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Observer

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THE RISE OF OMANI WOMEN IN SPORTS

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SUNRISE 06:39 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR 05:23 AM
DHUHR 12:26 PM
ASR 03:42 PM
MAGHRIB 06:08 PM
ISHA 07:19 PM

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INBRIEF

HM GREETINGS TO LITHUANIA LEADER

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Gitanas Nauseda of the Republic of Lithuania, on the occasion of his country's National Day.

In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere wishes for the President to succeed in leading this friendly country and achieving all the aspirations of his people. His Majesty also wished to advance the close relations between the two countries towards more partnerships and investments in various sectors.



AL BASHAYER FESTIVAL CONCLUDES

The UAE's Hamloula, Hadbah, Al Anood and Al Faydah emerged victorious on the final day of the eighth edition of the Al Bashayer Festival for Purebred Arabian Camel Racing 2025, held on Saturday. The closing ceremony at Al Bashayer Arabian Camel Racecourse in the Wilayat of Adam was presided over by His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan. As one of the most prestigious sporting events in the Sultanate of Oman, the festival attracts a significant number of camel owners and trainers from across the GCC. **DETAILS ON P10**

RARE RECOGNITION IN SPACE SCIENCE

One of the near-earth stars in the vast sky will soon be named by an Omani astro scientist, thanks to the efforts of Khalfan bin Hamad al Malki and the Oman Astronomical and Space Society to have placed the Sultanate on top of the world. Khalfan al Malki has become the first member of the Oman Astronomical Society to make a preliminary detection of a near sky object (P226gRJ), in response to Nasa's continuous efforts to scan the sky in search of near-earth asteroids which include small, irregular and rocky objects left over from the formation of the solar system. This object has been recorded by Nasa and Khalfan will be given the opportunity to name the object. In addition, Khalfan and the others who are participating in this project will be issued with a certificate from Nasa. **DETAILS ON P2**

Move to raise awareness on Omani architecture

Motivates society to understand cultural values

THE OFFICE of HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Honorary President of the 'Programme of Promising Omani Startups' is organising the Architecture Revival Initiative at Oman Across Ages Museum in the Wilayat of Manah, from February 19 to 22.

The Architecture Revival Initiative comes as a continuation of the journey initiated by the Bilarab bin Haitham Award for Architectural Design in its first and second sessions and the Oman Pavilion Design Competition at Expo Japan 2025, in enriching the architectural field in the Sultanate of Oman. The initiative targets people involved in architectural design including specialists, experts and students.

NATIONAL IDENTITY
The initiative also aims to raise awareness of the value of architecture as a component of national identity and motivate society to explore Omani architecture and understand its cultural, social and economic impact and highlight innovation in architecture by reviewing the methods used by Omanis throughout different eras and encouraging their use in a way that enhances architectural heritage and presents successful models that combine innovation with heritage.



The initiative will be held at Oman Across Ages Museum from February 19 to 22.

The initiative also aims to engage different society segments in debate about architecture and provide a conducive environment for creativity and leadership. Another significant objective of the initiative is creating opportunities for architectural cadres in the Omani labour market. Over the course of three days, the initiative

will discuss three main axes that serve the architectural field and revive it in the Sultanate of Oman. The axes are continuing education, innovation and market readiness. Those interested in the field of architectural design will be able to attend and benefit from the activities of the Architecture Revival Initiative starting on Thursday.

SIXTH HOSTAGE-PRISONER SWAP UNDER GAZA CEASEFIRE



A former Palestinian prisoner, released as part of the sixth hostage-prisoner exchange, flashes the V for victory sign as he is welcomed by friends and relatives upon arriving at the European Hospital in Khan Yunis. — AFP

KHAN YUNIS: Palestinians released three Israeli captives on Saturday in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian inmates freed by Israel, completing the latest swap despite fears the Gaza truce deal was near collapse. An AFP journalist saw masked Hamas fighters parade the captives onto a stage before a crowd in Gaza's southern city of Khan Yunis.

Israeli-American Sagui Dekel-Chen, Israeli-Russian Sasha Trupanov and Israeli-Argentine Yair Horn were made to make statements into a microphone before being handed over to the Red Cross and taken back home to Israeli territory, after being held for more than 16 months.

Clutching gift bags given by Hamas, the three men, flanked by fighters, called for the completion of further exchanges under the ceasefire deal.

Not long after, a busload of Palestinian prisoners departed Israel's Ofer Prison and were greeted by a cheering crowd in the occupied

West Bank city of Ramallah, an AFP journalist said. More buses took inmates from an Israeli prison in the Negev desert to the Gaza Strip, according to another journalist.

Saturday's swap, the sixth since the truce took effect on January 19, came after Hamas had threatened to pause releases over alleged Israeli violations, while Israel had threatened to resume the war if it did.

Out of 251 captives seized during the October 7, 2023 attack on Israel that sparked the war, 70 remain in Gaza, including 35 the Israeli military says are dead.

Later in the day, hundreds of Palestinians freed by Israel reached Khan Yunis, southern Gaza, where they made victory signs and waved to a jubilant crowd. In the West Bank, one freed inmate, Amir Abu Radaha, said: "I've returned to my family and I've returned anew, born again." Charged with intentionally causing death, Abu Radaha had spent almost 32 years in jail.

SEE ALSO P6

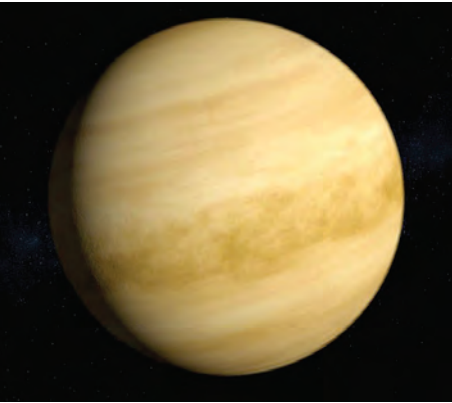
Venus to reach its peak brightness over Omani skies on Sunday

MUSCAT: Venus, the brightest planet we see from Earth, will reach its maximum brightness in the evening on the western horizon after sunset on Sunday.

According to the Oman Astronomical Society: "Venus is the third brightest celestial body after sun and moon, with an apparent brightness of -4.52 magnitude, making it about 30 times brighter than Sirius, the brightest star in the sky after the sun."

Venus will reach its peak brightness during this cycle and it will be in the crescent phase, which is the phase during which it reflects a large amount of sunlight due to the angle at which the sun forms to the Earth and Venus.

During this period, the planet will be at its closest point to the Earth, which makes it brighter and clearer, especially when observed with a telescope that will reveal the features of its surface covered with



dense clouds.

Venus will remain visible in the evening sky until mid-March as it will gradually disappear on March 16, to reappear on the eastern horizon as a 'morning star' at the end of the same month.

This period is a golden opportunity for astronomy enthusiasts to observe one of the most beautiful celestial scenes, whether with the naked eye or using telescopes that will reveal the details

of the crescent phase that the planet is passing through.

Venus is classified as one of the inner planets because it revolves within the Earth's orbit around the sun and it is the second closest planet to it after Mercury.

Due to its proximity to the sun, it cannot be seen all night like the rest of the outer planets, but rather appears either before sunrise on the eastern horizon or after sunset on the western horizon.

OMAN



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FREE



SHORT TAKES

OMANI SCIENTIST
MAKES HISTORIC
SPACE DISCOVERY

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KHALFAN BIN
HAMAD AL MALKI

astro scientist

In a groundbreaking achievement, Omani astro scientist Kalfan bin Hamad al Malki has become the first member of the Oman Astronomical and Space Society to make a preliminary detection of a near-Earth object (P226gRJ). His discovery has been officially recorded by Nasa, unique honour of naming

granting him the the celestial body.

This recognition highlights Oman’s growing presence in global space research, thanks to the continuous efforts of the Oman Astronomical and Space Society. The discovery comes as part of Nasa’s ongoing mission to identify near-Earth asteroids — small, irregular, rocky objects left over from the formation of the solar system.

As a reward for his contribution, Kalfan and other participants in the project will receive an official certificate from Nasa.

The discovery was made through the International Astronomical Search Collaboration (IASC), a citizen science programme that distributes time-lapse images of the sky to researchers worldwide. These images allow scientists to identify and track main belt asteroids, near-Earth objects and trans-Neptunian objects.

Speaking to Observer, Dr Al Malki expressed his excitement over the achievement.

“The feeling is indescribable. Discovering a celestial body and being able to name it is an extraordinary moment. I am grateful to the Oman Astronomical and Space Society for this opportunity. Oman, God willing, will continue making significant contributions to space science.”

The IASC’s Asteroid Search Campaigns enable global citizen scientists to make original astronomical discoveries. Each campaign runs for a month, during which participants analyse data and search for new asteroids.

With this latest achievement, Oman continues to carve a name for itself in the realm of space exploration, paving the way for future discoveries in astronomy and space sciences.

OMAN RANKED
AMONG TOP TOURIST
DESTINATIONS IN MEA

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, FEB 15

Oman was among the best performing tourist destinations in the Middle East and Africa (MEA), according to UN Tourism. Oman saw an increase of 15 per cent in international tourism arrivals compared to 2019. The country was sixth best behind Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan.

The main challenges facing the tourists include high transport and communication costs, travel requirements, economic factors, political crisis and extreme weather. Oman received a total of 3.89 million visitors by the end of December 2024, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

According to NCSI’s report, visitors from the UAE topped the list at 1,185,880 arrivals. Indian nationals followed with 623,623 visitors, while Yemeni travellers ranked third with 203,055 entries. Oman with its strategic position becomes a regional tourism hub, attracting visitors from neighbouring Gulf countries and beyond, NCSI said. The surge in arrivals reflects the country’s efforts to enhance its tourism sector through improved infrastructure, promotional campaigns and streamlined visa procedures.

8th edition of Indian Ocean
Conference begins today

THE 8th edition of the Indian Ocean Conference (IOC) takes place in Muscat today under the theme ‘Voyage to New Horizons of Maritime Partnership.’

The two-day conference will highlight the importance of inclusivity and building new partnerships in the maritime sector and is expected to host participants from over 60 countries and international organisations, reflecting the region’s strategic importance and the need for collaborative solutions.

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, is a member of the presidium committee for the conference, underscoring Oman’s leadership role in this initiative.

The Indian Ocean Conference (IOC) is an annual international platform dedicated to promoting regional cooperation and addressing challenges in the Indian Ocean region. It brings together, heads of government, senior officials, private sector representatives, scholars and experts to discuss issues of mutual concern, including maritime security, economic development,



The event fosters dialogue and collaboration among countries bordering the Indian Ocean, as well as global powers with strategic interests in the region

environmental sustainability and geopolitics.

The event fosters dialogue and collaboration among countries bordering the Indian Ocean, as well as global powers with

strategic interests in the region.

Since its establishment in 2016, the IOC has served as a significant forum for fostering dialogue and cooperation. Countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Australia, Oman and Singapore have played central roles in its proceedings. The conference addresses traditional security concerns, such as naval power and territorial disputes, alongside emerging challenges like climate change, natural disasters and economic disruptions.

The discussions will focus on promoting regional cooperation, enhancing maritime security, amplifying the voice of the Global South and tackling major challenges in the maritime sector.

The conference will explore strategies to improve trade corridors, ensure freedom of navigation, foster environmental sustainability and leverage technological advancements for port security and governance. Participants will have opportunities for bilateral and multilateral engagements to strengthen relationships and identify new areas of collaboration.

Oman’s local content drive fuels institutional growth

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 15

The Sultanate of Oman has placed significant emphasis on local content to drive the growth of Omani companies, aligning with Oman Vision 2040. By enhancing local added value, this initiative strengthens Omani institutions, increases productivity and stimulates the national economy.

With incentives and privileges for Omani enterprises, local content plays a crucial role in job creation, Omanisation and boosting economic sectors. A prime example is Karwa Automobiles Company, which has demonstrated remarkable growth, with local purchases exceeding RO 2.5 million since its commercial operations began.

In 2024 alone, Karwa awarded contracts worth over RO 1.1 million to 93 local small and medium enterprises (SMEs), reinforcing its commitment to local supply chains and reducing import dependency.

Dr Ibrahim bin Ali al Balushi, CEO of Karwa, highlighted the strategic

The SMEs Development Authority has also played a key role in promoting local content through targeted initiatives, resulting in a surge in SMEs



Till Dec 2024 about 145,750 SMEs were registered, with 123 small enterprises scaling up to medium-sized businesses

importance of investing in local suppliers, noting that collaboration with Omani institutions strengthens the industrial sector and yields long-term benefits.

The SMEs Development Authority has also played a key role in promoting local content through targeted initiatives, resulting in a surge in SMEs securing business opportunities. As of December last

year, 145,750 SMEs were registered, with 123 small enterprises scaling up to medium-sized businesses and five medium enterprises expanding into large corporations.

To sustain SME growth and maximise local value-added contributions, Oman continues to implement initiatives that bolster the manufacturing sector — a key pillar of Oman Vision 2040.

EA study warns of declining Steppe Eagle population

SALALAH: A specialised study on the endangered Steppe Eagle (Aquila nipalensis) has shown a decline in its numbers worldwide due to habitat loss, poaching, environmental pollution, unintentional poisoning, electrocution and collision with electric poles.

A study conducted by a research team from the Environment Conservation Office at the Environment Authority (EA) stated that Dhofar Governorate faces increasing environmental challenges, calling for the results of the study to contribute



Steppe eagle is a migratory bird that crosses the skies of Oman during the migration seasons

to developing policies that protect wildlife and reduce negative impacts on the environment.

Mohammed bin Ghanem Nabhan Habis, Environmental Systems Supervisor at the Environment Authority, explained that the Steppe Eagle is a migratory bird that crosses the skies of the Sultanate of Oman during the migration seasons. These types of birds of prey feed on carrion, rodents, medium-sized mammals, other birds, various reptiles and insects.

He explained that the study

aimed to understand how the steppe eagle interacts with waste disposal sites and to assess the environmental and health impacts resulting from the birds’ reliance on these sites, including the risks of poisoning resulting from ingesting plastic waste or harmful chemicals.

He stated that the study included three waste disposal sites in Dhofar Governorate and the highest number was recorded at 1,122 individuals in 2019. The study also included a comparison of the results recorded during the winter between 2018 and 2022. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



Dr Al Maamari honours a winner of the Bahla Quran Competition

BAHLA HONOURS WINNERS OF QURAN COMPETITION

BAHLA: The Wilayat of Bahla in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate held a ceremony on Saturday to honour the winners of the Bahla Quran Competition. Organised by the Waqf Quran School in collaboration with the Office of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, the event took place under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. The competition aimed to nurture a love for the Holy Quran among the youth, encourage excellence in memorisation and recitation, and instill Islamic values and Quran ethics in society. It also served as a platform to discover and refine Quran talents.

Salim bin Abdullah Al Humaimi, Director of the Waqf Quran School in Bahla, highlighted that over 700 male and female participants across various age groups took part in the competition, with 277 advancing to the final evaluation. The participants competed in seven levels, categorised based on age and memorisation ability.

The first level was dedicated to memorising the entire Holy Quran, while the second to fourth levels involved memorising 20, 15 and 10 parts, respectively, open to all ages. The fifth level targeted students in the twelfth grade and below, the sixth level was for eighth-grade students and the seventh level was designed for fourth-grade students. — ONA

TRA LAUNCHES FIELD VISITS TO MONITOR TELECOM SERVICES

MUSCAT: The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has launched field visits to measure several indicators, including social media, signal strength and coverage, data speed, and voice service.

