

O M A N
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SUNRISE 06:33 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR 05:18 AM
DHUHR 12:25 PM
ASR 03:44 PM
MAGHRIB 06:12 PM
ISHA 07:23 PM



INBRIEF

HM GREETINGS TO ESTONIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Alar Karis of the Republic of Estonia, on the occasion of his country's National Day.

In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of success to President Alar Karis in leading his country and achieving the aspirations of further stability, security and development for the people of Estonia. His Majesty also wished the cooperation and partnership relations between the two countries further growth and expansion in all spheres.

HONOURABLE LADY GREETINGS ON TEACHER'S DAY



Her Highness The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, has addressed a message of greetings on the occasion of the Teacher's Day, which falls on February 24 every year.

The message reads as follows: "It pleases us to extend our heartfelt greetings to all male and female teachers in our dear homeland on the occasion of Teacher's Day, which falls on February 24 every year.

"As we voice our thanks and appreciation to teachers, we would like to value teachers' constant contribution to enhancing the talents of students, augmenting their potential with lofty values, sciences, as well as grooming and supplying them with different types of knowledge in a manner that assists them to bring about positive change to society.

"We wish teachers success in performing their noble educational mission. We would also like to express our deep gratitude to all other personnel in the education field for their sincere efforts in carrying out their duties." — ONA

HIS MAJESTY RETURNS HOME

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik returned home on Sunday, following a private visit. May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty and grant him success to realise all aspirations of further progress and prosperity for his loyal people. — ONA

Truce in grave danger after Israel delays prisoner swap

US expects phase two of Gaza ceasefire deal to proceed

HAMAS ON SUNDAY said Israel has gravely endangered a five-week-old Gaza truce by delaying the release of Palestinian prisoners under the deal because of the manner it has freed Israeli captives. The first phase of the truce ends early in March and details of a planned subsequent phase have not been agreed. With tensions again hanging over the deal, which halted more than 15 months of war, Israel on Sunday announced an expansion of military operations in the occupied West Bank.

The military said a tank division will be sent into the West Bank city of Jenin, the first such deployment to the territory in 20 years.

Since the Gaza ceasefire began on January 19, Hamas has released 25 living Israeli captives in ceremonies before crowds at various locations in Gaza.

Armed masked fighters escort the captives onto stages adorned with slogans.

The Red Cross has previously appealed to "all parties" for the swaps to be carried out in a "dignified and private" manner.

In the seventh such transfer, Hamas released six Israeli captives on Saturday but Israel put off the planned release of more than 600 Palestinian prisoners in exchange.

Senior Hamas official Bassem Naim said postponing the release exposes "the entire agreement to grave danger". Naim said the mediators, "especially the Americans", must pressure Israel's government "to implement the agreement as it is and immediately release our prisoners." Both sides have accused each other of violations during the ceasefire but it has so far held.



Palestinian families react after Israel delayed the release of Palestinian prisoners in the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah early on Sunday. — AFP

Meanwhile, President Donald Trump's Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff said on Sunday the US expects the second phase of the ceasefire deal to go forward and that he would visit the Middle East this week.

Witkoff made the comments in a CNN 'State of the Union' interview after being asked about Israel's decision to postpone the release of Palestinian prisoners and detainees and how he expected the ceasefire to be impacted by developments in the region. "We have to get

an extension of phase one," Witkoff said. "I'll be going to the region this week, probably on Wednesday, to negotiate that."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said on Sunday Israel was waiting to deliver 620 Palestinian prisoners and detainees "until the release of the next hostages has been assured, and without the humiliating ceremonies." Hamas handed over six hostages from Gaza on Saturday. — Agencies

Information Ministry Theatre ushers new era of cultural innovation



MUSCAT: The Theatre of the Ministry of Information (MoI) will be opened on Tuesday, as part of efforts undertaken by the ministry to motivate arts and innovation and highlight the role of the media portraying culture and thought in an advanced technical manner. The theatre is set to be a hub that embraces artistic and theatrical events and contributes to the evolution of cultural and media activities in the Sultanate of Oman.

The 560-sqm theatre, which can accommodate 500 people, is equipped with the latest equipment and technologies that would help highlight events in the best possible manner, thanks to a 150-sqm stage, special rooms for commentary, translation and advanced control and external transmission units.

The theatre's opening ceremony will include visual presentations, musical performances, national and Arab operettas. — ONA

OMAN



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SHORT TAKES



Jota Yamamoto, Ambassador of Japan, with Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy

AMBASSADORS OF JAPAN, KOREA BID GOODBYE

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Sunday received, separately, in his office Jota Yamamoto, Ambassador of Japan to the Sultanate of Oman, and Kiejoo Kim, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the Sultanate of Oman, to bid them farewell at the end of their tours of duty. Sayyid Badr expressed his appreciation for the efforts exerted by the ambassadors in boosting relations, wishing them success. — ONA

OMAN, UKRAINE DISCUSS BILATERAL COOPERATION

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received a phone call from Andrii Sybiha, Foreign Minister of Ukraine, during which they reviewed relations of cooperation between the two countries and means of promoting them in various areas, particularly in the economic field. The two ministers exchanged views on a set of regional and international issues. They underscored their joint support for all efforts aimed at establishing justice and achieving security and peace, in accordance with the United Nations Charter, international law and all other prevailing charters and norms.

A TRIBUTE TO THE ROLE TEACHERS PLAY



MUSCAT: The celebration of Omani Teacher’s Day, marked each year on February 24, is a tribute, appreciation and confirmation of the active and continuous role teachers play in the educational process. They are the main drivers in the educational system, instilling values of citizenship, tolerance and community service in the youth from the time they enter school until they graduate. Teachers guide students on the right path to create a knowledgeable, cultured and socially aware generation capable of contributing to the advancement of the country in all aspects of life, present and future. The number of educational professionals in government schools in Oman has reached 74,316 teachers and administrators, with a growth rate of about 3.1 per cent over the past five years (2020-2024). In private schools, there are 22,539 teachers and administrators in 1,223 private schools.

Oman, Somalia explore investment opportunities

DR Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, President of the Federal Republic of Somalia, on Sunday received in Mogadishu Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, the minister conveyed greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the President of Somalia. He also conveyed His Majesty’s wishes of good health and happiness to President Dr Hassan and further progress for the people of Somalia. On his turn, the Somali President asked the minister to convey his heartfelt sentiments to His Majesty the Sultan, along with his best wishes of good health and well-being. President Dr Hassan also wished the Omani people further progress and prosperity.

The meeting underscored the strength of the deep-rooted relations between Oman and Somalia and the importance of boosting cooperation in various sectors. On the sidelines of the visit, a session of talks was held with the Somali side. The session was attended by Fardowsa Osman Egal, Somalia’s Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation, and Mahmoud Aden Geesood, Somalia’s Minister of Ports and Marine Transport. It was also attended by



Dr Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, President of the Federal Republic of Somalia, on Sunday received in Mogadishu Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and his accompanying delegation. — ONA

several Somali officials. The session discussed means of enhancing cooperation between the two countries. It also highlighted investment opportunities. The Omani delegation to Somalia comprises Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications

and Information Technology for Transport, as well as officials from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), Oman Investment Authority (OIA), Oman Airports and several other entities. — ONA

SHURA TO HOST EDUCATION MINISTER ON WEDNESDAY

MUSCAT: The Majlis Ash’shura will host Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education on Wednesday to deliver her ministry’s statement before the council as the first ministerial statement to be discussed during the second regular session of the tenth term. This was stated by Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of the Majlis Ash’shura. He added that the council will convene its sixth and seventh regular meetings of the second regular session (2024-2025) of the tenth term (2023-2027) on Tuesday and Wednesday.

The Secretary-General of Majlis Ash’shura noted that the statement will deal with a number of topics. The first axis of the statement addresses school education policies in the Sultanate of Oman, while the second axis deals with the quality of school education in the Sultanate of Oman in terms of evaluation studies of educational curricula and their impact on improving curricula and the Ministry’s plan for digital transformation and the use of artificial intelligence in the educational process. The third axis deals with human resources, training and qualification in the ministry

including the Omanisation plan and procedures for appointing non-Omani teachers. The fourth axis of the ministerial statement will be allocated to discussing private school education in the Sultanate of Oman with a focus on the public-private partnership projects and investment policies in private education, Al Nadabi said. The Secretary-General of Majlis Ash’shura stated that the council will hold its sixth regular session on Tuesday which will be dedicated to discussing a number of draft laws referred by the government to the council for study.

Taqah Charity Team hosts ‘community giving’ forum

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH @patkaushal

The Taqah Charity Team organised the ‘Community Benevolence and Giving Forum’ on Sunday at the Office of the Wali of Taqah, under the auspices of Shaikh Tariq bin Khalid al Hinai, Wali of Taqah. The event brought together officials, dignitaries, and volunteers to celebrate and reinforce the spirit of community service. The forum commenced with a keynote address by the charity team’s chairman, Ahmed bin Salem al Maashani, who highlighted the team’s milestones and ongoing initiatives. He emphasised the progress made in key areas such as the construction of the Bayt al Khair shelter for underprivileged



The event brought together officials, dignitaries and volunteers to celebrate and reinforce the spirit of community service.

families, youth education programmes, medical aid initiatives, and debt relief projects. Al Maashani credited these achievements to the unwavering support of the Wali of Taqah, partnerships with sponsors, and the dedicated efforts of volunteers. A visual presentation showcased the team’s charitable

initiatives, followed by contributions from various community institutions engaged in volunteer work. Participating entities included the Taqah Sports Club, the Al-Wafa Center for Disability Rehabilitation, Parents’ Councils, the Zakat Committee and the Omani Women’s Association. Each organisation provided

an overview of its efforts in advancing social welfare and community development. The event concluded with a ceremony where the guest of honour, alongside the chairman of the charity team, recognised the contributions of participants, sponsors and volunteers who played a pivotal role in the team’s success. As a gesture of appreciation, the team presented a commemorative gift to Shaikh Tariq bin Khalid al Hinai for his continued support and leadership. The forum underscored the vital role of community engagement and volunteerism in the Wilayat of Taqah, highlighting the power of collective action in fostering sustainable development and uplifting those in need.

AFAQ2025



Afaq 2025 aspires to nurture a generation that reads without limits.

Building a reading culture and enhancing knowledge awareness

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, FEB 23

The General-Directorate of Culture, Youth and Sports launched Afaq 2025, a transformative initiative aimed at fostering a culture of reading and enhancing knowledge awareness within Omani society.

Recently held in the Wilayat of Suhar, the programme featured a series of interactive workshops designed to strengthen reading skills, aligning with the national framework of future skills in Oman. By integrating modern educational tools, Afaq 2025 seeks to support children’s linguistic and intellectual development from an early age.

Hosted at the Cultural Complex of Al Batinah North Governorate, the initiative is a step toward building a knowledge-driven society where reading is an integral part of personal and academic growth. The programme equips parents, educators and community members with effective strategies to cultivate a lifelong love for reading among children, ensuring that the next generation develops strong literacy skills.

The three core workshops of Afaq 2025 focused on different aspects of childhood literacy and educational technology:

How to raise a child who reads: This session guided parents and educators on nurturing reading habits in children through early exposure to books, storytelling techniques, and the creation of a reading-friendly environment at home.

Utilising modern educational technology for children’s language development: Participants explored how digital tools and AI-driven applications can enhance language acquisition and comprehension, making learning more engaging and effective. Reflecting on the experience, participant Jawaher al Gafri noted, “Expanding our horizons with AI tools and applications to enhance a child’s reading fluency is a unique opportunity for us.”

The importance of reading and how to develop it in children: This session highlighted the cognitive, emotional and social benefits of reading, offering practical methods to improve children’s literacy skills and sustain their interest in books over time.

With the motto ‘Reading to Build a Better Future,’ Afaq 2025 aspires to nurture a generation that reads without limits, empowering individuals to navigate the world of knowledge with confidence. By fostering a deep appreciation for reading and integrating innovative learning techniques, the programme bridges cultural awareness and intellectual engagement, ensuring that Oman’s youth are well-prepared for academic and personal success. Through collaboration between educators, parents, and cultural institutions, Afaq 2025 paves the way for a more literate, informed and enlightened society.

CROATIAN DELEGATION VISITS UNESCO SCHOOLS IN OMAN

MUSCAT: A delegation of educators and students from Unesco-affiliated schools in Croatia is currently visiting Unesco-affiliated schools in Oman, as part of a twinning programme aimed at fostering cultural exchange and educational collaboration. The visit, which runs until February 27, includes activities such as attending classes, exploring Omani heritage and engaging in discussions on topics such as climate change, technology and student entrepreneurship.



The programme promotes mutual understanding, tolerance and respect between cultures, enhancing educational practices and celebrating shared international

values. It also includes visits to key Omani landmarks like the Oman Across Ages Museum and the Royal Opera House Muscat.

During the 2023-2024 academic year, Oman’s Unesco schools have partnered with institutions in countries including Brunei, Greece, Palestine, Denmark, the UK, the US, Poland and Qatar. These initiatives, facilitated by video communication, aim to strengthen educational ties and enrich the students’ learning experiences on a global scale. — ONA

National Museum unveils Russian-language website

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, FEB 23

THE National Museum has launched its Russian-language website, marking a significant step in cultural diplomacy and global accessibility. The event, held under the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, (MoHT), and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the National Museum, was attended by Oleg Vladimirovich Levitin, Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Oman, along with distinguished officials, ambassadors and cultural enthusiasts.

Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, emphasised the initiative’s importance, and said: “This launch, part of the Russian Seasons in Oman, coincides with the 40th anniversary of diplomatic ties between our nations. The National Museum is now the first government entity in Oman — and the first museum in the Arab world and the Middle East — to offer a Russian-language website. This milestone reflects our commitment to strengthening cultural ties and promoting Oman’s rich heritage to Russian-speaking audiences.”



The Minister of Heritage and Tourism launched the Russian language website of the National Museum

The event featured a visual presentation on the museum’s collaboration with Russian institutions, highlighting their shared dedication to cultural preservation. Guests also toured the Hermitage Museum Corner exhibition, “Gifts of the Emirs of Bukhara and the Khans of Central Asia to the Russian Imperial Court,” which showcases exquisite artefacts from the late 19th and early 20th

centuries. With the addition of Russian, the Museum’s website now supports four languages - Arabic, English, Chinese, and Russian - enhancing its role as a digital gateway to Oman’s rich cultural heritage. This initiative aims to attract Russian-speaking visitors and further strengthen cultural tourism in the Sultanate of Oman.

Omani, German students explore collaboration

A STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 23

As part of an initiative to explore potential student exchange programmes and mutual research collaborations, the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), Nizwa, welcomed a delegation of 22 students from Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz (JGUM), Germany, on Thursday.

The group comprising students and faculty led by Dr Julia Verne, Professor of Cultural Geography, and Dr Sandra Petermann from the Department of Geography at the JGUM university, were hosted by the Department of Mass Communication at the College of Creative Industries.

The visit provided a platform for discussions on academic partnerships and cultural exchanges, fostering stronger ties between Oman and Germany in the field of higher



UTAS Nizwa welcomed a delegation of 22 students from Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz.

education. During the visit, the delegation participated in interactive sessions with UTAS faculty and students, exchanging insights on media studies, geography, and interdisciplinary research. Discussions covered mutual academic interests, potential joint projects, and student mobility opportunities. Faculty from the College of Creative Industries welcomed the initiative, highlighting prospects

for research collaboration and knowledge-sharing. Tahani al Abri, Head of the Department of Mass Communication, expressed her enthusiasm for the visit, highlighting the importance of international collaborations in broadening students’ academic and cultural perspectives. “We are excited about the opportunities for academic exchange between our institutions and look forward to future collaborations that will

benefit students and faculty from both universities,” Al Abi said.

This visit marked a significant step toward fostering global academic networks, enhancing research collaborations, and creating new learning opportunities for students and faculty alike.

Ayesha Mualla echoed similar sentiments, emphasising the role of such initiatives in fostering cross-cultural understanding and academic excellence. “Exploring new avenues for research and student exchanges can lead to meaningful collaborations that enrich learning experiences and enhance global perspectives” Ayesha said.

The event concluded with a screening of a music video and documentary film produced by Digital Media students as part of their graduation projects, showcasing their creative talents.

