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STOP THE ROT
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PAGES 20 BAISAS 200

SUNRISE 06:48 AM
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FAJR 05:28 AM
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INBRIEF

HM CONDOLES
PRESIDENT OF INDIA

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Droupadi Murmu of the Republic of India on the death of the former Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments to President Droupadi Murmu, the family of the deceased and the people of India.

OVER 1,000 JOBS
UP FOR GRABS IN
WHOLESALE, RETAIL

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, announced the availability of 1,157 job opportunities in the wholesale and retail sector in the Sultanate of Oman. These include 525 direct jobs and 332 job opportunities in fuel stations. The ministry also worked to provide 300 direct jobs coupled with training in the retail sector, by signing an agreement with a specialised academy in the field of retail. This agreement will be implemented in cooperation with the Employment and Training Support Centre at the Ministry of Labour. This took place during the signing ceremony of cooperation programmes with a number of wholesale and retail sector establishments in Oman and the launch of the ‘Itqan’ programme for the industrial sector. The launch of the programme comes within the framework of the Ministry’s efforts to support employment and enhance the role of Omani youth in the retail and industrial sectors. In conjunction with the launch of the ‘Itqan’ programme, the MoCIIP signed cooperation programmes with a number of factories, industrial facilities and higher education institutions to groom Omani youth with the necessary technical knowledge and skills. — ONA

PROTEST AGAINST WAR

A protester wearing a Christmas wreath, has her mouth taped with a slogan which reads “Shout” during a rally to call for the exchange of Ukrainian prisoners of war from the Azov Brigade and other units with Russian prisoners at St Sophia Square in Kyiv on Sunday. — AFP

Experts question bird strike as cause of South Korean plane crash that killed 179 people

SEOUL: Both black boxes — the flight data recorder and the cockpit voice recorder — for Jeju Air flight 2216 have been found, a transport official said on Sunday, after the Boeing 737-800 crashed on landing, killing 179 people. “Regarding the black boxes, both the cockpit voice recorder and the flight data recorder have now been retrieved,” deputy transport minister Joo Jong-wan said at a briefing.

Uncertainties surround the deadliest crash on South Korean soil, experts said on Sunday, questioning initial suggestions that a bird strike might have brought down the Jeju Air flight. The apparent absence of landing gear, the timing of the twin-engine Boeing 737-800’s belly-landing at Muan International Airport and the reports of a possible bird strike all raised questions that

Firefighters and rescue personnel work near the wreckage of a Jeju Air Boeing 737-800 series aircraft after the plane crashed and burst into flames at Muan International Airport in South Jeolla Province on Sunday.

could not yet be answered. The single-aisle aircraft was seen in video broadcast on local media skidding down the runway with no visible landing gear

before slamming into a wall in an explosion of flame and debris. “Why didn’t fire tenders lay foam on the runway? Why weren’t they in attendance when the plane

touched down? And why did the aircraft touch down so far down the runway? And why was there a brick wall at the end of the runway?” said Airline News editor Geoffrey Thomas. South Korean officials said they were investigating the cause of the crash of Jeju Air Flight 7C2216, including a possible bird strike. The crash killed 179 of the 181 people on board. A spokesperson for Jeju Air was not available for comments. Jeju Air declined to comment on the cause of the accident during news conferences, saying an investigation is under way. Under global aviation rules, South Korea will lead a civil investigation into the crash and automatically involve the National Transportation Safety Board in the United States where the plane was designed and built. — Reuters

SEE ALSO P6

New power tariffs come into effect on Wednesday

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, DEC 29

THE AUTHORITY for Public Services Regulation (APSR) has published electricity tariffs applicable to residential and large non-residential customers, as well as electricity connection and supply fees.

The issuance of the Cost-Reflective Tariff Regulation and the Approved Tariff Regulation for Electricity Connection and Supply follows approvals by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and Chairman of the Authority’s Board.

The Authority clarified that the newly issued tariffs are consistent with current applicable rates, and have been published to meet legal requirements, ensuring transparency and providing clarity to subscribers and operators regarding tariff implementation.

Cost-Reflective Tariff Regulation: This regulation applies to non-residential subscribers whose annual electricity consumption exceeds 100 megawatt-hours. The tariffs are reviewed and determined annually by the Authority in coordination with relevant stakeholders. Additionally, the regulation permits the issuance of supplementary rules to guide its implementation.

Approved Tariff Regulation for Residential

The newly issued tariffs are consistent with current applicable rates, and have been published to meet legal requirements, ensuring transparency and providing clarity to subscribers and operators.

Electricity: The regulation outlines electricity tariffs for residential subscribers based on their consumption and account type:

(A) Primary Account Tariffs:

- 14 Baisa per kWh for consumption up to 4,000 kWh.
- 18 Baisa per kWh for consumption between 4,001 and 6,000 kWh.
- 32 Baisa per kWh for consumption exceeding 6,000 kWh.

(B) Additional Account Tariffs:

- 22 Baisa per kWh for consumption up to 4,000 kWh.
- 26 Baisa per kWh for consumption

between 4,001 and 6,000 kWh.

- 32 Baisa per kWh for consumption exceeding 6,000 kWh.

Tariffs for Non-Residential and Agricultural Categories:

(A) Non-Residential Subscribers:

- A flat rate of 25 Baisa per kWh applies across all consumption levels

(B) Agricultural and Fisheries Subscribers

- 12 Baisa per kWh for consumption up to 3,000 kWh.
- 16 Baisa per kWh for consumption between 3,001 and 6,000 kWh.
- 24 Baisa per kWh for consumption exceeding 6,000 kWh.

The introduction of these regulations underlines the Authority’s commitment to enhancing transparency, balancing the interests of service providers and subscribers, and ensuring the sustainability of Oman’s Subscribers can opt for one of the following tariff structures:

1. A variable tariff based on the cost-reflective structure.
2. A fixed seasonal tariff (summer and winter) based on load levels.
3. A fixed non-seasonal tariff (applicable year-round) based on load levels.

The regulation defines non-residential use as electricity consumption for purposes such as government, commercial, industrial, and tourism activities, regardless of whether the property is designated residential or non-residential. TURN TO P2

Phase 2 of the ban on single-use plastic shopping bags from January 1

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, DEC 29

THE SECOND PHASE of the ban on plastic shopping bags in the Sultanate of Oman will begin on January 1.

The Environment Authority (EA), in a statement, said that this phase will focus on strengthening restrictions on the use of single-use plastic bags, by banning additional types of thin plastic bags that

are the most harmful to the environment. All businesses will also be encouraged to adopt sustainable alternatives such as reusable cloth and paper bags. The EA said that the second phase aims to raise the level of commitment of individuals and institutions to reduce reliance on single-use plastic materials, with a focus on reducing the damage caused by them, which includes

pollution of soil and water bodies, threatening wildlife and marine life, and the increase in plastic waste in the natural environment. PERIODIC INSPECTIONS The implementation of the decision would be supported by periodic inspections to ensure that all stakeholders are committed to banning prohibited plastic bags. Fines will also be imposed on violators to ensure full

compliance with the decision. EA praised the positive role that members of society can play by adopting responsible environmental behaviours such as using reusable bags, which contributes to reducing the environmental impact in the long term, and called on supermarkets and grocery shops to comply with the instructions of the new decision, stressing that cooperation is the basis for the success of this initiative.

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SHORT TAKES

NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES SURVEY LAUNCHED

AL KAMIL W'AL WAFI: The Directorate-General of Health Services in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate on Sunday celebrated the launch of the “National Survey for Non-Communicable Diseases.” The survey is scheduled to take place at the level of the governorate.

Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South, was the chief guest at the launch of the survey, held in the Wilayat of Al Kamil W'al Wafi.

The ceremony was attended by Shaikh Abdullah bin Mohammed al Braiki, Wali of Al Kamil W'al Wafi. — ONA

NEW ELECTRICITY TARIFFS COME INTO EFFECT ON WEDNESDAY

FROM PAGE 1

The cost-reflective tariff will be calculated using the following formula. Cost-reflective tariff = Wholesale electricity supply cost + Transmission cost + Distribution cost + Supply cost/ Exceptions to the standard tariff structure may be made for specific non-residential categories, subject to approval by the Council of Ministers. By the end of December each year, the APSR will publish detailed calculations of the tariffs for the following year.

