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Observer

ARE WEIGHT LOSS INJECTIONS SAFE?

4

ARE WEIGHT LOSS INJECTIONS SAFE?

VOL. 44, NO. 31

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His Majesty, President Aleksandr Lukashenko to hold talks today



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

Belarusian President's visit to Oman an important step in boosting partnerships in different areas

HIS MAJESTY Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will hold an official talks session on Sunday with President Aleksandr Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus, who began an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman on Saturday evening, lasting several days.

The session will discuss means of enhancing cooperation in various spheres. An official reception ceremony will be held for the guest president at Al Alam Palace on Sunday.

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, led the welcoming party for the Belarusian President and his accompanying delegation at the Royal Airport. The Foreign Minister welcomed the President, wishing him a pleasant stay and a successful visit.

The Belarusian President was also received by Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (Head of the Mission of Honour accompanying the guest), Hamoud bin Salim al Tuwaih, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Russian Federation and non-resident to the Republic of Belarus, Andrei Luchenok, Belarusian non-resident Ambassador to

Oman, and members of the Mission of Honour accompanying the guest.

During the visit, the Belarusian President is accompanied by an official delegation comprising Viktor Lukashenko, son of the President and President of the Olympic Committee, Maxim Ryzhenkov, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alexander Efimov, Minister of Industry, Anatoly Linevich, Minister of Agriculture and Food, and Sergei Terentiev, Non-resident Ambassador of Belarus to Oman.

The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Belarus seek to expand the scope of partnerships and promote relations in various economic, political and cultural areas.

Therefore, the visit of President Aleksandr Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus and his meeting with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik represent an important step in boosting partnerships in different areas, especially in the economic, commercial, and investment fields.

The exchange of official visits between the two sides reflects the joint keenness to develop and strengthen bilateral relations. — ONA

SEE ALSO P2



President Aleksandr Lukashenko

US, REGIONAL DIPLOMATS MEET TO DISCUSS SYRIA'S FUTURE

AQABA, JORDAN: Top diplomats from the United States, Türkiye, the European Union and Arab nations met in Jordan on Saturday for talks on Syria as regional and global powers scramble for influence over whatever government replaces ousted President Bashar al-Assad.

Outgoing US President Joe Biden's administration has begun engaging with the victorious rebel groups, including Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which led a lightning assault that ended in the capture of Damascus on Sunday.

Biden sent Secretary of State Antony Blinken to the region this week to seek support for principles that Washington hopes will guide Syria's political transition, such as respect for minorities. Meanwhile, Syria's northern neighbour Türkiye has for years supported Syrian opposition forces looking to oust Assad and is poised to play an influential role in Damascus. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said on Friday that his country's embassy in the Syrian capital would resume work on Saturday, after Türkiye's intelligence chief visited this week. — Reuters



A girl inspects identification documents as people search for information leading to their missing relatives at the prison facility run by the "Palestine Security branch" of Syria's Military Intelligence Directorate in Damascus. — AFP

South Korea's president Yoon Suk Yeol impeached

SOUTH KOREAN lawmakers on Saturday impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol over his failed martial law bid, with the opposition declaring a "victory of the people".

The vote capped more than a week of intense political drama in the democratic South following Yoon's failed attempt to impose martial law on December 3.

Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets of the capital Seoul in rival rallies for and against Yoon on Saturday. In a televised address following the parliamentary vote, the impeached Yoon said he would "step aside" but did not apologise for his botched bid to impose martial law.

Out of 300 lawmakers, 204 voted to impeach the president on allegations of insurrection while 85 voted against. Three abstained, with eight votes nullified.

With the impeachment, Yoon has been suspended from office while South Korea's Constitutional Court deliberates on the vote.

The court has 180 days to rule on Yoon's future and Chief Justice Moon Hyung-bae vowed to hold "a swift and fair trial".

If the court backs his



The service seeks to enable users around the world to explore Oman's natural landscapes, historical landmarks and modern infrastructure through a unique virtual experience.

removal, Yoon will become the second president in South Korean history to be successfully impeached.

Two hundred votes were needed for the impeachment to pass, and opposition lawmakers needed to convince at least eight parliamentarians from Yoon's conservative People Power Party (PPP) to switch sides.

"Today's impeachment is the great victory of the people," opposition Democratic Party floor leader Park Chan-dae said following the vote.

PPP lawmaker Kim Sang-wook told broadcaster JTBC that Yoon had "completely betrayed the values of conservatism".

"That is why we, as ruling party lawmakers, have decided to remove him ourselves," he said.

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo — now the nation's interim leader — said in an address to the nation that he "deeply acknowledges the heavy responsibility for the current situation" and "sincerely apologises to the people". "What is most important right now is that there must not be even the slightest gap in the administration of state affairs," said Han, who convened a National Security Council late on Saturday evening. A Seoul police official said at least 200,000 people had massed outside parliament in support of removing the president. — AFP

SEE ALSO P6

WORLD FALLS SHORT OF DROUGHT DEAL AT SAUDI-HOSTED TALKS

RIYADH: Negotiators failed to produce an agreement on how to respond to drought at Saudi-hosted UN talks, participants said on Saturday, falling short of a hoped-for binding protocol addressing the scourge.

The 12-day meeting of parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), known as COP16, concluded early on Saturday morning, a day later than scheduled as parties tried to hammer out a deal.

Prior to the talks, UNCCD Executive Secretary Ibrahim Thiaw said the world expected negotiators "to adopt a bold decision that can help turn the tide on the most pervasive and the most disruptive environmental disaster: drought".

But addressing the plenary session before dawn, Thiaw acknowledged that "parties need more time to agree on the best way forward".

A press release on Saturday said the parties — 196 countries and the European Union — had "made significant progress in laying the groundwork for a future global drought regime, which they intend to complete at COP17 in Mongolia in 2026".

The Riyadh talks came after the partial failure of biodiversity talks in Colombia, the failure to reach a UN deal on plastics pollution in South Korea, and a climate finance deal that disappointed developing nations at COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan. — AFP



Saudi Arabia, which hosted the United Nations' COP16 conference on drought and desertification, is betting on green innovation to transform its deserts. — AFP



BELARUS PRESIDENT ARRIVES IN OMAN

MUSCAT: President Aleksandr Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus arrived in Muscat Governorate on Saturday on an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman, lasting several days. During the visit, he will meet with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, led the welcoming party for the Belarusian president and his accompanying delegation at the Royal Airport. The Foreign Minister welcomed the president, wishing him a pleasant stay and a successful visit. — ONA



OMAN AND BELARUS

Strengthening ties across sectors



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Belarus seek to expand the scope of partnerships and promote relations in various economic, political and cultural areas.

Therefore, the visit of President Aleksandr Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus and his meeting with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik represent an important step in boosting partnerships in different areas, especially in the economic, commercial and investment fields.

The exchange of official visits between the two sides reflects their joint keenness to develop and strengthen bilateral relations.

In this context, Roman Golovchenko, Prime Minister of the Republic of Belarus, made a visit to the Sultanate of Oman and met with a number of officials last October.

He also held a meeting with some Omani business people, during which they explored areas

of economic and investment cooperation, in addition to inking some Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs).

Moreover, Alexei Bogdanov, Minister of Antimonopoly Regulation and Trade of the Republic of Belarus, visited Oman last August. During his visit, a business forum was held between the two sides, in addition to signing a number of MoUs.

Hamoud bin Salim al Tuwaih, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Russian Federation, and non-resident to the Republic of Belarus, pointed out that the visit of the Belarusian President to the Sultanate of Oman will explore means of promoting relations in various spheres, in addition to addressing a set of regional and international issues.

He told Oman News Agency (ONA) that this visit would contribute to expanding areas of



Hamoud bin Salim al Tuwaih, Ambassador of Oman to the Russian Federation and non-resident to the Republic of Belarus

economic cooperation between the two countries, whether through augmenting the volume of trade exchange or investment in strategic sectors such as renewable energy,

green hydrogen, heavy industries and technology.

He explained that the two countries have signed many memoranda of understanding and agreements in various areas, including an agreement to encourage and protect investment, an agreement on economic and trade cooperation, a memorandum of understanding for political consultations, an agreement to avoid double taxation, an agreement on cooperation between the chambers of commerce in the two countries, agreements on trade and economic cooperation, and mutual protection of investments, among others.

The two countries look forward to providing the tourism sectors with new visions that aim at promoting the tourism potential of Oman and Belarus, affirmed Ambassador Hamoud.

He pointed to the cultural and

academic cooperation between the two countries, as they signed a loan contract to organise a temporary exhibition with the National Historical Museum and inaugurated the Belarus exhibition 'At the Crossroads of Civilisational Communication' in 2018 in Muscat Governorate.

In return, the 'Oman Day' exhibition and events were inaugurated in 2019 in Belarus. The Belarusian Cultural Week was also held in Muscat in 2020, the ambassador added.

It is worth mentioning that the diplomatic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Belarus were established on July 23, 1992.

There have been continuous visits between the officials of the two countries, as the President of the Republic of Belarus paid an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman in April 2007. — ONA



Sayyid Badr holding talks with his Belarusian counterpart in Muscat

Sayyid Badr, Belarusian counterpart discuss areas of cooperation

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received in Muscat Governorate on Saturday Maxim Ryshenkov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views on areas of cooperation

between Oman and Belarus, as well as the joint preparatory coordination for the official visit to be made by President Aleksandr Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus to the Sultanate of Oman. They also touched on a set of regional and international developments.

The meeting was attended by Hamoud bin Salim al Tuwaih, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Russian Federation and non-resident to the Republic of Belarus, Andrei Luchenok, Belarusian Ambassador to Oman and some officials from both sides. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



COUNCIL OF OMAN
AT ARAB PARLIAMENT
GENERAL SESSION

CAIRO: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Council of Oman, participated in the second general session of the first session of the fourth legislative term of the Arab Parliament (AP), which was held at the headquarters of the Secretariat-General of the League of Arab States in Cairo on Saturday.

The Sultanate of Oman’s delegation was headed by Shaikh Said bin Hamad al Saadi, Deputy Chairman of Majlis Ash’shura, Deputy Speaker of the Arab Parliament, with the participation of representatives of legislative councils and members of the Arab Parliament to discuss the latest developments in various political, security, social, legal and human rights issues in the Arab region.

In his opening speech, the Speaker of the Arab Parliament stressed the Arab Parliament’s full support for all sincere Arab efforts led by the League of Arab States to address the crises facing the Arab nation. He said that the Palestinian people have been facing an unprecedented genocidal war and daily massacres for over a year, while the international community remains unable to act to save them. He added that many peoples around the world have risen up in support of the Palestinian people; however, the governmental position of some countries has been paralysed by the American veto. — ONA

1,613 STUDENTS
TO GRADUATE FROM
SQU TODAY

MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) will celebrate today the graduation of the 35th batch of students, under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance. A total of 3,090 students will graduate in two graduation ceremonies, the second of which will be held on Wednesday.

Today’s ceremony will see the graduation of 1,613 students, including 511 holders of doctoral and master’s degrees from various colleges, in addition to holders of bachelor’s degrees from engineering colleges (349 students), the College of Science (360 graduates), the College of Medicine and Health Sciences (177 graduates), the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences (156 graduates) and the College of Nursing (60 graduates).

Wednesday’s graduation ceremony will see the graduation of 1,477 students who obtained a bachelor’s degree from the College of Economics and Political Science (439 graduates), the College of Arts and Social Sciences (442 graduates), the College of Education (408 graduates) and the College of Law (188 graduates).

RAFO, RAO celebrate SAF Day with grand ceremonies

MUSCAT: The Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo) and the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) marked the Sultan’s Armed Forces Day on December 11 with grand celebrations in Muscat, showcasing their strength, skill, and modernisation under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, the Supreme Commander.

At the Rafo’s ceremony held at Seeb Air Base, the event began with a military salute to Shaikh Ghosn bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of the State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution, the patron of the occasion.

The Royal Air Force band played the Royal Anthem, followed by a silent infantry parade and a musical performance featuring various musical pieces. The highlight of the celebration was a parachute display by Rafo’s freefall team, a flyover by a helicopter carrying the Sultanate of Oman’s flag, and a series of fighter

jets performing in the sky.

The event demonstrated the high capabilities and skills of the Rafo, along with the ongoing development of modern equipment, advanced technologies, and systems. After the ceremony, the chief guest and the attendees toured exhibitions showcasing advanced aircraft, weapons, and equipment that reflect the Rafo’s role in supporting national defence.

Meanwhile, the Royal Army of Oman celebrated the occasion in Muscat Governorate, under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

The Royal Army Music Band performed the Royal Anthem, followed by a military parade, a rapid attack demonstration by mechanised infantry, and horsemanship displays by the Sultan of Oman’s Armoured Cavalry. The

CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT
OMAN’S PALM HERITAGE

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, DEC 14

Under the slogan ‘We protect our palm trees, we protect our heritage’, the second extensive campaign to raise awareness of the red palm weevil was launched in Al Falij village, Wilayat of Sur, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate. Spearheaded by the General Directorate of Agricultural Wealth, Fisheries and Water Resources, the initiative underscores the importance of safeguarding Oman’s palm trees as both a national treasure and a reflection of Oman’s cultural identity.

The event was inaugurated by Shaikh Dr Hilal bin Ali al Habsi, Wali of Sur, alongside community members and officials. Eng Khalid

bin Hamdan al Hadhrami, Director of the Agricultural Development Department, emphasised the campaign’s goal: to combat the red palm weevil, a major threat to Oman’s vital palm crops. He highlighted the critical role of preventing the transfer of infected palm seedlings to curb the pest’s spread.

The two-day campaign conducted field surveys in the villages of Al Fulaij and Tai in the wilayats of Sur and Al Kamil W’al Wafi. These surveys aim to ensure infected farms are addressed and healthy trees are protected. Eng Said bin Juma al Araimi, Director of the Department of Agricultural Wealth, Fisheries and Water Resources in Sur, noted that dividing villages into specific sectors for team operations has



An extensive campaign to raise awareness of the red palm weevil was launched in Sur

proven effective, as demonstrated in Iftaa village, where systematic efforts successfully contained the infestation. The history of red palm weevil infections in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate dates back to 2012 in Sur, with subsequent outbreaks in Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan. The consistent monitoring of traps

and targeted interventions has led to zero infections reported in 2024, reflecting the success of these coordinated efforts.

Eng Al Araimi highlighted the importance of raising farmers’ awareness, stressing that community cooperation remains essential for achieving the campaign’s goals. The initiative is part of a broader integrated management programme designed to combat the red palm weevil, enhance operational efficiency and mitigate risks.

Palm trees symbolise Oman’s agricultural and cultural legacy, deeply rooted in the nation’s history. The campaign reflects Oman’s determination to preserve its heritage by intensifying field efforts and fostering awareness, ensuring the sustainability of palm trees for future generations.

As the campaign progresses, it continues to reinforce the message of unity and commitment: Oman’s palm trees remain a symbol of life, giving and resilience.

ATM usage declines as
digital payments rise

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, DEC 14

ATM TRANSACTIONS in the Sultanate of Oman are witnessing a decline, with more users shifting to mobile-based payments and money transfers in recent times.

According to the Central Bank of Oman (CBO)’s National Payment Systems Annual Report, ATM transactions witnessed a decrease from 15 per cent in 2022 to 11 per cent in 2023, indicating a shift towards other digital payment channels.

Muscat Governorate has the most ATM installations (565), followed by Al Batinah North (173), as the total number of ATMs has increased by around 40 in 2023 from the previous year. This slight increase may be attributed to the growing availability and adoption of alternative banking channels, such as online and mobile banking, which offer convenience and flexibility to users.

“As consumers increasingly embrace electronic banking, their reliance on traditional ATMs may decrease. Despite the slight increase in ATM numbers, these machines continue to play a crucial role in facilitating 24/7 banking services, particularly in regions with high economic activity. They enable the seamless movement of goods and services by providing access to cash and banking services anytime, anywhere. It will be essential for CBO and financial institutions to adapt to evolving consumer preferences and technological advancements to ensure the continued relevance and effectiveness of banking infrastructure in meeting the needs of the



ATM usage dropped from 15 per cent in 2022 to 11 per cent in 2023, as more users transition to mobile-based payments and digital banking channels.

population. Additionally, promoting the benefits of electronic banking can further accelerate the transition towards digital banking solutions while ensuring financial inclusion for all segments of society,” the report said.

Apple and Samsung Pay: The services launched in 2024 online and offline payments via mobile devices. It also helps users make payments without the need to present their debit or credit cards at payment counters in retail outlets or even while travelling abroad.

Mohammed bin Saif al Manji of TechOneFive, an initiative group promoting awareness of new technologies, recently said, “Digital payments in Oman have been growing, with the Central Bank of Oman

(CBO) promoting cashless transactions through initiatives like mobile wallets and QR code payments. Apple Pay’s launch in Oman will enhance this trend, alongside Samsung Pay, offering users a secure and seamless way to make contactless payments via their iPhones and Apple Watches. Many banks have integrated Apple Pay, allowing customers to link their bank cards for effortless digital transactions. This aligns with Oman Vision 2040, supporting the country’s transition towards a cashless society.”