‘Omani Ethos’ symposium explores 5 key themes

MUSCAT: The University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), Al Musannah, hosted a thought-provoking symposium titled ‘The Omani Ethos: Spirit of Authenticity and Essence of Civilisation’. The event reaffirmed the institution’s commitment to strengthening national identity and instilling Omani values in younger generations. Featuring insights from distinguished academics and media professionals, the symposium

explored five key themes that highlighted the deep-rooted cultural and ethical framework of Oman. Dr Rajab al Owaisi, a Social and Educational Studies Expert at the State Council, opened the discussions with a paper on the role of Omani parliaments and the Ministry of Information in reinforcing the Omani ethos. He emphasised how these institutions shape a well-balanced national identity and contribute



to preserving Omani ethical and cultural values. The second presentation, delivered by academic Dr Mohammed al Huaili, examined

the historical roots of Omani values and their lasting influence on social behaviour. He delved into how generations have preserved this cultural heritage, ensuring continuity amid changing societal dynamics. Renowned media professional Ali al Ajmi addressed the third theme, focusing on the role of media in shaping the Omani ethos. He discussed how traditional and modern media contribute to

promoting Omani identity while highlighting the challenges posed by digital platforms in preserving cultural heritage. The fourth paper, presented by Dr Basma al Riyami, emphasised youth engagement in social development. She underscored the importance of fostering collaboration between community groups and empowering young Omanis to play an active role in upholding and transmitting national values.

SPOTLIGHT



DRIFTING: PASSION OR PUBLIC HAZARD?

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

THE ROYAL OMAN POLICE (ROP) recently took action by halting 98 vehicles in Muscat for violating traffic regulations and disturbing public peace. This enforcement underscores the ongoing efforts to ensure road safety, particularly as drifting – a high-adrenaline motorsport – re-emerges on public roads. While drifting is often associated with professional racing, it has gained popularity among car enthusiasts. However, when practiced outside controlled environments, it poses significant risks to both drivers and the general public.

Drifting, which involves intentionally steering a vehicle sideways while maintaining control through turns, has its roots in rallying and touring motorsports. It first gained prominence in Japan during the late 1970s and early 1980s, particularly among street racers. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, drifting had become a global phenomenon, influencing not only motorsports but also fashion, art and lifestyle. Today, drifting is recognised as a competitive sport, with professional series like Formula Drift in the United States and D1 Grand Prix in Japan.

In Oman, drifting has surged in popularity in recent years. Specific roads in Muscat have become hotspots for enthusiasts and despite previous efforts to curb the practice, drifting on public roads has resurfaced, prompting the ROP to take action. These recent efforts



Practicing motorsports in a controlled environment significantly reduces risks, making it far safer than drifting on public streets. The risk on public roads is much higher than in a race, which is a controlled environment

SULEIMAN AL RAWAHI,
Managing Director,
Oman Automobile Association

are part of a broader strategy to enhance security and maintain public order.

One organisation working to ensure drifting remains safe is the Oman Automobile Association (OAA). The OAA has established facilities in Muscat, Suhar and Ibri, where enthusiasts can legally practice and compete. According to Suleiman al Rawahi, Managing Director of the OAA, the association provides a safe and regulated environment for drifting, with strict safety standards in place. “We have rules and regulations. The simple fact is, following these rules can make you professional,” said Al Rawahi.

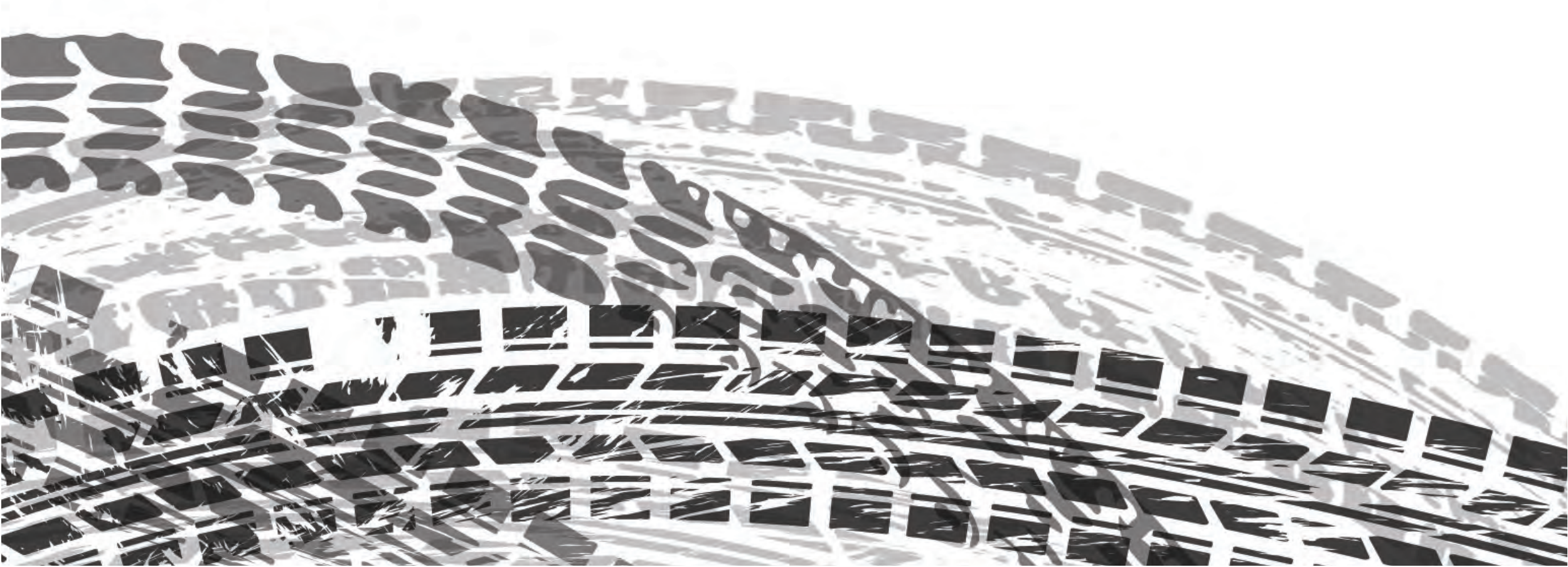
For safety, the OAA mandates that drifting vehicles include features such as roll cages, fire-resistant interiors, fire extinguishers and specialised fuel tanks to minimise fire risks. These safety measures align with international standards to protect drivers. Al Rawahi emphasised that practicing motorsports in a controlled environment significantly reduces risks, making it far safer than drifting on public streets. “The risk on public roads is much higher than in a race, which is a controlled environment,” he said.

While drifting is a recognised motorsports, street racing remains illegal. Al Rawahi stressed that the OAA’s facilities are designed to keep drifting off public roads. “These facilities are only part of the solution. The rest is the mindset, with better awareness to understand that if you practice motorsports, you must practice with education and respect,” he explained.

The 7th Oman International Drift Championship, taking place this weekend in Suhar, will see participants from 17 countries. This event offers drivers the opportunity to showcase their skills in a regulated, controlled environment. Drifting competitions involve drivers being judged based on several criteria, including drift angle, speed, line and style. Techniques such as power oversteer, clutch kicks, e-brake pulls and feint drifts are common. To achieve optimal performance, drivers modify their vehicles with upgrades such as suspension enhancements, high-performance tires and engine tuning.

Despite the excitement drifting brings, it is crucial to recognise the inherent risks, especially when practiced outside sanctioned events. By participating in competitions and adhering to safety guidelines, enthusiasts can enjoy the sport while minimising risks. For the safety of both drivers and the public, drifting should be confined to designated facilities, not public roads. As drifting continues to grow as both a competitive sport and a cultural expression, it must remain within controlled environments where risks are minimised and safety standards are upheld.

Drifting, with its unique blend of skill and creativity, is here to stay. However, enthusiasts must be educated on the importance of following regulations and practicing the sport responsibly. Only then can drifting remain a thrilling motorsports without compromising public safety.



OMANI CHILD ELECTED PRESIDENT OF CHILDREN’S PARLIAMENT

AL DAKHILIYAH: Omani child Elias bin Awad al Ma’ani, from Malik bin Fahm Basic Education School in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, was elected as the President of the Arab Children’s Parliament in its fourth session for 2025 on Saturday. Al Ma’ani secured the most votes in the second round of elections held at the Sharjah Consultative Council headquarters in the presence of



Elias bin Awad al Ma’ani

number of officials and representatives from 14 Arab countries. The election of Al Ma’ani as the President of the Arab Children’s Parliament is the culmination of efforts made by the Sultanate of Oman in supporting children and youth and enabling them to play leadership roles at the Arab level. This achievement also reflects the Sultanate of Oman’s keenness

to instil the values of dialogue and democratic practice among the youth and prepare them for the role of future leaders. The event is vital in enhancing joint Arab cooperation in the field of childhood, and enabling children to express their opinions and to effectively participate in the issues of their communities. — ONA

MoSD honours pioneers of social responsibility

AFRAH AL BALUSHI MUSCAT, FEB 23

THE Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) honoured pioneers of social responsibility at the ‘Pioneers of Social Responsibility’ forum, a two-day event aimed at increasing awareness of social responsibility and its role in sustainable development. Under the auspices of Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, and attended by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, the forum sought to highlight best practices and foster collaboration in achieving Oman Vision 2040. The event focused on structuring and organising social responsibility projects to maximise their impact. It emphasised the importance of partnerships between the public, private and civil society sectors to drive meaningful initiatives. Discussions also covered the need for governance frameworks to ensure transparency and accountability in social responsibility programmes. Shaikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development, highlighted the ministry’s efforts to develop governance mechanisms for social responsibility programmes, ensuring alignment with national priorities. He noted that these initiatives are integrated across governorates through a unified national electronic platform, enhancing coordination and efficiency. From an economic perspective, Haitham bin Salem al Salmi, CEO of the Muscat Stock Exchange, emphasised that financial markets now play a key role in promoting sustainability. He stated that the exchange has established a



The forum focused on structuring and organising social responsibility projects to maximise their impact

specialised centre for sustainable investment, focusing on projects that contribute to national growth and social impact. Dr Yousef al Fulaiti, General Supervisor of the Legislation, Judiciary and Oversight Priority Support Team for Oman Vision 2040, outlined key welfare and social protection objectives. Meanwhile, Eng Mohammed al Gharibi, Director of External Affairs at Oman Oil Development Company, highlighted the role of civil society institutions, such as charitable organisations and Omani women’s associations, in addressing social challenges. A key highlight of the forum was the recognition of organisations that have demonstrated outstanding contributions to social responsibility. Honorees included Oman Oil Development Company, Saud Bahwan Charity Foundation, Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO), Bank Muscat, Ishraqa Foundation for Community Development (Khimji Ramdas), OQ Group, Ooredoo, Omantel, Shell Oman Marketing Company, and several others. These organisations were acknowledged for their

dedication to social welfare, community empowerment and sustainable development. Sponsors of the forum and training session providers were also recognised for their contributions in advancing social responsibility initiatives. Hala al Wahaibi, Director of the Social Responsibility Organisation Department at the Ministry of Social Development, emphasised the forum’s role in strengthening national efforts. “This platform highlights the developmental dimensions of social responsibility and enables institutions to learn from successful programmes,” she stated. The forum will continue with workshops covering social responsibility strategy design, governance from a leadership perspective and innovative approaches to achieving sustainable development goals. By fostering collaboration and recognising impactful initiatives, Oman is reinforcing its commitment to ethical and sustainable growth, ensuring that social responsibility remains a key driver of national progress.

OAAA launches Capacity Building Programme



MUSCAT: The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) has officially launched the External Auditors Capacity Building Programme for the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) 2025. This programme consists of annual training sessions for external auditors to enhance the framework’s effectiveness. A total of 19 trainees from over 13 educational institutions participated in the first phase, with plans to train around 100 external auditors by the end of June 2025. The initiative reflects the authority’s ongoing commitment to empowering national competencies and raising awareness about the NQF by offering vital support and guidance to qualification-awarding bodies across Oman. — ONA

Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Defence ENGINEERING SERVICES

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Defence invites Contractors specialized in the under mentioned works and registered with the Govt. Tender Board and Ministry of Defence to participate in the following tender.

Tender No.	Tender Name	Contractors Grade	Last Date to Obtain Tender	Tender Submission Date	Tender Price (RO)
002/2025	Building works - Ghala	First & above	13 March 2025	14 April 2025	420/- R.O
003/2025	Building works - Oymn Al-Ghuaref	First & above	13 March 2025	14 April 2025	300/- R.O
004/2025	HVAC system works - Masirah	First and above - specialized in HVAC system	13 March 2025	14 April 2025	150/- R.O
005/2025	HVAC system works - Mussandam	First and above - specialized in HVAC system	13 March 2025	14 April 2025	100/- R.O
006/2025	Building works - MAM	First & above	13 March 2025	21 April 2025	200/- R.O
007/2025	Building works - MAM	First & above	13 March 2025	21 April 2025	230/- R.O
008/2025	MEP works - MAM	First & above specialized in MEP Works	13 March 2025	21 April 2025	320/- R.O
009/2025	Building works - Masirah	Excellent	13 March 2025	21 April 2025	600/- R.O
010/2025	Building works - Alkhoudh	Excellent	13 March 2025	28 April 2025	600/- R.O
011/2025	Electromechanical maintenance works - Mussandam	First & above specialized in fuel tank maintenance works	13 March 2025	28 April 2025	320/- R.O
012/2025	Building works - MAM	Excellent	13 March 2025	28 April 2025	750/- R.O
013/2025	Building works - Jarbeeb	Excellent	13 March 2025	28 April 2025	830/- R.O
014/2025	HVAC system works - Azaiba	First and above - specialized in HVAC system	13 March 2025	28 April 2025	300/- R.O

*For more information about the above Tenders please visit gate number (14)

- Tender Documents (Electronic Tender Document) can be obtained from the Tender office, Gate No: 14, Muaskar Al Murtafa’a after payment of the tender fee indicated above.
- The Payment should be made electronically by using SMART CARD, VISA CARD and VISA ELECTRON. Sunday to Thursday (0900 – 1300 Hours).
- The Bid to be accompanied by Tender Bond in the value of (1%) of the bid value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank and addressed to HE the Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Bids are to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to HE the Chairman of Tender Committee and marked with Tender Number and Name. Name of Bidder or any other marks should not be printed on the envelopes.
- Bids to be deposited in the Tender office at Gate No: 14 Muaskar Al Murtafa’a before 1300 hours on the assigned day for submission of the Tender.
- We would like to draw your attention to the importance of adherence to the submission date, request and any queries related should not be submitted to MODES fourteen days prior to submission of offer & that queries must be on electronic (Microsoft word).
- You are requested to submit the following items within your tender submission, failure to submit the required information may result a disqualification of your offer without any further notification.
 - Percentage of Omanisation within the company supported by an authenticated certificate from the Ministry of Labour (Updated Copy).
 - Detailed priced breakdown to be specified as per scope of works and drawings.
 - Tender Form and Tender Bonds to be submitted as hard copy and others documentation shall be as **SOFT COPY** (USB) in two separate files:
 - Financial (**bill 1&2 separated file from bill3**)
 - Technical files.
 - Confirmation of site visit.
 - All addendums and circulars.
 - List of sub-contractors/suppliers and their acceptance letter to this project.
 - List of current and executed projects for the last Five years.
 - Valid Registration Certificates from Tender Board.
 - Financial Statement for the last Three years.

THE ROYAL GUARD OF OMAN

Tender Advertisement

The Royal Guard of Oman, invites tenders for the following:-

Tender Reference	Subject	Grade	Tender Document Value	Submission Date
01/2025	Providing Catering Service from (01/01/2026) to (31/12/2028)	I & above	R.O. 150/- non-refundable	15 th April 2025

Specialized Companies registered in the Procurement and Contracts Directorate of the General Directorate of Finance, Royal Guard of Oman and the General Secretariat of Tender Board – Sultanate of Oman, can collect the tender document from the Tender Committee Secretariat, Royal Guard of Oman, Seeb during working hours from **Monday 24th February to Monday 03rd March 2025.**

Wax-sealed Tenders addressed to the Chairman - Tender Committee should be submitted to RGO before 1200 hours on the submission date along with a Tender Bond the name of the Royal Guard of Oman equivalent to 1% (One Percent) of the value of the Tender from any registered Bank in the Sultanate of Oman.. The tenderer shall not reveal his identity other than the tender title and the address mentioned below.

No Tender will be accepted after the submission date. The Royal Guard of Oman reserves the right to accept or reject any Tender without giving reasons.

