

O M A N
عُومَانِ
D A I L Y

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SUNRISE 06:45 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR 05:24 AM
DHUHR 12:10 PM
ASR 03:11 PM
MAGHRIB 05:31 PM
ISHA 06:47 PM

10

RED WARRIORS
DRAW KUWAIT
IN 26TH GULF
CUP OPENER



HM SENDS WRITTEN MESSAGE TO IRAQI PRIME MINISTER

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a written message to Mohammed Shia’ al Sudani, Prime Minister of the Republic of Iraq. The message focused on the strong fraternal ties between the two nations and peoples and ways to enhance cooperation in various fields. The message was delivered by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, during his meeting with the Iraqi Prime Minister in Baghdad on Saturday. — **ONA**

WINTER USHERS IN COOL WEATHER ACROSS OMAN

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, DEC 21

Winter has officially arrived in Oman, with temperatures dipping as low as 2.8 degrees Celsius in Saiq, located in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, according to the Oman Met Office. The arrival of winter coincides with the winter solstice on December 21, marking the shortest day and longest night of the year, as the Northern Hemisphere tilts farthest from the sun. The Oman Met Office has indicated that temperatures may drop further in the coming days, with potential frost formation over mountain peaks and the possibility of fog or low cloud formation along the Oman Sea Coast. On the other hand, Salalah recorded the highest temperature at 28.6 degrees Celsius.

Sea conditions are expected to range from slight to moderate along the Arabian coasts (1.25-1.75 metres) and the Musandam west coast (1.25-1.5 metres). The cooler weather is enticing residents and visitors to spend more time outdoors, with the season coinciding with events like the flower show and Muscat Nights. This is a popular time for barbecues, picnics and camping.

While the peak of date harvesting typically occurs in late summer and early autumn, Omanis continue to enjoy fresh dates throughout the winter. Dates are often a central feature in gatherings that showcase traditional Omani cuisine. Winter also invites an increase in outdoor activities like hiking, with the cooler temperatures offering a perfect opportunity for exploring Oman’s diverse landscapes, from Al Hajar Mountains to nature reserves. Winter in Oman is a time for gathering, and it is the season for Omani kahwa, dates and halwa, encapsulating the country’s hospitality and traditions.

OMAN ROLLS OUT IJARAH SUKUK FOR SUBSCRIPTION

MUSCAT: Acting on behalf of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Finance, the Oman Sovereign Sukuk has rolled out a new Sukuk issue with an Ijarah format worth RO 100 million extendable with a maturity period of 7 years and a profit rate of 4.8 per cent per annum.

The subscription will be open from today (Sunday) until Wednesday, December 25, 2024. The Sukuk will be issued on Monday, December 30, 2024 (settlement). The profit due on the Ijarah Sukuk will be paid twice a year on June 30 and December 30 until its maturity date on December 30, 2031. Subscription for this issue of Sukuk is available for all categories of local and foreign investors and the bonds will be issued through competitive subscription. Investors have to submit their bids through collecting banks during the subscription period. — **ONA**

HM’S GREETINGS CONVEYED TO EMIR OF KUWAIT

KUWAIT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent greetings to his brother Shaikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, on Saturday. HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth conveyed His Majesty’s greetings to the Emir of Kuwait while attending the opening ceremony of the 26th Arabian Gulf Cup hosted by the State of Kuwait that kicked off at Jaber Al Ahmad International Stadium on Saturday. HH Sayyid Theyazin also attended the opening match between Oman and Kuwait, in the presence of Shaikh Sabah Al Khalid al Sabah, Crown Prince of Kuwait.



STAR
OF THE DAY
ISSAM AL SUBHI

OMAN
1
KUWAIT
1

26th
Gulf Cup

Oman, Angola to expand ties in investment sector

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN and the Republic of Angola have expressed interest in establishing new cooperation, enhancing partnership, particularly in the economic, commercial and investment sectors.

This came in a joint statement issued on the occasion of the official visit of President João Lourenço of the Republic of Angola to the Sultanate of Oman. It reads as follows:

“At the gracious invitation of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, President João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço of the Republic of Angola paid an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman, during December 19-21, 2024.

His Majesty held discussions with the President, during which they reviewed bilateral relations and explored ways to develop them to serve the common interests of both countries.

The two leaders expressed interest in establishing new cooperation, enhancing partnership, particularly in the economic, commercial and investment sectors, specifically in the areas of mining, clean energy, technology, tourism,



agriculture and food security, transportation, logistics and ports.

They agreed to commence negotiations to enter into a cooperation agreement that covers economic affairs, science, technology and culture, in addition to signing memorandums of

understanding and agreements on areas such as mutual visa exemption for holders of Diplomatic and Official Passports, as well as in the field of agriculture.

His Majesty the Sultan and the President also exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual interest,

reaffirming their respect for international law and the United Nations Charter, and emphasising the importance of cooperation within the framework of international organisations to achieve peace and security. Both leaders stressed the need to intensify efforts to address issues related to climate change.

The two sides held meetings to discuss ways to develop trade, exchange visits of commercial and investment delegations, and encourage the establishment of joint projects.

His Majesty commended President Lourenço’s efforts in bringing a lasting peace to the Eastern DRC, and wished him success on the assumption of the African Union Chairship in February 2025. The President of Angola praised the wise leadership and foreign policy of His Majesty the Sultan, which is based on principles of dialogue and the promotion of peace and harmony for all.

The President of the Republic of Angola expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the warm welcome and generous hospitality extended to him and his accompanying delegation.” — **ONA**

Oman condemns attack in Germany

MUSCAT/MAGDEBURG: The Sultanate of Oman has condemned the incident in the German city of Magdeburg, where a number of people were killed and dozens injured in a car-ramming attack. The Sultanate of Oman expresses its heartfelt condolences to the government of the Federal Republic of Germany and the families of the victims, and wishes a swift recovery to those injured.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, Oman affirmed its strong stance against all forms of violence and terrorism, regardless of their motives or causes. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Saturday condemned the “terrible, insane” car-ramming attack on a crowded Christmas market that killed five people and injured more than 200.

Police arrested a 50-year-old Saudi



Co-leader of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party Tino Chrupalla (R) lays flowers among well-wishers near the site of a car-ramming attack on a Christmas market in Magdeburg, eastern Germany, on Saturday. — **AFP**

psychiatry doctor at the scene on Friday, next to the battered SUV that had ploughed through the festive crowd. A sombre Scholz, dressed in black, visited the attack site on Saturday with national and regional politicians in the eastern city of Magdeburg, where they laid flowers outside the main church.

He pledged that Germany would respond “with the full force of the law” to the attack. But he also called for unity in the country that has been plunged into a heated debate on immigration and security ahead of elections in February. The centre-left chancellor said it was important “that we stick together, that we link arms, that it is not hatred that determines our coexistence but the fact that we are a community that seeks a common future.” — **AFP/ONA**

OMAN



DHANK HOSTS FIDA WINTER FORUM

DHANK: In an effort to promote the cultural, historical, and natural richness of the Wilayat of Dhank, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) branch in Al Dhahirah Governorate, represented by the Tourism Committee, organised the vibrant Fida Winter Forum. The event witnessed remarkable community participation, drawing sports enthusiasts, entrepreneurs, and visitors.

Fahd bin Rashid al Zaidi, Chairman of the Organising Committee and OCCI member, stated: “The forum aims to spotlight the Wilayat’s abundant cultural landmarks and historical monuments. By offering visitors field tours, we showcase the unique tourist attractions and foster a deeper connection to the area’s heritage.”

The forum featured a multitude of activities, including an 8-kilometre running competition with over 120 participants. Visitors also enjoyed an engaging market showcasing small and medium enterprises, products from local families, and innovative student projects. Camel and Arabian horse displays, Bedouin tent experiences, and paragliding were among the highlights, offering glimpses into Dhank’s multifaceted charm. By facilitating such events, the forum not only enriches community interaction but also boosts domestic tourism, bringing economic vitality to local businesses. — ONA



Oman and Angola have expressed interest in establishing cooperation, enhancing partnership in the economic and investment sectors.

ANGOLAN PRESIDENT CONCLUDES VISIT

MUSCAT: President João Lourenço of the Republic of Angola and his spouse concluded the official three-day visit to the Sultanate of Oman. The Angolan President left Oman on Saturday as he was seen off at the Royal Airport by Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court.

He was also seen off by Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy (Head of the Mission of Honour) and Dr Frederico Cardoso, non-resident Ambassador of the Republic of Angola to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the visit, the Angolan President was accompanied by an official delegation that comprised José de Lima Massano, Minister of State for Economic Coordination, Tête António, Minister of External Relations, Vera Esperança dos Santos, Minister of Finance, Diamantino Pedro Azevedo, Minister of Mineral Resources, Oil and Gas, Mário Augusto da Silva Oliveira, Minister of Telecommunications, Information Technology and Social Communication, Edeltrudes Costa Lourenço, Chief of Staff at the Presidency. — ONA

Mubashir recognised as the ‘Best Outdoor Advertising Solutions in Oman 2024’ by International Business Magazine

MUSCAT: Mubashir, Digital Out-of-Home (DOOH) advertising company, proudly announces its win as the ‘Best Outdoor Advertising Solutions in Oman 2024’ at the prestigious International Business Magazine Awards. This award recognises Mubashir’s dedication to transforming Oman’s advertising landscape through innovative and impactful digital solutions.

The award ceremony took place on December 7, 2024, in Dubai, recognising excellence across industries with a global presence spanning the Middle East, Africa, America, Asia and Europe. Supervised by expert panelists conducting in-depth reviews, these prestigious annual awards highlight outstanding achievements and best-in-class business practices.

Since its establishment in 2015, Mubashir has set itself apart as a leader in digital out-of-home advertising, leveraging cutting-edge technology to enhance customer engagement. With a network of over 300 strategically located digital screens in venues such as the airport, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, shopping malls, highways, Sultan Qaboos University, telecom towers and leading fuel stations; Mubashir delivers dynamic and real-time advertising that seamlessly connects brands with their audiences.

The award highlights Mubashir’s commitment to excellence and its ability to provide client-centric DOOH advertising solutions such as their innovative ad booking platform at [www.mubashir.om](#). The achievement underscores the company’s role in helping brands effectively



communicate their stories and tailor ad campaigns to the evolving needs of businesses.

“Winning this prestigious international award is a testament to the hard work, dedication and creativity of our entire team.

We’re also grateful to our partners and clients for their trust and partnership,” said Ali al Raisi, CEO at Mubashir. “It inspires us to continue delivering bold and transformative advertising solutions for our clients.”

As Mubashir celebrates this recognition, it

reaffirms its mission to lead Oman’s outdoor advertising industry with forward-thinking advertising solutions, driving impactful connections between brands and their customers and empowering businesses to thrive in a competitive market.

SHORT TAKES



132 winners were honoured at the ‘Read’ Youth Competition

‘READ’ YOUTH COMPETITION WINNERS FETED

MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science celebrated the 13th edition of the ‘Read’ Youth Competition with a grand ceremony at the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque.

The initiative aims to instil a passion for reading among Oman’s youth while promoting good citizenship and knowledge.

Riyya bint Hamad al Habsiyah, Assistant Director of the Libraries Department, said, “Reading is the gateway to success and a cornerstone of personal and professional development. Libraries play a pivotal role in nurturing knowledge and creativity, reflecting the progress of society.”

The competition attracted 1,759 participants across age groups, with 132 winners honoured during the event. Special categories included contributions from juvenile centres, schools for the deaf and hospitals, emphasising inclusivity.

The ceremony also featured a visual film on the competition’s journey, an exhibition of participants’ works and a recognition of exceptional achievements. Through such initiatives, Oman fosters a culture of learning and innovation, empowering its youth to excel. — ONA

RIFQ SERVICES LAUNCHED TO MANAGE STRAY ANIMALS

MUSCAT: Muscat Municipality has launched initiatives to manage, care for, and rehabilitate stray and loose animals, including cats, dogs, and other species. This initiative adopts global best practices in animal welfare, preserves biodiversity and promotes public health, creating a more harmonious and compassionate community.

The Rifq Services will ensure public health and safety by reducing risks associated with stray animals, and promote sustainability through humane and responsible animal care.

Rifq Services allows the community to contribute to a safer and cleaner environment. Report stray animals by contacting the designated authority, and Rifq guarantees a swift response.

Muscat Municipality is committed to enhancing the quality of life for all - humans and animals alike. This vision reflects our values of kindness, compassion and environmental responsibility. Muscat Municipality had earlier floated bids for the project to manage and control stray dogs in the city, especially in residential areas.

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, DEC 21

The Omani Association for Organ Transplantation has launched its awareness campaign, ‘Legacy of Giving,’ in the Wilayat of Nizwa. The two-day campaign, held in celebration of Oman Organ Donation Day (December 19), includes activities aimed at highlighting the importance of organ donation and transplantation. The initiative reflects the values of generosity and solidarity within the Omani community.

The campaign began with an awareness seminar at the Research and Studies Hall in Nizwa Hospital, attended by Dr Ali bin Zayed al

Busaidy, Director of Nizwa Hospital, along with several healthcare professionals. Dr Khalfan bin Sinan al Shueili from the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs addressed the Islamic perspective on organ donation, emphasising its alignment with humanitarian solidarity and life preservation while calling for greater religious awareness to support such initiatives.

On its second day, the campaign extended to public spaces like Nizwa Souq, Harat Al Aqr and Nizwa Fort, featuring public awareness sessions under the slogan, ‘Your Decision to Donate Starts with Courage’. The activities encouraged individuals to consider the life-saving potential

MOSD TO MARK INTL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Social Development will celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities today evening under the auspices of Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The event will feature a visual presentation highlighting the lives and contributions of persons with disabilities and the launch of the “Empowerment Initiative” by the Committee for the Affairs of Persons



with Disabilities in Al Dhahirah Governorate. This initiative aims to enhance programmes tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities

across all governorates.

Key highlights include an initiative to employ persons with disabilities in the tourism sector and the ‘Creativity Competition’, which seeks to discover and celebrate the talents of men and women with disabilities. The competition also recognises supporting entities, rehabilitation centres and individuals who have made creative contributions to advancing services and programmes for persons with disabilities. — ONA

Oman marks milestones with 40 kidney transplants

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

IN 2024, as many as 40 kidney transplants were successfully carried out in Oman, saving lives of individuals who were on critical dialysis. Of these, 30 kidneys were sourced from living donors, while 10 were obtained from deceased individuals, according to the Ministry of Health (MoH), represented by the National Programme for Organ Transplant Department.

Oman maintains a strict zero-tolerance policy towards commercial organ transplants, with violators facing criminal prosecution by the Criminal Investigation Department. The National Programme for Organ Transplant Department has reiterated its commitment to ensuring that all donations are voluntary, without any commercial interest.

Additionally, 9 liver transplants were performed this year, with 7 sourced from living donors and 2 posthumous. The country also implanted 40 corneas into patients in need, showing significant progress. A noteworthy development is the rise in registrations for organ donation, with 36,000 people now registered on the Ministry’s Shifa application, a significant increase from 11,000 in 2023.

Speaking to the Observer on the sidelines of the Omani Organ Donation Day at the Hormuz Grand Hotel, Dr Ahmed al Busaidy, Director of the National Organ Transplant Programme, stated that individuals with blood, familial, or emotional ties to the patient are eligible to donate organs.

“We will carefully review both donor and recipient details to ensure that the process remains free of remuneration and without any commercial involvement,” Dr Al Busaidy emphasised.