The plan will include visiting centres in all governorates of Oman, and five tourist areas such as the Al Ashkharah, Harat al Aqr in Nizwa, Jabal Shams, Dhofar and Muscat Expressway, Sur-Qurayat Road, Nizwa, Ibri, Rub al Khali, Haima, Al Duqm, Adam, Thamrait, Bukha, Muscat, Suhar and Duqm airports, and the industrial estates of Suhar, Sur Free Zone and Ibri.

The team will monitor the video broadcast speed, quality, access time for the most important applications, access time for bands and the video playback time.

In the level of signal strength and coverage, the percentage of 4G coverage and the percentage of 5G coverage will be measured. In data speed, the speed of downloading and uploading data, response time and in voice service, the quality of sound and the percentage of failed calls will be measured. The field visits conducted by TRA have increased and will increase by 197 per cent in 2024.

OMAN WARMS AS GLOBAL TEMPERATURES HIT RECORD HIGH

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, FEB 15

Temperatures across several governorates in Oman are steadily climbing, with many regions now experiencing highs in the late 20s and beyond, according to Oman Meteorology’s daily forecast. In the capital, Al Seeb is expected to reach a maximum of 25°C and a minimum of 20°C, while Al Amerat will see 28°C and 19°C.

Other forecasts include Suhar (26°C/19°C), Nizwa (32°C/18°C), Sur (35°C/19°C), Al Duqm (28°C/19°C),

Haima (31°C/18°C) and Salalah (25°C/19°C). Some areas, like Al Kamil W'al Wafi, have already surpassed the mid-30s. Even traditionally colder regions are warming up, with Jabal Shams reaching 18°C/11°C and Saiq recording 20°C/13°C. The world has just experienced its warmest January ever, according to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), citing data from the Copernicus Climate Change Service and the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

(NOAA). Despite the cooling effects of a La Niña event, January 2025 recorded temperatures 1.75°C above pre-industrial levels, surpassing January 2024, which was influenced by a warming El Niño. This marks the 18th month in the last 19 where global average surface air temperatures exceeded 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. The year 2024 was officially the warmest on record, briefly touching the 1.5°C threshold for the first time, according to WMO’s global analysis of six international datasets.

Oman advances smart agriculture, empowerment

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, FEB 15

AS part of ongoing efforts to promote sustainable agriculture and empower rural communities, the General Directorate of Agricultural Wealth, Fisheries and Water Resources in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, through its Rural Development Department, organised a field visit to the Smart Agriculture Project in the Wilayat of Al Kamil W'al Wafi.

The visit brought together rural women supervisors and members of Omani Women's Associations, providing them with firsthand insights into modern agricultural technologies and their role in economic and social empowerment — aligning with Oman Vision 2040's goals for rural development and agricultural innovation.

The initiative aims to modernise agricultural practices and enhance food security by introducing smart farming techniques that improve efficiency and sustainability. Participants explored cutting-edge technologies such as advanced irrigation systems, smart soil and crop monitoring sensors, hydroponics, vertical farming and innovative harvesting methods. Discussions also highlighted the potential of value-added agricultural industries in boosting the local economy by transforming raw produce into marketable products. Recognising the vital role of women in



Advancing smart agriculture and women's empowerment in Oman

food security and rural economic growth, the programme provided knowledge and training opportunities to strengthen their participation in the agricultural sector. Asiya bint Mufid Al Shuaibiyah, a member of the Omani Women's Association in the Wilayat of Sur, emphasised the significance of such initiatives, She said, “We extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to the organisers for this valuable experience. Learning about smart farming techniques and modern farm management has been insightful. We hope such programmes will further enhance women's contributions to agriculture and sustainable development.” The visit also facilitated discussions on

expanding food processing industries and creating new economic opportunities for women in agriculture, helping them establish small businesses and improve household income. These efforts align with Oman Vision 2040's strategic objectives to promote agricultural sustainability, enhance food security and transition towards a knowledge- and technology-driven economy. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) office in Oman acknowledged the initiative, praising the country's commitment to sustainable agricultural practices and women's empowerment. The General Directorate of Agricultural Wealth, Fisheries and Water Resources plans to expand such programmes across the Sultanate of Oman, with additional training workshops and collaborations with the private sector to support innovative agricultural projects. By embracing smart agriculture, Oman is not only addressing environmental and climate challenges but also creating new avenues for women's economic participation. These initiatives lay the foundation for a more resilient and self-sufficient agricultural sector, fostering sustainable growth and enhancing the well-being of rural communities. Smart agriculture is one of the effective solutions to address environmental and climate challenges; and enhance the efficiency of agricultural production in Oman.

CPA launches drive against misleading ads

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 15

The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has launched its 'Misleading Advertisements' campaign under the slogan “Beware, it may not be what it seems.” The initiative aims to identify deceptive advertising practices, highlight their impact and equip consumers with the skills needed to verify ads before making purchasing decisions. Targeting consumers across all demographics, as well as service providers and advertisers, the campaign addresses the growing challenge of misleading ads. These advertisements often exploit trust, presenting false or incomplete information to achieve quick profits at the expense of credibility. The campaign emphasises the importance of consumer awareness and



engaging marketing and deceptive tactics, businesses can build long-term trust and maintain a strong reputation. The campaign also educates industry stakeholders on advertising standards, particularly in digital platforms, which have become a dominant force in modern marketing. “Misleading advertisements create false impressions, leading to consumer frustration and disappointment. The Authority is committed to protecting consumers and

the ability to assess the authenticity of advertisements. Additionally, the initiative promotes ethical and transparent advertising practices among companies. By distinguishing between

ensuring a fair balance between buyers and merchants within a legal framework,” said Maznah bint Rashid Al Maamariyah, Director of Communication and Media. The campaign focuses on four key aspects. They related to defining misleading advertisements, their types and legal regulations governing them. Teaching consumers how to verify ads before making purchases, differentiating between engaging advertising techniques and misleading content and setting standards for digital advertising to maintain transparency and fairness. A misleading advertisement exaggerates or omits key details, causing consumers to purchase products that differ from what was advertised. This often results in complaints, loss of trust and reputational damage for businesses.

Oman to host inaugural classics vintage car rally from Feb 17-21

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

Oman is set to welcome its first-ever classic car rally, Oman Classic — The First Drive, from February 17 to 21, featuring 12 legendary automobiles from Germany, Switzerland, the UK and the UAE. This event promises a visual treat for motor enthusiasts as these vintage masterpieces take to the streets of the Sultanate of Oman. The lineup includes rare automotive icons from the late 1950s and early 1960s, such as the Mercedes-Benz 300SL Gullwing and

Roadster, the Jaguar E-Type and the Mercedes-Benz Pagoda. The rally is organised by Al Mamari & Kiefer Investments LLC (AKI) in collaboration with Germany’s HK Engineering and is supported by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Oman Automobile Association (OAA) and Muscat Municipality. Zainab Al Maamari, the event's organiser, shared her remarks to Observer that the rally aims to celebrate Oman's heritage through these historic vehicles. “Classic cars are rich in history, and their owners appreciate heritage and strong roots,



The lineup includes rare automotive icons from the late 1950s and early 1960s

much like Oman itself. We envision this as an annual event, exploring different parts of the country each year,” she said. As a prelude to the rally, a prestigious Gala Night of Oman Classics will be held under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. This exclusive evening will bring together collectors, industry leaders and enthusiasts to celebrate automotive excellence, luxury and heritage. A key highlight of the event is the presence of

Hans Kleissl, a world-renowned expert in classic Mercedes-Benz restoration and the mastermind behind HK Engineering, the only company dedicated exclusively to the full restoration of the legendary 300SL Gullwing. “With decades of experience, his expertise has helped preserve and elevate the 300SL's legacy as one of the most sought-after collector cars in history,” added Al Maamari. The public will have a rare opportunity to view these iconic machines up close on February 21 at 6 pm at the Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM).

SPOTLIGHT

THE RISE OF OMANI WOMEN IN SPORTS

SIHAM AL SAIDI

SPORTS

HAVE long been a male-dominated field, but Omani women are steadily breaking barriers and making significant strides across various athletic disciplines. From athletics to football, female athletes are proving their talent and determination, earning recognition on the global stage. Despite these successes, challenges such as societal expectations, limited opportunities, and inadequate professional support remain obstacles to further progress.

One of the key milestones in women's sports in Oman is their increasing participation in international competitions. Notable athletes like Fatma al Nabhani and Aysha al Saidi have become role models, inspiring young girls to pursue their athletic dreams. "When I started training, I never imagined I would compete at an international level," says Aisha al Saidi,

an international table tennis (TT) referee. "The support from my coaches and teammates has been crucial, but women's sports still need more visibility and investment."

Despite these achievements, deep-rooted societal perceptions continue to limit opportunities. In certain communities, there remains resistance to women participating in competitive sports. "Many people still believe that sports are not suitable for women, especially those that require physical effort," explains Fatma al Balushi, a university basketball player. "This mindset discourages many girls from following their passion." Family restrictions are another major hurdle. Many parents hesitate to allow their daughters to participate in sports, particularly in public events. Amna al Hadrami, a supervisor in female hostels at a college, highlights this challenge: "Every year, we struggle to convince parents to let their daughters join the university's annual championships. Even when they agree, they insist that no photographs be taken of their daughters during the event."

A critical issue affecting female athletes is the lack of financial support and training facilities. Compared to their male counterparts, women's teams often face limited resources and sponsorship opportunities. "We train hard, but we don't receive the same level of financial support," says Aysha al Saidi. "For international competitions, I often have to buy my own tickets. If we want real progress, we need better investment in training programmes and sponsorship deals."

However, change is on the horizon. Omani sports organisations are beginning to recognise the importance of supporting female athletes. A significant development has been the introduction of mandatory female representation in sports federations. Women are now playing a key role not only in competitions but also in organising and managing sports events. Additionally, initiatives such as university leagues and government-backed programmes are providing young girls with more opportunities to engage in athletics. For Omani women in sports, the path forward is both promising and challenging. While they continue to break barriers and achieve success, greater social acceptance, financial backing, and media recognition are needed to sustain progress.

By addressing these issues, Oman can cultivate an inclusive sports culture where female athletes can thrive and inspire future generations.

GAME CHANGERS

SHORT TAKES



The conference aims to enhance the skills of nutritionists in therapeutic nutrition

LEADERSHIP, NUTRITION CARE CONFERENCE HELD

MUSCAT: The ‘Leadership and Therapeutic Nutrition Care Conference,’ organised by the Ministry of Health, concluded in Muscat under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Planning and Health Organisation. The two-day event was hosted by the Directorate General of the Royal Hospital.

The first day of the conference focused on a variety of topics, including evidence-based nutrition for youth and the elderly, weight loss medications, nutrition in tumors, artificial intelligence in clinical nutrition, and research opportunities in the field. It also explored change management in clinical nutrition and food security programmes.

On the second day, the conference covered essential nutrition for newborns and children in neonatal intensive care, breastfeeding studies, critical care nutrition, the role of diet in digestive system diseases, eating disorders, and equipping clinical nutritionists with quality tools.

Experts from the Kuwaiti Ministry of Health and Egypt presented lectures at the event, with 120 participants from nutrition and multidisciplinary health groups from both public and private health institutions, as well as educational and academic sectors.

The conference aims to enhance the skills of nutritionists in therapeutic nutrition, support health awareness, and activate digital health education aligned with Oman Vision 2040’s goals. — ONA

AL MAZYOUNA WINTER FORUM KICKS OFF

AL MAZYOUNA: The ‘Al Mazyouna Winter Forum 2025’ officially opened in the Wilayat of Al Mazyouna, Governorate of Dhofar, in collaboration with various governmental and private agencies. The four-day event kicked off with a vibrant mix of artistic and cultural segments, reflecting the region’s rich heritage. The forum will feature a diverse range of heritage, artistic, and entertainment activities at key locations, including Al Mazyouna Public Park, Sharut Rock, and the Al Mazyouna Governor’s Office Hall. Under the auspices of Saif bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Wali of Al Mazyouna, the forum aims to enhance the region’s economic and tourism activities, support local productive families, and preserve the state’s authentic heritage and cultural identity. — ONA

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, OAQHE SIGN MoU TO BOOST EDUCATION QUALITY

MUSCAT: Cambridge University Press & Assessment has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Oman Association for Quality in Higher Education (OAQHE), aimed at enhancing the quality of higher education in Oman. The agreement, under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahroutiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, was formalised during the Cambridge Experience in Higher Education event in Muscat recently.

This collaboration will focus on strengthening English language proficiency through initiatives like the Cambridge English



The MoU aims at enhancing the quality of higher education in Oman

Skills Test and Linguaskill, with tailored solutions for students and educators. Both organisations are committed to supporting academic excellence in alignment with Oman

Vision 2040.

Natasha Arain, Commercial Director for the Middle East and Africa Region at Cambridge, expressed excitement over the partnership, emphasising its potential to improve English language standards in Omani higher education. Prof Ali Al Badi, Chairman of OAQHE, outlined key objectives: enhancing language tools, developing innovative educational solutions, conducting joint research, and forming a committee for sustained progress.

This partnership is set to play a pivotal role in advancing Oman’s educational landscape.

60 graduates celebrate success in MoSD initiative

A special ceremony was held to mark the graduation of 60 male and female participants from the second batch of the ‘Be with Us for Them’ initiative, aimed at rehabilitating people with disabilities. The event was graced by Dr Laila bint Ahmed Al Najjar, Minister of Social Development (MoSD), and patron of the ceremony, who highlighted the significant contributions of the private sector, government institutions, and various companies in providing job opportunities for people with disabilities after completing their training.

Dr Laila emphasised that the training programme was instrumental in preparing individuals for their roles in the workforce. By equipping them with valuable experience and skills, the initiative has successfully enabled many to secure positions in the private sector, which has played a key role in their employment and inclusion in the labour market.

The programme offered training in several key areas including customer service, office management, document printing and copying, and electronic archiving. In total, 21 male and female participants with various disabilities, including mental, motor, and hearing impairments, underwent training at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) in Sohar, North



The ‘Be with Us for Them’ initiative is a collaborative effort between the MoSD and the Specialised Human Development Center



Dr Laila graced the graduation of 60 participants for the ‘Be with Us for Them’ initiative

Al Batinah Governorate. Another 39 participants, also with mental, motor, and hearing disabilities, received training at the Mohammed Al Barwani Training Institute in Al Athaiba, Muscat Governorate.

The ‘Be with Us for Them’ initiative is a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), and the Specialised Human Development Center, aiming to contribute to Oman Vision 2040. The initiative works to enhance the social responsibility framework by empowering people with disabilities and aligning with national priorities focused on inclusivity and workforce participation.

During the ceremony, success stories of graduates who have secured jobs in various sectors were shared, along with a visual presentation.

Hatem bin Hamad Al Taie, Editor-in-Chief of Al Roya Press and Publishing Foundation, delivered a presentation on the success of the initiative, revealing that 50 per cent of the graduates - 30 individuals - have been employed, with 9 in the government sector and 21 in private companies. A breakdown of employment locations showed that 22 individuals were employed in Muscat Governorate and 8 in Sohar.

Dina Al Khalili, General Manager of Al Jisr Charitable Foundation, also spoke at the event, affirming that the ‘Be with Us for Them’ initiative reflects a shared vision of empowering people with disabilities and enabling them to contribute meaningfully to society. She emphasised that true empowerment begins with an inclusive environment, which the Foundation has worked to create through its support of the initiative.

Aisha bint Badr Al Fazari expressed gratitude on behalf of the graduates, acknowledging the support and encouragement they have received since joining the programme. She shared how the initiative had bolstered their self-confidence, and prepared them to confidently enter the job market.

Launched in September 2022, the ‘Be with Us for Them’ initiative has successfully placed 57 individuals in paid training and job opportunities through the participation of 13 private sector entities.

