

OMAN

Sayyid Theyazin reviews Osaka expo preparations



MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, chaired the meeting of the main committee tasked with the Sultanate of Oman’s participation in Expo 2025 Osaka, in Japan. In its meeting, held in Muscat on Monday, the committee reviewed the latest preparations for the Sultanate of Oman’s participation in the global forum, including the readiness of the pavilion, now in its final stages of construction, and the start of experimental activities therein. — **ONA**



OMAN CELEBRATES GCC WILDLIFE DAY



GCC Wildlife Day is themed ‘Sustainable Marine Wildlife’

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, through its Environment Authority, celebrated GCC Wildlife Day under the theme ‘Sustainable Marine Wildlife’. Observed annually on December 30, this occasion underscores the Gulf Cooperation Council’s efforts to preserve biodiversity and raise public awareness about the importance of wildlife conservation.

The event highlights the Convention on the Conservation of Wildlife and its Natural Habitats and emphasises protecting ecosystems and endangered species across the region.

Oman’s Environment Authority has undertaken numerous initiatives to promote biodiversity and sustainability, including: the national biodiversity survey project, the marine mammal species survey project in Musandam Governorate and the national campaign to combat invasive birds.

In addition to these projects, the authority conducts research, field studies and control operations while updating laws to reduce risks to endangered species and protect the country’s diverse wildlife. These efforts reflect Oman’s commitment to maintaining ecological balance and ensuring the sustainability of its natural habitats for future generations. — **ONA**

Oman, Iran pledge to strengthen cooperation

THE Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran have underscored the importance of consolidating cooperation and partnership in various fields, such as economy, trade, energy, transport, tourism and other areas. This took place during a joint press conference held in Tehran on Monday by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Dr Abbas Araçchi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Sayyid Badr said that the two sides agreed to take practical steps to enhance trade and investment ties, augment the volume of inter-trade, and facilitate transport, shipping and travel. He also underscored the importance of cooperation in establishing projects related to food security and health.

Sayyid Badr pointed out that the press conference also discussed regional and international developments. It stressed the need to step up diplomatic efforts and enhance the mechanisms of constructive dialogue to address the current challenges facing the region, he added.

The Foreign Minister also said that the two sides agreed to focus on finding sustainable solutions to regional conflicts, without prejudice to the sovereignty of countries and non-interference in their internal affairs, noting that the overall aim is to boost the stability of the region and ensure the realisation of lasting peace.

Sayyid Badr affirmed that the Palestinian cause figured highly in the press conference, which, he said, laid emphasis on backing the Palestinian people’s legitimate rights and their aspirations for freedom, independence, security and peace. The two sides also



Sayyid Badr and Abbas Araçchi hold bilateral talks in Tehran

underlined the importance of respecting the national sovereignty of Syria and Lebanon and supporting efforts for establishing stability and development.

For his part, Dr Abbas commended the Sultanate of Oman’s constructive role in enhancing regional stability and deepening bilateral and international cooperation.

At the conclusion of the press conference, the two ministers agreed to pursue communication and joint coordination on various issues, achieve common interests, and enhance peace and stability in the region and the world at large.

REVIEWS PROGRESS:

Earlier, Sayyid Badr met with Abbas Araçchi for a meeting during which the two ministers reviewed the progress of bilateral relations and explored ways to enhance them in various fields to serve joint interests. They also discussed several regional and international developments, including the Palestinian cause and the situation in the Gaza Strip, Lebanon and Syria.

The two foreign ministers underscored the importance of efforts aimed at enhancing stability and supporting political initiatives to achieve security and peace for the region as a whole. The meeting was attended by Shaikh Ahmed bin Hashel al Maskari, Head of the GCC Department at the Foreign Ministry; Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Muaini, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Islamic Republic of Iran; and several officials from both sides. — **ONA**

SHORT TAKES



Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon holds talks with Brig Tariq Khalaf Al Hajaya from Jordan

STRATEGIC STUDIES ACADEMY CHIEF RECEIVES JORDANIAN DELEGATION

MUSCAT: Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies (ASDS), received in his office at Bait Al Falaj on Monday a delegation from the Royal Jordanian Command and Staff College (RJCS), headed by Brig Tariq Khalaf Al Hajaya, Commander of the Royal Jordanian Command and Staff College, currently visiting the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed several matters of mutual interest, particularly academic aspects.

The meeting was attended by Air Commodore Abdullah bin Fayez al Dhafri, Director-General of Administrative and Financial Affairs, Commodore Khalid bin Amer al Salti, Director-General of Studies and Academic Affairs, senior officers of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies, and the Military Attaché of Jordan's Embassy in Muscat.

Meanwhile, the Jordanian delegation also visited the National Defence College (NDC) at the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies.

Upon their arrival at the NDC, they were greeted by Brigadier Mansoor bin Ali al Amri, Acting Commandant of the NDC.

The delegation members were briefed on the college's facilities and its strategic curriculum, which focuses on preparing national competencies capable of making strategic decisions at various levels. They also toured the NDC's departments and various halls.

Furthermore, the Jordanian delegation visited the Joint Command and Staff College (JCSC) at the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies. — ONA

OMAN, SAUDI DISCUSS HEALTH SECTOR COOPERATION

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) on Monday explored means of enhancing cooperation and partnerships in the health sector, as well as available investment opportunities.

This took place during the joint meeting held here between the Ministry of Health and the Saudi Exports Development Authority with private sector companies in the KSA.



Oman, Saudi Arabia explore means of boosting cooperation in health sector

Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Organisation, underscored the importance of such meetings to benefit from the two countries' experiences in all fields, especially in the health sector.

He also stressed the importance of automation of health systems, as well as rebuilding, redesigning and reengineering the health sector.

— ONA

Geological heritage expo opens at Al Hazm Fort

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, DEC 30

THE Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT), in collaboration with national entities, inaugurated the fourth edition of the Omani Geological Heritage Exhibition under the theme 'Sustainability and Job Opportunities' at Al Hazm Fort in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, Al Batinah South Governorate. Running until June 2025, the exhibition showcases Oman's geological diversity through an immersive cultural and educational experience.

The event, graced by Eng Masoud bin Said al Hashmi, Governor of Al Batinah South, aligns with Oman Vision 2040, emphasising the role of heritage sites in local tourism and sustainable development.

Said bin Hareb al Obaidani, Director-General of Museums at the Ministry, highlighted the exhibition's timing with campaigns like 'Change the Atmosphere in Al Batinah South' and the 'Experience Al Batinah South' festival, designed to attract diverse visitors, including families, students and academics. The exhibition highlights include six main corners detail Oman's geological story, featuring:

- The story of geological heritage: A narrative of Oman's geological evolution.
- Unique fossils: Including an 800-million-year-old specimen.



MoHT inaugurated the Omani Geological Heritage Exhibition under the theme 'Sustainability and Job Opportunities' in Al Rustaq

- 3D models: Primitive elephants and extinct dinosaurs, with discovery site details.
- Al Batinah South geology: Showcasing local geological marvels.
- Sustainability of geological heritage: Linking it to national identity.
- Job opportunities: Exploring careers in geological tourism.
- Interactive displays and rare artefacts, such as fossilised dinosaur remains and primitive elephant teeth, enhance the visitor experience.

Eng Hussain bin Ali al Ghafri emphasised the dual goals of education and economic growth through geological tourism. The exhibition fosters opportunities for small and medium enterprises, tour operators and local guides, promoting investment in geological sites while preserving them for future generations.

The exhibition reinforces Oman's global reputation as a destination rich in heritage and tourism potential, inspiring a balance between preservation and economic growth.

'Sylinder' triumphs at film Awards

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 30

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, represented by the General Directorate of Youth, announced the winners of the 2024 Tawasul Short Films Award during a ceremony held at Vox Cinemas in Mall of Oman on Monday. Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information, presided over the event.

The film 'Sylinder' claimed first place, earning a RO 5,000 prize. 'Soul Bags' won second place with RO 4,000, while 'Shipment' secured third place with RO 3,000. 'Sa'l' and 'Return' earned fourth and fifth places, respectively, with prizes of RO 2,000 and RO 1,000.

Dr Abdullah al Muaini, chairman of the judging committee, praised the qualitative growth in the second edition, noting this year's broader exploration of national, societal and individual themes.

The event featured film excerpts, including a special screening of 'Sylinder'.

Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information, honoured the winners, participants and judges for their contributions to Oman's cinematic culture. This year's competition saw 24 films submitted, all Omani productions not previously screened or entered in other competitions.

Sorour al Khalili, director of 'Sylinder', shared that the film reflects personal challenges faced by Omani youth. It tells the story of an individual's journey towards self-discovery and the importance of coexistence.

Laura al Siyabi, Head of the Cinema Department, highlighted the competition's role in developing young film-makers and fostering creativity.



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MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee at Ministry of Information announces its Tender for the following work:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
9/2024 (513/2024) at E-Tendering	Construction of a Building for OB Vans and Administrative Offices for Ministry of Information at Al Qurum	Excellent First	11/1/2025	18/2/2025	250/-

1. All specialized companies in the field of the tender shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicated above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

2. Companies and institutions are exempted from providing a temporary insurance of 1% when submitting their bid, provided that they sign a document committing themselves to the submitted bid for a period determined when the bidding strategy is approved in accordance with the document attached to the Isnad platform. As for international companies that do not have a headquarters in the Sultanate of Oman, they are required to provide temporary insurance of 1%.

(For more information, please see the original circular issued by the Tender Board on the Isnad platform.)

Note that the last date for accepting bids as mentioned above is before 10:00 am. Any bid received after the time and date mentioned in the submission date will be rejected automatically.

You are requested to provide 2 hard copies for your offer after the submission in Projects Department at Ministry of Information.

3. The Ministry has the right to:

1) Add or Cancel some works in the tender if necessary.

2) Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:

Telephone : 24943785, 24943177, Email: (Moi.Tenders@omaninfo.om)



A GASTRONOMIC, CULTURAL EXTRAVAGANZA



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

MUSCAT Nights festival has turned into a paradise for food lovers, offering a vast array of culinary delights to visitors from 4 pm every day. The major venues — Al Qurum Natural Park, Al Naseem Public Park, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre and Oman Automobile Association — bustled with activity as families flocked to the festival. “The Muscat Nights venue at Al Naseem Public Park was more enjoyable with the large spread of foods ranging from Arab to Asian and from intercontinental to Chinese,” said Ahmed al Siyabi, a media professional. Traffic surged around the festival grounds from 4 pm until late night, as

visitors thronged the gates to explore a plethora of activities, including fireworks, laser shows, amusement rides and a variety of food offerings. “At the weekend, I could feel the snail-paced traffic from Barka towards Al Naseem Public Park,” commented Piya Pawani, a social media influencer. Muscat Nights festival is a harmonious blend of cultural, recreational and artistic activities aimed at creating memorable experiences for all family members. Highlights include the Heritage Village, which showcases frankincense products, traditional crafts, and daily cultural events featuring eminent scholars and poets. “What I’m attracted to is the Heritage Village, a large area for frankincense and its products, perfumery, and many more,” shared one visitor. Children have plenty to keep them

entertained, with amusement rides, stilt walkers and water balloon games, while adults indulge in shopping and cultural activities. “Events currently offered at the Muscat Nights festival are new and innovative. A whole lot of new artistes, troupes and ideas will be implemented in the latest edition of the Muscat Nights festival, and it will certainly be a treat for the whole family from across the world,” remarked Dr Shawki, Head of Marketing at Muscat Nights festival. The Heritage Village at Al Naseem Public Park also draws attention with its exquisite handicrafts and artefacts from countries like Iran, India, Ethiopia and Pakistan, offering visitors an authentic cultural experience. Muscat Nights festival is more than an event; it’s a celebration of culture, cuisine and community.

Muscat Nights festival is a harmonious blend of cultural, recreational and artistic activities aimed at creating memorable experiences for all family members



GLOBALMEET



The conference will be held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre

MUSCAT TO HOST ISC GENERAL ASSEMBLY, GLOBAL DIALOGUE

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, is set to host the Third General Assembly of the International Science Council (ISC), alongside the Muscat Global Knowledge Dialogue Forum, from January 26 to 30, 2025.

The event will be held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, drawing global scientific luminaries to address pressing global challenges and chart priorities for international collaboration in science.

This high-profile event will convene scientists, policymakers and partners from diverse disciplines and countries. Among the distinguished participants are Nobel laureates, renowned academics and thinkers from leading universities and research centres, as well as decision-makers and business leaders. The gathering aims to foster discussions that shape the future of science and its role in addressing critical global issues.

Hosted at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, the Dialogue serves as a key public-facing segment of the ISC’s General Assembly. It will focus on interdisciplinary discussions around three pivotal themes:

Science systems and science futures: Examining developments such as artificial intelligence, open science, transdisciplinary research and innovations in science publishing.

Science and just transformations to sustainability: Highlighting the role of science in driving environmental and societal advancements.

Science and society: Addressing topics like trust in science, science diplomacy, equality and social cohesion. With over 500 participants expected, the forum will include senior scientists, researchers, policymakers, academics, tech industry representatives and organisations focused on scientific innovation.

The ISC General Assembly, held every four years, is the council’s highest decision-making platform. Members and partners discuss strategic issues and set new visions for global scientific cooperation. Key topics include climate change, food security, global health and technological innovation.

Muscat will host the first in-person General Assembly since the ISC’s establishment in 2018, as the previous meetings were conducted virtually.

The ISC is a leading global organisation dedicated to advancing science for societal benefit. It encompasses scientific academies, research councils and international organisations from over 140 countries. Established in July 2018 through the merger of the International Council for Science (ICSU) and the International Social Science Council (ISSC), the ISC works to achieve scientific excellence and develop innovative solutions for global challenges.

NEW MOSQUES, QURAN TEACHING SCHOOL OPENED IN THAMRAIT

THAMRAIT: The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs marked a momentous occasion in the Wilayat of Thamrait, Dhofar Governorate, with the opening of two mosques and the Thamrait School for Teaching the Holy Quran.

The inauguration was graced by Ahmed bin Saleh al Rashdi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The Al Noor Al Mubeen Mosque, located in the Hayla Al Rakah area, spans 789 square metres

and accommodates 440 male and 64 female worshippers. Situated strategically on the Salalah-Muscat road, the mosque serves both local residents and travellers, offering public facilities and shops for operational sustainability.

The Ali bin Abi Talib Mosque, at the heart of Thamrait, covers an impressive 1,947 square metres. It accommodates 633 male and 120 female worshippers. This mosque is equipped with modern facilities, including a Quran teaching school,

commercial shops and ample parking.

The newly launched school boasts 10 classrooms and can host up to 200 students of various age groups. With a multi-purpose hall, library and other facilities, the school aims to impart Quranic knowledge and foster intellectual, spiritual and behavioural development among students.

The event concluded with the under-secretary honouring individuals and organisations who contributed to the establishment of the Thamrait School for Teaching the Holy Quran. — ONA

Private health forum calls for stronger PPP

THE third annual forum for private health institutions concluded with a call to strengthen partnerships between the Ministry of Health and private sector entities. The forum emphasised activating permanent communication channels to exchange expertise and information, aiming to bolster the private healthcare sector as a strategic partner in Oman’s national health system.

Organised by the Ministry of Health through its General Directorate of Private Health Institutions, the event focused on fostering institutional excellence. Key recommendations included establishing clear standards for recognising outstanding health institutions, enhancing medical waste disposal systems to align with global environmental conservation standards, and promoting complementary medicine to improve patient care and quality of life.

Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Organisation, highlighted the private health sector’s pivotal role in achieving sustainable health development.

He reaffirmed the Ministry’s commitment to creating an investment-friendly environment that would elevate the overall quality of life in Oman.

The forum featured robust preparatory sessions with experts and private health representatives from across the



DR AHMED BIN SALIM AL MANDHARI highlighted the private sector’s role in achieving sustainable health development

governorates. Discussions addressed key challenges facing the private health sector, proposing innovative solutions to enhance transparency, improve control systems and establish clear performance evaluation criteria.

Some of the main themes included launching mechanisms to

honour distinguished health institutions, fostering innovation and competitiveness, enhancing the quality of health services while ensuring patient safety, developing robust evaluation and control mechanisms to uphold the highest performance standards and safely managing medical waste to protect the environment and public health.

