



His Majesty felicitates armed forces

HIS Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, hosted a dinner on the occasion of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) Day at Hisn Al Shomoukh in the Wilayat of Manah on Wednesday. The ceremony comes as a felicitation by His Majesty, the Supreme Commander, to all military formations and units of the Armed Forces on this glorious day. It symbolises his Royal recognition for their great dedication in performing the sacred duty and safeguarding the national achievements to continue the march of building under the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan so that Oman retains its status as an oasis of peace, security and stability. The ceremony was attended by some

Royal family members, ministers, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and senior military and civil officers. His Majesty the Sultan has received a message of greetings from HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, on the occasion of the Sultan's Armed Forces Day (SAF Day). HH Sayyid Shihab expressed his sentiments to His Majesty the Sultan on this auspicious occasion, wishing him good health and long-life. He prayed to the Almighty Allah to protect His Majesty the Sultan, grant him success for achieving further progress and prosperity and guard him as a source of inspiration for the people of Oman. — ONA



Sayyid Asaad receives Maldives minister



MUSCAT: At the behest of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received Dr Abdullah Khaleel, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Maldives, in his office on Wednesday. The meeting reviewed aspects of cooperation between the two countries and means of promoting

them in various areas to serve the joint interests. They also discussed a set of issues of common concern. The meeting was attended by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister; Shaikh Khalifa bin Hamad al Badi, Secretary-General at the office of HH Sayyid Asaad; Dr Hala Hameed, Secretary, Bilateral for Foreign Affairs of Maldives; and Fathimath Naeema, Senior Under-Secretary of the Foreign Affairs Ministry of Maldives. — ONA

HM confers medals on SAF, RGO personnel

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, on Wednesday conferred medals of Excellent Service and Royal Commendation on a number of officers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and personnel of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and other departments of the Ministry of Defence and the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO). The ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs at Muaskar Al Murtafaa. HH Sayyid Shihab pinned the Medal of Excellent Service and the Medal of Royal Commendation on the honoured officers, NCOs, military and civil personnel of the SAF and the RGO, in appreciation for their dedication and sincerity in serving the homeland and performing their sacred national duty. HH Sayyid Shihab congratulated the recipients of the Royal medals. He praised them for their outstanding efforts and urged them to keep up the good performance under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander. The ceremony was attended by Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Za'abi, Secretary-General at the



Ministry of Defence; Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces; Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO); Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo); and Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO). — ONA

OMAN

HM hosts dinner to mark SAF day



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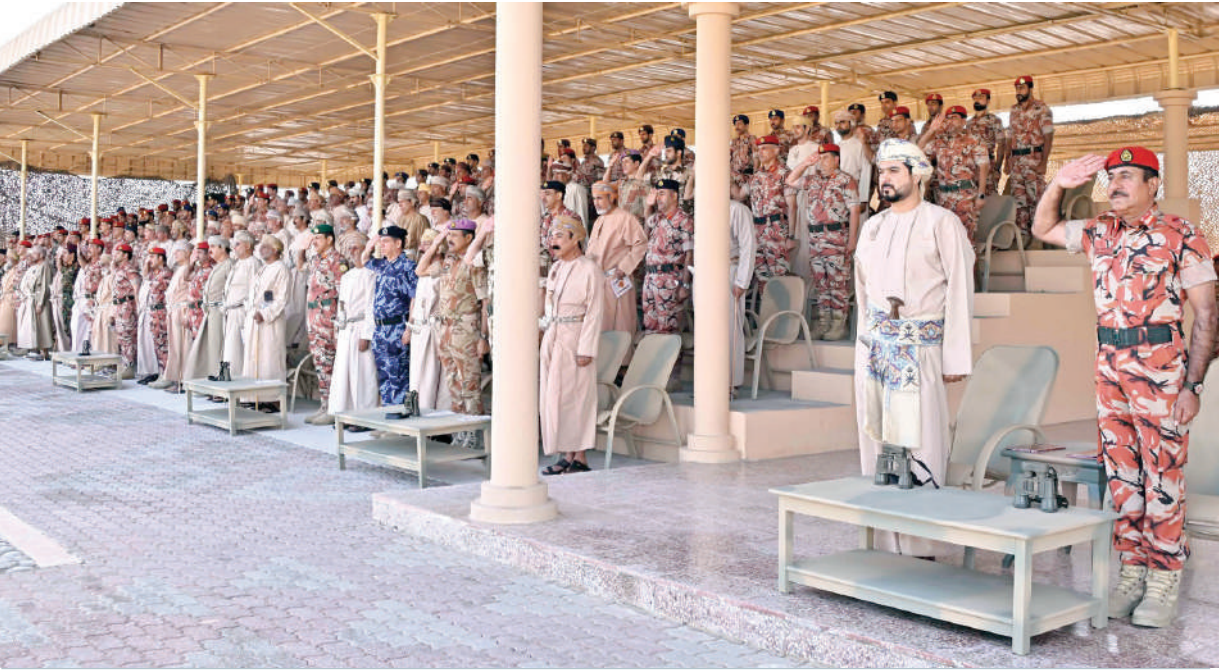


HM confers medals on SAF, RGO staff



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RAO marks SAF Day



The ceremony was held in the Governorate of Muscat under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. — **ONA**

MUSCAT: The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) on Wednesday celebrated the Sultan’s Armed Forces Day (SAF Day), which falls on December 11 every year.

The ceremony was held in the Governorate of Muscat under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

The event began with a military salute to the chief guest. The RAO band played the Royal Anthem. The chief guest and attendees saw examples of training exercises, military shows and various field skills that demonstrated competence and skill mastered by members of the RAO.

The attendees also watched an equestrian show and a tent-pegging show performed by the Sultan of Oman’s Armoured Cavalry, followed by a free-fall show performed by a team from the Sultan of Oman’s Parachutes Regiment. Within the context of marking the SAF Day, the chief guest felicitated members of the RAO and distributed medals of Long Excellent Service and Good Conduct.

The ceremony was attended by some commanders of the SAF and other military and security services, SAF veteran commanders, SAF senior officers, other military and security units, senior retired officers and SAF personnel. — **ONA**



Recall





Recall Date: 12/12/2024

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
Chevrolet Traverse	2014-2017	453
GMC Acadia	2014-2016	644

Recall consequence

In these vehicles, the front-driver airbag inflator may contain a supplier manufacturing defect that may result in inflator rupture during deployment. An inflator rupture may cause metal fragments to pass through the airbag and into the vehicle interior, which may result in injury or death to vehicle occupants.

Recall Action

Due to the importance of customer safety to the agent, as a precautionary measure, the agent will replace the driver's front airbag unit in the affected vehicles.

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



هيئة حماية المستهلك
Consumer Protection Authority
www.pccp.gov.om



خط المستهلك
Consumer line
80079009
80077997

During official working hours:
OTE No. 80050002
MARH No. 80076200



موش
On the move...



مجموعة أوت إي
OTE GROUP
The Power of OTC
OMAN TRADING ESTABLISHMENT LLC

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The two sides reviewed bilateral relations and means of bolstering them in a bid to achieve joint interests. — ONA

ROYAL OFFICE
MINISTER RECEIVES
AMBASSADOR OF
JORDAN

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received on Wednesday Tharwah Neimat, Ambassador of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the Sultanate of Oman.

The two sides reviewed bilateral relations and means of bolstering them in a bid to achieve joint interests. They also discussed the developments on the regional and international arenas. — ONA

OMAN, MALDIVES
HOLD POLITICAL
TALKS



The two sides reviewed the historic relations between the two countries. — ONA

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Maldives held a session of political talks.

During the session, the two sides reviewed the historic relations between the two countries. They also underscored their joint keenness to enhance bilateral cooperation in diplomatic, economic and tourism fields in a manner that serves mutual interests.

The session was headed from the Omani side by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, while the Maldivian side was headed by Dr Abdullah Khaleel, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Further, the two ministers signed a memorandum of understanding pertaining to political consultations between the two countries' foreign ministries. This move reflects the commitment of the two sides to boost bilateral coordination and joint action.

The session was attended by Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al Hosni, Head of the Asia and Pacific Department at the Foreign Ministry, and several officials from both sides. — ONA

SPOUSE OF EGYPTIAN
PRESIDENT
LEAVES OMAN

MUSCAT: Intisar El Sisi, Spouse of the Egyptian President, left the Sultanate of Oman on Wednesday, following a several-day private visit.

Her Highness The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, bid her guest farewell at Al Alam Palace two days ago, following their visit to Al Mirani Fort.

The Spouse of the Egyptian President was seen off at the Royal Airport by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, and some senior female figures, as well as Khalid Radi, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt, and his spouse. — ONA

FOREIGN MINISTER BIDS FAREWELL TO AMBASSADORS OF PAKISTAN, MALAYSIA, SUDAN



MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received on Wednesday Imran Ali Chaudhry, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the Sultanate of Oman, Shaiful Anuar Mohammad, Ambassador of Malaysia to Oman, and Salah Al Din Al Hajj Mohammed Al Kando, Ambassador of the Republic of Sudan to Oman, to bid them farewell at the end of their tours of duty. During the meeting, Sayyid Badr expressed his appreciation for the efforts exerted by the ambassadors in boosting bilateral relations. He also wished them success. — ONA

State Council discusses
Individual Income Tax Law

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, DEC 11

THE State Council discussed the draft 'Income Tax Law for Individuals' during the third session of the second regular sitting of the eighth term. The session was chaired by Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.

Al Khalili explained that the session's agenda includes discussing the draft 'Income Tax Law for Individuals' referred by the Council of Ministers under Article (49) of the State Council Law. The agenda also includes a review of the General Secretariat's report on the Council's activities.

The session reviewed the opinion of the Economic and Financial Committee regarding the draft 'Income Tax Law for Individuals' referred by the Council of Ministers. The Committee's Chairman, Dr Dhafir bin Awadh al Shanfari, stated that the law aims to diversify income sources, reduce dependence on oil, redistribute wealth among social groups, enhance the government's ability to fund social protection systems, and combat income tax evasion by companies and institutions.

Dr Al Shanfari emphasised that this draft law is among the most significant proposals submitted to the State Council in this term, marking a historic milestone for Oman's economic, financial, and social systems and the Gulf region. Given the importance of this project, the committee has focused on assessing whether its timing is appropriate both economically and socially while studying its potential positive and negative impacts.



The proposed law complements Oman's tax system and serves as an extension of efforts to develop new funding mechanisms to support state revenues

He further noted that the proposed law complements Oman's tax system and serves as an extension of efforts to develop new funding mechanisms to support state revenues. Over the past months, the committee dedicated sufficient time to evaluate its potential effects and determine the feasibility of implementing such a law at this time. Looking ahead, Dr Al Shanfari mentioned a joint session is expected to take place with the Majlis Ash'shura to finalise the recommendations before submitting them to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

Dr Al Shanfari highlighted that the committee had engaged with various stakeholders, including the Tax Authority, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, as well as representatives from the Oman Chamber of Commerce and

Industry, businessmen, academics and economic experts. Informal discussions were also held to gather public opinion. This comprehensive approach was integral to forming a clear perspective on the law and reviewing its provisions.

The draft law includes 28 articles divided into 16 chapters.

Eng Omar bin Khalfan al Wahaibi, a member of the Economic and Financial Committee, explained that the law aims to complement the tax system and support community services provided by the government, among other objectives. He noted that the State Council's role is to review the law, which has been presented by the Economic and Financial Committee. However, he stressed that it is still too early to disclose specific details about the draft law.

ICAO
SECURITY
WEEK
CONCLUDES
WITH MUSCAT
DECLARATION

MUSCAT: Activities of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Security Week 2024 concluded on Wednesday with Muscat Declaration on Aviation Security and Aviation Cybersecurity. Muscat Declaration affirms that aviation connects the world, brings people and countries together, and makes social and economic development possible through travel, trade and tourism, and thus shall be

effectively protected.

The declaration acknowledges the importance of a common UN approach involving cooperation and coordination among all relevant UN bodies and specialised agencies in recognising the aviation sector as critical infrastructure on which national security, prosperity and development, as well as the global economy, are dependent.

Further, the declaration

recognises that aviation security and cybersecurity are critical for the sustainable development of air transport and that it needs to be prioritised and appropriately resourced. Moreover, Muscat Declarations urges states, ICAO, international and regional organisations, industry and other stakeholders to strengthen efforts in addressing new and existing threats to international civil aviation. — ONA

Human Rights Day: OHRC calls for raising
awareness of the rights of the elderly

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 11

As part of the ongoing efforts to protect and promote human rights in the Sultanate of Oman, the Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) celebrated International Human Rights Day under the slogan 'The Pillar of the Nation: Sustainable Steps to Protect and Promote the Rights of the Elderly in the Sultanate of Oman' under the auspices of Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.

This year's celebration focused on the elderly, in appreciation of their pivotal role in building the nation and their effective contribution in various

areas of life. The Sultanate of Oman is keen to provide comprehensive care for this group and guarantee their basic rights.

The event confirmed the Oman Human Rights Commission's commitment to raising awareness of the rights of the elderly and highlighting the efforts made to guarantee their rights.

The celebration programme included various events, such as the screening of a documentary film highlighting the elderly and explaining their role as a fundamental pillar in the national development process. It also included a theatrical scene depicting the challenges facing the elderly, aiming to raise



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awareness in the society about the importance of supporting the elderly and addressing the difficulties they face.

This was followed by a visual presentation addressing the most important reports

and complaints related to the rights of the elderly, and how the Oman Human Rights Commission deals with them, along with national statistics shedding light on the reality of this group in Oman.

Dr Rashid bin Hamad al Balushi, Chairman of Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC), said: "This year's celebration came in appreciation of a dear and precious group in all our hearts, namely the elderly who contributed their efforts and giving to building this country. They are a national wealth and a societal value that we must all protect and promote their rights in a way that guarantees them a dignified and safe life."

SHORT TAKES

HM CONGRATULATES
PRESIDENT-ELECT
OF GHANA

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a cable of congratulations to President John Dramani Mahama of the Republic of Ghana on winning the presidential elections in his country. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of success to the President Mahama in leading the people of his country towards the realisation of further progress and prosperity. — ONA

OMAN SUPPORTS
HUMANITARIAN
ACTION



NEW YORK: During its participation in the high-level meeting of the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), for 2025, in New York, the Sultanate of Oman has affirmed its steadfast commitment to support international humanitarian action and enhance rapid response to address disasters around the world. Omar bin Said al Kathiri, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations (UN) in New York, said in a speech at the opening ceremony that the “Sultanate of Oman is engaged in backing rapid response to crises and humanitarian disasters around the world.” Oman’s speech, delivered in the presence of the UN secretary-general, stressed the importance of international solidarity in facing the rising number of humanitarian challenges. It also commended the vital role of the CERF in providing support to the most vulnerable groups. — ONA

ELEVATUS, OMANTEL
ACADEMY PARTNER
TO TRANSFORM
OMANI TALENT



The strategic collaboration focuses on leveraging artificial intelligence to streamline recruitment in Oman

MUSCAT: Elevatus, the leading AI-powered recruitment solutions platform, has partnered with Omantel Academy, Omantel’s specialised educational institution in AI and cybersecurity, to accelerate the development of Omani talent in technology. This strategic collaboration focuses on leveraging artificial intelligence to streamline and automate recruitment and selection processes in Oman, providing top digital solutions to identify and nurture talent in the technology sector. Ali al Lawati, Director of Omantel Academy, highlighted the significance of this partnership, stating, “Our collaboration with Elevatus aligns with Oman Vision 2040 and supports our goal of creating a highly skilled workforce equipped to drive innovation in the fast-evolving job market. This partnership empowers candidates with the skills and confidence they need to lead in the digital age.” Yara Burqan, CEO of Elevatus, added, “This partnership marks a transformative moment for Oman’s recruitment landscape. By integrating our AI-driven solutions with Omantel Academy’s training programmes, we are enhancing their capabilities and significantly contributing to Oman’s digital transformation. Together, we’re empowering a new generation of talent ready to excel in a rapidly changing job market and drive Oman Vision 2040 forward.”