Tender Committee
P.O Box 381, C.P.O
Postal Code 111

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A M23 rebel supervises Congolese soldiers who surrendered in Bukavu. — Reuters

CONGO PRESIDENT PLANS UNITY GOVT TO FACE CRISIS

GOMA: Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi will launch a unity government, his spokesperson said, as he faces domestic pressure over his handling of an offensive by Rwanda-backed M23 rebels in eastern provinces. The M23’s capture of swathes of eastern Congo and valuable mineral deposits has fanned fears of a wider war and provoked some members of the fractious opposition to openly predict his presidency will not last.

Tshisekedi told a meeting of the ruling Sacred Union coalition not to be distracted by internal quarrels: “We must unite... let’s stand together to face the enemy.” Presidency spokesperson Tina Salama said Tshisekedi would form a government of national unity and make changes in the leadership of the coalition, without giving further details.

“His management is one of the causes of the current crisis,” said opposition figure Herve Diakiese, criticising the move to form a unity government. “Tshisekedi is more concerned with saving his power, whereas we are more concerned with saving the Congo, and this can be done with or without him.” — Reuters

SUDAN’S RSF, ALLIES SIGN CHARTER FOR RIVAL GOVT



Sudanese attend a protest in support of the army in the eastern city of Gedaref. — AFP

NAIROBI: Sudan’s paramilitary Rapid Support Forces and its allies have agreed to form a parallel government, they said on Sunday, despite warnings such a move could further fragment the war-ravaged country. “The charter has been signed,” Najm al Din Drisa, spokesman of the United Civil Forces, one of the signatories, said.

The parties to the agreement, inked behind closed doors in Nairobi, said the charter establishes a “government of peace and unity” in rebel-controlled areas of the northeast African country. The move comes nearly two years into a devastating war with the regular army that has uprooted more than 12 million people and caused what the United Nations calls the world’s largest hunger and displacement crises.

The charter calls for “a secular, democratic, decentralised state based on freedom, equality and justice, without bias toward any cultural, ethnic, religious, or regional identity”. — AFP

TRAPPED WORKERS

Rescuers search in India tunnel collapse



Search teams in southern India were working to rescue eight workers believed to be trapped in an irrigation tunnel that collapsed during construction, officials said. The accident occurred in the state of Telangana after a sudden inflow of water and soil caused a part of the tunnel to cave in. Workers positioned near a boring machine managed to escape but another eight engineers and labourers were believed to be stuck inside. — AFP

SYRIAN NATIONAL DIALOGUE TO BEGIN ON FEBRUARY 25

DAMASCUS: Syria’s new authorities will hold a national dialogue conference starting on February 25 to discuss a new path for the nation after the overthrow of Bashar al Assad in December, two members of its preparatory committee said on Sunday. Foreign capitals will be closely watching the conference as part of a political process in Syria that they say needs to be inclusive of its ethnically diverse and multi-religious population as they consider suspending sanctions on the country. Holding the conference

has been a key pledge of former Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) which took control of Damascus on December 8 in a stunning offensive that prompted then-president Assad to flee to Russia, ending more than 50 years of his family’s autocratic rule.

The preparatory committee’s seven members consulted with some 4,000 people across Syria over the last week to gather views that would help shape a constitutional declaration, a new economic framework and a plan for institutional reform, the committee

told reporters on Sunday. The newly appointed President Ahmed Sharaa has said the conference was part of an inclusive political process to draft a constitution, which he said could take up to three years, and then hold elections, which he said could take four years.

The conference is scheduled for two days but could be extended if necessary, committee member Hassan Dugheim said, and a new government would also benefit from the conference’s recommendations. — Reuters

Israel puts obstacles to prisoner swap deal

HAMAS on Sunday said Israel has gravely endangered a five-week-old Gaza truce by delaying the release of Palestinian prisoners under the deal because of the manner it has freed Israeli hostages. The first phase of the truce ends early in March and details of a planned subsequent phase have not been agreed.

With tensions again hanging over the deal -- which halted more than 15 months of war -- Israel on Sunday announced an expansion of military operations in the occupied West Bank. The military said a tank division will be sent in to the West Bank city of Jenin, the first such deployment to the territory in 20 years.

Since the Gaza ceasefire’s first phase began on January 19, Hamas has released 25 living Israeli hostages in ceremonies before crowds at various locations in Gaza. Armed masked fighters escort the captives onto stages adorned with slogans. The hostages have spoken and waved in what Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called “humiliating ceremonies”.

In the seventh such transfer, Hamas released six Israeli captives on Saturday but Israel put off the planned release of more than 600 Palestinian prisoners in exchange. Senior Hamas official Bassem Naim said postponing the release exposes “the entire agreement to grave danger”. Naim said the mediators, “especially the Americans”, must pressure Israel’s government “to implement the agreement as it

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Children look on as a Palestinian boy receives a polio vaccine at a camp for displaced people in Nuseirat. — AFP

is and immediately release our prisoners.” Both sides have accused each other of violations during the ceasefire but it has so far held.

Early on Sunday, Netanyahu’s office said that, “In light of Hamas’ repeated violations -- including the disgraceful ceremonies that dishonour our hostages and the cynical use of hostages for propaganda -- it has been decided to delay the release.” Israel vowed to destroy Hamas after October 7, 2023 attack on Israel that triggered the war. The attack resulted in the deaths of more than 1,200 people, and Israel’s retaliation killed more than 48,000, according to figures from both sides. The war drew in groups around the region, including in Lebanon where Israel in November reached a separate ceasefire with the Hezbollah group. Alongside the Gaza war --

which displaced almost the entire population of 2.4 million -- violence has also soared in the West Bank. On Sunday, Israel’s military said “a tank division will operate in Jenin” as part of “expanding” operations in the area, where the military began a major raid against Palestinian militants just after the Gaza truce began. The United Nations has said the military activities have led to “forced displacement” of 40,000 Palestinians from Jenin and other refugee camps. Defence Minister Israel Katz said he has told troops “to prepare for a prolonged presence in the cleared camps for the coming year and to prevent the return of residents.” In the West Bank as well as in Gaza, families of Palestinian prisoners had waited with uncertainty into the night on Saturday, hoping for their release. — AFP



THOUSANDS MOURN HEZBOLLAH 'S LEADER

BEIRUT: Tens of thousands of people bid farewell to Hezbollah’s slain leader Hassan Nasrallah at a mass funeral in Beirut on Sunday, nearly five months after he was killed in an Israeli air strike. Carrying pictures of Nasrallah and Hezbollah flags, supporters from Lebanon and other countries in the region filled the 55,000-seat Camille Chamoun Sports City stadium in the southern suburbs of Beirut.

The group’s current leader, Naim Qassem, whose remote address to the mourners was broadcast on screens from an undisclosed location, said Hezbollah remained “strong”. “We will not submit and we will not accept the continuation of our killing and occupation while we watch,” Qassem said. Israeli warplanes carried out strikes in Lebanon’s south and east on Sunday morning and flew low over Beirut twice during the funeral. — Reuters

MAJOR OPERATION

Spain smashes human trafficking ring



Spanish police said on Sunday they had dismantled a human trafficking ring they said had exploited more than 1,000 women in the past year. “The victims, mainly of South American origin, were lured to Spain with bogus job offers,” police stated, adding they had rescued 48 women in an operation which brought 48 arrests. Most of those detained, including the three alleged ring leaders were held near the eastern city of Alicante. — AFP

ELECTRICITY FAILURE

S Africa faces highest level power cuts



South Africa’s Eskom has managed to restore six units at power plants after implementing its highest stage of controlled power cuts, the power utility said after multiple failures at Majuba and Camden power stations over the weekend. Eskom applied Stage 3 power cuts, effectively cutting 3,000 megawatts to the national grid. “Of the 10 units that we lost overnight we have essentially returned six units,” Dan Marokane, Eskom group chief executive officer, said. — Reuters

SHORTTAKES



French forensic police work to collect evidence at the site, in Mulhouse, eastern France. — AFP

FRANCE MAKES ARRESTS AFTER KNIFE ATTACK

MULHOUSE: French police have made several arrests since a man went on a stabbing rampage, killing one and wounding several others in what President Emmanuel Macron called an “terrorist act”, anti-terror prosecutors said on Sunday. The knife-wielding suspect, identified by prosecutors as a 37-year-old man, was arrested at the site of Saturday’s attack in the eastern city of Mulhouse. He was on a terrorism watchlist and subject to deportation orders.

A further three people were in custody in connection with the case on Sunday, the PNAT prosecutors unit said, without giving details. Local prosecutor Nicolas Heitz said the suspect was registered on France’s terrorist watchlist. Speaking at the police station late on Saturday, Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau said the man had “a schizophrenic profile” and his act had “a psychiatric dimension”. Retailleau said France had repeatedly attempted to expel him from the country, but Algeria refused to cooperate. The rampage occurred around 4 pm near a busy market in Mulhouse, a city of around 110,000 people near the German border. — AFP

SANTORINI SCHOOLS STAY SHUTTERED



Seismic activity on the Aegean Sea hotspot of Santorini has been “decreasing” over recent days but schools will remain closed for another week. The ministry aid preventative measures would remain in force, urging residents to be alert to the risk of landslides. Schools will meantime remain closed until Friday on Santorini and the nearby islands of Ios, Anafi and Amorgos while a ministerial assessment meeting will be held on Thursday. — AFP

Germans vote under shadow of far-right surge and Trump

BERLIN: Germans went to the polls on Sunday in a pivotal election, with the conservatives the strong favourites after a campaign rocked by a far-right surge and the dramatic return of US President Donald Trump. Frontrunner Friedrich Merz has vowed a tough rightward shift if elected to win back voters from the anti-immigration Alternative for Germany (AfD), which is eyeing a record result after a string of deadly attacks blamed on asylum seekers. If he takes over from embattled Chancellor Olaf Scholz of the centre-left SPD, as widely predicted given a yawning poll gap, Merz has promised a “strong voice” in Europe at a time of chaotic disruption.

Casting his ballot in Berlin, Daniel Hofmann, a 62-year-old urban planner, said it was his “civic duty” to vote as “right now we are going through very uncertain times”. “There must be a change,

a transformation.” More than 59 million Germans are eligible to vote. The high-stakes vote in the EU’s biggest economy comes amid tectonic upheaval in US-Europe ties sparked by Trump’s direct outreach to Russian President Vladimir Putin over their heads to end the Ukraine war.

Across Europe, Nato allies worry about the future of the alliance, nowhere more than in Germany which grew prosperous under the US-led security umbrella. Merz, in his final CDU/CSU campaign event in Munich on Saturday, said Europe needed to walk tall to be able to “sit at the main table” of the world powers. Voicing strong confidence, he told supporters in a large beer hall that “we will win the elections and then the nightmare of this government will be over”.

Amid the rise of the AfD, Merz has argued the next government must boldly address their concerns,



German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and his wife Elke Buedenbender enter the voting office, in Berlin. — AFP

warning that otherwise the far right might win next time around. “The stakes could not be higher”, argued political analyst and author

Michael Broening, who serves on the SPD’s Basic Values commission. “Germany’s mainstream parties have consistently failed to convince

voters to reject the far right, and this election could be their last chance to turn the tide.”

Democratic forces must find solutions to economic stagnation, immigration challenges and voter disaffection, he said, adding that “if Germany’s ‘establishment’ parties fail to deliver this time, they may not be the establishment for much longer”. For the next German leader, more threats loom from the United States, long its bedrock ally, if Trump sparks a trade war that could hammer Germany’s recession-hit economy. Trump, asked about the elections in Germany, which he has berated over its trade, migration and defence policies, said dismissively that “I wish them luck, we got our own problems”. Scholz will stay in charge as caretaker until any new multi-party government takes shape -- a task which Merz has confidently said he hopes to achieve in two months, by Easter. — AFP

MUSK SAYS ALL US GOVT STAFF MUST JUSTIFY THEIR WORK

WASHINGTON: Elon Musk, the billionaire adviser to Donald Trump, said that all US federal employees must justify their work or lose their jobs, hours after the president pushed him to be “more aggressive” in slashing government spending. Musk -- the world’s richest person and Trump’s biggest donor -- has led the effort to fire swaths of the government workforce. “All federal employees will shortly receive an email requesting to understand what they got done last week. Failure to respond will be taken

as a resignation,” Musk wrote. “A large number of good responses have been received already. These are the people who should be considered for promotion,” Musk posted on X after issuing the deadline.

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), the largest federal employee union, vowed to challenge any unlawful terminations in a statement from national president Everett Kelley. Kelley slammed Musk and the Trump administration, saying the move showed “their utter disdain

for federal employees and the critical services they provide to the American people.”

“It is cruel and disrespectful to hundreds of thousands of veterans who are wearing their second uniform in the civil service to be forced to justify their job duties to this out-of-touch, privileged, unelected billionaire who has never performed one single hour of honest public service in his life,” he said. Several federal employees said that they were advised by their agencies not to respond to the e-mail. — AFP

EU chief says vowed ‘unflinching’ Ukraine aid

EUROPEAN

Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said she held talks with the British and French leaders this weekend and all had pledged “unflinching” support for Ukraine ahead of the third anniversary of its war with Russia. “We discussed our unflinching support to Ukraine, financially and militarily,” Von der Leyen said of her telephone discussions with France’s President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer. The EU chief said in a post on the X platform she had “good exchanges” with two key European leaders. “We shared updates on our contacts with US partners and discussed plans for the defence and security of our continent,” she said amid growing US-Europe tensions on the Ukraine conflict and funding for Nato.

Macron and Starmer are both due in Washington this week for talks with US President Donald Trump. According to Downing Street, Starmer and von der Leyen agreed on the importance of offering guarantees for a just and durable peace in Ukraine when they spoke on Saturday. European states are concerned that, in his desire to end the conflict, Trump will offer Moscow favourable conditions without providing Kyiv with security guarantees while keeping European powers away from negotiations. To mark the third anniversary of the attack, Starmer said in an opinion piece for The Sun on Sunday newspaper that “it is in UK and US interests to stand by Ukraine with security guarantee.”

Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on Sunday, on the eve of a key United Nations vote, for a Ukraine peace deal that respects the country’s “territorial integrity.”

“I reaffirm the urgent need for a just, sustainable and comprehensive peace -- one that fully upholds Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders,” Guterres said in a statement. The Security Council vote will be on a US-backed draft resolution that makes no mention of Ukraine’s territorial integrity. “Monday



Visitors stand next to a makeshift memorial paying tribute to Ukrainian fighters with flags at the Independence Square in Kyiv. — AFP

24 February marks three years since the Russian Federation launched its full-scale attack of Ukraine, in clear violation of the United Nations Charter and international law,” the UN chief said. “Eighty years after the end of the Second World War, the war in Ukraine stands as a grave threat not only to the peace and security of Europe but also to the very foundations and core principles of the United Nations,” Guterres said. He saluted “all efforts towards achieving a just and inclusive peace.”

The statement comes as US President Donald Trump has adopted a tougher stance on Kyiv while taking a friendlier tone toward Moscow. The United States wants the Security Council and General Assembly to vote on a short text calling for a “swift end” to the devastating conflict, while making no mention of Ukraine’s territorial integrity. Ukraine and its European allies are seeking a vote in the General Assembly on a text that repeats earlier demands for an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine and an end to Russia’s attacks on its neighbour. Similar resolutions

have been voted on since Russia’s attack on February 24, 2022, and each has passed the General Assembly by overwhelming majorities, with support from the US administration of then president Joe Biden.

The Kremlin on Sunday hailed dialogue between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin -- two “extraordinary” presidents -- as “promising”, and vowed it would “never” give up territory seized in eastern Ukraine. Top Russian and US officials then met in Saudi Arabia last week to discuss a “restoration” of ties and start a discussion on a possible Ukraine ceasefire -- all without the involvement of Kyiv or Europe.

“This is a dialogue between two extraordinary presidents,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told state TV on Sunday. “That’s promising,” he added.

“It is important that nothing prevents us from realising the political will of the two heads of state.” Trump’s overtures to Moscow have triggered alarm in Kyiv and across Europe. But it is unclear whether his moves will be able to bring Moscow and Kyiv closer to a truce. — AFP

OPINION

The best teachers never stop being students



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is a Associate Professor, Dept of English and Translation, SQU.

AS Oman celebrates Teacher’s Day on February 24, it is an occasion to celebrate their pivotal role in developing young minds and remaining a source of knowledge, motivation and inspiration. But an oft-ignored aspect is that teachers themselves have to remain students throughout their career in order to share the most current information while keeping in mind developing trends in education and student learning methods.

One of the main reasons why it is essential for teachers to remain life-long learners is the constant change in the nature of knowledge. As new research, technologies and educational methodologies emerge, teachers should be able to adapt and adopt them in their classrooms.