Serving as a critical platform for public-private collaboration, the forum showcased achievements and identified challenges in the private health sector. It underscored a shared commitment to driving transformative improvements in Oman’s healthcare landscape, reflecting the nation’s aspirations for a healthier future. — ONA

Musandam hosts gathering of Ship for World Youth

KHASAB: The third GCC Gathering of the Ship for World Youth, hosted in Musandam from December 19 to 21, concluded with a workshop titled ‘Musandam – Gateway to Beauty and Sustainable Tourism’.

Organised by the Omani Committee for the Ship for World Youth in collaboration with the Khasab Sports and Cultural Club, the workshop focused on enhancing sustainable tourism while preserving the governorate’s cultural and natural heritage. Adel bin Ahmed al Shanfari,



The Musandam workshop was titled ‘Musandam – Gateway to Beauty and Sustainable Tourism’

Chairman of the Omani Committee, highlighted the event as a model of collaboration, emphasising the alumni’s role in promoting Oman’s cultural and tourist

appeal globally. He praised the partnership with the Governor’s Office of Musandam and other stakeholders for ensuring the event’s success. Participants from Oman,

the GCC, and countries like Japan, Mexico and South Africa engaged in cultural exchange, scenic tours and discussions on sustainable development. Activities included exploring Musandam’s iconic mountains, turquoise waters and historical landmarks like Khasab Fort.

Reflecting on the gathering, attendees described Musandam as a region of stunning natural beauty and cultural depth, often referred to as the ‘Norway of Arabia’. This successful gathering reinforced Musandam’s status as a unique cultural and tourist destination.

Over 26,000 imported food shipments processed

MUSCAT: The Food Safety and Quality Centre announced that it conducted 256 field visits during the first half of 2024 as part of its efforts to qualify facilities and enhance the monitoring and inspection of food products. These measures aim to ensure compliance with approved health standards and specifications.

The field visits spanned a variety of sectors including food, agriculture, animal and fish facilities, fish powder and fish oil factories, warehouses, fishing vessels, trading locations and marketing outlets, ensuring strict adherence to required safety and quality standards.

Dr Hussein bin Samah al Masroori, Director-General of the Food Safety



An integrated system has been developed to keep pace with advancements in food production

and Quality Centre at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, emphasised the Ministry’s commitment to ensuring

food safety and quality. He noted that an integrated system has been developed to keep pace with advancements in food production, focusing on scientific research and risk management.

Dr Al Masroori highlighted efforts, which include implementing procedures and controls for food production, import, export and trade. These efforts also cover inspections, issuing necessary regulations, qualifying food facilities and monitoring products in local markets. From January to October 2024, the centre addressed 90 reports and warnings, issued 11 local food circulars, conducted three recalls and released one public notice. — ONA

MOORE STEPHENS LLC

NOTICE ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF LIQUIDATION OF EOG RESOURCES MUSCAT BLOCK 49 SPC (AS APPEARED IN OFFICIAL GAZETTE NO 1577)

Moore Stephens LLC, announces the liquidation process of EOG Resources Muscat Block 49 SPC, bearing commercial registration number 1378880, in accordance with the decision taken by the Company’s Shareholders on 24 November 2024. The liquidator alone have the right to represent the Company under liquidation before third parties, and all parties are to confirm with the liquidator for all matters concerning the company’s business at the following address:

Office No. 41, 4th Floor, Building No. 1022, Way No. 1013; Al Walaj Street, Al Qurum
P O Box 933, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24061000, Fax: 24061099, Email: liquidation@moore-oman.com

By this announcement, the liquidator calls the company’s creditors to submit their claims against the company, together with the supporting documents, to the above address within 180 days from the date of publishing this announcement for the first time, and any debtors should settle the company’s rights with the liquidator on the address above.

Moore Stephens LLC
Official Liquidators of EOG Resources Muscat Block 49 SPC (Under voluntary liquidation)

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Syria's leader Ahmed al Sharaa meets with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha, in Damascus. — Reuters

SYRIA'S LEADER MEETS WITH UKRAINE'S DIPLOMAT

DAMASCUS: New Syrian leader Ahmed al Sharaa held talks on Monday with Ukraine's foreign minister, the official news agency SANA reported, weeks after president Bashar al Assad was ousted from power. "The leader of the new administration Ahmed al Sharaa met with a Ukrainian delegation headed by Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga," SANA reported, without providing further details. On Friday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said his country had sent its first shipment of food aid, 500 tonnes of wheat flour, to Syria.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga urged new Syrian leader Ahmed al Sharaa on Monday to expel Russia from the country during an unannounced visit to Damascus. But despite Moscow's backing for Assad, Sharaa on Sunday noted the "deep strategic interests between Russia and Syria" in an interview with the Al Arabiya TV channel. "All Syria's arms are of Russian origin, and many power plants are managed by Russian experts... We do not want Russia to leave Syria in the way that some wish," Sharaa added. — AFP



French PM Francois Bayrou (R), Prefect of Mayotte, Franis-Xavier Bieuville (2ndL) visit a water desalination plant in Mayotte. — AFP

FRENCH PREMIER PROMISES CONCRETE AID FOR MAYOTTE

MAMOUDZOU: French Prime Minister Francois Bayrou arrived in Mayotte on Monday, saying he aimed to rebuild the Indian Ocean territory ravaged by Cyclone Chido within two years. The most devastating cyclone to hit France's poorest department in 90 years caused colossal damage in mid-December, killing at least 39 people and injuring more than 5,600.

The people of Mayotte "often have the sentiment that what we bring them are assurances, pretty words of solidarity", Bayrou said after visiting a desalination plant. But what they want is "concrete" action, he said. "After a day of dialogue, we will announce tonight a plan named 'Mayotte standing' that will pave the way," he added.

Rebuilding within two years was "a goal we have to set ourselves", Bayrou told reporters. "There will be a second phase. A long-term plan. Because it's not just about rebuilding Mayotte as it was. It's about designing a different future for Mayotte." Two weeks after Cyclone Chido, emergency services are still trying to restore water, power and telecoms services. — AFP

PLUNGED INTO RIVER

About 71 killed in Ethiopia road accident



At least 71 people died in Ethiopia when a truck packed with passengers plunged into a river, according to the spokesperson for the southern Sidama regional government. The accident occurred in the Bona district, the regional communication bureau said in a statement. Wosenyeleh Simion, spokesperson for the Sidama regional government, said the truck had missed a bridge and fell into a river and that the road had many bends. — Reuters

EX SERBIAN MINISTER AMONG 13 CHARGED OVER TRAIN STATION ACCIDENT

BELGRADE: Serbian prosecutors on Monday charged 13 people, including a former transport minister, over the fatal collapse of a train station roof in the city of Novi Sad last month that killed 15 people. The fatal accident at the northern city's station occurred on November 1, following extensive renovation work at the facility. Fourteen people, aged six to 74, were killed at the scene and a 15th victim died in hospital weeks later.

Public outrage over the

tragedy has sparked regular nationwide protests, with many blaming the deaths on corruption and inadequate oversight of construction projects. "The indictment was submitted to the Higher Court in Novi Sad, accompanied by the complete documentation collected during the pre-investigation and investigation process. Former Serbian transport minister Goran Vesic, who resigned over the disaster, was among those charged.

The prosecutors requested that the 10 people currently in custody over the incident remain there and that three people who had been released pending the investigation be taken into custody. Serbia's Prime Minister Milos Vucevic said the filing of the indictments less than two months after the accident was "proof that no one obstructed the case". "In a very short period, this was accomplished... which confirms that absolutely no one obstructed the case," Vucevic said. — AFP

South Korea inspects fleet after worst plane crash

SOUTH KOREA ordered on Monday a "comprehensive inspection" of all Boeing 737-800 aircraft operated by the country's carriers, after a Jeju Air plane crash-landed and burst into flames, killing 179 people on board. US air safety officials and staff from the beleaguered aircraft maker Boeing were arriving to join investigators probing the worst air disaster on South Korean soil, which officials initially blamed on a collision with birds. The plane was carrying 181 people from Thailand to South Korea when it made a mayday call and belly-landing before crashing into a barrier and bursting into flames. Everyone aboard Jeju Air Flight 2216 was killed, save two flight attendants pulled from the wreckage.

South Korea began seven days of mourning, with flags flying at half-mast and the acting president flying to the crash site in southwestern Muan for a memorial. Acting President Choi Sang-mok, who has only been in office since Friday, said the government was making "every effort" to identify victims and support bereaved families. Choi, an unelected bureaucrat who became acting president after his two predecessors were impeached, said a "thorough investigation into the cause of the accident" would be conducted. He also said South Korea would conduct "an urgent safety inspection of the overall aircraft operation system" to prevent future aviation disasters. South Korea has a solid air safety record and both black boxes from Flight 2216 -- the flight data recorder and the cockpit



The wrecked tail section of the Jeju Air Boeing 737-800 aircraft is seen at the end of the runway at Muan International Airport. — AFP



US air safety officials and staff from the beleaguered aircraft maker Boeing were arriving to join investigators probing the worst air disaster on South Korean soil, which officials initially blamed on a collision with birds

voice recorder -- have been found. Officials have so far identified 146 victims using DNA analysis or fingerprint collection, said deputy minister for civil aviation, Joo Jong-wan. "As for the comprehensive inspection, maintenance records of key systems such as engines and landing gear will be thoroughly reviewed for 101 aircraft operated by six airlines using the same model as the accident aircraft," he said. "This process will be carried out intensively starting today and continuing until January 3, 2025."

Victims' families camped out at the airport overnight in special tents set up in the airport lounge after a long, painful day waiting for news of their loved ones. At the crash site early on Monday, a middle-aged man and woman kept their gaze fixed through the fence,

where remnants of the plane -- seats, gates and twisted metal parts -- were still scattered across the field near the charred tail. Soldiers carefully combed through a field of reeds next to the runway, engaged in what appeared to be a search for body parts. The passengers, aged from three to 78, were all Korean apart from two Thais, authorities said.

Low-cost carrier Jeju Air said it "sincerely" apologised, with top officials shown bowing deeply at a news conference in Seoul. Another Jeju Air flight was forced to return to Seoul's Gimpo International Airport shortly after takeoff on Monday, the airline said. The company's share price dropped as much as 15 per cent on Monday, with anxious customers also cancelling some 68,000 flights with the airline, Jeju Air said. — AFP

DISPLACED GAZA NEWBORN FREEZES

GAZA: Intense winter cold and heavy rain across the coastal enclave in previous days had made newborn lives a misery. In the second winter of the war in Gaza, the weather has added an extra element of suffering to hundreds of thousands of people already displaced, often multiple times, while efforts to agree a ceasefire go nowhere.

Israeli authorities say they have allowed thousands of aid trucks carrying food, water, medical equipment and shelter supplies into Gaza. International aid agencies say Israeli forces have been hampering aid deliveries, making the humanitarian crisis even worse. — Reuters



WAVE OF ABDUCTIONS

Police in Kenya fire teargas at protesters



Police in Kenya's capital Nairobi fired teargas to try to disperse protesters demonstrating against what they say is a wave of unexplained abductions of government critics as well as detaining some of those taking part. Dozens of Kenyans have been abducted, according to human rights groups, who blame the extrajudicial arrests on Kenya's police and intelligence services. Some groups of young protesters marched in downtown Nairobi. — Reuters

STASHED IN CONTAINERS

Spain seizes seven tonnes of cocaine



Spanish authorities said on Monday they had seized seven tonnes of cocaine stashed in sea freight containers installed underneath a farm, arresting three suspected smugglers. The Civil Guard police said they launched the operation on Friday when they detected two suspicious speedboats at the mouth of the Guadalquivir River. The Civil Guard said it was the largest seizure of cocaine smuggled into southern Spain by speedboat. — AFP

FAREWELL TRIBUTE



With the US Capitol in the distance, flags fly at half-staff at the Washington Monument on the National Mall following the death of former US President Jimmy Carter, in Washington, US. — Reuters

US, GLOBAL LEADERS PRAISE JIMMY CARTER’S LEGACY

WASHINGTON: Joe Biden led US presidents and other world leaders in paying tribute to Jimmy Carter, who died aged 100. “America and the world lost an extraordinary leader, statesman and humanitarian,” Biden said in a statement released by the White House. He added later in a televised address that Carter “lived a life measured not by words, but by his deeds.” “We’d all do well to try and be a little more like Jimmy Carter.”

President-elect Donald Trump said Americans owe Carter “a debt of gratitude.” “The challenges Jimmy faced as president came at a pivotal time for our country and he did everything in his power to improve the lives of all Americans,” he said on social media. Among former US presidents, Bill Clinton said his predecessor had “worked tirelessly for a better, fairer world.” George W. Bush said Carter “dignified the office. And his efforts to leave behind a better world didn’t end with the presidency.” Barack Obama hailed Carter for teaching “all of us what it means to live a life of grace, dignity, justice and service.”

The 39th US president “was early to recognise that protecting our shared planet and promoting global public health was vital to national security interests,” Secretary of State Antony Blinken said. At the United Nations, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Carter would be remembered “for his solidarity with the vulnerable, his abiding grace, and his unrelenting faith in the common good and our common humanity.” World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus noted Carter’s post-presidency work with his foundation “saved countless lives and helped bring many neglected tropical diseases close to elimination.”

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called for Carter’s “noble legacy” to live on. “His work advanced peace, health and democracy worldwide,” she said. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said with the death of Carter, “The United States lost a fighter for democracy. The world lost a great mediator for peace in the Middle East and for human rights.” Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Carter “was always thoughtful and generous with his advice to me.” Mexico’s ministry of foreign affairs called Carter’s death a “regrettable loss.” Britain’s King Charles said Carter’s “dedication and humility served as an inspiration to many,” while Prime Minister Keir Starmer paid tribute to the US leader’s “lifelong dedication to peace.” — AFP

GERMAN SECURITY CHIEFS FACE QUESTIONS OVER MARKET ATTACK

BERLIN: German security and intelligence chiefs faced questioning on Monday about the car-ramming attack that killed five people and wounded more than 200 at a Christmas market 10 days ago. They were to be quizzed about possible missed clues and security failures before the December 20 attack in the eastern city of Magdeburg, where police arrested Taleb al-Abdalmohsen at the scene.

Interior Minister Nancy Faeser, Saxony-Anhalt state officials

and the heads of Germany’s federal police and its domestic and foreign intelligence services attended a closed-door committee hearing in parliament, and Faeser was to address the media later. Abdalmohsen, 50, is the only suspect in the attack in which a rented BMW sport utility vehicle ploughed through the crowd of revellers at high speed, leaving a bloody trail of carnage.

According to media reports citing unnamed German security sources,

he has in the past been treated for mental illness and tested positive for drug use on the night of his arrest. Abdalmohsen has been remanded in custody on five counts of murder and 205 counts of attempted murder, prosecutors said, but so far not on terrorism-related charges. Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who faces election in February, has declared that Germany needs to “investigate whether this terrible act could have been prevented”. “No stone must be left unturned,” he said. — AFP

US announces \$2.5 bn package for Ukraine

THE United States announced on Monday a \$2.5 billion security assistance package for Ukraine as Washington races to provide aid to Kyiv before president-elect Donald Trump takes office. Trump’s November election victory has cast doubt on the future of American support for Ukraine, providing a limited window for billions of dollars in already authorised assistance to be disbursed before he is sworn in next month. Monday’s aid includes a \$1.25 billion military “drawdown package”, which allows the Pentagon to take weapons from US stocks and send them quickly to the battlefield. An additional \$1.22 billion will be funded via the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, under which military equipment is procured from the defence industry or partners.

“Today, I am proud to announce nearly \$2.5 billion in security assistance for Ukraine, as the Ukrainian people continue to defend their independence and freedom from Russian aggression,” President Joe Biden said in a statement. The drawdowns from the defence department shelves will involve drones, ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), optically guided missiles, anti-tank weapons systems, air-to-ground munitions and spare parts, according to a separate statement from the US State Department. “The United States and more than 50 nations stand united to ensure Ukraine has the capabilities it needs to defend itself against Russia’s aggression,” Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

Ukrainian Defence Minister Rustem Umerov hailed the fresh aid package in a post on social media. “The US is a key ally of Ukraine, providing us with invaluable assistance. Together, we will win!” he wrote. The latest assistance for Ukraine follows an announcement at the beginning of the month of a nearly \$1 billion tranche of drones, ammunition and equipment. The outgoing Biden administration is working to get as much aid as possible to Ukraine before Trump -- who has repeatedly criticised US assistance for Kyiv and claimed he could secure a ceasefire within hours -- takes over in January.