This will include the breakdown of costs for the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company, the Oman Electricity Transmission Company, and other licensed electricity distributors and suppliers. The information will be made available on the APSR website or other designated platforms.

APSR TAKES PART IN GCC INTERCONNECTION AUTHORITY FORUM

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing efforts to strengthen Gulf and regional cooperation in the energy sector, the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), participated in the 61st meeting of the Advisory and Regulatory Committee of the GCC Interconnection Authority, hosted by Qatar. The Omani delegation was led by Dr Mansour bin Talib al Hinai, Chairman of the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) and Head of the Basic Services Sector.

The meeting addressed a range of strategic topics, including the performance and technical activities of the Gulf electricity grid, as well as approved amendments to the General Agreement and the Agreement for Energy Exchange and Trade.

Discussions also encompassed mechanisms for determining additional linkage fees for energy trade between member states and external parties, setting minimum charges for the rights to use the additional interconnection for trade among GCC countries, and reviewing updates on the expansion projects of the Gulf electricity grid.

These efforts align with broader initiatives aimed at advancing economic integration and sustainable energy development across the GCC, contributing to comprehensive growth and reinforcing regional cooperation in the energy sector.

Oman, Palestine ink MoU in telecommunications, IT

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and the State of Palestine on Sunday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in the field of telecommunications and information technology. The MoU was signed by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology,



The MoU was signed by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali and Dr Abdul Razzaq al Natsheh.

and Dr Abdul Razzaq al Natsheh, Minister of Telecommunications and Digital Economy of Palestine.

The MoU focuses on enhancing cooperation in telecommunications and information technology, as well as exchanging experiences and expertise in the digital economy sphere. It also aims to promote business partnerships between companies of the two countries in related fields. — ONA

Loan scheme for laid-off employees extended

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, DEC 29

In a bid to provide continued financial relief to citizens affected by job losses, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has extended its loan deferment programme until December 2025. The scheme, initially set to end in 2024, aims to alleviate the financial burden on Omani citizens who are unemployed, offering them the opportunity to stabilise their finances until they find new employment.

The programme, first introduced in December 2023, was crafted to safeguard citizens during economic turbulence by suspending loan repayments and waiving associated interest during periods of unemployment. The recent extension, formalised in a new circular, reinforces the Sultanate of Oman's ongoing efforts to protect its workforce from the economic impact of job losses.

The revised deferment programme covers Omani citizens who have been laid off before or after the issuance of this new circular. Eligible borrowers can now benefit from a one-year deferment period starting from the



date of application or until they secure a new job — whichever comes sooner. A critical feature of the scheme is the suspension of interest or profit charges on deferred loans during this period. Moreover, loans under deferment will not be subjected to classification or provisioning requirements under International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS 9). To ensure borrowers are not overwhelmed by legal challenges, the CBO has also instructed banks and financial leasing companies (FLCs) to suspend all legal actions against borrowers or guarantors during the deferment period.

This protection extends to both categories of eligible borrowers, fostering a sense of security for those affected by job losses.

Once borrowers reenter the workforce, financial institutions will collaborate with them to reschedule loan payments. Adjustments may include reducing instalment amounts or extending repayment terms to better align with the borrower's new income level, based on individual requests. In an effort to enhance transparency and consumer trust, the CBO has mandated that banks and FLCs clearly communicate all details of the loan deferment process to borrowers. Institutions must also secure borrower consent for any changes to loan terms, in accordance with consumer protection regulations. Furthermore, any restructuring of credit facilities after the deferment period must adhere to CBO guidelines issued in previous circulars. These measures ensure a consistent and fair process for all borrowers.

The CBO has instructed all licensed banks and FLCs to submit quarterly reports on the progress and implementation of the loan deferment scheme. Reports must be submitted within two weeks of the end of each quarter, providing the CBO with the data needed to monitor compliance and evaluate the programme's impact.

Promoting circular economy eco-friendly way

SIHAM AL SAIDI
AL SUWAIQ, DEC 29

The Environment Authority in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq is spearheading efforts to promote the circular economy, a sustainable model that minimises waste and maximises resource reuse.

The Authority has launched initiatives to raise awareness, foster collaboration, and implement practical solutions to establish a circular economy culture in the region. “Our efforts focus on educating the community about the benefits of the circular economy while collaborating with key stakeholders to turn ideas into actionable projects,” said Shaikh Hamoud bin Sulaiman al Harrasi, Head of the Environment Centre in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq.

These efforts include engaging schools, where students are encouraged to



The Al Suwaiq branch of the EA has also teamed up with local small and medium enterprises to revive traditional landfills.

brainstorm and implement recycling initiatives. One of the standout projects involves recycling construction and demolition waste in partnership with be'ah, Oman's leading waste management company.

This collaboration has successfully transformed waste into reusable materials, showcasing the practical

applications of the circular economy in Al Suwaiq.

The Al Suwaiq branch of the EA has also teamed up with local small and medium enterprises to revive traditional landfills.

This project is part of a broader environmental sanitation campaign aimed at rehabilitating old landfill sites and converting them into green spaces, aligning with global climate goals.

Shaikh al Harrasi revealed plans to integrate a student-led competition in 2025, encouraging school companies in the wilayats of Al Suwaiq and Al Khabourah to develop innovative recycling projects. A recently held workshop organised by the Environment Centre brought together experts, academics, and community members to discuss the circular economy's potential.

Presentations included “Global and Regional Experiences in Waste

Management,” delivered by Mubarak bin Salim al Kalbani, and a case study by Jamal from be'ah on recycling construction waste.

Students from Ahad Basic Education School added a creative element to the workshop with their play, Fruitful Initiatives, emphasising the role of youth in driving sustainability efforts.

An accompanying exhibition provided a platform for knowledge exchange among government representatives, businesses, researchers, and students.

Shaikh al Harrasi highlighted the sustainability, innovation, and economic growth that the circular economy promises. “With the right support and collaboration of different community authorities related to environmental support, Al Suwaiq can lead the way in circular economy practices,” he said.

AL DHAHIRAH MEDIA FORUM KICKS OFF



The media forum emphasises the development of innovative media skills.

IBRI: The Wilayat of Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate witnessed the commencement of the Second Media Forum on Sunday, under the slogan ‘Media of the Future: Impact and Technology’. The three-day forum is organised by the Office of the Governor of Al Dhahirah. Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah and chief guest at the event, delivered a speech in which he underscored the media’s pivotal role in supporting local development within Al Dhahirah Governorate. He emphasised that the media also strengthens partnerships between service institutions and the local community, enabling effective communication channels and community-inclusive decision-making. The forum aims to build media capacities and promote media culture in the Governorate through training sessions conducted by experts and specialists. It highlights the importance of developing innovative media skills to enhance performance and ensure broader exposure. — ONA

Dibba Al Hisn Municipality reopens Al Doub Park

DIBBA: Dibba Al Hisn Municipality has successfully reopened Al Doub Neighbourhood Park, transforming it into a vibrant and sustainable recreational space for residents. The redevelopment features expansive green areas, walking paths, children’s play zones, and eco-friendly amenities, all designed to foster a healthier, more active community. The park now boasts native plants that reduce water consumption and a smart irrigation system to enhance sustainability. It also includes safe, eco-conscious equipment for children, ensuring the park is



Sustainable gardening practices were part of the ‘I Grow My Garden’ workshop for children.

welcoming for all ages. As part of the reopening, the municipality launched the ‘I Grow My Garden’ workshop to introduce children to sustainable gardening

practices. This initiative helps instil a sense of environmental responsibility and offers hands-on learning in a fun, engaging way. Talib bin Abdullah al Yahyai, Director of Dibba Al Hisn Municipality, highlighted the park’s role in enhancing residents’ well-being, stating that parks provide safe spaces for children to play, promote physical activity for all ages, and encourage relaxation. He emphasised that this initiative supports the municipality’s broader vision of creating sustainable urban spaces that balance development with environmental preservation.