After natural reluctance to accept card-based payments, small retailers have been more open to mobile transfers. “We encourage our users to make mobile-based transfers instead of using their debit or credit cards, and they are equally beneficial to both sides in terms of efficiency and reliability. Importantly, money comes to our account in real time,” one of them said.

POS transactions experienced an increase from 68 per cent in 2022 to 74 per cent in 2023, reflecting an expanding acceptance and utilisation, possibly bolstered by the introduction of software point-of-sale devices. A POS or ‘Point of Sale’ transaction is a purchase made with a debit card and requires entering your PIN on a keypad. E-commerce transactions witnessed a slight decrease in its share of OmanNet from 17 per cent in 2022 to 15 per cent in 2023, suggesting potential shifts in consumer preferences towards alternative payment channels. These variations underscore dynamic shifts in Oman’s electronic payment landscape, reflective of evolving consumer behaviours and technological advancements within the industry.



The Rafo celebrated Sultan’s Armed Forces Day at Seeb Air Base under Shaikh Ghosn bin Hilal al Alawi

event also featured a paragliding show and a free-fall parachute performance by the Royal Army’s free-fall team.

The celebration concluded with a review of modern military vehicles and equipment, and the presentation of the Long Service and

Good Conduct Medal by the Minister to members of the Royal Army of Oman in recognition of their dedication to national service.

Both events were attended by leaders of the Sultan’s Armed Forces, retired commanders, senior officers, dignitaries, and students,

celebrating the dedication and achievements of Oman’s military forces.

Meanwhile, the 11th Infantry Brigade and the Firaq Forces at the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) also marked the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF) Day, which falls on December 11 in the Wilayat of Salalah.

A ceremony marking this occasion was held at the military parade ground of Ngour Sahalnoot Camp in the Dhofar Governorate under the auspices of Maj Gen Sulaiman bin Khalid al Zakwani, Secretary-General of the Military Affairs at the Royal Office.

During the ceremony, the chief guest pinned long-service and good conduct medals on some officers and personnel of the 11th Infantry Brigade and Firaq Forces in appreciation for their sincere efforts and dedication in carrying out the sacred national duty. — ONA

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, DEC 14

WEIGHT LOSS INJECTIONS have gained popularity as a quick solution to obesity, a significant global health challenge. Despite advertisements promoting them as a magical solution, questions remain about their effectiveness and potential risks.

These injectable medications, such as those containing Semaglutide or Liraglutide, are primarily designed to treat type 2 diabetes. They help control blood sugar levels and suppress appetite, leading to reduced calorie intake and gradual weight loss.

Studies indicate that these injections can yield noticeable results for some individuals, particularly when paired with a healthy diet and exercise. Dr Khaled al Rashidi, a family medicine consultant, emphasises that while they are not a magical solution, they can be a valuable tool when used correctly and under medical supervision. Some users reportedly lose 10-15 per cent of their body weight during treatment, but success depends on a commitment to lifestyle changes.

SIDE EFFECTS

However, weight loss injections come with side effects, such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and stomach pain. Long-term effects, including pancreatic or digestive issues, may also occur.

Dr Khaled advises against blindly following commercial advertisements and stresses the importance of a thorough medical evaluation before using these injections. Instead of relying solely on injections, experts recommend a holistic approach to weight loss, incorporating gradual lifestyle changes, balanced nutrition, regular physical activity and psychological support when needed.

Dr Hala Mohamed, a clinical nutritionist, warns against using weight loss injections without medical necessity. She highlights the importance of consulting a doctor to prevent serious complications, such as digestive disorders or liver and kidney problems. It is crucial to recognise that these injections are not suitable for everyone. They are intended for individuals who are obese or have health conditions related to excess weight, such as diabetes or heart disease.

Additionally, psychological dependence on these injections can arise, leading to anxiety when they are discontinued or fail to deliver the desired results.

While commercials often portray weight loss injections as effortless solutions, medical professionals caution against their potential risks and side effects.

Dr Hala underscores the need for sustainable weight loss through healthy lifestyle habits, starting from a young age, incorporating regular exercise, and avoiding processed foods and sugary drinks. Weight loss injections may benefit certain individuals, but they are not a permanent or risk-free solution. Responsible weight loss, under medical guidance, is essential, focusing on natural and sustainable methods. Health is a long-term investment that requires dedication and informed decisions.

ARE
WEIGHT
LOSS
INJECTIONS
SAFE?

While commercials often portray weight loss injections as an effortless way to reach an ideal weight, it is essential to heed the warnings of medical professionals regarding potential risks and side effects.

SHORT TAKE



MoE CELEBRATES STUDENT INNOVATION

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education, through its Innovation and Scientific Olympiad Department, in collaboration with Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO), celebrated the conclusion of the National Olympiad of Student Scientific Innovation, Robotics Competitions, and Artificial Intelligence for the academic year 2024–2025.

The event, held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, was held under the auspices of Dr Mansour bin Taleb al Hinai, Chairman of the Public Services Regulatory Authority, and attended by Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, along with senior officials from OMIFCO and the Ministry of Education, as well as students.

In his speech, Hilal al Khazairi, Assistant Director of the Innovation and Scientific Olympiad Department, emphasised the ministry's commitment to fostering a creative and innovative environment for students. "We are dedicated to supporting students in developing their ideas into tangible achievements that contribute to building a brighter future," he said. "Through organising these competitions, we reaffirm our commitment to promoting innovative solutions and supporting young minds in driving digital transformation and technological progress."

Student Ohood Al Shaqsi, from Aisha Al Riyamiah Basic Education School in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, expressed gratitude for the opportunity to participate. “The Olympiad is a field of challenge, where young talents come together to prove that achievement starts with an idea and is completed with determination. Many new ideas were born, and stories of achievement were shared. We are thankful to the Ministry of Education for giving us the opportunity to take our first steps toward a bright future.” — ONA

OMAN, KUWAIT
TO ENHANCE
SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT
COOPERATION

KUWAIT: The Sultanate of Oman and Kuwait held productive discussions aimed at enhancing cooperation in the field of social development, focusing on initiatives that serve the mutual interests of both nations. These talks took place during the visit of Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, and her accompanying delegation to Kuwait. During the visit, Dr Laila Al Najjar met with Dr Amthal al Huwailah, Minister of Social

Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs of Kuwait. The two leaders exchanged views on topics of shared interest and reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral collaboration in social development, particularly in areas that benefit families, children and people with disabilities. The Omani delegation had the opportunity to visit several prominent facilities in Kuwait, including the Juvenile Care Department Headquarters, the Social Care Home Complex,

and the Childhood Home. They also toured the Care Centre for Persons with Disabilities, the Child Evaluation and Education Centre, and the headquarters of the Public Authority for Persons with Disabilities, along with its affiliated centres. In addition, the delegation visited the Kuwait Society for the Care of the Disabled, gaining valuable insights into Kuwait's efforts in providing comprehensive care and support to vulnerable populations. — ONA

Symposium highlights research chair impact

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, DEC 14

AL BURAIMI University hosted a scientific symposium titled 'Research Chairs in Promoting Education, Scientific Research and Knowledge Transfer', under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The event was organised collaboratively by the Ministry, Al Buraimi University, and the National Commission for Education, Culture and Science.

In her opening remarks, Dr Rahma emphasised the vital role of research chairs in advancing education and generating new knowledge. She highlighted their significance in student training, postgraduate supervision, and the attraction of international researchers, noting that these chairs foster partnerships that elevate Oman's global academic reputation. She advocated for more research chairs to support key national economic priorities and called for enhanced institutional backing and qualified personnel.

Dr Rahma also acknowledged the legacy of the late His Majesty



Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah presided over a scientific symposium of Al Buraimi University

The symposium emphasised on the vital role of research chairs in advancing education and generating new knowledge

Sultan Qaboos, whose initiatives in scientific research positioned Oman prominently on the global stage, with research chairs established at prestigious universities such as Harvard, Cambridge, Oxford and George Washington. She discussed the foundational work of the Research Council, initiated in 2011, including the establishment of nanotechnology and materials science chairs at the Sultan Qaboos University and the University of Nizwa, respectively.

The symposium covered essential topics, including the Ministry's support for research chairs, the contribution of international

organisations to sustainable development, and successful local and international case studies.

Key recommendations included revitalising the research chairs programme under the name of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, encouraging universities to align research with Oman Vision 2040, involving the private sector in funding, and holding annual symposia to assess progress.

Research chairs are strategic tools for sustainable development, driving collaboration and innovation to address economic, social and environmental challenges.

Oman, Netherlands rekindle maritime ties at Mirani Fort

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, DEC 14



*Dutch and Omani chefs Peter Gast and Dina Macki with Azzan Al
Busaidy and Stella Kloth at Al Mirani Fort*

The Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of the Netherlands commemorated over 400 years of maritime history and enduring ties at an event held at the historic Al Mirani Fort under the auspices of Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism (MoHT) on Wednesday. In addition to the exchange of commemorative plaques, an exclusive canapé menu was crafted by two chefs: Dutch chef Peter Gast, celebrated for his Michelin-starred culinary artistry, and acclaimed Omani chef Dina Macki, known for her innovative approach to Omani flavours. The duo rediscovered the enduring tastes of friendship between the two nations.

The menu featured a creative blend of typical Omani and Dutch ingredients, such as mussels and dates, creating a unique culinary experience that honoured the traditions of both nations over the centuries.

Speaking to Oman Daily Observer, Azzan al Busaidy said, "Oman and the

Netherlands share a timeless history and bond. We have maintained cordial relations for centuries, and what better way to rekindle ties than at this beautiful Al Mirani Fort overlooking the serene ocean? We are confident that our bonds will strengthen further in the coming times."

The event brought together various ministerial representatives, scholars, dignitaries, and business leaders, alongside members of the local community, turning the fort into a platform for rich cultural exchange. It also marked the official launch of a series of events planned for the coming year, ranging from

sports activities to cultural initiatives, all aimed at further bolstering the ties between the two nations.

“We are glad to host such a centuries-old relationship in a fort that has stood the test of time. It’s truly extraordinary that two nations, separated by oceans and seas, have forged such an enduring partnership over the past centuries. Looking to the future, events like this are vital for inspiring and educating new generations, highlighting the opportunities for collaboration that lie ahead,” said Stella Kloth, Ambassador of the Netherlands to the Sultanate of Oman.



سلطنة عُمان
وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات
Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology
Sultanate of Oman



سلطنة عُمان
وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات
Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology
Sultanate of Oman

إعلان مزاييدة استثمارية

Investment Announcement

Investment Announcement No. 3/2024

Bidding for the Management, Operation and Development of the maritime salvage service in the Sultanate of Oman

The Internal Investment Committee of the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology announces the launch of the following Bidding for local and international companies and investors specialized in managing, operating, and developing of maritime Salvage services in the Sultanate of Oman. Interested parties are invited to submit investment proposals in accordance with the terms outlined in this announcement and as detailed in the tender documents and attachments.

Number	Document purchasing Date	Clarification periods	Closing Date	Document Fees
3/2024	15/12/2024 to 12/01/2025	12/01/2025 to 26/01/2025	02/03/2025 12:00 PM	100 Omani Rials (non-refundable)

- Document fee should be paid by bank transfer only to the Ministry's account number **0325001361300017 Bank Muscat**
- The payment receipt must be sent to investment@mtcit.gov.om
- The bidding document will be shared via email
- The Investment proposals must include all the requirements mentioned in the Bidding document
- The Investment proposal must be valid for at least 12 months and should be signed and stamped
- All investment proposals should be sent as PDF to investment@mtcit.gov.om
- For any other inquiries, you can reach us via the following contact details:

Phone number	E-mail
24685340 24685341 24685091	investment@mtcit.gov.om

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WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Demonstrators gather as parliament members elected Mikheil Kavelashvili as a new president in Tbilisi. — AFP

GEORGIA RULING PARTY INSTALLS LOYALIST PRESIDENT



MIKHEIL KAVELASHVILI

Georgia new president

TBILISI: Georgia’s ruling party on Saturday installed a far-right loyalist as president in a controversial election process, amid a deepening constitutional crisis and weeks of mass pro-EU protests. The Black Sea nation has been in turmoil since the governing Georgian Dream party claimed victory in contested October parliamentary elections. Its decision last month to delay European Union membership talks ignited a fresh wave of mass rallies.

An electoral college, controlled by the ruling Georgian Dream party and boycotted by the opposition, elected Mikheil Kavelashvili with 224 votes as the country’s next figurehead leader for a five-year term, central election commission chair Giorgi Kalandarishvili said. The opposition has denounced Saturday’s election as “illegitimate” and said the sitting president, Salome Zurbishvili remains the country’s sole legitimate leader. Pro-Western Zurbishvili — who is at loggerheads with Georgian Dream — has refused to step down and is demanding new parliamentary elections, paving the way for a constitutional showdown. On Saturday morning, protesters began gathering outside the parliament building which was cordoned off by police. — AFP

LEBANON SAYS ISRAEL STRIKES THE SOUTH

BEIRUT: Lebanon’s health ministry said an Israeli drone strike in the south killed one person on Saturday, the latest deadly raid despite a more than two-week ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah. “An Israeli enemy drone strike... killed one person” in Marjayoun district, the health ministry said in a statement. The official National News Agency said a vehicle was hit.

Earlier, the Israeli military said the air force “struck a loaded and ready-to-use launcher aimed at Israel in violation of the ceasefire understandings between Israel and Lebanon”. A ceasefire came into effect between Israel and Lebanese group Hezbollah on November 27 but both sides have accused the other of repeated violations, with Lebanon reporting multiple deadly Israeli strikes.

On Saturday, the NNA said the “enemy... carried out detonations in the town of Kfar Kila” near the border, also reporting the sound of explosions and automatic weapons fire “from Israeli soldiers” in frontier village Mais al-Jabal. — AFP

UNDER INVESTIGATION

Brazil arrests ex-defence minister over coup



Brazilian authorities arrested Braga Netto, a former defence minister and close ally of ex-president Jair Bolsonaro, on suspicion of obstructing an investigation into an alleged coup attempt in 2022, a police source said. Brazil’s Federal Police said it had detained “people who would be obstructing” the investigation. “Braga Netto was arrested in the operation,” the source said. Attorney general Paulo Gonet has been examining the allegations to see if evidence supports charges. — AFP

PALESTINIAN MEDICS SAY 18 KILLED IN ISRAELI GAZA STRIKES

CAIRO: At least 18 Palestinians were killed in Israeli airstrikes in Gaza on Saturday, medics said, while the Israeli military said it targeted gunmen operating from shelters and aid storages. At least 10 people were killed in an airstrike near the municipality building in Deir Al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip where people gathered to receive aid, medics said. Casualties were being carried by foot, on rickshaws and private cars from the site of

the attack to the hospital, medics said. The strike killed the head of the administrative committee in central Gaza, a Hamas source said. A separate strike in Gaza City killed a local journalist, medics said. The military was looking into the report, a spokesperson said.

GAINED MOMENTUM Israel then launched an air, sea and land offensive that has killed at least 44,000 people, mostly civilians,

according to authorities in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip, displaced nearly the entire population and left much of the enclave in ruins. A fresh bid by Egypt, Qatar and the United States to reach a truce has gained momentum in recent weeks. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on Saturday discussed with visiting U.S. officials efforts to reach a ceasefire in Gaza and a captives-for prisoners deal in the Palestinian enclave, Sisi’s office said. — Reuters

South Korea’s Yoon defiant after impeachment over

SOUTH KOREAN President Yoon Suk Yeol vowed on Saturday to fight for his political future after he was impeached in a second vote by the opposition-led parliament over his short-lived attempt to impose martial law, a move that had shocked the nation. The Constitutional Court will decide whether to remove Yoon sometime in the next six months. If he is removed from office, a snap election will be called. Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, who was appointed by Yoon, became acting president while Yoon remains in office but with his presidential powers suspended halfway through his five-year term. “I will give all my strength and efforts to stabilise the government,” Han told reporters after the vote. Later, he chaired a National Security Council meeting and urged the country to maintain a “watertight readiness posture” to ensure North Korea could not plan any provocations.

The political crisis, which has led to the resignation or arrest of several senior defence and military officials, has raised concerns over the South’s ability to deter nuclear-armed North Korea at a time when Pyongyang is expanding its arsenal and deepening ties with Russia.

Yoon survived a first impeachment vote last weekend, when his party largely boycotted the vote, depriving parliament of a quorum. “Although I am stopping for now, the journey I have walked with the people over the past two and a half years towards the future must never come to a halt. I will never give up,” Yoon said. Considered a tough political survivor but increasingly isolated, he has been dogged by personal scandals and

“Although I am stopping for now, the journey I have walked with the people over the past two and a half years towards the future must never come to a halt. I will never give up

YOON SUK YEOL



Protesters participate in a rally against South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, in front of the National Assembly in Seoul. — Reuters

strife, an unyielding opposition and rifts within his own party.