Construction begins on Yanqul Viewpoint Project

YANQUL: Construction has officially begun on the Yanqul Viewpoint Project, launched by Al Dhahirah Municipality in the Wilayat of Yanqul, Governorate of Al Dhahirah. The project, located along the road connecting Yanqul and Suhar, is expected to be completed within a year.

Eng Abdullah bin Suleiman al Hashemi, Director of Yanqul Municipality Department,



The RO 1,680,000 project will include various facilities catering to all age groups

shared that the project spans 120,704 square metres, with 65,000 square metres dedicated to development in Al Nahda Square along the Suhar-Yanqul Road. The project, costing RO 1,680,000, will include various facilities such as green spaces, an open theatre, cafes, playgrounds, water fountains, walking paths, barbecue areas, and prayer rooms, catering to all age groups.

The Yanqul Viewpoint Project is part of Al Dhahirah Governorate’s ongoing efforts to enhance recreational services, expand green spaces, and foster investment.

It aims to showcase the natural beauty of the region and contribute to sustainable growth, featuring unique designs that complement the area’s geography and landscape. — ONA

Wadi Bani Khalid: Where nature and adventure meet

YAHYA AL SALMANI

WADI BANI KHALID, a tourist attraction in the north of Oman, is currently being visited by dozens of tourists from around the world. It has become a priority on the tourist list as it is situated between the charming mountains and vast agricultural oases.

Located 250 km from Muscat, reaching Wadi Bani Khalid has become easier with the development of the highway connecting Muscat to Al Sharqiyah North Governorate.

Four-wheel drive vehicles are not necessary to reach this valley, making it accessible to tourists of

all ages. The entrance to the valley is just 500 metres away from the beautiful green oasis.

Tourists visit this exceptional site daily to witness the abundant water flowing through the winding mountain paths year-round.

The natural features of the site also provide ample camping grounds. The water abundance makes this site resemble a natural swimming pool within a green agricultural oasis.

Sitting and relaxing spots are designated along the mountain valley, with a dedicated rescue team ensuring the safety of all tourists.

At the entrance, signs emphasise



Water abundance in Wadi Bani Khalid makes it resemble a natural swimming pool within a green agricultural oasis

the importance of wearing modest clothing and warn against swimming or diving in deep waters.

During this exceptional atmosphere in the various wilayats of Oman, tourists from around the world flock to Wadi Bani Khalid to enjoy the moderate temperatures and high water levels.

Visitors to Wadi Bani Khalid can explore geological sites such as Maql Cave and approximately 12 water springs, including Ain Al Sarooj, Ain Al Lathb, Ain Kanara, Ain Al Muntajar and Ain Ghalala.

There are also 56 Falaj, with notable ones being Aflaj Al Haili, Al Fardh, Al Sarooj and Al Jarbi.

Improvements have been made to the village, including a small hostel for tourists to spend nights on the northern bank of the valley. A restaurant on the western bank overlooks natural lakes where tourists can swim and dive under the supervision of a rescue team.

Water ponds serve as the main source of irrigation for the agricultural oases surrounding the valley, supporting the cultivation of dates, mangoes, lemons, onions, garlic and bananas.

Beekeeping is also a significant economic activity in the area.

— (Picture by Yahya al Salmani)

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A woman holds a statuette of Lady Justice holding a Serbian national flag, in Kragujevac. — Reuters

THOUSANDS RALLY IN CENTRAL SERBIA OVER CORRUPTION

KRAGUJEVAC: Tens of thousands of students descended upon the central Serbian city of Kragujevac on Saturday in the biggest show of anger yet against the government over a deadly railway disaster in November. In the three months since 15 people were killed when a roof collapsed at a newly-renovated train station in the city of Novi Sad, mass demonstrations have grown into Serbia's biggest protest movement in years.

On Saturday morning in near-freezing temperatures, students arrived in Kragujevac from across Serbia, by bus and even on foot from the capital Belgrade some 140 km away, beating drums, blowing whistles and holding up the country's flag. The protesters planned to blockade one of the city's main boulevards for 15 hours and 15 minutes, in a symbolic tribute to the victims. By noon, all roads leading to Kragujevac were jammed with traffic. Joined by teachers, farmers and other workers, the students have enjoyed support from the wider public, with many Serbians blaming the tragedy on corruption and nepotism within the government. — Reuters

UN WARNS AGAINST REGIONAL WAR OVER DR CONGO



ADDIS ABABA: UN chief Antonio Guterres on Saturday demanded the Democratic Republic of Congo's "territorial integrity" be respected and a regional war avoided, at an African summit the day after Rwandan-backed fighters seized a second DRC provincial capital. With international pressure mounting on Rwanda to curb the fighting in eastern DR Congo (DRC), the conflict was set to dominate the African Union summit as it opened in Addis Ababa. Having routed the Congolese army to capture the key provincial capital of Goma in North Kivu last month, the Rwandan-backed armed group pushed into neighbouring South Kivu.

"The fighting that is raging in South Kivu — as a result of the continuation of the M23 offensive — threatens to push the entire region over the precipice," Guterres told leaders in an address to the summit, without mentioning Rwanda. He urged dialogue, saying that a regional escalation must be avoided "at all costs", and that there was "no military solution". "And the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the DRC must be respected." — AFP

SUDAN'S RSF ATTACKS CAMP AS BATTLE LINES HARDEN

CAIRO: Sudan's Rapid Support Forces have attacked the famine-stricken Zamzam displacement camp, residents and medics say, as the paramilitary tries to tighten its grip on its Darfur stronghold while losing ground to the army in the capital, Khartoum. The latest fighting has hardened battle lines between the two forces in a conflict that threatens to splinter Sudan after plunging half the population into hunger and displacing more than one-fifth since April 2023. This week, as it attempts to consolidate its

territory, the RSF has staged multiple attacks on Zamzam residents, according to three people at the camp. Medical aid agency MSF has confirmed seven deaths from the violence, while residents say dozens may have been killed. Medics are unable to perform surgery inside Zamzam, and travel to al-Fashir's Saudi hospital, a frequent RSF target, has become impossible, MSF said. Zamzam is located near al-Fashir, capital of North Darfur and the army's last remaining foothold in the wider Darfur region.

The RSF says Zamzam is a base for the Joint Forces, former rebel groups now fighting alongside the army. The Joint Forces said in a statement on Thursday that they were not present in the camp. The Sudanese government said the army, Joint Forces, and other volunteers were able to push the RSF back from Zamzam on Wednesday. The RSF has targeted Zamzam with artillery for months, causing some people to dig holes for shelter, according to one resident and a video shared by activists. — Reuters

Zelensky warns US not to cut Europe out of talks

UKRAINIAN

PRESIDENT Volodymyr Zelensky on Saturday warned the United States not to strike a deal with Russia "behind our backs", as he urged Europe to stand up and make its voice heard. Speaking at a gathering of top policymakers in Munich, the Ukrainian leader issued a rallying cry for Europe to take responsibility for its own security — including by eventually forming a continental army.



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky receives a standing ovation during the Munich Security Conference in Munich. — Reuters

The plea from Zelensky came a day after he met US Vice President JD Vance as Kyiv scrambles to ensure it is not sidelined in Washington's push to wrap up the three-year war. "Ukraine will never accept deals made behind our backs without our involvement," Zelensky said in a keynote speech. "No decisions about Ukraine without Ukraine. No decisions about Europe without Europe." US President Donald Trump stunned allies and upended the status quo of US support for Ukraine this week when he announced he would likely soon meet Russian leader Vladimir Putin to start truce talks.

Zelensky cautioned Putin would seek to use Trump as a "prop in his own performance" — possibly by trying to get him to Moscow for Russia's WWII victory parade in May. Kyiv has urged Washington to come up with a "common plan" to confront Russia but Zelensky suggested there was not yet a joint stance after his meeting with Vance. Zelensky is pushing for "security guarantees" from both the United States and Europe to ensure that any peace deal does not allow Moscow just to



Ukraine will never accept deals made behind our backs without our involvement. No decisions about Ukraine without Ukraine. No decisions about Europe without Europe

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY

restart the war later. "Putin cannot offer real security guarantees, not just because he is a liar but because Russia in its current state needs war to hold power together," he said. The Ukrainian leader said forceful sanctions on Russia and building up Ukraine's military could help secure peace, and said he was "open" to eventually having European peacekeepers.

European leaders backed up Zelensky's call to action — and for their continent to play a key role. "There will only be peace if Ukraine's sovereignty is secured," German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told the Munich Security Conference. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk pressed Europe to establish its own stances on Ukraine and security as the United States sows doubts about its commitment to Europe. "Europe

urgently needs its own plan of action concerning Ukraine and our security, or else other global players will decide about our future," Tusk said. "This plan must be prepared now. There's no time to lose."

Nato boss Mark Rutte said that leaders in Europe were "now getting into the concrete planning phase" of possible security guarantees. US officials have said that Ukraine will not be left in the cold after three years of battling Russia's attack. Vance said after his sit-down with Zelensky that Washington was looking for a "durable, lasting peace" that would not lead to further bloodshed in coming years.

But US officials have sent mixed messages over Washington's strategy after Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth appeared to rule out Ukraine joining Nato or retaking all of its territory. That has sparked major worries in Kyiv and Europe that Ukraine could be forced into a bad deal that leaves the continent facing an emboldened Putin. In a bid to keep Washington close, Kyiv has held talks over granting access to its rare earth mineral deposits in return for future US security support. Zelensky said the negotiations were ongoing after his meeting with Vance.

Meanwhile, Russia's army on Saturday claimed to have captured a village in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region close to a road linking key towns as Moscow slowly eats up territory. Despite suffering heavy battlefield losses, the Russian army has been creeping forwards in eastern Ukraine for more than a year as it looks to cut off access to Pokrovsk. — AFP

GAZA TRUCE MARKS NEW SWAP



RAMALLAH: Hamas released Israeli hostages Iair Horn, Sagui Dekel Chen and Sasha (Alexander) Troufanov in Gaza on Saturday and Israel freed some 369 Palestinian prisoners and detainees in exchange, after mediators helped avert a collapse of the fragile ceasefire. The three Israelis were led onto a stage with Palestinian Hamas fighters armed with automatic rifles standing on each side of them at the site in Khan Younis, live footage showed, before they were taken back into Israel by Israeli forces.

Shortly afterwards, buses carrying freed Palestinian prisoners and detainees departed Israel's Ofer jail in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. The first bus arrived in Ramallah to a cheering crowd, some waving Palestinian flags.

Buses carrying some of the hundreds of Palestinian freed prisoners and detainees, some flashing victory signs as they hung from the windows, arrived later at the European Hospital in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip. — Reuters

MAINTAINING STABILITY

Lebanon says 25 arrested after attack



Lebanese authorities said that more than 25 people had been arrested following an attack on a UN convoy the day before that wounded two peacekeepers, including the force's outgoing deputy commander. "More than 25 people have been arrested by Lebanese army intelligence", with one detained by the security services, Interior Minister Ahmad al Hajjar said. "This does not mean these detainees carried out the attack... but the investigations will show who is responsible," he said. — AFP

MAJOR CRACKDOWN

Myanmar to deport 10,000 scam workers



A Myanmar ethnic group said it was preparing to deport 10,000 people linked to cyber scams in the area it controls to Thailand as part of a crackdown on the illicit compounds. "We have announced to get rid of all scams from our soil. We are now implementing it," Karen Border Guard Force (BGF) spokesman Major Naing Maung Zaw said. The deportations would be carried out in groups of 500 per day. — AFP

MILITANT VIOLENCE

Raid on Pakistan fort kills four soldiers



A militant raid on a Pakistan fort killed at least four soldiers on Saturday, a senior intelligence official and the military said, the latest in a streak of attacks targeting state forces. More than 1,600 people were killed in attacks in Pakistan in 2024 — the deadliest year in almost a decade — according to the Center for Research and Security Studies. The attack on Tall Fort in Miran Shah began around 10:00 am. — AFP

The New York Times

Army helicopter might have missed critical instruction



MARK WALKER

The writer is an investigative reporter for The New York Times

NATIONAL Transportation Safety Board officials said on Friday that they were investigating what appeared to be confused communications inside the cockpit of an Army Black Hawk helicopter moments before it collided with an American Airlines jet last month near Ronald Reagan National Airport. NTSB investigators are still trying to determine whether and how the miscommunications contributed to the collision that killed all 67 people in both aircraft over the Potomac River on January 29. The American Airlines regional jet was arriving at National Airport from Wichita, Kansas. The Black Hawk crew was carrying out a training mission so the pilot could perform a required annual evaluation flight. During a news conference, the investigative board’s chair, Jennifer Homendy, gave two instances of when the air traffic controller had given instructions to the Black Hawk three-person crew on how to weave through the busy National Airport airspace that the crew may not have completely received. The first instance, Homendy said, involved the helicopter crew members possibly not hearing the air traffic controller inform them that the American Airlines jet was “circling” to switch runways for landing. She said investigators

could hear that word when replaying the controllers’ communications but noticed it was missing from the Black Hawk’s cockpit voice recorder. The Airplane, American Airlines Flight 5342, was making its final descent after having been transferred from Runway 1, a regular landing strip for commercial regional jets, to Runway 33, a strip used far less often. Later, Homendy said, the air traffic controller told the Black Hawk helicopter to pass behind the plane that was seconds away from landing. But based on cockpit voice recorder data from the helicopter, a “portion of the transmission that stated ‘pass behind the’ may not have been received by the Black Hawk crew,” Homendy said. That is because the Black Hawk’s microphone key was depressed for 0.8 seconds, which meant that those words were “stepped on” — or not audible to the crew during that time — she said. Moreover, it appears the instructor pilot, later identified as Chief Warrant Officer Andrew Eaves, interpreted the controller’s instruction as telling the Black Hawk crew to move toward the river’s east bank. He relayed that to the pilot, identified as Capt. Rebecca M. Lobach. That is not, in fact, what the controller said, according to Homendy. This instruction from the controller to the Black Hawk was critical because, at that

The NTSB is also investigating possible discrepancies with the Black Hawk’s altitude readings. The altitude is another crucial piece of the puzzle because the helicopter was in a designated path where the maximum height was 200 feet above the river.

point, the control tower had been alerted that the two aircraft were veering perilously close to each other. The NTSB is also investigating possible discrepancies with the Black Hawk’s altitude readings. The altitude is another crucial piece of the puzzle because the helicopter was in a designated path where the maximum height was 200 feet above the river. Yet the mid-air collision appeared to be at about 300 feet, meaning the helicopter was out of position. Homendy said that during the flight, Eaves and Lobach appeared to give conflicting information on their location. At 8:43, when the Black Hawk was west of the Key Bridge, Lobach indicated the helicopter was at 300 feet while the instructor pilot reported that it was at 400 feet. “Neither pilot made a comment discussing an altitude discrepancy,” Homendy said. “At this time, we don’t know why there was a discrepancy between the two. That is something that the investigative team is analysing.” At 8:45 p.m., as the Black Hawk passed over Memorial Bridge, Eaves told Lobach that they were at 300 feet and needed to descend to 200 feet, Homendy said. Lobach affirmed that they would descend to 200 feet. Investigators do not yet know why the helicopter did not move to that altitude.

FOSSILS PRESERVE SKIN, SCALES FROM ANCIENT SEA MONSTER



SARA NOVAK

The author is a science journalist focused the life sciences and palaeontology.

With serpentine necks, flippers and a mouth full of needle-sharp teeth, plesiosaurs have captured imaginations since palaeontologists uncovered the first specimen more than two centuries ago. Their skeletal anatomy is well documented, but their external appearance has largely remained a mystery. Now researchers have conducted the first

detailed analysis of plesiosaur soft tissue, offering a more complete look at what these real-life sea monsters might have looked like when they lived from 215 million to 66 million years ago.

