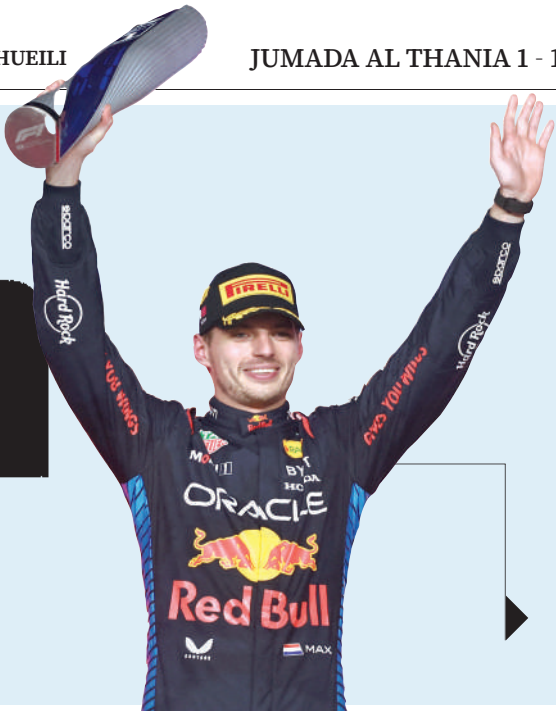


OMAN

دولة عمان

DAILY

Observer



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His Majesty arrives in Belgium

The visit underlines advanced relations between Oman and Belgium

BRUSSELS: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik arrived in Brussels on Monday evening, on a three-day state visit to the Kingdom of Belgium.

Upon the arrival of His Majesty the Sultan at Brussels Military Airport (Melsbroek Air Base), a welcoming musical piece was played as he descended the ramp.

At the foot of the ramp, His Majesty the Sultan was received by Tinne Van der Straeten, Minister of Energy, some Belgian officials and members of the Omani Embassy in the Kingdom of Belgium.

His Majesty the Sultan then proceeded to the main vehicle, passing between two rows of the Belgian Royal Guard of Honour. The motorcade of His Majesty the Sultan, escorted by a group of motorcycles, departed Brussels Military Airport, heading to his venue of residence at the Royal Castle of Laeken.

Earlier, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik left the Sultanate of Oman for the Kingdom of Belgium on a three-day state visit, during which he will meet King Philippe Leopold Louis Marie, King of the Belgians.

The visit comes in response to an invitation from the King of the Belgians and underscores the advanced relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Belgium.

His Majesty the Sultan was seen off at the Royal Airport by HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers; HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth; Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council; Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura; Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior; Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan al Busaidy, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council; Nasr bin Hamoud al Kindi, Secretary-

General of the Royal Court Affairs; Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education; Shaikh Al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers; Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs; Lt Gen Said bin Ali al Hilali, Head of the Internal Security Service; Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs; Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health; Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces ; Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman; Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman; Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman; and Maj Gen Musallam bin Mohammed Jaaboub, Commander of the Sultan's Special Force.

OFFICIAL DELEGATION

His Majesty the Sultan is accompanied during the visit by a high-ranking official delegation comprising HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs; Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court; Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office; Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister; Dr Hamed bin Said al Aufi, Head of Private Office of His Majesty the Sultan; Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority; Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals; and Rua bint Issa al Zadjaliyah, Ambassador of Oman to Belgium.

May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan in his journeys and grant him success!. — ONA



IN BRIEF

HM MESSAGE TO EMIR OF KUWAIT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to Shaikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, addressing bilateral relations and ways to strengthen them. The message was delivered by Dr Saleh bin Amer al Kharousi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the State of Kuwait, during his meeting with Shaikh Sabah Khalid Al Ahmad al Sabah, Crown Prince of Kuwait, at Bayan Palace.

FOUNDATION STONE FOR NEW HOSPITAL

The Ministry of Health celebrated the groundbreaking of Al-Falah Hospital in the South Al Sharqiyah Governorate. The project is to the tune of RO 51.8 million.

The event was held under the auspices of Dr Saud Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agricultural, Fisheries, and Water Resources, in the presence of Dr Hilal Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health.

*Safe and seamless movement pathways have been designed inside and outside the hospital, ensuring easy access and navigation across its various departments. **DETAILS ON P3***

National System for Evaluating School Performance launched

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 2

HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, on Monday presided over the launch of the National System for Evaluating School Performance in the Sultanate of Oman. The ceremony was organised by the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA).

The new system seeks to encourage educational institutions to develop their own internal sub-systems to ensure quality in line with the realisation of the goals of Oman Vision 2040, which accords top priority to education.

The National System for Evaluating School Performance



HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said presided over the launch.

is based on a multi-level evaluation scale comprising outstanding performances (to be emulated by schools), good, suitable and poor (performances that fail to meet minimum quality standards and require rapid intervention).

The system utilises

eight main performance evaluation tools applied in the approach to school education: comprehensiveness, impact measurement, student-centricity, national and international standards, accuracy of procedures, transparency, neutrality,

improvement and accountability.

NATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Dr Jokha al Shukaili, CEO of the authority, said: “The National System for Evaluating School Performance was built through specialised local and international efforts, and by benefiting from the national experience in improving education, and from the latest developments in international and regional education quality systems, so that it is comprehensive of the most important elements of school education quality, taking into account objectivity, transparency, and neutrality that the authority has been keen to establish in all its activities concerned with ensuring the quality of education. **TURN TO P5**

His Majesty arrives in Belgium



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The motorcade of His Majesty the Sultan, escorted by a group of motorcycles, departed Brussels Military Airport, heading to his venue of residence at the Royal Castle of Laeken. — ONA



Earlier, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik left the Sultanate of Oman for the Kingdom of Belgium on a three-day state visit, during which he will meet King Philippe Leopold Louis Marie, King of the Belgians. The visit comes in response to an invitation from the King of the Belgians and underscores the advanced relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Belgium.

OMAN

BILATERAL RELATIONS



HM SENDS MESSAGE TO KUWAIT EMIR

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to Shaikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, dealing with bilateral relations and means of enhancing them. The message was handed over by Dr Saleh bin Amer al Kharousi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the State of Kuwait when he was received on Monday by Shaikh Sabah Khalid Al Ahmad al Sabah, Crown Prince of Kuwait at Bayan Palace. — **ONA**

PLANS UNVEILED TO DEVELOP HAWIYAT NAJM



VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, DEC 2

Muscat Municipality has unveiled plans for the area surrounding Hawiyat Najm (Bimmah Sinkhole) in the Wilayat of Qurayat as part of the efforts to develop the site as a tourist attraction, which already receives thousands of tourists every year.

Over the years, it has become a regular spot to take a break on the way to the popular destinations of the Wilayat of Sur and other places in the Al Sharqiyah South Governorate. It is situated just 120 km from Muscat International Airport.

Hawiyat Najm or the sinkhole is situated in the middle of a park, which is currently developed and maintained by the municipality with no entrance fee charged to visitors. The park has arid landscapes and there is no water connection currently to the location though it has facilities such as toilets and a children’s play area.

The municipality’s land area is around 600,000 sqm with the park occupying a large portion of the site. The municipality intends to develop and extend the Hawiyat Najm Park site beyond the current boundaries, which include a parking lot for caravans, recreation vehicles (RVs), and camping facilities.

The municipality has created a licensing process for camping within Muscat and intends for this area to be the new destination for RV’s and campers. The design for the project is inspired by the site’s arid and organic nature, while also prioritising sustainability, availability of services and utilities, and the needs of the local community.

The contractor will be responsible for the detailed design of Hawiyat Najm Park and the construction of the buildings and infrastructure on the site, with additional surveying if necessary. The camping site, when ready, should be able to accommodate 144 visitors daily, use solar panels, recycle water and desalination, and recycle waste. The project is targeted to empower the local population with 300 job opportunities. The last date to get tender documents is December 15 and to submit bids is January 13.



OMAN ONE OF BELGIAN FAVOURITE PARTNERS: BFTA

KABEER YOUSUF
@KABIYOUSEF

The Belgian Foreign Trade Agency (BFTA), a public institution that collects, processes and disseminates statistics related to foreign trade at the national and international levels, has ranked the Sultanate of Oman as one of its favourite trade partners. Oman is ranked 86th in the list of international clients and 89th in international suppliers.

Dennis Gijsbrechts, International Trade Analyst with the BFTA,

highlighted the growing volume of trade and business between the two countries and the balance of trade and business.

“Oman and Belgium have conducted EUR 149.4 million worth of business from Belgium to Oman, which is a +24.6 per cent increase in 2024, and EUR 83.7 million worth of goods and services from Oman to Belgium, a +20.3 per cent increase in the first 8 months of 2024. These activities have resulted in a bilateral trade balance of EUR 65.7 million,” said Gijsbrechts.

Belgium’s major exports in the first 8 months of 2024 included chemicals (31.6 per cent), machinery & equipment (28.4 per cent), and foodstuffs (10.2 per cent). Imports consisted of mineral products (78.6 per cent), base metals (11.6 per cent), and plastics (7.0 per cent), according to BFTA statistics.

The BFTA is responsible for organising the logistical aspects of State visits led by His Majesty the King and co-organises Belgian economic missions chaired by Her Royal Highness Princess Astrid, in collaboration with FIT, Hub. brussels, Awex, and the FPS Foreign Affairs.

The Directorate-General for Bilateral Affairs (DGB) focuses

on defending Belgian interests in other countries, particularly in supporting Belgian economic interests.

Gijsbrechts emphasised the need for collaborative steps between Oman and Belgium in business, trade, diplomacy and bilateral relations. The Royal visit presents an opportunity to discuss common interests, exchange views on global challenges and current issues, and open new horizons for strategic partnerships between the two countries.

This visit aims to enhance cooperation in various fields, including trade, investment, and energy, to elevate bilateral relations to higher levels.

Annual GPCA forum opens with big turnout

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, DEC 2

THE 18th Annual Forum of the Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association (GPCA) opened here on Monday under the auspices of Shaikh Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ). Hosted by OQ Group, the event has drawn over 2,600 participants from 43 countries, including ministers, GCC energy leaders, corporate executives and industry experts. It serves as a vital platform to foster collaboration and innovation while highlighting the Gulf region’s role in advancing global industry standards.

Abdulrahman Al Pageeh, CEO of SABIC, opened the forum with a keynote address reflecting on the interconnected nature of the regional and global petrochemical industries. He acknowledged the support of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MoEM) and other stakeholders in fostering collaboration.

Al Pageeh emphasised the influence of global economic trends on regional strategies, noting that “our industry marches to the global economy’s rhythm.” He pointed to the 2.7 per cent growth in global GDP this year, comparable to 2022, and highlighted easing inflation and lower interest rates as positive developments.

However, he cautioned that these favourable conditions alone would not suffice to drive substantial growth in the petrochemical sector, calling for proactive measures to stimulate demand and align global capacity with future opportunities.

Al Pageeh underscored the importance of inspiring young people to pursue careers in the chemicals and petrochemicals industry, describing this as critical to sustaining the sector’s long-term growth.

Hosting the forum for the first time, OQ Group showcased its commitment to



advancing the petrochemical industry locally, regionally and internationally. By leveraging Oman’s natural resources, OQ has strategically invested in downstream and petrochemical sectors, serving over 3,000 customers across 80 countries and positioning itself as a leader in the energy industry.

Shaikh Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy described the forum as a milestone in Oman’s efforts to advance the energy sector, expand manufacturing and petrochemical industries, and contribute to sustainable economic development.

He called for greater collaboration among GCC nations to address the challenges of a volatile global economy and emphasised the importance of transitioning to clean energy, embracing digitalisation and reducing carbon emissions.

The forum features an exhibition of over 110 companies, showcasing cutting-edge petrochemical technologies and advancements. OQ highlighted its own sustainability and digital transformation initiatives, including its commitment to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. The group has implemented alternative

energy investments, energy intensity reduction programmes and an integrated energy management system to enhance efficiency and sustainability.

Key themes under discussion at the forum include growth, efficiency and sustainability in the petrochemical sector. High-level sessions are exploring resilience, innovation, and strategies to address global challenges such as energy and food security amid shifting geopolitical dynamics.

A major highlight is the SolutionXchange programme, now in its second year, which focuses on energy management, the circular economy and digital transformation, providing a platform for engagement between industry leaders and participants.

OQ’s integrated approach to petrochemical production, spanning the value chain from resource extraction to specialised chemical production, demonstrates its dedication to innovation and operational excellence.

By producing essential raw materials and attracting foreign direct investment, OQ continues to empower Oman’s manufacturing and chemical industries, driving industrial development and sustainable growth.

Foundation stone laid for new hospital

JALAN BANI BU ALI: The Ministry of Health (MoH) celebrated on Monday the groundbreaking of “Al Falah Hospital” in the Al Sharqiyah South Governorate. The project is to the tune of RO 51,861,148.

The event was held under the auspices of Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources, in the presence of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health.

Safe and seamless movement pathways have been designed inside and outside the hospital, ensuring easy access and navigation across its various departments. It is worth noting that Al Falah Hospital will be built on a land area of 343,000 square metres, with a construction area of 58,000 square metres.



The event was held under the auspices of Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources, in the presence of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health. — **ONA**

The hospital will have a capacity of 170 beds and 38 outpatient clinics covering various medical specialties, along with an emergency and trauma department.

The radiology department will be equipped with the latest imaging technologies,

including MRI, CT scans, X-rays, and ultrasound. The hospital will also feature a nephrology unit, a day-care unit, and a dental clinic, in addition to inpatient wards for surgery and internal medicine. The project will also include three fully equipped operating rooms

designed to handle surgical cases, along with facilities for endoscopic surgeries. It will feature a dedicated obstetrics, gynaecology, and paediatric unit, comprising a paediatric ward, an intensive care unit, an obstetrics & gynaecology ward, a delivery section, and a neonatal care unit for premature infants.

The hospital will also have three storage facilities for medical supplies, a general warehouse, and a specialised warehouse for flammable materials. It will feature a water treatment plant, backup generators, drinking water purification systems, and a fully integrated medical gas building. The facility will include 1,422 parking spaces and various other public services and facilities. — **ONA**

OMAN

DELICATE SURGERIES



The Rustaq Hospital successfully performed two delicate surgeries on premature babies

RUSTAQ HOSPITAL EXCELS IN COMPLEX SURGERIES FOR PREMATURE BABIES

RUSTAQ: The Al Rustaq Hospital in Al Batinah South Governorate has marked a significant medical achievement by successfully performing two delicate surgeries on premature babies. These complex procedures were carried out by the hospital's Intensive Care Unit for Premature Babies and the Paediatric Surgery Department.

The first surgery addressed necrotizing enterocolitis in one baby, while the second corrected esophageal atresia in another.

Dr Mahmoud bin Salim al Subhi, Director of Al Rustaq Hospital, who highlighted the importance of this milestone, said: "This medical achievement reflects the excellence provided by the hospital in the field of premature baby care. It reaffirms our commitment to delivering advanced medical services and comprehensive care for newborns, improving their quality of life, particularly in critical cases."

Dr Reda Abdel Fattah, Senior Paediatric Surgery Specialist, lauded the medical and nursing teams for their dedication, noting: "The success of these operations underscores the hospital's commitment to providing cutting-edge medical care. The nursing staff played an indispensable role in ensuring the stability of the babies before and after surgery."

Adding to the commendations, Dr Amer al Majrifi, Consultant in Premature Paediatric, emphasised the importance of interdisciplinary cooperation:

"The close collaboration between the paediatric surgery and premature paediatrics teams was instrumental in ensuring high-quality care. This teamwork significantly enhances the success rate of complex surgical interventions." This achievement highlights Al Rustaq Hospital's commitment to advancing neonatal healthcare and underscores its pivotal role in addressing critical medical conditions in newborns. — ONA

OMAN JOINS UAE IN CELEBRATING NATIONAL DAY

SHINAS: The Sultanate of Oman on Monday joined the United Arab Emirates in celebrating the 53rd anniversary of the establishment of the Union. A ceremony to mark the occasion was organised at Al Wajajah border crossing by the Secretariat-General for National Celebrations. Held in cooperation with the Royal Oman Police (ROP), the celebration saw the participation of Omani citizens.

