

OMAN
Observer
دَائِلِي

SUNRISE 06:51 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 05:32 AM

DHUHR 12:22 PM

ASR 03:26 PM

MAGHRIB 05:47 PM

ISHA 07:01 PM

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DJOKOVIC
CREATES SLICE
OF HISTORY,
ZHENG STUNNED

HM, BAHRAIN KING HOLD BILATERAL MEETING

LEADERS DISCUSS VARIOUS ASPECTS OF JOINT COOPERATION

HM, KING
HAMAD
REVIEW
MARCH OF
DEEP-ROOTED
RELATIONS

UNDERLINE
KEENNESS TO
PUSH THEM
TOWARDS
WIDER
HORIZONS

LEADERS
WELCOME
OMANI-
BAHRAINI
INVESTMENT
COMPANY



TWO
LEADERS
STRESS ON
EXPANSION
OF ECONOMIC
PARTNERSHIP

TWO SIDES
SIGN A
NUMBER OF
AGREEMENTS
AND MoUS

SUCCESS OF
OMANI-
BAHRAINI
JOINT
COMMITTEE
HAILED

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain, held a bilateral meeting at Al Barakah Palace on Wednesday.

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK and King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain, held a bilateral meeting at Al Barakah Palace on Wednesday.

During the meeting, the two leaders exchanged cordial conversations and reviewed march of the deep-rooted relations and aspects of the joint cooperation between the two countries. They underlined their keenness to push

them towards wider horizons in various spheres in a manner that serves interests of the two peoples.

The meeting was attended by some Royal family members, ministers and senior officials. It was also attended by members of the official delegation accompanying the King.

After that, His Majesty the Sultan hosted a luncheon in honour of the King and the accompanying delegation.

Later, His Majesty Sultan Haitham

bin Tarik led the farewell party at the Royal Airport for King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa, who concluded his two-day state visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

His Majesty the Sultan wished the King safe return home.

ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain, welcomed the establishment of the Omani-Bahraini Investment

Company. They stressed the importance of expanding the scope of cooperation and economic partnership by exploring more opportunities, and encouraging the public and private sectors to diversify the areas of economic and investment partnership in a manner that meets the aspirations of the two countries and their peoples.

This was stated in a joint communique issued on the occasion of King Hamad's state-visit to the Sultanate of Oman. It reads

as follows: "Stemming from the deep-rooted bonds between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Bahrain, and the distinguished fraternal relations between His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sultan of Oman, and His Majesty King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain, His Majesty the Sultan received His Majesty the King, who led a high-ranking delegation on a state-visit to the Sultanate of Oman on January 14-15.

SEE ALSO P2 & 3

15th Arab Theatre Festival concludes

HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, on Wednesday presided over the closing ceremony of the 15th Arab Theatre Festival, hosted by the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, in partnership with the Arab Theatre Authority and the Omani Theatre Society. The festival lasted for seven days at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The play 'Al-Bukhara' by the Tunisian Opera Company (Pole of Theatre) from the Republic of Tunisia won the His Highness Shaikh Dr Sultan bin Mohammed al Qasimi Award for the 15th Arab Theatre Festival. Rafiq Ali Ahmed, Chairman of the Jury of the 15th Arab Theatre Festival, said that the committee observed new features in the festival, including the



HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, presenting an award to a winner of the 15th Arab Theatre Festival.

presence of ten theatrical performances out of 15 by young female and male directors, all of whom presented new visions and aesthetics that tend towards employing new technologies and digitisation, in addition to six performances out of 15 performances in the festival by six Arab female creators from different generations, whose works raised contemporary issues that our societies are experiencing and touched on the sources of hope and pain. HH Sayyid Theyazin honoured the winners.

Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture and Chairman of the Main Committee of the Arab Theatre Festival in its 15th session, also honoured the participating bands in the festival. — ONA

ISRAEL, HAMAS REACH TRUCE DEAL

TEL AVIV: Negotiators reached a phased deal on Wednesday to end the war in Gaza between Israel and Hamas, an official briefed on the negotiations said, after 15 months of conflict that has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians and inflamed the Middle East.

The accord, which has not yet been formally announced, outlines a six-week initial ceasefire phase and includes the gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip and release of hostages held by Hamas in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, the official said. Phase one entails the release of 33 Israeli hostages including all women, children and men over 50. Negotiations on implementing the second phase will begin by the 16th day of phase one and it is expected to include the release of all remaining hostages, a permanent ceasefire. — Reuters

Establishment of Omani-Bahraini Investment Company hailed



HIS Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and His Majesty King Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain have welcomed the establishment of the Omani-Bahraini Investment Company. They stressed the importance of expanding the scope of cooperation and economic partnership by exploring more opportunities, and encouraging the public and private sectors to diversify the areas of economic and investment partnership in a manner that meets the aspirations of the two countries and their peoples.

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During the visit, extensive talks were held. The two sides reviewed march of the joint action and the bilateral cooperation.

The two leaders lauded the progress in bilateral relations and the growth in mutual interests. They stressed the importance of expanding the scope of cooperation and economic partnership by exploring more opportunities, and encouraging the public and private sectors to diversify the areas of economic and investment partnership in a manner that meets the aspirations of the two countries and their peoples. In this context, they welcomed the establishment of the Omani-Bahraini Investment Company, wishing it success.

During the visit, the two sides

signed a number of agreements, memorandum of understanding and executive programmes in various fields of interest to both countries, including sectors and areas that would boost the partnership between the two sides.

The two sides also commended the success made by the Omani-Bahraini Joint Committee and its active role in promoting bilateral cooperation and implementing joint projects that serve the interests of the two countries. They underscored the importance of the committee's continuous efforts to explore new areas of partnership to achieve their common aspirations. These efforts include encouraging economic and investment initiatives between the public and private sectors.

The two monarchs also reviewed the GCC march and the achievements made at the level of the Gulf joint action.

They also discussed a set of regional and international issues of common concern. In this context, they underlined the importance of settling disputes and differences through peaceful means and the need to advocate dialogue and international cooperation to back efforts aiming to maintain regional and international security and stability. They also stressed the importance of enhancing consultation and intensifying coordination in their stances in a way that serves common interests and strengthens the pillars of stability, security and prosperity for all peoples of the region and the world at large.

At the end of the visit, His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa expressed his utmost thanks to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the warm welcome and hospitality extended to him and his accompanying delegation. On his turn, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his best wishes of good health and well-being to the King. He also wished the Kingdom of Bahrain and its people further progress and prosperity." — ONA

King of Bahrain visits Royal Opera House Muscat



MUSCAT: King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain, on Wednesday visited the Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) as part of the programme of his state-visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

King Hamad toured the ROHM and listened to a briefing about its facilities, the nature of its performances, its seasons and its

programme throughout the year. He took note of the fact that ROHM boasts the latest equipment used in the field of international musical shows.

During his tour, King Hamad was briefed about the architectural features of ROHM's design, which highlights the Omani architectural heritage, with a blend of architectural

cultures representing different continents of the world.

On this occasion, ROHM presented a musical performance staged by the Jazz Band of the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO) and RGO's Second Battalion's bagpipes and drums troupe.

At the end of his visit, King Hamad signed the Visitors Book,

expressing his delight at visiting the ROHM, which he described as a true embodiment of Oman's art and culture and a symbol of the advanced Omani identity that is rich in culture and innovation.

King Hamad stressed that culture and arts constitute a bridge that links generations and promotes human values and understanding among

people who belong to different cultures. During his visit to ROHM, King Hamad was accompanied by Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior (Head of the Mission of Honour), members of the Board of Directors of the Royal Opera House Muscat and the official delegation accompanying the King.

— ONA



OMAN

SHORT TAKES



HM ORDER ON
FORMER JORDANIAN
AMBASSADOR

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has conferred Al Nu'man Order (First Class) on Amjad Jamil al Quhaiwi, former ambassador of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the Sultanate of Oman in appreciation to his efforts in serving relations between the two countries. The order was handed over by Shaikh Fahd bin Abdulrahman al Ojaili, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Jordan, during a ceremony held at Oman's Embassy in Amman on Wednesday. The ceremony was attended by Majid al Qatarneh, Secretary-General of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, ambassadors, heads of Arab diplomatic missions and invitees.



The building was inaugurated under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari.

BAHLA CHARITABLE
TEAM BUILDING
INAUGURATED

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

The Bahla Charitable Team Endowment building in the Wilayat of Bausher was inaugurated under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, in the presence of Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development.

The Bahla Charitable Team Endowment building consists of eight floors, with the basement and ground floor designated for shops, and six upper floors for residential apartments, covering a total area of 4,480 square metres. It was built at a cost of RO 1,300,000. “The idea of creating a permanent endowment for the team since its establishment in February 2012 was based on the belief that the endowments of the Bahla Charity Team are its investment arms, propelled by people endowing some of their properties,” said a representative from the ministry. He mentioned that these properties include land for agricultural, residential, and commercial purposes, as well as real estate. “This is due to their belief in the importance of endowment in the sustainability and continuity of charitable work, as well as seeking divine blessings,” he added.

National Museum hosts
works of acclaimed artist

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JAN 15

THE National Museum, in collaboration with the US Embassy in Muscat, is hosting an art exhibition titled Madeline Diaz: Nuevos Caminos.

The exhibition features over 20 artworks by the Dominican-American artist, depicting evocative landscapes and still life that explore and celebrate her cultural identity through art. The exhibition will run until January 29. US Ambassador to Oman, Ana Escrogima, said the collaboration is more than an exhibition; it is a platform for exchange and self-expression, offering Omani youth the opportunity to interact with themes of identity through nature, which is a key theme in Madeline Diaz's work. “The artwork of landscapes — from the Grand Canyon in the US to Jebel Shams in Oman — inspires reflection on identity and belonging. Through this exhibition, visitors will explore these themes, encouraging them to consider their own connections to culture and history,” she stated.

Madeline Diaz, the artist, said, “As an artist, my work explores the complexities of identity, migration, and cultural exchange. My time in Oman allowed me to be connected with the Omani youth, exploring their traditions and exchanging ideas with them on how natural scenes and history shape our identity. This cultural dialogue reminded me of the deep, reciprocal connections between our worlds — from the Americas to Oman — through trade, food, and shared humanity.”

The core series, Caminos (meaning “ways” or “paths” in Spanish), comprises sixteen landscapes inspired by Diaz's travels along the Saint James Way (Camino



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**MADELINE
DÍAZ**

de Santiago) in Spain, a historically and religiously significant pilgrimage route dating back to the Middle Ages.

While traversing these paths, the artist reflects on her personal journey from her native Santiago in the Dominican Republic to New York City, and ultimately to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, where the Saint James Way concludes. Diaz draws parallels between the pilgrimage route and the universal act of migration, which she experienced as a child.

In the still life series, Postcolonial Bodegón (postcolonial still life), Diaz seeks to reinterpret the classic Spanish still-life genre by infusing it with products from the Americas. By including purple and red corn, blue and purple potatoes, chocolate and hibiscus flowers, the artist celebrates the beauty, diversity, and ubiquity of these products,

as well as the rich diversity and contributions of her culture. Diaz engages in a form of reverse colonisation in art, acknowledging the historical flow of products from the Americas to Europe during the colonial era and its lasting impact in everyday life across borders and cultures.

Madeline Díaz was born in the Dominican Republic, raised in New York City, and is currently based in Paris. Through her artwork, she explores themes of identity, belonging, migration, place, and postcolonial legacies using a variety of art genres and mediums — from landscape to still life, and oil pastel to oil paint.

Through her work, Diaz seeks to acknowledge the impact of the old European art masters on her artistic development, while searching for and creating space for her own voice and complex cultural identity.

People invited to join marine procession

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, JAN 15

To mark the fifth anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's ascension to the throne, Muscat Governorate will organise a marine procession of yachts, boats and jet skis on Friday, in cooperation with several governmental and private entities, under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat.

The event will start at 9 am from Jumeirah Muscat Bay Resort and will continue until 5 pm will include marine shows using jet skis and fly-boards,



The march will begin from Marina Bandar Al Rowdha

in addition to Omani folk art performances.

The process will have stops at Marina Bandar Al Rowdha in Muscat, Muttrah Waterfront, Port Sultan Qaboos Port, and

Qurum Beach, with visual displays highlighting Muttrah's history and rich maritime heritage.

The parade will conclude at Al Mouj Muscat Marina in

Al Seeb, where boats, yachts, and jet skis line up to form a magnificent marine painting that reflects the beauty of Muscat's coastline and its blending with national sentiments.

All citizens and residents, who wish to participate in the march to register in advance via the dedicated link <https://linktr.ee/seamarch> .

The event is free and meals will be provided. Participants are urged to wear hats to avoid sunstroke or heat stress. Participants will return to Marina Bandar Al Rowdha from Al Mouj in Mwasalat buses.

ADSW 2025 unveils historic energy breakthroughs

AHMED AL KAABI
ABU DHABI, JAN 15

Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week (ADSW) 2025 commenced under the auspices of Shaikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, with a series of announcements that could redefine the global energy landscape.

During the opening ceremony, Dr Sultan bin Ahmed al Jaber, UAE Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology and Chairman of

Masdar, unveiled the world's first integrated renewable energy and battery storage facility. This project is designed to provide uninterrupted, large-scale renewable energy around the clock in Abu Dhabi. The facility reflects the UAE leadership's unwavering commitment to tackling the “moonshot challenge” of renewable energy intermittency.

This innovative project, a strategic collaboration between Masdar and the Emirates Water and Electricity Company (EWEC), is the largest of its



ADSW is a global platform for accelerating sustainable development and climate action.

kind globally.

It combines 5.2 gigawatts (GW) of solar photovoltaic (PV) power with 19 gigawatt-hours of battery storage to deliver 1 GW of continuous baseload renewable energy, setting a new global benchmark for sustainable energy production. In his keynote speech, Dr Al Jaber called for global unity among stakeholders, industries, and governments to harness collective strength for sustainable economic growth and unlock unparalleled opportunities.

“We are at the nexus of next—a defining moment that can accelerate socio-economic progress fuelled by global megatrends,” Dr Al Jaber stated. He highlighted how the rapid rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and the expansion of emerging markets are driving global power demand from 9,000 GW today to over 15,000 GW by 2035, with projections reaching 35,000 GW by 2050. Despite advancements in renewable energy, Dr Al Jaber stressed that the surge in global energy demand requires a diverse range of energy solutions.

SHORT TAKES



The plan is designed to implement sustainable impact projects, concentrating on vital sectors.

AL SHARQIYAH SOUTH UNVEILS 2025 PLAN

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JAN 15

The Al Sharqiyah South Governorate held its annual meeting on Wednesday to review performance measurement mechanisms and results for 2024, alongside presenting its annual plan for 2025.

Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, commended the efforts made to enhance institutional performance and increase operational efficiency within the governorate. He emphasised the importance of strengthening partnerships between institutions and the community to achieve sustainable development. He called for the adoption of innovative initiatives, data governance and the development of procedures in alignment with Oman Vision 2040.

“The collaborative effort and commitment to improving institutional performance are fundamental to achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040, which will enhance the quality of services and boost beneficiary satisfaction,” he stated.

Saada bint Salem Al Fannah al Araimi, Director of the Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Office in the governorate, delivered a detailed presentation on the governorate’s 2025 annual plan. She highlighted the strategic projects and initiatives aimed at meeting the national vision’s targets, with a focus on enhancing government services and infrastructure.