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee at Ministry of Information announces its Tender for the following work:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
9/2024 (513/2024) at E-Tendering	Construction of a Building for OB Vans and Administrative Offices for Ministry of Information at Al Qurum	Excellent First	11/1/2025	18/2/2025	250/-

1. All specialized companies in the field of the tender shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicated above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

2. Companies and institutions are exempted from providing a temporary insurance of 1% when submitting their bid, provided that they sign a document committing themselves to the submitted bid for a period determined when the bidding strategy is approved in accordance with the document attached to the Isnad platform. As for international companies that do not have a headquarters in the Sultanate of Oman, they are required to provide temporary insurance of 1%.

(For more information, please see the original circular issued by the Tender Board on the Isnad platform.)

Note that the last date for accepting bids as mentioned above is before 10:00 am. Any bid received after the time and date mentioned in the submission date will be rejected automatically.

You are requested to provide 2 hard copies for your offer after the submission in Projects Department at Ministry of Information.

3. The Ministry has the right to:

- 1) Add or Cancel some works in the tender if necessary.
- 2) Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:

Telephone : 24943785, 24943177, Email: (Moi.Tenders@omaninfo.om)

Workshop on medical, wellness tourism

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism on Sunday organised a workshop on ‘Medical and Wellness Tourism in the Sultanate of Oman’. The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health. The workshop aimed to develop a road map for launching a model of medical and wellness tourism and promoting it locally, regionally and globally. The workshop outlined relevant sources, experiences and opportunities on how to encourage tourism and health establishments to showcase their best products and practices. It explored ways to integrate medical and wellness tourism into streamlined services offered by those facilities. — ONA

Deadline to exchange currency ends tomorrow

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

THE deadline to exchange currencies that will be pulled out of circulation is midnight on Tuesday, December 31, according to the Central Bank of Oman (CBO). The CBO, through a circular dated January 7, announced that certain denominations of currency would be withdrawn from circulation and would not be usable as legal tender after December 31. Following this date, these denominations will hold no legal tender value. “Hence, we request all those who are in possession of these currencies to get them exchanged through banks or money exchanges before December 31,” a circular from the CBO stated. Meanwhile, banks in the Sultanate of Oman have urged their customers to exchange currencies that will be withdrawn from the economy by December 31 in exchange for valid currencies, as the earlier ones will cease to be legal tender.



“We urge our customers to exchange the currencies in their possession that will cease to be a legal tender on or before December 31,” banks said in messages to their customers. Banks further informed customers that they could exchange the currencies by visiting their nearest branch or depositing them at any CDM location to ensure a smooth process. Messages carrying this information have

been sent to customers via mobile phones and emails. Customers have been warned that after this date, these banknotes will no longer be accepted. The CBO statement further indicated that the banknotes to be withdrawn from circulation include the 1 Omani Rial, 1/2 Omani Rial, 200 Baisa, and 100 Baisa denominations issued by the Central Bank in November 1995. The banknotes announced for withdrawal also include the fifth issue banknotes (1995), upgraded issue banknotes (2000), the one-rial commemorative banknote (2005), the twenty-rial commemorative banknote (2010), upgraded issue banknotes (2011 and 2012), the one-rial commemorative banknote, and the upgraded RO 50 banknote (2019). The CBO has directed all banks operating in the Sultanate of Oman to accept these banknotes and replace them with banknotes of the sixth issue during the specified period. The CBO also instructed all institutions and retailers to accept these banknotes from the public and deposit them in banks operating in the Sultanate of Oman.

360 graduate from Vocational Training Institute

SALALAH: The Directorate-General of Education in the Wilayat of Salalah, Dhofar Governorate, celebrated on Sunday at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment the graduation of 360 educators from the Specialised Institute for Vocational Training for Teachers. The graduates belong to the fourth, fifth and sixth batches of the institute. Dr Fatima bint Ahmed al Ghassaniyah,

Director of the Educational Supervision Department at Dhofar Education, delivered the Directorate-General’s speech, highlighting that the establishment of the Specialised Institute for Vocational Training for Teachers aims to meet the evolving needs of the educational system. The institute plays a vital role in providing specialised human resources in line with the modern requirements

of education through strategic programmes that are sustainable, comprehensive, and development-focused. She elaborated on the institute’s strategic programmes, including the school leadership programme for principals and their assistants, the supervision experts programme for educational supervisors, and various programmes for subject and new teachers. — ONA



We are pleased to announce the following job vacancy:

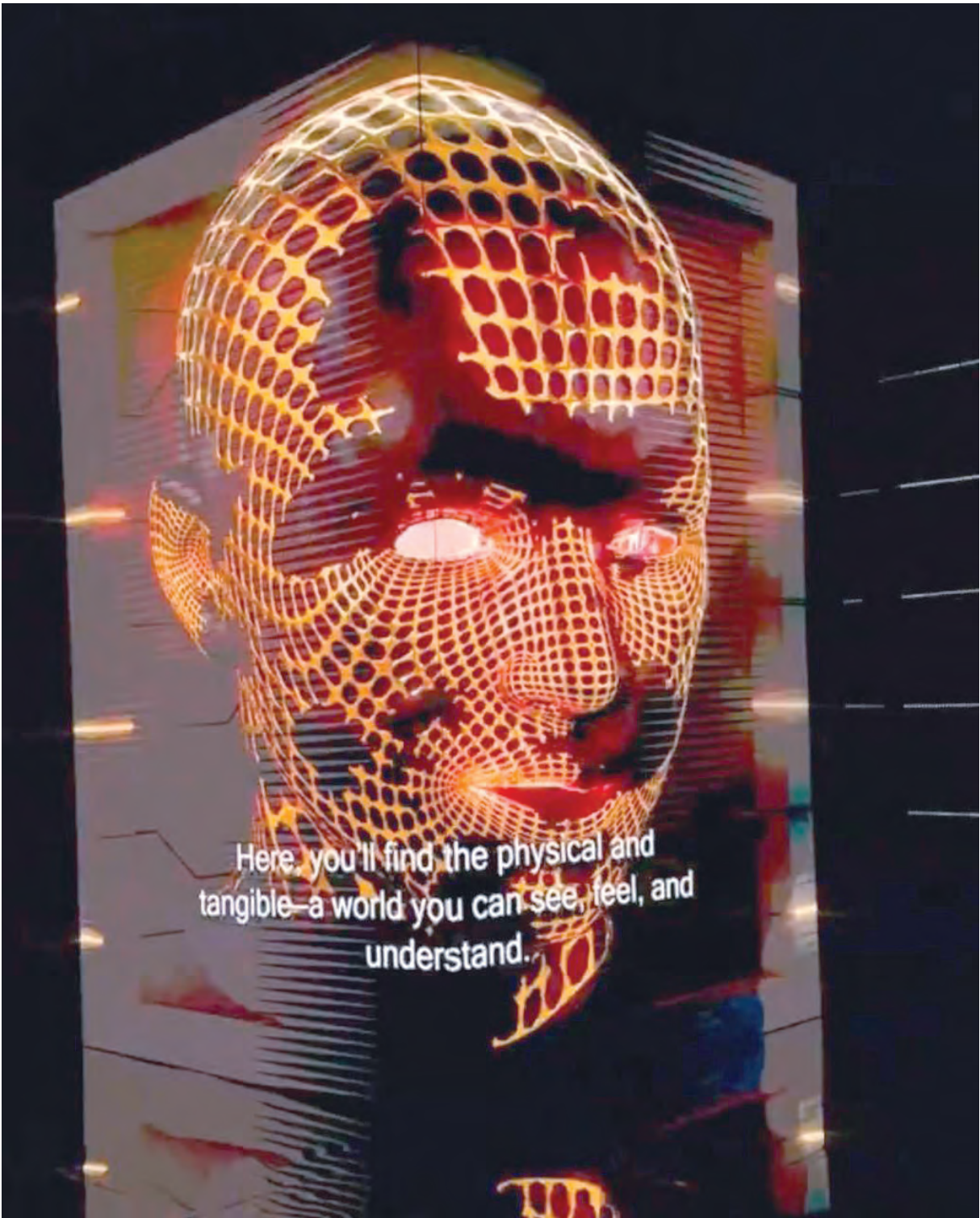
Position	Chief - Internal Audit (Omani National Only)
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How to Apply ?

