

UN nuclear head in Iran

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Rafael Grossi arrived in Iran's capital Tehran on Wednesday for critical talks on the country's nuclear programme, state media reported. The visit comes against the backdrop of tit-for-tat attacks by Iran and Israel and a week after Donald Trump won the US presidential election. State television broadcast images of Grossi's arrival at the airport terminal in Tehran.

SUNRISE - 06:18 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 05:00 AM

DHUHR - 11:56 PM

ASR - 03:05 PM

MAGHRIB - 05:27 PM

ISHA - 06:40 PM



P12

OMAN TO STAGE INAUGURAL FIH HOCKEY NATIONS CUP 2



P13

PDO DELIVERS BREAKTHROUGHS IN OMAN'S DRILLING EFFICIENCY



P20

OMANI TALENT BREAKING NEW GROUND WITH YAZATAS



MUSCAT

OQEP DISTRIBUTES RO 57M IN DIVIDENDS

The Board of Directors of OQ Exploration and Production SAOG (OQEP) has decided to distribute cash dividends totalling RO 57.675 million for the third quarter of the current year, 2024, at a rate of 7.21 baisa per share. This decision was made following the board's approval of the financial statements at its meeting. The board at its meeting reviewed and approved the unaudited financial statements of the company for the period ended on September 30, 2024. The board proposed payment of cash dividends of 7.21 baisas per share, totalling RO 57.675 million. The Annual General Meeting of the company is scheduled to be held in the first week of December.

SMES' INVESTMENT IN TOURISM SECTOR

The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) organised the fourth dialogue session entitled 'Enhancing Small and Medium Enterprises Investment in the Tourism Sector.' The session comes as a continuation of a series of meetings and dialogues implemented by the authority. These sessions aim to improve the business environment and its attractiveness to the SMEs, and to contribute to developing supportive policies and encouraging entrepreneurs to present innovative ideas. The dialogue session discussed four themes concerned with developing the tourism sector, namely the supporting policies and legislation in the tourism sector. **SEE P13**

Winners of Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts announced

MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science on Wednesday unveiled the names of winners of the 11th edition of the Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature.

This year's prize was exclusively to Omanis only. The winners were announced at a press conference held here

by Habib bin Mohammed al Riyami, Head of the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science. A podcast named 'Witness Beyond the Ordinary' hosted by Ahmed bin Salim al Kalbani won the award in the field of radio programmes in the 'Arts' category.

In the field of classic Arabic poetry in the 'Literature'

category, a poetry collection named 'Maqamat Zulaykha' by poet Shamsa bint Abdullah al Numaniyah won the award. Meanwhile, the award was withheld in the field of studies in the Omani environment from the 'Culture' branch.

The Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature was established as per Royal

Decree No 18/2011. The arts category recognises diverse creative fields such as music, fine art, sculpture, photography, and theatre, celebrating Omani talent in acting, directing, and performance.

Meanwhile, the literature category aims to honour excellence in Arabic poetry, along with other literary forms

like novels, short stories, and literary criticism.

Al Riyami said that the total number of applicants who met the requirements for nomination this session stood at 136, including 18 in the field of Omani environmental studies, 49 candidates in the field of radio programmes, and 69 in the field of classical Arabic poetry.

OMAN'S PAVILION OPENS AT BAKU SUMMIT



The Sultanate of Oman's pavilion was opened at the 29th Climate Summit in the Azerbaijani capital, Baku, in the presence of international negotiators. Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, the event's chief guest, said that the Sultanate of Oman's stance is clear through its full commitment to all the agreed-upon items, whether in previous meetings or in this meeting. He pointed out that the Sultanate of Oman has clarified the practical steps it has taken in the energy transition and capturing carbon emissions. **DETAILS ON P2**

Lebanon awaits truce ideas as Israel strikes

BEIRUT: Israeli air strikes pounded Beirut's southern suburbs for a second consecutive day on Wednesday, as Lebanon waited to hear Washington's latest ceasefire proposals after a US official expressed hope a truce could be reached.

More than seven weeks since Israel went on the offensive against Hezbollah, its latest air strikes levelled half a dozen buildings in the Beirut suburb known as Dahiyeh and killed six people in a village south of the capital.

"They used to hit Dahiyeh at night, now they are doing it in daytime. Things are intensifying day after day," said Hassan Moussa, 40, speaking in Beirut, adding that Israeli air strikes had also widened to areas such as Aramoun, the village south of Beirut where the health ministry said six people were killed.

Israel launched a major air and ground offensive against Hezbollah in late September

after nearly a year of cross-border conflict fought in parallel with the Gaza war.

White House envoy Amos Hochstein, the US official who has led several fruitless attempts to broker a ceasefire over the last year, told Axios that he thought "there is a shot" at a truce in Lebanon soon. "I am hopeful we can get it."

His comments point to a last-ditch bid by the outgoing administration of US President Joe Biden to secure a Lebanon ceasefire as diplomacy to end the Gaza war appears adrift, with mediator Qatar having suspended its role.

The United States and other world powers say a ceasefire in Lebanon must be based on UN Security Council resolution 1701 which ended a war between the sides in 2006. The resolution demands that the areas of south Lebanon near the Israeli border be free of any weapons other than those of the Lebanese state.

TRUMP AND BIDEN VOW SMOOTH TRANSFER OF POWER

WASHINGTON: US President-elect Donald Trump thanked President Joe Biden for pledging a smooth transfer of power as the victorious Republican made a historic return visit to the White House on Wednesday. "Politics is tough, and in many cases it's not a very nice world. It is a nice world today and I appreciate it very much," Trump said after the two men shook hands in the Oval Office. Trump, 78, added that the transition would be "smooth as you can get." Biden greeted Trump in front of a roaring fire, offering him congratulations and saying: "Welcome back."



US President Joe Biden meets with President-elect Donald Trump in the Oval Office. — Reuters

The 81-year-old Biden invited his sworn rival to the White House — despite the fact that Trump, who refused to admit his 2020 election loss, never afforded Biden the same courtesy. Biden, who dropped out of the election in July but saw his successor Kamala Harris lose to Trump last week, said he was "looking forward to having a smooth transition." "We'll do everything we can to make sure you're accommodated, (have) what you need," he told Trump. Their talks after the public handshake may have been a bitter pill to swallow for Biden, who branded Trump a threat to democracy. **SEE P7**

Study finds 44% of warm-water coral species face extinction



Corals are affected by severe bleaching events, pollution, agricultural runoff, disease and unsustainable fishing.

BAKU: Almost half of warm-water reef-building coral species are at risk of extinction, conservationists have warned after a global assessment released at the UN climate conference in Baku.

The conservation status for all 892 species was analysed for the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of threatened species ahead of COP29 in Azerbaijan.

The corals are found in shallow, warm-water habitats and form the colourful reefs seen in tropical and sub-tropical ocean areas. Built over tens of thousands of years, coral reefs are the most biodiverse of marine

ecosystems.

The IUCN analysis released on Wednesday showed that 44 per cent are threatened — up from a third in 2008 when reef-building corals were last assessed for the Red List.

It comes as world leaders gather this week in Baku for negotiations on cutting emissions and tackling climate change, which remains the top threat to reef-building corals.

In addition to climate change, corals are affected by severe bleaching events, pollution, agricultural runoff, disease and unsustainable fishing.

The assessments considered the most recent status update on coral reefs from the Global Coral Reef

Monitoring Network (GCRMN) and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) data for future warming scenarios.

Among the species analysed were staghorn coral and elkhorn coral — two "critically endangered" species in the Caribbean that have experienced significant declines due to increased warming, water pollution, hurricanes and the severe impacts of coral diseases.

Cutting greenhouse gas emissions is the main solution to saving corals from extinction, accompanied by actions to address other threats to strengthen species' resilience, the IUCN said. — **Agencies**

OMAN

SHORT TAKES

ROYAL OFFICE MINISTER
RECEIVES ITALIAN
MILITARY OFFICIAL



MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office received in his office on Wednesday Lt Gen Carmine Masiello, Chief of Staff of the Italian Army and his accompanying military delegation.

The two sides reviewed the joint cooperation between the two countries.

They also exchanged views on several regional and international issues. The meeting was attended by Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO).

It was also attended by the Ambassador of the Italian Republic to the Sultanate of Oman. — **ONA**

FAMILY AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE
HOLDS MEETING



The meeting discussed the formation of a team in the field of juvenile interrogation, among other topics. — **ONA**

MUSCAT: The National Committee for Family Affairs on Wednesday held its 2nd meeting for 2024 under the chair of Dr Laila bin Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, Chairperson of the Committee.

The meeting discussed a spectrum of topics, namely the formation of a national team of specialists in the field of juvenile interview and interrogation, among other topics. — **ONA**

OMAN PARTICIPATES IN
TRANSPORT MINISTERS’
COUNCIL MEETING



Oman's delegation in the meetings was headed by Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Oman's Ambassador to Egypt. — **ONA**

CAIRO: The Sultanate of Oman took part in the 37th session meeting of the Arab Transport Ministers' Council, the 73rd session meeting of the executive council and the 29th session meeting of the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport.

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation in the meetings was headed by Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Oman's Ambassador to Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the Arab League.

Meanwhile, Oman's delegation at the meeting of the executive council was headed by Adviser Dr Ahmed bin Salim Ja'aboub.

The meetings discussed means of supporting the Palestinian economy, implementing the strategic plan for sectoral development in Jerusalem (2018-2022), and enhancing integration among Arab countries in the fields of land, sea and air transport, with the aim of facilitating the movement of transport and inter-trade.

— **ONA**

Defence Studies Academy Board of Trustees meets

MUSCAT: The Board of Trustees of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies at Bait Al Falaj on Wednesday held its annual meeting under the chairmanship of HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Chairman of the Board of Trustees.

The meeting was attended by HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General for Police and Customs, Dr Rahma



During the meeting, the members reviewed a number of topics listed on the agenda. — **ONA**

bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy,

Maj Gen Sulaiman Khalid al Zakwani, Secretary-General of Military Affairs at the Royal Office, Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Chairman

of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies (ASDS), Commodore Khalid bin Amer al Salti, Director General of Studies and Academic Affairs at the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies (the meeting's rapporteur).

At the outset of the meeting, HH Sayyid Shihab welcomed the board members, wishing that the meeting comes up with fruitful results that serve the academy's objectives and mission.

During the meeting, the members reviewed a number of topics listed on the agenda.

— **ONA**

‘There is urgent need to
detect AI-powered crimes’

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

ASartificial Intelligence (AI) rapidly changes the financial landscape, there is an urgent need to detect AI-powered crimes faster. The Oman chapter of the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE) recently brought AI-powered financial fraud into focus.

The opening session of the forum was presided over by Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), while Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Chairman of the Tax Authority, and Shaikh Abdullah bin Salim al Salmi, Executive President of the Capital Market Authority (CMA), attended as Guests of Honour.

Khalil bin Nabhan al Rawahi, Chairman of the Oman Chapter of ACFE, told the Observer that the conference was attended by various entities, including the State Audit, the Public Prosecution, the Royal Oman Police, the Central Bank of Oman, the Tax Authority, and other ministries, as well as private banking and financial sectors.

“Attendees had the opportunity to share experiences and implement measures to combat fraudulent cases. As we navigate a rapidly changing financial landscape, it is essential for us to come together as a community to address fraud with innovative solutions,” he said.

“This forum demonstrates our commitment to creating a safer and more resilient financial future for Oman and beyond,” he added.

Padma Shri T N Manoharan, a chartered



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accountant and former President of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), who currently serves as the Chairman of the Industrial Development Bank of India, addressed two key aspects in his keynote speech: how to prevent fraud, and how to detect ongoing cases faster and mitigate them effectively.

He emphasised that organisations should focus on intangibles such as product and service quality, human resource development, employee well-being, customer satisfaction, brand image, goodwill, and reputation.

Regarding the current world focus on ESG (environmental, social, and governance), Manoharan explained that organisations need to prioritise ethical practices to earn profits.

He stressed the importance of value-based profit earning rather than compromising values for tangible gains.

In the digital era, seamless global transactions facilitated by technology offer numerous advantages such as

scalability, speed, accuracy, quality, and cost optimisation.

However, these advancements have also provided opportunities for cybercriminals to engage in fraudulent activities. Therefore, forums like these, along with forensic auditors, must collaborate to develop controlled measures to prevent and detect cybercrimes promptly.

The conference also delved into the psychological aspects of fraudulent cases.

Dr Hamed al Sinawi, a senior psychologist, explored the differences between scams and fraud activities, as well as the profiles of fraud perpetrators and victims. He emphasised the importance of understanding the psychological tricks used in scams and the mental health impacts on victims.

Over 350 experts, government representatives and industry leaders from Oman and other countries gathered at the event to address emerging fraud challenges and prevention opportunities in the digital era.

Oman’s pavilion opens at climate summit in Azerbaijan

BAKU: The Sultanate of Oman's pavilion was opened at the 29th Climate Summit in the Azerbaijan capital, Baku, in the presence of international negotiators.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufer, Minister of Energy and Minerals, the event's chief guest, said that the Sultanate of Oman's stance is clear through its full commitment to all the agreed-upon items, whether in previous meetings or in this meeting. He pointed out that the Sultanate of Oman has clarified the practical steps it has taken in the energy transition and capturing carbon emissions.

The minister stated that an important point was raised, that the dialogue cannot be a challenge between oil and gas producers and supporters of the energy transition, as the world needs all types of available energy, with the commitment to utilise clean energy.

He added that the funding file is still pending, and there are always challenges, the biggest



Oman's pavilion at the 29th Climate Summit reviews the energy transition and achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050. — **ONA**

of which are funding sources, despite all the commitments announced by many countries.

The Minister of Energy and Minerals said that the Sultanate of Oman's pavilion at the 29th Climate Summit reviews the energy transition and achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. It also highlights the roles and missions of the Environment Authority (EA) and all the environmental indicators achieved in conserving the

environment. The pavilion also showcases climate-related action, and projects in the energy sector, from emission reduction to energy transformation, especially the main sectors represented by industry, electricity generation, oil and gas, and transportation.

On the other hand, Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, described the Sultanate of Oman's

participation in the Climate Summit as successful and effective by highlighting national efforts in the field of environmental conservation, and reviewing the efforts made in carbon emission reduction projects, renewable energy and solar energy projects, as well as green hydrogen projects in the Sultanate of Oman.

He added that the Sultanate of Oman's pavilion at the 29th Climate Summit hosted a discussion panel in which the Ministers of Environment and Climate Change from Arab and foreign countries from different continents, and experts from the United Nations and specialised organisations participated.

He stressed that there is broad participation from the Sultanate of Oman, with more than 200 participants from various state institutions, in confirmation of the unified national action to achieve national climate targets, foremost of which is the National Strategy for Zero-Neutrality. — **ONA**

SHORTTAKES

Foreign Minister receives credentials of Saudi Ambassador



Sayyid Badr wished the ambassador success in carrying out his duties. — ONA

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Wednesday received in his office a copy of credentials of Ibrahim Saad Ibrahim Bishan, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) appointed to the Sultanate of Oman.

Sayyid Badr wished the ambassador success in carrying out his duties. He also wished the bilateral relations further development and growth.

The meeting was attended by Ahmed bin Hashel al Maskari, Head of the GCC Department, and Najeeb bin Yahya al Balushi, Head of the Protocols Department, and several officials from the Foreign Ministry. — ONA

COMMITMENT TO SUPPORTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP



The official ceremony, attended by Shaikh Saleh bin Dhiyab al Rubaiee, Wali of Nizwa, marked the beginning of a promotional campaign.

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, NOV 13

In a move to reinforce its commitment to supporting entrepreneurship and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate launched the marketing campaign and unveiled the visual identity for the first Entrepreneurs Forum in the governorate.

The official ceremony, attended by Shaikh Saleh bin Dhiyab al Rubaiee, Wali of Nizwa, marked the beginning of a promotional campaign aimed at establishing the forum as a vital platform for collaboration and innovation in the business sector.

He unveiled the forum’s new visual identity, symbolising concepts of innovation and sustainable growth.

The logo features sharp, upward lines representing ambition and a forward-looking vision, while balancing creativity with traditional values that resonate with Al Dakhiliyah’s cultural heritage.

