

Cultivating national leaders

The Royal Academy of Management (RAM) launched the National CEO Programme (NCP). The programme aims to cultivate national leaders. It signifies the academy's commitment to developing exceptional leaders within the private sector, equipping them with the essential skills necessary to achieve the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

DETAILS ON P2

SUNRISE - 06:01 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 04:46 AM
DHUHR - 12:00 PM
ASR - 03:22 PM
MAGHRIB - 05:54 PM
ISHA - 07:04 PM



P13

RO 20.1 BILLION INVESTMENTS IN FREE, ECONOMIC ZONES



P12

GAUFF BEATS MUCHOVA IN STRAIGHT SETS TO WIN CHINA OPEN



P20

THE LEGACY OF THE PDO PLANETARIUM



AFTER A YEAR OF WAR, GAZANS STILL FACE ISRAELI BRUTALITY

World marches for Gaza, Lebanon ceasefire

PARIS: Thousands of pro-Palestinian demonstrators protested in cities around the world on Sunday on the eve of the first anniversary of the October 7 attack on Israel that triggered the war in Gaza.

Demonstrations were held in major cities from Jakarta to Istanbul to Rabat, following protests on Saturday in major European capitals as well as Washington and New York.

“We are here to support the Palestinian resistance,” said protester Ahmet Unal in Istanbul, where thousands assembled.

Israel’s military campaign in Gaza has killed nearly 42,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza’s health ministry.

Israel launched air strikes on Beirut’s southern suburbs overnight and early on Sunday, the most intense bombardment of the Lebanese capital since Israel sharply escalated its campaign against Hezbollah last month.

In Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, at least 1,000 pro-Palestinian protesters

gathered on Sunday morning near the US embassy, demanding that Washington stop supplying weapons to Israel.

In Sydney, thousands of pro-Palestinian protesters gathered ahead of the October 7 anniversary, chanting and waving Lebanese and Palestinian flags amid a heavy police presence.

NEW CHALLENGES

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, on Sunday took part in the 10th meeting of the GCC Ministers of Endowments, Islamic and Religious Affairs held in Doha. Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, who headed the Sultanate of Oman’s delegation, said that the meeting offers an opportunity to consolidate ties of brotherhood, harmony and unity among member states.

The minister pointed out that the region is facing many challenges due to



A protester holds an “End the Genocide” sign as people rally in support of Gaza and Lebanon in front of the City Hall in Orlando, Florida, on Sunday. — AFP

global developments that continue to accelerate at a worrying and unbalanced pace. In this context, he spoke about “the unjust war and the ongoing aggression against Al Quds and Palestine,” noting that such actions underscore the importance of joining hands to address these rapid developments.

In his speech, Dr Al Maamari also cautioned against extremism, noting that it constitutes a deviation from the tolerant Sharia principles and poses a threat to security and development. “It is our responsibility to protect our societies from harmful ideas and ideologies that distort the truth of the Islamic religion, which unites souls in goodness and peace,” he added. The minister underlined the significance of allocating an “International Day for Endowments”, which, he said, would contribute to raising awareness about the important role that endowments play in promoting social care. — **Agencies**

MUSCAT

CHILDREN’S CULTURE AWARD WINNERS



The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth announced the names of the winners of the 4th edition of the Children’s Culture Award 2024. The award aims to develop and enhance cultural and artistic innovation and motivate talented children to develop their potential. The first place went to Aleen bint Majid al Saeediyah for her topic featuring the importance of trees in biodiversity. The second prize was bagged by Rofan Mahmoud Ahmed for successfully highlighting the same theme. The third prize was awarded to Jassim bin Yaqoub al Nakheli for his entry titled “Do you like animals?”. **DETAILS ON P3**

LOW PRESSURE TO BRING RAINS

The latest weather updates and analyses from the National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre indicate that the Sultanate of Oman will be affected by a low-pressure system starting from Monday until Tuesday. There is a chance of cloud formation over Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South governorates, with chances of isolated rain and occasional thunderstorms. Aerial images on Sunday showed the beginning of cumulus cloud formation and chances of scattered rain, sometimes associated with thunderstorms, in parts of the Al Hajar Mountains. The Oman Met Office forecasts rains over and around the Al Hajar Mountains and indicates that thunderstorms are expected in parts of the Al Hajar Mountains. **SEE P5**

EXPLORING RICH MARINE LIFE



Yacht tourism plays a crucial role in boosting marine tourism in the Sultanate of Oman and is an important element in developing the country’s tourism industry. It contributes significantly to attracting tourists seeking to explore the diverse and rich marine life on the coasts of Oman, especially in the Dimaniyat Islands and Bandar Al Khairan.

Action plan to attract more FDI in food security sectors

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, launched a massive plan to enhance local and foreign investment in various food security sectors to achieve the goals of Oman Vision 2040, with the aim of augmenting the food security sector.

The Food Security Lab 2024, organised by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, in cooperation with Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, the National Programme for Investment and Exports Development, a public drive code-named (Nazdahir), the National Employment Programme (NEP) and private sector companies, kicked off on Sunday.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The lab seeks to enhance local and foreign investment in various food security sectors towards the realisation of the goals of Oman Vision 2040. It will introduce a number of enablers to support the food security sector, develop a package of investment

opportunities related to in-country value (ICV), boost digital transition, identify challenges posed to the ministry’s plan and improve institutional performance.

The objectives include maximising economic return from natural resources by generating ICV-related investment opportunities, empowering local suppliers and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and activating initiatives to support suppliers and the Omani workforce.

NEW PILLARS

Speaking to the Observer on the pillars of the Food Security Lab 2024, Eng Hamoud bin Hamad al Rashidi, Adviser to the ministry for planning and supervisor of the Technical Team at the Lab, said that there will be two new pillars along with the existing three.

“Comprehensively, the lab will work on five pillars, including two digital transformation pillars, which aim to launch the ‘Tharwat’ platform with 10 electronic services and launch the ‘Silal’ application. The Strategic Planning pillar, which works to adopt the 2025 plan or the strategic plan, will work on detailed plans for projects and improve the ministry’s targets,” he said. **TURN TO P5**



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Seminar addresses protecting youth from negative influences

AMAL AL RIYAMI
IZKI, OCT 6

The Social Development Department in Izki organised a seminar titled 'Shielding Youth from Intellectual Influences,' aimed at addressing the behavioural challenges faced by young people and the role of family supervision in protecting them from modern distractions.

The event, which was held in Izki Public Hall was held under the auspices of Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, and attended by several dignitaries, including walis from the governorate, members of the Majlis Ash'shura representing Izki, officials from the government and private sectors and students from both genders.

In his opening remarks, Ahmed al Toubi, Assistant Director, Social Development Department in Izki, outlined the critical challenges confronting youth today, particularly amidst the fast-paced changes in intellectual and social landscapes.

"It is our collective responsibility to face these challenges with determination," he said, emphasising the Ministry of Social Development's role in collaborating with other entities



The Izki seminar was titled 'Shielding Youth from Intellectual Influences.' PHOTO BY IBRAHIM AL FAHDI

to address societal concerns, with youth support and the promotion of national identity as top priorities.

The seminar featured a panel discussion with Shaikh Ibrahim al Sawafi, media personality Moosa al Farei, Lieutenant Colonel Mohammed al Hashami, and moderated by Dr Ahmed al Maamari. Moderated by Dr Ahmed al Maamari, the discussion explored various perspectives on protecting youth from external influences.

Shaikh Ibrahim al Sawafi also noted that change is a gradual process, but young minds are increasingly impacted by rapid global shifts in ideas, particularly concerning religion, politics,

ethics and values.

Moosa al Farei emphasised the importance of family involvement, advising parents to engage closely with their children, understand their needs, and ensure their time is spent constructively. He warned against the negative impacts of social media, urging students to be cautious about the content they consume and avoid emulating individuals who do not align with their cultural values.

Lt Col Mohammed al Hashami discussed the challenges posed by the 'technological invasion,' which has made it difficult to shield young people from external influences. He highlighted the rise in

cybercrimes, including blackmail and identity theft, as key concerns. He also underscored the need for stronger family bonds to provide the guidance necessary for raising well-rounded, responsible individuals.

The seminar concluded with a call to action, emphasising families, educators, and community leaders to work together in fostering a safe and supportive environment for the younger generation.

Participants emphasised the importance of continuous dialogue and proactive measures to ensure that youth are equipped to navigate modern challenges while staying rooted in their values and cultural identity.

Sohar University hosts global forum on IP, research and innovation

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, OCT 6

Sohar University, in collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI), and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), organised the Forum on Elevating Intellectual Property, Research, and Innovation in Oman. The event was held at the Sohar University campus on October 2, 3, under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

The forum addressed critical issues related to intellectual property, emphasising its importance as a tool for fostering innovation and supporting researchers and innovators within the Sultanate of Oman. It featured nine distinguished experts and specialists in the field of intellectual property, both from within Oman and internationally. Representatives from WIPO also attended.

Participating entities included the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Sultan Qaboos University, UTAS, Omani Intellectual Property Association, SME Development Authority, and more.

Dr Hamdan al Fazari, Vice-Chancellor of Sohar University, in his keynote speech said, "Oman Vision 2040 focuses strongly on higher education, research, and innovation to enhance national capacities. Research and innovation are

fundamental components of any successful university and any successful country, as they are critical to the economic and social well-being of society. Research, at both the university and national levels, is crucial for driving innovation, economic growth and societal progress. Countries and universities that prioritise research invest in developing new knowledge, technologies and solutions to address pressing challenges and improve the quality of life."

Mohamed Abderraouf Bdioui, Senior Counsellor, WIPO Academy, emphasised the forum's role in consolidating the national endeavour towards achieving Oman Vision 2040, stating, "The forum also comes to consolidate the national endeavour towards reaching 'Oman Vision 2040,' which WIPO continuously supports by assisting Oman in its transformation into a knowledge and innovation-based economy." Dr Rahma al Mahrouqi also delivered a speech highlighting the forum's significance.

The first day included multiple working papers, starting with 'IP, Research and Innovation: Government Perspective in the Context of Oman Vision 2040,' presented by Muhanna al Zuheimi from the MoHERI. This was followed by a presentation from Julio Raffo, Head of Innovation Economy Section, WIPO Geneva, on 'Making Innovation Policy Work for Development: Insights from World Intellectual Property Report 2024.' Further discussions encompassed topics such as 'High-Tech, Intellectual Property and Open Knowledge Ecosystem.'

RAM launches CEO Programme for 35 private sector executives

MUSCAT: Sunday marked the launch of the National CEO Programme (NCP), delivered by the Royal Academy of Management, in response to the visionary directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, aimed at cultivating national leaders.

This programme signifies the Academy's commitment to developing exceptional leaders within the private sector, equipping them with the essential skills necessary to achieve the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. The NCP is designed to foster a dynamic community of leaders prepared to navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing international landscape, thus contributing significantly to the growth and sustainability of Oman's five-year economic plan.

The programme will take 35 executive leaders on a challenging 8-month learning journey comprising learning modules and experiential learning, besides international discovery site visits.

It also features mentoring sessions that enhance participants' understanding of leadership concepts and assist them in adopting new methodologies by immersing them in an unfamiliar environment that simulates the role of a CEO, thereby fostering strong teams and developing an organisation capable of competing and adapting to the future.

Abdulaziz bin Said bin Humaid al Risi, Assistant to the President for Studies and Development, assigned the duties of Assistant to the President for Institutional Affairs, emphasised that this new edition aims to develop Omani CEOs to a world-class standard. It focuses on achieving strategic objectives at the individual, institutional and national levels while promoting innovative and creative leadership within the executive sectors.

This initiative seeks to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of Oman's private sector by accelerating performance and growth across various industries through the development of participants' leadership capacities. These skills will empower them to inspire the next generation of leaders within Oman's private sector.



RAM programme takes 35 leaders on an 8-month learning journey

The programme's first module will focus on building a leadership community among participants, enhancing learning and reflection on contemporary leadership concepts.

The second module, which will take place in the UK, will emphasise leadership development and introduce new perspectives on methodologies. Participants will explore leveraging their strengths to develop strategies, lead teams and drive transformation.

The third module, 'Leading a 21st Century Organisation,' will cover essential skills for modern leadership, including financial management, digital marketing, stakeholder engagement and data-driven decision-making. The fourth module will involve field visits to examine business sector challenges, learning from successful individuals and institutions within Oman's private sector.

The final module will focus on change leadership, policy implementation, transformation strategies and building strong stakeholder networks. The programme will conclude with the 'Leadership Community' event, showcasing participants' learning experiences and reinforcing their leadership connections.

The NCP programme is one of several key initiatives delivered by the Royal Academy of Management through its Centre for Leadership Development.



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TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Special Oilfield Services Co LLC, hereby announces the following tender;

Tender No	Description of Works	Grade	Tender Fee	Date of Submission	Place of collection of tender documents	Place of submission of tender documents
DGEC/8240542/ SOS/2024/R1	Construction of Proposed Fabrication facility for SOS at Nizwa Industrial Estate	Grade 1 and Excellent Grade contractors with valid Tender Board registration	RO 500	29th October 2024	Design Group Engineering Consultants office in MBD, Way No. 3516, Building No. 1287, 5th Floor, Office No. 52	Special Oilfield Services Co LLC, P.O. Box: 880, Postal Code: 112 Ruwi, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

Scope of Works

Upon purchase of the tender documents in the form of Electronic copy.

The interested contractor who are qualified for such type of works are invited to contact "Design Group Engineering Consultants" office in MBD, Way No. 3516, Building No. 1287, 5th Floor, Office No. 52. (Tel +968 22522550, 24817197, Fax: 24819487), to collect the full tender documents. The document price quoted above is non-refundable. Upon collection of the tender documents, Contractors shall provide full contact detail, including address, email ID and telephone number, for tender correspondence .

Contractors can purchase the tender document from **Thursday 8 October 2024 until 29 October 2024.**

Contractors must submit their offer, accompanied by a bid bond issued by a licensed Omani bank for the value of one percent (1%) of the total tender price. The bond must be valid for ninety days starting from the date of submission. Any tender not including the bid bond will be rejected.

Documents must be submitted in a plain envelope sealed with red wax, which shall contain the Technical Proposal and the Commercial Proposal in two separate envelopes. The envelopes shall not show any sign which may identify the bidder.

The Tender must be addressed and submitted to "M/s Special Oilfield Services Co LLC, P.O. Box: 880, Postal Code: 112 Ruwi, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman" on or before 17.00 on **29th October 2024.**

The issue of this Tender does not oblige Special Oilfield Services Co LLC to award the contract to a tenderer. Special Oilfield Services Co LLC reserves the right to decide not to award the contract to any tenderer and to cancel the procedure at any time before award. Special Oilfield Services Co LLC shall bear no liability whatsoever in connection with the tender proceedings.



MoCSY celebrates talents at Children’s Culture Award

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, OCT 6

As part of its continuous efforts to promote cultural and artistic creativity and empower talented children and adolescents, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth organised the closing ceremony of the Children’s Culture Award in its fourth edition.

The event, held on October 2, honoured finalists in two key competitions: ‘Speak So I Can See You’, aimed at children aged 7–12 years, and the ‘Oman Tells’ competition for children’s writers and authors.

The ceremony took place at the Omantel headquarters under the auspices of Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises.

The first place in the Speak So I Can See You competition was awarded to Aleen bint Majid al Saeediyah, followed by Rofan Mahmoud Ahmed from Egypt in second place, while Jassim bin Yaqoub al Nakheli secured third place.