MOL LAUNCHES OCCUPATIONAL COMPETENCE
FRAMEWORK, MANAGEMENT MATRIX

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, DEC 11

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) on Wednesday launched the National Framework for Occupational Competence and the Human Resources Management Matrix. The step forms part of the ministry’s efforts to implement Oman Vision 2040 in cooperation with other government departments. The launch ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour. The National Framework for Occupational Competence and the Human Resources Management Matrix constitute pillars of a new future that envisages higher productivity and enhanced capabilities for employees of the State’s Administrative Apparatus.



The launch ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour

Forty-four technical teams from different government units, and more than 300 specialists from various job categories, participated in developing the National Framework for Occupational Competence, which comprises 2,000 job titles.

Mohammed bin Mubarak al Kalbani, Director-General of Development and Quality Assurance at the Ministry of Labour, said, “The launch of the two new systems sets an added feature to national projects at the level of the government sector.” He pointed

out that the Ministry of Labour, along with other government departments, sought to ensure that this programme keeps pace with future aspirations to develop human resources management methodologies. Hilal bin Humaid al Hosni, Director of Ejada Department at the ministry, gave an introductory presentation about occupational competence frameworks and human resources applications related to appointment, training and drawing out career paths. Dr Mohammed bin Mustafa al Najar, Director-General of Training at the Ministry of Labour, also spoke about Ejada Matrix for Human Resources Management, which, he said, contributes to aligning human capabilities with the strategic objectives of institutions.

Campaign raises awareness
for needs of the elderly

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 11

CONTINUING efforts through the ‘We Reach You’ campaign aim to increase community awareness of the services and programmes provided by the Ministry of Social Development to various beneficiary groups, including families, the elderly, people with disabilities, and others, as well as its oversight of civil society institutions. Safiya al Amiri, Director of the Department of Elderly Affairs at the Ministry of Social Development, stated, “The ministry’s approach to providing services to the elderly is based on assessing their needs and preferences through a sustainable system that emphasises empowerment, integration and capacity development, and upholds human rights, social capital and effective partnerships.” Key services provided to the elderly include support tools like prosthetic devices and various medical aids. The home care programmes assess each case and provide necessary devices based on medical recommendations and regulatory guidelines set by the Ministry of Social Development Resolution No 235/2014. The ‘Alternative Family’ programme also plays a vital role in supporting the elderly by ensuring they remain in their communities. When elderly individuals lack familial



Key services provided to the elderly include support tools like prosthetic devices and various medical aids.

support, the ministry seeks alternative families to provide essential care. The National Programme for the Care of the Elderly offers psychological, social guidance and counselling services, along with social and recreational activities. It also trains families to care for their elderly relatives at home based on the ‘Guide to the Care of the Elderly’. Additionally, the programme focuses on preparing homes for low-income elderly individuals according to their needs and health status. To enhance public awareness and support for the elderly, the ministry promotes

the involvement of elderly individuals in social, economic and political aspects of community life. The ‘Guidance Guide to the Care of the Elderly’ serves as a valuable resource for volunteers and home care providers, helping them interact effectively with this demographic. The ‘Awareness Bag’ initiative targets students across all educational levels in Oman to educate them about elderly issues, promote family cohesion, foster respect for the elderly and encourage community engagement related to elderly care.

‘Venture Investment and Family Business
Governance’ key to economic growth

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 11

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) organised the ‘Venture Investment and Family Business Governance Programme’ with the aim of keeping step with technological and market changes in the private sector and promoting innovation and economic growth. The two-day programme included two interconnected workshops that aim to enhance the positive and mutually beneficial relationship between family businesses and the start-up ecosystem. These workshops aim to explore venture investment and



The two-day programme included workshops that aim to enhance beneficial relationship between family businesses and the start-up ecosystem.

entrepreneurship within family businesses, and highlight the latest trends in governance to promote innovation. The workshops addressed the importance of the capital

market as a basic financing tool, in addition to human capital and technology. Moreover, the capital market helps companies to continue and sustain other than privately owned companies and family businesses. The capital market helps companies to sustain by applying governance standards and financial and non-financial disclosures that will raise the level of transparency and integrity. “The programme aims to empower family businesses on bold investment in start-ups as it includes a comprehensive understanding of the role of family businesses and their empowerment, in addition to identifying new trends in the field of family

business governance and bold investment, which enables family businesses to develop long-term strategic visions in investing in start-ups,” said Fathia al Hakmani, Director of the Investment Department in the Authority. The launch of the programme, which is the first of its kind, came to spread the culture of keeping pace with change among family businesses to enter sectors outside their traditional fields, and encourage them to embrace emerging companies and advanced knowledge-based industries such as technology, artificial intelligence, renewable energy and other fields that will contribute effectively to the country’s future economy.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A Palestinian man inspects the site of an Israeli strike on a house in Nuseirat, Gaza. — Reuters

MEDICS SAY AT LEAST 38 KILLED IN GAZA

GAZA: Israeli air attacks across the Gaza Strip killed at least 38 Palestinians on Wednesday, most of them in a strike on a house in Beit Lahiya on the northern edge of the enclave, medics said. The Beit Lahiya strike killed at least 22 people, including women and children, health officials said. Relatives listed the names of the dead on social media. More than 30 people were living in the multi-storey building before it was struck, and several family members remained missing as rescue operations continued through the morning, the Palestinian WAFA news agency said.

The Israeli military said that it had carried out a strike near the Kamal Adwan Hospital, which is located between Beit Lahiya and Jabalia, towns on the northern fringe of Gaza under Israeli siege for two months. In nearby Beit Hanoun, also part of the area under siege, medics said an Israeli air strike killed and wounded several people, without giving an exact toll. Rescue workers said several people were trapped under rubble. — Reuters



People walk past a destroyed vehicle, following shelling in Omdurman, Sudan. — Reuters

SUDAN FACES LARGEST CRISIS EVER RECORDED

CAIRO: Sudan has become the “biggest humanitarian crisis ever recorded” after 20 months of devastating war between rival generals, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) said in a report released on Wednesday. “The country accounts for 10 per cent of all people in humanitarian need, despite being home to less than 1 per cent of global population,” the New York-based organisation said in their 2025 Emergency Watchlist.

IRC’s report highlights the 20 countries at greatest risk of humanitarian deterioration, with Sudan ranking highest on the list for the second year in a row. They said a total of 30.4 million people were in humanitarian need across the northeast African country, making it “the largest humanitarian crisis since records began”, the IRC said. There is no end to the war in sight, with both parties intensifying strikes on residential areas in recent weeks. The IRC warned of total “humanitarian collapse”, as the health crisis was set to worsen and both sides continued to “choke humanitarian access”. — AFP

SOUTH KOREAN POLICE BLOCKED FROM RAID ON PRESIDENT’S OFFICE

SEOUL: South Korean police said on Wednesday that security guards were blocking a raid on President Yoon Suk Yeol’s offices to investigate his brief imposition of martial law, with the opposition party accusing the presidential staff of illegally protecting an insurrectionist. Yoon is already banned from foreign travel as part of an “insurrection” probe into his inner circle over the dramatic events of December 3-4 that stunned South Korea’s allies. Several hours into a standoff

at the presidential offices, police on Wednesday evening said “The special investigation team is currently continuing to discuss the seizure and search of the presidential office (with the presidential staff and security).”

The main opposition Democratic Party warned it would file legal complaints for insurrection against the presidential staff and security if they continued to obstruct law enforcement. “What the presidential office (staff) and the security are

protecting right now is not the head of state, but an insurrectionist,” said DP lawmaker and spokesperson Jo Seung-lae. Prison authorities, meanwhile, said former defence minister Kim Yong-hyun tried to kill himself shortly before his formal arrest late on Tuesday.

Kim was first detained on Sunday, and later formally arrested on charges of “engaging in critical duties during an insurrection” and “abuse of authority to obstruct the exercise of rights”. — AFP

Ukraine hits Russian regions, sets depot ablaze

UKRAINE attacked Russian border regions with missiles and drones early on Wednesday, sparking a fire at an oil depot and damaging an “industrial facility”, officials said. Two separate attacks targeted Russia’s southern Rostov region and western Bryansk region, both of which have been hit by cross-border Ukrainian fire throughout Moscow’s nearly three-year war. Videos purportedly taken in the Bryansk region showed a distant fireball illuminating the night sky over an urban area, while air raid sirens could be heard in footage from the southern Rostov region. Kyiv said it struck an oil depot being used to “supply the Russian occupation army” in the Bryansk region, while the governor of Russia’s Rostov region said a Ukrainian missile attack damaged an “industrial enterprise” in the port city of Taganrog.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky hailed “tangible blows against Russian targets last night” that he said would help bring the war to an end. In a post on Telegram he said Ukraine had hit “military facilities on the territory of Russia, as well as facilities of the fuel and energy complex, which is working for aggression against our state and people”. Kyiv has ramped up strikes on Russian oil and gas facilities this year, curbing Moscow’s energy industry and causing billions of dollars’ worth of damage. The Ukrainian army said Russia was using the facility in Bryansk as a loading point for the Druzhba oil pipeline, a key supply

Videos purportedly taken in the Bryansk region showed a distant fireball illuminating the night sky over an urban area, while air raid sirens could be heard in footage from the southern Rostov region



Rescuers work at the site where a building was heavily damaged by yesterday’s Russian missile strike, in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. — Reuters

route for Russian oil heading to much of central Europe. “A massive fire broke out,” Ukraine’s general staff said in a statement. It did not comment on the strike on the Rostov region.

The Russian governor of the Bryansk region, Alexander Bogomaz, said that Ukraine had attacked a “production facility” with drones but that the blaze had since been extinguished. Refineries and oil depots are a huge driving force behind Russia’s economy, with some facilities being given their own air defence systems to ward off attacks. Major companies have redirected oil to sites further away from Ukraine, as some Ukrainian drone strikes have reached hundreds of kilometres into Russian territory. Ukraine says its attacks are “fair” retaliation for Moscow’s strikes

on its own energy infrastructure that have cut power to millions of people.

Meanwhile, Russia said that it had recaptured two villages from Ukraine in the border region of Kursk, where Kyiv launched a major ground assault in August. Moscow was caught off guard when Kyiv began its incursion four months ago but has steadily clawed back territory, halting Ukraine’s advance and rushing reinforcements to the region. Russian army units “liberated the settlements of Darino and Plyokhovo during the course of offensive operations”, the Russian defence ministry said. Thousands of people have been evacuated from the Kursk region since Ukraine launched its incursion, while many others are trapped in Kyiv-held territory. — AFP



MALIBU FIRE DESTROYS STRUCTURES

CALIFORNIA: A wildfire in the beach community of Malibu, California, raged unchecked on Wednesday after destroying several structures and forcing residents to flee and schools to close in the area. More than 1,500 firefighters were battling the Franklin Fire, which was 3,900 acres (1,578 hectares) and 0% contained, as it burned in the steep, rugged terrain northwest of Los Angeles. The fire, which started on Monday night, has destroyed at least seven structures and damaged eight others.

A red flag warning issued by the National Weather Service remained in effect on Wednesday as strong Santa Ana winds and low humidity were expected in the area. — Reuters

FUNDING SHORTAGE

UK farmers stage tractor protest over tax



British farmers lined up tractors outside parliament in London, in protest over the government’s plan to impose an inheritance tax for agricultural businesses. It marks the latest angry objection by farmers in response to changes in the government’s budget, which they say threatens the agricultural sector. “Don’t bite the hand that feeds you,” read protestors’ banners as dozens of tractors lined Parliament Square in the centre of London. — AFP

POLITICAL RACE

Scholz starts process towards elections



Germany’s Chancellor Olaf Scholz kicked off the process towards February 23 legislative elections by requesting a confidence vote next week. The formal step is designed to force the dissolution of parliament and early elections in Europe’s biggest economy, which is mired in political crisis and economic troubles. Scholz’s centre-left Social Democrats are lagging in opinion polls behind the conservative opposition CDU-CSU, led by Friedrich Merz. — AFP

VIOLENT ATTACKS

Suicide blast kills Afghan refugees minister



The Afghan minister for refugees was killed in a suicide bombing at the ministry’s offices in the capital Kabul. Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid deplored “a cowardly attack” carried out by the IS group, saluting a “great fighter” who “fell as a martyr”. The explosion “happened at the Ministry for Refugees and Khalil Ur-Rahman Haqqani has been martyred along with some of his colleagues,” a source said. — AFP

SYRIA
MIGRANTS
IN EUROPE
EYE ‘PEACE’
IN NEW
ERA

CALAIS: Wrapped up against the cold in northern France, Syrian migrant Ali said that while he was delighted president Bashar al Assad had been toppled, he was still determined to cross the sea to England. “I was happy when Bashar al Assad left, he’s a criminal,” he said near the tent where he spent a bitter night in the port city of Calais. “Nobody wanted him in power anymore,” said the 23-year-old, who did not give his surname for his safety. “But the situation in Syria remains confused and the general atmosphere is chaotic,” he added.



Syrians living in Türkiye arrive with their belongings at the Oncupinar border crossing to enter Syria, in Kilis. — AFP

Syria’s new transitional prime minister has called for Syrians abroad to return to their homeland to help rebuild it, while Britain and other European countries have rushed to freeze all pending asylum requests from Syrians. But Ali, who hails from the Syrian region of Daraa that in 2011 was the first to rise up against Assad and has been hoping to cross the Channel for two months, was undeterred. “It’s very bad news, but it won’t stop us,” he insisted. “We want to continue to go to England because we’re looking for peace.” But, he added: “If the situation

improves in Syria, we’ll go back. “Everyone dreams of going home, but for now, the situation remains too uncertain, the leaders come from a background linked to terrorism.” HTS, which led the rebels that ousted Assad, have promised to protect minorities and respect people’s rights. Meanwhile, Türkiye has expanded its border crossing capacities to accommodate the surge in Syrian refugees seeking to return home following the fall of Bashar al Assad, the interior minister has said. — AFP

New Syria PM says
rights ‘guaranteed’

SYRIA’S new prime minister said the alliance that ousted president Bashar Al Assad will “guarantee” the rights of all religious groups and called on the millions who fled the war to return home. Assad fled Syria after a lightning offensive spearheaded by Hayat Tahrir Al Sham (HTS) group and its allies, which brought to a spectacular end five decades of brutal rule by his clan. Syrians across the country and around the world erupted in celebration, after enduring a stifling five decades that saw anyone suspected of dissent thrown into jail or killed. With Assad’s overthrow plunging Syria into the unknown, its new rulers have sought to assure members of the country’s religious minorities that they will not repress them. “Precisely because we are Islamic, we will guarantee the rights of all people and all sects in Syria,” said Mohammad Al Bashir, whom the rebels appointed as the transitional head of government. Asked about Syria’s new constitution, he told Italian daily Corriere della Sera that “we will clarify all these details during the constituent process”. Bashir, whose appointment was



Men ride bicycles through traffic along a street in Syria’s northern city of Aleppo. — AFP

announced on Tuesday, is tasked with heading the multi-ethnic country until March 1. After decades of rule by the Assads, Syrians now face the enormous challenge of charting a new course as they emerge from nearly 14 years of war. Roaming the opulent Damascus home of Assad, Abu Omar felt a sense of giddy defiance being in the residence of the man he said had long oppressed him. “I am taking pictures, because I am so happy to be here in the middle of his house,” said the 44-year-old. “I

came for revenge. They oppressed us in incredible ways,” he added. The war has killed more than 500,000 people and forced half the population to flee their homes, with six million of them seeking refuge abroad. In his interview with Corriere della Sera, which was published on Wednesday, Bashir called on Syrians abroad to return to their homeland. “Mine is an appeal to all Syrians abroad: Syria is now a free country that has earned its pride and dignity. Come back,” he said. — AFP

US top diplomat
Blinken
on Syria
crisis tour
with eye
on Biden
legacy

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken headed on Wednesday on an emergency tour after the overthrow of Syria’s dictatorship, in a new, last-minute attempt to shape a Middle East legacy after a turbulent year. The top US diplomat of President Joe Biden, who has little more than one month in office, is set to press principles he has outlined for a new government including that it be inclusive of Syria’s diverse populations. Blinken was set to head first to the Red Sea port of Aqaba in Jordan, Syria’s neighbour and a key US partner in the region, before going to Türkiye, the main supporter of the movement that toppled strongman Bashar al Assad over the weekend. — AFP



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Tender Announcement

Tender No.	24/ACC/24062
Name of the Tender	ERP System
Tender fees	50 OMR
Place of availability of Tender Documents (RFP)	CBFS, Finance Department (Sunday to Thursday 8:00 am to 2:00 pm on working days)
Address to send Prebid queries	“Chairman CSC, CBFS” Email: tc@cbfs.edu.om
Tender bond	2 sealed Envelopes, 1 for Technical and 1 for Financial
Last Date to Collect Document	Thursday 26th December 2024
Last Date to Submit proposal	Thursday 09th January 2025



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سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التراث والسياحة
Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

Announcement of an Internal Tender

Tender No.	269/2024/MHT/HQ-67	Tender Name	Civil Works to Rehabilitate the site of Al-Khattam Tower in Ibri.
Fees of Tender Documents (Non-refundable)	25 O.R		
Tender Document Sales End Date	30/12/2024		
Last Date for Bid Submission	21/1/2025		
Grade	Fourth		
E-Tendering Portal	https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om		

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents.

