



A 48-page magazine on Oman's 53rd Glorious National Day with today's edition



SYMBOLIC UNITS FROM RAO, RAFO, RNO, RGO, SSF, ROP, RCA PARTICIPATED IN THE PARADE

SULTAN OF OMAN'S ARTILLERY FIRED A 21-GUN SALUTE TO HIS MAJESTY THE SULTAN

THE JOINT CORPS OF MILITARY MUSIC BANDS PLAYED TUNES DURING THE MARCH

HM PRESIDES OVER 53RD NATIONAL DAY MILITARY PARADE

OMAN MARKS 53RD NATIONAL DAY

ADAM: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, presided over a military parade staged at the military parade ground of Adam Air Base in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah on Saturday on the occasion of the 53rd Glorious National Day.

The event saw the participation of symbolic units representing the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO), the Sultan's Special Force (SSF), the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and the Royal Court Affairs (RCA), in addition to the ground and mounted military music bands.

Upon His Majesty the Sultan's arrival at the parade ground, he was received by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), and Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO).

When His Majesty the Sultan ascended the Royal Dais, columns of the parade performed the military salute. The joint corps of military bands played the Royal Anthem, while the Sultan of Oman's Artillery

fired a 21-gun salute to His Majesty the Sultan.

Then, the parade commander stepped forward to the Royal Dais, requesting His Majesty the Sultan to signal the start of the military show. The joint corps of military music bands representing the RAO, the RAFO, the RNO, the RGO, the ROP and the RCA played various tunes as they marched in slow and normal pace before the Royal Dais.

Then, columns of the Protocols Guard joined the parade and performed ceremonial gestures to the accompaniment of melodies from the joint corps of military music bands - performing the military salute to His Majesty, the Supreme Commander.

His Majesty the Sultan watched a musical show staged by mounted bands representing the RGO cavalry and the Royal Cavalry at the RCA. They passed before the Royal Dais, performing the military salute to His Majesty the Sultan.

Later, the columns of the parade performed an ensemble of cheers that proclaimed "Faith in Allah, Loyalty to the Sultan, Sacrifice for the Nation". They chanted thrice "Long Live His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander".

Then, the joint corps of military music bands played the Royal Anthem, while the columns of the parade performed the military salute marking the conclusion of the military show. **TURN TO P4**

Visionary leadership for a brighter future

We are inspired by His Majesty's visionary leadership of a prosperous and brighter future for our dear Oman.

Congratulations to **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik** and the people of Oman on the occasion of the 53rd National Day.



#العيد_الوطني_٥٣_المجيد





Military parade steals the show



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and officials watch the parade at Adam Air Base on Saturday.





His Majesty takes salute at military parade





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HM greets Prince Albert II

MUSCAT:His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Prince Albert II of Monaco on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greeting to Prince Albert wishing him good health and the people of Monaco more progress and prosperity.

HM presides over Military Parade

FROM P1

Then, His Majesty the Sultan left the parade ground.

The military parade was attended alongside His Majesty the Sultan by Royal family members, ministers, advisers, chairmen of the State Council and Majlis Ashshura, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), commanders of military and security units, heads of the diplomatic missions of the Arab and foreign countries accredited to the Sultanate of Oman, members of

the State Council and Majlis Ashshura, under-secretaries, governors, ambassadors at the Foreign Ministry, retired military commanders, judges, members of the Public Prosecution Department, walis, shaikhs and dignitaries.

It was also attended by the military attaches of the Arab and foreign embassies in the Sultanate of Oman, senior military officers, senior state officials, senior retired officers, commissioned and non-commissioned officers at SAF and other military and security units.

— ONA

ESTABLISHED
SINCE
1920

OMAN'S
1
EXCHANGE

53
HAPPY
OMAN
NATIONAL
DAY

On the joyous occasion of Oman's 53rd National Day, we express our profound congratulations to **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**. May his leadership continue to flourish, bringing progress and prosperity to the people of Oman.

PURSHOTTAM KANJI
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sends its warmest greetings and congratulates

**His Majesty Sultan
Haitham bin Tarik**

and the people of Oman
on the momentous occasion
of the 53rd National Day of Renaissance

The ongoing transformation of the Sultanate continues
with vigor and purpose under His Majesty's wise
leadership and we are proud and privileged to be part of
this continued renaissance now and into the future.



Al Batinah International Film Fest concludes

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Previewing films that depicted the glorious Renaissance march of Oman, the second Al Batinah International Film Fest, part of regional film festivals, concluded at a simple yet star-studded ceremony, according to the Omani Film Society.

As many as 7 films made by local talents and 11 films from others were previewed at the event.

Acclaimed Egyptian film-maker Ashraf Zaki was the chief guest where Dr Talib al Balushi was the member of jury for short films.

The four-day festival which was announced in July 2023 began on November 12 and concluded on November 15, saw many locally made movies, short films, animations and documentaries vying for various positions.

Held in cooperation with the Office of the Governor of Al



The second Al Batinah International Film Festival which began on November 12 concluded last week.

Batinah South, the annual film fest was organised under the slogan ‘Human Relationship with Earth’, to highlight the strong ties between the Omani citizens and the environment.

“The second edition of the Al Batinah Film Festival has been an astounding success and is considered an attractive space for youth creativity in the field of film industry and an opportunity to benefit from international

cinematic experiences,” said Dr Hamid al Ameri, Chairman of the festival and head of Omani Film Society, adding, “By and large, the regional fests contribute to the dissemination of cinematic culture and the advancement of Omani cinematic works.”

Underlining the advancement that Omani youth has made in terms of film making, the festival included several competitions in a variety of genres, including the

Omani and international short narrative film competition, the Omani and international short documentary film competition, and the festival competition under the title “The Relationship of the Omani Man with the Land.”

“We have introduced a new competition for government and private institutions in the Sultanate of Oman with the aim of enhancing cooperation and communication between the

The film festival included several competitions in a variety of genres, including the Omani and international short narrative film competition

various institutions in producing documentaries using high-quality techniques in terms of clarity of idea, scenario and implementation, and contributing to the dissemination of culture and human values,” adds Al Ameri.

He further said that this edition of the Al Batinah International Film Festival was a continuation of the series of festivals held by the Society, through which it sought to achieve many common goals, the most important of which is spreading cinematic culture in the society, promoting the Sultanate of Oman as a future interface for the international film industry, and further presenting the Oman governorates and states to the media world.

It also aimed to introduce them in cinematic forums, and to motivate film-makers

in the Sultanate of Oman by encouraging them and presenting their cinematic works to the rest of the world.

“We welcomed film-makers from within and outside the Sultanate of Oman who participated in the Al Batinah Film Festival in its second edition, which is a unique opportunity for them to display their creativity, exchange knowledge and enhance cultural communication in this field,” said Mohammed bin Abdullah al Ajmi, Director of the festival adds.

The festival was also an opportunity to discover Omani and international talents in the film industry, and the Society believes in the importance of cinema as a means of conveying stories and enhancing cultural and human communication.



Participants at the second Al Batinah International Film Festival.

Oman to host first Airports Innovate Conference and Exhibition on Nov 21, 22

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 18

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by Oman Airports, will host Airport Innovate Conference and Exhibition in cooperation between Oman Airports, ACI, and the Regional Airports Council for Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, Europe under the auspices of Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center (OCEC) on November 21 and 22.

The two-day event attended by Shaikh Aimen bin Ahmed al Hosni, CEO of Oman Airports and the Chairman of the Board of the Airports Council International, and many highnesses and excellencies as well as experts in the aviation and airports sector from various countries around the world, and in the presence the Board Chairman and the Director General of the International Council of Airports and chairpersons of regional councils, the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Airport Innovate Conference and Exhibition will explore the most



innovative solutions, leading technologies, groundbreaking strategies in the future of the airports worldwide.

“There will also be brainstorming and high panel discussions on the latest trends, developments, and technological innovations in the airport sector through 23 sessions, including presentations and panel discussions. Over 45 CEOs from leading airports worldwide will explore the sector’s readiness for innovation, artificial intelligence, and the latest technologies and innovations designed to enhance the travel experience and operational practices in the airport sector,” a note from the organisers said.

Underlining the global aviation scenario, as many as 14 international organisations will showcase their latest products dedicated to airports at the exhibition, which will be held alongside the conference.

Scores of Oman’s startup technology companies will also participate in the exhibition and display their innovations in aviation and airports.

A number of globally-renowned companies are participating in this event and it includes Google, Amazon, Airbus, Idemia, Huawei, Nokia, Cisco, Moody’s Credit Rating Agency, IATA, Deloitte, TAV, SISTA, Gulf Air, J C Decaux, the International Hong Kong Aviation Academy, Caesar, and Dutch InterVistas. Additionally, the three regional offices of the Airports Council International are collaborating with Oman Airports in managing the content of this conference and the accompanying exhibition.

“Undoubtedly, the challenges faced by service and logistics organisations worldwide during the period of ‘Covid-19’ pandemic offered an opportunity to look for

innovations and solutions. They came up with a mature technological experience that serves these sectors,” said Shaikh Aimen bin Ahmed al Hosni, CEO of Oman Airports and the Chairman of the Board of the Airports Council International.

“The leaders of airports worldwide have contributed to cementing a culture of innovation as one of the work strategies, through which everyone sought to create a dynamic environment in line with the rapid technological advancements, especially with the advent of artificial intelligence,” he added.

He further said that innovation has become a reality and a fundamental necessity, especially in the field of airports and travel. Oman’s competitiveness prompts the country to work towards improving the travel experience for millions of passengers who trust in our capabilities as airport management entities in the region.

In a note, Luis Felipe de Oliveira, the Director of General Airports Council International expressed his excitement in attending the first event for airport innovation.

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

INTERNATIONAL TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
5/2023 2023/276/ 14 - م / ر - (at E-Tendering)	RENOVATION AND INTEGRATION OF THREE RADIO STUDIOS AND THREE DUBBING ROOMS – MUSCAT	Excellent Frst	26/11/2023	31/12/2023	25/-

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

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

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

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

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

3. The Ministry has the right to:
1) Add or Cancel some works in the tender if necessary.
2) Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:
Telephone : 24943785, 24943177, Email: (Moi.Tenders@omaninfo.om)



SAI chief reflects on Oman’s progress and commitments

In appreciation of the national achievements and gains achieved in the Sultanate of Oman in various development fields, and in celebration of the glorious 53rd National Day, Shaikh Ghusan bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of State Audit Institution, has expressed sincere greeting and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, coupled with prayers to Allah the Almighty to return this dear national occasion on His Majesty with good health, and to Oman and the loyal Omani people with goodness, prosperity, and continued progress.

In a statement, he has emphasised that the comprehensive development process since the beginning of the blessed renaissance and in its renewed and auspicious era is full of achievements that narrate the Royal will of the wise leadership, in addition to institutional work and community solidarity towards building Omani monuments in all fields.

This indicates that the various sectors have received attention

and care to achieve national objectives, for which society is the tool and the goal.

Shaikh Ghusan al Alawi states that celebrating the glorious anniversary of the National Day represents an appreciation of national gains and achievements, stressing the shared responsibility at the institutional and societal levels to preserve and direct them optimally.

He has stated that the process of auditing has witnessed significant progress at the level of subordination, naming, regulating laws, and others.

He also confirmed the keenness of SAI in performing its national role by harnessing all its resources and directing its expertise to achieve its objectives, implement its responsibilities, and work on continuous alignment of its work with Oman Vision 2040, particularly the goals related to its field of competence, such as comprehensive, effective and independent audit systems that protect public fund, achieve the principles of accountability and accounting and achieve added value to the national

SAI CHAIRMAN CONFIRMS KEENNESS IN PERFORMING THE NATIONAL ROLE BY HARNESSING ITS RESOURCES AND DIRECTING ITS EXPERTISE TO ACHIEVE ITS OBJECTIVES, AND WORK ON CONTINUOUS ALIGNMENT OF ITS WORK WITH ‘OMAN VISION 2040’

economy and government performance.

In addition, SAI devotes its care towards promoting integrity, employing transparency and awareness, preventing and combating administrative and financial corruption to ensure complete alignment with the requirements of the visions and objectives set by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

The SAI Chairman indicated that SAI is keen to adopt the best international practices in auditing and promoting integrity, confirming that the Institution devotes special



Shaikh Ghusan al Alawi, Chairman, State Audit Institution

attention to contributing in and benefiting from the activities and initiatives implemented by specialised regional and international organisations such as the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI), the Arab and the Asian Organizations of Supreme Audit Institutions (ARBOSAI and ASOSAI), and the committees at the level of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Furthermore, the Chairman stated that the Institution seeks to build professional partnerships with peer Institutions to exchange expertise and transfer experiences, which enhances the professional career building of human resources, affirming the appreciation that the Institution receives for its professional contributions through the presidency or membership of committees and executive councils and its implementation of a number of qualitative training programmes by national specialised competencies, as well as pointing to the attention the Institution pays towards building the capabilities of the employees of entities subject to its audit in the areas of auditing, financial management, audit of contract and tender activities and other related fields, indicating the high added value resulting from such programmes implemented by the Institution in the governorates of Oman represented in the achievement of preventive audit and enhancement of professional knowledge.

Shaikh Ghusan al Alawi further pointed out that while preparing annual audit plans, the Institution seeks to achieve the principle of accuracy in selecting audit topics and exercise professional care in

implementing various types of audits such as financial, administrative, and performance audits.

The Institution takes into consideration the standards issued by specialised international organisations in which it participates as a member, and in accordance with a scientific methodology that is based on risk analysis and materiality, and in line with the model prepared for selecting audit topics and determining the entities to be included within the annual audit plan so that the objectives and timeframe of each audit task are precisely defined, and the audit programme is prepared.

He stressed that audit reports and the observations therein are based on accurate data and evidence, according to which the Institution provides necessary recommendations to rectify the observations.

Shaikh Ghusan al Alawi also added that the issuance of audit reports is carried out in cooperation and effective partnership with the entities subject to the audit of the Institution according to a clear and transparent work mechanism, as the preparation of reports goes through several stages to ensure the validity and accuracy of the data contained therein.

The initial results are then sent to the entity subject to audit upon completion of the task and meetings are conducted with the entity’s specialists to discuss the Institution observations and recommendations. A draft report is later sent to the concerned official in the entity to receive its response which is included in the final report, in a written form.

Shaikh Ghusan al Alawi further stated that the implementation of the recommendations set out in the report by the entities subject to

the audit will certainly improve their performance, and ensure the achievement of highest levels of productivity and efficiency and optimal investment of human and financial resources to achieve public interest, which represents an added value to the Institution’s work.