The winners of the Oman Tells Competition were also recognised, with Hanan bint Salem al Maawaliyah, Taiba bint



The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth organised the 4th edition of the Children’s Culture Award.

Mohammed al Sinaniyah, Haifa bint Salem al Araithiyah, Salem bin Khamis al Muqbali and Aisha bint Juma al Farsiyyah taking top honours for their outstanding literary contributions.

Huda bint Saeed al Riyamiya, Director of the Department of Cultural Activities, emphasised that the Children’s Culture Award, which was introduced in 2021, aims to develop children’s cultural and literary abilities, especially their speaking skills.

The award encourages students to overcome the fear of public speaking while fostering self-expression and promoting Omani values and heritage. Additionally, the competition provides a platform for Omani



writers and authors to enrich the Arab child’s library with stories that instil human and cultural values.

Ahmed bin Nasser al Rashdi, Head of the Children’s Culture Department and Supervisor of the award, praised the achievements of this year’s participants. He expressed hopes for the competition’s expansion to include participants from across the Arab world in the future.

Since its inception, the award has honoured numerous eloquent students and writers, resulting in the publication of four books and contributing to Oman’s literary presence in Arab and international book fairs.

Dhofar Scientific Forum activities begin

SALALAH: The ‘Dhofar Scientific Forum’, organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, commenced on Sunday at Dhofar University, targeting students, academics, researchers and innovators. This forum will continue until October 11.

The forum will feature four training workshops focused on scientific research and innovation, covering topics such as the ethics of scientific research, creative thinking skills, strategic innovation management and techniques for writing scientific theses.

These workshops will be conducted in collaboration with academic institutions in the Dhofar Governorate, along with awareness presentations at various governmental, educational and private institutions.

The forum also includes an awareness exhibition designed to highlight scientific research and innovation projects, showcasing several success stories and interactive



The forum features four training workshops focused on scientific research and innovation

content.
Dr Salah bin Sumar al Zadjali, Director-General of Programmes and Capacity Building at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, emphasised that the forum aims to enhance the research and innovation capabilities of young students and graduates, introduce ministry programmes and projects, foster communication and partnerships between researchers and supporting entities, promote the culture of scientific research and innovation in society, and address challenges and aspirations in this field.

—ONA

Oman’s artisanal fish landings hit new heights

MUSCAT: By the end of July 2024, Oman’s artisanal fish landings totalled approximately 371,934 tonnes, valued at around RO 276.6 million, according to preliminary statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Commercial fishing contributed 32,976 tonnes, while coastal fishing added 4,629 tonnes to the total. The statistics revealed that Al Wusta Governorate led the way in artisanal fish landings with 130,854 tonnes, followed by Al Sharqiyah South with 102,838 tonnes. Other notable contributions came from the governorates of Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Dhofar, Musandam and Muscat.

Artisanal fishing predominantly yielded small surface fish, totalling about 201,275 tonnes. Large surface fish accounted for 97,039 tonnes, while demersal fish reached 61,913 tonnes.

Additionally, 4,810 tonnes of sharks, 3,695 tonnes of crustaceans and molluscs and 3,203 tonnes of other fish were recorded. — ONA

Omani delegation visits Unicef supply division in Denmark



The Omani delegation visited Unicef’s Global Supply and Logistics Hub in Copenhagen.

MUSCAT: A delegation from the Sultanate of Oman on Sunday visited Unicef’s Global Supply and Logistics Hub in Copenhagen. The visit aims to strengthen humanitarian cooperation. The delegation comprises representatives from the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Education, the Children First Association, the Oman Charitable Organization, Dar Al Atta and the private sector.

The delegation’s visit provided a comprehensive overview of Unicef’s exceptional procurement and delivery operations in some of the world’s most challenging environments. The visit is strategically aligned with Oman’s recent contribution to Unicef’s Gaza appeal.

The visit allowed the Omani delegation to witness firsthand the crucial role Unicef’s Supply Division plays in delivering life-saving supplies to children worldwide. The delegation was

briefed on Unicef’s extensive operations, which, in 2023 alone, facilitated the procurement of \$5.2 billion in essential goods and services, benefiting children in 162 countries.

As part of its operations in 2023 and to date in 2024, Unicef Supply Division has delivered more than \$270 million worth of life-saving supplies for children and families in Gaza and Sudan.

HH Sayyidah Dr Muna al Said, Chairperson of the Children First Association, reflected on the experience: “Our visit to Copenhagen has been truly enlightening. We witnessed firsthand Unicef’s cutting-edge facilities and innovative approaches, especially those that cater to the needs of children with disabilities. This aligns closely with Oman Vision 2040, where the health, education, and overall well-being of our children are central to our nation’s progress.”

During the three-day visit, the delegation was given an in-depth

tour of Unicef’s state-of-the-art facilities, including a close look at the fully automated High Bay storage area, a 24-metre-high structure capable of holding up to 36,000 pallets of essential supplies. The facility operates with eight robots, ensuring efficient handling and rapid response capabilities, which are crucial during crises.

In addition to the tour, the delegation had the opportunity to visit Unicef’s Innovation Hub, which showcases cutting-edge research and techniques, including assistive technologies designed to support children with disabilities.

“Children are at the heart of Unicef’s supply work,” said Director of Unicef Supply Division, Leila Pakkala. “We extend our sincere gratitude for the strong cooperation and partnership between the Government of Oman and Unicef for children in the most urgent need.” — ONA



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We invite applicants with skilled technical qualities to support our cutting-edge infrastructure and research initiatives. Candidates with hands-on experience in their field of expertise, and proficiency in managing and maintaining advanced laboratory equipment, IT systems, Learning Management Systems or multimedia resources essential. A strong problem-solving aptitude and the ability to work collaboratively with faculty and students are key attributes.
- Administrative Staff (College Registrar, Executive Secretary, Departmental Coordinators, Curriculum and Assessment Officers, Financial Administrators):**
We invite applicants with experienced administrative capabilities to ensure the smooth operation of the new College who possess excellent organizational, communication, and interpersonal skills as well as proficiency in office management software and the ability to handle multiple tasks efficiently are crucial. Experience in higher education administration, student services, or event coordination is highly desirable.

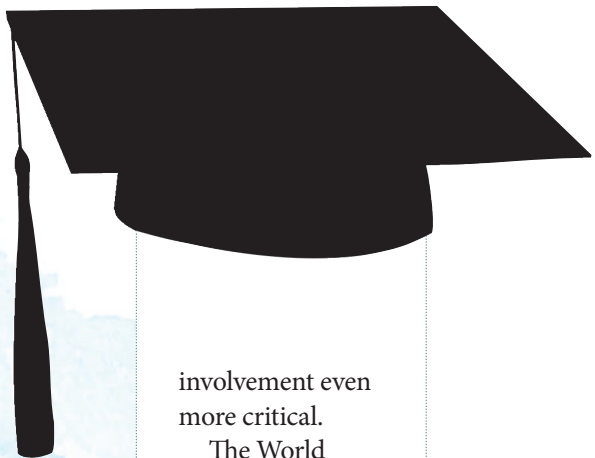
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CLOSING DATE
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E-GAMING’S IMPACT ON ACADEMICS, BEHAVIOUR



The World Health Organization (WHO) officially recognised ‘gaming disorder’ in 2018, identifying it as a behavioural condition that prioritises gaming over other essential tasks.

AFRAH AL
BALUSHI

Electronic games have become a staple in the lives of children, particularly during holidays when parental supervision tends to be more relaxed. While parents guide and limit playtime, it is crucial to recognise the impact of these games on academic achievement. Excessive gaming can lead to a decline in grades and concentration, often negatively influencing children’s health and their ability to focus on studies. With the rise of digital entertainment, children now

spend a significant portion of their day engaged in video games, often prioritising this over academic tasks. As a result, their academic performance may suffer, reflecting in poorer grades. To mitigate this, parents should limit gaming time, particularly during study hours, and introduce methods that encourage children to review their lessons instead. Apart from academic setbacks, the behavioural impact of electronic games is a growing concern. Many of these games promote aggressive tendencies, subtly altering a child’s personality. Younger children, who are unaware of the deeper psychological effects, may begin to display socially isolating behaviour, which hampers intellectual and social development. While there are educational games that benefit children, the prevalence of violent games poses a significant risk, making parental

involvement even more critical. The World Health Organization (WHO) officially recognised ‘gaming disorder’ in 2018, identifying it as a behavioural condition that prioritises gaming over other essential tasks. The fun and excitement derived from video games can lead children to favour them over their school responsibilities, compounding their academic challenges. Studies show that while video games may enhance certain visual-spatial skills, their overall negative effect on academic achievement cannot be ignored. Parents must take proactive steps to ensure a healthy balance between gaming and academic activities. By setting clear limits on playtime and engaging with their children in meaningful discussions, parents can help nurture a well-rounded, balanced individual. Moreover, selecting games with educational content and monitoring their children’s gaming behaviour will foster positive intellectual and social development.

PARENTS MUST TAKE PROACTIVE STEPS TO ENSURE A HEALTHY BALANCE BETWEEN
GAMING AND ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES



Omani identity and culture celebrated in Salalah

SALALAH: The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA), organised an event titled ‘Oman Bridges: Identity and Civilisation.’

During the five-day event, being held at Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah, the

ministry is represented by the ‘Department of Introduction to Islam and Cultural Exchange’ based at the Iftaa Office.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar. The event will run until October 10.



Dr Shaikh Kahlan bin Nabhan al Kharousi, Assistant Grand Mufti, in his speech elaborated on components that shape the Omani identity: the religion, the language and the distinctive national characteristics of the Omani people. The event is

accompanied by an exhibition featuring many themes, including ‘Rights in Omani Society’, the ‘Omani Values in Urban Jurisprudence’, the ‘Values and ethics that contributed to Omani merchants’ spreading Islam’ and ‘Omanis as Messengers of Peace’. — ONA

Oman, India explore naval cooperation

MUSCAT: Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF), received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Sunday Vice Admiral Vennam Srinivas, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Southern Naval Command of the Republic of India, and his accompanying military delegation.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed several topics of common interest. The meeting was attended by Brigadier Hamed bin Abdullah al Balushi, SAF Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations and Planning, a number of senior COSAF officers and the Military Attaché of India’s embassy in Muscat

Meanwhile, Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) also received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa today



Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi holds talks with Indian Vice Admiral Vennam Srinivas

Vice Admiral Vennam Srinivas, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Southern Naval Command of the Republic of India, and his accompanying military delegation.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the existing cooperation in various naval military fields and means of enhancing them. The meeting was attended by senior RNO officers and the Military Attaché in the Indian embassy at Muscat.

Meanwhile, Vice Admiral Vennam Srinivas and his accompanying military delegation

also visited the National Defence College (NDC).

Upon their arrival at the centre, the guests were greeted by Rear Admiral Ali bin Abdullah al Shidi, Commandant of the National Defence College (NDC). Members of the visiting delegation were briefed on the college’s facilities and its strategic curriculum, which focuses on preparing national competencies capable of making strategic decisions at various levels. They also toured the NDC’s departments and various halls.

— ONA

Oman at GCC Municipal Works Conference



RIYADH: The Sultanate of Oman took part on Sunday in activities of the 12th Gulf Municipal Works Conference, held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

The three-day event is themed ‘Sustainable Municipal Action’. It aims to discuss topics related to the sustainability of municipal work, as well as the exchange of experiences and expertise among GCC countries.

Oman’s delegation is headed by Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah. Further, the event reviewed the role of community participation in achieving sustainability in the municipal sector. It also touched on risks imposed by climate change on GCC cities and roads.

An exhibition is held on the sidelines of the conference to showcase products, technologies and innovations, as well as successful experiences in the field of municipal action. — ONA

Low pressure system to bring rains this week

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

The latest weather updates and analyses from the National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre indicate that the Sultanate of Oman will be affected by a low-pressure system starting from Monday until Tuesday.

There is a chance of cloud formation over Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South governorates, with chances of isolated rain and occasional thunderstorms. Aerial images on Sunday showed the beginning of cumulus cloud formation and chances of scattered rain, sometimes associated with thunderstorms, in parts of the Al Hajar Mountains.

The Oman Met Office forecasts rains over and around the Al Hajar Mountains and indicates that thunderstorms are expected in parts of the Al Hajar Mountains. Cloud formations and rainfall of varying intensity, ranging between 20 and 50 mm, accompanied by thunderstorms, active downward winds and hail, could also lead to the flow of wadis in the Al Hajar Mountains and surrounding areas during the afternoon and evening from Monday to Wednesday.

The Met Office stated that there are chances of low clouds or fog formation late at night and early in the morning, leading to reduced visibility in parts of Al Sharqiyah South Governorate and parts of the coastal areas of Dhofar and Al Wusta governorates, as well as along the coasts of the Sea of Oman. There is also a possibility of dust and dirt rising in the desert areas of Dhofar and Al Wusta governorates.

The active downward wind is expected to have a speed of 15-45 knots, leading to reduced visibility and the flying of loose materials during thunderstorms. The average wave height is expected to be around 1.5-2.0 metres along the coasts of the Sea of Oman and the western coasts of Musandam Governorate, while on the coasts of the Arabian Sea, it is expected to be calm with an average wave height of 1.5 metres.

The Met Office stated that on Tuesday and Wednesday, cumulus clouds are expected with chances of scattered rain over the Al Hajar Mountains and neighbouring areas during the afternoon.

Action plan to attract more FDI in food security sectors

FROM P1

Accordingly, the Investment pillar aims to support the strategic programme with a number of investment projects, and the Enablers pillar will launch a number of enablers to support investments in the food security sector.

“Lastly, the ‘Local Content’ pillar aims to maximise the economic returns from natural resources.”

Al Rashidi said that the importance of the import substitution initiative aims to develop a timetable to raise self-sufficiency rates for targeted goods to 75 per cent.



Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, presided over the launch

Dr Yousef bin Mohammed al Riyami, Director-General of the National Centre for Statistics and Information, said that the total annual household food consumption stands

at RO 3 billion, according to 2023 statistics, with an average monthly expenditure of RO 757, of which 28 per cent is for food (for Omanis) and RO 361, of which 22 per cent is for

food by expatriates.

Al Riyami pointed out that the number of Omanis working in agriculture and animal production activities stood at 39,655 and 22,485 nationals are working in the field of fishing and aquaculture.

“The percentage of the contribution of the added value of the food sector to the GDP stood at 3 per cent, 1.3 per cent the added value of the agriculture and forestry activity, 1 per cent the added value of the fishing activity, 0.7 per cent the added value of the food industries activity, and 1.2 per cent the added value of the water sector,” he added.

Space tech’s role in climate action highlighted

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman joins the world in celebrating World Space Week 2024, held from October 4 to 10 under the theme ‘Space and Climate Change’. The event aims to raise awareness about the vital role space technology plays in addressing global challenges, particularly climate change.

The Omani Astronomical Society has taken part in this global celebration, emphasising the significance of space technology in combating the climate challenges that affect Earth. Al Mukhtar bin Saif al Saeedi, a member of the Space Sciences Committee at the Omani Astronomical Society, explained the historical importance of this week, which commemorates two pivotal events: the launch of the first satellite, Sputnik 1, on October 4, 1957, and the signing of the Outer Space Treaty on October 10, 1967.

Al Saidi highlighted that space exploration has far-reaching impacts beyond the study of celestial bodies.



‘Satellites,’ he said, “are among the most crucial tools of space technology today, playing a pivotal role in climate monitoring, observing weather patterns, and tracking harmful gas emissions.” These advancements provide critical data for understanding climate changes and developing effective strategies to combat them.