This visual identity aims to elevate the value and image of SMEs, building trust and credibility through vibrant colours and attractive designs that emphasise sustainability and contribute to business success.

Ahmed bin Abdullah al Kharousi, Head of the Small and Medium Enterprises Committee at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Al Dakhiliyah branch, said: “The forum represents an important collaboration in supporting SMEs, which play a crucial role in Oman’s economy. The forum will create new opportunities and inspire economic growth by connecting participants and helping them build professional relationships that foster future success.”

The forum will commence on the November 27 and will continue for four days, featuring over 87 exhibitors, including entrepreneurs, home-based businesses and SME owners, showcasing a wide range of products.

The event will also include training sessions and entertainment activities aimed at skill development across various fields.

Attendees will have the chance to explore success stories from experienced entrepreneurs, offering fresh and innovative ideas to inspire participants.

Libraries foster digital identity and citizenship

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, NOV 13

THE 35TH Conference of the Arab Federation for Libraries and Information, held under the theme ‘Libraries and Arab Archive Institutions and Their Role in Promoting Identity and Digital Citizenship’, concluded on Wednesday.

The conference, co-organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Sultan Qaboos University, saw its closing ceremony under the auspices of Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture.

The conference aimed to explore the role of libraries and archive institutions in strengthening identity and digital citizenship, addressing core topics on digital citizenship, identity and the challenges associated with artificial intelligence featuring over 100 speakers.

Muna al Siyabi, Director of the Department of Public Libraries and Cultural Centres, stated that the conference focused on five research areas related to the role of information and archival institutions in instilling digital citizenship values and enhancing digital identity in society.

She emphasised that the sessions provided an essential platform to explore the impact of libraries and archive institutions in fostering cultural and digital identity in the Arab world, opening new opportunities for collaboration and development in this vital field.

The sessions saw fruitful interactions and enriching discussions, with numerous initiatives and research presented to enhance digital engagement and protect



The conference saw its closing ceremony under the auspices of Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture. — Photo by Abdulwahid al Hamadani

cultural heritage, underscoring the importance of this sector in addressing current digital challenges.

Over the two days, the conference showcased pioneering models in the field, where participants exchanged ideas and proposals to improve institutional efficiency and impact individual and community practices.

Nabhan al Harrasi, President of the Arab Federation for Libraries and Information and Chairman of the Conference Organising Committee, stated the efforts made by the Scientific Committee, which worked tirelessly for eight months to prepare and present the conference materials.

Al Harrasi expressed his happiness with the success of the conference, which was reflected in the hearts and eyes of the esteemed guests. He added, “We reaffirm our commitment to several principles that we will continue to follow in the coming years, which are to support and

enhance the role of libraries in spreading awareness and culture.”

The concluding day included ten diverse sessions, focusing on topics such as the role of national libraries in promoting cultural identity and digital citizenship, and the role of digital archives in heritage preservation. The conference highlighted the experiences of Omani and Arab institutions, such as Oman Memory Centre’s library and the Algerian National Archive.

The conference was accompanied by a tech exhibition with more than 20 companies from various countries, showcasing the latest technologies in library and archival management. Additionally, cultural and touristic visits were organised for participants, including visits to the National Museum, the Royal Opera House Muscat, and Sultan Qaboos University, offering an opportunity to explore Omani cultural and historical landmarks.

Cancer awareness day held in Al Sharqiyah South

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, NOV 13

The Governorate of Al Sharqiyah South held a breast cancer awareness day, organised by the Oman Breast Cancer Society under the theme ‘A Pink Journey’.

The event was attended by Her Highness Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation at SQU and honorary president of the Oman Breast Cancer Society in the presence of Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South.

Sayyida Dr Mona emphasised the importance of early screening as an effective preventive measure against breast cancer. She highlighted that the awareness tour, which covers various governorates across the Sultanate of Oman, aims to deliver a health message to every Omani woman, urging them to prioritise their health through regular early screenings. “It is the responsibility



The event was attended by HH Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said in the presence of Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South.

of everyone in society to combat severe diseases, and today, we are here to promote health awareness as one of the most effective preventive measures,” she

said. She also highlighted the crucial role of community responsibility and the volunteer efforts made by members of the Oman Breast Cancer Society, commending their continuous efforts in spreading awareness about breast cancer. Such efforts increase the chances of early detection, which improves recovery rates.

Dr Sefana al Saidi, who discussed the symptoms of the disease and factors that increase the risk of developing it, stressed the importance of understanding the symptoms and how to detect them early, while debunking some myths about the causes of breast cancer, emphasising that early detection is the first step to improving treatment and recovery prospects.

Dr Adel al Ajmi, President of the Oman Breast Cancer Society, delivered a lecture in which he presented the latest statistics on breast cancer in Oman. He called for intensified health awareness within local communities to reduce incidence rates and increase awareness levels.

500 women join for Thiruvathira classical dance

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

Over 500 women from across the country gathered at the International Hockey Stadium in Al Amerat to create a new chapter in the art and culture scene by choreographing the largest ever dance form, Thiruvathira.

Thiruvathira is a traditional Indian form of classical dance with unique, identical steps performed to music played aloud.

The audience, packed to capacity, cheered with joy as the mega Thiruvathira was staged by women dressed in identical traditional Indian attire. Teams from different



The audience, packed to capacity, cheered with joy as the mega Thiruvathira was staged by women dressed in identical traditional Indian attire.

parts of Oman participated in the event, organised under the leadership of Muscat Malayalees and the guidance of RLV Babu. Babu trained 30 teachers from various organisations in Oman online.

Thiruvathira groups from places like Sur, Ibra, Barka, Ghala, Athaiba, Al Ghubra, Al Khuwair and Ruwi were trained for just 18 days before the show at the hockey ground. People from far-off

places had already gathered at the stadium well before the event began. As the groups entered the stadium, they were welcomed by the audience, who were in for a spectacular show.

The teams, arranged meticulously in groups and lines, performed song after song, much to the delight of the audience.

Thani al Wahaibi, a board member of Oman Hockey Association, and TK Vijayan of Global Sourcing, honoured RLV Babu for his dedicated effort in teaching music and dance to such a large group and coordinating a fantastic show that satisfied the audience.

725-km

Desert road through the Empty Quarter starting from the Wilayat of Ibri was opened

Trains travelling at a speed of 200 kilometres per hour

Tourists will be able to visit all six countries with a single visa, and it is expected to attract

129 million visitors by 2030

The railway line is capable of carrying 15,000 tonnes of freight in trains

OMAN DRIVES GCC INTEGRATION

VINOD NAIR @vinot_nair

AS OMAN CELEBRATES the 54th National Day, it is important to reflect on the robust recovery of the travel, tourism and transport sectors. These sectors were unimaginably disrupted in the first half of the decade due to shutdowns. The pandemic highlighted the fact that no country or region is insulated from global developments. The Sultanate of Oman and its GCC counterparts have been cooperating since the beginning of the decade on major initiatives to facilitate the seamless movement of people and goods. One significant step in this direction is the reactivation of the GCC railway project, starting with linking the northern city of Suhar and the UAE capital, Abu Dhabi. The railway project, known as Hafeet Rail, is a joint venture with the UAE's Etihad Railway and is currently in various stages of implementation. Once completed, the project will reduce travel time between Suhar and Abu Dhabi to one hour and 40 minutes, and to Al Ain in just 47 minutes, with trains travelling at a speed of 200 kilometres per hour. Recent developments also indicate that the railway network will operate a luxury train service on the route in partnership with the Italian company Arsenale. The primary objective of the project is to enhance trade within the GCC by facilitating the transport of goods to and from the ports of Oman. Oman boasts one of the finest road networks and most advanced ports in the region. The railway line is capable of carrying 15,000 tonnes of freight in trains, and agreements have already been signed with major core sector companies such as Vale and

Shadeed Jindal. Significant progress has been made, and Hafeet Rail has appointed Systra, a French engineering and consultancy firm, to provide comprehensive technical support for the network, including contract management. Additionally, a contract has been signed with Progress Rail to supply heavy freight locomotives designed to suit the region's geography and climate. While the GCC railway project is still in various stages of development and implementation, another major landmark project of this decade is the opening of the direct road between Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Coinciding with the first visit of Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince in 2021, the 725-km desert road through the Empty Quarter starting from the Wilayat of Ibri was opened. HEAVY TRAFFIC FLOW Since its inception in 2021, the road has experienced heavy traffic flow, including tourists and goods. Scheduled international private bus companies and Umrah tour providers operate on this route, reducing the road distance between the largest countries of the GCC from 36 hours to nearly half. To facilitate movement in the GCC, one of the most eagerly awaited integration projects is the implementation of the GCC unified visa, similar to the European Schengen visa. The unified visa was approved during the regional tourism and interior ministers' meeting last year and is set to be launched in the coming months. With this visa, tourists will be able to visit all six countries with a single visa, and it is expected to attract 129 million visitors by 2030.

SAYYIDAH SANA WINS FATIMA MUBARAK AWARD

MUSCAT: Sayyidah Sana bint Hamad al Busaidiyah, Chairwoman of Oman Women’s Sports Gender Equality Committee, has been awarded the “Pioneers in Sports” Prize during the 8th edition of the Fatima Mubarak Award for Women’s Sports for 2024.

The ceremony took place on Wednesday in Abu Dhabi, under the auspices of Shaikha Fatima bint Mubarak, President of the General Women’s Union, President of



the Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood, and Honorary President of the Family Development Foundation. This award recognises Sayyidah Sana’s contributions to

women’s sports in Oman and represents an acknowledgment of her ongoing efforts to support women’s participation both locally and regionally. She has worked diligently to develop programmes and initiatives that enhance the presence of Omani women in sports, and she has played a key role in formulating plans to support Omani female athletes and develop their skills across various sporting disciplines.

Symposium discusses heritage of aflaj in Izki

AMAL AL RIYAMI
IZKI, NOV 13

THE WILAYAT of Izki organised the second edition of the “Izki Through History” symposium at the Izki Public Hall on Monday, where the importance of the aflaj and their economic and social impact were discussed, in addition to the challenges facing these ancient water systems. According to statistics, Izki has 114 aflaj, 8,116 registered wells and 2,035 agricultural holdings. Of these, 50 aflaj are considered dead and need revival. The Maliki Falaj is the most prominent of these aflaj, as it is a Unesco World Heritage Site. Sultan bin Hilal al Alawi, Wali of Izki, said: “Agriculture in Izki is not just an economic activity but rather an extended history and an Omani identity passed down through generations. The falaj is a symbol of the connection between man and nature.”

Dr Abdullah bin Saif al Ghafri, Chair holder of the Unesco Chair for the Study of Aflaj, said: “Aflaj are not just water channels, but an Omani identity and a way of life, and Maliki Falaj in Izki is a prominent example of the sustainability of these systems.”

Despite maintenance, some aflaj



The symposium was accompanied by an exhibition displaying farm products. Photo by IBRAHIM AL FAHDI

are suffering from deterioration. According to Dr Al Ghafri, most of Falaj Al Sahamah has been transformed into a place for dumping waste. Estimated to be over 800 years old, it was dug underground by traditional methods to provide water for agriculture and cattle. It is the largest irrigation tank in the Arab world and is in the form of a complete circle. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the University of Nizwa are currently protecting this falaj.

Dr Masoud al Hadhrami and Dr Ahmed al Azizi gave a presentation on the heritage related to date palms across generations in Omani society. Dr Khalifa bin Mohammed

al Kindi, Assistant Professor at the Unesco Chair in Palm Studies at the University of Nizwa, also participated with a research paper on the Ommatissus Iybcus Bergevin insect in date palms. He said there is a strong relationship between the spread of palm parasites and a number of variables such as the density of palm trees, the distance between them, the use of pesticides, pruning and irrigation systems.

The symposium was accompanied by an exhibition displaying farm products such as dates, honey and saplings, highlighting the need to preserve agricultural heritage and enhance the local economy.

OMANI STUDENTS TO TAKE PART IN ABU DHABI MEETING

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education, represented by the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, is participating in the GLOBE environmental programme regional conference, which is organised by the programme’s regional office for the Near East and North Africa region in cooperation with Nasa from November

13 to 15 in the UAE capital, Abu Dhabi. The conference targets a number of national coordinators and teachers from different countries, with the participation of a number of students; to give them the opportunity to present their environmental research projects. The conference activities include presentations on

environmental scientific research techniques, and the development of teaching skills, in addition to training sessions presented by experts from Nasa on the practical application of GLOBE protocols. Nasa supports teachers in using field data and linking it to curricula; to enhance learning based on environmental projects.

Bayan College celebrates global cultural diversity



Dr Mohammed bin Juma al Kharousi, Dean of Bayan College, at the culture expo

MUSCAT: Bayan College (affiliated with Purdue University) hosted its much-anticipated event Cultural Expressions on November 6, bringing together students, faculty and staff for a vibrant celebration of global diversity. Organised by the Department of English Studies, this event is one of the many held in each semester at the college campus, reflecting the institution’s commitment to experiential learning.

The event featured the cultures of six countries: Oman, Turkiye, Palestine, China, Zanzibar and Korea. Each country was represented through a cultural booth where students shared food, literature, music, language and local traditions.

Dr Mohammed bin Juma al Kharousi, Dean of Bayan College, honoured the event with his presence. He praised the efforts of the students in making the event a success. He awarded prizes to the winners and the runners-up for in the debate competition. Gao Aotian, the esteemed Director of the Chinese

Ambassador’s office, also graced the occasion. Cultural Expressions stood as a testament to Bayan College’s emphasis on activity-based learning. The event, conceived by Dr Indu, the Head of the Department, is part of the Studies in Literature and Culture course handled by her. “Experiential learning goes beyond lectures and textbooks. Through events like this, students can engage with their academic studies in practical, real-world contexts,” Dr Indu said.

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Defence
ENGINEERING SERVICES

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Tender No.	Tender Name	Contractors Grade	Last Date to Obtain Tender	Tender Submission Date	Tender Price (RO)
19/2024	HVAC System Works - SHAFA	First & Above- Specialized in HVAC system	26 November 2024	23 December 2024	65/- R.O
28/2024	MEP and Building Work - MAM	Excellent - Specialized in Building & MEP Works	26 November 2024	6 January 2025	315/- R.O
29/2024	MEP Works - IBRA (WATER NETWORK)	First & Above- Specialized in MEP Works	26 November 2024	23 December 2024	100/- R.O
30/2024	MEP Works - SHAFA (WATER NETWORK)	First & Above- Specialized in MEP Works	26 November 2024	30 December 2024	200/- R.O
31/2024	Building Works - MAM	Excellent	26 November 2024	6 January 2025	388/- R.O
32/2024	HVAC System Works - Salalah	Excellent - Specialized in HVAC System	26 November 2024	6 January 2025	353/- R.O
35/2024	Electrical Works - GHALA	First & Above- Specialized in Supply and Installation of Lighting System	26 November 2024	23 December 2024	125/- R.O
36/2024	HVAC System Works - KHASSAB	First & Above- Specialized in HVAC System	26 November 2024	23 December 2024	65/- R.O
38/2024	Building Works - MASIRAH	Excellent	26 November 2024	6 January 2025	1,500/- R.O
39/2024	MEP Works - SALALAH (WATER NETWORK)	First & Above- Specialized in MEP works	26 November 2024	6 January 2025	250/- R.O
40/2024	MEP Works - GHALA (WATER NETWORK)	First & Above- Specialized in MEP works	26 November 2024	30 December 2024	203/- R.O
42/2024	MEP Works - IBRI (WATER NETWORK)	First & Above- Specialized In MEP Works	26 November 2024	30 December 2024	150/- R.O

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

- Tender Documents (Electronic Tender Document) can be obtained from the Tender office, Gate No: 14, Muaskar Al Murtafa'a after payment of the tender fee indicated above.
- The Payment should be made electronically by using SMART CARD, VISA CARD and VISA ELECTRON. Sunday to Thursday (0900 - 1300 Hours).
- The Bid to be accompanied by Tender Bond in the value of (1%) of the bid value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank and addressed to HE the Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Bids are to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to HE the Chairman of Tender Committee and marked with Tender Number and Name. Name of Bidder or any other marks should not be printed on the envelopes.
- Bids to be deposited in the Tender office at Gate No: 14 Muaskar Al Murtafa'a before 1300 hours on the assigned day for submission of the Tender.
- We would like to draw your attention to the importance of adherence to the submission date, request and any queries related should not be submitted to MODES fourteen days prior to submission of offer & that queries must be on electronic (Microsoft word).
- You are requested to submit the following items within your tender submission, failure to submit the required information may result a disqualification of your offer without any further notification.
 - Percentage of Omanisation within the company supported by an authenticated certificate from the Ministry of Labour (Updated Copy).
 - Detailed priced breakdown to be specified as per scope of works and drawings.
 - Tender Form and Tender Bonds to be submitted as hard copy and others documentation shall be as **SOFT COPY** (USB) in two separate files:
 - Financial (**bill 1&2 separated file from bill 3**)
 - Technical files.
 - Confirmation of site visit.
 - All addendums and circulars.
 - List of sub-contractors/suppliers and their acceptance letter to this project.
 - List of current and executed projects for the last Five years.
 - Valid Registration Certificates from Tender Board.
 - Financial Statement for the last Three years.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A man and his dog walk past the Akshardham temple engulfed in smog in New Delhi. — AFP

SMOG SMOTHERING INDIA’S CAPITAL SMASHES WHO LIMIT

New Delhi: Residents of India’s capital New Delhi choked in a blanketing toxic smog on Wednesday as worsening air pollution surged past 50 times the World Health Organization’s recommended daily maximum.