The Institution aims to increase the implementation rate of its recommendations by the entities subject to its audit in the coming years, which will support the role of the Institution in protecting public fund, preserving the achievements of the blessed renaissance and verify the safety of their use and proper management, as well as consolidating transparency and accountability in the sound use of public fund and achieving the objectives for which these entities have been established.

As to the process of digital transformation in the Institution, he also stated that information technology, communications and artificial intelligence are amongst the main tools used to improve the performance and raise the efficiency of using resources. Hence, the Institution pays great attention and devotes its special care to activate the use of information technology as all audit and administrative works are managed by integrated automated systems that allow ease and accuracy of information flow and retrieval, keeping pace with the technical development that is in line with the government digital transformation plan, as it is a key supporter for the strategic and vital sectors in Oman.

The SAI Chairman concluded his statement by affirming that State Audit Institution pays full attention to contribute actively in advancing development across the Sultanate of Oman, side by side with all state institutions.

Moreover, the Institution harnesses its energies and capabilities to preserve public funds, State’s capabilities and public properties, and preserve the State’s achievements.

It also contributes to the prosperity of the nation, integrity promotion, reduction of public fund misuse, and efficiency raising of its use, in addition to activating community and institutional participation. As a result, this will promote the achievement of the national objectives, economic growth, and social well-being under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C invites interested companies to participate in the following tender

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Participation	Date of Submission	Grade	Tender Price (OMR)
NESC/05/2023	Provision of Manpower Outsourcing Services for Nama Electricity Supply Company for a Period of Three Year	28/11/2023	12/12/2023	Specialized	1,575/-
The table below shows the instructions for participation: -					
Participation	• Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion may obtain Tender documents. • The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. • The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply) • To obtain the tender document and payment procedure, please contact us by email Tender@supply.nama.om				
Enquiries	• Any inquiry can be sent to Tender@supply.nama.om , (05) Five working days before bid submission date. • Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.				
Tender Submission	• Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER mentioned in the Prime Document				
Guarantee	• The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted , amount of 3,000/- OMR valid for a period of (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF MINOR TENDER COMMITTEE, Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C. • The bid bond should be submmited as sepreate envelope. • Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected.				
Terms and Conditions	• The Tender shall be valid for a period of (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. • If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date. • NESC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer. • Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization • NESC gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. • Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.				
Incentives and exemptions	• Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from Tender fees • Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from bid bond requirements. • Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from registration fees on business opportunities platform and supplier registration with Nama Group.				



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Oman’s trailblazers: Achievements and aspirations in arts, sports, literature, and community

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, NOV 18

Al Din Theatre Group, pioneering vision in theatrical art: Led by Mohammed bin Salem al Nabhani, Al Din Theatre Group has become a beacon in the world of theatrical art. With a focus on nurturing and developing Omani youth talents, the group excels in creativity across various branches of theatre. Having secured 80 local and international awards, Al Din looks forward to furthering its global reach by collaborating with international festivals and promoting Omani culture through theatrical performances.

For the coming year, the group looks forward to continuing to present its works with high professionalism, enhancing its position in Omani theatre on both the local and international levels. The group also aims for global expansion by fostering cultural and artistic cooperation with international festivals, with the goal of promoting Omani culture through theatrical performances.

Jokha al Farsi and Ihsaan Association, fostering unity and compassion: Jokha al Farsi, President of Ihsaan Association, spearheads efforts to promote cooperation and unity within the community. In 2023, the association provided six free wheelchair-accessible vehicles to transport patients across Oman. The collaborative efforts of Omani youth volunteers under al Farsi’s leadership reflect a national spirit, aiming to build a more interconnected and compassionate community. The association’s ambitious goal for the future involves establishing a facility offering recreational and educational services for the elderly and volunteers.

The organisation aims to achieve an ambitious goal which is to provide a facility that offers all recreational and educational services for the elderly and the nation’s volunteers. This goal represents embodying Ihsaan’s vision



Mohammed bin Salem al Nabhani



Tariq bin Salem al Hashimi

of building a more interconnected and compassionate community.

Ibrahim al Salty and Qaraa Al Marifa Bookstore, bridging gaps in Omani literature: Qaraa Al Marifa Library, owned by Ibrahim al Salty, takes pride in bridging the gap between Omani readers and authors. Hosting cultural salons and participating in various events, the bookstore aims to enhance Omani literature, with a focus on scientific and philosophical publications. In the coming year, Qaraa Al Marifa plans to offer readers a curated selection of useful, refined and original Omani books.

They released a book titled Baby Maison and Her Doctor Ann, the doctor who embraced Islam admiring Umm Al Sultan’s character, compiled and translated by Fatima bint Nasser.

All copies of the book were sold out. In the coming year, they aim to enhance Omani books by offering readers everything that is useful, refined and



Jokha al Farsi



Jamal bin Khalid al Ghailani

original, focusing more on scientific and philosophical publications.

Mohammed al Saadi, Omani athlete’s record-breaking journey: Athlete Mohammed al Saadi achieved remarkable milestones in 2023, breaking the Omani record in the 200-metre race and securing gold medals in the West Asian Championship and Arab Games. With aspirations to participate in the 2024 Olympic Games, Al Saadi is dedicated to thorough preparation and active participation in local and regional championships, aiming to elevate Oman’s standing on the national and continental stages.

Al Saadi seeks to obtain thorough preparation, either through participation in specialised training camps or comprehensive programmes, to achieve a qualifying score that allows him to participate for the 2024 Olympic Games. He also looks forward to his active participation in local and regional championships, aiming to achieve



Ibrahim al Salty



Khalifa bin Sulaiman al Zeidi

significant accomplishments on both the national and continental stages, contributing to raising the flag of Oman high in the upcoming events.

Jamal bin Khalid al Ghailani and SQU’s Scientific Publishing Department, advancing research and knowledge dissemination: The Scientific Publishing and Communication Department at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) made significant strides in 2023, launching motion graphic films and scientific short films to introduce funding sources and raise awareness of scientific publishing services. The department’s initiatives support researchers and promote the culture of scientific research and authorship. In 2024, they aim to adopt plans and strategies to achieve further objectives while maintaining the accomplishments of the current year.

For 2024, the department strives to adopt plans and strategies to achieve further objectives while maintaining the

accomplishments of the current year.

Khalifa bin Sulaiman al Zeidi, balancing scientific research and literary pursuits: As a literary writer and researcher at SQU, Khalifa bin Sulaiman al Zeidi achieved personal and professional milestones in 2023. Despite challenges, he explored scientific writing and completed a new publication. For 2024, Al Zeidi aims for more practical and personal achievements, emphasising the role of educational institutions in scientific and knowledge building.

For 2024, Al Zeidi seeks more practical and personal achievements as his work in scientific research pushes him to be more diligent.

He views educational institutions, research and knowledge centres as a basis for scientific and knowledge building, and a basis for technical and industrial progress. He also seeks literary achievement that fulfils his favourite personal hobbies.

Tariq bin Salem al Hashimi and OWSF, leading water sports development: As the Vice-President of the Omani Water Sports Federation (OWSF), Tariq bin Salem al Hashimi played a pivotal role in the federation’s success in 2023. With achievements in hosting swimming championships and enhancing referee and trainer skills, OWSF continues its commitment to developing the sports scene in Oman. The national team’s participation in international events, including the 2024 Arab Swimming Championship and World Swimming Championship, reflects the federation’s ambitious plans for the future.

The national team will be participating in the Arab Swimming Championship and the World Swimming Championship both in Qatar. The year will conclude with participation in the Asian Indoor Championships in Thailand. The ambitious plans of the federation continues with local swimming championships, reflecting a continuous commitment to developing the sports scene in the country.



Omani athlete Mohammed al Saadi who achieved remarkable milestones in 2023 seen in action.



Brutal strikes hit UN school at Jabalia refugee camp



Palestinians gather as others search for casualties at the site of an Israeli strike, in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip. — Reuters

GAZA: An official of the health ministry in the Gaza Strip said more than 80 people were killed on Saturday in double Israeli strikes on the Jabalia refugee camp.

“At least 50 people” were killed in an Israeli strike at dawn on the UN-run Al-Fakhura school in the camp, which had been converted into a shelter for displaced Palestinians, the official said.

Social media videos showed bodies covered in blood and dust on the floor of a building, where mattresses had been wedged under school tables.

A separate strike on another building in the camp on Saturday killed 32 people from the same family, 19 of them children, the health ministry official said.

The ministry released a list of 32 members of the Abu Habal family it said had died.

Jabalia is the biggest refugee camp in Gaza, where some 1.6 million have been displaced by more than six weeks of fighting between Israel and Palestinians in Gaza.

The Israeli army did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the two strikes.

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) was also unable to offer an immediate reaction.

At the start of November, the government said more than 200 people had been killed and hundreds more wounded in Israeli bombardments on the Jabalia camp over three consecutive days.

The Israeli army’s relentless air and ground campaign has since killed 12,000 people, including 5,000 children, according to the Palestinian government.

Meanwhile, five fighters of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas’ Fatah party were killed early on Saturday in an Israeli airstrike on the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian Red Crescent and Fatah sources said.

Israeli army raids targeting Palestinian movements in the West Bank have surged since attacks were launched on October 7.

The Israeli army said it had killed Palestinians in an airstrike on the Balata refugee camp in Nablus, home to some 24,000 according to the United Nations which

manages it.

The Palestine Red Crescent Society said overnight five people were killed and two hurt in a strike, which the camp administration said hit local Fatah headquarters.

Witnesses said the strike appeared to have come from a drone, and Fatah sources confirmed the dead were members of the movement.

The Palestinian health ministry in Ramallah says since the war started more than 200 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank, with a spike in army raids and Israeli settler violence.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken this week urged Israel to act to confront “rising levels of settler extremist violence”. — AFP

EU CHIEF DISCUSSES GAZA HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN EGYPT

CAIRO: European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on Saturday said she was opposed to the “forced displacement of Palestinians” during a meeting in Cairo with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

Von der Leyen “thanked Egypt for its key role in providing and facilitating humanitarian aid to vulnerable Palestinians”, during her meeting with Sisi, she wrote on X.

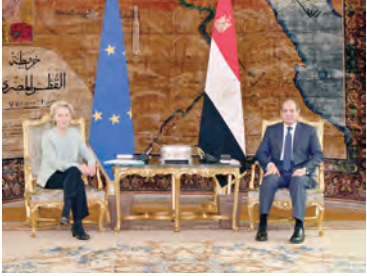
The two discussed “the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza” and a “political horizon based on a two-state solution”, she added, as Israel presses its military campaign in the Gaza Strip.

Von der Leyen later arrived in North Sinai for the arrival of a European Union humanitarian convoy, the governor of the Egyptian border region said in a statement.

“She is expected to... inspect the Rafah border crossing and the aid and to visit wounded Palestinians” in North Sinai, the statement said.

International aid has for weeks arrived at the international airport in El-Arish, some 40 km from the Rafah crossing with Gaza.

The border crossing — the only one to the Palestinian territory not controlled by Israel — has been the only entry point for aid trickling



Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi meets with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to discuss the latest developments in the Gaza Strip, at the Ittihadia presidential palace in Cairo, Egypt. — AFP

into war-ravaged Gaza.

“Egypt is a big country with a large population, strategically located for us,” a senior EU official said.

“We see new opportunities especially cooperation around energy and around hydrogen in the future,” the official added.

Meanwhile, first consignment of fuel has entered Gaza after US pressure on Israel, allowing communications to resume in the territory, where a hospital director on Saturday said 26 people had been killed in a strike in Khan Yunis. — AFP

ISRAEL AGAIN STRIKES DEEP INTO LEBANESE TERRITORY

BEIRUT: Israel on Saturday struck an aluminium factory deep in Lebanese territory, state media in Lebanon said, a week after its furthest strike since border skirmishes began last month.

“An enemy (Israeli) drone fired two missiles at an aluminium factory on the road between Toul and Kfour, setting it on fire,” Lebanon’s official National News Agency (NNA) said, without specifying whether there were casualties.

Kfour mayor Khodr Saad said that two wounded civilians were transported to a hospital in the village.

The factory is about 15 kilometres from the Israeli frontier.

Weeks of deadly skirmishes between Israel and armed factions in Lebanon have largely been limited to border areas since war on Gaza began on October 7.

NNA said it was the first strike in the Nabatiyeh region of Lebanon’s south since the 2006 war with Israel.



Smoke rises on the Lebanese side of the border after an Israeli airstrike. — Reuters

It also reported Israeli artillery strikes and air raids against several areas in Lebanon’s south.

The factory bombardment comes after Israel on November 11 struck a pickup truck on a farm in the Zahrani area on Lebanon’s coast, about 45 kilometres from the Israeli border, NNA said at the time.

Armed groups on Saturday claimed to have shot down an Israeli Hermes 450 drone “using a surface-to-air missile”, in addition to launching five other attacks on Israel’s northern border. — AFP

Patients and medics flee from hospital at the centre of war

GAZA: Hundreds of people fled on foot on Saturday after the director of Gaza’s main hospital said Israel’s army ordered evacuation of the facility where more than 2,000 patients, medics and displaced people were trapped by the Israeli strikes.

Columns of sick and injured, some of them amputees, displaced people, doctors and nurses, were seen making their way out of Al-Shifa hospital towards the seafont without ambulances as loud explosions were heard around the facility.

On the way, witnesses saw at least 15 bodies, some in advanced stages of decomposition, along a road lined by badly damaged shops and overturned vehicles as Israeli drones buzzed overhead.

The Palestinian health ministry said 120 wounded, along with an unspecified number of premature

babies, were still at Shifa hospital that has become the focus of the seven-week war.

Israel’s relentless air and ground campaign has since killed 12,000 people, including 5,000 children, according to the Palestinian government.

In Gaza City on Saturday morning, Israeli troops had ordered over loudspeakers the evacuation of Al-Shifa hospital “in the next hour”, a journalist at the scene reported.

They called the hospital’s director, Mohammed Abu Salmiya, telling him to ensure “the evacuation of patients, wounded, the displaced and medical staff, and that they should move on foot towards the seafont”, he said.

The United Nations estimated 2,300 patients, staff and displaced Palestinians were sheltering at Al-Shifa before Israeli troops entered



Palestinian man sits on a wheelchair as he flees north Gaza and moves southward, as Israeli tanks roll deeper into the enclave, in the central Gaza Strip. — Reuters

the facility on Wednesday.

Israel has told Palestinians to move from the north of Gaza for their safety, but deadly air strikes continue to hit central and southern areas of the narrow coastal territory.