The event, held annually on December 19, was presided over by Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Affairs, with the attendance of several officials from the Ministry of Health and civilian and military medical institutions, along with medical personnel.

Dr Al Busaidy further highlighted that the National Organ Transplant Programme has made significant strides in its mission,

Individuals with blood, familial, or emotional ties to the patient are eligible to donate organs.

DR AHMED AL BUSAIDY
Director, National Organ Transplant Programme

noting that five families this year consented to donate the organs of their brain-dead relatives. This resulted in 10 kidney transplants and 2 liver transplants, marking the highest number of posthumous organ donations since the programme’s inception in 1988.

One of the year’s medical milestones was the successful transfer of two kidneys from brain-dead donors between two hospitals, marking the first of its kind. Plans are underway to expand the Cornea Programme to additional hospitals.

During the event, Dr Brian Alvarez from the Spanish Donation & Transplantation Institute (DTI) Foundation presented insights from global practices in organ donation, highlighting success stories and the life-changing impact of organ transplants.

This celebration is part of the Ministry’s ongoing efforts to promote organ donation services, raise awareness about their importance and encourage more people to register for posthumous organ donation on the “Shifa” app.

The event also saw the official activation of the National Organ Transplant Programme webpage on the e-health portal and the introduction of the ‘Ataa Card’, recognising the humanitarian contributions of organ donors.

OMAN MARKS WORLD MEDITATION DAY

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, DEC 21

Nearly 400 participants gathered at the Oman Hockey Stadium in Al Amerat to commemorate World Meditation Day, observed annually on December 21. Organised by the Art of Living Foundation in collaboration with Oman Hockey, the event provided a serene space for attendees to embrace the transformative practice of meditation.

The United Nations General Assembly designated December 21 as World Meditation Day to coincide with the winter solstice, emphasising the ancient practice’s profound

impact on personal well-being and mental health.

Meditation, practiced globally for thousands of years, involves techniques like mindfulness and focused attention to achieve mental clarity, emotional balance and physical relaxation. Research highlights the benefits of meditation, including stress reduction, enhanced focus, improved sleep, and alleviation of anxiety and depression. It also supports physical health by lowering blood pressure and managing pain.

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, founder of the Art of Living, spoke during the UN observance of the day, stating, “Meditation is no longer a luxury;



it is a necessity. It’s akin to mental health, helping us stay centred and overcome aggression and depression. The mental health crisis demands it more than ever.”

As the world continues to adopt

meditation as a universal tool, Oman’s observance of the World Meditation Day underscores the importance of nurturing both mental and physical well-being through this timeless practice.

Organ donation awareness campaign launched in Nizwa



‘Legacy of Giving’ campaign in Nizwa launched to promote organ donation

of organ donation, and a special ‘Legacy of Giving Hackathon’ near Nizwa Fort added an innovative element to the outreach.

Dr Noreen al Balushi, President of the Omani Association for Organ Transplantation, highlighted the profound impact of organ donation in her keynote speech, calling it one of the highest forms of humanity and altruism. She described it as a living legacy that brings hope and a second chance at life to those in need, uniting people in a universal commitment to compassion and care.

Sami bin Mohammed al Numani, an organ donation coordinator, revealed that over 17,000 individuals have registered as donors through

the ‘Shifa’ app. This year alone, Oman recorded 40 kidney transplants (10 from brain-dead donors), 9 liver transplants (2 from deceased donors), and 60 corneal transplants. He noted that a living donor can donate two organs, while a brain-dead donor can save up to eight lives by donating kidneys, lungs, a heart, a liver, intestines, a pancreas, and other tissues. He also cautioned against illegal organ trade, emphasising that selling organs is both unlawful and religiously prohibited.

The campaign underscores the selfless nature of organ donation as an ongoing charity (sadaqah jariyah) and calls on individuals to join this life-saving initiative.

SPOTLIGHT



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

AS THE
NEED TO TRAVEL

has become more of a necessity than a luxury, and more people moving from place to place, the need for digital travel and tourism has become essential to avoid cumbersome travel experiences. Experts suggest that the use of digital technologies in tourism fosters the creation of new business models, expands market presence and optimises customer interaction, supporting SMEs and other local business models in the long run.

Backed by Oman Vision 2040, which envisions a digital society, digital travel technology can help make everyday operations more effective and efficient. For example, by digitalising processes where possible, time and money can be saved, allowing for more effective resource allocation based on customer needs.

According to the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and its partners, the industry is ready to deliver a fully digital air travel experience. This was demonstrated in a proof-of-concept (PoC) involving two passengers using different digital wallets and travel credentials on a round-trip between Hong Kong and Tokyo.

Travel to or from Muscat International Airport, which has introduced biometric identification for passengers, along with many other international gateways, will be different in the coming days. The airport elements of this PoC were conducted in a live environment, building on an initial PoC carried out in a test environment in 2023, applicable to all airports.

“Travelling in the future will be all digital, where one wouldn’t have to carry a passport, resident or identity card for entry into the airport, nor will they need to carry a visa copy or anything else. This is a very environmentally-friendly move,” said Ahmed bin Mohammed al Barwani, an airline expert.

In the PoC, two travellers used digital wallets containing their digital passport, company ID and frequent flyer credentials to obtain personalised offers, book a flight, obtain a visa, check their travel documentation, check-in and receive boarding passes.

The travellers used biometric identification to manage airport processes in a live environment

without repeatedly showing their travel documents. The successful journey integrated seven verifiable credentials (ePassport copy, live biometric image, visa copy, company ID, frequent flyer membership, order, and boarding pass), two digital wallets, and a trust registry to verify issuers. “Digital air travel is on the horizon for our region, as evidenced by Oman’s modernised immigration and Muscat International Airport’s upgraded check-in counters. These advancements, driven by digitalisation, aim to reduce human intervention and create a seamless travel experience for passengers,” says Venkat, Business Manager - Products & GSA Affairs at Meزون Travel LLC.

“A seamless fully digital travel experience powered by digital identity and biometrics has moved from theory to proven reality. The challenge now is to make this more efficient travel experience available to all travellers. There is good reason for optimism. With One ID standards already in place and the expansion of Modern Airline Retailing to support digital identity with the highest levels of data privacy and protection, the industry could be ready for this in the very near future. Government efforts to adopt digital travel credentials based on ICAO standards are picking up pace. Europe is already planning to issue Digital Identity Wallets to citizens and residents by 2027,” said Nick Careen, IATA’s Senior Vice-President for Operations, Safety and Security.

With air passenger numbers expected to double by 2041, and as building ever larger airports seems difficult, the industry needs to implement automation, digitalisation and efficient processes to handle this growth. All digital travel will assure speed in processing, accuracy and minimal human interventions.

The recent implementation of digital check-in at the immigration counters has been well-received by travellers, streamlining the process. As technology continues to advance and evolve, we can expect further innovations in our region to simplify air travel and complement our digital transformation efforts,” adds Venkat.

FUTURE OF TRAVEL
EMBRACING
DIGITAL
TRANSFORMATION



ASEAN
ENVOYS
WALK FOR
UNITY,
HEALTHY
LIVING

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

MUSCAT: Ambassadors of the six countries which are part of the Asean (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) came together on Friday morning for a cause to create awareness on healthy lifestyle and celebrate unity under the auspices of Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Mohammed bin Saif al Hosni, Head of Asia and Pacific Department at the Foreign Ministry.

Indonesia was the host this year and members and their families embarked on a

nearly three kilometres' walk starting from the Foreign Ministry till the Indonesian embassy in Shatti Al Qurum.

"This walk marks an important milestone as this is an attempt to gain positive impact of deepening the relations among the member countries and from a fitness perspective, this reiterates the need of following a healthy lifestyle as a tool to keep ailments away," said Abdulaziz.

Brunei Darussalam, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam are the Asean member countries and those



Asean Ambassadors came together for a cause to create awareness on healthy lifestyles.

who have embassies in the country were the participants in the walk that saw a colourful culmination at the residence of the ambassador of Indonesia to the Sultanate of Oman. Organised by the Asean Committee for the second time, scores of people, Home-Based Staff (HBS) and family from all six Asean diplomatic missions in Muscat. The event, which was held at the Residence of the ambassador of Indonesia to the Sultanate of Oman, has provided the opportunity for the Asean diplomatic missions to celebrate and strengthen the spirit and camaraderie of Asean.

Oman, Mauritania
sign MoU in
religious affairs



Dr Mohammed al Maamari and Dr Sidi Yahya signed MoU to enhance ties in endowments and religious affairs

NOUAKCHOTT: In a significant step toward fostering cultural and religious cooperation, Oman and Mauritania signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance collaboration in endowments and religious affairs. The agreement was signed by Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Oman's Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, and Dr Sidi Yahya Ould Sheikhna Ould Lemrabet, Mauritania's Minister of Islamic Affairs.

The MoU focuses on the exchange of

expertise in managing endowments, developing educational programmes, and adopting modern trends to bolster the effectiveness of religious sectors.

Both nations emphasised their commitment to strengthening bilateral relations and creating avenues for shared progress. Dr Al Maamari praised the deep-rooted ties between the two countries, expressing optimism about the MoU's role in fostering mutual growth and understanding. — ONA



Ministry of Health

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/ Date	Eligibility	Grade	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
4651/2024/ MOH/ DGHSMU-9	Maintenance Works Of Staff Accommodation at Kumzar Health Center in Musandam Governorate	06/01/ 2025	Before 10 am on Wednesday 29/01/2025	Construction and Maintenance	• First • second	• SME: 10,000, • LO: 25,000, • RE: 25,000,
4656/2024/ MOH/ DGHSMU-10	Supply & Installations of Electricity and Water Meters for the Kitchen and Laundry at Dibba Hospital in Musandam Governorate	06/01/ 2025	Before 10 am on Wednesday 29/01/2025	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board		• SME: 10,000, • LO: 25,000, • RE: 25,000,

• Tenders should be submitted **online** on the given website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

• Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

• For any inquiries in regard to the tender, please contact through the information below:

[\(https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om\)](https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om)

Any Clarification, you may contact via

Telephone: 24402200

Email id etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om

TENDER NOTICE



Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries
Wealth and Water Resources

The Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tenders: -

Tender no.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are eligible to participate	Tender Document fee (R.O)
882/2024/ MAFWR/ HQ-60	Construction of Sheltered Fish Landing Centre at Fins Wilayat of Quriyat	Tuesday 10/12/2024	Monday 30/12/2024	Monday 20/1/2025	Specialized companies registered with, Excellent, First, grades	(250/-) Omani riyals for local companies (25/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
890/2024/ MAFWR/ HQ-61	Construction of Sheltered Fish Landing Centre At Asifah Muscat state	Wednesday 11/12/2024	Tuesday 31/12/2024	Monday 20/1/2025	Specialized companies registered with, Excellent, First, grades	(218/600) Omani riyals for local companies (21/900) Omani riyals for SMEs
891/2024/ MAFWR/ HQ-62	Construction of Recharge Dam at Quraisha Village in Wilayat Wadi Bani Khalid, North Sharqiyah Governorate	Wednesday 11/12/2024	Tuesday 31/12/2024	Monday 20/1/2025	Specialized companies registered with, Third, fourth, grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
892/2024/ MAFWR/ HQ-63	Construction of Storage Dam at Hail AL-Shas Village in Wilayat Al-Hamra, AL-Dakhiliyah Governorate	Wednesday 11/12/2024	Tuesday 31/12/2024	Monday 20/1/2025	Specialized companies registered with, Third, fourth, grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
894/2024/ MAFWR/ HQ-64	Project Of Rehabilitation and Improvement of AL-Mitha Falaj in AL-Sifala village at Wilayat AL-Bahla at AL-Dhakliyah Governorate	Thursday 12/12/2024	Wednesday 1/1/2025	Tuesday 21/1/2025	Specialized companies registered with, Second, Third, grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
898/2024/ MAFWR/ HQ-65	Supply of Outdoor Yard Floor Cleaning Machine	Thursday 12/12/2024	Wednesday 1/1/2025	Tuesday 21/1/2025	Specialized companies registered with, Excellent, First Second, Third, fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
899/2024/ MAFWR/ HQ-66	Providing Cleaning Service For Qurayyat Fish Market At Qurayyat for one Years	Thursday 12/12/2024	Thursday 2/1/2025	Tuesday 21/1/2025	Specialized companies registered with, Excellent, First Second, Third, fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
902/2024/ MAFWR/ HQ-67	Supply of smart screens	Monday 16/12/2024	Sunday 5/1/2025	Sunday 26/1/2025	Specialized companies registered with, Excellent, First Second, Third, fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
908/2024/ MAFWR/ HQ-68	Supplying Laptops to the Food Security Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources	Tuesday 17/12/2024	Sunday 5/1/2025	Sunday 26/1/2025	Specialized companies registered with, Excellent, First Second, Third, fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
910/2024/ MAFWR/ HQ-69	For Supply, Installation & Commissioning of Laboratory Equipments, Consumables & Chemicals for Aquatic Animal Health Laboratory in ALBustan	Tuesday 17/12/2024	Monday 6/1/2025	Sunday 26/1/2025	Specialized companies registered with, Excellent, First Second, Third, fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs

- above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.

- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.

- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration for local companies.

- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.

- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: **+968 24402200** or **etenderhd@gstb.gov.om**.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A wounded Palestinian child receives treatment at a hospital, in the aftermath of an Israeli strike, in Nuseirat. — Reuters

POPE SLAMS ‘CRUELTY’ OF STRIKE KILLING GAZA CHILDREN



POPE FRANCIS

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis on Saturday condemned the bombing of children in Gaza as “cruelty”, a day after the territory’s rescue agency said an Israeli air strike killed seven children from one family. Gaza’s civil defence rescue agency reported

that an Israeli air strike killed 10 members of a family on Friday in the northern part of the territory, including seven children. “Yesterday they did not allow the Patriarch into Gaza as promised. Yesterday children were bombed. This is cruelty, this is not war,” he told members of the government of the Holy See. “I want to say it because it touches my heart.”

The health ministry in Gaza said on Saturday that at least 45,227 people have been killed during more than 14 months of war between Israel and Palestinian groups. The toll includes 21 deaths in the previous 24 hours which said 107,573 people have been wounded in the Gaza Strip since the war began on October 7, 2023. — AFP

FRANCE’S MOST POWERFUL NUCLEAR REACTOR FINALLY COMES ON STREAM

PARIS: France on Saturday connected its most powerful nuclear power reactor to the national electricity grid in what leaders hailed as a landmark moment despite years of delays and technical setbacks. The Flamanville 3 European Pressurized Reactor in Normandy started providing electricity to French homes at 11.48 am on Saturday, the EDF power company’s CEO Luc Remont said in a statement.

“Great moment for the country,” President Emmanuel Macron said in a statement on X, calling it “one of the world’s most powerful nuclear reactors.” “Re-industrialising to produce low-carbon energy is ecology French style,” he added. The EPR, a new generation pressurised water reactor, is the fourth to be finished anywhere in the world.