Many in the city cannot afford air filters, nor do they have homes they can effectively seal from the misery of foul smelling air blamed for thousands of premature deaths.

Cooler temperatures and slow-moving winds trap deadly pollutants each winter, stretching from mid-October until at least January.

At dawn on Wednesday, “hazardous” pollutant levels in parts of the sprawling urban area of more than 30 million people topped 806 microgrammes per cubic metre, according to monitoring firm IQAir. That is more than 53 times the World Health Organization recommended daily maximum of fine particulate matter — dangerous cancer-causing microparticles known as PM2.5 pollutants that enter the bloodstream through the lungs. — AFP



People wearing t-shirts with prints supporting nuclear energy in Baku on Wednesday. — Reuters

NATIONS FAR APART IN COP29 CLIMATE FINANCE TALKS

BAKU: A fresh draft of a UN climate deal released on Wednesday offers wide-ranging options to raise funding for poorer countries, signalling that tough negotiations remain at the COP29 talks in Baku.

Landing a new agreement to boost money for climate action in developing countries is the top priority of negotiators at the summit in Azerbaijan. But it is deeply contentious, and consensus has eluded negotiators from nearly 200 nations for the better part of a year.

Most developing countries favour an annual commitment from wealthy countries of at least \$1.3 trillion, according to the latest draft of the long-sought climate finance pact. This figure is more than 10 times the \$100 billion annually that a small pool of developed countries — among them the United States, the European Union and Japan — currently pay. Some donors are reluctant to promise large new amounts of public money from their budgets at a time when they face economic and political pressure at home. — Reuters

SIX-YEAR PRISON

Former president Kirchner guilty



A federal appeals court in Argentina upheld a guilty verdict for former president Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner on Wednesday. Kirchner, who served as president for two terms between 2007 and 2015 and then as vice-president from 2019 to 2023, was found guilty of defrauding the state and given a six-year prison sentence in December 2022. The case can still be appealed to the Supreme Court. Cristina has in the past been compared to Eva Perón.

14 DEAD IN PAKISTAN WEDDING BUS CRASH AND BRIDE SURVIVES

GILGIT: A bus carrying guests home from a wedding plunged into a river in northern Pakistan killing at least 14 people, officials said on Wednesday, with the bride so far the only known survivor.

“There were 25 people on the bus and so far 14 dead bodies have been recovered while 10 are still missing,” said Wazir Asad Ali, a rescue official in Gilgit-Baltistan.

“The bride is out of danger and she is being treated in a Gilgit

hospital,” Ali added.

Naik Alam, a senior police official from the area, said that the driver appeared to have been speeding when he lost control at a curve. The groom’s family had travelled from Punjab, more than 500 kilometres (300 miles) away, for the wedding and were returning home when the accident happened. Road accidents with high fatalities are common in Pakistan, where safety measures

are lax, driver training is poor and transport infrastructure is often decrepit. In Balochistan in August, 12 men died when their bus crashed into a ravine on the Makran Coastal Highway.

In another accident that month, 24 people on board a bus were killed when it plunged into a ravine near the town of Azad Pattan on the border between Punjab province and Pakistan-administered Kashmir. — AFP

Israeli forces kill 22 in Gaza, more people flee

ISRAELI MILITARY strikes killed at least 22 Palestinians across the Gaza Strip on Wednesday, as Israeli forces deepened their incursion into Beit Hanoun town in the north, forcing most remaining residents to leave.

Residents said Israeli forces besieged shelters housing displaced families and the remaining population, which some estimated at a few thousand, ordering them to head south through a checkpoint separating two towns and a refugee camp in the north from Gaza City.

Men were held for questioning, while women and children were allowed to continue towards Gaza City, residents and Palestinian medics said.

Israel’s campaign in the north of Gaza, and the evacuation of tens of thousands of Palestinians from the area, has fuelled claims from Palestinians that it is clearing the area for use as a buffer zone and potentially for a return of Jewish settlers.

“The scenes of the 1948 catastrophe are being repeated. Israel is repeating its massacres, displacement and destruction,” said Saed, 48, a resident of Beit Lahiya, who arrived in Gaza City on Wednesday.

“North Gaza is being turned into a large buffer zone, Israel is carrying out ethnic cleansing under the sight and hearing of the impotent world,” he said.

Saed was referring to the 1948 Middle East Arab-Israeli war which gave birth to the state of Israel and saw the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their home towns and villages in what is now Israel.

The Israeli military has denied any such intention, and Prime Minister Benjamin



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

Netanyahu has said he does not want to reverse the 2005 withdrawal of settlers from Gaza. Hardliners in his government have talked openly about going back.

It said forces have killed hundreds of Hamas fighters in Jabalia, Beit Lahiya and Beit Hanoun during its new military offensive, which began more than a month ago. Hamas claimed killing several Israeli soldiers during ambushes and anti-tank rocket fire.

Efforts by Arab mediators, Qatar and Egypt, backed by the United States, have so far failed to end the war in Gaza, with Hamas and Israel trading the blame for the

lack of progress.

Speaking on Wednesday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Israel “has accomplished the goals that it set for itself” by taking out Hamas’ leadership and ensuring the group is unable to launch another massive attack. “This should be a time to end the war,” he said.

“We also need to make sure we have a plan for what follows,” he said, “so that if Israel decides to end the war and we find a way to get the hostages out, we also have a clear plan so that Israel can get out of Gaza and we make sure that Hamas is not going back in.” — Reuters



Voters queue to cast their votes before the opening of the polls during the 2024 Somaliland presidential election in Hargeisa on Wednesday. — AFP

BREAKAWAY SOMALILAND VOTES

Mogadishu: Voters in Somaliland flocked to the polls on Wednesday to choose a president at a time when the breakaway Somali region sees international recognition within reach after three decades of de facto self-rule.

Somaliland, which occupies a strategic location at the juncture of the Indian Ocean and Red Sea, declared independence from the Mogadishu government in 1991.

It has not been recognised by any country, restricting access to international finance and the ability of its six million people to travel.

The Hargeisa government

is hoping to soon finalise a preliminary deal signed in January with landlocked Ethiopia that would grant Addis Ababa a strip of land on the coast in exchange for diplomatic recognition.

Hargeisa is also hopeful US president-elect Donald Trump will be favourable to its cause. President Muse Bihi Abdi, in power since 2017, is standing for re-election against the main opposition party’s candidate, Abdirahman Cirro. The vote was originally scheduled for 2022, but lawmakers opted to extend Bihi’s term by two years. — AFP

LANDSLIDE WIN

New Mauritius PM sworn in



Navin Ramgoolam was sworn in for his third stint as prime minister of Mauritius on Wednesday after his landslide election victory knocked out the ruling coalition and returned the opposition leader to power after 10 years in the political wilderness.

Ramgoolam’s Alliance of Change coalition made a clean sweep of the 60 parliamentary seats on the island of Mauritius in Sunday’s vote, out of a total of 66.

SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Ivory Coast to set up \$500m green fund



Ivory Coast will create a \$500-million green finance fund to support sustainable growth initiatives, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said in a statement. Africa’s 54 countries have borne the brunt of climate change, despite releasing far fewer polluting emissions than the industrialised world. They receive just 1% of annual global climate finance. Ivory Coast’s new facility will be established under the African Green Banks Initiative.

NO MORE SOCIAL



The paper’s main X handle — @guardian — was still accessible Wednesday but a message on it advised “this account has been archived” while redirecting visitors to its website.

UK’s The Guardian stops posting on ‘toxic media platform’ X

LONDON: Britain’s The Guardian newspaper announced on Wednesday it would no longer post content from its official accounts on Elon Musk’s X, branding it a “toxic media platform” home to “often disturbing content”.

“We think that the benefits of being on X are now outweighed by the negatives,” the left-leaning newspaper, which has nearly 11 million followers on X, said in a statement on its website.

It added that its “resources could be better used promoting our journalism elsewhere”.

“This is something we have been considering for a while given the often disturbing content promoted or found on the platform, including far-right conspiracy theories and racism,” the statement noted.

“The US presidential election campaign served only to underline what we have considered for a long time: that X is a toxic media platform and that its owner, Elon Musk, has been able to use its influence to shape political discourse.”

The paper’s main X handle — @guardian — was still accessible Wednesday but a message on it advised “this account has been archived” while redirecting visitors to its website.

The Guardian noted that X users would still be able to share its articles, and that it would still “occasionally embed content from X” within its articles given “the nature of live news reporting”.

It also said its reporters would still be able to use the site and other social networks on which the paper does not have an account.

“Social media can be an important tool for news organisations and help us to reach new audiences but, at this point, X now plays a diminished role in promoting our work,” The Guardian said.



VOLCANO CANCELS FLIGHTS

Mount Lewotobi Laki Laki spews ash and smoke during an eruption as seen from Lewolaga village in Titihena, East Nusa Tenggara, on Wednesday. Flights were cancelled at the Ngurah Rai International Airport in Tuban near Denpasar in Bali after the eruption. — AFP

UK writer wins 2024 Booker for 136-page space novel

LONDON: British writer Samantha Harvey won the prestigious Booker Prize on Tuesday for her short novel following six astronauts as they contemplate Earth from the International Space Station.

Spanning the course of a single day, Harvey’s “Orbital” tracks astronauts from Japan, Russia, the United States, Britain and Italy as they observe and reflect on their home planet, touching on themes of mourning, desire and the climate crisis.

The Booker, which comes with a 50,000 pound (\$64,000) cash prize, has launched careers and courted controversy since its

creation in 1969. Past laureates include Margaret Atwood, Ian McEwan, Julian Barnes and Kazuo Ishiguro. “I was not expecting that,” Harvey said upon learning of her win, the first by a woman since Atwood was recognised in 2019 for “The Testaments” alongside Bernardine Evaristo for “Girl, Woman, Other”.

In her acceptance speech, Harvey dedicated the prize to “everybody who does speak for and not against the Earth; for and not against the dignity of other humans, other life; and all the humans who speak for and call for and work for peace”.



Samantha Harvey poses with her novel ‘Orbital’ in London on Wednesday. — AFP

Just 136 pages long, “Orbital” is the second-shortest novel to win the award and the first to be set in space. It is the 49-year-old Harvey’s fifth novel, winning 15 years after her debut book “The Wilderness” was longlisted for the prize. Edmund de Waal, chair of the judges, described “Orbital” as “a book about a wounded world” with “everyone and no one” as the subject. “With her language of lyricism and acuity Harvey makes our world strange and new for us,” he added.

Harvey described her work as a “space pastoral” in an interview with prize organisers after she was named to the Booker longlist.

“I wanted to write about our human occupation of low earth orbit for the last quarter of a century — not as sci-fi but as realism,” she said. “Could I evoke the beauty of that vantage point with the care of a nature writer? Could I write about amazement? Could I pull off a sort of space pastoral? These were the challenges I set myself.”

A record five women were in the running for the prize. The others were Rachel Kushner for “Creation Lake”, Anne Michaels for “Held”, Yael van der Wouden for “The Safekeep” and Charlotte Wood for “Stone Yard Devotional”. — AFP

TRUMP, BIDEN PREPARE FOR POWER TRANSITION

Musk and Ramaswamy to lead a new US government efficiency group

PRESIDENT-ELECT Donald Trump returned to Washington on Wednesday for the first time since winning last week’s election to meet fellow Republicans in Congress and President Joe Biden at the White House.

Trump arrived at Joint Base Andrews aboard his self-styled “Trump Force One” plane.

Biden, who initially ran against Trump in the 2024 election before stepping aside and endorsing Vice-President Kamala Harris as the Democratic nominee, will welcome the former and future president into the Oval Office, a traditional courtesy by outgoing presidents that Trump, a Republican, did not extend when Biden won in 2020.

“He believes in the norms, he believes in our institution, he believes in the peaceful transfer of power,” White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said of Biden’s decision to invite Trump. She spoke at a briefing for reporters on Tuesday.

Biden and Trump have sharply criticised each other for years, and their respective teams hold vastly different positions on policies from climate change to Russia to trade.



Donald Trump arrives prior to meeting with President Joe Biden and members of Congress in Washington, at Joint Base Andrews on Wednesday.

Biden, 81, has portrayed Trump as a threat to democracy, while Trump, 78, has portrayed Biden as incompetent.

Outside the White House gates, signs of the impending power transfer were evident with construction already under way for the stands for VIP guests to sit during the parade that will take place after Trump is inaugurated on January 20.

Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk was expected to join Trump at a meeting with Speaker Mike Johnson and other Republicans in the US House of Representatives, according to a source familiar with the matter.

Although Biden intends to use the

meeting to show continuity, the transition itself is partially stalled.

Trump’s team, which has already announced some members of the incoming president’s cabinet, has yet to sign agreements that would lead to office space and government equipment as well as access to government officials, facilities and information, according to the White House. Trump announced on Tuesday that the world’s richest man, Elon Musk, will lead a new US government efficiency group tasked with cutting federal waste, as the Republican president-elect added a series of seasoned figures and hardliners to his incoming administration.

Musk became a key ally to Trump

during his campaign, reportedly spending over \$100 million to help the Republican win and repeatedly boosting Trump’s candidacy on X, the platform he owns.

Trump said Musk and another stalwart ally, businessman Vivek Ramaswamy, would lead a ‘Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE)’ a tongue-in-cheek reference to an internet meme and cryptocurrency.

“Together, these two wonderful Americans will pave the way for my Administration to dismantle Government Bureaucracy, slash excess regulations, cut wasteful expenditures, and restructure Federal Agencies,” Trump said in a statement. — Reuters

Red alert in parts of Spain two weeks after Valencia flooding

MADRID: Spain’s national weather service declared a red alert for parts of Catalonia in the north-east of the country and Andalusia in the south on Wednesday two weeks after devastating storms struck the Valencia region in the east.

About 3,000 people had been evacuated from an area near a river in Málaga Province in Andalusia as a precautionary measure, the Europa press news agency reported.

The official death toll from the October 29 floods has now risen to 223, with 215 of them from around Valencia, where a code orange alert level was declared for Wednesday.

A further eight people died in Andalusia and Castilla-La Mancha, which lies inland



Soldiers evacuate mud from a sewer in Paiporta, south of Valencia, eastern Spain, on Wednesday in the aftermath of deadly flooding. — AFP

from Valencia. The authorities are still listing 17 people as missing.

Clear up work was proceeding in many

municipalities, with roads still blocked by wrecked cars and household goods. The work is focused on clearing clogged storm water drains.

Heavy rain was recorded on Tuesday and overnight on Mallorca, with local landslides and fallen trees, the Balearic Islands emergency services reported on X.

By early on Wednesday, conditions were largely sunny again, with the rain moving westwards towards the mainland. Code yellow, the third-highest alert level, remained in force on Mallorca’s eastern coast.