“They said the south was safer, so we moved,” Azhar al-Rifi said.

Her family was caught in a strike at the Nuseirat refugee camp on Friday, killing seven of her relatives including her five-year-old nephew. The same blast caught up Nada Abu Hiya, aged eight — her third bombing of the war.

“There are bombings everywhere,” she said. “My grandmother is dead, my mother is dead, my grandfather is dead, my uncle is dead, they destroyed our house. Our neighbours’ house is also destroyed and they are all dead.”

Israel has imposed a siege on Gaza, allowing just a trickle of aid in from Egypt but barring most shipments of fuel.

A first consignment of fuel entered Gaza after Israel’s war cabinet bowed to pressure from its ally the United States and agreed to allow two diesel tankers a day into the Palestinian territory. — AFP

Do we need suicide enquiries?



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

Suicide is a tragic event not only for the patient’s family but also for the healthcare professionals who are caring for him. After fajr prayers, the young man next to me shook my hand and whispered, “Do you remember me”. I paused for a second or two before saying his name, his face lit up with a smile as he nodded “Correct”. He was one of my patients who was diagnosed with schizophrenia during his first year at the university which led him to eventually leave as he could not cope with studying and living on his own in a big city. I recognised him although he stopped coming to my clinic for over two years. He told me that he is now seeing a psychiatrist at a different clinic. I asked how he ended up in this masjid as I recalled he lived outside Muscat, and he told me he was visiting a friend in the area. We said goodbye and wished each other a nice day. A few weeks later I learned from a nurse who comes from the same village and knew his family that he was found hanging from the ceiling of his bedroom. The news

came as a shock to me, he was in his early thirties. I kept thinking what could we have done to prevent this suicide ? Suicide is a tragic event not only for the patient’s family but also for the healthcare professionals who are caring for him. It is not uncommon that doctors and nurses who lose patients to suicide experience variety of negative emotions such as anger, anxiety and depression as some tend to blame themselves and doubt their abilities to detect people with suicidal tendencies and provide the necessary support. The anger is often directed towards one self but sometimes to the person who committed suicide as if saying “why did you do this to us?” While anxiety can manifest in developing unnecessary fear that more patients will commit suicide and therefore need to stay in hospitals to prevent that, even when the risk is low. In some countries a coroner’s inquiry conducted by the legal system takes place to find out more about the person who committed suicide, how

IN SOME COUNTRIES A CORONER’S INQUIRY CONDUCTED BY THE LEGAL SYSTEM TAKES PLACE TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE PERSON WHO COMMITTED SUICIDE

was he or she and where did the act of suicide take place and how they died. If the patient was seen by a psychiatrist before the court will request a medical detailed report and may call the doctors for a hearing before a judge. Although the main idea is to learn from the event and prevent it from happening again some doctors feel that they are being blamed for the suicide even if they followed guidelines. If the inquiry showed there was a negligence from the doctor side a disciplinary action would be taken which varies from suspension to licence removal to imprisonment. During my training in the UK, I met colleagues who have been through this process and they reported feelings of shame and self blame that changed their lives. Some had to take early retirement because they could not cope with the emotional toll that followed the enquiry however one needs to look at the positive side of the process which is reviewing facts and learning how to prevent the next suicide.

Indo-Pacific trade deal prospects dim

DAVID LAWDER

The Biden administration has vowed to continue negotiating an ambitious Asia trade deal, but election-year pressures and resistance to tough commitments from some countries make a deal unlikely, trade experts and business groups say. The Biden administration had emphasised finishing key chapters of its Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) initiative trade “pillar” in time for this week’s Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting, aiming to offer the region an alternative to China’s growing trade clout. That effort failed after some countries, including Vietnam and Indonesia, declined to commit to strong labour and environmental standards with binding enforcement provisions. The lack of trade outcomes overshadowed the Commerce Department’s announcement that it had completed two more non-binding IPEF pillars on clean energy cooperation and anti-corruption measures. Deputy US Trade Representative Sarah Bianchi said that IPEF partners will “recalibrate” the trade talks in 2024. But it gets harder from here, said Wendy Cutler, the former chief USTR negotiator on the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal with many of the same countries. TPP succumbed to 2016 election-year politics, leading to former President Donald Trump’s US withdrawal just after taking office in January 2017. “My sense is that everyone’s trying to put the best face on this, including our trading partners, but privately they’re pretty discouraged,” said Cutler, the Asia Society Policy Center head, who attended APEC events in San Francisco. “They’re left with no choice but to continue to work with us in 2024, but they recognise that the prospects for resolving these issues in an election year are slim to none,” she added. IPEF negotiators will face stronger demands for any agreement including enforceable labour provisions after Democratic Senator Sherrod Brown urged Biden to abandon the trade pillar rather than lower its standards. The Biden administration had hoped to avoid such political blowback by limiting the scope of the IPEF trade pillar, excluding any possibility of tariff cuts or market access improvements for Asian countries that could cost US jobs. But these limitations do not make it easier for countries to make difficult commitments, business groups say. “The lack of ambition in the trade pillar sort of unites all stakeholders in scepticism,” said Jake Colvin, president of the National Foreign Trade Council, a group representing major US companies on trade issues. Colvin said it will be a challenge for the Biden administration to satisfy labour and environmental groups with strong protections, while also offering more benefits for businesses and member countries, which want fewer barriers to trade in the region. “Until they do that, the trade pillar will be a tough nut to crack.” Trade deals, even limited ones, take a long time to negotiate. The Biden administration launched negotiations in September 2022, leaving an impossibly tight deadline ahead of the APEC summit, according to some trade experts. — Reuters



Alex Brown

THOSE WHO ARE OLD ENOUGH TO REMEMBER THE 1970S OR EARLIER SEEM TO BE THE MOST APPRECIATIVE OF HOW MUCH HAS HAPPENED, AND HOW FAST



Oman national flags flutter in Qurum.

– PHOTO BY KHALFAN AL RUZAIKI

In 1999 I attended a short training seminar in Oman, visiting from Saudi Arabia. Those two or three days made a life-changing impression on me. A gentle-paced, low-rise city by the sea with friendly people and a distinct and diverse culture. Two years later, when I found out that I would be transferring to Muscat with a promotion that I’d applied for, I was delighted. I have left and come back twice now and spent half my adult life here. Oman gives me most of my friends, my livelihood and above all my wife. If I never leave again, it will be because Oman has all I really need. Perhaps that is the most sincere compliment I can offer. However, I did have mixed feeling about writing this article. There will be plenty of fawning reminiscences on how wonderful life in the Sultanate of Oman has been and I usually find them hard to read. The main reason I get irritated when I read endless gushing compliments about Oman in personal columns, is because I hear so much moaning and complaining in private. I am as guilty as any of finding things to complain about, whether it’s getting stuck in traffic, some bureaucratic issue, or despairing of finding a competent electrician. We all have good days and bad days! So, on the occasion of Oman’s National Day I would like to make a less emotional reflection. More than 50 years have passed since Sultan Qaboos ascended to the throne and began his urgent task of building a modern nation state. Half a century

sounds like a long time to achieve that, but as a man who has also passed 50 years I can also say that on some days it feels like I have just started. Those who are old enough to remember the 1970s or earlier seem to be the most appreciative of how much has happened, and how fast. In their youth they knew a life that was beautiful but hard, where their mothers and sisters died in childbirth, siblings passed away as infants of simple, treatable diseases, hot summers made daily life a struggle and productivity low, and the outside modern world was a strange mirage over the water. The basics we take for granted now, of well-stocked pharmacies and clinics, universal education and healthcare, luxury cars, drive through coffee and (my personal favourite) air conditioning, are transcendent. Of course older people find things to complain about as well, and their first subject is normally younger people! For those who grew up in the 1980s boom or later, the basics of modern life are no miracle of development. They are measures of comparison with neighbouring countries and the fascinating delights of Europe, the US and others. Often these comparisons are deeply unfair. The government could do more to educate on economic and demographic realities, maybe, but the stereotype of “millennial entitlement” has some resonance in this country. There was a time in Oman where the flow of money into the economy from massive government projects,

the subsidy of public consumption and the comfort blanket of free services was greater than it is now. Some neighbours with smaller populations and larger resources still behave in that way. Younger people wonder why their life in Oman isn’t easier, and older ones wonder what has changed. In truth, when His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik took the throne, he inherited all that his late and beloved predecessor had built. But he also had to deal with unprecedented debt, a global pandemic and structural issues in need of attention. A timely spike in the oil price certainly helped, but we cannot underestimate the tough decisions and hard truths that had to be faced. That is worthy of recognition when we celebrate the passing of another year. The reality is that the world keeps on turning and the state cannot be the mother and father of every citizen, just as expatriates like me cannot assume a new highly-paid position is waiting to be honoured with their presence. Oman’s population has quadrupled since those boom years and the resources in the ground have not. The future of this country is more Omanisation, more diversification and a recognition that we get out what we put in. On the occasion of this National Day, I tip my hat to His Majesty and to all Omanis. The easy road is long gone so let’s not complain about the hard road ahead, but keep walking. More power to you all. We have made a good start.

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His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik
and the generous people of Oman on the occasion of the
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مجلس تجارة وصناعة عُمان
Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry



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to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the people of Oman.



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Investments in OPAZ zones and industrial cities total RO 16.6 bn

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 18

Investments in Oman's special economic zones and industrial cities had surpassed RO 16.6 billion as of June 30, 2023, according to the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ).

Of this total, existing industrial cities account for RO 7.3 billion in investments, Salalah Free Zone (RO 4.5 billion), Special Economic Zone at Duqm (RO 3.8 billion), Sohar Freezone (RO 570 million, Al Mazunah Free Zone (RO 139 million, and Khazaen Economic City (RO 323 million), OPAZ noted.

Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) During the first half of this year, SEZAD received investments of RO 185 million, lifting the total cumulative investment to over RO 3.8 billion. During this period, 16 investment agreements were signed and 111 investment applications were received. Additionally, 80 applications for commercial activities were registered and 420 public service licenses were issued. SEZAD also approved 22 building permits and 34 environmental permits and licenses.

SEZAD is actively working to attract a diverse range of economic activities, such as clean energy projects, green hydrogen production, ammonia, refineries, petrochemical industries, commercial, tourism, logistics, light and medium industries,



Logistics facilities in Sohar Freezone

fishery industries, and real estate development projects. The vast area of 2,000 sq kilometres available to SEZAD allows it to accommodate requests from investors who require relatively large plots of land for their investment projects.

Sohar Freezone Investments in Sohar Free Zone during the first half of this year totalled RO 94 million Omani, bringing the total cumulative investment to RO 570 million.

During this period, Sohar Freezone signed four investment agreements and received 179 investment applications. Additionally, Sohar Freezone issued 284 licenses for public services and approved nine building permits, along with 90 environmental permits.

Sohar Freezone covers a total area of 45 square kilometres and boasts an integrated infrastructure, supported by a large and vital port. It is home to diverse projects that

span various sectors, including minerals, petrochemicals, and food industries. One of Sohar Freezone's competitive advantages is that it offers warehouses and prefabricated offices for rent to companies.

Salalah Free Zone (SFZ) Investments worth RO 727 million were made in SFZ from January to the end of June 2023, taking the total cumulative investment to RO 4.5 billion. During this period, SFZ received 127 investment applications and 18 commercial activities applications.

SFZ signed 6 agreements, issued 173 public service licenses, approved 3 building permits, and granted 41 environmental permits and licenses. Additionally, SFZ issued 1,512 business and investor licenses.

Al Mazunah Free Zone (MFZ) The total investments in MFZ during the period from the beginning of the year to the end of June amounted to RO 1.3 million.

This brings the total cumulative investment to RO 139 million. Furthermore, MFZ registered 25 investment applications and issued 19 business licenses, as well as 50 business and investor licenses. The number of workers in the zone surpassed 300.

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) manages the operation of MFZ. MFZ acts as the Gulf gateway for transit trade to Yemen. The establishment of MFZ has strengthened the relationship between the two countries and has helped revive economic activity on both sides of the border.

Madayn recorded investments of RO 87.6 million during the first half of this year, lifting the cumulative to RO 7.3 billion across the country. Since the beginning of the year, Madayn has received 122 new investment applications, while it has registered 80 applications in various commercial activities and issued 843 licenses to practice activities.

Madayn is currently working on building two industrial cities in Oman. The first city is located in Al Wadi Al Kabir and spans an area of 2.15 million square metres.

The second city is Mahas Industrial City, located in the Wilayat of Khasab, and covers an area of 1.5 million square metres. Currently, Mahas Industrial City houses 10 diverse industrial projects, including cement products, bricks, ready-mix concrete, quarries, and electricity production.

RCA and Ominvest fortify positions in Bank Muscat

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, NOV 18

In a strategic move affirming their commitment to Oman's banking sector, Royal Court Affairs (RCA) and Oman International Development and Investment Company SAOG (Ominvest) have acquired the stake previously held by Dubai Financial Group (DFG) in Bank Muscat, Oman's leading financial institution. This solidifies the positions of both RCA and Ominvest in the Omani banking landscape and emphasises their confidence in the future growth of Bank Muscat.

RCA's acquisition of 266.326 million shares has increased its total ownership to an impressive 2.049 billion shares. Concurrently, Ominvest secured 440 million shares, raising its stake to a substantial 478 million shares. This move follows Ominvest's recent approval from the Central Bank of Oman, received on November 8, 2023, to augment its shareholding in Bank Muscat. RCA now holds a 27.3% ownership stake, and Ominvest increased its ownership to around 6.5%.

"This strategic acquisition not only underscores the robust fundamentals of the Omani banking sector but also highlights Bank Muscat as an attractive investment opportunity," noted a market expert. He added, "Anticipated synergies from this transaction position RCA and Ominvest to leverage their strengths and expertise, contributing further to



the expansion of Bank Muscat's operations." In the week ending November 18, the Muscat Stock Exchange experienced notable gains fuelled by increased shares in banks and leading companies. The main index closed at 4619 points, a remarkable 80-point increase from the preceding week.

The financial sector index recorded the most significant surge, rising by 115 points, while positive movements were observed in the services and industrial sectors. Despite a marginal decline in the Sharia index, overall market activity reached a record high with a total trading volume of RO 208.8 million.

Key highlights include Dubai Financial Group's exit from Bank Muscat shares and the heightened ownership stakes by Royal Court Affairs and Oman International Development and Investment Company "Ominvest." RCA now holds a 27.3% ownership stake, and "Ominvest" increased its ownership to around 6.5%. Bank Muscat's shares closed at 272 baisas, while "Ominvest" shares closed at 430 baisas.