People stand during a memorial service at the Lychakiv Military Cemetery, in Lviv, Ukraine. — AFP

Ukraine said on Monday it had sentenced a former police officer to 15 years behind bars on high treason charges for passing the location of air defence units to Russia. Kyiv has opened thousands of probes against Ukrainians suspected of collaborating with Russian forces since Moscow launched its full-scale attack of Ukraine in February 2022. Prosecutors said the resident of the industrial Zaporizhzhia region, which Moscow claims is part of Russia, had communicated the positions of air defence units to a former classmate, now in the Russian military. “The man travelled around the city of Zaporizhzhia and its outskirts to establish the locations of air defence positions, personnel, and defence forces’ equipment,” the Ukrainian prosecutor general’s office said in a statement.

It added that the man had also gathered information on the locations of defence industry facilities in the region.

Zaporizhzhia, which had a population of around 700,000 people in 2022, has come under persistent Russian aerial attacks. Ukraine has urged its Western allies to bolster its air defence systems to thwart Russian attacks on critical infrastructure such as energy facilities.

Meanwhile, The UN special rapporteur on human rights in Russia called on Monday for the immediate and unconditional release of Alexei Gorinov, the first person convicted for speaking out against Moscow’s war in Ukraine. “I am outraged by the severity of the punishments imposed on peaceful anti-war voices in today’s Russia. Alexei Gorinov is paying an incredibly high price for exercising his freedom of speech,” Mariana Katzarova said. Katzarova’s latest report to the council found that laws were being systematically used to target peaceful protesters and dissenting voices in Russia. — AFP

Azerbaijan says Russia pledged to punish those responsible for crash

BAKU: Azerbaijan said on Monday that Moscow had promised to punish those responsible for the downing of an Azerbaijan Airlines plane that Baku says was shot at by Russian air defences. The AZAL Embraer 190 jet crash-landed in Kazakhstan on December 25, killing 38 of the 67 people on board.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has demanded that Moscow accept responsibility for mistakenly shooting the plane as it tried to make a scheduled landing at Grozny airport in south Russia. Russia has not confirmed that one of its air-defence missiles hit the plane, though President Vladimir Putin told Aliyev in a phone call over the weekend that the systems were active at the time and that he was sorry the incident took place in Russian airspace.

Azerbaijan’s General Prosecutor said in a statement on Monday that the head of Russia’s Investigative

Committee had told Baku: “Intensive measures are being carried out to identify the guilty people and bring them to criminal responsibility.” Russia has opened a criminal inquiry into the incident but has not said whether it agrees that the plane was hit by one of its air-defence missiles, and has not said anything about finding or bringing any perpetrators to justice. Aliyev had issued a rare forthright condemnation of Moscow -- a close partner of Baku -- on Sunday. He said the plane was “hit by accident” but was angry that Russia had apparently tried to hide the cause of the crash.

Demanding that Putin admit responsibility, Aliyev also accused Russia of putting forward alternative theories that “clearly showed the Russian side wanted to cover up the issue”. Russia said Grozny, in the southern Russian region of Chechnya, was being attacked by



People mourn at the grave of Captain of the plane Igor Kshnyakin during the funeral, in Baku. — Reuters

Ukrainian drones when the plane approached to make its landing through thick fog. Survivors have described hearing explosions outside the plane, which then diverted more than 400 kilometres across the Caspian Sea towards the Kazakh city of Aktau, where it crash-

landed.

Putin said Russian air defence was operating in Grozny on December 25 when the plane tried to land, before diverting and crashing in western Kazakhstan. The Kremlin statement gave no indication that Putin had said Russia was at fault. Later on

Saturday, the Russian leader called for a “transparent” probe into the crash. Aliyev’s office said that he had “emphasised” during the call that the plane had been subject to outside interference over Russia. Russian news agencies reported that Putin and Aliyev discussed the crash again on Sunday.

The United States this week said that it had “early indications” that Russia was responsible for the crash but did not provide details. The European Union on Saturday called for a “swift” and “independent” probe into the crash. The International Air Transport Association on Sunday called for a “thorough, transparent and impartial” probe. “We must find out why this catastrophe happened and take action to ensure there is never a repeat,” it said in a statement. “Civil aircraft must never be the intended or accidental target of military operations.” — AFP

OPINION

Goodbye 2024: Looking ahead hopefully in 2025



THE penultimate day of the year offers a chance to reflect on the positives and approach the upcoming year, 2025, with confidence, ready to build on those achievements.

Globally, 2024 was another year of political achievements and uncertainties as Donald Trump made a strong comeback in the US presidential elections with landslide results, surprising all pollsters and analysts.

The Middle East conflict expanded from Gaza to Iran and Lebanon to end the year with some dramatic developments in Syria. Russia and Ukraine continue with no winners in sight, and closed the year with some civilian air travellers losing their lives in the crossfires.

But in the Sultanate of Oman, it was not that gloomy, despite having had the tragic incident of schoolchildren losing lives in floods, with the country recording budget surplus for straight years and inflation ranked among the lowest in the world.

Technically, announced in late 2023, the

year also saw the Social Protection Fund (SPF) benefits being extended to children and the elderly.

The elderly get a monthly payment of RO 115 per month if the person fulfils the conditions mentioned in the Social Protection Law, while each child, below 18 years, gets RO 10 per month.

Another important part of the Social Protection Law was that mandatory maternity leave benefits were provided to Omani and expatriate workforce in both private and public sectors.

Women are also entitled to 98 days of maternity leave, with the option to take up to 14 days before the expected birth date. Men are entitled to seven days of paternity leave.

The good news for the economy is that global credit rating agency Moody's upgraded its outlook on the Government of Oman to 'positive' from 'stable', while affirming Oman's Ba1 long-term issuer and senior unsecured ratings based on the ongoing improvement in the government's debt

A noteworthy development was the progress in digital payments, highlighted by the launch of Apple Pay and Samsung Pay, along with the rapid adoption of mobile payments

metrics, supported by elevated oil prices and prudent fiscal management.

Standard & Poor's upgraded rating from BB+ to BBB- with a stable outlook, reflecting the improved financial performance of the country, while recently Fitch Ratings revised the outlook from stable to positive.

Not to mention the progress in digital payments with the launch of Apple Pay and Samsung Pay and the rapid acceptance of mobile payments (phone number and QRs). The focus on digital transformation is evident in all spheres, especially with most of the ROP and Ministry of Health services going online.

There has been progress on cable car and railway projects, and we can just hope there will be more updates coming in the new year.

In the end, we cannot miss the launch of the Duqm-1 rocket, which was successfully carried out.

This launch signifies a transformative moment for Oman as it embarks on a journey to become a leading player in the growing space industry.

NEW YEAR IN
QUAKE-HIT
JAPAN HOMES

HIROSHI HIYAMA

Before the earthquake changed everything, 83-year-old Sueko Naka from Japan's remote Noto Peninsula wished to live out her life at home, watched over by an altar to her ancestors. But a year after a 7.5-magnitude quake and its aftershocks devastated the region, she lives in a small temporary unit with her husband and daughter, facing an uncertain future.

"When I imagine I might die here, I can't sleep well," Naka said among her minimal belongings in the newly-built dwelling in the city of Wajima. "I guess I have to accept reality. We have a place to stay," she said.

The earthquake on New Year's Day 2024 was Japan's deadliest in over a decade, claiming nearly 470 lives.

Around half the victims were killed in the disaster itself, which brought tsunami waves and sparked a huge fire in Wajima's city centre, burning down a historic market. The rest perished later, as hundreds of aftershocks and cold weather compounded stress for survivors, including 40,000 people -- many elderly -- evacuated to shelters in school gyms and community centres.

A year later, the Ishikawa region still quivers with aftershocks, stoking fears of another huge jolt. Unprecedented rains in September also unleashed severe flooding in Noto, resulting in 16 further deaths. Today, more than 200 people still live in shared emergency shelters, while thousands of others like Naka are in accommodation units meant as a stop-gap solution.

Even in the world's fourth biggest economy, reconstruction has been slow, with only a quarter of Wajima's heavily damaged buildings demolished so far. The quake ripped up roads and triggered landslides, making it difficult for heavy equipment to traverse the rural peninsula on the Sea of Japan coast.

Its most remote parts give the impression of a large construction site dotted with empty homes, some at slanted angles. An army of demolition crews operate heavy trucks on pavements warped into wavy, uneven surfaces, but locals say much more is still needed to clear the destruction.

After the earthquake "we received various forms of external support, and there was an emerging sense that everyone was going to start over", Wajima city official Yasuaki Ipponmatsu said.

"But the torrential rain swept away everything, and people had to go back to square one," he said. "That was very difficult."

New Year is an important period of rest for Japanese families, so when the strongest of several quakes hit in the afternoon of January 1, 2024, Naka was at home with her husband.

Its force knocked them to the floor as the foundations of their house dropped half a metre. "A big roar came from the house next door. Their house crashed down on ours, leaning on it," she recounted. "I thought, 'This cannot be.'"

The couple's family home was among the newer structures in their Wajima neighbourhood, built after a 6.9-magnitude earthquake in 2007 destroyed their last house. "When I remember what happened, I can only cry," Naka said.

The quake significantly damaged more than 100,000 buildings and completely destroyed over 6,000 across the region of Ishikawa. — AFP

Resilience and renewal:
Lessons for the new year

AS the year turns anew, we often find ourselves between hope and exhaustion, ambition and despair. For many of us, the weight of past struggles threatens to dampen the promise of fresh beginnings.

This New Year, however, I am reminded of an invaluable lesson on resilience that came not from my achievements but from the indomitable spirit of two students from Sultan Qaboos University who refused to give up when everything seemed against them.

Several months ago, I had the privilege of supervising a group of students for a research project sponsored by Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Qatar.

The FIGNEWS project's topic was both timely and daunting: analysing bias in news coverage of the war between Israel and Palestine. Despite their initial enthusiasm, the challenge of applying discourse analysis — a methodology they had no prior experience with — soon became apparent.

As the semester wore on, one by one, other students dropped out, overwhelmed by the complexity of the task.

But two of them stayed. Their names are etched in my memory not because they were the brightest or most experienced, but because they were the most determined. They faced every setback with grit, even when the odds seemed insurmountable. There were moments when their frustration was palpable, when progress seemed nonexistent. Yet, they refused to quit.

I recall vividly the 11th hour of the project. The deadline loomed, and the paper was still incomplete. Against all odds, these two students managed not only to finish their research but to submit a paper that exceeded all expectations.

The most remarkable part? Out of over 100 submissions, their paper was selected for publication. Their journey exemplified the power of perseverance and the rewards of refusing to give up.

This experience was more than just a testament to their determination; it was a wake-up call for me. In that same period, I had been wrestling with doubts about my own professional and personal goals. The weight of unmet expectations and relentless challenges had me contemplating surrender. But then, these two



The FIGNEWS project's topic for a research project sponsored by Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Qatar analysed bias in news coverage of the war between Israel and Palestines



DR NAJMA
AL ZIDJALY

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students walked into my office, their faces alight with pride and disbelief at what they had accomplished.

In that moment, I realised that their victory was as much mine as theirs. Their resilience reignited my own resolve.

Their story reminds me of a powerful lesson often echoed by a famous politician. Reflecting on life's inherent unfairness, he emphasised that things will not always go your way, and at times, you will face challenges you neither deserve nor expect. Yet, the path to success lies in persistence — in keeping your head down and pushing forward, no matter the obstacles. This call to endure, to keep fighting despite the odds, resonates deeply as a testament to the value of resilience.

On another occasion, this leader spoke of the battles life demands after the festive season, urging focus and determination. He reminded all to approach these challenges with an unyielding spirit, to never accept defeat, and to strive relentlessly

for ultimate success. His words underscore the importance of perseverance, even in the face of daunting difficulties.

As we step into this New Year, let us carry these lessons with us.

The politician's insistence on persistence and the students who overcame their lack of expertise to achieve recognition taught me that success is not reserved for those with innate talent or abundant resources; it belongs to those who persist despite their shortcomings and challenges. Their story is a reminder to adopt new perspectives as the greatest battles are won not by those who never falter but by those who refuse to stay down.

So, if you find yourself weary, on the verge of giving up, remember this: The road may be long and unfair, but the end is worth the fight. As we celebrate this New Year, let us resolve to push forward, focus on our goals, and never, ever give up. For in the relentless pursuit of our dreams lies the promise of triumph.

It is time to say goodbye to 2024



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior editor of Observer

We are done with 365 days, and we have a few hours to reflect on the year it has been. There have been lessons to learn and changes we have had to accept. I came across this quote by Eleanor Roosevelt, which says, “Today is the oldest you’ve ever been, and the youngest you’ll ever be again.” That is a thought to entertain because it urges us to appreciate everything we have and had. Once again, there have been people we have had to say goodbye to. It is always difficult to accept the fact that you will never hear from them or see them again. Just as we start a new chapter with a new year, there is much to be accomplished and looked forward to, but there are also matters that require closure. It is not because somebody is sitting there to grade you, but for our own clarity of mind, which we often describe as peace of mind. Quite often, our mind is compartmentalised into pieces, and most of the time we jump from one to the other, reacting instead of responding simply because we have not planned what we want. We have desires, but we do not want to plan how to achieve them or plan what to do if we achieve them.

At that moment, we think our investment is just our time. But if we only wish and do not materialise what we want, then we are just hoping, and we are wasting our own precious time. I was just reading about what a difference it can make to our lives if we were to write down our thoughts before we go to sleep. All we have to do is write our goals for the next day, recollect what we are grateful for, and jot down if there are any negative thoughts. If we can do this for each day, we can surely do so for a whole new year awaiting us as we cross the threshold. There might have been things we wished for that may not have been fruitful, but there is no point in carrying forward regrets. That space can be used for visualisations and manifestations. Of course, it is always better to do what we want to do when we have a chance. This moment will never come back. If it is a project, don’t be surprised if someone else thought of a similar idea and did it before you did. On the other hand, what we like today may not be what we appreciate five years down the line. As time goes by, people grow, change, and think differently. It is the beauty of ageing. The author of

Just as we start a new chapter with a new year, there is much to be accomplished and look forward to in the new year, but there are also matters that require closure.

The Power of Now stresses how we should be aware of the present moment instead of losing ourselves in worry and anxiety about the past or future. Eckhart Tolle’s famous quote is, “When you lose touch with inner stillness, you lose touch with yourself; when you lose touch with yourself, you lose yourself in the world.” It is wonderful to realise that each one of us has a special place in this world. The question is: should we just exist, or should we excel? The answer might vary depending on our age and experiences. But the best quality we can take with us into next year is resilience and, most importantly, the power of faith. We have to keep reminding ourselves not to indulge in the past because we are losing in the now. Maybe we could have been many things in the past, but if we do not have them now, what is the point of indulging in those moments? Instead, we can create the new version of ourselves now. Water changes forms, and change is the factor. That is how the world moves forward. The beauty is we are one of the links of the world. In the stillness of the mind lies creativity. Creativity is the fuel for the mind.

EU darling Poland replaces ‘irritating’ Hungary at bloc’s helm

UMBERTO BACCHI

Poland takes over the European Union’s rotating presidency from Hungary on January 1, a change at the helm likely to be met with a sigh of relief in many EU quarters. Warsaw is expected to bring a more conciliatory approach than its predecessor to a role that—although lacking in real power—is seen as a key driver of the bloc’s action. Traditionally hawkish towards Russia, Poland has been among Ukraine’s loudest backers since the 2022 attack, while Hungary—as Moscow’s closest EU ally—has resisted support for Kyiv. “Everyone is looking forward to having a fresh start,” said a diplomat. Long bound together by strong cultural and diplomatic ties, Poland and Hungary have seen their European fortunes diverge dramatically in recent years. Under Hungary’s nationalist prime minister, Viktor Orban, Budapest has regularly found itself at loggerheads with Brussels, becoming something of a black sheep. Its six-month presidency was awaited with dread and later proved to be “quite irritating” to other EU governments, said Guntram Wolff, a senior fellow at Brussels-based think tank Bruegel. While each EU country fights tooth-and-nail for its own interests, when they assume the EU presidency they are meant to put their politics aside to take on a seemingly more neutral role. Orban used the platform to openly pursue his own diplomatic agenda. He began by travelling to Russia for talks with President Vladimir Putin as part of an unapproved Ukraine “peace mission” that also saw him visit Kyiv and Beijing. That sparked fury among fellow EU leaders. Although the EU likens the role of the presidency to “hosting a dinner” among the bloc’s members, the job is not without punch. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk is likely to oversee a return to the more traditional tasks of consensus building and compromise brokering, said Wolff. The former EU chief has ended the fraught relationship between Brussels and Poland’s previous nationalist government—boosting the country’s already growing clout. Since it joined the EU in 2004, Poland’s economy has almost tripled in size, according to the Danish Institute for International Studies. It currently accounts for more than four per cent of the EU’s total output. Only Germany, France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands contribute more. Poland currently tops Nato’s spending ranking relative to the size of its economy, with more than four per cent of its GDP devoted to defence. This will be reflected in the goals it pursues over the next semester. The bloc’s fifth-largest country in terms of population has said it wants to use the presidency to “strengthen its position as one of the most important” EU states. Its representative to the EU, Agnieszka Bartol, said “security” would be its main focus. — AFP

AI: How we are forced to change ethical framework

AS we strive to develop machines that can navigate the complexities of human morality, we find ourselves confronting unsettling truths about the nature of ethics itself. Rapid advancements in AI have brought us to an era where these systems are no longer mere digital tools but key decision-makers in scenarios laden with moral consequences — from self-driving cars forced to choose between two harmful outcomes to loan-approval algorithms that determine people’s fates. This intertwining of AI and ethical challenges prompts a critical question: can we truly embed morality in AI algorithms? And what does our effort reveal about our entire ethical system? Ethics is not a single, uniform concept. It is a diverse tapestry of cultural, social, and individual threads. Standards vary significantly across societies and among individuals. Reducing this complexity to lines of code reveals profound philosophical hurdles.