The Tenderers must acknowledge commitment to the bid.

The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids

The bid submission period starts after the end of the inquiry period shown in the e-tendering system, until the last date for submitting bids before (10:00 am, Oman time).

Support and inquiries

For more information, related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering system: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om or 24402200

For further information

Email : sofic@mht.gov.om
Phones : 22088348 - 22088085

OPINION

Sultan Haitham City an address of sustainable living



DR KHALFAN AL HARRASI

The author is an academic and researcher

SULTAN Haitham City, located in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, Muscat, represents a pioneering urban development initiative to revolutionise sustainable living in the Sultanate of Oman. Spanning approximately 14.8 million square metres, the city is designed to accommodate 100,000 residents across 20,000 diverse housing units, including villas, townhouses, and apartments. This ambitious project is integral to Oman Vision 2040, a national strategy focused on sustainable growth, economic diversification, and improving the quality of life for its citizens. Central to the vision of Sultan Haitham City is a strong emphasis on sustainability. The development allocates 2.9 million square metres for green spaces, including a central park and natural valleys, offering residents a harmonious blend of urban living and nature. Renewable energy solutions—such as solar power, waste-to-energy systems, advanced wastewater treatment, and recycling facilities—ensure that the city operates with minimal ecological impact. These sustainable practices are essential to Oman's long-term goals for environmentally responsible urban growth. The city features a wide range of housing options to meet the diverse needs of its residents. With a mix of detached and semi-detached villas, townhouses, and apartments, the design promotes inclusivity and caters to various preferences. Sultan Haitham City also offers extensive amenities,

including 25 mosques, 39 schools, 11 healthcare facilities, sports complexes, and a university. Sultan Haitham City's development is set to progress in four well-planned phases. The first phase, from 2024 to 2030, will cover 5 million square metres and focus on the city core, including six modern neighbourhoods, a central park, and 6,743 residential units to house over 35,000 residents. The subsequent phases will expand the city's capacity, with the second phase (2028–2035) incorporating 2.6 million square metres, the third phase (2033–2040) covering 2.3 million square metres, and the fourth phase (2038–2045) encompassing 5.5 million square metres. Sultan Haitham City places a strong emphasis on healthcare, ensuring comprehensive medical services for its residents and surrounding communities. Central to this commitment is a state-of-the-art 1,200-bed referral hospital, set to become one of Oman's largest medical facilities. Additionally, the city will include two health centres, each capable of serving 20,000 patients, and six smaller health centres designed to cater to 10,000 patients each. Plans also encompass a private hospital and a specialised centre dedicated to supporting individuals with disabilities and the elderly. These facilities underscore Sultan Haitham City's vision of fostering a self-sufficient urban environment with accessible and inclusive healthcare services. The city also represents substantial

Renewable energy solutions ensure that the city operates with minimal ecological impact. These sustainable practices are essential to Oman's long-term goals for environmentally responsible urban growth.

economic potential, expected to generate 50,000 jobs across various sectors, contributing positively to Oman's economy and attracting foreign investment. Designated areas within Sultan Haitham City allow for foreign property ownership, thus appealing to international investors. Developments like 'Yenaier,' featuring over 700 apartments and commercial spaces, highlight the city's ability to blend modern design with traditional Omani elements, positioning itself as a centre for innovation and economic activity. Engaging the youth is crucial to Sultan Haitham City's development plan. The 'Basamat' competition, launched at the October Urban Conference and Home and Building Expo, invites young Omanis to present innovative ideas for the city's future. This initiative aligns with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's vision of encouraging youth involvement in national development and fostering creativity. Sultan Haitham City is part of a broader initiative to modernise Muscat's urban landscape while preserving Oman's cultural heritage. As the nation's first integrated smart city, it incorporates advanced technology, sustainable design principles, and community-oriented planning. The city's development serves as a scalable model for similar projects across Oman, advancing the goals of sustainable urbanisation. The project was officially launched on May 31, 2023, by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, symbolising a significant milestone in realising the city's vision.

ICELAND WANTS IMMIGRANTS TO LEARN ICELANDIC

JONATHAN KLEIN

In Iceland's parliament, six cleaners take a break from their duties to spend time learning Icelandic, seen as one of the principal barriers to integration in the country. Of the roughly 400,000 residents of Iceland, about one in five have an immigrant background, and few of them speak Icelandic, which experts say could affect social cohesion. Six years ago, Kanyamon Juisikaew, 46, moved to Reykjavik from Thailand, married an Icelander, and now works as a cleaner in parliament.

"I would like to communicate with Icelandic people when they speak, and in my family because we are an Icelandic family," Juisikaew said in English. She also said she was disappointed not to be able to follow along during meetings at work.

She has just started taking classes during her regular working hours — an opportunity provided by a handful of companies and institutions in the Subarctic nation. Alongside her, colleague Carolina Rivas hopes the classes will help her develop her career.

Among OECD countries, Iceland has seen the sharpest rise in the share of immigrants in its population, going from three per cent in the early 2000s to 20 per cent last year.

The Nordic country opened up for migrants in the 2000s to cope with a boom in tourism and a labour shortage for low-paid service jobs. But a recent report from the OECD, which advises industrialised nations on policy matters, said immigration increases have not been accompanied by sufficiently inclusive public policies.

"Where does Iceland want to be in the future? One cannot afford having 20 per cent of the population not speaking the language. So this is really becoming an issue of social cohesion for Iceland," Thomas Liebig at the OECD's International Migration Division, said. Coming mainly from the European Economic Area (EEA), immigrants to Iceland do relatively well and enjoy the highest employment rate in the OECD. But the labour market suffers from over-qualification as language presents a hurdle to job opportunities matching their skills. At the Mimir training institute in Reykjavik, students flock to take the Icelandic language exam in order to obtain Icelandic citizenship, and language classes are overflowing.

"We see an annual increase every year around 20 per cent," Joanna Dominiczak, director of the Icelandic language programmes at Mimir, said. Dominiczak added that they also had to stop offering classes in September as their funding for the year had run out. The OECD has also criticised Iceland for providing minimal public funding for language training and reserving fully subsidised courses for refugees and the unemployed. — AFP

Why are so many Indians fleeing to the US?

WHEN US president-elect Donald Trump vows to deport millions of illegal immigrants, India might not be the first source country that comes to mind. But the uncomfortable reality, to which Indians are now waking up, is that compatriots represent a significant share of those who have fled to the US in search of a better life.

In January 2022, an Indian family of four seeking to cross illegally into the US froze to death in Canada, less than 40 feet from the border. It might seem strange that a family from one of India's more prosperous states, Gujarat, with two educated parents and a home in a middle-class town, would risk life and limb on such a dangerous, even foolhardy, journey. But their story is not uncommon. In fact, seven other people from Gujarat had embarked on the illegal crossing with them.

Gujarat is Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state, where he served as Chief Minister for nearly 13 years. His election to lead the national government was based significantly on the apparent success of his economic stewardship there. But people from the state have reached the point where they are willing to risk everything to go elsewhere. This reality seems to belie the prevailing narrative of prosperity.

It is not just Gujarat. A growing number of people from Punjab — India's "breadbasket" — are also seeking a better life outside India. Though Punjab is a fertile agrarian state, unemployment is above the national average, and drug use is becoming increasingly rampant. Even as the state's farms produce a large share of India's food, they are unable to provide livelihoods for all the young people who depend on them.

With few opportunities at home, many young Punjabis have been driven toward the "donkey route" — a slang term for the long, tortuous journey illegal Indian migrants



SHASHI THAROOR

The author is a writer, columnist, former UN under-secretary-general and Member of India's Parliament

The sad truth is India's much-vaunted economic success story is one of jobless growth, record-high youth unemployment, and, for most Indians, slipping standards of living

take to countries like Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the US. The expression arose from the mangling of the title of the Bollywood film Dunki, which is about illegal immigration, though "mule route" is also used. Would-be Indian immigrants pay agents as much as \$100,000 to smuggle them into the US through what they are told are loosely guarded border points. Some start their journey by travelling legally to Central or South American countries; others are told that Canada is a safer option, as America's northern border is longer and less tightly policed than its border with Mexico. But, as we have seen, slipping through snow and ice in the dark carries its own risks, especially for those who lack experience with such cold temperatures.

Since October 2020, US Customs and Border Protection officials have detained nearly 170,000 Indian migrants attempting to cross the border illegally from either Canada or Mexico. They were mostly young men, but the demographics at the US border have lately been changing, with families now accounting for 16-18 per cent of detentions. It is not just desperate young men looking for a break; middle-class families also see no future in today's India.

Of course, some Indian migrants do manage to complete the dangerous journey: the Pew Research Centre estimates that, as of 2022, there were 725,000 undocumented Indian immigrants in the US — the third-largest group, outnumbered only by nationals of Mexico and El Salvador. But their future in the US is far from guaranteed.

As a US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) official recently noted, there has been a "steady increase in removals" of Indian nationals from the US over the past few years, with 1,100 deported just in the last fiscal year (which concluded at the end of September). This trend is not slowing. A

DHS press release from October described a "large-frame charter removal flight" of Indian nationals, who "did not establish a legal basis to remain" in the US, to India.

This was not the first such deportation flight, and all signs indicate that more are in process. And Trump has not even been inaugurated yet. The Indian government, which has cooperated in the repatriations, has attempted to put a positive spin on them. "The idea," declared External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, "is to create more avenues for legal migration." What India's leaders should be doing, however, is asking themselves why so many of their fellow citizens want to leave in the first place.

Most Indian migrants are unashamedly seeking better economic opportunities. They believe that if they can reach a major US city, they will be able to disappear into the crowd and find decent work. But some migrants cite other reasons for leaving. Some Sikhs from Punjab, for example, have applied for asylum, claiming that they fear persecution by Indian authorities' crackdown on the Khalistan separatist movement.

Indian officials typically respond to such allegations with indignation, claiming that accusers are inventing stories to improve their chances of staying.

They would be better off taking people's motivations seriously.

India must become a land of hope again. The sad truth is that for all the Modi government's hype, India's much-vaunted economic success story is one of jobless growth, record-high youth unemployment, and, for most Indians, slipping standards of living.

An India with a revitalised economy, a level playing field, and adequate job opportunities for the young, as well as a government that defends the rights and interests of all, is an India that few people would want to leave.

Tech, trade and turmoil: Oman’s road map for 2025



KHALID AL HURAIBI

khalidalharibi@gmail.com

The writer is an innovator and an insights storyteller

AS we enter 2025, the world is changing rapidly, and the Sultanate of Oman is standing at five crucial crossroads. Geopolitical tensions, technological advances, shifting energy markets, climate concerns, and digital threats are shaping the future. While these changes may seem far removed from daily life, they present real challenges and exciting opportunities for all of us.

Around the world, political divisions are deepening. Conflicts in the Arab world — from the ongoing US- and EU-backed Zionist occupation to the rise and fall of non-state actors — create waves of uncertainty. While the Global South rejoices at the justice delivered by the ICC’s recent warrants against the war crimes committed by Israel, and at the liberation of Syria from a tyrannical regime, these conflicts still affect economies, security, and everyday stability. Oman has long maintained its role as a diplomatic bridge, offering a voice of calm in a targeted region. This balanced approach keeps the country stable and respected internationally, showing that wise leadership can foster peace even in difficult times.

Meanwhile, technology is transforming how we live and work. Innovations in artificial intelligence, robotics and drones, and smart systems are no longer futuristic ideas — they are part of our reality. Oman is embracing this digital revolution through initiatives like COMEX 2025, which highlights new ideas in tech and digital services. For younger generations, this means more

opportunities for jobs, learning, and innovation. Imagine faster government services, smarter cities, and a thriving tech sector driving the economy forward.

Energy is also at a turning point. While oil and gas remain essential to Oman’s economy, the global push for cleaner energy sources is reshaping markets. In 2025, Oman’s deal to supply liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Thailand will keep the economy strong. The country is also looking to the future by investing in solar, wind, and green hydrogen projects, as highlighted during His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik’s recent state visits to both Türkiye and Belgium, and through the establishment of the new Net-Zero Centre by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals. This balance between traditional strengths and new energy sources is crucial for long-term prosperity. Diversifying energy ensures Oman stays resilient, no matter how global markets shift.

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges of our time, and countries worldwide are racing to adopt greener solutions. The global clean and green tech market is booming, and Oman is ready to play its part, as shown by its focus on investment in sectors such as the Rising Startups Programme. By investing in sustainable technologies, such as Carbon Capture Utilisation and Storage (CCUS), the country can protect its stunning natural beauty — from deserts to coastlines — while creating new industries and jobs. Whether it’s developing solar farms or finding better

Oman is proving that it can adapt and thrive by balancing diplomacy with innovation, tradition with progress, and stability with change

ways to manage water resources, these efforts ensure a healthier and more secure future for everyone.

With the digital world growing, cybersecurity is becoming more critical. The more we rely on online services for banking, communication, and government processes, the more we need to protect ourselves from digital threats. Cyberattacks are becoming more sophisticated, and their potential damage is greater than ever. Oman is stepping up its cybersecurity efforts to protect personal data, business operations, and essential services. For the average person, this means safer online transactions, secure information, and confidence in using digital tools.

These five trends — geopolitical challenges, technological advancements, energy shifts, climate action, and cybersecurity — are all interconnected. They influence each other and impact lives in ways not always visible. Oman is proving that it can adapt and thrive by balancing diplomacy with innovation, tradition with progress, and stability with change. For ordinary Omanis, this means a future filled with opportunity. There are new careers to pursue, smarter technologies to benefit from, and a safer, greener country to enjoy. Oman’s road map for 2025 is clear: by staying resilient, embracing innovation, and maintaining its role as a peaceful mediator, the country is ready for whatever the future holds. As the world faces tech, trade and turmoil, Oman is charting its path to prosperity.