- The Last date for receiving the applications will be: **8 January 2025**
- To apply and view the detailed job description, please visit **Jadarah Platform**



jadarah.oia.gov.om



BLENDING TECHNOLOGY WITH ART

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, DEC 29

THE 'HYBRID SHOW EXPERIENCE', a captivating event at Al Amerat Public Park, is one of the standout attractions of the Muscat Nights festival 2024. Running daily from December 23 to January 21, 2025, the event uniquely merges cutting-edge technology with live performances, offering an immersive experience that appeals to visitors of all ages.

Combining virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and artificial intelligence (AI), the show transports attendees into breathtaking digital worlds. Visitors can fly over Oman's majestic mountains, interact with vibrant virtual elements and enjoy dynamic visual effects that evolve with every moment, making the experience

fresh and exciting.

Beyond entertainment, the 'Hybrid Show Experience' also celebrates Omani heritage, incorporating digital depictions of the country's natural landscapes and myths. Through this fusion of tradition and modern technology, the event offers a fresh perspective on Oman's beauty.

With interactive features that engage the audience, the show ensures that every visitor feels like part of the action. Feedback from young attendees like Noura al Balushi and Abdullah al Amri underscores the awe and pride they felt experiencing their culture through futuristic technology.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE EVENT: Immersive technologies: The show features VR and AR, allowing visitors to experience breathtaking virtual landscapes, including flying over Oman's mountains and interacting with digital

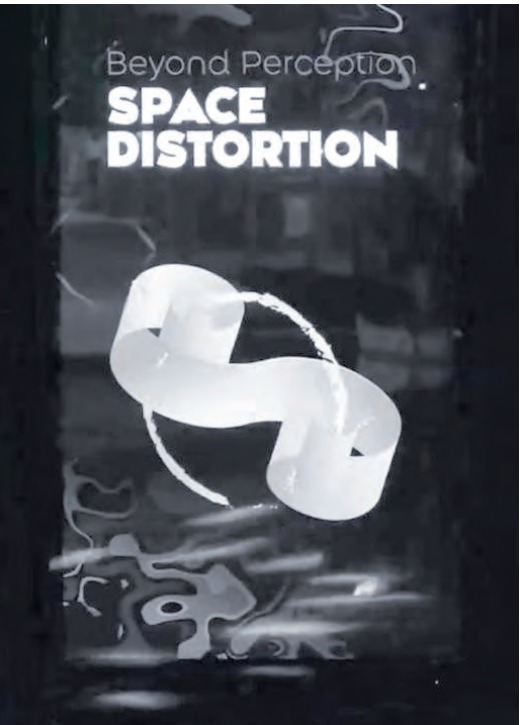
elements in real-time. AI-powered visual effects ensure every moment is dynamic and one-of-a-kind.

CULTURAL FUSION: The event not only entertains, but also highlights Omani heritage through digitally enhanced depictions of local myths and natural landmarks, blending tradition with futuristic technology.

INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCE: With daily shows designed for all age groups, the event offers an interactive journey that integrates technology to engage visitors, making them feel like active participants in the experience.

The 'Hybrid Show Experience' promises to be one of the most exciting attractions at the Muscat Nights festival 2024, offering a perfect blend of entertainment, creativity and technological innovation for all to enjoy.

With interactive features that engage the audience, the show ensures that every visitor feels like part of the action. Feedback from young attendees like Noura al Balushi and Abdullah al Amri underscores the awe and pride they felt experiencing their culture through futuristic technology.



UTAS MUSANNAH WORKSHOPS PREPARE YOUTH FOR THE JOB MARKET

AL MUSANNAH: As part of its commitment to equipping Omani youth with essential skills for the labour market, the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Al Musannah recently concluded a series of training workshops focused on CV writing, personal interviews and IQ test preparation. These sessions, led by Eng Ismail al Shukaili, Talent Acquisition Specialist at Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), spanned six days in November and December 2024, benefiting over 180 students, graduates and trainees.

The workshops offered participants practical insights into crafting professional CVs to effectively showcase their skills and experiences. They also provided strategies to excel in personal interviews, boosting candidates'



UTAS Musannah holds a series of training workshops focused on CV writing, personal interviews and IQ test preparation.

confidence and helping them stand out to potential employers.

The participants praised the workshops for their interactive nature and valuable guidance, citing the opportunity to engage directly with Eng Al Shukaili as a highlight. Personalised advice and hands-on practice made the sessions particularly impactful.

These initiatives underscore the shared commitment of the university and PDO to nurturing young talent, empowering the local community and paving the way for a brighter future for Oman's youth.

The university plans to continue such efforts, further expanding opportunities and horizons for aspiring professionals.



Leadership Startup initiative was held under the banner of Gulf Skill Pioneers Oman

LEADERSHIP STARTUP CALLS TO BOOST YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

SALALAH, DEC 29

Leadership Startup, an innovative initiative aimed at promoting young entrepreneurs at the leadership levels, evoked good response as a large number of attendees showed interest in the initiative and expressed willingness to collaborate with the idea.

An event marking the initiative concluded in Muscat under the banner of Gulf Skill Pioneers Oman, which witnessed delegates from 11 countries, including the US, UK, India, Oman, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Germany, UAE and Africa.

The event was inaugurated by HH Sayyid Hussam bin Numair al Said in presence of SFaisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), and a large number of national and international delegates.

The event titled 'Leaders IISA-2024', touted as one of the most prestigious leadership gatherings, brought together legendary leaders, diplomats and delegates from different parts of the world.

The event, themed 'We are the world, we are the family - unity in diversity', emphasised spreading human values, ethics, and the legacy of leadership while fostering international networking and collaborations.

Dr Shama Hussain, Founder and CEO of the I.I.I Group, and Chairman Syed Sajid hosted the event, welcoming an illustrious lineup of dignitaries.

The Leadership Startup initiative is positioned as a transformative platform to build leaders equipped with vision, ethics and global collaboration.

An international conference was a platform for global leaders, who shared insights on leadership values and the legacy of collaboration.

Youth Ambassadors Rayyan Syed and Zayan Syed moderated the conference with remarkable poise and enthusiasm.

The event celebrated Oman's pivotal role in bringing global leaders together to promote international collaboration and unity.

BALQEES AL ORAIMI

MUSCAT, DEC 29

THE Wilayat of Sur, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, was the centre of strategic discussions on Sunday as the Ministry of Labour inaugurated the Governance and Strategic Planning Conference. Spanning two days, this important event brings together experts and specialists from within Oman and beyond to delve into the critical role of governance in strategic planning and anticipating future challenges. This conference is a vital initiative aligned with Oman Vision 2040, focusing on enhancing innovation, boosting competitiveness, and achieving sustainable development at both local and regional levels.

Several pressing themes discussed included the importance of strategic planning and sustainable development, where efficient resource utilisation is underscored as a foundation for achieving long-term prosperity. Transparency and accountability also took centre stage, with participants exploring how open administrative systems can foster trust between institutions and society. Modern approaches to performance monitoring and evaluation were highlighted, with a focus on aligning institutional strategies with global trends to enhance efficiency. The conference further examined risk governance and change management, emphasising the need for proactive strategies to identify and



The Ministry of Labour inaugurated the Governance and Strategic Planning Conference in Sur.

address potential challenges.

Through these discussions, the conference aims to solidify governance as a cornerstone for sustainable development and future foresight. The event seeks to raise awareness about governance's significance in building trust, stimulating innovation and enhancing competitiveness. It also serves as an interactive platform, enabling participants from various sectors to exchange ideas and experiences while fostering stronger public-private partnerships for integrated development. Dialogue sessions held during the conference covered a range of critical topics. These included achieving integration between public and private sectors for balanced development, showcasing successful governance models from the private sector, and leveraging

artificial intelligence for predictive analysis and decision-making. The participants also explored practical approaches to risk governance, examining real-world applications in various sectors to mitigate potential disruptions effectively.

Shaikh Dr Hilal bin Ali al Habsi, Wali of Sur, in his opening remarks, underscored the importance of governance as a fundamental pillar for sustainable development. He highlighted Oman's commitment to adopting global best practices in governance, emphasising that transparency, accountability and innovation are integral to fulfilling the goals of Oman Vision 2040. The chief guest also called on institutions to adopt strategic approaches that foster cooperation across sectors to achieve shared objectives.