Protesters near parliament backing Yoon’s impeachment leapt for joy, waving colourful LED sticks as music pumped out. By contrast, a rally of Yoon supporters emptied following the news.

Opposition Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung urged protesters near parliament to fight together so Yoon is removed swiftly. “You, the people, made it. You are writing a new history,” he told the jubilant crowds braving subfreezing temperatures.

The impeachment motion was carried as at least 12 members of Yoon’s People Power Party joined the opposition parties, which control 192 seats in the 300-member national

assembly, clearing the two-thirds threshold needed. The number of lawmakers supporting impeachment was 204, with 85 against, three abstentions and eight invalid ballots.

Yoon is also under criminal investigation for alleged insurrection over the martial law declaration and authorities have banned him from travelling overseas.

In another defiant speech, Yoon vowed to “fight to the end”, defending his martial law decree as necessary to overcome political deadlock and protect the country from domestic politicians who he said were undermining democracy. Yoon’s impeachment is unlikely to end the political turmoil, analysts warned. — Reuters

SYRIA WAR MONITOR REPORTS ISRAELI STRIKES

BEIRUT: A Syria war monitor said Israel launched strikes early on Saturday targeting military sites in Damascus and its countryside, in the latest such raids since fighters brought down Bashar al-Assad almost a week ago. “Israeli strikes destroyed a scientific institute” and other related military facilities in Barzeh, in northern Damascus and targeted a “military airport” in the capital’s countryside, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Strikes also targeted “Scud ballistic missile warehouses” and launchers in the Qalamun area, as well as “rockets, depots and tunnels under the mountain”, according to the Britain-based Observatory, which has a network of sources inside Syria. The Observatory said several rounds of bombardment targeted “military sites of the former regime forces, as part of destroying what is left of the future Syrian army’s capabilities”. — Reuters



LAUNCH FAILED

Japan postpones second attempt at orbit



A company aiming to become Japan’s first private firm to put a satellite into orbit postponed its rocket launch on Saturday, after its first try ended in a mid-air explosion. “During the final decision-making process for the launch, we analysed the weather conditions and determined that the wind speeds above an altitude of 10 kilometres were so strong that it was not suitable for launch,” Space One executive Kozo Abe told reporters. — AFP

SEA TRAGEDY

5 dead in Greece migrant boat sinking



Five migrants died early on Saturday when a migrant boat sank off Crete, leaving 40 people reportedly missing while 39 survivors were rescued. The boat sank 12 nautical miles southwest of the island, according to ERTNEWS, which reported the 40 missing. A huge rescue operation involving vessels and aircraft was under way in the sea south of the island of Gavdos, south of Crete, after the boat capsized shortly after midnight. — AFP

The New York Times

Ex-FBI informant agrees to plead guilty to lying about Bidens



GLENN THRUSH

The writer reports on the Justice Department for The New York Times

A FORMER FBI informant accused of fabricating a claim that President Joe Biden and his son Hunter were each paid a \$5 million bribe by a Ukrainian oligarch has agreed to plead guilty to a range of federal charges, according to a court filing. Alexander Smirnov, a profiteer, fixer, and gossip based in Las Vegas, reached a deal with David C Weiss, the special counsel overseeing the investigation into Hunter Biden, that could lead to 48 to 72 months in prison, according to the filing in federal court in California.

Under the terms of the agreement, Smirnov agreed to plead guilty to creating a false record in a federal investigation, obstructing justice, and failing to pay taxes and penalties on \$2.1 million in income for 2020 through 2022. He is also required to pay \$675,502 in restitution, according to the filing. The plea deal effectively ends the work of Weiss, whom Donald Trump appointed as a US attorney in Delaware during his first term. A federal judge could review the deal as soon as Monday.

By admitting to felonies, Smirnov, who stored more than a half-dozen firearms at his luxurious apartment off the Vegas strip, will no longer be able to legally own a gun.

For more than a decade, Smirnov played a double game, providing the FBI with tantalising and, at times, valuable intel-

ligence about a rogues’ gallery of oligarchs and public officials while offering himself as a consultant, with a fuzzy skill set, to some of the same people he was keeping tabs on. But his charm, confidence, and daring finally caught up with him in 2020 when he told his FBI handler what prosecutors say was a brazen lie — that the oligarch owner of the Ukrainian energy company Burisma had arranged to pay \$5 million in bribes to both Joe Biden and his son. The explosive claim was leaked to Republicans, who made Smirnov’s allegations a centre-piece of their now-stalled effort to impeach Biden, apparently without verifying the allegation.

Many of the politicians who highlighted his fake allegations have remained silent about his indictment.

Smirnov was accused of falsely telling the FBI that Hunter Biden, then a paid board member of Burisma, had demanded the money to protect the company from an investigation by the country’s prosecutor-general at the time. Smirnov’s motivation for lying, prosecutors wrote, appears to have been political.

During the 2020 campaign, he sent his FBI handler “a series of messages expressing bias” against Joe Biden, including texts, replete with typos and misspellings, boasting that he had information that would put

Smirnov played a double game, giving the FBI tantalising and, at times, valuable intelligence about a rogues’ gallery of oligarchs and public officials while offering himself as a consultant to some of the same people he was keeping tabs on.

him in jail. At the time he was arrested, Smirnov, 43, was preparing to leave for what prosecutors called “a months-long, multi-country foreign trip” during which he claimed to have plans to meet with contacts from multiple foreign intelligence agencies.

Prosecutors argued in court that his arrest and detention were necessary because Smirnov was “actively peddling new lies that could impact US elections after meeting with Russian intelligence officials in November.” In a memo arguing for his indefinite detention, deputies to Weiss described him as a hall-of-mirrors fabulist.

He not only fed the FBI bogus information about the Bidens and misled prosecutors about his wealth, estimated at \$6 million, but he also told officials that he worked in the security business, even though the government could find no proof that was true. He was initially held in Las Vegas and later transferred to California, and was scheduled to face trial in January before the same judge who presided over Hunter Biden’s case.

Smirnov — who was born in the former Soviet Union and became a US citizen in 2015 — received millions in consulting fees from various sources without reporting the income, prosecutors found when they began digging into his bank records.

US COURT DENIES TIKTOK’S REQUEST TO FREEZE LAW



SAPNA MAHESHWARI

The author is a reporter, covering technology for The New York Times

A federal court denied TikTok’s request to temporarily freeze a law that requires its parent company to sell the app or face a ban in the United States as of January 19, a decision that puts the fate of the app in the Supreme Court’s hands. The US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit said in a filing late on Friday that an injunction was

“unwarranted” and that it had expedited its decision so TikTok and its users could seek an emergency freeze from the Supreme Court. A week ago, three judges in the same court unanimously denied petitions from the company and its users to overturn the law. TikTok then asked the court on Monday to temporarily block the law until the Supreme Court decided on TikTok’s planned appeal of that decision and sought a decision by December 16.

The court said on Friday that TikTok and its users “have not identified any case in which a court, after rejecting a constitutional challenge to an Act of Congress, has enjoined the Act from going into effect while review is sought in the Supreme Court.” It is unclear whether the Supreme Court will agree to temporarily freeze the law and hear the case, although experts say that is likely.

Michael Hughes, a spokesperson for TikTok, said: “As we have previously stated, we plan on taking this case to the Supreme Court, which has an established historical record of protecting Americans’ right to free speech.” He added that American users’ voices would be “silenced” if the law were not stopped.

TikTok has been hoping that a temporary freeze of the law might also give President-elect Donald Trump more time to try to rescue the app, as he pledged to do on the campaign trail. The law is scheduled to go into effect a day before his inauguration.

In a recent interview with NBC’s Meet the Press, Trump appeared to scale back some of his previous comments about saving TikTok. Asked about his plans, he said he would “try and make it so that other companies don’t become an even bigger monopoly” and noted that the law states the government has “the right to ban it if you can prove that Chinese companies own it.”

A House committee sent letters to the CEOs of Apple and Google on Friday, warning them to comply with the law in the absence of a sale. The law requires app store operators such as Apple and Google to stop distributing and updating the TikTok app.

Apple did not respond to a request for comment on its plans to comply with the law. Google declined to comment.

Putin might seek vindication in Ukraine

THE DOWNFALL of President Bashar Assad of Syria has exposed the limits of the Kremlin’s military power and the global influence of Russia. Yet to President Vladimir Putin, the loss of his closest Middle Eastern ally may only be a temporary setback in his quest for a much greater geopolitical prize: triumph in Ukraine.

Military and political analysts said winning the war in Ukraine has become an all-encompassing goal for Putin. That outcome, they said, would justify to the Russian leader the conflict’s tremendous human and economic losses, safeguard Russia’s statehood and global stature, and compensate for strategic failures elsewhere, such as in Syria.

“Putin’s bet on the war in Ukraine is so high that a victory there would bring Russia a pay-out of historic proportions: It’s all or nothing,” wrote Alexander Baunov, a political analyst at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Centre, a research group. “If he thinks the fate of the world is being decided in the Donbas, then the future of Syria will be decided there as well.”

In the short term, as Moscow manoeuvres to keep its military bases in Syria, Putin could intensify his costly offensive in Ukraine to recover some prestige. Pro-war Russian commentators have called on Putin to do just that, while also demanding tougher peace conditions in Ukraine to avoid the kind of inconclusive ceasefire that ultimately led to Assad’s downfall.

Both scenarios would complicate the incoming Trump administration’s promise to swiftly end the fighting in Ukraine. As Assad’s regime crumbled, President-elect Donald Trump taunted Russia for its failure to save its ally and called on Putin to strike a deal on Ukraine, without explaining what it might look like.

Russia is “in a weakened state right now,” Trump wrote on his social media platform, Truth Social, on Sunday, “because of Ukraine and a bad economy.” “I know Vladimir well. This is his time to



Ukrainian soldiers from a mobile air defence unit at a shooting range near Kyiv, Ukraine.



ANATOLY KURMANEV

The writer is a reporter, covering Russia and the war in Ukraine

act,” Trump added.

Analysts have pointed out that one of the most consistent features of Putin’s opaque 25-year rule is his aversion to acting from such obvious positions of weakness or submitting to external pressures.

Putin’s own descriptions of what a Russian victory in Ukraine would look like have always been vague. By last year, the Russian army had abandoned its failed attempts to mount grand offensives that could topple the Ukrainian state. It has concentrated instead on Ukraine’s east, simultaneously pressuring Kyiv’s forces in multiple parts of the front and bombing Ukrainian cities and critical infrastructure.

Military experts have interpreted this strategy as an attempt to exhaust Ukraine’s military and society and force Kyiv to the negotiating table. Putin has implied that any peace deal must allow Russia to keep at least the territory it has already occupied and guarantee Ukraine’s military neutrality, meaning no entry into Nato. Russia also wants to suppress Ukraine’s military capacity.

“We must not talk about a ceasefire for half an hour or half a year, so that they could resupply ammunition,” Putin said at a forum in southern Russia last

month, referring to Ukraine. The Ukrainian government has repeatedly rejected any peace conditions that would formalise the loss of its territory or bar the country from seeking Nato membership. In the short term, Moscow’s setback in Syria could shrink the room for compromise further.

Russia’s pro-war commentators have reacted to Assad’s downfall with bewilderment and anger, lamenting the lives of hundreds of Russian soldiers who died proping up a Syrian army that melted away under a rebel assault. The demands of the war in Ukraine had reduced Russia’s ability to prevent the collapse.

“The conclusion is obvious: It’s best not to leave frozen conflicts,” said Oleg Tsaryov, a pro-Russian former Ukrainian lawmaker who now writes about the war from exile in Russia. “If a conflict is frozen, the enemy will undoubtedly exploit your moment of weakness,” he wrote in a written response to questions.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine has said recently that his country may accept a temporary loss of some occupied territory, but that it would never acquiesce to permanent border changes. Polls show that most Ukrainians support this view.

OPINION

The psychological cost of professional setbacks



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A few weeks ago, I noticed a friend was over-posting on social media. The posts were about his recent and sometimes old achievements. Some days he will post about ordinary everyday activities like attending a meeting or sitting at his desk and include details on descriptions of his impressive management style. His posts attracted my attention, especially since it's unlike him to post in such a way. So, I invited him for a coffee and asked, "Are you OK?" He paused a little and then told me that he had recently retired from his work despite his hard work in establishing the company where he worked. The worst part, he said, was he was getting good feedback from top management which motivated him to give more. The dismissal came as a shock to him and left him wondering what he did wrong. When he asked, he was told that he had reached retirement age, and the company needed 'new blood'. He described feeling angry, confused and humiliated. In the first few weeks, he lost sleep and ended up driving aimlessly at night for a long distance to calm himself. He could

not tell his family about the termination as he was worried about their reactions. It became clear to me that he felt the need to highlight his previous achievements to reassure himself about his worth. The story of my friend reflects a common response to professional setbacks or perceived failures. In the modern world we live in we often find our personal and professional identities intertwined with our digital presence so it's not surprising that social media becomes a coping mechanism. When people feel undervalued or overlooked, posting about previous accomplishments can serve as a reminder – to themselves and others – of their competence and value. This phenomenon is called self-affirmation and it can be a way to regain a sense of control and self-worth. However, while these posts may provide temporary reassurance, they sometimes mask deeper feelings of insecurity, frustration, or even shame. What my friend was experiencing was a need for validation and acknowledgment after what felt like an unjust and confusing dismissal. From a psychological perspective, the lack of recognition at work and sudden professional changes can harm one's

From a psychological perspective, the lack of recognition at work and sudden professional changes can harm one's well-being.

well-being. Being removed from a role can lead to feelings of betrayal and self-doubt. When hard work goes unnoticed or seems to be discarded, the emotional toll can be significant. This raises important questions: Are organisations doing enough to support employees when roles or responsibilities shift? Is constructive feedback, transparency and empathy consistently practiced in professional settings? And as individuals, how do we respond to professional setbacks in healthy, constructive ways? While posting achievements online can serve as a short-term confidence boost, it can also signal a deeper need for support. Conversations, like the one I had with my friend, can provide a safe space to unpack these feelings without being judged. A simple question, "Are you OK?" can open the door to understanding, validation and perhaps a path to healing. One should remember that acknowledging someone's contributions, understanding their struggles and offering support when needed can make all the difference, so don't shy out from asking "Are you OK?"

MEDICAL TRAINING BAN THREATENS AFGHAN HEALTH SECTOR

AYSHA SAFI & SUSANNAH WALDEN

From her private hospital in Afghanistan's capital, doctor Najmussama Shefajo predicts a rise in maternal mortality rates "within three or four years", following the latest restrictions on women's education. The Taliban's supreme leader is reportedly behind a ban on women studying midwifery and nursing at training institutes across the country, already among the worst in the world for deaths in childbirth. "We may not see the impact very quickly but after three to four years we will see the maternal mortality rate go up and up," said Shefajo. "People will for sure have more babies at home. But what about complications? What about operations? Many procedures cannot be done at home." Since the Taliban government banned women from universities two years ago, Shefajo has been giving on-the-job medical training, including in midwifery and nursing. But she said she doesn't have the capacity or facilities to take on every woman keen to learn in her hospital, despite no shortage of volunteers. "Midwifery and nursing are like the two wings of the doctors; if the bird doesn't have wings, it cannot fly," she added, ducking behind curtains to treat patients. Already Afghanistan is facing a "desperate shortage of trained healthcare workers, especially women", according to the UN children's agency Unicef. No official notice has been issued by the Taliban government, but health ministry sources and managers of training institutes said this month that they had been told to block women from classes. Restricting medical training is the latest action against women's education since the Taliban authorities swept to power in 2021, imposing rules the United Nations has called "gender apartheid". "In a country where women and children depend on female health professionals for culturally sensitive care, cutting the pipeline of future health providers would put lives at risk," Unicef Executive Director Catherine Russell said in a statement. Training institutes had ensured women would continue to learn healthcare skills, such as midwifery and nursing, or laboratory work, pharmacy and dentistry. The ban would impact about 35,000 women studying at medical training centres, according to a figure from a health ministry source. "We are concerned about the effects on the already fragile healthcare system," said Achille Despres, spokesperson for the International Committee of the Red Cross in Afghanistan, where the organisation offers health services and training. International NGO Doctors Without Borders (MSF), which runs some of its busiest maternity hospitals in Afghanistan, also warned of the consequences of the ban, given that the nation's "medical needs... are huge". "There is no healthcare system without educated female health practitioners," country representative Mickael Le Paih said in a statement. — AFP

