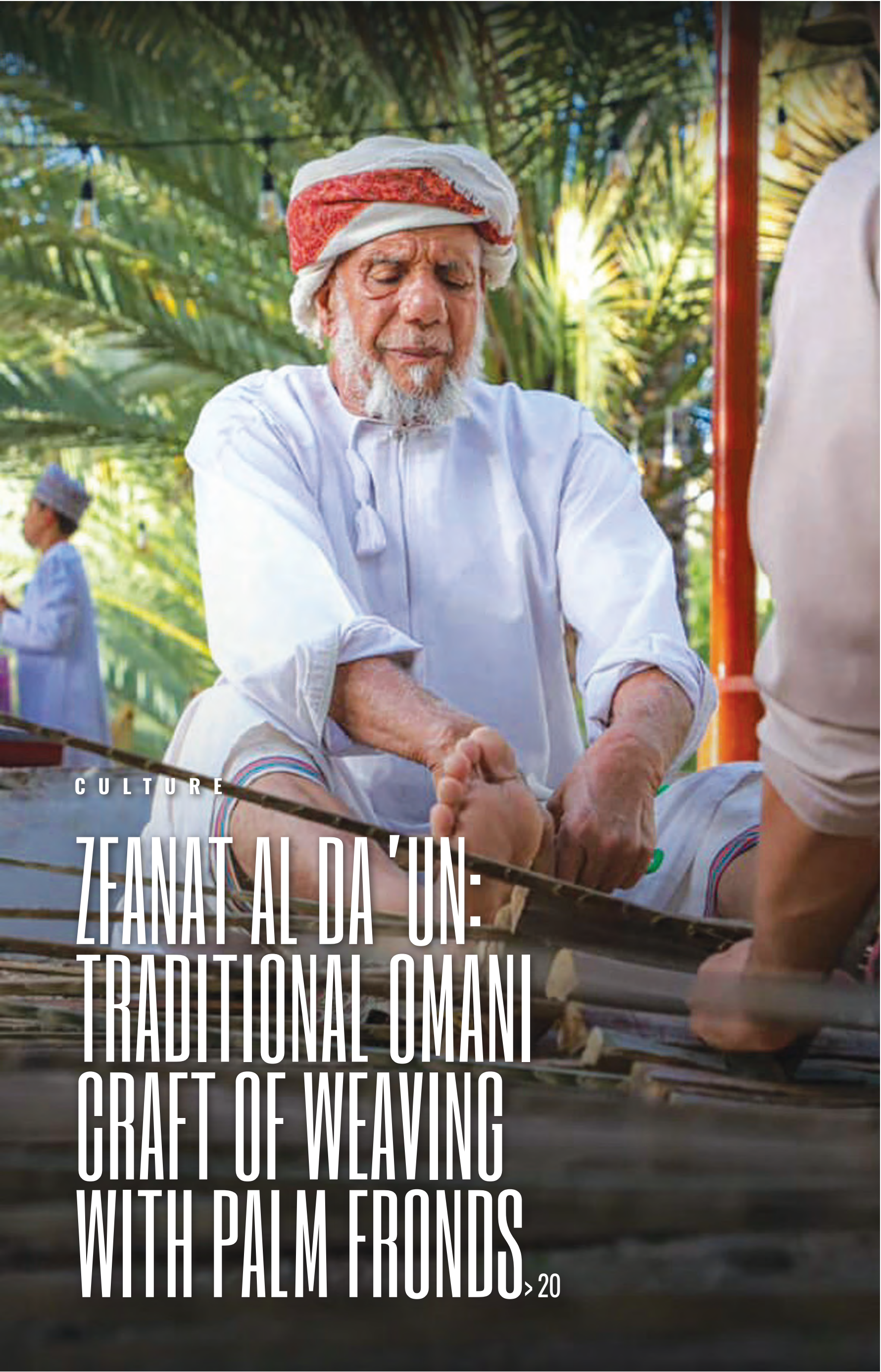
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CULTURE

ZANAT AL DA'UN: TRADITIONAL OMANI CRAFT OF WEAVING WITH PALM FRONDS₂₀

HEALTH

Is It Bad to Chew Gum All Day?



Q: MINT GUM IS THE ONLY THING THAT GETS ME THROUGH THE WORKDAY. IS ALL THAT CHEWING BAD FOR MY HEALTH?