Nizwa University showcases research excellence

AMAL AL RIYAMI

NIZWA, DEC 29

The University of Nizwa marked its annual Scientific Research Day for the academic year 2023-2024 with an inspiring event held at Al Hazm Hall. Held under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the celebration showcased the university's impressive contributions to research and innovation.

The event featured 100 research posters highlighting projects supported by



institutional and strategic grants. Nine patents and several industry-ready projects were also unveiled, reflecting the university's dedication to advancing applied sciences and innovation.

In his address, Prof Ahmed

al Harrasi, Vice-Chancellor for Postgraduate Studies, Scientific Research and External Relations, emphasised the university's focus on national priorities such as food security, pharmaceuticals and cybersecurity. He noted key milestones, including 3,500+ peer-reviewed publications, 26 patents, and investments exceeding RO 70 million in research.

The event also introduced the inaugural issue of Al Khalil Journal for Arts and Design Studies and the official website of the Maeen Endowment Foundation, which provides

academic and financial support to students. Collaborative agreements with entities like the Industrial Innovation Academy and the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund further underscored the university's commitment to fostering impactful research partnerships.

The day concluded with awards for the Best Research Poster competition and recognition of distinguished researchers. Dr Rahma toured the research exhibition, commending the diverse projects and their alignment with Oman Vision 2040.

Oman Film Society celebrates World Cinema Day

MUSCAT: The Oman Film Society marked 'World Cinema Day' with a vibrant celebration at its headquarters in Airport Heights, showcasing its commitment to fostering the cinematic arts in the Sultanate of Oman.

The event, held under the auspices of Her Highness Sayyidah Hujaija bint Jaifer al Said, brought together prominent figures from the film industry to celebrate Omani cinema's remarkable strides in 2024.

In his keynote address, Mohammed bin Abdullah al

Ajmi, Chairman of the Oman Film Society, emphasised the society's milestones, underscoring Omani cinema's strong presence on regional and international platforms. He highlighted achievements such as the participation of 27 members in global festivals and 25 films across genres receiving recognition, resulting in 29 international awards from 46 film festivals.

The event also showcased the involvement of 12 members in prestigious festival arbitration



Her Highness Sayyidah Hujaija bint Jaifer al Said was the chief guest at the 'World Cinema Day'

committees, reflecting international trust in Omani film-making expertise.

Rana bint Nasser al Abriyah, director of the event, applauded the achievements and reiterated the role of cinema in preserving cultural identity and sharing Omani creativity with the world.

A comprehensive report detailed the Oman Film Society's accomplishments in 2024, including organising five international film festivals that attracted 1,373 submissions from 122 countries.

Notably, 115 Omani films were featured, and key productions such as 'Corona Melody' and 'Dirty Feet' were highlighted.

The ceremony concluded with the screening of these films, audience interactions, a live musical performance by Tahera Jamal, and the honouring of contributors to Omani cinema.

The event reaffirmed the association's dedication to advancing the film sector and elevating Oman's cultural prominence on the global stage. — ONA

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un chairs a meeting of the country's ruling party, in Pyongyang. — Reuters

NORTH KOREA CALLS FOR ‘TOUGHEST’ US STRATEGY

SEOUL: North Korea will launch its “toughest” ever strategy to counter the United States, state media said on Sunday, reporting on a key year-end party meeting overseen by leader Kim Jong Un. The nuclear-armed state held a five-day party meeting last week as part of a drive to chart the country’s course for 2025, the official Korean Central News Agency reported in a lengthy English dispatch.

“The US is the most reactionary state that regards anti-communism as its invariable state policy,” the report said. It slammed growing ties between South Korea, the US and Japan, saying it had “expanded into a nuclear military bloc for aggression”. It also said South Korea had “turned into an out-and-out anti-communist outpost of the US”. “This reality clearly shows to which direction we should advance and what we should do and how,” KCNA said. Against this backdrop, Kim’s speech to top officials “clarified the strategy for the toughest anti-US counteraction to be launched aggressively”, the report said without providing details. — AFP



A WFP worker stands next to a truck carrying aid from Port Sudan to Sudan, near border crossing with Chad. — Reuters file photo

SUDAN GOVT REJECTS UN-BACKED FAMINE DECLARATION

CAIRO: The Sudanese government rejected on Sunday a report backed by the United Nations which determined that famine had spread to five areas of the war-torn country. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) review, which UN agencies use, said last week that the war between Sudan’s army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces had created famine conditions for 638,000 people, with a further 8.1 million on the brink of mass starvation.

The army-aligned government “categorically rejects the IPC’s description of the situation in Sudan as a famine”, the foreign ministry said in a statement. The statement called the report “essentially speculative” and accused the IPC of procedural and transparency failings. They said the team did not have access to updated field data and had not consulted with the government’s technical team on the final version before publication. The war in Sudan has killed tens of thousands of people and uprooted over 12 million people. — AFP

POLLING STARTS

Chad votes after three years of army rule



Chad began voting in a general election that is presented by the government as a key step towards ending military rule but has been boycotted by the opposition. Turnout was low in the capital N’Djamena when polling stations opened for voters to choose a new parliament, provincial assemblies and local councils. Election officials in the upmarket district where the president’s family live put voter apathy down to the “cold weather”. — AFP

INCREASE CAPACITY

Egypt tests extension of the Suez Canal



Egypt has tested a new 10-kilometre extension to the Suez Canal as it tries to minimise the impact of currents on shipping and increase the key waterway’s capacity. Two ships used the new extension, a statement from the Suez Canal Authority said. Authority chief Osama Rabie said the development in the canal’s southern region will “enhance navigational safety and reduce the effects of water and air currents on passing ships”. — AFP

CARTEL VIOLENCE

15 bodies found in southeastern Mexico



At least 15 bodies were recovered from pits in a southeastern state of Mexico plagued by drug cartel violence. Chiapas State Governor Eduardo Ramirez detailed an operation to restore stability to Frailesca, an agricultural region near Guatemala. “Unfortunately, 15 bodies (have been found) so far in secret graves in two properties,” Ramirez wrote. He added that weapons, vehicles and drugs were also seized and four people had been arrested. — AFP

SYRIA’S LEADER SAYS HOLDING ELECTIONS COULD TAKE UP TO FOUR YEARS

CAIRO: Holding elections in Syria could take up to four years, Syria’s leader Ahmed al Sharaa said in remarks to be broadcast on Sunday, the first time he has commented on a possible electoral timetable since Bashar al Assad was ousted this month. Drafting a new constitution could take up to three years, Sharaa said. He also said it would take about a year for Syrians to see drastic changes.

In the interview, Sharaa said

Syria shared strategic interests with Russia, a close Assad ally during the long civil war which has military bases in the country, reiterating conciliatory signals his government has made previously.

Sharaa said earlier this month that Syria’s relations with Russia should serve common interests.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the status of Russia’s military bases would be the subject of negotiations with the new leadership in Damascus. “It is a

question not only of maintaining our bases or strongholds, but also of the conditions of their operation, maintenance and provision, and interaction with the local side,” he said on Sunday.

Regional and world leaders has started to communicate with the new Syrian rulers with many sending top delegates to the country. Sharaa also said he hoped the administration of US President-elect Donald Trump would lift sanctions imposed on Syria. — Reuters

At least 179 dead in South Korea’s worst plane crash

A Jeju Air plane carrying 181 people from Thailand to South Korea crashed on arrival on Sunday, smashing into a barrier and bursting into flames, killing everyone aboard except for two flight attendants plucked from the wreckage. A bird strike was cited by authorities as the likely cause of the crash -- the worst ever aviation disaster on South Korean soil -- which flung passengers out of the plane and left it “almost completely destroyed”, according to fire officials. Video showed the Jeju Air Boeing 737-800 landing on its belly at Muan International Airport, skidding off the runway as smoke streamed out from the engines, before crashing into a wall and exploding in flames.