OPEC+ to consider whether more oil cuts needed

LONDON: OPEC+ is set to consider whether to make additional oil supply cuts when the group meets later this month, according to three OPEC+ sources who spoke to Reuters after prices dropped by almost 20 percent since late September.

Oil has slid to around \$79 a barrel for Brent crude from a 2023 high in September near \$98. Concerns about demand and a possible surplus next year have pressured prices, despite support from the OPEC+ cuts and conflict in the Middle East.

Saudi Arabia, Russia, and other members of OPEC+ have already pledged total oil output cuts of 5.16 million barrels per day, or about 5 per cent of daily global demand, in a series of steps that started in late 2022. The cuts include 3.66 million

bpd by OPEC+ and additional voluntary cuts by Saudi Arabia and Russia.

One OPEC+ source, who declined to be named, said the existing curbs might not be enough, and the group will likely analyse if more could be implemented when it meets. Two other OPEC+ sources said deeper cuts could be discussed.

"It is not pleasant to see that market volatility is greater ahead of the next meeting while fundamentals overall remain solid," one of the OPEC+ sources said. "Ministers are likely to express some thoughts on what to do more, to secure a stable trend."

Ministers from OPEC+, which groups the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and allies led by Russia,



meet on Nov. 26. The group already has a plan to curb supplies by 3.66 million bpd into 2024, made

during its last meeting in June.

OPEC and the Saudi Energy Ministry did not respond to

requests for comment on Friday. The price drop has deepened this week, even after OPEC, in a monthly report, said the oil-market fundamentals remained strong despite "negative sentiment" and stuck to its relatively high 2024 oil demand growth forecast.

The International Energy Agency, which also updated its outlook this week, has a lower 2024 demand growth forecast and said the market could shift to a surplus in the first quarter.

While three sources said more cuts could be required, two other OPEC+ sources said it was too early to say whether further cuts will be discussed, while another said he did not think it was likely, with the caveat to "wait and see."

OPEC+ does not have a target for oil prices. Members depend

on oil as a primary source of government income. Analysts have said that Saudi Arabia's oil cut extension raises the risk of Saudi economic contraction this year.

Saudi Arabia has repeatedly stressed during previous meetings that it wants to see strong compliance with cuts so all members share the burden of producing less.

At its last policy meeting in June, OPEC+ agreed on a broad deal to limit supply into 2024, and Saudi Arabia pledged a voluntary production cut for July of 1 million bpd that it has since extended to last until the end of 2023.

Some analysts, including Energy Aspects, expect Saudi Arabia to keep the voluntary cut at least until the first quarter of 2024.

— Reuters

Toyota GAZOO Racing Dominate 8 Hours of Bahrain

MUSCAT: Toyota GAZOO Racing (TGR) brought the curtain down on a thrilling 2023 FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) season with a one-two victory in the 8 Hours of Bahrain, confirming its fifth World Championship drivers' title. Additionally, Toyota secured its manufacturers' title, marking the perfect conclusion to an exciting season which featured fierce challenges from the motorsports world's top competitors.

First-place winners Sébastien Buemi, Brendon Hartley, and Ryo Hirakawa clinched their second consecutive drivers' World Championship in their No.8 GR010 Hybrid Electric Hypercar. Buemi and Hartley also made history by securing their fourth drivers' title each, while Hirakawa claimed titles in WEC's 2022 and 2023 seasons. Meanwhile, Mike Conway, Kamui Kobayashi, and José María López battled to secure second place in the championship in the No.7 GR010 Hybrid Electric Hypercar.

Akio Toyoda, TGR Chairman, commented: "The "battle of athletes" that the two Toyota GAZOO Racing cars fought until the end was the best. Thank you to the six drivers, and the mechanics and engineers of both cars for a wonderful race. Congratulations to Sebastien, Brendon and Ryo for their second consecutive driver's title! Thank you also to Kamui, Jose, and Mike in car No.7 who made it a one-two!" Toyoda added, "The main characters of motorsports are the people behind the wheel. That's what makes it a sport, and I believe that everyone who takes part is an athlete and a fighter. This year's WEC has seen an increase in rivals, making it the



Toyota GAZOO Racing Dominate 8 Hours of Bahrain

"battle field" that fans have been waiting for. At the championship finale, today's athletes showed how they are giving their all to get the result. As a fan, I was very excited to see this. We would also like to thank the organisers for creating an environment where athletes can compete. I hope that next season we will continue to put forward a driver-first approach, led by Kamui, and we can make the team stronger." Buemi led from pole position and his consistent speed allowed him to build an advantage over the competition for top spot. Despite an accident that knocked Conway to the back of the field early-on, he was able to pull off a series of decisive overtaking manoeuvres and two stunning overtakes at the one-hour mark to return to the top three. During the second hour, Buemi stretched his lead further while Conway closed in on second place. Just before

the start of hour three, Conway handed the No.7 to Kobayashi, who quickly set a new fastest lap and moved into second.

Hartley took the wheel of the No.8 and led the race as darkness fell, with Kobayashi around half a minute behind. Precise driving through the lapped traffic saw the situation stabilise at the front and, at half distance, López and Hirakawa began their stints with the GR010 Hybrid Electric Hypercars running comfortably in first and second.

Kobayashi and Hartley took over for the final hour of the race. With a 40-second advantage in the lead, Hartley guided the No.8 safely through the closing laps while Kobayashi set the race's fastest lap.

Toyota GAZOO Racing brought the 2023 season to an end after seven events, 64 hours of racing and six wins, including four

one-tuos, to take the team's tally to 45 victories since its WEC debut in 2012.

Toyota presented its multi-pathway approach to hundreds of motorsports fans at a dedicated booth during 8 Hours of Bahrain. This approach encompasses a diverse range of eco-friendly vehicle technologies, catering to global market needs, including the Toyota Mirai and the GR lineup. These events affirm Toyota's commitment to achieving a carbon-neutral society and creating a more sustainable future, both on and off the racetrack.

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BMW group named VIP E-Mobility provider for COP28

DUBAI: BMW Group has announced its role as the VIP E-Mobility Provider for COP28 UAE, scheduled to take place from November 30 to December 12, 2023, in Dubai.

As part of its contribution to COP28, BMW Group will deploy a fleet of BMW i7, BMW iX, as well as the BMW iX5 Hydrogen for the exclusive use of VIP guests and officials during COP28.

The flagship BMW i7 carries the hallmark of Middle Eastern innovation and ingenuity, with key components crafted using sustainably sourced solar electrons produced in the UAE by Emirates Global Aluminum, contributing to a significant reduction in greenhouse emissions during the production cycle.

Meanwhile, the BMW iX embodies BMW Group's key approach of circular design. The principle is to find the best way to keep materials in the cycle – ensuring resources are not lost but retain their value for long-term use.

Moreover, the use of high-

quality secondary materials significantly reduces BMW Group's vehicles' carbon footprint.

The BMW iX5 Hydrogen has just successfully completed intensive hot-weather tests in the United Arab Emirates. The pilot vehicle is highly suited for long journeys and short refuelling stops, while also featuring a locally emissions-free drive. Subject to the corresponding framework conditions, its hydrogen fuel cell technology has the potential to be another pillar in the future BMW Group drive portfolio.

Commenting on the announcement, Christian Bahoo, Global Head of Special Political Engagement at BMW Group, said: "The COP28 UAE Presidency's vision correlates with BMW's commitment to technology-oriented solutions and the Paris Climate Agreement. At COP28, the BMW Group will present solutions and discuss the requirements that we consider necessary to achieve the transformation to sustainable mobility."



BMW Group to showcase commitment to emission-free mobility and sustainability.

In ousting CEO Sam Altman, ChatGPT loses its best fundraiser

NEW YORK: Artificial intelligence may be well-known for generating human-like images out of whole cloth, but if the software has a public face it is Sam Altman's.

The co-founder of OpenAI, which caused a sensation just a year ago with the introduction of ChatGPT, Altman has presented himself as the benevolent wizard behind the curtain of a technology that many say could upend entire industries and even mankind itself. But on Friday it was the earnest Altman who was upended after OpenAI's board, in a surprise move, stripped him of his CEO title and directorship. He is out.

Directors of the company, now worth about \$80 billion, cited a failure to be "consistently candid in his communications."

Further details of what finally led to the ouster of Altman were not immediately clear Friday.

The company reassured staff that it would be fine without him, but the Silicon Valley superstar, who once ran the best known startup incubator YCombinator, or YC, leaves the company with a big hole to fill in its fundraising efforts: maintaining the software costs some very real money. It



Sam Altman. – Reuters file photo

also takes talented engineers, who flocked to Altman.

Altman, 38, was plucky to the end of his run at OpenAI. He was seen mingling with attendees briefly at an AI conference in San Francisco on Wednesday, and the next day spoke on a panel with a top Meta executive at the ongoing APEC summit in San Francisco, while the board deliberated on his future.

In a post on AI-rival Elon Musk's X, he said Friday of OpenAI: "I loved working with such talented people. Will have more to say about what's next later." Altman is credited with almost singlehandedly convincing

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella to commit \$10 billion to the company and leading the company's tender offer transactions this year that fuelled a nearly three-fold valuation bump from \$29 billion to over \$80 billion. His aura also helped attract AI engineering talent in what may be the most competitive market seen in tech circles in years. He successfully recruited from Google, Microsoft and other established tech giants with surer pay packages, promising to let them in on the ground floor of a world-altering technology.

That tech has since fuelled concerns of doomsday scenarios where the software takes over the

world, steals intellectual property with impunity and makes secondary education a hotbed of cheating or simply unnecessary; but Altman at an event on Thursday said "heavy regulation" wasn't needed for some time.

"At some point when the model can do like the equivalent output of a whole company, and then a whole country and then the whole world," such rules would be helpful, he said.

Altman grew up in St. Louis, Missouri and attended Stanford for one year, marking a tradition of sorts among tech titans of dropping out before getting their degrees. In addition to his efforts with OpenAI he started a cryptocurrency firm this year that scans people's irises for verification. Altman's moonshot ethos likely played well among ambitious engineers tired of toiling away for blue chip tech firms.

"As long as you are right, being misunderstood by most people is a strength not a weakness," wrote Altman in a blog post three years ago. "You and a small group of rebels get the space to solve an important problem that might otherwise not get solved."

— Reuters

Oman-backed Utico to extract bromine from waste brine



Oman-backed Utico to extract bromine from waste brine

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 18

Utico, a GCC-based private power utility partly owned by Oman Investment Authority (through its subsidiary Majis Industrial Services), has announced a partnership with a Chinese company to develop a trailblazing joint venture circular economy project to extract industrial chemicals from brine, a first of its kind in the GCC in recycling waste seawater from desalination plants.

Utico says it is joining hands with Shandong Tianyi Chemical Corporation of China to build the zero-breakthrough project in Ras Al Khaimah in the UAE over an area of 20,000 square metres at an estimated investment of AED 160 million. The joint venture project will be developed adjacent to Utico premises.

"This is a pioneering project

in the region's renewable energy industry paving the way for innovation in converting brine waste from desalination plants. The project is of particular significance in the GCC, a region which is estimated to contribute a lion's share of the world's brine affecting the land and marine ecology adversely," said Hussain al Lawati, Group CEO, Utico.

The joint venture company will extract bromine and deeply processed hydrobromic acid from discarded concentrated seawater waste from Utico's desalination plants to produce final products of calcium bromide and sodium bromide, which is in high demand for industrial uses in both local and export markets.

The end products from the bromine extraction from brine is in demand for industries such as oil & gas, pharmaceuticals and are used in flame retardants, detergent, refrigeration, etc.

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OMAN DAILY
Observer

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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Saad bin Ahmed al-Hadi, Chairman of the Supreme Court, and Sheikh Khalifa bin Abdullah bin Isa al-Hadi, Chairman of the Administrative Judiciary Court, took the oath of office at the Al-Baraka Palace on Thursday.

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

SOME PEOPLE, NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING NORMS

MUSCAT: The frequent orders and frequent physical and mental strain, we should distance ourselves, and in some cases, it is necessary to police the behavior of other people as well, said bin al-Hadi, who stepped into a car to

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Omani Rial, the Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) will issue new banknotes for all other denominations during the last quarter of 2020.

UN HAILS OMAN'S SUPPORT FOR PEACE IN YEMEN

NEW YORK: Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has commended the role of the Sultanate in supporting international efforts to establish security and peace in Yemen.

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His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik
– may Allah protect him –
and the people of Oman on the 53rd
National Glorious Day

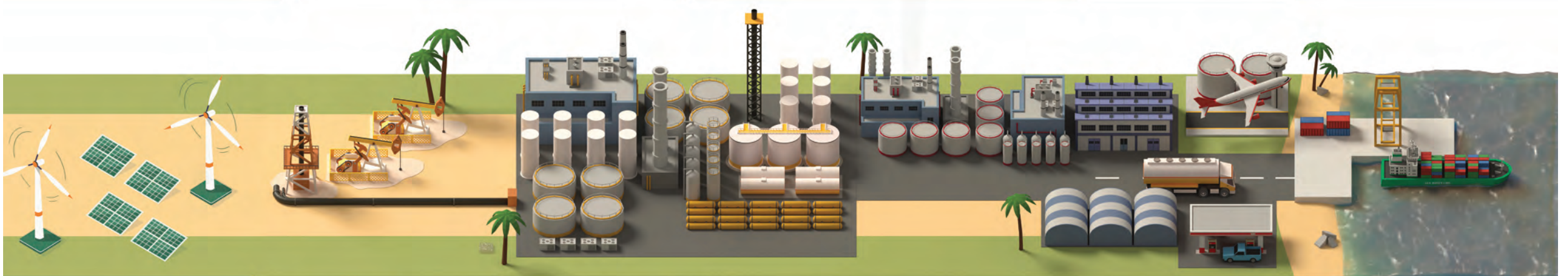
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OQ IN NUMBERS

Source: H1 2023 Performance Report

OQ is a global integrated energy company with origins in Oman, operating across 17 countries. OQ's operations span the entire value chain, from the exploration and production of oil and gas to refining, petrochemicals, and the marketing and distribution of end-user products, which reach a worldwide market in over 70 countries.