This is most applicable today when knowledge, technology and learning styles are so rapidly changing as to make it challenging to keep up with it. A science teacher, for example, would need to incorporate environmental education within a curriculum of chemistry or biology in order to ensure that life lessons are being imparted to students.

Similarly, teachers of language and literature would have to add aspects of new literature like Manga and graphic novels which are very popular with younger readers in order to show the way in which literary trends are transforming. Not doing so would alienate the teacher from their younger audience.

In order to stay in tune with developing ideas, theories and pedagogies, teachers committed to their craft involve themselves in professional development, both in terms of their content areas as well as teaching styles. This has become much more accessible today with the rise of online courses offered by the best institutions worldwide. They ensure that teachers stay aware of changing student learning styles, as well as be prepared for emerging challenges in the classroom.

In fact, teacher development need not be limited to academics. They could include engaging in creative pursuits, developing a new set of skills or following a new sport. Students are encouraged when they see teachers opting to self-develop.

Another important reminder for teachers to remain committed to learning is the drastic changes which are taking place in

Teachers can embrace self-development by engaging in creative pursuits, acquiring new skills, or exploring new interests, setting an inspiring example for their students

classroom management. This includes a focus on mental health, with attention shifting from students as consumers of knowledge to being seen as individuals with unique and diverse needs. Recognising a student as an individual develops their morale, making a school a space where students can thrive, yet remain unique.

A commitment to life-long learning also inculcates humility, encouraging teachers to remain open-minded and willing to learn from all sources, including their students.

As change is the only constant, teachers today tend to be well informed about global issues. This allows them to encourage critical thinking among students, training them to ask relevant questions and preparing them to be responsible citizens.

One of the most rewarding aspects of teaching is the potential to remain young in spirit, in the company of succeeding generations of young learners who are full of potential, hope and eager to know more about the world. This is both a challenge and an opportunity. Leveraging such an opportunity by engaging in continuous learning is a privilege that teachers can maximise.

AI RESHAPES OPPORTUNITIES FOR FASHION MODELS

LUCIE LEQUIER

London-based model Alessandrah Gondora understands the power of being in “two places at the same time” thanks to an AI replica of herself: “She’s doing the hard work so I don’t have to!” Fashion designers and retailers can book her digital double for photo shoots without her having to travel or physically be there, Gondora said.

It is a solution that “saves time”, said the model, who is also walking down in-person runways at London Fashion Week, which runs until Monday. In the fashion industry, AI is already used by brands to create visual imagery for e-commerce websites and customised advertising campaigns at a lower cost.

While the technology opens up opportunities for some, critics fear AI will render many professionals, including models, make-up artists and photographers obsolete -- and could risk promoting an artificial standard of beauty.

In one video, sculpted male models flex their muscles next to women, with a backdrop of marble pools and gilded mirrors.

But none of it is real: this Christmas campaign was entirely generated with the use of AI by studio Copy Lab for the Swedish underwear brand CDLP.

“We are a very small company: I cannot go to a house in Beverly Hills and shoot a campaign,” said CDLP co-founder Christian Larson.

According to Larson, “real” photography has limitations.

“You have a film of this many pictures, the sun will set, and the light will disappear, and the budget will run out,” Larson said. But with AI, “you dive into this black hole of endless options.”

Preparing an ad campaign involving a photo shoot in the French Alps for ski eyewear would normally take several months to complete and could cost \$37,000, but can be done virtually for just €500 in a few days, claimed Artem Kupriyenko, citing a campaign done by his technology company Genera.

London and Lisbon-based Genera boasts a catalogue of 500 AI-generated models, all of which it claims to own the copyrights for.

The avatars can be customised by clients: “We can do any body shape, any gender, any ethnicity,” assured Genera’s creative head Keiron Birch, who said the practice was “super inclusive”.

But AI tends to create a characteristic face type, which differs from generator to generator, said Carl-Axel Wahlstrom, co-founder of Stockholm-based Copy Lab, an “AI creative studio”.

MidJourney, for example, has a tendency to generate models with thicker lips. — AFP

Kurti faces tough coalition challenge in Kosovo

KOSOVO’S recent parliamentary elections have injected fresh uncertainty into the country’s political landscape, presenting a serious test for Prime Minister Albin Kurti and his party, Vetëvendosje (Self-Determination).

Though Vetëvendosje is still the most significant political force in the country, it did not win an outright majority, therefore the government was compelled to go into a tricky coalition-building process. The outcome of the elections showed one big change in the political dynamics of Kosovo. Vetëvendosje saw a drop of roughly 41 per cent in its votes from the overwhelming win it had in 2021.

This signals growing public discontent, driven by economic stagnation, unresolved tensions with the ethnic Serb minority, and increasingly strained relations with Western allies. Gaining ground, the opposition - made up of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) - won 17.8 per cent and 21.8 per cent of the vote respectively. Their tangible performance indicates the electorate’s quest for different leadership amid the rising issues in Kosovo.

One of the most striking features of this election was the historically low voter turnout, barely exceeding 40 per cent. This decline suggests mounting political apathy and disillusionment, particularly among younger voters who once energised Kurti’s reformist agenda. Their disengagement complicates governance, reflecting a deeper erosion of trust in Kosovo’s political institutions.

With no party commanding a parliamentary majority, coalition negotiations are now in full swing. For Kurti, this presents an especially difficult challenge. Vetëvendosje has historically positioned itself as a staunch opponent of Kosovo’s entrenched political elites, whom



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ALBIN KURTI
Leader of the Self-Determination Movement Party

it has accused of corruption and mismanagement. This stance has made coalition-building with traditional parties a fraught endeavour.

One potential path forward is an alliance with LDK, a centre-right party with deep roots in Kosovo’s post-independence politics. While ideological and policy differences remain stark — particularly on economic and security matters — both parties share a mutual interest in advancing Kosovo’s European integration. However, years of political animosity make this a fragile option at best.

Another possibility is reaching an agreement with PDK, a party with strong ties to Kosovo’s wartime leadership and a history of clashing with Vetëvendosje on governance priorities, particularly Kosovo’s stance towards Serbia and the West. While such a coalition might bring short-term stability, it risks alienating Kurti’s base, which views PDK as emblematic of the very political establishment Vetëvendosje seeks to dismantle.

One of the most striking features of this election was the historically low voter turnout, barely exceeding 40 per cent. This fall shows increasing political apathy and disenchantment among Kosovo’s people, especially the young generation, which had formerly been a strong foundation for Kurti’s reformist vision. Kosovo’s political leaders are currently in heated negotiation to create a coalition since no party has a ruling majority.

Given his party’s historically aggressive attitude towards the conventional political elite and opposition groups, this presents Kurti a particularly tough obstacle. Vetëvendosje has in the past opposed coalition-building with parties considered to be representatives of Kosovo’s former political system. This stance has made coalition-

building with traditional parties a fraught endeavour.

One avenue might be a partnership with LDK, a centre-right party which has been quite influential in the political history of Kosovo. Though LDK historically has disagreed with the policies of Vetëvendosje, especially on economic and national security issues, there is room for cooperation.

Another alternative is turning to PDK, a party controlling much of Kosovo’s political scene following independence. Founded by ex officials of the Kosovo Liberation Army, PDK has sometimes battled Vetëvendosje on governmental priorities, especially regarding Kosovo’s relations with Serbia and the West. A coalition with PDK would call for substantial concessions on either side even if it could bring about stability. Supporters of Kurti could see this collaboration as a betrayal of Vetëvendosje’s fundamental values, therefore undermining the credibility among their constituency.

Kurti could look towards smaller political groups and ethnic minority representatives to guarantee a ruling majority given the challenges in lining up with the main opposition parties. Kosovo’s constitution ensures parliamentary representation for the Serb minority as well as Bosniaks, Turks and Gorani. Though this scheme will have its own difficulties.

Should coalition talks fall apart, Kurti could try to run a minority government with occasional outside assistance from opposition parties.

Though this alternative would let Vetëvendosje keep control of crucial policies, it would produce an unsteady governing environment in which passing bills is a daily battle. Opposition parties might withdraw support at any time, starting another cycle of elections and probably short-lived government.

Delivering lessons beyond books...



ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI

The write is author, translator and a communications professional

TEACHERS are the unrewarded heroes who shape who we are today. They were the first to awaken our dreams, inspire us to set goals and encourage us to believe in ourselves. Even before we understood what it meant to dream, our teachers introduced us to the magic behind it. For many of us, they were the first to truly care about our future and the dreams we wanted to pursue. Their frequent question, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” opened up new possibilities and changed our perspective on life.

Teachers are the first ones who believe in us. They lay the foundation for our future, and without their guidance and support, many of us might have lost the way. In those early school years, teachers asked questions that helped us cultivate hope, confidence and a sense of direction. Their dedication brought our dreams closer to reality, even when we were just children. Our dreams started to take shape the moment when our teachers believed in us and inspired us to plan for our future.

At one point, each of us dreamed of becoming something different - whether it was a doctor, a police officer, a pilot, an engineer, a teacher, or a captain. These

dreams started small, but grew over time. Teachers fanned the flames of our aspirations, and many of us are now living those dreams. While some may not have achieved exactly what they envisioned, they at least took the first step towards realising their goals, all thanks to the inspiration from their teachers. As the saying goes, “Where there is a will, there is a way.” Thank you, dear teachers, for instilling that belief in us!

There is no denying the essential role teachers play in shaping their students’ personalities and futures. As a Turkish proverb puts it, “A good teacher is like a candle, it consumes itself to light the way for others.” Whether a teacher’s influence is positive or negative, they leave a lasting impact on their students’ lives. For many children, their journey begins as early as five years old, in kindergarten, or six years old in first grade.

In teaching, the results of a day’s work often are not immediately visible. The true impact of a teacher’s efforts can remain hidden for years - sometimes even decades. Yet, teaching is the profession that shapes all others. Every successful person has been influenced by a teacher at some point, whether in school, college, or university. Teachers initiate the lifelong journey of acquiring knowledge and gaining wisdom

Teachers are the first ones who believe in us. They lay the foundation for our future, and without their guidance and support, many of us might have lost the way

through all the experiences a student will encounter. Every teacher touches hearts, opens minds and shapes futures.

To all teachers, we owe you a deep debt of gratitude. You work tirelessly to nourish your students with knowledge, enlighten them with your wisdom and inspire them with your experiences. You are more than just educators; you are fathers, brothers and friends. Likewise, female teachers are mothers, sisters and friends to the girls they teach. Today, on Teacher’s Day, we honour and celebrate the unwavering commitment you show to your students.

These moments of recognition are filled with both joy and appreciation for all that you do.

To all the teachers, thank you for your hard work, dedication, and the care you invest in shaping minds and hearts every day. Your passion, patience and constant support are truly noticed. Thank you for not only imparting knowledge, but for believing in us, encouraging us and making a lasting difference in our lives. Your influence reaches far beyond the classroom; you shape not only minds but also hearts. Your efforts are tireless to ignite curiosity, foster growth and nurture dreams.

The lives you have touched will forever carry your wisdom and kindness.

TRUMP SHAKES TRANSATLANTIC ALLIANCE WITH RUSSIA PIVOT

DANNY KEMP

Donald Trump’s sudden shift on Ukraine has shaken the transatlantic alliance to its core. Now European leaders are crossing that same ocean in a desperate bid to shore it up.

French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer will meet Trump separately at the White House this week to try to convince him to stick by Kyiv.

But fears are growing in European capitals that the bond forged from the ruins of World War II is on the verge of collapse as Trump pursues talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

In Trump, many see a president who has abandoned the traditional US view of a rules-based world order in favour of a nationalist, great power game with Moscow and Beijing.

That has caused panic on a continent that has relied on US security assurance for 80 years.

“The Europeans are running around with their hair on fire,” Max Bergmann, director of the Europe, Russia and Eurasia programme at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, said.

For his part, Trump insists that he is just seeking peace in Ukraine. “I think that President Putin and President Zelensky are going to have to get together. Because you know what? We want to stop killing millions of people,” Trump told reporters in the Oval Office on Friday.

But Trump’s embrace of Kremlin talking points on Ukraine — calling President Volodymyr Zelensky a “dictator without elections” and blaming Ukraine for Russia’s 2022 war — has caused alarm in Europe. It has also reinforced suspicions that Trump is effectively pulling the plug on decades of US support for Europe. In Trump’s view, European officials fear, the United States, Russia and China will instead look after their own spheres of influence closer to home.

“You know, it doesn’t affect the United States very much. It’s on the other side of the ocean,” Trump added on Friday about the Ukraine war.

Even in his first term he threatened to pull out of the Nato military alliance and questioned why the United States spends huge amounts on keeping troops in Europe. Trump’s meetings with Macron on Monday and Starmer on Thursday could therefore be testy. Macron said he would tell Trump not to be “weak” on Ukraine. Britain and France have both offered to send peacekeepers in the event of a deal to end the war, but Starmer has pushed for a US “backstop”.

Trump for his part accused both leaders of doing “nothing” to end the Ukraine war over the past three years. Many Europeans are also realising that the writing could be on the wall.

“We experience now quite a difficult and very dangerous moment when both parts of the transatlantic community, so to say, are getting more and more away from each other,” Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said. — AFP

Will we squander the AI opportunity?

I was fortunate to participate in the recent AI Action Summit in Paris, where many discussions emphasised the need to steer AI in a more socially beneficial direction. At a time of increasingly loud calls for AI acceleration from Silicon Valley – and now from the US government – the opportunity to focus on what we want from the technology was like a breath of fresh air.

As I noted in one of my speeches, we should start by asking what is valuable and worth amplifying in human societies. What makes us so special, or at least successful in evolutionary terms, is our ability to devise solutions to problems large and small, to try new things and to find meaning in such efforts. We have a capacity not only to create knowledge, but also to share it. Though the human journey has not always been smooth – our capabilities, machines and knowledge sometimes cause profound harms – constant inquiry and prolific sharing of information is essential to what we are.

For more than 200,000 years, technology has been central to this story. From the days of stone tools to the present, we have built the solutions to our challenges; and from oral storytelling and the invention of writing to the printing press and the Internet, we have developed new and better ways of sharing knowledge. Within the past 200 years, we have also figured out how to experiment better and more freely, and we have communicated this knowledge, too. The scientific process gave us established facts, allowing each generation to build on its predecessors’ advances.

It also underpinned spectacular growth in most countries over the past two centuries. While economic development has created tremendous inequality between and within countries, people almost everywhere today are healthier and more prosperous than they would have been in the eighteenth century. AI could invigorate this trend by complementing human skills, talents and knowledge, improving our decision-making, experimentation and applications of



For more than 200,000 years, technology has been central to this story.

useful knowledge.

Some may question whether we need AI for this purpose. After all, we already live in an age of information abundance; everything one might want – and much that one does not want – is technically accessible through the Internet. But useful information is scarce. Good luck finding what you need to address a specific problem in a particular context, in a timely fashion.

It is relevant practical knowledge, not mere information, that makes factory workers more productive; enables electricians to handle new equipment and perform more sophisticated tasks; helps nurses play a more critical decision-making role in healthcare; and generally allows workers of all skills and backgrounds to fill new and more productive roles.

AI, properly developed and used, can indeed make us better – not just by providing “a bicycle for the mind,” but by truly expanding our ability to think and act with greater understanding, independent of coercion or manipulation.

Yet owing to its profound potential, AI also represents one of the gravest threats that humanity has ever faced. The risk is not only (or even mainly) that superintelligent machines will

someday rule over us; it is that AI will undermine our ability to learn, experiment, share knowledge and derive meaning from our activities. AI will greatly diminish us if it ceaselessly eliminates tasks and jobs; overcentralises information and discourages human inquiry and experiential learning; empowers a few companies to rule over our lives; and creates a two-tier society with vast inequalities and status differences. It may even destroy democracy and human civilisation as we know it.

I fear this is the direction we are heading in. But nothing is preordained. We can devise better ways to govern our societies, and choose a direction for technology that boosts knowledge acquisition and maximises human flourishing. We can also ensure that AI creates more good jobs and enhanced capabilities for everyone – regardless of their education and income level. But first, the public must recognise that this socially desirable path is technically feasible. AI will move in a pro-human direction only if technologists, engineers and executives work together with democratic institutions, and if developers in the United States, Europe and China listen to the five billion people who live in other parts of the world.

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DARON ACEMOGLU

The writer is a 2024 Nobel laureate in economics and Institute Professor of Economics at MIT, is a co-author of Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



SEEB AND MAJEES REACH OVL FINAL

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 23

Seeb achieved a commanding victory over Masirah in straight sets 3-0 on Saturday at Al Amal Club, marking the first match of the final round of the Omani Volleyball League (OVL).

