

O M A N
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TOTTENHAM
BEAT MAN UTD
IN BATTLE OF EPL
STRUGGLERS

INBRIEF

HM GREETINGS TO
GAMBIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Adama Barrow of the Republic of Gambia, on his country's Independence Anniversary.

In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of success to President Barrow in leading his country's people towards further progress in all spheres.

WINNERS OF BAIT AL
GHASHAM AWARDS

American Luke Leafgren won the second edition of the Bait Al Ghasham Dar Arab Translation Prize in the translators' category for his translation of Bushra Khalfan's novel "Al Baghunder" to the title The Garden. Sudanese Mustafa Khalid Mustafa won the prize in the authors' category for his novel "I Survived by a Miracle". The winners were announced at the annual award ceremony held at the Cultural Club in Al Qurum under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, on Monday. — ONA

REAL GDP REGISTERS
1.9% GROWTH

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has issued the 2024 Macroeconomic Stability Report, a key communication tool alongside other reports the bank regularly publishes.

This report provides an in-depth analysis of the macroeconomic performance of the Sultanate of Oman and evaluates its stability, considering the most prominent risks and vulnerabilities. It also presents forecasts for key economic indicators over the medium term.

Despite the spillover arising from global developments such as inflation, disruptions in energy supplies, elevated interest rates, and increased uncertainty, the Omani economy has demonstrated resilience in withstanding shocks.

In spite of fluctuations in oil prices and global economic pressures, the report highlights continued growth in real GDP and improvements in economic activity. Real GDP grew by approximately 1.9 per cent during the first half of 2024 compared to the same period last year. This growth is largely attributed to a 3.6 per cent increase in non-oil activities.

Indian Ocean facilitates
80% of global oil trade

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

THE ACTIVITIES of the 8th Indian Ocean Conference (IOC) concluded on Monday. Through various topics, the conference addressed the opportunities and challenges facing the Indian Ocean countries and means of enhancing regional cooperation. On the sidelines of the closing day, an event titled India-Indian Ocean Economic Forum was held. It was attended by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and officials from the Foreign Ministry and participants in the conference.

Speaking at the event, Al Yousef said: "The 8th Indian Ocean Conference is a platform dedicated to fostering maritime partnerships and economic integration across our region as Oman underlines its commitment to strengthening ties with our neighbours and fostering a regional economic ecosystem that promotes prosperity for all."

"Trade has always been at the heart of Oman's identity; Centuries ago, Omani sailors set sail across the Indian Ocean, navigating as far as the eastern coast of Africa, India, and China. They traded frankincense, dates, and copper, returning with spices, textiles, and knowledge that enriched our civilisation. That same maritime tradition continues today, with Oman serving as a strategic gateway between the East and the West. Always being a champion of trade, from the bustling souqs 5,000 years ago to our modern free zones and world-class ports," he added.

The minister said that the Indian Ocean is not just a body of water — it is an economic lifeline. It facilitates nearly 80 per cent of global oil trade and carries a significant portion of the world's container traffic. The

Dignitaries at the conference on Monday.

ports in this region handle billions of dollars in trade annually, yet we are only scratching the surface of our collective potential.

On his turn, Miyaji Takuma, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, touched on the importance of enhancing the common interests of all countries bordering the Indian Ocean and the ties that unite them to foster growth and prosperity for all countries, overcome crises, geopolitical competition and climate change that have impacts on everyone.

He also underlined the need for promoting and protecting the free global economy and ensuring economic security through the development of advanced technology, respect international agreements and enhance maritime security.

MARITIME TIES

Three main sessions were held at the closing day. The first one, titled "Strengthening Global Maritime Cooperation", focused on the importance of joint cooperation among countries to ensure the security and freedom of navigation, enhance maritime and international trade, protect the marine environment, develop the blue economy, the challenges of climate change and the importance of devising new international agreements to regulate navigation.

The second, titled "Innovative Port Security", addressed the importance of technology and innovation in port security and international and regional cooperation in setting standards to enhance maritime security. **TURN TO P5**

MOU TO DEVELOP ADVANCED AI
SEMICONDUCTOR CHIPS IN OMAN

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) on Monday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with AONH Private Holdings to formalise mutual cooperation to develop advanced Artificial Intelligence Semiconductor Chips. The chips will be used in next generation AI

applications such as self-driving vehicles, AI training and others. The project, will be based in the Salalah Free Zone in Dhofar Governorate.

The MoU was signed by Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for

Technology, and Ali Steve Chao, Chairman of AONH Private Holdings.

The Oman Advanced Semiconductor Manufacturing plant is expected to contribute to building and developing national expertise in semiconductor design and manufacturing, creating new business opportunities for Omani youth, and attracting international talent from leading semiconductor nations such as Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. This will support the transfer of global expertise and the localisation of advanced

semiconductor technologies in Oman.

Dr Al Shaithani emphasised that this project aligns with the Digital Industry Programme, one of the key initiatives under the National Digital Economy Programme, and Oman Vision 2040, which positions technology and digital innovation as fundamental pillars of the national economy. He said that the establishment of this digital industry will strengthen Oman's regional and global presence in semiconductor design and advanced packaging technologies. **SEE P13**

Arab summit on Trump's Gaza plan postponed to Friday

RIYADH: A planned Saudi meeting of Arab leaders in response to US President Donald Trump's plan to take control of Gaza has been postponed by a day and expanded, Arab diplomats said on Monday.

"The mini Arab summit in Riyadh has been postponed from Thursday to Friday, February 21," a Saudi source said. An Arab diplomatic source confirmed the new date.

Three Arab states had been expected to attend the summit, but the Saudi source said the expanded meeting will "include the leaders of the six Gulf Cooperation Council countries along with Egypt and

Jordan to discuss Arab alternatives to Trump's plans in the Gaza Strip".

Trump had proposed taking over the war-batted Gaza Strip and moving its more than two million residents to Jordan or Egypt — a plan experts say would violate international law.

Arab countries have unanimously rejected the idea or any prospect of displacing Palestinians from their lands.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Thursday that Washington was open to proposals from Arab countries concerning the Palestinian territory, where a fragile ceasefire

A Palestinian girl carries a food ration back to her family in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip on Monday. — AFP

in the Israel-Hamas war came into effect on January 19 after more than 15 months of fighting.

Rubio said he hoped to be able to discuss these ideas during a tour that took him to Israel on Sunday, Saudi Arabia on Monday, and on to the United Arab Emirates. Last Tuesday Jordan's King Abdallah II met with Trump at the White House and "reiterated Jordan's steadfast position against the displacement of Palestinians", according to a statement issued later, saying this was "the unified Arab position". Trump doubled down on his plan during the meeting. — AFP



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SHORT TAKES



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy shakes hands with Dr S Jaishankar after launching the logo in Muscat on Sunday.

INDIA AND OMAN CELEBRATE 70 YEARS OF DIPLOMATIC TIES

STAFF REPORTER
Muscat, Feb 17

Marking a significant milestone in their long-standing partnership, India and Oman have launched a year-long celebration of 70 years of diplomatic relations. The commemorative events were inaugurated with the unveiling of a specially designed logo by India's External Affairs Minister, Dr S Jaishankar, and Oman's Foreign Minister, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy on Sunday. The unveiled logo symbolises the deep-rooted historical and cultural connections between the two nations.

India and Oman share a history of trade, commerce, and strong people-to-people ties spanning centuries. This relationship was formally institutionalised with the establishment of the first Indian Consulate in Muscat in February 1955. The Indian Consulate was later upgraded to a Consulate General in 1960 and then to an Embassy in 1971. Oman reciprocated by opening its Embassy in New Delhi in 1972 and a Consulate General in Mumbai in 1976, reinforcing the depth and breadth of the bilateral engagement.

To commemorate this milestone, a series of events and initiatives will be organised throughout 2025 in both countries.

PACT TO FUND PURCHASES OF MEDICAL SUPPLIES



The agreement was signed by Dr Rashid al Alawi, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Khoula Hospital and Omar al Farsi, Director-General of Al Yusr Charity Foundation.

MUSCAT: The Directorate-General of Khoula Hospital and Al Yusr Charity Foundation signed an agreement to finance the second phase of purchase of medical devices and surgical tools for the day care unit at Khawla Hospital with financial support worth RO 639,025,084.

The agreement was signed by Dr Rashid bin Mohammed al Alawi, Director- General of the Directorate-General of Khawla Hospital and Omar bin Mohammed al Farsi, Director-General of Al Yusr Charity Foundation.

The agreement included the provision of 162 medical devices and equipment and 7,520 surgical tools for a number of medical specialties including 21 medical devices and equipment for general surgery, 475 surgical tools, 10 medical devices and equipment for plastic surgery, 1,398 surgical tools, 84 medical devices and equipment for maxillofacial surgery, 5,529 surgical tools, 47 medical devices and equipment for obstetrics and gynaecology and 118 surgical tools. — ONA

Sayyid Badr, counterparts underline cooperation

SAYYID Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister held meetings on Monday with his counterparts, on the sidelines of the 8th Indian Ocean Conference. The meetings were held with the following: Vijitha Herath, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment and Tourism in the Republic of Sri Lanka, DN Dhungyel, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade of the Kingdom of Bhutan, Miyaji Takuma, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, Touhid Hossain, Adviser for Foreign Affairs in the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Dr Rana Arzu Deuba, Foreign Minister of Nepal and Dr Abbas Araghchi, Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran in addition to Indra Mani Pandey, Secretary General of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic



The meetings focused on means of promoting economic and investment relations. — ONA

Cooperation(BIMSTEC). The meetings focused on means of promoting economic and investment relations. They underlined the importance of cooperation in the fields of blue economy, trade, energy and tourism.

They also discussed opportunities for expansion in the fields of marine technology, infrastructure, and youth empowerment, in addition to exchanging expertise in natural resource management to ensure their sustainability.

The Foreign Minister also discussed with his counterparts ways to enhance maritime security in the Indian Ocean

MUSCAT: The National Defence College (NDC) is organising its annual symposium about strategic issues, titled “Digital sovereignty and its impact on national security”. The 4-day symposium kicked off at the NDC premises on Monday under the auspices of Maj Gen Musallam bin Mohammed Jaaboub, Commander of the Sultan's Special Force (SSF).

Representatives of government departments participate in the symposium, which lasts until 20 February 2025 and forms part of the NDC's 12th course. The course covers various topics, including infrastructure, technological independence, international cooperation, policies and legislation.

The symposium explores the strategic dimension of protecting digital infrastructure, the importance of protecting national data, the strategic importance of developing technology products and services, the State's ability to control

region, as a strategic corridor for global trade.

The stressed the importance of cooperation to address regional challenges, such as piracy, smuggling and organized crime, in addition to the impact of climate change on the marine environment. The meetings also reviewed the diplomatic efforts to enhance regional stability through dialogue and joint coordination.

During the meetings, Sayyid Badr underscored the Sultanate of Oman's keenness to enhance cooperation with various countries, pointing to the importance of developing partnerships through mutual visits and participation in international events, including Expo 2025 in Osaka, which represents an opportunity to support economic and technological cooperation and enhance the use of modern innovations to achieve sustainable development.

— ONA

national content and information flow, policies and laws that support digital sovereignty, strategic planning and ways of devising national initiatives.

The opening of the symposium was attended by senior commanders of military and security services, members of the State Council, under-secretaries, officers of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and military and security services, other invitees and and participants in the 12th NDC course. — ONA

MoI hosts media delegates from 10 countries

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

The Ministry of Information (MoI) is currently hosting a media delegation consisting of 26 journalists, photographers and editors-in-chief from 16 media institutions representing 10 countries around the world. The delegation is visiting Oman from February 17 to 24, with the aim of highlighting Oman's cultural, historical and natural diversity, as well as its economic and social development.

The media group includes journalists from various countries such as China, Russia, Egypt, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and others. They are touring the governorates of Musandam, Al Buraimi and Al Dhahirah, where they are being introduced to the rich cultural, civilisational and historical components of Oman. The trip also focuses on the country's development in the fields of tourism, infrastructure and natural heritage.

Shaikha al Mahrouqi, from



The media delegation representing 10 countries around the world visiting Khasab

the Directorate-General of Foreign Media, told Observer that the media delegation received a warm welcome at Khasab Airport upon their arrival. “This visit is part of our ongoing efforts to showcase the cultural, historical and natural richness of the Sultanate of Oman to the world. The delegation was given a comprehensive introduction to Musandam's heritage, including visits to Khasab Castle, where they were briefed on the governorate's history,” she said.

The delegation's tour also included a visit to the Oman Adventure Centre, where they experienced the Jabal Fatt zipline, one of the governorate's popular attractions, and the waterfront area at Bada Beach. Additionally, they explored the waterfront project at Bukha and Hal Beach, which are part of Musandam's growing tourism infrastructure.

On Monday, the group attended a traditional weapons shooting event in Musandam. Following the event, the media

representatives engaged in discussions about tourism development plans in the governorate. The tour also included visits to Khor Al Najd and the Ras Amoud Resort Project, providing further insights into Oman's tourism and development plans.

Today, Tuesday, the media delegation is set to visit Kumzar Village and the Strait of Hormuz from Khasab Port, where they will continue their exploration of the governorate's natural beauty and traditional way of life.

Their visit will also include a stop at Kumzar Majlis, which is known for its cultural significance.

Tomorrow, the delegation will travel via ferry from Khasab Port to Lima District and then to Dibba, before returning to Shinas by ferry, rounding off the diverse experiences in Oman's three governorates.

The journalists and media representatives in the delegation are from various renowned outlets.

HOSPITALITYBOOM



The event was opened under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality. — Photo by Hamed al Khatiri

ICAPTH AIMS TO BOOST TOURISM SECTOR

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

The First International Conference for Academics and Professionals in Tourism and Hospitality (ICAPTH) commenced on Monday at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah.

The three-day event, opened under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, has participation from national and international experts featuring over 30 speakers, eight panel discussions, 15 academic tracks and five specialised workshops. Additionally, 37 research papers focusing on tourism and hospitality will be presented during the conference.

In his comments to the Observer, Dr Saeed al Rubaie put stress on collaboration of academic institutions with the industries. “About the ongoing conference, I would like to mention that the focus here is tourism and give it a proper boost through academic expertise. Boosting tourism is high on Oman Vision 2040 agenda, as Oman stores a lot to offer to the world with its variety of natural attractions.” “The event will throw light on Oman’s tourism strength and ways to make the sector more dynamic,” he said.

Dr Ahmed bin Ali al Shahri, Assistant Vice-Chancellor of the university’s Salalah branch, emphasised on the university’s commitment to fostering research and development in tourism and hospitality.

He highlighted the importance of bridging academic knowledge with practical applications to support Oman Vision 2040, which positions tourism as a key driver of economic diversification and sustainable growth.

Dr Ali Akkak, Chair of the Organising Committee, highlighted the conference’s dynamic agenda and said, “This conference stands out due to the richness of its programmes. The conference delves into tourism investment, destination governance, sustainability in tourism enterprises, marketing strategies, hospitality management and the role of education in adapting to the artificial intelligence revolution.” Dr Nasser Mohammed Al Hamar al Kathiri, Head of Scientific Committee, Dean of Economics and Business Administration College at UTAS, said the ICAPTH is important not only for the academicians, but also for the tourism and hospitality industries.

“We at UTAS try not only to transfer knowledge, but also generate knowledge through research and innovation. To achieve desired goals, we need to sit with the private and government sectors to have a right solution for the issues prevailing in the hospitality and tourism sectors,” he said.

Professor Carlos Vogeler, Former Executive Director at UNWTO, lauded the conference as timely and relevant. He emphasised the need for integrating professional expertise with academic research to ensure tourism education and training align with industry needs.

JAPANESE OFFICIAL VISITS MSC



MUSCAT: Takuma Miyagi, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Japan, and his accompanying delegation on Monday visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). They were received upon their arrival at the centre by Commodore Adil bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Head of the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). — ONA

OMAN AN IMPORTANT PLAYER IN THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION: CHINESE SPECIAL ENVOY

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

Oman, a nation with a strong maritime tradition, has played a significant role in promoting exchanges and mutual learning among Asian countries, according to Chinese special envoy, Zhai Jun.

Jun highlighted the historical significance of Omani navigator Abu Obaid, who set sail from Suhar over 1200 years ago and navigated along the Indian Ocean coast, reaching China’s Guangzhou.

“This incident etched a remarkable chapter in history and it was the beginning of the brotherly relations between the two

countries. The 8th Indian Ocean Conference held in Oman is of great significance, and I believe with the efforts of Oman and support of participating countries, it will surely witness a great success,” he told the media.

The Indian Ocean serves as a hub for global economic exchanges and trade, with the largest number of developing countries and significant development potential. China is committed to deepening development cooperation with the region, building a maritime community with shared interests, and promoting high-quality, sustainable development.

Jun expressed gratitude to

the Omani government for their warm reception and thoughtful arrangements.

He highlighted the longstanding friendship between Oman and China, emphasising the need to strengthen political trust, practical cooperation and people-to-people exchanges to advance the China-Oman strategic partnership.

The close ties between countries in the Indian Ocean region, in terms of people-to-people exchanges, trade and culture, were also praised. Jun noted the historical friendship between Oman and China, dating back to the voyages of Zheng He, which enhanced cultural exchanges between the two countries.