Remont of EDF called the event “historic.” “The last time a reactor started up in France was 25 years ago at Civaux 2,” he said, referring to the Civaux power plant in southwestern France. It is the most powerful reactor in the country at 1,600 MW. Ultimately, it should supply electricity to upwards of two million homes. — AFP

SYRIA NAMES FOREIGN MINISTER AMID PUSH FOR INTERNATIONAL TIES

DAMASCUS: Syria’s new rulers have appointed a foreign minister, the official Syrian news agency (SANA) said on Saturday, as they seek to build international relations two weeks after Bashar al-Assad was ousted. The ruling

General Command named Asaad Hassan al-Shibani as foreign minister, SANA said. A source in the new administration said that this step “comes in response to the aspirations of the Syrian people to establish international relations

that bring peace and stability”. Shibani, a 37-year-old graduate of Damascus University, previously led the political department of a rebel government in Syria’s northwestern province of Idlib, the General Command said. Syria’s new de facto ruler, Ahmed al-Sharaa, has actively engaged with foreign delegations since assuming power, including hosting the UN’s Syria envoy and senior US diplomats. Sharaa has signalled a willingness to engage

diplomatically with international envoys, saying his primary focus is on reconstruction and achieving economic development. He has said he is not interested in engaging in any new conflicts. Meanwhile, the United Nations Security Council on Friday extended a long-running peacekeeping mission between Syria and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights for six months and expressed concern that military activities in the area could escalate tensions. — Reuters

Drone attacks hit Russian city, closing airports

KYIV ON SATURDAY staged a major drone attack on the Russian city of Kazan, 1,000 kilometres from the frontier, as

Moscow’s troops captured a new frontline village in eastern Ukraine. The drones damaged buildings in Kazan, the capital of the Tatarstan Republic, with a population of more than 1.3 million, but there were no victims, local officials said. Kazan City hall said some fires had started and were being tackled by the fire brigade. The city’s airport was temporarily closed, the Russian civilian aviation authority, Rosaviatsia, said. Some residents were evacuated, but authorities did not give figures. Authorities said that all major public events in Tatarstan had been cancelled as a precaution. Videos on Russian social media networks showed drones hitting high rise buildings setting off fireballs.

Ukraine, which has staged regular attacks on targets inside Russia since the start of full scale military offensive on February 22, did not immediately comment. “Today Kazan suffered a massive drone attack,” Rustam Minnikhanov, the Tatarstan republic leader, said in a post on Telegram. “While before industrial enterprises were attacked, now the enemy attacks civilians in the morning,” he added. Minnikhanov’s press service said at least eight drones had been detected.

Russia’s defence ministry accused Ukraine of targeting “civilian infrastructure” in Kazan. It said six drones had been neutralised or destroyed but did not say how many had been involved. The ministry



A view shows a damaged multi-storey residential building following an alleged Ukrainian drone attack, in Kazan, Russia. — Reuters



Russia on Friday staged strikes on the Ukraine capital, Kyiv, that left one dead and 13 wounded, according to the city’s authorities. Another five people were killed in a Ukrainian attack on the Russian frontier region of Kursk.

LOCAL GOVERNOR

said the Russian army had captured a new village near the key city of Kurakhove in eastern Ukraine where Russian forces have made major advances in recent months. Russian troops had “liberated” the village of Kostiantynopolske, just eight kilometres (five miles) from Kurakhove, an industrial town that is a looming Russian target, a statement said.

Russia on Friday staged strikes on the Ukraine capital, Kyiv, that left one dead and 13 wounded, according to the city’s authorities. Another five people were killed in a Ukrainian attack on the Russian frontier region of Kursk, the local governor said. Russia’s security service said meanwhile that a man had been sentenced to 19 years in jail for sending information to US intelligence services about the

Russian military, The unidentified man, who was born in 1993, was found guilty of “high treason” and other charges, the FSB agency said. The inquiry “confirmed that he had established a confidential cooperation relationship with representatives of the US intelligence services,” the agency said. The man was accused of sending information about the identity and other personal details on Russian soldiers. He was arrested in January 2023. A regional court at Orenburg in the Urals ordered the jail term and sent the man to a “strict regime” penal colony, the FSB said.

It released images of the man surrounded by agents and in court. Russian courts have ordered multiple heavy jail terms for treason, terrorism and sabotage since the start of the military offensive. — AFP

SCHOLZ PLEDGES SYMPATHY FOR VICTIMS

BERLIN: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Saturday went to Magdeburg to voice his sympathy and support for the victims of a Christmas market attack that killed five and left more than 200 injured. “What a terrible act it is to injure and kill so many people there with such brutality,” Scholz said. “Almost 40 are so seriously injured that we must be very worried about them.” The chancellor called on the nation to stand together against hate. German authorities are investigating a man as the suspected

driver in a car-ramming attack at a Christmas market in the city of Magdeburg which killed five people, officials said on Saturday. The Friday evening attack on crowds of market visitors gathered to celebrate the pre-Christmas season comes amid a fierce debate over security and migration during an election campaign in Germany, where the far right is polling strongly. Germany’s domestic and foreign intelligence agencies both declined to comment on the ongoing investigation. — Reuters

VERDICTS ANNOUNCEMENT

Pakistan military courts convict 25 of unrest



Pakistan military courts have convicted and sentenced 25 people for involvement in pro-Imran Khan unrest last year, the armed forces said. Amnesty International called the move “an intimidation tactic, designed to crack down on dissent” and said it was “contrary to international law”. All of the convicted are men and 14 have been sentenced to a decade of “rigorous imprisonment”, the military said with the remaining 11 set to serve lesser prison terms. — AFP

ROAD TRAGEDY

At least 22 die in bus accident in Brazil



At least 22 people died on Saturday when a bus crashed into a truck and then caught fire in southeastern Brazil, officials said, adding that the death toll is likely to rise. Around four in the morning, the bus travelling from Sao Paulo blew a tire near the town of Lajinha, in the state of Minas Gerais, causing the driver to lose control of the vehicle and hit a truck, the state’s fire department said. — AFP

PLATFORM SHUTTING

Albania shuts down TikTok for a year: PM



Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama announced that the government will shut down social network TikTok for at least a year starting at the beginning of 2025. During a meeting, Rama said that “we are going to chase this thug out of our neighbourhood for one year”. He added that the government will start programmes that will “serve the education of students and help parents follow their children’s journey”. — AFP

The New York Times

Biden weighs roadblocks to Trump’s deportation campaign



HAMED ALEAZIZ

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THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION is considering extending protections for hundreds of thousands of immigrants whose status in the United States is set to expire in the first months of the Trump administration, according to US officials and documents viewed by The New York Times. The move would make it harder, though not impossible, for president-elect Donald Trump to deport those people. But it is a sign that the Biden administration could try, in its final weeks, to build some obstacles to what Trump has promised will be the biggest deportation in US history.

The immigrants in question have Temporary Protected Status, which allows people from dangerous and troubled countries to live and work in the United States legally. As of this year, there are 1 million immigrants from 17 countries with TPS, according to the Congressional Research Service.

Trump tried to get rid of the programme during his first term and his advisers have made clear that he will try again as part of a broad crackdown on legal and illegal immigration. If Biden were to extend TPS, even for a relatively narrow group of people, Trump would either have to wait for the protections to expire, or cut them off early — something that would almost certainly be challenged in court. The programme has come under criticism over the years, in part because TPS requires regular extensions, generally every 18 months. Im-

migrants from some countries, including El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, have been eligible for the protection for more than two decades — drawing criticism from Republicans who say the programme effectively allows people to stay in the United States indefinitely.

In September and October, before the presidential election, Secretary of State Antony Blinken sent the Department of Homeland Security a series of letters recommending the 18-month extension of Temporary Protected Status for 300,000 people from Ukraine, Sudan and Venezuela, which is set to expire in April. In his letter on Venezuela, Blinken said making more Venezuelans eligible for the status would show “solidarity” with the Venezuelan people. Separately, he wrote that the department should also make more immigrants from the other two countries eligible for protection because of the perilous conditions there, according to a copy of the correspondence viewed by the Times.

Two administration officials said the White House was considering the extension, but cautioned that no decision had been made. White House officials also have reached out to activists and business leaders for their thoughts on the various forms of immigration relief Biden could take during his final days in office, including extending temporary status for other nationalities, two people with knowledge

The move would make it harder, though not impossible, for president-elect Donald Trump to deport those people. But it is a sign that the Biden administration could try to build some obstacles to what Trump has promised will be the biggest deportation in US history.

of the situation said. Blinken also sent a letter this fall recommending an extension of protections for immigrants from El Salvador. Those protections expire in March. A White House official said the State Department assessment is part of a standard process when TPS is expiring. Trump’s plans have caused enormous anxiety within immigrant communities. Bahaa Jacknoon, a 45-year-old Sudanese man, was granted Temporary Protected Status in 2012 and has lived in the US ever since. He now works for an education company in Washington, DC.

Immigrant advocates have pushed the Biden administration to take the opportunity to extend and expand the protections immediately before Trump takes office in January. During his time in office, Biden has vastly increased the use of the programme.

During his first term, he tried to cut TPS for several countries, including Sudan, Haiti and El Salvador, but he was blocked in court. His administration argued that the conditions in those countries were suitable for return and that the protections had been extended far too long — making them no longer “temporary.” During the campaign, Trump and his running mate, Sen. JD Vance, said they wanted to get rid of temporary protections. “We’re going to stop doing mass grants of Temporary Protected Status,” Vance said in October.

WHY DOES OPENAI NEED SO MUCH MONEY?



CADE METZ

The author is a technology reporter for The New York Times.

Early last year, OpenAI raised \$10 billion. Just 18 months later, the company had burned through most of that money. So it raised \$6.6 billion more and arranged to borrow an additional \$4 billion. However, in another 18 months or so, OpenAI will need another cash infusion because the San Francisco startup is spending

more than \$5.4 billion a year. By 2029, OpenAI expects to spend \$37.5 billion annually. OpenAI’s accelerating expenses are the main reason the corporate structure of the company, which began as a non-profit research lab, could soon change. OpenAI must raise billions of additional dollars in the years to come, and its executives believe it will be more attractive to investors as a for-profit company.

In many ways, artificial intelligence has inverted how computer technology used to be created. For decades, Silicon Valley engineers designed new technologies one small step at a time. As they built social media apps like Facebook or shopping sites like Amazon, they wrote line after line of computer code. With each new line, they carefully defined what the app would do. But when companies build AI systems, they go big first: They feed these systems enormous amounts of data. The more data companies feed into these systems, the more powerful they become. Just as a student learns more by reading more books, an AI system can improve its skills by ingesting larger pools of data. Chatbots like ChatGPT learn their skills by ingesting practically all the English language text on the Internet.

That requires larger and larger amounts of computing power from giant data centres. Inside those data centres are computers packed with thousands of specialised computer chips called graphics processing units, or GPUs, which can cost more than \$30,000 apiece. The cost is pushed higher because the chips, data centres, and electricity needed to do this digital work are in short supply. Sean Holzknecht, CEO of Colovore, a data centre operator whose facilities are adopting specialised chips used to build AI, said this new kind of computing facility costs 10 to 20 times more than a traditional data centre.

These chips spend months running the mathematical calculations that allow ChatGPT to pinpoint patterns in all that data. The price tag for each “training run” can climb into the hundreds of millions of dollars. “Imagine needing to read the Internet over and over and over,” said David Katz, a partner at Radical Ventures, a venture capital firm that has invested in AI startups. “This is the most computationally intensive task the world has ever seen.”

Congress approves spending extension, ending shutdown crisis

THE SENATE approved a spending measure early on Saturday to keep government money flowing through mid-March, sending it to President Joe Biden for his expected signature and closing a chaotic endgame in Congress minutes after federal funding had lapsed. The 85-11 Senate vote followed earlier House passage of the legislation, which also provided \$100 billion in disaster relief for parts of the nation still reeling from storms. The action pushed major spending decisions into 2025 and the first months of the incoming Trump administration and a fully Republican-controlled Congress. The White House said that Biden would sign the measure on Saturday and that no agencies would shut down despite the technical lapse in funding.

The end to days of shutdown drama came after House Republicans stripped out a provision demanded by President-elect Donald Trump to suspend the federal debt limit and spare him the usually politically charged task of doing so when he takes office. But that demand sparked a revolt by dozens of Republicans on Thursday and led to a major defeat on the House floor. The measure that ultimately passed kept dollars flowing to federal agencies and prevented a prolonged funding lapse that could have led to government disruptions just days before the holidays.

Sen. Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., the majority leader, said the final product was not all Democrats wanted, but avoided a crisis. “Though this bill does not include everything Democrats fought for, there are major victories in this bill for American families,” Schumer said, citing “emergency



CARL HULSE

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aid for communities battered by natural disasters,” as well as no suspension of the limits on federal borrowing. He added that it would “keep the government open with no draconian cuts.” The legislation also extends farm programmes for one year and provides \$10 billion in direct aid for farmers.

The vote in the House capped an extraordinary week of Republican chaos and dysfunction in which Speaker Mike Johnson cut a deal with Democrats to avert a shutdown, only to see it torpedoed by billionaire Elon Musk and Trump, who demanded a different plan, which was promptly defeated by Republicans with help from Democrats. After the vote, Johnson, who faced questions about his ability to continue as speaker next year after the tumult of the past few days, said he had been in constant contact with Trump and had talked with Musk, whom Trump named to help lead an effort to cut government spending, as well. “He knew exactly what we were doing and why,” Johnson said of the president-elect. “This is a good outcome for the country.”

POTENTIAL DIFFICULTIES Still, the vote illustrated the limits of the president-elect’s power to keep fractious House Republicans in line. Trump failed in his effort to win a debt-limit suspension even after threatening primary campaigns against Republicans who voted for a stopgap bill that did not address it. The internal divisions over spending and debt foreshadowed potential difficulties for Republicans next year as they try to navigate their narrow House margin and accomplish an ambitious domestic agenda including complex tax and spending issues. The government funding

measure was a stripped-down version of an earlier proposal negotiated between Republican and Democratic leaders of the House and Senate that was filled with policy priorities for both parties as well as a cost-of-living pay adjustment for members of the House and Senate.

But as soon as it was rolled out by Johnson on Tuesday, it ran into fierce criticism from members of his own party as a bloated legislative Christmas tree of the sort Johnson had pledged to avoid. Musk piled on with an onslaught of criticism on his social media platform X, and Trump warned Republicans not to support any deal without a debt-ceiling suspension. Johnson quickly withdrew the bill and never put it to a vote.

That outcome angered Democrats who savaged Johnson for reneging on the deal they had reached. It also meant that some of the provisions they sought on health care and trade, among other issues, would fall by the wayside. Democrats weighed opposing the stripped-down measure that Johnson hastily cobbled together on Friday, but ultimately decided to back it rather than risk being blamed for a shutdown.

Congress had flirted repeatedly with shutdowns over the past two years with Republicans in control of the House and Democrats the Senate. But lawmakers pulled back from the brink each time, fearing election fallout. With the elections over and the holidays coming the next two weeks, lawmakers had initially expected a fairly smooth path to funding the government into next year, but they instead found themselves enmeshed in one final episode of disarray to cap a tumultuous Congress.

OPINION

How to decide when trust is gone



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MRS A CAME TO OUR CLINIC with one question, “What should I do with my husband who has been cheating for the past five years?”. She was in her early thirties with two children and a successful job, while he was two years older than her and a manager. He was also “charming, loving, and very kind”, according to her.

She found evidence of the “other women” on his WhatsApp messages and some days he would come home “late with a lipstick stain on his clothes”.

When she confronted him, he “cried and promised to stop, but returned to cheating after few weeks”. She was not sure what to do. Leave the house and ask for a divorce? Or turn a blind eye?

A statement, “Leaving your husband because he cheats is like leaving your country because it rains,” is believed to have been said by the British writer Agatha Clarissa Christie. It suggests that infidelity is an unfortunate but tolerable part of marriage, just as bad weather is an inevitable part of life. But is this perspective valid or fair?