At the outset of the ceremony, a reception was held for UAE officers,



officials and citizens, greeted and congratulated by Omani on this auspicious national occasion. A concert was presented by the band of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO). The Omani signers presented four musical performances, while Omani folk troupes entertained the public.

The celebration concluded with a national song whose lyrics symbolised the two countries' deep-rooted historical bonds, good neighbourliness and family ties.

— ONA

OHRC hosts dialogue on elders' quality of life

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 2

THE Omani Human Rights Commission (OHRC) launched a dialogue session titled 'Protecting and Promoting the Rights of the Elderly in Oman,' on Monday with broad participation from governmental and private entities as well as civil society organisations. The session aims to review efforts to support the rights of the elderly, discuss the challenges faced, and propose practical recommendations to improve the quality of life for this vital segment of society.

Prof Dr Rashid al Balushi, Chairman of the OHRC, in his address emphasised the importance of collaborative efforts across various sectors to provide comprehensive care for the elderly that meets their social, health, and psychological needs.

Al Balushi stated that caring for the elderly is not merely a social responsibility but a reflection of national identity and the deeply rooted values of Omani society. He noted that Oman has made significant strides in providing care for the elderly, through both legislation that protects their rights and initiatives that support their health and psychological and



OHRC launched a dialogue session on 'Protecting and Promoting the Rights of the Elderly in Oman'

social well-being.

He added that the dialogue session seeks to enhance discussions among various sectors on the best ways to develop policies and practices that serve the elderly. He highlighted that exchanging ideas and experiences among the participating entities is key to reaching practical recommendations that contribute to improving the quality of life for this demographic.

He also stressed the importance of leveraging such events to shed light on both successes and challenges, calling for greater integration between the public and private sectors to support the elderly in alignment with Oman Vision 2040.

Dr Al Balushi underscored that the outcomes of the dialogue session will be presented on International Human Rights Day, December 10, reflecting Oman's commitment to enhancing human rights in all forms, including the rights of the elderly. He pointed out that the anticipated recommendations will serve as a practical guide for achieving further progress in this field.

The first session was chaired by lawyer Saud al Maawali, Vice-Chairman of the OHRC, and included four working papers. Safiya bint Mohammed al Amiriyah from the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), presented a paper on social services dedicated to the elderly. Dr Hilal al Habsi from

the Sociologists Association discussed the impact of social isolation and loss of purpose on the living conditions of the elderly. Yousef al Abri from the Social Protection Fund (SPF) highlighted the benefits and services provided by social funds, while Joukha al Farsi presented initiatives by the Ehsan Association.

The second session, moderated by Dr Saleh al Barashdi, Head of the Monitoring and Complaints Committee, Omani Human Rights Commission, focused on legal and developmental frameworks that support the elderly. Abdulhakim al Balushi reviewed Oman Vision 2040 and its priorities related to the well-being and protection of the elderly.

Legal adviser Jamal al Nabhani, Director of the Legislation Department, Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs (MoJLA), delivered a comprehensive paper on Omani legislation related to the elderly, emphasising the need for alignment with international standards.

The session also included two additional papers: one on social justice and another on the national healthcare programme for the elderly, presented by Dr Ahmed al Wahaibi from the Ministry of Health (MoH).



REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATION

LEADING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW SOLAR PV INDEPENDENT POWER PROJECT (IPP) AT AL KAMIL WAL WAFI, SULTANATE OF OMAN

Nama Power and Water Procurement (PWP) is responsible for procuring new capacity for power and water and for purchasing and selling the output in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the requirements of the law for the regulation and privatisation of the electricity and related water sector promulgated by Royal Decree 78/2004 as amended and the PWP license.

In line with Sultanate of Oman vision to diversify fuel sources and achieving net zero target by 2050 through the use of clean energy for power generation, PWP is planning to develop the fourth solar PV project with a capacity of 280 MW at Al Kamil Wal Wafi ("Al Kamil Solar IPP" or "Project") in partnership with the private sector. PWP is announcing the launch of the qualification process for interested developers through the issuance of the Request for Qualification (RFQ) document.

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Purchase Price	Statement of Qualification Submission Deadline
OPWP/2024/29	Request For Qualification for the Development of Solar PV IPP at Al Kamil Wal Wafi	RO 350 Last day of purchase is 16 December 2024	03 February 2025 Before 10.00 Am (Gulf Standard Time)

Disclaimer: This RFQ is for interested developers and is not applicable to interested or potential EPC contractors.

The tender documents are available for purchase in an electronic format through PWP website (<https://www.omanpwp.om/new/Default.aspx>) after completion of the registration process via the e-tendering system.

The supplier user manual can be accessed on the official website of the Company. In case of any queries, please send an email to: procurement.officer@Omanpwp.nama.om with a copy to tendering.support@nss.nama.om and prj.solar.27@Omanpwp.nama.om.



نماء

شركة الطاقة والمياه

POWER & WATER PROCUREMENT

شركة تنمية الكهرباء والطاقة المتجددة وشركة المياه

شركة تنمية الكهرباء والطاقة المتجددة وشركة المياه

شركة تنمية الكهرباء والطاقة المتجددة وشركة المياه

‘Wings Through the Lens’ — a visionary initiative to preserve natural beauty in Suhar

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, DEC 2

In a remarkable effort to promote environmental sustainability and showcase Oman's biodiversity, the Environment Authority of Al Batinah North recently included a pioneering programme as an environmental social initiative titled 'Wings Through the Lens' in Suhar.

This unique initiative, which brought together 40 participants and produced stunning works of wildlife photography, blends education with a call to action for the preservation of Oman's natural heritage.

The founder of the initiative, Iman Ali al Hosni, highlighted the initiative's profound objectives, saying, "This initiative is not just a training programme; it's an environmental message with far-reaching goals. We aim to revive awareness of Oman's ecological beauty, nurture national talent, and instil the value of sustainability. By uniting efforts between the authority and the community, we are building a future that respects and protects our environment. More importantly, we hope to inspire future generations to take the lead in



The initiative not only enhanced environmental awareness but also produced a collection of many unique artistic works showcasing the avian wonders of Al Batinah North.

environmental preservation."

The programme's core goals reflect its ambitious vision, which are Reviving Awareness of Environmental Beauty, Nurturing National Talent, Instilling Sustainability, Fostering Community Partnerships, and Inspiring Future Leaders.

The programme unfolded in two phases. The first, academic theoretical, included workshops on

wildlife photography techniques, camera handling, and understanding the behaviour of local and migratory birds. The second, practical, involved fieldwork using professional cameras, smartphones, and trap cameras, enabling participants to bring their newfound skills to life.

As a result, the initiative not only enhanced environmental awareness but also produced a collection of many unique artistic works showcasing the avian wonders of Al Batinah North and adding treasures to Environment authorities there. These works symbolise the participants' dedication to capturing the essence of Oman's natural beauty and advocating for its preservation.

"Through this initiative, we are creating a generation of environmental storytellers, individuals who can inspire through their lenses and contribute to the sustainability of our nation's precious biodiversity," Al Hosni said.

With 'Wings Through the Lens,' Oman is witnessing a powerful fusion of art, education, and environmental responsibility, an inspiring example of how communities can unite to preserve and celebrate the natural world.

OMAN

National Musuem hosts premiere of documentary film ‘Al Khanjar’

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, DEC 2

THE National Museum inaugurated on Monday the premiere of the documentary film ‘Al Khanjar’ produced by RT Arabic in collaboration with the Ministry of Information (MoI).

The event was held under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, and attended by several distinguished guests and individuals interested in media and museum affairs.

Dr Al Harrasi expressed his thanks to TV channel Russia Today (RT) for producing the visually stunning and content-rich documentary film ‘The Dagger’ in terms of the information it provides to Russian and international viewers about the Omani dagger, one of the Sultanate of Oman’s most important national symbols.

He said in a press statement that the documentary reflects the depth of the Omani-Russian relations in the fields of culture and media and expresses the two countries’ efforts to consolidate global cultural diversity and introduce the Omani

civilisation in Russia and the world.

He stressed that the Ministry of Information (MoI) backs all media initiatives that introduce the Sultanate of Oman, its civilisation at the international level, noting that such international media initiatives also contribute to economic growth by boosting tourism and investment.

Dr Al Harrasi said the Ministry of Information encourages such media initiatives carried out in collaboration with other countries by hosting international journalists and supporting media production about the Sultanate of Oman, which contributes to consolidating its international presence in various aspects.

Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, stated during his speech at the ceremony “The launch of the documentary film ‘Al Khanjar’ represents a significant step in showcasing one of the most prominent Omani cultural symbols, which forms an integral part of Oman’s identity and rich heritage.

The Omani khanjar was inscribed on Unesco’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2022.

This valued initiative, carried out



The premiere of the documentary film ‘Al Khanjar’ was held under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information

in collaboration with RT Arabic, highlights the partnership between the National Museum and the State Hermitage Museum through the symbolism and narrative of the Omani khanjar and its historical evolution. It underscores the exceptional craftsmanship of Omanis in preserving this authentic emblem.”

Anisa Murad, Director of the Programmes Department, RT Arabic, said: “Working on this film was not a simple exploration to document the history of the Omani

khanjar, and the transfer of a unique khanjar from the National Museum in Muscat to the State Hermitage Museum in Russia, but also an opportunity to discover Oman’s traditions and astonishing resilient culture against globalisation to preserve its national identity. In this culture, we find a great similarity with Russia, which strives to maintain its cultural imprint in a rapidly changing world.”

The 28 minutes-film takes the viewer on a journey through time and space to trace the history and

development of the Omani khanjar, highlighting its change in shape from the 17th century, during the era of the Imamate of Al Yaarubi Dynasty to the splendour of the Saidi khanjar. It has maintained its status and significance to this day, becoming an integral part of Oman’s cultural identity and a national symbol.

The film guides the viewer across deserts, wilderness, plains, mountains, and vast seas to explore the various styles of Omani khanjars, which differ across Oman’s governorates, while answering the question: What makes the Omani khanjar a symbol of prestige and dignity, and an authentic identity that remains unaffected by the waves of globalisation?

The documentary film was prepared by Anisa Murad, directed by Karim Najib, and the soundtrack was recorded by both Ahmed and Mohamed Saleh. It features a group of khanjar makers and restorers from Oman, as well as National Museum staff.

The film was shot at various locations in Oman, including the National Museum, the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, the Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM).

National System for Evaluating School Performance launched

FROM PAGE 1

It is also an important national project that enhances the quality of education in the Sultanate of Oman.”

Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, stated: “The evaluation will be an external one that gives the Ministry of Education indicators about the strengths and aspects that need development in Omani schools, whether government or private.

The ministry is always

a partner in this aspect, and we will provide all support and efforts to the authority to carry out its roles to the fullest extent. We actually benefit from the comments and aspects that need development, and the ministry is fully prepared to deal with any of these aspects to raise the level of the Omani school and what it provides to students and teachers.”

Dr Thuraya al Hosani, Director-General of the Education Quality Assurance Centre, gave a visual presentation introducing the system, in which she discussed the nature of

the system, its history, components, objectives and the basic determinants of the school performance evaluation system.

The authority was keen on developing these educational standards to meet national goals and visions, as well as the requirements of the labour market, while keeping pace with global updates.

Al Dhahla al Rawahi, Senior Quality Assurance Specialist, said that the system has undergone a comprehensive development process, starting with the Ministry of Education as its basis.

Injaz platform empowers students in applied sciences

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman’s schools are continuously introducing innovative initiatives to enhance the quality of education and foster well-rounded development among students. One such endeavour, the Injaz Educational Platform Initiative, spearheaded by Amina bint Al Imam Jabir bin Zaid School (grades 9–12) in Al Buraimi Governorate, has been pivotal in improving students’ applied science skills and academic achievements.

Targeting students in grades 10 and 11, the Injaz initiative motivates learners through competitive tests and an incentive-based system. Students earn an Injaz card — bronze, silver, or gold — after completing challenges and excelling in



The Injaz initiative motivates learners through competitive tests and an incentive-based system

periodic applied science tests conducted on the initiative’s digital platform. These cards come with tangible benefits such as discounts and recognition, provided in collaboration with local entities and companies supporting the programme.

Samia al Balushi, Headmaster and Initiative Director, emphasised its objectives: “The Injaz Initiative aims to inspire students to work diligently, achieve academic

excellence, and foster positive competition. It also strengthens school-community partnerships and integrates e-learning into the educational process.”

The initiative is implemented in four structured phases namely planning and preparation, promotion or awareness campaigns in schools, execution, monitoring and evaluation which tracks student progress, analysing data, and refining the initiative. The project’s multidisciplinary team includes academic, technology, marketing, and public relations experts, ensuring seamless implementation and continuous development.

Students participating in the initiative have lauded its impact.

سلطنة عُمان

وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات

Sultanate of Oman

Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

إعلان مناقصة

Tender Notice

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

TENDER NUMBER	TENDER NAME	DATE OF PUBLISHING	LAST DATE TO PURCHASE TENDER DOCUMENT	SUBMISSION DATE	COMPANIES WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THIS TENDER	DOCUMENT PRICE
MTCIT 276/ 2024	TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR GENERAL DIRECTORATE OF ROADS & LAND TRANSPORT	27-11-2024	05-12-2024	12-12-2024	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF TENDER BOARD (FIRST& EXCELLENT) CLASS	(150/-) ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY OMANI RIAL FOR LOCAL COMPANIES (10/-) TEN OMANI RIAL (FOR SME) NON-REFUNDABLE
MTCIT 279/ 2024	CONSULTANCY SERVICES SUPERVISION OF REPAIRING CRACKS AT SEA WATER RETURN CANAL AT SOHAR PORT	28-11-2024	11-12-2024	29-12-2024	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF TENDER BOARD (FIRST& EXCELLENT) CLASS	(25/-) TWENTY FIVE OMANI RIAL FOR LOCAL COMPANIES (10/-) TEN OMANI RIAL (FOR SME) NON-REFUNDABLE
MTCIT 280/ 2024	REPAIRING OF CRACKS AT SEA WATER RETURN CANAL AT SOHAR PORT	28-11-2024	11-12-2024	06-01-2025	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF TENDER BOARD (FIRST& EXCELLENT) CLASS	(149/300) ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY NINE OMANI RIAL AND THREE HUNDRED BAIZA FOR LOCAL COMPANIES (14/900) FOURTEEN OMANI RIAL AND NINE HUNDRED BAIZA (FOR SME) NON-REFUNDABLE
MTCIT 283/ 2024	DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION, AND MANAGED SERVICES OF THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT INTEGRATION PLATFORM (NGIP)	01-12-2024	15-12-2024	23-01-2025	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF TENDER BOARD (ALL) CLASSES	(25/000) TWENTY FIVE OMANI RIAL FOR LOCAL COMPANIES (10/-) TEN OMANI RIAL (FOR SME) NON-REFUNDABLE

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

CORRESPONDANCE:

1. Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at e-Tendering System. (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).

2. E-Tendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the e-Tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number:
Tel: +968 24402200, e-mail :etenderhd@gstb.gov.om

INTERNAL TENDERS COMMITTEE

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WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Members scouts clean rubble and debris from damaged buildings in Beirut. — Reuters

LEBANON SAYS ISRAEL VIOLATES CEASEFIRE DEAL

BEIRUT: At least two people were killed on Monday in Israeli strikes on southern Lebanon, Lebanese authorities said, as a ceasefire ending more than a year of hostilities between Israel and Lebanese armed group Hezbollah appeared increasingly fragile. Lebanon and Israel have already traded accusations of breaches, and on Monday Lebanon said the violations had turned deadly.