Why job interview preperation matters

INTERVIEWS are a significant milestone when you're trying to secure a job or gain admission to a university. They provide an opportunity to demonstrate why you're the ideal candidate, but they can also feel daunting if you're unprepared. Taking the time to prepare can make all the difference. Preparation demonstrates your seriousness, boosts your confidence and increases your chances of success. During my tenure as Principal of two schools in Cambridge, I also managed the Careers Department. I took on this responsibility because I found it incredibly rewarding to see my students succeed in their interviews, whether gaining entry to university or landing the job they desired. I excelled in this role because I genuinely enjoyed it. While I wasn't 100 per cent successful, I estimate my success rate was at least 90 per cent. For example, in one year, nine of my students gained admission to the University of Cambridge. For most schools, having even one student admitted to Cambridge or Oxford would be considered a remarkable achievement. At that time interviewing well could mean the difference between success or failure. That said, it's more accurate to say that the students were the ones who succeeded; I was simply instrumental in helping them achieve their goals. With guidance and practice, almost anyone can excel in an interview. Some students who came to my school to retake exams already had what I considered sufficiently strong results to secure university admission or obtain their desired job. However, they had failed their interviews. The more interviews they failed, the more nervous they became, which in turn made them more likely to fail again. It was a vicious cycle. In addition to assisting with their CVs and university application forms, I also provided them with interview practice. After the first mock interview, it was usually evident why they had struggled in previous interviews. I took detailed notes during these mock interview



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One of the main problems was that students often failed to understand what employers or university admissions tutors were looking for

sessions and then discussed with them at the end the areas where they had gone wrong. They were often shocked by the inappropriate or disastrous answers to my interview questions. Some answers were not only problematic but occasionally even humorous. It wasn't a matter of lacking the right qualifications or skills but rather of being unprepared and overly nervous. By the second mock interview, their interview skills began to improve, and by the fourth or fifth, they had learned how to handle difficult questions and were no longer as anxious because they were well-prepared. Most importantly, they never resorted to being untruthful when answering questions. Interviewers can usually detect dishonesty, and no one is expected to know everything. If you don't have an answer or the knowledge to answer, it's best to admit this and turn the question back to the interviewer. For example, you could say: "That is something which wasn't covered at my school/university, but I know it's important. Would you have the time after this interview to explain it to me?" I call this one of my "get-out-of-jail-free" answers. It shows honesty and a desire to learn. One of the main problems was that students often failed to understand what employers or university admissions tutors were looking for. They had the right qualifications and skills but didn't know how to present these effectively or consider what the interviewer was looking for in a candidate. Here's one example: one of my students came from a well-known and highly successful UK holiday company. He had applied to several universities to study Business Studies but had failed all his interviews. His A-level results were average but sufficient to gain admission to study Business Studies. Before giving any mock interviews, I always asked my students if they had experienced previous interviews that they had failed. I asked this particular student if he had been asked why he wanted to study Business Studies. His answer was honest and

might seem reasonable to some, but it was disastrous: he had said, "I want to go into business and make money." Why was this the wrong answer? Because he failed to understand that he wasn't being interviewed by another businessman but by a teacher or an academic. His answer demonstrated to the admissions tutor that he hadn't studied the course content. What would have been the right answer – or at least one that would have greatly improved his chances of success? "Having looked carefully at your course content, I felt these were the subjects that would help me in my business career. In particular, I felt your course stood out by covering important topics such as human resource management, understanding the economy, strategic leadership and international business." Each business course offers different areas of study, so he would have needed to tailor his answer. He retook his A-levels with us, achieved better grades, and gained entry to a more prestigious university. And yes, his interview went well. Whether you are applying for a place at university or a job, the same rules apply. Do your homework in advance of an interview. BRIEFLY, HERE ARE SOME BITS OF ADVICE: - Get some interview practice. - Study the job description to understand what they're looking for. - Be ready to explain why you think you're the right person for the job. - Be prepared to answer when asked to tell the interviewer about yourself. - When answering questions, don't ramble. Keep your responses to the point and well-articulated. There are many other factors that can help you succeed, such as body language and eye contact. I hope this brief article helps you understand the importance of preparation. Walking into an interview unprepared will only make you feel nervous and unsure of yourself. Good luck with your next interview!

Peace is the only alternative



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THE WELSH born Third Earl of Russell, Bertrand Russell was much more than an aristocrat, born into wealth and privilege. He was a deeply intellectual student, a polymath, whose search for philosophical answers to some of the world's most pressing issues saw him apply mathematics and logic in several diverse areas of concern.

He was a late nineteenth, early twentieth century anti-imperialist, who railed against the United Kingdom's colonialist policies, particularly in respect of its continued pillaging of the Indian sub-continent. He didn't just talk social activism either, as he was imprisoned for six months towards the end of the Great War in 1918 for his pacifist views.

Conflict was always an intrusive element in Russell's public persona, and he was an early advocate of Lenin's Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, but was disappointed in the innate cruelty forced upon his own people and whilst supporting a Communist perspective, was disappointed in the 'nature of the beast'. He felt that Marx's metaphysical justifications were "simply nonsense," while not being opposed to socialism in its 'pure' form.

He was, during World War II, an early critic of Adolf Hitler's blitzkrieg, he became vocal in his anti-Nazi view that democracy would become a "permanent threat to democracy," so he formed a 'pragmatic

pacifist' perspective that the German threat must be countered, as "War was an evil, but that in extreme circumstances, it is the lesser of two evils."

Post WWII, he was to utter the famous phrase, "War does not determine who is right, but who is left."

Russell's peace activism was as vigorous as ever during the so-called, 'Cold War,' with Russia, and he publicly begged then United States President John F Kennedy to retract his confrontation with Russian Premier Nikita Khrushchev, writing boldly of Kennedy's "desperate threat to human survival," with "no conceivable justification," continuing that civilised man condemns it, and would not sustain the madness of the "mass murder" the American was contemplating.

He wasn't shy of expressing his opinions on any social issue, which alienated him both at home in the United Kingdom, but particularly in the United States, with his criticism of Kennedy, who was idolised across the Republican/Democratic political divide. He often quoted his good friend Albert Einstein's view however, that a nation could not 'simultaneously prevent and prepare for war,' which flies in the face of the military and armaments manufacturers who would argue otherwise.

Mostly though, he canvassed the widely held political disdain which politicians held everywhere for their constituents, seeing

Conflict, pain, injury and death, on the international scene, are never the final alternative, but a convenient one for the power brokers

them as "monstrous and immoral in that the general principle of tolerance (sic) does not apply to them," comparing their callousness to that of the Spanish Inquisition of King Ferdinand II of Spain, during the 15th century.

I'm no particular advocate of Bertrand Russell, but what does occur to me is that this individual was, while wealthy and privileged, he always supported 'the man and woman in the street.' He was aware of, and rarely overlooked the fact that war and conflict casualties were inevitably drawn from this lower income group.

Princes and Presidents don't perish, those without the protection of wealth, privilege and power... do.

My main point however, is that conflict and war, pain, injury and death, on the international scene, are never the final alternative, but a convenient one for the power brokers, militarist hawks and weak politicians. There will always be other options, other solutions... and if that means swallowing a little pride, or back-tracking on a political statement or ideology. It must be done. Wars cost lives, cost money, cost opportunities... the cost is just simply too high, and if we look at the conflicts around us now, there is so much that swallowing some 'pride,' massaging some ego, and putting historic wrongs behind us, cannot appease.

FILIPINA ON DEATH ROW SAYS PLANNED TRANSFER ‘MIRACLE’

DEVI RAHMAN

A Filipina inmate on death row in Indonesia said from prison that her planned transfer was a "miracle", in her first interview since Manila and Jakarta signed an agreement last week to repatriate her. Mother of two Mary Jane Veloso, 39, was arrested and sentenced to death in 2010 after the suitcase she was carrying was found to be lined with 2.6 kilogrammes of heroin, in a case that sparked uproar in the Philippines.

Both she and her supporters claim she was duped by an international drug syndicate and in 2015, she narrowly escaped execution after her suspected recruiter was arrested.

"This is a miracle because, honestly, even now, it still feels like a dream. Every morning when I wake up, I think about my aspirations, aspirations that I never had any certainty about," she said when asked about the decision.

"That's why I always prayed to God, 'Lord, I only ask for one chance to go home and be with my family'. And God answered that prayer."

Last week, Indonesia's senior law and human rights minister Yusril Ihza Mahendra said a "practical arrangement" had been signed for her repatriation. He said her transfer could happen "around December 20" before Christmas and that he had heard her death penalty would be reduced to life imprisonment.

Veloso's case sparked outrage in the Philippines, with rallies of support and world boxing superstar Manny Pacquiao pleading for her life.

Her supporters said she was headed to work as a maid when she was arrested in Indonesia. She now dreams of being reunited with her family after 14 years in prison, and wants to advocate for other women if released. "What I'm certain about is my first priority: focusing on my family," she said.

The prisoner said she had feelings of "happiness" since hearing news of the repatriation agreement. "After almost 15 years, that is what I am waiting for... I can go home to my country," she said. "I need to prepare mentally to face it all, to face my family, to face everybody out there."

Veloso's family are due to arrive next week on central Java island where she is being held, with a Christmas farewell party organised for her, an Indonesian official said. Her mother Celia Veloso, 65, called for Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos to grant her clemency so she can spend Christmas with her family. "We are excited to finally be with my daughter," she said. "Her two kids are pining to be with her too."

Veloso said she had learned how to play volleyball in prison and showed off traditional Indonesian batik clothing she had made. She said she will gift a butterfly painting to the prison, symbolising her transformation.

"I was once like a caterpillar — unwanted, looked down upon," she said. "But through this painful process I've grown into who I am today, a butterfly, reborn and ready to face a colourful future." — AFP

Foreign policy challenge for Trump is clear



An olive branch left in the barrel of an abandoned Syrian army howitzer on the outskirts of Aleppo. — TNYT



THOMAS L
FRIEDMAN

The writer is an American commentator and author

manifested itself in 2020, also out of the blue, he seized it and helped to forge normalisation between Israel and four Arab states — to the benefit of the region and to the United States. This is a similar moment. The odds of success are low, the payoff could be enormous and the risks to America not all that high, but it will require a lot more intensive US leadership than the Abraham Accords.

To understand why, I need to take you back to 2003. The US invasion of Iraq under President George W Bush always had two objectives. One was removing weapons of mass destruction, which turned out to be fraudulent. The other, which I supported, was aspirational but ultimately impossible: trying to replace Saddam Hussein with a multisectarian, pluralistic democracy in a great Arab capital — Baghdad — in the hope that this could create an example in the heart of the Arab world that could radiate out and help cure the pathologies that produced the September 11 attacks. I say "impossible" because, as we learned, you can't deliver democracy from the top down and from the outside in. It has to grow organically from the bottom up.

In Iraq, it was primarily US forces who pulled down Saddam's statue in Baghdad, not Iraqis, even if many of them enjoyed watching it crumble. In the end, Iraqis did produce a constitutional power-sharing democracy on their own, but it teeters

on the edge of failed statehood and is deeply penetrated by Iranian agents and influence, as well as homegrown corruption. While Iraq has actually held six pretty fair elections since the US-led invasion that toppled Saddam in 2003, the multiparty parliament it produced is dominated by parties defined by sect or ethnicity, not a true spirit of Iraqi citizenship strong and broad enough to resist Iran.

Iraq has also struggled since 2003 because the neighbours did everything they could to make sure no decent democratic example would emerge in Baghdad that might inspire their own people to follow suit. Eventually, though, the Arab Spring that began in Tunisia and Egypt spread to Syria in 2011 — organically, without a US invasion — but Assad was ready to kill hundreds of thousands of his own people and drive millions abroad to hold onto power — until last week.

The big question in my mind now is: Will the Middle East get another chance to have a consensual, pluralistic government emerge in its midst in another great Arab capital, Damascus — only this time driven by its own people, not by any foreign power? If Syrians over the coming years can find their way from the bottom up to live together in a pluralistic society as citizens, not just sects, held together by voluntary consent, not just the iron fist of a dictator, that would radiate out to Iraq, Lebanon, Iran, Libya, Sudan — everywhere.

That would be the most positive event in the Middle East since Anwar Sadat got on a plane and went to Israel to make peace in 1977 — and one of the most important in modern Arab politics.

I don't need any lectures on how unlikely this is. I lived through the Lebanese civil war for over four years and reported extensively from Iraq. A happy ending in Syria is a low-probability outcome, but it offers an enormous payoff for the Syrian people and the whole region. And unlike the US invasion of Iraq, it would cost the United States and its allies little money and few troops to try to help.

— The New York Times

SPORTS

STRONG SUPPORT



OMAN SEEDED IN TOP POT FOR AFC THAILAND BEACH SOCCER ASIAN CUP

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 14

Oman's national beach soccer team has been seeded into the first pot ahead of the AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup Thailand 2025 draw, which will take place on Thursday. The 16 confirmed teams have been distributed into four pots based on their final ranking from the 2023 tournament, where applicable, with Thailand seeded first as the host association. Oman is in the same pot as joint-record three-time champions Iran, Japan and the hosts, Thailand.

The United Arab Emirates heads pot two alongside Kuwait, Bahrain and China. Pot 3 features Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Afghanistan and Malaysia, while Indonesia is allocated in pot 4 alongside India, Iraq, and Vietnam.

The AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup draw will be unveiled at the AFC House in Kuala Lumpur on Thursday. Thailand will host the event for the third time, and this edition of the tournament will feature 16 teams, all vying for the title at Jomtien Beach in Pattaya from March 20 to 30, 2025.

The 16 participating teams will be distributed into four groups, and the top two finishers from each group will advance to the knockout stage. The event will act as a qualifier for the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup, with the top three teams securing their berths at the 2025 Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup in Seychelles.

Oman's national beach soccer team previously won the 2015 AFC Beach Soccer Championship, hosted at Katara Beach in Qatar. In the final, Oman defeated Japan to be crowned champions, and both teams, along with third-place Iran, qualified for the 2015 Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup.



India, China to clash for Women's Junior Asia Cup

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
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INDIA OUTSMARTED Japan 3-1 while China accounted for South Korea 4-1 in the semifinals on Saturday night to set up a cracking final of the Women's Junior Asia Cup hockey championship in Muscat Governorate.

Defending champions India will take on China in the final at the Hockey Oman Stadium in the Wilayat of Al Amerat on Sunday at 7 pm (Oman Time).

Losing semifinalists Japan and South Korea will meet each other in the third-place match at 4.30 pm.

An elated Indian coach Tushar Khandker said the girls put up a great performance in the crucial knockout stage.

“Our players had a great start and we managed well to keep our advantage until the end of the match,” Tushar told Oman Observer. Responding to a query, he said the team didn't have any pre-plans regarding the game.

“We responded brilliantly to the match situation and credit to the girls for taking good advantage of their chances early in the match.”

India had only lost to China 2-1 in their group match in Pool A.

The coach said India had rectified many shortfalls from that match in the later games.

“Our defence has rectified the mistakes and we are now focusing on making the most from our chances in front of the goal. Overall, the players' confidence is high as we are ready for the final,” he concluded.

In the first semifinal, India started off in great fashion to pump in all their crucial goals in the first quarter itself.

Mumtaz Khan struck in the fourth minute with a brilliant field goal. Sakshi Rana made it 2-0 for India in the very next minute with another field goal.

Two minutes before the end of the first quarter, tournament's leading scorer Deepika made no mistake from a penalty corner to earn her 11th goal in the Women's Junior Asia Cup as India raced to a 3-0 goal. Stunned by the early goals, Japan tried to regroup in the second



quarter and were successful in returning one when Niko Maruyama found the net in the 23rd minute.

At half-time, India led 3-1.

In the third and fourth quarters, India's defence put up a brilliant performance to deny Japan any more goals. Japan could not capitalise on the four penalty corners that they got in the last two quarters.

In total, India got only one penalty corner while Japan got five.

CHINA SUPREME

In the second semifinal, China mostly controlled the proceedings as Qingmiao Feng put them ahead in the sixth minute with a field goal.

In the second quarter, Lihang Wang made it 2-0 for China when she calmly

netted a penalty stroke past South Korean goalkeeper Siwoo Ryu.

China led 2-0 at half-time.

Jiajing Lei found the third goal for China in the 40th minute. A brilliant counter-attack by South Korea led to their first goal of the match.

After some good passes, Seoyeon Park struck the goal past Chinese goalkeeper Mengyao Zhang in the 41st minute.

In the final quarter, China netted their fourth goal to confirm their triumph. Jinzhuang Tan scored from a penalty corner in the 53rd minute to make it 4-1.

In the 5-8 placement matches, Malaysia smashed 11 goals past Hong Kong, Thailand edged Chinese Taipei 2-1. Bangladesh thrashed Sri Lanka 8-0 to end ninth in the 10-team competition.

Ahli Sidab, Oman Club set for handball super cup final

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 14

PICTURE BY KHALEFAN
AL RAZIQI

AHLI SIDAB secured a spot in the Handball Super Cup final after an intense marathon match against Muscat, winning 4-3 in a penalty shootout. The match was held at the main hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in the Wilayat of Bausher.

Meanwhile, Oman Club achieved a hard-fought victory over Seeb with a score of 26-24 after extra time, setting the stage for a thrilling final next Wednesday.