Today’s child responsible citizen tomorrow: OHRC

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
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THE Omani Human Rights Commission (OHRC) and the Children First Association (CFA) launched an awareness programme on children’s rights with the slogan ‘Values and Belonging’ under the auspices of Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, in Muscat on Monday.

The programme targets multiple segments of society to include students, parents, social activists, psychologists and child protection committees.

Her Highness Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation at SQU, said in her speech: “The launch of the programme is the implementation of the common visions and goals of OHRC and CFA to develop childhood, consolidate authentic Omani national values, and enhance the necessary means of protection for children’s rights in light of social and international changes.” She also highlighted CFA’s five-year strategic plan 2021-2025 that works to raise awareness, develop and empower children in the educational, health and cultural fields and enhance their rights to be an active individual in society. It also included within its strategic directions the creation of a cultural environment that enhances the concepts of citizenship and identity and preserves the values of citizenship.

Dr Rashid bin Hamad al Balushi, Chairman of Omani Human Rights Commission (OHRC), said that the awareness programme is an important step towards achieving an educational and cultural environment that enhances the values of citizenship, belonging and responsibility



Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Dr Rashid bin Hamad al Balushi and HH Sayyida Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said at the event in Muscat on Monday.

among future generations.

The Chairman said that within the framework of Oman Vision 2040, great attention was paid to ‘Human and Society’, which focuses on strengthening national identity and active citizenship. The Commission was entrusted with the task of instilling these values in the younger generations, informing them of their rights and duties, and consolidating the principles of responsible citizenship, which contributes to building a strong and cohesive society capable of achieving the sustainable development that the Sultanate of Oman aspires to.

He also expressed that investing in children is an investment in the future, because today’s child will be a responsible citizen tomorrow. Therefore, this programme is not just a temporary initiative,

but rather part of a broader national strategy aimed at promoting a culture of human rights.

The cooperation programme comes to confirm the desire of the two parties to define a framework for coordination and joint cooperation, which contributes to promoting human rights, which includes the exchange of knowledge. A number of programmes will also be implemented this year.

“The Commission monitors violations related to children’s rights through field visits, in addition to media follow-up by monitoring newspaper reports, television channels and social media to identify any issues related to human rights,” said Shatha bint Abdul Majeed al Zadjali, OHRC’s Director of the Organizations and International Relations Department.

Conference on Humanitarian Law in Islam

MUSCAT: The third international conference titled ‘International Humanitarian Law in View of Islamic Jurisprudence’ kicked off at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Monday.

Representatives of 20 countries are taking part in the 3-day conference organised by the College of Sharia Sciences from February 17 to 19.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council. The event is attended by ministers, senior state officials and other international guests.

The conference aims to explore the relationship between international humanitarian law and the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (law), with special emphasis on issues related to armed conflicts and the protection of human rights in times of war.



The 3-day conference will see 167 abstracts, 90 research papers being presented by researchers from Oman and abroad

As many as 167 abstracts, in addition to 90 research papers, will be presented by researchers from Oman and abroad.

The conference explores the role of Islamic jurisprudence in promoting international peace and preserving the rights of victims of armed conflicts.

It also looks into the basic principles of international humanitarian law and options to activate them in the legal context. In this context, the conference will highlight the efforts of Muslim scholars in developing a theoretical framework for these rules, with

the prime aim of diminishing the impacts of wars on individuals and societies.

The conference will see the participation of representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, government departments, researchers and academics specialised in international humanitarian law and Islamic jurisprudence.

The conference focuses on the importance of integrating Islamic law in addressing contemporary challenges related to armed conflicts. This approach seeks to enhance awareness about the importance of international humanitarian law in accommodating the rights of all individuals in times of war. It will also reflect the interaction between the Islamic law and international law.

The first and second editions of this conference were organised by the College of Sharia Sciences in 2018 and 2023. — ONA

SPOTLIGHT

ENSURE TRAFFIC SAFETY

AFRAH AL BALUSHI

DATA FROM the National Centre for Statistics and Information indicates that the number of registered vehicles in Oman reached approximately 1,753,872 by the end of December 2024. With this growing number of vehicles on the roads, strict adherence to traffic safety measures is essential to protect lives.

A recent run-over incident in one of the governorates tragically claimed multiple lives, underscoring the devastating impact of road accidents. Beyond the immediate loss of life, such incidents create psychological distress for citizens and impose significant financial burdens on society due to the loss of human capital.

Despite ongoing efforts to improve road safety, including the development of modern highways, pedestrian bridges and advanced traffic infrastructure, the number of road accidents remains a pressing concern. The latest statistics reveal a 9-per cent increase in accidents compared to previous years, with 2,000 reported cases in 2023 and a rate of 12.2 per 10,000 vehicles, up from 11.7 the previous year.

While some accidents stem from technical, engineering, or mechanical failures, human error remains the primary cause.

Drivers bear the responsibility for their safety, as well as that of passengers and fellow road users.

Speeding continues to be the leading factor in road fatalities and injuries, alongside reckless driving, improper overtaking and failure to maintain safe distances.

Promoting traffic safety not only reduces accidents and injuries, but also enhances public confidence in road travel, minimises economic losses and contributes to social stability. A well-planned traffic system improves the quality of life by fostering a safer, more sustainable environment for all.

KEY TRAFFIC SAFETY MEASURES
To improve road safety, both pedestrians and drivers must adopt responsible behaviours:

STRICT ADHERENCE TO TRAFFIC LAWS:
Both drivers and pedestrians must comply fully with traffic regulations to ensure collective safety.

TRAFFIC EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN:
Teaching children about road safety helps protect them from accidents and instils lifelong responsible behaviour.

OBEDIENCE TO TRAFFIC SIGNALS:
Following traffic lights and road signs is crucial to maintaining order and preventing collisions.

UNDIVIDED ATTENTION WHILE DRIVING:
Drivers must avoid distractions, such as mobile phones, to maintain full concentration on the road.

Traffic safety is a collective responsibility, requiring commitment from individuals, society and institutions. By respecting road rules and adopting safe driving habits, Oman can move closer to its vision of an accident-free future.

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1,753,872

by the end of December 2024

The latest statistics reveal a

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reported cases in 2023 and a rate of 12.2 per

10,000

vehicles, up from 11.7 the previous year.



SHORT TAKE



Lt Gen Abdullah bin Khamis Al Raisi at the International Defence Conference

OMAN AT ABU DHABI INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE CONFERENCE

ABU DHABI: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Chief of Staff of the Sultan’s Armed Forces, participated in the opening of the International Defence Exhibition ‘IDEX 2025’ and the Naval Defence Exhibition ‘NAVDEX 2025’ in Abu Dhabi, UAE. The Sultanate of Oman’s delegation participating in the opening of the two exhibitions was headed by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF).

The delegation toured the exhibitions’ sections and pavilions, and were briefed on the latest military technologies, systems and defence industries.

The conference delved into crucial defence topics, with the first session focusing on ‘Global Disruptions and Defence Preparedness’, specifically addressing threats to vital supply chains.

The second session explored ‘Disinformation and Influence Operations: Using Information as a Weapon in Modern Conflicts’, while the third session examined the theme ‘The Sky is No Longer the Limit: Emerging Threats and Opportunities in Space’. — ONA

OMANI PUBLICATIONS’ CORNER TO BE SET UP AT CHECHEN UNIVERSITY

MUSCAT: The National Museum signed an agreement on Monday with the Chechen State Pedagogical University to establish ‘Omani Publications’ Corner’ at the university. This initiative is part of the celebrations marking the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Russian Federation.

On behalf of the National Museum, the agreement was signed by Jamal bin Hassan al Mousawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, while Prof Dr Ismail



Jamal bin Hassan al Mousawi and Prof Dr Ismail Baudinovich Bekhanov signing the agreement

Baudinovich Bekhanov, President of the Chechen State Pedagogical University, signed the pact on behalf of the university.

The ‘Omani Publications’ Corner’ aims to enable Arabist students specialising in Omani studies to acquire valuable knowledge about the cultural and intellectual heritage of Oman. It, thus, fosters deeper connections and mutual understanding between the two nations while promoting further collaboration in academia and research. — ONA

Global conference debates humanities in AI era

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, FEB 17

THE second international conference, ‘The Future of Humanities, Social and Sharia Sciences in Light of Artificial Intelligence and Building the Contemporary Human Being’, commenced on Monday in Muscat. Organised by Ishraq Press and Publishing in collaboration with the Arab Open University, the event saw the participation of over 200 academics and researchers from across the Gulf and Arab world.

Inaugurated by Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, the conference comes at a time of rapid digital transformation. It aims to explore how AI is reshaping academic and educational landscapes and to identify ways to harness emerging technologies for societal benefit.

The conference programme is structured around six key themes. They are values and ethics in AI, AI’s impact on humanities, social sciences, and Sharia studies, future prospects of these disciplines in the digital age, AI and sustainable development, education in the AI era



The conference showcases exhibition that contribute to developing the process of education and research

The conference seeks to provide comprehensive visions and practical recommendations that contribute to development of scholarly domains

and AI’s role in enhancing scientific research.

Some of the key discussions and insights included:

Prof Dr Mohammed bin Hamdan al Badi, President of the Arab Open University in Muscat, emphasised that the conference aligns with Oman Vision 2040 which prioritises human capital development amid the Fourth Industrial Revolution. He highlighted the need for a new generation of skilled professionals to navigate AI-driven transformations.

Dr Humaid bin Muslim al Saidi, CEO of Ishraq Press and Publishing, underscored that AI is spearheading

a civilisational shift, and the conference aims to explore both its opportunities and challenges in humanities and education.

Dr Badriya bint Mohammed al Nabhani, Editor-in-Chief of Ishraq Omani Magazine and head of the Scientific Committee, chaired the first session featuring a range of academic papers. Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, discussed AI’s role in transforming education and enhancing 21st-century skills.

Associate Prof Khalid bin Khamis al Saadi explored AI-driven data analysis and its impact on academic research.

Prof Issa al Hadi from Algeria examined the future of AI in Arab sports media.

Dr Mahfoudha al Mishqari, from the University of Nizwa, shared insights from a study on AI adoption in education, revealing largely positive student experiences.

The conference serves as a crucial platform for scholars and experts to discuss the ethical, educational and research implications of AI, ensuring the region remains at the forefront of digital transformation in academia.

80% of global oil trade facilitated

FROM P1

Meanwhile, the third session, titled “Global Marine Resource Management — Challenges and Opportunities”, addressed the main challenges in marine resource management and the opportunities available to enhance cooperation and future solutions.

At the end of the conference, a joint dialogue session was held, bringing together Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Dr Ram Madhav, Chairman of the India Foundation and Jaideep Mazumdar, Secretary East, Ministry of External Affairs, Republic of India.

The session witnessed interaction from the participants, as the speakers received various questions from the audience about the future of relations among the countries of the region, the role of international cooperation in enhancing maritime security and trade, in addition to mechanisms to address environmental and economic challenges in the Indian Ocean.

Sayyid Badr affirmed that the conference represented an opportunity to enhance regional and international cooperation in the fields of



maritime security, trade and sustainable development, expressing his hope that these discussions would be a starting point for more constructive partnerships and purposeful initiatives that benefit the countries and peoples of the region.

On his turn, Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, said in a statement: “During the conference, many topics were discussed on means of utilising oceans in general and the Indian Ocean in particular to enhance partnership between all countries.

Bilateral meetings were held with delegations participating in the conference from more than 30 countries and private sector companies. They discussed the Omani capabilities and exchanged experiences on how to benefit from what the oceans provide and exchanged visions on some of the challenges facing maritime routes”. He pointed

out that all participants agreed on the importance of enhancing cooperation and coordination in this regard.

Chairman of Environment Authority, Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, said that the IOC has been discussing several strategic pillars and one of them is the environment.

“Environment is one of the most important subjects since the world is taking numerous efforts to protect the ecological balance and to move from a linear economy to a sustainable one. This is a good time to exchange the experience and knowledge with friends and neighbors,” he said, speaking to Observer.

He added, “Oman is currently the President of the UN Environment Assembly for the years 2024 & 2025. And this is a good opportunity to learn from our colleagues in the Indian Ocean region. We hope we will be able to come up with strategic solutions to the environmental issues and tackle the climate change in the region and the world.”

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/ 20/2025	PAVING WORK OF SOME SEPARATE MOUNTAIN ROADS IN NORTH AL SHARQIYYA GOVERNORATE	16-2-2025	25-2-2025	11-3-2025	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF TENDER BOARD (THIRD & FOURTH CLASS)	(35/-) THIRTY- FIVE OMANI RIALS AND FIVE HUNDRED BAISA (LOCAL, REGIONAL) (10/-) TEN OMANI RIAL FOR SME NON-REFUNDABLE
MTCIT/ 21/2025	MAINTENANCE OF ASPHALT ROADS IN MADINAT AL HAQ-YUR ROAD AND DARBAT - TAWI ATAIR ROAD IN GOVERNORATE OF DHOFAR	16-2-2025	2-3-2025	23-3-2025	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF TENDER BOARD (EXCELLENT & FIRST)	(210/600) TWO- HUNDRED TEN OMANI RIALS AND SIX HUNDRED BAISA (LOCAL, REGIONAL) (21/100) TWENTY- ONE OMANI RIAL AND ONE HUNDRED BAISA FOR SME NON-REFUNDABLE

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WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A giant screen shows news footage of Chinese President Xi Jinping during a symposium on private enterprises, in Beijing. — Reuters

CHINA’S XI HOLDS RARE MEET WITH BUSINESS LEADERS

BEIJING: President Xi Jinping held a rare meeting on Monday with some of the biggest names in China’s technology sector, urging them to “show their talent” and be confident in the power of China’s model and market. Xi’s move to gather business leaders, including those behind breakout successes despite US pressure in recent months, underscores the importance of private-sector innovation for China to gain ground in technology, they said. “It’s a tacit acknowledgement that the Chinese government needs private-sector firms for its tech rivalry with the United States,” said Christopher Beddor, deputy China research director at Gavekal Dragonomics in Hong Kong. Xi’s remarks stressed continuity in China’s economic development strategy. But he also said its private business had “broad prospects and great promise” to create wealth and opportunity. China’s governance and the scale of its market give it an inherent advantage in developing new industries, Xi said. “It is the right time for the majority of private business and entrepreneurs to show their talent,” he was quoted as saying in remarks state media called an “important speech”. — Reuters

LEBANON URGES TRUCE SPONSORS TO PRESSURE ISRAEL



Lebanese army soldiers stand guard at the entrance of the southern Lebanese village of Houla. — AFP

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Joseph Aoun on Monday urged sponsors of a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hezbollah to help pressure Israel to withdraw troops by a deadline the following day. “We are continuing contacts on several levels to push Israel to respect the agreement and to withdraw on the scheduled date, and return the prisoners,” Aoun said, according to a presidency statement. “The sponsors of the deal should bear their responsibility to assist us,” he added. A fragile ceasefire between Israel and the Iran-backed militant group has been in effect since November 27 after more than a year of hostilities including two months of all-out war during which Israel launched ground operations. Under the deal, Lebanon’s military was to deploy in the south alongside United Nations peacekeepers as the Israeli army withdrew over a 60-day period that was later extended to February 18. A committee involving the United States, France, Lebanon, Israel and UN peacekeepers is tasked with ensuring any ceasefire violations are identified and dealt with. — AFP

MASS ESCAPE

Thousands flee east DRC into Burundi



Thousands of refugees have fled into Burundi from eastern Democratic Republic of Congo since Rwandan-backed forces seized the nearby city of Bukavu, a humanitarian source and a minister said Sunday. “Since late Friday afternoon we have been facing the mass arrival of Congolese refugees,” said a source in a non-governmental organisation on the Burundian side of the border. The refugees have fled the Kamanyola area in DR Congo across the Ruzisi River. — AFP

SOUTH AFRICA OPEN TO NUCLEAR PROJECT BIDS FROM RUSSIA OR IRAN

CAPE TOWN: South Africa could turn to Russia or Iran to expand its civilian nuclear power capacity, a senior government minister said, a stance analysts say could deepen a rift with the United States and further delay the renewal of a strategic energy pact. South Africa, which operates Africa’s only nuclear power plant, Koeberg, plans to add 2,500 megawatts of new capacity to tackle electricity outages that have plagued the economy and to reduce emissions.

“We can’t have a contract that says Iran or Russia must not bid, we can’t have that condition,” Minister of Mineral and Petroleum Resources Gwede Mantashe, one of the government’s leading proponents of expanding nuclear capacity, said. “If they are the best in terms of the offer on the table, we’ll take any (country),” he said. The country is under scrutiny from Washington after President Donald Trump issued a far-reaching executive order this

month halting aid. Among other criticisms, the order claimed that South Africa was “reinvigorating its relations with Iran to develop commercial, military, and nuclear arrangements”. Pretoria has no bilateral cooperation with Iran on any nuclear-related technology, the office of South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said. A South African tender for nuclear projects has been delayed for further consultation following legal challenges. — Reuters

Gazans must return home, EU plans to tell Israel

THE EU plans to tell Israel next week that Palestinians uprooted from their Gaza homes should be ensured a dignified return and that Europe will contribute to rebuilding the shattered territory, according to a document seen by reporters. That echoes Arab positions but conflicts with President Donald Trump’s stated aim for the US to take over the shattered coastal strip and rebuild it into a “Riviera of the Middle East” while Gazans emigrate to other nations. The EU, which has been a major aid provider to Palestinians, is to outline its position to Israeli officials in talks in Brussels on February 24 as part of the EU-Israel Association Council, the first such session since 2022.