He further explained how space technology contributes to sustainable resource management. “Through satellite data, we gain insights into the distribution of resources on Earth, helping us address environmental degradation and protect the planet.”

The Omani Astronomical Society has organised a variety of community

events, including expert-led dialogue sessions and astronomical observation activities, which coincide with the Nasa Space Apps Hackathon. Participants also had the chance to observe Saturn and Jupiter through telescopes in the Wilayat of Bidiyah, attracting space enthusiasts eager to learn more about these planets.

Upcoming events include a monitoring session in Samad Al Shan on Thursday and a dialogue session at Sultan Qaboos University on Monday titled ‘Space and Climate: Solutions from the Sky’, featuring experts discussing the latest scientific advancements.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the association is also conducting educational lectures for students, aiming to expand their knowledge of space sciences and its relevance to daily life. The week’s celebrations reflect Oman’s commitment to leveraging space technology for the betterment of the planet. — ONA



BOOK ON OMAN-KOREA HISTORICAL TIES LAUNCHED

MUSCAT: Acting in cooperation with the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Seoul, the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) published a book titled “The Sultanate of Oman: Historical Cooperation and Friendship with the Republic of Korea”. The book was authored by Korean writer Dr Hee Soo Lee. The first edition of the book (in Arabic and Korean languages) comprises seven chapters. It reflects the writer’s keenness on the strategic importance of the Sultanate of Oman and his awareness of the need to highlight the importance of cooperation between Korea and the Sultanate of Oman, activating historical and cultural aspects of the two countries and linking them with the political and economic realities. — ONA

Oman Textile Mills Co. LLC

PB No. 39, PC 124, Rusayl Industrial City, Muscat

This is to inform all concerned that **Mr. Srinivasan Mahadevan** who was working with us as Deputy Manager is no longer an employee of this company effective from September 5, 2024. Oman Textile Mills will not be responsible for any business dealings conducted by Mr. Srinivasan on behalf of the company after the said date. Any outstanding liabilities with Mr. Srinivasan should be reported to the company within one week of this notice. We request all our associates not to deal with him on our company business.

GAZA

TIMELINE

As we mark 12 months into the Israeli genocide in Gaza, here are some key incidents that saw the expansion of the Israeli attacks to Lebanon, Syria and Iran.

The renewed conflict has raged for months and has seen an escalation between Israel and Iran and the most dangerous situation on the border with Lebanon for many years.



A Palestinian family arrives in Gaza City after evacuating their homes in the Jabalia area. — AFP

OCTOBER 7 Hamas attacks southern Israel, including capturing of captives. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declares that Israel is at war and orders air strikes on Gaza.

OCTOBER 13 Israel tells residents of Gaza City to evacuate and move south. Israel Defence Force (IDF) troops move into the Gaza Strip.

OCTOBER 17 An explosion at the Al Ahli hospital in Gaza City triggers outrage in the Arab world. Israel launches ground assault and invades Gaza territory.

NOVEMBER 15 Israeli troops enter Gaza's biggest hospital, Al Shifa, in Gaza City, after a siege lasting several days during which medical staff say patients including newborn babies died from a lack of power and supplies. All hospitals serving the northern half of Gaza cease functioning.



A boy holds Turkish and Palestinian flags during a protest to express support for Palestinians in Gaza, in Istanbul. — Reuters

NOVEMBER ceasefire: Israel and Hamas agree to pause fighting for four days to exchange women and child captives held in Gaza for Palestinian women and teenagers detained by Israel, and allow in more aid. The ceasefire was extended for a week in total and led to the freeing of 105 captives and about 240 Palestinians.

DECEMBER 1 Israeli forces launch their first big ground assault on southern Gaza, on the outskirts of the city of Khan Yunis.

DECEMBER 6 22 members of the same family are killed in an Israeli air strike at the Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza.



A protester plays a drum during a demonstration in support of Palestinians in Gaza, in Berlin. — Reuters

GAZA: 365 DAYS

THOUSANDS AROUND THE



People demonstrate during a protest to express support for Palestinians in Gaza, in Barcelona. — Reuters

PARIS/WASHINGTON: Thousands of protesters took to the streets in major cities around the world demanding an end to bloodshed in Gaza and the wider Middle East ahead of the first anniversary of the deadly Hamas attack on Israel.

About 40,000 pro-Palestinian demonstrators marched through central London, while thousands gathered in Paris, Rome, Manila, Cape Town and New York City. Demonstrations were also held near the White House in Washington, protesting against US support for Israel in military campaigns in Gaza and Lebanon.

Protesters at New York's Times Square chanted slogans like: "Gaza, Lebanon you will rise, the people are by your side." They held banners demanding an arms embargo against Israel.

The war in Gaza was triggered when Palestinians attacked southern Israel on October 7, 2023, killing 1,200 people and

taking about 250 as captives, according to Israeli tallies. Israel's military assault on Gaza has killed nearly 42,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's health ministry. It has laid waste to the enclave, displacing nearly all of the 2.3 million population and causing a hunger crisis.

In Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority country, at least 1,000 pro-Palestinian protesters gathered on Sunday morning near the US Embassy demanding that Washington stop supplying weapons to Israel.

In Rome, police fired tear gas and water cannons after clashes broke out. Around 6,000 protesters defied a ban to march in the city centre ahead of the October 7 anniversary. In Berlin, a protest drew about 1,000 demonstrators with Palestinian flags, who chanted: "One Year of Genocide." The war in Gaza has led to genocide allegations against Israel at the World Court.

German demonstrators also criticised what they called police violence against pro-Palestinian protesters. Israel supporters in Berlin protested against rising antisemitism. Scuffles broke out between police and pro-Palestinian protesters.

Over the past year, the scale of the killing and destruction in Gaza has drawn some of the biggest global demonstrations in years, including in the US, which saw weeks of pro-Palestinian college campus encampments.

The war in Gaza has spread through the region, drawing in groups in Lebanon, Yemen and Iraq. Israel has sharply escalated a campaign in recent weeks in Lebanon. Iran launched a barrage of missiles against Israel this week to which Israel has not yet responded.

In Paris, Lebanese-French protestor Houssam Houssein said: "We fear a regional war, because there are tensions with Iran

DECEMBER 15 Three Israeli captives are killed by IDF troops. US launches air strike operation over Yemen. Continued attacks on Red Sea shipping during this time caused major concerns for international trade.

JANUARY 11 The US and UK launch dozens of air strikes across Yemen in retaliation. Yemenis say five of their fighters have been killed in the initial strikes, and vow to continue their attacks on shipping.

JANUARY 22 21 IDF soldiers are killed in central Gaza in a single incident - the deadliest day for Israel's forces.

The UN warns that a famine is imminent in northern Gaza and says 1.1 million people are starving.

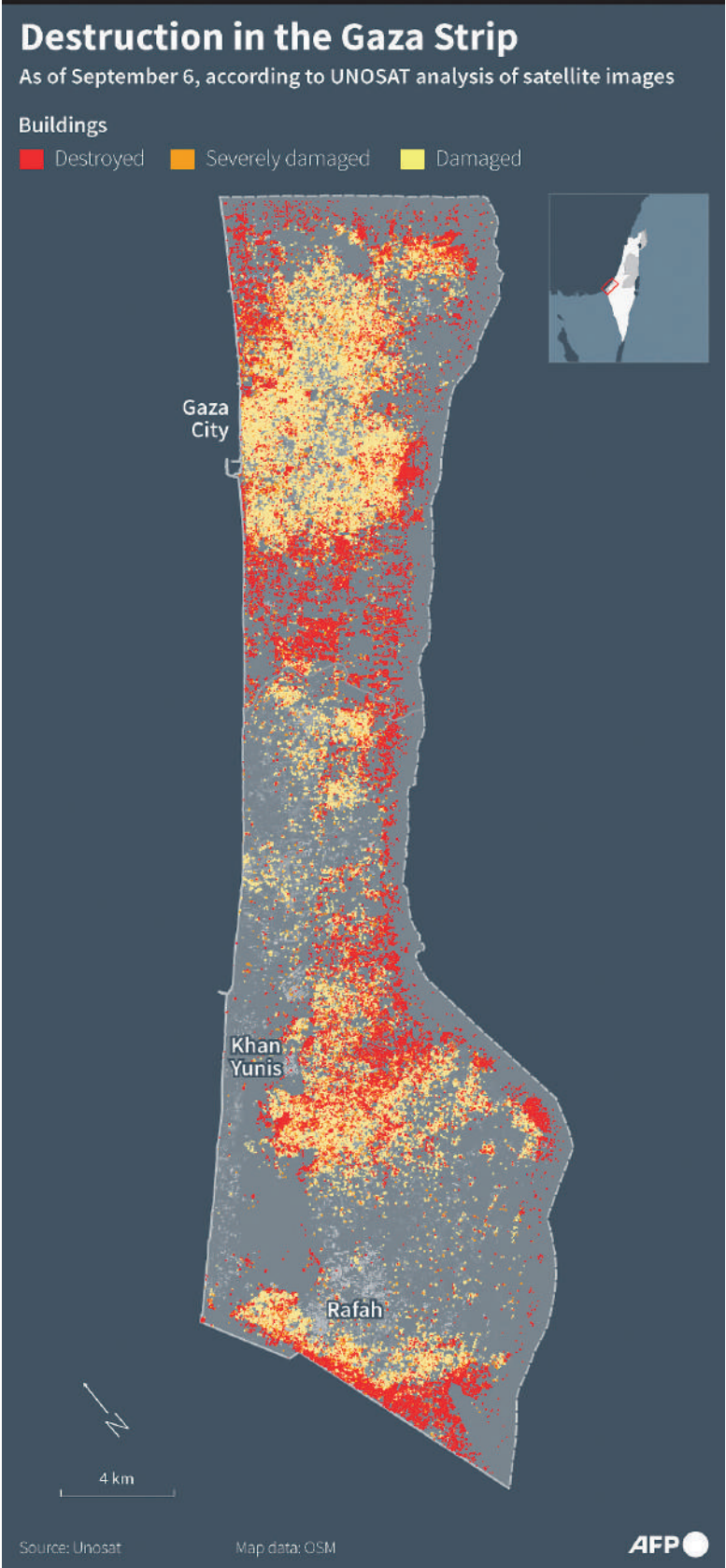
APRIL 1 Seven aid workers from World Central Kitchen are killed in an Israeli military strike in Gaza. Israel strikes the Iranian embassy in the Syrian capital, Damascus, killing Iranian officers including a top general.

APRIL 13 Iran launches dozens of missiles and drones at Israel. Israel strikes several targets in Iran. Israeli strike on Rafah kills 45, leading to international outrage.

JULY 19 The International Court of Justice ruled that Israel's settlement policy in occupied Palestinian territories is in breach of international law. Hamas's top political leader Ismail Haniyeh is killed in an apparent assassination in Iran at the end of July. Hamas says Haniyeh died in an air strike and blames Israel.

AYS OF GENOCIDE

WORLD PROTEST MIDDLE EAST WAR



A Palestinian family arrives in Gaza City after evacuating their homes in the Jabalia area. — AFP

at the moment, and perhaps with Iraq and Yemen.” Houssein added: “We really need to stop the war because it’s now become unbearable.” In Manila, activists clashed with anti-riot police after they were blocked from holding a demonstration in front of the US Embassy in the Philippine capital against Washington’s support for Israel.

Tens of thousands of Moroccans protested in Rabat on Sunday in support of Palestinians a day ahead of the October 7 attack anniversary. Demonstrators waved Palestinian flags. “We consider Palestine to be a national cause,” Khadija Mokhtari, a 56-year-old retiree living in the capital, said at the protest near parliament. She said she joined the protest to demonstrate against “flagrant injustice, Israeli killings and the genocide” against Palestinians. Another protester, Noufissa Souad, 39, said: “They are going to kill the entire Palestinian people for their land.” — Agencies

AUGUST 10 Dozens of people are killed in an Israeli strike on a school-turned-shelter in Gaza City. No deal is agreed and the conflict continues.

A tentative agreement for brief ceasefires to conduct polio vaccination.

SEPTEMBER 17 Mass explosion of handheld pagers used by Hezbollah members in Lebanon kills 12 people and injures nearly 3,000.

SEPTEMBER 30 Israeli forces cross the border to conduct ground raids against Hezbollah.

OCTOBER 1 Iran launches 200 missiles in retaliation for Israel’s campaign against Hezbollah.



Displaced Palestinians make their way as they flee areas in the northern Gaza Strip. — Reuters

OPINION

One year of conflict: A call for peace, humanitarian action



AS we mark a year since the onset of the conflict between Israel and Palestine, it is crucial to recognise that the situation has not improved but rather deteriorated.

Reports from organisations like Amnesty International highlight a stark failure by Israeli authorities to facilitate aid delivery or meet basic humanitarian needs.

As of now, reports indicate that approximately 42,000 Palestinians have been killed, with a significant percentage being civilians, including children.

The humanitarian crisis has reached catastrophic levels due to continuous bombardment and a blockade that restricts essential supplies such as food, water and medical aid.

Amnesty International has highlighted stark failure by Israeli authorities to facilitate aid delivery or meet basic humanitarian needs.

The Israeli government has been committing acts that could be classified as ‘genocide’ under international law. These include systematic attacks on civilian infrastructure such as hospitals and schools, cutting off humanitarian aid, and creating conditions that threaten the very existence of the Palestinian people.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued orders for immediate measures to protect Palestinians and ensure humanitarian assistance reaches those in need; however, compliance from Israel remains lacking.

While there are widespread protests advocating for Palestinian rights and calling for an end to what many describe as genocide, governments allied with Israel have often remained silent or supportive of Israeli actions under the guise of self-defence.

This complicity raises moral questions about international obligations to prevent genocide.

During the past year, Oman has emerged as a voice advocating for peace amidst this turmoil. The Sultanate of Oman emphasises that lasting stability in the region can only be achieved through dialogue and mutual recognition between Israelis and Palestinians.

Oman’s position aligns with broader Arab sentiment that recognises Israel’s right to exist while also affirming Palestinian aspirations for statehood. This dual recognition is essential for fostering an environment conducive to peace negotiations.

The two-state solution remains widely regarded as the most viable framework for resolving this long-standing conflict. It

Oman underscores that lasting stability in the region can only be attained through open dialogue and mutual recognition between Israelis and Palestinians

envisioning an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, allowing both peoples to coexist peacefully within secure borders.

However, achieving this goal requires genuine commitment from all parties involved to engage in meaningful dialogue and address core issues such as borders, security arrangements, refugees and Jerusalem’s status.

Peace cannot be achieved by simply containing Iran, eliminating Hamas, or defeating Hezbollah. Such policies fail to address the crisis in any meaningful way. The supporters of Israel speak in the name of international law while repeatedly preventing its implementation in the case of Palestine, and this must change now.

Respect for international law must be real not in words but through action.

It is imperative that individuals and nations take action against these atrocities. Advocacy for an arms embargo against Israel, support for humanitarian efforts in Gaza, and pressure on governments to uphold international law are critical steps needed to address this crisis effectively.

The call from Oman serves as a reminder that reconciliation is possible if there is political will from both sides to prioritise dialogue over conflict.

DESPERATE DEJA VU FOR FOREIGN WAR DOCTORS IN LEBANON

ALICE HACKMAN

In a south Lebanon hospital, Norwegian doctor Mads Gilbert peered out of the window after bombardment near the Israeli border, four decades after he first worked in the country.

“It’s a horrible experience,” he said in a video call from the southern town of Nabatiyeh. “It’s been 42 years and nothing has changed,” said Gilbert, who first saw war treating patients during the 1982 Israeli invasion and siege of Beirut.