A bird strike was cited by authorities as the likely cause of the crash -- the worst ever aviation disaster on South Korean soil -- which flung passengers out of the plane and left it “almost completely destroyed”



Rescuers work the wreckage of an aircraft that went off the runway and crashed, at Muan International Airport, South Korea. — AFP

Under floodlights, rescue workers used a giant yellow crane to lift the burned-out fuselage of the orange-and-white aircraft on the runway at Muan. Bits of plane seats and luggage were strewn across the field next to the runway, not far from the charred tail, offering a glimpse into the catastrophic impact of the crash.

All of the passengers were Korean apart from two Thais, with the youngest a three-year-old boy and the oldest a 78-year-old. The accident took place in a matter of minutes as Jeju Air Flight 2216 tried to land -- with the control tower issuing a warning of a bird strike, and the pilot soon after calling “mayday”. “It took approximately three minutes from the control tower’s mention of a bird strike warning to the aircraft’s attempt to land on the runway again,” an

official said.

Lee Jeong-hyun, chief of Muan fire station, said the cause was “presumed to be a bird strike” but that the exact details would be announced after a full investigation. Low-cost carrier Jeju Air said it “sincerely” apologised -- with top officials shown bowing deeply at a press conference in Seoul -- and vowed to do all it could to help. Boeing said in a statement that it was in touch with Jeju Air and stood “ready to support them”.

South Korea’s acting President Choi Sang-mok convened an emergency cabinet meeting.

“The entire government is working closely together to manage the aftermath of the accident... making every effort to ensure thorough support for the bereaved families,” he said. — AFP



BABY DIES FROM ‘SEVERE COLD’

GAZA: Gaza health officials said that a 20-day-old baby died on Sunday from “severe cold” as the war-ravaged Palestinian territory grapples with winter weather. Jumaa al Batran died from the cold, while his twin brother remains in the intensive care unit at a local hospital, the health ministry said in a statement. Marwan al Hamas, head of field hospitals in Gaza, confirmed the death. He said it brought to five the total number of children “who have died due to severe cold” in recent weeks.

Hundreds of thousands of displaced people are crammed into unsuitable tents, most of which were hastily set up in Deir Al Balah and in the southern areas of Khan Yunis and Rafah. — AFP

SHARPCURBS



Tesla CEO and X owner Elon Musk listens as US President-elect Donald Trump speaks during a meeting, in Washington. — Reuters

TRUMP SIDES WITH MUSK OVER WORKER VISAS

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump weighed in a bitter debate dividing his traditional supporters and tech barons like Elon Musk, saying that he backs a special visa programme that helps highly skilled workers enter the country. “I’ve always liked the (H1-B) visas, I have always been in favor of the visas, that’s why we have them” at Trump-owned facilities, the president-elect said in a statement to the New York Post in his first public comments on the matter since it flared up this week. An angry back-and-forth has erupted in fiery fashion, with Musk even vowing to “go to war” over the issue. Trump’s insistent calls for sharp curbs on immigration were central to his election victory in November over President Joe Biden. Trump has vowed to deport all undocumented immigrants and limit legal immigration. But tech entrepreneurs like Tesla’s Musk — as well as Vivek Ramaswamy, who is set to join Musk in co-chairing a government cost-cutting panel — say the United States produces too few highly skilled graduates and they fervently champion the H1-B programme. — AFP

MIGRANTS TRY TO CROSS CHANNEL



People, believed to be migrants, arrive at the Port of Dover on a lifeboat in Dover, Britain. At least three migrants died in the Channel off France’s northern coast on Sunday as a group of around 50 people tried to set off in a small boat, hoping to reach Britain, authorities said. The incident occurred at Sangatte at around 6 am during a series of attempted crossings by migrants aiming for the southern coast of England, the French maritime prefecture for the Channel said in a statement. — Reuters

CROATIA ELECTS PRESIDENT AS INCUMBENT LOOKS FAVOURITE

ZAGREB: Croatians cast their votes on Sunday to elect a new president, with the outspoken incumbent Zoran Milanovic appearing set to come out on top according to opinion polls. His likely main rival among the eight contenders for the largely ceremonial post is Dragan Primorac, backed by the conservative HDZ party that currently governs the country. The election comes as the European Union and Nato member country of 3.8 million people struggles

with biting inflation, widespread corruption and a labour shortage. Milanovic, backed by the left-wing Social Democrats party, is supported by 37 per cent of the electorate while Primorac has 20 per cent, according to an opinion poll released on Friday. But as none of the candidates are expected to garner more than 50 per cent of the vote to win outright, the new head of state is likely to be chosen in a runoff in two weeks. “There will be two races,”

Milanovic said in a statement to reporters after casting his ballot in downtown Zagreb, referring to the probable runoff. He urged people to take part in the vote, saying “it’s worth it”. During the campaign, the two main rivals often traded insults, with Milanovic ridiculing Primorac as boring and as “fake as a 13-euro note”. For many, the election is a continuation of the longstanding feud between two powerful politicians. — AFP

Crashed plane was shot at from Russia: Azerbaijan

AZERBAIJANI President Ilham Aliyev said on Sunday that a passenger plane that crashed last week, killing 38 people, had been damaged by shooting from the ground in Russia and he said some in Russia had lied about the cause of the disaster. President Vladimir Putin on Saturday apologised to Aliyev for Wednesday’s “tragic incident” in Russian airspace involving the plane after Russian air defences engaged Ukrainian attack drones. A Kremlin statement did not say Russia had shot down the plane, only noting a criminal case had been opened. “Our plane was shot down by accident,” Aliyev said in a statement to the state television on Sunday, adding that the plane had come under some sort of electronic jamming and had then been shot at while it was approaching the southern Russian city of Grozny. “Unfortunately, in the first three days we heard only absurd versions from Russia,” Aliyev said, citing statements in Russia that attributed the crash to birds or the explosion of some sort of gas cylinder. “We witnessed clear attempts to cover up the matter,” said the Azerbaijani leader, who has close ties to Russia and was educated at one of Moscow’s top universities. Aliyev said he wanted Russia to accept it was guilty of downing the plane and to punish those responsible for fatally damaging the aircraft. Putin and Aliyev held another telephone call on Sunday, the Kremlin said. It gave no details but on Saturday it said that both civilian and military specialists were being questioned about what had taken place. Azerbaijan Airlines Flight J2-8243 crashed on Wednesday in a ball of fire near the city of Aktau in Kazakhstan after diverting from southern Russia where Ukrainian drones were attacking several cities. The extremely rare publicised apology from Putin on Saturday is the closest Moscow has come to accepting some blame for the disaster. Four sources with knowledge of the preliminary findings of Azerbaijan’s investigation into the disaster said on Thursday that Russian air defences had mistakenly shot it down. Aliyev’s remarks came as Azerbaijan paid tribute to the pilots and passengers



Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev and his wife Mehriban Aliyeva (C) attend a funeral ceremony for crew members of Azerbaijan Airlines Flight J2-8243 crashed near the Kazakh city of Aktau, at Heydar Aliyev International Airport outside Baku. — Reuters

of the plane. Captain Igor Kshnyakin and co-pilot Alexander Kalyaninov, both ethnic Russians with Azerbaijan citizenship, and Hokuma Aliyeva, a flight attendant, were given full honours at a ceremony at the Alley of Honour in central Baku attended by Aliyev and his wife, Mehriban. The pilots have been lauded in Azerbaijan for landing in a way which allowed 29 people to survive but led to their own deaths. “The pilots were experienced and knew they would not survive this crash landing,” Aliyev said, praising them for sacrificing themselves by putting the nose down first in an attempt to save some of the passengers. “In order to save the passengers, they acted with great

heroism and as a result of this there were survivors,” he said. The Alley of Honour is Azerbaijan’s most sacred modern burial ground — where prominent politicians, poets and scientists are laid to rest, including Heydar Aliyev, father of the current president. Captain Kshnyakin’s daughter, Anastasia Kshnyakina, said her father was a dedicated pilot who took his responsibilities to his passengers extremely seriously. “My father always said: when I take off, I am responsible not only for my life, but also for the lives of all passengers and crew members,” Kshnyakina said. “With his last flight, he proved what a true hero should be.” — Reuters

Georgia’s new president sworn in amid political showdown

TBILISI: Georgia inaugurated a far-right governing party loyalist as president on Sunday, escalating a political showdown moments after his pro-EU predecessor declared herself the “only legitimate president”. The inauguration of former footballer Mikheil Kavelashvili ratchets up a months-long political crisis that has seen huge pro-European Union demonstrations. Outgoing head of state Salome Zurbishvili and protesters have declared Kavelashvili “illegitimate”, demanding a re-run of the October general elections that they say the governing Georgian Dream party rigged. “Our history clearly shows that, after countless struggles to defend our homeland and traditions, peace has always been one of the main goals and values for the Georgian people,” Kavelashvili said after taking the presidential oath in parliament.