Ahli Sidab opened the scoring early through their player Muhannad al Zarafi, but Muscat quickly responded with an equaliser. The two teams exchanged the lead in the opening minutes, with Al Azhar al Hidithi levelling the score for Muscat from a penalty shot. After the first five minutes, Ahli Sidab led 3-2 thanks to another remarkable goal by Al Zarafi from outside the area.

Muscat maintained their



offensive pressure, with Nawaf al Hosni narrowing the gap. Muscat took the lead for the first time when Badr al Harthi scored following an excellent breakthrough on the right flank. Al Hidithi and Saeed al Hosni then added two more goals, ending the first half with Muscat ahead 14-8.

In the second half, Ahli Sidab showed a fighting spirit. Al Zarafi and Khalid al Jabri scored several crucial goals, cutting the deficit to just two points. The match remained neck-and-neck, reaching an 18-18 tie after a stunning strike by Al Jabri.

The teams continued to

battle into extra time, with the score locked at 30-30. The match was ultimately decided in a penalty shootout, where Ahli Sidab's goalkeeper, Huthaifa al Siyabi, delivered a heroic performance by saving the decisive shot, leading his team to a 4-3 victory and a place in the Handball Super Cup final.

In a match filled with excitement, Oman Club defeated Seeb 26-24 after extra time, securing their place in the Handball Super Cup final.

Seeb started strongly, dominating the opening minutes and taking an early lead with two quick

goals. Oman Club missed an opportunity to close the gap when Asaad al Hosni's shot hit the post. Seeb capitalised on their chances, with Osama al Kasbi scoring two consecutive penalty goals, putting Seeb ahead 4-0 within the first ten minutes of the game.

Despite Seeb's commanding start, Oman Club gradually found their rhythm. Mohammed al Aرامي scored their first goal from a penalty shot, followed by goals from Asaad al Hosni and Mahmoud al Wahaibi, narrowing the score to 5-3 in favour of Seeb.

The two sides traded goals in a competitive atmosphere, with veteran Nasr al Tamtami reducing the deficit to a single point through his exceptional skills. However, Seeb maintained their edge and ended the first half leading 10-9 after a resilient effort from Oman Club. The second half began cautiously, with Seeb adding their 11th goal early on. Oman Club, showing great determination, managed to close the gap again, with significant contributions from their Algerian professional player, Mohammed.

SPORTS

STRONG START



OMAN BEAT QATAR BY 35 RUNS IN GULF CUP T20 OPENER

MUSCAT: Oman’s all-round performance marked a strong start to their Gulf Cup T20 title defence, as they comprehensively defeated Qatar by 35 runs in a high-scoring encounter at the ICC Academy ground in Dubai.

Skipper Jatinder Singh led from the front with a brilliant knock, while veteran spinner Aamir Kaleem’s stunning bowling display, taking two wickets off successive balls, provided pivotal moments in the game.

With solid contributions from Wasim Ali and a breezy cameo from Vinayak Shukla, Oman cruised to a total of 204/5 from their 20 overs after being put to bat.

Oman’s innings got off to a commanding start, with Jatinder anchoring the innings with a composed 69 off 50 balls, including six boundaries and two sixes. However, he was dismissed while trying to accelerate, caught behind by Imal Liyanage off Mohammed Nadeem, but not before he had set the platform for the middle order.

Aamir Kaleem, despite being run out for 13, had his moments with the ball later on, making a significant impact by picking up three wickets. Karan Sonavale (10), Hammad Mirza (16), and Wasim Ali (34) all contributed to the run chase.

Ali’s fiery 34 off 19 balls, which included three boundaries and a six, before departing off the penultimate ball, and Vinayak Shukla’s explosive 40 off 18 balls that were studded with seven boundaries and a six helped take Oman to a total of 204/5 as the pair shared a 64-run partnership.

Shukla’s ability to clear the boundary added some much-needed acceleration to the innings, making it difficult for the Qatar bowlers to gain control at the death.

Qatar, in response, faced setbacks after a promising start, which led them to 49 in less than five overs by openers Imal Liyanage (22) and Saqlan Arshad (28). The middle order struggled to find rhythm, as Aamir Kaleem took three wickets, including two off consecutive deliveries, to leave Qatar reeling at 113/6 by the 14th over.

Wasim Ali (2/23), Shakeel Ahmed (1/34), Jay Odedara (1/28) also made vital contributions with the ball.

Qatar’s Muhammad Asim provided a glimmer of hope with a blistering 63 off 28 balls, which included six fours and three sixes. However, the target proved too steep as wickets continued to fall at regular intervals, and Qatar was ultimately restricted to 169/8 in their 20 overs, falling short by 35 runs.



Al Bashayer, Dhofar secure win in Oman Basketball League

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 14
PHOTOS BY AMMAR AL MUSAFIR

THE OMAN Basketball League witnessed decisive victories as Al Bashayer defeated Salalah 98-50, while Dhofar overcame Al Suwaiq 71-34. Both matches were held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in the Wilayat of Bausher.

The first match was dominated by Al Bashayer’s offensive superiority, securing the first three quarters with significant leads, making Salalah’s fourth-quarter win insufficient to narrow the gap.

Standout players for Al Bashayer included Saeed al Saadi, Osama al Riyami, Hadid Bait Bukhait, and Slaven Kopkavik, alongside Ahmed al Halhali, who all delivered exceptional offensive performances. Salalah’s notable scorers were Faisal Bait Abdanabi and Mohammed al Houti.

The game opened with a strong attack from Al Bashayer, who led the first quarter 26-14 thanks to scoring contributions

from Mahmoud al Souli, Saeed al Saadi, and Slaven Kopkavik. Despite Faisal Bait Abdanabi’s impressive three-point shots for Salalah, Al Bashayer maintained their lead.

In the second quarter, Al Bashayer extended their dominance with three-pointers from Hadid Bait Bukhait, Slaven Kopkavik, and Saeed al Saadi, closing the first half with a score of 52-18.

Al Bashayer continued their control in the third quarter, scoring 24 points compared to Salalah’s 11. Although Salalah showed slight improvement in the fourth quarter by adding 21 points, the substantial lead ensured Al Bashayer’s victory.

The match was officiated by an experienced referee team led by international referee Issam al Siyabi, along with international referees Thani al Khalasi and Al Mahdi al Alawi. The table officials included Maryam al Zadjali, Fatima al Harthy, and Salim al Judeidi.

Dhofar dominates Al Suwaiq

In the second match, Dhofar achieved a comfortable victory over Al Suwaiq with a score of 71-34. Dhofar’s performance was powered by standout players Ayman

al Tarshi, Mohammed al Muharami, Abdulrahman al Shibli, and Abdulrahman al Noufali. On the other side, notable scorers for Al Suwaiq were Noufal Taysir and Abdul-Salam al Khasibi.

Dhofar started strong, imposing their offensive and defensive strategies in the first quarter, scoring 18 points while limiting Al Suwaiq to 11. The second quarter saw balanced exchanges, with both teams scoring 10 points, leaving Dhofar ahead at halftime with a score of 28-21.

Dhofar regained full control in the third quarter, adding 21 points while Al Suwaiq managed only 7, ending the quarter with a commanding 49-28 lead.

In the fourth quarter, Dhofar maintained their momentum, excelling in offence and defence. They added 22 points while limiting Al Suwaiq to just 6, sealing their impressive victory at 71-34. The match was officiated by a team led by international referee Rashid al Mushefri, with international referee Wafa Al Samri as the second referee and Hassan al Owaimri as the third. Saeed al Ghamari, Huda al Hanaei, and Yaqoub al Nadabi were the table officials.

Austrian Otmar seals Oman Golf Trophy in Al Mouj

MUSCAT: Otmar Pusterhofer, winner of the second round, retained top spot on the leaderboard after the final day of play at the Oman Golf Trophy to win the title by six points. Day three was won by Atsushi Kiba, winner of the first round as well, but he had to settle for second place overall as the two showcased their class until the championship round’s end at Al Mouj Golf. Shingo Kato of Japan finished third, narrowly ahead of Austrians Gerald Monsberger in fourth and Michael Winner in fifth. The Ladies’ Division was won by Hiroko Ozaki of Japan, who held a four-point advantage over Gabriela Porstner Banea of Germany, one of the winners of the final day’s Nearest to the Pin Challenge on hole 5, in second. Kazue Miyamoto ended the tournament in third on 83 points.

Porstner Banea shared Nearest to the Pin Challenge honours on the final day with Jonas Lange of Germany on hole 11 and Silvia Valli of Italy on hole 13. The prizegiving and closing ceremonies were held under the auspices of Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, and attended by Khalid bin Hashil al Muselhi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs. Khalid bin Hashil al Muselhi said:

“Golf provides the perfect platform to strengthen relationships and explore opportunities for collaboration. Beyond showcasing Oman’s stunning courses and landscapes, this tournament highlights our nation’s commitment



to building bridges and promoting global cooperation. I extend my sincere thanks to those coordinating with us at the Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the Oman Golf Association, and all our partners for their support.

To the players, congratulations on reaching this stage. May you enjoy the competition, the camaraderie, and Oman’s warm hospitality.”

The Oman Golf Trophy is a unique initiative led by the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, alongside the Oman Golf Association, Strategic Partners for the event. The Grand Final brought together more than 80 players—48 winners from seven

qualification events held in Italy, Austria, Germany, India, South Africa, Japan and France—and international business leaders, diplomats, and invited guests to leverage the unifying power of sport to strengthen ties, build new bonds, facilitate long-term trade and business relations, and demonstrate Oman’s capabilities as an international host venue and destination. Throughout the event, players interacted and networked on three of Oman’s most stunning and technically challenging golf courses. As well as a welcome event and networking business dinner at the Kempinski Hotel Muscat, guests enjoyed a full day of sightseeing in Muscat Governorate, Wadi Shab, the Dimaniyat Islands and the wilayats of Nizwa, Al Hamra and Nakhal.

SPORTS

STRONG SUPPORT



#07 Lee Jae-Sung (R) celebrates with #11 Armino Sieb (L). — AFP

LEE SCORES TWICE
AS MAINZ STUN
LEADERS BAYERN
2-1 FOR FIRST
LEAGUE DEFEAT

MAINZ, GERMANY: Mainz 05's Lee Jae-sung scored either side of the break as the hosts stunned Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich 2-1 on Saturday to snap their unbeaten league run this season.

South Korea international Lee struck four minutes before the break after pouncing on a defensive blunder by the lacklustre visitors.

The 32-year-old then doubled the hosts' lead on the hour, turning beautifully in the box to finish a superb attacking move that left the complete Bayern defence frozen to the spot.

It was also the first league loss for Bayern coach Vincent Kompany, who last week became only the third coach in Bundesliga history to have gone without defeat in his first 13 league games in charge.

The Bavarians, who pulled back a goal with Leroy Sane in the 87th, remain in top spot on 33 points, four ahead of Bayer Leverkusen, 2-0 winners at Augsburg.

Bayern, missing eight players to injury including top scorer Harry Kane, got off to a strong start, hitting the woodwork with Michael Olise in the sixth minute.

Mainz were dealt a major blow when Jonathan Burkardt, who had scored in their previous four league games, was taken off injured after he fired wide following a powerful sprint in the 14th minute.

But it was the hosts who were more threatening, with Anthony Caci missing their best chance when his point-blank shot was blocked by Bayern keeper Daniel Peretz.

Lee did better four minutes before the break, slotting in from a cross that first slipped past Bayern's Kim Min-jae and Olise.

He then struck again with their first chance in the second half, turning well in the box to drill in after a quick six-pass move by Mainz.

Kompany's team never showed any desire for a comeback even after Sane's late goal, with Mainz comfortably holding on to their lead. — Reuters



Liverpool's Diogo Jota scores their second goal. — REUTERS

Jota rescues 10-man
Liverpool in Fulham
draw, Arsenal frustrated

DIOGO JOTA rescued Liverpool as the Premier League leaders recovered from Andy Robertson's early red card to snatch a 2-2 draw with Fulham, while Arsenal's title challenge was dented by a goalless stalemate against Everton on Saturday.

With just four minutes left at Anfield, Arne Slot's side was in danger of losing for just the second time in 15 top-flight games this season.

But Jota grabbed a valuable equaliser as Liverpool extended their unbeaten run in all competitions to 19 matches since a loss to Nottingham Forest in September.

With last weekend's Merseyside derby at Everton postponed by severe weather, Liverpool have now gone two league games without a win following their 3-3 draw at Newcastle.

The Reds sit five points clear of second-placed Chelsea, who can close the gap with a win against Brentford at Stamford Bridge on Sunday.

Liverpool were rocked in the 11th minute as Fulham midfielder Andreas Pereira met Antonee Robinson's cross with an agile volley that deflected in off Robertson.

The Reds suffered another blow when Scotland left-back Robertson was sent off in the 17th minute for a professional foul on Harry Wilson.

But Slot's men have made a habit of coming from behind this season and Cody Gakpo equalised in the 47th minute with a stooping header from Mohamed Salah's cross. The Dutch forward's ninth goal in all competitions this season was the prelude to a period of sustained Liverpool pressure.

But Fulham forward Rodrigo Muniz delivered a sucker punch as he bundled over the line from Robinson's cross in the 76th minute.

That set the stage for a dramatic finale as Jota levelled in the 86th minute with a cool finish past Bernd Leno from the edge of the area.

Arsenal failed to take advantage of Liverpool's rare stumble as the Gunners were kept at bay on a frustrating afternoon at the Emirates Stadium.

LACK OF FIREPOWER

The north Londoners have become a force from set-pieces, scoring 23 goals from corners since the start of last season.

But their lack of firepower outside of that route has been questioned this season and once again they were hampered by a failure to turn pressure and possession into goals.

After a second successive league draw, third-placed Arsenal remain six points behind Liverpool, who have a game in hand on last season's runners-up.

Newcastle handed Ruud van Nistelrooy his first defeat as Leicester boss with a 4-0 rout at St James' Park.

Former Manchester United striker Nistelrooy had taken four points from his first two games since replacing the sacked Steve Cooper.

But Newcastle ended that encouraging start as Jacob Murphy drilled a clinical finish into the bottom corner from the edge of the area in the 30th minute.

Bruno Guimaraes nodded in Newcastle's second goal in the 47th minute after Lewis Hall headed Anthony Gordon's free-kick toward the Brazilian.

Alexander Isak bagged the Magpies' third two minutes later with a close-range finish and Murphy struck again on the hour to leave Leicester two points above the relegation zone. Jack Taylor's stoppage-time goal gave Ipswich a priceless 2-1 win over relegation rivals Wolves at Molineux.

Kieran McKenna's team went ahead through Matt Doherty's 15th minute own goal after Wolves made a hash of clearing Liam Delap's cross.

Just as Wolves fans were calling for chairman Jeff Shi and owners Fosun to sell the club, Matheus Cunha grabbed a 72nd minute equaliser as his shot beat Arijanet Muric's weak attempted save.

But Taylor headed home from a 94th minute corner to seal Ipswich's second league win since their promotion to the top tier.

Third-bottom Ipswich are just one point adrift of safety, while second-bottom Wolves are three points behind them after an 11th loss in 16 league games piled further pressure on boss Gary O'Neil.

Nottingham Forest host Aston Villa in a battle of top four contenders in Saturday's late game. — AFP

BUSINESS

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The third public bidding round for green hydrogen project lands in March 2025, targeting at least two new sites in Al Wusta and Dhofar governorates.

HYDROM TARGETS GLOBAL INVESTORS IN GREEN HYDROGEN EXPANSION



ENG ABDULAZIZ BIN SAID AL SHIDHANI
Managing Director, Hydrom

MUSCAT: Hydrogen Oman (Hydrom) announced its third public bidding round for green hydrogen project lands in March 2025, targeting at least two new sites in Al Wusta and Dhofar governorates. The initiative aims to diversify investors and attract global players from emerging markets like China, the

US and Europe. Eng Abdulaziz bin Said al Shidhani, Managing Director of Hydrom, highlighted the sector’s challenges, including fluctuating markets, political changes and technical barriers. He noted that improving production costs, driven by technological advancements and government incentives, would make green hydrogen more competitive globally. Hydrom remains committed to expanding Oman’s green hydrogen portfolio, aligning with the country’s sustainability and economic goals. — ONA

Oman eyes global liquid hydrogen export

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 14

OMAN’S ambition to become a global hydrogen export hub is gaining momentum through a strategic collaboration with international partners, focusing on centralised liquefaction.