Below the window paramedics were on standby next to parked ambulances at the hospital behind the front line.

The anaesthetist and emergency medicine specialist said he had seen just a few cases since arriving on Tuesday.

“Most of the cases have been south of us and they have not been able to evacuate them because the attacks have been so vicious,” Gilbert said.

On Thursday, the Israeli army warned residents to leave Nabatiyeh.

Israel’s military “can do whatever they want to healthcare, to ambulances, to churches, to mosques, to universities, as they’ve been doing in Gaza,” said Gilbert, who has repeatedly volunteered in the Palestinian territory during past conflicts.

“And now we see the same repeat itself in Lebanon in 2024.”

A hospital in the town of Bint Jbeil closer to the border on Saturday said it was hit by heavy overnight Israeli strikes, wounding nine medical and nursing staff, most seriously.

At least four hospitals said they had suspended work amid ongoing Israeli bombardment on Friday, and affiliated paramedics said 11 personnel were killed in Israeli raids in south Lebanon.

On Thursday, Lebanon’s health minister said more than 40 paramedics and firefighters had been killed by Israeli fire in three days.

UN official Imran Riza on Saturday spoke of “an alarming increase in attacks against healthcare in Lebanon”.

Britain said reports that Israeli strikes had hit “health facilities and support personnel” in Lebanon were “deeply disturbing”.

In the capital Beirut, British-Palestinian doctor Ghassan Abu Sittah said he also saw parallels with the conflict in Gaza.

Abu Sittah has tirelessly campaigned for “justice” since spending weeks in the besieged Palestinian territory treating the wounded at the start of the war.

Now in Lebanon, the plastic and reconstructive surgeon described seeing “kids, families whose houses have been targeted” with blast injuries in the past few weeks. — AFP

No school student wants to choose the ‘wrong’ degree



BREGJE VAN BAAREN
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The writer worked for the MoHERI, where she contributed to the Directorate-General of Scholarships and the Higher Education Admission Center

ACCESS to higher education is often considered a ‘must-have luxury,’ providing the knowledge and skills both people and a nation need to thrive. However, having a rough idea at a relatively young age about what undergraduate degree or vocational course one ‘should’ pursue or the career one wants to specialise in can be challenging.

Many factors come into play when deciding on a suitable undergraduate degree course or major: individual skills, capabilities, talent, intrinsic and extrinsic interests, possible job prospects, societal attitudes towards specific areas of specialisation and careers, peer pressure, and the appeal of specific educational institutions, locations, and study destinations.

With many options and factors to consider, the decision-making process that often starts in grade 10 or year 11 can feel daunting for many school students and their caregivers, as they fear their choices will shape ‘their entire future.’

Despite peer and parental pressure, school students should prioritise self-awareness, as understanding themselves better can lead to more informed and thoughtful decisions about higher education

On top of that, most Omani school students plan to competitively apply for a merit-based scholarship, seat, or grant, which means they cannot ‘place all their eggs in one basket’. After all, there is no guarantee one will be selected for their preferred course at their favourite institution and location.

Students also often worry about the roads they may not be able to take after choosing a specific degree subject: “What if I study Finance but prefer a job in Communications later on?” “What if I study Medicine but do not want to become a Cardiologist like my father and prefer to become an Architect instead?” or “What if I want to become an Artist but end up studying Engineering as my parents and

siblings did before me?”

So, how do young ones in Oman ensure that they make well-informed choices that suit them as individuals and that are also aligned with the needs of the diversifying, ever-changing, and increasingly knowledge-based economy?

First, let us agree that it is normal for school students not to know what exactly they want to study and do for a living when they ‘grow up,’ even if everyone around them seems to know and has sorted it all.

It is also not the end of the world if one makes what may initially feel like the ‘wrong’ choice, while most experts agree that one should realise that the ‘perfect’ study does not exist.

Despite the peer and parental pressure, school students need to focus on the role of self-awareness in this process as an ability to understand oneself can result in making more informed higher education decisions.

Students are advised to ask themselves a few questions: What am I good at, and, perhaps more importantly, do I also like what I am good at? At what level do I want to study? What type of learner am I: vocational, applied, or more research-oriented? Am I more practical or theoretical? Do I know the difference between a generic and a professional degree? And what else than a degree alone do I need to secure that future dream job?

Am I concerned with what makes a study interesting to me, or am I more interested in the location or reputation of an institution? Should I sit for an aptitude test or attend so-called taster days at institutions or exhibitions to learn more about certain courses? Do I know enough about the future career pathways I can pursue with this degree? And did I ever consider job shadowing to understand what it is like to pursue a particular career?

To make this self-awareness journey hopefully a bit easier, this writer has painstakingly collected verified information to support students, their families and counsellors in navigating these questions and choices.

So, keep watching this space!

Does your spirit move with the rhythm



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If one asks what calligraphy is, many might nod in agreement, believing they understand its essence. However, it is not surprising that many struggle to articulate a reliable definition. The term “calligraphy” originates from the Greek language, meaning the art of beautiful writing.

Centuries ago, calligraphy provided people across the globe with a means of communication. Whether through cave paintings, symbols, Asian characters, or Arabic and Western scripts, calligraphy has long been regarded as an art form dedicated to communication. This practice has existed for thousands of years and has been independently demonstrated in multiple cultures worldwide.

Since the dawn of civilisation, every community has developed its unique calligraphy, born from a blend of necessity and creative expression, utilising various styles and tools. Calligraphers are deeply aware of this heritage, which plays a significant role in contemporary calligraphy, shaped by a rich and inspiring history. Indeed, imitating historical handwriting is a common and encouraged method for achieving success in calligraphy.

However, the advent of printing technology has gradually diminished the reputation of calligraphy, as many who need something written opt for the more efficient, faster, and cheaper methods available. This trend

has only intensified with the introduction of home printers and computers.

Nevertheless, calligraphy has endured the challenges of history. At its core, calligraphy is the artistic process of forming beautiful symbols by hand and arranging them to inscribe words that embody integrity, harmony, and rhythm.

In this context, integrity refers to the admirable patterns and designs of letters and symbols in calligraphic works. Harmony denotes a pleasing relationship between the words and characters. Rhythm involves a deliberate repetition in calligraphic writing that creates patterns and emphasis for the viewer. Individually, these elements do not constitute a valid calligraphic art form; it is only when they converge that the essence of calligraphy emerges. Simply, calligraphy is where symbols and gestures intersect, yet it fundamentally remains a form of writing. It employs traditional tools such as pens and ink or brushes and paint. While writing communicates predetermined meanings through standard forms of language, calligraphy extends this communication by embodying the spirit of the writer. The spirit informs the body, which moves in a unified gesture, transferring energy from both the body and spirit through the arm, hand, pen, and ultimately into the mark on the page.

Calligraphy aims to evoke a reaction,

Since the dawn of civilisation, every community has developed its unique calligraphy, born from a blend of necessity and creative expression, utilising various styles and tools

much like any quality piece of sculpture or painting. Its goals are to inspire deeper meaning and foster communication with the viewer on both linguistic and creative levels. Although somewhat metaphorical, many experts contend that reading calligraphy is akin to hearing music with one's eyes — perhaps the most precise explanation of the creative passion that drives calligraphy.

Mastering calligraphy and learning to write in historical styles serves as an excellent means of training both the hand and the eye. While merely copying ancient scripts does not fulfil the creative intent of calligraphy, it provides a fine starting point for beginners and an engaging exercise for skilled calligraphers.

In both writing and music, rhythm is the most distinguishing element. It is rhythm that lends calligraphy the breath of individuality. Generally, calligraphy is more about personal gestures, and the meanings expressed in writing transcend the inherent significance of the symbols themselves. While calligraphy may be just a hobby for some, dedicated enthusiasts can certainly build successful careers in this art form if they are willing to invest the time and effort.

Calligraphy stands out as a celebration of the human touch. It invites us to slow down, appreciate the beauty of the written word, and connect with a rich artistic tradition.

TRUMP RALLIES AT PENNSYLVANIA SAYS WILL ‘NEVER QUIT’

GREGORY WALTON

Donald Trump defiantly returned to the site of a campaign rally where an assassin's bullet almost killed him in July, questioning whether his opponents were responsible and declaring he would “never quit.”

“Exactly 12 weeks ago this evening, on this very ground, a cold-blooded assassin aimed to silence me,” the Republican candidate told tens of thousands of supporters after taking the stage behind bulletproof glass.

Calling the gunman a “vicious monster,” Trump vowed he would “never quit... never bend... never break” to cheers of “fight, fight, fight” from the crowd.

Trump's much-hyped return to Butler, Pennsylvania, came exactly one month before the November 5 presidential election, the outcome of which President Joe Biden suggested on Friday might not be peaceful.

Trump lashed out at his political opponents, calling them the “enemy within” who had pushed to indict him and “who knows, maybe even tried to kill me.”

“I wasn't supposed to make it,” he said ominously. Security was noticeably tighter than Trump's July rally, with sniper squads atop surrounding buildings, and a surveillance drone deployed overhead.

“There's a lot going on that's unnerving,” said Heather Hughes, 43, who had travelled from New

Castle in must-win Pennsylvania. “Do I think he's safe? No, I think there's going to be another attempt. But I think he's going to make it through.”

After the assassination attempt, pictures of Trump — with a blood-streaked face, pumping his fist and shouting “fight, fight, fight” — became defining images of the

campaign. On Saturday, many Trump supporters wore shirts emblazoned with the iconography, and some sported ear coverings recalling the bandage the former president wore after the shooting.

Billionaire Elon Musk joined Trump on stage, stressing the tight margins that will likely decide the election in battleground states like Pennsylvania and encouraging voter registration.

Trump “must win to preserve democracy in America,” said Musk, echoing the alarmist messaging he frequently pushes to his 200 million followers on his X platform.

Much has changed since Trump's last visit to Butler, when he was riding high in polls after crushing Biden in a TV debate. Barely a week after the failed assassination bid, the presidential race was turned on its head when Biden dropped out and was replaced as the Democratic nominee by Vice President Kamala Harris. Harris has clawed back the poll deficit — reversing it in some states — and the seismic events in Butler that had threatened to unleash chaos were largely overtaken. — AFP

Africa's food security depends on adaptive crops

AFRICA'S food systems are facing myriad challenges, from climate shocks and low productivity to supply-chain disruptions and soil degradation. In 2022, one in five Africans was undernourished, even though the continent's cultivated land could more than meet its food needs. But that would require effective management and, perhaps most importantly, planting adaptive crops such as millet, sorghum, teff, and fonio.

These underutilised crops have long been staples in African communities and offer nutritional, environmental, and economic benefits. Unfortunately, food companies and retailers often overlook them — which must change to have any hope of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

Rapid urbanisation and changing tastes have dampened demand for traditional crops in Africa, increasing reliance on the small number of staples that dominate global agriculture. Only 20 plant species provide more than 90 per cent of the world's food requirements, with maize, rice, and wheat accounting for 60 per cent of total caloric intake. But relying on a few staples is unsustainable, especially given rising temperatures. Without effective climate adaptation strategies, yields for such crops could decline by as much as 30 per cent by 2050, in which case demand would outstrip supply and even more people would go hungry.

African governments must work with the agri-food industry and farmers to increase demand for climate-resilient and nutrient-rich adaptive crops that would enable the continent to feed its growing population. There are more than 300 such “opportunity crops,” a few of which are popular globally, including lentils, cassava, pumpkin, and sweet potato. But many more are known mainly by the communities that grow them.

Interest in these crops has been growing. Efforts to commercialise fonio in West Africa have been relatively successful, and the ancient gluten-free grain is gaining international attention, with the global brand Knorr naming it as a “Future 50 Food” for a healthier planet. Teff, a cereal



Rapid urbanisation and changing tastes have dampened demand for traditional crops in Africa.



AGNES
KALIBATA

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CARY FOWLER

The writer, 2024 World Food Prize laureate, is US Special Envoy for Global Food Security

grain from the Horn of Africa, is also growing in popularity as a so-called superfood.

National policymakers and international partners have an important role to play in reducing Africa's overdependence on global staples such as maize and wheat. The Ghanaian government has used policies that promote cereal-flour blending to boost consumption of locally grown sweet potatoes. In Kenya, the International Potato Center has encouraged local women to make chapatis, a type of flatbread, with orange-fleshed sweet potatoes. Making greater use of these crops has nutritional benefits and creates new investment opportunities, especially because consumers have shown a preference for these substitutions.

But to change eating habits and create new markets, policymakers must ensure that African farmers and communities reap the benefits of growing adaptive crops. That is not the case today: climate-resilient and nutrient-dense grains such as fonio are not as commercially viable as traditional staples. In Senegal, the labour-intensive process of removing fonio's tough hull results in just 10 per cent of the crop reaching market, with the rest consumed by farmers and their families. Therefore, at pre-

sent, there is little financial incentive to grow fonio. But this can change. Providing farmers with better equipment and processing methods could make the grain more competitive in wider markets.

The large-scale adoption of adaptive crops and their associated technologies requires market and policy incentives, research funding, and regulatory reform. The Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils (VACS), launched by the African Union, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, and the US Department of State, is a step in the right direction. VACS promotes global interventions, including land-use planning and fertilizer technologies for adaptive crops, and helps governments develop supportive policies and build agricultural capacity. It also educates farmers on how to grow adaptive crops successfully.

At this month's Africa Food Systems Forum in Kigali, Rwanda, African institutions demonstrated their willingness to lead this charge. The AU Commission, in particular, has made important progress with its Africa Common Position on Food Systems, which recognises that expanding the continent's food basket will require intentional investment in traditional and indigenous crops.

To make this a reality, the private sector in Africa and elsewhere must invest in research and development to scale up production of a new wave of food products made with adaptive crops that are attractive to consumers in Africa and elsewhere.

Policymakers, for their part, must promote the commercialisation of opportunity crops by coordinating with pioneering companies, small- and medium-size enterprises, and non-state actors to address constraints.

That could mean leveraging policies like blending targets, providing incentives such as tax breaks and subsidies, and launching public-awareness campaigns. Governments could also use procurement to introduce adaptive crops into meals for schools, hospitals, and other public-sector catering. Closer collaboration between governments, development partners, the private sector, and farming cooperatives can accelerate the uptake of adaptive crops.

@Project Syndicate, 2024

SPORTS

JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIP



Al Seeb Club and Al Nasr Club

AHLI SIDAB EDGE SALALAH IN A NAIL-BITING CLASH

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 6

In an exciting match as part of the final stages of the Oman Hockey League, Ahli Sidab Club managed to secure a 4-3 victory over Salalah Club in a game held at the hockey field in Al Amerat. The first quarter saw clear competition, with both teams exchanging chances evenly. However, in the 9th minute, Ahli Sidab's player, Sanad al Fazari, successfully scored the opening goal, ending the first quarter with a 1-0 lead.

Salalah Club started the second quarter looking to regain their balance. In the 18th minute, Ayman Faraj managed to equalise. He didn't stop there, as he came back in the 23rd minute to add a second goal. As the quarter neared its end, Ahli Sidab's player, Rashid al Fazari, scored a last-minute equaliser, ending the second quarter in a 2-2 tie.

In the third quarter, Salalah players dominated the match, with Osama Khamis scoring the third goal in the 36th minute, ending the quarter with a 3-2 lead. As the final quarter began, Ahli Sidab re-entered the match. In the 53rd minute, Khalid al Shaibi scored the tying goal. Rashid al Fazari scored his second and the team's fourth goal, turning the tables on Salalah and securing a 4-3 victory for Ahli Sidab.