Chewing gum has various effects on the body, offering both potential benefits and drawbacks.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

Enhanced Oral Health: Chewing gum can bolster oral health by stimulating saliva production, which protects teeth from erosion and neutralises acidity in the mouth. Dr Peter Arsenault, a dentist at Tufts University, notes that chewing also helps to dislodge food particles and plaque, contributing to fresher breath by combating dry mouth. Sugar-free gum is preferable to sugary alternatives, as sugar promotes cavity-causing bacteria. Notably, gum with xylitol can further reduce cavity risk; a 2022 meta-analysis indicated that chewing xylitol gum three to five times daily after meals could decrease cavity risk by 17%.

Reduced Heartburn: Gum chewing may also alleviate heartburn symptoms for some individuals. The extra saliva produced helps neutralise acid in the esophagus. While research is limited, a 2005 study found that chewing sugar-free gum for 30 minutes after meals reduced acid levels in the esophagus for those prone to acid reflux.

Cognitive and Emotional Benefits: Preliminary evidence suggests gum chewing may enhance concentration and learning. A 2018 study showed that participants who chewed gum performed better on tests compared to those who did not. Additionally, chewing gum may improve mood and reduce stress, similar to other nervous habits. Increased blood flow to specific brain regions during chewing may explain these effects.

POTENTIAL DRAWBACKS

Jaw Issues: Despite its benefits, chewing gum can exacerbate problems for individuals with jaw issues, especially those with temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorders. Dr Arsenault cautions that frequent chewing can lead to jaw muscle fatigue, resulting in clicking, popping, headaches and facial discomfort. He recommends limiting gum chewing to short periods after meals and suggests that those with TMJ disorders should avoid it.

Digestive Concerns: For some, chewing gum may worsen digestive issues. It can relax the lower esophageal sphincter, increasing acid entry into the esophagus and leading to heartburn. Rapid chewing can also lead to swallowing air, resulting in bloating and gas. Common sugar substitutes like sorbitol and xylitol may have laxative effects, increasing the risk of diarrhea or abdominal pain.

Microplastic Exposure: Many gums contain synthetic materials like polyethylene and polyvinyl acetate. Studies suggest these microplastics may leach into our mouths when chewing. To minimise exposure, it may be best to maintain the same piece until the flavour diminishes and dispose of gum responsibly. — NYT

QUICK FEATURES



ANCIENT

An ancient Roman mosaic depicting a scene of an execution known in Latin as 'damnatio ad bestias' which translates to 'condemnation to beasts,' displayed in El Jem, Tunisia. — Reuters



ENTERTAINMENT

US singer Usher performs during his concert, as part of the Past Present Future tour, at the Ziggo Dome in Amsterdam. — AFP



ART

Kuwaiti artist and architect Ghadeer Mohammad looks her immersive art installation 'The Muqarnas of Sadu' exhibited in Kuwait City. — AFP

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Napoleon’s sword to be sold at auction in Paris



A SWORD THAT belonged to Napoleon and was specially ordered for the personal use of the French emperor is to be auctioned in Paris next month, the auction house said.

Napoleon ordered the sabre in 1802 and kept it throughout his reign.

The Giquello auction firm said on Friday it expected the sword to reach 700,000 to one million euros (\$800,000 to \$1.1 million) when it goes under the hammer in Paris on May 22.

Napoleon passed the sabre on to his close ally Emmanuel de Grouchy, who the French emperor named his last marshal of the empire.