Georgian Dream has presented itself as the sole guarantor of stability in the country, accusing the West of trying to drag Tbilisi into the Ukraine conflict. Kavelashvili went on to praise “our traditions, values, national identity, the sanctity of the family, and faith”. Moments earlier and a few minutes’ walk away at the presidential palace, Zurbishvili said that while she would vacate the premises, her fight against Georgian Dream would continue. “I remain the only legitimate president,” she said. “I will leave the presidential palace and stand with you, carrying with me the legitimacy, the flag and your trust.” In a symbolic gesture, Zurbishvili wore the same white-and-black attire — the colours of Georgian flag — she was dressed in during her inauguration six years ago. She reiterated that redoing the “illegitimate” election would be the “formula to resolve such a crisis”.



Mikheil Kavelashvili, elected by lawmakers as Georgia’s new President, takes the oath during his swearing-in ceremony at the parliament in Tbilisi. — AFP

Following her address outside the presidential palace, thousands of protesters moved towards parliament, with some holding up red cards in a clear nod to Kavelashvili’s football career. They dispersed shortly afterward, vowing another protest later in the

evening. Interior ministry said six protesters were detained outside parliament. Local media reported that several people were injured during the violent arrests, despite protesters complying with police orders to clear the road. Zurbishvili has emerged as the most popular

politician and a last hope for protesters who accuse Georgian Dream of steering Tbilisi away from the West and towards Moscow. Georgia has been in political turmoil since October’s disputed parliamentary elections and the government’s decision to shelve EU membership talks. Thousands of Georgians have taken to the streets daily for a month, accusing the increasingly repressive government of derailing Tbilisi’s EU ambitions. Many protesters said they intended to keep taking to the streets. For the first time in Georgia’s history, the presidential swearing-in ceremony was held behind closed doors in the parliament’s plenary chamber. Opposition parties have refused to enter parliament after the October elections and Zurbishvili has declared the newly elected legislature, the government and president-elect “illegitimate”. — AFP

OPINION

The best non-fiction of 2024 reflects a complex world



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is Associate Professor, Dept of English and Translation, SQU.

WHILE fiction often imagines the world as it could be, non-fiction writing reflects our world as it really is – with all its complications and anxieties. The non-fiction of 2024 is no different. From a range of readings in history, memoir and society, the books which came out this year showcase the complexities of our world and point to ways in which we can understand it better.

Part memoir and part travelogue, Ta-Nehisi Coates’ ‘The message’ created ripples for its poetic and moving descriptions of everyday life of Palestinians as he travelled to the region in 2023. Coates’ original intention was to write about the process of powerful writing. Soon, he gets caught in the contradictions of a place and how it is written about – whether in Dakar, South Carolina or Palestine. A New York Times bestseller, ‘The message’ calls for writing which is liberating, even if painful at times.

The power of social media and its impact on the young generation cannot be ignored anymore.

Jonathan Haidt’s ‘An anxious generation’

explores the impact of technology on mental health. Based on hard data, Haidt calls for a freer childhood without the dependence on digital media which is so polarising and has serious impact on impressionable youth. The book is essential reading for parents who are concerned about avoiding the psychological damage on children from the excesses of technology.

Another major concern that will take much of our attention in the future is Artificial Intelligence. Mustafa Suleyman’s ‘The coming wave’ takes a complex look at the technologies that are becoming commonplace in our world: robotics, biotechnology and AI. While being excited about these innovations, he also warns that they could pose existential challenges to our world. His main argument is that these new innovations do not have intrinsic coping mechanisms and they are new and untested. This is also the argument of Yuval Hariri’s ‘Nexus’, also published this year.

Equally important and of urgent concern is the environment. While many books on climate change can be repetitive and dry, Ayana Johnson’s ‘What if we get it right?’

The best non-fiction of 2024 captures the impact of technology on youth to the urgency of climate change and the transformative power of history

strikes a hopeful note that also shows that we should not be giving up on our earth just as yet. A collection of essays from influential policymakers, Johnson uses conversations and imaginative literature by people who are willing to make the right choices and ‘imagine what seems impossible’.

The most delightful read of this year is William Dalrymple’s ‘The golden road: How ancient India transformed the world’. In his inimitable style of storytelling, Dalrymple traces the ancient naval routes of India and how they impacted trade, philosophy, art and ancient religion. He focuses on the contribution of ancient India to mathematics, astronomy and Buddhism, not through wars and conquest but through its merchants, monks and artists. As all his other books on history, ‘The golden road’ also shows how history is a complex interweaving of forces and narratives, often lost in the passage of time. There are many more books that influenced 2024 by talking about the most important concerns that occupy us today – climate change, technology and other global concerns. The next year promises to be just as exciting in its potential.

GERMAN ‘SICK LEAVE DETECTIVES’ SEE BOOMING BUSINESS

SAM REEVES

Rising sick leave rates may be bad news for German companies at a time the economy is already ailing – but for private eye Marcus Lentz, it has been a boon for his business. He is seeing a record number of requests from firms for his agency to check up on employees suspected of calling in sick when they are actually fit to work.

“There are just more and more companies that don’t want to put up with it anymore,” he said, adding his Lentz Group was receiving up to 1,200 such requests annually, around double the figure from a few years earlier. “If someone has 30, 40 or sometimes up to 100 sick days in a year, then at some point they become economically unattractive for the employer,” he said in an interview at his office in the gritty district around Frankfurt’s main train station.

From auto titans to fertiliser producers, companies are ringing the alarm about the impact of high rates of sick leave on Europe’s biggest economy. While some say changes to reporting in sick have made it easier to fake illnesses, experts insist the reasons behind the rising numbers are more complex, ranging from increases in mental illnesses to more work pressure.

Many agree that the trend is weighing on Germany at a time the country’s woes, from a manufacturing slowdown to weak demand for its exports, have led some to once again dub it “the sick man of Europe”.

“The impact is significant and certainly affects economic activity,” Claus Michelsen, chief economist at the German association of research-based pharmaceutical companies, said.

The association calculated that higher rates of absenteeism at work due to illness shaved 0.8 per cent off Germany’s output in 2023 – helping push the economy into a 0.3 per cent contraction.

Workers in Germany on average took 15.1 days of sick leave last year, up from 11.1 days in 2021, according to federal statistics agency Destatis. The TK, one of Germany’s major statutory health insurers, reported the average number of sick days among workers it covers was 14.13 in the first nine months of the year – a record high.

The Hans Boeckler Foundation’s WSI institute, which is linked to German trade unions, said blaming workers for deciding to stay home too easily or for faking sickness were “dangerous shortcuts”.

“They obscure the view of the really relevant causes,” said Bettina Kohlrausch, WSI’s scientific director, who pointed instead to more stressful working conditions, increasing respiratory ailments and fraying social protections.

According to OECD data, Germans missed on average 6.8 per cent of their working hours in 2023 due to illness – worse than other EU countries such as France, Italy and Spain. — AFP

Syria’s struggle and Palestine’s betrayal

THE Syrian war has been one of the most heartbreaking tragedies of our time. Over a decade of violence has destroyed a beautiful country, leaving millions of people displaced, families torn apart and entire cities reduced to rubble.

So many innocent lives have been lost and the people who remain are fighting to survive. It’s not hard to understand why some Syrians might feel a sense of hope at the idea of escaping the grip of a cruel dictator like Bashar al Assad.

But what’s happening in Syria is about so much more than just one man’s fall – its part of a much bigger and darker picture.

One of the most painful consequences of Syria’s collapse is what it means for Palestine. We may not have liked Assad but Syria used to be one of the few countries in the region that openly stood against Israel’s oppression of Palestinians.