In another match, Al Seeb Club achieved a hard-fought 1-0 victory over Al Nasr Club. The first quarter began with extreme caution from both teams, while the first quarter ended in a goalless draw. The second quarter also ended in a goalless draw. In the third quarter, the struggle between the teams intensified in the midfield, despite several dangerous chances, particularly for Al Seeb, ending the quarter still tied. In the final quarter, the breakthrough finally came in favour of Al Seeb, where in the 49th minute, Osama al Shibli capitalised on his opportunity and fired a strong shot into Al Nasr's net, scoring the match's goal.

Oman football team eye redemption against Kuwait



National football team during the training

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 6

THE NATIONAL football team are looking for a strong bounce back as they will host Kuwait on Thursday in a key match in the third round of the final qualifiers for the 2026 Fifa World Cup. The forthcoming game against Kuwait will decide the national team's chances further in this qualifiers campaign.

Oman, under the domestic guidance of the experienced coach Rasheed Jaber, are working very hard in the previous training sessions to raise the players' readiness ahead of the upcoming clash. Coach Rasheed and his assisting coaching team are working with the team to enhance weak areas and rebuild the team's trust after the first two losses against Iraq in Basra and South Korea in Muscat Governorate.

The Kuwait game is classified as a very

essential match as it will be hosted in Muscat and in the presence of the home fans. Secondly, this game will be followed a few days later by another crucial encounter against Jordan in Amman City. A positive result against Kuwait will encourage the players to deliver their utmost performance at Amman International Stadium. On the other side, Kuwait ended their first two games against Jordan and Iraq with draw results, and they will enter their game against Oman with the same target.

The Oman team, who are chasing a historic appearance at the 2026 Fifa World Cup, resumed their daily training sessions at Seeb Stadium ahead of the Kuwait and Jordan matches.

The coaching staff is busy raising the team's harmony level and increasing the technical readiness of the players in all three lines.

Bahrain's Al Khaldiya SC player, Salah al Yahyaie, joined in the training sessions of

the Red Warriors last week. The inclusion of Salah boosted the squad as he is a key player and will shine on the pitch alongside the other new faces who returned to the squad.

Kuwait team will arrive in Muscat on Tuesday, and they will train twice at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. The team is currently busy in a camp in Dubai for a few days ahead of the upcoming games against Oman and Palestine.

On the other hand, the Oman Football Association (OFA) through the Awn volunteering team concluded a workshop on how to deal with football fans. As many as 70 volunteers took part in the workshop. The participants learned different topics relevant to sports volunteering and how to manage large sporting events that normally record a huge presence of audience. Several sessions and presentations were delivered to the volunteers who attended the sessions on Thursday on how to manage during match day.

‘Nahab’ triumphs on day three of Barka Camel Racing

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, OCT 6

‘Nahab’, owned by Hamed al Jedali, snatched the third-day honours of the first general camel race in Barka on Sunday. ‘Sasko’, owned by Shehab al Shabibi, was the champion in Al Bashayer field.

This was the first race of the 22nd edition of the annual camel races for the 2024-2025 season, with more than 2,500 camels competing in 89 rounds in Barka and Adam fields.

The event is supported by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and organised by the Oman Camel Racing Federation (OCRF) in cooperation with the Royal Camel Corps (RCC).

The OCRF's Board of Directors recently announced 23 local events: 13 general races, three races spon-



Photo by: Mohammed al Buwaiqi

sored by Shell Oman, three races sponsored by Occidental Oman, and four events featuring camel beauty contests, milking competitions and Ardah (traditional races).

On the third day, there were 26 rounds divided equally between Barka and Adam, with 12 rounds for the ‘Al Ythaa’ category, four years old, for 5 km, six rounds for the ‘Al Thanaya’ category, five years old, over a distance of 6 km, and eight rounds allocated for the ‘Al Hawl’ category, above six years, for 6 km.

‘Nahab’, owned by Hamed al Jedali, won the first race. In the second race, ‘Khaya’ came first, owned by Abdulah al Khali. The third race was won by ‘Moghree’, owned by Said al Hashmi. The fourth race was won by ‘Hothur’, owned by Nasir al Wahibi. The fifth race was won by ‘Rhaa’, owned by Said al Wahibi.

‘Dagash’, owned by Ali al Jedali, won the sixth race.

In the seventh race, ‘Al Shamkha’, owned by the Royal Camel Corps, bagged the top place. ‘Mehnah’, owned by Saleh al Malki, won the eighth race. ‘Al Mokhtaber’, owned by Salim al Madhoshi, came first in the ninth race. The tenth race award was snatched by ‘Al Maha’, owned by the Royal Camel Corps. In the eleventh race, ‘Harba’, owned by Said al Hashmi, was the winner.

‘Al Shahenyah’, owned by Mohammed al Saedi, came out on top in the last race.

The Oman Camel Racing Federation will hold the second event of the season from October 9 to 13 at the Royal Camel Corps in Barka; the event will be for camel beauty. The second race will be from October 18 to 20 in Barka and Al Bashayer.

INTERNATIONAL COACH



DR SHIHAB NAMED TO AVC COACHES COMMITTEE

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 6

Dr Shihab Al Din bin Ahmed al Riyami, Oman's FIVB International Coach Instructor, was named as a member of the Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC) Coaches Committee. Al Riyami is the only Omani citizen who is present currently in all the AVC Confederation's various committees.

"I am pleased with this announcement and decision by the AVC. It is a new achievement in my career as International Coach Instructor. Thanks to the AVC Coaches Committee for their trust and confidence and I am looking forward to supporting the committee in the coming period," Dr Shihab Al Din said. This selection of Al Riyami comes following the confidence of AVC as Al Riyami was in charge of the position of Secretary of the Coaches Committee during 2008-2012 and then he was opted for another term in the Coaches Committee during 2016-2020 as well as the third period 2021-2024 as member.

FIVB International Coach Instructor from the International Volleyball Federation had managed to contribute and develop coaches programmes and events in Oman and the Asian continent beside his attendance in several courses internationally.

He also held series of training courses and technical seminars that exceeded more than 66 in worldwide in addition to his membership in the technical committees of the Asian Championships. He is considered one of the elite instructors in the Asian continental and among the experts of the European-Asian programme that was recently established in cooperation with the European and AVC. Furthermore, he also contributed to the coaching programme and the last course was in Thailand, Bangkok 2022.

Last July, Dr Shihab Al Din and American international lecturer Gordan Mayforth delivered both a national programme and development strategy for the Chinese Taipei Volleyball Federation titled "CTVBA Coach Course".

The course has been divided into three phases and it concluded in the beginning of August.

West Asian Badminton Championship from today



THE ACTIONS of the West Asian Badminton Junior Championship begin today as 58 players representing eight nations from the West Asian zone will vie for slots in the final stages. The preliminary rounds of singles and doubles events for the U-15 and U-17 categories will start on Monday and will run for two days and it will be followed by the final stages.

The six-day event organised by the Oman Racket Games Committee (ORSC) in collaboration with Badminton Asia and supported by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth. The championship features the participation of 58 players representing Jordan, UAE, Bahrain, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Syria and the hosts Oman.

"It is a great pleasure to welcome all participants from various West Asian countries to Muscat to take part in the prestigious West Asian Badminton Junior Championship. The beautiful city of Muscat will provide a memorable and successful hosting experi-



DR ABDULRAHIM AL DAROUSHI
Chairman,
ORSC

"Thanks to all stakeholders including the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Badminton Asia, and the private sector sponsors for their contributions to ensuring the success of the tournament. He also thanked the committee members, volunteers and all those involved for their hard work and dedication in preparing for this important sporting event," the chief of ORSC ended.

Oman's junior badminton team is fully prepared to begin their championship

ence, given Oman's excellent infrastructure and organisational capabilities. This is the first time Oman is hosting such a prestigious event marking a significant milestone for the country," Dr Abdulrahim al Daroushi, Chairman of ORSC, said

journey. The team completed their technical preparations under the guidance of national coach Hamed al Maqbali and his technical team. The team recently completed an internal training camp ahead of the tournament. The coaching staff focused on technical and tactical strategies helping players enhance their skills and prepare for the competition.

Earlier this year, ORSC held a national junior tournament in May where talented players were selected to represent the nation in the West Asia event including Shihab al Hinai, Faisal al Hinai, Abdulaziz al Hinai, Ziyad al Hinai, Hamed al Buraidi, Mohammed al Maqrashi, Sultan al Azri, Ahmed al Azri and Miral al Hosni.

The selected players underwent rigorous training camps in August, held at various sports complexes across Oman, ensuring they are well-prepared for the competition. The team, consisting of eight male players and one female player, will compete in various categories including singles and doubles for boys and singles for girls.

Masirah claims victory in Omani Women's Game

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 6

Masirah Club secured first place in the chess competition at the Omani Women's Game 2024. Shaybi Binouj claimed the top spot in the competition which witnessed fierce competition among the participants.

Kauthar al Maamari from Ahli Sidab Club took second place, while Yumna al Nadabi from Masirah Club grabbed the third.

The competition, held at the Rustaq Sports Complex on October 4, 5, featured 18 players representing nine clubs from various governorates. The chess tournament is part of the Omani Women's Game, organised by the Women's Sports Department at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, in cooperation with several sports associations.

The game will continue with the athletics competition next Friday, while the badminton, basketball, volleyball and handball competitions are scheduled to take place from October 17 to 20.

The Omani Women's Game aims to expand the base of women's participation in various sports across the Sultanate of Oman, establish women's sports teams within clubs, and strengthen partnerships with sports federations to promote women's sports, contributing to the sustainability and local identity of the programme.



The closing ceremony and awarding of the winning clubs takes place on October 20 in Muscat Governorate.

Fourteen clubs are participating in this year's edition of the Omani Women's Game, competing in six major sports, including basketball, volleyball,

handball, athletics, badminton and chess.

Among the participating clubs are Salalah, Bahla, Al Suwaiq, Al Kamil W'al Wafi, Masirah, Khasab, Al Bashayer, Qurayat, Oman, Sohar, Al Shabab, Al Ittihad, Al Mudhaibi and Ahli Sidab.

The Omani Women's Game aims to expand the base of women's participation in various sports across the Sultanate of Oman, establish women's sports teams within clubs, and strengthen partnerships with sports federations to promote women's sports, contributing to the sustainability and local identity of the programme.

The competitions feature both individual and team events for women's sports teams in clubs.

Some governorates host the league and tournament qualifiers, while the semifinals for all sports will be held in Muscat Governorate. Clubs compete for the Women's Sports Cup by participating in the largest number of individual and team events and achieving the best results, with points being awarded based on performance. These points will also contribute to the clubs' standings in the His Majesty the Sultan's Youth Cup. Most of the tournaments and competitions are managed and refereed by female staff through collaboration with the ministry's sports and youth departments in the governorates and sports federations.



USA's Coco Gauff celebrates with the trophy. — AFP

Gauff beats Muchova in straight sets to win China Open

WORLD NUMBER six Coco Gauff dominated unseeded Czech Karolina Muchova to win the China Open final 6-1 6-3 on Sunday and become the first player to win each of their first seven WTA hardcourt finals in the Open Era.

Gauff fired off 24 winners in a strong performance to add the Beijing trophy to her win in the Auckland Classic this year and win the second WTA 1000 title of her career after her 2023 victory in Cincinnati, where she also beat Muchova in the final.

Gauff, who improved her head-to-head record against Muchova to 3-0, has won eight of her nine WTA finals.

"I want to say congratulations to you, Karolina, it's great to see you back on tour," Gauff said of her opponent Muchova, who spent an extended spell on the sidelines after suffering a wrist injury at the 2023 US Open.

"I think you're such an amazing player, and you deserve everything, and hopefully you play many more finals."

The tournament was Gauff's first after adding Matt Daly to her coaching team, following her split with Brad Gilbert last month.

"I would like to thank my team. It's our first tournament together as a full, complete team," Gauff said.

"Thank you, Matt, this is our first tournament together, and obviously, it's going well, so thank you for helping me throughout this week."

Heading into the final, Gauff had lost the first set in three straight matches and the former US Open champion seemed determined to buck that trend, serving to love in the opening game and breaking early for a 2-0 lead.

The American continued to build on that momentum with two more holds to love, before breaking once again to go 5-1 ahead.

After dropping no points in her first three ser-



I want to say congratulations to you, Karolina, it's great to see you back on tour. I think you're such an amazing player, and you deserve everything, and hopefully you play many more finals.

COCO GAUFF



Coco Gauff (L) poses with the trophy with Karolina Muchova. — AFP

vice games, some doubt crept in as Gauff was forced to defend a break point, but she was able to clinch the set with an emphatic forehand winner.

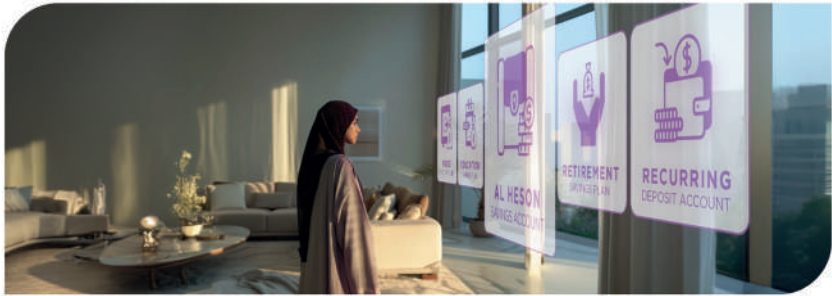
Gauff's serve continued to falter early in the second set, leading to two double faults in her opening service game as Muchova broke for a 2-0 lead, but the American responded by turning up the aggression and approaching the net to break back immediately.

Muchova, who beat Australian Open and US Open champion Aryna Sabalenka and Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen in previous rounds, appeared deflated after losing her advantage and won just two points in the next three games as Gauff eased to a 4-2 lead.

The pair traded holds before the fourth seed sealed the win by breaking serve when Muchova's backhand sailed long on match point.

Earlier on Sunday, Paris Olympics gold medalists Sara Errani and Jasmine Paolini defeated Chan Hao-Ching and Veronika Kudermetova 6-4 in the women's doubles final to earn their third WTA Tour title of the year. — Reuters

BUSINESS



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SMART METRES

\$46M CONTRACTS FOR INSTALLATION OF SMART ELECTRICITY METRES IN OMAN



As many as 300,000 electricity smart metres will be installed by ONEIC

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, OCT 6

LOCAL Omani power sector services contractor Oman National Engineering & Investment Co SAOG (ONEIC) has won a pair of contracts from Nama Group to support the rollout of electricity

smart metres across key areas of Oman.

In separate filings to the Financial Services Authority (FSA), publicly traded ONEIC said it had secured a contract worth around \$41 million from Nama Electricity Distribution Company – part of Nama Group – for the supply and operation of smart metres and head-end systems (HES).

On its heels, came another smaller contract valued at around \$4 million from Nama Dhofar Services Company, for electricity smart metre reading, metre replacement and maintenance services in Dhofar Governorate.

According to ONEIC officials, as many as 300,000 electricity smart metres will be installed as part of the first contract. Comprising a combination of single phase and 3-phase electricity smart metres, these devices are planned for installation across Oman in line with Nama Group’s multi-year initiative to replace analog metres with smart metres.

That initiative, first conceived under the National Smart Metre Programme of the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), envisages the installation of an estimated 1.2 million smart metres covering all electricity consumers by 2025. The project – orchestrated as part of the government’s digital transformation drive – is expected to deliver a number of far-reaching benefits to consumers, as well as the broader electricity sector.

For one, it will do away with physical metre readings – a practice long associated with faulty readings and inaccurate billings. As smart metres allow remote reading, consumer complaints related to erroneous billings are expected to be dramatically reduced, thereby contributing to a more efficient billing and collection system in the country.