A document outlining the draft EU position emphasises both Europe’s commitment to Israel’s security and its view that “displaced Gazans should be ensured a safe and dignified return to their homes in Gaza”. “The EU will actively contribute to a coordinated international effort to early recovery and reconstruction in Gaza,” it said, also calling for full humanitarian access. “The EU deeply deplores the unacceptable number of civilians, especially women and children, who have lost their lives, and the catastrophic humanitarian situation notably caused by the insufficient entry of aid into Gaza, in particular in the North.”

Israel launched its assault on Gaza after fighters from the Palestinian group Hamas stormed southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing 1,200 people and taking more than 250



Palestinians walk at a street market near buildings damaged and destroyed during the Israeli offensive, in Gaza City. — Reuters

A document outlining the draft EU position emphasises both Europe’s commitment to Israel’s security and its view that “displaced Gazans should be ensured a safe and dignified return to their homes in Gaza”

hostages, according to Israeli tallies. More than 48,000 people have been killed in Gaza, according to Palestinian health officials. Much of the enclave has been laid waste with most of its 2.3 million pre-war population displaced multiple times, humanitarian agencies say. “The EU strongly opposes all actions that undermine the viability of the two-state solution,” the document added, referring to its position that Palestinians should have an independent homeland alongside Israel.

Meanwhile, Rubio arrived in the Saudi capital Riyadh on Monday on a previously planned trip. US National Security Advisor Mike Waltz and Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff will be joining him at the talks with the Russians. On the agenda for Rubio’s

meeting with MbS is likely to be Trump’s proposal for the Palestinian residents of Gaza to be resettled in other Arab nations and for the US to lead reconstruction of their home. That proposal has infuriated the Arab World and heightened fears among Palestinians in Gaza of being driven out of the coastal strip. Saudi Arabia, alongside other Arab nations, has rejected any plan that involves resettling Palestinians, and Riyadh is spearheading Arab efforts to develop a counterproposal. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday that Palestinians should be given the choice to leave Gaza. Trump’s call for Palestinians to emigrate from Gaza, including to Egypt and Jordan, has been widely condemned with some critics saying that it amounted to “ethnic cleansing”. — Reuters

UN APPEALS FOR \$6 BN FOR SUDAN AID

GENEVA: The UN appealed on Monday for \$6 billion to provide desperately-needed aid to people in war-ravaged Sudan and millions of refugees fleeing “appalling” conditions. The aim is to provide assistance to nearly 26 million people this year, the United Nations’ humanitarian agency OCHA and refugee agency UNHCR said in a joint appeal. The UN agencies said the civil war has displaced 12 million people, of whom around 3.5 million have fled the country. “Sudan is a humanitarian emergency of shocking proportions,” UN humanitarian chief Tom Fletcher said in a statement. — AFP

DIGNIFIED INTERACTION

Taliban delegation visits Japan in rare trip



A Taliban government delegation was visiting Japan for the first time on Monday, in a rare diplomatic visit outside of the region. The Afghan delegation included officials from the higher education, foreign affairs, and economy ministries. “We seek dignified interaction with the world for a strong, united, advanced, prosperous, developed Afghanistan and to be an active member of the international community,” Latif Nazari, a deputy minister at the ministry of economy, said. — AFP

MISLEADING COMMENTS

Singapore court fines opposition leader



Singapore’s opposition leader was fined for lying to parliament while helping a fellow party member cover up a false witness account, but narrowly avoided being barred from contesting upcoming national elections. Pritam Singh, 48, secretary-general of the Workers’ Party, was found guilty on two counts of lying to a parliamentary committee probing a fellow MP. Pritam had not done enough to get rookie MP Raeesah Khan to admit to her lie in parliament. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Elon Musk speaks in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington. — Reuters

JUDGE CALLS HEARING AGAINST MUSK’S DOGE

WILMINGTON: A US judge has scheduled a rare holiday court hearing on Monday, in a case brought by Democratic state attorneys general seeking to protect major federal agencies from Elon Musk’s government cost-cutting team known as DOGE. US District Judge Tanya Chutkan in Washington, DC, on Sunday called the hearing for Monday, the Presidents Day holiday when federal courts are closed. She did not say why she ordered the hearing, but on Friday she heard arguments by 13 Democratic state attorneys general for a temporary restraining order that would bar Musk’s DOGE, or Department of Government Efficiency, team from accessing information systems at several government agencies including the departments of Labor, Education, Health and Human Services, Energy, Transportation, Commerce, and the Office of Personnel Management.

The attorneys general also asked the judge to prevent Musk and DOGE team members from firing government employees or putting them on leave. The attorneys general have requested the order to last for 14 days, giving them time to file legal briefs in pursuit of a more permanent order.

— Reuters

STARMER TO MEET TRUMP ‘NEXT WEEK’



UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer will meet US President Donald Trump in Washington next week to discuss a “wide range of issues”, a British government spokesperson confirmed on Monday. “The prime minister looks forward to meeting President Trump shortly to discuss how we can deepen the special relationship across trade, investment and security,” the Downing Street spokesperson said. The encounter will be the first face-to-face talks between the two leaders. — AFP

GREECE TO BUILD ESCAPE PORT ON SANTORINI AS QUAKE CONTINUE

ATHENS: Greece will soon set up an evacuation port on the island of Santorini to facilitate the safe escape of people in case a bigger quake hits the popular tourist destination, a Greek minister said on Monday. Santorini, a volcanic island in the Aegean Sea, has been shaken by tens of thousands of mild quakes since late January, forcing thousands of people to flee, and authorities to ban construction activity, and shut schools and nearby islands. They have identified the main ferry port

at the foot of a precipitous slope and other sites across Santorini as weak links, although they have not said they cannot be used in an emergency situation. Civil Protection Minister Vassilis Kikilias said Greece will build an evacuation port for the safe docking of passenger ferries until a new port infrastructure is in place. “Along with the new port in Santorini which is being prepared, there was a decision for setting up an escape port on the part of the island where

passenger ferries would be able to dock in an emergency,” he said in an interview with Greek ANT1 television. Although the tremors lessened over the weekend, local authorities extended emergency measures for a third week on Sunday and reiterated calls for people to stay away from coastal areas and steep hillsides prone to landslides. Seismologists have said the latest seismic activity has pushed subsurface layers of the island upwards. — Reuters

EU pushes to boost guns deliveries for Ukraine

THE EU is pressing its member states to bolster supplies of key weaponry to Ukraine this year, including air defences, missiles and at least 1.5 million artillery shells, a proposal on Monday said. Europe is scrambling to offer backing to Kyiv after US President Donald Trump blindsided allies by launching peace efforts with Russia over the Kremlin’s three-year war.

Key leaders from the continent were to gather in Paris on Monday to discuss how to shore up any deal that Trump strikes and try to strengthen Ukraine’s hand. The proposal circulated by the EU’s diplomatic arm said it “aims to accelerate and focus the efforts of the EU and member states to meet Ukraine’s most pressing short-term needs”. It called on EU states to commit to delivering a specific amount of weaponry “as soon as possible in 2025” — but did not lay out a figure.

The initiative covered “large-calibre artillery ammunition, with a minimum objective of 1.5 million rounds” as well as “air defence systems, missiles (deep precision strikes), drones.” It said each EU state would be assigned a financial quota to fulfil that would be worked out in relation to their gross national income. Diplomats said the proposal would be discussed by representatives from the EU’s member states in Brussels on Tuesday.

“I understand it is far from being close to an agreement,” said one EU diplomat, adding that several countries had major questions on the initiative. Another diplomat said the proposal was still “very vague”, and it did not contain recommendations of how to avoid long-standing blockages from Hungary. Brussels is keen to send a strong message of support to Kyiv as EU chief Ursula von der Leyen and her top team are set to visit Ukraine next week for the third anniversary of Moscow’s attack. As Trump presses for a quick end to the conflict, Washington has said it now expects Europe to provide the “overwhelming share” of aid to Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Spain said on Monday it was “too soon” to discuss sending its troops to war-torn Ukraine as part of any potential peacekeeping force after Britain declared it was ready for such a move. “It is too early at



Servicemen of the Ukrainian Armed Forces prepare to fire a multiple-launch rocket system toward Russian troops, near the town of Chasiv Yar in Donetsk region. — Reuters

the moment to talk about deploying troops in Ukraine. There is no peace at the moment, and the effort has to be to achieve it as soon as possible,” Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares told a joint news conference with his visiting Brazilian counterpart Mauro Vieira. “When we have peace, we will have to see what conditions that peace requires. And whenever there is talk of any kind of deployment of forces, we have to consider what the mission is, who can make it up, under what flag, with what mandate,” he added. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on Sunday he was willing to put “our own troops on the ground if necessary” in Ukraine to ensure security in Europe.

Germany said it was “premature” to discuss sending its troops to war-torn Ukraine as part of any potential

peacekeeping force after Britain declared it was ready for such a move. “We have repeatedly stated that, first of all, we have to wait and see whether and how peace will hopefully emerge for Ukraine,” said German deputy government spokeswoman Christiane Hoffmann.

“Then we will be able to talk about the conditions and how this can be implemented,” she told reporters in Berlin, adding it was “premature to discuss (sending troops) at the present time”. A government source in Berlin said Germany rejects sending troops to Ukraine for a potential future peacekeeping mission if it is “without full US involvement”. “We will not participate in scenarios in which European and American security (policy) diverges,” the source added. — AFP

US tensions add fire to final stretch of German election campaign

BERLIN: Germany entered the final week of election campaigning on Monday, with the debate more heated than ever after the Trump administration weighed in with backing for the anti-immigration far-right AfD party. US Vice President JD Vance and tech billionaire Elon Musk, a Trump ally, have voiced support for the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, which is polling at a record 20 per cent.

All other parties have vowed a “firewall” on non-cooperation with the AfD, and tens of thousands again protested against the party at the weekend — but Vance said on Friday in a combative speech in Munich that there was “no room for firewalls”. His blistering comments, in which he also accused EU governments of stifling free speech, became a major topic in the latest TV debate between the four top candidates in the February 23 election. “I will not

allow an American vice president to tell me who I can talk to here in Germany,” said Friedrich Merz whose conservative CDU/CSU is leading the polls on around 30 per cent. Merz told voters he would “not tolerate such interference” in the polls or in any subsequent coalition negotiations.

Centre-left Chancellor Olaf Scholz also rejected Vance’s comments as “unacceptable” and asserted there is “no cooperation with the extreme right”. But the AfD’s top candidate Alice Weidel praised Vance for having “spoken out so clearly”. “We must not build firewalls to exclude millions of voters from the outset,” she told the TV audience. “We have to talk to each other. He made that clear.”

Merz called the AfD “a radical right-wing party”, a view shared by Scholz and Habeck, but Weidel told her political foes that by insulting her “you are insulting millions of



German parties candidates take part in a TV debate ahead of the parliamentary election, in Berlin. — AFP

voters”. News outlet Der Spiegel said the evening was “a complete success” for Weidel despite her “theatrically cold manner” because her very presence among the top four candidates “gives the impression that the AfD belongs

there and is a party like any other”. In Sunday’s debate, Merz was declared the winner by 32 per cent of respondents in a poll by the RTL broadcaster, and Scholz by 25 per cent. Weidel — the first AfD politician to feature in such a debate

-- found favour with 18 per cent of viewers.

She tied with Robert Habeck of the Greens. “None of the candidates landed a knockout blow,” the head of polling firm INSA, Herrmann Binkert, told Bild daily.

The debate was unlikely to produce any “big changes”, Binkert said, as Merz’s polling lead looks set to hold firm.

In the final stretch of the campaign, the candidates are fighting for every last vote, with around 30 per cent still undecided according to latest surveys.

The vote is being held six months earlier than planned after Scholz’s centre-left coalition collapsed in November in a row over budget questions.

The campaign has been dominated by the dire state of the economy and a bitter debate on migration after a series of attacks blamed on asylum seekers. — AFP

OPINION

Top honour for HM a testament to security commitment



HIS Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has recently been awarded the prestigious Prince Naif Medal for Arab Security of Excellent Class. This accolade is not merely a ceremonial honour but also represents a significant recognition of his leadership and the policies implemented under his reign that have contributed to regional security and stability.

The Prince Naif Medal is awarded to individuals who have made outstanding contributions to Arab security. By receiving this medal, His Majesty underscores his commitment to fostering peace and stability within Oman and across the broader Arab region.

The award reflects an acknowledgment from peers in the Arab world regarding his effective governance and diplomatic efforts aimed at mitigating conflicts and enhancing cooperative security measures.

Since ascending to the throne in January 2020, His Majesty has prioritised national security as a cornerstone of his administration. His policies are characterised by a balanced approach that emphasises dialogue, diplomacy, and collaboration with neighboring countries.

This strategy has been essential in

navigating complex regional dynamics, particularly given Oman's historical role as a mediator in conflicts.

In regards to diplomatic engagement, His Majesty the Sultan has actively engaged in diplomatic initiatives aimed at resolving tensions in the Gulf region. His government has maintained open lines of communication with various stakeholders, including Iran and Saudi Arabia, promoting dialogue over confrontation.

Under his leadership, Oman has participated in various regional forums focused on collective security arrangements among Arab states.

These efforts aim to address common threats such as terrorism, cyber threats, and transnational crime.

Domestically, HM has implemented measures to enhance internal security while respecting civil liberties. This balance is crucial for maintaining public trust and ensuring social cohesion within Oman.

The recognition bestowed upon HM through the Prince Naif Medal serves as an endorsement of these policies.

It highlights how effective leadership can lead to enhanced security frameworks that benefit not only individual nations but also

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's policies are characterised by a balanced approach that emphasises dialogue, diplomacy, and collaboration with neighboring countries.

contribute to overall regional stability.

Moreover, this award may inspire other leaders in the region to adopt similar approaches that prioritise dialogue and cooperation over conflict. In an era where geopolitical tensions are prevalent, such recognition can serve as a catalyst for positive change within the Arab world.

Oman emerged as a significant peacemaker in the Middle East, particularly in the context of regional conflicts and diplomatic tensions. Oman has adopted a unique approach characterised by diplomacy, neutrality, and a commitment to dialogue.

The roots of Oman's diplomatic efforts can be traced back to its long-standing relationships with various countries and Oman's continued engagement with the rest of the world is a tradition of diplomacy that persists today.

To sum it all, His Majesty's receipt of the Prince Naif Medal for Arab Security of Excellent Class is a testament to his steadfast commitment to fostering security and stability across the region.

It reflects both national achievements in governance and international recognition of Oman's role as a stabilising force in Middle Eastern politics.

Grannies against the right rally before Germany elections

OLIVIER FENIET & JASTINDER KHERA

They are the true veterans of German anti-fascist protests: the 'Grannies Against The Right', known to sport colourful knitted hats on their mission to safeguard democracy for future generations. Ahead of Germany's February 23 election, the 'Omas Gegen Rechts' have amped up their campaign against the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), which is polling at a record 20 per cent or higher.

Most of the group's members either have early-childhood memories of Nazi Germany or grew up amid the rubble of the devastated and shamed country, now determined to warn younger generations of the dangers of political extremism.

"Whenever there's anti-democratic behaviour, we can't stay quiet," said Uta Saenger, one of the organisers of a nationwide day of action earlier this month that drew 24,000 people in the northern city of Hannover alone.

The Omas movement has become a force to be reckoned with as right-wing extremism is on the rise again. While many retirees may be quietly kicking back, the Grannies hit the streets with gusto.

"In the past year we have held or participated in over 80 protests," Maja, a 72-year-old member in Berlin, said, saying many rallies were shows of solidarity against antisemitism. She said her Jewish background made the issue deeply personal, as "my grandmother had to leave Germany with my father". She said some of her grandchildren are of Middle Eastern heritage, "and I don't want them to have to leave Germany. That's why I joined the Omas."

At another recent rally, held in the city of Nuremberg, the Omas were out in force again, some of them holding up a knitted banner in the form of a "firewall". That is a reference to the long-established agreement between Germany's mainstream parties not to cooperate with extremists in any form.

Many accuse the conservative CDU, which is leading the polls at around 30 percent, of blowing a hole in the firewall last month by teaming up with the AfD to push a motion curbing immigration through parliament.

CDU leader Friedrich Merz has insisted he is not seeking any further cooperation with the far-right and argues that action is needed after a spate of deadly attacks blamed on migrants and asylum seekers. Gabi Heller, 58 and one of the founders of the Nuremberg chapter of the Omas, said that "it's an easy solution to blame migration for everything, but this is just total nonsense". — AFP

I've got the POWA

ONE of the most influential self-development books I have encountered is The Concise 48 Laws of Power by Robert Greene. This book serves as a manual for navigating the complex dynamics of power and influence, drawing on timeless wisdom from historical figures such as Machiavelli and Sun-Tzu.