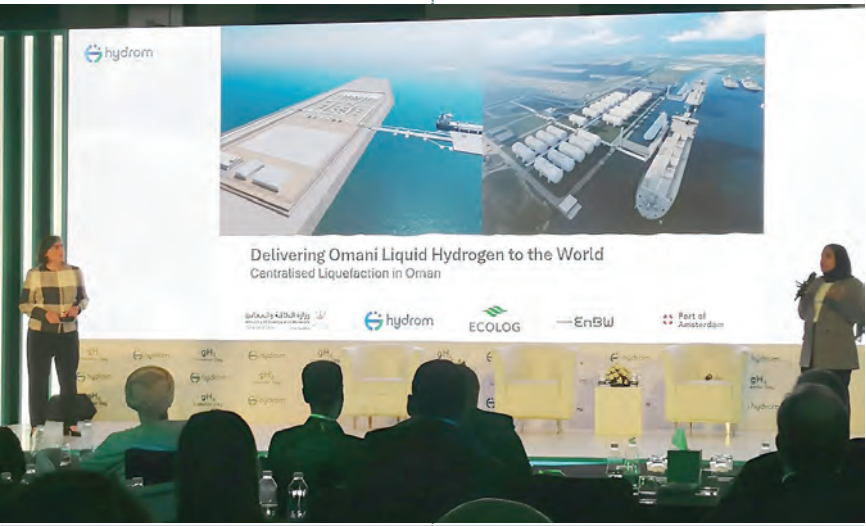
During the inaugural GH2 Investor Day, Rumaitha al Busaidy, Business and ICV Development Manager at Hydrom Oman and Ellen Ruhotas, Head of Hydrogen Midstream at Ecolog, shared insights on advancing Oman’s liquid hydrogen export capabilities.

Al Busaidy highlighted the origins of the partnership, driven by mutual interests between Oman as a hydrogen producer and the Netherlands as a potential buyer.

“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,” she said, referencing Oman’s production capabilities and the Netherlands’ demand-side potential.

The collaboration aims to establish a commercially viable hydrogen export value chain by connecting Oman’s production facilities with European markets through liquefied hydrogen shipments.

Ruhotas emphasised the importance of bridging the



Ellen Ruhotas (left), Head of Hydrogen Midstream at Ecolog and Rumaitha al Busaidy, Business and ICV Development Manager at Hydrom Oman, share insights on advancing Oman’s liquid hydrogen export capabilities.

midstream gap, explaining, “We have strong producers on one side and really strong demand... But no one is talking about how to bridge that gap... Putting something in place which is cost-effective in a market that doesn’t exist.”

REPLICATING LNG SUCCESS

The initiative draws inspiration from the development of the global liquefied natural gas (LNG) market. Ruhotas recounted how LNG emerged from innovative thinking in the 1950s, enabling its transport across continents.

“In 1959, the first LNG ship sailed... Today, there are 700 LNG ships on the water,” she noted, illustrating how Oman’s hydrogen strategy follows a similar path. The partners aim to build

a centralised liquefaction terminal in Oman with a target capacity of 200,000 tonnes of hydrogen annually.

“Our study... covers the whole stream, from production... to midstream shipping... reaching the Port of Amsterdam,” Al Busaidy explained. The comprehensive approach includes technical, commercial and environmental studies ensuring feasibility.

ENGINEERING CHALLENGES AND INNOVATIONS

Developing a liquid hydrogen export system presents unique engineering challenges due to hydrogen’s cryogenic nature, requiring storage at -253°C.

Ruhotas explained, “It’s not new... NASA and the semiconductor industry have been using liquid hydrogen

for many years.” However, scaling up requires specialised liquefaction technology and shipping solutions.

The team’s engineering concept includes constructing a liquefaction terminal near Oman’s hydrogen production sites, supported by two liquefaction trains with a combined capacity of 300 metric tonnes each.

Ruhotas highlighted a critical innovation: minimising cargo boil-off during shipping.

“We do not want to burn the cargo... ensuring we can retain all the cargo as we sail,” she stressed, emphasising cost efficiency.

The project also envisions building hydrogen import terminals in Europe. Ruhotas described the proposed terminal in the Port of Amsterdam, which would regasify liquid hydrogen for industrial use and export liquefied carbon dioxide (CO2) captured from carbon-intensive industries.

“The facility has a dual purpose... regasifying green hydrogen... and taking CO2 out that the industry has had to abate,” she said.

Potential hydrogen users include hard-to-electrify industries such as brick and glass manufacturing, as well as data centres and food processing facilities. “The food industry... has a high willingness to pay,” Ruhotas noted, citing Starbucks’ use of green hydrogen to roast coffee beans in Amsterdam.

First-ever battery storage option for Oman’s Ibri III solar project

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 14

A NEW solar PV based Independent Power Project (IPP), set to come up at Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate, is expected to be integrated with utility-scale battery storage in a first for Oman’s rapidly expanding renewable energy sector.

Battery storage allows solar power plants to store excess energy generated during the day for use at night or when demand is higher. Storage is key to balancing electricity supply and demand, while also supporting the grid.

According to a senior official of Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (PWP), the single procurer of power and water capacity in the Sultanate of Oman, the upcoming 500 MW Ibri III Solar IPP — currently in the early stages of procurement — will include a sizable battery storage option.



Battery storage allows solar power plants to store excess energy generated during the day for use at night or when demand is higher. Picture for illustration only.

“The unique thing about the Ibri III PV project is that it will have two options: It will be a solar PV as a standalone and also come with an option of 100 MW of battery storage — the first renewable project that will have this option,” said Eng Said al Abri, General

Manager — Planning and Project Development, PWP.

Speaking at the ‘Korea-Oman Renewable Energy Business Round-table and KSP (Knowledge Sharing Programme) meeting held here on Thursday, December 12, 2024, Eng Al Abri said a Request

for Proposals (RfP) for the Ibri III Solar IPP was issued in July this year. An award is anticipated in Q1 2025, with all 500 MW of capacity scheduled to come online in Q 2027. Total investment in the project is estimated at \$380 — 400 million.

In June, PWP named nine international bidders as having pre-qualified to compete for the contract to build, own and operate the Ibri III Solar IPP under a 20-year Power Purchase Agreement (PPA). KPMG is PWP’s Financial Advisor for the project, with CMS as Legal Advisor and ILF Consulting as Technical Advisor. At the same forum on Thursday, Nama’s Eng Al Abri announced plans for the development of a swathe of new Solar IPPs with a capacity aggregating around 4,500 megawatts (MW) and entailing an estimated investment of \$2.8 billion.

Notable is ‘Solar PV IPPs 2030’ with a combined capacity of a 3

gigawatts (GW), and estimated to cost between \$1 billion - \$1.5 billion. Commercial operation is slated during Q1 2030. It will be preceded by Solar PV IPPs 2029 centring on a 1 GW capacity PV project, estimated to cost around \$600 – 800 million and planned to come online in Q1 2029.

Sinaw in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate is tipped to host a 250 – 300 MW solar PV project worth around \$200 – 250 million in investment and slated to be operational in Q2 2028.

Taken together with parallel plans for the implementation of a raft of Wind IPPs and combined cycle gas turbine (CCGT) power projects, total investment in Oman’s power sector is set to balloon to well over \$5 billion over the next six years through to 2030.

These projects will help broadly achieve the nation’s goal of securing at least 30 per cent of electricity consumption from renewables.

ADVERTORIALS

KEY ENABLER



Sohar International has positioned itself as a catalyst for propelling the Sultanate of Oman’s economic growth.

SOHAR INTERNATIONAL WINS BEST GOVERNMENT BANKING IN OMAN

MUSCAT: Sohar International, Oman’s best bank, has been honoured with the title of ‘Best Government Banking in Oman 2024’ by International Business Magazine. This prestigious accolade underscores the bank’s pivotal role in the government banking sector, showcasing its comprehensive suite of tailored financial products and services designed to meet the unique needs of government entities.

As a key enabler of national mega projects, Sohar International has positioned itself as a catalyst for propelling the Sultanate of Oman’s economic growth. The award was presented at a grand ceremony held at Atlantis, The Palm in Dubai which was attended by Khalil Salim al Hedaifi, Chief Government and Private Banking Officer, and Mazin Mahmood al Raisi, Chief Marketing Officer, along with representatives from prominent regional and international financial institutions.

Commenting on the award, Khalil Salim al Hedaifi, Chief Government and Private Banking Officer at Sohar International, stated, “Being awarded such a coveted title is not just a reflection of our leadership in the sector, but a direct endorsement of the trust and confidence placed in us by the institutions that drive national progress.

At Sohar International, we go beyond being a traditional service provider — we are a strategic partner to the government, helping navigate the complexities of public sector financing. Our approach is anchored in delivering bespoke, forward-thinking solutions that align with Oman Vision 2040, supporting the country’s efforts to diversify and grow its economy.

On the other hand, our dedication to innovation and the seamless integration of modern financial technologies has enabled us to enhance the efficiency of government operations, streamline financing for critical projects and facilitate large-scale investments.

The continued confidence from government entities reflects the stability, credibility and depth of expertise that Sohar International has cultivated over the years. This recognition further underscores our unwavering commitment to Oman’s economic agenda.”

Sohar International’s Government Banking unit offers a comprehensive suite of services, including remittances, trade finance, corporate credit cards and other advanced digital banking solutions. In addition, the bank delivers customised financial solutions tailored to meet the unique needs of government institutions and their employees.

Moreover, Sohar International partners with local financial entities on syndications to support large-scale national projects in sectors such as shipping, hospitality, and oil and gas. This collaborative and integrated approach enables the bank to play a pivotal role in driving Oman’s economic growth.

MUZN ISLAMIC BANKING INTRODUCES EXCLUSIVE REFERRAL REWARD CAMPAIGN

MUSCAT: As part of its efforts to enhance its customer reach, NBO Muzn Islamic Banking has introduced a distinctive referral reward campaign lasting until December 31, 2024, encouraging customers to refer friends and family to its Privilege and Priority Banking services. The campaign offers vouchers as a token of appreciation for customers who successfully introduce new clients to Muzn’s Sharia-compliant financial services. Commenting on the initiative,

Salima bin Obaid al Marzooqiyah, Assistant General Manager and Chief Islamic Banking Officer at NBO, said: “It gives us a great delight to reward our loyal customers who have referred our Privilege and Priority Banking services to their network of friends and relatives for every new account opened. In addition, we are thrilled to welcome new customers and expand our base by offering Sharia-compliant financial solutions through our Privilege and Priority Banking Services”.



Throughout the campaign’s period, existing Muzn customers will earn exclusive rewards upon referring individuals who meet specific deposit requirements. Customers who refer a new Privilege Banking customer with a deposit of RO 10,000 or more

will receive a voucher worth RO 30. Those who refer a new Priority Banking customer with a deposit of RO 30,000 or more will be rewarded with a voucher worth RO 50. This initiative reflects Muzn’s commitment to expanding its reach and providing Sharia-compliant, customer-focused solutions. Muzn’s Privilege and Priority Banking services are designed to offer tailored financial solutions, delivering an elevated banking experience to customers seeking a secure and ethical approach to managing their wealth. Through this referral reward campaign, Muzn aims to strengthen further its community of customers who appreciate the convenience, integrity, and values embedded in Islamic banking.

SOHAR launches port management programme

SOHAR Port and Freezone is proud to announce the launch of a first of its kind Port Management Programme, an innovative initiative designed to deepen engagement with key government stakeholders. This comprehensive, four-day programme aims to provide 30 participants with critical insights into SOHAR’s strategic business model, regulatory framework and its significant contributions to Oman’s economy and global trade networks. By providing an in-depth overview of its infrastructure, operations and value propositions, the programme aims to foster stronger collaborations and align efforts for sustainable growth. Participants will gain foundational knowledge of the port and freezone sectors,



This programme aims to provide 30 participants with critical insights into SOHAR’s strategic business model, regulatory framework.

appreciating its economic significance to Oman and exposure to international best practices in port management. The programme will also focus on regulatory familiarity, ensuring participants are well-informed about the laws and

regulations governing port and freezone operations. This knowledge is crucial for maintaining compliance and promoting efficient operational standards. Additionally, attendees will delve into SOHAR’s collaborative

business model, highlighting strategies that drive sustainable growth and development. A significant feature of the programme is the opportunity for participants to engage in site visits to major tenants such as OQ, Hutchison Ports Sohar, Vale Oman, and National University Science and Technology (IMCO). These tenants are instrumental in facilitating the trade of Oman’s top imports including mineral fuels, vehicles, machinery and equipment as well as top exports, such as mineral fuels, plastics, iron and steel, mineral ores and fertilisers, with key international partners like the UAE, KSA, India, China, Qatar and South Korea. These visits provide direct insights into the operations of SOHAR’s key partners, fostering stronger relationships and promoting a collaborative environment among stakeholders.

Festive celebration awaits at St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort

MUSCAT: The festive season has gracefully arrived at The St. Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort, marked by the dazzling illumination of its modern-cone Christmas Tree. This iconic display invites guests to immerse themselves in an atmosphere of elegance and celebration, inspired by the storied legacy of the Astor family. The House of Celebration has been transformed into a luxurious haven, offering exquisite experiences that seamlessly blend timeless traditions with contemporary flair. Families are encouraged to create unforgettable memories with a special accommodation package this holiday season. When booking

one room, guests can save 50% on their second room for children aged 16 and under, including breakfast for up to two adults and two children. As the holiday spirit unfolds, patrons are welcomed to indulge in refined Festive Afternoon Tea available until January 11, served daily at The Lobby Lounge. Accompanied by soothing Christmas melodies, this delightful experience features a selection of delicate pastries and artisanal teas. Children can also partake in a whimsical “Tiny Afternoon Tea” tailored just for their enjoyment. Until December 28, visitors can savor in a gourmet takeaway turkey that embodies the seasonal spirit,



perfect for the celebrations ahead. This offering includes a beautifully roasted turkey accompanied by traditional trimmings, allowing families to enjoy a sumptuous and memorable feast within the comfort of their own homes without the stress of preparation. As dusk descends upon the resort, a sense of anticipation fills the air as guests are invited to partake in the

elegant tradition of Sabrage daily at The Stage Bar and Lounge, adding a touch of grandeur to their festive evenings. The Adventure Hub transforms into a canvas of creativity from December 20 to January 11, offering children opportunities to participate in cupcake decorating and gingerbread workshops daily. Following these engaging workshops, face painting and henna art sessions await, creating a joyful atmosphere where families can bond and create lasting memories. For detailed information on the festive offerings at The St. Regis Al Mouj Muscat, please visit: <https://online.fliphtml5.com/xibqh/fzrb/>

Bank Muscat conducts seminar in Nizwa

MUSCAT: Continuing its series of educational seminars aimed at familiarising customers across the Sultanate of Oman with its cutting-edge electronic platforms, Bank Muscat, the Sultanate’s leading financial services provider, recently hosted a seminar in Wilayat of Nizwa, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. The session showcased the Bank’s extensive range of banking products and services available

through its internet and mobile platforms. It was delivered by technical expert and entrepreneur Salim bin Mohammed al Badi, and attracted significant customer participation. Bank Muscat’s is committed to organise such events within its efforts in the field of building a robust digital infrastructure that meets evolving local, regional and global standards By fostering direct communica-



The session showcased the Bank’s extensive range of banking products and services.

tion with customers across Oman, the Bank aims to stay aligned with their needs and expectations, strengthening relationships and empowering users to make the most of the Bank’s digital services. Taya Eid Bait Sabeea, Deputy General Manager, Interior Regions at Bank Muscat, emphasized the Bank’s dedication to leveraging technology for improved customer experiences. He said: “Keeping

pace with technological advancements is crucial to delivering efficient and responsive banking solutions. The quality of services provided by Bank Muscat through the Internet and Mobile Banking during the past period has enhanced in order align with the customers’ requirements. We deeply appreciate our customers’ trust in Bank Muscat’s products and services.”

BUSINESS

KSPMEETING



Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, with Korean Ambassador Kim Kiejoo and other key guests at the Korea — Oman Renewable Energy Round-table on Thursday.

OMAN AND KOREA PLEDGE COOPERATION IN ADVANCING ENERGY TRANSITION

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 14

The Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Oman, in collaboration with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals of the Sultanate of Oman and the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA), hosted the ‘Korea-Oman Renewable Energy Business Round-table and KSP (Knowledge Sharing Programme)’ kick-off meeting in Muscat on Thursday, December 12, 2024.

The round-table was attended by more than 70 government officials, business stakeholders and experts from Korea and Oman, to promote partnership between Korea and Oman in the renewable energy sector, in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Korea and Oman.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals (MoEM) of the Sultanate of Oman graced the meeting and delivered a keynote speech on behalf of the Omani government. Representatives from high-profile energy companies of Oman were in attendance, such as Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), Nama Power and Water Procurement Company, Hydrom and Oman LNG.

The meeting was also attended by representatives from Korea’s leading energy-related organisations and companies, including the Korea Electric Power Research Institute (KEPRI), Hyosung Heavy Industries, POSCO Holdings, GS Energy, Samsung E&C and LS Cable & System.

The participants discussed ways to strengthen Korea — Oman cooperation in the value chains of renewable energy, from power production to storage and transport, as well as in elaborating technological solutions to be applied to enhance efficiency of renewable energy.

The meeting also included a kick-off of Korea’s 2024-25 Knowledge Sharing Programme (KSP) project with Oman, which aims to share experiences and best practices between the two countries to improve the reliability and efficiency in integrating renewables into the national power system.

Kim Kiejoo, Ambassador of Korea to the sultanate of Oman, underlined that there is great potential for mutually beneficial cooperation between Korea and Oman in the field of renewable energy and expressed his hope that the two countries will further expand their collaboration.