Published February 6 in Current Biology, the findings suggest that some plesiosaurs had humanlike skin on their tail regions and fishy scales on their flippers, similar to the features of some living sea turtle species. The research highlights an evolutionary detour that runs counter to other ancient marine reptiles like ichthyosaurs and mosasaurs, which evolved away from scales in favour of skin, or much smaller scales, to allow them to move more efficiently through their marine habitats.

“These are iconic animals, and the way we reconstruct them hasn’t changed for nearly 200 years, so this is a big update,” said Miguel Marx, a doctoral student at Lund University in Sweden and lead author of the paper. “It changes our perspective on their evolutionary history and how they adapted to life in the ocean.” Marx and colleagues analysed three soft-tissue skin samples, each about the size of a fingernail, from a flipper and the tail of a 183 million-year-old long-necked plesiosaur specimen. The species is to be named in a future peer-reviewed paper. But the samples came from the Posidonia Shale in Germany, where the ocean chemistry preserved soft tissues. Some of the tissue remains were so flawlessly fossilised that researchers could see skin cell nuclei under the microscope.

While it’s difficult to know for sure how extinct animals would have manoeuvred through their environments, Marx said that the scales observed on the plesiosaur had probably stiffened the trailing edge of the flipper, allowing for enhanced propulsion through the water, another feature shared with today’s sea turtles.

Plesiosaurs may also have used scales on their flippers for traction and protection as they sifted through sand and vegetation on the ocean floor for food. Previous research suggests that preserved marine trackways found near Ancona, Italy, came from plesiosaurs, another indication that they might have spent time feeding at the bottom of the ocean.

Stop shuning parties deemed extreme: Vance

VICE PRESIDENT JD VANCE urged European leaders to end the isolation of far-right parties across the continent, an extraordinary embrace of a once-fringe political movement with which the Trump administration shares a common approach on migration, identity and internet speech. The address stunned and silenced hundreds of attendees at the Munich Security Conference, a forum where top-level politicians, diplomats and analysts had gathered expecting to hear President Donald Trump’s plans for ending the war in Ukraine and Europe’s defence against a rising Russian threat.

The vice-president singled out his German hosts, telling them to drop their objections to working with a party that has often revelled in banned Nazi slogans and has been shunned from government as a result. He did not mention the party, the Alternative for Germany, or AfD, by name, but he directly referred to the long-standing agreement by mainstream German politicians to freeze out the group, parts of which have been formally classified as extremist by German intelligence. “There is no room for firewalls,” Vance said, bringing some gasps in the hall. He punctuated the message by meeting on Friday with Alice Weidel, the AfD’s candidate for chancellor in this month’s election, as well as other German leaders. Altogether, it was an unusual intervention in the domestic politics of a democratic American ally. The vice-president offered what may be a preview under Trump of a redefinition of a trans-Atlantic relationship built on postwar bonds of stability between allied governments. Vance aggressively challenged the diplomats in the hall in Munich, telling them that their biggest security threat was not from China or Russia, but “the enemy within”.

Vance’s remarks echoed those of hard-right leaders across Europe and the anti-establishment messages that Russia has pumped onto social media in an effort to destabilise democratic politics in America and Europe. Trump, speaking to reporters in the Oval Office on Friday, called it “a



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AfD supporters attend the election campaign launch of the Alternative for Germany party in Halle, Germany.

very brilliant speech.” “I heard his speech, and he talked about freedom of speech,” Trump said. “And I think it’s true in Europe; it’s losing. They’re losing their wonderful right of freedom of speech. I see it. I mean, I thought he made a very good speech, actually, a very brilliant speech.” Vance is the second figure in the Trump administration to try to chip away at the efforts to isolate the far right before the German elections on Feb. 23 by attempting to stigmatise the AfD.

Vance’s remarks drew a furious response from German leaders across most party lines. They immediately rejected Vance’s suggestion that they should drop their firewall against the AfD, pointing to past comments by the party’s members in support of the National Socialists, or Nazis. Boris Pistorius, the German defence minister and a member of the governing Social Democrats, deviated from his planned speech on Friday afternoon to rebuke Vance. “If I understood him correctly, he is comparing parts of Europe with authoritarian regimes — this is not acceptable,” Pistorius said, drawing sustained applause. “This is not the Europe, not the democracy, where I live.” Thomas Silberhorn, a member of Germany Parliament for the Christian Social Union, the Bavarian sister party of the Christian Democrats, said: “This is our business. My message

to the US administration is: German extremists who explicitly refer to National Socialism — part of the AfD — are clearly anti the US that liberated us from National Socialism.” In his speech, Vance seemed to lump those restrictions into a long list of what he called European deviations from democratic values and attacks on free speech. Those failures, Vance said, included efforts to restrict misinformation and other content on social media, and laws against abortion protests that he said unfairly silenced Christians. “If you are running in fear of your own voters,” Vance said, “there is nothing America can do for you.” European intelligence agencies have raised alarms about what they consider to be a systematic effort by Russia at mass disinformation and propaganda, often by using fake social media accounts to sow division and doubt about democratic systems. Vance ridiculed and diminished that threat. “It looks more and more like old entrenched interests hiding behind ugly Soviet-era words like misinformation and disinformation, who simply don’t like the idea that somebody with an alternative viewpoint might express a different opinion, or, God forbid, vote a different way, or, even worse, win an election,” he told a largely stony audience.

OPINION

The man who is struggling to stay focused



DR HAMED
AL SINAWI

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

A 34-year-old man came to my clinic saying he struggles with meeting deadlines, staying organised and focusing during meetings at work. He changes jobs frequently, often forgets appointments, and makes impulsive decisions in relationships which leaves him overwhelmed and frustrated.

As a child, he was always ‘hyperactive’ and ‘easily distracted,’ which affected his confidence and performance but he was never formally diagnosed with ADHD.

A recent study published in The British Journal of Psychiatry revealed that adults diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) have a significantly reduced life expectancy — 7 years shorter for men and 9 years shorter for women — compared to those without the condition.

This disparity was explained by other factors such as smoking, unmet mental and physical health needs, and lack of adequate treatment and not the presence of the ADHD diagnosis alone.

The study also showed that adults with ADHD are more likely to be unemployed, face financial difficulties, encounters with the criminal justice system and homelessness. They are also more likely to have a higher risk of suicide, premature death and risky

behaviours such as smoking, substance use and alcohol consumption.

So, what can be done to improve the quality of life of people with ADHD?

The first step is to enhance public and professional awareness about the condition. Most people believe that ADHD only occurs in children and that the symptoms are mainly related to hyperactivity. However, it often persists into adulthood with some changes in the symptoms observed in children.

While hyperactivity tends to diminish with age, inattention, impulsivity and emotional dysregulation become more prominent. These challenges can severely impact a person’s ability to maintain stable employment, relationships and a sense of self-worth.

Raising awareness can help reduce the stigma surrounding ADHD and encourage individuals to seek help. Early diagnosis and intervention are critical in managing the condition effectively.

Unfortunately, many adults with ADHD go undiagnosed because they believe their symptoms are due to personal failings or because healthcare providers fail to recognise the signs.

Medication can help regulate attention and impulse control, while Cognitive-behavioural

A recent study published in the British Journal of Psychiatry revealed that adults diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder have a significantly reduced life expectancy

therapy provides practical skills to manage time, organise tasks and address emotional challenges.

Support groups can also provide a sense of community and shared understanding for individuals dealing with similar struggles.

Education systems can provide a strong foundation during childhood so adverse outcomes associated with undiagnosed or untreated ADHD in adulthood can be prevented.

Workplace initiatives such as flexible deadlines, structured routines and tools like task management software can make a significant difference in productivity and job satisfaction for employees with ADHD. In some cases, working remotely or finding roles that align with their strengths can also be beneficial.

Encouraging healthy habits, such as regular exercise, balanced nutrition and good sleep hygiene can have a positive impact on both physical and mental health. Additionally, targeted interventions to reduce substance use and promote mental health awareness can help mitigate the risks associated with ADHD.

In my opinion, people with ADHD can thrive and make meaningful contributions to their communities and workplaces if they get the right support at the right time.

SWEDEN’S IMMIGRANTS ON EDGE AFTER MASS SHOOTING

NIOUCHA ZAKAVATI

The motive behind Sweden’s deadliest mass shooting may never be known but the fact that almost all of the victims had foreign backgrounds has sparked concern among the country’s immigrants. On February 4, 35-year-old Rickard Andersson entered the Campus Risbergska adult education centre in Orebro and killed 10 people before turning his gun on himself.

Police have not publicly named the victims but their foreign backgrounds soon came to light when their names and photos were published in Swedish newspapers and on social media.

Salim Iskef, a 28-year-old Syrian nursing assistant who came to Sweden in 2015. Niloofar Dehbaneh, 46, an Iranian nursing assistant living in Sweden since 2011. Elsa Teklay, a 32-year-old nursing assistant who arrived in 2015 from Eritrea. Bassam Al Sheleh, a 48-year-old baker who left Lebanon nine years ago. Ali Mohammed Jafari, 31.

Kamar, 38, who fled Somalia’s civil war 17 years ago. Aziza, a 68-year-old Kurd, who taught math at Campus Risbergska.

Three other women have not been identified in the media. One of them, a 55-year-old, was of Bosnian origin.

Mirna Issa, 31, was in the middle of a Swedish language class for foreigners at Risbergska when the first gunshots rang out around midday.

“Why? We’re just students. Students don’t do anything” bad, she said the day after the shooting, as she, her husband and daughter lay down flowers near the school.

Campus Risbergska offers Swedish classes for foreigners as well as secondary school classes for adults.

Margaretha, a 68-year-old pensioner in Orebro, spoke as she paid her respects to the victims three days after the shooting.

As soon as she heard about the attack, she immediately thought racism could be behind it.

“There are a lot of immigrants who come here to learn Swedish or learn a trade. It’s really terrible. There are no words,” she said, her eyes hidden behind sunglasses. Police have remained tight-lipped about the killer’s possible motive.

The day after the tragedy, police said there was no indication of an ‘ideological motive’ before apologising for the ‘unfortunate phrasing’.

They said a racist motive was one of several being investigated. — AFP

Oman: A beacon of wisdom, hospitality and integrity

I’m not the easiest person to get along with. I have high standards, and little patience for incompetence, and I don’t hold back when criticising governments — especially my own. I love my country, England, but I am also its harshest critic. Many English people find me difficult, and I often feel the same about them. My few English friends are intelligent, successful people who somehow put up with me. Even my wife will admit I’m not easy.

That’s why I remain amazed at how the Omani people have welcomed me without judgment. Despite my sharp edges, Omanis treat me with kindness and respect. I’ve travelled widely, yet I have never experienced such genuine warmth and generosity anywhere else. It would not be an exaggeration to say I’ve fallen in love with Oman and its people.

At a time when the world seems consumed by conflict and self-interest, Oman stands apart. It is a country built on honesty, hospitality and strong community values. Violent crime is almost nonexistent. Under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Oman proved that a nation can be stable, fair and caring without losing its identity.

Oman is one of the few places where honesty still means something. While corruption is rampant in much of the world, Oman has remained remarkably clean.

Whether in business, government, or daily life, fairness and trust are deeply ingrained. It is the least corrupt country in the Arab world, a testament to its leadership’s commitment to integrity and transparency.

Unlike many nations where



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Oman has shown that wisdom not war is the key to lasting success. It remains one of the rare nations that balance tradition with modernity

politicians are only out for themselves, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq prioritises his people. Oman’s government provides free healthcare and education — not just as political promises, but as a reality. Leaders are connected to the needs of their citizens rather than detached elites ruling from a distance.

Omani hospitality is legendary. Here strangers invite you into their homes for coffee and dates, not out of politeness but because generosity is part of the culture.

In an increasingly individualistic world, Oman has preserved its sense of community. Neighbours look out for one another, and family connections matter more than material wealth. No one is left to struggle alone.

Oman’s approach to development also sets it apart. While some nations bulldoze through progress — Dubai, for example — Oman balances modernisation with cultural and environmental preservation. Growth benefits everyone, not just the elite.

While many countries thrive on war and political games, Oman has chosen a different path — one of peace and diplomacy. It has remained neutral in regional conflicts, acting as a mediator rather than taking sides. Yet its government does not shy away from condemning injustice, as seen in its stance against Israel’s treatment of Palestinians.

Unlike nations that rely on military might for influence, Oman demonstrates that real power comes from wisdom and dialogue. This has earned it international respect as a country that leads with reason, not aggression.

While others flex their military muscles or impose economic threats, Oman has built lasting

relationships through trust and stability.

Many nations struggle to retain their traditions in the face of globalisation, but Oman has found a perfect balance.

Its cities blend modern infrastructure with traditional architecture, and its people take pride in their heritage. Progress here does not come at the cost of identity.

Oman proves that a country can grow and evolve while remaining true to its values.

In contrast, the US, particularly under Donald Trump, could learn a thing or two from Oman. Empires built on military strength eventually collapse, leaving their people lost with no guiding values. Real strength is not found in war or economic dominance but in good governance, culture and the principles that hold a nation together.

America’s threats of economic and military aggression, whether excessive import tariffs or threats of obliteration, have cost its respect worldwide.

Instead of increasing its influence, it is strengthening its rivals. The global winds of change are shifting but Trump seems dangerously unaware.

Oman has shown that wisdom not war is the key to lasting success. It remains one of the rare nations that balance tradition with modernity, peace with strength and hospitality with integrity.

While many countries struggle with corruption, division and short-sighted leadership, Oman continues to shine as an example of what a nation can be. In a world often driven by self-interest, Oman proves that kindness, honesty and community are the true foundations of strength.

You have all the gear, but any idea?



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

All the gear but no idea,' is a bit of a caustic comment by the professionals, aimed at those who, for example, turn up at the gym with the latest 'Gymshark' or 'Adidas' gear on, looking the part, but with no idea of what they are doing, or even worse, are 'posers,' there to see, or be seen.

Research tells us that wearing 'labels' is primarily a mental, then subsequently a physical wellness issue, which is entirely understandable. Well, it's understandable if you don't feel good about yourself in either respect, but particularly if you stand in front of the mirror and see yourself as, for example, a 5 out of 10. It only costs money, doesn't it, to buy a bit of that good gear? At least it will make you feel better about yourself and then who knows, maybe getting to the gym will work the oracle for you and a year later you look more like a 10 than ever before. You look good... you feel good... your transformation is complete! Unfortunately, the reality is mostly very different!

Marketing agencies prey on your insecurities, these being driven by what Dr Sandra Dalton-Smith, in her book 'Sacred Rest,' as she exhorts her readers to recover their lives and restore their sanity, affirming that "the way you dress doesn't just affect the way that others perceive and treat you," but

that looking sharp will positively transform your self-esteem and that's exactly what the ad agencies want to hear!

The problems occur when the dreams of change, even though you are pushed by the trite motivational posters around the gym walls screaming at you: "No pain, no gain;" "Sore today, gone tomorrow;" and "Look in the mirror. That's your competition." By the time you have finally realised that you don't look like Amr Diab, or Ahlam al Shamsi, on their worst day, you are broke, disheartened and worse-off than when you started.

By then, the people around you who don't go to the gym will tell you you're wasting money, you'll dream of chocolate, eating it, drinking it, even bathing in it. You'll want a burger, fries and KFC. You want rest... not circuits, treadmills, weights, the steam room or the spa. Hmm, well maybe the spa, but the dream is gone. The illusion is now as real as the fog on a mirror, the bubbles in the spa and the amount of truth in your head as you debate a choice, briefly, between deadlifts and donuts.

Did you know that in 2023, the total activewear market alone, in the USA alone, was \$412 billion and with the US having 40 per cent of the global market, that means the global spend then and each year since, has been in excess of \$1 trillion. That's madness

Research tells us that wearing 'labels' is primarily a mental, then subsequently a physical wellness issue, which is entirely understandable

when you consider that in this sector, most of the apparel is thrown out long before it's worn out.