RO 20.1 billion investments in free, economic zones

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 6

THE recently published 37th issue of the Duqm Economist magazine reveals that by the end of the first half of 2024, the Sultanate of Oman has seen a remarkable increase in committed investments within its special economic zones, free zones, and industrial cities, surpassing RO 20.1 billion.

This marks a 20 per cent rise, translating to an additional RO 3.4 billion compared to the same period in 2023.

Last year, the committed investment exceeded RO 1 billion, predominantly fuelled by a significant RO 600 million agreement for a polysilicon plant project located in the Sohar Free Zone, which accounted for more than 67 per cent of the total investment.

Notably, the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) has experienced a substantial growth rate of 55 per cent, with cumulative investments reaching RO 2.1 billion. Investment distribution across areas monitored by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) reveals RO 7.5 billion allocated to operational industrial cities, while the Salalah Free Zone has attracted RO 4.6 billion.

The SEZAD is now home to investments exceeding RO 6 billion, and the Sohar Free Zone has reported investments totalling RO 1.3 billion. Additionally, the Al Mazyunah Free Zone has surpassed RO 139 million, and the Khazaen Economic City has reached a cumulative investment of RO 459.5 million.

The report also highlighted a surge in new commercial registrations, with 1,885 recorded in the first half of the year. The Authority issued 735 public service



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licences, 740 activity licences, and 156 building permits. Work and investor licences totalled 5,466, accompanied by 15,548 inspection and supervision visits and 191 environmental permits and licences granted.

By mid-2024, the workforce in economic zones, free zones, and industrial cities reached 71,684, with an Omanisation rate of 35 per cent. Industrial cities boasted the highest Omanisation rate at approximately 38 per cent.

To bolster investment attraction, OPAZ has intensified its efforts by implementing a project tracking system via Odoo, facilitating project monitoring, documentation of meetings, and follow-up on requirements. The system includes business management tools, both community

and commercial editions. As of last month, 160 projects were registered under execution.

The Authority also launched an awareness programme in the first half of 2024, attracting 145 applications from companies, with 20 responding positively. Five visits are planned, three of which have already been completed.

OPAZ oversees 15 existing areas, comprising two economic zones and three free zones in Sohar, Salalah, and Al Mazyouna, along with ten operational industrial zones.

Additionally, eight areas are under development, including an integrated economic zone in Ibri, a free zone at Muscat International Airport, and five industrial zones, bringing the total areas supervised by OPAZ to 23.

Oman is looking to acquire first national telecom satellite

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, OCT 6

THE Sultanate of Oman is in the process of acquiring its first national satellite, according to Dr Saud al Shueili, Director-General and Head of the National Space Programme at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT).

Speaking to the Middle East Space Monitor, Dr Al Shueili shared that the move marks a huge step towards building national capabilities.

“Oman is currently in the process of acquiring a telecommunications satellite. This satellite isn’t just about fulfilling national security needs; it’s also a major step toward building our own capabilities.

“We’re not interested in a company



Oman is currently in the process of acquiring a telecommunications satellite. This satellite isn’t just about fulfilling national security needs; it’s also a major step toward building our own capabilities!

DR SAUD AL SHUEILI
Director-General and Head of the National Space Programme at the Ministry of Transport

that will sell us the satellite, launch it, and operate it without our involvement. No, we want to develop our own expertise throughout the entire process.”

Oman, he further noted, is entering into collaborations that foster long-term capability development.

“When we enter into partnerships, especially with strategic partners, we’re not simply looking to buy products or services.

“We don’t want vendors who just sell us equipment. Our goal is to build long-term relationships that focus on capability development,” he shared.

“We don’t want to repeat the same delays in other sectors, waiting 10 or 20 years to develop local expertise. We are starting from the outset to ensure that every new project contributes to the national level.



“And by “national level,” I don’t just mean government interests — I’m talking about how these projects will benefit private companies as well... This approach ensures that local businesses grow and develop alongside international partnerships, which is key to building a sustainable and competitive space industry in Oman.”

Back in November 2023, the first private Omani Satellite Aman-1 suc-

cessfully launched into orbit. The nano-satellite launch was a result of a collaboration between Omani space company ETCO, Polish data analysis and solutions provider TUATARA, and Polish nano-satellite manufacturer SatRevolution.

ETCO recently announced that the data from the satellite will be used to monitor and track the country’s gas networks, which are operated by OQ Gas Networks (OQGN).

Furthermore, ETCO also announced that it has established a new company ‘Spazers’, in collaboration with SatRev and Tuatara for the manufacture and launch of satellites here in Oman.

Similarly, another Omani company, Oman Lens, is currently in the process of developing a satellite in collaboration with Chinese space firm, Star Vision Aerospace Group.

ADVERTORIALS

NBO YOUTH ACCOUNT
EMPOWERS FINANCIAL
INDEPENDENCE



MUSCAT: Tailored for the youth aged 13-17, the National Bank of Oman's (NBO) Youth Account serves as a vital tool that fosters financial responsibility and independence among Omani and expatriates.

The account offers a range of tailor-made services and features designed to cater to the specific needs of young individuals including customised debit cards specifically made for each holder.

NBO believes that empowering the youth with financial literacy is the key to shape a responsible and confident generation. The benefits go beyond saving money; it is also about instilling lifelong financial skills. With the NBO App offering mobile banking access for both the account holder and their parents, families can ensure transparency and control over their teenager's finances, fostering trust and accountability.

Through the NBO App, the account holder can instantly transfer money hassle-free, without worrying about minimum balance charges. Furthermore, opening an account and downloading the NBO App instantly rewards users with free reward points.

NATIONAL FINANCE,
ESO LAUNCH GREEN
CAMPUS INITIATIVE

MUSCAT: In a commendable effort to promote environmental stewardship among college and university students, National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman's leading finance company, has partnered with the Environment Society of Oman (ESO) to launch the innovative Green Campus Educational Initiative.



This initiative is designed to enhance ecological awareness and inspire a sense of environmental responsibility among youth, empowering the leaders of tomorrow to take meaningful action. The formalisation of this partnership took place during a signing ceremony between Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer of National Finance, and the Dr Amor al Matani, ESO Board President, in the presence of esteemed representatives from both organisations.

The Green Campus Initiative 2024 will be the first competition of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman, designed to inspire the nation's youth to reduce their environmental impact while advocating for sustainable policies and practices within their campuses.

Omran enhances ICV,
launches 'Intajee' platform

In line with its ongoing commitment to enhance In-Country Value (ICV) and support the growth of local business, Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) has launched the "Intajee" e-platform.

This innovative platform aims to enhance economic growth by empowering local companies and entrepreneurs and expanding the presence of made in Omani products and local services in the tourism and hospitality sector, which contributes to strengthening the local industry and highlighting Omani products in the sector.

Badriya bint Abdulrahman al Siyabiyah, Director of Sustainability and Social Investment at Omran Group, stated: "The Intajee platform is one of Omran Group's initiatives aimed at enhancing local content."

She explained that the platform serves as a link between local suppliers and manufacturers and Omran Group, its companies, hotels and resorts, thereby supporting the competitiveness of made in Oman products and creating an authentic tourism experience for a diverse range of visitors.

She added: "The platform will offer an organised database of made in Oman products and suppliers within the tourism and hospitality sector, playing a pivotal role in promoting Omani brands and enhancing their presence and growth in the local market."



The total expenditure on SMEs last year amounted to RO 15 million, with an average of 450 baisas spent on SMEs for every Omani rial.

Omran Group encourages the providers of made in Oman products and services to register on the platform and showcase their products and services through the link: intajee.om.

Omran Group's objectives are focused on enhancing the potential of the tourism sector in Oman and reinforcing the role of local

businesses in achieving this goal. The total expenditure on SMEs last year amounted to RO 15 million, with an average of 450 baisas spent on SMEs for every Omani rial.

Additionally, over RO 8.5 million was spent on locally manufactured products, while the group invested more than RO 200,000 in technology localisation.

BANKDHOFAR ORGANISES OPEN DAY FOR STUDENTS

MUSCAT: BankDhofar recently organised a visit for secondary school students to the Performance Academy of BankDhofar, as part of the 'Financial Literacy' initiative organised by the Ministry of Education.

The bank's participation comes within the framework of introducing financial literacy and culture among school students and reinforcing BankDhofar's role in building future generations through various initiatives.

This initiative was organised with the aim of promoting the principles of financial literacy and raising awareness in this field among school students from different governorates, instilling the concept of saving and



introducing them to some financial terms and concepts and other areas that contribute to organising their financial affairs in the future and preparing them well from an early age.

Dr Khalid al Hamdani, Chief Human Resources Officer at BankDhofar, gave a welcome speech to the students.

Najma al Handhali, from the Organisational Effectiveness and Career Planning Department, presented an overview on the history of banking and its long term benefits. Amur al Rawas, Products and Segmentation Department, gave a presentation on financial management and financial planning and saving.

Finally, Buthaina al Jahdhami, Marketing and Corporate Communications Department, gave a presentation about the bank's various activities and initiatives. Financial literacy is an important

aspect of society, as it contributes to individual's knowledge and confidence to make the right financial decisions in all areas of life.

Financial literacy is particularly important in light of the current economic changes, as it affects the financial stability of individuals and families being an important element in building a strong foundation for future economic growth for all individuals in society.

It is essential that individuals have the financial understanding to make future financial plans, by understanding basic financial terms such as budgets, interest and insurance.

BankDhofar contributes effectively in the development of the country.

Oman fire, safety and security exhibition on Oct 8-9 at OCEC

MUSCAT: The 8th Edition of OFSEC — Oman's only and most comprehensive exhibition on fire, safety and security — will take place from October 8-9, 2024, from 9 am – 6 pm at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

This year OFSEC brings together over more than 80 exhibitors from over 20 countries who will showcase their avant-garde solutions, latest technologies, cutting edge innovations, cost-effective products and services to meet the requirements of governments, businesses, industrial and commercial entities, aviation, construction, infrastructure, transportation, manufacturing, oil and gas and utilities sectors.

OFSEC is designed to meet the needs of the local, regional and international markets by linking practitioners, suppliers, distributors and manufacturers from the fire, safety and security industry, with key decision makers from the government and private sectors

Highlights

This year OFSEC brings together over more than

80 EXHIBITORS

from over 20 countries who will showcase their avant-garde solutions, latest technologies, cutting edge innovations, cost-effective products and services



making it a definitive networking platform, where new projects and partnerships are initiated and visionary objectives are implemented.

This event also aims to create synergy and strengthen the collaboration between the authorities and the industries.

The OFSEC Summit will feature an expansive line-up of stellar speakers, case studies, panel dis-

cussions and unique presentations providing access to a wealth of industry leading knowledge, sharing best practices and experiences and spotlighting trends, information exchange, insights and outlooks.

The key reasons to visit the event: Source best solutions to suit your business requirements; See first-hand live interactive demonstrations; Discover edge-cutting and innovations developments; Com-

pare and contrast prices and specifications product variants; Meet specialist exhibitors from local, regional and international leading companies.

OFSEC is officially supported by Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority, Ministry of Labour, Muscat Municipality and Emirates Safety Laboratory – Directorate-General of Dubai Civil Defence.

Some of the key supporters and associations are Advantage Austria, Arab Institute for Safety Sciences, The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB), Dubai Council for Marine and Maritime Industries, Firestop Contractors International Association (FCIA), Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH Oman), International Water Mist Association, National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), National Fireproofing Contractors Association, Oman HSE Professionals (OHSE), Madayn, and more are also supporting the show.

TAAGEER FINANCE
COMPLETES
CLOSURE OF
INAUGURAL
PERPETUAL BOND
ISSUANCE

MUSCAT: Taageer Finance Company SAOG has successfully completed its inaugural RO 25 million perpetual bond issuance, marking a significant milestone in company's growth and further reinforcing its position as a pivotal player in the finance & leasing sector in Oman.

The offering received strong interest from a well-diversified investor base, reflecting the company's robust market position and long-term growth potential. Based on the investor interest received for the offering, the Company elected to fully exercise the RO 10 million green shoe option resulting in a total issue size of RO 25 million, which stands as the largest bond issuance successfully closed by the company till date.

The proceeds from this issuance will bolster the company's capital structure and will be used to support company's growth initiatives, thereby enhancing its competitive position in the market. The perpetual bonds carry a coupon of 7.50% and will be listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange.

"We are pleased to announce the successful completion of our perpetual bond issuance, which marks a pivotal moment for our company," said Shahin Mohammed al Balushi, Chief Executive Officer, Taageer Finance.

"This achievement underscores our robust market position and strong investor confidence in our long-term strategic vision. The perpetual bond issuance allows us to further strengthen our capital structure, providing flexibility to pursue growth opportunities and enhance shareholder value.

We deeply appreciate the support of our investors and stakeholders, whose trust and engagement have been instrumental in bringing this transaction to fruition. This offering reaffirms our commitment to sustainable financial management and positions us well for continued success in an evolving market landscape."

On the successful completion of this transaction, Khalifa bin Abdullah al Hatmi, Deputy General Manager, Investment Banking and Capital Markets, Bank Muscat, said: "We are proud to have successfully led and executed Taageer Finance's inaugural perpetual bond issuance, as their financial advisor and issue manager.

This landmark event not only reflects the confidence investors have in Taageer Finance's strategic direction but also highlights our commitment to delivering on complex financing solutions, even in a dynamic economic environment. We are grateful for the support from all parties involved, and we believe this transaction will significantly contribute to strengthening the company's capital base and thereby support its growth aspirations. We look forward to continuing our partnership."

OQEP appoints United Securities as liquidity provider ahead of listing

MUSCAT: OQ Exploration and Production (OQEP), Oman's largest pure-play oil and gas exploration and production company and the nation's only wholly government-owned upstream operator, has announced the appointment of United Securities LLC as the Liquidity Provider for its upcoming listing on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

This appointment comes as OQEP undertakes Oman's largest-ever initial public offering (IPO), aiming to list its ordinary shares later this month.

The collaboration with United Securities, the country's leading brokerage services provider regulated by the Financial Services Authority (FSA) of Oman, marks a strategic move to enhance trading activity and foster a stable market environment for OQEP shares post-listing.

This partnership is expected to boost liquidity and narrow the spread between bid and ask prices,

OQEP's IPO offers a 25% free float of its shares for both local and international investors. Upon successful completion of the IPO and listing on the MSX, OQ Group will retain a 75% ownership stake in OQEP, ensuring continued alignment with the company's strategic objectives



The collaboration with United Securities marks a strategic move to enhance trading activity and foster a stable market environment for OQEP shares post-listing.

making OQEP's stock more attractive to both local and international investors.

The entry of OQEP into the MSX, supported by robust liquidity provision, contributes significantly to the diversification and dynamism of Oman's capital market.

This aligns with the Sultanate of

Oman strengthens trade relations with Indonesia



The delegation comprises 26 members, including representatives from various sectors.

Trade between Oman and Indonesia had reached approximately RO 129.6 million (around \$ 336.6 million) by July 2024.

Anwar bin Hamad al Sinani, Chairman of OCCI's branch in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, mentioned that an extensive agenda has been arranged, including visits to various public and private institutions in Indonesia, meetings with local business leaders, and participation in an Indonesian trade exhibition.

This visit is part of broader efforts to enhance collaboration

between Oman and Indonesia and to support private sector initiatives in discovering new investment opportunities.