Greene's premise is simple yet profound: everyone desires some degree of control over themselves and others. The lack of power or control can lead to stress, disillusionment, and a diminished sense of well-being.

While we may aspire to live by ideals of fairness and decency, the reality is that success often requires understanding and playing by the rules of power that govern human interaction.



DR NAJMA AL ZIDJALY

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University



The Concise 48 Laws of Power by Robert Greene offers valuable insights into the mechanisms of power and influence, making it an essential resource for anyone seeking success in a world where power dynamics are central.

Similarly, Greene's law "Never put too much trust in friends, learn how to use enemies" suggests that friends can be unreliable, while enemies, if managed properly, can be a source of valuable alliances.

Another central theme in the book is the importance of controlling your own image and actions.

Greene's law, "Conceal your intentions," suggests that keeping your plans hidden from others allows you to operate without interference.

This ties into his advice to "Always say less than necessary," as revealing too much can weaken your position. A more enigmatic and unpredictable demeanor can create an aura of control, helping to keep others unsure of your true intentions.

Greene also stresses the need to understand and manipulate social

dynamics. One of the most famous pieces of advice in the book is, "Get others to do the work for you, but always take the credit." While this may seem underhanded, it underscores the value of leveraging the efforts of others to increase your own standing. Greene further advises that "Make others come to you – use bait if necessary," highlighting that power is often gained by drawing people toward you rather than chasing after them.

The book delves into the power of perception as well. Greene's law "So much depends on reputation; guide it with your life" emphasises the importance of cultivating a strong reputation, as it is one of the most valuable assets in the pursuit of power. Reputation often determines how others perceive and respond to you, making it crucial to manage and protect carefully. Similarly, the advice to "Play on people's need to believe to create a cult like following" underscores the role of belief and identity in influencing others.

Greene's work is not solely about manipulation and control. He also discusses the importance of timing, careful planning, and adaptability.

"Master the art of timing" and "Plan all the way to the end" are laws that emphasise the need for patience and foresight in achieving one's goals.

The law "Concentrate your forces" suggests that focus and determination are key to overcoming obstacles, while "Assume formlessness" teaches the value of remaining flexible in the face of change.

Despite the sometimes harsh tone of Greene's laws, the book offers valuable insights into the mechanisms of power and influence, making it an essential resource for anyone seeking success in a world where power dynamics are central.

The changing times of the Indian Ocean



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is senior editor of Observer

THE Sultanate of Oman hosted the 8th Indian Ocean Conference, an initiative by the India Foundation. The event saw the participation of about 250 delegates under one roof. It was fascinating to watch the members of the delegation because they were from different countries. It was a mini world because most of the people chose to wear their traditional clothes. They followed each speaker’s words with keen interest. Imagine this: one ocean and around it 38 countries and not to forget islands. From coast to coast, people vary in beliefs, language, customs and diet. The Indian Ocean is the third largest ocean in the world. The Indian Ocean touches Asia, Africa, the Gulf countries and Arab countries. The Indian Ocean has been an incubator for civilisations. It would be intriguing to read the history of the Indian Ocean. But from the ancient days onwards, people had the urge to sail across to other coasts and this trade began. Of course, the Indian Ocean has seas too — the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, Andaman Sea, Red Sea and the list goes on. The sea routes became well defined and even

with modern transport other than the sea, the seaports continue to play a major role in global logistics. The archaeological sites like Baleed and Qalhat tell us the historical role of the sea in civilisations. The Frankincense Land Museum in Salalah and the National Museum in Muscat gives us plenty to think about. They braved the waves, followed the stars and sailed with the wind. We have potteries, seals and stamps to tell us who travelled to where. But today the nations of the Indian Ocean region have challenges and the experts and speakers talked about the importance of freedom of navigation. Sea piracy is still a reality not just in the storybooks. In fact, the experts pointed out how the very source of trading was impacted by piracy that led to higher tax rates, insurance and freight charges. It is nice to see the initiatives taken to work together to solve problems. Not to forget are the environmental challenges that are threatening the Indian Ocean and its marine life. The ocean gave many gifts, but man sometimes became greedy. If the world is being touched by AI, so is the Indian Ocean too. The experts talked

The Indian Ocean has been an incubator for civilisations. It would be intriguing to read the history of the Indian Ocean

about the security of ports and in comes the new kid in town — AI in port management. This again needs security just like cybersecurity because they are all data. There must be sad stories too because human and drug trafficking also exist. According to Britannica, the formation of the Indian Ocean is a consequence of the breakup, which “began about 180 million years ago, of the southern supercontinent Gondwana by the movement to the northeast of the Indian subcontinent, which began colliding with Eurasia about 50 million years ago. With all the developments the region went through from then to now, human civilisations have witnessed and have been influenced as well. Today there is Indian Ocean literature and, of course, natural resources. So many aspects to think about, yet the most unique feature is its seasonal circular patterns — churning out the beautiful monsoon. It is also the warmest of all the five oceans of the world. But today, even its coral is threatened. The time is now to protect it. After all, we seemed to be more dependent on it than the other way around.

END OF THE ROAD FOR KOLKATA’S YELLOW TAXIS

SAILENDRA SIL

Kolkata locals cherish their city’s past, which is why many in the one-time Indian capital are mourning a vanishing emblem of its faded grandeur: a hulking and noisy fleet of stately yellow taxis. The snub-nosed Hindustan Ambassador, first rolling off the assembly line in the 1950s with a design that barely changed in the decades since, once ruled India’s potholed streets. Nowadays it is rarely spotted outside Kolkata, where it serves as the backbone of the metropolitan cab fleet and a readily recognisable symbol of the eastern city’s identity. But numbers are dwindling fast and a court ruling means those that remain — lumbering but still sturdy — will be forced off the roads entirely in the next three years. “I love my car like my son,” Kailash Sahani, who has sat behind the wheel of an Ambassador cab for the past four decades, said. “It’s a simple car — no electronics, no frills,” the 70-year-old added. “It’s unbelievable how much things have changed... The end of these taxi cars also marks our end.” Sahani is among thousands of Kolkata cabbies relinquishing their vehicles in line with tough emissions standards introduced in 2009 to ease the city’s endemic smog problem. Only around 2,500 Ambassador taxis were still working at the start of this year, down from 7,000 a year earlier, according to Bengal Taxi Association figures. Another 1,000 will be retired this year and West Bengal state transport minister Snehasis Chakraborty said that the remainder will be gone by the end of 2027. “The car is strong. Parts and maintenance are cheap and if it breaks down, it’s easy to find a mechanic,” said Bengal Taxi Association spokesman Sanjeeb Roy. Their disappearance, he added, “represents all that’s wrong with India’s changing economy”. The Hindustan Ambassador was the cornerstone of India’s automotive industry for decades from its 1957 debut at a factory on Kolkata’s northern outskirts. Modelled on a similarly regal sedan car from Britain’s now long-defunct Morris Motors, the car was a triumphant achievement of industry in the first years of India’s history as an independent nation. A deluxe model, its windows adorned with lace curtains, was for years the main means of conveyance for government ministers and captains of industry. But the car’s shortcomings also served as a reminder of deep structural problems with the quasi-socialist economic system that prevailed in India at the time. Buyers sat on wait lists for years because pervasive red tape stopped Hindustan Motors from raising production to meet demand, while a near-monopoly on sales left no incentive to maintain quality standards. That gave rise to an oft-repeated joke about the litany of defects found in the average “Amby”: the only thing in the car that doesn’t make a sound is its horn. — AFP

Meloni takes on judiciary, in echo of Berlusconi

ITALIAN Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni is clashing with the country’s judiciary in the same way her old political ally and mentor Silvio Berlusconi used to, promising a once-in-a-lifetime overhaul of the legal system. But whereas Berlusconi failed to impose his will on Italy’s fiercely independent magistrates and prosecutors, Meloni could yet come out on top, unburdened by the crushing conflict of interest that pegged back her billionaire predecessor. The judiciary is resisting pressure to change, calling a rare strike later this month over the planned reform. Separately, courts are challenging a flagship government initiative to redirect migrants away from Italy to Albania. Meloni’s rightist government has cried foul, accusing the powerful judges of playing politics and has said it will not back down, drawing comfort from opinion polls that show many voters support its uncompromising stance. “Basically, they want to govern themselves. But there’s a problem. If I make a mistake, the Italians can vote me out of office. If they make a mistake, no one can say or do anything. No power in a democratic state works like that,” Meloni told a TV channel owned by the Berlusconi family in late January. Italy’s justice system is one of the most dysfunctional in Europe, where, despite recent improvements, it still takes four times the European average to reach a final ruling in civil cases and 3.5 times the average to secure a definitive verdict in criminal trials, according to 2022 data. While centre-left governments have tended to focus on improving the efficiency of the courts, Berlusconi, who faced dozens of trials largely tied to his media empire up to his death in 2023, repeatedly pushed to curb prosecution powers. Opponents denounced these efforts as an attempt to curtail his legal woes and while he succeeded in making it harder to convict white-collar criminals, he failed in his effort to break the links that bind prosecutors and judges.



Italy’s Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni during a press conference in Rome. — Reuters file photo



ANGELO AMANTE

The writer is political and general news correspondent for Reuters in Rome Crispian Balmer The writer is Reuters' chief correspondent, Italy, based in Rome

Unlike in the United States or Britain, judges and prosecutors in Italy share the same career track and are overseen by the same self-governing body, which will not stand for government interference. Meloni, who took power in 2022 at the head of a coalition that includes Berlusconi’s Forza Italia party, has revisited the old plan of splitting up the judiciary, saying it will make judges more impartial by cutting their ties with prosecutors. “This is the reform of all reforms,” said Francesco Paolo Sisto, the deputy justice minister and Forza Italia politician. “You would never see a soccer referee coming from the same city as one of the two teams on the field. They must be from a different city. Likewise, a judge must be third-party and impartial,” he said. In a sign of their discontent, the judiciary has called a one-day strike on February 27, accusing the government of seeking to gain power over prosecutors and dictate what crimes they want to investigate, or steer clear of. “This will only be harmful. The separation of careers will turn the public prosecutor into a super-police officer and they will lose the culture of impartiality,” said Nicola Gratteri, the chief prosecutor in Naples who is famed for his battles against the ‘Ndrangheta mafia. The government has accused some prosecutors and judges of flexing their judicial powers to force a retreat and the battle looks set to dominate domestic politics for months. A court in January blocked for the third time a government initiative to detain migrants in camps in Albania, frustrating Meloni’s plans to deter people from seeking refuge in Italy and leaving the project in legal limbo. That same week, a prosecutor stunned Meloni by placing her and three cabinet colleagues under investigation following a government decision to release a Libyan police chief wanted by the International Criminal Court. Andrea Delmastro Delle Vedove, an under secretary at the Justice Ministry and member of Meloni’s Brothers of Italy party, said the magistrates wanted to sabotage the reform. “It seems blatantly obvious to me that this is the case,” he said. Magistrates deny this and say they are only applying the law. Supreme Court prosecutor Marco Patarnello wrote to colleagues last October warning them that Meloni was a “far more dangerous” adversary than Berlusconi because she was not mired in legal investigations and was acting out of “political vision”. The message, which was leaked to the media and confirmed by Patarnello, acknowledged that public opinion was no longer behind the magistrates, unlike in the 1990s.

SPORTS

CAMELRACING



OMAN SECURES 8 CARS, UAE 11, QATAR 1 AT AL BASHAYER FEST

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, FEB 17

The prestigious Al Bashayer Festival for Purebred Arabian Camel Racing 2025 competitions concluded with thrilling performances over six days, awarding 20 cars to top competitors.

The closing ceremony at Al Bashayer Arabian Camel Racecourse in the Wilayat of Adam was presided over by His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan.

The event was held from February 10 to 15, saw fierce competition among elite camel owners from Oman, the UAE and Qatar.

The eighth edition witnessed 5,320 camels competing in 84 races for prestigious prizes, including 20 cars, three daggers, three guns, seven cups and the coveted golden and silver swords.

UAE camel owners dominated by winning 11 cars out of 20 cars in different categories:

- 1/ Baynoonah / Ateeq bin Matar al Qubaisi
- 2/ Hemloulah / Hijin Al Rysasah
- 3/ Al Nader / Jumaa bin Mohammed al Ketbi
- 4/ Najla / Atiq bin Matar al Qubaisi
- 5/ Al Madinah / Hamid bin Said al Neyadi
- 6/ Dawama / Atiq bin Matar al Qubasi
- 7/ Al Mudhish / Abdullah bin Hamad al Aamri
- 8/ Hamloulah / Hijin Al Riasa
- 9/ Hadbah / Mani bin Ali al Shamsi
- 10/ Al Anood / Ali bin Khalifa al Rumaithi
- 11/ Al Faydah / Hijin Al Riasa

While Omani camel owners snatched 8 cars:

- 1/ Ameera / Mohammed al Habsi
- 2/ Najd / Sulaiman bin Ali al Wahibi
- 3/ Fal / Rashid bin Salim al Zarai
- 4/ Mulfat / Mohammed bin Shteib al Habsi
- 5/ Al Azoum / Ghasi bin Salim al Mashaykhi
- 6/ Nawyed / Salim bin Thaloub al Daree
- 7/ Al Madinah / Said bin alim al Jadaili
- 8/ Al Aarab / Mohammed bin Ali al Jahafi car

The last car was won by Qatar's camel 'Shahaniyah' owned by Hijin Al Shahaniyah.

In addition to the car prizes the winner received one of the festival icons, daggers, guns, cups, or swords depending on the race categories.

Scotland thump Oman, Egypt win thriller

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 17

OMAN SUFFERED a 10-1 thrashing by Scotland in their opening match of the FIH Hockey Men's Nations Cup 2 Oman 2025 at the Hockey Oman stadium in Al Amerat on Monday night. Oman next face a tough challenge against the United States on the second day of the tournament.

Scotland started strong, scoring five goals in the first quarter through Jamie Golden (4', 11'), Andrew McConnell (6'), Struan Walker (7', 10'), leaving Oman struggling to respond. The second quarter saw Scotland extend their lead to 7-0 with goals from David Nairn (19') and Andrew Loughrey (20'), while Oman failed to break through their defence. Oman showed improvement in the third quarter, but Scotland regained control late, adding two more goals from Ali Douglas (42') and Andrew McConnell (43'), making it 9-0. In the final quarter, Oman finally found the net through Ammar al Shaaibi (50'), but Scotland sealed their dominant performance with Craig Falconer's tenth goal (55'), ending the Pool B match 10-1.

EGYPT EDGE CHINA IN NAIL-BITER

In the opening Pool A match, Egypt edged past China in a thrilling 5-4 victory. Egypt took an early lead through Ahmed Elganaini in the 4th minute, but China dominated possession, ending the quarter 1-0 in Egypt's favour.

China equalised via Benhai Chen (21') and took the lead (25'), but Egypt responded with two late goals from Mohamed Nasr (29') and Elganaini (30') to lead 3-2 at halftime.

China levelled the score again with a penalty goal from Yuanlin LU (37'), but Egypt quickly regained control with goals from Ziad Adel (38') and Hossameldin Ragab (40'), ending the third quarter 5-3.

China fought back with a late penalty corner goal from Jiesheng Gao (55'), but Egypt's defence held firm, securing a 5-4 victory.

Ahmed Elganaini was awarded the best player of the match.

Elganaini expressed his happiness with the victory, noting that he has played in Oman before and looks forward to better performances ahead. He emphasised staying focused on each match.

He highlighted the team's intensive training camps aimed at securing first place. After scoring two goals and earning the Best Player award, he said, "I aim to be



Oman and Scotland players fight for the ball during the FIH Nations Cup at the Hockey Oman stadium.

the tournament's top scorer."

Praising Oman's organisation, he stated, "Oman always impresses with its exceptional hosting," adding that the country has become a top sports destination, citing major international tournaments it has successfully hosted.

POLAND CRUISE PAST CHILE

In the second Pool A match, Poland secured a commanding 4-0 win over Chile.

Poland dominated possession and applied high pressure in the first quarter, but Chile's solid defence held firm. Despite both teams creating chances, the quarter ended goalless.

In the second quarter, Poland took the lead in the 17th minute with a penalty corner goal by Bembenek Tomasz. Chile pressed for an equaliser but was denied by Poland's goalkeeper, leaving the halftime score at 1-0.

Chile started aggressively in the third quarter but failed to capitalise on a penalty corner. Poland regained control, and in the 43rd minute, Koperski Maksymilian scored from a rebound, extending the lead to 2-0.

In the fourth quarter, Poland sealed the win with two late goals by Gumny Mikolaj 54' and Koperski Maksymilian 56'. With this, the match ended in a well-deserved 4-0 victory for Poland, following a strong and organised performance, while Chile struggled with missed opportunities and

failure to capitalise on its penalty corners. Mateusz Popiolkowski won the best player of the match.

USA BEAT AUSTRIA

In Pool B, the USA earned their first points with a close 1-0 win over Austria.