One person was killed in an Israeli air attack on the southern Lebanese town of Marjayoun, about 10 km from the border with Israel, Lebanon's health ministry said. Lebanon's state security said an Israeli drone strike had killed a member of its force while he was on duty in Nabatieh, 12 km from the border. State security called it a "flagrant violation" of the truce. The Lebanese army said an Israeli drone hit an army bulldozer in northeast Lebanon near the border with Syria, wounding one soldier. The Israeli military did not immediately respond to questions about the incidents. — Reuters



Philippine House of Representatives Secretary General Reginald Sagun Velasco holds the impeachment complaint in Quezon City. — Reuters

PHILIPPINE GROUPS SEEK IMPEACHMENT OF VICE-PRESIDENT

MANILA: Philippine civil society and religious leaders asked Congress on Monday to impeach Vice-President Sara Duterte over a list of complaints that include graft, incompetence and amassing ill-gotten wealth while in office. The daughter of firebrand former President Rodrigo Duterte has been embroiled in a row with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr and is the subject of an enquiry into her spending by the House of Representatives. She denies wrongdoing.

Monday's complainants included civil society and religious leaders, as well as former government officials critical of her father.

They include priest Flaviano Villanueva, who runs a support group for families of victims of the drug war, former congressman Gary Alejano who represents military veterans and their families, and singer-activist Leah Navarro.

The complaint includes 24 violation based on major grounds composed of culpable violation of the constitution, graft and corruption, bribery, betrayal of public trust, and other high crimes. — Reuters

SYRIA'S ASSAD SAYS FIGHTERS ADVANCE A BID TO 'REDRAW' REGIONAL MAP

BEIRUT: Syria's President Bashar al Assad on Monday branded an offensive that has captured swathes of territory a bid to redraw the map of the region in line with US interests. His comments were made in a phone call with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian. "The terrorist escalation reflects the far-reaching goals of dividing the region and fragmenting the countries in it and redraw the map in line with the objectives of the United States and the West," Assad said in a statement

from his office.

During the weekend, fighters group and allied factions took over Aleppo city, barring neighbourhoods, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Aleppo, an ancient city dominated by its landmark citadel, is home to two million people, and saw fierce battles earlier in the conflict. But until this weekend, the fighters were never able to totally take over.

Gunmen have also taken dozens

of towns across the north, including Khan Sheikun and Maaret Al Numan, roughly halfway between Aleppo and Hama, the Observatory said. Footage showed people in military fatigues patrolling Aleppo's streets. While the streets appeared to be mostly empty, some were out to cheer for the advancing fighters. The violence in Syria has killed more than 457 people, mostly combatants but also including at least 72 civilians, according to the Observatory. — AFP

UN chief says situation in Gaza 'appalling'

THE United Nations chief said on Monday the situation in war-torn Gaza was "appalling and apocalyptic", warning conditions faced by Palestinians in the territory may amount to the "gravest international crimes". In remarks read out on his behalf at a Cairo conference aimed at increasing humanitarian aid, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged the international community to "build a foundation for sustainable peace in Gaza and across the Middle East".

Israel's retaliatory campaign has killed 44,429 people in Gaza.

Guterres highlighted the devastating toll of the conflict and the urgent need for international action. "Malnutrition is rampant... Famine is imminent. Meanwhile, the health system has collapsed," he said. The UN chief added that Gaza now has "the highest number of children amputees per capita anywhere in the world", with "many losing limbs and undergoing surgeries without even anaesthesia". The secretary-general also criticised the severe restrictions on aid delivery, calling the current levels "grossly insufficient".

According to the UN Palestinian refugee agency (UNRWA) count, only 65 aid trucks per day had been able to enter Gaza this past month, compared to a pre-war average of 500. International aid organisations have repeatedly raised alarm over the deteriorating conditions in Gaza, warning that civilians are on the brink of famine.

They have said aid shipments reaching the enclave are now at



Palestinians walk past a damaged house in the Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip. — AFP

their lowest since the start of the war.

Israel has blamed aid issues on what it says is the inability of relief organisations to handle and distribute large quantities of aid. UN's Guterres said on Monday that the blockade of aid to Gaza "is not a crisis of logistics" but rather "a crisis of political will and of respect for fundamental principles of international humanitarian law".

UNRWA said all the attempts it has made to deliver aid into northern Gaza have either been "denied" or "impeded" between October 6, 2024 and November 25, amid fierce fighting in the area. Guterres said "if UNRWA is forced to close, the responsibility of replacing its vital services ... would rest with Israel".

UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini said that the agency "remains

the backbone of humanitarian response" in Gaza. He also called for the use of "a robust international legal and political framework" to ensure the continuation of humanitarian aid to Gaza. "Without this, humanitarians, however selfless and courageous, cannot stay and deliver," he added.

Meanwhile, a Hamas delegation discussed a ceasefire in Gaza with Egyptian intelligence officials, two officials from the Palestinian group said. The "delegation met with the head of the Egyptian general intelligence, Major General Hassan Rashad, and a number of Egyptian intelligence officials, and discussed ways to stop the war and aggression, bring in aid, and open the Rafah crossing" at Gaza's border with Egypt, said a senior Hamas official who was part of the Cairo meeting on Sunday evening. — AFP

The blockade of aid to Gaza is not a crisis of logistics but rather a crisis of political will and of respect for fundamental principles of international humanitarian law

ANTONIO GUTERRES



THAILAND, MALAYSIA BRACE FOR FLOODS

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia and Thailand are facing a second wave of heavy rain and potential flooding this week, authorities said on Monday, even as some displaced residents were able to return home and the worst floods in decades began receding in some areas.

Since last week, 27 people have died and more than half a million households in the neighbouring Southeast Asian countries have been hit by torrential rain and flooding that authorities say have been the most severe in years. The immediate situation has improved in some areas and water levels have eased, according to government data on Monday. — Reuters

POLITICAL ROLE

Senegal PM says to remain head of govt



Senegal's Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko on Monday said he would remain head of the government rather than preside over the parliament, after his party's landslide election win sparked questions over his political role. "I'm staying on at the prime minister's office. I had come to submit my letter of resignation as an MP," Sonko said. "We have started work at the prime minister's office... We are continuing this work", he added. — AFP

FIRST BILATERAL VISIT

Nepal PM departs for China visit



Nepal's prime minister left for his first bilateral visit to China. Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli will meet Chinese President Xi Jinping. "The two countries' leaders will have in-depth exchanges of views on deepening our traditional friendship, expanding Belt and Road cooperation and exchanges and cooperation in various fields, as well as international and regional issues of mutual interest," China's FM spokeswoman Mao Ning said. — AFP

RUSH AND SCRAMBLE

Guinea stadium crush kills 56 people



A controversial refereeing decision sparked violence and a crush at a soccer match in southeast Guinea, killing 56 people as a witness described scenes of chaos. The fatalities occurred during the final of a tournament in honour of Guinea's military leader Mamady Doumbouya at a stadium in Nzerekore, one of the West African nation's largest cities. Fans threw stones, triggering panic and a crush, the government said, promising an investigation. — Reuters

BUDGET DEMANDS



French Prime Minister Michel Barnier speaks during the questions to the government session at the National Assembly in Paris, France. — Reuters

FRANCE PM BARNIER MAKES LAST-MINUTE CONCESSION

PARIS: French Prime Minister Michel Barnier on Monday made another major concession to Marine Le Pen’s far-right National Rally party, dropping planned cuts to medication reimbursements in a last-minute bid to get his 2025 budget bill over the line. It was not immediately clear if that would be enough to save his fragile coalition from being toppled this week, with an RN spokesman saying that there were other key demands ahead of a crunch parliamentary vote.

“It’s a good thing, undoubtedly,” Philippe Ballard said of Barnier’s latest move to yield to his party’s demands. “But there are other” demands, he said, referring to the fact that Marine Le Pen’s party wants Barnier to raise pensions in line with inflation. RN leaders were meeting ahead of the parliament’s vote.

Barnier’s struggles to get the 2025 budget through a deeply divided parliament threaten to plunge the euro zone’s second-biggest economy into its second political crisis in six months, underlining the instability that has taken hold in capitals across the EU. — Reuters



STORM BORA BATTERS GREECE

A drone view shows a damaged bridge following floods caused by Storm Bora, in Faliraki, on the island of Rhodes, Greece. A third victim was claimed in the sweeping storm. Thunderstorms interrupted train services in mainland Greece, especially in the centre and north of the country. — Reuters

TOP UNITED NATIONS COURT HEARS LANDMARK CLIMATE CASE

THE HAGUE: The United Nations’ top court kicked off unprecedented hearings on Monday aimed at setting legal guidelines for how countries should protect the planet against climate change and help vulnerable nations combat its devastating impact. Presiding Judge Nawaf Salam opened the hearings that will see more than 100 countries and organisations present before the International Court of Justice, the highest number ever. Representatives from Vanuatu

and other low-lying at-risk islands in the Pacific Ocean launch the proceedings before a 15-judge bench in the panelled hall of the Peace Palace in The Hague. Activists hope that the opinion from the ICJ’s judges will have far-reaching legal consequences in the fight against climate change, impacting ongoing court cases and domestic and international legislation. Others fear the UN-backed request for a non-binding advisory opinion will have limited impact

-- and it could take the UN’s highest court months, or even years, to deliver. Wealthy polluting countries ultimately agreed to find at least \$300 billion a year by 2035 to help poorer nations transition to cleaner energy sources and prepare for increasing climate impacts such as extreme weather. Developing countries condemned the pledge as too little, too late, and the summit’s final deal failed to include a global pledge to move away from burning planet-heating fossil fuels. — AFP

Scholz promises \$685m military aid in Kyiv visit

GERMAN

Chancellor Olaf Scholz unveiled \$685 million of new military aid as he came to Kyiv on Monday, vowing Berlin would remain Ukraine’s biggest backer in Europe at a crucial moment in the war, with Donald Trump set to return to the White House. The visit, his first to Kyiv since the early months of Russia’s attack in 2022, comes weeks after his governing coalition collapsed, setting him up for a tough election battle in February.

The political turmoil in Europe’s biggest economy adds to a growing feeling of uncertainty in Ukraine, with Russian troops advancing ever faster. It is unclear how much Kyiv’s European allies can step up support for Ukraine if Trump cuts back help from its biggest backer.

Scholz and President Volodymyr Zelensky met at an undisclosed location and reviewed military drones manufactured by Ukrainian and German firms. They also visited a hospital and spoke to people wounded in the war. Scholz was expected to hold talks later with Zelensky, whose government is urging Nato to invite Ukraine to join the military alliance at a meeting in Brussels this week.

While trumpeting Germany as Ukraine’s second-biggest weapons supplier after the United States, Scholz has repeatedly refused to send Taurus cruise missiles to Ukraine, fearing this could draw his country into a direct conflict with Russia. He also drew fire from allies, including Zelensky himself, for holding a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin in November, for the first time in almost two years, which critics saw as a bid for domestic political gain.

“Germany will remain Ukraine’s strongest supporter in Europe,” Scholz wrote on X, adding that he would promise Zelensky “further military equipment worth 650 million euros”, to be delivered this month. The package includes IRIS-T air defence systems, Leopard 1 tanks and armed drones, a defence ministry spokesperson said. On Sunday, new European Council president Antonio Costa and new EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas visited Kyiv on their first day in office to demonstrate the EU’s



Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz visit a makeshift memorial place displaying Ukrainian flags, in Kyiv. — Reuters

support.

Backing for Ukraine is shaping up as a major issue in Germany’s election. Friedrich Merz, the conservative opposition leader who is on course to unseat Scholz, has said Germany should send Taurus missiles and at the weekend said Scholz was raising unnecessary fears. Roderich Kiesewetter from the Christian Democrats (CDU) accused Scholz of “campaigning on the backs of the Ukrainian population and at the same time ... feeding the Russian fear narrative”. “He is increasingly isolating Germany and endangering our security,” he told Monday’s Augsburger Allgemeine newspaper. Moscow’s troops have been capturing village after village in Ukraine’s east, pushing to fully seize the industrial Donbas region, while Russian airstrikes continue to target a hobbled Ukrainian energy grid as winter sets

in.

Kyiv has long demanded Moscow withdraw all troops from its territory. It also wants Western security guarantees comparable to Nato membership to prevent Russia from attacking again. Moscow, which controls nearly a fifth of Ukrainian territory, demands recognition of its annexation of Ukrainian land and permanent neutrality for Ukraine.

Last week Zelensky floated the idea of Ukraine being granted Nato membership even while Russia occupies some captured territory, which he said could end the “hot stage” of the war.

On Sunday, he clarified that any invitation to join Nato must extend to all Ukrainian territory, even if the alliance’s collective defence agreement might not operate in areas occupied by Russian forces. — Reuters

Georgian president seeks Europe’s support as she defies govt

TBILISI: Georgia’s president, locked in a standoff with her own government, appealed to European countries on Monday to confront what she described as a Russian attempt to impose control on her nation.

President Salome Zourabichvili was speaking after a fourth night of clashes between protesters and police after the governing Georgian Dream party announced last week that it was suspending talks on joining the European Union.

Critics saw that as confirmation of a Russian-influenced shift away from pro-Western policies and back towards Moscow’s orbit, something the ruling party denies. “We want our European destiny to be returned to us,” Zourabichvili, who has personally remonstrated with riot police, told France Inter radio.

“This is the revolt of an entire country,” Zourabichvili, whose powers are mainly ceremonial, said

Russia, already at war in Ukraine, was conducting a “hybrid strategy” against Georgia and other countries such as Moldova and Nato and EU member Romania.

“There is a very strong need for very clear moral and political support” from Europe, said the 72-year-old president, who was born in France to Georgian parents and once served as French ambassador to Georgia. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov denied Russia was interfering in the situation in Georgia, which he compared to the 2014 “Maidan” revolution in Ukraine that overthrew a pro-Russian president.

Former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev warned on Sunday that Georgia was “moving rapidly along the Ukrainian path, into the dark abyss”, predicting it would end “very badly”.

The United States and the EU have voiced alarm at what they



Law enforcement officers walk on a street as fireworks explode during a protest against the new government, in Tbilisi. — Reuters

see as democratic backsliding by Georgia, a South Caucasus country of 3.7 million people that lies at the intersection of Europe and Asia and was once part of the Soviet Union. The government, which earlier this year enacted a law against “foreign agents”, say it is acting to protect

Georgia against outside interference and prevent it from being dragged, like Ukraine, into a war with Russia. Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze accused the opposition of “coordinated violence” aimed at overthrowing the constitutional order.

On Sunday night, thousands of protesters gathered again in the capital Tbilisi and some tossed fireworks at police, who responded with volleys of water cannon and tear gas.

Some protesters stayed out all night, but police eventually ended the standoff by moving them away from the parliament building. Georgia’s interior ministry said 21 police officers had been injured in the overnight protest.

Scores of protesters have also been injured in recent days. Georgia’s public ombudsman said 124 out of 156 people arrested at rallies had complained of the police using violence against them, calling this a “very disturbing number”. Hundreds of diplomats and civil servants have signed open letters protesting the decision to suspend talks with the EU and stop receiving any funds from the bloc for four years. — Reuters

OPINION

Will collective GCC call for Gaza ceasefire reap results?