“The plan is designed to implement sustainable impact projects, concentrating on vital sectors such as education, health, and the economy, contributing to balanced and sustainable development in the governorate,” Al Araimi explained.

Salem bin Khadem Al Hashmi, Director of the Planning and Investment Department, provided a comprehensive report on the governorate’s performance in 2024. The report outlined the stages of performance development and evaluation results, highlighting key achievements and challenges faced by the governorate.

“The performance evaluation demonstrated significant progress in various areas, with numerous improvements implemented to elevate administrative efficiency,” Al Hashmi stated. He emphasised the role of the Institutional Excellence System in enhancing institutional performance, noting that it plays a vital role in increasing transparency and administrative efficiency, positively impacting the services delivered to citizens.



Indian Social Club Oman
(SALALAH BRANCH)

NOTICE

On behalf of President & The Managing Committee, ISC Salalah hereby notify all the members of ISC Salalah that the Annual General Body Meeting has been scheduled on Friday, 28th February 2025 at 10.00 am at the Club’s premises.

Request members to join as agenda circulated by emails and displayed at notice board at ISC Salalah.

Dr. Sandeep Ojha
General Secretary
Phone: 23235600
Email: iscsalalah@gmail.com

Session looks at utility services solutions for SMEs

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 15

THE Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) organised the eighth dialogue session on electricity and water services for small and medium enterprises, with the aim of continuing the approach of partnership and integration between small and medium enterprises and related parties.

The session was attended by Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), Dr Mansour bin Talib al Hinai, Chairman of the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) and Head of the Basic Services Sector, with the participation of owners of small and medium enterprises in service sector activities and related activities.

The authority seeks, through organising dialogue sessions, to improve the business environment and its attractiveness to small and medium enterprises, contribute to developing policies that support entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises, and explore promising opportunities for small and medium enterprises in economic sectors. Additionally, motivating entrepreneurs to present innovative ideas that contribute to sector development, informing the public about its programmes, projects, and initiatives, and providing the opportunity to discuss topics related to economic affairs.

Dhofar public satisfaction results announced



MUSCAT: The National Centre for Statistics and Information, in collaboration with the Dhofar Governor’s Office, has announced the results of the third cycle of the public satisfaction survey on services provided in the Dhofar Governorate.

This initiative forms part of ongoing efforts to enhance the quality of services and improve the standard of living for citizens and residents in the region. According to the findings, some service sectors achieved high satisfaction levels, reflecting significant progress, while other areas highlighted the need for further development.

The key results are as follows: E-Services and Municipality Permits topped the list with a satisfaction rate of 76 per cent, underscoring substantial advancements in digital transformation and streamlined procedures. Parks and Public Gardens recorded a satisfaction rate of 71 per cent, demonstrating the efforts to improve recreational facilities.

Public Cleanliness and Health achieved a satisfaction rate of 70 per cent, reflecting compliance with health and cleanliness standards.

The Overall Satisfaction Rate was maintained at an acceptable level of 70 per cent. Development Efforts in the Governorate registered a satisfaction rate of 68 per cent, indicating the need for greater focus on developmental projects. Finally, Market Monitoring and Inspection achieved a satisfaction rate of 65 per cent, marking one of the areas requiring significant improvement.



The session focused on opportunities to obtain business through distribution companies and Nama Holding Company.

In her remarks, Halima said: “The session focused on opportunities to obtain business through distribution companies and Nama Holding Company. Entrepreneurs spoke at length about the requirements and standards needed to obtain contracts and purchases, and an executive plan was agreed upon to hold focused sessions with companies operating in the service sector in the electricity, water, sanitation, and waste sectors.”

Dr Mansour al Hinai, Chairman of the Authority for Public Services Regulation, said: “Today we discussed the challenges facing small and medium enterprises working alongside licensed companies, some of which are limited to entering

and participating in tenders offered by companies. Giving them incentives to participate in these tenders was also discussed.

These sessions have a timetable for follow-up on decisions made and agreements reached, obligating regulated companies to implement these policies.” The session addressed several topics concerned with developing the sector, most notably the legislation and laws supporting the electricity and water sector, enhancing the efficiency of electricity and water services, tenders and contracts, in addition to supporting SMEs to enhance their competitiveness and contribute to economic development.



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Tender Price (OMR)
NESC/2024/ 022/02	Providing digital screens and billboard services for Nama Supply Company	22/01/2025	04/02/2025	Specialized Companies	52.5

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -					
Participation	• Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion may obtain Tender documents. • The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. • The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply) • To obtain the tender document and payment procedure, please visit https://supply.nama.om , under NESC vendor / E Tender				
Enquiries	• Any inquiry can be sent to Tender@supply.nama.om , using the inquiry form found in the tender document (05) Five working days before bid submission date. • Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.				
Tender Submission	• Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER and supplier guidelines available at NESC Website https://supply.nama.om , under NESC vendor / E Tender				
Guarantee	• The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of 1,000 OMR valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF MINOR TENDER COMMITTEE, Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C. • The hard copy of the bid bond should be deposited in the Tender Box at the Nama Electricity Supply Company Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 10:00 AM on the day specified for bid submission or any extended deadline. • Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected.				
Terms and Conditions	• The Tender shall be valid for a period of (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. • If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date. • NESC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer. • a certificate confirming 30% Omanization within originaiztion • Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization • NESC gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies • Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.				
Incentives and exemptions	• Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from Tender fees • Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from bid bond requirements. • Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from registration fees on business opportunities platform and supplier registration with Nama Group.				



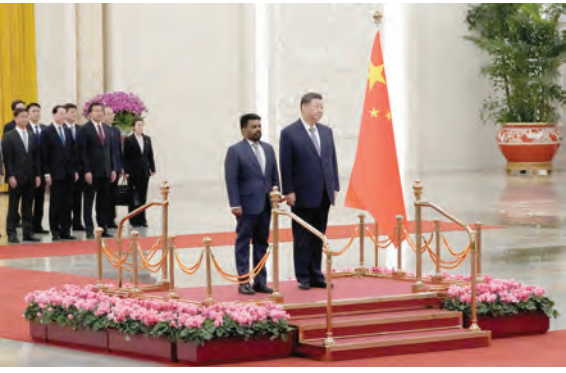
ناما
SUPPLY لتزويد

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Tel: +968 24250800 | CR 1/71235/7
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WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Chinese President Xi Jinping (R) stands beside Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake during a welcoming ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. — AFP

XI HAILS ‘HISTORICAL OPPORTUNITY’ FOR CHINA-LANKA TIES

BEIJING: Chinese leader Xi Jinping said relations between China and Sri Lanka faced a “historical opportunity” to foster ties, in talks with the island nation’s President Anura Kumara Dissanayake on Wednesday. “China-Sri Lanka relations face a historical opportunity to build on the past and forge ahead,” Xi told Dissanayake during the bilateral meeting in Beijing, according to state broadcaster CCTV. The two sides should see ties from “a strategic perspective and build a China-Sri Lanka community with a shared future.” Dissanayake’s visit to China comes after he was given a red-carpet welcome to India by President Narendra Modi during his first overseas trip as premier in December. Xi told Dissanayake that China would “actively support Sri Lanka in focusing on economic development and promote high-quality cooperation” under Beijing’s Belt and Road infrastructure initiative (BRI). — AFP



Search and rescue teams comb through the rubble of a home searching for victims, in Altadena, California. — AFP

LA FACES NEW PERIL AS DANGEROUS GUSTS FORECAST

LOS ANGELES: Powerful winds forecast for Wednesday threatened to whip up massive fires still burning around Los Angeles, possibly worsening an inferno that has killed at least 25 people. A week after blazes erupted and spread uncontained, forecasters predicted “particularly dangerous” Santa Ana winds would spike. “Stay aware of your surroundings. Be ready to evacuate. Avoid anything that can spark a fire,” the National Weather Service said, warning of gusts up to 110 kilometres. Part of Los Angeles County and much of neighbouring Ventura County were in a “Particularly Dangerous Situation,” according to the NWS, a designation that was in effect before last week’s deadly blazes. “All the plants and vegetation is really dry and ready to burn so... fires can grow pretty fast,” meteorologist Ryan Kittell said. The Palisades and Eaton fires could flare up, and new ignitions could quickly turn problematic, Kittell said. Officials insisted they were poised for any renewed threats. — AFP

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Japan, Philippines vow to boost security



Japan and the Philippines vowed to strengthen security cooperation, amid speculation incoming US President Donald Trump could scale back security commitments. Japanese FM Takeshi Iwaya met with his Filipino counterpart Enrique Manalo and with Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos in Manila to affirm security commitments. Iwaya said he and Manalo agreed to strengthen their trilateral partnership with the United States. — AFP

RUSSIA STRIKES UKRAINE ENERGY SITES IN ‘MASSIVE’ BARRAGE

KYIV: Russia launched dozens of missiles and drones at the Ukrainian energy sector, Kyiv said on Wednesday, ramping up a months-long bombing campaign at a precarious moment of the war for Ukraine. The barrage came just one day after Kyiv said it had carried out its largest aerial attack of the war on Russian army factories and energy hubs hundreds of kilometres from the front line. The Ukrainian air force said Russia had deployed 43 cruise and ballistic missiles and 74 attack

drones in the overnight barrage that appeared to have targeted sites mainly in western Ukraine. “Another massive Russian attack. It is the middle of winter, and the target for the Russians remains the same: our energy sector,” President Volodymyr Zelensky wrote on social media. The Russian defence ministry confirmed in a statement its forces had carried out “high precision” strikes on energy facilities that “support the Ukrainian military-industrial complex.” It also repeated

its claim that all the designated targets had been struck. But the Ukrainian air force said 30 missiles had been shot down as well as 47 drones, while Zelensky said the authorities had been able to maintain the “operation of our energy system.” His comments, in which he urged allies to supply air-defence systems already promised to Ukraine, came ahead of a meeting in Warsaw between Zelensky and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk. — AFP

President Yoon arrested over failed martial law bid

IMPEACHED

South Korean leader Yoon Suk Yeol was arrested on Wednesday over his failed martial law bid, ending a weeks-long standoff with authorities and becoming the first sitting president to be detained in the nation’s history. Yoon, who faces charges of insurrection over his short-lived effort to impose martial law last month, said he would comply with investigators to avoid “bloodshed”. A former prosecutor who led the conservative People Power Party (PPP) to election victory in 2022, Yoon could face the death penalty or life in jail if found guilty of insurrection. He had sought to evade arrest for weeks by remaining in his residential compound, protected by members of the Presidential Security Service (PSS) who had remained loyal to him. His guards had installed barbed wire and barricades at the residence, turning it into what the opposition called a “fortress”. Yoon, who had vowed to “fight to the end”, managed to thwart a first arrest attempt on January 3 following a tense hours-long impasse between the guards and anti-graft investigators working with police. But before dawn on Wednesday, investigators presented the fresh warrant to Yoon’s guards, then had to bypass bus barricades and cut barbed wire to get inside the compound, a CIO official told reporters. Hundreds of police



Impeached South Korea President Yoon Suk Yeol (C) leaves the complex building housing the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials (CIO) in Gwacheon. — AFP

Before dawn on Wednesday, investigators presented the fresh warrant to Yoon’s guards, then had to bypass bus barricades and cut barbed wire to get inside the compound, a CIO official told reporters

officers and investigators from the Corruption Investigation Office surrounded the residence, some scaling perimeter walls and hiking up back trails to reach the main building. After a standoff of about five hours, authorities announced Yoon had been arrested and the impeached leader released a pre-recorded video message. “I decided to respond to the Corruption Investigation Office,” Yoon said in the message, adding that he did not accept the legality of the investigation but was complying “to prevent any unfortunate bloodshed”. Shortly after he was taken to the CIO offices in a convoy, investigators

began questioning Yoon but they said later he exercised “his right to remain silent”. He refused to be filmed during questioning, a CIO official told reporters, before Yoon was transferred to a detention centre for the night. Outside the CIO offices, a man set himself on fire, a local fire department official told AFP. Local media reported that he died in hospital. In a Facebook post published after he was detained — which Yoon said he wrote while holed up in his residence — the suspended leader repeated election fraud claims and spoke of “hostile” nations attacking the country, alluding to North Korea. — AFP



ISRAELI STRIKES KILL 27 PALESTINIANS

GAZA: Gaza’s civil defence agency said on Wednesday that Israeli strikes killed at least 27 people, as the military issued new evacuation calls in northern areas of the Palestinian territory. The latest Israeli strikes come as truce mediator Qatar said negotiations for a ceasefire and hostage release deal in Gaza were in their “final stages”. 11 bodies were brought to the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central Gaza Strip, after Israel struck a family home in Deir el-Balah city during the night. A seven-year-old boy and three teenagers were among the dead. A separate strike targeted a school building used as shelter for war-displaced Palestinians in Gaza City, killing seven people and injuring several others, the civil defence agency said. A third strike at dawn hit a house in the Al-Nuseirat refugee camp, killing six people and injuring seven. — AFP

THIN ATTENDANCE

Mozambique’s Chapo sworn in as president



Daniel Chapo of Mozambique’s long-ruling Frelimo party was sworn in as president at a sparsely attended ceremony after months of protests against his disputed election victory. Chapo told a group of supporters from a stage in the capital Maputo that social and political stability would be his government’s top priority. He also promised to shrink the size of the government by reducing the number of ministries and prioritise health and education. — Reuters

DEADLOCK ENDS

Bulgarian parties agree to form government



Bulgaria’s conservatives said they and three other parties had reached agreement on forming a government in a bid to end the prolonged political crisis. The conservative GERB party of three-time premier Boyko Borisov won general elections in October — the seventh in three years — but has struggled to find partners to govern. GERB’s PM-designate Rossen Jeliazkov received the mandate to form a government from President Rumen Radev at a ceremony. — AFP

How to build trust in the workplace

NASSER AHMED ALABRI

TRUST is the backbone of any productive and thriving workplace. Without it, relationships falter, productivity suffers, and toxic dynamics can arise. As Stephen Covey, the author of ‘The Speed of Trust’, aptly said, “The first job of a leader — at work or at home — is to inspire trust. It’s to bring out the best in people by entrusting them with meaningful stewardships, and to create an environment in which high-trust interaction inspires creativity and possibility.” In the workplace, trust is not just a nice-to-have — it is a necessity. When employees feel trusted, they perform better, collaborate more effectively, and contribute to a positive organisational culture. Conversely, when trust is absent, suspicion, and disengagement often take its place.

Distrust often stems from feelings of favoritism or unequal treatment. For instance, employees may perceive that their leader gives more responsibilities or recognition to certain colleagues while sidelining others. This perception can be exacerbated in competitive workplaces where achievements are tracked and measured by performance reviews and metrics.

In some cases, distrust grows in toxic environments where gossip and rumors prevail. Employees may accuse managers of favoritism based on personal connections such as family ties, old friendships, or shared interests. Such accusations, whether true or false, erode morale and hinder collaboration.

As General Colin Powell once noted, “The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them.

They have either lost confidence that you can help them or concluded that you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership.” Without it, the machine of the workplace grinds to a halt.