The USA took an early lead in the fourth minute through Sekayi Charasika's penalty corner goal and controlled the first quarter. Austria dominated possession in the second quarter, missing key chances, including a penalty corner by Fulop Losonci (18'), but the USA held their 1-0 lead at half-time. Austria maintained pressure in the third quarter but couldn't break through the solid American defence. In the final quarter, the USA missed a penalty (50'), while Austria pushed hard for an equaliser but failed to convert. The match ended in a hard-fought 1-0 victory for the USA. Jack Heldens from US team received the best player award.

Eight teams are competing in the tournament for the title and qualification to the 2026 Hockey Nations Cup. The teams are divided into two groups: Pool A: Egypt, Chile, China and Poland. Pool B: Austria, Oman, Scotland and the United States.

Each team will play against every other team in its group, striving to secure a spot in the semifinals. The top two teams from each group will advance to the knockout stage.

Kuwait SC revive hopes at Gulf Club Handball Championship

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 17

Kuwait club tasted their first win at the 41st Gulf Club Handball Championship after their thrilling 34-22 win over Dibba Al Huson from UAE on Monday at indoor hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

The win revived Kuwaiti team's hopes to progress into the second round after their defeat in the opening match against Al Arabi from Qatar by 34-33. On the other side, Dibba Al Huson received their second straight defeat after they lost against Oman Club by 29-26 in the opener.

Kuwait Club took control of the first half with an aggressive offensive strategy led by Saif al Adwani and Mohammed Radhei. Their relentless pressure prevented Dibba Al Huson from creating scoring opportunities,

resulting in a significant lead. By half-time, Kuwait had established a 20-8 advantage.

In the second half, Dibba Al Huson fought hard to close the gap, with Mario De Jesus delivering an impressive performance. He helped his team reduce the deficit to 31-22, but Kuwait Club's experience proved decisive. They maintained composure and secured a convincing 34-22 victory.

SEEB TAKE ON AL RAYYAN

Oman's representative, Seeb club, will commence their campaign at the 41st Gulf Club Handball Championship against Qatar's Al Rayyan club on Tuesday in Group A which also feature Al Noor club from Saudi Arabia. The match will kick off at 5 pm.

Seeb players took advantage of their rest period as they did not compete in the first two rounds.



Kuwait SC and Dibba Al Huson players in action.

The team is in top condition after completing internal training sessions. This event marks Seeb's fifth participation in the Gulf championship, with their best results being fourth place in 2008 and 2009.

STRONG PERFORMANCE

With the tournament being held in Muscat, the Omani side hopes to put on a strong performance in front of their home fans.

On the other hand, Al Rayyan aim for a second straight victory, which would secure their place in the semifinals after their 31-26 win over Al Noor in the group opener. Seeb's head coach Nabil al Balushi and his assistant Ahmed al Hinai closely analysed Al Rayyan and Al Noor in their first match. The coaching staff has gathered valuable insights to help Seeb develop a tactical approach for their opening game.

FEBRUARY 21



RAS AL HAMRA CLUB TO HOST CHARITY GOLF SCRAMBLE

MUSCAT: Ras Al Hamra Golf Club is set to host a Charity Golf Scramble on February 21, in support of the Positive Vision Association (PVA), an Omani non-governmental organisation (NGO) dedicated to raising awareness about HIV/Aids, substance abuse, and community health support.

The event aims to unite corporate sponsors, golf enthusiasts, and the broader community to promote awareness, reduce stigma, and provide essential support to individuals and families affected by HIV/Aids and substance use. Participants will engage in a golf tournament, raffle draws, live entertainment and a dinner gathering open to families and supporters.

Nashia Nasib, President of the Positive Vision Association, stated, "Our mission is rooted in compassion, and we are here to embrace those who are most affected. This event is more than just a tournament; it is an opportunity to champion awareness, advocacy and change within our community."

The event is made possible through the generous sponsorship of Renaissance Services as the title sponsor, Special Technical Services (STS) as the gold sponsor, MASIN Projects and Dolphin Village as the silver sponsors, and Al Busaidy, Mansoor Jamal & Co (AMJ), Towell Group, Oman Shapoorji LLC as bronze sponsors.

These organisations play a significant role in supporting community-driven initiatives aligned with their corporate social responsibility commitments.

Established on July 27, 2023, by Ministerial Decision 177/2023, Positive Vision Association is committed to enhancing public awareness of HIV/ Aids, drug addiction, and psychotropic substance abuse while promoting social inclusion and reducing stigma and discrimination.

In the last year, the Positive Vision Association has collaborated with key partners such as Al Jisr Foundation to support the peer education programme, Omantel for the establishment of a national hotline, Dar Al Atta'a to financially support people living with HIV and individuals in recovery and their families, and the Oman Automobile Association to utilise their youth friendly spaces for raising awareness purposes.



Oman second in World Cup League 2 with win

OMAN AVENGED their earlier defeat to Namibia in the ongoing ICC Men's Cricket World Cup League 2 tri-series with a tense two-wicket victory at the Oman Cricket Academy ground in Al Amerat on Sunday.

The win, secured in a low-scoring contest dominated by spinners, propelled Oman to second place in the standings with 18 points from 15 matches, trailing leaders USA (20 from 15), while Canada sit third with 16 points from 12 games.

Namibia's decision to bat first backfired as they were left reeling at 19/4 within the first 10 overs. Oman's spinners exploited the conditions brilliantly, with left-arm orthodox bowler Shakeel Ahmed leading the charge once again. Continuing his fine form, he picked up 4/25, adding to his four-wicket haul in the last game against the USA.

Jay Odedra set the tone early, trapping Zane Green (6) lbw before dismissing JP Kotze (1) soon after. Shakeel then dismantled the middle order, bowling Jan Frylinck (9) and later returning to clean up tail-ender Jan-Izak de Villiers (1).

Namibia captain Gerhard Erasmus (15 off 43) and Jan Nicol Loftie-Eaton (30 off

54) briefly revived the innings with a 35-run fifth-wicket stand, but Aamir Kaleem (2/16) broke the partnership by dismissing Erasmus. From 54/5, Namibia continued to lose wickets at regular intervals.

Siddharth Bukkapatnam (1/26) and leg-spinner Samay Shrivastava (1/4) ensured that all ten wickets fell to spin, as Namibia were bundled out for just 96 in 33.1 overs.

CONFIDENT START
Chasing a modest 97, Oman started confidently with a 42-run opening partnership between skipper Jatinder Singh (14 off 25 balls) and Aamir Kaleem (21 off 33). The pair looked in control until Erasmus (5/34) broke the stand by removing Kaleem in the 10th over.

Four balls later, Bernard Scholtz (2/31) dismissed Jatinder, triggering a collapse that saw Oman slump from 42/1 to 87/8. Erasmus ran through the middle order with a brilliant spell, trapping Hammad Mirza (4) lbw, and

removing Sufyan Mehmood (0) with Wasim Ali sent back for 10 by Scholtz.

Vinayak Shukla (18 off 19) played a crucial hand, striking a boundary and a six to ease the pressure before falling to JJ Smit in the 19th over—the only wicket to fall to pace in the match.

With Oman still needing 16 runs, Erasmus struck twice in quick succession, dismissing Shakeel Ahmed (6) and Jay Odedra to leave the hosts on the brink at 87/8. However, Hashir Dafedar (5* off 19) and Siddharth Bukkapatnam (4* off 2) held their nerve, guiding Oman home in 22.4 overs. Dafedar struck a crucial boundary with six needed, and four byes sealed the win for the hosts.

Kaleem was named the player of the match for his all-round performance.

Oman now take on the USA in the concluding game of the tri-series on Tuesday. A win for Duleep Mendis' men, who defeated the USA by seven wickets last Wednesday, will propel them to the top of the table.

BRIEF SCORES: Namibia 96 all out in 33.1 overs (Jan Nicol Loftie-Eaton 30, Gerhard Erasmus 15; Shakeel Ahmed 4/25, Aamir Kaleem 2/16, Jay Odedra 2/24) lost to Oman 100/8 in 22.4 overs (Aamir Kaleem 21, Vinayak Shukla 18; Gerhard Erasmus 5/34, Bernard Scholtz 2/31).

Oman take part in U14 tourney in Bahrain

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 17

The Oman national tennis team is participating in the qualifying rounds of the Under-14 International Championship (Asia/Oceania), which will be hosted by Bahrain from February 15 to 23. This participation is part of the efforts of the Oman Tennis Association to enhance the level of the sport and provide young female players with the opportunity to gain experience and compete on the international stage.

The Omani delegation is led by Sara al Balushi, while coach Sergey Pershin is responsible for the technical supervision of the team, which includes players Areen al Azkawi, Talia al Busaidy and Salma al Riyami.

Regarding the significance of this participation, coach Sergey Pershin emphasised that the tournament represents a key milestone in the players' development. "These qualifiers provide a great opportunity for the players to develop their skills by competing against strong teams from various countries. After their outstanding performance in



the ITF tournament held in Muscat last January, we are excited to continue this progress and deliver an even better performance in this championship."

He added: "The competition will be more intense and challenging, but we believe this will motivate the players to improve all aspects of their game. The experience they gain from this tournament will be invaluable in raising their technical level, and we will work on enhancing their tactical and technical skills in preparation for future competitions."

READY FOR CHALLENGE
For her part, Sara al Balushi confirmed that the team is ready for the challenge and that participating

in this tournament represents an important step in developing young players. "We are excited to take part in these qualifiers, and the players are highly motivated to compete and give their best effort. The OTA is working to provide a suitable environment for player development, and this tournament is a fantastic opportunity for them to gain experience and engage with strong teams from different Asian and Oceanian countries," Sara said adding, "our goal is to strengthen Oman's presence in international tennis and achieve honourable results that reflect the association's efforts in supporting young talents."

Oman will compete in Group 4 alongside Macau and the Maldives, while the other participating teams have been distributed across different groups. Group 1 includes Sri Lanka, Bahrain and Singapore, while Group 2 consists of Mongolia, Lebanon, and Jordan. Group 3 features Turkmenistan, Bangladesh and Oceania. Group 5 includes Kyrgyzstan, Syria and the Philippines, while Group 6 comprises Indonesia, Guam and Iraq.



Recall

Isuzu NPR Trucks

Recall Date: 18 Feb 2025

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
ISUZU N-series	2024	42

Recall Consequence

Description of defect:
Due to improper production of the injection pipe bracket, interference between an injection pipe and pipe clip may occur. If a vehicle is used in this condition continuously, fuel leaks may occur.

Recall Action

Procedure:
Replace the injection pipe bracket and pipe clip.

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pacp.gov.om>

Toll free number 80050004 on all working days, 08:00am to 01:00pm and 2:00pm to 05:00pm with effect from Date 18/2/2025



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Consumer Line
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SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Brazil's Joao Fonseca celebrating with the trophy after defeating Argentina's Francisco Cerundulo in the ATP 250 Argentina Open singles final match in Buenos Aires. — AFP

FONSECA, 18, CAPTURES ARGENTINA OPEN TITLE

BUENOS AIRES: Brazilian teenager Joao Fonseca became the 10th youngest champion in ATP Tour history when he swept past home hope Francisco Cerundolo in the final of the Argentina Open on Sunday.

The 18-year-old, ranked 99 in the world and playing in his first tour-level final, came through 6-4, 7-6 (7/1) against his 28th-ranked opponent.

Fonseca twice unsuccessfully served for the tie-break but regrouped to claim victory in the tie-break in a frenzied atmosphere in Buenos Aires.

The 2024 ATP NextGen champion is the youngest male player from South America to win a tour title while his victory will also see him rise to 68 when the new rankings are released on Monday.

“Unbelievable week, even in Argentina there are some Brazilians cheering for me,” Fonseca said on court.

“That’s just amazing. Every Brazilian, everyone from their country wants this support from your own country. For me, this moment that I’m living is just unbelievable.”

He added: “Of course I want to be No 1, of course I want to win Slams, titles, but my dream is just to play tennis, and I’m living it.”

Cerundolo, seeking his fourth career title, was broken in the seventh game of the first set and fought off Fonseca when the teenager served for the trophy at 5-4 and 6-5 in the second.

However, the Brazilian impressively held his nerve in the tie-break and celebrated his triumph by collapsing in joy on the dusty, clay surface.

Fonseca made his maiden final the hard way — in Friday’s quarterfinals he saved two match points to defeat Mariano Navone in a match six minutes shy of three hours.

In all, he defeated four Argentinian players on the road to the trophy.

He had already announced himself on the scene in January when he came through qualifying at the Australian Open and defeated top 10 player Andrey Rublev in the first round. — AFP

HUMBERT SECURES BACK-TO-BACK TITLES



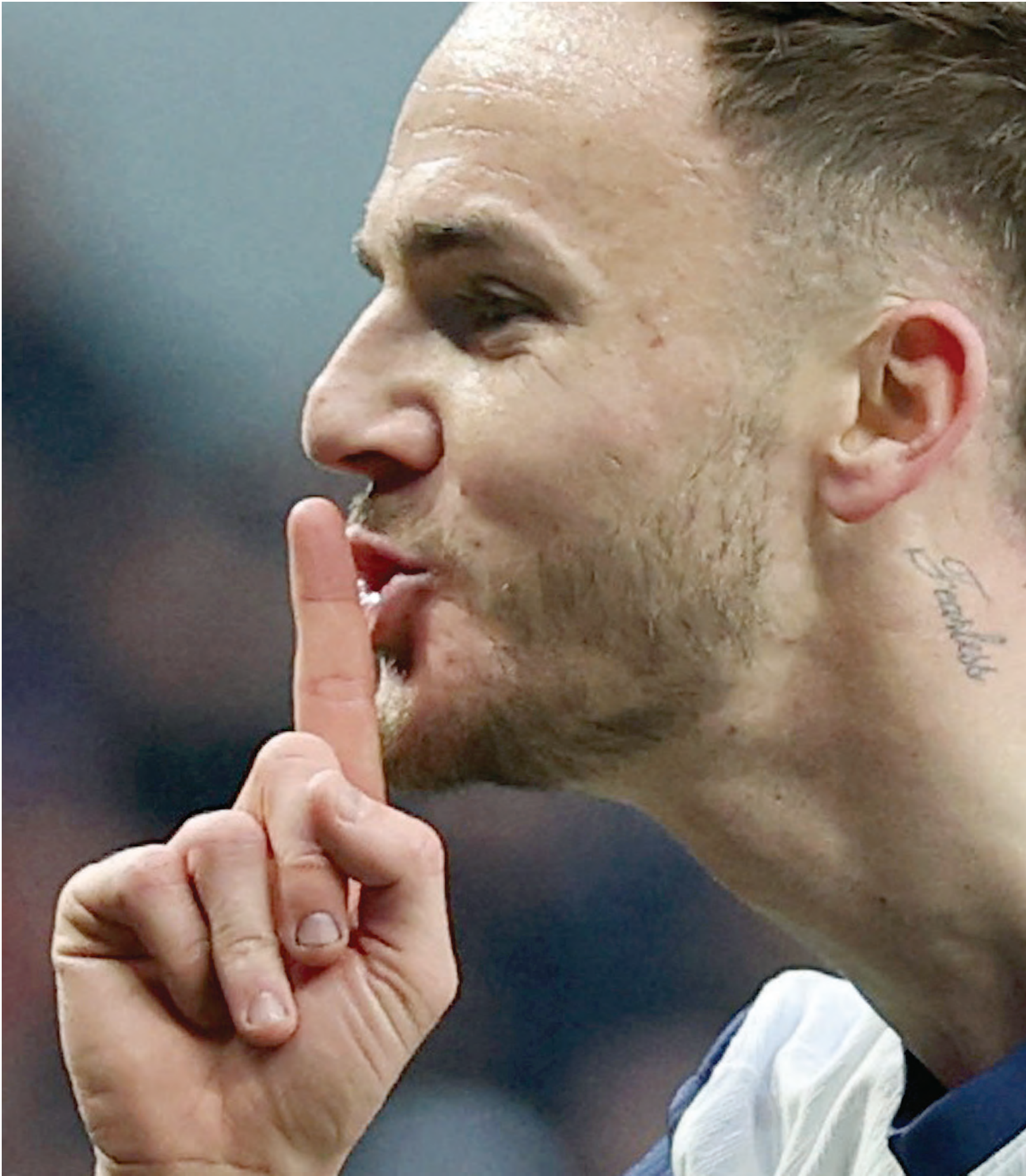
France's Ugo Humbert holds the trophy after winning against Serbia's Hamad Medjedovic during the men's singles final match at the Marseille Open 13 ATP World Tour in Marseille. — AFP

MARSEILLE: France’s Ugo Humbert successfully defended his Marseille ATP title on Sunday, securing a seventh career crown with a straight-set defeat of Hamad Medjedovic in the final.

The second seed came through 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 against his 96th-ranked opponent to extend his record on indoor hard courts in his own country to 18-1. That run also included the title in Metz in 2023 as well as a run to the Paris Masters final last year where the left-hander lost to Alexander Zverev. “I didn’t know him well and he was very, very good,” said 26-year-old Humbert of his opponent on Sunday. “I am very happy to retain my title here. I am very proud too, because I was a little nervous at the start of the tournament. It means a lot to win in France.”