THE ONGOING conflict in Gaza has reached a critical juncture, prompting urgent calls for a ceasefire from various international bodies, including the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

The 45th GCC Summit held in Kuwait underscored the need for an immediate and permanent cessation of Israeli military operations in Gaza. This call reflects a broader regional concern about the humanitarian crisis unfolding as a result of the conflict. Separately, the Sultanate of Oman has been taking a clear and firm stance regarding the ongoing conflict in Gaza, emphasising the urgent need for a ceasefire. The Foreign Ministry of Oman has expressed its strong condemnation of the violence occurring in Gaza and the West Bank, attributing much of this turmoil to the actions of Israeli occupation forces.

In its official statements, Oman has called for an immediate end to hostilities and highlighted the necessity of adhering to international laws and humanitarian principles. Since October 7, last year, Israel has engaged in extensive military operations in Gaza. The resulting violence has led to significant casualties and widespread destruction, exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation.

Reports indicate that over 44,000 people

have died as a result of these hostilities, with countless others displaced and in desperate need of aid. The GCC's response is not merely a political statement; it is a reflection of the urgent need to address human suffering and restore peace.

The GCC's final statement from the summit emphasised not only the cessation of hostilities but also the necessity for delivering humanitarian aid to those affected in Gaza. This focus highlights an understanding that while military actions may be politically motivated, they have profound implications for civilian populations.

The call for humanitarian assistance aligns with international norms regarding armed conflict, which prioritise the protection of civilians and their access to essential services. The stance of the GCC Council which comprises six member states — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates — is particularly significant given its geopolitical context.

The summit discussions also touched upon broader issues such as regional security affairs and economic integration among member states.

By advocating for a ceasefire and humanitarian support, the GCC aims to mitigate potential spillover effects that could destabilise neighbouring countries like

The GCC's final statement from the Kuwait summit emphasised not only the cessation of hostilities but also the necessity for delivering humanitarian aid to those affected in Gaza

Lebanon and further complicate relations with Iran. The international community's reaction to the GCC's calls will be crucial in shaping future developments.

There is a growing recognition that unilateral military actions can lead to long-term instability if not accompanied by diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving underlying conflicts.

The GCC's unified voice adds weight to calls for international intervention and support for peace initiatives that respect Palestinian rights and aspirations.

The GCC's call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza represents a critical step towards addressing both immediate humanitarian needs and longer-term political solutions.

As tensions continue to escalate in the region, it is imperative that all parties involved prioritise dialogue over violence and work collaboratively towards sustainable peace. In this regard, Oman has consistently advocated for peaceful resolutions through dialogue rather than military confrontation. We believe that collective responsibility among nations is crucial in addressing humanitarian crises like that in Gaza. By calling for de-escalation and adherence to relevant international resolutions, there is always positivity towards achieving a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

GLOBAL CALLS TO SAVE THE CHEETAH

This year, International Cheetah Day coincides with the premiere of 'Return of the Cheetah', a compelling new documentary on Discovery Channel that highlights critical conservation efforts aimed at protecting cheetahs in the wild. The film follows renowned biologist Hazen Audel to Namibia, home to the world's largest cheetah population, where he meets Dr Laurie Marker and her dedicated team at the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF).

Airing across Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Latin America, the documentary unveils the innovative strategies CCF employs to combat the threats cheetahs face, including habitat loss, human-wildlife conflict, and the illegal wildlife trade. It also features powerful moments, such as the rehabilitation and release of a wild cheetah, embodying CCF's mission of ensuring a sustainable future for these iconic predators. As Dr Marker puts it, the documentary serves 'as a celebration of the progress we've made, but also a reminder of the urgent work still ahead.'

Dr Marker's journey into cheetah conservation was not a career she initially planned. In the 1970s, she moved to Oregon, but was diverted from her path by a cheetah cub named Khayam, whom she met while working at Wildlife Safari. Hand-raising Khayam and taking her to Namibia for a pioneering rewilding project sparked Dr Marker's lifelong commitment to cheetah conservation.

In 1990, she moved permanently to Namibia to establish an international cheetah research and education centre on a 156,000-acre private wildlife reserve. Today, the centre is home to a modern genetics lab, veterinary clinic, model farm, and eco-tourism operations that provide employment to hundreds of people in some of Africa's most economically challenged regions.

To commemorate International Cheetah Day, Dr Marker will visit Egypt and explore historical sites like Luxor's Valley of the Kings, reflecting on the species' historic significance. In Ancient Egypt, cheetahs were revered symbols of speed and royalty, often kept as royal hunting companions. Yet today, fewer than 7,500 cheetahs remain in the wild, emphasising the urgency of global conservation efforts. Return of the Cheetah underscores the importance of apex predators in maintaining healthy ecosystems. Dr Marker believes, "Protecting cheetahs safeguards biodiversity, strengthens rangelands, and promotes sustainable human development. International Cheetah Day is not just a celebration of cheetahs but a global call to action to join us in this fight."

International Cheetah Day was established in 2010 to honour Khayam's birthday. This day is now celebrated by conservationists worldwide, highlighting the need to rally support for cheetah conservation.

The Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) is the world's leading organisation in cheetah research and conservation. Founded in 1990 by Dr Laurie Marker, CCF is dedicated to ensuring the survival of cheetahs in the wild.

The evolving impact of boycott in Oman

AS we mark the first anniversary of the boycott against several globally recognised companies in Oman due to their perceived political affiliations with Israel, it is evident that the movement has evolved into a significant cultural and economic phenomenon.

Sparked by online activism, the boycott united Omanis across generations in a shared commitment to social justice, prompting a rethinking of consumer habits and brand loyalty.

The impact has been particularly visible on the streets.

Prominent coffee chains, once synonymous with modernity and sophistication, now struggle to maintain their presence. In my neighbourhood, a once-thriving outlet has reduced its hours, laid off staff, and left broken equipment unattended.

Many Omanis have shifted their loyalties to local cafes, which offer better quality and provide a more authentic experience. This transformation underscores a broader trend: the rise of Omani hospitality and craftsmanship as a source of pride, replacing the faded allure of international brands as symbols of (past) coolness.

Similarly, the fast-food sector has faced challenges. Although many outlets appear emptier, some Omanis find it difficult to replace the distinct taste these franchises offer, especially when catering to children.

To navigate this dilemma, many have turned to delivery apps, balancing their desire to support local eateries with the convenience of familiar flavours. This situation illustrates the complexities of consumer behaviour, where ethical considerations coexist with practical compromises; even in a boycott, the allure of familiar tastes can lead to creative workarounds to avoid 'The Drive of Shame' to questioned franchises.

Meanwhile, the popularity of Omani restaurants has surged. These establishments have become preferred choices for quality food, free from the ethical concerns associated with global franchises. This shift reflects a growing



Palestinians receive cooked food rations as part of a volunteer initiative in a makeshift displacement camp in Mawasi Khan Yunis in the besieged Gaza Strip amid the ongoing war between Israel and the Hamas movement.
— AFP File



DR NAJMA AL ZIDJALY

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

appreciation for local cuisine, rejecting the notion that Western brands symbolise modernity. Oman's rich culinary heritage is rearing as consumers increasingly align their choices with cultural values.

The retail sector has also experienced notable changes. While certain large supermarkets have regained some traction, they have yet to return to their previous popularity levels. The boycott has left an indelible mark on consumer behaviour, with many Omanis demonstrating reduced loyalty to global chains and a heightened interest in corporate ethics and transparency.

Social media has played an instrumental role in amplifying the boycott's reach and impact. Through tweets and hashtags, Omanis have engaged in ongoing discussions about ethical consumption, holding global corporations accountable while promoting local alternatives. This digital activism has empowered citizens, enabling a movement that reflects the collective voice of a diverse demographic.

However, the boycott's early stages revealed a complex reality. Many Omanis expressed concerns about the economic implications for their fellow citizens employed

by these companies. Social media became a forum for these discussions, where individuals weighed the desire for ethical consumption against the need to protect local jobs. This duality highlighted the movement's multi-faceted nature, as Omanis sought to balance economic realities with their convictions.

Looking back, the boycott has proven to be more than a reaction to global events. It has become a catalyst for broader conversations about identity, values, and consumer choices in Oman. The rejection of brands perceived as politically complicit reflects a cultural shift toward prioritising ethical consumption and embracing local alternatives. This transformation not only underscores the power of grassroots action but also signifies a renewed connection to Omani heritage in the face of globalisation.

As Oman continues to navigate these dynamics, the lessons from this movement will likely resonate for years to come. The boycott serves as a reminder of the profound connections between global politics, cultural identity, and local consumer behaviour, shaping a future that prioritises values over convenience.

A wake-up call from the earth...



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is senior editor of Observer

WE THINK Earth is just an abode for all, not realising it evolves just like us. There has been continental drift, and it has endured climate changes where it has seen lands change features from having glaciers to deserts.

When we hear about events happening in faraway places, we are often unable to relate to them — until it happens to us. Just as November 2024 wrapped up, on November 30, just before noon, there were frantic inquiries being exchanged. “Did you notice anything? A tremor?”

A friend described the incident like this: “Yes, I did. It was a little severe for three seconds and earlier felt like someone was drilling the floor.” He lives in the Wilayat of Muttrah. He found it a bit shocking. His description is apt. More than anything else, we take the ground beneath us for granted. A vibration from underneath can unsettle everything.

They tell us to be grounded. And then you experience a tremor.

The Earth just made us know its presence. Engrossed in our daily thoughts, affairs, and emotions, aware of the sun and the moon defining our days and nights, we so easily forget about what we are perched on. The bird is aware of the branch it is resting on, and it knows if the branch is to snap, it has wings to fly.

The Science Daily described it so well: “The solid Earth breathes as volcanoes ‘exhale’ gases like carbon dioxide (CO2), which are essential in regulating global climate, while

carbon, ultimately from CO2, returns into the deep Earth when oceanic tectonic plates are forced to descend into the mantle at subduction zones.”

The trees are Earth’s lungs. Yet we forget their importance for our own existence when societies focus more on building urban habitats. What is even more interesting is that scientists believe oceanic plankton produce more than half of the oxygen on Earth. We don’t even see them, but our negative actions reach them too, in the form of water pollution.

Oceanservice.noaa.gov notes that, though they are invisible to the naked eye, they produce more oxygen than the largest redwoods. “Scientists estimate that roughly half of the oxygen production on Earth comes from the ocean.

The majority of this production is from oceanic plankton — drifting plants, algae, and some bacteria that can photosynthesise.”

But Earth is also known to shift and rearrange landscapes, and its interior structure is an active system with the crust, the mantle, and the core. Plate tectonics prove that the Earth has been on the move internally. Externally, we are an extension of Earth. Nevertheless, we take Earth for granted quite often, even though it is the foundation of our survival.

We are emotional beings and known to be impulsive. Yet it is about time we internalised an understanding of Earth into our core being. This is as much about understanding ourselves too —the making of the body, mind,

Nevertheless, we take earth for granted quite often, even though it is the foundation of our survival. We are emotional beings and known to be impulsive

and energy. The significance of our existence is a study on its own, and the individual is even more intriguing. Maybe it was a bit easier when communities lived within their own boundaries of knowledge. Today, the individual has expanded beyond the limitations of the mind through knowledge and imagination, leading to creativity that furthers experiences for others.

Civilisations that thrived in the past are historical wonders, mysteries for archaeologists and researchers to uncover. We are yet to know what else happened on Earth. But we do not have to go far to see a reminder of the past. All we have to do is visit Jiddat Al Harrassis, which is full of geological wonders.

‘Older geological features include 300-million-year-old glacial pavements that are well-preserved given their age,’ according to geologists.

If one is in Oman, this is a place one must visit. This is one of the reasons why the Sultanate of Oman is considered an open lab of geology and a haven for geologists and enthusiasts. So that drilling sound we heard on the weekend could be yet another wake-up call for all of us to remember Earth and realise what we can do individually and collectively. Most importantly, we must realise the wealth we have been blessed with.

Because Jiddat Al Harrassis, though classified as a dry, rocky desert, is a location where we can spot wildlife and vegetation — all thanks to fog.

Earth has all the answers.

FOUR DECADES OF HORROR AFTER BHOPAL DISASTER

ABHAYA SRIVASTAVA

Just after midnight, as poisonous plumes of smoke wafted through the Indian city of Bhopal four decades ago, Gas Devi was born, gasping for every breath. Her feeble cries were drowned out by the screams of men, women and children as they ran to escape the cloud of highly toxic gas leaking from the Union Carbide factory on the night of December 2, 1984.

Some 3,500 people were killed in the immediate aftermath, and up to 25,000 are estimated to have died overall in the world’s deadliest industrial disaster. Forty years later, the horror continues to blight the lives of those like Devi, as well as countless others born with deformities since that fateful night. Devi, a daily wage labourer, has constant chest pain, one of her lungs is not fully developed, and she keeps falling sick. “My life is a living hell,” Devi said, speaking at her shanty in Bhopal, the capital of the central state of Madhya Pradesh. Even if she wanted to, she cannot forget the night she was born.

“My parents named me Gas,” she said, her eyes welling up. “I believe this name is a curse. I wish I had died that night.”

Twenty-seven tonnes of methyl isocyanate (MIC), used in the production of pesticides, swept through the city of over two million people after one of the tanks storing the deadly chemical shattered its concrete casing.

As the white cloud of MIC shrouded areas close to the factory, people started collapsing in the streets. Nathuram Soni, now 81, was among the first to rush out.

“People were frothing from their mouths. Some had defecated, and some were choking in their own vomit,” said Soni.

A handkerchief tied over his nose, Soni used his pushcart to carry his wailing neighbours, many of them infants, to hospital.

Rashida Bee, co-founder of the Chingari Trust charity that offers free treatment to children of gas-affected families, believes those who died were fortunate. “At least their misery ended,” she said. “The unfortunate are those who survived.”

Her trust has seen more than 150 children being admitted this year alone with cerebral palsy, hearing and speech impairments, and other disabilities. She blames the disorders on the accident and the contamination of the groundwater.

In 1989, Union Carbide, in a partial out-of-court settlement with the Indian government, agreed to pay \$470 million in compensation to the victims. But the victims themselves were not consulted in the negotiations and received just \$500 each. The current owners have refused to pay further compensation for the catastrophe that continues to unfold to this day. — AFP

A promising scientific and economic launch

THE Sultanate of Oman has recently launched its first satellite, named OL-1, marking a significant technological advancement and enhancing the nation’s position in the global space arena. This milestone, achieved through the efforts of the company Oman Lens, reflects the country’s ambition to realise its scientific and technological visions using advanced methodologies. By launching OL-1, Oman positions itself among countries striving to strengthen their presence in space and leverage it to support sustainable development projects, aligning with its national vision for substantial achievements in space exploration and remote sensing systems.

Prior to this development, the Sultanate of Oman demonstrated its commitment to scientific progress by investing in SpaceX, the American aerospace manufacturer owned by billionaire Elon Musk. This investment underscores Oman’s strong will to integrate scientific advancements within its economic and developmental strategies.

Understanding the significance of the OL-1 satellite requires an examination of its scientific and technical features. Equipped with multiple digital technologies that combine artificial intelligence (AI) and advanced sensing systems, OL-1 operates as an intelligent digital platform capable of collecting data and images, analysing them in real-time without human intervention. Its integration with advanced sensors allows it to capture precise details of natural features and infrastructure across Oman’s geographical regions.

The deployment of OL-1 not only propels Oman’s progress in space sciences but also showcases the nation’s capabilities in utilising AI algorithms in innovative ways that transcend traditional frameworks. The satellite’s sensors gather data, which is then processed by AI systems more rapidly and effectively



This project mirrors Oman’s strategic vision.



DR MUAMAR BIN ALI AL TOBI

The writer is an Omani academic and researcher

than conventional models allow. The integration of such advanced technologies provides sustainable solutions to environmental and economic challenges by supplying accurate information that aids in making strategic decisions based on solid scientific foundations.