When trust is broken repeatedly, as in Mrs

A’s case, it can lead to emotional damage such as feelings of betrayal, humiliation, and self-doubt. The partner who has been cheated on may constantly question their worth and wonder what they did wrong, even when they are not to blame. This emotional damage can impact different aspects of their life such as parenting, work, and friendships affecting mental health and overall well-being.

Mrs A’s dilemma is not unique. Many people in committed relationships struggle with similar questions. Societal pressure and concern for children’s welfare often complicate the decision to leave when trust is broken. In some societies, divorce is viewed as a failure, while endurance is seen as a strength. However, enduring an unhealthy relationship comes at a cost.

Turning a blind eye may seem like the easier option, especially when children are involved. Some argue that maintaining the appearance of a stable family is better for children than subjecting them to divorce. But most children can sense tension, sadness, and dishonesty in their parents’ relationship. Growing up in an environment

When trust is broken repeatedly it can lead to emotional damage such as feelings of betrayal, humiliation, and self-doubt

where betrayal is normalised can send harmful messages about self-worth and relationships.

On the other hand, choosing to leave a cheating partner is not about giving up; it is about self-respect and setting boundaries. Mrs A deserves a relationship based on mutual respect, honesty, and trust. Staying in a relationship where infidelity is ongoing and unrepentant may compromise her mental health and emotional well-being.

While we all agree that deciding whether to stay or leave is personal and there is no one-size-fits-all answer, Mrs A can benefit from both individual and marital therapy. A counsellor can help her process her emotions, clarify her thoughts, and explore her options without judgement.

Couples therapy, if her husband is willing, can offer a safe space to address underlying issues in the relationship. Whether Mrs A chooses to rebuild the marriage or move on, it is important that she feels respected, valued, and at peace with her choice. The rain may fall, but we all have the right to decide how we weather the storm.

WOMEN FILM-MAKERS DEFY WAR WITH STORIES OF RESILIENCE

Far from the frontlines of Sudan’s devastating war, a new generation of amateur women film-makers is gathering in the formerly sleepy city of Port Sudan to explore the untold stories of their troubled country. Armed with only their smartphones, the women, brought together in a project run by film-maker Mohamed Fawi, have produced three short documentaries tackling education, independence and community resilience.

“After the war broke out, I felt compelled to keep contributing from within Sudan,” said Mohamed Fawi.

He relocated 800 kilometres northeast to Port Sudan from Khartoum, where fighting between the regular army and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has devastated the city since mid-April 2023.

According to UN estimates, the war has displaced more than 11 million people -- over a quarter of a million to around Port Sudan, the de facto capital now hosting the army-aligned government and international organisations. Like millions who fled the war-torn capital, Fawi, a visual artist and film-maker with more than a decade’s experience, had to leave everything behind. “We lost all our equipment in Khartoum,” he said. “We could not get any cameras. So, our only option was smartphones.”

In Port Sudan, he began his project to empower women through film production, initially training 11 women in cinematography, scriptwriting and directing techniques, as well as post-production skills. In one standout film, girls from eastern Sudan’s Beja tribe beam at the camera as director Areej Hussein, 26, carefully frames her shot.

The short titled ‘Toknan’ — which means ‘knowledge’ in the local language — captures their journey as they learn to read, make incense, craft embroidery, and market their creations online.

For cinematographer Tasabih Hussein, 22, the whole process of production was thrilling. “We filmed for seven days, ending up with about 32 hours of footage, which we then condensed to 18 minutes,” she said.

Another documentary, Eithar Khairy’s ‘Ana Hona’ (I Am Here) follows two women who run Talking Hands, an initiative supporting deaf women and children displaced by war.

Doctor-turned-film-maker Khairy said capturing the footage was ‘challenging’ but it was ‘incredibly rewarding’ to see children being offered a bridge to communicate with a world that is often out of reach. The third film, Zeinab Alfadel’s ‘Umm Al Fuqara’ (Mother of the Poor), follows two women who try to set up a health and cultural day for those displaced by the war. They aim to foster a sense of identity and belonging through traditional dances at a cultural centre on the outskirts of Port Sudan.

“It is a model for peaceful coexistence,” said Alfadel, a chemical engineer by training.

Before the war, Sudan’s nascent film industry was just beginning to gain international recognition.

The country’s first feature film in decades — Amjad Abu Alala’s “You Will Die at Twenty” — became Sudan’s first-ever Oscar submission in 2020. — AFP

Why Thomas Friedman’s columns should come with a fact-check

ON DECEMBER 4, I read Thomas Friedman’s article in the Oman Observer titled ‘So Much for Trump’s Fantasy of a Quieter Middle East.’ I am always impressed by the Oman Observer’s willingness to publish diverse political perspectives.

Friedman, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who regularly writes a column for the New York Times, is plausible. However he is well-known for perpetuating myths and falsehoods about Israel, usually unchanged in mainstream Western media.

Since he is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist perhaps he deserves a reply although it is difficult to take him or anything he writes seriously. In his Observer article, he makes unreferenced statements such as “a Western intelligence source tells me” and “a senior US official remarked to me.”

Perhaps it’s the CIA who gives him his information, the same people who advised Bush to invade Iraq on the false premise that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction.

In his February 2 column for The New York Times, Friedman disturbingly describes the Middle East as an “animal kingdom.” Arabs are likened to insects, with Iran depicted as a “parasitoid wasp” injecting its eggs into helpless Arab caterpillars. In contrast, in the same article, he describes the US as a “stately old lion,” while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is defined as a particularly intelligent monkey species.

Friedman’s language risks dehumanising Arabs and Iranians, while Americans and Israelis are elevated as intelligent and capable. This grotesque dehumanisation is offensive and a cornerstone of Zionist propaganda, reinforcing the colonial narrative that rationalises the exploitation and subjugation of Palestinians and other Arab populations.

Friedman’s claim in the Oman Observer that Hezbollah’s recent defence of innocent Palestinians marked the start of a war against Israel is a blatant distortion. It erases decades of documented Palestinian suffering. This misrepresentation is part of Friedman’s long-standing



Palestinian children help push a car as people evacuate from their homes with their belongings, after received evacuation orders from the Israeli military, at the Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip. — AFP



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In Gaza, repeated Israeli bombing campaigns continue to kill thousands of civilians, mostly children and women, amounting to collective punishment

practice of cherry-picking history to frame Israel as the perpetual victim while ignoring the root causes of the conflict.

The real story of the conflict didn’t begin in 2023 with Hezbollah and Hamas — it began in 1948, during the Nakba, when over 700,000 Palestinians were forcibly displaced in a campaign of ethnic cleansing by Zionist Jews.

Palestinian villages were destroyed, families massacred, and land was expropriated to establish a Zionist State at the expense of the indigenous population.

Jewish authors like Ilan Pappé have meticulously documented this process, but Friedman ignores it, preferring instead to point to moments that justify Israeli actions. This is not just poor journalism — it’s wilful and dangerous Zionist propaganda.

Friedman’s refusal to acknowledge ongoing Israeli crimes is equally staggering. He glosses over the illegal settlement expansion in the West Bank, the inhumane blockade of Gaza, and the violent displacement of Palestinian families in East Jerusalem.

Human rights organisations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have labelled these practices as apartheid. Yet Friedman clings to the excuse of “Israel’s security needs,” casting Zionist Israelis as perpetual victims and Palestinians as aggressors.

This selective outrage is deeply hypocritical. When Israelis are harmed, Friedman demands global

attention. When Palestinians are bombed, displaced, or killed, he is silent — or worse, he justifies the violence.

In Gaza, repeated Israeli bombing campaigns continue to kill thousands of civilians, mostly children and women, amounting to collective punishment. Yet Friedman avoids calling these actions what they are: genocide.

Friedman also chooses to ignore the history of the Zionist Jews’ disturbing collaborations with oppressive, racist regimes such as Nazi Germany and the Apartheid South African regime.

He fails to mention the 1933 Haavara Agreement between Zionist leaders and Nazi Germany, which prioritised Jewish emigration to Palestine over resisting Hitler’s regime. While Jewish communities in Germany faced persecution in the 1930s, Zionist leaders in Nazi Germany turned a blind eye while even at times sharing the wealth stolen from German Jews.

In presenting his columns as “nuanced analysis,” Friedman masks what is ultimately polished Zionist propaganda. His dehumanisation of Arabs and Iranians, erasure of Palestinian history, and defence of Israeli crimes contribute to a system of violence, apartheid, and colonial oppression. Publications like The New York Times do themselves and their readers a disservice by continuing to platform Friedman’s biased narratives which incite hatred against Arabs and Iranians.

The many faces of Christmas



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IT’S NEARLY here again, the ‘other’ great religious festival, of Christmas, which to many of the Islamic faith, is a confusing, sometimes contradictory, celebration, much less of faith.

I’ve been asked, “Why is Santa Claus the lead character at Christmas, if he’s not in the Holy Bible?” It’s a great question if we only consider the time of year as a religious event, however, Christmas has emerged from recent history as an icon of retailing, commercialism, and marketing, rather than the religious event it celebrates. But, more on that, later.

An encyclopaedic definition of Christmas is a Christian observance, when people of earlier societies would come together, ‘en masse,’ to celebrate the birth of the baby Jesus, thence known as Christ’s Mass, later abbreviated to Christmas. Ironically perhaps, given Jesus’s demise, it is believed to be the Ancient Romans, from two thousand years ago, who assigned the December 25th date to the festival, as it was nine months after the Spring Equinox. Who knew?

It wasn’t though, until more than 900 years later that the winter date, and its celebration, was championed, and it took until the 18th century before exchanging gifts, and thereby representing the gifts of the Three Wise Men, the Maji, became a ‘thing.’ Christmas cards, which appear to be almost unfashionable now, became fashionable from 1823, on the back of a popular poem, ‘The Night Before

Christmas,’ by J E Luebering, which featured a new character, the mythical Santa Claus.

The Dutch are credited with deriving him from Saint Nicholas, in Dutch: ‘Sinterklaas,’ and took the tradition, now anglicised, with them, when they migrated to America, where the ‘New World’ Santa Claus himself was first depicted as a jolly, white-bearded, red-coated, bearer of gifts, by American cartoonist Thomas Nast, in Harper’s Weekly magazine, in 1863.

His caricature has been embraced by children for 150 years ever since, as living in the North Pole with Mrs Claus, a host of gift-making elves, and a herd of reindeer. Then, on Christmas Eve, he flies everywhere in his sleigh, pulled by eight reindeer, climbing down chimneys to leave gifts for children. It’s an impossibility, I know, but let’s not destroy all childish illusions too soon. They will grow up quickly enough.

I wonder then, if those children who are not left any gifts on Christmas Day are traumatised? Scarred for life? Research by the University of Zurich (2017), on identifying and evaluating the neural pathways heightened by the receiving of gifts established that children’s happiness is significantly elevated, which is exactly as we would expect.

In my personal experience, Christmas was always ‘better’ than a birthday... because all of us kids got to enjoy the giving and receiving as one.

I guess there is a glitzy not-so-appealing perspective to Christmas, in its overt over-commercialisation..

But what of those who do not receive Christmas gifts... for whatever reason? Involved in child poverty relief, the MIND charity alludes to most children at risk being, “affected by, bereavement, poverty, family issues, being a young carer, and many other situations, that make them more vulnerable during the festive period.” Then, to not receive gifts, while those around them are, can be devastatingly harmful to children’s mental health and wellbeing.

I guess there is a glitzy not-so-appealing perspective to Christmas, in its overt over-commercialisation. But that is the way of the world, isn’t it? I feel it’s a juggernaut too big to tackle, because those drawing affluence and wealth from Christmas excesses and retailing would always perpetuate it.

At the end of the day, whether it’s Christmas, Ramadhan, or whatever festival, I’m all in, 100 per cent all for giving gifts, seeing happiness abound, hearing laughter, embracing, coming together as families or friends, enjoying each other’s company, because even if it is for just one day... it’s worth it.

I always have a ‘moment’ at Christmas. My father was born on December 25, and his name was Noel, which figures prominently in the etymology of Christmas. So, on that day I’ll take a moment to reflect on those no longer with me while celebrating it not as a religious event, but as a time to share joy. Happy Christmas, and goodwill to all.

IN WARTIME BETHLEHEM, CHRISTMAS JOY HARD TO FIND

LOUIS BAUDOIN-LAARMAN

On Bethlehem’s Manger Square, Christmas decorations and pilgrims are notably absent for a second wartime festive season in the Israeli-occupied West Bank city. The Church of the Nativity that dominates the square is as empty as the plaza outside. Only the chants of Armenian monks echo from the crypt where Christians believe Jesus Christ was born.

“Normally on this day you would find 3,000 or 4,000 people inside the church,” said Mohammed Sabeh, a security guard for the church. Violence across the Israeli-occupied West Bank has surged since the war in Gaza broke out last year, but Bethlehem has remained largely quiet, even though the fighting has taken a toll on the now predominantly Muslim city.

Foreign tourists, on whom Bethlehem’s economy almost entirely relies, stopped coming due to the war. An increase in restrictions on movement, in the form of Israeli checkpoints, is also keeping many Palestinians from visiting. “Christians in Ramallah can’t come because there are checkpoints,” Sabeh said, complaining that Israeli soldiers “treat us badly”, leading to long traffic queues for those trying to visit from the West Bank city 22 kilometres away, on the other side of nearby Jerusalem.

Anton Salman, Bethlehem’s mayor, said that on top of pre-existing checkpoints, the Israeli army had set up new roadblocks around Bethlehem, creating “an obstacle” for those wanting to visit. “Maybe part of them will succeed to come, and part of them, they are going to face the gates and the checkpoints that Israel is putting around”, Salman said. The sombre atmosphere created by the Gaza war, would make showy celebrations an insensitive display, said Salman. “We want to show the world that Bethlehem is not having Christmas as usual”, he said.

Prayers will go on, and the Catholic Church’s Latin Patriarch will make the trip from Jerusalem as usual, but the festivities will be of a more strictly religious nature than the festive celebrations the city once held. There will be no float parade, no scout march and no large gatherings on the streets this year.

“Bethlehem is special at Christmas. It is so special in the Holy Land. Jesus was born here”, said Souad Handal, a 55-year-old tour guide from Bethlehem.

“It’s so bad (now) because the economy of Bethlehem, it depends on tourism.”

Joseph Giacaman, owner of one of Bethlehem’s best-located shops right on Manger Square, said he now only opens once or twice a week “to clean up”, for lack of customers. “A lot of families lost their business because, you know, there are no tourists”, said Aboud, another souvenir shopkeeper. — AFP

A call for excellence in higher education

HIGHER EDUCATION has experienced remarkable growth over the past three decades. This is because education is the backbone of an informed and thriving society as there is a high demand for higher education especially in the most needed specialisations.

During the journey which the students travel through their higher education, it determines to a large extent their future and of their country. This also includes the expectation of students’ advancement and progressive development is decided by the quality of education they receive.

There are of course countless number of higher education institutions (HEIs) that exist all over the world. In almost every country, higher education institutions offer degrees in various specialisations, with each country claiming that it has a strongly formed and constructed educational system.

There is no doubt that higher education system is the foundation and most substantial and sturdiest part of the country as it plays a foundational and pivotal role in society.

A country cannot enjoy success and prosperity without having higher education system that is free from flaw, defect, and decay, since all aspects and sectors of the country are heavily dependent of what education produces.

The quality of HEI graduates is represented by the quality of its internal stakeholders, including students, faculty, and staff. But this quality cannot be asserted without being acknowledged by external stakeholders, including employers, internship providers, and community members who are in fact the ones who evaluate the quality of HEI academic and non-academic provision.