Even outside the gym, in offices everywhere, those ubiquitous men in white coats tell us that "displays of luxury consumption lead to favourable social interactions," which plays a key role in why less secure people are more likely to 'bust their budget,' to buy the best brands. Research studies determined that males in 'GQ' gear, must be regarded as more dominant, while females who focus on high fashion apparel and accessories, are seen as more ambitious, younger and more attractive, and marketers and ad agencies will gleefully perpetuate such expressions, ad infinitum.

Fashion though, is a slightly different, even more expensive realm. It has always been a factor in mankind's vanity. It's a bit of a 'chicken and egg' scenario as to whether 'fashionable' and 'quality' cloth came first as transformed together by Yves Saint Laurent, Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Prada and the like, or whether brand patronage through style and innovation came first?

I guess the message is... "Clothes maketh the man," or the woman, to some extent, but we all know that doesn't change what's underneath, does it?

WITH BLITZ OF POLICIES, TRUMP GOES BEYOND PROJECT 2025'S GOALS

BRAD HEATH AND MIKE SPECTOR

US President Donald Trump's early actions in office have in many cases expanded upon proposals from Project 2025's conservative policy blueprint that the Republican tried to distance himself from on the campaign trail, a Reuters review found.

Reuters identified more than a dozen Trump executive orders or other policy moves that exceed in ambition or scope what Project 2025's 900-page "Mandate for Leadership" book advocated in a series of detailed policy proposals.

The conservative initiative caused an uproar on the campaign trail, with Democrats calling it a set of extremist ideas that would form the basis for Trump's potential second-term agenda if elected. Trump, however, repeatedly distanced himself from Project 2025 during the presidential campaign, saying he had not read the policy blueprint.

While Trump has so far not adopted some of Project 2025's most aggressive ideas, his blizzard of more than 50 executive orders and series of other policy moves during his initial weeks in office have gone beyond some of its other proposals.

For example, Project 2025 recommended "scaling back" roughly \$40 billion of annual US aid spending through the US Agency for International Development, which administers much of America's foreign assistance. But the administration, after tapping billionaire Elon Musk to downsize the federal bureaucracy, has moved to dismantle the agency altogether.

A US judge last Thursday extended for one week a pause on the administration's plan to put thousands of the agency's workers on leave.

Where Project 2025 advocated Congress fund a wall along the US-Mexico border, Trump simply declared an "emergency" and ordered US troops and Homeland Security officials to build it.

Trump has installed one of Project 2025's architects, Russ Vought, as the head of the Office of Management and Budget. Vought last Friday became acting director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and told its nearly 2,000 employees to stop working. Project 2025 had called for the agency's elimination. A union of Treasury employees filed a lawsuit last week seeking to block the stop-work order.

The White House said Trump's moves are the fulfillment of pledges he made on the campaign trail.

The president "had nothing to do with Project 2025," White House spokesperson Harrison Fields said.

"In his first few days in office, President Trump has delivered on the promises that earned him a resounding mandate from the American people — securing the border, restoring common sense, driving down inflation and unleashing American energy," Fields said. — Reuters

Children in the age of social media

Social media has become widely diffused and prevalent, gaining widespread public interest especially among the younger generations. The way we are connected with each other to transmit or receive information is shaped to a great extent by the means of social media. While there are many advantages social media offers, there are also drawbacks that younger generations need to avoid and be aware of.

Due to social media, people gain access to a wide range of facilities and attractions. They connect with their peers, no matter when and where they are, transcending the physical boundaries. They can also get access to trends, entertainment and events that take place elsewhere in the world.

Social media can also serve as a principal tool for people to express themselves, to be creative, and explore their identity. People can share their thoughts, practical knowledge, skill, practice and creative and artistic aptitude with a wide range of audience within their own country or anywhere else in the world.

In addition, learning opportunities amongst young learners can be enhanced by social media. Students do not only have access to educational content, but they can also be mutually and reciprocally active by interactively connecting with experts with special skills, knowledge and mastery of subjects related to students' interests.

However, there is also another dark side on the use of social media. The content put forth on social platforms is not always consistent with our values, morals and ethics. What is acceptable in one culture is not necessarily appropriate for another. While mature adults can weigh the information they come across, young children and teenagers could easily slip into bad habits and be influenced by what is shared in social media.

The downturns, which children and teenagers could be subjected to, include electronic posting of mean-spirited messages, mental



The content put forth on social platforms is not always consistent with our values, morals and ethics.

health issues, lack of freedom from unauthorised intrusion concerns and the condition of being presented to view inappropriate content.

As children's brains are still developing, they are more vulnerable and open to online attacks and peer pressure. But children cannot be stopped at this age from navigating social media platforms. What parents and guardians need to do is to direct, supervise and influence children while searching in these platforms.

Children should be shown how they make use of the advantages of social media, but parents have to set boundaries that indicates and fixes limits on which platforms their children could access and at what age.

Parents should also set limits on the time their children spend on watching or navigating social media daily. It is always important to manage the privacy settings on children's devices so that limits are also set on the content acceptable to

share or engage with, through the use of family accounts or shared devices. By so doing, parents ensure transparency and at same time instill a sense of obligation and willingness amongst their children to accept responsibility and to account for their actions.

We need also to teach children that not all news shared online or through social media platforms are correct and should not share information not transmitted through official sources.

Online activities of children need to be periodically checked while at the same time teaching children how to recognise fake news and incorrect or misleading information.

Children should be taught how to make informed decisions, as they should be advised to use information or social media activities which are consistent with their interests, values and personal goals, rather than engaging in negative online interactions such as hurtful comments.



DR MUSALLAM AL MA'ANI

The author is Dean, Al Zahra College for Women

SPORTS

UAE CAMELS DOMINATE FINAL DAY OF AL BASHAYER FESTIVAL 2025



His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, presided over the closing ceremony at Al Bashayer Arabian Camel Racecourse in Adam

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, FEB 15

THE UAE's Hamouloula, Hadbah, Al Anood and Al Faydah emerged victorious on the final day of the eighth edition of the Al Bashayer Festival for Purebred Arabian Camel Racing 2025, held on Saturday afternoon.

The closing ceremony at Al Bashayer Arabian Camel Racecourse in the Wilayat of Adam was presided over by His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan.

As one of the most prestigious sporting events in the Sultanate of Oman, the festival attracts a significant number of camel owners and trainers from across the GCC. The event, supported by HH Sayyid Asaad, aims to promote equestrian sports in Oman while preserving the nation's cultural heritage.

"The festival reinforces Oman's deep-rooted traditions in line with Royal directives. It fosters an integrated sports environment that encourages younger generations to embrace our authentic customs," HH Sayyid Asaad stated.

The six-day festival saw the participation of over 5,320 camels from across the GCC, competing in 84 races for prestigious prizes, including 20 cars, three daggers, three guns, seven cups, and the coveted golden and silver swords.

February 10: 'Hagayeg' (2 years old, 4 km) — 19 morning races with cash prizes for the top 10; 8



afternoon races featuring cars, a cup and a gun for winners.

February 11: 'Lagaya' (3 years old, 5 km) — 15 morning races with cash prizes; 7 afternoon races with five cars, two cups and a gun for winners.

February 12: 'Yathaa' (4 years

old, 6 km) — 11 morning races with cash prizes; 4 afternoon races with four cars, two cups and a gun for winners.

February 13: 'Thanaya' (5 years old, 8 km) and 'Al Hawl' (6 years and above) — four races in each category with daggers awarded



in the main rounds. Afternoon competitions featured human riders, including a 1,500m sprint and a 12 km main race with an SUV car for the winner.

February 14: Cultural events and exhibitions, including a Bedouin village, a marketing corner and an Entrepreneurs Exhibition with participation from women's associations.

February 15: The grand finale featured four main races (8 km each) for the older category. Two races awarded SUVs and cups, while the winners of the final two races took home the golden sword and silver sword, each along with an SUV.

FINAL DAY RESULTS
Round Winning Camel Owner Timing Prize

1 Hamouloula Hijan Al Riasa (UAE) 12:35.94 Al Bashayer Cup
2 Hadbah Mani bin Ali Al Shamsi (UAE) 12:34.12 Al Bashayer Cup
3 Al Anood Ali bin Khalifa Al Rumaithi (UAE) 12:45.56 Silver Sword
4 Al Faydah Hijan Al Riasa (UAE) 12:23.84 Golden Sword

The Al Bashayer Festival continues to stand as a beacon of tradition and sporting excellence, celebrating Oman's deep connection to camel racing while strengthening regional ties in the equestrian world.

SHORTTAKES



During the ceremony the official logo of the NEOM Asian Winter Games was unveiled.

KSA TO HOST THE 10TH ASIAN WINTER GAMES “NEOM 2029”

FARAH AL ZAHRANI
HARBIN, FEB 15

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) on Friday received the flag of the Olympic Council of Asia, signifying the official handover for the 10th Asian Winter Games to be held in Trojena, NEOM, as the first country in West Asia to host this continental sporting event.

The flag handover took place during the closing ceremony of the 9th Asian Winter Games, held on Friday at the Harbin International Conference Exhibition and Sports Center, in the presence of officials and representatives from 45 Asian countries. His Royal Highness Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki al Faisal, Minister of Sports, President of the Saudi Olympic and Paralympic Committee, and head of the Saudi delegation at the Games, received the Asian flag from the vice-president of the Olympic Council of Asia, Timothy Tsun Ting FOK.

During the ceremony the official logo of the NEOM Asian Winter Games was unveiled.

The design draws inspiration from the mountains of NEOM, symbolising the city’s strength and ambition. The letter “A” connects memorably with the Asian Winter Games and the mountainous environs. Finally, the textures of the NEOM future loop capture the spirit of progress and innovation.

In a press statement, His Royal Highness Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki al Faisal welcomed all Asian nations participating in this edition of the Asian Winter Games. He promised an exceptional event in NEOM, ensuring a memorable experience for everyone.

His Royal Highness said: “The Kingdom is witnessing a significant transformation in the sports sector, thanks to the guidance and generous support provided by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, and His Royal Highness Crown Prince and Prime Minister, Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz. This has resulted in making the Kingdom a preferred destination and an ideal home for major global and continental sporting events.” Many prominent global sports figures attended the closing ceremony, and distinguished leaders and presidents of national Olympic committees across Asia.

Al Arabi edge Kuwait club in Handball Championship

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 15

QATAR'S Al Arabi began their campaign at the 41st Gulf Handball Clubs Championship which is underway in Muscat with a 33/34 win over Kuwait club on Saturday in the opening match at indoor hall at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. With the victory, Qatari team received their first winning points in group B which featured also the hosts Oman club and Dibba Al Huson from UAE. The first half ended for the Qatari team by 18/14 through active movement of Garca Goncalo, Mario Tumeek, Anees AbdulRazzq, and others. In the deciding half, Kuwait club managed to bounce back strongly as they reduced the gap to few minutes through Saif al Adwani but Qatar's Al Arabi kept their domination and ended the match at 33/34 despite the Kuwait club players requests to the match referee to continue the match for few seconds until the end.

Following the opening match, the opening ceremony of the championship took place at the same venue under auspices of HH Sayyid Mohammed bin Salim al Said in presence of Moosa bin Khamis al Balushi, Chairman of Oman Handball Association (OHA) and the Chairman of Oman Club, Muneer al Rawahi alongside with various officials and dignitaries.

The opening ceremony was simple as the participating teams entered to the venue while students raised the flags of their countries. Later, the second match between the hosts Oman Club against UAE's Dibba Al Huson in Group B started for the same group.

The gulf handball event featured event teams following the sudden withdrawal of Bahrain's Al Najma Club due to some private reasons just few days ahead the tournament start. The withdraw of the Bahraini team caused disruption in the technical committee's scheduling as they diced some slight changes in the matches schedule beside changing the rules of placement matches.

On Sunday, Qatar's Al Rayyan club will take on Al Noor club from Saudi Rabia in Group A and the match will kick off at 5:00 pm. On the other hand, Oman's other representative in the tournament Seeb club will begin their participation in the event on Tuesday as they will face Qatar's Al Rayyan club in a tight match. Seeb club will work to utilise the rest days by registering a win in the opener ahead of playing their following match against Al Noor from Saudi Arabia in the final group match on Thursday. Seeb chances are high to secure slot in the next round after Al Najma's withdrawal and they need to register at least one win to qualify for the semifinals. Seeb team had a training preparatory camp in Bahrain in the last period and they had played several friendly matches including one against Dibba Al Huson. The team is in good shape to begin their campaign in the gulf event.

The technical committee decided after the approval of all participating teams to



release a revised schedule for placement from 5th to 7th positions after Al Najma's withdrawal. According to the new changes of the technical committee, the third-place finisher of Group A will play against the fourth-place finisher from Group B while the winner of the placement match will face the third-place finisher of Group B to determine

positions 5th and 6th. Positions 1st to 4th will remain unchanged.

Moosa al Balushi, Chairman of OHA said that Gulf tournaments considered as vital chance for gathering of the teams in one place. “ These kind of sporting events acted as great platform to bring people from the Gulf countries together in an exceptional atmosphere. This is the true value of the championship which is held currently in Oman and it is expected to feature intense competition between the teams striving to reach the podium,” he added.

“The tournament featured participation of the best clubs from the region. In previous years, the Gulf Handball Championships for Clubs are considered among the best in terms of technical quality with top players and clubs participating. Oman Club, as the host, prepared well both organisationally and technically for the event beside Seeb club which is another Omani representative. Best wishes for the Omani club in this event to progress into the finals,” he said.

Major Sporting Event

Jihad bin Abdullah al Sheikh, Chairman of the Organising Committee highlighted that the event is a major sporting event which is bringing together the Gulf teams. “ The tournament provides players with an opportunity to showcase their skills, reflecting the development of sports, especially handball in the region. It boosts sportsmanship and healthy competition among the clubs. This championship is one of the competitive events where top clubs from the Gulf region compete, making the competition intense,” he ended.

Seeb enter final, secure crucial win over Nizwa

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 15

Seeb booked a place in the final of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) Basketball Shield 2024-2025 after securing a 79-68 victory over Nizwa in a highly competitive match. The game, which saw intense rivalry between the two teams, was held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex's in Bausher.

Seeb's scoring was led by Kyl Jordan, Romeo Wilfred, Rashid al Zuhaibi, and Noah al Amri, while Nizwa's standout players included Saif al Toubi, Hussein al Kindi, Qasim al Qasimi, Basil al Subhi, and Agassi Tounion.

Both teams entered the game with high energy. Saif al Toubi opened

the scoring for Nizwa, but Rashid al Zuhaibi quickly responded for Seeb with a successful free throw. The first quarter saw a fast paced exchange of attacks and points, with both teams scoring 22 points until the final minute. Kyl Jordan then added a two pointer for Seeb, but Nizwa equalised in the last seconds to end the first quarter 24-24.

Seeb started the second quarter with strong offensive pressure, capitalising on Nizwa's rushed passes to intercept the ball and convert them into points. Romeo Wilfred shined with multiple successful three pointers. Meanwhile, Nizwa struggled to break through Seeb's defence, relying on long range shots that lacked accuracy. Seeb outscored



Seeb and Nizwa players in action

Nizwa 21-12 in this quarter, finishing the first half with a 45-36 lead.

Nizwa came back strong in the third quarter, determined to reduce the gap. They started with six consecutive points from Agassi Tounion and Qasim al Qasimi,

forcing Seeb's coach to call a timeout to reorganise the defence. Saif al Toubi and Basil al Subhi then hit successful three pointers, cutting the deficit to just one point at 53-52. However, Seeb quickly regained control, with Mazen al Hadidi sinking two consecutive shots, followed by Noah al Amri and Rashid al Zuhaibi, who combined for six straight points, closing the quarter with Seeb leading 60-55.