Building trust in the workplace isn’t just about maintaining harmony; it’s about fostering growth, innovation, and accountability. Trust can be cultivated in three key areas:

1. Professional Trust
This type of trust relates to an employee’s competence and their continuous effort to develop professionally. A diligent employee strives to improve their skills through further education, online courses, attending conferences, and expanding their professional network. When employees feel supported by their organisation — through promotions, new responsibilities, or training opportunities — they experience greater job satisfaction, which positively impacts their personal and social lives. However, in workplaces that lack encouragement, an employee’s ambition may be stifled by measures such as relocation to remote areas or stripping them of responsibilities. Such practices erode trust and leave employees feeling disconnected, which ultimately affects their performance and sense of belonging. However, when ambition is stifled — through micromanagement, unfair treatment, or a lack of development opportunities — employees can feel undervalued. This not only diminishes their productivity but also impacts their morale and sense of belonging.

As Simon Sinek, author of Start With Why, stated, “When we trust, we don’t just rely on someone to do what we think is right; we let them do what they think is right.” Encouraging this kind of trust unlocks an

Building trust in the workplace is not a one-time effort but a continuous process. Organisations must prioritise fairness, transparency and empowerment to create an environment where employees feel valued and engaged.

employee’s full potential.
2. Structural Trust
Structural trust refers to the organisational framework that governs how responsibilities and power are distributed. A healthy workplace is one where roles and expectations are clear, and fairness and transparency guide decision-making. Michael Jordan noted “Earn your leadership every day.” Leaders who lead with fairness build trust, foster teamwork, and enhance productivity. On the other hand, authoritarian leadership or favoritism can lead to feelings of exclusion and resentment among employees. This can result in a cycle of disengagement, self-doubt, and even psychological harm.

3. Personal Trust
Personal trust is cultivated over a lifetime through family, education, and community. Employees with strong personal trust are better equipped to face challenges, adapt to change, and remain optimistic in difficult circumstances.

Organisations can nurture this type of trust by creating a supportive culture that values personal growth and encourages open communication.

When trust is embedded in a workplace, the benefits are profound: higher employee satisfaction, increased productivity, and a stronger organisational culture. As Barbara Brooks Kimmel emphasised, “Trust starts with trustworthy leadership. It must be built into the corporate culture.”

In short, building trust in the workplace is not a one-time effort but a continuous process. Organisations must prioritise fairness, transparency, and empowerment to create an environment where employees feel valued and engaged.

Meet the next fact-checker, debunker and moderator: You

STUART A. THOMPSON
AND KATE CONGER

META would like to introduce its next fact-checker — the one who will spot falsehoods, pen convincing corrections and warn others about misleading content. It’s you. Mark Zuckerberg, Meta’s chief executive, last week said that he was ending much of the company’s moderation efforts, like third-party fact-checking and content restrictions. Instead, he said, the company will turn over fact-checking duties to everyday users under a model called Community Notes, which was popularised by X and lets users leave a fact-check or correction on a social media post.

The announcement signals the end of an era in content moderation and an embrace of looser guidelines that even Zuckerberg acknowledged would increase the amount of false and misleading content on the world’s largest social network.

What is a Community Note? On X, the notes are appended beneath posts to add missing details or corrections. This one, highlighted in red, appeared on a post by Elon Musk.

“I think it’s going to be a spectacular failure,” said Alex Mahadevan, the director of a media literacy programme at the Poynter Institute called MediaWise, who has studied Community Notes on X. “The platform now has no responsibility for really anything that’s said. They can offload responsibility onto the users themselves.”

Such a turn would have been unimaginable after the presidential elections in 2016 or even 2020, when social media companies

The end of an era in content moderation and an embrace of looser guidelines that even Zuckerberg acknowledged would increase the amount of false and misleading content on the world’s largest social network

saw themselves as reluctant warriors on the front lines of a misinformation war. Widespread falsehoods during the 2016 presidential election triggered public backlash and internal debate at social media companies over their role in spreading so-called fake news. The companies responded by pouring millions into content moderation efforts, paying third-party fact-checkers, creating complex algorithms to restrict toxic content and releasing a flurry of warning labels to slow the spread of falsehoods — moves seen as necessary to restore public trust.

The efforts worked, to a point — fact-checker labels were effective at reducing belief in falsehoods, researchers found, though they were less effective on conservative Americans. But the efforts also made the platforms — and Zuckerberg in particular — political targets of President-elect Donald J Trump and his allies, who said content moderation was nothing short of censorship.

Now, the political environment has changed. With Trump set to take control of the White House and regulatory bodies that oversee Meta, Zuckerberg has pivoted to repairing his relationship with Trump, dining at Mar-a-Lago, adding a Trump ally to Meta’s board of directors and donating \$1 million to Mr Trump’s inauguration fund.

Zuckerberg’s bet on using Community Notes to replace professional fact-checkers was inspired by a similar experiment at X that allowed Elon Musk to outsource the company’s fact-checking to users.

X now asks everyday users to spot falsehoods and write corrections or add extra information to social media

posts. The exact details of Meta’s programme are not known, but on X, the notes are at first visible only to users who register for the Community Notes programme. Once a note receives enough votes deeming it valuable, it is appended to the social media post for everyone to see.

“A social media platform’s dream is completely automated moderation that they, one, don’t have to take responsibility for and, two, don’t have to pay anyone for,” said Mahadevan. “So Community Notes is the absolute dream of these people — they’ve basically tried to engineer a system that would automate fact-checking.”

Studies have shown Community Notes works at dispelling some viral falsehoods. The approach works best for topics on which there is broad consensus, researchers have found, such as misinformation about Covid vaccines.

In that case, the notes “emerged as an innovative solution, pushing back with accurate and credible health information,” said John W Ayers, the vice chief of innovation in the division of infectious disease and global public health at the University of California, San Diego, School of Medicine, who wrote a report in April on the topic.

But users with differing political viewpoints have to agree on a fact-check before it is publicly appended to a post, which means that misleading posts about politically divisive subjects often go unchecked. MediaWise found that fewer than 10 per cent of Community Notes drafted by users ended up being published on offending posts. The numbers are even lower for sensitive topics like immigration and abortion. Researchers found that the

majority of posts on X receive most of their traffic within the first few hours, but it can take days for a Community Note to be approved so that everyone can see it. Since its debut in 2021, the programme has sparked interest from other platforms. YouTube announced last year that it was starting a pilot project allowing users to submit notes to appear below misleading videos. The helpfulness of those fact-checks is still assessed by third-party evaluators, YouTube said in a blog post.

Meta’s existing content moderation tools have seemed overwhelmed by the deluge of falsehoods and misleading content, but the interventions were seen by researchers as fairly effective. A study published last year in the journal Nature Human Behavior showed that warning labels, like those used by Facebook to caution users about false information, reduced belief in falsehoods by 28 per cent and reduced how often the content was shared by 25 per cent. Researchers found that right-wing users were far more distrustful of fact-checks, but that the interventions were still effective at reducing their belief in false content. Researchers believe that community fact-checking is effective when paired with in-house content moderation efforts. But Meta’s hands-off approach could prove risky.

“The community-based approach is one piece of the puzzle,” said Valerie Wirtschafter, a fellow at the Brookings Institution who has studied Community Notes. “But it can’t be the only thing, and it certainly can’t be just rolled out as like an untailored, whole-cloth solution.”

— NYT

OPINION

Crossing the threshold and understanding 1.5 degrees



RUMAITHA AL BUSAIDI
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The writer is environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development

It began with a glow on the horizon. A fiery red sky stretched over Los Angeles, illuminating the city’s palm trees and urban sprawl in an unsettling haze. This was not the aftermath of a summer drought. It was midwinter. A season we once associated with cold winds and frost now sees wildfires raging across continents, fueled by unprecedented heatwaves and dry conditions.

The year 2024 marked a grim milestone. Global temperatures surpassed 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels for the first time in recorded history. This number has loomed large in climate discussions for years, a threshold scientists have warned must not be crossed to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Now, that warning has become reality. The consequences are everywhere. Homes in wealthy neighbourhoods reduced to ash. Floodwaters submerging centuries-old cities. Heatwaves claiming lives in regions unprepared for such extremes.

Yet, as these disasters unfold across the globe, here in Oman, we find ourselves

waking to cooler-than-usual mornings. The breeze carries a refreshing chill, unexpected in a world that is supposed to be relentlessly warming. The irony is striking. While parts of the planet burn, we are bundling up in jackets, marvelling at what feels like a reprieve from the usual heat. But is this a reprieve, or is it simply another piece of evidence that climate patterns are shifting in ways we do not yet fully understand?

The rise in global temperatures does not manifest uniformly. A warmer planet disrupts weather systems, making extremes more extreme and anomalies more frequent. What feels like an unusually cool winter in Oman may, in fact, be tied to the same global warming that is amplifying heatwaves and storms elsewhere. The planet’s delicate climate balance is tipping and the results are not always as straightforward as a linear rise in temperatures.

This winter chill should not lull us into complacency. If anything, it serves as a reminder of how unpredictable the climate has become. The same forces disrupting

While parts of the planet burn, we are bundling up in jackets, marveling at what feels like a reprieve from the usual heat. But is this a reprieve, or is it simply another piece of evidence that climate patterns are shifting in ways we do not yet fully understand?

traditional weather patterns elsewhere are at work here too, shaping our seasons in ways that will continue to surprise us. The question is not whether Oman will be affected by the changing climate, but how.

While we enjoy the cooler mornings, the world at large is grappling with the implications of passing 1.5 °C. Scientists warn of rising sea levels, dwindling freshwater supplies and ecosystems pushed to their breaking points. These are not distant possibilities. They are happening now, even as we savor the unexpected chill of January.

The glow on the horizon may feel far away for now, but it is closer than we think. It is a moment to reflect on what this means for the planet and for us. Climate change is not a far-off future. It is here, shaping the seasons we once knew and leaving us to grapple with its contradictions, a chilly winter in one place and a raging fire in another.

As the mornings stay cold and crisp, we might wonder how long this will last. What we should be asking, instead, is how much longer we can wait to act.

SYRIAN ACTIVISTS WORK TO AVOID RETURN TO DICTATORSHIP

ACIL TABBARA

In a Damascus courtyard, Syrian activists brainstormed strategies to ensure their country does not return to authoritarianism, in a scene unimaginable under president Bashar al-Assad’s rule.

Since rebels ousted the longtime ruler last month, the Syrian capital’s public spaces have been abuzz with previously banned civil society meetings. Exiled activists have returned to the country for the first time in years, often leading to moving reunions with friends who stayed behind throughout the civil war.

The war began with a peaceful democracy uprising in 2011 that morphed into a brutal conflict after Assad cracked down on protesters, jailing and killing them en masse and forcing survivors to flee the country.

Now, with Assad out, the activists who spearheaded the revolt want to ensure their voices count.

In the arched courtyard of a traditional Damascus home, Syrian activist Sawsan Abou Zainedin recounted meeting the country’s new leader Ahmed al Sharaa earlier this month.

“We stressed the essential role that civil society needs to play in the political transition,” said the director of a coalition of dozens of non-governmental groups called Madaniya.

And “we insisted on the need to not only name people from the same camp” to form the interim authorities, she added of the January 4 meeting.

Sharaa, who leads a group once affiliated to Al-Qaeda called Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, has named people close to him to key ministerial posts.

His armed group severed all ties with Al-Qaeda years ago and his authorities have sought to reassure Syrians and the international community that they will respect the rights of minorities.

But activists say he has named at least six foreign extremists to key positions in the country’s future army.

Abou Zainedin said she and Madaniya founder Ayman Asfari, a Syrian-British businessman, spoke to Sharaa about the “problem” of “the foreign extremists” being nominated within the defence ministry.

The new Damascus authorities have suspended the Assad-era constitution and the parliament.

Sharaa last month said it could take four years before elections could be held, and up to three years to rewrite the constitution.

He said HTS would be disbanded at a so-called national dialogue conference to bring together Syrians of all political stripes.

His foreign minister, Asaad alShaibani, said last week a committee is to be set up to prepare the meeting, for which no date has been announced.

Abou Zainedin said she and Asfari had requested “absolute transparency” in the preparation of that conference.

The Damascus authorities have appointed new officials to head other bodies too.

Lawyer Abdulhay Sayed said the conference would be “crucial” as long as representatives of civil society and unions were invited. — AFP

AI’s ethical challenges

TODAY’S AI landscape calls for a profound philosophical and ethical review, prompting us to revisit the frameworks that have guided human moral behavior throughout history. Let us consider three such influential approaches: Immanuel Kant’s ethics, John Stuart Mill’s utilitarianism and Aristotle’s virtue ethics. We will attempt to integrate these philosophical standpoints into our understanding of AI, examining how they interact with algorithms capable of learning and making critical decisions.

Kant’s ethics revolve around a key concept known as the ‘Categorical Imperative’ which essentially dictates that an individual should act only in accordance with a rule that can be willed to be a universal law. For Kant, morality does not hinge on outcomes but on the intention of the agent and on whether that intention aligns with moral duty. Hence, goodwill takes precedence as the highest ethical standard: an action is moral if it is performed out of respect for moral law rather than in pursuit of personal gain. Applied to AI, this approach imposes strict conditions on digital algorithms; if we build Kant’s Categorical Imperative into an AI system, it must be guided by ethical principles that treat humanity as an end, never merely as a means. Yet a pivotal question arises: can a machine truly embody goodwill as Kant demands, given that will and intention are properties of conscious moral agents? Since Kant’s focus is on moral intent rather than results, we must ask whether deep-learning algorithms — based on massive datasets and mathematical logic — can genuinely carry “moral intention” or if they remain bound by pre-set pathways, no matter how adaptive they seem.

By contrast, Mill’s utilitarianism posits that moral acts are those that maximise overall happiness, caring only about outcomes rather than intentions. In practice, behavior is judged based on its net utility, even if it sometimes requires sacrificing certain individual interests for the benefit of the larger community. Unlike Kant’s framework, utilitarianism can feel more compatible with how AI works, since algorithms frequently rely on optimisation principles to achieve specific results. However, the crux of the problem lies in conceptualising happiness or utility within diverse societies with differing values.

Who defines happiness? Who



In reviewing these three philosophies, none seems fully equipped to resolve AI’s ethical challenges.



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Perhaps we must ensure that we, as humans, retain the authority to direct AI technologies towards ethical commitments that reflect our deepest values.

decides if one group’s benefit outweighs another’s? Moreover, the data powering AI may contain historical or cultural biases, possibly leading to unequal treatment of various segments of society. Thus, when we shift from the theoretical ideal of ‘maximising happiness’ to real-world application, grave ethical and practical obstacles appear. Programming algorithms purely for utilitarian ends can result in injustices that strip certain groups of their rights. This prompts a deeper ethical dilemma: do we permit these algorithmic systems to prioritise economic gains or political advantages even if that means harming individuals or entire communities?

Aristotle’s approach, on the other hand, places virtue at the heart of ethical philosophy. He maintains that moral persons cultivate good character traits and internal motivations, enabling them to behave ethically and with moderation. Unlike Kant, Aristotle does not emphasise unbreakable duties or rigid outcomes; rather, he focuses on shaping a morally virtuous individual who uses practical wisdom, balancing reason, personal experience and cultural values.

When we turn this lens on AI, we confront the question of whether a digital algorithm can “develop virtues” comparable to those cultivated by humans.