The lower pressure front is being attributed to the same “Cold Drop” phenomenon typical in the region at this time of year that led to the October 29 rains and flooding, when a year’s worth of rain fell within eight hours in some areas. — Agencies

OPINION

Technology’s green wave hits choppy waters



JOSEPH BOYLE

TECH ENTREPRENEURS have spent years selling the dream that we can save the planet without changing our ways, but the current focus of innovation is dividing experts and investors.

The tech industry loves splashy world-saving ideas and spends billions on the hunt for new energy sources, often clashing with calls from activists and experts simply to use less energy.

The Web Summit in Lisbon this week, one of Europe’s biggest tech events, gave top billing to a Californian firm called Twelve that claims to be able to make sustainable jet fuel out of the carbon dioxide in the air.

“In a lot of ways we’re mimicking trees and plants,” Twelve co-founder Etosha Cave told the audience, describing a process that takes carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and converts it into fuel.

Cave painted a picture of a future where her company’s tech could power long-haul flights and even help exploit mineral wealth on Mars — a utopian vision that has helped her firm raise some \$650 million.

Climate expert Mike Berners-Lee, a professor at the University of Lancaster in the UK, said that world-changing claims about sustainable fuel or new energy sources needed to be viewed sceptically.

“Everyone’s looking for a silver bullet that would mean we wouldn’t have to do anything difficult,” he said.

More broadly, the green wave in tech is entering a tricky period.

While Twelve and other major start-ups are attracting massive investment, Bloomberg recently reported that funding for climate tech was on track to fall 50 per cent this year compared with last year.

And climate tech has long been subject to the whims of politics and global economic trends.

The current green wave is the second this century.

The first — now called Clean Tech 1.0 — was fostered by US politician Al Gore, whose calls for funding were met with an estimated \$25 billion of investments.

The period ended in 2011 after the global financial crisis ended cheap loans

The tech industry loves splashy world-saving ideas and spends billions on the hunt for new energy sources, often clashing with calls from activists and experts simply to use less energy.

and China ramped up its solar panel output, wiping out most US startups and roughly half of investors’ cash.

But those investments were not wasted.

They led to an era of inexpensive solar and wind power and laid the foundations for the electric vehicle revolution.

Clean Tech 2.0 began around 2018 as companies and governments committed to net-zero carbon targets laid out by the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement.

However, the US has re-elected Donald Trump as president with support from many leaders in the tech industry.

Trump — an avowed climate-change denier whose campaigning slogan on fossil fuels was “dig baby dig” — withdrew the US from the agreement in his first term and analysts believe he will do the same again.

And the global fight against climate change is still fraught, with national leaders meeting for the UN’s COP29 climate summit in Azerbaijan this week divided on the idea of phasing out fossil fuels, the main driver of global warming.

— AFP

NO END IN SIGHT TO SUDAN WAR AS BOTH SIDES SEEK VICTORY

HAITHAM EL Tabei

No end in sight to Sudan war as both sides seek ‘decisive’ win. Sudan has seen a surge in extreme violence in recent weeks as the warring military and paramilitary forces push for a decisive victory, with no political solution in sight.

Fighting between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has intensified since late October, with reports of attacks on civilians, including misconduct against women and girls, raising alarm.

The war, which erupted in April 2023, has created what the UN describes as the world’s worst displacement crisis, with more than 11 million people forced from their homes. It has brought the country to the brink of famine and sparked warnings of escalating violence in a conflict that has already claimed tens of thousands of lives.

“Over the last two weeks, the situation in the country has been marked by some of the most extreme violence since the start of the conflict,” said Rosemary DiCarlo, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. “Let me stress that both warring parties bear responsibility for this violence,” she added, noting that both sides “seem convinced they can prevail on the battlefield.”

Since October 20, at least 124 civilians have been killed in central Al-Jazira state, and another 135,000 have fled to other states, according to the UN.

With global attention focused on other wars, particularly in Ukraine and the Middle East, civilians in Sudan are paying a steep price for the escalation.

The conflict pits army chief Abdel Fattah al Burhan against his former ally Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, leader of the RSF. The country is divided into zones of control, with the army holding the north and east, including the government based in Port Sudan on the Red Sea coast. The RSF controls much of the capital, Khartoum, the Darfur region in the west, and parts of Kordofan in the south, while the centre is contested.

With no mandatory military conscription, the Sudanese army includes Islamist-leaning forces as well as other factions, while the RSF primarily comprises tribal militias from Darfur’s Arab communities.

Local reports estimate the army’s strength at about 120,000 troops, while the RSF is believed to have 100,000. On the battlefield, Sudan’s air force provides the military with a significant advantage.

— AFP

Trump has it easy the first time as president

DON’T know why people say that president-elect Donald Trump is going to face difficult challenges in foreign policy. All he needs to do is get Vladimir Putin to compromise on Russia’s western border, get Volodymyr Zelenskyy to compromise on Ukraine’s eastern border, get Benjamin Netanyahu to define Israel’s western and southern borders, get Iran’s supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, to define his country’s western border — that is, stop trying to control Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen.

He also needs to get China to define its eastern border as stopping short of Taiwan, and get Ansar Allah in Yemen to define their coastal border as limited to just a few miles offshore — without the right to stop all shipping into the Red Sea.

In other words, if you think the only border that will preoccupy Trump when he takes office on Jan. 20 is America’s southern border, you’re not paying attention.

When Trump left office in 2021, before the Russian attack of Ukraine and the war between Israel and Hamas and Hezbollah, one could argue that we were still in the “post-Cold War” era, dominated by increasing economic integration and Great Power peace.

Russia had taken a bite out of Ukraine but had never attempted to devour the whole country. Iran and Israel were hostile but had never directly attacked each other.

Israel occupied the West Bank but had never had a government whose official coalition agreement included formal annexation of the entire West Bank, and now it has members advocating the same for the Gaza Strip.

The US did not care for Ansar Allah in Yemen, but had never sent B-2 stealth bombers to drop some of the largest payloads in its arsenal on them.

In short, many bright red lines



Donald Trump meets with House Republicans on Capitol Hill in Washington on Wednesday. — Reuters



THOMAS L FRIEDMAN

A Trump administration could cause a new and very different set of red lines to be crossed if it pulls back from Nato or expresses any diminished willingness to protect longtime allies.

have been crossed since Trump last occupied the White House.

Restoring them and “making America great again” will almost certainly require more subtle and sophisticated uses of force and coercive diplomacy than the isolationist Trump ever contemplated in his first administration or suggested in his campaigns.

In Israel, where I am right now, one of the farthest-right members of Israel’s far-right government, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, did not waste any time, declaring on Monday that Trump’s new presidency presents an “important opportunity” to “apply Israeli sovereignty to the settlements in Judea and Samaria,” using the biblical names for areas of the West Bank. He added, “The year 2025 will, with God’s help, be the year of sovereignty” in these occupied territories.

But Trump may be more of a wild card for Israel today than Smotrich expects. He is the first US president to overtly appeal to and benefit from votes from Arab and Muslim Americans unhappy with unconditional US support for Israel in Gaza. He also comes in with as strong an isolationist mandate as any president since the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, when

Trump was president before, he put out a peace plan for a two-state solution in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, albeit one that strongly favoured Israel.

A Trump administration could cause a new and very different set of red lines to be crossed if it pulls back from Nato or expresses any diminished willingness to protect longtime allies.

Japan, Poland, South Korea and Taiwan have hostile nuclear-armed neighbours and the technology and resources to build nuclear weapons themselves.

“They haven’t done it because they thought they didn’t need to — because they believed that the United States had their back, even in the ultimate nightmare of a nuclear war,” said Gautam Mukunda, the noted strategy expert and Yale University lecturer. “Think about that for a second: They had such total faith in the US as an ally that for decades, they have, literally, bet the existence of their country on America’s word.” He added, “Given what Trump has said about alliances, could any responsible foreign leader keep making that wager?”

These countries have seen what happened to Ukraine after it returned the nuclear weapons stationed there to Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union. If these countries lose faith in America’s promise — or if that promise is withdrawn — and they develop their own nuclear weapons, it would end the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty that has limited the spread of nuclear weapons since World War II. That would erase the mother of all red lines.

The world, as it stands, is always so much more complicated than it seems on the campaign trail, especially today. Or as boxer Mike Tyson is said to have observed, “Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face.”

— The New York Times

Journalism, AI, and ethical challenges



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The writer
is journalist,
academic, researcher
in media studies

AA PEEP into the intersection of journalism and artificial intelligence (AI) highlights the need for new journalistic standards. Ethical implications, intellectual property, content verification, and moderating are just a few of the issues that lie ahead.

Currently, AI lacks awareness. It cannot explain why it wrote a certain article; it is unaware of misleading content, and AI cannot be held accountable, though it can shape public opinion.

Understanding what constitutes responsible use of AI goes beyond the application of large language models (LLMs) in a journalistic context. Each person learns differently; the same goes with AI, which relies heavily on data and information available.

While AI is not new, it is now in a string of constant development and changes. For decades, we have used chatbots to do interactive journalism and provide automated news updates. We have LLMs that helps with fact-checking by cross-referencing information, and we are familiar with using LLMs to create personalised content based on user's preferences and reading records.

Automation and later artificial intelligence in journalism were already discussed in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. That was also the time when full computerisation of the newsroom as well as the civilian internet was adopted by the news and media industries.

From the mid-2000s to the 2010s, machine learning algorithms become an essential component of journalism. AI was simply known as automated or automatic processes. Distribution, content recommendation algorithms, and data analysis were used. Early accounts of the use of AI in journalism take us back to 2014 with the Associated Press automating stories about corporate earnings.

News organisations have been under pressure to adopt AI as a result of technological advancement but also due to market pressures, financial challenges, and competitiveness. But there is a catch! News organisations utilise AI tools, infrastructure, and configurations provided by major tech companies like Google, Amazon, and Microsoft. These monopolies are the backbone of the current media system. This is a key area that needs scrutiny: control of structure confers power!

One of the most common applications of LLMs is automated reporting, which writes structured news articles such as financial data, and sports scores. Machine learning algorithms are increasingly being used to interpret and generate human-sounding language.

We have already leaped into content optimisation through image recognition, newsworthy event detection, real-time transcriptions, and automatic translation to multiple languages. What has become clear is the reshaping of the information ecosystem.

News organisations have been under pressure to adopt AI as a result of technological advancement but also due to market pressures, financial challenges, and competitiveness

While all these are exciting, there are profound concerns about artificial intelligence and its potential impact on elections, privacy, liability, and news. We are at a stage, where scrolling through the feed, we don't know if we can trust what we are reading. In times of fake news, wide-ranging uncertainty, and dissatisfaction, the average news consumer cannot truly identify whether a news text was written by a person or created by a machine; whether it is accurate or misleading.

AI moved from a novelty to a pivotal component in journalism; it is now less of an innovation and more of a challenge with ethical and practical implications, including its prospects.

One of the main priorities is to have a clear and transparent understanding of the legal artificial intelligence policies in the news and its ethical considerations and responsibilities. It is essential that a policy establishes clear boundaries for what AI may be used for and how the editorial process should manage quality.

People and machines can team up successfully. The aim is to recognise which areas people are essential to and when and where technology is used. Artificial intelligence, hopefully, is not to replace editors; rather, it is to optimise processes and adapt content to different formats. Not every problem in the news can be addressed with technological solutions. Emotional intelligence, empathy, and unique skills are essential for storytelling.

INDONESIANS DRILL FOR DISASTER BEFORE TSUNAMI ANNIVERSARY

JACK MOORE

Hundreds of Indonesians fled for higher ground on Wednesday as they ran through disaster drills in the region worst hit by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami ahead of its 20th anniversary next month. Children burst down the stairs in a rush for safety from the second floor of a school near Aceh's provincial capital Banda Aceh, where more than 60,000 were killed in the tsunami.

As school bells rang out, dozens of children ran into the road covering their heads, following marked escape routes as volunteers shouted "evacuate".

"With exercises, we can prevent, rather than cure," said 34-year-old participant and local village official Rizky Firmansyah.

"It's better like that I think, because it's better for us to anticipate than to have things that we don't want to happen." The drills simulated a repeat of the magnitude 9.2 earthquake which

struck off the west coast of Indonesia's Sumatra island on December 26, 2004, sparking giant waves that killed over 200,000 people in 14 countries.

The UN-organised drills saw hundreds of students and volunteers run to safe houses, including one four-storeys high, when the mock quake struck.

The drills — which took place in two villages as hundreds of observers

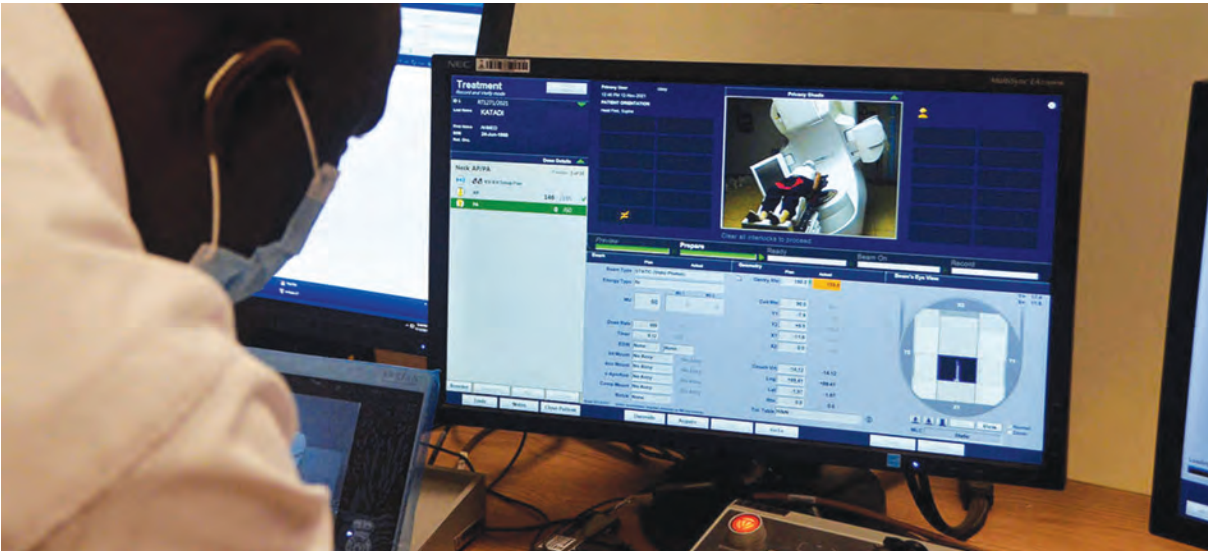
watched — were part of a tsunami summit of experts organised by the United Nations cultural agency (Unesco). Nearly 20 years on from the disaster, the UN is trying to get 100 per cent of coastal communities prepared for a repeat tsunami by 2030.

"We must ensure the next generation remains informed, prepared, and resilient," Ardito Kodijat, a Unesco official and head of the Indian Ocean Tsunami Information Centre, said. "Ensuring community preparedness requires regular drills."

Indonesia is one of the most disaster-prone nations on earth. The archipelago nation lies on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", where tectonic plates collide and many of the world's volcanic eruptions and earthquakes occur. Unesco experts say the world is much safer today from the threat of massive tsunamis due to early warning systems that were lacking in 2004. But the agency has also warned coastal communities to stay alert.

"While we have made significant strides, the nature of this hazard requires us to remain vigilant," Vidar Helgesen, executive secretary of Unesco's intergovernmental oceanographic commission, told delegates in Banda Aceh. — AFP

Reducing the cancer burden in men!



The focus on prevention is fundamental, especially given limited resources.

A RECENT study projected a troubling global rise in cancer among men, from 10.3 million cases in 2022 to 19 million by 2050 – an 84 per cent increase.

Deaths are expected to increase from 5.4 million to 10.5 million per year during the same period, with two demographic groups — men aged 65 and above, and men in low- and middle-income countries — facing the biggest increases. In Sub-Saharan Africa alone, male cancer deaths could reach one million annually, driven by factors like limited health-care access and lack of screening services, which contribute to late-stage diagnoses.

These alarming figures highlight the need for stronger global cancer prevention, screening, and treatment efforts, especially in lower-income regions and among older men.