LONDON-BORN FIRST LADY OF SYRIA NOT WELCOME IN UK

MARIE HEUCLIN

Once celebrated as an advocate of women’s rights in the Middle East, Syria’s British-born former first lady Asma al Assad has fled into exile with her husband, with UK officials saying she is not welcome to return to London. Asma al Assad, 49, her husband, and three children have sought refuge in Moscow after rebels ousted Bashar al Assad from power, according to Russian state news agencies, although the Kremlin has not confirmed the reports. It is just the latest blow to the shredded reputation of a woman whose glamour and charm had been seen in the past as a key asset to the Syrian government.

Asma was born in London in 1975 and has spent half her life in the UK, with her parents still living in the west of the capital city. She retains British citizenship, but Foreign Minister David Lammy said on Monday that she was no longer welcome in the country, suggesting she may soon lose her UK passport.

Asma had her UK assets frozen in March 2012 amid growing protests against her husband’s rule, as part of a European sanction programme that London maintained after Brexit.

Asma was born to cardiologist father Fawaz al Akhras and retired diplomat Sahar Otri, both from Syria.

She grew up in the leafy west London neighbourhood of Acton where the Akhras still live, although some UK media reported on Monday that they were thought to have flown to Russia to be with their daughter.

Asma attended a local primary school, where she went by the name of Emma, before studying at the prestigious Queen’s College private school. She later graduated from London’s King’s College university with a degree in computer science and French literature before moving into finance, working at Deutsche Bank and JP Morgan.

It was in this line of work that she met Bashar al Assad in the late 1990s, and the couple married a few months after he succeeded his father, Hafez, as Syrian president in July 2000.

The couple have two adult sons and a daughter, with the eldest recently graduating in mathematics from the University of Moscow. The Syrian presidency announced in May that Asma had leukaemia, having already been treated for breast cancer between 2018 and 2019.

Feted by the Western media for her looks and style, Asma became the toast of high society, hosting celebrities such as Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie while enjoying a lavish reception overseas.

Fashion bible Vogue called her the “Desert Rose”. But her reputation crumbled when she stood by her husband’s side as he cracked down on anti-government protests that erupted in 2011, turning into a full-scale civil war in June 2012.— AFP

Media’s impact on politics

THEORISTS of public freedoms and human rights in liberal nations

believe that the primary role of the press and media is to monitor and evaluate government actions. Many politicians regard the media as the “fourth estate” in democratic societies, following the three traditional branches of power. In the United States, the media has established itself as a formidable authority, serving as the primary source of information for the public and playing a significant role in shaping and transforming the careers of politicians.

This dynamic underscores the strong relationship between politicians and the media, as highlighted by Munther al Zubaidi in his book ‘The Role of the Media in Political Decision-Making’. The media’s influence extends beyond informing the public, affecting public opinion and even creating industries dedicated to shaping it. Companies specialising in public opinion polling and strategic messaging have emerged, swaying voters and political stances alike.

The media has also drawn attention to issues that were previously neglected by political circles, such as human rights, racial discrimination, terrorism, women’s rights and minority concerns. By amplifying these topics, the media has not only engaged domestic audiences, but also turned local issues into global concerns — a phenomenon intensified by globalisation. Jan Aart Scholte, a political theorist, defines globality as “the spread of things, experiences and cultures across the world.” This has deeply influenced local policies and politicians while also disrupting international relations.

The media’s ability to shape agendas is rooted in agenda-setting theory, which was proposed by Maxwell McCombs. By selectively highlighting specific issues, the media influences societal priorities, which in turn shape the priorities of decision-makers. A study cited by Bassiouni Hamada in 1987 examined the media’s role in guiding the priorities of policymakers, pressure groups, leaders and the public.



A former UN secretary-general even referred to CNN as the “sixteenth member” of the Security Council.

The findings revealed that media coverage strongly influences public perception and politicians’ decisions, with a significant impact on whether an issue is perceived as critical and necessitating action.

An illustrative example is the global case of George Floyd’s murder in the United States. Extensive media coverage of the incident, particularly on social and mass media, provoked widespread demonstrations and pressured politicians to act.

The coverage was so pervasive that the implicated police officer claimed it had denied him a fair trial. The media’s influence on policy is also evident in its impact on foreign affairs. Al Jazeera and CNN have shaped the foreign policies of nations, particularly the US. The term “Al Jazeera effect” describes how media have disrupted traditional information monopolies, empowering previously voiceless groups and influencing global politics. For instance, during the Iraq War in 2003, Al Jazeera’s critical coverage challenged US military operations, prompting retaliatory strikes against its staff.

Al Jazeera’s ability to shape public opinion, particularly among Arab and Muslim audiences, has influenced perceptions of US policies. However, its influence

in the US itself is limited, given its niche audience and cultural resistance to alternative viewpoints.

CNN’s influence on US foreign policy has been similarly profound. A survey conducted by Gowing in 1994 revealed that American and British officials widely acknowledged CNN’s role in altering policy decisions. Former UN secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali even referred to CNN as the “sixteenth member” of the Security Council. The American intervention in Somalia, spurred by CNN’s focus on starving children, illustrates how media coverage can compel governments to act, sometimes in ways that conflict with national interests.

In conclusion, the media wields significant power in shaping policy. Its influence on public perception and decision-making underscores its role as an indispensable, albeit potentially disruptive, force in modern governance. Whether accelerating decisions, spotlighting critical issues, or shaping political discourse, the media continues to play a pivotal role in the political landscape.

Translated by Baḍr al Dhafari. The original version of this article was published in Oman Arabic newspaper on 10 December, 2024.



JASSIM BANI URABA

SPORTS

PRACTICALSESSIONS



SCHOOL BASKETBALL WORKSHOP AT ELLESMERE SCHOOL

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 11

Trainees participating in the school basketball workshop, organised by the Oman Basketball Association in collaboration with the International Basketball Federation, conducted interactive practical sessions earlier this week. These sessions took place in the sports hall of Ellesmere Muscat International School, where trainees demonstrated the skills and techniques they had learned during the workshop to the school's students. This activity was part of the practical sessions, complementing the theoretical sessions held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex's in Bausher, under the supervision of international instructor Nemanja Bejdov.

The practical programme at Ellesmere International School focused on teaching students the fundamentals of basketball through interactive and hands-on training. The sessions included skills such as passing, shooting and team movements, along with practical games to enhance students' understanding of the sport. The sessions were organised and overseen by the school's physical education teachers, led by the head of the department, Samar Eid Adeeb, ensuring that the lessons adhered to the planned schedule.

Bejdov, along with Abu Bakr al Jahwari, OBA Vice-President and Head of the Technical Development Committee, evaluated the trainees' performance. The event was also attended by OBA Chairman Engineer Khalfan al Naabi.

OBA DISCUSSES HOSTING GULF 3X3 BASKETBALL CUP

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 11

The Board of Directors of the Oman Basketball Association (OBA) held a meeting presided over by OBA Chairman Engineer Khalfan al Naabi at the association's headquarters in the Oman Olympic Committee and Sports Federations Building. The meeting, attended by Abu Bakr al Jahwari, Vice-President, Saeed al Habsi, Acting Secretary-General, and other board members, focused on the competitions calendar for the 2024-2025 season, hosting the Gulf 3x3 Basketball Championship for Men, and various cooperation topics with the International Basketball Federation.

During the meeting, technical reports related to the competition calendar for the new season were reviewed. Preparations for the remaining competitions scheduled for the coming period were also discussed. Additionally, reports from the Technical Development Committee were reviewed, including programmes implemented in cooperation with the International Basketball Federation, particularly those focused on training national cadres in schools.

The meeting also addressed the activities of the 3x3 Basketball Committee, including implemented programmes and upcoming plans. Discussions were held regarding the possibility of introducing a new youth club competition for 3x3 basketball.

Regarding the Gulf 3x3 Basketball Championship for Men, the board discussed hosting the event, which is expected to take place at the end of November 2025, and reviewed organisational aspects and required preparations. The meeting also covered the activities of the Women's Sports Committee, including its plans to organise several competitions next year.

Pusterhofer wins in second round of Oman Golf Trophy

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 11

THE Oman Golf Trophy continued with players teeing off at La Vie Golf Club on the second day of the Grand Final. The day's standout performance came from Otmar Pusterhofer of Austria, who secured victory with an impressive 46 points. Austria dominated the leaderboard, with Gerald Monsberger taking third place with 30 points and Michael Winner finishing fifth with 37 points. France's Edouard Rasquinet claimed second place with 38 points, while Michele Oronti of Italy secured fourth, also with 37 points.

In the Closest to the Pin competition, Mayu Otsuka of Japan excelled on hole 3, while Constance Johnson of Germany triumphed on hole 12.

Players enjoyed a well-deserved rest day after the first round, exploring Muscat and its surrounding areas. The tour included visits to iconic locations such as Wadi Shab, Nizwa, Al Hamra, Nakhal and the Daymaniyat Islands, offering participants a glimpse of Oman's rich culture and famed hospitality.

The tournament culminates on Thursday with the final round at Al Mouj Golf Club, where players will compete in a championship format starting at 8 am. The prize giving and closing ceremonies will be held at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth under the auspices of Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth.

The Grand Final is supported by Silver Partners Experience Oman, Ominvest and the Saud Bahwan Group, Bronze Partners Kempinski Hotel Muscat, Lovera and the Oman Chamber of Commerce & Industry, along with official supporters including Aster Royal Al Raffah Hospital, Qatar Airways, SeaOman, Tanuf and Visit Oman.

Oman Golf Association Vice-Chairman Faiz Mohammad Riaz highlighted the significance of the Oman Golf Trophy, now in its second season, as a unique event fostering international collaboration and showcasing Oman's culture, history and beauty. He praised the collaborative efforts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and Ministry of Tourism in organising such a successful



Otmar Pusterhofer (centre) of Austria receives the trophy.



Mayu Otsuka of Japan claimed the Nearest to the Pin on third hole.

initiative. The Oman Golf Trophy spans eight countries, including Japan, South Africa, Germany, Italy, Austria and India, where over 5,500 players competed in 79 qualifying rounds. From this pool, 100 participants, many of whom are prominent businessmen, were invited to Oman for the grand finale held across Ghalala Golf Club, La Vie Golf Club and Al Mouj Golf Club.

Faiz emphasised that this event is more than just a sports tournament. "When the Oman Golf Association and the ministries announced this tournament and presented Oman to these countries, showcasing what our nation is all about, the benefits were immediate," he stated. He added that the tournament is not solely about winning but about using sports as a bridge to unite countries and foster connections. By welcoming influential figures from eight different nations and introducing them to Oman's landmarks, including cultural and historical sites, the event serves as



Constance Johnson of Germany won the Nearest to the Pin on hole 12.

a catalyst for promoting investment, tourism, and economic growth.

Faiz concluded by expressing optimism about the tournament's impact on Oman's global reputation, remarking that initiatives like this will undoubtedly attract future investment and further strengthen international ties.

Dieter Hoover from Munich, Germany, expressed his delight in participating in the Oman Golf Trophy, describing it as an incredible experience. He praised the exceptional golf courses, excellent hotels, delicious food and the warm hospitality of the Omani people. Reflecting on the games, he admitted that this tournament wasn't his best performance but appreciated the spirited competition. He also shared his admiration for Oman landmarks, highlighting visits to the Grand Mosque and the other landmarks of Muscat, Wadi Shab, Nizwa, Al Hamra and Nakhal, in addition to a trip to the Daymaniyat Islands.

Seeb crush Al Rustaq to stay on top of OL

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 11

Seeb secured a resounding 3-0 win over Al Rustaq in the rescheduled match from the 10th round of the Omantel League, held on Tuesday at the Seeb Sports Stadium.

The match began with Al Rustaq launching an aggressive attack, aiming to capitalise on the early minutes to surprise Seeb's defence. However, the resilience of Seeb's backline and the brilliance of goalkeeper Bilal al Balushi thwarted Al Rustaq's attempts to find the net.

After the first five minutes, Seeb took control of the game and imposed their playing style. In the 11th minute, Jameel al Yahmadi opened the scoring with a powerful shot that deflected off Al Rustaq defenders and found its way into the net, boosting his team's confidence.

Seeb didn't stop there, as Abdulaziz al Muqbali added a second goal in the 16th minute with a surprising strike from outside the penalty area that nestled into the far corner, leaving the goalkeeper helpless. Despite Al Rustaq's efforts to reduce the deficit with swift moves on the flanks, Seeb's defence remained solid.

In the 39th minute, Zaher al Aghbari missed a golden opportunity after a



Seeb and Al Rustaq players in action.

precise pass from Al Muqbali inside the box. However, he quickly redeemed himself in the 42nd minute with a brilliant assist to Omar al Salti, who scored the third goal in style after an impressive dribble. The first half ended with Seeb leading 3-0.

At the start of the second half, Al Rustaq's Romanian coach, Catalin Mihai, made several changes. The team showed more determination to get back into the game, creating two clear chances for their professional player, Viston Abdul,

but his shots lacked accuracy. Another opportunity was squandered by Hudhaifa al Mamari, as Bilal al Balushi continued his stellar performance in goal.

Seeb managed the second half calmly, slowing the tempo and exploiting the spaces left by Al Rustaq's advanced defence. In the 70th minute, Jameel al Yahmadi missed a chance to extend the lead with a shot that went wide of the post. This was followed by a dangerous attempt from Abdulrahman al Mashfari, but Al Rustaq's goalkeeper made an excellent save. In the final minutes, Al Rustaq intensified their efforts to close the gap, but Seeb's defence and goalkeeper Bilal al Balushi remained steadfast, maintaining a clean sheet. The match ended with a 3-0 victory for Seeb.

With this win, Seeb increased their tally to 30 points, solidifying their position at the top of the league table, four points ahead of second placed Al Nahda. They remain the only team unbeaten and undrawn this season.

On the other hand, Al Rustaq's tally remains at five points, keeping them at the bottom of the standings. Their position has become increasingly precarious as the first round nears its end, heightening the risk of relegation to the First Division.

SPORTS

HM CUP HOCKEY



SOHAR DRAWN WITH AHLI SIDAB, AL NASR AND AL SALAM

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 11

Title holders Sohar were grouped in Pool A of the 54th edition of prestigious His Majesty’s Cup Hockey Championship and they will defend their title against Ahli Sidab, Al Nasr and Al Salam. The Pool B comprised Salalah, Seeb, Al Amerat and Dhofar clubs. The matches of the finals stage will begin on December 17.

The draw ceremony for Oman’s oldest sporting competition took place on Wednesday, under auspices of His Highness Sayyid Nasr bin Salim al Said. The event was attended by Oman Hockey Association (OHA) Chairman Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma, top officials from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), and other dignitaries.

This edition of the tournament featured 16 clubs including: Ahli Sidab, Seeb, Al Amerat, Qurayat, Dhofar, Al Nasr, Salalah, Al Ittihad, Mirbat, Sohar, Saham, Al Salam, Al Rustaq, Al Nahda, Al Shabab and Masirah.

The final stage of the championship will follow a single round-robin format, with the top two teams from each group advancing to the semifinals. The winners of the semifinals will progress to the final match scheduled for December 24 while the losing teams will compete for third place. Matches will be held at hockey fields across Oman, including the Hockey Oman Stadium in Al Amerat.

During the ceremony, a documentary highlighting OHA’s domestic and international activities was screened.

CONTRIBUTORS HONOURED

The association also honoured several key contributors to Omani hockey. Among them was Tarmah bin Al Hussein al Ajmi, the first Omani player to exceed 100 international matches. Joining him were Shaaban bin Ramadan al Balushi, a player since 1980 and a referee since 1991, and Abdulrahman bin Yahya al Raisti, a hockey veteran and international referee since 1993. Other honourees included referee Hussain al Hasani and international lecturers Abdullah al Harrasi, Khamis Talib and Mohammed Hubais. Additionally, Shakir Muneer was recognised for receiving the FIH Diploma of Merit during the FIH Congress held in November in Muscat.