Seeb's win was driven by the outstanding performances of several key players, including Saud al Maamari, Younis al Amri, and Mahmoud al Saadi, who played crucial roles in scoring points.

The game began with Seeb establishing clear dominance, imposing their fast-paced attacking style and securing consecutive points early on. Masirah attempted to close the gap with strong responses, but Seeb maintained their lead, securing the first set with a score of 25-20.

In the second set, Seeb demonstrated a perfect balance between offence and defence. The team employed rapid offensive formations, executing powerful spikes from various positions on the court. Additionally, Seeb's precise and challenging serves put pressure on Masirah's reception, forcing repeated errors. This strategic approach resulted in a clear victory in the set, ending 25-18.

The third set witnessed intense competition and an exciting exchange of points between both teams. The match remained tightly contested until the final moments when Seeb secured the decisive point after a series of close rallies, ultimately closing the set with a narrow 26-24 victory.

Majees Defeat Al Bashayer in Straight Sets

In the second match of the day, Majees also secured a 3-0 victory over Al Bashayer at Al-Amal Club Hall.

Majees' victory was highlighted by the performances of Falah and Hilal al Muqbali, while Al Bashayer's standout players were Haitham al Shuraiqi and Mazin al Hashemi.

The match began with Majees asserting their dominance through an aggressive offensive approach. Falah delivered swift and precise attacks, while Hilal al Muqbali contributed with powerful spikes and strong defensive positioning. Despite Al Bashayer's efforts, led by Haitham al Shuraiqi and Mazin al Hashemi, to make an impact, Majees' organised serves and receptions prevented any real breakthrough. The set ended in Majees' favour with a score of 25-20.

In the second set, Al Bashayer improved defensively, but Majees' quick offensive transitions secured them a 25-22 win.

Entering the final set with confidence, Majees quickly widened the gap with powerful spikes and well-organised defence, sealing the victory with a 25-18 win, confirming their complete dominance in the match.

Five teams have advanced to the final stage of the Omani Volleyball League: Salam, Seeb, Al Bashayer, Majees and Masirah. The matches will follow a home-and-away league format, with the top four teams qualifying for the next stage.

Scotland crowned 1st FIH Hockey Men's Nations Cup



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 23

SCOTLAND

DEFEATED Egypt 4-2 to clinch the first ever FIH Hockey Men's Nations Cup 2 Oman 2025 crown in a thrilling final at the Hockey Oman Stadium in Al Amerat on Sunday night. With the triumph, Scotland earned promotion to the FIH Hockey Nations Cup in 2026 as this event acted as a pathway to ascend to the FIH Hockey Nations Cup and through it ultimately to the FIH Hockey Pro League.

In the final, Scotland players managed to dominate the first half as they scored three goals taking the advantage of

mistakes created at defending side of Egyptian team. WALKER Struan took the lead for this team as he netted the opener before end of first quarter. GOLDEN Jamie doubled the lead and made it 2-0 in the second quarter. WALKER Struan returned back again to hit the third goal prior end of the second quarter and make it 3-0. AUSTIN Thomas scored the fourth goal in the third quarter. Rajab Mahmood and LGANAINI Ahmed reduced the scoring gap as they netted the first and second goals for Egypt in the fourth quarter to make it 4-2 and the match ended with that result.

Earlier on the day, Poland earned the third spot following their victory over USA by 3-1 in penalty Shootout after the 2-2 draw in a tense encounter.

Chief guest for the final, Tayyab Ikram FIH President, delivered the trophy to the winners Nations medals to the runner-ups in the concluding ceremony. Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma, Oman Hockey Association (OHA) Chairman, FIH officials and OHA board directors were present.

This event considered as a fresh opportunity for eight ambitious teams ranked below the teams playing in the FIH Hockey Nations Cup to make their mark on the international stage. The opening edition of the championship featured participation of eight teams distributed into two pools including pool A comprised from Egypt, Chile, China and Poland while pool B featured from the hosts Oman, Austria, Scotland and United States.

SHORT TAKES



USA team celebrating a wicket

USA SWEEP OMAN IN T20I SERIES

MUSCAT: The United States completed a resounding 3-0 victory in the three-match T20I series against Oman, sealing the clean sweep with a dominant eight-wicket win in the third and final match on Sunday at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground in Al Amerat. Despite flashes of brilliance from Oman, particularly in the second match, the visitors proved too strong across all three encounters. On Sunday, Oman struggled to set a challenging total, despite a determined knock from skipper Jatinder Singh, his second successive half-century. Batting first after winning the toss, Oman was in early trouble. They were reduced to 6/3 by the third over, with the powerplay yielding just 34 runs.

By the eighth over, they were struggling at 45/4. However, Jatinder Singh (51 off 31 balls, 7x4, 2x6) played a crucial knock, anchoring the innings and giving Oman a chance to recover.

His half-century also marked a personal milestone, as he became Oman's highest T20I run-scorer with 1,399 runs, surpassing Zeeshan Maqsood's tally of 1,369 runs.

Despite Singh's valiant efforts, Oman's lower order failed to capitalise. Jiten Ramanandi (16), Vinayak Shukla (13), and Shakeel Ahmed (24 off 14, including 1 boundary and 2 sixes) contributed, but Oman was eventually bowled out for 123 runs in 20 overs. USA's Juanoy Drysdale was the standout bowler, taking 3 wickets, while Ali Sheikh and Stephen Wig claimed two wickets each, ensuring Oman could not build momentum.

In reply, the USA chased down the target in 15.1 overs, finishing at 127/2.

The powerplay was a confident one, as they amassed 61 runs for the loss of just one wicket. Andries Gous (31) and Milind Kumar (56* off 38 balls, 4x4, 3x6) formed a strong 64-run second-wicket partnership, with Kumar leading the charge. His half-century included a six to bring up the winning runs, while Aaron Jones (20*) supported him to seal the victory.

Back-to-back wins Going into the final match on Sunday, the USA had already taken an unassailable 2-0 series lead after winning the first two matches in dominant fashion.

In the first match on February 20, Oman posted a competitive 190/5 in their 20 overs. Aamir Kaleem was the standout for the hosts with a brilliant 72 off 50 balls. Jatinder Singh (28) and Vinayak Shukla (36) provided valuable support, but the middle order faltered. USA's bowlers, led by Harmeet Singh (3/37), restricted Oman effectively.

In reply, the USA chased down the target comfortably with Saiteja Mukkamalla's explosive unbeaten 100 off 48 balls, including 7 fours and 7 sixes, leading the chase. Mukkamalla was supported by Andries Gous (28) and Monank Patel (27), as the visitors reached 194/3 in 19 overs, securing a seven-wicket win.

Ministry of Education to face Royal Court Affairs in Final



Government Institutions' Football Championship concludes tonight

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 23

THE CURTAIN falls this evening on the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth's Eights Football Championship for Government Institutions 2025. The final showdown will take place at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, where the Royal Court Affairs team will face off against the Ministry of Education team at 8:00 pm. Before the final, a third place match will be held between the State Audit Institution and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology. The closing ceremony will be under the auspices of Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, who will oversee the awarding of the winning teams.

Ministry of Education aims for the title Khalid al Toubi, a player from the Ministry of Education team, affirmed that reaching the final came after a challenging journey, with the team facing strong opponents on their path to the decisive match. He attributed this achievement to the support of officials, particularly Saif bin Said al Kharousi, Director-General of Administrative Affairs.

Al Toubi explained that the team was formed through internal qualifiers among ministry employees and underwent intensive training to enhance cohesion. He noted that the geographical distances

between the players' residences posed a challenge, but it was overcome through collective determination. He emphasised that the team enters the final at full strength, with no injuries or absences, ensuring stability in performance and consistency in the lineup.

He also pointed out that the coaching staff has developed a comprehensive plan based on analysing the strengths and weaknesses of their opponent to ensure the highest level of readiness. Concluding his remarks, Al Toubi stressed that winning the championship would be a significant achievement for the ministry, especially since this is the first tournament of its kind among government administrative units. He highlighted that their goal from the outset was not just participation but securing the title.

ROYAL COURT AFFAIRS EYES THE CHAMPIONSHIP On the other hand, Abdulhamid bin Rashid al Kiyoumi, manager of the Royal Court Affairs team, stated that the team has had a challenging journey, supported by continuous backing from the institution. He praised the excellent organisation of the championship by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

He noted that the team faced tough competitors throughout the tournament, making each match a learning experience that further strengthened the players'

readiness. Al Kiyoumi also commended the coaching staff, led by coach Nasr al Wahaibi. Al Wahaibi has been instrumental in analysing opponents and devising tactical strategies.

He added that the team encountered significant pressure in every stage, especially against teams with strong defensive organisation, which required innovative attacking solutions. Despite some injuries, substitutes played a crucial role in the team's journey to the final.

Al Kiyoumi emphasised that the team relies on high physical fitness and tactical discipline, boasting a solid defence and a quick attack capable of capitalising on opportunities. Additionally, they have a strong bench that provides multiple options during the match.

Regarding preparations for the final, he explained that the team underwent intensive training focusing on physical and tactical aspects, making adjustments to counter the playing style of the Ministry of Education team. The strategy will emphasise effective pressing and exploiting defensive gaps.

Concluding his remarks, Al Kiyoumi affirmed that winning the championship would be a major accomplishment for the team and the institution it represents. He highlighted that the tournament has strengthened team spirit within the Royal Court Affairs unit and enhanced camaraderie among employees in the workplace.

Oman U17 lose twice at Hattrick International Tournament

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 23

The Oman U-17 national football team suffered two defeats at the Hattrick U-17 international tournament against South Korea and Saudi Arabia. Oman junior team boys started their campaign in the warm-up event at Ras Al Khaimah in the UAE by a match against Saudi Arabia and ended for the latter by 2-1. Then, in the second match Oman boys delivered a 6-1 loss against South Korea.

The international preparatory event is a key part of Oman's technical programme to gear up for the main assignment at the AFC U-17 Asian which will be scheduled in Saudi Arabia during April 3-20,

2025. Oman will conclude their participation at the Hattrick U-17 international tournament with a match against Australia on Monday.

STARTING LINEUP

Back to the matches of the national team boys against South Korea and Saudi Arabia, Oman head coach Anwar al Habsi played with a starting lineup that featured from Ahmed al Rawahi as a goalie beside Ibrahim al Tamimi, Sulieman al Kharousi, Al Hassan al Qasmi, Fahad al Mashaiki, Ahmed al Omrani, Firas al Saadi, Mohammed al Mashaiki, Waleed al Baradei, Talal al Rashdi and Osama al Mamari.

At South Korea game, the opponent took the lead through



Son in the 30th minute by header. Ahmed al Omrani managed to equalise few minutes later. Ahead of the completion of first half, Oman's goalie Ahmed al Rawahi scored an own goal. In the following half, Korean players added four goals to end the match at 6-1.

VALUABLE EXPERIENCE

Despite the back-to-back defeats, the tournament provided Oman's players with valuable experience at a high technical level ahead of the AFC U-17 Asian Cup. The coaching staff, led by Al Habsi, will assess player performances before finalising the squad for the continental tournament.

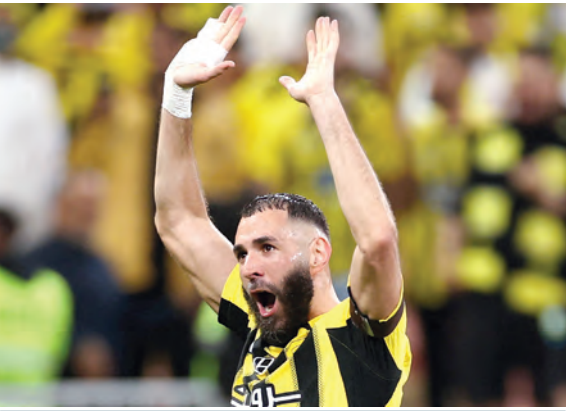
Oman will vie in the AFC Asian Cup beside Iran, Tajikistan and

North Korea in Group D while the hosts, Saudi Arabia, will play against Uzbekistan, Thailand and China in Group A. Asian heavyweights Japan will compete against Australia, Vietnam and the United Arab Emirates in Group B, while North Korea will take on Yemen, Afghanistan and Indonesia in Group C.

The 16 qualified teams for the Asian Cup were divided into four groups, with the two top teams from each group advancing to the quarterfinal stage. The AFC U-17 Asian Cup will act as a qualifier for the Fifa U-17 World Cup Qatar 2025, which will feature eight Asian teams for the first time at the newly expanded 48-team annual tournament.

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



Al Ittihad’s French forward Karim Benzema greets the fans after the match between Al Ittihad and Al Hilal at King Abdullah Sports City in Jeddah. — AFP

AL ITTIHAD CRUSH AL HILAL IN THE SPL

JEDDAH: Former France striker Karim Benzema was delighted to help Al Ittihad secure a 4-1 victory over Al Hilal in a top-of-the-table clash on Saturday, maintaining their dominance in the Saudi Pro League (SPL).

Benzema sealed Al Ittihad’s victory with a stunning goal four minutes before the final whistle, giving coach Laurent Blanc’s team a seven-point lead over the champions, who sit in second place.

“It was an important match, and we played seriously against a strong opponent,” Benzema told SSC Sports.

“The support from the fans gave us a boost, and we gave everything in the game, scoring four goals, with all the players putting in a great performance from the start.

Benzema, who has provided seven assists, tops the Saudi league scoring chart with 16 goals. He is level with former Real Madrid teammate Cristiano Ronaldo, who has netted 16 times for Al Nassr.

“I am delighted because I am helping my team, and all the goals I score are to help my team-mates. My team-mates are always passing to me... and we are working together,” the 37-year-old said.

Despite Al Ittihad’s lead on top of the standings, Benzema remained cautious about the team’s chances of securing the title with 13 matches remaining. “There are many matches left, and we have to keep working and looking ahead,” he added. — Reuters



Al Ittihad’s French forward Karim Benzema is marked by Al Hilal’s Senegalese defender Kalidou Koulibaly during the match between Al Ittihad and Al Hilal.



Russia’s Andrey Rublev celebrates with the trophy after winning the final against Britain’s Jack Draper. — Reuters

Rublev downs Draper to claim Qatar Open

DOHA: Russian Andrey Rublev was given a tough test early on, but finished in style to beat Britain’s eight seed Jack Draper 7-5 5-7 6-1 and win the Qatar Open on Saturday.

Fifth seed Rublev, who also won the title in 2020, claimed his first tournament win since his triumph at the Madrid Open last April, but was made to battle in the opening two sets.

“It feels amazing. It’s the first time I’ve won the same title twice,” a delighted Rublev said.

“I’m really happy. I don’t know what else to say.”

The opener went with serve for the first 11

games, with Rublev serving to love on four occasions and Draper twice doing likewise, before the Russian finally broke the Briton to take the first set.

The second set appeared to heading towards a tiebreak when Draper managed to break for a 6-5 lead and served out to level the match.

Draper had never beaten Rublev in their three previous meetings, and went into the deciding set with the wind in his sails, but Rublev showed no mercy.

Rublev broke twice early on to storm into a 5-0 lead and while Draper managed to avoid a bagel, the Russian fired down two

aces to wrap up the win.

“I really like Jack as a person and I really like his game. He has a really, really great career and future ahead. He will win many great things,” Rublev said.

Draper failed in his bid to win his third ATP title after winning in Stuttgart and Vienna last year, but the 23-year-old’s run to the final will lift him to a career-high 12th in the rankings.

“I want to congratulate Andrey. He was too good today. Outlasted me,” Draper said.

“We played some really tough matches this week. In the third set he was a bit too strong for me.” — Reuters

Barcelona reclaim top spot with dour 2-0 win at Las Palmas

BARCELONA: Dani Olmo and Ferran Torres struck to earn Barcelona a 2-0 win at Las Palmas on Saturday which took them back top of La Liga.

After Atletico Madrid beat Valencia to temporarily take pole position, the Catalans replaced them with a narrow victory on the road and sit one point ahead of the Rojiblancos.

Substitute Olmo produced a fine finish before Torres drilled home to settle the game and earn Barca revenge for a shock home defeat by Las Palmas earlier in the season.

Champions Real Madrid, third, can pull level on points with Barcelona if they beat Girona at home on Saturday.

“We don’t feel pressure, we want to be at the top, we know (winning

the league) is up to us,” Olmo told Movistar.

“Today we took three important points, so we’re going home happy.”