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Financial Performance

Net Profit
\$1.1 Billion

EBITDA
\$2.3 Billion

Total Assets
\$31.2 Billion

Growth Projects

OQ8

CAPACITY OF
230 kbd

OQ Ammonia

CAPACITY OF
365,00 MTPA

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POTENTIAL STORING CAPACITY
200 million barrels of oil

Operational Performance

Natural Gas



471 Mn
CUBIC FEET
Daily Production



18 Mn
CUBIC FEET
Operated Assets



454 Mn
CUBIC FEET
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Oil



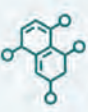
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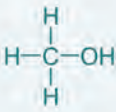
61,000 BARRELS/DAY
Block 60



302,000
BARRELS
Average Daily Production



497,000
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Methanol



595,000
METRIC TONNES
Polymer



1,016,000
METRIC TONNES
Aromatics



167,000
METRIC TONNES
LPG

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(Under Development)

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SalalaH2

Renewable Energy Capacity: 3.8 GW

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B60 Solar Project

Renewable Energy Capacity: 35 MW

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\$211.23 Million
Retained In-Country Value

\$653 Million
Total Expenditure on
Goods and Services

\$81.9 Million
Spent on Omani Products

\$123 Million
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The risks of AI hallucinations



STEFANO VIRGILLI
stefano@virgilli.com

The author is a member
of the International Press
Association

In a world increasingly reliant on artificial intelligence (AI), the phenomenon of AI hallucinations — where AI systems generate erroneous or nonsensical outputs — presents a growing concern. These glitches can have far-reaching consequences, from trivial inaccuracies to life-altering misjudgments. Highlighting real-world examples, this article underscores the need for vigilance and critical assessment in the age of AI.

AI hallucinations aren't just theoretical risks; they're current realities with tangible impacts. Consider the case of Humane's AI Pin, a product developed by Apple veterans with high expectations and (\$230 million) in investor funding over the last five years. Shortly after its launch, the AI Pin, intended as a smartphone replacement, was found giving wildly inaccurate information in its promotional video. For example, it incorrectly stated that the best place to view the next solar eclipse was Australia, not North America. It also wrongly asserted that a handful of almonds contains 15 grams of protein, a significant overestimation.

The Broader Implications:
These aren't isolated incidents. AI systems, from facial recognition technologies to medical diagnostic tools, have shown similar lapses. Facial recognition software has been known to misidentify individuals, leading to wrongful arrests. In healthcare, AI

has sometimes provided incorrect diagnoses, potentially putting lives at risk. These errors often stem from biases in training data, algorithmic limitations, or the AI's lack of contextual understanding. AI systems, despite their sophisticated algorithms, still struggle with complexities and nuances that humans navigate with ease.

Given these risks, it's imperative to approach AI outputs with a critical eye. Blind trust in AI can lead to significant repercussions, especially in critical areas like healthcare, law enforcement, and financial decision-making.

- 1. **Critical Evaluation**:
Don't take AI outputs at face value. Cross-checking with reliable sources and seeking expert opinions where necessary can prevent costly mistakes. But the counterintuitive risk here, is that with so much content generated by AI, sources are getting more inaccurate by the day.

- 2. **Awareness and Continuous Learning**:
Staying

informed about the capabilities and limitations of AI systems is crucial. Understanding their operational mechanics can help in identifying potential errors.

- 3. **Demand for Transparency**:
Advocating for transparent AI algorithms and decision-making processes can help in identifying and mitigating biases, leading to more accurate outputs. Some are envisioning a near future where publishers are requested to disclose if AI was used in generating their content.

- 4. **Regular Auditing**:
AI systems should be regularly audited and updated to ensure they remain accurate and free from biases that could lead to hallucinations.

- 5. **Human Oversight**:
Integrating human oversight in AI-assisted decisions is vital. Human judgment can often catch errors that AI might miss. This is the most paradoxical part of course. We use AI because we are afraid of human errors, but then we need humans to catch AI errors.

AI technologies continue to advance and permeate various sectors of society. Recognising and addressing the risk of AI hallucinations is essential. By maintaining a vigilant approach, demanding transparency, and advocating for ethical AI development, we can harness the benefits of AI while safeguarding against its potential pitfalls. This balanced approach is crucial for building a future where AI is a reliable and trusted tool in our decision-making arsenal.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this page are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the opinion of the Observer.

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– may Allah protect him – and the people of Oman wishing them
continued prosperity, unity and harmony. May this special day be a
time of pride and reflection on the remarkable achievements and
progress of Oman under the wise leadership of His Majesty!



53

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Nizwa triumph over Dhofar, Oman Club beat Salalah in OBL

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, NOV 18

The Oman Basketball League 2023-24 on Friday witnessed two exhilarating matches that showcased outstanding performances and strategic play. The games, held at Al Amal Club's Hall in the highlands of Ghala, featured Nizwa Club securing a resounding 77-44 victory over Dhofar Club. Simultaneously, Oman Club faced stiff competition from Salalah Club, ultimately emerging victorious by 66-54.

The first match unfolded as Nizwa Club showcased an impressive display of skill, securing a comprehensive win over Dhofar Club. Led by standout performances from American player Nefer McCord and Mohammed al Anquodi, Nizwa dominated all four quarters. The dynamic duo of Ahmed al Wahibi and Ahmed Abu Hamar, along with Mohammed al Muharrami, exhibited noteworthy efforts for Dhofar.

The match started quickly, with Nizwa Club taking a five-point lead, with Mosab al Riyami

contributing two points and a three-pointer from Mohammed al Anquodi.

Dhofar responded with two points from Mohammed al Muharrami. Nizwa Khamees al Mar next netted a three-pointer. The excitement continued with mutual attacks, during which Dhofar's Ahmed Abu Hamar scored a point from a mistake, and Nizwa's Nefer McCord scored four points after two successful shots from under the basket. Nizwa led 12-5.

Nizwa continued their offensive dominance, and Mohammed al Anquodi added five points, three of which came from a three-pointer. Dhofar's Mohammed al Muharrami responded with two points from a mistake, but Nizwa's Mohammed al Anquodi scored a three-pointer to make it 20-7. The excitement continued with more attacks, during which Nizwa added three points, while Dhofar added four points, ending the first quarter with Nizwa leading Dhofar 23-11.

In the second quarter, Nizwa continued dominance, with Basel al Sabahi and Nefer McCord



Dhofar player with the basket trying to passes Nizwa defebses

leading the charge. Nizwa added 20 points to their tally, while Dhofar struggled to match their intensity and added only 13 points, resulting in a half-time score of 43-24 in favour of Nizwa.

SUPERIORITY

In the third quarter, Nizwa maintained their superiority in both defence and offence. The team managed to add 18 points, while Dhofar could only score eight points. The third quarter ended with Nizwa leading Dhofar 61-32.

In the fourth quarter, Nizwa continued their scoring lead despite Dhofar's improvement in defence and offence. Nizwa's quick response kept the lead in

their favour, adding 16 points, while Dhofar added 12 points. The match ended with Nizwa winning with a score of 77-44.

OMAN CLUB PREVAIL

In the second match, Oman Club won a tough match against Salalah 66-54. The performance was uneven, with Oman Club excelling in the first, second and fourth quarters, while Salalah Club performed better in the third quarter. However, the point difference in the other quarters allowed Oman Club to secure the victory.

The match started with Oman Club, taking a three-point lead with two points from Haitham Bani Araba and one point from Hussein

al Kindi. Salalah narrowed the gap with a basket from Qaisar al Balushi. Oman Club extended their lead with two points from Hussein al Kindi. Salalah responded with two points from Mohammed al Hooti. The excitement continued with more attacks, with Oman Club adding 11 points and Salalah adding four points, ending the first quarter with Oman Club leading Salalah 16-8.

In the second quarter, both teams were active offensively, and the scoring rates increased. Oman Club initiated by scoring a three-pointer from Musab al Wahibi and his teammate Abdullah al Ghasani added two points. Salalah responded with two points from Qaisar al Balushi and

a three-pointer from Faisal Abdul Nabi. The excitement continued with more attacks, with Oman Club adding 20 points and Salalah adding 11 points. The first half ended with Oman Club leading Salalah 41-24.

In the third quarter, Salalah took control of the offensive and defensive aspects. They capitalised on most of the opportunities while Oman Club struggled to score, adding only five points. The third quarter ended with Oman Club still leading Salalah 46-41.

In the fourth quarter, Oman regained their advantage. Oman scored 20 points, while Salalah added 13 points. The match ended with Oman Club winning with a score of 66-54.

Oman set for Arab School Football Championship in Egypt

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, NOV 18

The Oman under-15 football team will face a challenge of battling with Morocco and Lebanon in Group B after the draw for Arab School Football Championship took place in Cairo on Saturday.

As many as 10 teams are taking part in the school football event and the teams are distributed into three groups.

Group A comprised the hosts Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait while Group C featured Algeria, Iraq, Palestine and Libya teams. The top two teams in each group will advance to the second round besides the two best-placed teams in the third place.

The Arab School Football Championship began in Cairo, Egypt on Saturday and will run until November 27. Besides football competitions, swimming is another sport competition which will take place during the same period.

Oman junior team will begin their campaign in the school event with a match against Morocco on Monday while they will conclude their group match on Thursday against Lebanon.

The Oman girls football

junior team is taking part in the tournament as well. As many as five teams are competing in the girls competition including hosts Egypt, Oman, Algeria, Morocco and Jordan. The playing format will be from one round. The Oman girls will meet Egypt in the opener on Monday.

The Oman boys completed their preparatory programme after a series of local gatherings. In October camp, the team played two friendly matches against Kuwait. The Oman junior team won both of them with a 3-0 score in the opening fixture and 2-0 in the second match. In the both encounters, the head coach Anwar al Habsi had taken the advantage of giving the opportunity for maximum players to play and to evaluate their final performance and readiness ahead of finalising the starting line-up.

Following this event, Oman team will take part in the Under-15 West Asian Football Championship which will be hosted in Salalah. The West Asian event is scheduled from December 1 to 10 under the umbrella of the West Asian Football Federation (WAFF) in coordination with the OFA.



The Oman national under-15 football team



The Oman under-15 football team during the training



Oman take part at tournament preparation meeting

PSG's Mbappe unfazed by transfer speculation



Didier Deschamps (L) speaks Jean Clair Todibo (C) next to Kylian Mbappe at training session at the Allianz Riviera Stadium. – AFP

PARIS: Paris St Germain forward Kylian Mbappe said he would not let speculation over his future at the Ligue 1 club pollute his performances on the pitch.

Earlier this year, Mbappe said he would not renew his contract at PSG, which expires at the end of the 2023-24 season when he could leave Paris for free. The

France captain has been linked with a move to Spanish giants Real Madrid.

“(Questions around my future are) not something that weighs on me. On the pitch, I don’t think about that. I just think about playing, being efficient, and winning titles,” Mbappe told reporters ahead of France’s UEFA

qualifier against Gibraltar.

“I’ve always done that. I’ve always had a lot to deal with off the pitch and that hasn’t stopped me from achieving what I have. When I’m out on the pitch, I don’t get caught up in the outside world.

“I’ve started this season with the desire to think only about

my football and not to think about outside things or bring in things from outside, to pollute my football, so the most important thing for me today is to play.”

Mbappe also dismissed any talk of a rift between him and PSG manager Luis Enrique.

The 24-year-old was singled out for criticism by the PSG boss

following a 3-0 win over Reims last week, despite scoring all three goals in the league match.

Asked about the criticism, Mbappe said: “I honestly don’t know. You’d have to ask (Luis Enrique) why this timing. But I took it very well and, as I said, he’s a great coach. I know he has a lot to offer me, a lot to teach me.

“I’m a player who’s very demanding with myself and if I can find that demand with my coach, I’m very happy, because I know it’s going to take me very high up.

“I don’t necessarily need the coach to say every day that I’m the best in the world for me to play well.” — Reuters

Wembanyama shines but Spurs slide to seventh straight NBA defeat

LOS ANGELES: Star rookie Victor Wembanyama put on a show, but his San Antonio Spurs slumped to a seventh straight defeat on Friday, with the Sacramento Kings knocking them out of the NBA’s new in-season tournament with a 129-120 triumph.

De’Aaron Fox matched his career high with 43 points, adding eight rebounds and seven assists for the Kings, who weathered a series of San Antonio scoring spurts to seal the win.

After scoring just eight points in a 36-point loss to Oklahoma City on Tuesday, Wembanyama scored 27 points and pulled down nine rebounds.

Wembanyama impressed with an array of shots that included an alley-oop dunk on which his head threatened to hit the backboard.

Zach Collins scored 28 for the Spurs, who roared to an 18-point lead in the first quarter but couldn’t keep pace in a fourth quarter that saw Fox deliver 14 points as Wembanyama was held to six.

A game of multiple momentum shifts saw the Spurs close within 112-111 midway through the fourth, but the Kings responded with a 7-0 scoring run and held on.

Now 3-9, the Spurs fell to 0-3 in group play in the league’s new Cup-style tournament — out of the



Domantas Sabonis (10) drives to the basket past San Antonio Spurs forward Victor Wembanyama (1) at Frost Bank Center. —USA TODAY Sports

running for a quarter-final berth.

In other tournament games on Friday — which also count in the regular-season standings — Zion Williamson scored 26 points and the New Orleans Pelicans withstood a Nikola Jokic triple-double in a 115-110 victory over the NBA champion Denver Nuggets.

Brandon Ingram added 21 points for New Orleans. He and Williamson each made a pair of buckets in an 8-0 scoring run that saw the Pelicans pull away after Denver closed within one point with 4:01 to play.

Jokic scored 26 points, pulled down 16 rebounds and matched his career high with 18 assists.

The Nuggets, still without injured Jamal Murray, never led. But they battled back from a 20-point third-quarter deficit to give themselves a chance in the final period.

Down by three with less than a minute remaining, the Nuggets came up empty on three straight three-point attempts on the same possession and the Pelicans escaped with the win.

In Toronto, Boston guard Derrick White drained a go-ahead three-pointer with 27.5 seconds left as the Celtics held off the hard-charging Raptors 108-105.

Jaylen Brown scored 23 points, Jayson Tatum added 17 and

Kristaps Porzingis chipped in 14 points and 12 rebounds for the Celtics, who are 2-0 in tournament play and improved to 10-2 in the regular season standings — still leading the Eastern Conference by one game from the Philadelphia 76ers, who beat the Atlanta Hawks 126-116.

Pascal Siakam and Dennis Schroder scored 23 points apiece for the Raptors. Scottie Barnes had a chance to tie it with 11.4 seconds left but couldn’t get his three-pointer to drop.

In Atlanta, 76ers star Joel Embiid —questionable to start because of a sore hip — scored 32 points and grabbed seven rebounds.