In “How Can AI Be Truly Ethical?” (published in The New Yorker), Paul Bloom highlights that humans themselves disagree on what constitutes moral behaviour. From a scientific perspective, classic programming is built on clear rules and logic, yet real moral dilemmas often transcend binary reasoning. The famous “trolley problem” illustrates this challenge: an autonomous vehicle must make a split-second choice without human intuition. Should it prioritise passengers over pedestrians? How does it measure one life against another? Our limited human capacity to capture the full breadth of ethics hinders our efforts to devise a clear, fair “moral algorithm” for AI. In trying to build ethical AI, we confront our own contradictions: AI systems learn from human-generated data, inevitably mirroring our biases and moral standpoints. They become a “moral mirror” reflecting both our outward behaviour and the hidden flaws in our ethical thinking. This, in turn, sparks difficult questions about responsibility. If an AI, shaped by biased data, makes a questionable decision, who should bear the blame — the developers, the users, or society at large?



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DR MUAMAR AL TOBI

The writer is an academic and researcher

This dispersal of accountability introduces yet another ethical dilemma. Some argue that AI can render objective decisions free from emotional or irrational influences. However, ethics itself is not universally objective: one society’s norm may be another’s taboo. This discrepancy poses a major challenge in coding universal moral principles into AI. Moreover, a strictly “logical” AI that aims to maximise overall benefits could neglect individual rights or emotional harms, clashing with human values that attempt to balance collective and personal interests. For instance, an AI might boost workplace productivity through policies that seem efficient but result in exhausted employees or lost jobs, valuing productivity over individual well-being. As AI expands rapidly into more areas of life, robust ethical regulations become essential. Governments and international organisations must prioritise establishing guidelines to ensure AI systems operate within acceptable moral boundaries, addressing issues like privacy, consent, and the morally charged dimensions of AI-driven decisions. The EU’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) represents a solid step toward creating accountability and ethical constraints. Yet laws alone cannot guarantee the ethical use of

AI. Responsibility extends from the developers who build these systems to the policymakers who oversee their deployment. AI must be aligned with core ethical principles widely recognised by humanity. Some researchers propose developing explainable AI (XAI) so that the reasoning behind decisions is transparent, allowing human oversight when moral hazards arise. As AI grows more integrated into daily life, its influence on human ethics may become reciprocal. We could adopt ethical standards that mirror the logic of AI — for better or worse — shaped by digital rationality. This dynamic appears in calls to “humanise AI and digitise humanity,” hinting at a new frontier that reveals yet another moral puzzle. We may believe we can bypass the pursuit of absolute moral perfection in AI algorithms, but creating truly ethical AI involves daunting philosophical challenges, not merely technical ones. Ultimately, this pursuit highlights the fragility of our moral concepts, pushing us to reconsider what it means to be an ethical human before deciding how to code morality into machines. Indeed, AI systems serve as a moral mirror, reflecting our values and behaviours, prompting us to refine our own ethical foundations even before we impose them on intelligent algorithms.

SPORTS

RED WARRIORS AIM TO OVERPOWER SAUDIS

WALEED AL JAHWARI
KUWAIT, DEC 30

THE Oman national team is looking forward to holding Saudi Arabia in the semifinal match at Jaber Mubarak Al Hamad Stadium in Sulaibikhat City in Kuwait on Tuesday.

The national team aims to be in the final competition of the 26th edition of the Arabian Gulf Cup.

The Oman team qualified for the semis after a thrilling match against the UAE on Friday, which ended 1-1.

The Saudi team passed to the semis after beating Iraq on Saturday.

Oman team is highly motivated to achieve victory and confirm the ambitions for the Gulf wedding final.

The Red Warriors are reaching the semifinals for the seventh time out of 10 editions after the group system was launched 20 years ago.

Oman reached the final five times, won the title twice in the 19th and 23rd editions, and lost the final in the 17th, 18th, and 25th editions.

It has become imperative to be careful not to fall into the trap of conceding early, as suffered in the group stage against Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE, respectively.

The national team's match against Saudi will be the first of the semi-finals of Gulf Cup tournaments. Saudi Arabia has the advantage with 17 wins, compared to 3 wins for the national team.

Rasheed bin Jaber al Yafei, Oman national football team coach, in the press conference on the eve of the match said: "The match is important, as it has good elements and its history attests to that. Our team needs to be ready for this match. I trust all the players, and indeed the absence of Al Musalmi is significant, but I trust all the substitutes.

"Mistakes exist with all teams, hoping that our team will succeed in reaching the final. Our team must work double hard in order to win the title. Omani players are ready for all possibilities, including playing for 120 minutes or penalty kicks. We need mental focus for this important match.

"Salah al Yahyai and Amjad al Harthy will not be able to play due to injury, in addition



to Mohammed al Musalmi, team captain. The Saudi team is good and has high-level players, but our team has the ability to face them.

"All teams qualified for the semi-finals are good candidates to win the title, and their chances are equal," he said.

Issam al Subhi, Oman national team

player, and Abdullah al Hamdan, Saudi Arabia player, are competing for the top scorer title as they have three goals each.

The match will be officiated by Turkish referee Halil Olnmut, assisted by Kerim Ersoy, Ibrahim Ciglar, and Mustapha Gherbal. Japan's Eddie Jamie is a video assistant referee, assisted by Mohammed Obaid.

The Referees Committee decided to end the journey of the refereeing crews representing the four teams that reached the semi-finals to ensure equal opportunities.

Accordingly, Oman's international crew, Qassim al Hatmi, Hamad al Ghafri and Nasser Ambusaidi, ended their journey after they managed matches in the group stage.

Oman should focus on strong defence: Al Riyami

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 30

The experienced national coach, Abdulaziz al Riyami, urged Oman's players to maintain concentration and composure in their semifinal clash against Saudi Arabia in the 26th Arabian Gulf Cup, emphasising the importance of disciplined play and strategic execution.

The match will take place at Jaber Al Mubarak Stadium in Kuwait on Tuesday at 6:30 pm (Oman time).

"The match against Saudi Arabia will be a tough challenge for both sides," Al Riyami said.

"Saudi Arabia demonstrated their strength with an impressive victory over Iraq in their last game. They are highly disciplined and boast experienced players who excel on the field."

Al Riyami highlighted specific strategies to counter Saudi Arabia's strengths, particularly in midfield. "The coaching staff should focus on dominating the ball in the centre of the field and increasing the number of players in this critical area. Most of Saudi



Arabia's scoring opportunities stem from this zone. A stronger midfield presence can neutralise their attack and reduce their effectiveness," he explained.

The importance of tighter defensive measures was another

key matter which was addressed by Abdulaziz.

"The defenders need to implement a man-to-man marking strategy especially to track the movements of Saudi strikers both inside and

outside the penalty box. This will minimise their chances of penetration into dangerous areas," he added.

The domestic coach pointed out some areas where Oman players need to enhance their gameplay,

particularly in utilising crosses effectively.

"Oman team must diversify their style of play and improve their use of crosses from the flanks to create more opportunities in front of the goal. Additionally, the defensive line needs to be more robust to prevent opponents from breaking through the box," he said.

Al Riyami emphasised the need for heightened focus during the game, especially in the dying minutes. "In the closing moments of matches, we have seen lapses in concentration like the penalty conceded against the UAE.

The players must avoid making unnecessary errors near the penalty area especially in the final minutes," he cautioned.

Commenting on the absence of key defenders, including Mohammed al Musallami and Amjad al Harthy, Al Riyami expressed confidence in the team's ability to adapt.

"While they are vital players, this situation presents a great opportunity for new faces to step up and deliver at their highest level," he concluded.

SPORTS

WINTEREVENINGS



Elite chess players compete in thrilling rounds at Muscat Masters

INTENSE BATTLES AT MUSCAT CHESS MASTERS

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 30

The Muscat International Chess Masters Championship continued as part of the Muscat Nights festival on Monday, aimed at enlivening winter evenings with activities that blend culture, sports and entertainment. With the launch of the sixth round, the championship witnessed fierce competition among a selection of top local and international chess players, showcasing high levels of competitiveness and thrilling performances.

The tournament, running until Tuesday, features 200 players representing 22 countries, reaffirming its status as one of the most prominent championships on the international stage. The matches are played in a Swiss-system format over nine rounds, with each player allotted 90 minutes of thinking time, plus a 30-second increment per move.

The sixth round was marked by intense matches, highlighted by the draw between Egyptian Grandmaster Adham Fawzy and Uzbek International Master Najmatov in a game full of excitement until the final moments. In another match, Uzbek Grandmaster Abdusalamov asserted his dominance by defeating Algerian Grandmaster Bilal Ben Hassan.

On the local front, Omani player Hamood al Busaidy achieved a significant victory against Egyptian Grandmaster Shahenda Wafaa, reflecting the rising level of Omani players in the tournament.

Meanwhile, in an all-Iranian showdown, Grandmaster Gholami triumphed over his compatriot Sabih. Filipino player Emerson continued his winning streak with a well-deserved victory against Egyptian Imad Abdel Nabi. In another match, India's Siriya delivered a remarkable performance, overcoming Iraqi Ali Farhad, while Omani Mohammed al Saidi clinched an exciting win against compatriot Emad al Balushi.

With more exciting rounds ahead, the tournament is expected to culminate in a grand finale. The closing ceremony will honour the winners and highlight their achievements on the international stage.

All eyes remain on this championship, which combines intellect, competition and the spirit of sportsmanship, solidifying chess's position as one of the leading sports in Oman and on the global stage.



Seeb player attempts a layup under pressure from Bashayer defenders in during an intense basketball match

Al Bashayer beat Seeb to top basketball league

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 30

Al Bashayer Club snatched victory over Seeb Club with a score of 60-56 in a match held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. With this win, Al Bashayer raised their tally to 12 points, while Seeb now stands at 11 points in 2024-2025 Oman Basketball League.

The match witnessed intense competition and excitement throughout all quarters. Seeb dominated the first and fourth quarters, while Al Bashayer asserted their control in the second and third quarter. Al Bashayer's standout performers included Ahmed al Halhali, alongside professionals Samkelo Brian and Slavin Kupkovic, as well as Bassam al Busaidy.

For Seeb, notable players included Rashid al Wahaibi, Marwan al Hadidi and Abdulrahman al Shaibi.

The game kicked off strongly with Seeb taking the lead as Rashid al Zuhaibi scored two points with a basket from under the rim.

Al Bashayer quickly responded with a three-pointer by Said al Saadi. The exchanges continued, with Seeb adding 16 points and Al Bashayer 14 points, ending the first quarter with Seeb leading 18-17.

In the second quarter, Al Bashayer showcased superior offensive and defensive skills.

Their players alternated in scoring, allowing Al Bashayer to advance to 32-22. After an attempt by Seeb's player Romeo

to score from a foul, Al Bashayer retaliated with a three pointer, strengthening their lead to 35-23. The back and forth play continued, with Al Bashayer maintaining their lead by the end of the first half at 40-26.

The third quarter saw Al Bashayer retaining their dominance despite Seeb's attempts to narrow the gap.

Brian opened the scoring for Al Bashayer with three points, countered by Seeb with six points through Nooh al Amri and Marwan al Hadidi, who hit two three pointers to bring the score to 32-43. However, Brian added two more points for Al Bashayer.

Seeb reduced the gap further before Al Bashayer's Hadid Bait Bakhit responded with a three pointer to extend the lead to 48-35.

Both teams continued to score, concluding the third quarter with Al Bashayer ahead 49-40.

In the fourth quarter, both teams increased their offensive efforts, with Seeb particularly focused on closing the gap.

They managed to bring the difference down to just two points, but Al Bashayer responded effectively, reinforcing their lead.

The match concluded with Al Bashayer securing a 60-56 victory over Seeb.

The match was officiated by Ahmed al Balushi as the first referee, Essam al Siyabi as the second referee, and Mazen al Hilali as the third referee.

The table officials included Mariam al Zadjali, Majid al Akhzami, and Omaina al Hajri, with international referee Younis al Zadjali serving as the technical observer.



Australia beat India by 184 runs in Test thriller

MELBOURNE: Australia ripped out seven Indian wickets in the final session of a dramatic fourth Test in Melbourne on Monday to win a thriller by 184 runs and go 2-1 up in the five-match series.

India crumbled to 155 all out with just 12.5 overs left in the match at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and will need to win the final Test starting in Sydney on Friday to level the series and retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

Set an unlikely 340 to win, India looked well placed to salvage a draw when opener Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rishabh Pant batted through the second session to take their side to 112-3 at tea.

But Pant perished trying to slog part-time spinner Travis Head for



Australia celebrate after defeating India in Melbourne on Monday. — Reuters

six to spark a collapse as India's last seven wickets fell for 34 runs from 20.3 overs.

Top-scorer Jaiswal was out for 84 to Australia captain and man-of-the match Pat Cummins, who took 3-28, and Nathan Lyon ended the contest when he trapped Mohammed Siraj lbw to spark wild scenes of jubilation among the home team.

Pace bowler Mitchell Starc said the home side never lost faith they could force victory in the last session.

"There were a few patches through the day with the wicket not doing a whole lot, but we managed to find a way," Starc said.

"I think that's just a feature of the group at the moment, is that calmness, to have that belief that we

can get the job done."

The departure of Pant for 30, caught on the boundary from a wild shot, ended an 88-run partnership and rejuvenated the Australia bowlers. Ravindra Jadeja and first-innings centurion Nitish Kumar Reddy came and went quickly before Cummins ended Jaiswal's gritty 208-ball knock in controversial fashion.

The 23-year-old was given not out to a caught-behind appeal from an attempted hook. But the decision was overturned by the TV umpire on visual evidence that the ball had changed direction, even though no noise was picked up by technology.

Akash Deep was caught at short leg off Scott Boland, who took 3-39, before Jasprit Bumrah scored his second duck of the match. —AFP

SPORTS



Liverpool's Cody Gakpo celebrates scoring their second goal with Mohamed Salah Action Images via Reuters

Liverpool thrash West Ham to go eight points clear

LIVERPOOL thrashed West Ham United 5-0 at the London Stadium to stretch their Premier League lead to eight points on Sunday with Mohamed Salah once again in irrepressible form.

The Egyptian has been enjoying a vintage season despite uncertainty over a new contract and scored once and provided two assists as Liverpool dismantled their outclassed hosts.

He now has 20 goals in all competitions this season, has scored and assisted in eight Premier League games and appears to be firing Liverpool towards a 20th league title in Dutchman Arne Slot's first season in charge.

Liverpool have 45 points from 18 games with surprise package Nottingham Forest their closest pursuers with 37 points having played a game more. Fourth-placed Chelsea could cut the gap to seven on Sunday when they take on struggling Ipswich Town.

"The only thing on my mind is I want Liverpool to win the league and I want to be part of that," Salah said.

"I will do my best for the team to win the trophy. There is a few other teams catching up with us and we need to stay focused and humble and go again. I am almost hungry for more." Asked if there was any breakthrough in extending his contract beyond this season, Salah added: "No, we are far away from that and I don't want to put anything in the media." While that impasse will concern Liverpool's fans, they are enjoying watching Salah reach new levels every week, as is his appreciative manager Slot who has lost only one match



this calendar year, including his results with former club Feyenoord.