Olmo has not featured a great deal since the club’s financial problems forced him to be unregistered at the start of the year, until Spain’s national sports council granted a temporary measure which allowed him to play again.

The former RB Leipzig star missed some games with a calf strain in January.

“I am in shape, I’m 100 per cent, with a lot of desire to play and get back in the team,” he added.

Barca were inaccurate in attack in a tight first half, unable to find the quality they needed to unpick the hosts’ defence.



FC Barcelona’s Ferran Torres celebrates scoring their second goal. — Reuters

Flick took action at the break and brought on playmaker Dani Olmo in place of the quiet Fermin Lopez.

The Spain international’s first contribution was a sloppy pass that flew out of play but he quickly found his focus.

Lamine Yamal skipped forward and slipped the ball to Olmo, who showed good footwork to find space in the box and finish.

Las Palmas pushed forward in search of an equaliser and former Barca striker Sandro Ramirez lashed an effort narrowly wide of Wojciech Szczesny’s post.

At the other end Yamal burst into life, increasingly threatening, and crossed for the league’s top scorer Robert Lewandowski, who directed his header straight at Jasper

Cillessen. Lewandowski fired over after good work by Alejandro Balde as the Polish veteran began to enjoy the extra space left at the back by the hosts.

Las Palmas appealed for a penalty when a shot struck the back of Eric Garcia’s arm in the box but VAR showed there was an offside in the build-up.

Eight minutes of stoppage time were added on which gave Las Palmas heart but instead it was Barcelona who struck.

A loose pass at the back was picked up by Raphinha, who fed Torres to rifle past Cillessen and seal Barcelona’s win. Defeat leaves Las Palmas 17th, level on points with Valencia, 18th, in the relegation zone. — AFP



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BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 23

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates “Madayn”, successfully wrapped up its participation in Gulfood 2025, one of the world’s leading food and beverage events held in Dubai, UAE.

Oman’s pavilion attracted an impressive turnout from global decision-makers, investors, producers and industry stakeholders, all keen to explore the diverse range of showcased high-quality Omani products. The exhibition presented an ideal platform to highlight Oman’s thriving food industry and the lucrative investment opportunities available in Madayn’s industrial cities.



HAMOOD
AL BALUSHI

Hamood Al Balushi, Assistant Director General of Al Suwaiq Industrial City, affirmed that the exceptional quality of Omani products showcased at Gulfood has strengthened their market reputation, paving the way for

companies to secure new export contracts, distribution partnerships and business agreements related to financing and packaging development. “The exhibition provided an excellent opportunity to promote investment opportunities in the food sector across all industrial cities under Madayn, with a special focus on Al Suwaiq Industrial City,” Al Balushi said.

“Al Suwaiq Industrial City will officially begin accepting investment applications next week. The food sector is one of the key targeted sectors for this industrial city, given its strategic location between local and regional markets. Its proximity to the Sea of Oman and Port Suwaiq enhances its connectivity, which will add significant value to the industrial city by leveraging the Sultanate of Oman’s maritime transport and logistics,” he added.

He further noted that Madayn had previously awarded the consultancy services tender for the design and supervision of Al Suwaiq Industrial City’s establishment.

The selected company has already commenced the implementation of the project and work is underway to prepare and finalise the tender of Phase 1 construction, which will be announced to contractors in the coming period.



al kawthar

Announcement for Al Kawthar Shariah-Compliant Fund Unit Holders on Dividend Distribution

The management of Al Kawthar Shariah-Compliant Fund is pleased to announce a cash dividend distribution of 6% of the fund’s capital for the financial year ending December 31, 2024. These dividends will be available with two options:
Option 1: Automatic reinvestment of dividends to enhance the growth of your investment portfolio.
Option 2: Receiving dividends in cash for those who prefer this option.
Important Information:

- Dividend Entitlement Date: April 24, 2025.
- Last Subscription Date: Thursday, April 17, 2025 (to ensure dividend entitlement).
- Deadline for Cash Dividend Request: April 17, 2025 (please send requests via email to alkawthar@tanmia.om).

For further clarification contact us at: 22300426 / 22300417 / 98933396

Invest with confidence and enjoy rewarding returns with Al Kawthar Fund



TANMIA



TATHMEER

Announcement for Tanmia GCC Diversified Fund (Tathmeer) Unit Holders on Dividend Distribution

The management of Tanmia GCC Diversified Fund (Tathmeer) is pleased to announce a cash dividend distribution of 6% of the fund’s capital for the financial year ending December 31, 2024. These dividends will be available with two options:
Option 1: Automatic reinvestment of dividends to enhance the growth of your investment portfolio.
Option 2: Receiving dividends in cash for those who prefer this option.
Important Information:

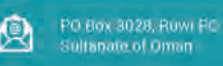
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For inquiries or further clarification, investors can contact us at: 22300426 / 22300417 / 98933396

Invest with confidence and enjoy rewarding returns with Tathmeer Fund



TANMIA



TATHMEER

\$150m investment to boost
Oman’s EV, battery sector

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, FEB 23

A global player in electric vehicles (EVs) and energy storage is making a significant entry into Oman with a \$150 million investment in manufacturing and technological innovation. In an exclusive interview with the Observer, Simardeep Chhabra, Director and CEO of ELB&T, outlined the company’s plans to establish a state-of-the-art EV and battery production hub in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

“Oman’s strategic location, coupled with a business-friendly investment framework, makes it the ideal gateway for expanding into the Middle East and Africa,” Chhabra stated. “We are bringing cutting-edge advancements in electric mobility, battery storage, and renewable energy solutions that align with Oman Vision 2040.”

MANUFACTURING
AND TECHNOLOGICAL
ADVANCEMENTS

ELB&T plans to set up a manufacturing facility in Duqm dedicated to EV production, Lithium Iron Phosphate (LiFePO4) battery

ELB&T plans to set up a manufacturing facility in Duqm dedicated to EV production, Lithium Iron Phosphate battery assembly, and Energy Storage Systems.

assembly, and Energy Storage Systems (ESS). The EV plant is expected to produce 30,000 vehicles annually, while the battery facility will manufacture up to 1.4 million cells per year. The ESS plant will generate between 1,200 MW and 1,400 MW in energy storage capacity.

The company’s focus extends beyond production. “We are developing next-generation battery-swapping and fast-charging solutions to enhance urban mobility and significantly reduce charging times,” Chhabra explained. “Additionally, our energy storage systems will integrate with Oman’s grid

infrastructure to optimise power distribution and resilience.”

The planned manufacturing hub will not only support local demand but also position Oman as a key supplier of EV technology to neighboring markets. By focusing on energy-efficient transport solutions, ELB&T aims to contribute to reducing carbon emissions and promoting sustainable mobility across the region.

LEVERAGING DUQM’S
ECONOMIC ZONE

SEZAD will serve as ELB&T’s regional base, providing logistical and regulatory

advantages. “Duqm offers world-class port facilities and economic incentives that will allow us to streamline exports and establish strong trade links across the Gulf, South Asia, and East Africa,” Chhabra noted. The zone’s tax exemptions and infrastructure support will further enhance ELB&T’s operational efficiency and long-term business viability.

With Duqm’s growing reputation as an industrial and logistics hub, ELB&T’s presence is expected to attract additional investment in related industries, including battery recycling, charging infrastructure, and smart mobility solutions.

PARTNERSHIPS AND
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Beyond industrial expansion, ELB&T is committed to local partnerships and workforce development. The company is working closely with the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and other stakeholders to integrate local suppliers into its production ecosystem. It also plans to establish a technical training institute in Oman to develop expertise in EV technology, battery manufacturing, and renewable energy systems.

Asyad Shipping eyes new contracts from
Oman’s 4th LNG train project

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 23

OMANI state-owned maritime transportation company Asyad Shipping — part of Asyad Group — sees new business opportunities emerging from

the proposed addition of a new LNG train at the country’s gas liquefaction complex at Qalhat. The company recently launched an IPO offering 20 per cent of its share capital to anchor investors, corporate entities and retail customers. The public subscription, set to conclude on February 27, 2025, aims to raise approximately RO 128 million.

US-based global engineering technology giant KBR is currently undertaking the front-end engineering design (FEED) contract for the 4th LNG train project, which will boost the integrated complex’s overall capacity to 15.2 million tonnes per annum (MMTPA). The contract award also entails the expansion of utilities, an LNG tank, the jetty and associated infrastructure.

“The project’s future expansion includes a fourth production train, anticipated by 2029, which is expected to add 3.8 MMTPA of LNG export capacity and presents an opportunity for (Asyad Shipping) to secure new contracts in the future,” the company said.

“This project highlights the Company’s integral role in supporting Oman LNG’s expansion plans, enabling the Company to strengthen its position as a key partner in Oman’s energy export strategy,” it noted in its IPO prospectus.

Asyad Shipping’s Gas Shipping business currently operates five co-owned and one owned LNG carriers, among other gas carriers, to transport LNG to markets around the world. The LNG carriers primarily serve Asian markets,

Two new eco-LNG carriers, currently under construction at a Korean shipyard, are scheduled for delivery during May — June 2026.

including China, South Korea and Japan, supporting clients such as Oman LNG, AMIC (formerly ADNOC), Gunvor Group, Itochu Corporation and Trafigura.

As a key player in the transportation of Omani LNG, Asyad Shipping currently supports the Qalhat complex’s existing three production trains, which export 11.4 MMTPA of LNG, with two LNG carriers contracted until the end of 2025.

Significantly, this ongoing support will be further bolstered by two new eco-LNG carriers, which have already been contracted for delivery in May and June 2026. The Company and South Korean shipyard Hyundai Samho is currently constructing two 174,000 cubic metre class LNG carriers under contracts signed in 2022. These vessels are intended to be chartered to Oman LNG for a period of eight years.

ADVERTORIALS

FINANCING FACILITY



BankDhofar will provide a 1:1 financing facility to retail and corporate banking customers.

BANKDHOFAR SUPPORTS ASYAD SHIPPING MILESTONE IPO

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, the second-largest bank in Oman by branch network, is pleased to announce its role in facilitating the Initial Public Offering (IPO) of Asyad Shipping SAOG “Under Transformation”. As part of the offering, BankDhofar will provide a 1:1 financing facility to retail and corporate banking customers, ensuring seamless access to this significant investment opportunity.

The IPO comprises the sale of 1,041,748,856 existing shares of Asyad Shipping by Asyad Group SAOC, representing 20% of Asyad Shipping’s total issued share capital.

Anchor investors Mars Development and Investment LLC and Falcon Investments LLC, a subsidiary of the Qatar Investment Authority, have committed to subscribing for 10% and 20% of the offer, respectively, at Baisas 123 per share. The IPO is expected to raise up to RO 128.1 million (\$332.8 million) at the top of the price range, valuing Asyad Shipping at up to RO 640.7 million (\$1.66 billion).

The subscription price for Category I investors will range between Bzs 117 and Bzs 123 per share, with the final price determined through a bookbuilding exercise, while the subscription price for Category II retail investors is set at Bzs 123 per share.

The offering includes a Category I allocation for institutional investors, representing 75% of the total offer size, with 30% reserved for anchor investors. The remaining 25% is allocated to Category II retail investors. Subscription opens on February 20, 2025, with the Category I offer closing on February 27, 2025 and the Category offer closing on February 26, 2025.

The Asyad Shipping IPO presents a compelling investment opportunity in a globally competitive shipping platform with a diverse fleet of 89 vessels, spanning container ships, product tankers, dry bulk carriers, crude tankers and gas carriers.

As a core entity within the state-owned integrated logistics conglomerate Asyad Group, Asyad Shipping has consistently by driven cost efficiency, operational excellence and robust contract management supported by long-term agreements with top-tier clients.

BankDhofar is committed in ensuring that investors can participate in this landmark IPO conveniently and efficiently. Customers can apply digitally through BankDhofar’s user-friendly mobile application, enabling instant and hassle-free participation.

Recognising the diverse needs of retail investors, BankDhofar offers a 1:1 IPO financing option through its mobile banking app, allowing customers to access funds instantly or by visiting any of its branches across Oman.

Significantly, IPO financing from BankDhofar is available at 0% interest/profit, respectively, for the first 15 days from the IPO listing, ensuring that investors can participate without incurring additional financial costs.

AHLIBANK ENHANCES CAREER OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH AT THE SQU CAREER FAIR 2025

MUSCAT: As part of its strategic objectives to develop national expertise and empower the youth to begin a successful journey in the banking sector, ahlibank participated in the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) Career Fair.

The event took place over the span of three days, from February

17- 19, 2025 and it succeeded in connecting groups of students; giving them a brief look into the intricacies of ahlibank.

The Career Fair aims to provide job and training opportunities for students and graduates. Students interested in working for the companies and institutions at



the career fair were given insight on how they operate and what is expected of them upon joining

the workforce. Representatives of ahlibank offered consultations to those present at the event, driving forward the Bank’s mission to nurture bright, young individuals.

Talent acquisition is a key focus at events like the SQU Career Fair, where ahlibank actively works to unlock youth potential, enhance their skills and accelerate their professional growth.

By offering a platform that empowers national talent, the Bank reinforces its commitment to Oman’s socio-economic development, aligning with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Unparalleled performance with Lexus UX hybrid

LEXUS has pioneered luxury with innovation by introducing a premium product range that creates unforgettable journeys. In the UX hybrid, Lexus has redefined excellence combining luxury and high performance with an exceptionally efficient hybrid power-train.



In the UX hybrid, Lexus has redefined excellence combining luxury and high performance with an exceptionally efficient hybrid power-train.

Drive the luxury crossover to live moments and enjoy the perfect city life with its captivating futuristic technologies, smooth road response and distant bold exteriors.

Equipped with an eco-friendly 2.0-litre four-cylinder gas engine and the high-torque electric motor, it delivers an exhilarating response and optimised fuel efficiency that align with Lexus’ work towards realising a carbon-neutral society.

The auto regenerative braking of the hybrid helps the vehicle charge, save fuel and reduce carbon emissions. The UX hybrid makes a bold daring statement on the road and is an absolute delight to drive.

Undoubtedly, the UX is one of the most sought-after crossovers in its league.

Adhering to Lexus’ unparalleled luxury experiences, the interiors of the UX hybrid merge traditional Japanese aesthetics of ‘Tazuna’ by creating a spacious driver-focused cockpit with ventilated seats and premium leather seats to ensure a smooth journey.

Carefully crafted into the dashboard, it features a 12.3-inch high-resolution touchscreen display with hands-free access, Bluetooth voice recognition, Apple Carplay Android Auto, wireless charging pad for compatible smartphones and four USB ports to charge your device and keeps you connected on the road.

Fitted with the best-in-class

Lexus Safety System+ 2.5, a suite of standard advanced safety equipment and convenience features, it brings countless benefits. The built-in Pre-Collision System with Bicycle and Pedestrian Detection alerts about potential collisions and brakes automatically.

The Full-Speed Range Dynamic Radar Cruise Control helps maintain distance from the vehicle ahead.

The Lane Departure Alert with Steering Assist issues warnings on risky lane changes and makes minor steering adjustments to help keep the car in the lane.

Moreover, the Lane Tracing Assist centres the vehicle within its lane while Dynamic Radar Cruise Control is active.

Another noteworthy feature includes Road Sign Assist, which recognises certain road signs and displays such as speed bumps or pedestrian crossings, preventing life-threatening situations.

Discover Lexus’ premium hybrid innovation at Lexus Saud Bahwan Automotive showrooms near you.

NBO LEADS WAY IN YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AT SQU CAREER FAIR 2025

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) has participated in the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) Career Fair 2025, a dynamic event focused on connecting academia with the labour market. The Fair offered an exclusive platform for visitors to engage with aspiring talents and explore a wide range of career opportunities in different organisations.

NBO’s participation reflected its dedication to empower the next generation of Omani talent, providing students and graduates a chance to discover exciting career opportunities.

Key highlights included the launch of Tomorrow’s Leaders



NBO’s participation reflected its dedication to empower the next generation of Omani talent.

Programme and the unveiling of X-Wall, an innovative interactive digital display that engaged and

captivated attendees.

Speaking on the participation, Ali al Abri, General Manager and Chief

Human Resources Officer at NBO, said: “NBO is committed to play a vital role in the professional growth of Oman’s youth. Our participation in the SQU Career & Training Fair 2025 is a great opportunity to connect with students and recent graduates, share our career development programmes and offer them valuable insights into the opportunities available at NBO.

This reaffirms our dedication to build meaningful connections with the next generation of Omani talents. It goes without saying that we are excited to engage with promising professionals and support their journey towards a successful and fulfilling career.”