Although modern algorithms use deep learning and reinforcement learning — methods that can resemble educational processes — Aristotle’s virtue requires real-life experience and a refined cognitive ability to act ethically in varied, context-driven scenarios. Deep

learning might mimic certain desirable behaviors, but it lacks the fully realised moral discernment that Aristotle insists upon, an understanding that integrates justice, kindness and compassion in real-world contexts. After all, an algorithm merely processes structured data and cannot draw on the rich human experiences and empathetic contexts that underpin moral life.

In reviewing these three philosophies, none seems fully equipped to resolve AI’s ethical challenges. Kant highlights dignity and the primacy of respecting human rights. Mill’s utilitarianism provides a potential framework for evaluating actions by their outcomes, which can be especially relevant in time-sensitive situations, such as self-driving vehicles or drones.

Aristotle’s virtue ethics stresses the importance of moral character, emotional depth and rational thinking, a reminder that ethics cannot be reduced to mere calculations of inputs versus outputs. Yet as AI advances, a deeper question surfaces: what sort of ethical act can a predefined algorithm produce? Lacking Kantian intention deprived of Aristotelian practical wisdom and ignorant of the utilitarian notion of pleasure and pain can we measure AI’s decisions solely through legal codes or social utility? Might an over reliance on machine-driven decisions erode the distinctly human qualities of empathy and moral reflection, which have shaped our collective ethical memory? Perhaps we must ensure that we, as humans, retain the authority to direct AI technologies toward ethical commitments that reflect our deepest values.

Who gets called a terrorist and why?



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FIGURING out who is and isn't a terrorist should be pretty simple, right? After all we have dictionaries that clearly define words. "Terrorist" is part of the English language and we should stick to what it actually means. If we don't, words lose their meaning. We might as well call a dog a cat or the other way around. If we don't use words properly, language becomes meaningless and open to personal moods or preferences. So, let's look at the definition. The Oxford English dictionary says "terrorism" is "the use of illegal violent action in order to achieve political aims," and a "terrorist" is "a person who uses unlawful violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims." These definitions don't give a free pass to anyone just because they wear a state uniform or claim to act under state authority. They also don't mention anything about race, religion, or nationality. The bottom line is: if someone uses illegal violence to achieve political goals, they fit the definition of a terrorist.

Take Israel, for example. Its history includes numerous acts that violate international law, often justified as "self-defence" or "national security." Bombing civilians in Gaza is illegal under international law, as outlined by the UN and organisations like the International Criminal Court (ICC). Based on the definition of terrorism, these actions qualify Israel as a terrorist state. If illegal violence against civilians for political aims is terrorism, then Israel as a state engages in terrorist acts and its soldiers who carry out such violence are terrorists. Now what about groups like Hezbollah, Hamas, or the Yemeni Ansar Allah? Israel and many Western countries often label them as terrorist organisations. But these labels are heavily influenced by politics. Supporting these groups, even in the context of resistance against Zionist oppression, can lead to legal trouble in some places. In the UK for example openly backing their defence of the Palestinians with only words might get you arrested under the Terrorism Act, which doesn't leave much room for free speech.

Bombing civilians in Gaza is illegal under international law, as outlined by the UN and organisations like the International Criminal Court

Globally most people now see these groups as freedom fighters, much like Nelson Mandela during his fight against South African apartheid. Mandela took up arms against white supremacist oppression rule, just as these groups attacking Israel are resisting Zionist oppression in Palestine. The Axis of Resistance, which includes Hezbollah and Hamas, fights for Palestinian self-determination and justice. Their actions are widely supported within the Palestinian community and are seen as a morally justified fight against tyranny. The real question is this: when states break international law and use violence against civilians, does that count as terrorism? Legally, it should. But in practice the term is often used selectively, mainly against non-state actors. To be fair and consistent, anyone — whether they're a state or an individual — using illegal violence for political goals should be called out as a terrorist. Flying a national flag or wearing a military uniform doesn't give anyone a free pass. If we want justice, the same rules need to apply to everyone, including Israel, the USA, the UK and France.

TRUMP TO JOIN DAVOS MEETING DIGITALLY

MARWA RASHAD

Donald Trump will mark his return to the global stage with a virtual World Economic Forum appearance in Davos next week, as world leaders await details of the incoming US President's policies and his pledge to end the war in Ukraine. Trump is due to return to the White House on January 20, with his inauguration for a second term as US President coinciding with the start of the 55th annual WEF meeting of political and business leaders in the Swiss mountain resort. Meanwhile, another key player in any attempt to bring peace to Ukraine, the country's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, will make a special address and take questions, the WEF meeting organisers said on Tuesday. Among the other global leaders due to attend the meeting, which will include 60 heads of state and government, are European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and China's vice premier Ding Xuexiang, WEF President and CEO Borge Brende said during a press conference. Brende said Trump, who has twice previously attended Davos, will join "digitally" on January 23, without giving further details. He said it would be a "very special moment" to learn about the new Trump administration's policy priorities. "There is a lot of interest to decipher and to understand the policies of the new administration, so it will be an interesting week," Brende said. Topics on the Davos agenda range from mounting global geopolitical and economic uncertainty to trade tensions, climate goals and how AI can help make lives better. Business leaders have become more optimistic about the economy given Trump's pledges to reduce regulation, potentially cut taxes and ease restrictions on activities including mergers and acquisitions, Rich Lesser, global chair of Boston Consulting Group, said ahead of the meeting. Lesser said, however, that underlying optimism is being offset by concerns about tariffs, deportations, a widening budget deficit and the US relationship with China. This year's meeting in Davos is taking place against "the most complicated geopolitical backdrop in generations," Brende said, adding that the forum will have a strong focus on Middle East geopolitics, including high-level diplomatic talks. Delegates will discuss developments in Syria and the humanitarian crises in Gaza and Yemen alongside other topics. Participants will include Qatar's Prime Minister, the Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister, Syria's foreign minister, the UN special envoy on Syria, the Iranian Vice President, Israel's President and the Palestinian Prime Minister. "There will be a hard work at the situation in Syria, the terrible humanitarian situation in Gaza... the potential escalation of the conflict in the Middle East. We were very close to it between Israel and Iran, and I don't think we're out of the woods yet," Brende said. The WEF will this week release an analysis looking at companies that account for two-thirds of global market capitalisation, which will show that only about 10 per cent are taking meaningful and tangible action on the climate and nature agenda. — Reuters

Revealing an invisible health threat

LEAD is everywhere, often hiding in plain sight — in the water you drink, the air you breathe, the food you eat, your personal care products and your children's toys. Despite being a useful metal, it is highly toxic and difficult to detect: its fumes and dust are odorless, and exposure to them does not immediately cause overt symptoms in most cases. This is particularly worrying because exposure to and ingestion of lead can negatively affect almost every part of the body. Recent research finds that exposure contributes significantly to cardiovascular disease, killing millions worldwide. But while lead poisoning is responsible for more deaths annually than HIV/Aids and malaria combined, and more than tuberculosis, it receives a small fraction of the funding allocated to these better-known diseases. The health effects are often irreversible and unequally distributed. For example, lead is especially harmful to children's cognitive development, leading to lower IQs and behavioral problems. Today, one in three children worldwide have dangerous levels of the metal in their blood, and nearly all of them live in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). This inequality in exposure accounts for more than 20 per cent of the learning gap between high- and low-income countries. Moreover, the annual economic losses from lead poisoning are enormous, amounting to around 6.9 per cent of global GDP. Healthcare for those sickened by the toxin, coupled with additional financing for special-education services to address the developmental and behavioural issues caused by lead poisoning, costs millions of dollars each year in the United States alone. Lead poisoning also reduces an individual's lifetime earning potential, leading to lost tax revenue. This makes it all the more important to reduce and eliminate lead exposure. The good news is that it is possible to detect lead in soil, spices, food, paint, cookware and other solid materials using a portable X-ray fluorescence analyser (pXRF), which provides near-instantaneous results and has already proven effective in many settings. In Nigeria, health



The annual economic losses from lead poisoning are enormous, amounting to around 6.9 per cent of global GDP.



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The writer is Chief Economist at the Asian Development Bank

officials used pXRFs to help identify and clean up the source of a lead-poisoning epidemic that killed more than 400 children, ultimately saving thousands of lives. An assessment of lead levels in consumer goods and foods used the devices to test samples in 25 LMICs, finding that 45 per cent of ceramic tableware, 52 per cent of metallic cookware, and 41 per cent of paint exceeded regulatory limits. The technology has enabled some governments to test the safety of toys and playgrounds, enforce lead-paint regulations in houses, and investigate whether lead exposure is the cause of health incidents. Researchers using pXRFs identified dangerous levels of lead paint — which is still sold in many LMICs — in schools and playgrounds in Guyana. But very few LMICs currently use pXRFs to determine the sources of lead poisoning. In some cases, policymakers lack awareness that lead exposure is a major public-health issue. Perhaps most importantly, these devices are expensive to buy and maintain and training on how to interpret the data they produce remains limited. What would it take to improve access to this valuable technology, so that LMICs can identify and eliminate the sources of lead poisoning that put their populations — especially their young people — at risk? To answer this question, a working group comprising global lead-poisoning experts, practitioners, policymakers, and funders gathered in "Room 3" —

linked to Sustainable Development Goal 3 for Good Health and Wellbeing — within the 17 Rooms Initiative. In our discussions about how to make pXRFs universally available by 2030, we agreed that the recently launched Partnership for a Lead-Free Future (PLF), supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef), is best positioned to bring together stakeholders to support such an initiative. Regional hubs, centrally coordinated by the PLF, could be established to provide pXRFs at low cost, training for authorised users, and technical support — both in terms of maintenance and data analysis — for governments, NGOs, and academic partners. With sufficient demand, the proposed hubs can negotiate directly with pXRF manufacturers to lower prices and tailor device design to ensure cost-effective and accurate screening for lead in different sources. The PLF could thus roll out this technology on a global scale — a breakthrough that would serve as a mechanism for international and local organisations to work together to raise awareness among LMIC governments about the importance of lead poisoning. This could include setting clear protocols and guidelines for using pXRFs to screen for lead in different sources and for acting upon the results. When it comes to lead exposure, prevention is the only option, because there is no cure. ©Project Syndicate, 2025

SPORTS

SEEDS THROUGH



HARIMOTO, ODO AND KEM PROGRESS INTO QUARTERS OF WTT CONTENDER MUSCAT

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 15

World Ranking No 3, Tomokazu Harimoto, delivered an outstanding show and managed to secure slot in the men's singles quarters of the WTT Contender Muscat 2025 following his resounding triumph over Jinabo MA from the USA by 3-1 (13-11, 11-5, 9-11, 14-12). The victory meant that the top seed in the tournament will meet the winner between Huang Youzheng from China and Simon Guazy, who played during the evening session on Wednesday.

Wong Chun from Hong Kong moved to quarterfinals after he blanked Huang Yan from Chinese Taipei by 3-0 (6-11, 2-11, 14-16). French paddler, Lilian Bardet, stun Japan's Hiroto Shinozuka by 3-2 in a tough encounter. The French player will face Kuo Guan-Hong from Chinese Taipei in quarterfinals as Kuo Guan edged Xiang Peng from China by 3-1 (12-10, 11-8, 2-11, 11-8).

In women's singles, World No 6 Satsuki Odo beat India's Ayhika Mukherjee 3-1 to seal spot in the quarterfinals while Chinese paddler Kuai Man, World No 44, outclassed Suh Hyo from South Korea 3-0 (11-9, 11-7, 12-10).

Hong Kong paddler Doo Hoi Kem surprised all as she beat World No 18 Bruna Takahashi from Brazil by 3-0 to progress into last 8 teams. She will meet Shi Xun Yao from China following her victory over Yeh Yi-Tian from Chinese Taipei by 3-1 (11-7, 11-7, 11-13, 11-4).

The final match of mixed doubles will be played on Thursday after French duo of Thibault and Leana will meet Shi and Huang from China in the first semifinal while Prithika and Simon from France will take on Maria and Alvaro from Spain in the second semifinal.

The WTT Contender Muscat 2025 will conclude on Saturday as the finals of all the remaining events will be held at the main indoor hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.



Al Qudra emerge champs in 10th Shotokan Open

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 15

THE 10th Shotokan Karate Open Championship concluded recently at Al Amal Sports Club Hall in Muscat Governorate as part of the Muscat Nights events. The championship witnessed intense competition among participants from various local and international clubs, with 34 clubs from nine countries participating. Al Qudra Karate Club were crowned champions, delivering an outstanding performance by winning 18 gold medals, four silver and six bronze medals. While Shotokan Karate Centre secured second place with 10 gold medals, 13 silver and 14 bronze medals, reaffirming its strong presence in the two-day competition that ended on January 11. Shitoryu Oman Club claimed third place after winning 10 gold, seven silver and 36 bronze medals. Kuwait Force Club finished fourth, earning eight gold, two silver and four bronze medals.

Ali bin Said bin Saif al Shabibi, coach of the Oman national karate team, emphasised that the timing of this championship was highly appropriate. He highlighted that the championship achieved record-breaking participation with over 400 players, reflecting the significant interest from players, coaches, and parents in karate. Al Shabibi added that the championship's success, from his perspective, was 100 per cent, noting that many national team players proved their worth by securing top positions and multiple gold medals. Additionally, the direct interaction with international players greatly enhanced their experience and skills.

Al Shibeebi stressed the importance of such tournaments for Omani players and residents in Oman, explaining that the participation of international teams with their top players provides local athletes with real opportunities to engage with high-level competition, contributing to their skill development and helping them gain valuable experience for their athletic careers.

Regarding the growth and spread of karate in Oman, Al Shabibi noted that the sport has witnessed wide expansion recently, from Dhofar Governorate in the south to Musandam Governorate in the north. He pointed out that Muscat Governorate alone has more than 50 karate clubs, reflecting the large number of practitioners in this growing sport. On the selection process for the



national team, Al Shabibi explained that the technical staff and the specialised committee evaluate players based on their technical performance, mastery of offensive and defensive moves, and overall technical execution. This ensures the selection of the most competent and distinguished athletes to represent the national team in regional and international championships. Mohammed Haid al Qattan, coach of the Kuwait national team, expressed his gratitude and appreciation to the Shotokan Centre for organising this exceptional championship. He praised the high level of organisation and competition. Al Qattan mentioned that the Kuwait team participated with 15 players across

various categories and was able to strongly compete for top positions in all divisions. He confirmed that the championship was successful in terms of participation numbers, the level of challenge and the spirit of competition. Al Qattan also commended the technical and ethical standards of the participating teams and countries, highlighting the high sportsmanship and cooperation among the teams. He added that Kuwait's participation in this championship was not merely a sports competition but also an opportunity to visit Oman, which they greatly admired, especially with the well-organised event and the exceptional activities that took place during the two days of intense matches.