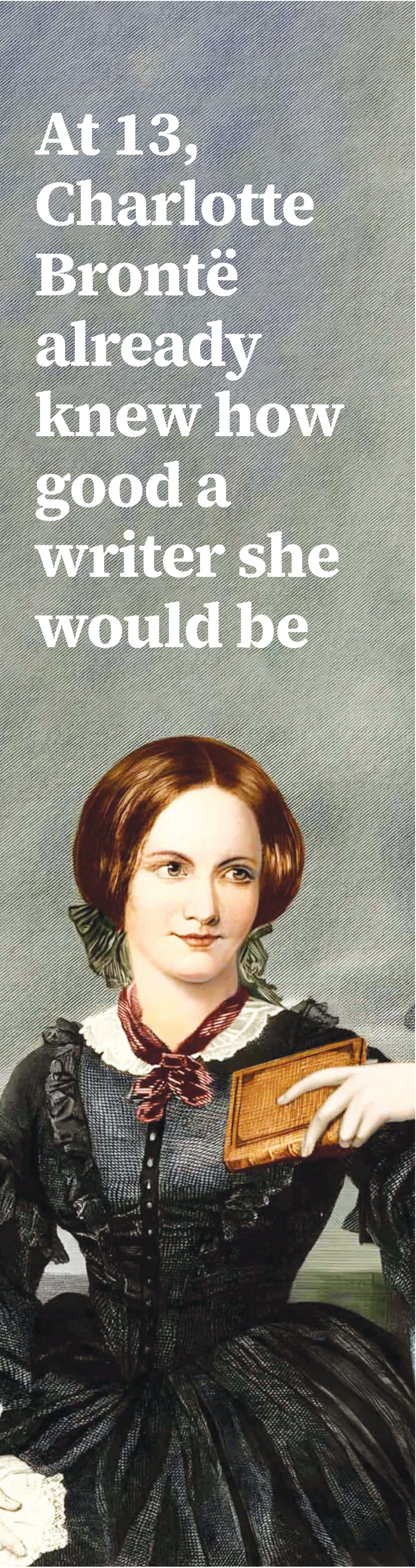
The sword has been in Grouchy’s family since 1815, the year of Napoleon’s last defeat at the Battle of Waterloo.

A second copy, identical

to this one and also commissioned by Napoleon, is kept at the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg, Russia.

Napoleon memorabilia regularly comes up for sale at auction in France in a flourishing trade marked by intense interest from collectors.

Two pistols that he once intended to use to kill himself were sold in France last July for 1.7 million euros, while one of his trademark “bicornes” hats set a record price for his possessions when it was acquired for 1.9 million euros in November 2023. A hand-written letter from Napoleon denying his role in the kidnapping of Pope Pius VII in 1809 is to go under the hammer this weekend outside Paris and is expected to reach 12,000 to 15,000 euros. — AFP



At 13, Charlotte Brontë already knew how good a writer she would be

FEW TEENAGERS would want the world to read their poems, but at 13, Charlotte Brontë was an exception. In 1829, she collected her verse in a humble anthology that hinted at her ambition to become an author at a time when few women wrote for a public audience.

The poems in Brontë’s “Book of Rhymes” were handwritten in tiny script on scraps of paper, no larger than playing cards and stitched together with a meticulously crafted contents page. The author of “Jane Eyre” likely never intended to publish this juvenile work, inscribing on the cover “Sold By Nobody and Printed By Herself.” Years later, the anthology will be available to the public for the first time.

To celebrate the 209th anniversary of her birth, the Brontë Parsonage Museum in England has published a collection of 10 poems alongside images of the original ink-smudged pages. The anthology features a long poem on the beauty of nature, an epic attempt and a piece intriguingly titled “A Thing of Fourteen Lines—Commonly Called a [Sonnet?]”.

Brontë’s manuscript reveals her editing process, illustrating her as an aspiring author already grappling with character and perspective. Ann Dinsdale, the museum’s principal curator, notes, “They chart her development as a writer.” The original manuscript, lost for over a century, will also be exhibited at the museum in Haworth, northern England.

The existence of these poems came to light through Elizabeth Gaskell’s biography of Brontë, published in 1857. Gaskell mentioned a catalog of 22 works created by Brontë, starting at age 10. “A Book of Rhymes” and similar juvenile pieces became treasured collectibles. Records indicate the anthology was auctioned in New York in 1916 but later vanished. It resurfaced in 2022 as the highlight of the New York International Antiquarian Book Fair.

Sold by an anonymous private collector, the anthology fetched \$1.25 million during an auction held on the 206th anniversary of Brontë’s birth. Friends of the National Libraries, a British nonprofit, raised the funds through donations from nine contributors, including the Garfield Weston Foundation and the estate of TS Eliot, to prevent it from disappearing into private hands again. The anthology was then donated to the Brontë Parsonage Museum, where the Brontë family lived and wrote in the 19th century.

From their home in Haworth, Charlotte, Emily, Anne and their brother Branwell produced tiny magazines filled with elaborate worlds. Their imagined readers were toy soldiers and they crafted stories on scraps of paper, hiding their creations from adult scrutiny. Dinsdale notes they wrote to scale for the toy soldiers, using small text to keep their adventures private.

In “A Book Of Rhymes,” Brontë adopted the voices of two toy soldiers — Marquis of Duro and Lord Charles Wellesley — as they embarked on an expedition through a Canadian forest or an exiled journey through biblical Babylon. The young Brontës’ works reflected their reading influences and their father, Patrick Brontë, a priest and bird watcher, encouraged their explorations of nature during long walks over the moors. This connection with the landscape became a hallmark of Charlotte’s writings.