Final Quarter – Seeb Secure the Win Both teams entered the final quarter with high concentration. Nizwa continued pushing to narrow the gap, and Qasim al Qasimi scored five consecutive points, bringing the score to 70-68 in Seeb's favour. However, Kyl Jordan responded with a successful drive, followed by a

free throw from Rashid al Zuhaibi, extending Seeb's lead. Jordan added another basket from under the rim and a successful free throw, increasing the lead to 77-68. Seeb capitalised on Nizwa's aggressive offence in the final minutes, with Jordan adding another two points, sealing the victory at 79 68 and becoming the first team to qualify for the final.

The match was managed by a refereeing team consisting of international referee Ahmed bin Darwish al Balushi (first referee), international Rashid al Mushaifri (second referee), and Ali al Salmani (third referee), while Omaima al Hajri, Saeed al Ghammari and Fatima al Harthy supervised the table.

Reviving Architecture Initiative

20–22 February 2025
Oman Across Ages Museum



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CORPORATE EARNINGS



Local investors accounted for 22.6% of total trading activity, acquiring shares worth RO 16.3 million.

INVESTORS BUY UP MSX STOCKS AHEAD OF DIVIDEND PAYOUTS

MUSCAT: Omani individual investors increased their stock purchases on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) last week as they positioned themselves for upcoming dividend distributions, set to be discussed at annual general meetings in March.

Local investors accounted for 22.6% of total trading activity, acquiring shares worth RO 16.3 million, while their sales made up 17.1%. This heightened interest reflects investor confidence in benefiting from dividend payouts, further supported by positive corporate earnings.

Several companies have already announced dividend proposals. Al Jazeera Steel Products approved its annual financial results and recommended a cash dividend of 43 baisas per share, subject to approval at its March 23 AGM. The company's net profit surged to RO 7.7 million in 2024, up from RO 4.024 million in 2023.

Following the announcement, Al Jazeera Steel's stock price jumped by 20.6%, closing at 380 baisas, making it the top gainer for the week.

The industrial sector led market gains, with several stocks performing well. Voltamp Energy climbed 8.6% to close at 555 baisas, while Oman Cement rose by 10 baisas, settling at 405 baisas.

Building Materials Industry increased 6 baisas to 82 baisas, and other industrial stocks such as Al Anwar Ceramic Tiles, Oman Chrome, and Gulf Mushroom Production also saw gains. As a result, the industrial sector index rose by 172 points, closing at 5,614 points, making it the only index to record gains.

Meanwhile, the MSX main index declined by 86 points to 4,478, while the financial sector index dropped 89 points, and the services sector index lost 27 points. The Sharia index also saw a slight decline of two points, closing at 416 points.

Market performance remained mixed, with 38 stocks declining, 24 gaining and 24 remaining unchanged. The overall market capitalisation fell to RO 27.344 billion, reflecting weekly losses of RO 164.2 million.

Among the top-performing stocks were Al Jazeera Steel, Al Maha Petroleum and Voltamp Energy, while Ooredoo, Muscat Gases and Dhofar International Development & Investment recorded the steepest declines.

Trading activity was particularly strong in OQ Exploration & Production, which saw a total trading volume of RO 5.063 million, representing 31% of the total market turnover. Omantel followed with RO 1.8 million in trades, while OQ Gas Networks recorded RO 1.5 million.

— ONA

Investment, new block buoy Oman Chromite's growth

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 15

OMAN Chromite, a publicly-traded mining firm partly owned by Minerals Development Oman (MDO), says it anticipates a positive upturn in its financial and operational performance on the back of a number of notable milestones achieved during 2024.

Most significant has been the acquisition of a new mining concession which, upon development, is set to bolster access to new chromite ore deposits and reverse a decline in availability of this key commodity.

"The company's acquisition of an exploration and mining concession for Area 11-A, located in northern Oman with an area of 1,438 km², represents one of the most significant achievements in its history," said Humaid bin Masoud al Muqbali, Chairman of the Board of Directors.

"This area is expected to help address previous challenges such as the lack of available sites and the depletion of ore reserves in the company's old mines. Exploration activities have already commenced," he added in the Directors' Report for fiscal 2024.

Despite production stoppages linked to weather-related disruptions during the year, Oman Chromite performed moderately well operationally and financially, according to the Chairman.

Chromite ore (also known as chrome ore) is processed to make metallic chromium, which is used in the production of stainless steel, in chromium plating, and as an alloy in cast iron and steel.

Chromium compounds are also used as colours in paint, ceramics and plastics, and as a catalyst in making chemicals and refining



Chromite ore (also known as chrome ore) is processed to make metallic chromium, which is used in the production of stainless steel, in chromium plating, and as an alloy in cast iron and steel.

oil. Additionally, it is used as a refractory in furnace linings.

Production of chromite ore totalled 70,817 tonnes in 2024, reflecting a 19-per cent increase compared to the previous year, the company said. However, sales and exports dipped 13.88 per cent to about 74,780 tonnes, down from 86,840 tonnes a year earlier. "This decline is attributed to capitalising on the high prices in 2023 and the availability of large stockpiles due to accumulated production from previous years," the Chairman stated.

Reflecting this trend, revenue from sales amounted to RO 4.9 million in 2024, down from RO 5.9 million for the previous year. Net profit declined to RO 1.001 million, down from RO 1.631 million in 2023.

However, buoying earnings for the company

was its 20 per cent stake in Gulf Alloys and Metals (FZC) LLC, which brought into operation its low-carbon ferrochrome plant at Sohar Freezone last year. A second production line commenced operations in January this year, promising to further bolster returns for Oman Chromite.

Established by Royal Decree in 1991, Oman Chromite produces metallurgical and refractory chromite ores for a variety of industrial applications.

In June 2022, the company entered into a joint arrangement with MDO – a subsidiary of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) – to share the cost of exploration, evaluation and feasibility phases covering the development of two sites at Liwa and Mahadha. MDO has a 25.4% stake in Oman Chromite.

GCC leads global oil reserves and exports

MUSCAT: The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries continue to dominate global energy markets, ranking first worldwide in key indicators such as crude oil production, crude oil reserves, crude oil exports and natural gas reserves, according to the Statistical Center of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf.

In 2023, the GCC nations collectively produced around 17 million barrels of crude oil per day, accounting for 23.2% of total global crude production.

Despite a 6.8% decline from 2022 levels, the region maintained its leading position in the global oil market.

Additionally, the GCC's crude oil reserves reached approximately 511.9 billion barrels, representing 32.6% of the world's total, with an annual growth rate of 0.3% over the past decade.

Crude oil exports from the GCC in 2023 amounted to about 12.4 million barrels per day, contributing 28.2% to global crude exports. However, there was an 8.2% decline in crude exports compared to the previous



In 2023, the GCC nations collectively produced around 17 million barrels of crude oil per day, accounting for 23.2% of total global crude production.

year.

On the other hand, petroleum derivative exports from the region reached 1,518.6 million barrels, making up 13.4% of global petroleum product exports – an increase of 7.1% year-on-year.

The report also highlighted the region's robust natural gas industry. GCC countries held approximately 44.2 trillion cubic metres of natural gas reserves in 2023, representing 21.4% of the world's total reserves, with a

slight increase of 0.2% compared to 2022.

Natural gas exports stood at 180.9 billion cubic metres, accounting for 13.1% of the global market, with an annual growth rate of 2.5% between 2014 and 2023.

In addition to its dominance in traditional energy sectors, the GCC is rapidly expanding its renewable energy capacity. The installed capacity of renewable energy stations across the region reached 10,742

The report also highlighted the region's robust natural gas industry. GCC countries held approximately 44.2 trillion cubic meters of natural gas reserves in 2023, representing 21.4% of the world's total reserves, with a slight increase of 0.2% compared to 2022.

megawatts in 2023, marking an impressive 74.7% increase compared to 2022.

Energy production from these renewable sources reached 14,403 gigawatts per hour, reflecting a 72.4% year-on-year rise.

Electricity generation across the GCC grew to approximately 794,900 gigawatts per hour in 2023, averaging a 4.7% annual growth from 2019 to 2023.

Meanwhile, electricity consumption also rose, reaching 732,500 gigawatts per hour, reflecting a 1.3% increase compared to 2022. These figures highlight the region's ongoing investment in energy infrastructure to support economic growth and diversification. — ONA

ADVERTORIALS

BESTPRACTICES



Events were organised across all governorates to promote awareness of health, adherence to safety measures and compliance with environmental standards to protect Oman’s environment.

OETC CONCLUDES 2024/2025 HSE CAMPAIGN

MUSCAT: As part of its commitment to achieving the highest standards and implementing best practices in health, safety, and environmental (HSE) aspects, Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) recently concluded its 2024 HSE Campaign.

The campaign, launched under the slogan “Beyond Zero,” lasted for four months and included a series of programs, workshops, initiatives, field visits, and awareness lectures.

These activities targeted various segments of society, including school students and employees of governmental entities. The events were organized across all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman to promote awareness of health, adherence to safety measures, and compliance with environmental standards to protect Oman’s environment.

Fahad Nasser al Kiyumi, General Manager of Quality, Health, Safety, Security, and Environment at OETC, reaffirmed the company’s continuous commitment to adopting best practices and ensuring compliance with local and international standards.

He emphasized the importance of instilling and promoting a strong HSE culture among all stakeholders, highlighting the vital role each individual plays in achieving the company’s goals in this domain.

Al Kiyumi added: “OETC’s dedication to achieving the highest quality, health, safety, and environmental standards is reflected through various initiatives and accomplishments. In 2024, we conducted 24 workshops and training programs, carried out over 470 field visits and inspection campaigns at work sites, and organized numerous voluntary events to spread community awareness.

Additionally, we actively participated in local and international forums and conferences, all of which contributed to strengthening compliance with HSE standards and procedures.”

He stated that these efforts resulted in achieving 53 million safe working hours without any lost-time injuries, along with ‘zero’ major environmental incidents, underscoring the company’s success in fostering a safe and sustainable work environment.

OETC, a member of Nama Group, is the only company responsible for the transmission and control of electricity across Oman’s network. The electricity is transmitted from production stations to distributed load centers in the governorates.

The transmission network operates at a voltage of 132kV and above to cover most of the governorates in the Sultanate, whether in the north or the south. Furthermore, OETC manages the interconnection lines between Oman and the GCC interconnection network, which operates at a voltage of 220kV.

OMAN-SAUDI FORUM TO STRENGTHEN TRADE AND INVESTMENT TIES

MUSCAT: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), through the Omani-Saudi Business Council, is set to host the Omani-Saudi Joint Business Forum on February 19.

The two-day event aims to strengthen economic, trade, and investment ties between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, fostering deeper cooperation between their private sectors.

Key discussions will focus on identifying new avenues for joint investments, enhancing trade exchanges, and supporting ongoing collaborative projects. The forum will provide a platform for business leaders, investors, and policymakers from both countries to explore ways to streamline business operations, reduce trade barriers, and leverage emerging opportunities in various



economic sectors.

Shaikh Ali bin Hamad al Kalbani, Head of the Omani side in the Omani-Saudi Business Council, emphasized that the forum reflects the strong commitment of both nations’ leaderships to

achieving economic integration.

He noted that clear strategies must be set to promote bilateral trade and investment growth, in line with the broader vision of regional economic cooperation.

He further explained that continuous engagement between the private sectors of both nations is vital for unlocking investment potential. This engagement includes reviewing regulatory frameworks, discussing infrastructural support, and assessing the requirements needed to facilitate seamless trade and investment activities.

These efforts, he added, contribute significantly to achieving mutual economic goals and supporting long-term sustainable development in Oman and Saudi Arabia.

— ONA

BYD Qin plus hybrid: Bold, futuristic and exciting

THE BYD Qin Plus Plug-in Hybrid Sedan, is a revolutionary blend of advanced hybrid technology, exceptional fuel efficiency and cutting-edge design. It is set to redefine the driving experience, offering an unparalleled combination of performance, cost-effectiveness and sustainability.

At the heart of the Qin Plus is BYD’s ground-breaking DM-i Super Hybrid System, designed to maximise fuel efficiency without compromising power.

The intelligent hybrid system optimally balances electric and fuel-driven power, allowing the sedan to achieve exceptional fuel economy as low as 3.8L/100km under standard driving conditions.

This means fewer trips to the fuel station, lower running costs and a significantly reduced carbon footprint.

The BYD Qin Plus is powered by a highly efficient 1.5L engine combined with an EHS electric motor, providing swift acceleration and seamless power



It is set to redefine the driving experience, offering an unparalleled combination of performance, cost-effectiveness and sustainability.

delivery.

Drivers can experience instant torque, a smooth ride and enhanced handling, making every journey comfortable and exhilarating. With an electric-only range of up to 110 km (depending on the variant), the Qin Plus allows for zero-emission city commuting, while the hybrid mode extends total range

capability, making it an ideal choice for long-distance travel.

Owning the Qin Plus translates to substantial savings on fuel and maintenance. Thanks to its advanced battery technology and energy regeneration system, the vehicle ensures reduced wear and tear on components like brakes and the engine.

With lower fuel consumption,

minimal maintenance costs and government incentives for hybrid vehicles, the Qin Plus stands out as a financially sound investment.

Designed to impress, the Qin Plus boasts an aerodynamic exterior with bold contours and a modern aesthetic, ensuring a striking presence on the road. The spacious and technology-rich cabin features an intuitive rotating touchscreen, intelligent voice command system and a digital cockpit, ensuring that connectivity and convenience are always within reach.

Additionally, the Qin Plus is equipped with BYD’s advanced infotainment system, providing seamless smartphone integration, navigation and entertainment, all at the driver’s fingertips.

BYD prioritises safety and the Qin Plus is no exception. The sedan is equipped with a suite of intelligent safety features, including Automatic Emergency Braking (AEB), Lane Departure Warning (LDW) and Adaptive Cruise Control (ACC).

OMAN’S REGISTERED VEHICLES REACH 1.75 MILLION

MUSCAT: The total number of vehicles registered in the Sultanate of Oman reached 1,753,872 by the end of December 2024, with private vehicles accounting for the vast majority at 79.6% (1,396,117 vehicles), according to data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Among these registered vehicles, those with engine capacities ranging from 1,500 to 3,000 cc constituted the largest segment, representing 54.4% (954,137 vehicles). In terms of color preferences, white remained the most popular, with 42.5% (745,196 vehicles) of the



Those with engine capacities ranging from 1,500 to 3,000 cc constituted the largest segment, representing 54.4% (954,137 vehicles)

total fleet. Commercially licensed vehicles accounted for 14.5% (253,895 vehicles), while rental vehicles and taxis made up 2.3% (39,919 vehicles) and 1.6% (28,239 vehicles), respectively.

Regarding vehicle weights, 90.7% (1,591,234 vehicles) weighed less than three tonnes, highlighting a strong preference for light vehicles in Oman’s transportation sector. These figures underscore the sustained growth in Oman’s automotive market, driven by rising consumer demand and economic expansion.

— ONA

Omantel partners with Shaffra Technology for AI & metaverse tech

MUSCAT: Omantel has entered a strategic partnership with Singapore-based Shaffra Technology Labs to develop groundbreaking solutions leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) and metaverse technologies.

These solutions will be hosted within Omantel cloud services and provided to government institutions and private sector companies in the Sultanate of Oman to enhance operational efficiency. The agreement was signed during the LEAP 2025 Conference in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Eng Aladdin Bait Fadhel, Chief Commercial Officer of Omantel, stated: “At Omantel, our vision is to solidify our leadership role as



Omantel has previously signed multiple agreements to localise global technologies and enhance the ICT infrastructure in the Sultanate of Oman.

a key enabler of Oman’s digital transformation and to be the premier provider of innovative technology solutions in the region. Our collaboration with Shaffra will significantly contribute to

developing cutting-edge technology solutions, particularly in artificial intelligence, for our customers”.