This project mirrors Oman’s strategic vision to enhance its ability to monitor natural resources, manage development projects, observe climatic and environmental changes, and track natural phenomena such as floods and droughts. By enabling proactive decision-making, Oman can mitigate negative impacts on the environment and society. Activating these technical systems contributes to environmental protection and ensures the sustainability of natural resources, aligning with Oman Vision 2040, which prioritises sustainable development at its core.

Moreover, the OL-1 satellite serves as an effective tool to support urban planning projects within the Sultanate of Oman. By providing accurate data on infrastructure and the distribution of urban areas, relevant authorities can better plan future projects and develop

cities to meet the growing needs of the population. The satellite also aids in monitoring agricultural lands and assessing soil fertility levels, thereby helping to improve agricultural production, enhance food security, and increase self-sufficiency in Oman. This highlights the project’s significant scientific and economic dimensions.

While some may question the necessity or economic viability of these activities, real-world statistics from other countries confirm the tangible investment potential and economic returns in the space sector. The American company Rocket Lab, for example, reported a revenue increase of up to 55 per cent in its third quarter of 2024, reaching approximately \$104.81 million, according to Investopedia. Similarly, India’s investment in manufacturing small satellites at reasonable costs positions it to capture a significant share of the satellite launch market, expected to reach \$14.54 billion by 2031, as reported by Reuters.

These examples suggest that decision-makers involved in Oman’s space projects recognise the need to move beyond traditional economic activities.

SPORTS

WEST ASIA CHAMPIONSHIP



Oman karate team members with their medals.

OMAN KARATE TEAM BAGS SIX MEDALS IN SHARJAH

MUSCAT: The Oman karate national team achieved a remarkable feat by winning six medals in the fifth edition of the West Asia Championship for Juniors, Youth, Under-21, and Seniors. The event took place at the Sharjah Sports Club arena in the United Arab Emirates on November 29-30. Around 500 athletes from 10 countries competed in a highly competitive sporting atmosphere.

The Omani team secured four silver medals and two bronze medals. The silver medalists were Sharifa al Shibibi, Idris al Batrani, Laith al Barwani and Al Yaqdhan al Abdali. Mukhtar al Amri and Mohammed al Shibibi bagged bronze medals for Oman. The Oman team was coached by Ali bin Said al Shabibi.

On the sidelines of the championship, the Asian Referees Course was held from November 26 to 28. It covered kata and kumite rules, along with qualification exams for the Judge (B) level referee badge. Several referees from the Oman Karate Committee participated and successfully passed the examinations, including Tariq bin Juma al Raisi, Khalifa bin Hamad al Rasbi, Munthir Bilal Hassan, Adel bin Salim al Hinai, Mohammed bin Khalifa al Hinai, Mohammed bin Abdullah al Mahrouqi, Ali bin Mushtaq al Lawati, Al Munthir bin Mohammed al Alawi, Zulfa al Kindi, Ahmed al Balidi, Samira Najafi and Ali Reza.

Additionally, referees Suleiman bin Khalifa al Hinai, Yusuf bin Muslim al Siyabi and Hilal bin Mohammed al Abdali renewed their kata and kumite referee badges. Coach Basil bin Abdunnabi al Balushi also successfully completed the Asian Kumite Coaches Course.

The championship's opening ceremony on November 29 was attended by the Chairman of the Oman Karate Committee, Salim bin Hamad al Mahrouqi. His presence provided a significant morale boost to the athletes, coaches and referees, inspiring them to achieve greater success and elevate karate in Oman.

India take on Malaysia, Pakistan meet Japan

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 2

The Men's Junior Asia Cup Muscat 2024 will enter its crucial knockout phase on Tuesday as the semifinals are set to take place at the Hockey Oman Stadium in the Wilayat of Al Amerat. In the first semifinal, Pakistan will face Japan and the match start at 4:30 pm while in the following match India take on Malaysia at 7 pm.

Meanwhile, Oman will compete against Chinese Taipei in the 9th and 10th place playoff and Bangladesh will take on Thailand. South Korea will meet China in classification matches.

Japan have been in formidable form throughout the tournament, which doubles as a qualifier for the FIH Junior Hockey Men's World Cup 2025. Their dominance was on full display in their commanding 9-1 win over Thailand in their final group match. The victory cemented their position at the top of their group, showcasing a strong defensive line-up.

Prior to this, Japan also delivered a solid 2-0 victory over South Korea.

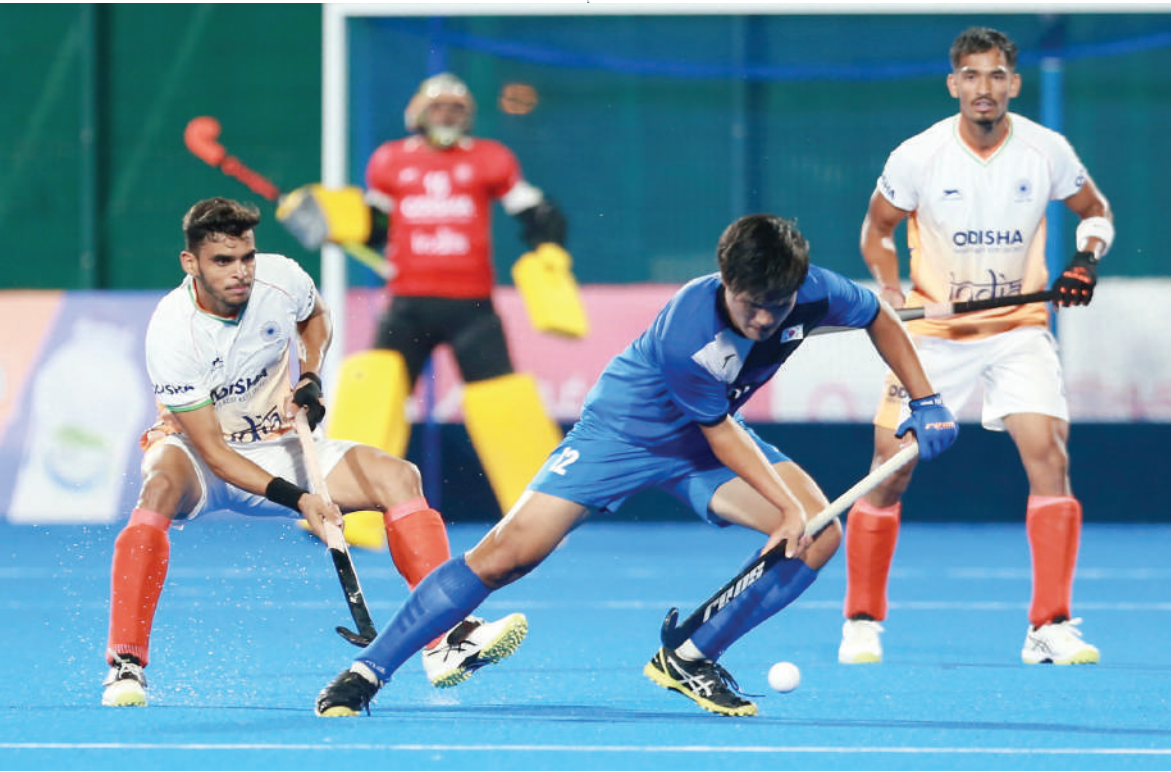
India continued to impress with their attacking prowess, overwhelming South Korea 8-1 in a masterclass performance. Arijit Singh opened the scoring in the third minute, setting the tone for a dominant display. India netted five goals in the first half and added three more in the second, with South Korea managing only a solitary goal through Kim Taehyun.

In an earlier group match, India posted the largest victory margin of the tournament, dismantling Chinese Taipei 16-0.

In Pool B, Pakistan triumphed over Malaysia in a hard-fought 4-1 win. Rising star Sufyan Khan struck early in the third minute, giving Pakistan the lead. Malaysia's Adam Ashraf equalised in the second quarter, but Pakistan regained control as Khan restored their advantage with his second goal. Abdul Qayyum further extended the lead in the final quarter before Khan sealed his hat-trick, ensuring a comprehensive victory for Pakistan.

In earlier group action, Malaysia and Bangladesh drew 2-2, while Oman fell to a 7-0 defeat at the hands of Pakistan.

The stakes are high, as the top six teams in the tournament will qualify for the FIH Junior Hockey Men's World Cup 2025, to be held in India.



Action from India vs South Korea and (below) Japan vs Thailand.



Seeb secure resounding win over Ahli Sidab in OBL

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 2

Seeb Club secured a resounding 84-38 victory over Ahli Sidab in the Oman Basketball League match at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in the Wilayat of Bausher.

The game witnessed Seeb's clear dominance from the outset, with the team excelling both offensively and defensively throughout. Key contributors included Ahmed al Sinani, Islam al Ajmi, Noah al Amri and Mazin al Hadidi, whose performances played a pivotal role in securing the victory.

On the Ahli Sidab side, standout efforts were made by Jilin Key and Humyar al Hasani, who worked hard to narrow the gap. Seeb began the match strongly, scoring 10 points through Noah al Amri, Mazin al Hadidi and Rashid al Zuhaibi. Ahli Sidab's response came through Humyar al Hasani, who netted three points for his team. However, Seeb quickly countered with six additional points from two three-pointers by Islam al Ajmi, ending the first quarter with a commanding 25-5 lead.

Ahli Sidab showed slight improvement in the second quarter, with Jilin Key and Sami al Ghilani scoring six points, reducing



Seeb and Ahli Sidab players fight for the ball during the Oman Basketball League. — Amir al Hamhami



Entering the third quarter with high morale, Seeb sought to widen the gap further by leveraging their speed and solid defence. The team added 18 points, while Ahli Sidab managed only 8 points, primarily from Jilin Key and Humyar al Hasani, who struggled against Seeb's robust defence. The quarter ended with Seeb leading 63-29.

The final quarter reaffirmed Seeb's complete dominance. Romeo and Alfred opened the scoring with a skilful layup under the basket, followed by successive points from Ahmed al Sinani.

Ahli Sidab attempted to respond through Jilin Key, who scored two points after a well-coordinated attack, but Seeb's efficiency in finishing plays and maintaining high concentration allowed them to extend their lead. Despite repeated efforts from Ahli Sidab, the game concluded with a decisive 84-38 victory for Seeb.

The match was officiated by an international referee team comprising Ahmed bin Darwish al Balushi as the first referee, Issam al Siyabi as the second referee and Rashid al Mashaifri as the third referee. The table officiating duties were handled by Hafidh Awlad Ahmed, Wafa al Samri, Majid al Akhzami, and technical supervisor Faris al Khalasi.

the gap to 25-11 at the start of the quarter. Despite this, Seeb continued to dominate by organising swift attacks and capitalising on defensive errors.

Noah al Amri and Mazin al Hadidi added more points with precise shots, allowing Seeb to close the first half with a comfortable 45-20 lead.

SPORTS

WASL SHOWDOWN



AL BASHAYER FACE AL AHLI BAHRAIN IN CRUCIAL MATCH IN MUSCAT TONIGHT

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 2

AL BASHAYER CLUB are set to play a crucial match this Tuesday evening as they face Bahrain's Al Ahli Club in the West Asia Super League (WASL) for basketball. The game will kick off at the main hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. Both teams are aiming for their first victory in the tournament, having suffered losses in the previous two rounds against Shabab Al Ahli (UAE) and Kuwait Club (Kuwait). This encounter is particularly significant as both sides are looking to avoid finishing at the bottom of the group.

Al Ahli Club arrived in Muscat on Monday and conducted a light training session to recover and prepare for the game. The West Asia Super League is considered a key platform for regional competition, with the group stage being played in a home and away format. Six teams will advance to the final stages, ultimately competing for the WASL title and the Asia Champions Cup. The winner of the tournament will then qualify for the Intercontinental Cup, the premier club competition under the International Basketball Federation (Fiba).

Al Bashayer conducted their final training session at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, with the players showing high spirits and optimism to deliver an impressive performance. The training included light drills, offensive tactics, and shooting practice from various distances and under the basket. All 14 players on the team's roster participated, including Mahmoud al Souli, Hadeed Bait Bukhait, Osama al Riyami, Tamim al Riyami, Ahmed al Halhali, Noah al Mahrouqi, Saeed al Saadi, Bassam al Busaidy, Eid Ghassan, as well as three foreign professionals from Serbia and the USA. The team is led by Serbian coach Arujan Vaskanin, assisted by national coach Mahmoud Ambo Ali.

This game represents a valuable opportunity for both teams to improve their group standings and stay in the competition. The WASL offers a unique experience for clubs to participate in a competitive regional tournament that gathers top teams from the area, contributing to raising the technical level and enhancing their continental and international presence.



The men's and women's champions of MB Padel Championship with the chief guest and officials. — Hussein al Muqbali

Younis-Munir, Sara-Maryam duos clinch MB padel titles

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 2

YOUNIS AL RAWAHI and Munir al Rawahi clinched first place in the men's category of the 2024 Mohammed Al Barwani Padel Championship, while Sara al Balushi and Maryam al Balushi claimed title in the women's category.

The closing ceremony of the championship took place under the auspices of HH Sayyid Fahr bin Fatik al Said at the Oman Automobile Club (Strike Centre).

The championship included rounds held in five governorates, with more than 600 male and female participants of various

ages, ranging from 13 to 54 years old, and an audience of over 3,000 people.

In the men's category, the team of Younis and Munir al Rawahi made it to the final, where they defeated Abdullah al Barwani and Ahmed al Barwani 6-1, 6-4.

In the women's category, Sara al Balushi and Maryam al Balushi reached the final, where they triumphed over Fatima al Nabhani and Ither al Balushi 7-5, 6-2.

Ali al Lawati, from the tournament organising committee, confirmed that the event marked an important turning point in enhancing padel sports locally, as the tournament succeeded in achieving its goals in terms of organisation and the outstanding performance level of the participants.

Al Lawati added, "the tournament

showcased a noticeable development in the level of both male and female players. The competitions were intense and exciting, reflecting the spread of padel sports across various age groups and both genders in Oman. These competitions provided an opportunity to showcase local talents and highlight their competitive capabilities."

He also mentioned that the championship was not just a sporting event, but it also significantly contributed to strengthening the presence of padel in the Omani sports scene, opening up opportunities for a new generation of players to develop their skills.

He said: "One of the major outcomes of the tournament is that it successfully attracted a large base of people interested in padel, reinforcing the importance of organising more similar sports events."

OTA's third monthly tennis championship concludes

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 2

THE THIRD monthly tennis championship organised by the Oman Tennis Association, concluded on Sunday with extensive participation from players of various age groups and nationalities. The championship witnessed strong competition among nearly 100 male and female players at the tennis courts of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. The event was held under the auspices of the Secretary-General of the Oman Tennis Association, Munther al Barwani, and attended by the players' families and the coaching staff of the national teams.

The championship culminated

with the final match in the Under 14 category, which brought together Abdulrahman al Rahbi and Sharon. Sharon won the match with a score of 9-3, showcasing the high technical level of the participants. The strong performances reflected the players' development and the benefits of participating in such regularly organised tournaments aimed at enhancing their technical skills and improving their abilities.

At the conclusion of the third monthly championship, several players excelled across various categories. In the Under-18 Boys and Girls category, Abdulrahman al Rahbi claimed first place, followed by Azzan al Busaidy in second. The Under-14 Boys category saw Sharon securing the top spot, with



Abdulrahman al Rahbi finishing as the runner-up. In the Under-12 Boys category, Mithun Brahman emerged as the champion, while Kavinraj Arunraj took second place. Among the girls, Talia al Busaidy demonstrated her prowess

by winning both the Under-14 and Under-12 categories, with Arin al Azki and Jigesha Diori finishing second in their respective categories. In the Under-10 Boys category, Riyan Tyagi clinched first place, followed by Kavinraj Arunraj.

The mini tennis categories also showcased young talent, with Omar al Shaibani securing first place in both the Under-9 and Under-8 categories, while Hatem al Rahbi finished second in both groups.