Established in 1971, His Majesty’s Hockey Cup is one of Oman’s most prestigious sports championships. Oman Club dominated the early years, winning the inaugural title and securing victories through 1974. Since then, clubs like Al Ahli, Al Nahda, Muttrah, Seeb, and Ahli Sidab have left their mark on the tournament.

Sohar claimed their maiden title in 2021, followed by Al Nasr in 2022 and another Sohar victory in 2023.

The champions of this year’s edition will be awarded the prestigious trophy, 30 gold medals, and a cash prize of RO 40,000. The runners-up will receive 30 silver medals and RO 25,000, while the third-placed team will be honoured with bronze medals and RO 15,000.



Asian Football Confederation (AFC) President Shaikh Salman bin Ibrahim al Khalifa (L) and Saudi Arabia’s Minister of Sports and Youth Abdulaziz bin Turki Al Faisal al Saud celebrate after Saudi Arabia was confirmed as host of the 2034 World Cup during a ceremony in the capital Riyadh on Wednesday. — AFP

2034 EDITION AWARDED TO SAUDI ARABIA

Morocco, Spain and Portugal confirmed as 2030 WC hosts

SAUDI Arabia will host the men’s soccer World Cup in 2034 while the 2030 edition will be held in Spain, Portugal and Morocco, with one-off matches in three South American countries, world soccer’s governing body Fifa confirmed on Wednesday. The decision was announced by Fifa President Gianni Infantino following a virtual extraordinary Congress. The 2030 and 2034 World Cups each had only a single bid and both were confirmed by acclamation.

“We are bringing football to more countries and the number of teams has not diluted the quality. It actually enhanced the opportunity,” Infantino said about the 2030 World Cup. “What better way to celebrate the 100th anniversary in 2030 than to have the World Cup in six countries, in three continents, with 48 teams and 104 epic matches. The world will stand still and will celebrate the 100 years of the World Cup.

“Congratulations to all the bidders for putting up a great dossier, but I would like to put on record my big, big thank you to the six confederation presidents and to their teams,” he added.

The combined proposal from Morocco, Spain and Portugal will see the 2030 World Cup take place across three continents and six nations, with Uruguay, Argentina and



A speech by President of Fifa Gianni Infantino is broadcasted on a screen during a ceremony in the capital Riyadh, as the Fifa Congress votes for the hosting rights for the 2034 World Cup with Saudi Arabia being the sole candidate. — AFP

Paraguay hosting celebratory games to mark the tournament’s centenary.

Uruguay held the first World Cup in 1930, while Argentina and Spain have also staged the tournament. Portugal, Paraguay and Morocco will all be first-time hosts.

SECOND NATION FROM GCC

Four years later, Saudi Arabia will become the second nation from the Middle East to host the quadrennial tournament, 12 years after neighbours Qatar staged the 2022 edition.

In 2023, Fifa said that the 2034 World Cup would be held in the Asia or Oceania region, with the Asian Football Confederation throwing its support behind the Saudi bid.

Australia and Indonesia had also been in talks over a joint bid, but dropped out.

Fifa announced that both bids would be uncontested in 2023, leaving little room for doubt. On Tuesday, the Norwegian Football Federation (NFF) said it would vote against the awarding of hosting rights by acclamation and criticised Fifa’s bidding process, saying it was “flawed and inconsistent”.

Both bids have already come under fire. The decision to host the 2030 World Cup across three continents has been panned by climate activists because of the increased emissions from the extra travel required.

Fifa has said it will take measures to “mitigate the environmental impact.”

The 2034 bid by Saudi Arabia has been criticised because of the country’s human rights record and desert climate, much in the same way as the Qatar World Cup.

The Saudi climate will likely force Fifa to hold the tournament in the Northern Hemisphere winter, just like it did in Qatar.

Saudi Arabia has also never previously hosted a tournament of this magnitude, and will have to construct eight stadiums that will be used for the event. — Reuters

Miller, Linde take South Africa to win over Pakistan

DURBAN, South Africa: A power-packed innings by David Miller and a career-best all-round performance by George Linde took South Africa to an 11-run win in the first T20 international century against Pakistan at Kingsmead on Friday. Miller slammed 82 off 40 balls with four fours and eight sixes and Linde hit a rapid 48 in a South African total of 183 for nine.

Left-arm spinner Linde followed up by taking four for 21.

Pakistan captain Mohammad Rizwan hit 74 and his team were still in with a chance of winning until he was caught off the second ball of the

final over. “It was almost the perfect comeback,” said Linde after being ignored by successive South African selectors for more than three years.

Linde said he felt calm with both bat and ball - but he said he felt he “had to deliver a good performance” after missing the team bus to the ground. He needed a police escort to catch up.

Linde took two wickets in his final over and briefly had a hat-trick when Haris Rauf was given out leg before wicket before successfully reviewing the decision.

Rizwan said the individual performances of Miller and Linde



South Africa’s George Linde celebrates the wicket of Pakistan’s Irfan Khan. — AFP

was the difference between the teams. Shaheen Shah Afridi led a disciplined Pakistan bowling attack, taking three for 22 - and reaching 100 wickets in T20 internationals.

Leg-spinner Abrar Ahmed took three for 37 despite being hit for three successive sixes by Miller.

Miller was in sublime form but the rest of South Africa’s top order failed, with only captain Heinrich Klaasen (12) reaching double figures.

Miller was sixth out with the total on 135 in the 14th over but Linde hit four sixes in a 24-ball innings - including three in the last over by

Sufiyan Muqem - to take South Africa to a respectable total. —AFP

BRIEF SCORES:

South Africa 183-9 in 20 overs (D Miller 82, G Linde 48; Shaheen Shah Afridi 3-22, Abrar Ahmed 3-37, Abbas Afridi 2-30).

Pakistan 172-8 in 20 overs (Mohammad Rizwan 74, Saim Ayub 31; K Maphaka 2-39, G Linde 4-21).

Result: South Africa won by 11 runs.

Series: South Africa lead the three-match series 1-0.

Remaining matches:

December 13, Centurion

December 14, Johannesburg

SPORTS

MOHAMED Salah helped maintain Liverpool's perfect record in the Champions League on Tuesday while holders Real Madrid bounced back from their defeat at Anfield to topple in-form Italians Atalanta. Elsewhere, struggling Paris Saint-Germain gained a vital win at Salzburg, while Bayer Leverkusen edged Inter Milan to move second.

Aston Villa, in their first appearance in the continent's elite club competition for 41 years, maintained their bright progress beating Leipzig 3-2 to sit third. The first eight teams qualify directly for the last 16 with those placed ninth to 24 entering a play-off round.

In Spain, Salah's 63rd-minute penalty proved decisive against dogged debutants Girona to extend the Premier League leaders' record to six from six in the revamped format of Europe's flagship club competition.

Under new coach Arne Slot Liverpool are virtually assured a place in the last 16.

"If you ask me about all six games, I'm really pleased with all the results... (but) I'm far from pleased about the performance tonight," Slot told reporters in Girona.

"(We had) hardly any control at all over the game, maybe the second half was a bit better but then I'm trying to be positive."

Salah sent Paulo Gazzaniga the wrong way to net his 50th Champions League goal, pulling the Egyptian level with Filippo Inzaghi as the 10th highest goalscorer of all-time in the competition.

The winger is out of contract at the end of the season but his 16 goals across all competitions have been essential in Liverpool's superb first half of the season.

While Liverpool are sitting pretty with two league phase rounds to come early next year, kings of Europe Real Madrid, beaten 2-0 by Liverpool last time out, have work to do to ensure their progress into the knockout phase.

Kylian Mbappe gave Real a 10th minute lead before hobbling off injured in Atalanta, his strike was cancelled out by Charles de Ketelaere's penalty in first-half additional time.

SETTLE NERVES

Real coach Carlo Ancelotti started Vinicius Junior for the first time since a hamstring problem last month. The Brazilian had Real back on top before the hour, with Jude Bellingham also on the scoresheet for a 3-2 win over the Serie A leaders.

The hard-fought victory moved Real up to 18th on nine points and will have helped to settle any nerves at the 15-time European champions ahead of games against Salzburg and Brest in January.

PSG put the wheels back on their stuttering campaign with a much needed 3-0 defeat on the road at Salzburg.

The French champions went into this encounter in 25th with just four points and three goals scored after five matches.

They approach their last two league outings in provisional 24th — the final berth for the play-offs ahead of Wednesday's games.

Bayern swept aside Ukraine side Shakhtar Donetsk in Gelsenkirchen 5-1. Fellow Bundesliga giants Leverkusen became the first team to score against Inter in this year's competition in a 1-0 win that lifted them five points adrift of Liverpool at the top of the league.

Another noteworthy performance on matchday six came on the Brittany coast where modest French Ligue 1 outfit Brest dished out a 1-0 defeat to former European champions PSV Eindhoven.

It left the Atlantic port city club flying high in fifth in their first ever appearance at

Salah keeps Liverpool on top, Real down Atalanta



Liverpool's Egyptian forward #11 Mohamed Salah dribbles the ball during the Uefa Champions League, league phase match against Girona FC in Girona. — AFP



Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham celebrates with Lucas Vazquez scoring his team's third goal. — AFP



Aston Villa's Diego Carlos jumps for the ball next to Leipzig's Lois Openda in Leipzig, Germany. — AFP

European football's high table.

In other games, Celtic and Dinamo Zagreb remained in contention for the knockout round after an uninspiring 0-0 draw and Club Brugge beat Sporting 2-1.

Headline matches on Wednesday include Manchester city at Juventus, and Barcelona at Borussia Dortmund. — AFP

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE RESULTS ON TUESDAY:

Dinamo Zagreb (CRO) 0 Celtic (SCO) 0

Girona (ESP) 0 Liverpool (ENG) 1 (Salah 63-pen)

RB Leipzig (GER) 2 (Openda 27, Baumgartner 62)

Aston Villa (ENG) 3 (McGinn 3, Duran 52, Barkley 85)

Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR) 1 (Kevin 5) Bayern Munich (GER) 5 (Laimer 11, Mueller 45, Olise 70-pen, 90+3, Musiala 87)

Atalanta (ITA) 2 (De Ketelaere 45-pen, Lookman 65)

Real Madrid (ESP) 3 (Mbappe 10, Vinicius Junior 56, Bellingham 59)

Club Bruges (BEL) 2 (Quaresma 24-og, Nielsen 84)

Sporting (POR) 1 (Catamo 3)

RB Salzburg (AUT) 0 Paris Saint-Germain (FRA) 3 (Goncalo Ramos 30, Nuno Mendes 72, Doue 85)

Brest (FRA) 1 (Le Cardinal 43) PSV Eindhoven (NED) 0

Bayer Leverkusen (GER) 1 (Mukiele 90) Inter Milan (ITA) 0

Japan boost semifinal chances with third straight victory

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroop_ath

Japan thrashed South Korea 4-0 to all but ensure the semifinals of the Women's Junior Asia Cup hockey championship at the Hockey Oman Stadium in Al Amerat on Wednesday.

Niko Maruyama netted a hat-trick (29th minute, 41-penalty corner, 54th) and Mai Wakasa (38th) scored one goal in the crucial Pool B match.

With their third consecutive win in as many matches, Japan topped Pool B with nine points and meet Chinese Taipei in their last group match on Thursday. A defeat in the last match will also see Japan through unless a huge win margin

by Chinese Taipei (7) to overhaul Japanese goal difference of 32.

Chinese Taipei, who smashed Sri Lanka 5-0, kept their hopes alive for a semifinal place with six points behind South Korea who are second with same points and a better goal average (11).

Ting-ya Wang (20-pc), Yu-Ting Huang (21, 57-pc), Yu-Chiu Wang (23) and Hui-Yun Fan (34) were the scorers for the Taipei team.

Korea face Hong Kong, who have three points, in their last pool match on Thursday. The Koreans need to win the match by keeping their advantage in goal difference compared to Chinese Taipei, for ensuring a place in the semifinals.

Sri Lanka finished the group



Japan and South Korea players in action at Hockey Oman Stadium in Al Amerat.

proceedings with their fourth defeat and no points.

In Pool A, Bangladesh also suffered their fourth defeat to remain in the bottom of the pool with no points as Malaysia kept semifinal hopes alive with a 6-1 win. Malaysia, who are third in Pool A, have six points from three matches and face China in their last group match on Thursday.

China lead Pool A with six points from two matches and a better goal difference (27) compared to India who have same points and a goal difference of 17.

On Tuesday, Thailand beat Bangladesh 2-1 to earn their first win in Pool A while Hong Kong beat Sri Lanka 2-0 to get first points in Pool B.

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ROBUSTGROWTH



The Omani economy is projected to grow 3.2 per cent in 2024.

STATE REVENUES
RISE 4% TO RO 10.2
BILLION BY OCT-END

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, DEC 11

THE Ministry of Finance has announced a significant 4 per cent rise in Oman’s state general revenues, which climbed to a total of RO 10.203 billion as of October-end 2024, up from RO 9.800 billion during the corresponding period of 2023. The growth was driven by a robust performance in non-oil revenues, showcasing the success of economic diversification initiatives, the Ministry stated in its latest financial report.

October, in particular, saw a 12 per cent year-on-year rise in revenues, climbing from RO 1.525 billion last year to RO 1.734 billion this year. These figures are a testament to Oman’s ability to adapt to a dynamic global economic landscape while strengthening its fiscal foundations.

Expenditures rose by 8 per cent, amounting to RO 9.684 billion, compared to RO 8.970 billion in 2023. This increase, while notable, is underpinned by a 12 per cent surge in investment expenditures, reflecting the government’s commitment to building a sustainable economic future.

Strategic infrastructure projects and long-term development goals were prioritised, even as October recorded a 1 per cent decrease in monthly spending compared to the same period last year—a sign of improving short-term fiscal discipline.

The national economy, meanwhile, exhibited consistent growth, with a projected 3.2% expansion in 2024 and further stability expected in subsequent years. This steady trajectory reflects the resilience of Oman’s economy amidst global and regional challenges.

Oman gears up for 3rd
green hydrogen auction

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 11

HYDROM, Oman’s green hydrogen orchestrator, announced its third auction round for green hydrogen (gH2) projects at its inaugural gH2 Investor Day, drawing more than 400 global stakeholders, investors and industry leaders.

The auction, set to launch in early 2025, builds on the success of previous rounds and aims to solidify Oman’s position as a global leader in renewable energy.

The third auction round is designed to attract a wider pool of international and local investors by incorporating lessons from earlier rounds.

This includes refined block allocation strategies, streamlined auction processes and the introduction of double-sided auctions — where both hydrogen producers and downstream industries like green steel and fertilisers can bid simultaneously.

Bids will open in Q1 2025, with project awards expected by Q4 2025 and Q1 2026.

Hydrom’s approach emphasises localisation, infrastructure development and alignment with global market trends. This strategy is intended to strengthen Oman’s green hydrogen ecosystem while contributing to the nation’s long-term renewable energy targets outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al



Eng Abdulaziz Said al Shidhani, Managing Director of Hydrom and Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals and Chairman of Hydrom, speak during the inaugural gH2 Investor Day.

The third auction round is designed to attract a wider pool of international and local investors by incorporating lessons from earlier rounds. This includes refined block allocation strategies, streamlined auction processes and the introduction of double-sided auctions — where both hydrogen producers and downstream industries like green steel and fertilisers can bid simultaneously.

Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals (MoEM) and Chairman of Hydrom, remarked: “With this third auction round, Oman is taking a measured and strategic step forward in advancing its green

hydrogen ambitions.