OETC launches winter training programme to empower Omani youth

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing efforts to empower youth and enhance their skills and competencies, as well as its commitment to equipping them for meaningful contributions to national development across various fields and sectors, and in alignment with its social responsibility initiatives, the Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) has welcomed the first batch of interns for this year.

This group consists of 21 students from different higher education institutions across all governorates of Oman, participating in the company’s Winter Training Programme.

The programme commenced on Sunday, February 16, 2025 and will run for two consecutive months.



Students will undergo intensive training experience in various work fields relevant to their disciplines.

During this period, students will undergo intensive training experience in various work fields relevant to their academic disciplines.

The programme aims to develop highly qualified talents who are well-prepared to compete in the job market, in line with technological advancements and national aspirations, while meeting the demands of the Omani labour market.

Mubarak al Jahwari, General Manager of Human Resources at OETC, emphasised the company’s dedication to community service and collaboration with various institutions and sectors to ensure progress and development in alignment with national strategies and objectives. He highlighted that these training programmes reflect the company’s strong belief in the importance of transferring knowledge and expertise to the younger generation,

thereby strengthening their capabilities and ensuring their readiness to contribute effectively to the country’s comprehensive development journey.

Al Jahwari added: “OETC is committed to supporting the Omani community through various initiatives, programmes and projects. We prioritise diversity in our initiatives to reach different target groups.

This is evident in the various projects we have successfully implemented over the years. The biannual training programmes we conduct for higher education students across Oman are among our most significant initiatives aimed at empowering youth and providing them with growth opportunities.

BUSINESS

SHORT TAKES



These reserves accounted for 4.9% of global foreign reserves.

GCC FOREIGN RESERVES REACH \$804.1 BILLION

MUSCAT: The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries’ official foreign reserves totalled \$804.1 billion by mid-2024, marking a 7.5% increase from the end of 2023. According to the Statistical Centre of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, these reserves accounted for 4.9% of global foreign reserves, ranking the GCC fifth worldwide after China, the European Union, Japan and Switzerland.

The surge in reserves was attributed to higher oil revenues, with Brent crude averaging \$84 per barrel in the first half of 2024. Additionally, rising financial asset values in global markets contributed to the growth. Commercial banks in the GCC reported total assets of \$4.3 trillion, an 8.4% increase from the previous year.

Foreign reserve assets include monetary gold, special drawing rights, International Monetary Fund (IMF) reserves and foreign currency holdings, along with deposits and securities investments abroad.

Bank deposits within GCC commercial banks reached a record high of \$2 trillion by mid-2024, a 6.2% rise from the end of 2023 and a 9.9% increase from mid-2023.

GCC commercial banks provided total loans amounting to \$1.97 trillion by mid-2024, up 8.3% year-on-year, with 81.1% directed to the private sector. Meanwhile, the money supply expanded significantly, with narrow money supply reaching \$781 billion, up 2.7% and broad money supply hitting \$1.71 trillion, reflecting a 5.8% rise. — ONA

CREDIT OMAN PAYS OVER RO 307,000 IN COMPENSATION

MUSCAT: Credit Oman announced that it disbursed over RO 307,000 in compensation to policyholders for 40 claims in 2024, significantly up from RO 128,400 in 2023. The institution reaffirmed its commitment to supporting Omani exporters and local sellers by ensuring business continuity amid financial risks.

Compensation for local sales within Oman accounted for RO 212,200, while RO 95,200 was allocated for export-related claims.

Ahmed bin Khalfan al Balushi, Senior Manager of Claims and Refunds at Credit Oman, emphasised the organization’s role in bolstering non-oil exports and diversifying revenue streams. — ONA

CEO TALK

Turning dreams into goals: The key to success

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, FEB 23

SUCCESS in the marine industry requires a blend of passion, strategic vision and resilience, qualities that have propelled Anwar Hamood al Rashdi to the forefront of Oman’s boating sector. As the CEO of United Boats, he has built a thriving business by transforming ambitions into tangible goals. In an exclusive interview with the Observer, Al Rashdi emphasised that true success stems from careful planning and execution rather than mere aspirations.

“I turned all my dreams into goals because not every dream comes true, but a goal is only a goal through planning,” he explained. His philosophy underscores the importance of determination, planning and continuous learning — values that have guided his journey from a marine sports enthusiast to the leader of a pioneering company in Oman’s boating industry.



Our vision is clear: to become the leading brand in the boating and marine sports industry in the Gulf and beyond.

ANWAR
HAMOOD AL
RASHDI
CEO of United
Boats

BUILDING A VISION FOR SUCCESS

Al Rashdi’s entry into the maritime industry was driven by his deep-rooted passion for marine sports. Over the years, he accumulated valuable experience by organising tournaments, leading specialised committees and engaging with industry experts.

In 2011, he took a decisive step by founding United Boats, setting his sights on transforming the local marine industry.

His leadership has led to several groundbreaking initiatives, including Oman’s first Marine Exhibition and Conference in 2022, the upcoming National Maritime Parade in 2025 and a strategic partnership with Gulf Craft to transfer advanced boat manufacturing technology to Oman.

“Our vision is clear: to become the leading brand in the boating and marine sports industry in the Gulf and beyond,” he stated.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES WITH INNOVATION

Like any business leader, Al Rashdi has faced obstacles, particularly the seasonal nature of marine activities in Oman. However, instead of viewing this as a limitation, he turned it into an opportunity.

“We tackled this by diversifying services and introducing year-round maritime experiences,” he said, emphasising that adaptability is crucial for sustainability.

His company has also ventured into marine tourism, investing in yacht manufacturing and marina development, ensuring that Oman remains a key player in the regional maritime sector.

Additionally, United Boats is actively involved in sustainability efforts, developing eco-friendly boats and launching marine conservation initiatives.

LEADERSHIP THAT INSPIRES

For Al Rashdi, leadership is not just about making decisions but about inspiring and empowering his team. “I believe true leadership lies in motivating and guiding the team towards shared goals,” he said.

He fosters a culture of innovation and teamwork, ensuring that his employees feel a sense of belonging and commitment to the company’s mission.

His leadership style has been instrumental in securing international recognition for United Boats.

The company’s participation in the 2024 Dubai International Boat Show has opened doors for investment and trade partnerships, further cementing Oman’s position in the global marine industry.

ADVICE FOR FUTURE LEADERS

Reflecting on his journey, Al Rashdi encourages young entrepreneurs to embrace challenges and remain committed to their ambitions.

“Passion is the key! Seek experience, embrace challenges and never stop learning. Persistence and continuous development are the foundations of success in any field,” he advised.

As United Boats continues to expand its reach, Al Rashdi remains focused on his long-term vision.

“United Boats will soon be a global company — it’s just a matter of time,” he asserted confidently. With a clear strategy and an unwavering commitment to innovation, he is set to leave a lasting impact on Oman’s marine sector.

Al Rashdi’s story is a testament to the power of turning dreams into goals. By combining passion with strategic planning and relentless execution, he has not only built a successful business but also inspired the next generation of leaders in Oman’s maritime industry.

OCCI discusses industry competitiveness

MUSCAT: The Industry Committee of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) convened its first meeting of 2025 in Muscat, focusing on strategies to boost national industries and enhance the global competitiveness of Omani products.

Key discussions included improving the industrial business environment by revising legislation and providing facilities that enable local manufacturers to expand and increase productivity.

The committee emphasised the need for more flexible policies,



The committee emphasised the need for more flexible policies, investment incentives and the adoption of modern technology.

investment incentives and the adoption of modern technology to stimulate industrial growth.

The meeting underscored the importance of collaboration among stakeholders to strengthen the sector’s contribution to the national economy, aligning with Oman Vision 2040’s economic diversification goals.

Tawfiq bin Abdul Hussain al Lawati, Chairman of the Industry Committee, highlighted the necessity of supporting and protecting Omani products to ensure their global reach. — ONA

126 engineers graduate from ‘Emkan 2’ programme

FAISAL AL AJMI
MUSCAT, FEB 23

THE General Secretariat of the Tender Board celebrated yesterday, February 23, 2025, the graduation of 126 engineers from the “Emkan 2” programme, a strategic initiative designed to enhance competencies in government project and contract management. The ceremony, held under the auspices of Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour (MoL), was attended by Eng Badr bin Salim al Maamari, Secretary-General of the Tender Board.

The six-month training programme, which included workshops and field visits to government projects, aimed to elevate the skills of professionals managing public sector contracts.

It also sought to improve the efficiency of ongoing projects, aligning with Oman Vision 2040

and the Tender Board’s strategy to increase local content in government projects.

Eng Al Maamari highlighted the programme’s significance, stating, “The graduation of this second cohort marks a qualitative leap in our efforts to enhance the management of government projects and contracts. ‘Emkan 2’ not only develops technical and professional skills but also supports Oman’s long-term vision for sustainable development.” The programme is part of a broader initiative to empower national cadres, foster innovation and improve governance in public sector projects.

By equipping engineers with advanced skills in strategic planning, risk management and contract analysis, the Tender Board aims to ensure the efficient execution of major projects while reducing delays and cost overruns.



The Emkan 2 Programme is designed to boost the Omani government’s Project Management capabilities.

Abdullah bin Saif al Hosni, Talent and Project Development Advisor at the Tender Board, emphasised the programme’s alignment with global best practices.

‘Emkan 2’ integrates cutting-edge technologies, including digital analysis tools and artificial intelligence, to enhance project

evaluation and monitoring. It also promotes a culture of transparency and innovation, which is critical for achieving excellence in public sector projects,” he said.

The “Emkan” initiative, now in its second phase, has already demonstrated significant success.

The first phase, which involved multiple government entities, established a robust platform for human resource development in project management. It also introduced a unified strategy for project quality systems, adhering to both national and international standards.

The second phase saw the participation of 126 engineers from 20 government entities, including the Ministry of Interior, Sultan Qaboos University and the Environment Authority. The programme has also created a comprehensive database of over 1,000 engineers working in the

sector, with a focus on priority areas such as construction, supplies and technology.

The third phase of “Emkan” will focus on technology-driven project and contract management, benefitting approximately 21 government entities. The programme aims to address common challenges in public sector projects, including delays, change orders and budget overruns, by equipping engineers with the skills to manage these issues effectively.

The Tender Board’s investment in human capital development through initiatives like “Emkan” underscores its commitment to improving government performance and economic efficiency. By fostering a skilled and competitive workforce, Oman is poised to achieve its vision of sustainable development and global competitiveness in the years to come.

OPINION

Mechanisms of funding for Agri-Fish Development Fund projects



HANAN AL SULAIMI

The author is Executive Director - Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund

THE FUNDING of projects under the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund (AFDF) is one of the key instruments the fund relies on to achieve its objectives.

As a government institution with a financing mandate, the AFDF primarily aims to conserve, manage and efficiently utilise natural agricultural, livestock and fisheries resources to ensure their sustainability. To fulfill this role, the fund must establish a structured mechanism for financing projects submitted by applicants while adhering to clear criteria for approving or rejecting funding requests.

The AFDF represents a pioneering model in financing development and research projects, benefitting from government funding and support based on quality and performance standards. With administrative and financial independence, the fund has successfully implemented projects that have gained the satisfaction of its partners, including both implementers and beneficiaries.

The financial resources supporting the AFDF’s activities come from various sources, primarily government allocations, which

constitute 1 per cent of the total national gross domestic product (GDP) of the agricultural and fisheries sectors.

This government support serves as the fund’s primary financial source. Additional funding sources include contributions from companies, institutions and individuals operating in these sectors, as well as revenue from intellectual property rights generated through research, studies and projects financed by the fund.

Moreover, the AFDF benefits from returns on its financial contributions to funded projects and accepts donations and grants from entities and companies, subject to approval by the fund’s board of directors.

Funding applications for projects are submitted to the AFDF by various entities and are reviewed by specialised committees within the fund.

The applications may be approved, rejected, or recommended for deferment based on a set of well-defined criteria. Key considerations include:

- Contribution to food security and increasing local added value, with priority given to projects that significantly enhance

To fulfill this role, the fund must establish a structured mechanism for financing projects submitted by applicants while adhering to clear criteria for approving or rejecting funding requests.

the GDP contribution.

- Incorporation of innovative and sustainable approaches.
- Job creation for citizens and benefits for many small-scale investors and producers.
- Generation of direct revenue.
- Long-term sustainability beyond the funding period.

Since its inception, the AFDF has financed projects across five key sectors: fisheries, plant agriculture, livestock, water resources, and food safety and quality.

The fund continues to seek diversification in its financial resources, enhance staff capabilities and mitigate environmental and climate-related risks affecting the sectors it supports due to their biological nature.

To this end, the AFDF remains committed to improving its operations, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Moving forward, the fund sees promising opportunities in focusing on projects that strengthen food security, stimulate investment in job-creating initiatives and support innovation that fosters sustainable development.

TRUMP RECIPROCAL TARIFFS ARE KEY TEST OF EU UNITY

YAWEN CHEN

Donald Trump’s tariffs are a headache for all his trade partners. But the US president’s plan to impose ad hoc “reciprocal” levies on imports are a particular problem for the European Union. By enabling him to target whichever countries in the bloc he pleases, it could put the 27 member states’ unity under severe strain.

The European Commission represents the bloc on trade and has a united front when it comes to tariffs. Say Trump decides to place a 25 per cent levy on imports of European cars, as Goldman Sachs analysts expect.

EU Trade Commissioner Maros Sefcovic can speak for all member states in formulating a trade response.

Even in this straightforward case, the EU has a weakness. Over 80 per cent of the bloc’s 156-billion-euro trade-in-goods surplus with the US stems from Germany and Italy, with a big chunk coming from car exports. Many member states don’t have a surplus at all, and the likes of Spain import more than they export. Hence a Brussels tit-for-tat response helps Berlin and Rome, but constitutes wasted negotiating capital for everyone else.

Assuming they actually get deployed, Trump’s “Reciprocal and Fair” tariffs could amplify that vulnerability. They may allow the US to unilaterally target trading partners, even if they are part of a wider bloc.

but also any structural impediment Washington deems “unfair”.

Imagine Trump slaps a blanket 50 per cent tariff on all imports from Denmark, to punish Copenhagen’s temerity in refusing to hand over Greenland.

Unlike an EU-wide levy, it wouldn’t hurt any of the other 26 member states at all. The likes of Germany, France and Spain would have limited incentive beyond solidarity to anger Trump by placing counter-tariffs on US imports.

Reciprocal tariffs could extend far beyond Greenland-style spats, though.

Trump may decide to punish certain member states for having higher “unfair” rates of value-added tax, which he has decided punishes US exporters. He could also single out the likes of France, which levies digital services taxes on US big tech groups, for treatment.

Europe isn’t completely powerless. Individual EU states could try to placate Trump via non-tariff goodies. Germany, for example, could nudge Volkswagen to make more cars in the US instead of Mexico.

Still, EU officials already face the difficulty of trying to get member states to spend more on defence, even though not all of them are right next to Russia. — Reuters

What business leaders should prioritise in 2025

THE WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM’S 55th Annual Meeting of 2025 was held in Davos, Switzerland, with approximately 3000 participants from over 130 countries, including academicians, government leaders, CEOs, innovators and 60 heads of state and governments gathered to address key global and regional challenges. The theme of the 2025 meeting was “Collaboration for the Intelligent Age.”

The theme focuses on the need for swift adaptation and international cooperation for emerging technologies reshaping the world. At the summit, pressing global challenges like geopolitical tensions, climate change, economic inequality and technology disruptions were deeply pondered to emphasise pivotal priorities for navigating the challenges of a rapidly evolving global landscape. Analysing the discussions reveals key aspects that business leaders should concentrate on for sustainable growth and development.

PRIORITY 1: There will be a significant policy shift in the world. The potential change towards prohibitive tariffs could increase. This might unearth global tension and fragmentation in trade and business. There is also a growing trend of economic scapegoating and prejudiced policies. The world will witness more economies adopting interventionist industrial policies, so there will be an inward focus that could divide global economic systems. Geopolitical uncertainties will amplify and create another layer of uncertainty.

The chief economists predict that there will be greater regionalisation of trade over the next three years. To address these challenges, leaders must collaborate across sectors and nations. The key insight is that leaders must build resilience and adaptability in the organisation and the economies to manage technological transformation, policy changes and global shifts.

PRIORITY 2: According to the World Happiness Report, most young people globally now report lower happiness levels than their elders; this trend has been observed across multiple regions since 2006. This could be attributed to rising costs, job market instability, financial insecurity, rapid change,



Analysing the discussions reveals key aspects that business leaders should concentrate on for sustainable growth and development. Image for illustration only.