Long before her characters traversed the landscapes of her novels, the teenage Brontë captured nature in poems like “Autumn, a Song” and “Spring, a Song.” In “A Bit of a Rhyme,” she describes, “Meantime the rushing stream which roars along / its black waves foaming in high majesty.”

Despite acknowledging the imperfections in her writing, Brontë introduced her anthology by stating, “The following are attempts at rhyming of an inferior nature, it must be acknowledged, but they are nevertheless my best.”

The Brontë Parsonage Museum collaborated with a local publisher to have musician and poet Patti Smith write the foreword. She reflects on how Brontë’s writing transported her to her own childhood and emphasises that the poems embody a determined ambition. “It is not simply a handful of juvenile verses,” Smith writes, “but the manifestation of an ambitious dreamer.” — NYT

FEATURES

BY ARWA AL HASHIMI
PHOTOS BY FAISAL AL SAADI

OMAN HAS long been known for the richness of its natural environments and the diversity of its cultural heritage, shaped by the deep connection between its people and the land. Among the many natural resources that have played a central role in daily life, the palm tree stands out not only as a source of food and shade but also as the foundation for several traditional industries. One of the most significant among these is Zfanat Al Da'un, a craft that reflects the skill of the Omani people and their deep connections with their land.

Zfanat in Omani dialect refers to the craft of weaving, specifically in this context to the traditional art of weaving da'un – a final product crafted from dried palm fronds. The process begins with carefully collecting the fronds from the palm trees, which are then manually cleaned of any coarse fibres and thorns. These fronds are then woven into the final product, known as da'un, using a meticulous process that requires both skill and patience.

Once the da'un is prepared, it is woven by hand in a detailed and precise manner that ensures strength and durability. Craftsmen rely on simple, traditional tools, often reinforcing the structures with additional fibres from the palm itself. This weaving process requires patience, expertise and knowledge passed down through generations.

The products made through Zfanat Al Da'un were not merely decorative; they were essential to daily life. The woven mats covered the floors of homes, large canopies provided much-needed shade from the harsh sun; and sturdy baskets were used to store and transport crops. These items were prized for their lightweight properties, resilience to the local climate and sustainability, relying solely on natural materials abundantly available throughout Oman.

Omani photographer Faisal al Saadi has been fascinated by the process, saying that it is one of Oman's traditions that needs protection to ensure it is passed on to future generations.

In one of his Instagram posts, he noted that there was a time when crafts made through this process were in demand, particularly when people had more limited resources.

"It's one of Oman's ancient traditional crafts practised extensively in Nizwa and it has been passed down from grandfathers to their grandchildren. At one point, it was socially and economically important."

"For many Omanis, this craft was used to create materials for drying dates and for building shelters like the 'areesh' and tents. Some used it as roofing for buildings and mosques. Many of the people who know this craft well have passed away," he noted.

As an avid traveller with a deep appreciation for the Omani landscape and culture, Faisal has journeyed through different wilayats celebrating Oman's traditions. Through his travels all over the country, he has observed that some traditions are no longer of interest to young people.

"This is a very tedious process. Creating this takes quite some time because after cutting the wood, it involves a lot of processes, including cleaning the fronds, soaking them in water, drying them again and another week or two to weave them together in a very stable manner. It's true artisanal work," he said.

He felt nostalgic that what was in demand in the past, used for the construction of not just tents but also for camping and hotels, is now losing its relevance.

The craft of Zfanat Al Da'un demonstrates the Omani people's profound understanding



Zfanat Al Da'un: Traditional Omani craft of weaving with palm fronds



of their natural environment and their commitment to sustainable living. Every part of the palm tree was utilised, reflecting a way of life deeply rooted in resourcefulness and respect for nature. Moreover, the skill and care involved reveal an innate Omani aesthetic, balancing function with understated beauty.

Although modern materials and industrial alternatives have largely transformed daily living, Zfanat Al Da'un has survived as a vibrant part of Oman's cultural identity. Today, it

features prominently in heritage festivals and traditional markets, supported by initiatives from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism; and various craft associations. These efforts aim to revive the craft, preserve it and pass its techniques on to younger generations.

Zfanat Al Da'un is more than a traditional craft; it is a living story of patience, creativity and an enduring love for the land. It continues to tell of an Omani spirit that holds fast to its roots while embracing the future.