Medjedovic, the 2023 ATP NextGen champion, was chasing his first tour-level title. — AFP

Tottenham beat Man Utd in battle of EPL strugglers



Tottenham Hotspur's James Maddison celebrates scoring their first goal against Manchester United. — Reuters

TOTTENHAM WON the battle of the Premier League's underachievers 1-0 on Sunday to inflict another dismal result on Manchester United boss Ruben Amorim.

James Maddison scored the only goal in 13 minutes as Spurs moved above United in the table into 12th thanks to a third win over the Red Devils this season.

Victory eased the pressure on under-fire Tottenham boss Ange Postecoglou after exiting both domestic cup competitions this month to go with their lowly league position.

United now find themselves down in 15th, but do enjoy a 12-point cushion over the bottom three.

“The place in the table is my worry, I am not worried about me,” said Amorim, who has won just four of 14 Premier League games since taking charge in November. “I hate to lose. That feeling is the worst. The rest I am not thinking about. I understand my situation, my job, I am confident in my work and I just want to win games.”

Tottenham's first home league win since November came amid a spirit of revolt among their support.

Before kick-off and after the match Spurs fans again vented their frustration towards owners ENIC and chairman Daniel Levy.

A huge banner read “24 years, 16 managers, 1 trophy - Time for change” as a sizeable contingent of the home crowd

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS ON SUNDAY:	
Liverpool 2 (Diaz 15, Salah 37-pen)	Wolves 1 (Cunha 67)
Tottenham 1 (Maddison 13)	Manchester United 0
PLAYED SATURDAY	
Aston Villa 1 (Watkins 69)	Ipswich 1 (Delap 56)
Crystal Palace 1 (Mateta 47)	Everton 2 (Beto 42, Alcaraz 80)
Fulham 2 (Smith Rowe 15, Bassey 62)	Nottingham Forest 1 (Wood 37)
Leicester 0	Arsenal 2 (Merino 81, 87)
Manchester City 4 (Marmoush 19, 24, 33, McAtee 84)	Newcastle 0
Southampton 1 (Sulemana 72)	Bournemouth 3 (Quattara 14, Christie 16, Tavernier 83)
West Ham 0	Brentford 1 (Schade 4)
PLAYED FRIDAY	
Brighton 3 (Mitoma 27, Minteh 38, 63)	Chelsea 0

joined a protest calling for Levy to go.

However, the mood for Postecoglou was lifted even before kick-off as he was able to welcome back a host of first-team regulars who have been sidelined by injury.

QUALITY PLAYERS' RETURN

Goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario made his

first appearance since November. Maddison returned to the starting line-up, while Destiny Udogie, Brennan Johnson and Wilson Odobert were on the bench.

“They are quality players. We’ve had it pretty tough the last two-and-a-half months,” said Postecoglou. “It was important for us to win and gain some traction.

“I certainly feel there is still a massive opportunity for us in this back half of the season and hopefully today is the start of that.”

United have their own injury troubles with Amad Diallo joining Lisandro Martinez on the sidelines for the rest of the season and Kobbie Mainoo ruled out for a month.

Amorim had to name eight teenagers among his nine substitutes, forcing Rasmus Hojlund and Joshua Zirkzee to start together up front after both were overlooked for United's last league game - a 2-0 defeat to Crystal Palace.

Hojlund had the first chance when he fired too close to Vicario before the Italian flew to his left to deny Alejandro Garnacho.

Instead, Spurs got the opener when Andre Onana could only parry Lucas Bergvall's shot into the path of Maddison, who tapped into an empty net for his 10th goal of the season.

United should have been at least level by half-time as Garnacho blazed over a glorious opportunity with just Vicario to beat after being picked out by Bruno Fernandes. — AFP



MUSCAT
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EXCHANGE
4,465.492

BUSINESS

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HI-TECHINDUSTRY



The project will focus on designing and manufacturing AI chips, creating opportunities for local talent and attracting top international expertise from key semiconductor markets.

OMAN TO DEVELOP AI CHIPS, SEMICONDUCTOR INDUSTRY IN SALALAH

MUSCAT: Oman has taken a major step towards becoming a hub for artificial intelligence (AI) chip manufacturing, with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to develop an advanced chips and semiconductors project in the Salalah Free Zone.

The agreement, signed with EONH Private Holdings and supported by regional and international investment funds, aims to establish a high-tech semiconductor industry in Oman. The project will focus on designing and manufacturing AI chips, creating opportunities for local talent and attracting top international expertise from key semiconductor markets such as Taiwan, South Korea and Japan.

Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, emphasised that the initiative aligns with Oman's Digital Industry Programme. He highlighted that investing in semiconductor manufacturing will strengthen Oman's position in the global AI and microelectronics sector, attracting further investments and boosting local innovation.

"The global semiconductor industry is projected to reach \$1 trillion by 2030, driven by growing demand for AI, Internet of Things (IoT), 5G, and autonomous vehicle technologies," Al Shaithani stated, citing McKinsey & Company.

Ali Steve Chao, Chairman of EONH Private Holdings, noted that Oman's strategic location and investment-friendly environment were key factors in selecting it for the project. "We aim to enhance manufacturing capabilities, from high-performance memory solutions to next-generation AI chips, positioning Oman as a key player in this rapidly evolving industry," he said.

— ONA

Oman's real GDP up by 1.9%

OMAN'S economy continued its upward trajectory in 2024, with real GDP growing by 1.9% in the first half of the year compared to the same period in 2023, according to a recent report by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

The report attributes this growth primarily to a 3.6% expansion in non-oil activities, underscoring the country's ongoing efforts to diversify its economic base beyond hydrocarbons.

Despite global economic uncertainties and fluctuations in oil prices, the report highlights that oil activities still accounted for 32.5% of total real GDP in the first half of 2024.

However, Oman's long-term economic outlook remains positive, driven by the government's focus on economic diversification, financial reforms and strategic investments in non-oil sectors.

The report outlines key fiscal policies that have contributed to economic stability, including rationalised government spending, reduced public debt levels and revenue diversification efforts.

The implementation of these measures has helped mitigate risks associated with oil price fluctuations and strengthen Oman's financial foundation.

One of the significant milestones highlighted is the launch of the social safety net programme, designed to balance social welfare needs with long-term financial sustainability. This initiative ensures economic inclusivity while maintaining fiscal discipline.

Although the average price of Omani crude oil declined in 2024 compared to the



The report attributes this growth primarily to a 3.6% expansion in non-oil activities, underscoring the country's ongoing efforts to diversify its economic base beyond hydrocarbons.

previous year, its impact on the economy was cushioned by stronger performance in non-oil sectors such as manufacturing, logistics, tourism, renewable energy and technology.

These sectors are expected to play an increasingly vital role in Oman's economic expansion, reinforcing the need to enhance foreign and domestic investment in non-hydrocarbon industries.

The government's diversification strategy has also bolstered international confidence in Oman's economy. Recent assessments by credit rating agencies reflect improved sovereign credit ratings, signalling trust in the country's financial policies and ongoing economic reforms.

On the monetary stability front, Oman's foreign reserves remained robust, with the Central Bank of Oman holding approximately RO 7.5 billion in reserves as of September 2024.

This amount is estimated to cover 6.6 months of commodity imports.

The report underscores the importance of maintaining sufficient foreign exchange reserves, particularly in a rapidly changing global economic environment.

Overall, the continued growth of Oman's GDP, coupled with prudent fiscal policies and economic diversification initiatives, positions the country on a stable path towards sustainable economic development.

— ONA

ASYAD SHIPPING'S IPO PROSPECTUS APPROVED

MUSCAT: The Financial Services Authority (FSA) has approved the initial public offering (IPO) prospectus of Asyad Shipping Company, marking a major milestone in its transformation into a public joint stock company. The offering will include approximately 1.042 billion shares, representing 20% of the company's capital, as part of Oman's broader strategy to privatise government assets and attract investment.

The IPO will be structured into three investor categories: institutional investors, individual investors and major investors. The subscription

period for individual investors will run from February 20 to 26, while institutional investors can participate from February 20 to 27.

Retail Investors (Individual Category): 25% of the total offering is allocated to this segment, with shares priced at 123 baisas per share. Small individual investors can subscribe to a minimum of 1,000 shares and a maximum of 81,300 shares, while major individual investors must subscribe to at least 81,400 shares, with no upper limit.

Institutional Investors: 45% of the offering is allocated to local, regional and international

institutions, with a minimum subscription of 100,000 shares and no upper limit. The final price per share will be determined through a book-building process, within a price range of 117 to 123 baisas per share.

Major Investors: This category will receive 30% of the offering, with 208.35 million shares allocated, amounting to a value of over RO 40.83 million. Asyad Shipping, a subsidiary of Asyad Group and part of the Oman Investment Authority (OIA), plays a crucial role in Oman's maritime transport sector.

— ONA

4 groups in fray for Ibri III solar project in northwest Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 17

BIDDING for the Ibri III Solar Independent Power Project (IPP) has narrowed down to four contenders, Nama Power & Water Procurement (PWP), the sole national agency overseeing the procurement of new capacity in the Sultanate of Oman, announced on Monday.

In the fray for the 500 MW capacity project, estimated to cost RO 155 million, are: (i) the consortium of Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company (Masdar), Korea Midland Power (KOMIPO), and Al Khadra Partners; (ii) ACWA Power and TotalEnergies Renewables; (iii) EDF Renouvelables and Korean Western Power (KOWEPO); and (iv) Sembcorp Utilities.

Scheduled for commercial launch in the first quarter of 2027, the Ibri III Solar IPP is set to be the fourth large-scale solar



The new 500 MW solar IPP at Ibri is slated for launch in Q1 2027.

energy project prepped for implementation in Oman. It will come up on a 10 million m2 site adjoining the 500 MW capacity Ibri II Solar IPP – the country's first solar PV scheme that came into operation in January 2022.

Manah Solar I and Manah Solar II, the country's second and third solar PV

schemes, were brought into operation earlier this year with a combined capacity of 1000 MW in the Wilayat of Manah (Al Dakhiliyah Governorate).

Speaking at the formal inauguration of the Manah 1 and Manah II schemes last month, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, said the country is on track to securing 30 per cent of its electricity requirements from renewables by 2030.

This is projected to rise to 60–70 per cent by 2040, reaching ultimately 100 per cent by 2050. In capacity terms, Oman's renewable energy capacity is anticipated to reach 8 gigawatts by 2030.

Articulating its strategy to achieve these ambitious targets, PWP announced last December plans for the development of a swathe of new Solar IPPs with a capacity aggregating around 4.5 GW and an estimated investment of \$2.8 billion, over the next six years.

Also planned for implementation in conjunction with these Solar IPPs are five Wind IPPs with an aggregate capacity of around 1 GW.

The projects, planned for location in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, Al Duqm, Mahout, Harweel and Sadah, will be operational during 2027. Total investment in these projects is estimated at over \$1.2 billion.

Further in a bid to support grid stability as new renewable capacity is progressively brought into operation, PWP has launched a competitive process to procure two gas-based projects with an aggregate capacity of around 2.4 GW.

To be established at Misfah in the Wilayat of Bausher (Muscat Governorate) and Al Duqm in Al Wusta Governorate, the two IPPs will be based on advanced thermal Combined Cycle Gas Turbine (CCGT) technology. They are slated for launch during the 2028-29 timeframe.

ADVERTORIALS

NEWCOLLABORATION



This collaboration is set to redefine the financial services landscape by providing customers with enhanced access to innovative, integrated solutions.

TAKAFUL OMAN
INSURANCE, OAB
SIGN PACT TO
ENHANCE FINANCIAL
SERVICES

MUSCAT: Takaful Oman Insurance, a leading provider of insurance solutions, and Oman Arab Bank (OAB), one of Oman’s foremost financial institutions, are proud to announce a strategic partnership. This collaboration is set to redefine the financial services landscape by providing customers with enhanced access to innovative, integrated solutions.

This partnership will enable Oman Arab Bank customers to seamlessly access Takaful Oman’s comprehensive suite of insurance products through OAB’s extensive network of branches and advanced digital platforms.

The collaboration reflects both the organisations’ commitment to innovation, customer satisfaction, and delivering tailored financial solutions that address the evolving needs of Oman’s diverse market.

Neelmani Bhardwaj, CEO of Takaful Oman Insurance, stated, “This partnership with Oman Arab Bank reflects our shared commitment to serving the community with exceptional financial and insurance solutions. We aim to provide Oman Arab Bank’s customers with products that align with their values while ensuring peace of mind and security for their families and businesses. Together, we aim to build a stronger, more inclusive financial ecosystem.”

Juma al Fulaiti, Deputy Head of Retail Banking in Oman Arab Bank, commented, “At Oman Arab Bank, we offer comprehensive financial solutions that empower our customers and contribute to Oman’s economic progress. This partnership with Takaful Oman Insurance is a testament to our shared commitment to innovation, quality and customer-centric services.”

Al Fulaiti further affirmed, “Together, Takaful Oman Insurance and Oman Arab Bank are ready to create a more secure and prosperous future for Oman’s individuals and businesses, cementing their positions as leaders in financial services.”

The partnership is scheduled to commence in the first quarter of 2025, with plans to roll out various insurance products catering to individual and corporate clients. Both organisations are focused on ensuring a seamless and efficient customer experience by leveraging their combined expertise, resources and capabilities.

SHELL OMAN
LAUNCHES
NEXT-GEN
MOBILE FUEL
TANKER

MUSCAT: In a momentous move that underscores its commitment to safety, efficiency and operational excellence, Shell Oman Marketing Company (Shell Oman) recently announced the launch of Oman’s first-ever 7.5KL mobile fuel tanker. Equipped with state-of-the-art safety and operational features, the new tanker is set to redefine fuel transportation — ensuring on-time, in-full deliveries while adhering to the most stringent industry standards.



The new tanker is set to redefine fuel transportation.

Commenting on the launch, Said bin Mohammed al Rawahi

General Manager – Low Carbon Products & Sectors, Shell Oman, said, “ Innovation is not just a driving force for us — it is fundamental to how we evolve and lead in a rapidly changing industry. As energy demands rise, our capacity to enhance critical fuel transportation infrastructure becomes more important than ever. This will contribute to improving efficiency whilst ensuring safety and environmental responsibility that are integral to our operations.”

BYD ATTO 3: The pure
electric SUV experience

BYD, the world’s #1 leader in new energy vehicles, is making its mark in the Omani market, revolutionising the way we move. Offering a high-tech range of plug-in hybrid (PHEV) and electric vehicles (EV), the BYD ATTO 3 stands as a powerhouse of innovation with its all-electric capabilities.

Designed to embody strength and elegance, the ATTO 3 takes inspiration from the Chinese dragon. This compact electric SUV delivers an exhilarating driving experience with 201 horsepower. It accelerates from 0 to 100 km/h in just 7.3 seconds, making it the fastest SUV in its segment. With a range of 420 km on a full charge, the ATTO 3 offers a smooth and efficient urban ride.

The ATTO 3 boasts a dynamic waistline and 18-inch alloy wheels, ensuring excellent road handling and responsiveness. Designed to appeal to a younger, more energetic crowd, its gym-themed cockpit reflects its commitment to innovation and excitement.

The dashboard features a 5-inch LCD display, complemented by BYD’s revolutionary 12.8-inch rotatable touchscreen, dumbbell shaped vertical AC vents, rhythmic interactive ambient lighting and

This compact electric SUV delivers an exhilarating driving experience with 201 horsepower. It accelerates from 0 to 100 km/h in just 7.3 seconds, making it the fastest SUV in its segment.



Designed to embody strength and elegance, the ATTO 3 takes inspiration from the Chinese dragon.

ergonomic seats enhance comfort, making every ride fun, engaging and stress-free while displaying important driving information seamlessly. Emphasising utility and spaciousness, the ATTO 3 offers a double-layered storage compartment with a smart power tailgate with sensors for convenient luggage loading.

The safety-feature packed ATTO 3 consists of two front and rear cameras, parking radars by displaying panoramic images of the road to mitigate risks of collision and thwart life threatening situations.

At the heart of its technological advancements is BYD’s pioneering Blade Battery, built with the highest safety standards. It has undergone rigorous testing, including nail penetration, crushing, bending and heating to 300°C, without causing fire or explosion. Compared to conventional battery packs, the Blade Battery provides enhanced energy efficiency, an extended range, and an impressive lifecycle of approximately 5,000 charge cycles.

NBO OUTLOOK OFFERS INSIGHTS INTO FINANCIAL GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) hosted the third edition of its Annual Market Outlook event for 2025 titled ‘Financial Markets in the Trump Era: Disruption or Opportunity’. The event featured Stefan Hofrichter, Head of Global Economics and Strategy at Allianz Global Investors, offering valuable insights into the 2025 macro-outlook, exploring how financial markets are responding to the evolving global economy influenced by political factors.

Speaking about the event, Ali bin Mustafa al Lawati, Assistant General Manager and Head of Private Banking at NBO, stated: “This event reaffirms our commitment to support and enhance the investment landscape in Oman, as we aim to provide our clients and stakeholders with the insights needed to address these complexities



The event featured Stefan Hofrichter, Head of Global Economics and Strategy at Allianz Global Investors.

and make appropriate investment decisions. We also take pride in hosting the Market Outlook Event for the third consecutive year and have Stefan Hofrichter with us to share his expertise. His insights have given us with invaluable perspectives on the challenges and opportunities for the year ahead.”