"If you look at his number you can't argue with that," Slot said when asked if Salah was currently the best in the world.

"Mo is definitely up there at the moment." Liverpool had scored nine goals in their last two league games and the only surprise on Sunday was that they could not make their superiority tell in the opening stages at West Ham.

But once Luis Diaz swept a shot past home keeper Alphonse Areola after the ball rebounded kindly into his path after 30 minutes there was no stopping Slot's men.

West Ham might point to a Mohammed Kudus shot that rattled the post when it was 1-0 but they were never really in it.

Salah showed great footwork to tee up Cody Gakpo in a crowded area to make it 2-0 in the 40th minute and was then played in by Curtis Jones to effectively end the contest just before the interval, firing a shot inside the post.

Liverpool throttled back after the break but still carved out several chances and Trent Alexander-Arnold's shot deflected off the head of Max Kilman to make it 4-0 in the 54th minute.

Slot made a raft of substitutions in the second half but Salah stayed on to torment West Ham and produced a mazy dribble before releasing Jota to curl in the fifth in the 84th minute.

Some of the few West Ham fans who remained at the end booed at the final whistle but Liverpool, as they have been since the start of the season, were simply too good. — Reuters



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POULTRYPRODUCTS

A'Saffa Foods is a key player in Oman's poultry sector.

A'SAFFA FOODS TO BOOST POULTRY PRODUCTION

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, DEC 30

The Board of Directors of A'Saffa Foods SAOG has announced an ambitious expansion plan to significantly increase its broiler chicken production capacity. The plan will see production grow from the current 48 million birds per year to an impressive 60 million birds annually.

This expansion aligns with A'Saffa Foods' commitment to meet the growing demand for high-quality poultry products in Oman and beyond. The increase in production capacity reflects the company's proactive approach to address food security challenges while cementing its position as a leader in the poultry sector.

A spokesperson for A'Saffa Foods stated that the move is part of the company's strategic five-year growth plan. "This step represents our dedication to ensure sustainable growth and meet the rising demand from our customers, while continuing to deliver premium halal poultry products."

The company's investment in this expansion underscores its role in contributing to Oman's food security, supporting the nation's economic development under Oman Vision 2040. With increased production, A'Saffa Foods aims to further strengthen its supply chain, enhance operational efficiency and create additional employment opportunities in the Sultanate of Oman.

Manah II solar IPP commences operations

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 30

SINGAPORE-based Sembcorp Utilities Pte Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of Sembcorp Industries, has announced the successful commercial operation of its Manah II Solar Independent Power Project (IPP) in the Sultanate of Oman. This milestone marks the completion of acceptance tests, more than four months ahead of the originally scheduled commercial operation date.

With a peak installed capacity of 588 megawatts (MW), Manah II stands as Sembcorp's largest utility-scale solar farm within its global renewables portfolio. The project is also Sembcorp's first greenfield renewable energy development in the Middle East, underscoring the company's commitment to expanding its clean energy footprint in the region.

The facility is supported by a 20-year power purchase agreement with Nama Power and Water Procurement Company for the supply of 500 MW of electricity. This collaboration aligns with the country's strategic energy transition goals under Oman Vision 2040, which include increasing the share of renewable energy to 30 per cent by 2030.

The Manah II project represents a significant step forward in Oman's renewable energy ambitions. By harnessing solar power on a utility scale, the project will contribute to diversifying Oman's energy mix and reducing dependence on conventional fossil fuels.

For Sembcorp, the project is expected to bolster its earnings

Manah II stands as Sembcorp's largest utility-scale solar farm within its global renewables portfolio.

Manah II stands as Sembcorp's largest utility-scale solar farm within its global renewables portfolio

per share without materially impacting its net tangible assets per share for the financial year ending December 31, 2024.

The early completion of Manah II reflects the efficiency of Sembcorp's project execution capabilities, as well as its dedication to support global clean energy initiatives. This development further cements Oman's role as a key player in the Middle East's transition to

sustainable energy solutions.

This achievement also highlights the importance of public-private partnerships in fostering sustainable infrastructure development, showcasing how collaboration between local entities like Nama Power and Water Procurement Company and international firms like Sembcorp can drive progress towards shared environmental goals.

Gulf countries' tourism revenues balloon to \$110.4 billion in 2023

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, DEC 30

International tourism revenues earned by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states amounted to \$110.4 billion in 2023, according to recent data published by the GCC Statistical Centre.

This figure represents a 28.2 per cent increase compared to 2019, when revenues were \$86.1 billion. GCC earnings constituted 7.2 per cent of the global market share, emphasising the GCC's role as an attractive tourism destination.

In terms of revenue, the United Arab Emirates ranked first with \$51.9 billion, followed by Saudi Arabia with \$40.6 billion, Qatar with \$8.8 billion, Bahrain with \$5.1 billion, Oman with \$2.3 billion, and Kuwait with \$1.7 billion.

In terms of revenue growth compared to 2019, Qatar experienced the highest growth

Revenues constituted 7.2 per cent of the global market share, emphasising the GCC's role as an attractive tourism destination.

rate at 61.7 per cent, followed by Kuwait at 41.9 per cent and the UAE at 35.1 per cent. Bahrain recorded a 33 per cent increase, Saudi Arabia saw a 15.3 per cent increase, and Oman experienced growth of 14.9 per cent.

With these revenues, the Gulf states achieved 58.7 per cent of their 2030 target goal of increasing international tourist expenditure to \$188 billion, as outlined in the GCC tourism strategy.

The number of international tourists grew by 42.8 per cent compared to 2019, reaching a total of 68.1 million visitors, which represents 5.2 per cent of the global market share.

The UAE ranked first in terms of tourist attraction with 28.1 million visitors, followed by Saudi Arabia with 27.4 million visitors, Bahrain with 5.6 million visitors, Qatar with 4.1 million visitors, Oman with 2.8 million visitors,

and Kuwait ranking last with 0.4 million visitors. In terms of tourist growth, Qatar ranked first with a growth rate of 91.9 per cent compared to 2019, followed by Saudi Arabia with 56.5 per cent growth and Bahrain with 44.3 per cent.

The UAE demonstrated a growth rate of 30.3 per cent, while tourists visiting Oman grew by 13.9 per cent. Kuwait, however, experienced a sharp decline in visitors, with a drop of 59.8 per cent.

The largest share of international tourists to the GCC came from Asia and the Pacific, accounting for 38 per cent of total visitors, followed by the Middle East at 25.1 per cent, Europe at 22.9 per cent, and Africa at 8.8 per cent.

Visitors from the Americas represented 4.3 per cent of the total, followed by unspecified destinations at 0.9 per cent.

OMAN

STRONG SUPPORT



The newly signed projects represent a variety of industries, showcasing the industrial city's appeal as a hub for diverse business ventures.

AL BURAIMI INDUSTRIAL CITY INKS RO 8M WORTH PROJECTS IN H2 2024

BUSINESS REPORTER
AL BURAIMI, DEC 30

Al Buraimi Industrial City, part of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), has signed a total of 16 investment contracts during the second half of 2024, with a total investment value of RO 7.97 million. These agreements pave the way for new projects spanning a combined area of more than 165,000 sq metres.

The newly signed projects represent a variety of industries, showcasing the industrial city's appeal as a hub for diverse business ventures.

These include automotive oil manufacturing, wood impregnation, carton production, production line manufacturing, water tank manufacturing, food packaging factory, storage facility for new car spare parts, water production and bottling plant, medical supplies factory, and a commercial showroom.

Al Buraimi Industrial City undertakes constant ongoing efforts to enhance its investment environment and provide streamlined facilities for businesses. By attracting a wide array of investments, the industrial city continues to contribute to Oman's economic growth and support the realisation of national strategic goals.

STOCK MARKETS, DOLLAR RETREAT

LONDON: European and Asia stock markets mostly fell Monday in jittery holiday trade ahead of a potentially tumultuous 2025 when Donald Trump returns to the White House.

With volumes thin, US futures were also pointing lower after losses on Friday that put paid to Wall Street's usual holiday period "Santa Claus rally".

"We can't drive major conclusions in a holiday-shortened and thin-trading-volume week, but last week's price action looked pretty close to the narrative of rotation from tech to non-tech stocks that many investors expect to be the theme of next year," noted Ipek Ozkardeskaya, senior analyst at Swissquote Bank.

US tech stocks had led the losses Friday, with Elon Musk's electric car giant Tesla shedding around five percent and AI chipmaker Nvidia off around two percent.

Weighing on sentiment were worries about slower-than-hoped US interest rate cuts and possible higher import tariffs once Trump is inaugurated on January 20.

Tokyo closed down almost one percent Monday, its last day of trading until January 6.

Nissan fell as much as 6.7 percent on worries about its mooted merger with fellow Japanese automaker Honda. — **AFP**

Training workshop aims to enhance financial literacy among students

Financial Literacy is one of the basic skills that individuals need in their daily lives, especially in light of increasing economic challenges and rapid changes in financial markets.

Financial literacy contributes to enable individuals to make wise decisions about their money, which enhances their ability to manage their personal budgets, invest wisely and plan properly for their financial future.

In this context, Bank Muscat, in

partnership with the Ministry of Education (MoE), recently organised a two-day training workshop on the concepts of financial literacy, as part of the Bank Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Maliyat Academy initiative.

It targeted a group of life skills teachers, vocational guidance specialists and a number of members of the Khazna project team.

The workshop aimed train the



The workshop aimed to train the trainers and provide participants with the necessary knowledge and skills to learn basic financial concepts.

Sohar International raises RO 130 million in capital

DEMONSTRATING strong Investor confidence, Sohar International has successfully concluded its 2024 rights issue, raising RO 130 million, further strengthening its capital base to support future growth initiatives.

The Issuance marks one of the largest Rights issues in 2024 on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

The capital raise showcases Sohar International's dedication to growth with excellence, aligning with Oman Vision 2040 by promoting sustainable development and empowering businesses, individuals and communities.

The proceeds from the rights issue will primarily be utilised to enhance capital buffers, fuel strategic initiatives and expand product and service offerings, particularly in sectors crucial to Oman's economic development.

This move aligns with banks commitment to deliver sustainable value to both shareholders and the broader economy.

Commenting on the successful completion of the rights issue, Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, remarked, "This milestone marks a pivotal moment in our journey, reaffirming our resolve to fortify our financial foundation.

The trust our shareholders have shown is a clear endorsement of their steadfast belief in our strategy and future direction. This achievement not only strengthens

Sohar International Bank's 2024 Rights Issue launched in November 2024, attracted a broader and diverse investor base, including Government and Private institutions, Family Offices and Individuals.



The capital raise showcases Sohar International's dedication to growth with excellence.

our capital base, ensuring resilience against future economic uncertainties, but also provides the vital resources necessary to accelerate our growth trajectory.

The funds raised will power our ongoing business development, fuelling the execution of our transformation agenda, which is closely aligned with the evolving banking landscape and our enduring vision."

Sohar International Bank's 2024 Rights Issue launched in November 2024, attracted a broader and diverse investor base, including Government and Private institutions, Family Offices and Individuals.

The overwhelming support from our shareholders reflects their belief in our growth strategy and

commitment to deliver sustainable value. Participation in the Rights Issue recorded a remarkable 65 per cent increase in the number of investors compared to the previous Rights issuance in 2022.

The success of the Issuance is a testament of the strong fundamentals of the bank and the unwavering confidence of Sohar International Shareholders despite challenging market conditions.

Following the launch, the allotted rights were then successfully listed on Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on December 2, 2024. Together with the support of the Muscat Clearing & Depository (MCD) and the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), the issuance was also governed by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) and the Financial Services Authority (FSA).

Aussie firm acquires Oman-focused Tethys Oil

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 30

Swedish upstream energy firm Tethys Oil, now majority-owned by Roc Oil Company Pty Ltd (ROC) of Australia, has de-listed from Nasdaq Stockolm as part of the new owner's plans to take the company private.

Tethys Oil has interests in a number of upstream onshore assets in the Sultanate of Oman — interests that will transfer to the new owner once the acquisition process is completed and ratified by Oman's authorities.

As of December 18, 2024, the deadline for Tethys Oil shareholders to transfer their shares to the new buyer, more than 90 per cent of the former's shares had passed into the hands of ROC.

It follows an all-cash proposal by ROC offering Tethys' shareholders 58.70 Swedish Krona (SEK) in cash per share, amounting to a total value of 1.894 billion SEK (approximately \$180 million) for all outstanding



With Tethys Oil's acquisition, ROC is set to make its debut in Oman's upstream energy sector.

shares in the Swedish firm.

Settlement of the Offer was completed last week.

As for the outstanding shares not transferred to the new company, ROC announced that it would initiate a compulsory redemption of these shares.

It also requested Tethys Oil

to apply for the de-listing of the shares from Nasdaq Stockholm.

The last day of trading in Tethys Oil shares on Nasdaq Stockholm is January 10, 2025.

Predominantly Oman-focused Tethys Oil has a 30 per cent non-operating stake in Blocks 3&4 in eastern Oman, which

is its flagship asset accounting for almost all of its current hydrocarbon production from Oman.

It also owns and operates the exploration Blocks 49 and 58 located in the south of the country, as well as the exploration Block 56 which it operates with a 65 per cent ownership stake.

With Tethys Oil acquisition, ROC will be making its debut in the energy sector of the Middle East. Headquartered in New South Wales (Australia), ROC has a presence in China and South-East Asia, besides Australia.

The company operates across the full range of upstream business activities from exploration and appraisal to development and production delivery.

ROC's parent company is Fosun International Limited, a large investment group with substantial operations and business interests in China and internationally. Fosun International is listed on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.

OMAN

STRONG SUPPORT



Photographers take photos of the stock closing price and forex exchange rates on a board during a ceremony marking the end of trading in 2024 at the Tokyo Stock Exchange (TSE) in Tokyo, Japan.

— Reuters

WORLD SHARES TICK LOWER AS HIGH YIELDS TEST LOFTY VALUATIONS

World shares drifted lower on Monday as elevated government bond yields prompted investors to pull out of equities at the end of a year that has been positive for many regional markets.

MSCI's broadest index of world shares dipped 0.1 per cent, but is still 17 per cent higher for the year. Trading volumes were thin ahead of the New Year holiday on Wednesday. Stock markets in Germany, Italy and Switzerland are shut on Tuesday as well, while those in the UK and France have a half-day trading session.

European stocks opened lower. The pan-European STOXX 600 index ticked down 0.1 per cent by 1030 GMT, weighed down by the technology and industrial goods sectors.

This week China reports on the purchasing power of its manufacturing industry (PMI) on Tuesday, while the US activity data from the manufacturing industry in December is due on Friday.

South Korea's main index has suffered a storm of political uncertainty in recent weeks, and is saddled with losses of 9 per cent for the year. It was last down 0.2 per cent.

Shares of South Korean budget carrier Jeju Air hit their lowest level on record on Monday, in the wake of a plane crash that killed 179 people.

China's blue-chip CSI300 Index closed up roughly 0.5 per cent, to be up almost 16 per cent on the year with almost all that gain coming in just two weeks in September after Beijing promised more stimulus. Hong Kong's benchmark Hang Seng closed roughly 0.2 per cent. lower.

Japan's Nikkei share average retreated on its last trading day in 2024, down from Friday's five-month high, as investors locked in profits on the index that rose nearly 20 per cent for the year.

S&P 500 futures and Nasdaq futures were both lower by roughly 0.2 per cent following Friday's sell off.

The S&P 500 is up 25 per cent for the year and the Nasdaq up 31 per cent, which is stretching valuations when compared to the risk-free return of Treasuries.

Yields on 10-year Treasuries are near eight-month highs at 4.597% and ending the year around 75 basis points above where they started, even though the Fed delivered 100 basis points of cuts to cash rates. "The continued rise in bond yields, driven by the reassessment of less restrictive monetary policy expectations, creates some concern," said Quasar Elizundia, a research strategist at broker Pepperstone.

"The possibility that the Fed may keep restrictive monetary policy for longer than expected could temper corporate earnings growth expectations for 2025, which could in turn influence investment decisions," said Elizundia. — Reuters

SOME GLOBAL PROPERTY CATASTROPHE REINSURANCE RATES TO FALL, BROKER SAYS

LONDON: Global property catastrophe reinsurance rates will fall 5 per cent to 15 per cent on January 1 for books of businesses which have not suffered losses, reinsurance broker Guy Carpenter said on Monday, as the market becomes more competitive after years of rate rises. Reinsurers insure the insurers, and have raised prices and excluded some business in recent years following increased losses from wars and natural catastrophes. However, reinsurers have become more willing



A drone picture shows the Chicago skyline, Illinois, US. — Reuters

to take on risk after enjoying strong profits, Guy Carpenter, a unit of Marsh McLennan said.