There is some momentum towards these objectives. US President Joe Biden has revitalised the Cancer Moonshot initiative, which aims to reduce the death rate from cancer in the United States by at least 50 per cent in 25 years and improve patients' quality of life. Priorities include reducing lifestyle-related cancer risk, encouraging widespread cancer screenings, and expanding access to the latest innovations in diagnostics and treatment.

But while the Cancer Moonshot's headline goals are domestic, the initiative also aims to help reduce cancer cases and improve outcomes elsewhere, especially in the lower- and middle-income countries where most cancer deaths occur. To this end, it seeks to improve cancer research and care, build health infrastructure, expand access to vaccines, support public-health campaigns, and foster collaborative efforts for cancer prevention and treatment. Complementing this effort, the African Union's Africa Health Strategy 2016-2030 aims to reduce the incidence of

non-communicable diseases, including cancer, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and respiratory infections. The focus on prevention is fundamental, especially given limited resources. After all, the fight against cancer starts with individual choices, not least diet. To lower cancer risk, men should consume more fruits and vegetables, choose whole grains, reduce intake of red and processed meats, and limit sugar and processed foods.

The local availability of nutritious foods, particularly seasonal fruits and vegetables, helps to ensure that healthy eating is affordable and accessible. For example, teff — a tiny grain rich in iron, calcium, protein, and fibre — plays a crucial role in local diets in Ethiopia. Teff-based foods, such as injera, provide essential nutrients that support overall health, including reducing cancer risk, owing to their high fibre content and low glycaemic index (a measure of how quickly the food raises your blood sugar).

Meanwhile, men must reduce or eliminate harmful habits, such as smoking — tobacco accounts for 25 per cent of all cancer deaths globally — and excessive alcohol consumption. As it stands, approximately one in three men

smokes, compared to one in 16 women, and 21 per cent of men report binge drinking compared to 13 per cent of women.

Effective messaging — for example, highlighting the long-term benefits of cancer prevention, including a longer, more active, pain-free life spent with loved ones — can encourage men to adopt healthier habits. Beyond public-health campaigns, governments and NGOs can help smokers quit by offering cessation programmes and educational resources. Community-wide actions, including the enforcement of regulations on advertising tobacco and alcohol products, are also needed.

Governments can support healthier lifestyles in other ways. For example, regular physical activity significantly reduces cancer risk, with the World Health Organisation recommending at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise weekly.

Cities with parks, walking trails, and bike lanes encourage physical activity. One study found that a community's walkability and bikeability, and the availability of assets like parks close to home, are positively correlated with residents' overall health.

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M NSOFOR

The writer is a public-health physician and behavioral-science researcher, serves on the Global Fellows Advisory Board at the Atlantic Institute

SPORTS

FIRSTT20I



MIRZA’S FIGHTING 62 POWERS OMAN PAST DUTCH

MUSCAT: Oman’s excellent run at home continued as Duleep Mendis’ men won the first T20I match against the Netherlands by three wickets for their fifth successive win at the Oman Cricket Academy ground on Wednesday.

Hosts Oman, who recently concluded the Cricket World Cup League 2 tri-series with an all-win record (four wins in a row) against the UAE and the Netherlands, won the first of the three-match T20I series against the Dutch side.

In a thrilling low-scoring match, Oman chased down a target of 139 with five balls to spare. Hammad Mirza’s composed knock of 62 not out and a disciplined performance from the host bowlers played key roles in the victory, as Oman withstood early setbacks to get over the line.

Oman got off to a rocky start in the chase. Captain and opener Jatinder Singh was dismissed early for 12 off 7 balls by Timm van der Gugten, and Aamir Kaleem followed shortly after, caught behind off Aryan Dutt for just 2 runs. To make matters worse, Wasim Ali was dismissed for 5, leaving Oman struggling at 16-3 after just three overs. The Netherlands’ bowlers, particularly Van der Gugten and Dutt, kept the pressure on, and Oman appeared to be in danger of falling well short of the target.

However, the arrival of Mirza brought the innings back on track. Mirza, who has been in fine form, played a responsible innings, not only anchoring the chase but also striking some lofty blows with an unbeaten 62 from 42 balls, which included five boundaries and three sixes.

He found valuable support from Ashish Odedara (14) and Sufyan Mehmood (37), who put together a crucial 76-run stand for the fifth wicket.

In a thrilling low-scoring match, Oman chased down a target of 139 with five balls to spare. Hammad Mirza’s composed knock of 62 not out and a disciplined performance from the host bowlers played key roles in the victory.

Mehmood’s knock featured three sixes and helped steady the chase after Oman had slipped to 40-4.

As the target neared, the wickets continued to fall around Mirza. Odedara was dismissed for 14, and Mehmood was dismissed for 37 in the 17th over, leaving Oman needing 23

from 18 balls. However, with the steady hand of Mirza guiding the chase, Oman managed to cross the line. Despite losing Mehran Khan (4) and Siddharth Bukapatnam (0) in the final overs, Oman finished on 139/7 in 19.1 overs, with Mirza remaining not out at the end.

Earlier in the day, the Netherlands were put on the back foot by some sharp bowling from Oman. The Dutch openers were dismissed cheaply, and the top order collapsed under pressure. Teja Nidamanuru was dismissed for 9 off 7 balls by Muzahir Raza in the opening over, and Vikramjit Singh fell for just 6, bowled by Raza, leaving the Netherlands at 19-2 after 3 overs.

Scott Edwards, the Netherlands’ captain, was trapped lbw for 6 by Raza in the fourth over, deepening the visitors’ woes. Max O’Dowd and Colin Ackermann attempted a rebuild, with O’Dowd scoring 14 runs before falling to Aamir Kaleem. Ackermann fought valiantly and scored 34 off 31 balls, helping his side reach 50 by the 7th over. His dismissal to Kaleem in the 17th over, at 107/6, left the Dutch with little room to recover.

Raza was the pick of the bowlers, claiming 3-42, while Kaleem supported well with 2-28. Mehran Khan (1-15) and Shakeel Ahmed (1-24) also played crucial roles in keeping the Dutch total in check. **Brief scores:** Netherlands 138/7 in 20 overs (Noah Croes 33*, C Ackermann 34; Muzahir Raza 3-42, A Kaleem 2-28) lost to Oman 139/7 in 19.1 overs (Hammad Mirza 62*, Sufyan Mehmood 37; Roelof van der Merwe 3-15, Timm van der Gugten 2-33).

OMAN IN MUST-WIN SITUATION AGAINST PALESTINE TODAY

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, NOV 13

OMAN will take on Palestine in a must-win situation to keep their hopes alive in Group B of AFC Asian Qualifiers — Road to 26. The match will kick off at 8:00 pm at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Thursday. The Red Warriors, under supervision of head coach Rasheed Jaber, will aim to bounce back strongly after the 4-0 defeat against Jordan in Amman last month.

Oman will head into the tie looking to utilise the fans support and take advantage of the home match. The victory in today’s game will provide a timely boost to the Red Warriors for the following clash against Iraq as they aim to earn six points from both the matches.

Oman currently are in a very precarious position as they are fourth in the group with three points after a challenging start with three defeats against Iraq, South Korea and Jordan. Clinching the full points is much needed in today’s assignment to revive Red Warriors’ campaign.



Despite the injuries of mid-fielder Yazeed al Maashani, Ali al Busaidy and Salah al Yahyaei, Oman head coach Rasheed Jaber and his assistant Yaqoob al Sabahi will depend on many other key players including Bangkok United forward Mohsin al Ghassani, Abdulrahman al Mushaifri and Omar al Malki to lead the team’s attack.

On the other hand, Palestine will eye to snatch the winning points to keep their 2026 Fifa World Cup dreams alive and move forward in their campaign. The opponent side had only two points from two draws while they had suffered two losses to put them in the bottom of the table.

ESSENTIAL TIE
Rasheed Jaber voiced confident during the press conference saying the team will play for a win. “It is an essential match and we will enter the match with winning target. The opponent is in similar situation and if we need to keep our chances alive in the qualifiers, we have to snatch the three points in this game. The presence of the fans will support the team and will capitalise the chances of securing the victory,” he added.

“After the defeat against Jordan, the team underwent a compre-



After the defeat against Jordan, the team underwent a comprehensive training plan and we are looking to convert our plans to a thrilling win. There some injuries in the team but I am confident in my squad as all the players are at the same level of the main players.

RASHEED JABER
Oman head coach

hensive training plan and we are looking to convert our plans to a thrilling win. There some injuries in the team but I am confident in my squad as all the players are at the same level of the main players,” he ended.

Oman’s forward Mohsin al Ghassani said the match is not going to be easy. “The goal is to end the match on a winning target. We had closed the chapter of Jordan match and our full focus now is on today’s tie against Palestine. Our aim is to take advantage of the home match and learn from our mistakes in the previous match.

“All the players in the squad are in full readiness and best shape. We are playing as a group and we should not depend on the individual. Our target is to fulfil the fans dreams,” he added.

GO FURTHER IN CAMPAIGN
Palestine head coach Makram

Dabdoub said that both teams are equal in their technical performance.

“Oman are considered among the teams that are technically well-organised in the field. Despite their top performances in the previous games they suffered defeats. Our target is to win and go further in the table order. The replacements for the injured players are available,” he said.

“Each match has its own characteristics and we will focus in Oman match to secure the desired goal. We faced difficulty with some of our professional players and their clubs. However, we are ready with the available players in the squad and I am looking from my team to deliver a top game. The chances and technical performances are very close between the teams. The team that can manage well on the field and benefit from the scoring chances will be the winner,” he concluded.

NBA CUP



Golden State Warriors' Stephen Curry (30) dribbles past Dallas Mavericks' Klay Thompson (31) in the fourth quarter at the Chase Center. — **Imagn Images**

Curry dazzles on Thompson’s return as Warriors down Mavs

LOS ANGELES: Stephen Curry scored 37 points as the Golden State Warriors spoiled Klay Thompson’s return to the Bay Area with a thrilling 120-117 victory over the Dallas Mavericks in the opening round of the NBA Cup on Tuesday.

Thompson — a beloved member of four NBA championship-winning Golden State teams before joining Dallas in July — received a rapturous welcome in his first game back in San Francisco since his departure.

The 34-year-old was given a guard of honour by cheering Golden State staff upon his arrival at the Chase Center before fans wearing nautical caps roared their appreciation for the player who famously used to commute to work in his fishing boat.

But despite delighting the home crowd with six three-pointers in a 22-point haul, Thompson was upstaged by former team-mate Curry who produced a stunning fourth-quarter performance to drag the Warriors over the line.

The Mavericks looked poised to snatch victory after battling into a six-point lead at 114-108 with just over three minutes remaining.

But Curry then took over with 10 unanswered points — including one sensational step-back three from 28 feet — to put Golden State into a 118-114 lead, before adding two late free throws to seal the win. “There was a lot of emotion but both teams wanted to win,” Curry told TNT television. “It was a playoff-like atmosphere, with great players making great plays. That’s why we love the competition.”

Thompson meanwhile said it had felt “surreal” lining up against his former team-mate.

“We’ve guarded each other plenty of times in practice for Team USA or All-Star Games, but a competitive NBA game — it was pretty surreal,” Thompson said. — **AFP**

Alcaraz beats Rublev to open ATP Finals account



Spain’s Carlos Alcaraz celebrates after winning his singles group stage match against Russia’s Andrey Rublev at the ATP Finals tournament in Turin, Italy. — **Reuters**

CARLOS ALCARAZ opened his account at the ATP Finals on Wednesday with an entertaining 6-3, 7-6 (10/8) win over Andrey Rublev which boosted his hopes of reaching the semifinals.

World number three Alcaraz comfortably defeated Rublev to lift himself off the bottom of the John Newcombe Group and looked in much better form despite struggling with fatigue and illness in the lead-up to the match.

There had been some doubt as to whether Alcaraz, who lost his opening match in straight sets to Casper Ruud, would continue in Turin after quickly ending his training session on Tuesday, with his coach Juan Carlos Ferrero saying that he had trouble breathing.

“I could be better, I’m not going to lie,” said Alcaraz on court after beating Rublev.

“I’ve been struggling with my health the last week and today I thought I was going to feel better. I was OK to play, but thinking about the first match I was thinking a lot about that I was sick, that I couldn’t play.

“Today I really wanted to step on the court and just think about tennis, try to play a high level... When I played the first match I felt like I did not entertain the people, I did not play good tennis.”

Alcaraz, who has won the Wimbledon and French Open titles this season, cruised to the first set in 38 minutes, breaking Rublev in game seven and quickly winning the next two to go one set ahead.

And although the Spaniard had a harder time of it in the second set he delighted the spectators with a series of spectacular shots which suggested he might be approaching his best form.

Alcaraz winning in straight sets means that Ruud will reach the semifinals if he beats two-time Finals champion Alexander Zverev in the day’s late match.

Rublev meanwhile drops to last place after losing his sixth straight Finals match, although he put up a battle and had two opportunities to win the second set.

The Russian will be cheering on Zverev later as he will be eliminated should Ruud win and secure passage to the knockout stage.

On Thursday, world number one Jannik Sinner will reach the last four if he claims a single set against Daniil Medvedev, and will top the Ilie Nastase Group with a third straight win. — **AFP**

Workshop on scouting, scientific follow-up for coaches

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, NOV 13

The Sports Medicine Department of the General Directorate for Care and Development at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth concluded the Workshop on Sports Scouting and Scientific Follow-Up. The two-day workshop, held at the Radisson Panorama Hotel, Bausher, saw the participation of 48 coaches from various sports federations and committees.

The sessions and lectures focused on scouting test methodologies and the goals of scientific follow-up, along with active discussions on enhancing competencies in this field.

The workshop also provided participants with an opportunity to exchange experiences and best practices supporting the development of sports performance in Oman.

Ahmed bin Salem al Hashmi, Head of the Testing and Measurements Department at the Sports Medicine and Sciences Directorate, gave a comprehensive presentation on the ‘Guide to



Approved Measurements and Tests for Sports Scouting in Athlete Preparation Centres’ during the workshop. His presentation highlighted the importance of conducting anthropometric measurements and physical and motor tests for young athletes in centres and schools, aiming to identify and nurture sports talent.

Al Hashmi’s presentation also highlighted various tests and standards to assess youth athletic abilities. These tests include the ‘Battery of Measurements’, which comprises precise anthropometric measurements, such as total



height, arm length, trunk length and weight, providing a comprehensive database that reflects the physical standards of young athletes.

Al Hashmi also addressed physical ability tests, such as the trunk flexibility test for flexibility, the seated medicine ball throw test for upper limb strength, the horizontal jump test for lower limb strength, a 30-metre sprint test for speed, and the 5x10 agility test to assess quick directional changes. These tests are essential for analysing an athlete’s physical endurance and determining the basic fitness levels needed for

optimal performance.

He also discussed endurance tests like the Luc Leger shuttle test, used to determine maximum oxygen consumption (VO2 max) and aerobic endurance, and the Yo-Yo intermittent test, which measures maximum aerobic capacity with recovery intervals. These tests guide athletes towards sports disciplines that align with their abilities.

Al Hashmi emphasised that these tests are a key component of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth’s strategy to achieve the national goals of Oman Vision 2040. The tests include

measurements such as height, weight, flexibility, muscle strength and endurance, used to identify physical and motor competencies that help pinpoint potential areas of athletic excellence.

After the workshop’s conclusion, Ahmed al Hashmi explained that the current workshop targets coaches from various the governorates involved in athlete preparation centres, as well as the school sports federation, aiming to provide them with information and train them on how to conduct and monitor selection tests in schools.

He added, “This workshop enhances coaches’ abilities to conduct periodic tests every three months, different from those used in the initial selection, to ensure a precise player selection.”

Regarding the workshop’s benefits, Al Hashmi emphasised the importance of coaches providing relevant authorities with player data, stressing the need to build a comprehensive database for all athletes, including school students and club members, to understand and assess Omani athletes’ levels.

SPORTS

BASKETBALL LEAGUE



Al Bashayer and Al Suwaiq players in action.
Photos by **Ammar al Musafir**

AL BASHAYER
DOMINATE
AL SUWAIQ WITH
CRUSHING
116-16 VICTORY

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, NOV 13

Al Bashayer Club achieved a significant victory over Al Suwaiq with a score of 116-16 in the Oman Basketball League. The game took place at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher on Tuesday.