An imperfection and weakness of a higher education system hinder the effectiveness of all other sectors. If higher education is degraded with unsound principles and moral



DR MUSALLAM AL MAANI

The writer is Dean of Al Zahra College for Women

values, there will be a change from good to bad in morals, manners, and actions of younger generations.

A country cannot have a strong economy, manufacturing, judiciary system, social structure without having a sound course of study and academic programmes.

A quality higher education system should focus on ensuring that graduates from HEIs should have a degree of excellence in their specialised area, with knowledge and skills that enable them to exercise careful judgement or judicious evaluation of matters receiving or deserving attention.

Within corrupt societies, the primary concern of people is to acquire a piece of paper (the certificate) rather than being preoccupied with the acquaintance with and understanding of a science, art, or technique. That is why holders of various degrees and certificates are in reality lack developed knowledge, skills, vigour, aptitude and ability to use their knowledge effectively and readily in

the execution and performance of tasks assigned to them.

In fact, holders of academic degrees from countries with academically and intellectually deficient higher education system lack the learned power of doing things competently, and cannot pass from one stage of experience and proficiency to a higher one. Even the argument of such graduates is not factually grounded and logically presented.

That is why HEIs should have in place clearly stated and described quality management system in order to make certain the quality of its academic provision is attained.

The quality of education HEIs deliver cannot be achieved without an implementation of a systematic, consistent and rigorous quality management system. While such processes cannot be achieved unless HEIs have firmly built and constituted educational system, along with ensuring that relevant mechanisms and benchmarking are sound in design and execution.

SPORTS

Red Warriors draw Kuwait in 26th Gulf Cup opener

WALEED AL JAHWARI
KUWAIT, DEC 21

IN THE PRESENCE of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Red Warriors drew in the opening match against the host Kuwait.

The match was held on Saturday evening at the Jaber Al Ahmad International Stadium, packed with more than 42,000 spectators.

The opening ceremony, which lasted 20 minutes, included artistic performances that told the story of the history of the Gulf Cup tournaments and highlighted the tournament's long history and legacy.

The Oman national team opened the Gulf Cup competitions for the tenth time in their history since their first participation in Kuwait 50 years ago in the third edition, as well as playing for the seventh time against the host.

Although the Oman national team had a strong start, they lost control and wasted a counterattack in the second minute through Jameel al Yahmadi being considered offside.

In the 25th minute, Oman made a mistake outside the box, giving Kuwait an indirect free kick from a dangerous angle that was defended.

Kuwait's striker Yusef Nasir secured the first goal through a header from an amazing cross in the 34th minute.

Kuwait's striker Mohammed

Daham missed a chance to score from a crossed ball, kicking it next to the goalpost in the 41st minute.

Issam al Subhi took advantage of Jameel al Yahmadi's cross to score, leaving Kuwait's goalkeeper helpless in the 42nd minute.

Six minutes later, Oman missed a direct free kick opportunity from a mistake by Harib al Saadi, kicking it above the crossbar.

The Oman team were unlucky not to secure a second goal when the ball hit the crossbar twice, first from Ahmed al Khamisi and then Zahir al Aghbari, ending the first half with a 1-1 score, with Kuwait at a 52-per cent acquisition rate and Oman at 48 per cent.

The second half started with Abdulrahman al Mushefri replacing Zahir al Aghbari.

Omani captain Mohammed al Musallami received a yellow card in the 68th minute.

There was no danger until the 73rd minute when Mutaz

Saleh, Abdullah Fawaz's replacement, missed a crossing that nearly hit the goalpost.

The second half ended with a positive tie of 1-1, with Oman at a 53-per cent acquisition rate and Kuwait at 47 per cent, with a yellow card issued to each team.

The Oman lineup included: Ibrahim al Mukhaini (goalkeeper), Mohammed al Musallami (C), Arshad al Alawi, Ahmed al Khamisi, Issam al Subhi, Zahir al Aghbari, Jameel al Yahmadi, Amjad al Harthi, Abdullah Fawaz, Ali al Busaidi and Harib al Saadi.

The match was officiated by Saudi international referee Khaled al Turais, assisted by Mohammed al Abkari as the first assistant, Abdulrahim al Shammari as the second assistant, and Bahraini Ammar Mahfouz as the fourth referee. The VAR referees were Abdullah al Shehri from Saudi Arabia and his assistant Ida Jumpei from Japan.

In the second leg of group A, UAE will meet Qatar in the late evening at the Jaber Mubarak Al Sabah Stadium.

The next match will be against Qatar on December 24, followed by a match against UAE on December 27, both matches at the Jaber Mubarak Al Sabah Stadium with 15,000 spectators at 6:25 (Oman time).

The Media Committee announced that more than 2,000 media personnel have registered to cover the championship, with expectations of an increase, in addition to 7 Gulf channels that will broadcast the event.



Kuwait's Yusef Nasir celebrates scoring their first goal



Omani Issam al Subhi celebrating scoring the equaliser

SIGNIFICANT VICTORY



AL ITTIHAD TRIUMPH OVER AL NASR

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 21

Saudi club Al Ittihad secured a significant victory over Omani club Al Nasr with a score of 4-1 in a friendly match held at Al Saada Sports Complex. The match was part of Al Nasr's celebrations marking its 55th anniversary.

The match began with clear dominance from Al Ittihad players, who sought early chances to breach Al Nasr's defence. In the 14th minute, Ahmed al Ghamdi came close to scoring after an organised attack allowed him to penetrate the penalty area, but goalkeeper Bilal al Balushi brilliantly saved his shot. Al Ittihad maintained the pressure until the 17th minute when Karim Benzema opened the scoring with a header following an accurate cross.

Al Ittihad continued to press while Al Nasr relied on counterattacks, which posed no real threat. In the 22nd minute, Fawaz al Saqoor almost doubled the lead for Al Ittihad with a shot that went just over the crossbar. Shortly before the end of the first half, Mario Mitaj added the second goal in the 45th minute with a powerful strike from outside the box, ending the first half with a 2-0 lead for Al Ittihad.

The second half kicked off with great energy from Al Ittihad. Mario Mitaj almost scored his second goal in the 46th minute with a powerful shot from outside the box, but goalkeeper Bilal al Balushi continued to shine. Al Nasr's coach, Ahmed Bait Said, made several substitutions to improve his team's performance, which resulted in better offensive movements. In the 51st minute, substitute Mohammed Abdulhakim missed a golden opportunity with a powerful shot that went over the crossbar, followed by another attempt from Mohammed al Musallami that hit the crossbar in the 54th minute.

Al Ittihad regained control, and Karim Benzema scored his second goal and the team's third in the 68th minute after a brilliant pass from his team-mate N'Golo Kanté. Although Al Ittihad were awarded a penalty in the 71st minute after Ahmed al Ghamdi was fouled, Muadh Faqihi missed the chance to widen the gap.

In the 73rd minute, Al Nasr managed to reduce the deficit through Awad al Shahri, who capitalised on a ball inside the penalty area and struck it powerfully into Al Ittihad's net. Al Nasr almost scored a second goal in the 79th minute, but Waleed al Musallami's shot narrowly missed the post, leaving Al Nasr fans frustrated.

In the dying moments of the match, the referee awarded another penalty to Al Ittihad in the 90th minute, which Brazilian Fabinho executed perfectly into the net, sealing a 4-1 victory for Al Ittihad.



Ahli Sidab face Salalah; Al Amerat take on Al Nasr

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 21

Ahli Sidab, Al Nasr, Salalah and Al Amerat secured a spot in the semis of the 54th edition of the prestigious His Majesty's Cup Hockey Championship. The semifinal matches will take place on Sunday as the topper of group 'A' Ahli Sidab will take on Salalah club, who finished as runners-up in group 'B', and the match will start at 5:00 pm at Oman Hockey Stadium in Al Amerat. The group leader of group 'B', Al Amerat, in their debut, will face the second placed of group 'A', Al Nasr, and the match will begin at 7:00 pm at the same venue. The winners will battle for the championship title which is scheduled on Tuesday while the losers will play for the third and fourth playoff.

Ahli Sidab confirmed their berth in the semifinal with a commanding 6-0 win over the defending champion Suhar in the concluding match of group 'A' while Al Nasr managed to thrash Al Salam by 10-0 in the same group. In the other group, Al Amerat registered a 3-1 win against Seeb to head the group order while Salalah snatched a 2-2 draw against Dhofar to join Al Amerat in the semis.

Ahli Sidab commenced their campaign with a win against Al Nasr by 2-0 after the withdrawal of the latter. Then, they blanked Al Salam by 2-0 before winning Suhar by 6-0. Al Nasr's victories in the group stage registered against Suhar by 5-1 and then thrashing Al Salam by 10-0 while they



withdrew in the first game against Ahli Sidab.

Al Amerat started their campaign strongly as they thrashed Dhofar by 16-0 and they ended their match against Salalah by 2-2 draw before snatching a crucial 3-1 win from Seeb. Salalah club managed to blank Seeb by 3-1 in the opening match before playing out a 2-2 draw against Al Amerat and then ending their match against Dhofar by a 2-2 draw.

It is expected that the semis games will feature tough competitions as all four teams will eye to reach the final match of the top hockey domestic event. Al Amerat are seeking for their historic title in first attendance at the HM's Cup for Hockey event. They will depend on many key players including Ilyas al Noufli, Shahid Abdulhannan and Ahmed Mohammed. Al

Nasr will eye to rekindle their memories after the last title in 2022 while Ahli Sidab will look to regain the coveted cup after an absence in the last years. Salalah will aim for another top achievement.

Al Nasr, last crowned champions in 2022, seek to reclaim their glory, while Ahli Sidab, one of Oman's most prominent clubs, aim to end their title drought. Salalah, fresh off winning the His Majesty's Cup for Youth, will be eager to add another accolade to their achievements.

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

Gulf Cup: Symbol of unity, brotherhood across the Gulf

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 21

THE GULF CUP Football Championship stands as a powerful platform for strengthening relations between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, transcending the boundaries of the football field to symbolise Gulf unity and cooperation. Since its inception in 1970, the tournament has conveyed both sporting and fraternal messages, playing a key role in uniting the hearts and minds of the Gulf nations.

The championship has consistently shown its ability to overcome political differences, with each new edition diminishing borders and fostering an atmosphere of Gulf brotherhood. Players and fans from

various nations come together under one roof to celebrate the love of the game, highlighting the role of sport in bridging gaps and promoting mutual understanding.

Throughout its history, the Gulf Cup has been marked by moments of solidarity and camaraderie, with fans filling the stands to support all the Gulf teams, regardless of their nationality. This spirit of cooperation and unity exemplifies the power of sports in creating lasting connections among people.

Since its debut in Bahrain, the Gulf Cup has become integral to the sporting and cultural identity of the Gulf states. Over the years, it has etched unforgettable memories, from intense competition to historic triumphs, leaving a lasting legacy in



Gulf Cup - Group A - Kuwait v Oman

the hearts of the Gulf peoples.

For Oman, the tournament has been a platform to affirm its sporting excellence and solidify its position in Gulf football. The Omani national team has achieved significant success, with championship titles in

2009 and 2017. During each edition, Oman's streets come alive with excitement, as markets, cafes, and homes transform into mini-stadiums, adorned with Gulf flags and filled with the sounds of enthusiastic cheering.

Mohammed al Salmi shares that for Omanis, the Gulf Cup is more than just a sporting event; it is an occasion that unites the Gulf people in a unique fraternal spirit. He highlights the family atmosphere that accompanies the tournament, where homes become lively hubs for watching the matches, bringing together children, adults, and even neighbours.

Zakaria al Zadjali, a football coach, reflects on the special significance of the tournament for younger generations. "I remember the joy of

celebrating Oman's victories in 2009 and 2017, when the streets were filled with celebration.

"The Gulf Cup teaches us that sports can unite us, and it serves as a lesson for the youth about the importance of cooperation and solidarity," he says. Al Zadjali also emphasises that the Gulf Cup showcases the strong bonds between the Gulf nations, with fans from all teams interacting positively, promoting unity and mutual understanding.

In this tournament, it's common to see fans of the losing team celebrating alongside supporters of the winning team, further reinforcing the unity and brotherhood that the Gulf Cup embodies.



VILLA BEAT
MAN CITY
TO DEEPEN
GUARDIOLA’S
PAIN

VILLA BEAT Man City to deepen Guardiola's pain Birmingham, Aston Villa beat crisis-hit Manchester City 2-1 on Saturday to heap more misery on floundering manager Pep Guardiola, who has now suffered nine defeats in his past 12 matches. Jhon Duran finished off a fine team move to give the home side an early lead and Morgan Rogers doubled Villa's advantage in the 65th minute. Phil Foden scored his first Premier League goal of the season in stoppage time to pull one back but it proved to be too little too late. Guardiola, in the worst run of his glittering career, said on Friday that "sooner or later" things will turn around but City's fear factor has vanished and they have just one win in their past 12 games in all competitions. City have now lost six Premier League games in the current campaign, twice as many as they suffered during the whole of last season, when they were crowned champions for a fourth straight

season. They have dropped to sixth in the Premier League, nine points behind leaders Liverpool having played two games more, while Villa leapfrogged them into fifth. Guardiola said he trusted his players despite their shocking form. "It depends on us," he told the BBC. "The solution is to bring the players back. We have just one central defender fit, that is difficult." "We have to think positive and I have incredible trust in the guys," he added. "Some of them have incredible pride and desire to do it. We have to find a way, step by step, sooner or later to find a way back." Guardiola made six changes to the team side that lost last week's Manchester derby, bringing in goalkeeper Stefan Ortega and reshaping his defence with Rico Lewis, John Stones and Manuel Akanji. Mateo Kovacic and Jack Grealish also returned. But the defending champions started the match in chaotic fashion and could have been behind with just 15 seconds on the clock.



Untidy work from Josko Gvardiol allowed John McGinn to steal the ball and he fed Duran, whose shot from outside the box was pushed behind by Ortega. Villa were millimetres away from taking the lead from the resulting corner, with Ortega, in for injured first-choice goalkeeper Ederson, producing a superb save to deny Pau Torres. City then settled and their possession numbers topped 75 per cent but they created little. **DURAN STRIKES AGAIN** Instead it was Villa who took the lead in the 16th minute through Duran after a superb team move. Youri Tielemans delivered a wonderful defence-splitting pass to Rogers, who burst through City's backline with ease before squaring for Duran and the Colombian international finished crisply for his seventh Premier League goal of the season. Foden tested Villa goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez in the 35th minute after an incisive move involving Lewis.

And Gvardiol squandered a glorious chance moments before half-time, heading a Grealish cross over the bar. Guardiola brought on Kyle Walker for Stones at the break but Villa again took control, this time enjoying much more of the ball. Minutes into the second half Matty Cash lashed an attempt into the side netting after a speedy attack before Duran had a strike ruled out for offside. Rogers, formerly of Manchester City, hit the foot of the post just before the hour mark after an intricate team move down the left. But Emery's men doubled their lead 20 minutes into the second half, with Rogers finishing unerringly from a McGinn pass. City created little as they searched for a way back into the game until Foden pounced for a late consolation goal. Emery told TNT Sports that Villa were "feeling strong". "We played the first half very well," he said. "In the second half we kept possession more and getting in the box to score the second goal, we imposed and dominated more." — AFP

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SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE

Dignitaries attending the conclusion of the OMRAN Hackathon 2024 at the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar

OMRAN HACKATHON 2024 BOLSTERS SUSTAINABILITY IN TOURISM SECTOR

BUSINESS REPORTER

AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR: The Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group) has successfully concluded the inaugural edition of the OMRAN Hackathon, marking a significant milestone in advancing innovation and entrepreneurship within Oman's tourism sector.