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The author is an assistant professor at the marketing and management department of the College of Banking and Financial Studies in Muscat

technological disruptions, work-life imbalances, stress and an anxious generation of young people. Poverty has been identified as one of the key economic factors affecting the health and well-being of employees.

The prevalence of depression among women was also highlighted. Anita Zaidi, President of the Gender Equality Division from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, noted, “For every dollar you invest in women’s health, there’s a three-dollar return.” Experts emphasised investing in women’s health, highlighting its positive impact on societal prosperity and economic growth. Leaders need to understand the interconnectedness of employee well-being and work — environment aspects like gender equity, women empowerment and access to health care and education. Leaders must prioritise creating a supportive work environment with wellness programmes and flexible hours and increase awareness of the importance of mental health issues, work-life balance and workplace inclusion.

PRIORITY 3: As the global landscape evolves, transformational breakthroughs, like generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), reshape organisations and tasks across all sectors. These technological advances are not to be viewed in isolation but converge with broader challenges, like economic volatility, geo-economic realignments, environmental

challenges and evolving societal expectations.

The web of interconnectedness is defining the global labour market. According to the Future of Work report, 39 per cent of the current skills will be outdated or transformed within five years due to the pace of technological advancements. According to the Future of Work Survey, skill gaps are the most significant barrier to business transformation. Leaders must prioritise strategies that focus on reskilling and upskilling their workforce.

PRIORITY 4: Climate change was central to all discussions at the Davos Summit 2025. 2024 has been the hottest year on record. Financial institutions will be key in mobilising funds to support the energy transition. Leaders must scale up ambition, governance, partnerships and capital to accelerate decarbonisation efforts. Leaders must seek innovative solutions and investments in clean technologies for sustainable business and safeguarding the planet.

Developments and advancements mark the global landscape of 2025, reshaping economies and redefining societies. Leaders urgently need to prioritise people-centric leadership and foster collaboration to address systemic distortions, build resilience and focus on innovation, sustainability and inclusivity to ensure long-term prosperity and sustainability.

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ART/LIFE



ENTERTAINMENT

Boone's 'Beautiful Things' is best-selling digital single of 2024



BENSON BOONE'S "Beautiful Things" has been named the world's best-selling digital single of 2024 by the International Federation Of The Phonographic Industry (IFPI).

The singer, who was nominated for best new artist at this year's Grammy Awards, was awarded the IFPI Global Single Award For 2024 for the biggest selling single across digital formats such as paid subscription streaming, ad-supported platforms and single track downloads.

Boone, 22, beat Sabrina Carpenter, who came second with her single "Espresso," Teddy Swims, who finished third with "Lose Control," Billie Eilish who had the fourth best-seller with "Birds Of A Feather," and Shaboozey, who came fifth with "A Bar Song (Topsy)."

It was Boone's first appearance in the chart's top 10. Four of the top five records came from artists making their first appearance in the IFPI chart this year.

Victoria Oakley, chief executive of the IFPI, said: "We are delighted to present the IFPI Global Single Award to Benson Boone. "As a global breakout artist, this is an amazing achievement to produce a truly worldwide hit. Congratulations to Benson, his team and Warner Records for this incredible accomplishment.

"It is also fantastic to see so many other newcomers to the industry shine through in the IFPI Global Singles Chart.

"It is a wonderful reflection of how emerging artists, working in partnership with their record labels, are finding international success."

The rest of the top 10 best-selling singles digitally were Hozier's "Too Sweet" (six), Post Malone's "I Had Some Help" (seven) featuring Morgan Wallen, Kendrick Lamar's "Not Like Us" (eight), Taylor Swift's "Cruel Summer" (nine), and Noah Kahan's "Stick Season" (10).

Washington-born Boone released his debut album "Fireworks And Rollerblades" last year, reaching number 16 in the UK album charts. "Beautiful Things" also reached the summit of the UK singles chart.

Boone lost out on the best new artist Grammy to "Hot To Go!" singer Chappell Roan. —PA Media/dpa

QUICK FEATURES



FILM

Winner for Best Flemish Film Belgian director Leonardo van Dijk poses with an award during the 14th edition of the 'Magritte du Cinema' film awards ceremony, in Brussels. — AFP



FASHION

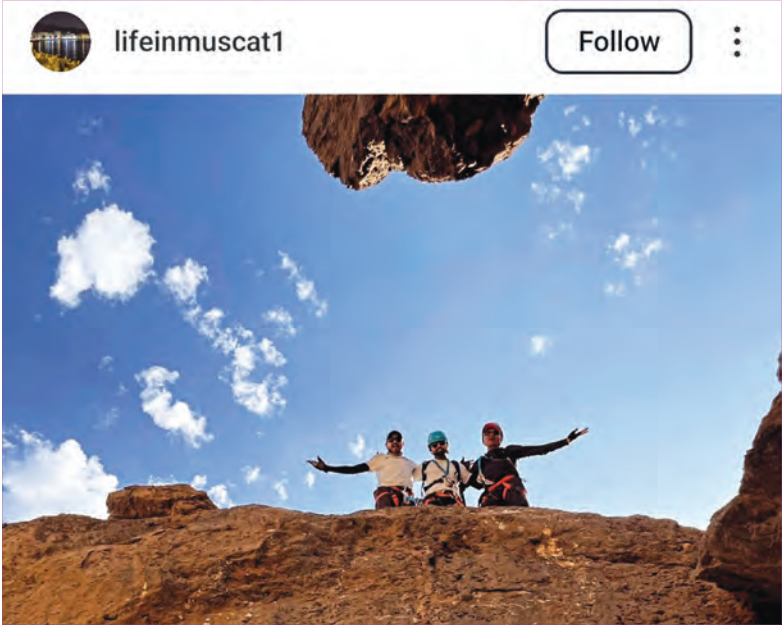
London-based model Alexsandrah Gondora poses for a photograph with her on-screen AI twin "Alex", created by digital modelling agency, The Diiigitals in the AFP offices in London. — AFP



FESTIVAL

An artist performs amongst bubbles during the parade of the 140th edition of the Nice Carnival, in the French Riviera City of Nice. — AFP

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Top bug: Slime-spitting prehistoric velvet worm gets nod in Kiwi vote



A WORM-LIKE creature that shoots jets of fluid to capture its prey has been named New Zealand’s Bug of the Year. The peripatus, also known as ngokeoke or New Zealand velvet worm, was crowned winner after earning 2,652 of the 24,985 votes cast in the competition run by the Entomological Society of New Zealand. Plant and Food Research research associate Julia Palmer said the velvet worm was “not technically” a bug. “This incredible species could represent the peak of evolution - a living testament to the gods’ perfect creation,” she said. “These fascinating creatures have remained virtually unchanged for the last 500 million years, bridging the gap between worms and insects with their long velvet bodies and stumpy pairs of legs.” They shoot jets of fluid to capture their prey, dissolving it into a soup to eat, Palmer said. “These living fossils are unlike anything else.”

Velvet worms are primarily found in the moist forests of New Zealand, thriving in leaf litter and hiding beneath rocks. Their predatory behaviour sets them apart in the animal kingdom. Ecologically, velvet worms play a crucial role in maintaining the balance of forest ecosystems. They serve not only as predators but also as prey, reflecting the health of their habitats. However, some species face threats from habitat destruction, prompting conservation efforts to ensure their survival. The New Zealand praying mantis - one of the few mantises that doesn’t commonly perform sexual cannibalism - took silver in the competition. The giant springtail, with yellow and orange spines and a tendency to defensively bleed if disturbed, placed third. The battle for top bug was launched in 2023, inspired by the country’s wildly popular and at times controversial - bird of the year competition. —dpa



What is Brutalism? And why do architects hate ‘The Brutalist’?

“THE BRUTALIST,” an epic drama loosely inspired by the life and work of architect Marcel Breuer, is one of the favorites for the Oscars. But the film has drawn scorn from design experts, who accuse it of glaring errors, and question whether its main character is even a Brutalist architect. Here are five things to know about the film, which is up for 10 Academy Awards including best picture: - Who was Marcel Breuer? - Director Brady Corbet has said his protagonist Laszlo Toth is an “amalgamation” of several famed architects, most notably Breuer. Like the fictional Toth, Breuer was born in Hungary, honed his skills at inter-war Germany’s influential Bauhaus school, and immigrated to America. Both designed iconic chairs before turning their focus to grand buildings. Born Jewish, each was commissioned to construct giant Christian buildings in remote parts of the United States that become their masterpieces. Corbet has said a book about Breuer’s work on Saint John’s Abbey, in rural Minnesota, was a key inspiration for the film. Breuer is also known for designing parts of Paris’s UNESCO headquarters, New York’s Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Pirelli Tire Building in Connecticut.

- WHAT IS BRUTALISM? - Brutalism is a polarizing design style that emerged in the 1950s post-war reconstruction of Europe. It is recognizable for its exposed, unembellished concrete, and giant, bold geometric forms. The term is believed to come from “beton brut,” French for raw concrete. Surprisingly, almost no Brutalist architecture appears in “The Brutalist” -- until we glimpse Toth’s completed masterpiece at the end of the three-and-a-half-hour film. In a podcast episode entitled “Why The Brutalist is a Terrible Movie,” design critic Alexandra Lange said the filmmakers “say they read



all these books on Brutalism, but absolutely none of that is used to any dramatic purpose or really seems to have been absorbed.” Victoria Young, a professor at the University of St Thomas, told AFP that the building we see at the end is not even Brutalist, but early modernist. “I’m like, ‘You’re kind of missing the whole timeline here,’” she said. - WHAT ABOUT THE TIMELINE? - Experts have pointed out other ways in which the film distorts history. In the film, Toth is a Holocaust survivor who struggles for work and queues for free bread on arrival in post-war America, before his talents are eventually spotted by a wealthy benefactor. In reality, Bauhaus alumni like

Breuer and Walter Gropius crossed the Atlantic in the 1930s, before the war. They arrived as globally famous professionals, welcomed into prestigious posts at places like Harvard University. Modernist architecture was deeply established and fashionable in the United States long before the film’s setting. “As an architectural historian, my head is still spinning apart from watching that movie,” said Young. Toth is presented as a devoutly religious heroin addict. Breuer was sober and secular. - ANY OTHER CONTROVERSIES? - “The Brutalist” editor David Jancso said artificial intelligence was used to make renderings of Toth’s buildings and blueprints. (AI, which is both increasingly used and loathed by many in Hollywood, also sharpened up the actors’ Hungarian accents.) Corbet swiftly clarified the blueprint designs were hand-drawn. But he said the technology was used to create “intentionally... poor digital renderings circa 1980” for the movie’s epilogue. - Will it matter? - “The Brutalist” is a frontrunner for best picture. And the criticisms of it pale in comparison to the storm surrounding “Emilia Perez,” over its star’s offensive social media posts. Robert McCarter, architect and author of monograph “Breuer,” said the film’s occasional historical distortion “doesn’t bother me.” “They’re just using his biography conveniently... I think it’s fine,” he told AFP. What of the monks who pray each day in Saint John’s Abbey, the movie’s supposed inspiration? Alan Reed admitted the supposed Brutalism of the film’s title reminds him of “Russian modern buildings... that look like gun parapets” or “a bunch of boxes piled up,” rather than his extraordinary church. Still, he said, his fellow monks are “quite excited” by the extra attention their home is receiving. —AFP

FEATURES

BY NAJAH AL RIYAMI

OMAN, a newly discovered kiteboarding haven, is quickly gaining recognition as a unique destination along the stunning Arabian Sea coastline. With its strong, reliable winds and a diverse array of water conditions—from perfect waves to tranquil lagoons—Oman promises an exhilarating experience for kiteboarding, surfing, and stand-up paddleboarding enthusiasts.

In an exhilarating showcase of adventure and artistry, “Chase of the Trade Winds” by Majan Ospreys has been crowned the #1 Kitesurfing Video of the Year at the 2024 IKSURFMAG Readers’ Awards! This remarkable accolade not only celebrates stunning kitesurfing cinematography but also propels Oman into the spotlight as an emerging hotspot for adventure sports enthusiasts.

Picture a windswept coastline teeming with pristine kitesurfing spots—Oman is that undiscovered gem! While renowned locations like Brazil, Cape Verde, and Mauritius have long dominated the kitesurfing scene, Oman opens its doors to thrill-seekers with breathtaking locales such as Masirah Island, Al Ashkharah, Ras Al Hadd, and Bar Al Hikman, each offering exceptional conditions for both freestyle and wave-riding.

Unlike your typical adrenaline-fuelled kitesurfing videos, “Chase of the Trade Winds,” skillfully crafted by filmmaker Nikola Bagarov, invites viewers on an immersive cinematic journey. Through the lens of exploration, it captures the stunning landscapes, the raw power of the wind, and the sheer thrill of unveiling new kitesurfing havens across Oman. The film enchants audiences by blending action with storytelling, allowing them to experience the adventure and beauty that Oman has to offer.

Featuring a dynamic cast of professional kitesurfers, including Mostafa Abbas, Janek Grzegorzewski, Giel Vlugt, and Luca Ceruti, the film highlights their thrilling escapades as they navigate the dramatic desert vistas, idyllic shores, and secluded islands—pushing the sport’s boundaries while fostering a deeper connection with nature.

Hosted by IKSURFMAG, the premier kitesurfing magazine, this annual competition honours the most outstanding talents, brands, and films within the industry. This year’s nominees dazzled with high-stakes performances, extreme weather challenges, and mind-blowing cinematography, including formidable contenders like “60+ Knots Kitesurfing - To Break A World Record” and “ELEVIGHT - Poetry in Flight.”

By encapsulating themes of exploration, adrenaline, and the breathtaking beauty of the natural world, “Chase of the Trade Winds” positions Oman as an essential destination for kitesurfers hungry for fresh challenges and untouched waters. As international recognition continues to build and efforts to enhance the sport’s infrastructure unfold, Oman is poised to establish itself as a leading kitesurfing paradise on the world stage.

SO MUCH MORE TO OFFER

The kite surfing scene in Oman is still in its infancy, ensuring that intrepid adventurers can enjoy pristine sessions without the crowds that often accompany more established locations. Here, the ocean feels like a private playground, with the added thrill of encountering magnificent wildlife such as dolphins, rays, and turtles along the way.

The ideal kiting conditions can be found between April and September, when wind speeds typically soar between 25 to 30 knots and temperatures linger between a balmy 30 to 35 degrees Celsius. Kiteboarders can leave their wetsuits at home; however, a rash guard is recommended for sun protection and to shield against the strong winds. With a variety of spots available, from shallow, flat water lagoons perfect for beginners to challenging waves reaching up to 4 metres for experts, Oman caters to riders of all skill levels.

For those seeking an adrenaline-fuelled adventure, a kite safari in Oman is an experience not to be missed. Intermediate and advanced riders can join guided excursions that explore various kite spots, revealing breathtaking natural beauty along the coastline. Visitors can opt to stay



Award-winning film spotlights Oman as a prime location for kitesurfing



in comfortable hotels situated right on the water at Ras Al Hadd lagoon, or for a more rustic experience, camping rentals are available, complete with weather-proof tents and optional amenities such as toilet facilities and meals.

Starting from Ras Al Hadd lagoon, kite safari participants can embark on daily adventures that include everything from flat water spots to towering waves, with the option to take part in a thrilling 300-kilometre downwinder along the coast, camping on the beach each night and discovering offshore islands along the way.

Thanks to its reliable winds and shallow lagoons, Oman is also an excellent environment for beginners. Locations like Ras Al Hadd lagoon, Masirah Island, and Muscat’s Kite Beach provide safe and suitable conditions for novice riders to hone their skills.

Being a relatively undiscovered kiteboarding destination, Oman offers

the rare opportunity to enjoy idyllic kiting conditions, from serene flat water to challenging waves, often entirely to oneself. Masirah Island, in particular, is a kiteboarder’s dream, with all conditions accessible within a short 20-minute journey. Mussanah Beach offers a fantastic resort experience with water sports readily available, while Muscat’s Kite Beach serves as a convenient spot, just a stone’s throw from both the airport and the city.

Though kiteboarding is an emerging sport here, the infrastructure is still developing. Prospective visitors are encouraged to bring their own gear, and those planning to travel between sites are advised to pack spare equipment and a repair kit, as repair shops are sparse. Transportation from the airport can easily be arranged through accommodations, particularly for those joining a kite safari. For those keen to explore on their own, renting a 4x4 vehicle is highly recommended.