Al Harith al Atawi, CEO of Shaffra Technology Labs, expressed his enthusiasm about partnering with Omantel on this strategic project.

He noted that this cooperation would open vast opportunities for Shafra in the Omani market by introducing successful AI and metaverse solutions, such as the AI employee project, which is now being adopted by numerous government and private entities in several countries.

“We aim to deliver a unique experience for Omantel customers through this partnership and innovative projects that enhance

productivity and reduce costs,” said Al Atawi.

Omantel has previously signed multiple agreements to localize global technologies and enhance the ICT infrastructure in the Sultanate of Oman. In collaboration with major international technology giants, Omantel seeks to attract the latest technological and innovative advancements to foster Oman’s digital transformation.

This strategic initiative aligns with Omantel’s vision to become an integrated provider of digital solutions, catering to the diverse needs of government institutions, private sector companies, and individual subscribers under one umbrella.

BUSINESS

ROYAL MANDATE

THE AGRICULTURAL AND FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT FUND: STRENGTHENING FOOD SECURITY



HANAN AL SULAIMI
The author is Executive Director - Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund

THE AGRICULTURAL and Fisheries Development Fund is one of the key entities contributing to the food security system in the Sultanate of Oman. Since its establishment, it has been dedicated to advancing the agricultural, livestock and fisheries sectors by financing research and development projects aimed at increasing these sectors’

contributions to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and improving self-sufficiency rates for food commodities. Recently, the Fund marked its 20th anniversary since its founding by Royal Decree No (48/2004). Certain provisions were later amended by Royal Decree No (23/2017), representing a qualitative shift to keep pace with the comprehensive development of the Sultanate of

The Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund can be described as a government institution with a financing-oriented mandate, primarily focused on conserving, managing, and efficiently utilising agricultural, livestock, and fisheries resources to ensure sustainability.

Oman and the integration of modern technologies, innovation, investment, marketing and community partnerships in service of the agricultural and fisheries sectors. The Fund operates as an independent administrative and financial entity. The Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund can be described as a government institution with a financing-oriented mandate, primarily focused on conserving, managing and efficiently utilising agricultural, livestock and fisheries resources to ensure sustainability. Among its top objectives are enhancing institutional and human capabilities, preserving and developing

these resources and increasing their contribution to national food security. The Fund also strives to improve marketing systems, adopt best sustainable practices in the sectors it finances, elevate the economic and social well-being of beneficiaries and boost individual income levels. Additionally, it encourages innovation and investment to achieve sustainable food security development. The Fund is committed to strengthening the food security system by preserving agricultural, livestock and fisheries resources, localising modern technologies, implementing advisory programmes, conducting scientific research and developing studies and development initiatives. Since its inception, it has worked closely with farmers, livestock breeders, and fishermen to ensure the implementation of these projects using the latest technologies and innovations to enhance efficiency, maintain sustainability and optimise resource utilisation. The Fund prioritises financing innovative and sustainable projects while also focusing on the transfer and localisation of advanced technologies, particularly those that improve the efficiency of agricultural, livestock and fisheries sectors. The Fund’s organisational structure consists of a Board of Directors and an executive management team. The Board is chaired by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and includes representatives from various ministries, Sultan Qaboos University and the private sector. By the end of 2023, the Fund had financed 111 projects in the fisheries sector, 119 projects in the plant sector and 55 projects in the livestock sector. Some of these projects have been fully funded, while others are still in progress. The total funding allocated by the Fund for projects continuing until the end of 2024 exceeds RO 6 million, distributed across 23 projects in the plant sector, 14 in the fisheries sector and 8 in the livestock sector. Furthermore, the Fund remains open to reviewing new funding applications, provided they aim to enhance and sustain food security across the country.

OMAN’S ELECTRICITY PRODUCTION RISES 7.5%

MUSCAT: Oman’s electricity production surged by 7.5% in 2024, reaching 45,388 gigawatts per hour by the end of November, up from 42,208.9 gigawatts per hour in 2023, according to preliminary statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Regional production trends varied, with Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South and Al Dhahirah



Oman’s electricity production surged by 7.5% in 2024, reaching 45,388 gigawatts per hour by the end of November 2024.

contributing 28,270 gigawatts per hour, reflecting a 6.2% increase. In contrast, Muscat Governorate recorded a 6.7% decline, while Dhofar Governorate saw an 11.5% rise. Meanwhile, Oman’s water production reached 478.5 million cubic metres by November 2024, reflecting steady demand for utilities amid continued economic and population growth. — ONA

Karwa Motors contributes RO 2.5m to local purchases



Motors’ commitment to strengthening Oman’s industrial sector is evident in its growing reliance on local suppliers. Since the start of its commercial operations, the company’s total local purchases have surpassed RO 2.5 million, reinforcing its efforts to integrate Omani businesses into the country’s manufacturing landscape. In 2024 alone, Karwa Motors awarded business contracts worth more than RO 1.1 million to 93 small, medium and local enterprises.

This initiative aligns with the company’s strategy to reduce dependence on imports, enhance supply chain resilience, and support local industries that contribute to the vehicle manufacturing ecosystem in Oman. Dr Ibrahim bin Ali al Balushi, CEO of Karwa Motors, emphasised the company’s long-term vision of fostering industrial sustainability through investment in local suppliers. He noted that Karwa’s partnerships with Omani businesses have helped lower import



DR IBRAHIM BIN ALI AL BALUSHI
Chief Executive Officer
Karwa Motors



In 2024 alone, Karwa Motors awarded business contracts worth more than RO 1.1 million to 93 small, medium and local enterprises.

costs, improve supply chain efficiency and minimise risks associated with global disruptions. Moreover, Karwa Motors is expanding opportunities for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to participate in various manufacturing and service-related activities linked to the automotive sector. The company is also developing training programmes for local suppliers to enhance their competitiveness and ability to meet

international quality standards, opening doors for them in both regional and global markets. Karwa Motors plans to further increase local procurement volumes as it expands its operations and secures additional commercial contracts. The company’s continued investment in domestic suppliers not only supports Oman’s economic diversification goals, but also contributes to job creation and industrial growth within the country. — ONA

OPENAI BOARD REJECTS MUSK’S \$97.4 BILLION OFFER

NEW YORK: OpenAI on Friday rejected a \$97.4-billion bid from a consortium led by billionaire Elon Musk for the ChatGPT maker, saying the start-up is not for sale and that any future bid would be disingenuous. The unsolicited approach is Musk’s latest attempt to block the start-up he co-founded with OpenAI CEO Sam Altman — but later left — from becoming a for-profit firm, as it looks to secure more capital and stay ahead in the artificial intelligence race. “OpenAI is not for sale, and the board has unanimously rejected Mr. Musk’s latest attempt to disrupt his competition. Any potential

reorganization of OpenAI will strengthen our non-profit and its mission to ensure AGI benefits all of humanity,” it said on X, quoting OpenAI Chairman Bret Taylor. Musk’s lawyer Marc Toberoff, in a statement, responded that OpenAI is putting control of the for-profit enterprise up for sale, and said the move will “enrich its certain board members rather than the charity.” OpenAI in late December had outlined plans to revamp its structure, saying it would create a public benefit corporation to make it easier to “raise more capital than we’d imagined,” and remove the restrictions imposed on the start-up



OpenAI logo is seen in front of Musk photo in this illustration. — Reuters by its current non-profit parent. Altman on Monday had rebuffed the consortium’s offer with a “no thank you” posted on X, prompting Musk to retort: “swindler.

On Tuesday, Altman told news website Axios that OpenAI was not for sale. Musk’s lawyers said the consortium, which includes Musk’s own AI start-up xAI, would withdraw its bid for OpenAI’s non-profit arm if it drops plans to become a for-profit entity. “Two days ago, you filed a pleading in court adding new material conditions to the proposal. As a result of that filing, it is now apparent that your clients’ much publicised ‘bid’ is in fact not a bid at all,” the OpenAI board said, according to a letter signed by William Savitt, a lawyer representing the company, and sent to Toberoff. — Reuters

Trump says auto tariffs to come ‘around April 2’

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said on Friday that he planned to unveil tariffs on imported cars around April 2, adding to a cascade of levies he has threatened since taking office. Trump’s statement did not specify whether the tariffs would apply to all auto imports. Since his inauguration on January 20, Trump has taken aim at allies and adversaries alike with threats of fresh duties. He has referred to tariffs as a way to raise revenue, remedy trade imbalances and pressure countries to act on US concerns. Experts have warned it is often Americans who pay the tariffs on US imports - not the foreign exporter. Asked when he might unveil auto tariffs, Trump said, “Maybe around April 2.” About 50 per cent of the cars sold in the United States are manufactured within the country. Among imports, about half come from Mexico and



US President Donald Trump speaks, as he signs an executive order, as Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum stand next to him, in the Oval Office, in Washington, DC. — Reuters

Canada and the other half from other major auto-producing countries. This latter group is led by Japan, South Korea and Germany, with Britain, Italy and Sweden a source of a smaller volume of imports. In recent days, Ford CEO Jim Farley has blasted a proposed

Trump tariff of 25 per cent on Mexico and Canada, noting that it disadvantages US companies that have integrated their supply chains across North America under trade agreements, including the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) negotiated in the first Trump administration. On February 3, the White House suspended the tariffs for 30 days following moves from Canada and Mexico on border security and fentanyl policies. Levies targeting the auto sector would come after the president recently firmed up plans for tariffs on all steel and aluminium imports beginning March 12. He has previously promised tariffs on semiconductors, steel, oil and gas. On Thursday, in a move broadening trade conflicts, Trump launched plans for “reciprocal tariffs” that could hit all US trading partners on a country-by-country basis. — Reuters

OPINION

Entrepreneurship in Oman: A blueprint for sustainable development



QASIM AL MAASHANI

The writer is the head of Oman Observer Business Section

THE Sultanate of Oman is undergoing a remarkable transformation in its support for entrepreneurship, establishing itself as a prominent global destination for start-ups and innovative ventures.

These efforts have resulted in Oman being ranked among the top 15 countries worldwide for start-up growth, as well as securing 11th place on the Global Entrepreneurship Index. These milestones reflect not only the success of governmental policies but also Oman's strategic approach to building a dynamic and competitive business sector that can adapt to global economic challenges.

At the heart of Oman's entrepreneurial transformation is the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, which serves as a driving force for the nation's vision in this domain. Through its annual media briefings, the Authority provides detailed insights into the progress made up until the end of 2024.

For 2025, it announced 481 initiatives distributed across eight key strategic pillars:

1. Promoting an entrepreneurial culture: The Authority is reshaping societal perceptions of small businesses, emphasising the significance of entrepreneurship as a key economic driver.
2. Regional and global expansion: Efforts are being made to empower Omani SMEs to penetrate international markets, creating new export opportunities and enhancing competitiveness.
3. Maximising in-country value: The

initiatives aim to leverage local resources more effectively, reducing reliance on imports and fostering self-sufficiency.

4. Innovative financing and digital transformation: The Authority encourages the adoption of creative financing solutions while focusing on digitising processes to improve operational efficiency.

5. Developing the governorates and localising digital manufacturing: Expanding economic activities to Oman's governorates and promoting high-value-added technological industries domestically are among the key objectives.

6. Supporting start-ups: Start-ups receive special attention as primary drivers of creativity and economic rejuvenation in Oman.

ACHIEVEMENTS THAT INSPIRE THE FUTURE

The figures released by the Authority paint a compelling picture of the progress achieved so far. By the end of 2024, there were 145,750 registered SMEs, providing 192,714 jobs.

In addition, 64,436 entrepreneurship cards were issued, streamlining market entry for young entrepreneurs and investors. On the financing front, 400 applications worth a total of RO 37.6 million were approved, underscoring the country's commitment to turning innovative ideas into thriving businesses.

CRAFT INDUSTRIES: A MODEL OF ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

Beyond tech-driven entrepreneurship, Oman's

These efforts have resulted in Oman being ranked among the top 15 countries worldwide for start-up growth, as well as securing 11th place on the Global Entrepreneurship Index. These milestones reflect not only the success of governmental policies but also Oman's strategic approach to building a dynamic and competitive business sector that can adapt to global economic challenges.

artisanal industries have also benefited from substantial investment. The establishment of the National Centre for Creative Craft Industries, spanning 10,000 square metres, and the support extended to more than 4,000 artisans highlight the dedication to preserving Omani heritage while fostering its growth as a viable economic sector.

TRAINING AND CONSULTING: THE CORNERSTONE OF DEVELOPMENT

The Authority's initiatives go beyond financial support to include training and consultancy programmes aimed at enhancing entrepreneurs' capabilities. More than 28,000 entrepreneurs benefited from training courses, while over 7,800 consultations and feasibility studies were conducted.

These programmes equip business owners with the knowledge and tools needed to transform their ideas into successful, profitable ventures.

INCENTIVES AND FINANCING: A SUSTAINABLE STRATEGY

The incentives offered to entrepreneurs in Oman set a regional and global benchmark. Highlights include financing of up to RO 500,000 without guarantees, reserving 10% of government tenders for SMEs, and exemptions from registration and classification fees for tenders. In addition, plots of land are allocated on usufruct terms to support various projects.

These measures create a favourable environment for investment and innovation in Oman.

US IS BIGGEST LOSER FROM TRUMP'S METALS TARIFFS

BY ANTONY CURRIE

US President Donald Trump says trade wars are easy to win. If so, his 25% tariffs on steel and aluminium imports ought to have big overseas producers like Rio Tinto begging for mercy.

Yet shareholders in the \$107 billion miner and rivals like BHP have already shrugged off concerns. Granted, they may be overly optimistic, or reckon the levies, set to go into effect next month, won't be imposed. But it also could be because the duties would hurt the US the most.

These universal tariffs would hit the major exporting countries like Canada and Mexico as well as other mining players equally. That means none would suddenly have an advantage to jostle for a larger slice of the pie.

That may yet change: Trump has indicated he may grant an exemption to Australia. But it's the source of just 1.5% of US aluminium imports and a similarly de minimis amount of steel.

Regardless, the US will bear most of the pain. It relies on Canada for around a quarter of its steel and around 60% of its aluminium imports.

The only country with the capacity to step in would be top producer China.

But one of the reasons given for imposing the tariffs is to reduce the dominance of the People's Republic - though that's overstated. Sure, its exports of the metal last year of 110 million tonnes were double that of 2020. But only a trickle went directly to the United States.

Some get there indirectly, but the vast majority went to countries that use it domestically, a senior industry insider said.

Moreover, another rationale for the levies is to support US producers. With the industry running at around 75% of capacity, steelmakers could increase output. But the short-lived bump in shares of players like Cleveland-Cliffs suggests investors are sceptical.

The outlook is even bleaker for aluminium: domestic players provide around 650,000 tonnes, with imports almost 10 times that. Building more smelters would be costly, take five years or more, and require a degree of certainty about long-term returns that Trump's volatile trade policy cannot provide.

It's probably why Alcoa's stock has retreated. That means the main impact of tariffs would be to make the US pay more for its dependence on the same overseas suppliers.

That would push up prices for everyone buying end-products from tin foil to cutlery to wind turbines to cars. As the largest consumers, Americans would be the biggest losers.

— Reuters

OCCI's role in driving economic diversification

ECONOMIC diversification is a critical goal within every nation whose revenue generation is over reliant on a single sector.

Similar is the case with Oman, which previously focused on oil exports, but has been able to successfully pivot to a more enhanced economy due to Oman Vision 2040. Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) stands at the forefront of this progress, encouraging private sector development, investment into non-oil industries, and fostering an overall friendly business environment.

This article addresses the role of OCCI in economic diversification through private sector development, investment promotion, SME assistance, trade policy implementation, policy advocacy, human resource development, and other sectoral initiatives.