Juve hold Atalanta, Conceicao gets maiden Serie A win

MILAN: Atalanta crept closer to Serie A leaders Napoli on Tuesday after drawing an entertaining match with Juventus 1-1 and moving to within four points of the summit, while AC Milan came from behind to beat Como. Mateo Retegui salvaged a point for Atalanta with a close-range header 12 minutes from time, not long after returning to action from the bench following four weeks on the sidelines with a hamstring injury. The Italy striker's finish, which levelled Pierre Kalulu's 54th-minute opener for Juve, put him out on his own at the top of the Serie A scoring charts on 13 goals and pushed Atalanta to 43 points, ahead of table-topping Napoli's crucial trip to Bergamo this coming weekend. Gian Piero Gasperini's side, who are



AC Milan's Rafael Leao scores their second goal. — Reuters

bidding for their first league title after winning the Europa League last season, sit level on points with second-placed Inter Milan. "It was a great match tonight, and I'm very happy with the way my boys

played," said Gasperini to Sky. "It was difficult going behind because we were hoping to go ahead but I think at the end of the day a draw is probably a fair result." Juve remain unbeaten but

have now drawn 13 of their 20 league fixtures and sit fifth, 13 points behind Napoli. Earlier, Theo Hernandez and Rafael Leao saved Milan from an embarrassing defeat at Como with the goals which gave Sergio Conceicao's new team a 2-1 win. Trailing to Assane Diao's fine low strike on the hour mark, star players Hernandez and Leao turned the match around by the 76th minute, handing Conceicao his first league win as Milan coach. Tuesday's victory in one of their two games in hand moved Milan up to seventh on 31 points, five behind fourth-placed Lazio as Conceicao tries to reignite the Italian giants' bid for Champions League qualification. "They (Como) are a good team with a good coach, it's not easy to play here," said Conceicao. — AFP

ATHLETICSFEAT



Ishwar Deshmukh, Senior Physical Education Teacher working at Indian School Salalah (ISS), excelled in the 45th Maharashtra State Inter District Masters Athletic Championship held at Nagpur.

ISS SPORTS TEACHER
ISHWAR EXCELS IN
INDIA ATHLETICS

MUSCAT: Ishwar Deshmukh, Senior Physical Education Teacher working at Indian School Salalah (ISS), excelled in the 45th Maharashtra State Inter District Masters Athletic Championship held at Nagpur in the last week of December organised by Nagpur District Masters Athletics Association.

Deshmukh who hails from Nagpur competing in the 55 + age category clinched gold medal in 4 x 100 metres relay and silver medals in the 5 km walk and high jump. He was also felicitated by Dominic Savio, Secretary of Maharashtra Athletic Federation, for his contribution in the field of sports and games in India and also in the Gulf countries. He had represented the Maharashtra State Athletic team for the Masters Athletic Championship held at GMC Balyogi Athletic Stadium, Hyderabad in 2017.

Ishwar was the first expatriate in Salalah to complete a challenging distance of walking 54 km in 8.08.09 s setting a new benchmark for endurance in the region on 20th November to commemorate the 54th Oman National Day. Deshmukh was not only the first to begin the journey but also the first to cross the finish line.

His ability to conquer these physically demanding challenges demonstrates an unwavering commitment to fitness and an indomitable will.

Being a professional in the field of Physical Education for more than three decades, He is also a columnist penning down on the topics related to wellness and fitness, healthy eating habits and general awareness for the youth and for noble cause donates blood regularly once in three months.



Ishwar Deshmukh, who hails from Nagpur, competing in the 55 + age category clinched gold medal in 4 x 100 metres relay and silver medals in the 5 km walk and high jump.



Ahmad makes winning
start to 2025 in Dubai 24H

MULTIPLE motor racing champion Ahmad al Harthy produced an absolutely sensational start to 2025 at Dubai Autodrome recently with a faultless victory in the GT3-Am class at the Michelin 24H Dubai with British team Paradine Competition.

“I’m absolutely delighted with this first race of the season; it was a great experience for me to win GT3-Am in such a competitive field and to be fighting overall for the majority of the race. Finishing fifth overall in itself is great, but to win our class was very important for me with this opportunity in the 24H DUBAI. It’s always fantastic to have the chance to race so close to home,” Ahmad said.

“I’m also delighted for Al Faisal [Al Zubair] and his team [AlManar Racing by Team WRT] to win the race outright as well, we were in one pit box the entire weekend together so that was a great experience and a fantastic result for Oman overall. It was an exhausting race, as I drove a lot of stints, but I am truly delighted with the result and thank the team for doing such a great job,” the Omani racer added.

Invited to join the squad’s line-up for the 20th Anniversary staging of the race, the traditional start to the global endurance racing year, Ahmad partnered team-mates Toby Sowery, Simon Traves and Darren Leung in the No 991 BMW M4 GT3 EVO.

Starting the race from the class pole, eighth on the overall grid

■ Ahmad al Harthy posts magnificent class win in 24H Dubai

■ Omani celebrates GT3-Am class win, P5 overall with Paradine Competition

■ Al Harthy congratulates compatriot Al Zubair’s team on outright win

of 63 cars, the team delivered a remarkable performance throughout the 24 hours and ultimately went on to take the chequered flag at 13.00 local time on January 12 an excellent fifth overall and over a lap clear in GT3-Am.

Al Harthy starred in qualifying on January 10, with a fantastic performance in the opening 15-minute session. Steering the BMW to the fastest time of all on his first flying lap, with just six minutes to go he sat atop the timing screens with a lap of 1m58.845 seconds.

Ultimately ending the run third overall and second in GT3-Am, Al Harthy’s efforts ensured Paradine Competition went on to claim the class pole position in style. Leung and Sowery took the second and third sessions, but the Omani remained the fastest of the trio.

Sowery took the start of the race for Paradine and delivered an electrifying first half lap, scything through the upper order to climb into third position overall, obviously retaining the Am class lead in the process. Taking second place on lap six, Sowery then seized the outright lead of the race on lap 18 from Gabriele Piana’s Pro-Am Mercedes-AMG.

Although slipping back to second on lap 28, behind the No 777 BMW M4, he remained in touch and at the first round of pit-stops handed the car over to Al Harthy. Running in sixth position originally, the Omani’s first stint was impacted by two cautionary periods but at the second of the two he was able to move ahead of the No 777 car – in which was Leung who doubled-up

by racing in both cars.

The third Code 60 caution of the race occurred later in hour three, where Al Harthy pitted to hand over the Paradine car to Traves. Although slipping behind a few GT3 rivals, Traves continued to lead Am and after moving back into second overall by hour five, as pit stops played out, Leung then took his first laps in the Paradine entry.

While track position ebbed and flowed during the evening, through the varying strategies and driver changes, the No 991 remained squarely in the front-running battle overall and at around one third distance Al Harthy returned to the driving seat with a realistic prospect of an outright podium.

Emerging on track during a Code 60 period, when a GT4 car caught fire, the Omani held the outright race lead. Driving superbly as always, the team outperforming any expectation, Al Harthy continued at the front until entering the pits for fuel and tyres around 22.00 local time.

Past midnight into Sunday, Al Harthy continued to lead GT3-Am and was inside the outright top four as he circulated flawlessly. Through the remainder of the race, into daylight and towards the afternoon finish, the quartet all performed impeccably with the BMW running very reliably.

Right up to the final hour of the race an overall top four result remained a possibility, but a nonetheless excellent outright fifth place and a clear GT3-Am victory was Paradine’s just reward for a tremendous and well executed race.

India’s struggling batters return to domestic cricket looking for form

NEW DELHI: The Ranji Trophy has benefited from an unexpected sprinkling of stardust with several big-name India batters returning to domestic cricket looking to find form after their horror run over the last three months.

Rohit Sharma and his team are still smarting from a 3-0 series sweep at home by New Zealand followed by a 3-1 hammering in Australia which ended their decade-long hold on the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

The setbacks also ended their hopes of making a third straight World Test Championship final. India dropped their woefully out-

of-form captain Rohit for the final Test in Australia after he failed as both an opener, his usual role, and in the middle order.

Rohit, who has ruled out Test retirement despite managing one fifty in his last 15 innings in the format, trained with the Mumbai squad at the Wankhede Stadium on Tuesday ahead of the second phase of the Ranji Trophy beginning on January 23.

The 37-year-old is likely to play at least one of Mumbai’s remaining two Group A matches, nine years after his last appearance in the country’s premier domestic first-



India captain Rohit Sharma attends a promotional event for an electronics company in Mumbai. — AFP

class tournament.

Rohit’s opening partner Yashasvi Jaiswal, who was India’s highest scorer in the five-Test series in Australia, has made himself available for Mumbai’s home match against Jammu and Kashmir next week.

Top order batter Shubman Gill, who tallied 93 from five innings in Australia, will be seen in action in Punjab’s next match against Karnataka in Bengaluru.

Rishabh Pant, whose natural aggression occasionally bordered on recklessness in Australia, will play Delhi’s next match against

Saurashtra. The exciting stumper-batter has not played a Ranji Trophy match since the 2017-2018 season.

Batting stalwart Virat Kohli also returned with a battered reputation from Australia having managed 190 in nine innings, including an unbeaten 100 in the series opener in Perth.

Kohli is yet to confirm his return to the tournament he last played in 2012 even though the Indian board has told players to return to domestic cricket to regain their form. India’s next Test assignment is a five-match series in England from June 20. — Reuters

SPORTS



DJOKOVIC CREATES SLICE OF HISTORY, ZHENG STUNNED

with a straight-set victory over Spain's Pedro Martinez.

Heading home on Wednesday with Ruud was qualifier Hady Habib, who on Sunday became the first player from Lebanon to win a Grand Slam match.

He exited in three sets to France's Ugo Humbert.

‘NOTHING MORE’

Olympic champion Zheng was sent packing 7-6 (7/3), 6-3 by world number 97 Laura Siegemund, the second-oldest player in the women's draw at age 36.

"I knew I just had to play more than my best tennis. I had nothing to lose so I just told myself to swing free," said the German.

"It's tennis. Nothing more," said China's Zheng, 22, who was given two time violations and lost her cool as her tilt at a maiden major crown evaporated in only the second round.

Sabalenka dropped her serve three times and faced 11 break points before overcoming Spain's Jessica Bouzas Maneiro 6-3, 7-5, rattling off the last five games in a row.

"I have to fight. Today's match proved that. Girls can go there and just play without any fear, without anything to lose. They can put you in really uncomfortable positions," said Sabalenka, who beat Zheng in the 2024 final.

The win kept the Belarusian world number one on course for a rare hat-trick of consecutive Australian Open titles, a feat last achieved 26 years ago by Martina Hingis and only matched by four other women in history.

Former world number one Osaka, the 2019 and 2021 champion in Australia but now unseeded, stormed back to defeat 20th seed Karolina Muchova 1-6, 6-1, 6-3.

Osaka called it a "little revenge" for defeat at the US Open in August to the Czech.

World number three Gauff, who finished 2024 by winning the China Open and the WTA Tour Finals, fought back from 5-3 down in the second set to see off Britain's Jodie Burrage 6-3, 7-5.

Asked what she had to do to beat 30th seed Leylah Fernandez next, Gauff told reporters: "Obviously serve better!"

Gauff's fellow American Jessica Pegula, beaten in the US Open final by Sabalenka last year, eased through against Belgium's Elise Mertens.

On Thursday, men's number one Jannik Sinner steps up the defence of his Melbourne crown when he faces Australian wildcard Tristan Schoolkate.

Daniil Medvedev, Iga Swiatek and Brazilian teenage sensation Joao Fonseca are also in second-round action. — AFP

NOVAK DJOKOVIC celebrated a slice of Grand Slam history on his way into the Australian Open third round on Wednesday, but last year's women's finalist Zheng Qinwen was knocked out in the biggest shock so far.

Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka, in-form Coco Gauff, former Melbourne winner Naomi Osaka and a rampant Carlos Alcaraz were all victors on a rainy day four.

Alexander Zverev also progressed but Norway's Casper Ruud went down in four sets to Czech teenager Jakub Mensik to become the highest men's seed to fall at six.

Playing under the roof on Rod Laver Arena, Djokovic needed four sets for the second match in a row before defeating Portuguese qualifier Jaime Faria 6-1, 6-7 (4/7), 6-3, 6-2.

It was Djokovic's 430th singles match at a major to claim sole ownership of most ever played, men or women, in the Open Era ahead of Roger Federer (429) and Serena Williams (423).

The Serb is chasing a record-extending 11th Australian Open title and historic 25th Grand Slam crown.

"Whether I win or lose, I will always leave my heart out on the court. I'm just blessed to be making another record," said Djokovic, 37, now coached by former rival Andy Murray.

Djokovic faces Czech 26th seed Tomas Machac next and is drawn to meet Spain's Alcaraz in the last eight.

Four-time Grand Slam winner Alcaraz dropped just five games in an ominous display to sprint into the third round.

The third seed showed no mercy to Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka in a 6-0, 6-1, 6-4 rout in 81 minutes.

"The less time you spend on court in the Grand Slams, especially in the beginning, it is going to be better," said Alcaraz, who is yet to go beyond the quarterfinals in Melbourne.

Second seed Zverev swept through

Whether I win or lose, I will always leave my heart out on the court. I'm just blessed to be making another record.

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Samayil Industrial City inaugurated

THE Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) inaugurated the infrastructure project for Samayil Industrial City at a cost exceeding RO 35 million. The project marks a significant milestone in Oman's efforts to enhance its industrial capacity and diversify its economy in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The inauguration ceremony was presided over by Shaikh Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones. He emphasised the project's pivotal role in complementing the government's initiatives to establish modern industrial cities that cater to diverse sectors.

Al Sunaidy noted that Samayil Industrial City has already succeeded in attracting transformative industries and serves as a strategic extension of Rusayl Industrial City, which is nearing full capacity with investment projects.

Eng Yasser bin Ibrahim al Ajmi, Director-General of Samayil Industrial City, outlined the project's comprehensive development.

He revealed that the city spans a total developed area of 753 hectares, with 548 hectares allocated to the first phase and 205 hectares to the second.

The city's design adheres to international standards, incorporating environmental and civil defence requirements, while addressing the social and recreational needs of workers and local residents. The infrastructure includes modern roads, lighting systems, fibre optic networks, water supply systems, and valley protection works.

Key facilities include water and irrigation tanks with advanced pumping stations, a sewage station with a capacity of 3,500 cubic meters per day, and multiple security gates equipped with surveillance cameras. The project also features a service building covering over 16,000 square metres, designed to accommodate market demands and provide support facilities for workers and businesses.

Eng Haitham bin Sulaiman al Afi, Head of Project Implementation at Madayn, highlighted additional infrastructure elements, such



The inauguration ceremony was presided over by Shaikh Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones.

as 1221 lighting poles, 604 fire hydrants, 215 CCTV cameras, and 82,051 square metres of public parking spaces for trucks and taxis.

Streets span 45.78 kilometres, while the irrigation, water, and sewage networks measure 58.04 km, 62.74 km, and 51.62 km, respectively.

Samayil Industrial City has been strategically developed to attract foreign and local investments,

create job opportunities, and bolster the industrial sector. The city's location, near Sultan Turki bin Said Road, offers convenient access to Muscat and other regions, enhancing its appeal to investors.

The industrial city features various sectors, including technical, medical, food, petrochemical, iron, aluminium, wood, marble, and building materials. The entrepreneurs'

sector provides additional support for startups and small businesses.

Furthermore, the city integrates artificial intelligence technology to optimise industrial operations.

An exhibition held on the sidelines of the opening ceremony showcased products from companies operating in Samayil Industrial City.

The exhibits included building materials, food products and metal and plastic industries, reflecting the city's growing industrial diversity.

Located approximately 60 kilometres southwest of Muscat, Samayil Industrial City is positioned as a vital hub for industrial development. It serves as a strategic extension of Rusayl Industrial City, benefiting from its proximity to major transportation routes and its role in supporting Oman's broader economic diversification goals.