Munther al Barwani emphasised the importance of continuing to organise such tournaments to provide young players with more opportunities to gain experience and competitiveness.

He highlighted that these events significantly contribute to improving the performance of national team players. Al Barwani also noted that the association is working on various programmes to expand the game's base, with plans to host upcoming tournaments in Oman.

SPORTS



VERSTAPPEN DEFIES GRID-DROP TO CLAIM QATAR GP

RED BULL'S
Max Verstappen won the Qatar Grand Prix on Sunday, a day after being stripped of pole position, as McLaren and Ferrari took their constructors' title duel down to next weekend's last race of the season in Abu Dhabi.

The win was the Dutch driver's ninth of the Formula One season, second in a row in Qatar and the first since he wrapped up his fourth successive title in Las Vegas a week earlier.

"Karma is a wonderful thing. You definitely did not drive unnecessarily slowly today. Great job," said Red Bull boss Christian Horner over the radio after Verstappen took the chequered flag.

Stewards had handed the champion a one-place grid drop on Saturday for driving too slowly, with Mercedes' George Russell the beneficiary but making a poor start from the top slot and finishing fourth. Ferrari's Charles Leclerc finished runner-up, 6.031 seconds behind, after McLaren's Lando Norris was handed a surprisingly tough 10 second stop/go penalty for speeding during yellow warning flags.

That dropped the Briton from second, a position seized at the start, and challenging for the lead to 10th at the chequered flag with the consolation of fastest lap for a bonus point to double his meagre score.

On Saturday sprint winner Oscar Piastri finished third for McLaren in a race punctuated by crashes and three safety car periods.

McLaren's lead was trimmed to 21 points with 44 remaining to be won, and a first constructors' title since 1998 beckoning, while reigning champions Red Bull were mathematically out of contention.

LOT OF FUN
"Lando and I were within 1.8s of each other the whole time, pushing each other and honestly, it was a lot of fun out there," said Verstappen. Norris, now only eight points clear of Leclerc, saw a missed opportunity as others questioned the harshness of the penalty. "I don't know if I've missed it or just been dumb, but the rule is, if you don't slow down under the yellow that's the penalty, so it's fair penalty," he said.

"I've made the job of the team much harder than it needs to be.

The team are doing a great job but I've let them down."

Ferrari's Carlos Sainz was also slowed by a puncture and long pitstop, finishing sixth with Alpine's Pierre Gasly an impressive fifth to send the Renault-owned team back up to sixth overall.

Fernando Alonso was seventh for Aston Martin and China's Zhou Guanyu scored Sauber's first points of the season with eighth.

Kevin Magnussen was ninth for Haas, who dropped back behind Alpine.

HAMILTON WOES
Seven times world champion Lewis Hamilton collected a five second penalty for a false start, then a puncture and finished only 12th in his penultimate race for Mercedes before moving to Ferrari.

As a final blow of the night, he was also handed a drive-through penalty for speeding in the pit lane.

"The car and I don't get along really that well," said the Briton, who at one point asked to retire.

"We were very far off at the beginning. We didn't have enough wing to start with, the cars were quite different and it wasn't really great to drive. But it's my fault so apologies to the team for the false start and the pit lane incident."

Verstappen's team mate Sergio Perez also had a dismal time, failing to finish.

The safety car was deployed initially when Alpine's Esteban Ocon collided with Nico Hulkenberg's Haas, with the Frenchman then taking out the Williams of Argentine rookie Franco Colapinto on the rebound. Hulkenberg made it back to the pits with the remains of the rear left tyre flailing but eventually retired.

Williams' Alex Albon and Aston Martin's Lance Stroll also clashed, with the latter pitting for fresh tyres before being told to retire.

Albon's wing mirror flew off his car at the halfway point and landed on the track, where it lay until Sauber's Valtteri Bottas ran over it and scattered sharp debris across the track that may have caused Sainz and Hamilton's punctures.

Race control reacted with the yellow flags that were to catch out Norris, waiting seven laps before then deploying the safety car again.

Bottas, who finished 11th, and RB's Liam Lawson also tangled on lap five after the safety car came in. — Reuters

Verstappen wins for ninth time this season

Norris handed heavy penalty, takes fastest lap in 10th

McLaren's lead cut to 21 points from 30

Team title to be decided in final race in Abu Dhabi

Zhou scores Sauber's first points of 2024



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BOOSTING OUTPUT



Discussions also covered the roles of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and Oman Investment Authority in food security projects.

FOOD SECURITY SYMPOSIUM EXPLORES OPPORTUNITIES

MUSCAT: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) organised a symposium in Muscat to discuss the state of food security in Oman, investment opportunities, and the role of technology in boosting agricultural output. Key stakeholders, including government officials and industry leaders, participated in the event.

The symposium was inaugurated by Eng Yaqoub bin Khalfan al Busaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Fisheries.

Rashid bin Amer al Musalhi, First Deputy Chairman of the OCCI, highlighted the symposium's objective to enhance Oman's agricultural and fisheries sectors as critical components of its food security system and economic diversification strategy.

Eng Saleh bin Mohammed al Shanfari, Chairman of the Food Security Committee, emphasised Oman's advanced position in global food security indicators, attributing success to collaborative efforts among farmers, fishermen, and government bodies. He noted that ongoing investment initiatives are enhancing production, increasing exports, and reducing food import costs.

Discussions also covered the roles of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and Oman Investment Authority in food security project.

Omani bourse on path to Emerging Market status

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 2

OMAN'S efforts to modernise its capital markets have positioned the Sultanate of Oman closer to earning Emerging Market (EM) classification by global index providers such as MSCI and FTSE. A new report by Oman Investment Bank (OIB) highlights the strides made in equity and fixed income markets while outlining the challenges that remain.

ROAD TO EM INCLUSION
Recent IPOs on the Oman's bourse, Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) — notably by entities such as OQ Exploration and Production, OQ Gas Network, and Abraj Energy— have bolstered Oman's bid for EM status, according to the report.

These listings have significantly expanded the market capitalisation of MSX, which has more than doubled since 2020 to reach \$32 billion. Analysts anticipate that the total market cap could further



Recent IPOs on the MSX have bolstered Oman's bid for EM status.

grow to \$64-66 billion by 2030, driven by robust IPO pipelines and government-backed reforms.

Despite this progress, Oman is unlikely to be reviewed for EM inclusion before 2026 due to MSCI's stringent criteria and the need for greater market depth and liquidity.

However, the report anticipates inclusion by 2027 if Oman sustains its current trajectory and implements critical reforms, OIB notes in its report.

Oman's reclassification journey is underpinned by its

is projected to grow to \$70 billion by 2030, with non-government issuances driving this expansion.

ENHANCING MARKET EFFICIENCY
The report underscores the need for further modernisation to align with global standards. Key recommendations include enabling custodians to act as clearing members, integrating with Euroclear, promoting over-the-counter debt trading, and introducing hedging mechanisms.

Enhanced investor relations and increased free float in equities are also pivotal for boosting liquidity and trading volumes, which are projected to surge from \$13 million daily in 2024 to \$50-60 million by 2030.

Oman's ambitious reforms reflect its vision for a diversified economy, with capital markets playing a central role in attracting foreign investment and fostering sustainable growth. While challenges remain, the outlook suggests a promising trajectory for Oman's financial ecosystem.

OMAN PROMOTES GOLF TOURISM WITH GLOBAL PARTNERS

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism hosted a workshop to boost golf tourism, engaging 40 international tourism companies from Asia and Europe and 20 local and Omani firms specialising in golf packages.

The workshop facilitated meetings between international and local stakeholders to promote Oman as a premier golf tourism destination.

Khalid bin Mohammed al Azri, Director of Tourism Patterns at

the Ministry, highlighted Oman's strategic location, natural beauty and cultural heritage as key attractions.

Al Azri stressed that golf tourism not only enhances sports tourism, but also diversifies the economy

and creates job opportunities for Omanis.

Participants toured key tourist destinations in Muscat, Al Sharqiyah North and Al Dakhiliyah governorates as part of the programme.

Oman-China MoU on hydrogen fuel cell trucks

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 2

FTXT Energy Technology Ltd, a Chinese-based specialist in fuel cell systems for the transportation sector, has announced the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with an Omani firm aimed at exploring strategic cooperation in the field of hydrogen fuel cell commercial vehicles.

The Omani partner in the MoU has been named as Synergy Investment LLC, a well-established player in the clean energy, e-mobility and related green economy sectors.

"The signing of this strategic cooperation is an important reflection of the formal establishment of a hydrogen energy strategic partnership between the two parties. It marks a significant step for GWM



Representatives from the two parties at FTXT's facilities in China.

Hydrogen-FTXT in its layout of the Middle East market.

Additionally, it will provide new impetus for the green energy transition and environmental protection in the Middle East region," said FTXT in a statement.

Under the MoU, both parties will jointly explore the establishment of research and development, production, sales, and related service sites, technical support,

and after-sales services for hydrogen fuel cell commercial vehicles in Oman and other Middle Eastern countries.

Together, they aim to develop the hydrogen fuel cell commercial vehicle market in the Middle East and promote the internationalization of the hydrogen energy industry, the Chinese partner further noted.

Significantly, FTXT Energy Technology is a subsidiary of Great Wall Motor (GWM), China's largest SUV and pickup manufacturer, which enjoys an expanding presence in the global electric car market.

A specialist in the development, production and sales of fuel cell and hydrogen storage systems and components, FTXT currently operates five R&D centers in Shanghai and Baoding (China), Canada, Japan, and Germany

FTXT says it plans to leverage its

extensive experience in the field of hydrogen energy to collaborate with vehicle manufacturers to provide Omani partner Synergy with advanced hydrogen fuel cell technologies and products, as well as hydrogen energy vehicles.

"Synergy will be responsible for market development and localization operations," it said.

"By fully leveraging their respective industrial, technological, and resource advantages, they plan to create and complete demonstration operations of hydrogen fuel cell vehicles in the Sultanate of Oman within the next 2-3 years.

They are actively promoting the construction of hydrogen energy infrastructure and diversified applications of hydrogen energy scenarios, providing strong support for the development of the hydrogen energy industry in the Middle East."

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Oman Observer is media partner to the 12th global edition of CYSEC Summit and Awards.

OMAN TO HOST 12TH GLOBAL CYSEC SUMMIT AND AWARDS

MUSCAT: The National Cybersecurity Industry Programme has estimated the value of the Omani cybersecurity market at around \$50 million, with a projected annual growth rate of 24 per cent to reach \$58 million in 2024. Furthermore, Omani companies are expected to spend approximately \$225 million annually on cybersecurity by 2025. Oman is stepping up to the challenge of building a secure and resilient digital future.

The 12th Global Edition of CYSEC Summit and Awards, to be held at the Mövenpick Hotel & Apartments Ghala Muscat, will reinforce the Sultanate of Oman’s commitment to cybersecurity excellence and align with Oman Vision 2040, which prioritises digital transformation as a cornerstone of its national development.

This prestigious event, organised by CYSEC Global, is set to host over 120 cybersecurity experts, policymakers and thought leaders from across the globe, making it a significant milestone in the region’s cybersecurity journey. The summit will be graced by VVIP guests of honour, including Bader al Salehi, Director-General of Oman National CERT and Head of ITU Regional Cybersecurity Center, and Dr Saud al Shoeili, Director-General of ICT Policies and Governance at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

The summit will feature over 25 prominent speakers, including:

Iman Ahmed – the Director of Cybersecurity Development at Oman National CERT; Rasha al Abdali, Assistant Director-General of Policies and Governance, Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology; Dr Haitham al Hajri – CISO, Oman Housing Bank; Sara al Kindi – IM&T Cyber Defence Head, Petroleum Development Oman; Amjid Ali – General Manager IT, Al Ansari Trading Enterprise; Muhammad Moqet ur Rab, Telecom Cyber Security Strategist at Omantel, Chairman of Middle East Fraud and Security Group, GSMA

These speakers will share actionable insights on combating cyber threats, advancing digital security and fostering innovation in sectors critical to Oman’s economy, such as banking, oil and gas, and public governance.

The summit also celebrates exceptional women shaping Oman’s digital future, through its SheLeads Segment; Some noteworthy names include: Laïla al Hadhrami – Executive Director, Oman IT Society; Thuraya al Harthy – Director, Government Digital Services Unified Portal, Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology; Hawraa Fida Hussain – Head of Customer Experience, Al Mouj Muscat; Maha al Habsi – President of Blockchain Club & COO, Ai Tech Academy; Fathiya al Maskari – Director of Training, ACFE Oman

For more information and registration details, visit oman.cysecglobal.com

NBO EMPOWERS OMANI YOUTH WITH 2024 INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) has successfully completed its 2024 Internship Programme offering more than 500 students the opportunity to gain practical work experience in a dynamic corporate environment. This initiative aligns with NBO’s commitment to unlock opportunities for Omani youth, while contributing to their professional growth and developing their future workforce. With significant participation

from higher education students, the programme lasted for 1-3 months and offered participants the chance to apply classroom-gained knowledge in real-world situations while learning from experienced professionals. Commenting on the program’s success, Ali bin Moosa al Abri, General Manager & Chief Human Resources Officer at NBO, said: “At NBO, we are committed to nurture and develop local skillsets and talents by providing valuable

learning opportunities through our internship programme. We also aim to empower younger Omanis with practical experience that complements their academic studies and equips them with the necessary skills they needed to thrive in the future job market. Our goal is to contribute to the growth of Oman’s economy by fostering a highly skilled and capable workforce.” This year’s programme emphasised inclusivity, with 75% of the interns being female.

Festival of Joy campaign with exclusive benefits

NOW is a good time to own a Toyota and benefits with exclusive Festival of Joy benefits. Get service from 3 years / 30,000 km up to 6 years / 60,000 km (whichever is earlier), insurance 1 year and chance to win 1 out of 16 units of iPhone 16 Pro Max. The campaign is valid up to January 23, 2025 (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms & Conditions apply.

Customers can visit any Saud Bahwan Automotive showroom for exact details.) In Oman, Toyota offers an exciting line-up of vehicles, including the all-new Camry, Land Cruiser Prado, Corolla, Hilux, RAV4 and Yaris, each one packed with performance, style and reliability.

Since 1982, the Camry has won over drivers worldwide with its refined design, superb performance and top-notch quality. The new Camry is available with a choice of two engines: a powerful 2.5-litre four-cylinder engine delivering 201 hp and 240 Nm of torque with an eight-speed Direct-Shift automatic transmission and an efficient hybrid version that combines a petrol engine with two electric motors for

In Oman, Toyota offers an exciting line-up of vehicles, including the all-new Camry, Land Cruiser Prado, Corolla, Hilux, RAV4, and Yaris, each one packed with performance, style and reliability.



The campaign is valid up to January 23, 2025.

226 hp, connected to a smooth ECVT transmission for an elevated driving experience. The new Prado fuses its renowned Land Cruiser heritage with modern tech to tackle off-road challenges and daily drives with ease. The latest model introduces electric power steering for greater control and less road impact. Drivers can choose between a 2.4-litre turbo petrol or a 2.8-litre turbo diesel engine, both paired with an 8-speed automatic transmission.

A trusted companion for every journey, the Corolla balances power, fuel efficiency and advanced safety

features. It’s powered by a 2.0-litre four-cylinder Dynamic Force engine producing 168 hp and 20.39 kg-m of torque, paired with a Direct Shift CVT for a responsive drive. For those prioritising fuel efficiency, a 1.6-litre version offers 121 hp and 15.7 kg-m of torque with a CVT. Built for adventure, the Toyota Hilux offers impressive power with its 4.0-litre V6 engine producing 235 hp and 38.3 kg-m of torque. The 4X4 variant, powered by a 2.7-litre petrol engine, is available in both a 5-speed manual and a 6-speed automatic transmission.