Tobias Harris added a season-high 29 points and 10 rebounds and Tyrese Maxey finished with 19 points for Philadelphia, who ended a two-game losing streak.

BRIDGES RETURNS

In Charlotte, Milwaukee’s Damian Lillard scored 27 points to lead seven Bucks players in double figures in a 130-99 victory over the Hornets. Malik Beasley added 20 points and Bucks star Giannis Antetokounmpo returned from a one-game injury absence to score 16 points with eight rebounds and nine assists in Milwaukee’s third-straight victory. — AFP



Shaikh Dr Adil bin Said al Shanfari, honorary the winner

Traditional Karate tourney concludes in Muscat

MUSCAT: The Karate and Kickbox Center in Azaiba held the fifth indoor tournament for traditional karate (kata) on Friday, with the participation of 60 competitors from the ages of 5 to 18 years, under the auspices of Shaikh Dr Adil bin Said al Shanfari, honorary president of the club among more than 120 attendances.

Shaandar Bukhari - Secretary-General World Karate Confederation Oman & Arab countries said, “This tournament was based on the traditional karate system and is being managed by the international coach and CEO of the club, Iqbal bin Yousef al Balushi (6th Dan Black Belt)”.

The competitors were divided into three groups, group One for Children between the ages of 5 to 8 years, group Two for junior belt holders and group Three for Senior belt holders.

The Karate and Kickbox Center is under the supervision of the Oman Karate Committee and in terms of the training and technical is follow-up the World Karate Confederation in Russia.

ALCARAZ DREAMING OF ATP FINALS TRIUMPH AS DJOKOVIC AWAITS IN SEMIS



Serbia's Novak Djokovic reacts after winning against Denmark's Holger Rune. — AFP

TURIN, ITALY: Carlos Alcaraz is dreaming of victory at the ATP Finals after setting up a semi-final showdown with Novak Djokovic with Friday's 6-4, 6-4 win over Daniil Medvedev.

Alcaraz came into his debut Finals appearance struggling with form and injury but has warmed up as the tournament has progressed and is now a serious threat in the semis, which features the world's four top-ranked players.

"Well, it's just two matches, but at the same time it's too far away. I have Novak in the semifinal. If I win that match, I have a really tough final," Alcaraz told reporters.

"I'm dreaming about winning this tournament. Why not? But I have to play my best first in the semi-final."

World number two Alcaraz needed to win to ensure a spot in the last four, and he did just that in impressive fashion, cruising to a victory against Medvedev who had looked hugely impressive in his previous two victories in Turin.

Winning in straight-sets ensured him first place in the Red Group ahead of Medvedev, regardless of the result of the late match which was won 6-4, 6-4 by Alexander Zverev against Andrey Rublev.

Alcaraz also gained a small measure of revenge for defeat in the US Open semi-finals against Medvedev, who finishes second in the group after having already qualified for the semis on Wednesday.

Alcaraz has a burgeoning rivalry with Djokovic as the Spaniard is already a two-time Grand Slam champion at the age of 20 and won an epic five-set Wimbledon final against the world number one.

His semi-final with Djokovic, who beat Alcaraz on his way to triumph at Roland Garros and in the final at Cincinnati, on Saturday promises to be a blockbuster.

"Novak is Novak, he is the best player in the world right now, he's just lost six matches this year so that means he is unbelievable. I'm going to bring my best tennis," said Alcaraz.

Djokovic has already secured the year-end top spot in the world rankings and is gunning for a record-breaking seventh Finals triumph after qualifying second in the Green Group.

Medvedev, the 2020 Finals champion, will now face home hope Jannik Sinner, who became the first Italian ever to reach the tournament's semis on Thursday.

"First of all, at this moment he's in top form... He can do everything," said Medvedev.

"Here he played unbelievable, but he still lost two sets. That's what I'm going to try to aim for: try to play like guys who won the set from him.

"I need to definitely be at my absolute best and better than today, tomorrow."

The Russian has faced Sinner in four finals this season, sharing them with two wins each but prevailing in the most important, at the Miami Masters back in April. — AFP



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz reacts during the ATP Finals. — AFP



India's Virat Kohli celebrates after reaching his 50th century, breaking Sachin Tendulkar's record of most number of ODI centuries. – REUTERS



Adam Zampa takes the catch to dismiss England's David Willey, off the bowling of Josh Hazlewood. – Reuters



Australia's Glenn Maxwell in action. – REUTERS

India eyes fairytale finish in World Cup final against Australia

ROHIT Sharma's undefeated India will look to end a 10-year global title drought in front of 130,000 fans in the World Cup final against five-time champions Australia on Sunday.

India have racked up 10 straight wins at the tournament as they seek a third World Cup triumph to add to their 1983 and 2011 victories, the last of which came on home soil.

Despite the country's cricket riches, India are without a major international title since the 2013 Champions Trophy and expectations in the cricket-crazy nation of 1.4 billion people have reached fever pitch.

However, the hosts are up against an Australian side who have won eight matches in a row and will be playing in their eighth World Cup final.

"We've won before," Australia captain Pat Cummins said on Saturday.

"I think one of the pleasing things is I still don't feel like we've played the complete game."

REAL CHALLENGE

Former India captain Sunil Gavaskar, a member of the 1983 World Cup-winning team, told TV channel India Today, "This is going to be an unbelievable game".

"You are playing against the five-time champions, a team that knows how to come back from almost impossible situations, who know how to play finals, how to win finals."

"So I believe it will be a real, real challenge for the Indian team but I do believe that Rohit Sharma's men are up for it."

Apart from their five World Cup titles, Australia clinched their maiden T20 crown in 2021 and also beat India convincingly in the World Test Championship final earlier this year.

India handed Australia a six-wicket mauling in the group stage in Chennai four weeks ago where Cummins' side were bowled out for 199.

Australia also slumped to a 134-run defeat by South Africa in pool play but avenged that loss with a tense three-wicket semifinal win over the Proteas in Kolkata on Thursday.

RED-HOT KOHLI

India made the final by hammering New Zealand by 70 runs in Mumbai with a red-hot Virat Kohli hitting a record 50th ODI century.

Kohli, who surpassed compatriot Sachin Tendulkar's record of 49 tons, leads the tournament batting with 711 runs including three hundreds.

Rohit is the next best Indian batsman with 550 runs and his leadership has been widely praised -- former England captain Nasser Hussain called him a "real hero".

India also boast the tournament's leading bowler with Mohammed Shami taking 23 wickets in six matches, including 7-57 against the Kiwis on Wednesday.

Despite losing to India and South Africa in their first two matches of the tournament, Australia have bounced back.

They won seven league games on the trot with a hobbling Glenn Maxwell authoring a performance for the ages with his undefeated 201 not out against Afghanistan, rescuing his team from 91-7 and carrying them to their victory target of 292. Leg-spinner Adam Zampa is their top bowler with 22 wickets with pacemen Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood, who both played in the 2015 World Cup winning side, peaking at the right time.

The new-ball duo reduced South Africa to 24-4 in Kolkata, with their performances key to setting up a repeat of the 2003 World Cup final — where Australia thrashed India by 125 runs in Johannesburg.

Sunday's meeting will be the eighth between the two teams in ODIs in 2023.

"We have played them a lot of times so we know them inside-out," Hazlewood told reporters.

"Same for them, with us. They have been a quality team, they have been on the march the whole tournament. No real weaknesses in their team, so looking forward to Sunday."

India rode on the back of an explosive start from opener Rohit (47) and Shubman Gill (80 not out after retiring hurt) as they racked up 397-4 against New Zealand in the first semifinal.

But Hazlewood preferred to focus on the early stages of India's pool chase against Australia, when the hosts were three down for two runs in pursuit of a modest 200 to win.

"Hopefully similar to last time we played them," Hazlewood said on tackling the Indian top-order.

"We got them out cheaply. I think we made them 3-3 maybe so that would be ideal."



TRAVEL TALES

An aircraft passes in front of the moon as it makes its landing approach to Heathrow Airport in London, Britain. — Reuters



CHANGING WORLD

Newly arrived Rohingya refugees are stranded on a boat after the nearby community decided not to allow them to land after giving them water and food in Pineung, Aceh province. — AFP



ART

Indigenous leader, environmentalist and writer Ailton Krenak, visits the photographic exhibition "Hiromi Nagakura to Amazonia with Ailton Krenak," on display at the Tomie Ohtake Institute in Sao Paulo, Brazil. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Vietnamese born swiss singer-songwriter Theo Marclay aka Nuit Incolore poses during a photo session in Paris. — AFP



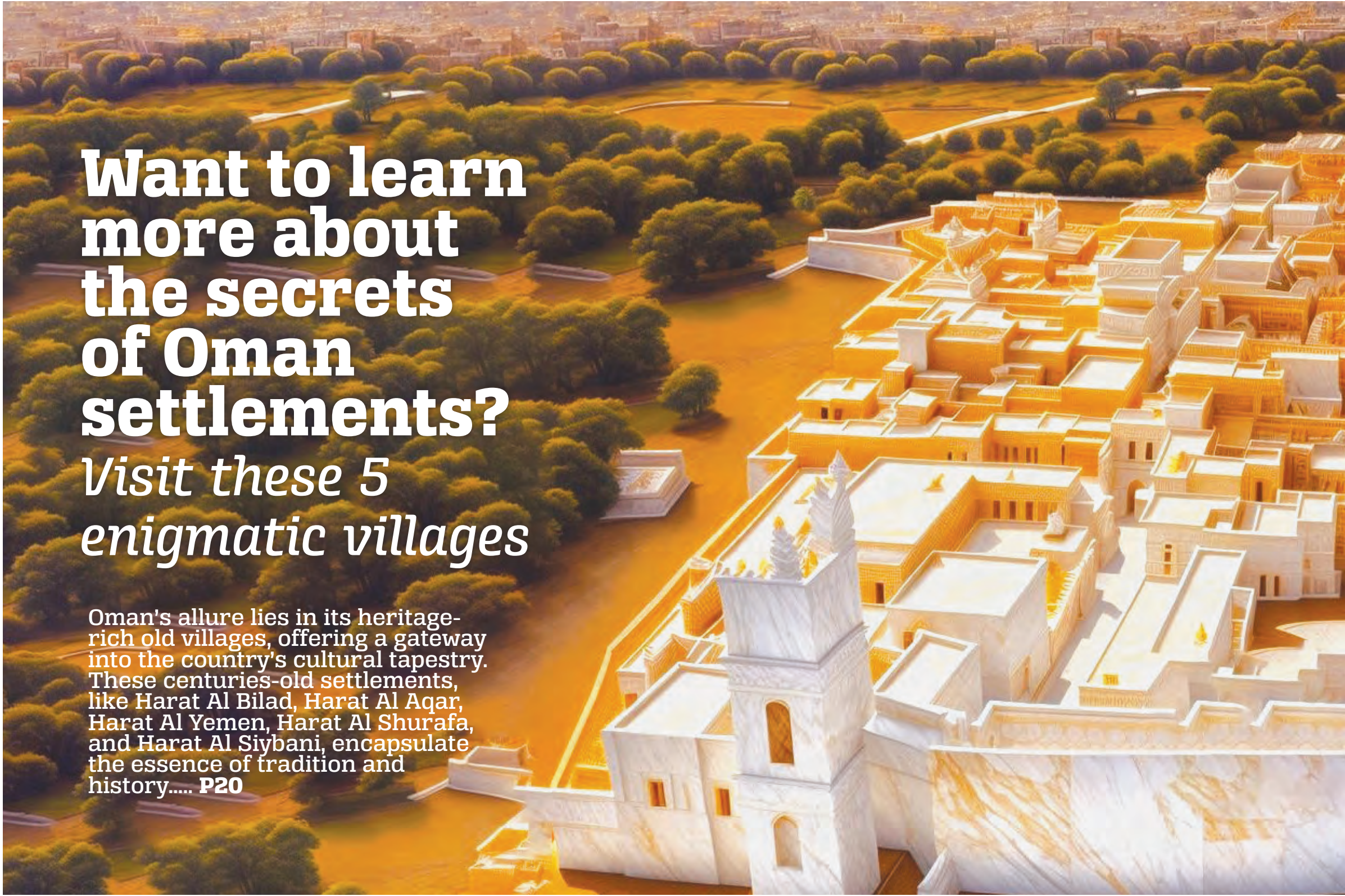
LIFESTYLE

An oyster farmer brings back damaged oysters bag on the beach after Storm Ciaran hit an oyster farm, in the English Channel, off Glatigny, northwestern France. — AFP

art & life

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Want to learn more about the secrets of Oman settlements? Visit these 5 enigmatic villages

Oman's allure lies in its heritage-rich old villages, offering a gateway into the country's cultural tapestry. These centuries-old settlements, like Harat Al Bilad, Harat Al Aqar, Harat Al Yemen, Harat Al Shurafa, and Harat Al Siybani, encapsulate the essence of tradition and history..... P20

ENTERTAINMENT

Super-fan Giorgia Meloni opens Rome Tolkien exhibition

IN HER YOUTH SHE dressed up as a Hobbit. As Italian prime minister, Giorgia Meloni formally opened a Rome exhibition on Wednesday about "Lord of the Rings" author J.R.R. Tolkien. Marking 50 years since the British academic died and since the publication of first Italian edition of "The

Hobbit", the exhibition was conceived and promoted by Italy's culture ministry — with the enthusiastic support of the prime minister. Meloni, 46, often talks about how she has loved since her childhood Tolkien's magical tales about good battling evil — a feeling shared by many on the far-right. In her 2021 autobiography, Meloni recalled how she and fellow members of the youth wing of the post-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI) used to dress up as "Lord of the Rings" characters, called together by the horn of the warrior Boromir. Long before the story was turned into blockbuster movies, she chose to dress up as Samwise Gamgee, the best friend and trusty side-kick of Frodo Baggins, whose quest to destroy the ring and its evil powers are at the centre of the books. Sam is not a king, or a magician, or warrior elf, "he is just a hobbit, he works as a gardener. Yet without him



Frodo would never have accomplished the mission," Meloni wrote. "He knows that it will not be his deeds that will be sung about in the future, but it is not for glory that he risks everything," she added. Many academics have written about the fascination of the far-right with Tolkien. The world of Middle Earth is a pre-

industrial, feudal world, where the values of fraternity, chivalry, tradition and national identity hold sway over faceless industrialisation. "He was a convinced Catholic who glorified the value of tradition, of the community and of the history to which he belongs — a true conservative, one might say," Culture Minister Gennaro Sangiuliano said in September. His department has sponsored the exhibition at a cost of 250,000 euros, according to La Repubblica newspaper. But many note that he was also popular with the hippies in America in the 1960s, perhaps by offering a vision of a purer world. The Rome exhibition promises to tell "the human journey, the academic work, the narrative power, the poetic strength" of the writer. "Tolkien: Man, Professor, Author", runs from November 16 to February 11 at the National Gallery for Modern and Contemporary Art. — AFP

Move Over, Machu Picchu: There's More to See in Peru

ELVIS LEXIN LA TORRE Uñaccori knows quite well that a wonder of the world often creates a less-wondrous world of waste — he is the mayor of Machu Picchu Pueblo, the gateway village to the bucket-list destination in Peru that draws millions of visitors (and their trash) each year.