"Renewal outcomes at year-end reflect reinsurers' positive property experience over the last two years," Dean Klisura, president and CEO of Guy Carpenter, said in a statement.

However, insurance portfolios which have faced catastrophe losses in the United States, Europe and Canada will see unchanged rates, or rises of up to 30 per cent, Guy Carpenter added. — Reuters

Oil prices remain steady in thin holiday trade

PRICES

were broadly steady on Monday in thin holiday trade at the end of the year, as traders awaited more Chinese and US economic data later this week to assess growth in the world's two largest oil consumers.

Brent crude futures eased 4 cents to \$74.13 a barrel by 0948 GMT. The more active March contract was at \$73.75 a barrel, also down 4 cents.

US West Texas Intermediate crude lost 1 cent to \$70.59 a barrel.

Both contracts rose about 1.4 per cent last week buoyed by a larger-than-expected drawdown from US crude inventories in the week ended Dec. 20 as refiners ramped up activity and the holiday season boosted fuel demand.

Oil prices were also supported by optimism for Chinese economic growth next year that could lift demand from the top crude oil importing nation.

To revive growth, Chinese authorities have agreed to issue a record 3 trillion yuan (\$411 billion) in special treasury bonds in 2025, Reuters reported last week.

"Global oil consumption reached an all-time high in 2024 despite China underperforming expectations, and oil stockpiles are heading into next year at relatively low levels," said Ryan Fitzmaurice, senior commodity strategist at Marex.

"Going forward, China economic data is expected to improve as the



Global oil consumption reached an all-time high in 2024 despite China underperforming expectations, and oil stockpiles are heading into next year at relatively low levels

RYAN FITZMAURICE

Senior commodity strategist at Marex



Oil prices were also supported by optimism for Chinese economic growth next year that could lift demand from the top crude oil importing nation.

recent stimulus measures take hold in 2025. Also, lower rates in the US and elsewhere should be supportive of oil consumption." China has also issued at least 152.49 million metric tons of crude oil import quotas to independent refiners in a second batch for 2025 so far, trade sources said on Monday.

Separately, the World Bank has raised its forecast for China's economic growth in 2024 and 2025, but warned that subdued household and business confidence, along with headwinds in the property sector,

would remain a drag next year.

Investors are eyeing China's PMI factory surveys due on Tuesday and the US ISM survey for December to be released on Friday.

In Europe, hopes for a new deal to transit Russian gas through Ukraine are fading after Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday that there was no time left this year to sign a new deal.

The loss of piped Russian gas should see Europe import more liquefied natural gas (LNG), analysts said. — Reuters

Euro zone bond yields steady near six-week highs

LONDON: Euro zone bond yields were little changed on Monday and traded at around their highest since mid-November as investors face an uncertain monetary policy and borrowing outlook for 2025. Germany's 10-year bond yield, the benchmark for the euro zone, rose 1 basis point (bps) to 2.399 per cent, around its highest in six weeks. Yields move inversely to prices.

Yields rose on Friday, reflecting a move higher in the US, where a strong economy has limited the amount the Federal Reserve is expected to cut rates

next year. US Treasury yields set the tone for borrowing costs around the world.

The euro zone economy has also shown some minor signs of improvement. The decline in euro zone business activity eased this month as the bloc's dominant services industry bounced back to growth, survey data showed on December 16.

"Real rates are rising primarily for macro reasons," said Florian Ielpo, head of macro at Lombard Odier Investment Managers, referencing bond yields adjusted for inflation.



European Union flags flutter on the day European Central Bank (ECB) President Christine Lagarde speaks to reporters following the Governing Council's monetary policy meeting in Frankfurt, Germany. — Reuters

"The improvement in current economic conditions - notably in China and Europe, against a backdrop of improving US industrial surveys - has led to a revision of central bank rate cut expectations."

He added: "The market now only expects 1.5 rate cuts in the United States in 2025, suggesting a scenario of strong growth and renewed inflationary pressures." Italy's 10-year yield was flat at 3.536 per cent, and the gap between Italian and German bond yields stood at 113 bps.

— Reuters

Chinese youth are flocking to civil service jobs, but jobs at risk

BEIJING: A record 3.4 million young Chinese flocked to the civil service exam this year, lured by the prospect of lifetime job security and perks including subsidised housing as an economic slowdown batters the private sector and youth unemployment remains high.

Applicant numbers, which surged by over 400,000 from last year and have tripled since 2014, reflect the huge demand for stability from disillusioned Gen Z Chinese and

the lack of attractive options in the private sector even though local governments are struggling to pay wages due to a fiscal crisis.

Klaire, a master's student in Beijing, took the notoriously competitive exam in early December, studying for nine hours a day and spending 980 yuan (\$134) on online tutoring.

She cited social prestige and stability as major factors why she is only applying for government



People walk past an office and shopping complex in Beijing, China. — Reuters

or state-owned enterprise (SOE) jobs. Klaire has also seen colleagues get laid off during a previous tech internship.

"I only want to pass the exam and not worry about what happens next," said the 24-year-old, withholding her surname for privacy reasons.

"Despite personally knowing civil servants who haven't been paid for months, I still applied because I don't wish to make lots of money."

If she passes the exam, she will

have a further interview as well as political background and physical checks, with the final outcome expected around April.

Layoffs are rare in China's civil service, earning it the "iron rice bowl" moniker, though individuals can be dismissed for disciplinary violations.

The State Council and Shenzhen government did not reply to faxed requests for comment.

— Reuters

OPINION

How to spot and protect yourself from bank scams



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The author is the founder of Knowledge Oman.

TWO days ago, I received a phone call from someone posing to be an official from the bank here in the Sultanate of Oman, specifically the Central Bank of Oman. The caller claimed that my bank account was compromised, i.e., misused by unauthorised access. The caller asked me whether I had debited (taken some money out) an amount of RO 1000. The caller then insisted that I immediately share my personal Omani Identification Card (ID) number, along with my bank card(s) (both debit and credit if available), in order to avoid losing any money. Obviously, the caller/scammer did not realise who I am and the humble experience I hold in this industry. I decided to tag along for an approximately 6-minute phone call in order to understand their tactics and share with you the highlights of the conversation in the form of an article—specifically in order to protect yourself and others from being scammed. How you can spot and avoid being scammed is the focus of my article today. Since the call was supposedly from the bank, and it is obvious that all banks have all their customer data, it was intriguing (yet funny) that the caller was requesting my ID card, but did not know my name. In order to continue the conversation, I shared a fake ID number in which the caller validated and accepted. Next, the caller asked

me to share my bank card account number. I responded by asking which of the card does he want, is it debit or credit? and from which of the banks I have an account with. The caller at this stage realised this was probably not an ordinary easy call, or felt it was a big opportunity to scam for more money. Anyways, the caller requested that I share the type of the card (be it debit or credit), the number on the card starting with “4” or “5”. I questioned the caller and said why do you need this number, the caller said in order to validate your bank details and protect you from losing money. The caller said an “OTP” (one time password) would be sent to my phone, I would require to share the number to the caller in order to safeguard the account. I asked the caller for his name, in which he shared an Arab name, though he sounded eastern European. I later asked for basic Arabic questions, in which the caller realised I knew the game and hanged up the phone. The caller was a scammer who got punked this time. Now let me demystify the call for your kind perusal in order to spot the scammer. First, the call originated from an international number (claiming to be a local bank). Secondly, the caller didn’t know my name (but asked for my personal ID number). Third, he didn’t know what bank account or card type do I have (but stated initially that

the caller requested that I share the type of the card (be it debit or credit), the number on the card starting with “4” or “5”

there was a misuse on my card). Lastly, the scammer was putting fear and using urgency to force me into making quick decision (to share the OTP). These were all signs that the caller was indeed a scammer. Most of the scammers use almost the same tactics. Be careful and do not share your sensitive personal and banking details no matter how convincing the caller sounds. Even better, hang up the call and call your bank directly using the official number you can find on the card(s) or the bank’s official website if you find the call suspicious. Too many people have been receiving bank scam calls lately. A number of those who have received these calls have been scammed and lost money. I’ve read a report that bank scam calls in Oman have increased approximately by 25% in this year itself. The number will most probably increase as these scammers continue to find innovative tactics (even using technology) to trick people. It’s important to know that banks would not call customers for account issues and ask for OTP (PIN, password, etc.) over the phone. I hope my dialog with the scammer and the details of the same have shed some light on you. Stay vigilant and be safe. I take this opportunity to wish you and your families a blessed and safe year in 2025 ahead.

DEBT BRAKE RELEASE WILL PULL GERMANY OUT OF SLUMP



PIERRE BRIANCON

The writer is a Break-ingviews columnist at Reuters

Only unforeseen circumstances could prevent Friedrich Merz, the hard-talking chief of the CDU conservative party, from heading the government of Europe’s largest economy after the general elections in February. With the country barely growing after a two-year-long recession, Merz will push for a German version of shock therapy. That will only work if he finds creative ways to loosen the “debt brake” that for 15 years has been the main obstacle to sensible fiscal policies.

Merz does not want to scrap the measure forcing German governments to contain the federal budget deficit within 0.35 per cent of GDP. He has been a fierce advocate of the measure, which was voted into the constitution in 2009. But he can’t tackle the country’s woes just by scrapping welfare payments and reducing bureaucracy – his only two economic ideas for now. The CDU leader is a determined proponent of keeping German aid flowing to Ukraine – just as current Chancellor Olaf Scholz is. But Merz knows it would be difficult to do that while abiding by the rigid fiscal rule. He said in November that he might be open to reforming the debt brake on the condition it was not used to finance welfare transfers or stimulate consumer spending. There are ways to amend the rule. The five-strong German Council of Economic Experts, tasked with advising the government, some of them earlier in 2024. It suggested that the 0.35 per cent limit could be raised if the country’s debt load is below a certain level. Germany’s current debt to GDP ratio, at around 62 per cent of GDP, is one the lowest in the euro zone. The advisers also advocated more flexibility when the government needs to suspend the debt brake in cases of national emergency or in bad economic times. Even those reforms would need a constitutional amendment. Merz, whose CDU is expected to receive about a third of the popular vote, will have to govern with other parties. Building a new “Grand Coalition” with Scholz’s Social Democrats is the most obvious option. But even then, the two traditional parties may not muster the two-thirds of MPs needed for such changes. But change is imperative because the German economy has been shackled by the debt brake for too long. The dearth of public investment has resulted in decaying infrastructure, poor network connections, declining productivity and the inability for Europe’s largest economic power to fund priority tasks like defence spending or the green transition. — Reuters

Unlock your potential – Resolutions for 2025

EVERY year, millions worldwide make New Year’s Resolutions hoping for changes to make their life more happy and fruitful. Making New Year’s Resolutions are setting priorities for a productive year. It is also an opportunity to review last year’s goals and achievements. The tradition of making New Year resolutions dates back to ancient times. The resolutions may vary from individual to individual depending on his age, income, wealth, financial goals, personal and professional goals, family background, etc. Given below are certain tips for unlocking your potential for the New Year 2025.

- Time Management:** By combining effective time management strategies with your New Year’s resolution, you can make meaningful changes in your life. Fixing priorities is very critical. Here you may apply the High, Medium, Low (HML) framework to time management. Allocate 50 to 60 percent of your time for urgent, critical things that have significant consequences on your personal and professional life. 20 to 30 per cent of time may be spared for important but not urgent matters. Remaining 10 to 20 percent of time for other matters, which are not important or urgent. Financial Discipline is very important irrespective of your financial status. A well-drafted monthly family budget helps you to manage finances effectively. Create a safety net to meet unforeseen expenses. Living within your means provides a greater sense of financial security. Follow the 50:30:20 family budget rule.
- Over Leveraging:** Excessive borrowings including that of credit cards need to be checked. The total debt repayment



By combining effective time management strategies with your New Year’s resolution, you can make meaningful changes in your life.



R MADHUSOODANAN pakku_ms@yahoo.com

The writer is the Executive Advisor to the Board, Global Money Exchange, Muscat-for-mation mentor

obligations shall not exceed your repaying capacity. Make your life stress-free. Remember responsible borrowing habits improve your Credit Score.

- Savings:** Make smart decisions to save consistently for the long term. Let the investment grow to meet your financial goals. Understand the power of compounding in the long-term horizon. Diversify your investments across different asset classes to minimize the risk and maximize wealth creation.
- Retirement Planning:** Make retirement planning a priority this year, if not done already. A well-planned retirement solution ensures enough cash flows to meet your lifestyle at the fag-end of your life. Join pension schemes/annuity schemes of trusted pension funds to ensure uninterrupted annuity payments.
- Health Insurance:** Hospitalization expenses are on the increase. Major and critical illness of you or your family members can make you bankrupt or lead to financial instability. Spending money

- for the health insurance policy provides peace of mind, financial protection, and access to quality medical care.
- Digital Life:** Prevent cyber security breaches, and financial frauds and keep sensitive data remain confidential. Be vigilant on OTPs/SMS/passwords, suspicious emails, attachments, links, and malware. Protect your digital life by ensuring a safer online experience. Share the knowledge of all important records with your spouse:: Record properly all the details of your investments and liabilities and keep your spouse informed. Ensure valid nominations in all your deposit accounts, safe deposit lockers, investments, and insurance policies. Huge unclaimed deposits and matured life insurance sums are lying in the system waiting for the claimants. Remember proper estate planning makes the life of the legal heirs easy.
- Health and Wellness:** ‘Health is Wealth’ means health is a more valuable and irreplaceable asset. Exercise regularly and have a balanced diet. Proper sleep, and meditation daily for half an hour help you to keep fit. Avoid unhealthy habits injurious to health.
- Relationships:** Find time to attend social events, and meet your near and dear ones at regular intervals. Show gratitude and appreciation to those around you. The above lists are not exhaustive. The New Year is an opportunity to do a self-assessment as to how much one could stick to the previous year’s resolutions. A couple of studies by clinical psychologists show that about 45 percent of the resolvers stick to their goals for six months in the year while about 20 percent maintain them for two years. The number is fair enough.

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Observer

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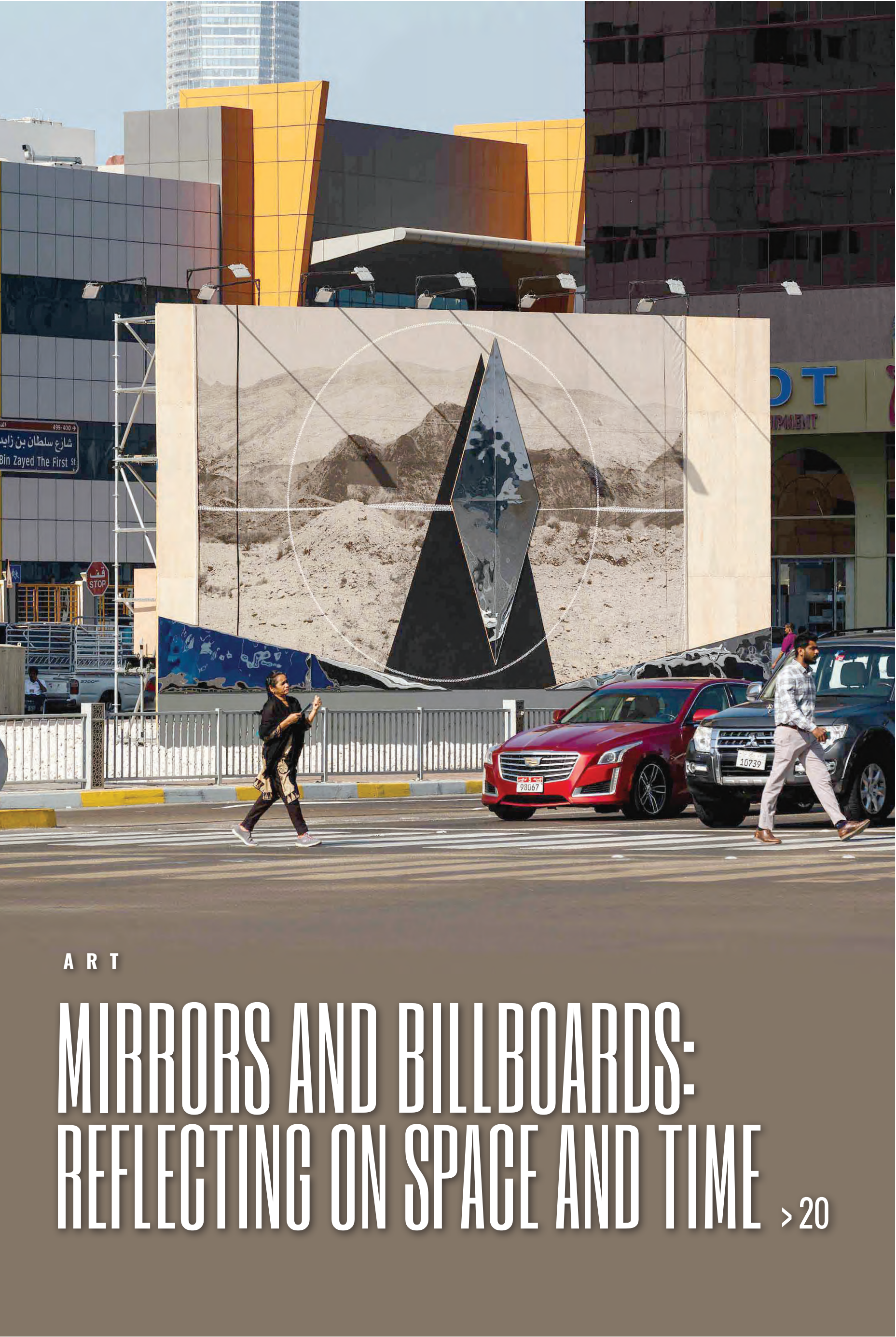
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ART/LIFE



ENTERTAINMENT

Both ‘Mufasa’ and ‘Sonic’ claim N America box office supremacy



THE HOLIDAY weekend in North America saw two films battling for box-office supremacy and both emerging with a claim to first place.