Held at NBO’s Head Office, the event brought together industry leaders, investors and financial experts to examine the global economic climate and its impact on financial markets in 2025. Attendees had a unique opportunity to engage directly with leading financial experts, gaining awareness on political impacts on global markets and its associated risks, as well as learning how to strategically position themselves in a dynamic market environment.

Oman seeks to boost food industry investment at Gulfood 2025

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), is participating in the 30th edition of Gulfood, one of the world’s largest annual food and beverage sourcing events. Gulfood 2025 is taking place from February 17 to 21, at the Dubai World Trade Centre in the United Arab Emirates, with over 129 countries joining the exhibition.

Khalid al Salehi, Director-General of Marketing and Commercial Affairs at Madayn, highlighted Madayn’s strategic focus in Gulfood 2025 on attracting and localising foreign investments in Oman’s thriving food sector.

“On the sidelines of Gulfood 2025, Madayn is organising an event targeting CEOs, investors and industrialists interested in expanding their businesses or launching new projects



A number of Omani businesses and trade organisations are participating in Gulfood 2025.

in the Sultanate of Oman’s food sector. The event will showcase the diverse opportunities available in the food sector within Madayn’s industrial cities across the Sultanate of Oman’s

governorates, while a discussion session will bring together Omani and international experts to spotlight strategies for food security, resilience and innovation in sustainable food solutions,” stated Al Salehi.

As part of its efforts to support Omani entrepreneurs and SMEs, Madayn has coordinated with the SMEs Development Authority to provide a dedicated space for non-exhibiting Omani entrepreneurs to connect and meet with investors and business leaders attending the event.

Additionally, Madayn has provided a platform for a number of entrepreneurs who graduated from the ‘Industrial Innovation Specialist’ programme in the Food and Beverage (F&B) industry, implemented by the Industrial Innovation Academy in Sur and Raysut Industrial Cities.

Their presence at Gulfood 2025 offers a valuable opportunity to showcase their products on a global stage, thereby enhancing their visibility and supporting long-term sustainability.

Al Salehi further emphasised that Madayn’s participation in Gulfood for the 13th consecutive year reflects the exhibition’s importance as a global platform for promoting Omani products.

“This long-standing presence opens new doors for Omani businesses, enabling them to access international markets and showcase their high-quality offerings to thousands of visitors and over 5,500 global exhibitors. The increasing demand for Omani products in recent years, both locally and internationally, highlights their growing appeal and competitiveness,” he added.

BUSINESS

GLOBAL SHIFTS



The seminar underscores the critical role of economic diversification in strengthening Gulf economies.

GCC SEMINAR EXPLORES ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION METRICS

MUSCAT: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) inaugurated the “Gulf Economic Diversification Indicators” seminar on Monday, February 17, focusing on methods for assessing economic diversification in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

The two-day event is organised by OCCI’s Economic Committee in collaboration with the Regional Programme for the Gulf States of the German Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the Smart Portal for Investment and Consulting.

The seminar underscores the critical role of economic diversification in strengthening Gulf economies, particularly amid global economic shifts. It aims to refine measurement tools for diversification progress, ensuring GCC nations can track and enhance their economic transformation efforts.

Shaikh Rashid bin Amer al Musalhi, First Deputy Chairman of OCCI’s Board of Directors, presided over the opening ceremony, which was attended by leading economists and industry experts from across the region.

HH Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki al Said, Chairman of OCCI’s Economic Committee, emphasised that economic diversification is a core pillar of the Oman Vision 2040 strategy. He noted that engaging local and international experts in this discussion is essential to identifying key progress indicators and setting a roadmap for the next phase of economic reform.

He highlighted that all GCC economies prioritise diversification as a safeguard against economic volatility caused by geopolitical shifts and global market fluctuations.

The seminar will delve into the current state and challenges of economic diversification in GCC countries. It will also introduce a composite index for measuring economic diversification, providing a standardised framework to assess the effectiveness of diversification policies across the region.

The event marks a significant step in aligning Gulf economic strategies and ensuring a more resilient, innovation-driven economy for the future. — ONA

OMAN LAUNCHES PLATFORM TO TRACK GREEN HYDROGEN PROGRESS

MUSCAT: Oman’s Green Hydrogen Ecosystem Readiness Steering Committee, chaired by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals and Chairman of Hydrom, has launched a dedicated digital gH2 Ecosystem Readiness monitoring platform called ‘gHad’.

The Hydrom-led initiative is designed to track sector-wide progress, enhance collaboration and provide real-time data-driven insights on key initiatives supporting the development of Oman’s green hydrogen strategy.

The platform builds on the outcomes of the Ecosystem Readiness Lab conducted in September 2024, which identified 26 key initiatives designed to deliver Oman’s 2030 green hydrogen production targets.

By digitalising sector-wide coordination, ‘gHad’ will move



Ecosystem readiness steering committee, chaired by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals

Oman’s hydrogen strategy from planning to structured execution across five key focus areas including permits, contractors, workforce development, logistics and local content.

Eng Abdulaziz bin Said al Shidhani, Managing Director of Hydrom, said: “Ensuring the readiness of all supporting sectors is critical to delivering Oman’s green hydrogen ambitions. ‘gHad’ is an integral tool to our joint success, providing us with a one-stop-shop to

align efforts, address challenges early and create the right conditions for large-scale project execution.

With clear visibility on sector progress, we can support decision-making, strengthen investor confidence and position Oman as a competitive player in the global hydrogen economy.”

‘gHad’ will serve as a centralised system, integrating key public and private sector stakeholders across multiple sectors, including government entities, infrastructure providers, workforce development institutions, local industries and regulatory bodies.

As Oman progresses towards becoming a global green hydrogen hub, the platform will play a pivotal role in enhancing governance, increasing transparency and driving data-backed decision making.

Tender floated for dry port at Al Dhahirah EZ

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 17

THE Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) announced on Monday, February 17, 2025, the launch of the third package of the tender for the development of the Economic Zone at Al Dhahirah (EZAD), which includes the construction of dry port facilities and a veterinary quarantine.

OPAZ has invited experienced Omani and Saudi companies (JV) to purchase the tender documents and submit their bids before April 17.

The proposed dry port will be the main driver of the Economic Zone at Al Dhahirah (EZAD), located near the Omani-Saudi border in Rub Al Khali. It is being developed as a collaboration between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The total area allocated for the dry port is 4 square kilometres, with the first phase planned on a 1 square kilometre area. A veterinary quarantine facility is also planned in this phase

Eng Ibrahim bin Yousuf al Zadjali, EZAD Project Manager, said the new tender will enable the Economic Zone to achieve its objectives of enhancing



Asyad Group will operate the planned dry port.

trade between Oman and Saudi Arabia.

The design incorporates the latest facilities and ensures the port is built with the highest standards and top-quality specifications taking into consideration all the stakeholders requirements.

He explained that the dry port, in integration with the border crossing, will shorten the time required for goods transported to and from Oman via other entry points.

This will be achieved by reducing the number of transit points, thereby decreasing the time needed for goods to reach their final destination.

He also noted that the dry port will facilitate the smooth flow of goods between Oman and Saudi Arabia, enhance bilateral trade, strengthen investment partnerships and attract further investment.

The tender includes the execution of civil, mechanical,



ENG IBRAHIM BIN YOUSUF AL ZADJALI

Project Manager
Economic Zone at
Al Dhahirah

electrical, plumbing and structural works for the dry port and veterinary quarantine.

According to the tender specifications, the project will include the construction of a customs gate, inspection platforms, customs clearance areas, substation facilities, a maintenance workshop, laboratories, a water tank, fire protection systems, X-ray and scanning equipment, as well as the administration building, mosque, offices, rest areas, staff accommodations, fencing and surveillance cameras and various other facilities.

The dry port will be operated by Asyad Group, a subsidiary of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), due to its experience in managing and operation such facilities.

Last year, OPAZ awarded a consultancy services contract for the design and supervision of the Phase 1 infrastructure facilities to an Omani-Saudi consortium. The first phase covers an area of 20 square kilometres.

Also, last year, OPAZ floated a tender for the construction of the main roads, protection channels, and surface water drainage systems and associated services. An award is expected for the end of Q1 225.

EZAD covers a total area of 388 square kilometres.

Oman’s liquid hydrogen export project gains traction

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, FEB 17

OMAN’S plans to establish itself as a key exporter of liquefied hydrogen (LH2) are advancing, with feasibility studies confirming the project’s viability. Speaking at the World Hydrogen MENA Congress in Dubai last week, Rumaitha al Busaidi, Business and ICV Development Manager at Hydrom, reaffirmed the country’s commitment to developing a full-fledged liquid hydrogen supply chain to serve European markets.

“We think liquid hydrogen can work, it is feasible,” Al Busaidi stated, emphasising that Oman is on track to become one of the world’s top green hydrogen producers by 2030.

The project, spearheaded by Hydrom — the orchestrator of Oman’s green hydrogen sector — in collaboration with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Athens-based Ecolog, and German power company EnBW, is expected to create a seamless export route from Oman to the Port of Amsterdam.



Delivering Omani Liquid Hydrogen to the World Centralised Liquefaction in Oman

The project is expected to create a seamless export route from Oman to the Port of Amsterdam.

The initiative builds on the Joint Study Agreement (JSA) signed during COP28 in 2023, which brought together Oman, the Port of Amsterdam, Zenith Energy Terminals and GasLog to explore the development of a liquid hydrogen export chain.

The planned liquefaction facility in Duqm will process hydrogen at -253°C, allowing it to be transported via specialised Ecolog vessels with a capacity of 2,000 tonnes per shipment.

Once in Amsterdam, the hydrogen will be either regasified and supplied to German industries via pipeline or distributed in its liquefied form via trucks within the Netherlands.

The Port of Amsterdam’s hydrogen terminal will also serve a dual role, including the export of captured CO₂ from European industries back to Oman for potential utilisation or sequestration.

Oman’s hydrogen ambitions were previously highlighted at the GH2 Investor Day in December last year, where Al Busaidi and Ellen Ruhotas, Head of Hydrogen Midstream at Ecolog, provided an in-depth look into the project’s development.

They stressed the importance of bridging the midstream gap between strong hydrogen producers like Oman and growing demand centres in Europe.

“The journey actually started when two nations... looked at each other and said we need to come up with a way of how we actually make this a reality,” Al Busaidi said,

emphasising the mutual interest between Oman and the Netherlands.

The event also underscored the project’s engineering complexity, particularly in scaling up liquefaction and shipping technologies to support a commercial hydrogen market.

Ruhotas compared the initiative to the early days of the LNG industry, pointing out that commercialising LH2 exports requires overcoming technical challenges such as boil-off losses during shipping.

She emphasised that Oman’s approach covers the entire value chain, ensuring efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

The project targets industries that are difficult to electrify, such as brick and glass manufacturing, data centres and food processing facilities, where demand for green hydrogen is rising.

Minimising hydrogen losses during transport remains a key challenge, as unlike LNG, hydrogen’s low density makes efficient shipping more complex.

OPINION

Tips to stay safe from AI-powered apps



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The author is
the founder of
Knowledge Oman

My article last week revolved around whether the Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered apps support or are exposing you. I received quite a number of feedback on the same, and specifically, how can one protect themselves from AI-powered apps? Hence, I decided this week to focus on cybersecurity tips that one can follow in order to protect oneself from snoop AI apps.

First and foremost, let’s get one thing clear. AI-powered apps are very useful and can truly transform the way you work personally and professionally. I personally use some of the AI-powered apps, and there is no question about the kind of value these apps as tools provide today, and surely tomorrow (apart from taking our jobs away and invading our world, of course).

Some of the AI apps, however, as I had shared in my last week’s article, require and store a lot of information about you, which, if it gets into the hands of mischievous users (hackers and the like), would take you for a wild ride.

Over 92 per cent of organisations worldwide have experienced some security breaches, and approximately 72 per cent

of businesses have also faced AI security breaches—clearly illustrating a reality and not just fiction on the security impact of AI in general.

So what to do in order to be safe? First things first, ensure you check the permission of the AI-powered app you’re downloading. Look at what they are trying to access from the device you’re downloading and would be using. Are they accessing your smartphone or tablet’s microphone, your photos, videos, etc.? Why do they need to access that information? Make sure you only allow necessary access by giving permissions (turning on or off accordingly). For example, if you are downloading an AI photo editing app, disable or don’t allow access to anything unrelated to editing.

Secondly, avoid sharing sensitive data with the AI-powered app you downloaded. Sensitive data can be things such as (but not limited to) passwords, security numbers, passport details, and identification numbers

I read of an AI smart home assistant device that recorded private conversations at one of the homes and sent the recorded media to another company accidentally. That can happen to you if you are not careful.

Over 92 per cent of organisations worldwide have experienced some security breaches, and approximately 72 per cent of businesses have also faced AI security breaches — clearly illustrating a reality and not just fiction on the security impact of AI in general.

Thirdly, before downloading the new AI-powered tool in town, ensure you verify the app’s authenticity. Is it from an official app store (Apple, Google, or Huawei)? Do research online by reading about the app and whether you find any positive feedback on the same. Furthermore, review the app’s privacy policy to understand and see what they’re doing with their data and who they’re sharing it with.

Fourthly, always ensure you update the AI-powered app irrespective of its authenticity. Doing so will help ensure you avoid any vulnerabilities.

To conclude my article this week, I would like to re-emphasize the benefits AI-powered apps can offer you, from incredible convenience, efficiency, and innovation. Nevertheless, some AI-powered apps also come with serious security risks, which include but are not limited to data breaches.

The amount of data that you input into those apps can be used maliciously. By carefully following the tips I shared in my article today, you can continue to enjoy the benefits without falling victim to hackers. Until we catch up again next week, stay updated and be safe.

UKRAINE ‘PEACE DIVIDEND’ WILL BE PAID BY EUROPE

PIERRE BRIANCON

Europe should not expect any “peace dividend” from the truce Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin say they are ready to strike on Ukraine.

Even though European nations have provided most of the \$213 billion in financial support allocated to Ukraine since the Russian invasion three years ago, they were snubbed by the US president after talks with his Russian counterpart on Wednesday.

The bill they now face is much higher than merely the cost of implementing any truce.

Trump’s Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth laid out the new rules of the game in a speech at NATO headquarters. The US, he said, will neither provide troops nor aid to help implement any would-be truce with Kyiv.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has already accepted the principle of territorial concessions, and has estimated around 200,000 troops may be needed to guarantee a ceasefire on the ground. Even half such a force would represent a burden for the French and UK armies, which might bear the brunt of the effort.

But looking ahead, a peace agreement would cause a greater headache. It would embolden Russia by rewarding its territorial ambitions.

Coupled with the overt US intention to pull the security blanket that has protected Europe since World War

Two, Europe would have to accelerate the military buildup it embarked on 10 years ago when Putin annexed Crimea.

European governments’ spending on defence jumped 12% in real terms last year to \$447 billion, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). Germany, the UK, France and Italy together accounted for 60% of that amount. At \$968 billion, US defence spending was more than twice as much.

Most European members of NATO are now forking out around 2% of GDP on their military, and according to most experts they’d need to boost that to 3% to cope with current challenges.

But even at 2024 rates of growth it would take five years to reach that level, and 10 years to reach the 5% of GDP that Trump has suggested they should spend, according to the IISS.

Whatever their tight fiscal constraints, Europeans have little choice. They’re the ones who will have to pay the supposed “peace dividend” generated by an elusive Ukraine truce. And they can’t wait much time before they come up with some form of common strategic doctrine, beginning with a basic agreement on where the threats come from. — Reuters

Manufacturing clusters: Path to industrial growth

In today’s rapidly changing global economy, nations are seeking innovative strategies to drive industrial growth and diversify their economic base. Oman, a country with a rich history and a forward-looking vision, is no exception. As the world transitions towards more sustainable and knowledge-based industries, Oman has recognised the immense potential of integrated manufacturing clusters as a catalyst for economic transformation.

Manufacturing clusters, where interconnected businesses, suppliers and associated institutions concentrate in geographical proximity, have emerged as dynamic engines of industrial development and economic diversification.

These clusters leverage the collective power of collaboration, innovation and efficiency, creating a vibrant ecosystem that attracts investment, generates employment and drives technological advancement.

OMAN’S SUCCESS STORY: LADAYN PLASTIC MANUFACTURING PARK

The Ladayn Plastic Manufacturing Park in Suhar stands as a testament to the transformative potential of cluster manufacturing in Oman.

By capitalising on Oman’s abundant petrochemical resources and creating downstream opportunities, Ladayn has attracted investors from across the value chain, establishing a thriving hub for plastic product manufacturing.

With 16 operational factories and 3 more poised to commence production, Ladayn has attracted over \$154.4 million in investments, demonstrating the confidence of the business community in Oman’s cluster-based approach.

The park’s success lies in its ability to convert crude hydrocarbons into refined polymers and ultimately into a wide range of plastic products, fostering synergy and knowledge sharing among participating companies.

Building on the success of Ladayn, Oman is presented with a unique opportunity to replicate and expand the cluster model across various sectors, further diversifying its industrial base and strengthening its economic resilience.