With its advanced infrastructure and investor-friendly environment, Samayil Industrial City represents a new chapter in Oman's industrial development, strengthening the nation's position as a regional leader in industrial innovation. — ONA



TENDER NOTICE

Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) hereby announces the following Tenders: -

Tender No.	Description	Eligibility	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date of Sale Tender Documents	Bid Submission Date
T/2683052/ 2025	Construction of Water Distribution Network and House Connections in Al Khuwimah Network in Jalan Bani Bu Ali Wilayat in South Ash Sharqiyah	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	R.O 500/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	30/1/2025	24/2/2025
T/2684053/ 2025	Consultancy Supervision Services of " Construction of Water, Wastewater and Water Irrigation TE Networks and STP in Al-Amerat A10	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and International Companies specialized in the works mentioned	RO 2,500/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	30/1/2025	3/3/2025

The tender documents can be obtained from the e-tendering page (Supplier Login) from this announcement date. The applicants shall pay the tender fee by logging into their (I-supplier Page).

Applicants who are not registered shall register through the following link: <https://owwsc.nama.om/Business-with-Us/Vendor-Registration> in order to receive the login credentials of the Supplier portal.

All applicants who have paid the tender fee shall have access to the Tender Documents through Nama Water Services e-tendering page (Supplier Login <https://nws.nama.om/en-us/Business-with-Us/Supplierlogin>). All participating companies shall submit a Bid Bond of 1% of the bid value in a sealed envelope. Bid Bonds must be obtained from a local Bank registered in the Sultanate of Oman addressed to Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) Chairman of Tender Committee not later than 2:00 pm on the bid submission date.

The bid along with all required documents shall be uploaded through Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) e-tendering page not later than 2:00 pm on the date specified above. For more details refer to Tender Page of our website www.owwsc.nama.om & in case of general queries you may contact us through the email ID of tender@owwsc.nama.om





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Masdar strengthens commitment to Oman's green energy sector

AHMED AL KAABI
ABU DHABI, JAN 15

UAE state-owned renewable energy firm Masdar has pledged to strengthen its presence in the Omani market, notably by exploiting promising green energy opportunities promoted by the Omani government in support of its transition to a low-carbon sustainable future.

Abdulaziz Alobaidli, Chief Operating Officer, Masdar, emphasised the company's strong interest in the Omani clean energy market given its potential as a destination for investments in renewable energy and green hydrogen production.

He explained that Masdar had previously participated in many of the tenders launched by Nama Power and Water Company (PWP) in recent years. He added that the company is currently working on improving its strategies, as well as its technical and financial proposals, to ensure its competitiveness in upcoming tenders.

He also noted that Masdar is preparing to submit bids for new tenders that are due for submission on January 28, 2025.

Speaking about the company's relationship with Oman, Alobaidli



highlighted that it began with a pioneering step—developing the first wind power plant in the Dhofar Governorate with a production capacity of 50 megawatts.

This project was executed by Masdar according to the highest global standards in the renewable energy sector and was later handed over to the relevant authorities in Oman for operation.

According to Alobaidli, the initiative reflects Masdar's commitment to supporting Oman's efforts to diversify its energy sources and enhance environmental sustainability.

The project also laid the foundation for further collaboration in renewable energy projects between Masdar and both public and private entities in Oman, he noted.

According to the official, intensive negotiations and discussions are currently underway between Masdar

and several government and private companies in Oman to develop new projects in the green hydrogen sector—a sector gaining increasing global attention for its pivotal role in the transition to clean energy.

He affirmed that Oman is endowed with unique natural resources that make it an ideal destination for investment in this field, particularly due to its high and stable wind speeds compared to other Gulf countries. This gives Oman a competitive advantage in terms of 'capacity factors' or the daily energy production hours.

These natural advantages, along with advanced infrastructure and strong government support, position Oman as a regional leader in producing and exporting clean energy, especially green hydrogen, Alobaidli stated.

Masdar is keen to seize these promising opportunities to expand its investments in Oman and contribute to achieving the Sultanate of Oman's goals of transitioning to a low-carbon economy in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Al Obaidli expressed his optimism about the future of cooperation between Masdar and the Sultanate of Oman.

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BANKDHOFAR NAMED OMAN’S BEST TRADE FINANCE PROVIDER

MUSCAT: BankDhofar is honoured to announce its recognition as “Oman’s Best Trade Finance Provider 2025” by Global Finance, a prestigious accolade that underscores the Bank’s unwavering dedication to delivering innovative, customer-focused digital trade finance solutions.

This milestone reflects BankDhofar’s commitment to advancing the trade finance landscape in the Sultanate of Oman by continually enhancing its offerings to meet the evolving needs of businesses.

This esteemed award, conferred annually by Global Banking and Finance Review, a highly regarded UK-based publication, celebrates institutions that redefine industry excellence. The awards spotlight financial organisations that push boundaries, drive innovation and shape the future of global banking and finance.

As Oman’s foremost provider of trade finance solutions, BankDhofar offers a comprehensive suite of services tailored to the unique requirements of its diverse client base.

These include supply chain finance, open account trade solutions, standby Letters of Credit (LC), guarantees and traditional trade instruments such as Letters of Credit and Documentary Collections. Additionally, the Bank provides customised trade facilities designed to address the specific needs of corporate clients, ensuring businesses can efficiently manage cash flows and secure working capital.

BankDhofar’s robust global network of top-tier correspondent banks supports its ability to facilitate seamless cross-border transactions. The Bank’s trade risk management team further strengthens its offerings by delivering expert insights and strategies to mitigate risks related to countries, counterparties and exchange rates.

This holistic approach enables Omani businesses to navigate the complexities of international trade with confidence.

HOTEL REVENUES IN OMAN EXCEED RO 212 MILLION

MUSCAT: Revenue from Oman’s 3- to 5-star hotels rose by 4.9% by the end of November 2024, reaching OMR 212.37 million, compared to OMR 202.50 million in 2023, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The growth is attributed to a 3.9% increase in hotel guests, totalling 1.93 million. The occupancy rate also climbed to 48.7%, up from 47.9% the previous year.

The number of Omani guests



The growth is attributed to a 3.9 per cent increase in hotel guests, totalling 1.93 million.

grew by 4.9% to 739,406, while Gulf visitors increased marginally to 182,408.

European guests reached 466,827, marking a 4.7% rise. Other notable increases include a 12.4% growth in Arab guests and a 6.4% rise in African visitors. However, guests from Oceania declined by 30%.

These statistics reflect the growing appeal of Oman’s hospitality sector, driven by efforts to attract diverse international markets. — ONA

Bank Muscat posts net profit of RO 225.58 million

BANK Muscat, the flagship financial institution in the Sultanate of Oman, announced its preliminary unaudited results for the year ended December 31, 2024.

The Bank posted a net profit of RO 225.58 million for the period compared to RO 212.45 million reported during the same period in 2023, an increase of 6.2 per cent.

The key highlights of the results for the period are as follows:

- 1- Net Interest Income from Conventional Banking and Net Income from Islamic Financing stood at RO 397.70 million for the year ended December 31, 2024 compared to RO 374.82 million for the same period in 2023, an increase of 6.1 per cent.
- 2- Non-interest income was RO 145.00



million for the year ended December 31, 2024 as compared to RO 138.00 million for the same period in 2023, an increase of 5.1 per cent.

- 3- Operating expenses for the year ended December 31, 2024 was RO 209.26 million as compared to RO 196.39 million for the same period in 2023, an increase of 6.6

per cent.

- 4- Net impairment losses on financial assets for the year ended December 31, 2024 was RO 64.41 million as against RO 64.66 million for the same period in 2023.
- 5- Net Loans and advances including Islamic financing receivables increased by 3.7 per cent to RO 10,247 million as against RO 9,877 million as at December 31, 2023.
- 6- Customer deposits including Islamic Customer deposits increased by 3.6 per cent to RO 9,777 million as against RO 9,438 million as at December 31, 2023.

The full results for the year ended December 31, 2024 along with the complete set of unaudited financial statements will be released following the approval of the Board of Directors of the Bank at its meeting scheduled later during January 2025.

Boosting SME access to electricity and water services

MUSCAT: The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) hosted a dialogue session aimed at enhancing electricity and water services for small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

The event focused on improving the business environment, encouraging innovative ideas, and reviewing legislation and policies to support these sectors.

Key topics included the efficiency of electricity and water services, tender opportunities and initiatives to bolster SME competitiveness, contributing to



The event focused on improving the business environment.

economic growth. The session, led by Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), and Dr Mansour bin Talib al Hinai, Chairman of the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), emphasised collaboration to address challenges facing entrepreneurs.

Representatives from government agencies and SME owners participated.

This initiative is part of SMEDA's ongoing efforts to engage SMEs and foster sustainable development. — ONA

Voltamp opens transformers factory in Al Rusayl Industrial City

MUSCAT: The opening ceremony of the expansion of the Voltamp Oman Transformers Factory (Voltamp) was held under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat, in the Al Rusayl Industrial City in Muscat Governorate. At the beginning of the ceremony, Al Busaidy cut the ribbon.

Then Eng Yousef bin Salman al Saleh, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Voltamp Transformers, delivered a speech in which he stated that Voltamp is a key partner in supporting the development of the industrial sector in the Sultanate of Oman, in order to achieve Oman Vision 2040, that aims to build a diversified and sustainable economy based on innovation and renewable energy and in line with one of the vision’s goals to enhance local added value.

He added that Voltamp continues its role in strengthening Oman's position as a regional industrial destination, through the quality of its products and its commitment to providing advanced products.

It has been able to put Oman on the regional and international manufacturing map, as the company has become a reliable source for providing electrical transformers in the Gulf and international markets that it has exported its electrical transformers to more than 22 countries around the world.

Eng Ahmed bin Salem al



Voltamp is a key partner in supporting the development of the industrial sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

Kharousi, General Manager of Voltamp Transformers, also delivered a speech in which he talked about the expansion project and its role in increasing the company’s production capacity by 30 per cent, to meet the growing demand from regional and international markets.

He also expressed his pride that the company exports about 60 per cent of its products to more than one country and several sectors, which reflects the confidence of international partners.

In the context of keeping pace with technological developments and the requirements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, he stated that the company has developed its facilities and upgraded its technologies to include digitisation and automation in all operations, which contributed to improving performance, increasing productivity and enhancing competition in the market.

He stressed that the company’s commitment to developing its products, especially in the

renewable energy and green hydrogen sector, is constant and continuous, and an evidence of this is Voltamp’s leadership in manufacturing solar energy converters for years.

After that Al Busaidy honoured the members of the teams that contributed to the factory expansion operations and a number of small and medium enterprises that contribute to implementing some of the manufacturing operations.

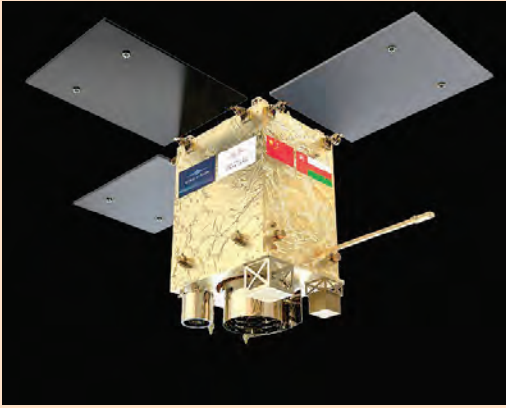
At the end of the celebration Al Busaidy toured the factory’s

corners, where he learned about the developmental aspects in the design and manufacture of electrical converters.

The celebration was attended by Sayyid Ayman bin Hamad al Busaidy, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Voltamp Energy Company, a number of CEOs and senior officials of the company and companies benefiting from Voltamp products, and members of the technical and administrative team that worked on the factory expansion.

BUSINESS

FOSTERINGTIES



The meeting will focus on fostering international collaboration in satellite technology and applications. **Image for illustration only.**

OMAN TO HOST GLOBAL SATELLITE APPLICATIONS FORUM

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JAN 15

THE Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Civil Aviation Authority, will host the 11th meeting of the Virtual Laboratories Coordination Group for Centres of Excellence for Satellite Applications (VLMG-11) from January 20 to 23, 2025, at the Authority’s headquarters.

The event will bring together over 35 representatives from the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), satellite agencies, and centres of excellence in satellite applications. Distinguished attendees include the President of WMO, the President of the European Organisation for Satellite Applications (EUMETSAT), and other key officials. The meeting will focus on fostering international collaboration in satellite technology and applications. Discussions will revolve around advancing training programmes, enhancing cooperation between training centres, and exchanging expertise and tools. A significant emphasis will be placed on supporting the transition to modern satellite technologies within WMO member states.

Participants will engage in joint working sessions to strategize future training activities, aiming to improve the utilisation of satellite products to safeguard lives and property.

This gathering coincides with the 50th anniversary of Oman’s accession to WMO, which the Sultanate of Oman joined in 1975. It also highlights Oman’s leadership in satellite applications, underscored by the inauguration of the Centre of Excellence for Training and Teaching Satellite Applications in Meteorology in 2006.

This initiative, established in collaboration with Sultan Qaboos University, WMO, and EUMETSAT, serves West Asian and Middle Eastern countries. The event reflects Oman’s commitment to advancing meteorological science and fostering international cooperation in satellite applications.

CONSTRUCTION BEGINS ON OMAN’S FIRST SPACE ECONOMIC ZONE AT DUQM SEZ

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 15

CONSTRUCTION work on Oman’s first “scientific and economic space zone”, formally known as Zone 88, has commenced at a designated site the Special Economic Zone in Al Duqm, according Eng Bahiya bint Hilal al Shuaibiyah, CEO and Founder of Global Space and Technology Company, the Omani startup behind this landmark initiative.

In a recent interview with the Duqm Economist, the newsletter of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), the CEO revealed that the project is around 25 per cent complete. Located in the Duqm SEZ, the zone will include five main space projects.

The first is a space settlement centre, aimed at creating a space simulation environment mimicking life on Mars and the Moon.

Also envisioned is a commercial spacecraft launch site, aimed at establishing an investment hub for commercial spacecraft launches.



Official mock-up of Zone 88.

Another feature of the facility is an Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Advanced Technology Experimentation Zone aimed at facilitating experimental research and tests linked to space and artificial intelligence for companies and scientific institutions.

Additionally, a drone technology centre is being set up with the aim of providing a scientific and practical environment for aerial, terrestrial,

and marine drones. Rounding off the list is a ground transmission and reception station aimed at providing infrastructure services to global governments and local companies.

Upon completion, this one of its kind project is expected to contribute significantly to Oman’s ambitious plans of positioning itself as a global space hub.

According to the CEO, the project is expected to significantly contribute to Oman’s local economy through facilitating knowledge transfer, job creation, and positioning Oman as a space investment hub. Currently the space sector contributes 0.05 per cent to the local GDP with a market value of \$155 million as of 2021.

In 2023, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology unveiled the National Space Policy and Executive Programme which aims to boost the contribution of the digital economy to the local GDP from 2 per cent currently, to 5 per cent by 2030 and 10 per cent by 2040.

Oman’s OQBI records 16% production uptick in 9M

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 15

OQ Base Industries (SFZ) SAOG (OQBI), the majority Omani state-owned integrated producer of methanol, ammonia and LPG, has reported a significant 16.2 per cent increase in output during the first nine months of this year, attributable primarily to optimal utilisation of the capacity of its modern production complex in Salalah Free Zone.