Disney’s animated drama “Mufasa: The Lion King” prevailed in the five days from Christmas Day through Sunday with an estimated take of \$63.8 million, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday.

But Paramount’s action comedy “Sonic the Hedgehog 3,” which booked \$59.9 million for that same five-day holiday period, came out on top for the traditional Friday-through-Sunday stretch, edging the Disney film by \$38 million to \$37.1 million.

Overall, the weekend generated “big, although not record-breaking box office” numbers, said analyst David A Gross, adding that “the next seven days should be excellent.”

New vampire pic “Nosferatu” from Focus Features also posted impressive numbers, with \$40.3 million for the five-day period and \$21.2 million for the three-day weekend.

Gross called that “an excellent opening for a new horror film” — a remake of the 1922 silent classic inspired by the 1897 novel “Dracula” — and noted that critics’ reviews are outstanding.

The ensemble cast includes Bill Skarsgard, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Willem Dafoe and Nicholas Hoult.

Universal’s musical fantasy “Wicked,” starring Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande, earned \$31.7 million for five days (\$19.5 million for three) as the latest spin on the magical world of Oz slipped one spot to fourth place. Its global earnings now stand at \$634 million.

And Disney’s animated “Moana 2” had an estimated \$28.3 million in ticket sales for five days (\$18.2 million for three), slipping one spot but holding on to top-five status for the fifth straight week.

Meantime, Searchlight Pictures’ “A Complete Unknown,” with Timothee Chalamet portraying an enigmatic Bob Dylan during the dizzying years that propelled the singer-songwriter from anonymity to world fame, took in a solid \$23.3 million for five days (\$11.6 million for three). Dylan himself has described Chalamet as a “brilliant actor.” — AFP

ART

MIRRORS AND BILLBOARDS: REFLECTING ON SPACE AND TIME > 20

QUICK FEATURES

MUSIC

Several guitars owned by Paco de Lucia are displayed at the newly opened Paco de Lucia Interpretation Centre, a new cultural space that pays tribute to the famous flamenco composer and performer, in Algeciras. — AFP

FESTIVAL

On the last three days of the year, local young men dressed as bearded figures, wearing special masks and colourful costumes parade through the streets of Slawatycze and hassle passers-by to bid farewell to the old year and welcome the new one. — AFP

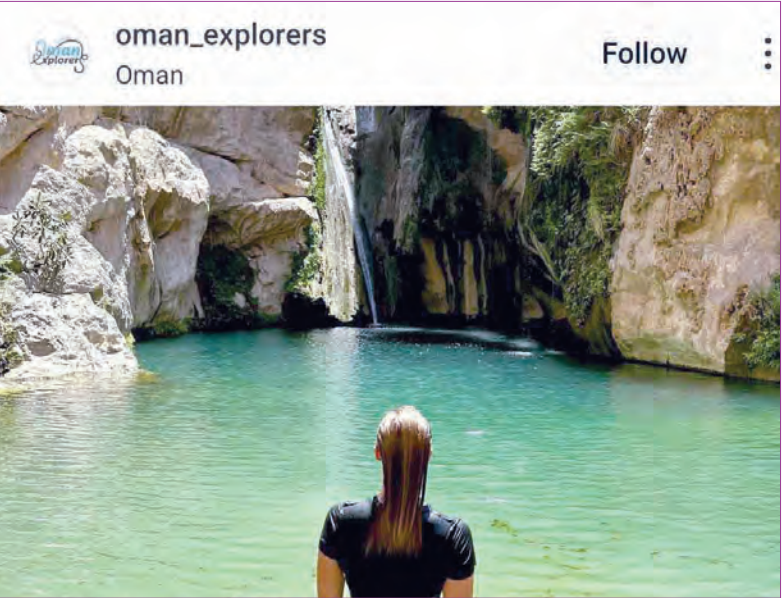
CULTURE

A man from the Miao ethnic group blowing a lu sheng traditional wind instrument as he attends a cultural new year celebration as part of the Lu Sheng festival in Congjiang county, in southwestern China’s Guizhou province. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Stars on the Beach



Beauty of Remote Places

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The barnacle, Spaniards’ favourite Christmas dish, imperilled by climate change



ON THE CRAGGY rocks on northwestern Spain’s treacherous Costa da Morte (Death Coast), wetsuit-clad fishermen dodge crashing waves as they pick barnacles, a prized Christmas delicacy facing decline due to climate change and other factors. Fetching up to 200 euros (\$208) per kilogramme (2.2 pounds) during the holiday season, the gooseneck barnacle from the Galicia region has long been treasured by Spaniards for both its flavour and difficulty to harvest. However, the rise in sea temperatures driven by climate change has severely affected barnacle habitats, as they thrive in icy waters. A recent study by the University of Vigo also linked changing wave patterns to lower quality in the shellfish. Israel Martinez, an auctioneer in the A Coruna fish market, said that there used to be double or triple the number of barnacles just 10 years ago.

Despite state regulations — such as limiting daily harvests to 7 kg per fisherman — illegal fishing has surged due to the barnacles’ high value. Licensed percebeiros, or barnacle pickers, have called for increased policing of the coast to deter poachers. Their job is classified as a risky profession due to the adverse work conditions. “The percebeiro trade on the Costa da Morte is dying. This is due to climate change, absurd laws, illegal fishing and a lack of workers,” 36-year-old Roberto Vidal, who started out as a percebeiro at 16, said in a statement to Reuters. He said there used to be between 100 and 200 percebeiros in his town of Corme. Now, there are around 30. Fellow percebeiro Serafin Rodriguez said that future generations would be unable to follow in his footsteps due to declining barnacle populations. — Reuters



Japan’s Wajima craftmakers see hope in disaster-hit region

Lacquerware maker Takaho Shoji hunches over his desk in the disaster-hit city of Wajima in central Japan, applying another layer of coating to a dark, wooden box. One brushstroke at a time, the 53-year-old is determined to bring life back to his remote community after a devastating New Year’s Day earthquake, followed by severe floods. “I need to do whatever I can to move forward with the reconstruction and to continue this tradition and pass it on to the next generations,” said the soft-spoken father of two. “We have to work harder together, otherwise the local lacquerware industry will fade.” Wajima, a coastal city with a population of just over 20,000, is a nationally celebrated centre for fine lacquerware. Products made there are known as Wajima-nuri and a basic soup bowl can command a price of \$150 or more. This year brought death and suffering to the city and its surrounding communities at the tip of the Noto Peninsula. As families prepared for their New Year’s Day dinners, a terrifying 7.5-magnitude jolt accompanied by powerful aftershocks destroyed houses and businesses. Sweeping fires, a tsunami and landslides engulfed the region and forced most residents and their visiting relatives to flee to evacuation shelters. Then, as they tried to rebuild their lives, torrential rain flooded the city in September, destroying more homes. The disasters also shattered the network of roughly 700 artisans and workers in Wajima’s lacquerware industry, which has been losing workers like other fine crafts. Damage to the city has been so extensive that municipal officials are not even certain how many craftspeople are still active. — ‘WARMTH AND WELLBEING’ — Wajima-nuri is known for its durability and delicate designs and is often used in tableware like bowls and chopsticks.



With its understated elegance, the technique is also used to create high-end furniture and home decor. More than 100 steps are involved in the production of Wajima-nuri. The tasks are distributed among specialised artisans, some focusing on lacquer coating and others on carving and shaping. Among the city’s lacquerware professionals trying to restore the network of artisans is Taiichi Kirimoto, the seventh-generation proprietor of a Wajima-nuri studio. He and his wife now live at his company’s gallery space after they lost their house, but he has wasted little time in moving forward. He worked with renowned architect Shigeru Ban to build temporary work spaces made with cardboard materials and he has travelled around the country promoting his studio’s work and providing places of work for artisans. “Lacquerware provides a sense of comfort and warmth and well-being to people. Perhaps this is different



from modern convenience,” said Kirimoto, who has worked with top brands including Louis Vuitton. “I absolutely do not see a choice to leave this city or to move to another profession.” — UNCERTAIN FUTURE — Among Kirimoto’s staff artisans is Shoji, a specialist in coating. An avid angler, Shoji was alone at a local port late afternoon when the earthquake struck, knocking him onto his back. Sea water roared and receded fast, exposing the seabed before rushing back as a tsunami. With landslides blocking the roads home, he decided to spend the night in his car on higher ground. The next day, he was reunited with his family but his house was unsafe to live in. They moved into an evacuation shelter and he began helping others in his community. Shoji encouraged others to stay in the city after the quake. But after the September floods, he questioned whether it was the right decision. “That’s what worries me the most — when you lose people, it devastates the community,” he said. Shoji still believes the Wajima-nuri tradition, a source of local pride, can bring energy back to his home city in its time of dire distress. He is testing new methods, inspired by the centuries-old tradition, to bring lacquerware into the modern era. “Our future is uncertain. But I want to do something to move things forward,” he said. — AFP

FEATURES

BY YERU EBUEN

HER BODY of work is a fascinating intersection of painting, drawing, photography and sculpture, where she is known for playfully destabilising the relationship between the figure and the ground. Born in 1979 in the Sultanate of Oman, Radhika Khimji has developed a remarkable artistic practice that spans Muscat and London. Radhika's innovative approach allows her to reassemble fragmented identities and challenge cultural stereotypes, often employing surrealistic language to illuminate themes that are frequently obscured by censorship.

An accomplished scholar, Radhika studied at the prestigious Slade School of Fine Art and the Royal Academy of Arts, ultimately earning her Master's Degree in Art History from UCL. Her works have gained international recognition, with solo exhibitions including “Shift” at Galerie Krinzinger and “Adjusted Becoming,” and she represented Oman at the historic first Omani Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022.

Always proud of Oman, which help her foster her creativity, Radhika is unveiling her latest work, “We trapped us in a frame, in the earth: Reflections on a surface,” at the highly anticipated Public Art Abu Dhabi Biennale 2024-2025. The visually layered installation exemplifies Khimji's unique ability to navigate various artistic mediums to explore themes of place and belonging.

The piece features a stunning large-scale image of a mountainous landscape, meticulously screen-printed on canvas and mounted on a wooden billboard — an object typically used in urban environments to obscure construction sites or vacant areas. By repurposing this common structure, Khimji challenges viewers to ponder the contrasting notions of revelation and concealment, inviting contemplation on what is hidden from view and the potential futures that lie beyond.

Embedded mirrors within the installation reflect the surrounding environment, creating a dynamic interaction that collapses traditional boundaries of space and time. The reflective surfaces merge past, present and imagined worlds, blurring the lines between reality and representation. This deliberate choice underscores the billboard's dual function: as both a façade and a portal, offering a glimpse into the future vision of a place.

“I am influenced by construction sites and spaces that are in the process of being created. They feel like internal landscapes that often relate to my research into child psychology and hypnosis as the space opens up and breaks down how things are built up. These in-between spaces become metaphors for how identity could be a manufactured kaleidoscope of external and internal factors,” Radhika has stated in an interview.

Measuring an impressive 1000 x 550 cm, “We trapped us in a frame, in the earth” serves as a monumental entry point for visitors, drawing them into Khimji's exploration of identity and experience. Commissioned by the Department of Culture and Tourism — Abu Dhabi, this installation is a thought-provoking addition to the biennale, aligning with Khimji's commitment to creating artworks that resonate on both an emotional and intellectual level.

Khimji's work continues to captivate audiences globally and her latest installation promises to leave an enduring impact on visitors attending the Public Art Abu Dhabi Biennale. As they navigate the immersive space created by Khimji, viewers are encouraged to reflect on their own notions of belonging and the ever-changing landscapes that shape our identities.

The inaugural Public Art Abu Dhabi Biennale, organised by DCT Abu Dhabi, has launched as a significant addition to the region's cultural calendar. Running until April 30, 2025, this vibrant event features sculptures and large-scale installations by over 70 artists from both the region and around the globe. The Biennale delves into



MIRRORS AND BILLBOARDS: REFLECTING ON SPACE AND TIME



the intricate relationships between public space, environment, community, urbanity and indigeneity.

Among the standout artists featured are renowned regional and Arab talents, including Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Wael al Awar, Mohammed al Hawajri, Farah al Qasimi, and Khalil Rabah, representing countries across the Arabian Peninsula, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, and beyond. Notably, Omani artist Radhika Khimji adds her voice to this diverse lineup.

Visitors are encouraged to navigate eight specially designed Biennale routes, which showcase the works of participating artists while highlighting iconic locations in Abu Dhabi. The routes are intended to inspire exploration either on foot or by car, offering a fresh perspective on the city's dynamic public life, influenced by its environmental context and architectural development.

The Abu Dhabi Corniche Route, for instance, offers a one-hour walking experience showcasing works by artists such as Wael al Awar, Oscar Murillo, and Farah al Qasimi. Meanwhile, the Abu Dhabi Public Parks Route traverses four parks — Urban Park, Formal Park, Lake Park and Recreation Park — featuring contributions from artists including Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Kader Attia and Nathan Coley.

DECEMBER 25
PAGE NO: 10

Issam al Subhi, top scorer, brightens Oman's semifinal hopes.

LOOKING BACK



The year of growth, achievements

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
MUSCAT, DEC 30

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN experienced a year of positive developments across various sectors in 2024. This includes economic growth through diversification efforts, advancements in social reforms particularly for women's empowerment, initiatives focused on environmental sustainability, vibrant cultural celebrations that showcased its heritage, and strengthened international relations that fostered cooperation.

Oman continued to make significant strides in its economic diversification efforts, which are crucial for reducing the country's dependency on oil revenues. The government implemented various initiatives under the Oman Vision 2040

framework, aimed at positioning Oman among the top economies globally.

INVESTMENTS Key sectors such as tourism, logistics, and renewable energy saw substantial investments. The tourism sector, in particular, experienced a boost with new attractions and infrastructure developments that drew international visitors, contributing positively to local businesses and employment.

With regard to social reforms, particularly regarding women's empowerment, the government launched programmes aimed at increasing women's participation in the workforce and leadership roles within various sectors.

These initiatives included mentorship programmes and training workshops

designed to equip women with skills necessary for high-demand jobs. Additionally, there was an increase in female representation in advisory councils and committees, reflecting a commitment to gender equality.

In response to global climate change challenges, Oman took significant steps towards environmental sustainability in 2024. The government also announced several green projects focusing on renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power.

These projects not only aimed to reduce carbon emissions but also sought to create job opportunities within the green technology sector. Public awareness campaigns were launched to educate citizens about sustainable practices and conservation efforts.

Also, Oman celebrated its rich cultural

heritage through various festivals and events throughout 2024. These celebrations highlighted traditional music, dance, art, and cuisine, fostering national pride among citizens while attracting tourists interested in Omani culture. The government also invested in preserving historical sites and promoting cultural tourism as part of its broader strategy to diversify the economy.