PRIVATE SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

New industry creation is a prerequisite for effective economic diversification and pivots within Oman Vision 2040 try to absolutely accomplish that as well.

OCCI is the mouthpiece for businesses from all sectors and ensures that policies set within the government are aligned with their interests. OCCI is essential for pivoting and adopts policies related:

- Fighting for a leaner and better organised set of rules for doing business.
- Promoting growth by providing entrepreneurship training and mentorship services.
- Creating business networking platforms to enable companies to grow their markets both in Oman and abroad.
- Fostering progress through R&D in different sectors.

With these steps, the OCCI makes certain that the private sector continues to be an important contributor to the economic growth and diversification of Oman.

PROMOTING INVESTMENTS

One of the key factors in Oman's diversification strategy and the growth of its economy is investment. With this knowledge, the OCCI works actively to make Oman favourable for both resident and non-resident investors. This includes:

- Hosting investment fora and trade missions to market Oman.



DR HILAL AL SAWAI

A specialist in local content/In-country value, the writer is the Acting Director-General of Local Content, previously assigned to the General Secretariat of the Tender Board.



OCCI is the mouthpiece for businesses from all sectors and ensures that policies set within the government are aligned with their interests.

- Developing and disseminating intelligence and market feasibility studies to prospective investors.
- Sponsoring and fostering joint ventures between Omani and foreign investors.

- Helping investors in compliance with regulatory changes regarding business start and growth.

The OCCI is working to create a favourable climate for investments in Oman which would reduce the dependency on hydrocarbons by investments in oil-free industries like manufacturing and building, tourism, transportation, logistics and IT.

SUPPORTING AND PROMOTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP AMONG SMES

Supporting SMEs is essential for innovation, employment generation and ensuring economic diversification.

Therefore, the OCCI assists SMEs through:

- Implementing nation-wide campaigns to promote idea and money equity.
- Providing business mentorship and incubation services to young entrepreneurs.
- Training SMEs on business management and digital skills.
- Facilitating legislation that supports SME sustainability, including low taxation and easy licensing.

By supporting SMEs, OCCI makes sure that a lot of local businesses are present which

keeps the economy vibrant and varied.

TRADE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Trade development is a crucial aspect of diversification, and the OCCI is key in promoting exports and imports. Some of the steps taken are:

- Marketing Oman trade agreements and opening markets for Oman goods and services.
- Promoting Oman products through trade exhibitions and missions in important Oman markets.
- Bringing international business delegations to Oman for partnership discussions.
- Creating programmes to strengthen conditions for export. With these steps, the OCCI helps Oman to integrate into the world economy, minimises reliance on oil exports and develops non-oil trade activities.

POLICY ADVOCACY AND ECONOMIC REFORMS

In partnership with the government, OCCI tries to develop policies that promote diversification and works towards them. This consists of the following activities:

- Conducting outreach with the business community to gather feedback for policy development.
- Promoting dialogue between the public sector and private sector for effective national business policies.

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Email: mayakrish.1804@gmail.com

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Contact: +968 98510880.

Indian male (Mechanical Engineering) with 3 years experience in Diesel engine works (Gensets/ Engines), 2 years in Machine Maintenance, seeks job.
Contact: 78022420

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Contact: 78611653.
Email: jobcpacma@gmail.com

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Contact: 78002582
Email: engineer4planning@gmail.com

29 years old Indian female, MBA holder with 2 years experience. Seeking a suitable position. Currently in Muscat on visit visa. Contact: 78641071, shazashakeel@gmail.com

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ART/LIFE



CULTURE

TRACE THE EVOLUTION OF ITALIAN FASHION JEWELLERY AT THIS EXHIBIT

> 20

A LOOK AT THE ACADEME

Gamification and Learning Environments



BY DR ZAINAB AL-AJMI
zeinbf@moe.om

Dr Zainab possesses a profound passion for education and is a keen observer of the sector's development.

GAMIFICATION, defined as “the use of game design elements in non-game contexts,” has emerged as a significant area of interest since 2010.

This approach transforms tasks into game-like activities to enhance intrinsic motivation, attract greater participation and increase engagement levels. Over the years, gamification has been extensively applied across various domains,

including business operations, marketing and education.

In particular, the fields of education and training have shown substantial interest in gamification (Wang A, Hsu B & Fang A, 2022). According to Muangsrinoon and Boonbrahm (2019), gamification serves as a conceptual framework that applies game elements and techniques to enhance engagement and interest in non-game contexts.

Gamification can be implemented across various fields of knowledge, with the most common applications identified in the education area, where gamification is not limited to applications or serious games but extends to the gamification of teaching practices to enhance academic performance. On the other hand, it can be stated that the current generation of children, often referred to as the “millennial” generation, has grown up immersed in video games and spends a significant portion of their time engaging with them. These individuals have been surrounded by rapid advancements in information and communication technologies, which have become central to how they interact with one another and their environment. In light of this, there is a pressing need to modernise and adapt educational curricula to align with the realities of children, students and youth, whose natural environment revolves around the use of such technologies.

Whether acknowledged or not, information and communication technologies have become an integral part of their lives. From this perspective, gamification offers a valuable opportunity to enhance engagement, motivation and communication among children, students and youth. By incorporating gamification into educational practices, it is possible to leverage thoughtfully designed mechanisms, such as earning badges, collecting points, progressing to new levels, or achieving rewards. For example, language-learning apps like Duolingo use streaks and rewards to keep users engaged. Furthermore, communication platforms that facilitate task sharing, idea exchange, and the expression of opinions can elevate these efforts. For instance, educational platforms like Kahoot turn quizzes into competitive games.

Such activities encourage students to perceive educational goals and achievements as proactive, dynamic and enjoyable experiences, rather than monotonous and obligatory tasks. Gamification, therefore, has the potential to transform traditional education into an interactive and stimulating process that aligns with the needs and preferences of younger generations (Ružic & Dumancic, 2015).

In summary, gamification has been effectively applied in education and training to enhance engagement through interactive quizzes, challenges and reward-based simulations. However, the success of gamification depends on proper implementation. If students perceive gaming elements as unnecessary, or if the focus is on correcting behaviour without addressing deeper issues, gamification may become counterproductive. Moreover, failing to follow essential design principles can lead to disengagement and a loss of interest among students.

QUICK FEATURES



MUSEUM

A carved ivory panel from Nimrud depicting a human-headed animal is displayed at the Iraqi National Museum in Baghdad. — AFP



FASHION

Models walk the runway during the Carolina Herrera Fall/Winter 2025 show at New York Fashion Week. — AFP



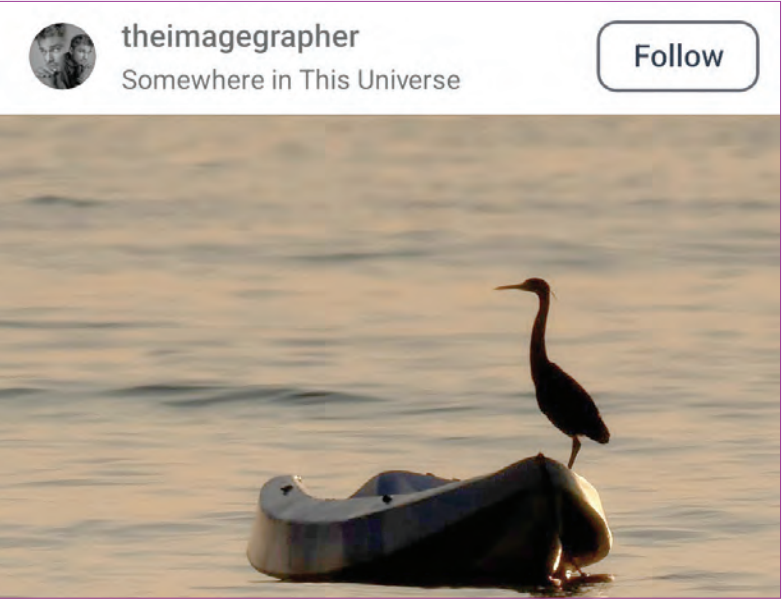
LIFESTYLE

Two girls dressed in traditional clothing sit at a table inside a massage parlour in Cyryldene, the Chinese district, during the Chinese Lunar New Year celebrations in Johannesburg. —AFP

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‘White Lotus’ returns with Thailand romp



PROBLEMATIC tourists, searing heat and monkeys: Thailand was the perfect setting for the new season of HBO’s “The White Lotus” to explore the dark secrets and base desires of the jet-set class, its creator said on Monday.

After visits to Hawaii and Sicily, season three of the smash-hit steamy satire about well-heeled and badly-behaved hotel guests takes place on the tropical island of Koh Samui.

The cast and crew spent six months, primarily at the Four Seasons Resort Koh Samui, which served as the show’s main setting and the actors’ real-life hotel. According to creator Mike White, it was the hardest season yet, not just due to the expanding number of characters and episodes (eight).

“Thailand was a beautiful place to shoot, but it also had a lot of challenges,” White told a press conference on Monday.

“There were days I was like, ‘maybe I’ll just die today, I

don’t know!’ So I’m proud that I got through it.”

The shoot had to contend with sweltering temperatures, outbreaks of dengue fever and food poisoning, and wildlife including giant monitor lizards, snakes and tarantulas, according to a recent Guardian article.

Actors described a “claustrophobic” atmosphere in which “tensions and difficulties” and “off-screen drama” were rife.

Actor Walton Goggins, who plays a surly tourist with a young girl (Aimee Lee Wood) and a mysterious vendetta, described the experience as like being “in my own ‘Apocalypse Now.’”

“It was a reckoning... spirituality, life and death, and 18 really talented actors in front of the camera that Mike assembled, going through an existential crisis... sequestered in a five-star resort.” — AFP



Croatia laughter museum aims to blow away the blues

A NEW MUSEUM of laughter is offering to put people through the spinner to wash away the negativity of modern life.

Visitors to the HaHaHouse in the Croatian capital Zagreb are blasted with a puff of white smoke once they step inside to blow away their worries before climbing into a “giant washing machine”.

The “centrifuge of life” then whips them away Willy Wonka-style down a twisting slide into a pool filled with little white balls where their journey to a happier place starts.

Its creator Andrea Golubic said she had the idea for the museum during the pandemic when many were feeling down, depressed and isolated.

“I realised that I had a mission — to heal people with laughter,” added the upbeat 43-year-old.

The idea “came straight from the heart”, Golubic said, and on that very day I listed 78 exhibits... that’s how the HaHaHouse began.”

Golubic said it was her carefree seven-year-old self that inspired her — “a picture of me as a first-grader, with wide teeth and dying of laughter. I was constantly joking as a kid,” she said.

Visitors press a button to be “disinfected from negativity” as soon as they step inside the museum, which has eight interactive zones.

One has a rubber chicken choir cheerfully cackling out hits like ABBA’s “Dancing Queen”, there is a karaoke room with distorted voices and a “Sumo Arena” for wrestling in puffed up costumes.

There is also some serious history of humour from ancient to modern times told through theatre, film or the net.

The museum also explains humour styles, from word play, slapstick, toilet and dark humour to satire with the help of some choice one-liners.

“I’ve had so much plastic surgery, when I die they will donate my body to Tupperware,” is one of the featured zingers from US comedian Joan Rivers.

- ‘INNER CHILD’ -

Golubic said the HaHaHouse is drawing everyone from small children to the elderly, with grown-



ups seeing it as a good excuse to play at being kids again themselves.

“All those who still feel a bit of childish joy and embrace their inner child, will recharge themselves,” she insisted.

Pensioner Bruno Dadic said he was “delighted” by his visit “as there is never enough humour in life.

“Laughter is a medicine for the soul,” he said.

Zagreb’s psychiatric hospital has voiced interest in organised visits and links are also being made with schools and retirement homes.

“The museum is great,” said Aleksandar Suka who celebrated his fifth birthday with a visit.

Accompanied by his mother, the little boy said he loved lying on the “Bed of Nails” since they tickled him.

Singer Zorica Bucic, from the coastal town of Split, said the museum was perfect for our times “when we are bombarded with so much bad news.

“Entering here is like entering

childhood, being relieved of all problems. If you could come here more there would be no need to pay a psychologist,” she said.

Indeed, laughter is a defence mechanism which gives people strength to face their problems, psychologist Petar Kraljevic said, saying he loved the idea too.

“If a prescription for three hours of laughter per 24 hours could be written and followed that would certainly give positive results.” — AFP

FEATURES

TRACE THE
EVOLUTION
OF ITALIAN
FASHION
JEWELLERY
AT THIS
EXHIBIT



BY LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

STEPPING into the captivating world of Italian fashion jewellery at the National Museum of Oman is nothing short of enchanting in 2025. The exhibition, titled “Diva! Italian Glamour in Fashion Jewellery”, showcases an exquisite array of collections spanning from the 1950s to the present day, each piece a testimony to the artistry and innovation intrinsic to Italian fashion.

Amongst the treasures from the 1950s, we are greeted by the dramatic presence of heavier designs, with a particularly intriguing focus on animal-themed collections. As the decades unfolded, jewellery makers began pushing boundaries, experimenting with an eclectic mix of materials beyond traditional gold. Notable examples include the use of ceramic and leather, with some daringly incorporating industrial elements like oil filters in more contemporary works.

Highlighting the richness of this era is the striking Butterfly necklace by Ornella Bijoux, crafted from gold-galvanised ceramic and adorned with intricate murrine, glass paste and crystals, dating back to 1975. A standout from 1925 is the vibrant coral necklace sourced from the Deanna Farneti Cera Archive. Innovative designer Paola Volpi Gioilli surprises us with the Tilted Alga, a remarkable piece created from industrial oil filters interlaced with cultured pearls.

More recent creations, such as the kimono collection earrings by Lebole Gioielli, made from silk, wood, gold and galvanised brass, highlight the evolving trends of 2013. Gucci’s necklace, blending brass with glass, and Carmen Scar’s Place Vendome Smeraldo, made of linen, oil colours and resin, further demonstrate the diverse artistry that has emerged in modern times.

The exhibition is a narrative of Italy’s rich jewellery history, showcasing modern craftsmanship through pieces like the Timone necklace by Grazia & Marcia Vozza from 2018, which harmoniously combines silver, gold, turquoise paste, tiger’s eye and mother of pearl. An elegant eye-catching piece, the Re Ottavio – Princess Grace Necklace, created in 1960, boasts gold-galvanised brass, pearls and crystals, adding a touch of nostalgia to the collection.

Curated by Professor Alba Cappellieri, a distinguished Jewellery Design educator at Politecnico di Milano and Director of the Vicenza Museum of Jewellery, this exhibition is the culmination of two years of meticulous research. Professor Cappellieri shared with the *Observer*, “The purpose of this collection is to reveal that Italian fashion jewellery transcends mere ornamentation. It embodies creativity, craftsmanship and innovation.” She emphasised the significance of ancient techniques, such as enamel, alongside contemporary materials,



echoing the sentiment that beauty stems from both creativity and quality. Supported by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, this exhibition fosters a cultural dialogue between Italy and the Sultanate of Oman, reinforcing the bonds of friendship and collaboration between both nations. Visitors are invited to explore the artistic evolution of modern Italian jewellery, representing a hallmark of global Italian creativity. The pieces on display also reflect the dynamic social changes throughout the decades. The exhibition invites visitors to

consider Italian fashion jewellery not merely as aesthetic embellishments but as cultural artefacts that embody the roots and values of Italian heritage. As *Diva!* elegantly explores the masterpieces crafted by renowned Italian bijoutiers and independent designers, it highlights the outstanding craftsmanship that epitomises unique Italian creativity on a global stage. This celebration features an array of visionary talents, from established masters to burgeoning designers, each contributing their unique perspectives under the unifying theme of excellence in Italian fashion jewellery.