Organised in strategic partnership with the Oman Across Ages Museum, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate and several Oman Investment Authority entities and executed by Al Jabr Mena, the event showcased a collaborative approach to tackling key challenges in tourism and related industries like energy, logistics, environment and others.

The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), in the presence of Al Muatasim bin Said al Sariry, Deputy Chairman of the Board of Directors of OMRAN Group, and Dr Hashil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, CEO of the Group, at the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar's Naseem DusitD2 Resort.

The hackathon kicked-off with an intensive bootcamp held on December 14 at the Oman Across Ages Museum. Out of over 400 applicants, 100 participants were selected to form 20 teams. During the boot camp, they underwent intensive training sessions.

After rigorous evaluation, only 8 teams were selected to advance to the final stage, which took place during December 19-21 at the Naseem DusitD2 Resort in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. Participants completed their projects under the guidance of a panel of experts and mentors from various sectors. The final ideas were then presented to a judging panel composed of experts and specialists.

The closing ceremony witnessed the crowning of the winners of the first places, which were as follows: first place went to the 'Beyond' team, whose project focused on designing an intelligent tourism platform that utilises VR and AR technologies, targeting primarily the Chinese market. Meanwhile, the 'Walk' team secured second place, crowned for their project that employs AI to assist visitors in exploring destinations and tourist experiences. The third place was awarded to the 'Hydro-X' team, which presented innovative solutions that contribute to reducing water waste through the use of advanced leak detection technologies.

Additionally, the 'Janainah' team received a special award presented by Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, whose project focused on developing a digital platform that serves as a smart technical reference and personal assistant for every farmer, facilitating farmers' access to the latest information and remote consultations on various crop cultivation methods.

GCC economies set for growth through 2026

THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL (GCC) economies are set to experience steady growth over the coming years, with real GDP projected to expand by 3.7 per cent in 2024, 4.5 per cent in 2025, and stabilise at 3.5 per cent in 2026, according to forecasts by the GCC Statistical Centre.

This positive outlook is attributed to rising oil production across the region, supported by OPEC+ gradually easing production quotas since the second half of 2024. The completion of key gas field developments, coupled with robust recoveries in transport, tourism and infrastructure sectors, underpins this growth. Expansionary fiscal policies implemented by GCC governments further bolster these projections.

The non-oil sector is also expected to play a critical role, with growth forecasted at 4.5 per cent in 2024, maintaining momentum at 3.3 per cent and 4.1 per cent in 2025 and 2026, respectively. Accelerated private sector activity is driving this expansion, particularly in tourism, transport, storage and retail. Major infrastructure projects across the GCC are acting as catalysts, stimulating private sector growth and supporting economic diversification efforts.

The report highlights that the continued implementation of economic diversification strategies will significantly

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enhance key sectors such as renewable energy, technology and innovation, and manufacturing, solidifying the GCC's position as a hub for emerging industries.

In 2023, the GCC's real GDP reached \$1.691 trillion, reflecting a modest growth of 0.5 per cent compared to the previous year. The non-oil sector's contribution grew by 3.3 per cent during the same period. However, average per capita GDP at current prices declined by 5 per cent, dropping to \$36,700 in 2023 from \$38,600 in 2022. Globally, the GCC's nominal GDP contributed 2 per cent of the world's \$105.4 trillion economy in 2023 and accounted for 60.5 per cent of the Arab region's \$3.5 trillion GDP.

Inflation across the GCC is expected to remain stable at 2.4 per cent in 2024, 2.6 per cent in

2025, and 2.1 per cent in 2026. However, potential risks to inflationary pressures could arise from higher consumer prices, increased costs of imported raw materials and rising household consumption due to improved employment rates, higher wages and greater household incomes. Additionally, expansionary public spending across the region and global monetary policies — particularly in the United States, European Union, United Kingdom and Japan, aimed at curbing inflation through high interest rates — are expected to influence inflation trends.

The GCC remains on track to further strengthen its economic resilience, leveraging its strategic policies to achieve long-term sustainable growth across diverse sectors.

SEZAD expands municipal services to boost investments

AL DUQM: The Duqm Special Economic Zone Authority (SEZAD) has commenced providing comprehensive municipal services in areas lifted from public utility status within the economic zone. This move follows extensive coordination between SEZAD and Al Wusta Governorate, completing all procedures necessary to implement the Cabinet's decision.

This initiative aims to accelerate economic and social development in the Wilayat of Al Duqm and is in line with the Cabinet's directive assigning the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones to oversee municipal services and public facilities in these areas. The decision empowers SEZAD to develop, implement and supervise municipal services, as outlined in the Governorates System issued by Royal Decree No (36/2022).

Shaikh Ahmed bin Musallam al Kathiri, Governor

of Al Wusta, emphasised that this decision enhances investment opportunities in Al Duqm, bolsters infrastructure efficiency and expedites municipal services for citizens, investors and residents. He noted the success of SEZAD's one-stop shop approach in facilitating services for

investors, further boosting the competitiveness of areas now outside the public utility framework.

The areas stripped of public utility status within the Duqm Special Economic Zone encompass approximately 33 square kilometres, including the Sai District Plan, with a

mix of commercial, industrial and residential uses.

Eng Ahmed bin Ali Akaak, CEO of SEZAD, highlighted that this strategic step aligns with Al Duqm's role in Oman's development plans. He stated that transitioning municipal services to SEZAD would positively impact citizens and investors by ensuring efficient service delivery and promoting flexibility in land allocation to support investment and development projects.

SEZAD has already implemented measures to provide seamless municipal services, transferring competencies and integrating systems to streamline operations. The newly established service hall in the commercial district is operational, offering electronic services via SEZAD's digital platform and one-stop services, enhancing accessibility for beneficiaries in the region. — ONA

BUSINESS

CXO AWARDS



SOHAR INTERNATIONAL’S CEO NAMED ‘CEO OF THE YEAR IN BANKING SECTOR’

Sohar International’s Chief Executive Officer, Ahmed al Musalmi, has been named ‘CEO of the Year in the Banking Sector’ at the prestigious Business Today CXO Awards organised by Apex Media, a recognition that highlights the transformative impact of visionary leadership in driving growth, innovation and organisational excellence.

The event was graced by Sayyid Dr Munthir bin Hilal al Busaidy, Deputy Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, as the chief guest and witnessed the attendance of 200 senior corporate leaders from across Oman’s key sectors, gathered to celebrate excellence in corporate leadership.

Under Ahmed al Musalmi’s leadership, Sohar International has risen to become the second-largest bank in Oman, earning the prestigious title of ‘Best Bank in Oman’ and playing a pivotal role in driving national economic progress. Additionally, the bank has emerged as the fastest-growing financial institution, expanding its reach beyond borders.

Commenting on this achievement, Said Mohamed al Aufi, Chairman of Sohar International, stated: “Leadership is the cornerstone of progress and Ahmed al Musalmi exemplifies the qualities needed to inspire teams, shape strategies and deliver outstanding results. His forward-thinking approach and commitment to fostering a culture of innovation, resilience and purpose have propelled Sohar International to unprecedented heights. Under his stewardship, the bank has achieved remarkable milestones that extend beyond financial performance, setting new standards for the industry while contributing significantly to Oman’s economic diversification and growth. This recognition not only reflects his accomplishments but also underscores the profound impact that exceptional leadership has in shaping organisations and communities for a sustainable future.”

Said al Aufi extended his congratulations, adding: “On behalf of the Board of Directors and Sohar International, I congratulate Ahmed al Musalmi on this well-deserved honor. His relentless pursuit of excellence and unwavering focus on creating value for all stakeholders continue to inspire and pave the way for a promising future for Sohar International and beyond.”

Since assuming leadership, Ahmed al Musalmi has spearheaded a comprehensive transformation agenda, propelling Sohar International towards a future where innovation, operational excellence and customer-centricity redefine banking experience. Aligned with the nation’s trajectory, the bank’s strategic focus on digital advancements, operational efficiency, robust financial management and a people-first culture has solidified its position as a responsible and innovative corporate leader. This approach has been instrumental in driving sustainable growth across all facets of business, propelling Sohar International to become the second-highest bank by market capitalisation on the Muscat Stock Exchange.

In response, Ahmed al Musalmi remarked: “This award is a testament to the collective strength, resilience and shared vision of the Sohar International family. Our journey has been one of collaboration, innovation and an unwavering commitment to excellence, guided by a forward-looking strategy and a deep understanding of the evolving needs of our stakeholders. This recognition reflects the relentless efforts of our exceptional team, whose dedication, agility and unity have been the driving forces behind our success. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Board of Directors for their unwavering trust and strategic guidance, which have been pivotal in shaping our path”.

CBFS BOARD OF DIRECTORS HOLD SECOND MEETING FOR 2024-25

The Board of Directors of the College of Banking and Financial Studies held its second meeting for 2024-2025 academic year on December 18, 2024. The meeting was chaired by Dr Khalfan bin Mohammed Al Barwani, Chairman of the College Board, with the attendance of board members representing banks, the Ministry

of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the Ministry of Labour, as well as the Dean and Assistant Deans of the College. The Board reviewed updates on the progress of work at the College and the implementation status of various decisions and recommendations from previous meetings. The Board also approved several committee

minutes, including those of the Advisory Committee, the Risk and Strategy Management Committee, the Academic Council, the Planning and Quality Assurance Committee, and the Audit Committee.

Additionally, the Board was briefed on the latest developments regarding the College’s plan to renew its institutional accreditation by the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education.

During the meeting, the Board approved the introduction of a Master’s programme in Accounting and Finance and endorsed signing a Memorandum of Understanding

with Euromoney Learning, a UK-based organisation, to collaborate on delivering training courses in banking and finance.

The College also plans to introduce Bachelor’s programmes in Accounting and Finance and in Business Administration in partnership with the University of Portsmouth, UK, starting in the 2025-2026 academic year.

Specialists from the College presented updates on this partnership, which aims to enhance academic collaboration and establish a sustainable international strategic partnership through this agreement.

Owner of Kia’s electric vehicle EV9 shares story

WITH TECHNOLOGICAL advancements happening at lightning speed, the shift in perception towards electric vehicles is evident, as customers in Oman increasingly move beyond conventional modes of transport. Kia Oman proudly announces that Humaid Rashid Humaid al Habsi is the proud owner of Kia’s EV9 in Oman.

Sharing his transition from conventional to electric vehicles, Al Habsi expressed, “I’m incredibly excited to take this journey forwards and become one of Kia’s proud owner of EV9 in Oman. The vehicle is smart, spacious and luxurious, packed with a range of safety and seamless connectivity features.”

Al Habsi emphasised that one of the key reasons he opted for the EV9 is low maintenance compared to gasoline-powered vehicles, as EVs have fewer moving parts. With a battery management warranty of 160,000 kms/8 years, whichever is earlier, Kia ensures that its EV9 customers have a trouble free experience. To deliver complete peace of mind, Kia in collaboration with European Mobility Company – Wall Box also installs an AC charging unit at the customer’s residence or office.



The Kia EV9, with its powerful battery and an impressive driving range of up to 500 kilometres, provides an ideal solution for city driving while ensuring minimal environmental impact and eliminates the need to stop at a petrol station. It is a great family car, perfect for a large family of 7-members.

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Humaid Rashid Humaid al Habsi.

“The Kia EV9, with its powerful battery and an impressive driving range of up to 500 kilometres, provides an ideal solution for city driving while ensuring minimal environmental impact and eliminates the need to stop at a petrol station. It is a great family car, perfect for a large family of 7-members,” he shared.

Based on Kia’s “Opposites United” philosophy, Kia’s next-gen EV9 is its first mid-sized all-wheel-drive SUV, built on Kia’s advanced E-GMP platform. Experience the exhilaration of noiseless

acceleration, with a motor output power of 283 kW. Available in 6 and 7-seater configurations, it offers sophisticated leather interiors, remarkable speed, and an impressive range of up to 500 kilometres on a full charge. The battery charges quickly in Ultra-fast (350 Kw) mode, with a 24-minute boost delivering up to 80% charge, ensuring smooth and efficient journeys.

The EV9’s front exudes confidence, clarity and calmness with its clear-cut lines and surfaces. The SUV’s signature ‘Digital Tiger Face’ is accentuated by the Digital Pattern Lighting Grille and vertical headlamps, giving the EV9 a bold and futuristic look. The EV9’s ‘Star Map’ LED daytime running lights (DRL) create a modern animated lighting pattern providing a new illumination experience.

Beyond its stunning exterior, the EV9 offers ample storage and immersive infotainment options. The integrated 12.3” Navigation on a Cluster LED with 64 colour Ambient Mood Lighting, wide electric sunroof, a wireless smartphone charging tray, Premium Meridian 14 speakers Music System and Remote Smart Parking Assist (RSPA) among others are some of the top attractive features.

OETC strengthens volunteer culture through blood donation campaigns

MUSCAT: Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) has successfully organised four blood donation campaigns in 2024, as part of its ongoing commitment to social sustainability and promoting a culture of volunteerism. These campaigns, which reflect the company’s dedication to social responsibility, were held in response to the urgent need for blood donations at local blood banks. A total of approximately 170 donors participated across the four campaigns, contributing more than 76 litres of blood.

OETC’s annual blood donation campaigns aim to foster a spirit of community service and volunteerism among its employees and stakeholders. The campaigns also raise awareness of the health benefits of blood donation and its life-saving impact. This effort aligns with OETC’s broader social responsibility goals, which include engaging in various community projects, initiatives and events designed to support and enhance societal well-being.

In line with its commitment to sustainability, OETC adheres to Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) standards and Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) guidelines, ensuring that its actions reflect a strong commitment to long-term social and environmental responsibility. These standards guide OETC’s approach to community service, transparency and ethical business practices.

Fahad Nasser al Kiyumi, General



A total of approximately 170 donors participated across the four campaigns, contributing more than 76 litres of blood.

Manager Quality, Health, Safety, Security and Environment at OETC, emphasised the company’s role in fostering community engagement and improving the quality of life in Oman. He noted that OETC encourages employees to actively participate in volunteer activities, alongside fulfilling the company’s broader social responsibilities.

Al Kiyumi stated, “OETC has always prioritised social initiatives that benefit the Omani community, aiming to improve lives across the nation. This commitment

is reflected in the range of initiatives we undertake, including those focused on health, the environment and sustainability. Our ongoing dedication to these values underscores our determination to serve and develop the community, in alignment with our ESG and GRI commitments.”

OETC remains committed to its mission of contributing positively to society, enhancing volunteerism and driving sustainable development through proactive community engagement.

DIGITAL DILEMMA

UNDERSTANDING DATA PRIVACY RISKS IN OMAN



DR KHALID HUSSAIN
The writer is Assistant Professor, Dept of Marketing, College of Economics and Political Science, SQU

In today’s digital age, online consumer data has become a valuable commodity and a key ingredient to fuel economic growth and innovation. However, the increasing collection and use of consumers’ personal data have also raised serious concerns about privacy and security. In Oman, as in many other countries, customers are becoming increasingly aware of the risks associated with

online data sharing and are demanding greater protection of their personal information. The proliferation of digital platforms, devices, gadgets and services has led to an exponential increase in the amount of data collected about consumers. Companies, from social media giants to small businesses, are gathering vast amounts of personal information, including names, addresses, contact details, browsing history and even biometric data.

This data is used for a variety of purposes, such as targeted advertising, market research and product development. While data collection can provide valuable insights, it also poses significant risks to privacy. Data breaches, where unauthorised individuals gain access to sensitive information, have become increasingly common.