Al Bashayer displayed complete control over the game's flow, thanks to the focus and experience of its players, dominating in all phases. Leading the team in scoring were Mahmoud al Souli, Osama al Riyami, Noah al Mahrouqi, Saeed al Saadi, Hadeed Bait Bakhit and Saeed Ghassan.

Al Bashayer started the game strongly, with Saeed Ghassan scoring the first two points, giving his team a solid boost. Although Al Suwaiq attempted to equalise through Hamad al Musharafi, Al Bashayer maintained their effective offence. The team scored 11 consecutive points, fuelled by precise moves from Hadeed Bait Bakhit, Ahmed al Halhali, Shaker Smith and Mahmoud al Souli, extending the lead to 13-2. Both teams continued to push, but Al Bashayer ended the first quarter with a commanding lead of 25-6.

In the second quarter, Al Bashayer sustained their offensive pressure, with Hadeed Bait Bakhit adding 5 more points, while Al Suwaiq managed two points through Nawfal Taysir. Al Bashayer widened the gap with a three-pointer from Shaker Smith, concluding the first half ahead at 51-12.

Al Bashayer's dominance continued in the third quarter, as the team added another 11 points through Saeed Ghassan, Bassam al Busaidy, Ahmed al Halhali and Mahmoud al Souli, stretching the lead to 62-12. Al Bashayer capitalised on offensive opportunities, finishing the third quarter at 87-12.

The game's dynamic didn't change in the final quarter, with Al Bashayer maintaining offensive control and a high-performance level. The team added more points, closing the game with a sweeping victory of 116-16, showcasing superiority in every aspect of the match.

The officiating team included international referee Issam al Siyabi as the main referee, international referee Wafaa al Sumari as the second referee and Ali al Salmani as the third referee. At the scoring table were Miad al Hamdani, Huda al Hanai and Hafidh Awlad Ahmed.



India players celebrate a goal against Pakistan during the Junior Asia Cup 2023 final in Salalah. Indian won 2-1.

Oman to stage inaugural
FIH Hockey Nations Cup 2

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
[@anuroop_ath](#)

THE Sultanate of Oman, which recently hosted the centennial Congress of the International Hockey Federation (FIH), will stage the inaugural edition of the FIH Hockey Nations Cup 2 (men) in Muscat, next year.

This new tournament will be played at the Oman Hockey Stadium in Al Amerat from February 17 to 23, 2025.

FIH President Tayyab Ikram said: "Oman is the nation of the 'firsts'! Hosting very successfully the inaugural FIH Hockey5s World Cup and now the very first FIH Hockey Nations Cup 2! The global hockey community could witness the wonderful hospitality of our Omani hosts during our FIH Congress, and all the participating teams can expect the same. It will be an amazing event in a magnificent hockey venue. Thank you, Oman!"

The colourful Hockey Stars Awards Gala was also held during the 49th FIH Congress in Muscat.

FIH Hockey Nations Cup 2 will give the opportunity for eight more nations — ie, the national teams ranked after those involved in the FIH Hockey Pro League and the FIH Hockey Nations Cup — to play an intercontinental FIH tournament, and compete for the chance to be promoted into the 2026 FIH Nations Cup.

The teams qualified for the tournament include Austria, Chile, China, Egypt, Oman, Poland, Scotland and USA.

"Hosting the inaugural FIH Nations Cup 2 in Oman is both an honour and a testament to our commitment to advancing hockey in the region. We are thrilled to welcome teams and fans from around the world to experience Oman's passion for this sport. This tournament marks a significant milestone for Hockey Oman, and we look forward to an exciting display of talent and sports-



Oman and Japan players fight for the ball during the Men's Junior Asia Cup 2023 in Salalah.

manship on our home ground", said Oman Hockey Association Chairman Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma.

WOMEN'S NATIONS
CUP IN CHILE

On Wednesday, the FIH announced Chile as the hosts of the third edition of the FIH Women's Hockey Nations Cup from February 23 to March 2, 2025.

The participating teams include some of the best hockey nations in the world, with even two of them — Japan and the USA —, having played at the Paris 2024 Olympics: Canada, Chile, Ireland, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Scotland and the USA.

JUNIOR ASIA CUP

Coming next, the Oman Hockey Stadium will host the Men's Junior Asia Cup 2024 from November 26 to December 4.

The Women's Junior Asia Cup 2024 will follow suit at the same venue from December 7 to 15.

In the men's section, India, Japan, South Korea, Thailand and Chinese Taipei form the Pool A while hosts Oman are in Pool B along with Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malaysia and China.

In the round-robin league format, top two teams from each group will qualify for the semifinals on December 3. The final is on the next day.

In the women's tournament, Pool A include China, Bangladesh, India, Malaysia and Thailand. Japan, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Chinese Taipei and Hong Kong form the Pool B.

Top two teams from each group will make the semifinals on December 14 with the final on the next day.

India are the defending champions in the Men's Junior Asia Cup after they beat Pakistan 2-1 in the final of the 2023 edition held in Oman's Salalah. Indians also won the women's championship, when they beat South Korea 2-1 in Kakamigahara, Japan.

Coming next, the Oman Hockey Stadium will host the Men's Junior Asia Cup 2024 from November 26 to December 4. The Women's Junior Asia Cup 2024 will follow suit at the same venue from December 7 to 15.



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PDO delivers breakthroughs in Oman’s drilling efficiency

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, NOV 13

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), Oman’s leading hydrocarbons producer, has announced a milestone in its drilling operations, achieved through a first-of-its-kind collaboration with global energy service provider Halliburton.

This partnership, centred around an Integrated Project Management (IPM) approach, has revolutionised PDO’s well delivery process, significantly boosting productivity while achieving remarkable reductions in both time and cost.

The project, named the Upper Shuaiba Integrated Drilling



The project saw the completion of 320 wells under the IPM framework.

Services, saw the completion of 320 wells under the IPM framework, marking a substantial advancement in Oman’s energy sector.

By optimising drilling operations, PDO managed to slash the average drilling time per well from 45 days to just 13 days.

This reduction, equating to a 23% improvement, underscores PDO’s commitment to enhancing operational efficiency and contributing to a sustainable energy future.

The project’s outcomes go beyond time efficiency, as significant cost savings were also realised. Process optimisations led to reduced operational expenditures, strengthening

PDO’s goal to drive value for Oman’s energy economy while ensuring sustainability in resource management.

Moreover, the project delivered an unexpected boost in production levels.

The collaboration with Halliburton resulted in an output of 12,578 barrels per day beyond initial forecasts, significantly raising PDO’s contribution to Oman’s energy supply and national economic growth.

PDO’s partnership with Halliburton exemplifies the advantages of IPM, as it brings together technical expertise, advanced project management techniques, and a shared focus on optimizing resources.

Boosting SME investment in tourism sector

THE Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) recently hosted a dialogue session titled “Enhancing SME Investment in the Tourism Sector”, focusing on strengthening the participation of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Oman’s growing tourism industry.

This marks the fourth in a series of discussions aimed at refining the business environment, implementing supportive policies and motivating entrepreneurs to bring innovative ideas to the tourism market.



The session addressed four key areas essential for developing the tourism sector.

in heritage tourism. The government has introduced investment opportunities for Omani SMEs to manage and operate various historical and heritage sites, expanding their role in the cultural tourism landscape. The move aligns with Oman’s vision of engaging more local businesses in preserving and promoting its heritage, providing a platform for SMEs to thrive.

The dialogue session resulted in actionable recommendations to ease SME entry into the tourism sector.

Key suggestions included making tourism-related licensing laws more flexible, raising awareness of tourism’s importance, and supporting SMEs by securing tourism contracts, reducing taxes and enhancing financial incentives. The aim is to empower SMEs to become vital players in Oman’s tourism growth story.

SMEDA statistics reveal that by the end of October this year, around 4,595 SMEs were registered in the tourism sector.

These include 3,668 micro-enterprises, 839 small enterprises and 88 medium enterprises. To further support these businesses, twelve loans were approved through the Al Azm portfolio, totalling approximately RO 1 million.

Additional funding has also been made available through the Al Rafd Fund, which has financed 69 tourism projects, amounting to RO 2.2 million.

Medco LLC Oman Achieves Five-Year Safety Milestone in its Oil Production Operations



Medco LLC Oman, a leading oil production company operating in the Sultanate of Oman, proudly announces a remarkable safety milestone: five years without a Lost Time Injury (LTI), totaling over 10 million safe work hours. This achievement was commemorated at the Nimr Oil Field in the presence of senior officials, including MedcoEnergi’s Chief Operating Officer and key representatives from Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), led by PDO’s Oil South Director, Salim Hamed Al Sukaiti.

Reaffirming its commitment to strict safety standards, Medco LLC Oman has also completed over 17 million kilometers driving without a motor vehicle incident. Managing oil production in the Karim Small Fields cluster in Shuwaimiah, with a workforce of over 200 employees, the company has been recognized for its ethical, professional, and innovative contributions to Oman’s energy sector.

Since beginning operations in January 2006 within the Karim Small Fields—a group of 24 fields under PDO’s oversight—Medco LLC Oman has consistently enhanced its operational capabilities. To date, the company has drilled over 400 wells, utilizing primary, secondary, and tertiary recovery techniques to maximize oil extraction while maintaining high safety standards, thus strengthening its reputation as a reliable player in Oman’s oil sector.

“This achievement underscores Medco LLC Oman’s steadfast dedication to safety and operational excellence, reinforcing our role as a trusted partner in Oman’s oil industry,” stated Ronald Gunawan, Chief Operating Officer of MedcoEnergi. “Guided by professionalism, integrity, and innovation, Medco LLC Oman upholds a



culture of continuous improvement and innovation. Our commitment to transparency and sustainable practices is integral to our mission of delivering value for Oman and adhering to international standards.”

Medco LLC Oman is part of PT Medco Energi Internasional Tbk, a Southeast Asian energy and natural resources company headquartered in Indonesia, with a portfolio spanning Oil & Gas, Clean Power, and Copper & Gold mining. While rooted in oil and gas production in Indonesia, MedcoEnergi is expanding across Southeast Asia and the Middle East and advancing clean energy projects in geothermal, solar, and hydropower. Through its subsidiary, PT Amman Mineral Nusa Tenggara, MedcoEnergi also supports regional copper and gold demand.

ADVERTORIALS



Meticulously crafted to make every moment memorable, take control of your journey by owning the luxury compact-size sedan.

MAKE A MARK IN THE LUXURY LEXUS IS

MUSCAT: Designed to deliver a pulsating performance, the Lexus IS delivers a dynamic and power-packed experience. Cruise the roads with confidence as the IS pierces through winds with its aggressive looks supplemented with unprecedented luxury innovations.

Meticulously crafted to make every moment memorable, take control of your journey by owning the luxury compact-size sedan. Built to appeal to the younger and more energetic crowd, the attractively stylish drive is an inspiring blend of luxury and utility that takes the whole experience up a notch. The exterior boasts an illuminated scuff plate, a chrome metallic finish with bold character lines, the Lexus signature gloss black grille, LED headlights, and LED turning signals.

The IS designs represent Lexus' vision of pioneering luxury and providing a seamless driving experience.

Available in three trims, the Lexus IS300, IS 350 ELITE and IS 350 F Sport is a driver's dream. In the IS300, experience an exhilarating response with a turbocharged 2.0L 4-cylinder, delivering 241 HP at 5,800 rpm.

Unbeatable in its league, offers comfort and agility with its smooth leather-wrapped steering wheel, ventilated seats, electrochromic inside rear view mirror with tilt in reverse mode, a remote engine starter, and a smart key for ease of access.

Feel connected and indulge in the drive with IS's built-in 10.3" navigation system and 17-speaker Mark Levinson Premium Surround System.

Advanced safety features include a tyre pressure monitoring system, a speed-sensing door lock function, ISOFIX child seat restraint anchors on the rear, cruise control, front and rear parking sensors, side and knee airbags for the front and rear, and an electric parking brake, among others.



BankDhofar, in partnership with Dhofar Insurance, offers various insurance coverage plans.

BankDhofar, Dhofar Insurance partner to provide insurance solutions

MUSCAT: Commercial banks are considered an important part of the insurance industry and play a vital role in providing individuals with comprehensive and integrated insurance solutions that meet both their personal and financial needs.

BankDhofar acts as an intermediary between insurance companies and customers to facilitate the process of obtaining appropriate insurance which in turn contributes to providing convenience and ease to customers by allowing them to manage their bank accounts and insurance services under one roof.

BankDhofar, in partnership with Dhofar Insurance, offers various insurance coverage plans, such as comprehensive and third party motor insurance at attractive premiums, as well as health insurance cover for family members and domestic workers. The health insurance plans are customised based on the requirements.

BankDhofar's home insurance plan provides protection of the building; its contents and appliances against potential loss or damage resulting from fire, explosion, civil unrest and natural disasters such as storms, hurricanes, floods, landslides and earthquakes.

MGD unveils limited edition collection

To pay tribute to the glorious spirit of the nation on Oman's 54th National Day, Malabar Gold and Diamonds (MGD), the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 365 showrooms across 13 countries, has launched a special collection of diamond pendants and rings priced at RO 54.

"As a proud part of Oman's rich cultural and commercial heritage, we are thrilled to launch our limited-edition collection of pendants and rings to celebrate the 54th National Day. At Malabar Gold and Diamonds, we deeply value the significance of this day for the nation and its people.

These exquisite designs are our tribute to Oman's history. Our 12 showrooms across the Sultanate of Oman are warmly embraced by both nationals and expatriates, reflecting Malabar Gold and Diamonds' esteemed position in the country's jewellery trade," said Najeeb K, Regional Head – Oman, Malabar Gold and Diamonds.

The exclusive collection is available in 11 designs and reflects the vibrance of the Omani culture. Malabar Gold and Diamonds has a strong retail presence across Oman and has incorporated the special design as part of the Mine Diamonds collection.

The National Day products will be available across all 12 outlets of Malabar Gold and Diamonds in Oman, located at Muscat, Seeb, Barka, Salalah, Sohar, Muthra Souk, Ibri, Nizwa and Al Khoud.

To pay tribute to the glorious spirit of the nation on Oman's 54th National Day, Malabar Gold and Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 365 showrooms across 13 countries, has launched a special collection of diamond pendants and rings priced at RO 54.



ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) has been a primary commitment of Malabar Group since its inception in 1993, setting 5% of its net profits towards such causes in every region of operation.

The group operates on the strong belief that the most successful companies are the ones that integrate

responsibility and sustainability into their core business.

The key focus areas of Malabar Group's ESG initiatives are Health, Housing, Hunger Eradication, Education, Environment and Women empowerment. The group periodically strengthens its ESG goals to remain a socially conscious and responsible organisation.

DRIVING A VOLKSWAGEN IS NOW EASIER THAN EVER

MUSCAT: Volkswagen Oman, represented by Premium Motors, has launched a new leasing option, making it simpler than ever for customers to experience the luxury and performance of a Volkswagen without the commitment of ownership.

With lease terms starting at just RO 239 per month and no down payment required, drivers can enjoy comprehensive benefits across Volkswagen's most sought-after models.

Featured lease offers include the Touareg at RO 499 per month, the Golf R at RO 455 per month, and the T-Roc at RO 239 per month.

Christian Nehme, General Manager of Premium Motors, highlighted the programme's value to customers, saying,



"Our new leasing options are crafted for flexibility and customer convenience.

By offering tailored plans for the Touareg, Golf R, and T-Roc, we are making it easier than ever for our customers to experience the performance and elegance

of a Volkswagen with unmatched value and peace of mind."

Each lease package includes free insurance, five years of roadside assistance, a five-year or 150,000 KM manufacturer warranty (whichever comes first), and five years of servicing, providing a worry-free driving experience.

Additional perks, such as free lifestyle accessories, registration, and a car care package with window tinting and interior protection, further enhance the leasing experience.

This exclusive offer is available from October 20 to December 21, 2024, on select models, including the Touareg and Golf R MY 2023, as well as the Teramont, Tiguan, and T-Roc MY 2024.