He shared this expertise in waste and waste management in February, at a two-day summit he organised about environmental and infrastructural advances at the Inca citadel. To 99 mayors and other municipal leaders from across Peru, La Torre spoke about a plastic bottle compactor, a glass bottle pulveriser and a processor his village developed for hotel and restaurant food scraps.

But the main goal of the summit was larger than recycling and food waste initiatives; it was about disseminating effective practices for sustainable tourism across Peru, part of a national desire to fast-track tourism development of lesser-known archaeological sites and their local villages. In recent years, the country has engaged in a grassroots effort to elevate its vast trove of archaeological sites that are often just as well preserved or culturally significant as Machu Picchu. "Machu Picchu is a wonder seen by the world. We are fortunate. But there are many wonders in Peru waiting to be seen," La Torre said.

Local leadership like that of La Torre has filled a power vacuum in Peru, which has had seven presidents since 2016 — all from different political parties. Violent protests after its last transfer of power, in December 2022, prompted a mass evacuation of tourists from Machu Picchu and a complete shutdown of the site for 21 days.

The importance of Machu Picchu and tourism overall to Peru's economy is unquestionable. Madeleine Burns Vidaurrezaga, Peru's vice minister of tourism, said the industry in 2019 accounted for \$8.9 billion, or 3.9% of the country's gross domestic product, and 1.5 million jobs.

Burns said the Peruvian government in 2023 raised its annual tourism budget to \$100 million, about a 15% increase from \$87 million last year, then dedicated an additional \$144 million for tourism infrastructure, marketing, and support for artisans and businesses with fewer than 50 employees. In December, Burns plans to unveil a national campaign called "Peru al Natural" that will highlight

Huascarán National Park and other "nature and adventure hot spots" and complement better-known sites like the Nazca Lines, the ancient geoglyphs etched into the coastal desert in Southern Peru.

"We have jewels but don't know how to use them, how to discuss them, how to share them," Burns said, adding that her tourism models are Egypt and India, both of which have expanded their tourism offerings and infrastructures beyond the Great Pyramids and the Taj Mahal.

"We have a living culture and a living history," said Jose Koechlin, chair of Canatur, Peru's national tourism agency. "We're one of the cradles of civilisation

"Peru is not only Machu Picchu. It is the home of a vast empire," said Roger Gabriel Caviedes, a tour guide across the Cuzco region who is mestizo of Andean descent and who grew up speaking Quechua

on the level of Egypt or Mesopotamia. But it needs un codazo suave." A gentle nudge.

'CHALLENGING, BUT IT'S EXCITING'

In 1975, Koechlin founded Inkaterra, an ecotourism company based in Peru that now employs 600 workers across several properties.

"We can make things happen on our own terms. It's challenging, but it's exciting," Koechlin said.

One of Koechlin's employees, Joaquín Escudero, transferred from Inkaterra's Machu Picchu hotel, where he worked as its general manager, to become general manager at Hacienda Urubamba, its property in the Sacred Valley near Cuzco, in 2014. In 2017, he founded a tourism alliance in the region that now includes 14 local restaurants, hotels, travel agencies and a clinic. The alliance recently

met with local police chiefs to strategise on safety, including the creation of special patrols and the installation of security cameras for tourists and locals alike.

Escudero has lobbied the local government for better roads and sewage treatment for the whole community. "We are not living on another planet," he said of the travel industry in Peru. "We are in the same towns. We are neighbours. I want to feel proud of my neighbourhood. Pride is the magic that changes stones into world wonders."

For some of Peru's Indigenous Quechua people, the movement to expand tourism is also a chance for increased visibility for their ancestors and culture.

"Peru is not only Machu Picchu. It is the home of a vast empire," said Roger Gabriel Caviedes, a tour guide across the Cuzco region who is mestizo of Andean descent and who grew up speaking Quechua. "If tourists can see all of our story, we have an opportunity to exist in their hearts, not only their Instagrams."

A visit to Machu Picchu has become a highly choreographed experience with specific arrival times, time-limited visits, roped-off areas and caps on daily visitors (now set at 4,044).

"It was almost like the Disneyfication of the Incas," said Rachel Rucker-Schmidt, 48, a tourist from Dallas, of her Machu Picchu visit last summer. "It was like being back in Texas. Everyone was American, just a little less special. It was neat to see but had a different vibe. We had resigned ourselves to checking it off the list."

Then her family went to Moray, a terraced farm site built by the Incas, where they encountered fewer than a dozen other tourists. "It was very intimate," Rucker-Schmidt said. "We were often the only people there with locals."

Her husband, Jason, 48, agreed. "I found it much more charming," he said of Moray. "It wasn't being presented to you in a perfect state. It's maintained, but not to the same level as Machu Picchu. Everyone has the same photo from Machu Picchu."

Moray and the eight-hour hikes the family completed through the Andean wilderness also resonated with their daughter, Trilby, 15. "It was more of a local point of view," she said. "We were basically in Peru's backyard." — **NYT**

RECIPE

This Simple Hack Yields the Best Mashed Potatoes



MASHED POTATOES, while buttery and delicious, can also be a little uninspired. To me, they've always felt like filler on my Thanksgiving plate — an afterthought, more vehicle for gravy than anything else.

I wondered: How could I turn a "just fine" side dish into something more exciting?

The answer may be brown butter. In the hopes of discovering my platonic ideal, I started testing reader suggestions accompanying a blueprint recipe from Julia Moskin (at [nytcooking.com](#)), playing with potato variety, cooking and mashing methods, and flavours.

I had a few essential findings: All cooks think their version is supreme (all were delicious!). How you mash is up to you (one reader suggests finding a teenager "with a strong arm and a good heart who loves hanging out in the kitchen"). And, at the end of the day, you can make just about anything taste good with enough butter and salt.

In the end, my favourite version emerged from a 2-year-old Thanksgiving memory. Stuck in a mid-pandemic slump and antsy to revive my culinary curiosities, I decided to bolster the potatoes with a little brown butter. I haven't looked back since.

This dish infuses earthy russet potatoes with the toasty, nutty notes of brown butter and the aromas of garlic, rosemary and thyme, imparting a distinct flavour that makes them taste luxurious without much extra work or ingredients.

Browning butter may seem intimidating, but doing so is really quite simple. Its transformation is at once incremental and instantaneous. You may not think you're browning it right, and then, all of a sudden, it happens.

As butter heats in a saucepan, the water content begins to evaporate, resulting in a vigorous boil. After about 5 or so minutes of bubbling, a hush falls. The liquid becomes more viscous, and the bubbles turn to foam. The milk solids underneath start to caramelise and turn chestnut brown. Be mindful, for butter can go from brown to burned very quickly. As soon as brown flecks rise to the surface, remove it from the heat and stir well, taking care to scrape the "fond" — the bits stuck on the bottom of the pan.

The result is a brilliant amber, a combination of toasted milk solids and clarified butter, with a nutty aroma reminiscent of a bakery in France. I tend to make a big batch of brown butter the day before Thanksgiving so that I can sneak it into desserts, the gravy and, of course, the mashed potatoes.

RECIPE: BROWN-BUTTER MASHED POTATOES

By Vaughn Vreeland

The simple act of browning butter takes this holiday mainstay from simple to superb in a matter of minutes. Russet potatoes are the perfect blank canvas for the toasty, nutty notes of the brown butter, which is lifted to a starring role as it permeates the potatoes and pools on top. Mashed potato purists may say that using a ricer or food mill is the only way to achieve a creamy texture, but a hand mixer or potato masher works just as well, as long as you don't overmix and your potatoes stay hot. Make sure to create divots for the pools of brown butter that sit atop the dish, which make each spoonful feel extra luxe.

Yield: 8 to 10 servings
Total time: 1 hour
Ingredients:
1 cup/2 sticks unsalted butter
2 cups whole milk
1 head of garlic, halved
4 thyme sprigs or 3 rosemary sprigs
Kosher salt and black pepper
4 pounds russet potatoes (about 8 medium potatoes)

Preparation:
1. In a medium saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat. Once it begins to bubble vigorously, cook for another 6 to 8 minutes, swirling occasionally, until the bubbles subside and turn into foam, and toasty brown flecks begin to float on the surface. Take off the heat and scrape the bottom of the pan. Pour the browned butter into a heatproof measuring cup and set aside to cool slightly. (Don't clean the saucepan.)
2. Add the milk to the saucepan and heat over low. Give the brown butter a stir, then add all but a scant 1/4 cup into the milk. Add the garlic and herbs and steep over low for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally.
3. Meanwhile, bring a large pot of generously salted water to a boil over high heat. Peel and quarter the potatoes (see Tip for make-ahead instructions). Boil the potatoes for 15 to 20 minutes, until a fork goes through them without resistance. Drain the potatoes and return them to the dry pot. Put over low heat and shake the potatoes to dry them out.
4. Strain the warm milk mixture over the potatoes (or just pluck out and discard the garlic and herbs) and mash with a potato masher or a hand mixer on low speed until your desired consistency is reached. Taste and season with salt and pepper. (If making ahead, turn off the heat and cover with a lid to keep warm for up to 30 minutes.)
5. Transfer to a large serving bowl. Make a few divots on the surface with the back of a spoon and pour the reserved brown butter on top.

Tips:
You can peel and cut the potatoes up to 4 hours ahead; keep them in a bowl of cool water to keep them from discolouring. — **NYT**



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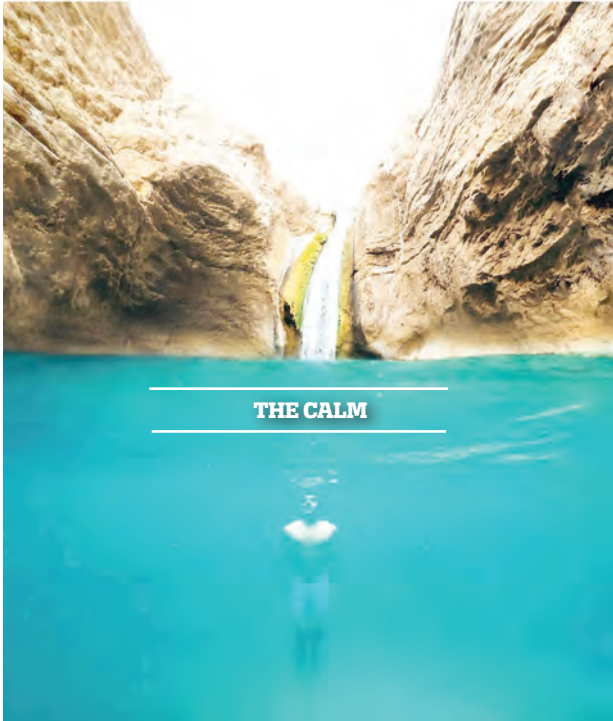


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A Michelangelo mystery inside a secret room

THE NARROW, ARCHED ROOM below the Medici Chapels Museum in Florence has some suspiciously virtuosic doodles on the walls.

"The hand is very fast, showing great confidence, it makes you think," Francesca De Luca, the museum's director, said as she con-

tourists. He and his colleagues discovered a trapdoor hidden beneath a wardrobe off to the side of the New Sacristy, where the tombs Michelangelo created for members of the powerful Medici family line the walls. The door revealed stone steps that led to a room filled with

hideout. But many scholars believe the sketches show his hand. The general public, except for a brief period in the 1990s, has been kept in the dark, out of fear that the narrow room at the bottom of a flight of steep stairs posed a safety risk for visitors, and that museum-goers would pose a threat to the drawings.

So for decades only accredited scholars, the occasional journalist and big cheeses got to see inside. King Charles III got a peek in 2018. Leonardo Di Caprio was smuggled inside. "We were very good because no one spotted him," said Paola D'Agostino, the director of the Bargello Museums, to which the Medici Chapels belong.

In September,

specific person whose ID will be checked to prevent tour operators from gobbling them up, will cost 32 euros (about \$34), and include access to the Medici tombs. Depending on how things go, the museum could increase visitor numbers next year.

D'Agostino noted that the drawings, despite their age and years covered up, were "in remarkably good state." She added that advancements in technology over the last half century have led to "a certain stage in which I think most scholars

is the sketch of the legs. Other scholars have suggested that Michelangelo could have drawn sketches of a falling man that resemble the central figure of his "The Fall of Phaeton." Some even think a flexed and disembodied arm on the wall evokes his David statue.

What is certain, D'Agostino said, is that "nothing of this kind exists in the world of 16th century drawings."

"The moment you enter that room you simply are speechless," she added. Then, as your eyes adjust to the dim light, "you start seeing all the different drawings and all the different layers."

On a recent morning, a careful descent down the stairs led to a direct confrontation with the draw-



templated a muscular nude by the entrance. She pointed out the legs in another sketch and their resemblance to the powerful gambs of a Michelangelo sculpture on a tomb upstairs.

"These have never been seen by the public," she said.

Until now. Next month, the museum's so-called stanza segreta, or secret room, where Michelangelo possibly hid and drew on the walls nearly 500 years ago, will open to the public.

The sketches were discovered in 1975 by Paolo Dal Poggetto, then the director of the Medici Chapels, who was hoping to create a new exit for

coal.

In 1527, Florentines, including Michelangelo, supported a Republic and the overthrow of the Medici. But the Medici's stormed back in 1530. Michelangelo went into hiding and slipped off the grid for a few months. Dal Poggetto had a hunch about the newly discovered room. He had the plaster walls removed, revealing charcoal and chalk drawings unseen for centuries. He believed he had found Michelangelo's hiding place and de facto atelier.

Others doubt that Michelangelo, already in his 50s and an acclaimed artist with powerful patrons, would have spent time in such a dingy

after years of planning slowed down by the pandemic, D'Agostino inaugurated a new grand exit, which she said opened the door for the secret room to open. The museum installed LED lights in elegant low rails that were safer for the drawings and also acted as a de facto barrier to keep visitors from getting too close.