These breaches can have devastating consequences for individuals, including identity theft, financial loss and reputational damage. Another major concern for many customers is the proliferation of unsolicited emails, text messages and phone calls. These messages often contain spam, phishing attempts, or fraudulent offers.

Not only are these messages annoying and intrusive, but they can also pose a security risk. Phishing attacks, for example, can trick individuals into revealing sensitive information, such as passwords or credit card numbers.

As customers become more aware of the risks associated with data privacy, they are becoming increasingly concerned about how their personal information is being used. Many individuals are taking steps to protect their privacy, such as using strong passwords, avoiding public Wi-Fi networks and limiting the amount of personal information they share online.

However, these measures cannot restrict all the access to consumers’ personal data. The growing concern about data privacy is also influencing customers’ online behavior. Many individuals are becoming more hesitant to share personal information online, which can have a negative impact on businesses that rely on customer data for marketing and product development. Additionally, customers may be less likely to engage with online services or make purchases if they do not trust the company to protect their privacy. The constant threat of data breaches and privacy violations can have a significant impact on individuals’ overall well-being.

OMAN, BELARUS AIM TO STRENGTHEN ECONOMIC TIES

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Belarus are taking significant steps to bolster economic ties and develop partnerships across key sectors, including clean energy, tourism, technology, transportation, logistics and industry, among others.

Sergey Terentiev, the non-resident Ambassador of Belarus to Oman, described the recent official visit of President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus to Oman as both pivotal and productive. He emphasised that the visit underscored Oman’s potential to become a regional hub for Belarusian producers and joint products with various global partners.

In a statement to the Oman

News Agency (ONA), Ambassador Terentiev remarked, “We are tasked with creating a comprehensive road map for bilateral relations across all sectors to enhance trade volumes and expand cooperation, particularly in the industrial sector.” He noted, however, that current economic relations between the two nations have not yet reached the levels their respective competitive advantages could support.

The Ambassador highlighted numerous investment opportunities, including the transfer of technology from Belarus to Oman, the establishment of joint factories and projects, and the development of transportation and logistics

networks. He also underscored Oman’s strategic location as a gateway to new markets. Additionally, he revealed plans for Belarus to introduce charter flights to Oman, which aim to foster stronger tourism links between the two countries.

Ambassador Terentiev called on Oman’s private sector to explore investment opportunities in Belarus, especially in technology-driven industries and joint market ventures. He expressed aspirations to attract Belarusian industrial and technological investments to Oman, paving the way for collaborative projects in these fields.

On the sidelines of President Lukashenko’s visit, the two nations signed a road map for agricultural cooperation. This agreement is expected to unlock opportunities for

private sector collaboration in areas such as food security, agricultural technology transfer and related fields. Furthermore, memorandums of understanding were signed in the areas of industry and standardisation, which will enable mutual recognition of standards, enhance quality assurance and streamline the movement of goods and services between the two countries.

The Ambassador also announced the establishment of a joint Oman-Belarus committee to further strengthen economic and trade ties.

The committee will serve as a platform to facilitate mutual business opportunities, with active participation from the private sectors of both nations, ensuring greater collaboration and sustainable growth. — ONA

Industrial sector exceeds Omanisation goals in 2024

OMAN’S INDUSTRIAL sector has achieved a significant milestone in 2024, recording exceptional growth in Omanisation rates from January to November. The sector exceeded its national workforce employment targets by an impressive 5.5 per cent, employing 1,708 Omanis, including 1,145 men and 563 women.

Data released by the Ministry of Labour highlight that the total number of Omanis employed in the industrial sector reached 30,993 by the end of November 2024, far surpassing the initial goal of employing 1,000 Omanis within the year.

Dr Ahmed bin Khalfan al Badawi, Director of the Industrial Strategy Implementation and Evaluation Department and Head of the Employment Portfolio Team at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, underscored the ministry’s strategic commitment to prioritising the localisation of technical and specialised roles in the industrial sector.

He noted that efforts are focused on elevating professional competencies and advancing the technical skills of Oman’s national workforce. This initiative is aligned with the ministry’s broader vision of investing in local talent, reflected in the execution of 265 initiatives in collaboration with development

Data released by the Ministry of Labour highlight that the total number of Omanis employed in the industrial sector reached

30,993 by the end of November 2024, far surpassing the initial goal of employing 1,000 Omanis within the year.



Efforts are focused on elevating professional competencies and advancing the technical skills of national workforce

stakeholders.

In a statement to the Oman News Agency (ONA), Dr Al Badawi highlighted the positive outcomes resulting from the Royal endorsement of the Industrial Strategy 2040, which was launched mid-2024. This strategy encompasses 265 initiatives, of which 125 are directly linked to the ministry’s sectors, constituting approximately 47 per cent of the total. The remaining 140 initiatives are distributed among other relevant entities.

Dr Al Badawi revealed that the ministry has commenced

workshops with these entities to elaborate on the objectives and implementation plans of these initiatives.

The focus is on fostering high-tech industries, encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation, and refining governance and management within the industrial development framework.

Dr Al Badawi further elaborated on the ministry’s emphasis on promising sectors, including resource-based industries, which comprise three industrial clusters spanning 15 sub-industries, capital-intensive industries with two clusters covering nine sub-industries and knowledge-driven industries with two clusters encompassing five sub-industries.

He stressed that these sectors represent pivotal strategic priorities for advancing the industrial sector’s growth.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion remains steadfast in its collaboration with key stakeholders through governance committees to ensure alignment of job localisation efforts with the objectives of the National Employment Programme.

Utilising the ‘Tawteen’ platform, the ministry aims to meet employment targets across all economic sectors by harnessing the potential of Oman’s educational and vocational outputs and attracting specialised national talent.

Australia’s Hysata affirms support for Oman’s green hydrogen goals

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 21

Hysata, the Australian manufacturer of electrolyzers billed as among the world’s most efficient, foresees a significantly enlarged role for itself in Oman’s emerging green hydrogen industry, far bigger than first envisaged when Oman Investment Authority (OIA) announced an investment in the tech startup earlier this year.

Reflecting this augmented role, high-level officials representing Hysata and its strategic partners, attended the inaugural GH2 Investor Day held here last by Hydrom, the orchestrator of Oman’s green hydrogen industry.

Hysata is among an expanding portfolio of international manufacturers of electrolyzers that Oman is currently engaging with to help secure its massive requirement of electrolyzers necessary to achieve its ambitious green hydrogen production targets. An estimated

5,200 electrolyzers — critical systems that use renewable electricity to split water into green hydrogen and oxygen — will be required to support the country’s green energy strategy over the next 25 years.

Eager to secure access to world-leading electrolyzer technologies in this regard, OIA, through its venture capital arm IDO Investments, participated in a key funding round launched by Hysata in May this year. Leading the investment round were BP Ventures and Templewater, with backing coming from existing major investors and other strategic investors as well.

Hysata is credited with developing new high-efficiency electrolyzers designed to produce green hydrogen at scale with higher energy efficiency and lower costs than alternative technologies. The company’s innovative technology combines engineering and science in a unique capillary-fed alkaline electrolyser that uses less energy to convert water to hydrogen.



Hysata’s CCO, Daniel Tas Sandermann (right), with Eng Abdulaziz al Shaiithani, Managing Director, Hydrom (centre)

The Australian firm was represented at the Hydrom Investor Day event by its Chief Commercial Officer, Daniel Tas Sandermann. He was joined by representatives from Templewater, a Hong Kong-based

alternative investment firm, which has also invested in Hysata.

Commenting on a much-anticipated role for Hysata in supporting Oman’s electrolyzer needs, the company said in a post: “Oman has the makings to be a global sustainability leader, featuring impressive renewable capacity for wind and solar, ambitious hydrogen programmes and an attractive location for manufacturing. Australia can be the home of electrolyser manufacturing, but the ambition of governments like Oman, matched with attractive policy for onshoring electrolyser manufacturing is a good reminder of the fierce global competition in this sector.”

Also auguring well for an invigorated role for Hysata in Oman is its newly announced strategic partnerships with South Korean steel giant POSCO and its subsidiary POSCO Eco & Challenge aimed at boosting green hydrogen production efficiency. The pact has potentially

beneficial implications for Oman, particularly in relation to POSCO’s key role in a consortium that has been awarded a major land block to produce green hydrogen here in the Sultanate of Oman.

POSCO, together with global low carbon energy developer ENGIE, are leading a multinational consortium that plans to invest around \$7 billion in a green hydrogen project planned at Al Duqm. Envisaged at the upstream end are 5 GW of renewable capacity supported by battery energy storage capacity (BESS) aimed at producing 200 kilotonnes of green hydrogen per annum. This hydrogen will be piped to downstream facilities in the Special Economic Zone at Al Duqm where it will be processed into 1.2 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) of green ammonia by 2030.

“Hysata looks forward to continuing to grow our partnership with Oman as it progresses its green hydrogen goals,” the company added in its post.

OPINION

From blockchain to AI: A decade of tech evolution



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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The author is a member of the International Press Association.

AS I CELEBRATE my tenth anniversary writing for the Oman Observer, I find myself reflecting on the profound technological shifts that have taken place over the past decade. When I first began contributing columns, my focus was primarily on startups and traditional businesses, drawing from my experience as a mentor to small and medium enterprises with Riyadhah. Gradually, I expanded my scope to include finance and technology and by 2018, I found myself writing increasingly about blockchain and cryptocurrency.

I vividly recall a column in which I explored the potential utility of blockchain technology, envisioning a future where passports, educational records and medical data would all be migrated to blockchain-based systems.

At the time, I believed that blockchain held the key to solving many of society’s issues. However, as the years have passed, I’ve come to realise that while blockchain and cryptocurrency can indeed support advancements in technology and finance, their impact on the world may not be as immediate or revolutionary as I once naively believed. If blockchain is to become the prevailing technology, it will likely take decades to truly transform our lives, if it ever does.

In stark contrast, the rapid rise of artificial intelligence (AI) has demonstrated just how quickly a low-hanging-fruit technology can

penetrate every aspect of our existence. Within a mere two years of the public release of Chat GPT, there is virtually no one in the world who doesn’t know what AI is and broadly what it can do for society. From children to the elderly, people everywhere are discovering tangible ways to interact with AI technology.

The creative industries, in particular, have blossomed thanks to AI. Tools like Adobe Sensei and Canva’s AI-powered features enable designers to quickly generate layouts, color palettes and design elements, streamlining the creative process. AI-based platforms such as AIVA and Amper Music allow musicians to create original compositions and complete unfinished songs.

Video editing software now incorporates AI-powered tools that automate tasks such as colour grading and object removal. Game developers use AI-assisted tools to create more realistic non-player characters, while AI writing assistants help writers refine their work and overcome creative blocks.

Programmers, too, have become exponentially more efficient with the help of AI. Tools like DeepCode and Codota provide real-time suggestions for code optimisation and bug fixes, helping programmers write cleaner, more efficient code in less time. AI-driven testing tools automatically generate and run test cases, reducing the time and effort required for manual testing. Natural Language Processing libraries and

The most well-known element of blockchain technology is undoubtedly Bitcoin — not the fastest, most flexible, or best blockchain solution

frameworks enable programmers to more easily incorporate advanced language understanding capabilities into their applications.

News media outlets have also embraced AI, with entire sections now dedicated to AI-generated content. Media giants like The Washington Post and The Guardian use AI to automate the creation of routine news stories, freeing up journalists to focus on more complex and investigative pieces. News aggregators employ AI algorithms to curate and recommend personalised content, while fact-checking tools help identify and flag potential misinformation. AI-assisted data visualisation tools enable journalists to quickly create interactive and visually compelling data-driven stories.

Meanwhile, blockchain technology, despite being around for well over a decade, has struggled to make a clear statement about its efficacy and necessity in any industry. The world continues to function without widespread blockchain adoption. The most well-known element of blockchain technology is undoubtedly Bitcoin — not the fastest, most flexible, or best blockchain solution, yet it has become the standard by which everyone gauges what blockchain is. Ask a child or an elderly person about blockchain and you’ll likely be met with vague, lost expressions. But ask about Bitcoin and everyone nowadays will tell you “\$100k”.
(To be continued... Part 2)

QUALCOMM SECURES KEY WIN IN CHIPS TRIAL AGAINST ARM

TOM HALS

Qualcomm’s central processors are properly licensed under an agreement with Arm Holdings, a jury found in a trial in US federal court that removed some, but not all, uncertainty around the mobile chipmaker’s expansion into the laptop market. A week of courtroom arguments and deliberations ended in a mistrial after the jury failed to resolve one of three questions put before it in the trial between the two chip giants. Qualcomm said the result affirmed its right to innovate, but Arm vowed to seek a new trial. Arm’s shares were down 1.8 per cent in extended trading after the news and Qualcomm’s shares were up 1.8 per cent.

The outcome means the case could be tried again in the future — something Arm vowed to pursue in a statement following the verdict. Judge Maryellen Noreika, who presided over the case in US federal court in Delaware, encouraged Arm and Qualcomm to mediate their dispute. “I don’t think either side had a clear victory or would have had a clear victory if this case is tried again,” Noreika said in a statement to the parties. After more than nine hours of deliberations over two days, the eight-person jury could not reach a unanimous verdict on the question of whether startup Nuvia breached the terms of its licence with Arm. But the jury found that Qualcomm — which purchased Nuvia for \$1.4 billion in 2021 — did not breach that licence.

The jury also found that Qualcomm’s chips, created using Nuvia technology and central to Qualcomm’s push into the personal computer market, are properly licensed under its own agreement with Arm, clearing the way for Qualcomm to continue selling them. “The jury has vindicated Qualcomm’s right to innovate and affirmed that all the Qualcomm products at issue in the case are protected by Qualcomm’s contract with Arm,” Qualcomm said. An Arm spokesperson said the company was “disappointed” that the jury was unable to “reach consensus” about the company’s claims and said from the outset the goal has been to protect the company’s intellectual property. For now, the outcome paves the way for Qualcomm to continue to push what it calls the “AI PC” in laptop chips that are aimed at handling tasks such as chatbots and image generators. That is a market where Nvidia, Advanced Micro Devices and MediaTek are also planning to make Arm-based processors. “My biggest worry was what happens to the future road map if they (Qualcomm) no longer have access to Nuvia (computing) cores,” Bernstein analyst Stacy Rasgon said. “At this point, that risk is a lot closer to being off the table.” — Reuters

New wave of solar energy projects in Oman

OMAN IS MAKING bold moves to secure its place as a leader in renewable energy. With the recent announcement by Nama Power and Water Company to develop an additional four major solar energy projects, the country is taking a significant step towards reshaping its future. Backed by a \$2.8 billion investment, these projects are more than just a response to growing energy demands — they represent Oman’s commitment to building a sustainable future that balances economic growth and environmental preservation.

These renewable energy projects are closely tied to Oman Vision 2040, a comprehensive road map aimed at diversifying the economy and reducing reliance on oil and gas. By aiming to generate 30 per cent of its electricity from renewable sources by 2030, Oman is sending a clear message: sustainability isn’t just an ideal — it’s a necessity.

This ambitious vision is about more than just numbers. It’s about creating a future where clean energy drives progress, attracting foreign investment and opening up opportunities for local industries. Oman is positioning itself not just as a consumer of renewable energy but as a pioneer in the field, proving that environmental responsibility can go hand-in-hand with economic growth.

To make these projects a reality, Oman plans to leverage cutting-edge technologies. From advanced energy storage systems to artificial intelligence for optimising operations, these innovations are set to transform the energy sector. Digital solutions will also play a role in ensuring efficiency and sustainability, pushing Oman to the forefront of renewable energy innovation.