The delegation comprises 26 members, including representatives from various sectors such as small and medium enterprises, health, construction, logistics, manufacturing, and renewable energy, along with government officials. — **ONA**

SUHAR INDUSTRIAL CITY CONTINUES TO GARNER NEW INVESTMENTS

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, OCT 6

THE recently released 37th issue of the *Duqm Economist* magazine highlights the vital role of Suhar Industrial City, affiliated with the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), in transforming the economic landscape of the Sultanate of Oman. Over the past two decades, the industrial city has attracted substantial investments, contributing significantly to the nation's GDP and job creation.

In the first half of 2024, Suhar Industrial City witnessed significant growth with the investment of 239,000 square metres of land. The completion of 100 per cent of the infrastructure project for Phase Seven marks a pivotal milestone in the city's development.

Additionally, a substantial investment of RO 21 million



In the first half of 2024, Suhar Industrial City attracted four projects with RO 21 million in investments at the Ladayn Complex.

has been allocated to four projects within the Plastics Industries Complex, along with the investment of 53,000 square metres of land dedicated to the same complex. These developments reflect the ongoing commitment to enhancing the industrial landscape of Suhar and bolstering its economic growth.

Engineer Abdullah Ahmed

al Mayasi, Director General of Suhar Industrial City, announced that four new projects have been successfully attracted to the Ladayn Plastics Industries Complex during the first half of 2024, with a total investment volume of RO 21 million.

These projects occupy an area exceeding 53,000 square metres within the complex,

showcasing Ladayn's strategic importance in achieving self-sufficiency in plastic products and enhancing Oman's position in global markets.

Suhar Industrial City has also made significant strides in localising 22 projects during the first half of 2024, with total investments exceeding RO 43 million and covering an area of over 239,000 square metres.

This progress underscores the city's commitment to enhancing its industrial base and attracting substantial investments.

Furthermore, Sohar Industrial City has signed an investment contract with Abdelaziz Abbas Morsy Trading to establish a new project in the plastics sector, focusing on manufacturing plastic products from non-hazardous waste. This initiative will occupy a land area of 33,298 square metres and involves an investment of RO 2 million.

OPINION

The jobs report is good news for the Fed



JEANNA SMIALEK

The author writes about the Federal Reserve and the economy for The New York Times

FEDERAL Reserve officials have been watching the job market closely, wary that it might be cracking under the pressure of high interest rates. The September employment report does a lot to alleviate those concerns. Companies hired at a rapid clip, the unemployment rate dipped and wage growth came in strong last month — a sign that the economy is holding up in the face of high borrowing costs. The report reversed recent signs of a labour market slowdown. In doing so, it probably took away the argument for a big rate cut at the Fed’s next meeting, in early November. Fed policymakers lowered interest rates by half a point in September, an unusually large rate cut and their first in more than four years. Officials were reacting to slowing inflation and a recent cooling in the labour market. But Fed Chair Jerome Powell has been clear that future rate cuts are likely to be more measured if the economy performs as expected. The Fed’s economic projec-

tions in September showed that officials expect to lower borrowing costs by another half a point before the end of the year, implying that they would make a quarter-point cut at each of their remaining two meetings. Officials had forecast that the job market would continue to slow slightly — with unemployment ticking up to 4.4% — before levelling off. Friday’s jobs data suggested that instead of gradually slowing, the job market may in fact be stabilising already. Unemployment ticked down to 4.1% last month, and wage growth picked up to 4%, faster than the 3.8% economists had expected. While Fed officials will receive one more jobs report before their meeting on November 6-7, that report will come just days before the gathering, during the quiet period that Fed officials observe before their policy decisions. That means that the September employment report is the final one that central bankers will be able to assess and widely talk about before their decision.

Highlights

Unemployment ticked down to

4.1%

last month, and wage growth picked up to 4%, faster than the 3.8% economists had expected.

Some economists, including Joe LaVorgna at SMBC Nikko Securities, suggested after the report that the Fed should contemplate skipping a rate cut at their upcoming meeting in light of the labour market’s strength. But most said the improved job market picture meant policymakers could take their time lowering interest rates — not that they needed to stay high. “The September report generally reversed many of the cooling trends that had been apparent in various measures of labour market activity,” Michael Feroli, chief US economist at JPMorgan, wrote after the release, explaining that it would take a “large” surprise to shake the central bank from its path of gradually normalising interest rates. “After today’s report, the soft landing looks back on track,” Feroli wrote. Investors widely expected a quarter-point rate cut in November in the wake of the release, where they had previously been split between expecting a half or a quarter-point reduction. — The New York Times

DEFORESTATION U-TURN TAKES EU DOWN A RISKY ROAD

EUROPE’S latest efforts to green its supply chains have hit a roadblock. The European Commission on Wednesday proposed a one-year delay to the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR), which was supposed to be implemented in December. While European lawmakers and member states still have to vote on the move, opposition to the EUDR from the likes of Germany and Sweden suggests a postponing will indeed happen – and that may have ramifications. The EUDR, which blocks foreign exporters from accessing the EU single market if their products benefit from deforestation, is a logical piece of legislation. Forest fires constituted 19% of global carbon emissions in the 60 years to 2019, an Oxford University study showed. New research from the investigative NGO Earthsight revealed how chicken sold by McDonald’s and major European supermarkets like Carrefour and Albert Heijn has been linked to the loss of 23,000 hectares of Brazilian forests since January 2021 – an area almost the size of Frankfurt. In one sense, applying the brakes makes pragmatic sense. Bigwigs like China and the United States have been united in opposition, while global pushback to the EUDR reached a crescendo last week during the United Nations General Assembly.

Highlights

Forest fires constituted 19% of global carbon emissions in the

60 YEARS

to 2019, an Oxford University study showed.

Still, the optics of delaying a landmark piece of legislation with less than three months to go to its initial deadline create two problems. On the EUDR specifically, it will embolden hostile lobbyists to defang as well as delay it. A majority of exporting countries are already likely to be classed as “low-risk”, dealing a significant blow to environmental and indigenous rights groups. Green MEPs say they will work to prevent any EUDR watering down, but they’re fighting an uphill battle. More broadly, the EU is facing battles on multiple fronts to preserve its attempts to do something meaningful about climate change. The greater proportion of right-wing lawmakers in the European Parliament may complicate aspects of the green transition, just as landmark policies like Europe’s carbon border adjustment mechanism are due to come into force. The more that punchy policies like the EUDR get chipped away at, the less the EU may seem like a decarbonisation leader. — Reuters

The EU calculated that its year-long delay was a “balanced solution” and that affected countries and businesses will now have less reason not to comply. While it seems more like Brussels just buckled to avoid upsetting its allies and trading partners, a bifurcating picture for world trade makes that understandable.



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The author is a food safety consultant & board member of Oman Consumer Protection Association



Ensuring food safety is the collective responsibility of every stakeholder within the food supply chain. Image for illustration only.

FOOD

Food safety legislation encompasses laws, regulations and standards designed to ensure food products are safe, nutritious, and of high quality. Enforced by governmental authorities and international bodies, these laws play a crucial role in protecting public health and saving lives, safeguarding the well-being of consumers with every bite. As food systems become increasingly globalised and complex, the need for robust regulatory frameworks and effective communication becomes more critical than ever. Therefore, the effectiveness and transparency of these regulations in addressing food safety issues are vital for enhancing consumer confidence. Due to the importance of food standards and regulations, the World Food Safety Day, introduced by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), which is observed every June 7, have selected “Food standards save lives,” as its theme for 2023. In an effort to highlight the essential role of food standards in ensuring consumer safety and promoting fair global food trade. Through their collaborative efforts, these international organisations aim to strengthen National Food Control Organizations in each country, leading to the establishment of the Codex Alimentarius. This body sets international food standards dedicated to protecting consumer health and ensuring fairness in international food trade by producing standards, guidelines, and codes of practice that contribute to the safety and quality of food products. Celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2023, Codex standards have been central to food safety for six decades. Now when you eat food, how can you be confident that your food is safe and free from contaminants?

You may have washed your hands, cleaned your dishes and utensils, and cooked your food to the appropriate temperatures. You might have even read labels, checked the ingredients, and trusted everyone involved in producing your food throughout the different processes from growing to handling and processing, to packaging and distribution. Your trust may have been well-built on those involved in bringing your food, whether locally or from around the world, adhere to food safety and quality practices clearly defined in standards. As these food standards serve as the foundation of trust for all of us. Given that every part of the food supply chain is vulnerable to food safety risks, food safety laws, regulations and standards play a vital role in creating an environment that protects all stakeholders against food safety concerns within the farm to plate continuum. Most food we eat today goes through multiple stages before reaching our plate. Therefore, ensuring food safety is the collective responsibility of every stakeholder within the food supply chain. This includes everyone from those who harvest raw materials, such as crops and livestock to food manufacturers, processors, distributors, retailers, restaurants, and ultimately the consumers. From fundamental standards like Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs) and Good Hygiene Practices (GHPs) to more complex frameworks such as Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) and ISO 22000, a self-regulated food business can effectively prevent emerging or anticipated food hazards. By adopting a proactive approach, it ensures that food safety is prioritised throughout the entire supply chain.

Integrating robust governmental inspection and testing protocols, manufacturers can ensure they produce safe, high-quality food products while also optimising their operations. Consistent testing allows manufactures to monitor safety and quality throughout the production process, enabling early identification of defects or deviations and ensuring that only products meeting quality standards reach the market. Early detection of food safety issues is cost-effective, reducing the likelihood of costly recalls or rework later in the production cycle. Effective testing can also streamline operations, leading to more efficient resource use, avoiding legal issues, and ensuring compliance with local and international regulatory standards. By delivering high-quality products that consistently meet customer expectations fosters brand loyalty and trust, which are essential for long-term market success and customers satisfaction. While food standards are crucial for safety and quality assurance, they can entail significant costs, as they require investment in quality and safety management systems, training, and equipment, which can increase production expenses. The complexity of regulations can be overwhelming, especially for smaller businesses lacking the resources to navigate compliance effectively. Market barriers may arise due to differences in standards between national and international markets that hinder business expansion. Despite these challenges, the benefits of food regulations and standards in ensuring safety and quality generally outweigh the drawbacks. By implementing robust Safety Management Systems and maintaining compliance with food regulations, businesses can enhance their reputation in a competitive marketplace. Organizations with strong safety records attract more investors and customers, opening up new business opportunities and fostering customer loyalty. Furthermore, food regulations and standards help reduce overall costs by minimising food waste and the need for recalls, while also protecting businesses from liability. Food standards are a cornerstone of public health, playing an essential role in preventing illness and ensuring that every bite of food is safe and nutritious. By adopting food standards and regulations, along with embracing self-regulating practices, not only individual health will be safeguarded but also the well-being of communities, making food standards a true lifesaver in every bite.

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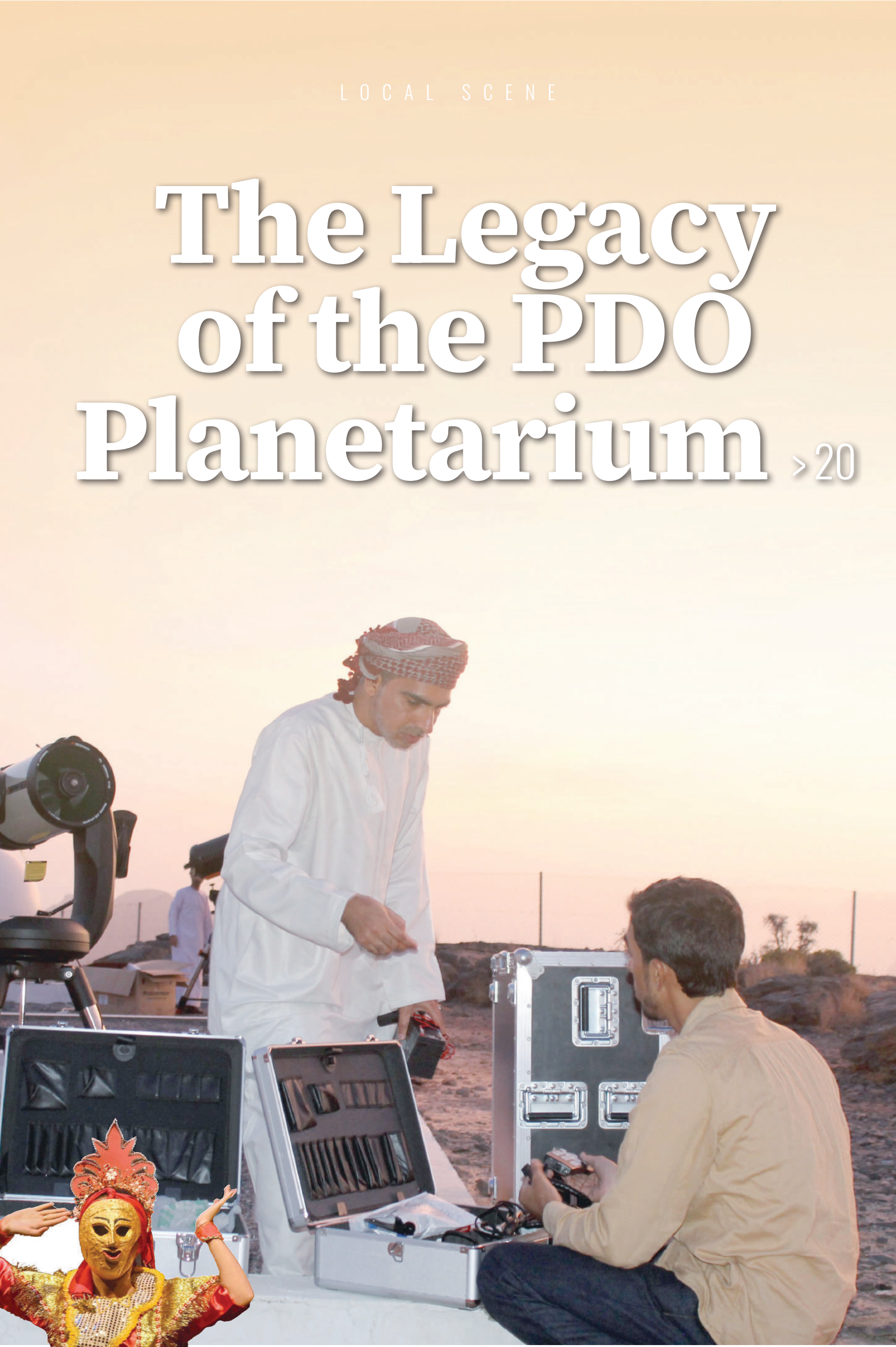
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MOVIE GREATS

French cinema’s beloved ‘worried clown’ Michel Blanc dies



France on Friday mourned actor Michel Blanc, beloved by generations for bringing a comic quality to even his saddest characters including losers and hypochondriacs.

Blanc died early on Friday, aged 72, his family said.

“He made us cry with laughter, and moved us to tears,” President Emmanuel Macron said of Blanc, calling him “a monument of French cinema”.

Blanc is most remembered for his breakthrough role in “French Fried Vacation” (“Les Bronzés”), a 1978 comedy about holidaymakers trying to escape their everyday problems and looking for romance at a holiday resort in Ivory Coast.

Blanc’s character, Jean-Claude Dusse, is an awkward bachelor and bad harmonica player with an orange belt in karate.

“He was a fabulous actor who made us laugh,” Prime Minister Michel Barnier said, adding that news of Blanc’s death had made him “very emotional and very sad”.

Blanc’s trademark bald head and moustache appeared in several other comedies.

“It was clear that the Jean-Claude Dusse role suited me,” he told Paris Match magazine this year. But, he added, “I got scared very fast that it would stick to me my whole life.”