To protect the drawings, D'Agostino said, visits will be kept to groups of four and limited to 15 minutes, with 45 minute lights-out periods in between to protect the drawings. Tickets, each connected to a

agree that certainly there is the hand of Michelangelo in some of these drawings."

While herself not a Michelangelo scholar, she said she was convinced that at least two of the quick and confident sketches belonged to the master, who left Florence after working in the chapel, never to return.

One is an imposing nude near the entrance, which has the sketch of a face in profile and looking forward. Experts say it evokes Michelangelo's "Resurrection of Christ." The other



ings, and their apparent mastery. Each minute examining the walls yields new discoveries — a muscular torso sketched from half circles, sloping lines and s-shapes. Shading transforms into sinew, a horse's head looks down from the ceiling.

At one point, De Luca swung open a wooden shutter to show that the room is actually above ground. Light from the Florence morning streamed in, illuminating the nook and the sketch of a face bearing a Michelangelo-like beard.

"Someone said that could be a self-portrait," she said. "Maybe that's a little much." — NYT

POETRY



Oman Is Blessed Indeed

By Bahulayan Madhu Govind
Lecturer, UTAS Ibri

Omniscient God Almighty in His infinite wisdom
Modelled the entire cosmos with absolute precision.
Astral world and galaxies, planets and their satellites,
Nebulae where stars die, where new stars are born!

In a blessed cosy space in all this star-spangled glory
Stands our blue planet earth, guarded by the moon.

Brightened and enlivened by the sun it circumnavigates,
Laid to order with its oceans five and continents seven,
Embellished with hills, mountains, valleys, wadis, plains.
Such is the terrain our land Oman is favorably blessed with.
Symbolic of prayerful peace, prosperity and all providence-
Enshrined amongst the sea, the gulf and the empty quarter;
Distinct with the northern tropic passing through its crown!

Inspired are we, stepping into another year of blessed rebirth!
Never in these years has God permitted a doubt, a turning back.
Dreams realized, visions coming true, clear new plans in place.
Ever and ever, dear God bless this land and its friendly people!
Enchanting landscape, eloquent culture, enlightened leadership-
Dawn, day, dusk and starry night be blessed- today and forever!

CONSERVATION

NASA's Lucy Mission Set Its Sights on One Asteroid. It Found Two.

LAST WEEK, NASA'S Lucy spacecraft zoomed by its first asteroid target — and scientists on the mission were shocked to discover that the rock, named Dinkinesh, was actually two rocks. The binary consists of a primary asteroid and a smaller "moon" orbiting around it, as seen in images taken by Lucy.

"We knew this was going to be the smallest main belt asteroid ever seen up close," Keith Noll, an astronomer and Lucy project scientist at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, said in a news release. "The fact that it is two makes it even more exciting."



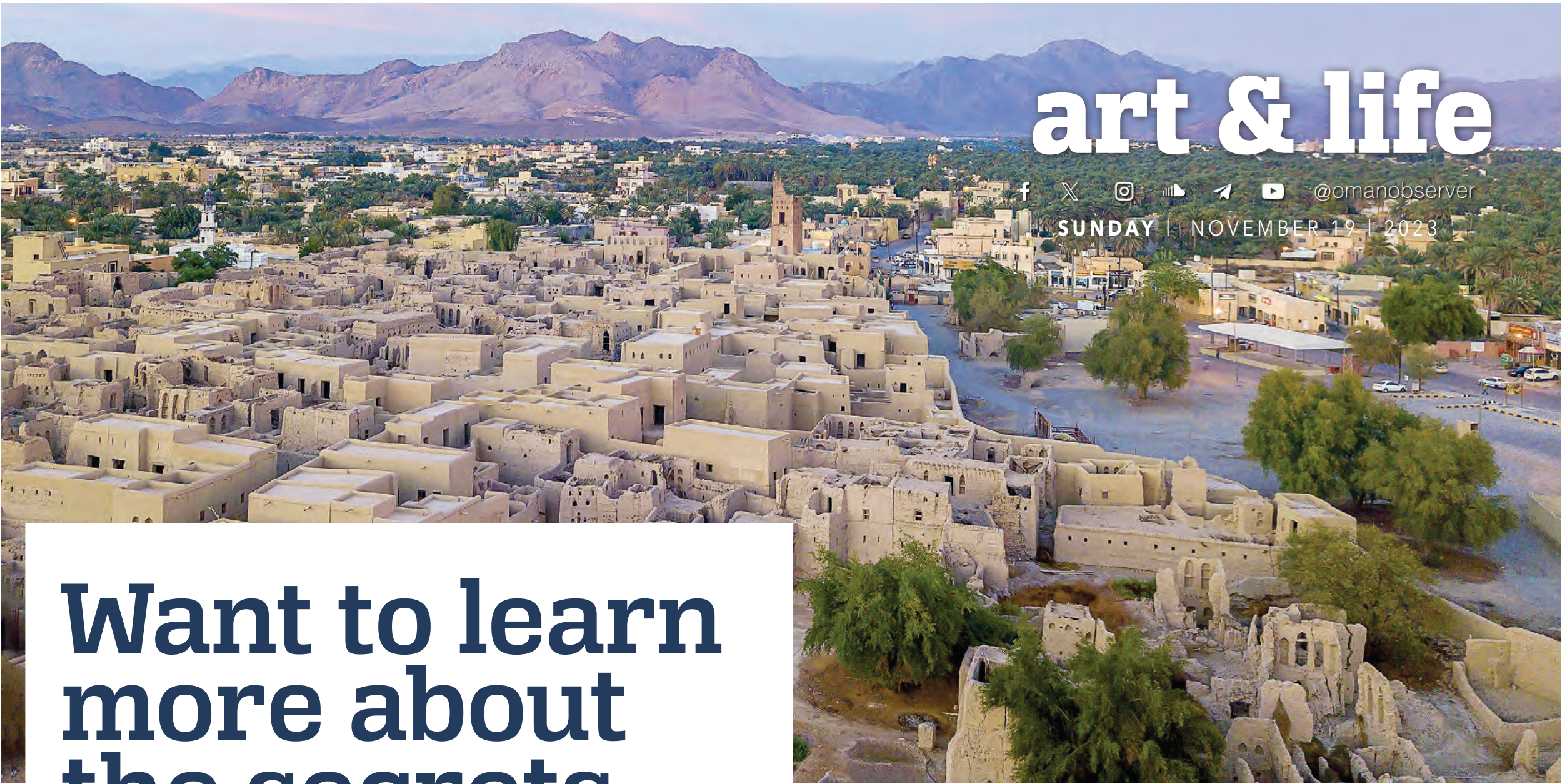
Lucy's flyby was a pit stop for more ambitious targets: two groups of asteroids called the Trojan swarms. The Trojans, leftover chunks from the outer planets' formation, are locked in orbits of the sun along the same path as Jupiter. Lucy will visit nine more space rocks through 2033, part of NASA's effort to

glean knowledge about our celestial neighbor-hood.

Lucy's encounter with Dinkinesh was serendipitous. When the mission launched in 2021, the previously unnamed asteroid was not part of Lucy's space tour. But the mission team found that by adjusting Lucy's course in May, the spacecraft could pass within 264 miles of the space rock, which was given the Amharic name for the Lucy skeleton, Dinkinesh.

While Lucy sped past Dinkinesh, it captured images of the asteroid's surface and measured the rock's composition and structure. Lucy's antenna pivoted back to the waiting team on Earth. Preliminary studies of the images of the binary asteroid pair indicate the bigger rock is a half-mile wide, while its satellite is 0.15 miles wide.

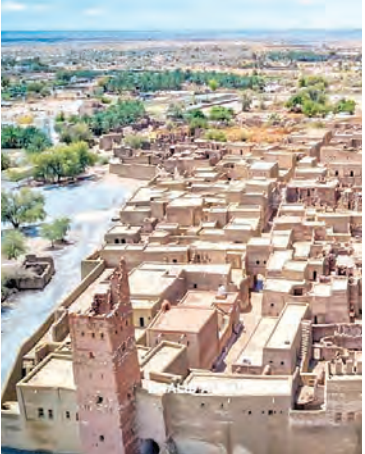
— KATRINA MILLER / NYT



Want to learn more about the secrets of Oman settlements? Visit these 5 enigmatic villages

By Yeru Ebuen

Oman is a country of heritage renowned for its fascinating old villages that offer a glimpse into the country's rich cultural practices and traditional way of life. Each village narrates a unique story—some restored to former glory, others standing as evocative ruins. The villages boast ancient mosques, forts, and scholarly associations, preserving Oman's architectural and intellectual heritage. Despite varied states of preservation, all offer an immersive experience of Omani hospitality and warmth, creating an unforgettable journey for travellers seeking a glimpse into the country's vibrant past. If you're travelling to Oman for a holiday and would like to learn more about how the ancient people of Oman lived, here are five villages you have to check out to give you an amazing insight into tradition and culture.



HARAT AL BILAD

Harat Al Bilad, situated in the Wilayat of Manah, stands as a vast ancient archaeological site boasting 376 houses and approximately 250 wells dating back nine centuries. Founded by Shaikh Nejad bin Ibrahim in 470 Hijri, it was a centre for scholarly pursuits, housing the Al Yamania Quarter and serving as a hub for intellectual activities. The neighbourhood, known by various names like "Manah Fortress" and "Fortress of bin Nejad," witnessed an active scientific movement, with books and Fiqh encyclopedias being transcribed there. Surrounded by a defensive wall, the area had several gates, including the Morning Gate near the wilayat's market. Four ancient mosques—Al Ali, Al Ain, Al Shara, and Al Rahba—stand along its central lane, with their Mihrabs dating back to the 9th and 10th centuries. To preserve this cultural treasure, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism initiated a restoration project in 2008, completed by 2016. Efforts continue to open these sites for economic use, managed by private companies and SMEs, while adhering to environmental and social norms.

HARAT AL AQAR

The Wilayat of Bahla in Oman, renowned for its historical and tour-

ist sites, boasts the captivating Al Aqar Neighbourhood—a jewel showcasing traditional Omani architecture called "Al Harat." Situated within the Bahla Oasis, a Unesco World Heritage Site since 1987, Al Aqar is ensconced by Bahla's defensive wall and linked to urban centres, yet retains its distinct identity. Researcher Zakaria al Humaimi unveiled Al Aqar's ancient past, revealing pre-Islamic remnants dating back nearly 3000 BC, including 177 mud brick structures, some incorporating modern materials while preserving original designs. Positioned near the Bahla Mosque and Bahla Historic Castle, the neighbourhood enjoys protection and panoramic views from an elevated hill. Al Aqar was more than a residential hub; it housed scholarly manuscripts and welcomed intellectuals like Shaikh Al Faqih Omar bin Said al Bahlawi Abu Haf, who curated the renowned Al Maad Library. Recognising its cultural and architectural significance, a study by the University of Nottingham Trent and Oman's Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in 2012 emphasised its importance as a World Heritage site, assessing conservation strategies and documenting its uniqueness amidst Bahla Oasis's tourism appeal. Al Aqar Neighbourhood embodies more than historic edifices—it symbolizes resilience, preserving Omani architectural heritage while inviting the world to glimpse its storied past within the embrace of Bahla's timeless allure.

HARAT AL YEMEN

The ancient district of Harat Al Yemen within Izki stands as a testament to bygone eras, an enclave of abandoned buildings retaining the essence of a forgotten time. Unlike its restored counterpart, Harat Al Bilad in Manah, Harat Al Yemen captivates visitors with its raw, unadorned charm. Adjacent to the dilapidated Izki



Castle, a casualty of the Jabal Akhdar War's devastation in 1959, Harat Al Yemen's strategic position near Wadi Halfain's bend hints at its primordial role as the settlement's genesis. Its proximity to freshwater suggests its pivotal significance in Izki's initial expansion, neighbouring the still-inhabited older section, Harat Al Nizar, denoted by signposts off the highway. Traversing this historic district demands vigilance due to scattered debris and crumbling structures, which pose potential hazards, especially if the roofs are unstable. Visitors, especially those accompanied by children, must exercise extreme caution. Amidst the weathered structures lies a treasure trove of history, preserving the authenticity of an era untouched by modern construction techniques.

HARAT AL SHURAF

In Al Buraimi Governorate, the revival of Harat Al Shurafa restored this ancient settlement to its former glory, and is now a great place that showcases heritage and helps promote tourism. Supervisor Talib bin Ahmed al Jabri emphasised its connection to the Falaj Al Sarrani project, envisioning Buraimi as a standout tourist destination.

The neighbourhood offers a historic journey with ancient structures showcasing unique architecture, utilising stones from nearby mountains for its timeless ceilings. Homes in Harat al Shurafa symbolise communal unity with interconnected designs and restored traditional mud entrances. Surrounded by lush orchards, these sites hold potential as popular tourist spots. Beyond its buildings, the Al Shurafa mosque, overseen by Suleiman bin Ali al Azzani, stands as a historical communal centre, featuring dual Mihrabs for varying weather conditions. These restoration initiatives



reflect Oman's commitment to preserving its cultural legacy. Throughout the sultanate of Oman, similar projects have successfully revitalised old neighbourhoods, blending the past seamlessly with the present to create vibrant and historically rich tourist accommodations, bridging heritage and modernity.

HARAT AL SIYBANI

Upon passing through a grand arch door, visitors are greeted by a signboard narrating the rich history of Harat Al Siybani in Birkat al Mouz. This historical settlement, reconstructed in the 17th century, boasts 50 deserted houses, intertwining narrow pathways, staircases, and three entrances intricately connected by the falaj irrigation channel. Inhabitants thrived here until the early 21st century, leaving behind an eloquent story of this serene and enchanting place. Located within the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, a mere 90-minute drive from Muscat, Birkat al Mouz stands as a small oasis town, nestled close to Nizwa city. It holds significance as the primary settlement regulating entry to the Jabal Al Akhdhar mountains, a gateway for anyone venturing towards the Green Mountain. The oasis of Birkat al Mouz comprises three ancient settlements: Harat Al Siybani, Harat Al Wadi, and Harat Al Makasir. The allure of historic locales and remnants captivates me; hence, upon glimpsing



images of this ancient settlement on social media, the irresistible urge to explore Harat Al Siybani emerged. Adding to its charm, 'Bait Al Sabah', a new cafe, now graces the entrance of this age-old settlement. This café breathes life into renovated buildings within the historical site. Traversing the ruins perched upon the hillside demands caution, as narrow pathways and steep steps are strewn with loose rocks and debris. The interiors of the abandoned houses hold surprises; floors are perilously weakened, potentially giving way underfoot.





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