Our focus is not only on scaling production but also on ensuring that each project is grounded in sustainability, technological innovation and tangible economic value.”

He added: “By leveraging Oman’s competitive renewable resources and strategic geographic position, we aim to create opportunities that resonate globally, attract meaningful partnerships, and contribute to a robust and reliable green hydrogen supply chain.

This is about delivering real impact — locally and internationally — while positioning Oman as a trusted and capable leader in the global hydrogen economy.”

The Investor Day also highlighted Oman’s growing role in the global hydrogen

supply chain. A key focus was the ongoing liquid hydrogen export collaboration with the Port of Amsterdam, Ecolog and EnBW, announced during COP28.

The partnership recently completed a feasibility study confirming the potential for specialised vessels and infrastructure for liquid hydrogen exports.

The Port of Duqm is central to this export strategy, serving as a vital hub for hydrogen shipments to Europe via the Port of Amsterdam and to Asia-Pacific markets through Singapore.

Liquid hydrogen, known for its higher energy density and transport efficiency, is expected to play a crucial role in global decarbonisation efforts by enabling long-distance energy transport.

Eng Abdulaziz Said al Shidhani, Managing Director of Hydrom, emphasised: “Hydrom’s inaugural gH2 Investor Day has been a powerful demonstration of global interest and trust in Oman’s green hydrogen vision.

The insights shared and partnerships explored reflect not only the progress we’ve made but also the immense potential that lies ahead.”

He continued: “Our role at Hydrom is to turn this momentum into action — delivering tangible results through the third auction round and beyond, while building a green hydrogen economy that benefits Oman and the world.”

PDO inks pacts for three renewable energy projects

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 11

PETROLEUM Development Oman (PDO) signed agreements yesterday with the partnership of OQ Alternative Energy (a subsidiary of OQ Group) and TotalEnergies to develop three independent renewable energy projects to support the company’s transition to Net-Zero.

The signing ceremony took place in the presence of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals (MoEM). Signing on behalf of their respective organisations were: Eng Aflah bin Said al Hadhrami, Managing Director of Petroleum Development Oman; Najla bint Zuhair al Jamaliyah, CEO of OQ Alternative Energy; and Olivier Jouny, Senior Vice President of Renewables at TotalEnergies.

As part of the agreements, a 100-megawatt solar photovoltaic



PDO signed agreements with the partnership of OQ Alternative Energy and TotalEnergies covering the development of one solar and two wind-based power projects.

plant, dubbed the North Solar project, will be developed in the north of PDO’s concession area, while two wind-based energy projects, Riyah-1 and Riyah-2’ - each with a capacity of 100 MW – will be

built in the south of the concession area.

Al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, lauded PDO’s leadership in advancing the energy transition, stating: “The Sultanate of Oman

has achieved significant strides in embedding sustainability principles to secure a prosperous future.

PDO’s commitment and collaboration with key energy sector partners reflect our collective efforts to achieve the nation’s visions and goals. Today’s event highlights the strength of our national partnership in reducing carbon emissions and advancing the transition to clean energy sources, aligning with global trends toward a more sustainable future. This project also reinforces the trust placed in OQ Alternative Energy as a leading developer for this and future initiatives.”

Dr Aflah al Hadhrami, Managing Director of PDO, stated: “PDO’s journey towards sustainability was firmly established with previous groundbreaking initiatives, including the Amin Solar IPP Power Plant and the Rima Water Treatment Project. These projects,

alongside the ones signed today, continue to reshape Oman’s energy landscape by blending technological innovation with environmental stewardship. They also support our aim of sourcing 30% of our power capacity from renewables by 2026, reflecting our dedication to a cleaner, sustainable future.”

Najla Zuhair al Jamaliyah, Chief Executive of OQ Alternative Energy added: “Today, we witness a significant milestone in OQAE’s journey as we step forward as the appointed National Champion for Clean Energy in Oman.

Energy transition is a significant journey for everyone, but we are actively engaged in planning this journey for Oman, with over 7 GW of projects within our project pipeline. At OQ, we focus on sustainable growth in Oman’s energy sector and foster partnerships for a smooth energy transition.”

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The new branch underscores the strategic importance of this sector in driving economic diversification and growth.

SOHAR ISLAMIC
OPENS NEW BRANCH
AT KHAZAEN

MUSCAT: Reinforcing its steadfast commitment to advancing the Sultanate’s economic aspirations while championing the advantages of Sharia-compliant financial solutions, Sohar Islamic — the Islamic banking window of Sohar International — has commenced operations at its new branch at Khazaen.

Situated within Khazaen Economic City, Oman’s largest integrated economic development zone and a vital hub for logistics, industry and commerce, the new branch underscores the strategic importance of this sector in driving economic diversification and growth.

The logistics sector is key to Oman’s economy, enhancing trade, supporting industry and creating jobs, aligning with Oman Vision 2040 goal of making the country a global logistics leader.

By establishing a presence in Khazaen, Sohar Islamic is well-positioned to contribute to this sector’s development through tailored financial solutions that foster investment, operational efficiency and sustainable growth.

The bank’s services will support logistics companies with Sharia-compliant financing options for infrastructure development, supply chain management and business expansion.

Furthermore, the branch will provide specialised banking products that empower businesses to access capital, enhance cash flow and achieve long-term sustainability, thereby reinforcing the sector’s capacity to meet the demands of an increasingly interconnected global economy.

Commenting on the operations commencement of the new branch, Abdul Wahid al Murshidi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer, stated, “Khazaen’s strategic location and advanced infrastructure position it as a cornerstone of economic activity, seamlessly connecting local, regional and international markets.

SOHAR
ALUMINIUM
RECEIVES
ISO
CERTIFICATION

SUHAR: Sohar Aluminium Company LLC has received the ISO 22301:2019 certification for its Business Continuity Management System (BCMS). This international standard demonstrates the company’s commitment to maintaining operational resilience and ensuring the continued delivery of its products. This certificate has been awarded to Sohar Aluminium by DNV Business Assurance, which is an independent assurance and risk management



It demonstrates the company’s commitment to maintaining operational resilience and ensuring the continued delivery of its products.

provider, headquartered in the UK and operating in more than 100 countries around the world. This ISO Certificate is recognised globally as the benchmark for organisations seeking to implement effective business continuity plans. By achieving this certification, Sohar Aluminium underscores its dedication to protecting its stakeholders, clients and employees, as well as its ability to respond swiftly and effectively to unexpected events.

BankDhofar wins best
trade finance bank award

BANKDHOFAR

is proud to announce that it has been recognised as the leading Trade Finance bank in Oman by Global Trade Review (GTR). This prestigious award reinforces the bank’s commitment to providing state-of-the-art digital trade solutions and enhancing its range of offerings to meet customer needs.

As a leader in trade finance in Oman, BankDhofar specialises in a wide array of services, including supply chain finance, open account trade, standby letters of credit (LC), guarantees and traditional trade instruments such as Letters of Credit and Documentary Collections.

The bank also provides customised trade facilities to meet the specific needs of its corporate clients, supported by a global network of top correspondent banks. BankDhofar’s tailored solutions offer working capital support to exporters and importers, supporting them manage cash



This prestigious award reinforces the bank’s commitment to providing state-of-the-art digital trade solutions and enhancing its range of offerings.

flows effectively and maintain a competitive edge. The bank’s trade risk management experts deliver comprehensive risk assessments, enabling businesses to navigate country, counterparty, and exchange rate risks confidently.

Commenting on the award, Mallikarjuna Korisepati, Chief Wholesale Banking Officer at BankDhofar, stated, “This award

is a recognition of the expertise and continuous efforts of our teams to support customers navigate challenging market conditions and manage risks, while we remain committed to our digital transformation journey.”

In addition to this recognition, BankDhofar was recently named “Best Bank for Corporates in Oman” by the

renowned financial publication Euromoney. This accolade further underscores the bank’s dedication to delivering comprehensive and innovative financial solutions that empower Omani businesses to thrive.

BankDhofar offers a comprehensive suite of products designed to meet the evolving needs of Omani corporates. These include lending and working capital solutions, trade finance products for both import and export financing and transaction banking services that facilitate faster collections and automated reconciliation.

With a network of 129 branches and over 360 ATMs, CDMs and FFM across Oman, BankDhofar continues to enhance its presence and service convenience for its esteemed clients.

The bank’s strategic vision, commitment to international best practices, exceptional customer service and dedication to community development and the national economy have solidified its position as one of the top banks in the Sultanate of Oman.

BYD unveils its second unique automotive space at Al Mouj Oman

WORLD

Auto Business has unveiled BYD’s second showroom at Al Mouj, redefining

the car-buying experience with a futuristic approach that steps away from traditional vehicle displays. This unique space is a testament to BYD’s commitment to innovation, offering visitors an immersive journey through its advanced technology and sustainable automotive solutions.

Setting a new benchmark in automotive retail experiences, the Al Mouj showroom captivates visitors with state-of-the-art installations that showcase BYD’s revolutionary engineering.

The highlight of the experience is the Blade Battery display, a symbol of BYD’s dedication to safety, sustainability and cutting-edge technology. Interactive screens and dynamic presentations enable guests to explore the core innovations behind BYD vehicles, turning the showroom into a hub of discovery and inspiration.

The showroom was inaugurated by Mr A D Huang, General Manager of BYD Middle East and Africa Auto Sales Division, Mr Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, Mr Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan, Managing Director — Corporate, Saud Bahwan Group alongside, Mr Adam Peng, Business Director of the Middle East Region and other senior officials from BYD.

During the inauguration, Mr Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan, Managing Director — Corporate, Saud Bahwan Group, emphasised that the



Showroom inauguration by Mr. A D Huang, General Manager, BYD Middle East and Africa Auto Sales Division, Mr. Nasser Al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat and Mr. Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan, Managing Director – Corporate, Saud Bahwan Group.



Interior of the showroom.

showroom reflects BYD’s forward-thinking vision. It is not just a venue for experiencing futuristic cars but an immersive portal into the brand’s technological achievements.

BYD’s pioneering innovations, including the innovative Blade Battery, are reshaping automotive standards, delivering exceptional performance, sustainability and cutting-edge design to its customers.

This showroom serves as a powerful representation of BYD’s mission to redefine mobility and

sustainability. It offers visitors a deep dive into the elements that make BYD vehicles exceptional, from superior battery technology to energy efficiency and futuristic designs.

Stepping into the showroom, visitors are encouraged to enter a world of unique storytelling and automotive advancements. The ultra-dimensional exhibition space showcases BYD’s futuristic DNA through high-tech interiors, immersive aesthetics and interactive displays.



Guests at the event.



The newly inaugurated BYD showroom at Al Mouj.

A centrepiece of the showroom experience is the 98-inch LED screen, which deliver captivating presentations on BYD’s transformative technologies, including the revolutionary Blade Battery, DM-i Super Hybrid technology and the e3 platform. Visitors can also explore advanced solutions such as the Disus Body Control system and the e4 (Visifang) platform, designed to offer consumers the benefits of cutting-edge automotive innovation.

Every aspect of the showroom

reflects BYD’s commitment to innovation, from earthy dome-like elements to illuminated floors and high-contrast mirror reflections. These design elements create a harmonious balance, emphasising the brand’s forward-thinking identity.

The launch of this unique showroom closely follows the opening of BYD’s flagship outlet in Wattayah highlighting the brand’s rapid growth in Oman. Together, these milestones strengthen BYD’s vision of bringing transformative experiences to customers, cementing its position as a trailblazer in the electric vehicle market.

Currently, BYD’s range in Oman includes the dynamic and eco-friendly Atto 3, the sleek and performance-driven Seal, the luxurious and powerful HAN, the stylishly versatile Song Plus, and the exciting Qin Plus. Soon, the line-up will expand further with the launch of the Sea Lion, an electric SUV that promises to elevate the BYD driving experience to new heights.

With its visionary approach and relentless pursuit of excellence, BYD continues to inspire a new generation of automotive enthusiasts, setting the stage for a sustainable and electrifying future.

In Oman, BYD vehicles are distributed by World Auto Business LLC. Please visit www.bydoman.com, www.youtube.com/@BYD_oman, www.facebook.com/BYDinOman and www.instagram.com/byd_oman. For any further details, or to ascertain the availability of stocks and for test-drive requests, please call 72225925.

BUSINESS

NEWPROJECT



The agreement was signed by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and Dr Badar bin Saud al Kharusi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Minerals Development Oman.

PACT SIGNED TO PRODUCE 400,000 TONNES OF SALTS ANNUALLY

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Energy and Minerals signed a mining concession agreement with a local firm for concession area No. (51-k) in the Wilayat of Mahout, Al Wusta Governorate. The 109-square-kilometre site is earmarked for extracting industrial salt, with an initial annual production target of 400,000 metric tonnes.

The agreement was signed by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals (MoEM), and Dr Bader bin Saud al Kharusi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Minerals Development Oman. The project will employ advanced technologies for natural evaporation, washing and refining operations, enhancing efficiency and sustainability.

Construction is scheduled to begin early next year, with the development phase extending over four years in partnership with a foreign investor.

The project is expected to stimulate related industries, including the production of bromine, caustic soda, soda ash and polyvinyl chloride (PVC). These materials are critical for sectors such as chemicals, plastics, water treatment, energy and construction.

Eng Salim al Aufi highlighted the ministry's efforts in expanding the mining sector, emphasising that several concession agreements targeting key ores such as copper, chromium, and silica have already been signed this year. He noted that the salt extraction project would support local and global markets while promoting transformation industries linked to oil and gas sectors.

"The project integrates sustainable technologies, including solar energy, to enhance energy efficiency, reflecting the Ministry's vision of developing the mining sector as a pillar of the national economy," Al Aufi said.

Dr Badar al Kharusi described the agreement as a milestone in diversifying Oman's mineral sector investments. He stated: "This concession deal opens new horizons for promising markets, boosting Omani exports and attracting foreign investments, particularly in salt processing industries."

He added that the project is the result of three years of exploration, prospecting and chemical studies, confirming the viability of salt extraction in the concession area. The project's development is expected to strengthen Oman's position in the global minerals sector and contribute to the country's economic diversification efforts.

Barka V desalination plant inaugurated

UNDER the auspices of Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), Nama Power and Water Procurement (NPWP) inaugurated the Barka Desalination Plant — Phase V in Al Batinah South Governorate, Wilayat of Barka.

Spanning 38,000 square metres, the facility has a production capacity of 100,000 cubic metres of desalinated water per day, using advanced reverse osmosis technology. The project, worth approximately RO 52 million, began commercial operations on June 22, 2024, aiming to meet Oman's growing water needs while ensuring sustainability.

Al Murshidi highlighted the plant's alignment with Oman Vision 2040's infrastructure goals. He remarked: "This project reflects the OIA's decentralisation approach to support governorate development while boosting local economic growth through opportunities for small and medium enterprises and job creation."

Ahmed bin Salim al Abri, CEO of Nama Power and Water Procurement, lauded stakeholders for completing the project ahead of schedule, noting its significance in expanding Oman's water



The project, worth approximately RO 52 million, began commercial operations on June 22, 2024, aiming to meet Oman's growing water needs while ensuring sustainability.

infrastructure. "Our average daily desalinated water production has surged from 220,000 cubic metres in 2005 to over 1.15 million cubic metres in 2024, with a 9% annual growth rate. We expect this to reach 2 million cubic metres per day by 2030," he said.

The plant was developed by GS Inima, a global leader in water desalination with over six decades of expertise. Juan Jose Benayas, CEO of GS Inima Barka 5 Desalination Company,

said: "Barka V is our first Middle East project, built entirely by GS Inima in under 27 months with zero-accidents. We achieved over 55% Omani content, and since June 2024, a fully Omani team has operated the plant."