Bank Muscat continuous to support Omani youth

MUSCAT: Young people are the collar bone of society, and Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in Oman, works relentlessly to empower youth by continually organising training programmes to help them develop their professional skills and grant them access to career opportunities across the Bank’s departments and branches.

It is important to examine the outcomes achieved annually in this area and explore potential future paths, creating an opportunity for growth.

Bank Muscat recognises the importance of developing human resources, and it has established a strategic plan for developing the capabilities of Omani youth across different



Bank Muscat recognises the importance of developing human resources.

specialties. The Bank is committed to adopting various innovative initiatives and programmes to form a fertile environment for creative ideas and help youth to

learn from the experiences of others. To effectively implement this plan, the Bank annually assess the needs of its various departments across a range of financial disciplines.

On this occasion, Said bin Salim al Aufi, General Manager – Human Resources & Administration at Bank Muscat, explained: “Omani youth are active partners in the current development plans and they are the leaders of tomorrow.” “In the Bank, we take pride in our young employees who work across the various departments and branches. Considering their pivotal role, we are keen to provide various training and learning opportunities to help them enhance their performance and achieve their goals. I would like to take this glorious occasion to extend my appreciation to our employees for their ongoing efforts to strengthen the Bank’s leadership position.”

Sarooj awarded two infrastructure projects by MoTCIT

MUSCAT: Sarooj, a trusted leader in Oman’s construction and infrastructure sector, is proud to announce the awarding of two major projects by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT). Valued at a combined total of RO 90,228,154, these projects highlight Sarooj’s unparalleled ability to deliver large-scale, high-impact developments that contribute to Oman’s long-term progress.

The first project involves the construction of a dual carriageway road connecting Adam to Thamrait, spanning 120 kilometres. This vital infrastructure will enhance regional connectivity, support economic integration and improve transport efficiency across the Sultanate of Oman. The total value of this project amounts to RO 70,031,554. The second project, “Construction of roads at Jabal Shams,”



Sarooj integrates state-of-the-art solutions and environmentally conscious practices.

demonstrates Sarooj’s capacity to address complex engineering challenges in mountainous terrains. This single carriageway road, valued at RO 20,196,600, will establish a critical link in one of Oman’s most iconic and remote areas, promoting accessibility and sustainable development. Sarooj is committed to delivering infrastructure that not only meets immediate functional needs, but also aligns with Oman’s

broader vision of sustainable growth and innovation. With a proven track record in executing diverse and challenging projects, Sarooj integrates state-of-the-art solutions and environmentally conscious practices to ensure the highest standards of quality and sustainability. These awards reinforce Sarooj’s trusted reputation for delivering critical infrastructure projects that align with Oman’s vision for sustainable development.

BUSINESS

STRATEGIC PLATFORM



Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, touring the various sections of the Oman AgroFood Expo on Monday.

6TH OMAN AGROFOOD EXPO DRAWS PARTICIPANTS FROM 19 COUNTRIES

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, DEC 2

THE 6th edition of the Oman Exhibition for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Products (AgroFood) opened at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on December 2, 2024, under the auspices of Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. The event, which runs until December 4, brings together more than 170 exhibitors from 19 countries, showcasing cutting-edge innovations and solutions across agriculture, fisheries, and food production sectors.

Dr Al Habsi highlighted the significance of the exhibition as an international platform. “This exhibition is vital for us, as it serves as a stage for private sector companies, both local and international, to explore opportunities in the food industry.

“It also welcomes related sectors such as food testing laboratories and logistics providers. We strongly encourage local companies to participate and benefit from the exposure offered by this important platform,” he said.

The exhibition underscores Oman’s commitment to fostering innovation and adopting the latest technologies in agriculture, fisheries and food production.

It provides a key opportunity for entrepreneurs to discover investment prospects, as well as explore advanced products, state-of-the-art machinery and sustainable practices aimed at enhancing industry standards in Oman.

This year’s participants include representatives from countries such as China, India, Germany, Saudi Arabia, the UK, and many others. Exhibitors are presenting a wide range of advanced technologies, innovative products and sustainable solutions, reflecting Oman’s growing role as a hub for agricultural and fisheries advancements.

The event is a strategic platform that bridges the gap between companies, government bodies and decision-makers in the public and private sectors.

It aligns with Oman Vision 2040, which prioritises sustainable growth and technological transformation across agriculture, fisheries and food production.

MUSCAT: In its ongoing efforts to enhance transparency and effective communication between companies and investors, the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) celebrated the launch of its Best Practices Guide for Investor Relations under the auspices of Ibtisam bint Ahmed al Faroojiyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion.

This guide represents a strategic step aimed at strengthening investor confidence and developing communication channels between companies and stakeholders, aligning with international best practices in this field.

The guide underscores the importance of building a strong relationship between companies and investors by providing clear policies and established procedures that contribute to attracting new investors and increasing the



The guide represents a strategic step aimed at strengthening investor confidence.

confidence of existing ones.

It also aims to ensure compliance with regulations and laws related to investor relations, enhancing the reputation of companies in local and global markets and helping them

achieve institutional sustainability through the application of disclosure and governance standards.

This initiative is part of MSX’s commitment to developing the capital market in Oman and

Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve attracts eco-tourists

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SUR, DEC 2

RAS Al Jinz Turtle Reserve on Oman’s east coast has emerged as a premier eco-tourism destination, attracting over 24,000 visitors as of October-end 2024. This figure underscores its global reputation as a sanctuary for endangered sea turtles and a hub for sustainable tourism.

The reserve recorded peak visitation in January and August, coinciding with holiday seasons and optimal turtle nesting periods.

While foreign tourists constituted the majority, a substantial number of Omani visitors reflected the growing local appreciation for preserving the nation’s natural heritage.

In 2023, the reserve welcomed 12,192 visitors, with 5,764 Omanis showcasing strong domestic interest.

However, international tourists made up the bulk of visitors, with 39,511 individuals travelling from abroad to witness the extraordinary sight of turtles nesting and hatching.

Additional demographic highlights included 788 visitors from GCC countries, 1,482 from other Arab nations, and 1,791 students participating in educational tours.

The upward trend has continued into 2024, with 23,137 visitors recorded by October.

Foreign tourists accounted for 57.3 per cent of total arrivals, Omanis



By fostering eco-tourism, the reserve not only aids conservation efforts, but also contributes to Oman’s economic diversification goals

NASSER BIN MOHAMMED AL GHILANI
Director of Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve

comprised 33.2 per cent, and notable contributions came from GCC nations (1,748 visitors), other Arab countries (790), and student groups (658). Visitor numbers mirror Oman’s seasonal and climatic conditions. In 2023, November led with 8,280 visitors, followed by October (6,951) and February (6,179), as cooler weather and tourism-friendly conditions prevailed. Similarly, in 2024, January (4,112) and August (3,731) were the most popular months, correlating with vacation period. Conversely, summer months like May and June recorded lower attendance due to high temperatures.

Nasser bin Mohammed al Ghilani, Director of Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve, emphasised the reserve’s commitment to sustainability, highlighting the delicate balance between tourism and conservation.

“Our foremost responsibility is to safeguard the nesting habitats of endangered turtles. Achieving this requires strict management practices and eco-friendly tourism initiatives,” he stated. To minimise environmental impact, the reserve enforces restricted access to sensitive nesting areas and offers guided tours led by trained experts. Education is also a cornerstone of its mission, with programmes designed to inspire awareness and environmental stewardship among visitors, particularly younger generations.

Ras Al Jinz plays a critical role in supporting Oman Vision 2040, which prioritises sustainability and environmental preservation as pillars of national development. “By fostering eco-tourism, the reserve not only aids conservation efforts, but also contributes to Oman’s economic diversification goals,” Al Ghilani noted.

The reserve exemplifies how natural heritage can drive tourism while adhering to sustainable practices. It demonstrates that ecological preservation and visitor engagement can coexist, creating a lasting impact on both the environment and the economy.

Looking ahead, the reserve aims to expand its educational programmes, enhance eco-friendly facilities and elevate the visitor experience.

“Our mission extends beyond drawing tourists; we strive to instil a deeper understanding of the vital connection between tourism and conservation,” Al Ghilani explained.

With its growing international recognition and steadfast commitment to sustainability, Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve is set to remain a cornerstone of Oman’s eco-tourism strategy.

It stands as a shining example of how a nation can balance environmental protection with economic development, leaving a legacy of conservation for future generations.

Musandam’s heritage projects gain momentum

MUSANDAM: A high-level delegation, led by Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, and including Eng Ibrahim bin Said al Kharousi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage, and Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, reviewed key social investment projects undertaken by OQ Exploration and Production Company (OQEP) in Musandam Governorate.

The delegation, joined by Eng Ahmed al Azkawi, CEO of OQEP, and other officials, visited the Dibba Archaeological Visitor Centre in the Wilayat of Dibba, a flagship project implemented by the ministry and funded by OQEP in partnership with the Governor’s Office. This initiative underscores OQEP’s commitment to community engagement and social responsibility.

The Dibba Archaeological Visitor Centre,



The delegation visited the Dibba Archaeological Visitor Centre in the Wilayat of Dibba.

spanning 17,562 square metres, houses essential facilities and interactive exhibits that highlight the historical and cultural significance of the area.

The site includes an archaeological excavation zone featuring artefacts from

the Bronze Age, Late Stone Age and Islamic periods. Eng Al Kharousi described the project as a pivotal step in leveraging Musandam’s rich heritage to attract local and international tourists.

“The centre combines interactive historical displays with innovative methods for showcasing artefacts, offering a comprehensive educational experience. It aims to support cultural tourism, create employment opportunities for local youth and enhance the region’s economic vitality,” he stated.

He also expressed gratitude to OQEP and the Governor’s Office for their financial and logistical support, which has been instrumental in preserving and promoting Oman’s heritage.

“We are confident the centre will become a cultural beacon, enhancing Musandam’s position as a premier heritage tourism destination in Oman,” Al Kharousi added.

MSX launches best practices guide for investor relations

enhancing its competitiveness regionally and internationally.

The market emphasised the importance of investor relations as an integral part of the integrated financial system that works to attract capital, respond to the growing needs of the investment community, and enhance Oman’s position as a regional and international financial centre.

Majda al Mamari, Director of the Sustainable Investment Center, stated, “Today’s launch comes as a continuation of the market’s strategic plans to achieve sustainable investment, which began with the launch of the Corporate Governance Guidelines last year and the ESG disclosure platform.

Today, we are in the second phase, where the importance of launching this guide lies in clarifying the role of the investor relations officer in each company as a bridge of

communication with all investors, analysts, and those interested in the economy and investment by providing financial and non-financial data (environmental, social and governance).

The guide provides practical guidance for companies, including methods of communicating with investors, determining disclosure mechanisms and managing investor expectations to contribute to their satisfaction.”

She added that the launch of this guide reflects the ongoing efforts to enhance the culture of transparency and professionalism, especially in light of the changes witnessed in the Gulf markets with their openness to international investors and increased inclusion in global indices, making the development of investor relations a vital tool in improving the reputation of companies and increasing their investment attractiveness.

OPINION

Don't make 2025 just like any other year



**TARIQ
AL BARWANI**

*The author is the
founder of Knowledge
Oman*

2025 is just a month away, and many people have already started crafting their New Year resolutions — from going to the gym to exercise, eating healthy and quality food, reading books, and upgrading oneself personally and professionally, to a long list of wishes and desires that keep coming back every end of the year, to form as a base for motivation.

Let me confidently state that 2025 will be no different for many people, as over 90 per cent of people I met over the years state they experience the same. I call this annual déjà vu. My humble advice is to not make 2025 just another year. I wrote an article a year ago for 2024, but this time, I will focus on the problem, that is the root cause.

So what is the problem? What most people believe they should be doing instead of what really aligns with their values and aspirations is the problem.

The lack of a link between the two is the main issue that causes most of the resolutions to fail. Many think motivation is a key factor in one implementing a change, yet motivation is at most a temporary feeling, wish, or desire, especially with the ongoing life challenges that keep coming up in one way or another.

We all may have good motivations for change, but those all will be short-lived without a clear set of actions to solidify a concrete plan that would turn the ideas/ intentions into reality. I am talking from experience, as I too have been sometimes a part of the bandwagon.

What can therefore be done?

First, ensure you reflect on your past year's resolutions. It is really important as you examine and be true to yourself on what worked and what has not worked. The insights you get out of the past reflection will help you refine your approach for your 2025 New Year resolutions and also help you from avoiding repeating the same mistakes again (if any).

Secondly, turn your wishes, aspirations, ideas, intentions, etc., into a project where it has clear timelines and includes all the necessary ingredients of running a project (i.e., who, what, where, how, etc.). Next, break this project into small chunks of meaningful and tangible action that you can undertake in an incremental manner — YES, Rome was not built in a day.

Lastly, commit to it by also celebrating even the small wins throughout the project journey — trust me, celebrating a win goes a

What most people believe they should be doing instead of what really aligns with their values and aspirations is the problem. The lack of a link between the two is the main issue that causes most of the resolutions to fail.

long way in motivating you to complete the entire project and ultimately resolution as a change per se.

Ensure you stay flexible (as life can be filled with a lot of unexpected surprises). Adjust and adapt accordingly as you stay focused on the ultimate goal, and finally, ensure you set a periodic review on where you are and what you need to complete the project (i.e., your newly set resolutions). By following a proactive and intentional approach, I am confident that you can transform your resolutions into a tangible outcome.

To conclude, avoid making New Year's resolutions every New Year's Eve (i.e., at the beginning of every year in the month of January). Instead, make them during the year as a journey of intentional action and reflection.

A motivation, as I described in my article today, is no doubt a good intention, yet without a clear plan of action coupled with distinct timelines, one would end up going in circles like the mass. I will try in my upcoming articles to share some tips that one could follow in order to progress with ideas that can be turned into reality. Until then, stay safe and remain positive.

CURRENCY DROP WORSENS MOSCOW'S STAGFLATION FEARS

The Bank of Russia has more serious concerns than having to manage the fallout from US sanctions on Gazprombank, which sent the rouble to a two-year low of 115 to the US dollar this week.

The Russian currency has since regained some ground after the central bank stepped in and stopped buying dollars and euros. But the rouble remains at levels it had not touched since the aftermath of Russia's war of Ukraine in February 2022.

Gazprombank was the main conduit for Moscow to receive revenues from oil and gas sales, so the US sanctions matter. But Russia will find a way to get its hands on the proceeds of energy sales. The crisis has illustrated a more serious problem for Russia and its President Vladimir Putin: its overheating economy is on course for a painful hard landing next year, and the authorities have few tools left to avoid it.

Central bank Governor Elvira Nabiullina has for months chronicled a crash foretold. She pushed interest rates to 21%, but inflation, now running at about 9% a year, is showing no signs of abating.

Central bank Governor Elvira Nabiullina has for months chronicled a crash foretold. She pushed interest rates to 21%, but inflation, now running at about 9% a year, is showing no signs of abating. It is fuelled by the massive spending on the war in Ukraine, now at about 8% of GDP, and the government's associated budget deficits of about 2% of GDP.

The rouble's weakness makes things worse by increasing the prices of imported goods.

Inflation is also propelled by the economy's overheating. The militarisation of Russia has diverted resources to the defence sector, creating labour shortages in the rest of the economy.

In this tight labour market, only 2% of the working age population is unemployed. The flight of talent after the Ukraine war, and a plan to mobilise up to 1.5 million men, have shrunk the available workforce.

In these conditions, the civilian economy has no capacity for further growth, while inflation on daily products has reached new highs - butter thefts are on the rise because it has become so expensive.