Sohar International supports young Omani designers

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to fostering creativity and empowering Omani talent, Sohar International, Oman's best bank, proudly sponsored the graduation ceremony for the first cohort of the Fashion Future Programme. Organised by Dar Al Aseel and led by renowned designer Amal al Raisi, this innovative eight-month programme offered aspiring female designers invaluable exposure and guidance in the fashion industry.

Representing Sohar International, Mazin bin Mahmood al Raisi, Chief Marketing Officer, attended the event, held under the auspices of HH Sayyidah Meyyan bint Shihab al Said, Chairperson of the Oman Design Association. The ceremony also featured the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the programme's second edition, with Sohar International reaffirming its commitment as the Gold Sponsor, continuing its support from the programme's inaugural cohort.

Mazin bin Mahmood al Raisi, Chief Marketing Officer of Sohar International,



The ceremony also featured the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the programme's second edition.

said, "Empowering Omani women is central to our social responsibility initiatives, and the Fashion Future Programme exemplifies our commitment to advancing their role in Oman's socio-economic landscape.

By equipping Omani women with critical industry skills and real-world experience, this programme enables them to make meaningful contributions to the growth of the fashion sector—a sector with immense potential for economic diversification. At Sohar International, we focus on strategic community investments

that extend beyond traditional philanthropy, aiming to create sustainable pathways that empower Omani women to realise both their creative and economic aspirations."

The Fashion Future Programme is designed to provide young Omani women a platform to refine their skills and gain industry exposure, blending theoretical knowledge with practical experience.

Through specialised courses in fashion forecasting and journalism, as well as international opportunities such as an internship at a prominent fashion house in Paris and visits to global sourcing events like Première Vision and Texworld, the programme offers participants a comprehensive view of the global fashion landscape, empowering them to make meaningful contributions to the sector's growth. The graduation ceremony for the first cohort was held at the Mandarin Oriental Muscat, attended by a number of distinguished guests, including several members of the royal family, diplomats, and media representatives, adding prestige to the event.

SHORT TAKES

MARAFIQ FUNDS PREPARATORY CLASSES AT SCHOOLS IN AL WUSTA



Marafiq has renewed its support to open preparatory classes at Dhahr School for Basic Education in Al Duqm and Al Lakbi School for Basic Education in Al Jazir.

DUQM: Marafiq, a company owned by OQ (Oman's leading energy company) and Gulf Energy Development (GED), a leading power and water utilities company based in Thailand, has strengthened its support for the local community by funding the opening of preparatory classes at schools in Al Wusta Governorate for the third consecutive year.

According to the agreement between Marafiq and the Directorate-General of Education in Al Wusta Governorate, Marafiq has renewed its support to open preparatory classes at Dhahr School for Basic Education in Al Duqm and Al Lakbi School for Basic Education in Al Jazir for the 2024/2025 academic year, after previously funding the opening of preparatory classes at both schools in the past two academic years.

Eng Abdullah al Hashimi, Managing Director of Marafiq, confirmed the company's commitment to supporting social initiatives in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) in particular and Al Wusta Governorate in general.

He emphasised that the company's support for the opening of preparatory classes reflects its focus on school children and enhancing the local community's benefit from Marafiq's social responsibility programmes.

He added, "Social investment is an integral part of Marafiq's corporate social responsibility, as the company places special emphasis on supporting the education sector in SEZAD and Al Wusta Governorate in general.

Through its continuous funding of preparatory classes at schools in Al Wusta Governorate, the company aims to enhance human development and build the capabilities of young generations to make the most of local potential."

The opening of preparatory classes is part of the efforts made by the Directorate-General of Education in Al Wusta Governorate to provide comprehensive care for children to overcome the challenges they face when transitioning to the first grade of basic education. It also serves as an encouragement and motivation for both children and their parents to further pursue academic achievement.

Majid al Sinawi, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Education in Al Wusta Governorate, expressed his appreciation to Marafiq for its role in supporting the efforts of the Directorate-General of Education in developing the abilities and skills of students.

He said that the support of companies for the Directorate's plans reflects the level of partnership between the public and private sectors and contributes to the implementation of various plans and programs aimed at improving the academic performance of students in the governorate's schools.

NASRULAH AL AJMI

MUSCAT, NOV 13

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) showcased innovative operational processes and services at an event held in collaboration with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit on the occasion of World Quality Week.

Themed "Quality from Compliance to Outstanding Performance," the event was attended by Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of OPAZ, along with officials, private sector representatives, and quality enthusiasts.

Speaking to Oman TV, Eng Al Dheeb said, "We are pleased to participate today in World Quality Week, organised by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones. From its inception, the Authority has focused on the principles of quality and innovation, which form one of its six core

Salalah Port to join global vessel-sharing network

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, NOV 13

PORT OF SALALAH – a major Omani logistics hub overlooking the Indian Ocean - is banking on the launch of the Gemini Network, a global vessel-sharing agreement between shipping giants Maersk and Hapag-Lloyd, to offset a downtrend in container throughput recorded at the Omani port over the past year.

That decline is largely attributable to disruptions in maritime shipping in the Red Sea linked to the ongoing Gaza War. Container volumes slumped 13 per cent to 2.5 million TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) during the first nine months of 2024, down from 2.9 million TEUs a year earlier.

"The decrease in volume is mainly attributed to the Red Sea issue," said Braik bin Musallam al Amri, Chairman, Board of Directors, Salalah Port Services Co. SAOG, in the Directors' report for the third quarter of 2024.

While cautioning that current containerised cargo trends are expected to persist for a while, the anticipated launch of the Gemini Network will help buoy volumes in the first quarter of next year, Al Amri noted.

By Q1 2025, the maritime hub will be prepared to receive the Gemini Network, a global vessel-sharing agreement between Maersk and Hapag-Lloyd, with the Port of Salalah serving as a strategic hub.

"This will coincide with increased terminal capacity becoming available at the same time and volumes are expected to increase as a result of the Gemini Network,"



Salalah Port recorded a 13% decline in container volumes during Jan – Sept 2024.

the Chairman stated.

In September, citing continued safety concerns in the Red Sea, Maersk and Hapag-Lloyd announced their joint plan to phase in their Cape of Good Hope network for the commencement of the Gemini Cooperation on February 1, 2025.

The network's ambition is to deliver industry-leading schedule reliability of above 90 per cent once fully phased in, ensuring efficient and flexible services across the East-West trades.

The Cape of Good Hope network will include 29 mainliner services supported by 28 intraregional shuttle services and will be operated by a fleet of around 340 vessels with a total capacity of 3.7 million TEU.

Meanwhile, general cargo volumes handled by Salalah Port climbed 7 per cent to 16.950 million metric tonnes during the first nine months of 2024, up from 15.820

million metric tonnes for the same period in 2023.

The increase was fuelled by higher dry bulk volumes of limestone and gypsum.

The general cargo outlook is expected to remain stable, with dry bulk commodities, particularly limestone and gypsum, playing a crucial role, said Al Amri.

"Demand for these materials from key markets in India and Southeast Asia, driven by the construction and manufacturing sectors, is likely to remain strong. Despite global economic uncertainties and fluctuating freight rates, these sectors are less vulnerable to short-term demand shocks.

Combined with improved performance in breakbulk, such as cement exports, and growth in the liquid segment, volumes are expected to surpass those of the previous year by the end of 2024," he added.

Visit Oman forms strategic partnership with Destinia

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 13

Visit Oman, the digitally native travel booking gateway of the Sultanate of Oman, has announced a strategic partnership with Destinia, a leading online travel agency known for its deep connection with European travellers and a strong foothold in the global tourism landscape.

This partnership, revealed at the World Travel Market (WTM) in London, serves to further Visit Oman's mission to amplify Oman's appeal as a distinctive destination by seamlessly integrating Oman's comprehensive tourism offerings to Destinia's platform, providing travellers with direct and easy access to Oman's curated experiences.

With Visit Oman's extensive portfolio of products and in-depth knowledge of Oman's tourism assets, Destinia customers can now access a range of carefully crafted Omani adventures designed to appeal to diverse



Representatives of Visit Oman and Destinia at the agreement signing in London.

travel interests. From cultural excursions and historical explorations to natural landscapes, this partnership ensures that Destinia's audience experiences the unique facets of Oman with ease and confidence. Through this collaboration, Visit Oman empowers local tourism suppliers and SMEs by enabling their services to reach a wider,

digitally savvy European audience.

"This partnership with Destinia is part of our ongoing commitment to digitally distribute Omani experiences in key international markets," stated Shabib bin Mohammed al Maamari, Managing Director of Visit Oman.

"With Destinia's vast reach across Europe, we are excited to deliver seamless access to Oman's experiences, inspiring travellers with our heritage, culture, and exceptional landscapes. We are dedicated to supporting Destinia's audience as they embark on new journeys with us".

Destinia's team also recognises the potential of this partnership: "We are thrilled to collaborate with Visit Oman to bring their beautifully crafted experiences to our platform.

Destinia travellers can now fully immerse themselves in the beauty of Oman, from pre-arrival planning through to on-ground explorations," stated Ricardo Fernandez, CEO of Destinia.

OPAZ showcases institutional progress at World Quality Week

NASRULAH AL AJMI

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Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of OPAZ, presided over the World Quality Week forum on Wednesday.

pillars. One of these pillars is institutional excellence. Institutional excellence within the Authority involves creating an environment, culture, planning and unique programmes to make our economic, industrial, special and free zones attractive destinations for local and foreign investments." Saleh al Hasani, Adviser to the OPAZ Chairman, delivered

a presentation on current and completed projects within OPAZ. Speaking to the Observer, he noted, "My participation was focused on showcasing the OPAZ strategy, particularly emphasising the six key pillars central to our objectives, especially during this gathering."

The event included presentations by Haitham al Rawas, a member of OPAZ's transformation team, who highlighted the transformation programme and organisational excellence.

Earlier, four key themes were highlighted, showcasing experiences in quality and institutional excellence, digital platforms that enhance performance and support innovation, workplace innovation, and the National Equal Opportunities initiative.

In the first theme, the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit presented guidance on quality and institutional innovation, while OPAZ highlighted its

Institutional Transformation Programme. Esnad Integrated Services discussed the value of ISO certifications, and SOHAR Port and Freezone shared outcomes from ISO 55001 asset management implementation.

The second theme, 'Digital Platforms Enhancing Performance and Supporting Innovation,' featured OPAZ's digital platforms, including OMAP and the electronic land selection service, which simplify investment planning in economic zones.

Eltizam platform was introduced for standards compliance, and SOHAR Port and Freezone showcased technologies in asset management and smart lighting. Madayn presented its Dorbah e-platform for workforce training in industrial cities.

In the third theme, 'Innovation in the Workplace,' OPAZ highlighted initiatives like Jisr and Short Dialogues to boost workplace efficiency, with SOHAR Port and Freezone also sharing their management practices.

OPINION

Boycott campaigns having an impact on targeted brands



HAIDER AL LAWATI

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

THE economic boycott of the products of companies supporting the Zionist entity and its fierce war on steadfast Gaza continues to gain momentum. The war has been going on for more than 400 days now and continues to exterminate the Palestinian people, with support from Western powers. The number of martyrs has soared to over 45,000 deaths in Gaza, in addition to more than 120,000 wounded, not to mention the numbers of missing persons and those suffering from diseases, famine and malnutrition. At the same time, we see that the barbaric campaigns of the Zionist government are also increasing against the people of southern Lebanon, and the resulting increase in the number of martyrs and wounded and daily tragedies and destruction due to the unity of the

resistance in defending Al Aqsa. The economic boycott over the course of one year has harmed foreign companies that support the Zionist entity. This has promoted some of the targeted companies to announce the closure of their branches in a number of Arab and Islamic countries. This is evident in the decline in daily revenues and their impact on profits according to the data they publish from time to time. The list includes giant companies operating in the fields of fast food, restaurants and tourism as well. The boycott has extended to the sales of car companies that support the Zionist entity as well, at a time when the daily demand for buying Chinese cars is increasing in a number of Arab countries as a result of this boycott, in addition to their competitive price and inclusion of many good specifications that are compatible

The list includes giant companies operating in the fields of fast food, restaurants and tourism as well.

with local environments. The impacted companies have themselves been publishing statements about declining revenues in the face of the expanding boycott. It seems that the effects of the economic boycott will continue even after the end of these wars that the occupying state has ignited with the help of America and the West in the region since the establishment of Israel in 1948 with the support of Britain, America, and Western countries. The popular boycott has succeeded in harming brands on a large scale. Some polls conducted by the media show that many respondents have voiced strong support for the boycotts, while also affirming the need to patronise national, local and regional products. At the same time, awareness of the Palestinian cause is strengthening as more and more people across the world stand for justice and humanitarian principles.

COP29 will highlight bifurcated energy transitions

“I’m not going to Baku, and very few of my peers are either”. So said a senior figure at an influential European asset manager last month. Throw in the election of climate change sceptic Donald Trump as US president, and the United Nations’ 29th Conference of the Parties climate change summit in Azerbaijan’s capital sounds like a non-event. Yet, while the fight against global warming is getting harder in the world’s largest economy, that’s not the case everywhere else.

Baku, on the Caspian Sea, is hosting what is billed as the “Finance COP”. One immediate problem is that even green transition-focused private sector players like Canada’s Brookfield Asset Management are either swerving this year’s gathering or sending a token force.

That complicates progress on the so-called New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG), which some academics think should require rich countries to supply \$1 trillion a year by 2030 to help the developing world decarbonise

One immediate problem is that even green transition-focused private sector players like Canada’s Brookfield Asset Management are either swerving this year’s gathering or sending a token force.

and protect against floods, droughts and other disasters made worse by rising temperatures.

Half of the figure is supposed to come from the private sector. And it’s a big ask overall: it took the developed world 13 years to hit a \$100 billion-a-year target set in 2009. There’s also no getting around the

fact that a White House headed by Trump, who has called climate change “one of the great scams of all time”, is a serious setback.

The world is already on track for a highly damaging 2.9 degrees Celsius rise in average temperatures compared to pre-industrial times, according to the United Nations – way higher than the 1.5 degrees Celsius level considered manageable.

Trump’s administration will likely increase fossil-fuel production and may try to repeal part or all of the green energy-focused Inflation Reduction Act – even though the legislation benefits states governed by his Republican Party. His policies could add 4 billion tonnes to carbon emissions by 2030, according to Carbon Brief – not far off 10% of the current global total. Completing the bleak picture, China and India are still building coal-fired power plants. Saudi Arabia – like COP29 host Azerbaijan – is still drilling for fossil fuels despite COP28’s resolution that countries should start ‘transitioning away’ from them.

With the US increasingly part of the problem rather than the solution, COPs may be a bust until 2029 – when Trump’s term is due to end – at the earliest.

All that said, Climate watchers do have some cause for optimism. The world is now less dependent on US support for climate action than when Trump first won the White House eight years ago. His return to power is likely to shift the fight against global warming even more to the East and South.

— Reuters



ANDERS ÅSLUND

The writer is the author of Russia’s Crony Capitalism: The Path from Market Economy to Kleptocracy (Yale University Press, 2019).



Pedestrians walk past the Central Bank headquarters in Moscow, Russia.

— Reuters

ALMOST three years after Russia attacked Ukraine, the West’s financial sanctions have finally started to bite, triggering fierce infighting within the Kremlin over control of Russia’s central bank.

Russia’s business community has remained largely silent over the past two years, even as Western sanctions triggered a surge in real interest rates. In recent weeks, however, business leaders have openly criticised central-bank governor Elvira Nabiullina, who has held her post since 2013 and reportedly sought to resign at the start of the war in 2022.

While Nabiullina’s position appears increasingly precarious, the Kremlin continues to insist that the sanctions have only strengthened the economy, making it more self-sufficient. This claim is patently false, as evidenced by Russian officials’ repeated calls for the West to lift its restrictions.

In fact, since Russia’s 2014 annexation of Crimea, economic sanctions have triggered three major exchange-rate crises: in March-April 2014, February-March 2022, and July-August 2023. Each time, Nabiullina managed to contain the fallout by hiking interest rates.

But things have changed. On October 25, the central bank raised its key interest rate from 19% to 21%, citing inflation concerns. In its statement, the bank noted that “inflation expectations continue to increase” and that growth in domestic demand is “significantly outstripping” the economy’s capacity to expand the supply of goods and services. The statement added that increased

government spending and the growing budget deficit have “pro-inflationary effects,” necessitating further monetary tightening.