He added that GS Inima plans to construct a solar PV plant in 2025 to enhance the plant's sustainability and profitability. The Barka V project was financed by the Korea Ex-Im Bank, Bank Muscat, and Standard Chartered.

The inauguration ceremony featured speeches from project leaders, a video presentation on the plant's development, and a symbolic electronic unveiling to mark the official opening of the facility.

The project underscores Oman's commitment to water security and sustainable development through public-private partnerships, setting a benchmark for future desalination initiatives across the Sultanate of Oman.

OCEC hosts 14 international events in 2024

MUSCAT: The Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), a premier venue in the region, achieved a significant milestone in 2024, hosting 14 international and regional events of high-calibre.

The OCEC continues to establish itself as Oman's leading destination for large-scale events that drive substantial economic and social impact. By attracting international events, the venue plays a pivotal role in supporting the Sultanate of Oman's economic diversification goals under Oman Vision 2040.

Among the prestigious events hosted at the OCEC this year were the Middle East Space Conference, the International



Occupational Health Summit, and the General Arab Insurance Federation (GAIF) Conference, which collectively brought thousands of visitors to the state-of-the-art facility.

Other landmark events included the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) World Congress and the Gulf Petrochemicals and

Chemicals Association 18th Annual Forum, which combined welcomed over 5,000 delegates from more than 80 countries to Oman.

Kate Lancaster, CEO of RCOG highlighted Oman's strategic advantage in hosting international events: "Oman has amazing facilities, such a central location for the whole of the Gulf region and beyond, very easy to get to and a beautifully welcoming country, so this was the perfect location for a global event."

Eng Said al Shanfari, CEO of the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre expressed his pride in the venue's achievements: "International

events are truly the essence of why the OCEC was built in the first place. Our state-of-the-art venue is versatile, modern, and sustainable — reuniting all the factors required to host world-class events.

It is vital for us to understand the economic ripple effect these events have, not only on our direct suppliers but also on external stakeholders such as hotels, local SMEs and other services. These events firmly position Oman on the global map across diverse sectors, while attracting foreign direct investments to the country. Ultimately, the OCEC remains a platform for global conversations that benefit Oman."

Operator sought for PPP-based Oman Business Platform project

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 11

The Ministry of Finance (MoF) has launched a competitive tender to procure the services of a private Omani firm to develop and operate the Oman Business Platform (OBP) project — an initiative at the heart of the government's goal to enhance the country's investment appeal.

The project will be delivered via the Public Private Partnership (PPP) route, with the Ministry of Finance overseeing the procurement process in line with its mandate as the orchestrator of all PPP initiatives in the Sultanate of Oman.

The client, however, is the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), under whose auspices the Oman Business Platform has been initiated as one of its flagship projects under the Digital Transformation Programme 2021-25.

Launched originally as a One-Stop-Shop in 2003, the Oman Business Platform has undergone a succession of upgrades and enhancements



The Oman Business Platform has been credited with raising Oman's standing as a business-friendly destination.

— technological and qualitative — to serve as the government's principal digital vehicle for engagement with investors and the wider business community.

"The Oman Business Platform plays a crucial role as the central hub for business registration

data in Oman, serving over 50 million records and supporting more than 36 government and private entities.

This platform is vital for ensuring smooth e-government services across the country. On an average day, it handles 250,000 web service requests, processes 10, 639 tasks, and supports more than 50 online services and licensing-related services," the Finance Ministry explained.

A Platform Operator from the private sector has now been sought to ensure the continued enhancement of the platform to keep pace with modern trends and technological advancements.

To this end, the Ministry recently issued a Request for Qualifications (RfQ) inviting Omani firms to register their interest in participating in the procurement process. The successful vendor will secure a 7-year contract (extendable by 1+1 year renewal periods) to operate the platform against a payment structure that includes "both a fixed component and one or more variable components possibly related to platform revenue growth and/or transaction volume growth".

The Platform Operator will be required to enhance the platform's capability to deliver seamless, efficient, and integrated government services.

"As a digital hub for the community, the platform's enhancements will prioritise user engagement and streamlined service delivery. The vision includes refining user interfaces and improving backend systems to ensure a responsive and accessible digital environment for all users, ranging from local Omani businesses to international investors and the general public," the Ministry of Finance stressed.

Significantly, the Oman Business Platform has been credited with raising Oman's standing as a business-friendly destination, notably by improving transparency, reducing processing times, and streamlining the handling of business registrations and licenses. In 2017, Oman was ranked #1 in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business report for the 'Starting a Business' category among GCC countries.

RfQ submissions for the Oman Business Platform project are due in by February 3, 2025.

OPINION

Challenges, pitfalls weighing down the Muscat Stock Exchange



HAIDER AL LAWATI

haiderdawood@hotmail.com

The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI

THE Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) has experienced a decline in its index for some time, driven by falling prices of many securities listed on the market. This downturn is attributed to several factors, primarily the lack of financial liquidity among individuals and institutions. Additionally, there is widespread indifference among people toward leveraging their investments and savings for long-term benefits.

Another factor has been the high expectations and promotional campaigns surrounding certain new shares, such as those of OQ Exploration and Production Company.

These shares were initially presented as a significant addition to the market. However, investor expectations — both domestic and foreign — were not met.

Within a month of trading, the share price dropped below its initial purchase value, leading to losses, particularly for individuals who relied on loans and financing from banks to acquire these shares.

Like any other financial market, the

MSX faces various risks, challenges, and problems that impact its performance and attractiveness.

A critical factor influencing the market is the balance of supply and demand. Price fluctuations are a recurring challenge, often tied to global commodity prices and broader economic conditions.

Domestic economic challenges, such as the Omani economy’s vulnerability to oil price fluctuations and weak growth, also have a direct and negative impact on the performance of companies listed on the stock exchange.

Furthermore, a limited number of active investors on regular trading days contributes to liquidity issues and amplifies price volatility. Raising awareness and educating individuals about the importance of investing in stocks and savings channels can mitigate some of these challenges.

Educational initiatives should target schools, colleges, universities, and civil society institutions to emphasise the value of investing in companies with strong assets, consistent annual growth, and a robust

This downturn is attributed to several factors, primarily the lack of financial liquidity among individuals and institutions. Additionally, there is widespread indifference among people toward leveraging their investments and savings for long-term benefits.

demand for their products in international markets.

Diversifying the economic and investment sectors is also essential to enhancing production and marketing capabilities. This approach can increase public confidence in investing, reduce risks, and stabilise stock market prices.

Updating regulations and legislation to align with broader economic and financial policies is equally important.

These updates can attract more capital, improve market performance, and create a favourable environment for investors. There are already several initiatives underway aimed at enhancing the MSX’s appeal.

These efforts include strengthening the market’s direction, increasing trading activity and liquidity, and creating a supportive environment for companies through improved legislation and infrastructure.

These initiatives are expected to address many of the challenges facing the Muscat Stock Exchange and contribute to its growth and stability in the future.

KOREA’S VALUE PUSH IS GETTING A MUCH-NEEDED SPARK

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol’s botched coup has plunged the country into political turmoil and adds urgency for it to curb the power of its family-owned businesses. Even before the crisis, the benchmark KOSPI was one of the world’s worst performing major stock indices.

That makes \$22 billion Korea Zinc’s shareholding meeting in January a key test.

The company’s investors will convene next month to discuss the appointment of new directors to the board amid an escalating fight for control of the metal smelter.

Critics lambasted Chair Yun B. Choi, a grandson of one of Korea Zinc’s co-founders, for using company funds to increase his control via a planned \$1.8 billion share sale to thwart a takeover led by private equity fund MBK and another founding family.

Amid intense shareholder pushback, he has ditched the stock issue and pledged to step down from the board, though he will remain CEO.

The messy saga showcases a problem at the heart of the corporate governance disaster: existing commercial rules state that directors’ fiduciary duty is to the company, rather than to those that own its stock.

Mandating shareholders be treated fairly and equitably may have helped to avoid the Korea Zinc standoff, and would bring South Korean regulations more in line with other Asian markets like Japan and Singapore.

This lack of shareholder protections, says, Jonathan Pines, lead portfolio manager for Asia ex-Japan at Federated Hermes, is the biggest contributor to the Korea discount and has significantly increased the country’s cost of capital.

Korea is making little progress in resolving this issue, however. Seoul’s “Corporate Value-up Program”, rolled out in February, encourages family-controlled conglomerates to publish plans on how to improve valuations.

Similar to Tokyo’s campaign, disclosures are voluntary. As of the end of November, though, just 96 out of some 800 companies from South Korea’s main KOSPI market, or 12 per cent, have announced or are considering plans, versus 90 per cent in Japan’s Prime market.

Giants like Samsung Electronics, for example, trade at earnings multiples far below global rivals.

The financial regulator in Korea is debating whether tweaking the commercial law makes sense or if there are better ways to force directors to broaden their responsibility to more stakeholders. Korea Zinc’s shareholders will probably vote before there is a decision, but the outcome will stress the need to act. — Reuters

Successful policy requires industry experts

AFTER decades on the fringes of economic debate, industrial policy has enjoyed a resurgence in recent years, with the United States, the European Union and China all ramping up their efforts to promote strategic sectors. Even the International Monetary Fund, once a vocal critic of industrial policy, has recently come around to endorsing it.

The reasons for this shift are obvious. The Covid-19 pandemic and geopolitical shocks, especially Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, have disrupted global supply chains, causing shortages and fuelling inflation.

Meanwhile, transformative breakthroughs in artificial intelligence and clean-energy technologies have triggered a race between major powers like the US and China for dominance in these rapidly evolving fields.

The bigger question is what it will take for today’s industrial policies to succeed. After all, the late-twentieth-century shift toward market-driven economic policies was largely a reaction to the failures of state interventions in the 1970s.

Back then, efforts to promote national “champions” often led governments to prop up uncompetitive industries or back technologies that proved obsolete. Why should this time be any different, given that politicians remain highly susceptible to corporate lobbying and influence campaigns?

To avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, policymakers must resist the urge to pick winners, whether specific companies or favoured technologies. Sadly, politicians are often dazzled by wealthy and powerful executives, especially in an era marked by staggering fortunes and little-understood innovations like AI.

Compounding this issue, many politicians today are less likely than their predecessors to have direct experience in business.

Consequently, they may be insufficiently sceptical of the promises made by companies and executives seeking government support. This ever-present risk underscores the importance of independent and robust antitrust enforcement. Although independent competition authorities have long



A US flag is seen outside the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) in New York City. — Reuters



DIANE COYLE

The writer is professor of Public Policy at the University of Cambridge and the author, most recently, of “Cogs and Monsters: What Economics Is, and What It Should Be” (Princeton University Press, 2021).

been recognised as a safeguard against corporate lobbying, the rise in market concentration across OECD countries over the past few decades suggests that competition rules have been severely under-enforced.

But times have changed. Recognising the risks posed by increasing market power, US President Joe Biden’s administration adopted a more aggressive antitrust policy, while the European Union and the United Kingdom have introduced new legislative frameworks aimed at regulating digital markets.

With AI and green technologies set to transform the global economy, sustaining this momentum is crucial to ensuring that new entrants and emerging companies have the space to innovate and grow.

Like competitive and open markets, industrial policies can play a vital role in boosting productivity and economic growth while helping governments resist undue corporate influence. But their success hinges on a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing specific industries.

Regrettably, the institutional expertise that characterised government agencies during the postwar era has steadily diminished since the 1980s. In the UK, for example, senior officials in the forerunners of the current Department for Business and Trade once had deep knowledge of key sectors like the auto industry. They were familiar with companies

across the supply chain, maintained direct relationships with top executives, and were well-versed in the latest management practices and technical innovations. Many were engineers by training, giving them an invaluable perspective on the industries they oversaw.

By the 1990s, this expertise had largely vanished as industrial policies were abandoned. Many experienced officials, their roles diminished in importance, left public service.

Today, senior civil servants oversee a wide range of industries, leaving them with little, if any, sector-specific knowledge.

For industrial policies to be effective, policymakers must move beyond the vague rhetoric about national strengths that characterises the current policy debate. Instead, they should focus on the specific products, services, and technologies for which their countries have a proven comparative advantage. This kind of industry-specific expertise is essential for any successful industrial policy.

Without these skills, today’s industrial policies might fail to strike a “Goldilocks” balance between supporting strategically important industries and maintaining market competition. In other words, they could become overly influenced by corporate interests while lacking the specialised knowledge and technical understanding required to guide domestic industries effectively.

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A close-up of a hand on a black steering wheel. In the background, a white car with red and black stripes is visible.

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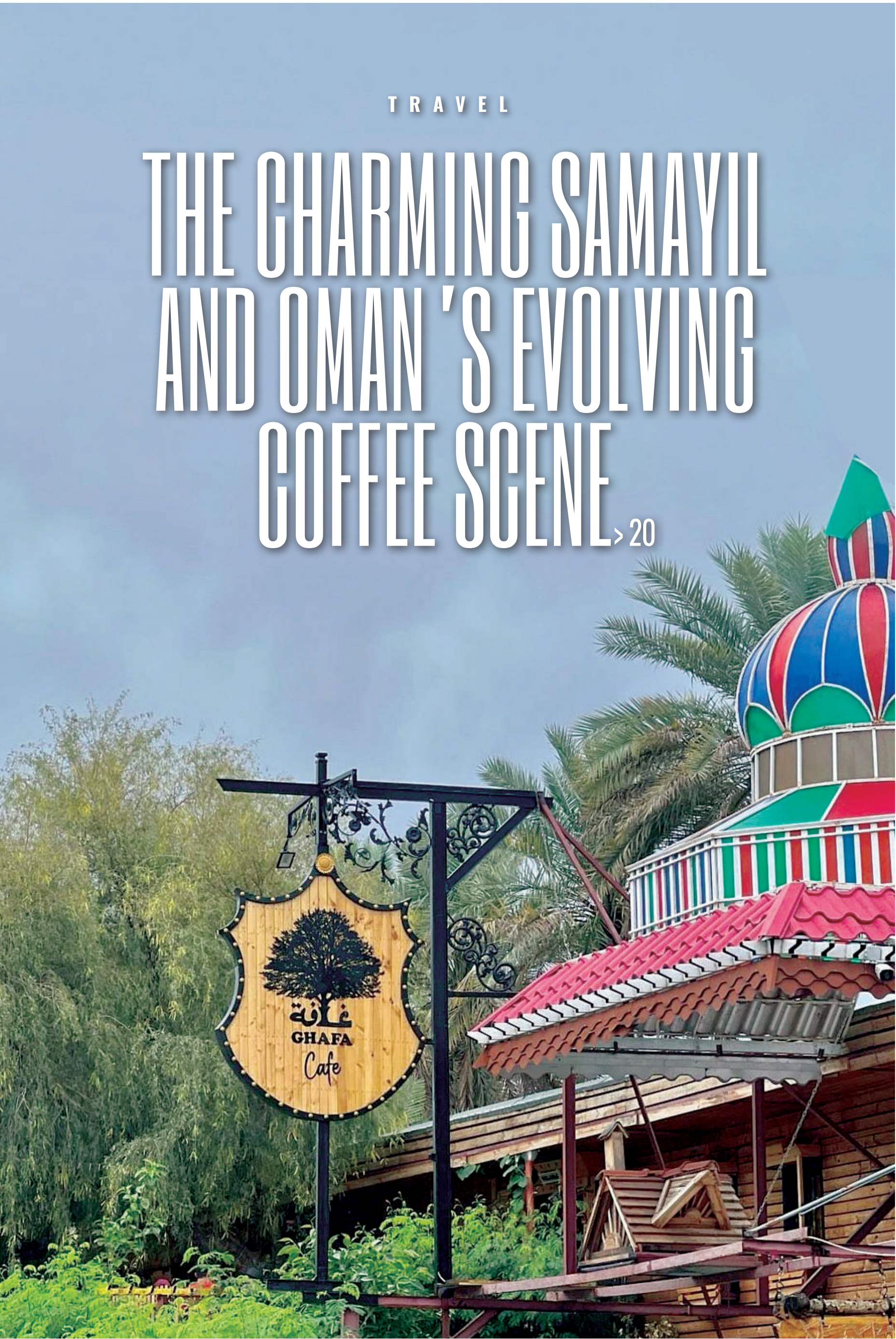
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T R A V E L

THE CHARMING SAMAYIL AND OMAN'S EVOLVING COFFEE SCENE > 20

ENTERTAINMENT

Harry Potter HBO series to begin filming in England in summer 2025



PRODUCTION of HBO series Harry Potter will begin at Warner Bros Studios Leavesden, in north west London, in summer 2025, it has been announced.