OMAN’S NATURAL GAS PRODUCTION RISES 4.5%

MUSCAT: Oman’s total natural gas production and imports hit 47.105 billion cubic metres by the end of October 2024, marking a 4.5% increase from last year’s 45.093 billion cubic metres, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Industrial projects accounted for 51.1% of gas consumption, using 24.081 billion cubic metres. Other



Oman’s total natural gas production and imports hit 47.105 billion cubic metres by the end of October 2024.

key sectors included oil fields (9.893 billion cubic metres) and power generation stations (12.922 billion cubic metres).

Non-associated gas production, including imports, totaled 37.549 billion cubic metres, while associated gas production reached 9.555 billion cubic metres, reflecting Oman’s expanding energy sector.

— ONA

E-gates help airports to tackle space constraints

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, DEC 14

THE e-gates and digitalisation of air travel are the way forward as they ensure comfortable travel for passengers but also help airports that face space constraints for expansion.

Speaking to the Observer in an interview, Willie Walsh, Director-General of the International Air Transport Association (IATA), said, “It is the way forward for us because what we recognise is that given the constraints at airports and there hasn’t been much airport expansion in many parts of the world.

We’re seeing airport terminals getting busier and busier, and anything that can speed up the processing of the customer through the airport has to be seen as a positive. This contactless travel that we talk about is a fantastic development from a passenger point of view. It’s just so much easier than, you know, having to queue up, find your passport, scan it, or hand it to somebody to be scanned.”

He added, “Anything that can be done through the use of biometrics and contactless travel is positive and it’s a big initiative that



It’s just so much easier than, you know, having to queue up, find your passport, scan it, or hand it to somebody to be scanned.

WILLIE WALSH
Director-General, IATA

we have here in IATA.

And it’s great to see, you know, airports and governments supporting this and promoting it because they can see the advantage of it. It’s they continue to collect the data, but they collect it in a much more efficient way. I

t takes a lot of pressure off the limited, uh, resource in terms of space that many airports have given the growth that we’ve seen and the projected growth for the industry, which shows no signs of abating. So the more that we can see in terms of e-gates and contactless travel, I think the better for everybody.”

On the impact of the conflicts in the Middle East air travel, he said, What’s happened in

Lebanon has had a big impact on me and their operations. and everybody would like to see peace in the region and peace that can be sustained on a long-term basis.

I don’t think it’s in anybody’s interest that conflict continues. So we will monitor the situation closely, but I think it’s too early for us to call what will happen in Syria. I think that’s something that we’ll need to monitor.”

The situation in what’s happening is impacting on the region but it has been a surprise that it’s not impacted every part of the region.

It seems to be localised to carriers in and around that area, and it’s impacted, particularly tourism, in the region. However, the Middle East and GCC hubs don’t appear to be impacted by it and continue to grow in terms of their traffic because of the strong leisure markets.

Another issue is that smaller airlines are struggling to get access to even leased aircraft because the lessors have the choice as to where they place those aircraft. They’re likely to favor providing leased aircraft to a more financially robust carrier. It always is the case that you get greater economies of scale, particularly around aircraft purchases, engine purchases and spare parts purchases.

Credit Oman insures RO 272.8 million in Q3 2024

MUSCAT: Omani non-oil exports and local sales insured by Credit Oman surged by 5% in Q3 2024, reaching RO 272.8 million, compared to RO 259.1 million in the same period last year.

The growth was driven by a significant 15% increase in locally insured sales, amounting to RO 126.9 million, up from RO 110.7 million in Q3 2023. However, non-oil insured exports experienced a slight dip of 2%, totalling RO 145.9 million compared to RO 148.4 million last year.

The petrochemicals and plastics sector led export growth, recording a 58% increase from RO 13.9 million to RO 22 million. Conversely, the mining sector contracted by 42%, dropping from RO 2.9 million to RO 1.7 million.

The packaging sector



The growth was driven by a significant 15% increase in locally insured sales.

demonstrated exceptional growth, with insured sales rising by 156% from RO 155,000 to RO 397,000. Similarly, the mining sector expanded by 95%, jumping from RO 329,000 to RO 643,000.

On the other hand, the

building materials sector faced a 12% decline, falling from RO 16.8 million to RO 14.7 million. Meanwhile, the consumer and food goods sector experienced a 13% rise, increasing from RO 72.2 million to RO 81.4 million.

Shaikh Khalil bin Ahmed al

Harthy, CEO of Credit Oman, attributed the overall growth to improved industrial sector performance, particularly in packaging, petrochemicals and consumer goods.

He emphasised that Credit Oman’s credit insurance services reduce financial risks, enabling businesses to expand into new markets and enhance their competitive edge.

“By mitigating commercial and non-commercial risks, we encourage Omani companies to explore additional markets with increased financial stability,” Al Harthy noted.

The company remains committed to supporting national economic growth by facilitating business expansion through secure trade, credit protection and market diversification. — ONA

Oman issues 133 licences for marine trips

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology announced that 133 licences for marine tourism trips were issued from January to August this year, enabling marine companies to operate and expand services across Oman’s coastal areas.

The ministry reported that eight companies currently manage and operate marine tourism piers across Musandam, Al Batinah South, Muscat and Dhofar governorates. These piers collectively serve as vital gateways for marine tourism, welcoming more than 450 yachts and over 4,700 pleasure

boats, with passenger numbers surpassing 800,000.

Muscat Governorate boasts five key tourist piers managed by leading tourism and development companies: Saraya Bandar Al Jissah (Muscat Bay); Muriya Tourism Development Company (Jebel Sifah); Barr Al Jissah Resort Company; Al Mouj Muscat and Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran) — Marina Bandar Al Rowdha.

In the Musandam Governorate, the Al Marsa Travel and Tourism Company operates the primary tourist pier. In Dhofar Governorate, the Muriya Tourism Development Company manages the



These piers collectively serve as vital gateways for marine tourism, welcoming more than 450 yachts and over 4,700 pleasure boats, with passenger numbers surpassing 800,000.

Hawana Salalah pier. In Al Batinah South Governorate, Omran — Oman Sail operates the tourist pier at Barcelo Musannah.

Mohanna bin Musa bin Baqer, Director-General of Ports at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, highlighted the ministry’s commitment to raising the operational efficiency of ports by aligning them with international maritime safety standards.

The ministry has signed concession agreements with global companies specialising in port management and development. He added that five licences for

commercial dock operations were issued between January and October 2024, involving four companies operating in Al Sharqiyah South and Musandam governorates.

Notably, Oman LNG in Qalhat, Oman India Fertilizer Company (OMIFCO), Al Shurooq Handling and Maritime Company, and Musandam Rocks Company are key players in these sectors. These companies processed 74 ships, handling over 12.17 million tonnes of goods by the end of September 2024.

The ministry encourages small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to invest in the maritime sector.

OPINION

Digital identities to pave the future of blockchain in our daily life



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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The author is a member of the International Press Association.

At the heart of this transformative journey lies the concept of decentralised identity. Unlike traditional identity systems controlled by central authorities, decentralised identity empowers individuals to fully own and control their digital identities. The potential applications of decentralised identity are vast, spanning across sectors such as finance, healthcare, education and government services.

In the financial industry, decentralised identity can streamline Know Your Customer (KYC) processes, reduce fraud and enhance the customer onboarding experience.

A survey by Deloitte found that 81% of executives believe that blockchain-based digital identity solutions can help reduce KYC and customer onboarding costs by up to 50%.

According to a report by Markets and Markets, the global decentralised identity market is expected to grow from \$285 million in 2021 to \$6.8 billion by 2026, at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 88.2%.

This rapid growth is attributed to the increasing need for secure and privacy-preserving identity solutions across various industries.

As decentralised identity solutions continue to evolve, addressing scalability and interoperability challenges remains a key focus. Initiatives such as the Decentralized Identity Foundation (DIF) and the Hyperledger Aries project are working towards establishing standards and protocols to ensure seamless

integration across different blockchain networks and identity systems.

Governments are also exploring the potential of decentralised identity to enhance citizen services and reduce identity fraud. Estonia, a pioneer in digital governance, has implemented a blockchain-based decentralised identity system called e-Estonia, which enables citizens to access various government services securely using their digital identities.

According to the Estonian government, the system has saved over 1,400 years of working time and reduced bureaucracy by enabling secure digital signatures and electronic voting.

As the adoption of cryptocurrencies and blockchain technologies accelerates, countries are taking steps to formalise their regulatory frameworks.

Ukraine, for instance, plans to legalise cryptocurrency by early 2025, with a focus on implementing a securities-based taxation model.

While no special tax benefits are expected for crypto transactions, this development marks a significant step towards integrating digital assets into the country's financial system and aligning them with standard taxation practices.

The Bank of England's regulatory arm has requested local firms to disclose their current and future crypto exposure by March, aiming to monitor stability and shape future policy.

This increased scrutiny highlights the

A survey by Deloitte found that 81% of executives believe that blockchain-based digital identity solutions can help reduce KYC and customer onboarding costs by up to 50%.

growing importance of regulating the crypto industry to ensure its sustainable growth and integration with traditional financial systems.

Societe Generale, one of Europe's leading financial institutions, has made history by conducting the first on-chain repo transaction with a European central bank.

Through its digital assets-focused subsidiary, SG-Forge, Societe Generale deposited bonds issued on the Ethereum blockchain as collateral in exchange for central bank digital currency (CBDC) issued by the Banque de France.

This groundbreaking transaction demonstrates the potential of blockchain technology to revolutionise interbank refinancing operations and improve the liquidity of digital financial securities.

Meanwhile, the adoption of blockchain technology is not limited to the banking sector.

Solana, a leading blockchain platform, has emerged as a frontrunner in the deployment of AI tokens and market capitalisation.

With 206 AI agent tokens and a market cap of \$5 billion, Solana has surpassed all other chains, demonstrating the immense potential of AI-powered solutions on blockchain networks.

Moreover, Solana's ecosystem has attracted an impressive 7,625 new developers in 2024, overtaking Ethereum's long-standing dominance and signifying the growing interest and confidence in its capabilities.

PRIVATE EQUITY BIDS LONG GOODBYE TO IPOS

BUYOUT firms are frantically seeking the nearest exits, and stock exchanges have become an impractical egress. The situation gives investors of all shapes and sizes two important things to consider for 2025: Private equity will benefit only marginally from any rebound in initial public offerings, while the premium on creative finance will keep growing.

For years, the industry sold or listed portfolio companies, returning the proceeds to pension funds and other backers, which then reinvested in new private equity funds. The money-go-round slowed considerably when interest rates rose.

Buyout shops worldwide called \$130 billion more from their investors than they returned to them between 2022 and early 2024, according to the latest data available from research outfit Preqin.

It's an unsustainable situation, as many firms are planning to pass the cap for new funds over the next two years. When consultancy EY surveyed so-called general partners about how much pressure they were getting from investors over distributions, more than half put it at the higher end of the scale.

A staggering accumulation of assets makes the math ever more challenging.

At this week's Reuters NEXT conference, Warburg Pincus boss Jeff Perlman noted that private equity owns about 5 times as many companies as it did five or six years ago, while the number sold annually is roughly unchanged.

He further suggested that investor enthusiasm for Big Tech makes it harder to get attention for sizeable businesses in other industries that used to be attractive IPO candidates. The value of buyout-backed market debuts last year was 80% below the five-year average, consulting firm Bain found.

This slump amplifies other inherent problems. Fund managers are often wary of private-equity-related IPOs, partly because they know buyout firms will offload more blocks of shares over time.

The drip-feed of capital derived from IPOs makes them even less appealing for private equity owners than a straightforward cash sale, like the \$13 billion one GTCR struck this week with insurance broker Arthur J. Gallagher.

Buyout barons therefore need other inventive ways to generate liquidity. One increasingly popular option is single-asset continuation vehicles, where a firm sells an existing investment held by a fund to a new standalone entity of its own or one established by a peer.

Such deals jumped 80% in volume during the first three quarters of 2024 from the same span a year earlier, with the \$25 billion estimated by advisory boutique PJT Partners eclipsing industry-related IPOs. — Reuters

How Ejada could change the way govts work



QASIM AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of Oman Observer's Business section.



What makes "Ejada" special isn't just what it does, but the way it could change how we think about running a government.

GOVERNMENTS everywhere face mounting pressure to keep up with a rapidly changing world. People want better services, more accountability and solutions to challenges like unemployment and economic growth.

It's not an easy task, but Oman may be onto something with its "Ejada" initiative — a system designed to measure and improve government performance.

What makes "Ejada" special isn't just what it does, but the way it could change how we think about running a government.

This isn't just about ticking boxes or meeting targets; it's about empowering people, driving innovation and even involving the community in decision-making. With the right steps, "Ejada" could become a blueprint for better governance — not just in Oman, but around the world.

MORE THAN JUST A PERFORMANCE TRACKER

Most government performance systems are focused on monitoring results — who met their targets, who didn't and what needs fixing. "Ejada" takes this a step further. It's not just about measuring performance; it's about helping people and organisations grow.

For example, "Ejada" links rewards to productivity, which means employees aren't just doing their jobs — they're motivated to excel. The system also makes evaluations more transparent, so employees can see where they stand and use that feedback to

With "Ejada", Oman has a chance to lead by example. If the system keeps evolving — embracing new technologies, encouraging innovation and strengthening its connection to the community — it could redefine what good governance looks like for generations to come.

improve.

Even more interesting, it turns national goals into personal ones, so every employee knows exactly how their work contributes to something bigger.

This isn't just smart — it's human. It recognises that people do their best work when they feel valued, supported and connected to a larger purpose.

A PLATFORM FOR INNOVATION

But what if "Ejada" wasn't just a system for improving performance? What if it became a platform for experimenting with new ideas in public administration?

Imagine this: the system starts using artificial intelligence to analyse trends in performance, spotting issues before they become problems.

Or maybe hiring in the public sector becomes based on proven performance instead of just credentials — rewarding people for their results, not just their résumés.

And why not rethink rewards altogether? Sure, financial incentives are great, but what about offering top performers opportunities to work on national projects or attend global conferences? That's the kind of recognition that inspires real pride and ambition.

MAKING A REAL IMPACT ON THE ECONOMY

"Ejada" isn't just about making the government more efficient — it's about driving real economic change. By encouraging public institutions to buy local products and hire local talent, the system directly supports Oman's economy. It's also helping tackle unemployment by pushing the public sector to play a bigger role in job creation.

And with its focus on transparency and efficiency, "Ejada" is making Oman a more attractive place for investors. When people and businesses trust the system, everyone benefits.

WHAT COULD "EJADA" LOOK LIKE IN 2030?

The potential here is enormous. By 2030, "Ejada" could be so much more than a performance system.

It could become a hub for innovation, where employees and citizens collaborate to create better public services; a regional training centre, helping other countries learn from Oman's success and a global standard, showing developing nations how to modernise their public sectors.

These aren't just big ideas — they're achievable goals if Oman continues to invest in the system and stay open to new possibilities.

WHY "EJADA" MATTERS

At its core, "Ejada" is about more than numbers, metrics, or policies. It's about people — helping employees do their best work and creating a government that truly serves its people.

The world is watching for new models of governance that are fair, effective and forward-thinking. With "Ejada", Oman has a chance to lead by example.

If the system keeps evolving — embracing new technologies, encouraging innovation and strengthening its connection to the community — it could redefine what good governance looks like for generations to come.