The company – part of OQ integrated energy group – also announced in its first quarterly financial report since its debut on the Muscat Stock Market (MSX) last month – that it is on track to surpass its 2023 output.

“(OQBI) Group has achieved 16.2 per cent higher production cumulatively for Methanol and Ammonia (1,138K MT) for nine months period ended September 30, 2024 compared to (979K MT) for the same period ended September 30, 2023.

The increase in production was due to effective utilisation of plant (106 per cent) as compared to utilisation of 93 per cent in 2023,” the Chairman of OQBI’s Board of Directors said.

“Likewise, LPG plant has achieved



OQ Base Industries is on track to surpass its 2023 output: **Chairman**

utilisation of 116 per cent resulting in 3.9 per cent higher production for LPG products (269K MT) for nine months period ended September 30, 2024 as compared to volume produced of 259K MT in same period last year.

It is expected that OQBI Group will exceed the production targets for 2024,” the Chairman added in the Board of Directors’ report for 9M 2024.

The combined nameplate capacity of the integrated plant currently stands at 1,816K tonnes per annum (tpa), distributed between methanol (1,095K tpa), ammonia (365K tpa) and LPG (356K tpa).

Following a successful public subscription of 49 per cent of its capital, which raised around RO 188 million from institutional and retail investors, OQBI listed on the Omani bourse on December 15, 2024.

On Wednesday, announcing its unaudited financial results for the first nine months of the year, OQBI said its Group revenue increased by RO 12.9 million (8.8 per cent) to reach RO 159.9 million, compared to RO 147 million for the corresponding period of 2023.

The increase in revenue was primarily due to an increase in both sales volume and market prices for all the products, it stated.

However, net profit declined 60.3 per cent to RO 21.0 million, compared to RO 34.8 million for the nine months ended September 30, 2023.

“The decrease in profit for the period was primarily due to an increase in non-cash expenditures that did not have any effect on the Group’s cash flows.

The notional cost of rich gas increased by RO 5.3 million, or 21.3 per cent, to RO 30.1 million in 2024 compared to RO 24.8 million in 2023, while the Company had one-off impairment of an RO 5.3 million related party receivable in 2024 compared to nil in 2023,” it added.

RO 90m Wadi Zaha neighbourhood unveiled in Sultan Haitham City

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JAN 15

THE “Wadi Zaha” project, the first neighbourhood by Al Ahly Sabbour Real Estate Development in Sultan Haitham City, was inaugurated at a ceremony held yesterday at the Royal Opera House Muscat on Wednesday, January 15, 2025.

With an investment of RO 90 million and covering an area of 420,000 square metres, the project represents a landmark step in the development of Sultan Haitham City as a leading urban destination. Designed to seamlessly blend architectural innovation with Oman’s rich cultural heritage, the project aims to position the Sultanate of Oman as a distinguished hub for real estate investment.

The inauguration ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning. It was attended by a distinguished gathering of dignitaries, including ministers, ambassadors, senior officials, business leaders, and investors.



Covering an area of 420,000 sqm, Wadi Zaha is the first neighbourhood of Al Ahly Sabbour Real Estate Development in Sultan Haitham City. Picture for illustration only.

Eng Ahmed Sabbour, Chairman and Managing Director of Al Ahly Sabbour, delivered the keynote speech, emphasising the company’s strategic partnership with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

He highlighted Oman’s stability,

visionary leadership, and strong international relations—especially with Egypt—as key factors in making Oman an ideal destination for business and investment.

“Oman’s wise policies and robust international ties have positioned it as a global hub for peace and

prosperity,” Sabbour remarked.

Sultan Haitham City was chosen for the project due to its strategic location and alignment with Oman Vision 2040, which seeks to establish the nation as a regional leader in urban and economic development.

Designed by renowned architectural firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), “Wadi Zaha” integrates contemporary urban planning with Oman’s traditional values.

The first phase of the development spans 23 acres of the 100-acre project, including 760 residential units with a total investment of RO 90 million. Sabbour emphasised the project’s focus on sustainability, innovation, and creating a vibrant, inclusive community.

“Wadi Zaha represents a harmonious blend of Omani traditions and modern living, offering residents an integrated and fulfilling lifestyle,” he said.

The development is divided into three neighbourhoods: Wadi Zaha, Wadi Tala, and Wadi Safa. The project aims to attract

significant investments, create job opportunities for Omanis, and stimulate economic growth in alignment with the nation’s Omanisation policy.

Jamal bin Nasser al Hadi, Media Advisor to the Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, described the project’s launch as a pivotal moment in Oman’s urban development journey. “This project is not just a real estate investment; it is a strategic initiative redefining urban development standards and advancing sustainable living,” Al Hadi stated. He emphasised the historical and economic ties between Oman and Egypt, which are further strengthened through this collaboration.

Thomas Beer, Managing Partner at SOM, highlighted the project’s innovative and sustainable design. “Wadi Zaha is envisioned as an urban oasis where nature and modernity coexist. Its strategic location in Sultan Haitham City, with views of the central park and tranquil natural landscapes, ensures a vibrant and balanced living environment,” Beer explained.

OPINION

An enhanced investment environment can spur diversification



HAIDER AL LAWATI

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

THE Sultanate of Oman recently celebrated the Renewed Renaissance Day on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham's assumption of power in the country. During the past five years, His Majesty issued many decrees and decisions to enhance the areas of economic development in the country and worked to restructure the state's administrative apparatus. The country issued many laws and legislations related to economic development, economic diversification and social fields by launching the social protection system to expand the base of beneficiaries from various categories. The date of the country's National Day was also changed to November 20 of the same year to coincide with the reign of the great founder, Imam Ahmed bin Said Al Busaidi in 1744 AD, so that the state's achievements and what was achieved during the reign of the previous Sultans continue until this day. During these few years, many achievements have been added to the renewed renaissance, including moving away from central decisions and working with a decentralized system, especially in the economic fields and enhancing economic diversification. Oman enjoys the presence of many natural

resources that each Omani state enjoys, and delegating powers to the governorates to exploit everything that brings good to the country, and enabling Omanis to work in those governorates and in various possible fields. In his royal speech, His Majesty the Sultan stressed the need to develop the investment and commercial environment in the country, which is a basic necessity to drive the wheel of development, explaining that His Majesty has directed the government to provide more necessary facilities, competitive incentives and a supportive environment for investment to facilitate the practice of business to ensure the diversification of the national economy and achieve sustainable growth. Everyone knows that the issue of diversifying economic resources is linked to the work and employment of national cadres, as there are still many Omanis waiting their turn to get suitable jobs in the presence of thousands of university and institute graduates who are waiting their turn to get an affiliated job opportunity. This is what His Majesty the Sultan indicated that economic diversification will work to provide more job opportunities in various economic and service sectors, making the country an attractive investment destination and more integrated into the

The country issued many laws and legislations related to economic development, economic diversification and social fields by launching the social protection system to expand the base of beneficiaries from various categories.

global economic system. From this standpoint, the government seeks to achieve this integration, and exploit its potential represented in the presence of a wide network of ports, free zones in enhancing job opportunities for Omanis first. The economic importance of the Sultanate of Oman and its policies to achieve economic diversification is due to the presence of many factors, the first of which is the country's important geographical location and its supervision of the Strait of Hormuz, which is one of the most important sea lanes in the world for exporting oil and gas. It is a strategic point for maritime trade between Europe, Asia and various countries of the world. The government is also working to encourage foreign direct investment by providing facilities and incentives to investors, and opening the Omani market to foreign companies, especially with institutions that have close trade relations with many countries, which will enhance their economic role. There is no doubt that the next phase will witness the Sultanate exploiting its wealth and economic resources and benefiting from its important oil and gas reserves in diversifying the economy which will help reduce dependence on oil.

ASIA'S YAWNING RENEWABLES LEAD MAY ONLY GROW FROM HERE

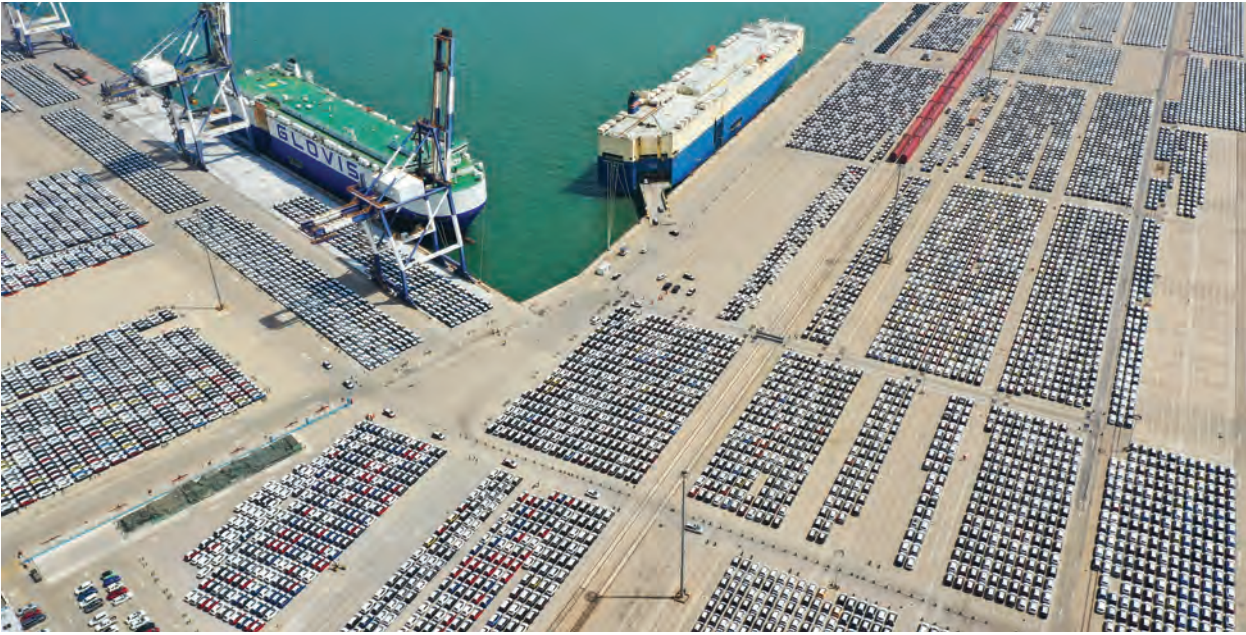
ASIA has widened its renewable energy capacity lead over all other regions, adding a record 450,000 megawatts (MW) of new renewable capacity in 2024, according to data compiled by LSEG. That capacity addition dwarfs the roughly 109,000 MW added in Europe and the 93,000 MW added in North America last year, and cements Asia's position as the main global hub for renewable energy generation. Asia's total installed renewables generation footprint is now roughly 2,500,000 MW, compared to around 1,000,000 MW in Europe and 700,000 MW in North America, and means Asia is now home to just over half of all renewable generation capacity. And Asia's capacity lead looks set to widen going forward as diminished political cohesion in Europe and a swing to a climate-sceptic administration in the United States potentially slows the pace of renewables growth in those markets. Trade spats between China - the world's top producer of renewable power production components - and Europe and the United States may also accelerate Asia's renewables build-out, by forcing China to

focus more on local markets for growth. Sustained renewables capacity growth in Asia just as capacity expansions slow in Europe and North America could spark a divergence in power price trends between those regions. If Asian power systems steadily increase the share of renewables within generation mixes, local power prices could be driven lower by the resulting increases in output from solar and wind farms that can produce power more cheaply than fossil fuel power plants. US stocks ended mixed on Tuesday as investors gauged the latest inflation data and braced for quarterly earnings reports to justify high stock valuations. At the same time, continued high reliance on natural gas for power generation in Europe and North America could keep power costs in those markets on a potentially rising trajectory. This is especially likely in Europe, where gas plants that previously ran on pipelined supplies from Russia must now be fed by imported liquefied natural gas (LNG), which can cost sharply more than pipelined gas. Gas prices in North America could also trend higher, especially if the United States ramps up gas exports in the form of LNG to feed the gas demand in other regions, and tightens domestic gas supplies as a result. — Reuters

China's \$1 trillion trade surplus: What to know

CHINA'S record trade surplus of almost \$1 trillion last year has a nearly perfect mirror image on the other side of the world: an American trade deficit last year that is expected to clock in at around \$1 trillion. But only a third of China's surplus was with the United States. And only a third of the American trade deficit was with China. That tricky math awaits President-elect Donald Trump, who will take office on Monday promising tariffs to reduce America's trade deficits. Raising taxes only on goods from China may do little to whittle down the overall US trade imbalance. Countries around the world are also running big trade surpluses with the United States — nothing on the scale of China's, but they are adding up. Other countries need trade surpluses with the US to pay for their own trade deficits with China. If the Trump administration raises tariffs only on China, the United States may find itself with bigger trade deficits with other countries as American companies import from them instead. But raising tariffs on imports from a wide range of countries could hit American allies.

Running a very large trade deficit in manufactured goods, as the US has been doing for decades, has eliminated well-paid jobs and weakened the country's base for military production. But the big trade deficit also has meant that American consumers have enjoyed low prices. Many consumers may be hesitant to give that up by paying higher prices for imported cars, smartphones and other products if Trump imposes broad tariffs. China faces a different problem: its people could enjoy a better lifestyle if its workers produced more for domestic markets and less for exports. But helping China's consumers afford more of their own country's production would require shifting government spending away



An aerial view shows cars for export at a port in Yantai, Shandong province, China. — Reuters



KEITH BRADSHER

The writer is a business and economics reporter and the Beijing bureau chief of The New York Times

from the country's military and security apparatus and state-owned enterprises and toward the meager social safety net. It might also require steps like cutting China's 13% national sales tax, as well as other consumption taxes on imported luxuries, like big American cars. Beijing has been wary of such measures. In the meantime, China's extraordinary volume of exports — up more than 12% last year — is swamping overall world trade. "That isn't sustainable," said Brad Setser, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. "Chinese exports cannot grow by 12% when global trade is only growing by 3% without cutting deeply into other countries' export sectors." Across Europe, Africa, Latin America, Asia and Oceania, countries depend on buying cars, household appliances, consumer electronics and other manufactured goods from China. To obtain the dollars they need to buy these goods from China, these other countries sell everything from Mercedes cars to cheap T-shirts to the United States. The European Union, for example, buys \$2 worth of goods from China for each \$1 of goods that it sells to China. That left the European Union with a \$247 billion trade deficit with China last year, while the EU ran an

estimated \$240 billion surplus with the US. For developing countries, the discrepancies are even more pronounced, except for a handful of exporters of oil and other natural resources that run trade surpluses with China. African nations as a group buy about \$3 worth of goods from China for each \$2 of goods they sell to China. They then mostly reverse that ratio in their trade with the United States. Most of China's imports are oil and other natural resources. But 98.9% of its exports last year were manufactured goods. Countries with few natural resources to sell end up with especially large imbalances with China. Kenya bought \$35 worth of goods last year from China for each \$1 of goods that it sold to China. Because Kenya's trade is roughly in balance with the United States, it has ended up borrowing heavily to raise the money to pay for imports from China and is now heavily indebted, like many developing countries. The US Department of Commerce will release final trade statistics for 2024 in early February. But trends in American trade are clear from statistics that cover all of last year except December. China announced that it was eliminating all tariffs for imports from dozens of the world's poorest countries. — The New York Times

ART/LIFE



A R T

ART FOR CHARITY ASPIRES TO BREAK GUINNESS WORLD RECORD > 20

ENTERTAINMENT

‘Conclave’ and ‘Emilia Perez’ top nominations for BAFTAs



“CONCLAVE” AND “Emilia Perez” on Wednesday led the shortlist of films unveiled vying for recognition at Britain’s BAFTA awards, as the race for Oscars glory gathers pace.