The series will feature a brand new cast while staying authentic to the original books, to bring the wizarding adventures to new audiences.

Leavesden is located in Watford, north of London, and box office hit film Barbie (2023) was largely filmed at the studios there.

On Thursday, Max, the streaming service of Warner Bros, posted to X: "Wands at the ready.

"The upcoming HBO Original Series, #HarryPotter, will be filming at Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden with production beginning in Summer2025 and coming to Max."

Warner Bros is the production company behind the original films, starring Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson and Rupert Grint.

The new, decade-long series, based on JK Rowling's books, was announced in 2023 with Max saying it would be "a faithful adaptation of the iconic books."

"The series will feature a new cast to lead a new generation of fandom, full of the fantastic detail, much loved characters and dramatic locations that Harry Potter fans have loved for over 25 years," the streamer said at the time.

"Each season will be authentic to the original books and bring Harry Potter and these incredible adventures to new audiences around the world, while the original, classic and beloved films will remain at the core of the franchise and available to watch globally."

Following a casting call, announced in September, 32,000 children have auditioned for the lead roles, with the team reviewing up to 1,000 tapes per day, according to HBO.

The casting call stipulated that applicants must be residents of the UK or Ireland aged between nine and 11 on April 2025.

Francesca Gardiner and Mark Mylod, who both worked on acclaimed drama Succession, were confirmed as executive producers of the series earlier in the year.

The cast of beloved characters including Harry Potter, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger - played by Radcliffe, Grint and Watson, respectively - will be announced at a later date. —PA Media/dpa

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



ENTERTAINMENT

Italian ballet dancer Roberto Bolle and French Ceo and Artistic Director of La Scala Opera House, Dominique Meyer arrive at the Teatro alla Scala prior to the gala opening of the Scala Opera House new season. —AFP



MUSIC

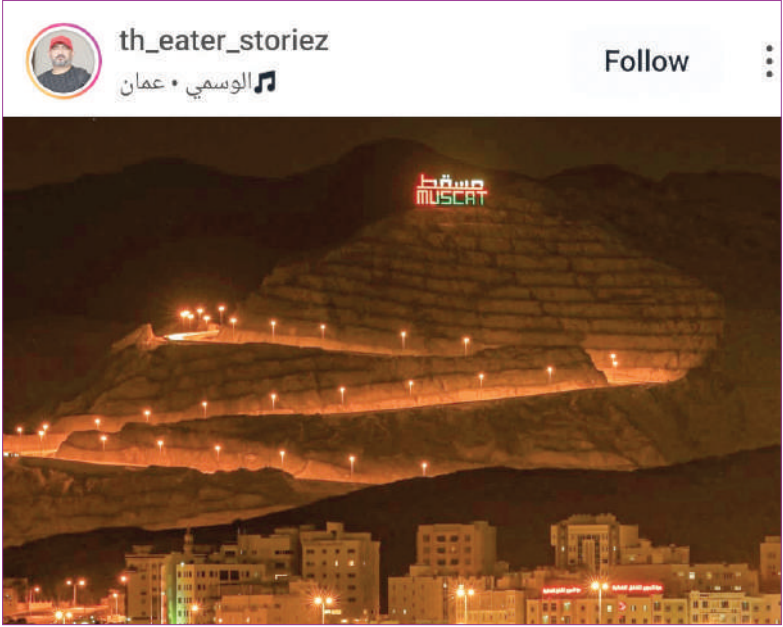
Argentine singer Duki performs during the Buenos Aires Trap music festival in Buenos Aires. —AFP



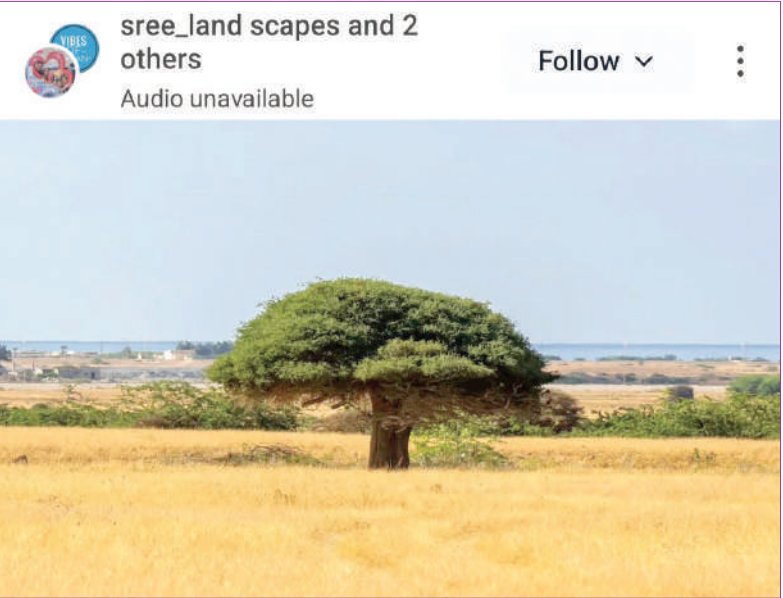
FASHION

Models pose for a portrait ahead of the final show of Dakar Fashion Week at Parc Hann, Dakar. —AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



A New Icon



Beauty of Remote Places

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

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

Way up high:
Dorothy’s ruby slippers
fetch record \$32.5 m



RUBY SLIPPERS worn by actor Judy Garland in “The Wizard of Oz” went under the hammer on Saturday and the winning price was over the rainbow — a record \$32.5 million, the auction house said.

The shimmering shoes, among the most famous pairs of footwear ever, soared past the preauction estimate of \$3 million within moments and by the time the bidding war was complete they had become the most valuable movie memorabilia ever sold at auction, according to Heritage Auctions which oversaw the dramatic sale in Dallas, Texas.

The final bid was \$28 million, with taxes and fees pushing the cost to \$32.5 million, Heritage Auctions said.

The entire haul for the

Hollywood/Entertainment Signature Auction, which also featured the sale of the Wicked Witch’s black hat for \$2.9 million, set a new record of \$38.6 million for an entertainment auction.

But it was the sequin-covered pumps — one of four surviving ruby pairs worn in the 1939 cult classic — that stole the show in Texas, as expected.

“There is simply no comparison between Judy Garland’s Ruby Slippers and any other piece of Hollywood memorabilia,” Heritage Auctions Executive Vice President Joe Maddalena said in a statement.

“The breathtaking result reflects just how important movies and movie memorabilia are to our culture and to collectors.” — AFP



ROHM production of
La Fille du Régiment
exceeds all expectations

BY GEORGINA BENISON
PHOTO BY KHALID AL BUSAIDI

BACK IN the main Royal Opera House Muscat, the auditorium was prepared for one of the biggest collaborations of the season. Set Designer, Rudy Sabounghi transformed the stage into a huge cinematic frame for Opéra de Monte-Carlo’s 2024 production, “La Fille du Régiment”. It was Donizetti’s last opera, commissioned by Opéra-Comique, Paris and premiered in 1840.

The projection of a sepia film like the early days of cinema during the orchestral ‘Overture’ gave the audience the life story of the Marquise of Berkenfeld and how her daughter came to be adopted as the “daughter” of the 21st Régiment aged 10; a clever touch to open the performance. La Corelli Orchestra was conducted with precision by Maestro Antonello Allemandi.

The screen opened wider to reveal a cast of colourful peasants waving silver branches as weapons against an impending French invasion. The Marquise, played superbly throughout by Veronica Simeoni, appeared among them in a check dress, a veritable drama queen with exaggerated theatrics in, “Pour une femme de mon nom”, her vocal timbre rich and warm. The whole chorus rejoice at the coming of peace and freedom from the French in a burlesque pageant.

The frame shifted back to reveal more depth in Scene 2 as Marie — La Fille herself — and Sergeant Sulpice sing, “La Voilà! Mordieu qu’elle gentille!”, extolling the joys of a soldier’s life and military victory. Here was Australian soprano, Jessica Pratt,

whose versatile and agile lyrical coloratura would increasingly beguile and amaze the audience for the next two hours. She mimicked the flow of her song while cooking, she pattered with Sulpice, she imitated the soldiers’ marching as the 21st emerged in startling blue and red costumes. Marie confessed to being in love as her “fathers” dragged their prisoner in — it was Tonio, her lover who had saved her life. She stood on a table to sing, “Chacun le Sait, Chacun le dit”. The role of Marie is demanding for its sustained high register and Ms Pratt proved equal to the challenge and



stunning in her delivery.

The Tyrolean, Tonio was performed superbly by Italian tenor, Antonino Siragusa. Shorter than Marie and sometimes playing a buffoon caricature, he was a more than convincing suitor in the duet, “Quoi! Vous m’aimez?”. His declaration of love was sincere, his diction and light tenor voice clear and compelling. In the duet sections their voices blended beautifully, and then it was Marie’s turn to declare her love in the same song, while a golden Cupid parody crept on from behind, much to everyone’s amusement.

The brilliant baritone Omar Montanari shines as Sulpice,

skillfully capturing the scene as the Marquise arrives to petition for safe passage to Berkenfeld Castle. Siragusa delivers a joyous rendition of “Ah! Mes amis, quel jour de fête,” showcasing his powerful voice with remarkable ease as he hits nine top Cs without a hitch. Having enlisted in the Régiment to win the heart of Marie, the soldiers comically agree to his marriage, as she reciprocates his feelings. However, the Marquise, posing as her aunt, insists on taking Marie back to her castle to be educated.

Jessica Pratt’s poignant performance in Marie’s aria, “Il faut partir!” resonates deeply as she expresses her sadness over leaving the fathers who have cared for her since childhood. Accompanied by a haunting Cor Anglais melody played by Fabiana Evangelista, her tender and controlled delivery captures the heart of the audience. As the curtain falls, Tonio remains in despair.

Act 2 shifts to a lighter tone under Jean-Louis Grinda’s humorous direction, featuring the Duchess of Crankentorp, portrayed hilariously by Jean-François Vinciguerra. The scene transforms into a whimsical picture gallery where bodybuilders and dancers perform a satirical waltz while a grand piano is introduced for a singing lesson. The Marquise hilariously leads a parody lesson, eliciting laughter from the audience with Marie’s comically off-key attempts.

As Marie reflects on her lost love in “Par le range et par l’opulence,” Vanessa Sinigaglia’s mournful cello enhances her tender control in the upper register. The French Régiment’s chorus bursts into “Salut à la France!” as Marie’s coloratura rises before she faints. In a lively trio, Tonio, Marie, and Sulpice plot to escape her arranged engagement, while comedic antics unfold in the background. Tonio’s heartfelt aria, “Pour me rapprocher de Marie,” ultimately leads to a dramatic twist as he reveals Marie’s true identity, saving her from an unwanted marriage.

The nobles are horrified, the Marquise realises she is sacrificing Marie for her own pride and allows her to marry the husband of her choice — Tonio. The dancers try to dance a revealing Can-Can and all burst into a Finale of “Salut a la France” — which sends the audience gaily singing their way home.

FEATURES

BY ARWA AL HASHIMI
PHOTOS BY MOHAMMED AL MASHARI

LONG AGO, under the shade of ghaf trees, villagers, travellers, and elders would gather to rest. They would light fires to roast coffee beans, grind them, and brew a rich cup of coffee, the aroma of which would drift through the air, inviting everyone to sit, sip, and share news after a day of work and life.

With these precious memories lingering in the hearts of many Omanis, the ghaf tree has become a symbol of nostalgia, inspiring the creation of a café that evokes the spirit of old Oman.

Located about an hour's drive from Muscat, the Wilayat of Samayil is a charming destination known for its breathtaking views and adventure-filled wadis. It boasts over 200 falaj systems, with Falaj al Samadi being one of the most well-known. There are approximately 300 mosques in Samayil, including the first mosque built in Oman, Mazin bin Ghadhoobah, while one of its most frequently visited structures is Samayil Castle.

Recently, besides its agricultural and industrial growth, Samayil has gained recognition for its picturesque lake, drawing visitors due to its unique location and clear blue waters. There is now yet another reason for people to visit this storied village.

Named “Ghafah Café” after the ancient ghaf tree that stands at its entrance, the café embodies the soul of Oman's past. This tree has watched over generations and has become entwined with local memory and tradition. As its owner, Qasim al Hashimi, lovingly remarked, “This tree is more than wood and leaves; it's a part of our story, a beautiful memory that time cannot erase.” The café has become a must-visit destination for those journeying through this historic town.

What sets Ghafah Café apart is not just its scenic location but its extraordinary design. Built over nearly three years by skilled Omani hands, the café is constructed from South American pine wood, lending it a unique elegance and warmth.

Now standing as a sanctuary that preserves memories, the café allows the past to gently reach into the present, enabling us to grasp beautiful pieces of history that nearly slipped away.

One of the enticing aspects of Ghafah Café is its exquisite detailing. The multi-coloured dome roof immediately captures attention. Nestled within a lush garden, its signage creates the feeling of stepping through history. Lounging at the café feels distinctly Omani, while certain elements evoke a sense of being in another part of the world.

Oman's coffee culture is thriving, rooted in historical significance and evolving into an emerging trend. Traditionally, Omani coffee, often brewed with cardamom, has been a staple of hospitality.

Today, modern cafés are reviving this heritage while introducing speciality coffee varieties and innovative brewing techniques. These social hubs attract a younger demographic, fostering connections and community engagement. Increased tourism and global exposure are further enriching the coffee experience, blending traditional aesthetics with contemporary influences.

As one of the oldest and most picturesque towns in Oman's Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, Samayil is a place where history and natural beauty converge in perfect harmony. Known as the gateway to Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, Samayil serves as a vital link between the capital, Muscat, and the heart of the country, making it a historical crossroads and gathering point for the wilayats.



THE CHARMING SAMAYIL AND OMAN'S EVOLVING COFFEE SCENE



Surrounded by a striking mountain range, including the famous Jabal Al Sara, Samayil is blessed with picturesque wadis, the most renowned of which is Wadi Samayil. This wadi breathes life into the wilayat, providing lush green oases and fruit orchards along its banks—an enchanting sight for those seeking tranquility amid nature.

With a rich history, Samayil has significantly shaped Oman's cultural landscape over the centuries. It has been home to many scholars, poets, and notable figures, granting it deep cultural and spiritual significance. Among its many historical landmarks stands the iconic Samayil Fort, a proud guardian of the town's heritage that has watched over the land for hundreds of years. The Wilayat of Samayil is also known for its ancient falajes, such as Falaj Al Samdi and Falaj Al Ain, which have flowed with fresh water for generations, sustaining the gardens and enhancing the region's timeless charm.

More than just a place on the map, Samayil represents a story passed down through generations—a collective memory of Omanis. Visitors are welcome to explore its fusion of tradition and modernity, where natural beauty and cultural heritage unite, offering a rare glimpse into Oman's rich past and vibrant present.