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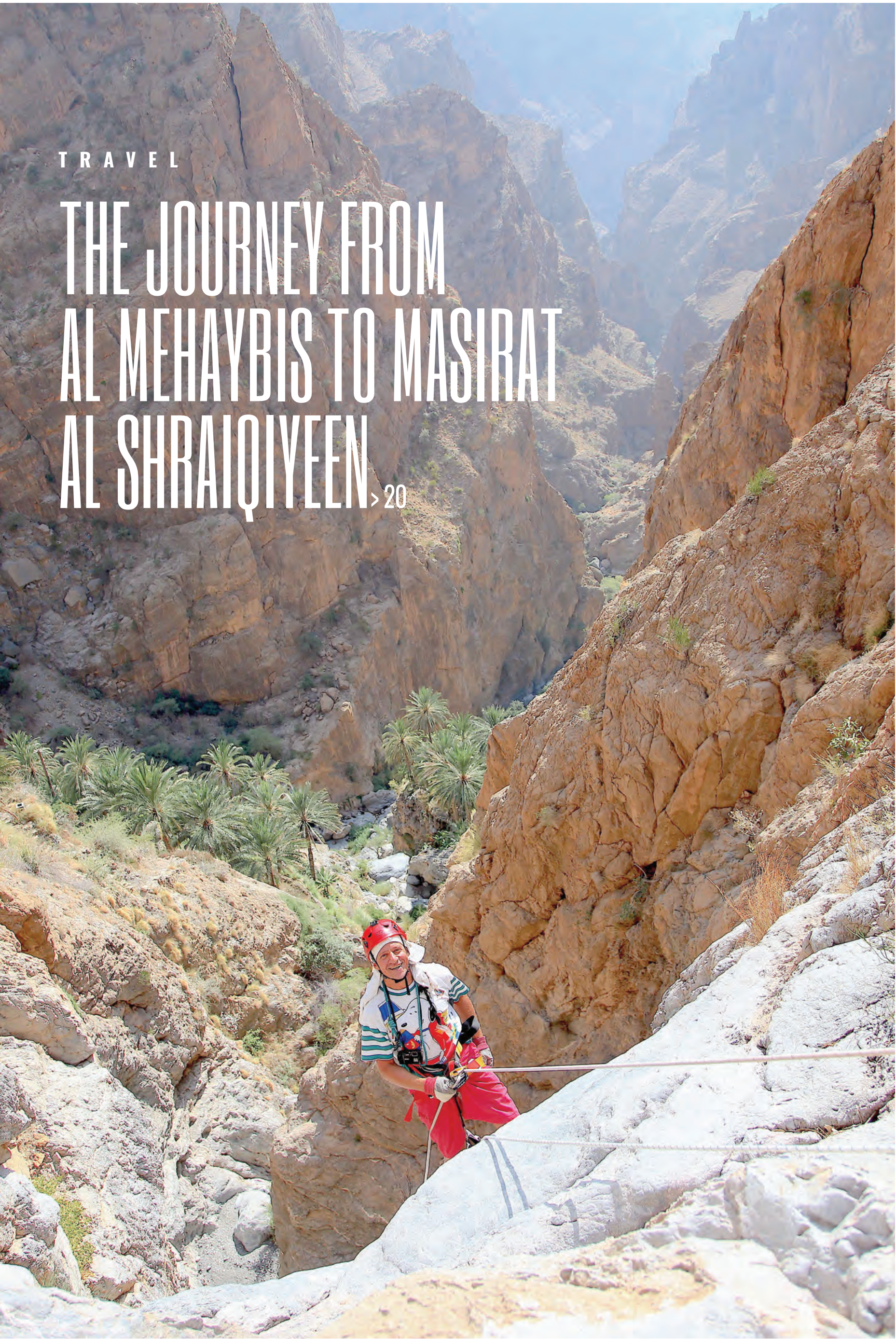
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TRAVEL

THE JOURNEY FROM AL MEHAYBIS TO MASIRAT AL SHRAIQIYEEN > 20

ENTERTAINMENT

Harrison Ford gets de-aged again for ‘Indiana Jones’ video game



HARRISON Ford’s iconic character, Indiana Jones, has once again been transformed for a new adventure, this time in the realm of video gaming. Building on the success of last year’s film, “Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny,” the latest title, “Indiana Jones and the Great Circle,” was released on Monday and promises to take fans back to the thrilling escapades reminiscent of the original film, “Raiders of the Lost Ark.”

The game’s trailer opens with a gripping scene featuring a bespectacled Nazi taunting the brave archaeologist, who is hilariously buried neck-deep in sand. However, in true Indy fashion, the moment escalates as he delivers a swift headbutt, followed by the nostalgic strains of the beloved theme tune that fans have come to adore.

Set in 1937, “The Great Circle” tracks Indiana Jones as he embarks on a globetrotting quest from the Vatican to China and Egypt, all in pursuit of a mysterious power that has caught the eye of Nazi spies. Gamers experience this action-packed journey from a first-person perspective, allowing them to embody the youthful hero of a bygone era.

The game development team, led by Axel Torvenius of MachineGames, faced a unique challenge in recreating a convincing young Indiana Jones. Unlike the other characters, who were modelled using 3D scanning technology, Ford’s character could not be directly scanned due to the lack of access to a younger version of the actor. Torvenius shared, “We didn’t have an opportunity to travel back in time and scan a young Harrison Ford,” highlighting the innovative approach the team took by utilizing unreleased archival materials from the original film.

They carefully analysed photographs of Ford to ensure the character’s likeness captured his unique facial features during that time, which was essential for creating an authentic representation.

The development of “The Great Circle,” which took four years, showcases a mix of action, puzzle-solving, and intense chases through exotic landscapes filled with ancient treasures and thrilling obstacles like rickety rope bridges and flame-lit caverns.

Torvenius expressed the immense pressure felt by the development team to honour the legendary character and the legacy of the franchise, aiming to recreate the vibe crafted by original film director Steven Spielberg. Alongside him, game designer Jens Andersson acknowledged the influence of the classic point-and-click adventure games from the 1990s, asserting the importance of contributing something fresh while respecting the source material. —AFP

QUICK FEATURES



ENTERTAINMENT

Robbie Williams poses on the red carpet on the day of the screening of “Better Man” at the Auditorium Parco della Musica, in Rome, Italy. —Reuters



FASHION

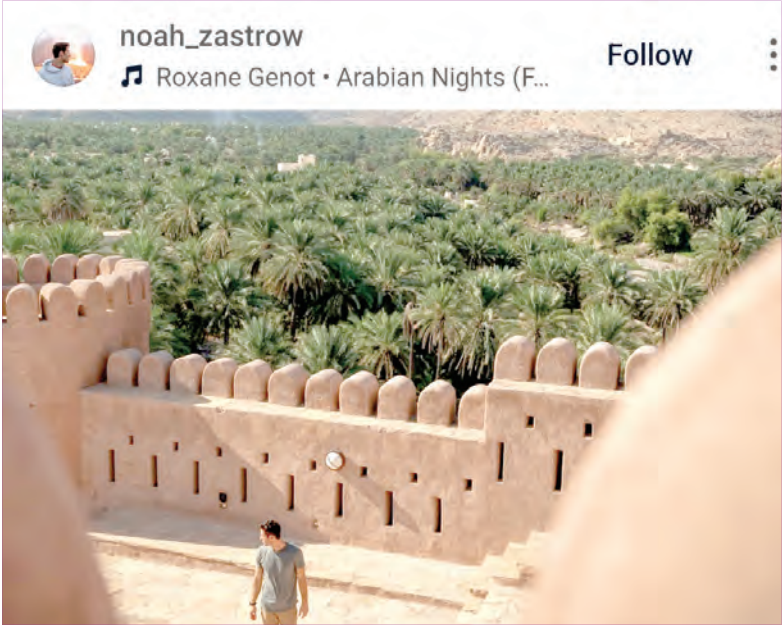
Models get ready backstage ahead of the final show of Dakar Fashion Week at Parc Hann, Dakar. —AFP



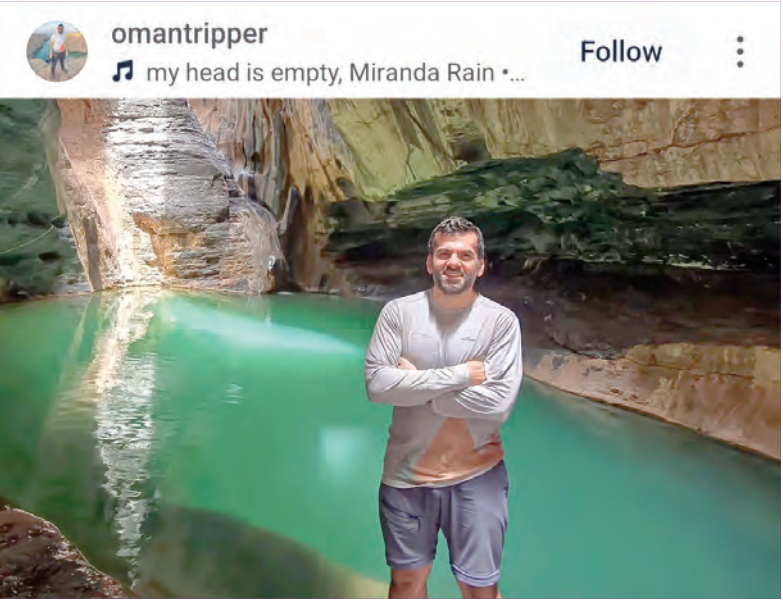
PERFORMANCE

Company members of the Dance Centre Kenya (DCK) perform on stage during The Nutcracker at the Kenya National Theatre in Nairobi. —AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Visiting Ancient Structure



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Historic Portrait of Arthur Rimbaud Sold for Over €580,000



A PORTRAIT of poet Arthur Rimbaud, drawn by his companion Paul Verlaine in 1872, has been sold at auction for a record-breaking price. This iconic portrait, which features Rimbaud in silhouette with long hair and a pipe, has significant historical importance as it served as the frontispiece for Rimbaud’s posthumous “Poésies Complètes,” published in 1895. For over 130 years, the portrait’s whereabouts remained unknown, hidden in private collections until its recent discovery in the estate of Hugues Gall, a prominent opera manager who passed away in May at the age of 84. Gall’s collection included a variety of cultural treasures, including a silver tea set, art nouveau furniture and ancient artifacts. Auctioneer Vincent Sarrou noted that Gall was well-connected in the arts community, collecting

numerous items throughout his life. Lot 187, the small brown ink drawing of Rimbaud, was initially estimated to sell for between 100,000 and 200,000 euros at the Hôtel Drouot auction house in Paris. The portrait’s creation date, June 1872, is significant as it was a time when Rimbaud and Verlaine were embroiled in a passionate affair, marking a tumultuous period in their lives. This relationship sparked a wave of literary creativity, with Rimbaud producing some of his most notable works during this time. On December 2, 2024, the auction concluded with Lot 187 being sold for 585,000 euros — approximately \$615,000 — setting a world record for a drawing by Verlaine. The piece was purchased by a private collector, whose identity remains undisclosed, adding to the portrait’s mystique.



World’s Priciest Dinosaur Fossil Comes to Museum of Natural History

IN A REMARKABLE development for paleontology and the field of natural history, a stegosaurus fossil, which holds the title of the most expensive dinosaur fossil ever sold, has found its new home at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. This iconic specimen, purchased by billionaire Kenneth Griffin for a staggering \$44.6 million during a summer auction, is set to be the centerpiece of the museum’s exhibits, having been loaned to the institution for a duration of four years.

The museum’s president, Sean M. Decatur, expressed his enthusiasm for the acquisition in a recent interview. He mentioned the unique appeal of the stegosaurus, noting that it is a dinosaur that has captured the imagination of children worldwide. “It’s one of the dinosaurs that every kid knows how to draw,” Decatur remarked, highlighting how the fossil not only fascinates the public but also serves as a significant specimen for scientific research.

The unveiling of the mounted stegosaurus, nicknamed Apex, took place on a Thursday morning with an audience comprising reporters, photographers, museum staff and school children. The public will have the opportunity to view Apex starting on Sunday, following the completion of its exhibition preparations. The selling of this exceptionally complete fossil at Sotheby’s auction was a groundbreaking event, marking a new pinnacle in the fossil market. Apex outbid the previous record-holder, a Tyrannosaurus rex skeleton, raising concerns among academic paleontologists about the potential impact of private collectors on the availability of significant specimens for research.

Billionaire Kenneth Griffin, the founder and CEO of Citadel, stated after the purchase that he wanted the specimen to be available to both scientists and the public. His commitment to ensuring the fossil’s accessibility is reflected in his agreement to fund research on the specimen as part of the loan arrangement with the museum. This funding will facilitate the creation of 3D scans of the fossil, enhancing



research opportunities for scientists worldwide. However, the broader academic community has expressed some trepidation about the long-term implications of such private acquisitions on scientific research, as ownership can often limit access.

Stuart Sumida, president of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology, mentioned that his organisation is currently examining the ethics surrounding privately owned fossils. They plan to issue a recommendation regarding these

issues in the coming months, as the increasing commodification of fossils raises new challenges for the scientific community. The commercial fossil market has seen significant growth, notably triggered by high-profile sales like that of T. rex skeleton Stan in 2020 and now the stegosaurus Apex.

With a history that traces back to 150 million years ago in present-day Colorado, Apex was unearthed by commercial paleontologist Jason Cooper in 2022. The fossil, measuring 11 feet in height and over 20 feet in length, may not be the most enormous dinosaur specimen in the museum, but its well-recognised form is expected to attract visitors and generate interest in ongoing paleontological research. Museum officials hope that Apex will contribute valuable data regarding the growth patterns and biology of stegosauruses, which have long intrigued scientists.

Regular access to Apex’s data is a crucial component of the loan agreement, as it emphasises the museum’s commitment to sharing findings with the scientific community. Curator Roger Benson has plans to conduct analyses that will enhance the understanding of stegosaurus growth and biology. In addition, the museum is set to create a replica cast of Apex for its exhibitions once the loan period concludes.

Griffin’s choice to lend the stegosaurus to the American Museum of Natural History is particularly notable considering his existing partnerships with other institutions, including the Field Museum in Chicago. This collaboration signifies a bridge between commercial and academic paleontology, as both realms aim to promote scientific progress.

For the foreseeable future, Apex will be displayed prominently at the Gilder Center, situated near an atrium named in honor of Griffin’s previous philanthropic contributions. Following its initial exhibition, the fossil will be relocated to a dedicated area within the museum’s fossil halls, allowing countless visitors to marvel at this extraordinary specimen. — NYT

FEATURES

DR KHALED ABDUL MALAK

TUCKED away in the heart of Oman, the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is a stunning destination bursting with natural beauty. A few years ago, I had the opportunity to explore a remarkable wadi that begins in the village of Al Mehaybis and winds its way down to the captivating terraces of Masirat Al Shraiqliyeen. It's truly a special place just waiting to be uncovered, effortlessly combining adventure with the breathtaking charm of nature.

JOURNEY TO AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR

We kicked off our adventure early one morning, setting out from Muscat. Having prepared all our canyoning gear — harnesses, descenders, ropes, drills, anchors — the night before, we were eager to hit the road by 6:00 am. The drive to Al Mehaybis took us about two and a half hours, guiding us first towards Nizwa before we turned off at Birkat Al Mawz to climb into the stunning heights of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

Upon reaching the Sayq Plateau, we made our way towards the village of Al Ruus, passing the Alila hotel along the route. Just before reaching Al Ruus, we took a left turn that led us to our destination, Al Mehaybis. I was joined by five friends, all from different countries and spanning three generations, ready to discover the wonders of what I like to call “Amazing Oman.”

THE RICHNESS OF THE LANDSCAPE

With the gear, food, and water packed, we set off on a historic trail that locals have used for centuries to reach Masirat Al Shraiqliyeen. The path meandered down the valley on the right side of the canyon, revealing breathtaking views of the landscape around us. Along the way, we stumbled across an abandoned hamlet called Al Khtaym, perched on the cliffs, offering a haunting glimpse into the past. On the opposite side of the canyon, we caught a glimpse of yet another deserted village, Sab Mal Homor, adding to the rich history of the area.

After about two hours of walking, we finally spotted the stone houses of Masirat al Shraiqliyeen nestled 200 metres below. It was here that I first met my friend Musabbah al Awaimri, who was tending to his garden some fifteen years ago. That day, I saw him clearing the falaj of gravel and mud, showcasing his dedication to maintaining his family's agricultural practices.

“I will never leave my land here,” he told me with conviction. “I’ll keep caring for my date and lemon trees, just as my father taught me, and I’ll pass that on to my children.” His words stuck with me, a reflection of the deep bond between the Omani people and their land.

ENCOUNTERS IN MASIRAT AL SHRAIQIYEEN

At one point, we needed to leave the main trail and navigate down into a tributary of the canyon. We used an acacia tree as our anchor to safely abseil down to the canyon floor, the excitement building as we descended. The weather was lovely that day, even in December, with clear skies and pleasant temperatures at around 1,600 metres above sea level.

Once we reached the canyon floor, I faced the challenge of using a drill for the first time to secure a metallic anchor since there weren't any natural options available for the next drop. The canyon was almost vertical, and after each descent, I diligently set a new anchor for the following drop. Altogether, we abseiled down nine times, with heights ranging from 7 to a thrilling 60 metres.

We didn't encounter water until just before the last drop, where we were met with a beautiful pool of spring water. To keep our gear dry, I cleverly set up a zip line to slide



THE JOURNEY
FROM AL MEHAYBIS
TO MASIRAT AL
SHRAIQIYEEN



our backpacks across the pond, ensuring they stayed untouched by the water. This spring feeds the falaj system below, providing essential water that flows year-round and supports the gardens.

THE THRILL OF CANYONING

As we descended to the final drop, we found Musabbah waiting for us in a small cave. He was there to water his plot, as it was his turn to access the life-giving falaj water. We took a quick break for a snack in the shade before gearing up for the challenging hike back to our car.

The return journey took about three hours, and by the time we reached our vehicle, we were completely exhausted but filled with immense joy and satisfaction.

This experience had offered us more than just adventure; it provided a glimpse into the rich tapestry of life in the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

Reflecting on our trek back, I couldn't help but appreciate how incredibly rich “Amazing Oman” is, filled with pristine, hidden gems waiting to be explored.

It's up to us to protect these treasures for future generations, ensuring they, too, can enjoy the beautiful culture and landscapes that Oman has to offer.