Oman’s aluminium industry, anchored by Sohar Aluminium, is



Oman possesses several key advantages that make it an attractive destination for integrated manufacturing clusters.

ripe for cluster development.

By attracting downstream processors, fabricators and end-product manufacturers, Oman can capture greater value from its primary aluminium production, creating a robust and integrated value chain.

Similar opportunities abound in the steel sector, where integrated clusters can cater to both domestic construction needs and export markets.

As global electronics supply chains seek diversification beyond traditional hubs, Oman is strategically positioned to become a new node in this network.

A dedicated electronics manufacturing cluster, focused on niche areas like automotive electronics, solar technology components, or telecommunications equipment, can attract global players and foster a local ecosystem of suppliers and service providers.

With construction remaining a major driver of Gulf economies, Oman has the potential to establish an integrated building materials cluster.

This cluster could combine cement production, steel fabrication, aluminium extrusion and modern construction materials, serving both domestic and regional markets.

Oman can draw valuable lessons from international examples of successful cluster development. Thailand’s Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC), with its focus on next-generation industries and

specialised zones with tailored incentives, has attracted significant investment in automotive, electronics and advanced manufacturing sectors.

OMAN’S COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Oman possesses several key advantages that make it an attractive destination for integrated manufacturing clusters. Its strategic location, proximity to major Asian and Middle Eastern markets, modern infrastructure, energy security, skilled workforce and stable business environment provide a solid foundation for industrial growth and investment.

Integrated manufacturing clusters represent a strategic imperative for Oman to accelerate its industrial development and economic diversification.

By learning from global best practices and leveraging its unique advantages, Oman can create vibrant manufacturing ecosystems that generate employment, attract investment and drive innovation.

The Ladayn Plastic Manufacturing Park serves as a shining example of the transformative power of cluster manufacturing, paving the way for Oman’s industrial future.

As the world embraces more sustainable and knowledge-based industries, Oman’s commitment to cluster manufacturing will undoubtedly position it as a leader in the global economy, creating sustainable growth and prosperity for generations to come.



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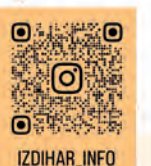


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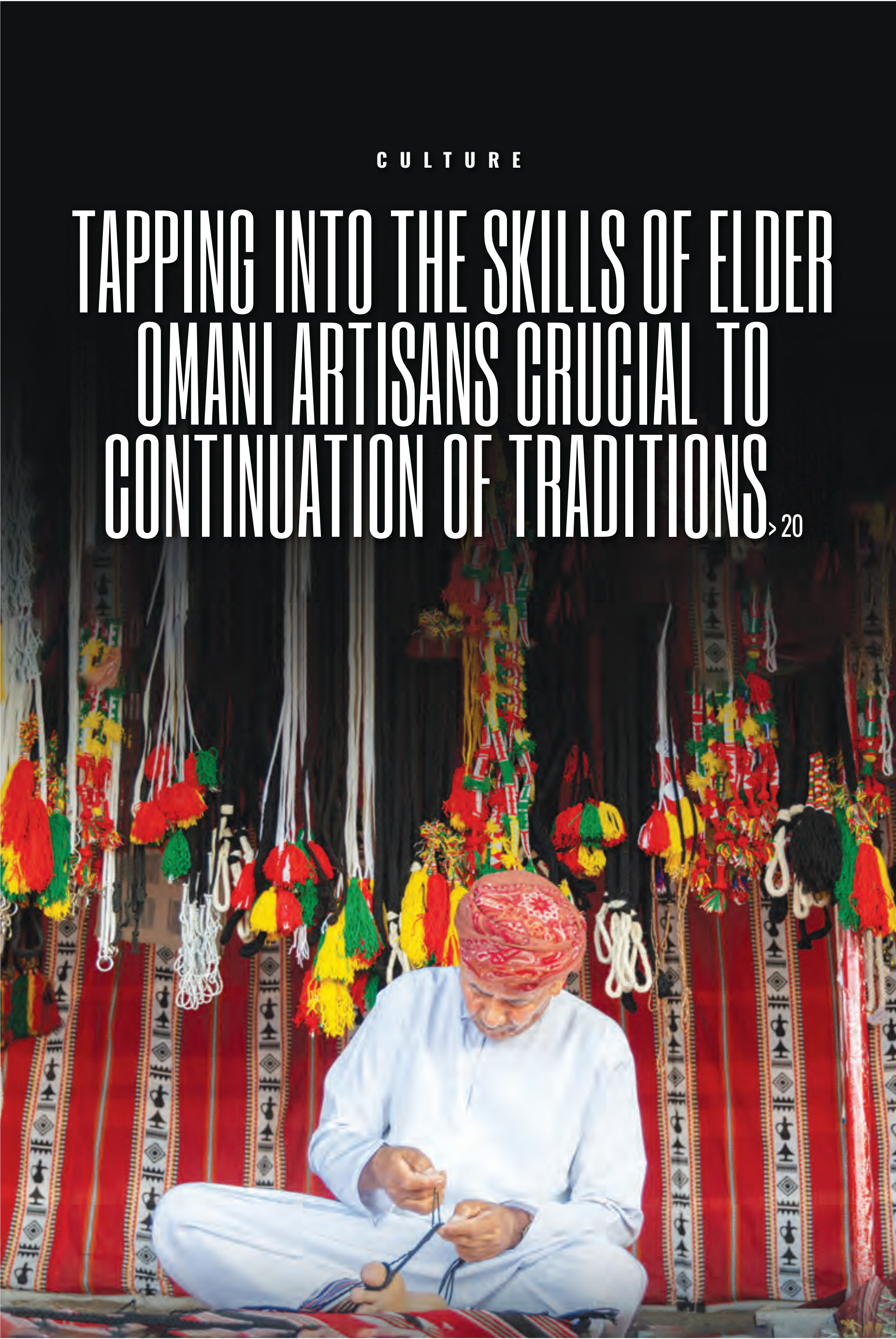
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ART/LIFE



CULTURE

TAPPING INTO THE SKILLS OF ELDER OMANI ARTISANS CRUCIAL TO CONTINUATION OF TRADITIONS_{>20}

ENTERTAINMENT

Jim Morrison’s footbridge: Paris to honour 1960s icon



ROCK ‘N’ ROLL icon Jim Morrison, a towering figure of the 1960s music scene, will have a central Paris footbridge named after him, the city has decided.

The grave of The Doors frontman in the Pere Lachaise cemetery in Paris is already a magnet for nostalgic rock fans, who pay their respects in such numbers that the cemetery has put up barriers around the American singer’s final resting place.

Morrison, who moved to the French capital a few months before he died in July 1971, “made Paris the location for his last inspirations”, said Laurence Patrice, a senior city official and sponsor of the footbridge idea that was adopted by the council this week.

The bridge crosses the Arsenal, a basin near the Bastille in the centre of the capital, only a short walk from the bohemian Marais neighbourhood where Morrison last lived.

The Doors, founded in Los Angeles, were among the most influential rock groups of the late 1960s and early 70s and a mainstay of the counterculture of the times.

Their hits include “Riders on the Storm”, “Light My Fire”, and “The End”, a haunting song that features prominently in Francis Ford Coppola’s 1979 Vietnam war movie “Apocalypse Now”.

Morrison’s charisma and magnetic stage performances made him a symbol, but he was also infamous for provocative behaviour, indiscipline and substance abuse.

The exact circumstances of Morrison’s death at the age of 27 are still shrouded in mystery, with most early accounts saying he died of cardiac arrest in his bathtub.

But a French journalist, Sam Bennett, claimed in a 2007 book that close friends and family spun the official version of Morrison’s death to sanitise his reputation.

Bennett said Morrison actually died from a heroin overdose.

Paris last year named a street after rock music icon David Bowie, eight years after his death. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



MUSIC

British songwriter Sting performs his Sting 3.0 show at Farmasi Arena in Rio de Janeiro. — AFP



FILM

Bollywood actor Arjun Kapoor attends a promotional event of upcoming Indian Hindi-language film ‘Mere Husband ki Biwi’ in Mumbai. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A technician works on The Reclining Vishnu of the West Mebon being restored at the Departmental Laboratory Arc’Antique in Nantes, western France. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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Ruins of London’s earliest-known Roman basilica uncovered



THE RUINS of London’s earliest-known Roman basilica have been uncovered beneath a commercial building slated for demolition.

Developers of the site asked the Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) to undertake investigations of the site ahead of a planned redevelopment.

MOLA said whilst it knew the basilica may have been beneath the site, it was difficult to predict how much of the structure — if any — survived.

“What we revealed was extraordinary. Within the test pits were massive foundations and walls made of flint, rag stone and Roman tile — in some areas we believe these are over 10m long, 1m wide and 4m deep,” MOLA said.

It believes the foundations are within an area of the basilica known as the tribunal, where political

leaders and officials would have made major decisions about the government of London. MOLA director of development Sophie Jackson said it was one of the most significant discoveries in recent years.

“It’s like discovering the Speaker’s Chair and chamber of the House of Commons, 2,000 years into the future. The levels of preservation of the Basilica have far exceeded our expectations, and we have possibly the most important part of the building,” she said.

“Excitingly, we’ve only just scratched the surface of this site’s potential through our initial investigations.”

Archaeologists and historians believe it was built during the late 70s or 80s AD.

Developers now plan to incorporate the basilica into the site. If approved, full excavations on the site will take place. — **dpa**



Austria celebrates 200 years of ‘waltz king’ Johann Strauss II

EVEN 200 years after the birth of Austria’s world-famous “waltz king” Johann Strauss II — widely revered like a modern-day pop star during his lifetime — his music has lost none of its magic.

Best known for his rousing waltz “The Blue Danube”, which became Austria’s unofficial national anthem, many of his 500 dance pieces live on in Vienna’s roaring ball season.

Strauss’s persistent popularity lies in the catchy tunes he composed to cheer up people, his great-grand-nephew Eduard Strauss said.

“He simply created music that touches everyone, regardless of their background,” he said.

But his fame was rooted in much more than his hits: just like today, selling music meant marketing the star’s image.

“One could say that he was actually the first pop star in the modern sense,” said Strauss museum guide Clara Kaufmann.

Vienna is marking the bicentenary with special events, concerts and exhibitions, and even an Austrian Airlines aeroplane emblazoned with a portrait of Strauss and his violin.

Strauss “symbolises music for all”, said British dentist Helen Foster, who visited one of Vienna’s Strauss museums, adding that his appealing waltz tunes have been “popular with everyone over the ages”.

IMPRESSIVE STAGE SHOWS

Strauss was born in the suburbs of Vienna in 1825 into a family of famous musicians, but despite his father being a household name, Strauss junior’s success did not come easily.

Defying his father’s explicit wish that he would not follow in his footsteps, he secretly took violin lessons with the support of his mother.

After his father abandoned the family for another woman, Strauss’s mother Anna became a driving force behind the career of her eldest son, who kept “churning out music” to make a living.

“Unlike today, there was no insurance, no pension scheme or anything like that,” Eduard Strauss said.

“Life had to be earned,” said the



retired judge, 69.

Johann made his debut at the age of 18, becoming his father’s direct rival.

Perfecting his father’s simpler waltzes, he elevated them into refined concert works, with the light-hearted, energetic dance music helping many to forget about the hardships they faced in 19th-century imperial Vienna.

He put on impressive shows on stage, playing the violin with great panache and conducting the orchestra with his bow while frantically jumping up and down.

Admired for his impeccable looks, his coiffure was styled “with hair irons before every performance to make it stand up”, said Kaufmann. As he aged, he dyed his hair and beard to maintain his youthful appearance.

‘MAMA’S BOY’

The workaholic was a completely different person off-stage, plagued by insecurities and self-doubt, his great-grand-nephew said.

“He had many phobias — including travel phobia — and had difficulties with women. He was a mama’s boy,” he said.

When his father died in 1849, the younger Strauss took over his orchestra as well as the up-scale entertainment establishments in the city. Despite suffering a nervous breakdown due to exhaustion, he kept performing and composing at an impressive pace.

In 1866, he wrote what is arguably the world’s most famous waltz, “The Blue Danube”, which is featured in



the prestigious Vienna New Year’s concert every year.

Although Strauss despised travelling, he regularly toured across Europe, entertaining Russian nobility for more than a decade.

In 1872, he headlined the World’s Peace Jubilee in Boston, a two-week music festival, attended by tens of thousands of people.

While initially struggling to compose operettas, he wrote several of them, including a few hits like “Die Fledermaus”.

“People still dance to Strauss waltzes, but you can also hear them in concert halls, and that was his special achievement,” musicologist Thomas Aigner said about the legacy of the revered composer, who died in 1899. — **AFP**

FEATURES

BY SIHAM AL SAIDI

FOR MANY elders in Oman, traditions are not merely practices; they are stories intricately woven into the fabric of their identities. Whether it is preparing traditional dishes, reciting special songs, crafting handwoven textiles, or celebrating age-old crafts, these ceremonies serve as threads that tie generations together.

Bakhita al Qartoobi, a passionate participant in the recently concluded Suhar Festival, remarked, “I cannot miss the chance to partake in such an event, where many people come to watch us practise the ancient craft of making textiles from goat hair at home. The way they look at us, as if we come from a strange, distant world, makes us somewhat uncomfortable, yet it encourages us to demonstrate that this was the beginning in Oman and these crafts were the starting point of what we are today as Omanis.”

Bakhita’s insights shed light on the significance of these crafts, which represent much more than just a means of livelihood; they embody symbols of patience, resilience and creativity.

Their commitment to preserving ancient crafts such as handwoven textiles, pottery, silverwork and palm weaving reflects their deep-rooted love for their heritage. Unfortunately, these time-honoured skills are at risk of fading away in the modern world.

THE CRAFTSMANSHIP OF OMANI HERITAGE

A few hours’ drive from Muscat, away from the busy noise of cars, inside Bakhita’s home, the intricate process of crafting begins. The rhythmic sound of weaving fills the air, accompanied by the delicate scent of natural dyes.

Elders like Bakhita find solace in their work. While Bakhita specialises in weaving fabrics, other elders in Oman engage in different crafts, knowing that every stroke of the chisel, every carved detail and every woven pattern carries a legacy steeped in history. For many, it is disheartening to witness younger generations turning away from these skills.

In this context, elders like Mohammed al Marzooki are determined to pass on their knowledge. He shared, “I am proud of what I hear about the youth who are striving to preserve our heritage using Oman’s natural and geographical resources. We continue to do what we have always done as craftspeople; the youth will learn from our experiences and delve more deeply into our past to ensure the sustainability of our heritage.” Fondly referred to as Umm, she resides in Bidiyah in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate and opens her doors, extending her hospitality to visitors. Her home — a tent made of animal hair — becomes a welcoming place for those interested in Omani culture. She cooks traditional meals and invites guests to experience life in the desert.

“To welcome people into my simple tent and see them eagerly watch me create these pieces means so much to me,” she said with a warm smile. “It is our responsibility to share our heritage and culture in Oman and to show how we used to live in the desert.”

Imagine being surrounded by the breathtaking landscapes of Oman, with colourful textiles and intricate pottery displayed against the backdrop of the dunes. Visualise elders demonstrating their craft, hands skillfully weaving as they share stories of their ancestors. These images not only enrich the narrative, but also celebrate the vibrant cultural heritage of Oman.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

In a commendable move towards preserving cultural heritage and empowering the elderly population, a series of initiatives have been launched across Oman, offering senior citizens a platform to showcase their skills and craftsmanship. These programmes are not only revitalising traditional practices, but also fostering intergenerational ties and community engagement.

The Omani government, alongside local non-profit organisations, has initiated



Tapping into the skills of elder Omani artisans crucial to continuation of traditions



various workshops and exhibitions highlighting the diverse talents of elder citizens. Artisans, weavers and poets are among those who are taking part, demonstrating skills passed down through generations. Local reports noted that these events have attracted large crowds and have been met with enthusiasm from local communities eager to engage with their elders’ rich cultural offerings.

One such event is the “Elderly Skills Expo”, held annually at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. This year, the expo featured over thirty elder artisans showcasing traditional crafts such as khanjar (dagger) making, pottery and embroidery.

“I am delighted to see my skills appreciated by the younger generation,” said 72-year-old weaver Fatima al Rahbi, who has been practising her craft for over fifty years. “These opportunities allow us to share our stories and teachings, bridging the gap between age groups.”

In addition to expos, local community centres are hosting weekly workshops where elders can teach their crafts to younger participants. This initiative

has not only enabled the transfer of knowledge, but has also encouraged collaborations between generations. Moreover, these initiatives align with Oman Vision 2040, which emphasises the importance of cultural preservation and community involvement. As the country moves towards a more diversified economy, tapping into the skills of elder citizens represents a unique approach to economic development while honouring the nation’s heritage.

It is clear that preserving Omani traditions is a shared responsibility between the generations. Elders invest their time and knowledge, while young people bring fresh perspectives and energy to these age-old practices. In this partnership, both parties find not only the motivation to engage but also a greater sense of purpose and belonging within their community.

Bakhita, reflecting on these changes, expressed her optimism. “When I see the youth picking up the crafts, I feel a warmth in my heart. It reassures me that our stories will not be forgotten, and our heritage will continue to thrive. We are not just preserving the past; we are shaping the future.”