Despite the punishing level of real interest rates, Russian corporates keep asking for more loans, albeit at variable rates, in the hope that they will be lowered soon, as in previous episodes of currency tensions. Corporate borrowing grew at the same hefty pace this year - by 15% year-on-year - as it did in 2023, when interest rates were much lower.

Nabiullina has warned that this time is different, and has pledged to keep rates high until she tames inflation. But whether or not she is free to do what she thinks is right depends on Putin alone. — Reuters

How food labelling protects consumers health

FOOD labels are essential pieces of information fixed on products, providing details on the contents of the food. Codex General Standard for the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods (CODEX STAN 1-1985) defines food label as “any tag, brand, mark, image, or other descriptive information that is written, printed, stencilled, marked, embossed, or impressed on, or attached to, a food container or food product.”

This label provides important information on the ingredients, product contents, expiration dates, serving size, nutritional value, allergen information, religious beliefs, ethical preferences, health claims and special dietary needs. Clear and accurate product labelling helps and empowers consumers to make informed choices, avoid health risks and follow dietary guidelines that protect their well-being.

Food labels contains more or less the following information such as an ingredient list of which is crucial for those individual who may suffer from food sensitivities or intolerances, such as lactose or gluten. The list may identify preservatives, colourings, allergens and harmful food additives.

The label may contain nutritional information such as proteins, carbohydrates, sugar, fats, fibres, vitamins and minerals, and most importantly, the calories, which may help consumers make informative, healthier choices, particularly for those with conditions like heart disease, hypertension, or diabetes. Expiration dates are vital in helping the consumers comprehend the safety and quality of the food product they purchased.

These dates usually include “Best Before”, “Use By”, and “Sell By” to safeguard consumers from risks of foodborne illnesses and reduce food waste over time. Individuals with specific dietary needs can benefit from the information provided by food labels by understanding the health claims label.

These claims assist individuals with specific dietary needs by providing allergen information, such as nuts, dairy and gluten, highlighted in bold or in different text fonts to help these individuals avoid life-threatening reactions to these allergens.



Nutrition facts are seen on a popcorn box, in this illustration image. — Reuters



**MOZA
ABDULLAH AL
BUSAIDI**

*The writer is food
safety consultant
and Board Member
of Oman Consumer
Protection Association*

Furthermore, religious or ethical preferences are addressed in food labels, providing information on the suitability of certain food products, such as halal, kosher, vegan, or vegetarian diets, in ensuring transparency and helping individuals in making informed choices.

Adherence to laws and regulations by food producers and manufacturers is of utmost importance in an era where consumers are increasingly knowledgeable and concerned about their health. Transparency and accountability are essential for ensuring compliance, consistency, and prevention of misleading or deceptive claims on food product labels.

Therefore, effective adherence to labelling regulations and laws promotes fair competition, provides accurate product descriptions, and protects consumers from deceptive marketing practices.

Numerous studies have been conducted in this field, with very promising outcomes in encouraging innovative ideas in the food labelling.

One such study published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine (February 2019, 56(2): 300-314) examined the impact of food labelling on consumer dietary behaviours and industry practices.

The meta-analysis included data from 60 studies, with 111

interventions and over 2 million observations across 11 countries.

The findings revealed that food labelling had a significant effect on reducing consumers' intake of total energy and total fat, while it also led to an increase in vegetable consumption. The study also found that food labelling influenced industry practices, particularly in reducing sodium and artificial trans-fat in products.

While the results highlight the potential of food labelling to reduce certain unhealthy dietary components, further research is needed to explore its effects on additional dietary targets, disease risk factors and clinical health outcomes.

A study on “Impact of Colour-Coded and Warning Nutrition Labeling Schemes: A Systematic Review and Network Meta-Analysis” published in 2021 in PLOS Medicine evaluated the effectiveness of colour-coded and warning labels in influencing consumer food choices.

The study found that both types of labels improved the understanding of nutritional content, but warning labels were more effective in encouraging healthier choices and reducing unhealthy food selection. Warning labels, which highlight health risks like excessive sugar, fat, or sodium, were particularly impactful in altering consumer behaviour.

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Indian male
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Engineering)
with 3 years
experience in
Diesel engine
works (Gensets
/ Engines)
2 years in
Machine
Maintenance
seeks job.
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Accountant with
overs 6 years
of experience
Detail-Oriented
Financial
Professional:
Expert in
Accounting, Audit
Prep, and Expense
Management:
Contact: +968
78320801,
Ready to join
immediately.

Indian Female,
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Environmental
Engineering,
B-Tech in Civil
Engineering. 7
years of Teaching
experience as
Asst. Professor,
2 years of
professional
experience in
civil construction
and soil
investigation.
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job, now in
Muscat.
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29 years old
Indian female,
MBA holder
with 2 years
experience.
Seeking a
suitable
position.
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ART/LIFE



T R A V E L

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FASHION

London leads fashion capitals in banning exotic animal skins



LONDON will become the first of the four main fashion weeks to ban brands featuring exotic animal skins, the British Fashion Council said on Friday.

“We will not showcase any brands featuring real fur or exotic skins in their collections and ask designers to agree to these conditions as part of their application to appear at London Fashion Week,” it said.

London fashion week has been fur-free since 2018 but until now designers have been free to use the skins of animals such as snakes, crocodiles and alligators in their collections.

It was not known if the other main fashion weeks — Paris, New York and Milan — would follow suit.

The council said the next issue it had to consider was the use of feathers.

It said it was “actively engaging with designers and the wider fashion community to discuss our approach to feathers on the catwalk”.

Copenhagen fashion week said earlier this year it would ban feathers from its shows from next year. Ostrich feathers are the ones most commonly used.

Copenhagen has already banned exotic skins.

The fashion industry is increasingly moving away from exotic animal skins due to ethical concerns regarding animal rights and cruelty, prompting consumer demand for humane practices.

Brands are also embracing sustainability, recognising the environmental impact of exotic animal farming and seeking alternative materials. Stricter regulations in many countries on the trade of these skins further complicate sourcing.

Additionally, changing consumer preferences, particularly among younger generations, favour cruelty-free products, leading major brands like Gucci, Chanel and Burberry to commit to ending the use of animal skins. Innovations in textile technology are providing high-quality vegan alternatives that maintain luxury aesthetics without ethical issues. — AFP

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



TRAVEL

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government building is lit up with the projection mapping programme “TOKYO GODZILLAs”, which is a follow-up to the presentation released in spring this year, in Tokyo. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

Singrid Campion, daughter of French businessman Marcel Campion who took over the activity of La Grande Roue (the Big Wheel), poses at the Tuileries Garden in Paris. — AFP



CULTURE

A bronze head of Roman Emperor Septimius Severus (145 AD-211 AD), Asia Minor, ca 195-211, displayed at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek museum in Copenhagen will be returned to Türkiye. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Driving Around

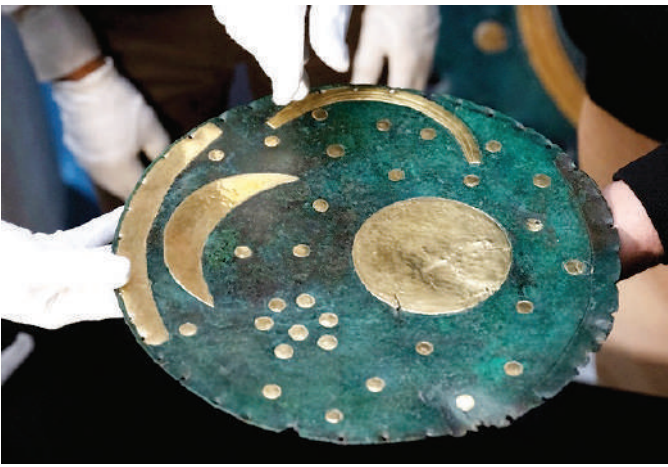


Beauty of Remote Places

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We select photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. To be selected, follow us on Instagram and every time you upload or share your photos, make sure to tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.

Scientists unveil 3,600-year-old forging process of Nebra Sky Disc



Scientists have for the first time conducted a comprehensive analysis of the manufacturing process behind the Nebra Sky Disc, a Bronze Age artefact more than 3,600 years old. The disc, discovered in 1999 near the German town of Nebra in the eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt, is regarded as the world’s oldest known depiction of the heavens. The study focuses on the detailed process of forging the disc’s bronze base. It reveals that the metal was heated to about 700 degrees Celsius and worked through up to 10 cycles of heating, forging and annealing, a heat treatment process used to make a material less hard and more workable, to achieve the necessary deformation and shape. Archaeologist Harald

Meller said that the research examines the creation of the disc’s bronze form, not the gold elements attached to it. Modern analysis techniques, including microstructural examination and imaging, confirmed the ancient craftsmanship. A sample taken in 2002 and re-examined during the study provided further data on the disc’s construction, alongside hardness measurements. The Nebra Sky Disc, with its golden depictions of the sun, moon, stars and a ship, was used by Bronze Age societies for up to 400 years. In 2013, the disc was added to Unesco’s Memory of the World Register, which collects items of importance to humanity, and is considered one of Germany’s most significant archaeological finds. — dpa



Manicurist to the stars keeps Cairo’s golden age alive

NESTLED IN a hidden alley off a bustling thoroughfare in the heart of the Egyptian capital sits an unassuming little manicure shop concealing a historic legacy. Today, Madame Lucie’s small establishment is dwarfed by the sleek facades of modern cafes, fashion boutiques and fast food chains that have all but snuffed out Cairo’s old grandeur. But decades ago, the shop’s seats were occupied by the likes of Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz, international singing sensation Dalida and cinematic heartthrob Omar Sharif, all of whom sought the now 88-year-old manicurist’s expert hand. For over six decades, Layla Abdel Hakim Mekhtegian — more commonly known by her sobriquet Madame Lucie — has presided over her little shop, standing guard over its rich history. For those who step inside the shop, which claims to be the country’s oldest manicurist, it is a step back in time to Cairo’s cosmopolitan heyday of the 1950s and 60s. “Everything here is as it was 64 years ago,” the French-educated woman of Armenian descent said.

- FROZEN IN TIME - Established in December 1960, the salon exudes old-world charm. Outside, the name Lucie greets customers in old fluorescent signage in both Arabic and French. Inside, antique manicure tables sit in front of sepia-toned photographs of the illustrious patrons of bygone times. “Customers tell us, ‘Don’t change a thing,’” she said. The list of Madame Lucie’s clientele reads like a roll call of Egypt’s cultural pantheon. “Mahfouz would come in for a trim while fans waited outside to have his autograph,” Madame Lucie



recalls with a nostalgic smile. “Dalida? Always punctual.” “Her fans used to come here when they heard that she visits the salon,” she continues. “And Omar Sharif,” she adds softly, “did not talk much, but he was so charming.” Madame Lucie is part of a generation of Armenian entrepreneurs who shaped much of downtown Cairo’s commercial life in the mid-20th century. She and her enduring salon are among just a handful of businesses that survived former president Gamal Abdel Nasser’s nationalisation drive of the 1960s. Prior to that, Egypt’s Armenian community had peaked at 45,000 in the 1950s, playing a vibrant role in the country’s cultural and economic landscape. **- LOYAL CUSTOMER BASE -** Lucie acquired her craft at the age of 14 under the guidance of Marie, her mentor at Bata, the now-defunct, once-renowned department store in Cairo. Together with her husband Jimmy and with the help of an investor,

she transformed a printing house in downtown Cairo into her salon. She has held fast to traditional nail treatments, shunning the more modern trends offered by many nail spas nowadays. But her work goes beyond aesthetics, and many of her clients come for relief from painful conditions like calluses, ingrown nails and dead skin buildup. She has in turn preserved not just the shop’s historic stature but also a loyal customer base for nearly as long. “It is more of a treatment than a cosmetic thing,” said Effat Adel, a housewife in her fifties who has been visiting the salon for 37 years. Sabry Ghoneim, an 89-year-old veteran journalist who has been a loyal customer for over four decades, said: “This place gives me peace of mind.” Despite suggestions to expand, Lucie refuses. “Why would I? This place is home,” she said. “Every year, I update the sign outside to show how long we’ve been here. This December, it’ll say 65 years.” — AFP

FEATURES

BY NAJAH AL RIYAMI

AS OMAN'S weather cools, its breathtaking terrains call adventurers to explore the magnificent and diverse landscapes. From climbing rocky mountains that reveal 360-degree views of our beautiful country to sliding down the wadi waterways into stunning aqua blue pools, Oman offers a variety of places and experiences to ignite your adrenaline and thirst for adventure.

However, the rewards of adventure come with considerations in terms of health, fitness, courage, and, crucially, safety. Hiking can be risky without proper preparation. To help ensure safe and enjoyable adventures, two seasoned hiking experts have shared their insights: Ahmed al Abri, a Ministry of Tourism-licensed guide and founder of Rawahna Adventure Tours, and Jenny Pinder, a UK-qualified outdoor instructor with extensive international experience.

To keep yourself safe during hikes, first check the local weather forecast and adjust your plans if necessary. Emergencies on the trail can occur, and knowing how to respond is essential. Ahmed recalls a challenging situation in which a hiker sustained serious injuries in a remote location. By providing immediate first aid, keeping the injured person stable and coordinating with local authorities, the group successfully evacuated the hiker.

Preparation is key to staying safe on the trails. Wearing inappropriate clothing and footwear, carrying insufficient water or food, and failing to manage time properly can lead to dehydration, exhaustion, or getting stranded in the dark.

Both experts emphasise the importance of bringing emergency equipment such as a head torch, spare batteries, a first aid kit and an emergency blanket. Common mishaps include not preparing adequately — for instance, not carrying enough water or food, or wearing inappropriate clothing or footwear, which can result in dehydration, sunburn, hypothermia, or exhaustion.

They stress the importance of informing someone about your plans and establishing an agreed time for a search to begin if you do not return.

While technology, such as GPS devices and apps, can be helpful, relying solely on these tools can be risky if they fail. Hikers should always carry physical maps and understand basic navigation techniques.

A well-stocked backpack is essential for any hike, containing items such as water, spare food, sun protection, a first aid kit, an emergency blanket, a whistle, a head torch with spare batteries, weatherproof clothing, navigation tools, and any personal medication required, such as an asthma inhaler.

Physical preparation is equally important, as regular exercise can help build stamina for hiking and enhance the overall experience. Mentally, careful planning of routes with emergency exit points and consideration of daylight hours are crucial for being prepared for unexpected challenges.

Regular exercise will make hiking more accessible and enjoyable. It's important to plan hikes suitable for your fitness level and to build up your endurance gradually. By exercising, you will also be more mentally prepared, as you will feel more comfortable.

Planning appropriate routes with emergency exit points, and access to



EXPLORING
OMAN'S TRAILS:
EXPERT TIPS
FOR SAFE HIKING
ADVENTURES



accommodation and refreshments, will further ensure that you are mentally prepared for your adventure.

Oman's rugged terrains present hazards such as loose rocks, slippery paths and wadi crossings. Both Ahmed and Jenny advise careful route planning and adaptability. They recommend avoiding wadi crossings during rainfall, and if crossing is unavoidable, choose narrow, open sections of the wadi. When navigating loose rocks, proceed cautiously and maintain a safe distance from others to avoid accidents. If you become separated from your group, staying calm is critical. A whistle can be useful for signalling for help, while bright clothing or reflective items enhance visibility. It is advisable to rely on maps or a GPS to navigate to a known landmark if possible. Hydration and shelter are also crucial while waiting for assistance.

Ultimately, hiking safely in Oman requires preparation, awareness and respect for the environment. Experts like Ahmed and Jenny stress the importance of checking weather forecasts and adapting plans accordingly. Whether hiking alone or in a group, sharing responsibilities and understanding safety protocols can make all the difference. As the hiking season commences, adventurers are encouraged to take these tips to heart, ensuring that their exploration of Oman's stunning trails is both safe and unforgettable.