BOLSTERING DIPLOMATIC TIES On the international front, Oman continued to strengthen its diplomatic ties with other nations in 2024, focusing on regional stability and cooperation.

High-level visits by Omani officials to neighbouring countries facilitated discussions on trade agreements and collaborative projects that benefited all parties involved.

See page 27 bottom on how to make a free calendar poster from this special supplement

MILESTONES, DEVELOPMENTS AND DISCOVERIES

From groundbreaking space launches to transformative infrastructure projects, Oman is making waves across various sectors. Explore key highlights, including the launch of Duqm-1 and OL-1 satellites, the opening of the Royal Cars Museum, advancements in transportation and environmental initiatives



VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH of ‘Duqm-1’
In a milestone for the Middle East, the Sultanate of Oman successfully launched its first experimental rocket, Duqm-1. The event was executed by Edaq, a subsidiary of the National Space Services Company (NASCOM), under the supervision of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology. The launch is part of Oman’s broader strategic vision to advance its space sector.

HAFEET RAIL ENTERS CONSTRUCTION STAGE
The partnership agreements were signed between stakeholders to mark the actual start of the construction of the railway linking the two countries. Oman and Etihad Rail Company (OERC) launched a new brand identity for the railway network, which will be now called ‘Hafeet Rail’.

ROYAL CARS MUSEUM
Upon the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said presided over the opening ceremony of the ‘Royal Cars Museum’ at Al Barakah Palace. The most prominent collections of cars include ones used by the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the late Sultan Said bin Taimour and Sayyid Tarik bin Taimour, in addition to the collections of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, among other cars. The museum was made open to members of the public and visitors may obtain tickets to visit the museum by booking in advance through the website (www.

rcm.gov.om). Royal Cars Museum will be open to visitors three days a week on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday.

WORK BEGINS ON THE MUTTRAH CABLE CAR PROJECT
Work has started on the Muttrah Cable Car project, according to a source connected to the main contractor. Cable car services will have three stations and is expected to be the longest in the Middle East over the sea.

OMAN LAUNCHES ITS FIRST SATELLITE (OL-1)
Represented by ‘Oman Lens’ company, the Sultanate of Oman has launched its first full-fledged Omani satellite registered under its name at the International Telecommunication Organization (ITU). Enhanced with artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, the satellite specialises in remote sensing and earth observation technologies. With the successful launch of this satellite ‘OL-1’, the Sultanate of Oman officially joins the field of space technology.

NEW MEDIA LAW ISSUED
A new media law was issued by Royal Decree No 58/2024 to ensure a safe environment for media work and prevent restrictions on the press and media while emphasising preventing the spread of misinformation and rumours that could harm the country’s reputation and cause harm to the society with inappropriate content that can be an incitement to hatred and violence.

PERSONAL INCOME TAX
It has been revealed by sources that overall impact on the economy because of the taxes will be about one per cent, due to the increase in operating costs, especially for workers in some institutions because they need them to raise their salaries. Individuals with salaries that are less than RO 2,500 will not be subject to tax.

MUSCAT STRUCTURE PLAN
The Greater Muscat Structure Plan (GMSP) places lots of importance on connectivity via public transportation and less dependence on private vehicles, according to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning. It may be noted that the plan will enter the implementation stage (four phases) once approved by the Council of Ministers.

MAWALEH CENTRAL MARKET BECOMES HISTORY
Muscat Municipality shifted all wholesale trading activities of Mawaleh Central Market for Fruits and Vegetables to Khazaen Economic City in June. The Mawaleh market opened in 1987 but closed soon after to reopen in 1997 and was operational full-fledged by 2000. Initially, 90 per cent of the products were imported via neighbouring countries.

MANDATORY MATERNITY LEAVE INSURANCE
The maternity leave insurance for citizens and expatriates working in the Sultanate of Oman was implemented by the Social Protection Fund (SPF). It applies to employees of both private and public sectors and includes all types of contracts, including temporary contracts, training contracts and retired workers. It does not apply to self-employed Omanis, part-time Omanis working in the GCC, and Omanis working abroad. The provisions of this section shall also be mandatory for non-Omani workers working in the Sultanate of Oman, clarified the SPF.

UKRAINIAN EMBASSY IN MUSCAT INAUGURATED
The Ukrainian Embassy in Muscat was inaugurated under the auspices of Andrii Sybiha, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, and under the presence of Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister. The embassy’s

opening comes within the framework of enhancing bilateral relations and expanding joint cooperation in various fields.

CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR FLOOD RISK MAPS
The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources assigned a specialised company with the task of drafting consultancy services project to update and prepare flood risk maps. The company will also prepare emergency management plans for handling flood risks in the Sultanate of Oman from 2024 to 2026.

TEN NEW SPECIES OF OMANI PLANTS DISCOVERED
Oman Botanic Garden registered 10 new species of plants that are native to the Sultanate of Oman. The newly registered plants, discovered by local and international researchers in different governorates of Oman, include a rare species of wild barley strain that is indigenous to Sahasah area in the Wilayat of Khasab.

UNESCO INCLUDES 3 OMANI CITIES
The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) has announced the addition of three Omani cities in the Unesco Global Network of Learning Cities. They were the Wilayat of Muscat, Governorate of Muscat, the Wilayat of Nizwa, Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah, and the Wilayat of Sur, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate.

APPLE AND SAMSUNG PAY LAUNCHED
Apple and Samsung Wallets were launched in the Sultanate of Oman, allowing users to make online and offline payments via mobile devices. Verification of debit or credit cards can be made through a simple process.

Observer

STARVATION IN GAZA
ISRAEL WARFARE METHODS
'CONSISTENT' WITH GENOCIDE: UN

UNITED NATIONS
Israel's war in Gaza is a "textbook case of genocide," UN experts say on Thursday, warning the country of "widespread and systematic" attacks on civilians and a "clear intent to destroy" the Palestinian people. The United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) said the UN is "convinced" that Israel's actions in Gaza are "consistent with the definition of genocide" under the 1948 Genocide Convention. The committee also urged Israel to "immediately cease all military operations in Gaza and to allow for the safe and unhindered return of all displaced persons."

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave an audience to the Ambassador of Bahrain, H.E. Khalid bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, at the Barakah Palace in Muscat.

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HM receives credentials of ambassadors

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received credentials of a number of ambassadors of Arab and Islamic states at the Barakah Palace in Muscat on Thursday. The ceremony was held in the presence of the Prime Minister, HH Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al-Busaidy, and other senior officials. The ambassadors, representing their respective countries, presented their credentials to His Majesty the Sultan. The ceremony was held in a formal setting, with the Sultan seated on a raised platform. The ambassadors stood in a line, presenting their credentials one by one. The ceremony was attended by a large number of officials and guests. The Sultan expressed his appreciation for the credentials and wished the ambassadors success in their duties. The ceremony was held in the presence of the Prime Minister and other senior officials. The Sultan also received credentials from the Ambassador of Bahrain, H.E. Khalid bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, and the Ambassador of Oman, H.E. Ali bin Hamad al-Saidi. The ceremony was held in a formal setting, with the Sultan seated on a raised platform. The ambassadors stood in a line, presenting their credentials one by one. The ceremony was attended by a large number of officials and guests. The Sultan expressed his appreciation for the credentials and wished the ambassadors success in their duties. The ceremony was held in the presence of the Prime Minister and other senior officials. The Sultan also received credentials from the Ambassador of Bahrain, H.E. Khalid bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, and the Ambassador of Oman, H.E. Ali bin Hamad al-Saidi.

NEW LOOK

OMAN DAILY OBSERVER unveiled a new look on the occasion of the daily's 43rd anniversary. The Observer has a tradition of keeping pace with the times. Throughout its 43-year history, we've undergone several redesigns to meet the evolving preferences of our readers. The latest design refresh aims to engage readers of all ages, with a particular focus on attracting younger audiences. It also aims at the mobile phone readers who consume news

through epaper with bold fonts and limited number of stories. We are not promoting the new design just for the sake of design. It's the contents and their quality that promotes a newspaper. The re-design adds value to the time-tested quality of Observer, and the paper gets promoted by itself. Observer is a newspaper that always believes in change. And, that is why, we go for re-design at regular intervals. Our readers, too, welcome this kind of change.

A YEAR OF HIGH-LEVEL STATE VISITS,

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

JANUARY 14

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik held a meeting at the Royal Camp in Saih Al Mahasin valley in the Wilayat of Khasab, Musandam Governorate, with shaikhs and dignitaries of Musandam, members of the Council of Oman and of the Municipal Council and the businessmen community in the Governorate.

JANUARY 21

His Majesty the Sultan presided over a ceremony to lay the foundation stone of Oman Cultural Complex project and the building of the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) at the Airport Heights in Muscat Governorate. The project is considered an embodiment of the Royal vision of His Majesty to establish a state-of-the-art cultural designation, a civilisational accomplishment and a scholarly and institutional edifice of Oman's blessed renaissance.

FEBRUARY 7

His Majesty the Sultan presided over the opening of Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries in the Special Economic Zone of Duqm (SEZAD) in the presence of Shaikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait.

APRIL 22

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) held an official session of talks at Qasr Al Watan (Palace of the Nation) in Abu Dhabi. The visit marked a historic opportunity to celebrate the process of benign relations between the two countries.

MAY 14

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Shaikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, held a fraternal meeting at His Majesty's residency in Bayan Palace in the capital city, Kuwait. During the meeting, the two leaders continued discussing aspects of the bilateral cooperation between the two countries to serve the fraternal relations between the Omani and Kuwaiti peoples and meet their aspirations towards further prosperity, progress and welfare.

MAY 23

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan held a meeting at His Majesty's residency in Nadwa Palace in the capital city, Amman, in the presence of Prince Al Hussein bin Abdullah II, Crown Prince of Jordan. During the meeting, the two leaders exchanged cordial conversations on the advanced relations between the two countries and means of promoting them to serve interests of their peoples.

AUGUST 6

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik met Keir Starmer, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (UK) at the Cabinet's headquarters in London. During the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan reviewed the deep-rooted historical relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom, as well as means of consolidating areas of bilateral cooperation to serve the joint interests of the two countries' friendly peoples.

SEPTEMBER 23

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, went on a Royal tour of military units of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) in Sarfait, Dhofar Governorate. Upon his arrival at Sarfait Camp, His Majesty the Sultan was received by Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), the Commander of the 11th Infantry Brigade and the Commander of the Northern Frontier Regiment. His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with the officers of the RAO military sites at the camp.

OCTOBER 28

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik held a meeting at Al Barakah Palace with

2024 was a landmark year for Oman under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

STRATEGIC DIPLOMATIC MIESTONES

in Tarik, marked by high-level visits, bilateral talks, and significant project inaugurations

representatives of the private sector, business people and owners of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups.

OCTOBER 29
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Abdelmadjid Tebboune of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria held an official session of talks at Al Alam Palace. Both leaders wished the visit a success for the welfare of the two countries and their peoples.

NOVEMBER 11
His Majesty the Sultan paid a Royal visit to the Medical City for Military and Security Services and presided over the official opening of the Medical City Hospital for Military and Security Services.

NOVEMBER 25
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik visited the Sultan Faisal bin Turki School for Boys in the Wilayat of Al Amerat, Muscat Governorate. During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan took note of the progress in the educational field, including modern programmes that have been implemented to enrich the students' cognitive and perceptual potential.



NOVEMBER 28
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of the Republic of Türkiye graced the signing of 10 agreements and memoranda of understanding (MoUs). The pacts come within the context of His Majesty's state visit to Türkiye.
The signing included two agreements in the fields of joint investment and health, and 8 memoranda of understanding in the fields of political consultations, investment promotion, agriculture, fisheries, livestock, water, labour, employment, entrepreneurship, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), cooperation between central banks and cultural cooperation.

DECEMBER 3
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Alexander De Croo, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium, held an official session of talks at the Belgian Prime Minister's Office (Le Lambermont). The session discussed areas of investment and economic cooperation and means of promoting them to serve joint interests. The two sides exchanged views on international developments and global changes, as well as investment opportunities available in various sectors.

DECEMBER 15
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Aleksandr Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus held an official session of talks at Al Alam Palace. The session reviewed the advanced relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Belarus. It also explored means of promoting cooperation and partnership in the economic, investment, technological and medical fields in a manner that serves interests of the Omani and Belarusian peoples.

DECEMBER 19
His Majesty the Sultan and President Joao Lourenco of the Republic of Angola, graced the signing of an agreement and two Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) at Al Alam Palace, as part of the President's official visit to Oman. The agreement provides for acquiring a stake in Angola's Catoca and Luele mines.

IS IT BETTER TO BUY OR LEASE A CAR

Most people can't afford to buy a car, so they lease. But is it really better to lease or buy? It depends on your financial situation. If you have a steady income and can afford the monthly payments, leasing might be a good option. However, if you have a lot of debt or a low credit score, buying might be a better choice. It's important to consider all the factors before making a decision.

BEWARE OF SNAKES IN SUMMER

Summer is the best time to visit Oman, but it's also the time when snakes are most active. Snakes are found in all parts of the country, but they are most common in the mountains and the desert. If you are going to the mountains, make sure you are wearing proper footwear and clothing. If you are in the desert, make sure you are staying hydrated and avoiding the heat.

WORRYING TREND

Worrying is a common trend among young people. It can be caused by many factors, such as school pressure, social media, and family issues. It's important to talk to a professional if you are worried about your mental health.

MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

Mental health disorders are a common problem. They can be caused by many factors, such as genetics, environment, and stress. It's important to seek help if you are experiencing symptoms of a mental health disorder.

JUNE 15
PAGE NO: 3

HAJ A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

The Haj is a spiritual journey that every Muslim must undertake at least once in their lifetime. It is a journey of faith, devotion, and self-reflection. The Haj is a journey that brings people from all over the world together in a shared experience of worship and devotion.

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NOVEMBER 3
PAGE NO: 10

DON'T PUT YOUR KID IN A PRESSURE COOKER

Parents should not put their children in a pressure cooker. Children should be allowed to grow up at their own pace and in a supportive environment. Parents should not put too much pressure on their children to achieve certain goals or to follow a certain path. Children should be encouraged to explore their interests and passions and to follow their own dreams.

SUICIDE IS THE THIRD LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH

Suicide is a serious problem that affects people of all ages and backgrounds. It is the third leading cause of death in many countries. It is important to seek help if you are thinking about suicide or if you know someone who is. There are many resources available to help people who are struggling with suicidal thoughts.

NURTURING YOUNG MINDS

Nurturing young minds is essential for the future. Children should be given the opportunity to learn, grow, and develop. Parents and educators should provide a supportive and enriching environment for children. Children should be encouraged to explore their interests and passions and to follow their own dreams.

CHILDREN SPEND THE FUTURE

Children spend the future. They are the future of our world. They are the ones who will shape the world we live in. It is our responsibility to ensure that they have a bright and promising future. We should provide them with the education, resources, and support they need to succeed.

DECEMBER 10
PAGE NO: 4

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A super fruit with dense nutrients

Avocado is a super fruit with dense nutrients. It is rich in healthy fats, fiber, and vitamins. It is a great addition to any diet. Avocado can be eaten in many ways, such as in a salad, on toast, or in a smoothie. It is a versatile and nutritious fruit that should be included in your diet.

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JUNE 8
PAGE NO: 3

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SEPTEMBER 10
PAGE NO: 4

PHYSIOTHERAPY

Physiotherapy is a vital key to recovery and wellness. It is a branch of medicine that deals with the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of physical conditions. Physiotherapists use a variety of techniques, such as exercise, massage, and heat, to help people recover from injury or illness. Physiotherapy is an essential part of many medical treatments and can help people improve their quality of life.

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MARCH 11
PAGE NO: 4

FLEXIBLE WORKING HOURS

Flexible working hours are a great way to improve work-life balance. They allow employees to work when and where they want. Flexible working hours can help reduce stress and improve productivity. They can also help attract and retain top talent. Flexible working hours are becoming increasingly popular among employers and employees alike.

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DECEMBER 21
PAGE NO: 4

COD IS KING IN PORTUGAL AT CHRISTMAS

Cod is king in Portugal at Christmas. Cod is a traditional Christmas food in Portugal. It is a fish that is cooked and served in a variety of ways. Cod is a popular food in Portugal because it is healthy and delicious. Cod is also a symbol of Christmas in Portugal. It is a food that brings people together and is enjoyed by everyone.

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