With official inflation at 9% and a real interest rate of 12%, Russia’s long-dormant economic-policy debate is heating up. But the dominant voices are no longer those of actual economists, because most independent experts have fled the country to avoid imprisonment.

Instead, three prominent oligarchs have recently spoken out against the central bank’s interest-rate hikes. While the outspoken Oleg Deripaska’s criticism was hardly surprising, Alexei Mordashov, who owns the Severstal steel conglomerate, typically chooses his words carefully.

In late October, Mordashov acknowledged that “the need to raise rates to limit inflation is clear” but warned, “We are coming to a situation where the medicine may become more dangerous than the disease.” Both Deripaska and Mordashov have broad support among Russia’s business elite.

But the real shock came when Sergei Chemezov, CEO of the state-owned weapons and technology giant Rostec, rebuked Nabiullina in a speech before the Federation Council (Russia’s upper legislative chamber), arguing that repeated rate hikes would lead to the bankruptcy of most enterprises.

Chemezov also warned that elevated interest rates might force Rostec to halt exports of high-tech products. Several other prominent business figures have voiced similar concerns, marking the first time since President Vladimir Putin launched Russia’s war against Ukraine that he has faced open opposition to his

economic policies. Since 2004, Putin and his cronies have amassed fortunes by rigging public contracts and systematically stripping the energy giant Gazprom’s assets, as documented by the late Boris Nemtsov and Vladimir Milov in their 2008 booklet Putin and Gazprom. But European sanctions have turned Gazprom’s once-enormous profits into huge losses, diminishing the financial clout of Putin’s longtime allies – the “Gazprom parasites,” including Mikhail and Yuri Kovalchuk and Gennady Timchenko. As Milov recently argued, Chemezov has emerged as the dominant figure among Putin’s business allies. Despite having few qualifications beyond his past KGB service alongside Putin in Dresden, he has leveraged this relationship to secure control of Russia’s armaments industry, now consolidated under the company Rostec, which, backed by federal funding (though its finances remain a state secret), oversees roughly 80% of Russia’s defence production. Chemezov is also a major beneficiary of the war in Ukraine. Recent shifts in government personnel – most notably, the dismissal of Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu – have worked in Chemezov’s favour, as Shoigu no longer dares to complain about Rostec’s substandard products. Meanwhile, Chemezov’s top protégé, Denis Manturov, has been promoted to First Deputy Prime Minister. Both Manturov and Alexei Dyumin, another Chemezov ally, now hold seats on the powerful Security Council. © Project Syndicate, 2024

ART/LIFE



MUSIC

Omani talent breaking new ground with Yazatas >20

CHANGINGWORLD

Why do we celebrate mistakes and not achievements?



BY SHADDAD AL MUSALMI

Shaddad is a seasoned Omani journalist and currently one of Oman Observer's senior editors.

CELEBRATING mistakes rather than achievements may seem counterintuitive, yet it reflects deeper psychological and social dynamics. Understanding why this occurs involves examining human behaviour, cultural norms, and the implications of failure versus success.

Mistakes are often more visible and memorable than achievements. When someone makes a mistake, it can lead to immediate consequences that draw attention. This visibility can create a shared experience among peers, fostering camaraderie through humour or collective problem-solving. Celebrating mistakes allows individuals to acknowledge their humanity and vulnerability, which can be refreshing in environments that often prioritise perfection.

In many cultures, there is a stigma attached to failure. However, some have begun to embrace a culture of learning from mistakes. By celebrating errors, they encourage openness and honesty about shortcomings. This approach helps reduce the fear associated with making mistakes, allowing individuals to take risks without the constant worry of repercussions. In contrast, achievements may not receive the same level of recognition because they are often seen as expected outcomes rather than extraordinary events.

In Oman, the cultural context and educational framework play significant roles in how mistakes and achievements are perceived. Traditionally, many societies, have emphasised success and achievement as indicators of competence and intelligence. However, there is a growing recognition of the importance of fostering an environment where mistakes are not only accepted but celebrated as part of the learning process.

Omani culture is deeply rooted in values such as respect, honour, and community. In educational settings, there has historically been a focus on achieving high grades and demonstrating knowledge. This can create an atmosphere where students may fear making mistakes due to potential embarrassment or loss of face. However, recent shifts towards more progressive educational practices have begun to challenge this norm.

From a psychological perspective, people may find it easier to relate to failures than successes. Success stories can sometimes feel distant or unattainable for others; however, everyone has experienced failure at some point in their lives. Celebrating mistakes creates an opportunity for empathy and connection among team members or friends who have faced similar challenges.

In team settings, celebrating mistakes can enhance collaboration and communication. When teams openly discuss errors without fear of judgment, they create an environment where members feel safe sharing ideas and taking risks. This openness can lead to innovative solutions that might not emerge in more rigid environments focused solely on achievements.

Conversely, if only achievements are celebrated while mistakes are hidden or punished, it can lead to a toxic atmosphere where individuals feel pressured to conform to unrealistic standards. This pressure may stifle creativity and hinder overall performance.

QUICK FEATURES



CONSERVATION

Britain's Prince William (R), Prince of Wales, talks with Park Manager for Table Mountain National Park Megan Taplin (C) and Australian conservationist and Earthshot Prize Global Ambassador Robert Irwin (L) while visiting Signal Hill in Cape Town. —AFP



MUSIC

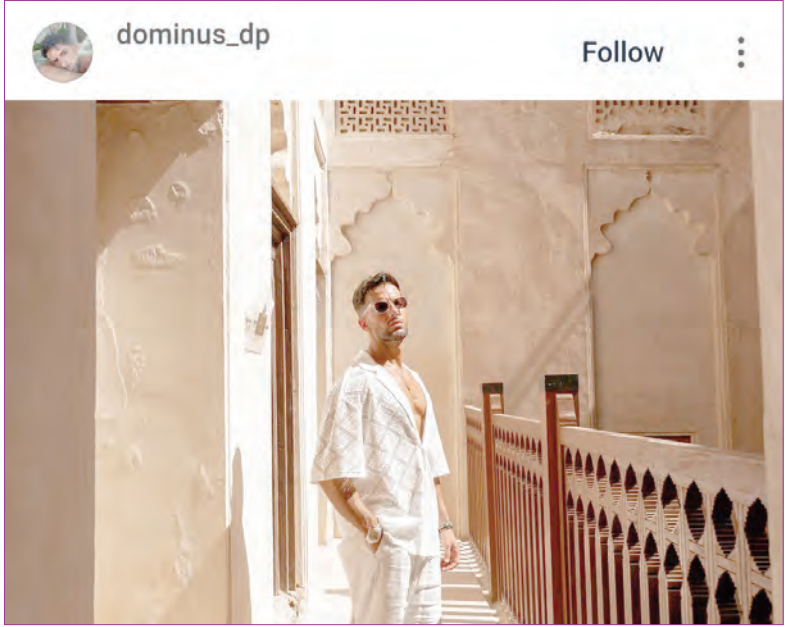
Minho, a member of K-pop group SHINee, speaks during a press conference on his new album 'CALL BACK,' in Seoul, South Korea. — AFP



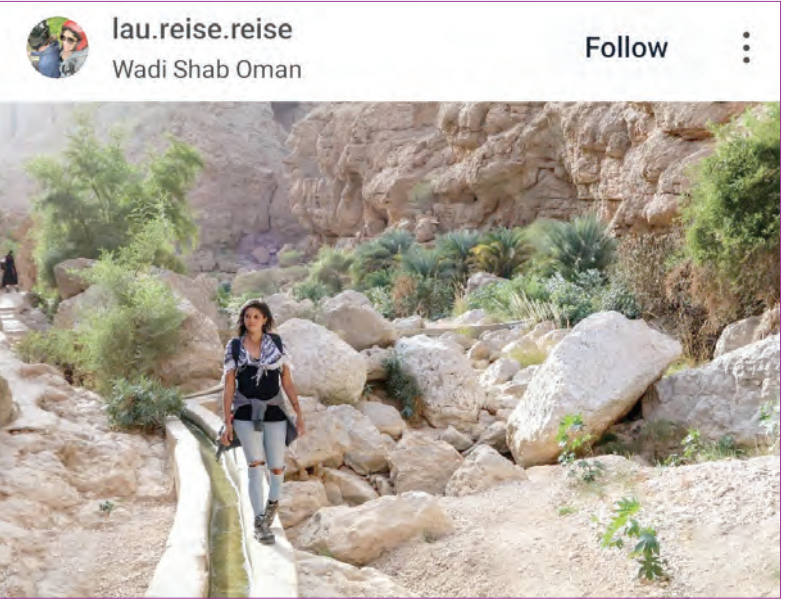
ENTERTAINMENT

Actress Genevieve Grad, who sang the famous song "Douliou douliou Saint-Tropez" in the film "Le gendarme de Saint-Tropez" starring Louis de Funes, has died at the age of 80 during the night of November 7, 2024, her husband said. —AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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Critically endangered Sumatran elephant calf born in Indonesia



A critically endangered Sumatran elephant has been born in Indonesia, officials said on Tuesday, another rare birth that has given renewed hope to conservation efforts.

Sumatran elephants are on the brink of extinction with only about 2,400-2,800 left in the world, according to the World Wide Fund for Nature.

The female calf was born on Monday at the Buluh Cina nature tourism park in Riau Province on the western island of Sumatra, local conservation agency head Genman Suhefti Hasibuan said.

The unnamed calf was born to a 24-year-old female named Ngatini and a 25-year-old bull named Robin, Genman added.

"The female calf weighs 104 kilogrammes (229 pounds)," Genman said.

"The calf is healthy, lively, and actively looking for milk

from the mother."

Two more critically endangered Sumatran elephants were born late last year in Way Kambas National Park on Sumatra island.

Indonesian officials hailed the births and said they showed conservation efforts were essential to prevent the protected species from extinction.

The elephant population is threatened by rampant poaching for their tusks, which are prized in the illegal wildlife trade.

The archipelago nation faces an ongoing battle against wildlife crime and several elephant poisoning cases have been reported in recent years.

Deforestation has reduced the critically endangered elephants' natural habitat and brought them into increasing conflict with humans. —AFP



Resilient but threatened, Kenya celebrates Maa culture

THE Maa Festival celebrates one of the best-known parts of Kenya's culture, which has been remarkably resilient even as it is strained by modernisation and climate change.

At this week's festival, which brought members of Maa tribes from across Kenya to the Samburu national reserve in the north of the country, modern technology sits comfortably alongside ancient culture.

In a straw-topped dung-walled hut, a group of women pass around smartphones and a tablet to share pictures of members of other sub-tribes they have met.

On a main stage, groups combine contemporary beats with the hypnotic guttural throb of Maa chants, while elsewhere people in dazzling beads and headdresses leap and dance in circles that speak of much older traditions.

Kenya has dozens of tribes, but it is the pastoralist Maa communities — named after the language they share — that have held on to ancient dress and customs the longest, becoming beloved symbols of the country as a result.

A DISCONNECT

The Maasai are the best-known to tourists, but the family includes the Samburu, Laikipiak, Njemps and many others.

"The Maa lived very communally," said Stella Napanu of the Northern Rangelands Trust, a conservation group run by local indigenous communities.

"That strengthened them and helped protect their culture from outside influences."

Climate change is a threat to the Maa, however.

Dwindling water resources have forced herders to travel further from their families, straining community ties.



"There's a disconnect between elders and young people because of this and it has weakened our government structures," said Napanu.

Other changes have been more positive.

Maa musicians have new outlets like YouTube to foster pride in their culture. Some travel as far as France and Australia to perform.

"God has given us this culture, so we must preserve it for our children," said a woman who recently travelled to Germany to show off her beadwork.

But communal living is unlikely to survive the lure of the city.

"Some parts of our culture will not last much longer," said Nasieku Letipila, 42, who runs Samburu

county's culture department.

"For the Maa, if I have 10 cows and my neighbour has none, I have to share — I cannot eat if they cannot eat — that is the most beautiful part of our culture," she said.

"It sustained us, but it is the most difficult part to maintain. Now I live in a city in a gated community and I don't know my neighbours."

The Maa festival, which is becoming an annual affair since its launch last year, is a chance to reconnect with that older way of being.

"I always have to go back to the village and live like that for a while," said Letipila.

"Our culture is the strongest in Kenya. It's a religion to us, we cannot live without it." — AFP

With unwavering support from his family, especially his mother, HH Sayyidah Zawan al Said, Zehy al Dhabari's journey from Oman to London's elite jazz scene has been one of passion and resilience. Now a drummer with Yazatas, a jazz fusion trio, Zehy blends his Omani roots with British influence to create a fresh, boundary-pushing sound



Omani talent breaking new ground with Yazatas



BY LIJU CHERIAN
@lijucherianoman

BRITISH-BORN Omani musician Zehy al Dhabari is gaining international recognition as a drummer and percussionist with Yazatas, a jazz fusion band set to release its debut album in the UK by late this year or early next. Yazatas, led by vocalist Jezmond Farren alongside bassist Zak Dajani, offers a fresh take on contemporary jazz, blending rock and jazz influences in a style that recalls an era of intricate musical expression.

Zehy's journey is supported by his family, especially his mother, HH Sayyidah Zawan bint Fahr al Said - a prominent former broadcaster in Oman - and his father, Brigadier (Retd) Abdullah al Dhabari. HH Sayyidah Zawan has been a steadfast advocate for her son's musical aspirations. "Parental support isn't common for aspiring musicians in Oman," she notes. "But I encourage parents to immerse their children in music - take them to performances, enrol them in classes, and expose them to various organisations."

Her commitment goes beyond encouragement. When Zehy was sixteen and too young to attend music clubs alone, she accompanied him to Ronnie Scott's jazz club in London, where he met renowned drummer Mark Fletcher. "I remember approaching Mark and asking if he'd consider mentoring Zehy," she recalls. "He agreed, and for four years, Zehy learned from one of the best."

Sam Jesson, Zehy's teacher at Portland School, also played a pivotal role in shaping his career as a jazz musician.

Additionally, with Fletcher's guidance, Zehy honed his skills and furthered his jazz education. HH Sayyidah Zawan later arranged for him to attend the Julian Joseph Jazz Academy, a programme led by acclaimed jazz musician Julian Joseph. "This exposure was invaluable," she reflects.

"It's the small but significant opportunities that help young musicians thrive." Zehy's growth continued at West Thames College and Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, where he deepened his expertise in music technology. "Studying at Trinity, surrounded by dedicated musicians and teachers, was incredibly inspiring," Zehy shares. "It encouraged me to deepen my commitment to music."

Yazatas' formation was almost accidental. Zehy first met lead vocalist Jezmond Farren through a mutual connection. "Jezmond already had an album's worth of music when we met," Zehy recalls. "I approached his work with a jazz musician's mindset, and together we created our own sound." Adding Zak Dajani on bass completed the trio. Although Zehy didn't choose the band's name, he appreciates its meaning. "Jezmond told me it was about music connecting people, though I always found the name unique," he says.

Their singles, already streaming on Spotify and Apple Music, have received positive feedback in both the UK and US. "Having our music appreciated in the US was an incredible feeling," Zehy says. "The hard work we've put in makes this recognition deeply rewarding." Yet, he is candid about the chal-



lenges emerging musicians face in London. "It's tough - venues rarely advertise, and they take most of the ticket sales. But we keep pushing because we believe in what we're creating."

While Zehy's music draws from Western influences, his Omani roots remain significant. His father's military background instilled discipline, which Zehy credits as essential to his work. "Growing up with a military influence taught me resilience, something every musician needs," he reflects. However, he emphasises his mother's support as the foundation of his journey. "Though my mother's career in media didn't influence my music directly, her encouragement has been invaluable."

As Yazatas prepares for its album release and considers potential tours across Europe, Asia, and America, performing in Oman remains a special goal. "Performing in Oman would be a dream come true," he shares.

For HH Sayyidah Zawan, witnessing her son's success brings immense pride. "Social media has made the world kinder for musicians, but there's still a lot of groundwork involved," she says. "This exposure is crucial, and I couldn't be prouder of all they've achieved."