“Conclave”, a fictionalised account of high-stakes horse-trading in the Vatican after the death of a pope, earned 12 nominations while surreal narco-thriller musical “Emilia Perez” followed with 11.

Both will compete for the coveted best film award at next month’s ceremony.

Epic immigrant drama “The Brutalist”, which received nine nominations including for best film, “Wicked” (seven) and “Dune: Part Two” (seven) were the other leading contenders.

Unexpected hit “Kneecap”, a docu-fiction about three Belfast upstarts who rap in the Irish language, racked up six awards, including for original screenplay and outstanding British film.

French director Jacques Audiard’s Mexico-set “Emilia Perez” and “The Brutalist” were the big winners at the Golden Globes earlier this month and both appear strong contenders for top gongs at the Oscars on March 2.

However, this year’s awards season is seen as highly unpredictable.

An international crop of movies are considered potential big winners in Hollywood and at the BAFTAs, the highlight of the annual British film calendar held two weeks earlier.

Hosted by Scottish actor David Tennant, it will take place on February 16 at London’s Royal Festival Hall.

Cannes favourite “Anora” and Bob Dylan biopic “A Complete Unknown” will also battle for the best film BAFTA in the British capital.

Meanwhile, the director award pits Audiard against Edward Berger (“Conclave”), Sean Baker (“Anora”), Brady Corbet (“The Brutalist”) Denis Villeneuve (“Dune: Part Two”) and Coralie Fargeat (“The Substance”).

Karla Sofia Gascon, the star of “Emilia Perez” will compete with Cynthia Erivo (“Wicked”), Marianne Jean-Baptiste (“Hard Truths”), Mikey Madison (“Anora”), Demi Moore (“The Substance”) and Saoirse Ronan (“The Outrun”) for best actress recognition.

The leading actor award will see Adrien Brody (“The Brutalist”), Ralph Fiennes (“Conclave”), Timothee Chalamet (“A Complete Unknown”), Colman Domingo (“Sing Sing”), Hugh Grant (“Heretic”) and Sebastian Stan (“The Apprentice”) all compete. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



LIFESTYLE

Ange Gnacadja, 31, collects cotton in a farm in Soclogbo. Benin, one of Africa’s leading cotton producers, is betting in part on local cotton processing to boost its economic growth. — AFP



FILM

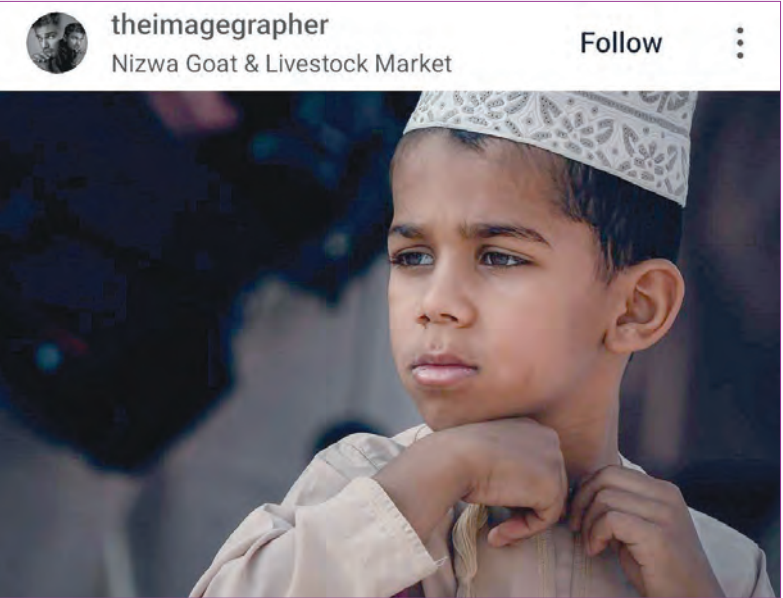
US-French actor Timothee Chalamet poses on the red carpet upon arrival for the UK Premier of the movie “A Complete Unknown” at the BFI Southbank in London. — AFP



AUCTION

A Christie’s art handler shows a Gibson Electric Guitar known as ‘The Oxblood’ during a photocall ahead of Christie’s auction “Jeff Beck: The Guitar Collection”, in London. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

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Kazakhstan says part of Aral Sea has nearly doubled in volume



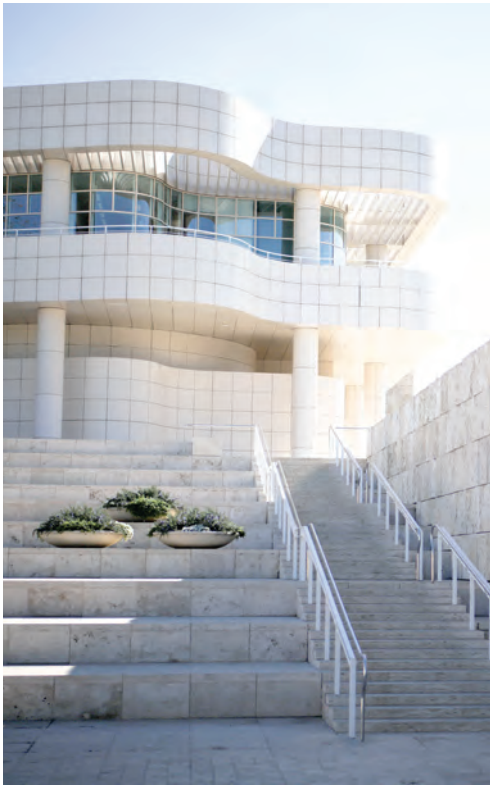
KAZAKHSTAN said on Monday the northern part of the Aral Sea had nearly doubled in volume since 2008, a rare environmental success story in a region plagued by pollution. The Aral Sea between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan was once the fourth largest lake in the world, before Soviet irrigation projects caused most of it to dry up. The transformation of the freshwater sea — once 40 metres (130 feet) deep and spanning 68,000 square kilometres (176,000 square miles) -- has been dubbed one of the world's worst environmental catastrophes. Since 2008, the volume of water in the northern, smaller part of the sea has "increased by 42 per cent and reached 27 billion cubic metres (950 billion cubic feet)", the Central Asian republic's water resources

ministry said. This was "thanks to the implementation of Phase One of the (Northern) Aral Sea conservation project", the ministry said. The scheme, funded jointly by the Kazakh government and the World Bank, has involved constructing new infrastructure to prevent water flowing out of the sea. In 2024 alone, authorities directed 2.6 billion cubic metres of water from the Syr Darya river into the northern part, reducing the salinity of the water by a factor of almost four and promoting aquatic life, it said. Efforts to save the Aral Sea have required close cooperation between the five former Soviet republics of Central Asia, who set annual water quotas for the Amu Darya and Syr Darya, the two rivers that feed the Aral. — AFP



LA's Getty Center's art safeguarded as Palisades fire rages

THE J. PAUL Getty Museum's priceless collection of artwork, which includes paintings by Van Gogh, Rembrandt, Monet and Degas, once again found itself in the path of destruction as the Palisades fire spread. As fire officials issued evacuation orders for the Brentwood neighbourhood on Friday night, the museum's collection remained safely inside the Getty Center's fortress of travertine stone, fire-protected steel and reinforced concrete. "It would be extremely foolish to try and remove artwork," said Katherine E. Fleming, president and chief executive of the J. Paul Getty Trust, noting how quickly fires spread, with little notice. "It's complicated enough moving really, really valuable artworks around under the best of circumstances. The last thing we would try to do is move them out en masse, on the eve of an event of this sort." The Palisades fire has burned over 23,000 acres (93 square km) from the sea to the mountains, damaged or destroyed some 5,000 structures since it began a week ago and was just 17 per cent contained as of Tuesday morning. It is responsible for eight confirmed deaths. The centre, which opened in 1997, was designed to withstand wildfires. Everything from the construction materials to the landscaping was built with fire safety in mind. It safely withstood one test, in October 2019, when a brush fire started along Interstate 405 near the Getty Center's access road, and burned 745 acres (3 square km), earning the name the Getty Fire. The 12-building Getty Center complex sits high above the access road, at a safe distance from the Santa Monica Mountains' flammable chaparral. The art galleries are located about 200 meters (655 feet) away from the arrival plaza, with its expansive barrier of travertine marble imported from Italy. "This was chosen for the construction of the site, not simply because it's beautiful and Italian, but also because it is highly fire-resistant as a construction material," said Fleming.



As soon as fire officials issue a "red flag" warning, signalling conditions of low humidity and high winds that are ripe for a dangerous conflagration, Fleming said the

Getty Center grounds crew begins irrigating its grounds, so the soil is wet and provides a buffer against a fire. A million-gallon (3.8-million litre) water storage tank on the site supplies the sprinkler system, and provides a resource for emergency fire suppression. The Getty's "minimalist" landscape design, with sparse vegetation, reflects concern about wildfires. "A lot of the plants that we have in immediate proximity to the buildings are either things that will burn out super swiftly," said Fleming, "Or are plants that retain a lot of water themselves, like Acacias, which hold water and actually can help you fight the fire if you have them close to your buildings." **STEEL, STONE AND TAPE** The walls are built of reinforced concrete or fire-protected steel, and the buildings are designed with automatic fire doors designed to seal off an area and prevent a fire from spreading, according to an article published after the Getty Fire in 2019. Roofs are covered with stone aggregate, which is fire-resistant. "We have taken such care to make sure that the galleries themselves are actually pretty much the safest place for a work of art to be in the middle of a fire," said Fleming. The museum's collection includes more than 400 European paintings produced before 1900, and reflects Getty's affinity for Italian Renaissance and 17th-century Dutch and Flemish paintings, according to its website. The collection was expanded, after J. Paul Getty's death in 1976, to include examples of early Italian and Dutch works, French impressionists and the examples of the Spanish and German schools. It also has one of the largest photo collections in the world. Among its best-known works are Vincent van Gogh's Irises, Rembrandt's An Old Man in Military Costume and Claude Monet's Wheatstacks, Snow Effect, Morning. — Reuters

FEATURES

ART FOR CHARITY ASPIRES TO BREAK GUINNESS WORLD RECORD

BY YERU EBUE

ON THE morning of January 15, 2025, the tranquil waves of Barr Al Jissah lapped rhythmically against the shore, their melodies harmonising with the soft whispers of the breeze and the gentle applause of palm leaves dotting the pristine beach. Under a sun that began its ascent over the horizon, artist Mahnoush Abbasgholy, affectionately known as Mia, donned her most comfortable outfit, embodying both professionalism and creativity. A palpable buzz filled the air, with curious onlookers and eager media members gathering around the Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah lawn, a picturesque backdrop for an unprecedented artistic endeavour aimed at not only breaking a Guinness World Record but also supporting a charitable cause.

This event is open to the public for viewing, and no registration is needed. Visitors are encouraged to document Mia as she embarks on this momentous journey, making them important witnesses to her creative process.

In this serene setting, excitement mingled with anticipation as crowds watched Mia prepare to outline what would become a magnificent 40-metre-long painting, a visual spectacle celebrating the stunning landscapes and rich cultural heritage of Oman. “This is the first time that I’m doing something of this scale. I will have to rely on my 32 years of experience in making art to make this happen,” Mia shared during an earlier press meeting. The dedicated artist had honed her skills over the years, with the last seven years spent falling in love with the Omani landscape—a passion she sought to translate onto canvas.

Dubbed “Sparkles of Oman,” this unique art event marks the fifth anniversary celebrations of Oman’s Renaissance Day, embodying both creative expression and community spirit. Mia’s ambitious endeavour will stretch over seven days, from sunrise to sunset, where she intends to paint for more than 15 hours a day.

The result will not only aim for the elusive world record but will also serve to highlight Oman’s breathtaking beauty and cultural depth. “It will be a vibrant journey through the Sultanate of Oman’s breathtaking scenery, using a medium of contemporary art,” she explained, detailing how she plans to weave gold and silver leaf into her masterpiece, adding layers of texture and vibrant colours.

As visitors gathered, the significance of the event was underscored by the royal patronage of notable figures including Sayyid Khalid bin Hamed al Busaidy, chairman of Sabco Group, who opened the gala at 10:30 a.m. alongside Shaikh Ahmed bin Suwaidan al Balushi. This high-profile backing not only elevated the event’s prestige but also highlighted its importance in the broader context of community and culture.



At the heart of this creative endeavour lies Mia’s commitment to philanthropy. The completed artwork will be auctioned, with proceeds benefiting the Children First Association, an NGO dedicated to supporting vulnerable youth in Oman. “I love that the proceeds from the art auction will benefit children. That is already commendable and gives me more motivation,” she expressed, reflecting on her newfound role as an artist for a cause.

A CELEBRATION OF CULTURE AND BEAUTY

Mia’s work is a colourful celebration of emotion, culture and the beauty of nature, often drawing inspiration from the breathtaking landscapes and rich heritage of Oman. With each brushstroke, Mia aims to invoke not just visual appeal but also a deep emotional resonance, inviting viewers to engage with her art on a personal level.

As she prepares for her monumental project, Mia anticipates the thrill of transforming her creative vision into reality using buckets of paint that will splash across the expansive canvas. The concept of using vast quantities of colour excites her; each bucket represents a different hue, a spectrum that will breathe life into her artistic tribute to Oman. “I want each colour to vibrate, to tell a story, and to create a dialogue with the viewer,” she explains, highlighting her belief that colour can evoke a sense of wonder and connection.

Mia envisions herself immersed in the process, layering the pigments to create texture and depth, making her abstract collage a living entity that evolves over the days of her painting marathon. She

embraces the challenge of working meticulously from sunrise to sunset, knowing that the intensity and focus required will only amplify her passion. “With every brushstroke, I will pour my heart into this artwork, utilising the natural surroundings as both inspiration and a canvas for expression,” she enthuses.

The anticipation of mixing colours and experimenting with various techniques fuels her excitement as she prepares to embark on this creative journey. This event also marks a significant milestone for Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah, as it celebrates 20 years of exceptional hospitality in Oman. General Manager Philippe Kronberg emphasised the resort’s commitment to community engagement, stating, “We are thrilled to support this Guinness World Record attempt and to kick off our 20th-anniversary celebrations with an initiative that not only inspires but also gives back to the community.”

As Mia embarked on her marathon of creativity, the scene at Barr Al Jissah was alive with energy, a fusion of artistry and philanthropy that promised to leave an indelible mark on Oman’s cultural landscape. From the soothing sounds of the waves to the vibrant colours on canvas, “Sparkles of Oman” is poised to shine brightly in the world of art and beyond, embodying the spirit of a nation committed to cultural expression and community support.

Would Mia break the world record? We will need to track her progress, and it would be a genuine celebration if she succeeds. However, we won’t know for sure until January 21.