Blanc branched out into serious film roles, theatre, screen-writing and directing, and became one of only a few people to win both an acting award and a screenplay award at the Cannes Film Festival.

“He was the sickly French guy that you just can’t keep down,” said Gilles Jacob, the Cannes Festival’s former president, adding he hoped that Blanc’s popular successes would not make the public forget his serious work, such as the acclaimed and haunting “Monsieur Hire” (1989).

Blanc, who was sometimes called a “sad clown” in media, said the description missed the mark.

“I’m not a sad clown at all, I’m a worried clown,” he told French culture magazine Telerama.

“And who isn’t worried? What is the human condition? It is not knowing why we are here, and not knowing how we will die,” he said. — AFP

INDUSTRY HIGHLIGHTS



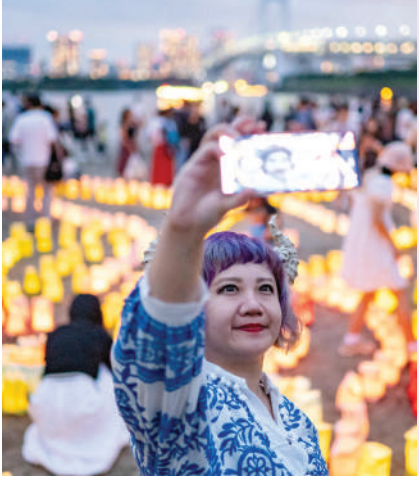
ENTERTAINMENT

An artist from Wahana Puspita Budaya performs the Arokat Topeng dance during the Goong Prada Festival 2024 at Taman Budaya Cak Durasim in Surabaya. —AFP



CULTURE

Members of the “Colla Castellera de Sant Pere i Sant Pau” team build a “castell” (human tower) during the 26th Human Towers Competition in Tarragona. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A woman takes selfies in front of paper lanterns during the Odaiba Lantern Festival at Odaiba Marine Park in Tokyo. — AFP

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Peru archaeologists find 600-year-old child sacrifice site



In a vacant lot outside the town of Trujillo, in northern Peru, archaeologists have unearthed the remains of nearly four dozen children — all thought to have been ritually sacrificed more than 600 years ago.

“Many of these remains have cuts on the sternum, some on their ribs,” said archaeologist Julio Asencio from the excavation site.

Each child was buried separately, the scientist said. The remains of two adults and nine llamas — thought to be an offering representing their source of food, clothing and transport — were also found nearby.

They likely belonged to the local Chimú group, which dominated northern Peru from the 700s to the late 1400s,

Asencio said.

Historians believe the group may have participated in child sacrifices as an attempt to appease their gods after heavy rains and flooding. They were conquered by the Inca just decades later.

Scientists had previously found another site thought to be a mass sacrifice by the Chimú nearby, of 140 children all with cuts on their sternum and ribs, their hearts believed to have been removed thereafter, alongside hundreds of llamas.

Peru is home to hundreds of archaeological ruins from a number of pre-Hispanic cultures up through the Inca Empire, which stretched from what is now southern Ecuador through central Chile some 500 years ago. —Reuters

Vietnam’s young Coffee entrepreneurs brew up a revolution



DITCHING a lucrative career in finance, Vu Dinh Tu opened a coffee shop without telling his parents and joined a wave of young Vietnamese entrepreneurs using espressos to challenge family expectations around work.

Traditionally taken black, sometimes with condensed milk, or even egg, coffee has long been an integral part of Vietnamese culture.

But starting a cafe is not a career that many of Vietnam’s growing group of ambitious middle-class parents would choose for their children.

“At first my family didn’t know much about it,” 32-year-old Tu said. “Gradually they found out — and they weren’t very supportive.”

Tu’s parents repeatedly tried to convince him to stay in his well-paid investment banking job.

But he persevered and opened four branches of Refined over four years in Hanoi.

Each is packed from morning till night with coffee lovers enjoying Vietnamese robusta beans — in surroundings more like a cocktail bar than a cafe. His parents “saw the hard work involved in running a business — handling everything from finances to staffing, and they didn’t want me to struggle”, explained Tu.

Vietnam was desperately poor until the early 2000s, pulling itself up with a boom in manufacturing, but many parents want to see their children climb the social ladder by moving into steady, lucrative professions such as medicine and law.

Coffee, on the other hand, has become a byword for creativity and self-expression.

LIKE AN ‘ARTIST’

In Vietnam, “cafes have become a way to break norms around family pressure to do well in school, go to college, get a degree... work in something that is familiar and financially stable”, according to Sarah Grant, an associate professor at California State University.

“They have also become spaces of possibility where you can bring together creative people in a community, whether that’s graphic designers... musicians, other kinds of do-it-yourself type people,” said Grant, an anthropologist specialising in Vietnam.

Coffee first arrived in Vietnam in the 1850s during French colonial rule, but a shift in the 1990s and early 2000s to large-scale production of robusta — usually found in instant brews — made the country a coffee production powerhouse and the world’s second largest exporter.

A passion for the coffee business is often linked to that history, Grant said. Coffee entrepreneurs are “really proud that Vietnam is this coffee-producing country and has a lot of power in the global market”, she added.

Down a tiny alley in the heart of the capital, 29-year-old Nguyen Thi Hue is mixing a lychee matcha cold brew in her new glass-fronted shop — a one-woman “Slow Bar” coffee business.

“When making coffee, it’s almost like being an artist,” said Hue, who had her first cup as a young child thanks to a neighbour who roasted his own. But coffee is also hugely trendy, and there is money to be made if a cafe appeals to selfie-loving Generation Z.

“No-one dresses poorly to go to a cafe,” notes Hue, herself decked out in stylish bright-blue-rimmed glasses and matching neck-tie.

COFFEE A SERIOUS CAREER

Relaxing at a rival shop nearby, Dang

Le Nhu Quynh, a 21-year-old university student, is typical of the new generation of customer — she says the cafe’s style is what counts for her more than the brews.

“I don’t like coffee that much,” she admits.

Vietnam’s coffee shop industry is worth \$400 million and is growing up to eight percent a year, according to branding consultancy Mibrand.

There are also thousands of shops not officially registered with authorities, says Vu Thi Kim Oanh, a lecturer at Vietnam’s RMIT university.

“If we have problems with a job at the office, then we quit and we think: let’s get some money together... choose one place, rent a house and then open a coffee shop,” she said.

“If it goes well, then you continue. If it doesn’t, you change.”

Global brands have struggled to gain a foothold and Starbucks accounted for just two percent of the market in 2022, according to Euromonitor International.

Earlier this year it announced it would shut down its only store in Ho Chi Minh City selling speciality brews.

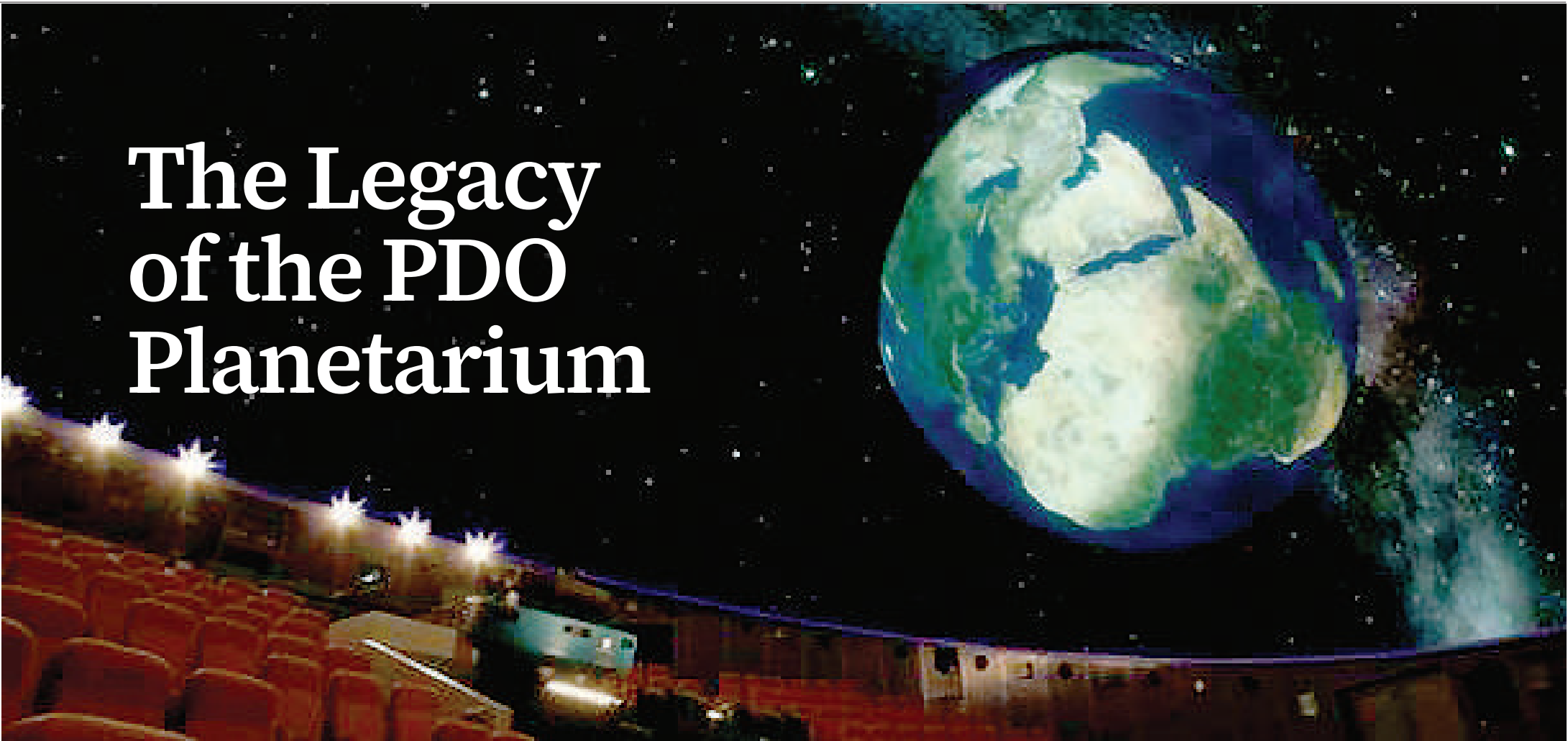
Unlike most local ventures, the coffee giant uses exclusively “high-quality” arabica beans, which have a distinctly different flavour from Vietnamese robusta.

For Tu, his parents eventually came around — and he plans further shops, wanting to create a workforce that loves coffee as much as he does.

“I want to build the mindset that this is a serious career,” he said.

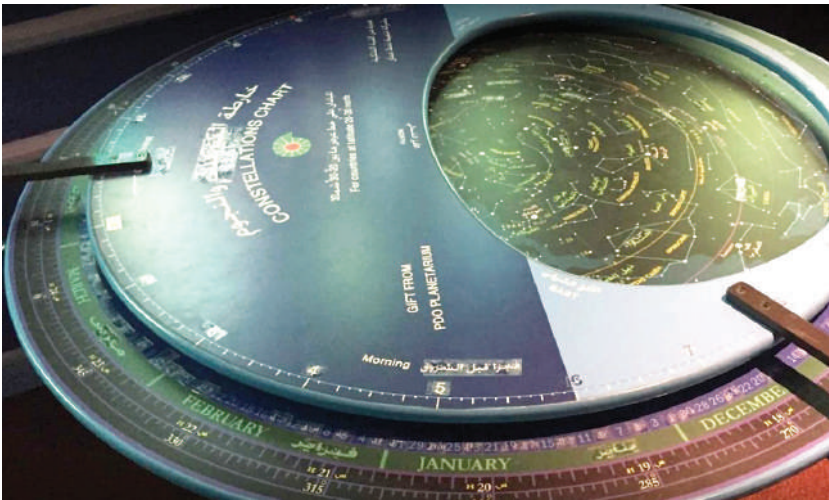
—AFP

Located in Muscat, the PDO Planetarium offers an immersive journey through space, inviting visitors to explore the universe's wonders. Since its opening, more than 270,000 visitors have passed through its doors, with many of these being schoolchildren — a testament to its educational significance.



BY STAFF REPORTER

FOR CENTURIES the night sky has captivated the human imagination. People have looked at the stars, seeking guidance, meaning, and a deeper connection to the universe. From ancient seafarers navigating vast oceans by the constellations to philosophers pondering humanity's place in the cosmos, the stars have been a universal compass and a source of wonder.



Today, our curiosity continues, albeit with the help of advanced technology, allowing us to explore the stars in ways our ancestors could only dream of. One such place of discovery in Oman is the PDO Planetarium — a gateway to the cosmos.

A GIFT TO THE NATION: THE PDO PLANETARIUM
Located in Muscat, the PDO Planetarium offers an immersive journey through space, inviting visitors to explore the universe's wonders. Since its opening, more than 270,000 visitors have passed through its doors, with many of these being schoolchildren — a testament to its educational significance. The venue was gifted to the nation, making it accessible to everyone free of charge. It's no wonder that interest in the planetarium has surged, especially after being highlighted by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism alongside the neighbouring Oil and Gas Exhibition and EcOman Centres.
Upon entering the planetarium, one immediately senses the thrill of discovery. Its 11-metre domed ceiling houses 60 seats where audiences are treated to hi-tech shows about astronomy, astrophysics and earth sciences. These shows are brought to life through cutting-edge digital technology, five specialised laser projectors, sophisticated LED lighting, and a state-of-the-art sound system, creating a mesmerising panorama of stars, galaxies and comets.
Over the years, visitors have left glowing reviews about their experience, though some noted a few caveats.



One visitor fondly recalled: "The PDO Planetarium visit was one of my best memories." Another recommended visiting in the evening for "wonderful views," adding, "If you are a stargazer, go for it." It's worth noting that the planetarium is frequently booked, so advanced reservations are a must, particularly for popular stargazing parties organised by the staff. These events feature telescopes and star charts, allowing visitors to observe the constellations and deepen their understanding of the solar system.
Some visitors were particularly impressed by the unique shows: "We came on the weekend! I'll be back again." Others appreciated the

educational aspect, with one stating: "The show was educational but quite old-fashioned. The information is in English and technical, so it might be better suited for those with a real interest in the field."
A STELLAR EXPERIENCE
In the past, the PDO Planetarium offers more than just a passive viewing experience. Among its standout features is the Special Astronomy Programme (Uniview), a fully immersive planetarium system that showcases planets, stars, constellations, galaxies and comets with breathtaking clarity. The laser shows, which combine graphics and music, add an artistic

element to the scientific content, making the experience both informative and entertaining.
All shows were available in both Arabic and English, allowing a broad range of visitors to enjoy the presentations in their preferred language. For families, combining the planetarium visit with a trip to the Eco Exhibit and museum is highly recommended, especially for a fun day out with children.
In 2016, PDO expanded its reach by donating a mobile planetarium to the Oman Astronomical Society. This mobile unit continues to travel across Oman, bringing the wonders of the universe to schools and communities, further enhancing public understanding of the cosmos. This outreach initiative reflects the planetarium's commitment to making astronomy accessible to all.
Although some visitors have noted that the planetarium's shows may feel dated, recent upgrades (in 2012) have significantly enhanced the experience.
As of late, there's not much talk about the planetarium and what it offers. But for those who have visited in the past, visitors noted that the full-dome digital setup offered a visually stunning tour of the universe.
Whether you're a seasoned stargazer or a family looking for a fun educational outing, the PDO Planetarium promises an unforgettable experience. We're looking forward to its fantastic reincarnation especially of its entertaining programming fit for the newer generation.