With a planned capacity of 4,500 MW of solar power and 1 GW of wind power, Oman is steadily reducing its dependence on fossil fuels. This shift isn’t just about meeting domestic energy needs —



To make the projects a reality, Oman plans to leverage cutting-edge technologies.



QASIM AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of Oman Observer’s Business section.

it’s about creating opportunities to export clean energy to neighbouring countries. By taking control of its energy future, Oman is ensuring greater stability and sustainability for years to come.

The impact of these projects goes beyond cleaner air and reduced carbon emissions. They’re set to create thousands of jobs, from engineering and technology roles to research and development positions. Small and medium businesses SMEs will also benefit, as they find new opportunities to grow and contribute to this expanding sector.

For Oman’s young people, these initiatives represent a chance to build careers in a rapidly evolving industry. The skills and experience they gain will help them shape not just Oman’s energy future but the global energy landscape.

Of course, such an ambitious plan doesn’t come without its challenges. Building the infrastructure for projects of this scale requires significant

investment and careful planning. Oman will also need to train its workforce to handle these advanced technologies. But these challenges are also opportunities. They encourage innovation, spark new collaborations with educational institutions and push Oman to invest in its people as much as its infrastructure.

Oman’s push towards renewable energy isn’t just about hitting targets or meeting quotas. It’s about creating a future where clean energy powers homes, industries and communities. It’s about giving the next generation a healthier planet and a thriving economy.

The road ahead may not be easy, but Oman is proving that with determination, innovation and a commitment to sustainability, a brighter, cleaner future is within reach. This is more than a story about solar panels and wind turbines — it’s a story about hope, progress and the power of human ingenuity to change the world.

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ART/LIFE



ENTERTAINMENT

A MEMORABLE NIGHT ENCHANTED BY RUSSIAN FOLK MUSIC^{> 20}

ENTERTAINMENT

No quitting: Bollywood's Aamir Khan wants to keep acting



DURING THE Covid-19 pandemic, Bollywood superstar and film-maker Aamir Khan considered quitting cinema for good after dominating the Indian film industry for more than four decades.

“It was in the middle of Covid and I was... thinking of a lot of things, and I suddenly felt that I had spent all of my adult life in this magical world of cinema,” Khan said in London, draped in a heavy purple shawl and sporting a handlebar moustache.

He is not wrong, having helped shape Indian cinematic culture for years, becoming one of Bollywood’s most popular actors.

He has amassed a formidable oeuvre of Hindi-language films, including “Lagaan”, nominated for best foreign language film at the Oscars in 2002, as well as movies such as “3 Idiots”, “Dangal” and “Taare Zameen Par” (Like Stars on Earth).

Starting as a child actor in the 1970s and synonymous with Bollywood ever since, Khan realised he had “not really given the kind of bandwidth to my personal life that I would have liked to”.

“The realisation that I’ve lost all that time was something that I was finding difficult to come to terms with and I was going through a lot of guilt... My knee-jerk reaction to that was that I’ve had enough of film,” Khan said.

However, his family, including two children, eventually convinced him not to retire. “In my head, I quit. And then I didn’t,” said Khan.

Now, turning 60 in March, Khan, who lives in Mumbai, wants to “continue to act and produce for some time”.

He also wants to use his company Aamir Khan Productions “as a platform to encourage new talent... whose sensibility is close to mine. And (who) want to tell stories which affect me.” —AFP

QUICK FEATURES



FILM

Marisa Paredes, an acclaimed Spanish actor who achieved international fame by starring in many films by director Pedro Almodovar, has died at 78, the Spanish film academy said. —AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

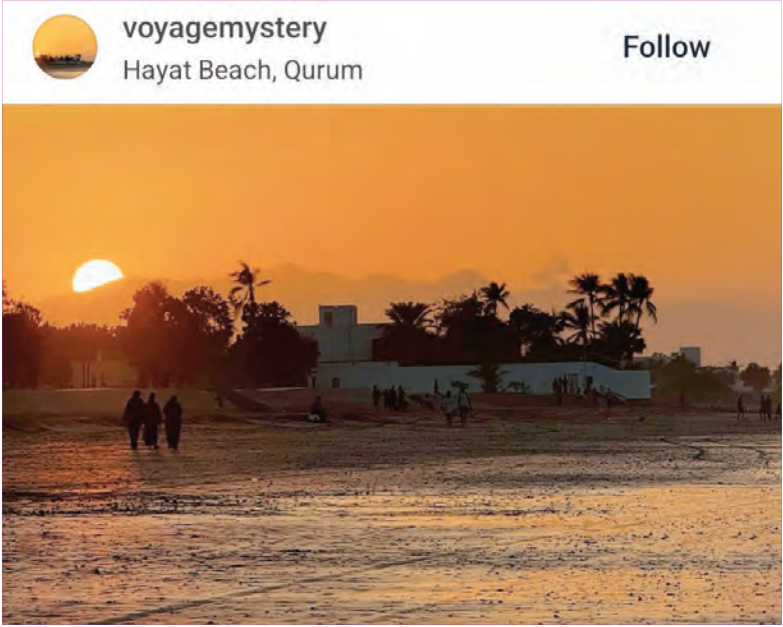
US rapper, producer and fashion designer Pharrell Williams (L) displays his diploma next to Unesco Director-General Audrey Azoulay after receiving a nomination as Unesco Goodwill Ambassador for Arts, Education and Entrepreneurship. —AFP



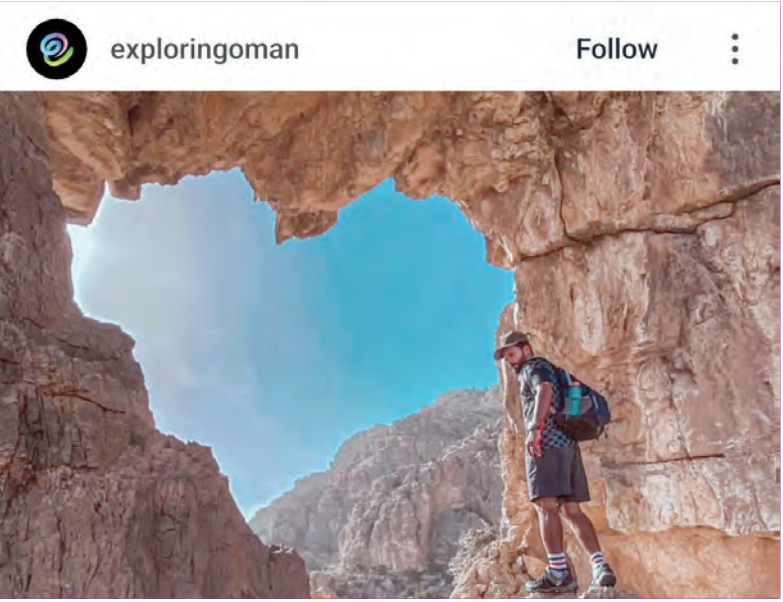
LIFESTYLE

An Amazigh woman spins wool as another looks on during the seventh edition of the annual Ouaouzguit Carpet Festival, in the town of Tazenakht in Morocco's Ouarzazat province. —AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



A Walk Along the Coast



Beauty of Remote Places

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Dinosaur Domination Is Marked in a Timeline of Vomit and Feces Fossils



WHEN DINOSAURS scampered onto the scene 230 million years ago, these “terrible lizards” were prehistoric pipsqueaks among a slew of bigger reptiles brimming with teeth and bolstered with armor. But 30 million years later, many of these older reptiles were gone, and dinosaurs reigned supreme. Determining how dinosaurs achieved worldwide domination has been difficult because of a scarcity of well-preserved early dinosaur skeletons. So a team of researchers recently explored another aspect of the fossil record: fossilised feces and vomit, known as bromalites. In a new study, the scientists used these materials to re-create how early dinosaurs fit into food webs across 30 million years in a region that is today part of Poland. The most famous

bromalites are fossilised feces, also known as coprolites. But bromalites also preserve digestive byproducts such as regurgitations and gut contents that help researchers pinpoint who was eating whom in ancient ecosystems. The new study examined more than 500 bromalite specimens that collectively weighed more than 220 pounds. Several bromalites revealed that the earliest dinosaurs were omnivores that ate insects. Slightly more recent dinosaur dung belonged to early carnivores and small herbivores. Even younger bromalites were linked to the emergence of the first large herbivorous dinosaurs, sauropodomorphs. The early Jurassic deposits yielded the bromalites of large predatory dinosaurs that had evolved to hunt large herbivores. — JACK TAMISIEA / NYT



Floor-length and horns: Namibia’s Herero dress endures

FROM HIS humble Windhoek workshop, Namibia’s leading fashion designer is keeping alive the love for the Herero people’s traditional dress with horned headgear, a full-length skirt and a link to German colonisers accused of genocide. McBright Kavari’s sewing room is piled high with seemingly ordinary fabric that he transforms with labour and skill into elegant and voluminous dresses called ohorokova. Kavari’s designs may introduce modern twists, but they maintain the distinctive and conservative character of a garment believed to have its roots in the arrival of German missionaries in this arid southwestern African land in the early 19th century. “Myself being a Herero, I felt like that to keep the dress alive, I have to think outside the box and modify it and make it lovable for the youth and the young generation,” he said. Kavari always includes one or two ohorokova outfits in his collections. His creations have walked runways in China, Ethiopia, Ghana and even Germany, the former colonial power that historians say committed the first genocide of the 20th century against the Herero and Nama, another of Namibia’s ethnic groups. “I want to show it (the ohorokova) to the world to tell more people about our Herero people,” he said. “Once it’s on stage, it wows everybody. Everybody wants to know more about it. It’s very attached to history as well.” The German occupiers are believed to have killed at least 60,000 Herero between 1904 and 1908, about 80 per cent of the population at the time, in outright massacres or by locking them into concentration camps. About 10,000 Nama people also died. It is not certain how Herero women came to adopt the ohorokova, replacing the long, hide aprons that they wore before, but the dress has endured despite the passage of time and its links to German colonisation.



“We don’t know if it was a choice to adopt that dress, or if it happened by force,” said Maria Caley, fashion lecturer at the University of Namibia. But it carried through the traditional values of the Herero people, such as that a woman should cover her body and not even show her knees, Caley said. And the Herero version of the dress is “completely different” to that of the first missionaries, having been adapted and appropriated to represent the Herero people, she said. **HORNED HEADDRESS** Perhaps the most striking piece of

the outfit is the headdress, called otjikaiva, which resembles the horns of a cow, reflecting the Herero roots as cattle herders. “The headdress used to be very plump and chunky, not so wide from the head,” Caley said. “But now it has become very thin and very, very stylised.” This is only one of Kavari’s innovations. Some of his designs have added several layered petticoats to the floor-length skirts, or abandoned the sleeves. He caused an outcry with a design in 2013 that featured a snake in the headdress of a creation for the country’s Miss Universe contender. “The journey hasn’t been that easy,” said the designer. “People are not easy when it comes to change.” “Non-negotiables” are the length of the skirt and conservative neckline, said one of his top customers, Yamillah Vetarapi Katjirua, who owns about 50 creations from flesh-coloured to aquamarine and lapis lazuli. “He has been able to maintain the integrity of the dress but still make it modern so that young people don’t disassociate from it,” she said. “For me he has struck that balance very well between modernising and respect.” That so many people have an opinion on the dress shows that this aspect of the Herero culture is still “very much alive”, said Caley. The Herero are a relatively small group: only around 179,000 remain, less than six per cent of Namibia’s population, according to the 2023 census. “I feel they fell in love with the dress, they are more in love with the dress,” Kavari said. “Every young Herero lady is owning one or two dresses in their closet.” By taking his designs from one of the world’s most sparsely populated countries to international catwalks, Kavari said he wants “to keep the people aware that there is a tribe in Namibia, the Herero-speaking people.” — AFP

FEATURES

BY NAJAH AL RIYAMI

ON THE EVENING of 15 December, I found myself in the elegant halls of the National Museum of Oman, eagerly anticipating an unparalleled cultural experience.

The State Academic Northern Russian Folk Choir, an ensemble renowned for its rich history and dedication to preserving folk traditions from Northern Russia, was about to take the stage.

This performance forms part of the “Complex of Cultural Events Abroad” initiative, supported by Russia’s Ministry of Culture and organised by ROSCONCERT.

As the choir began their performance, the atmosphere shifted dramatically. Under the artistic leadership of Svetlana Ignatyeva, an Honoured Artist of the Russian Federation, the group captivated the audience with vibrant harmonies and infectious energy.

Svetlana, who also serves as a professor of choral and solo folk singing, introduced the choir with notable humility, referring to it as “only a small fragment” of their larger ensemble. However, this “small fragment” was imbued with a profound sense of history, reverberating with the voices of their ancestors through the power of song and dance.

The State Academic Northern Russian Folk Choir is a distinguished ensemble focused on performing traditional Russian folk music, particularly from the northern regions of Russia. Established to preserve and promote the rich heritage of Russian folk culture, the choir features a diverse repertoire that includes traditional songs, dances, and musical styles reflecting the customs and history of the Russian people.

The choir is celebrated for its vibrant performances, showcasing unique vocal techniques, intricate harmonies, and colourful costumes that represent various aspects of Russian folklore. They typically perform at cultural festivals, concerts, and community events, both within Russia and internationally.

Their performances not only aim to entertain but also to educate audiences about the profound cultural significance of Russian folk music and its capacity to convey the emotions and stories of the people.

It is remarkable to note that the choir, founded in 1926 in Veliky Ustyug, is composed entirely of female voices. This tradition imbues their performances with a deeply moving essence — an ethereal quality that conveys stories, memories and the essence of Russia’s rich cultural heritage.

The joy radiating from the performers as they danced and sang was truly infectious. Their traditional dances, executed with graceful precision and heartfelt exuberance, transcended mere words, embodying a celebration of life, heritage, and community. In those moments, one felt transported to the very heart of Russia itself.

In Oman, cultural events such as this provide a vital space for connection and mutual appreciation among people from diverse backgrounds. The evening fostered a profound appreciation for cultural exchange and illustrated how music, art, and language can bridge continents and unite souls.

Oman is an ideal venue for cultural events due to its rich heritage that spans thousands of years, offering a genuine backdrop for exhibitions and performances.

The country’s diverse population enhances intercultural dialogue, creating an audience open to various cultural experiences. With strong government support promoting cultural initiatives and stunning venues like the Royal Opera



A MEMORABLE NIGHT ENCHANTED BY RUSSIAN FOLK MUSIC



House, Oman facilitates a range of activities. Additionally, the country’s commitment to preserving traditions while embracing global influences attracts cultural tourists, further enriching the experience. This harmonious blend of tradition and modernity makes Oman a perfect stage for celebrating diverse artistic expressions.

As I exited the museum, the choir’s melodies lingered in my mind, resonating like a beautiful echo of Russia’s spirit, shared and celebrated in this welcoming environment of Oman.

The evening continued beyond the music with a captivating art exhibition titled “RUSSIA,” which showcased stunning photographs of the country’s natural wonders — its vast landscapes, intricate wooden and stone architecture, and serene scenes of beauty. This exhibition perfectly complemented the performance, allowing attendees to not only hear but also visually explore the cultural treasures of Russia.

This event was part of a broader cultural initiative that has journeyed across the globe — from Tanzania to Venezuela, Myanmar to Morocco — and this year, it extended to Brazil, Laos, and now Oman. Experiencing the culmination of the 2024 Russian Express series in Muscat was indeed a special occasion.