Under Assad, Syria refused to even consider normalising ties with Israel and supported Palestinian resistance. Now that Assad has been ousted, it’s hard to imagine any future Syrian government being allowed to continue that support. The reality is, in the Middle East, no country is truly free to make its own choices unless it serves the interests of the United States and its closest ally, Israel.

This is not just my opinion – it’s a pattern we have seen time and time again. Look at Iraq. Look at Libya. And now look at Syria. Any government that dares to challenge US or Israeli dominance gets taken down, either through war or relentless sanctions. What’s left behind is chaos – a broken nation, stripped of its ability to stand up for itself or Palestine.

While Syria crumbles, Gaza bleeds. The genocide of the Palestinian people is still happening right now, right in front of us, and Israel is doing it with full support from the West and the connivance of its client States. Families are being bombed out of their homes, children are dying and entire communities are being erased. Yet Western leaders and media mouthpieces stay silent – or worse, they try to distract us. They talk about “liberating” Syria as if this is some grand humanitarian effort, all the while ignoring the horrors happening in Gaza.



This aerial view shows a destroyed mosque in a neighbourhood devastated by the Syrian civil war in Daraya, a suburb of Damascus. — AFP



KARIM EASTERBROOK

The writer is a former Cambridge School Principal and an Interview Skills Advisor.

For Syrians, it is understandable why toppling Assad might feel like a step forward, but it’s going to come at an unimaginable cost. Any new government in Syria will likely bend to the will of Washington and Tel Aviv. Syrians will be left with a terrible choice: either accept foreign control over their country or face a future of endless instability.

And then there’s Palestine, left even more isolated. Every Arab country that’s destabilised or forced into compliance with the West is another blow to the Palestinian cause.

The solidarity that once united the region against Israel’s oppression is disappearing and Israel knows it. Every time an Arab state falls, Israel becomes more emboldened, more ruthless and more unstoppable.

The criminal ideology of Zionism allows such genocide when it helps the Zionists to achieve their expansionist aims.

This is not just about Syria or Palestine. It’s about a whole region being torn apart by imperialist agendas, where justice and independence are treated as threats. Until the Arabs of the Middle East unite to resist these forces, no nation – whether Syria or Palestine – will truly be free.

For me, this is not just a story about politics. It’s about people – families in Gaza, refugees from Syria, kids who will never know peace. Their futures are being stolen and the world is letting it happen. We can’t let Syria’s tragedy overshadow Palestine’s suffering. Because when one nation loses its freedom, we all do.

No dream is too big for you to chase!



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHAMI

The write is author,
translator and a
communications
professional

ONE year is almost bidding farewell, and another has just kicked off, opening a new chapter in the book of life. In two more days, we will begin flipping the first page of a 365-page chapter. It is up to us to decide what to write on each page of this chapter.

As part of the celebrations and preparations to welcome the New Year, many people have been setting their plans and dreams for 2025. Undoubtedly, everyone has dreams and goals for this year. Some may have been postponed from the past year, while others are new. Now is the time to make them happen.

As long as we remain serious and persistent, those dreams will come true someday. Therefore, we should not give up on them, as where there is a will, there is a way. The day we celebrate the success of our dreams will come, sooner or later. All we need to do is believe in our dreams and keep hope alive.

Some dreams have been with us since childhood; the dreams of becoming a doctor, a policeman, a pilot, an engineer, and the list goes on. Every child should have a dream of a particular profession. Having such a dream is not abnormal; it is almost everyone's childhood right.

Dreams begin in childhood, but never end

until our last day on earth. Our wishes and dreams can even exceed our imagination. It is all about dreaming and being optimistic about the future. Of course, dreams have no limits!

As the New Year approaches, it will bring new hope, more opportunities and fresh dreams. At the same time, many people are busy drawing a roadmap for the new chapter ahead.

Therefore, it is time to write the story of this chapter, with all its episodes and achievements. Your story could be a dream waiting to come true, a goal to achieve, a promise to fulfil, or something else you plan to pursue over the course of the year.

Having a specific goal or dream is not enough; you must be committed to making those dreams a reality. Without belief in your dreams, you won't have the courage or motivation to make them happen. Hence, leave no stone unturned in pursuing your dreams and objectives, and make them come true.

In time, you will see the fruitful outcome of your dreams, which started as simple thoughts and ideas. The inability to achieve your dreams in the past year doesn't mean you've failed in planning your life. Sometimes, it is due to life circumstances going wrong, preventing you from

Having a specific goal or dream is not enough; you must be committed to making those dreams a reality. Without belief in your dreams, you won't have the courage or motivation to make them happen

accomplishing what you had planned to achieve.

Challenges often arise to test our patience and persistence, but successful people never surrender. They believe in the saying, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." It was said that successful people keep trying until they get it right. Think about what you want to achieve this year and plan it well. The amount of time you spend achieving your dreams and goals doesn't matter, but your sincerity and determination do. Take all the time you need to make your dreams come true, even if it requires multiple attempts and fights.

A dream doesn't become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work. Albert Einstein once said, "A person who never made a mistake never tried anything new." Every time you tear a sheet off the calendar, you create space for new ideas and progress in your life. With every New Year come new obstacles and challenges. Never say die to challenges, no matter how big or small; all are steps towards making success!

There is no dream is too big for you to chase! No matter how far-reaching our aspirations may seem, they are always within our reach if we are willing to pursue them with determination and resilience.

OUTGOING GEORGIAN LEADER DEFYING THE GOVERNMENT

IRAKLI METREVELI

Salome Zurabishvili has vowed to stay on as the president of Georgia, becoming an icon to thousands of pro- The 72-year-old has taken a central role in Georgia's crisis, having vowed not to stand down when her mandate ends on Sunday, unless the ruling Georgian Dream party holds a re-run of October elections that she says were rigged.

"I remain the only legitimate president," she told supporters on Sunday.

Zurabishvili was a French diplomat before entering the turbulent politics of her ancestral homeland. Born in Paris to a Georgian family who fled Bolshevik rule in the 1920s, she has accused the government of steering Tbilisi back towards Moscow and acting on Russian orders.

Elected as Georgia's first woman leader in 2018, she became in recent months the beacon of Tbilisi's EU aspirations — in a fierce feud with the ruling Georgian Dream party and backing massive anti-government protests.

For tens of thousands of protesters, Zurabishvili represents hope against an increasingly repressive government that has adopted a series of Kremlin-style laws. She has vowed to stand by pro-EU protesters staging daily mass rallies since November 28, when Georgian Dream made its shock announcement that it will shelve EU accession talks until 2028.

On December 14, an electoral college controlled by the ruling party installed its loyalist, far-right former footballer Mikheil Kavelashvili, as the country's next figurehead leader.

But Zurabishvili, whose mandate was meant to end on Sunday with the new leader's inauguration, has refused to step down until the government organises fresh parliamentary elections. "There is only one formula to resolve such a crisis, one universally recognised in every democratic country: new elections," she said last week. While she has now vacated the presidential premises in Tbilisi, she has vowed to fight on against Georgian Dream and many protesters see her as the real president of Georgia.

Moving Tbilisi closer to Europe has been a lifelong goal for Zurabishvili, who was not always at war with Georgian Dream.

She was elected with the support of billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, Georgia's most powerful man and the ruling party's founder.

Georgians backed Zurabishvili in the polls despite her outsider status and mistakes when speaking Georgian. Fighting Russian influence in Georgia is in Zurabishvili's blood.

She is a descendant of Niko Nikoladze, a prominent writer who called for Georgia's independence from the Russian Empire.

After the bloodless 2003 "Rose Revolution", Georgia's reformist then-president Mikheil Saakashvili — now in prison — appointed her as foreign minister, approving the move first with Jacques Chirac, France's president at the time.

— AFP

Norway is a Ukraine war profiteer

WHEN Russian President Vladimir Putin gave the order to attack Ukraine in February 2022, he surely did not expect that one of Russia's neighbours would be the main beneficiary of his war. Yet as Russian hydrocarbon exports to Europe cratered in the wake of the attack, Norway emerged as the continent's largest supplier.

Owing to the steep increase in gas and oil prices that followed the outbreak of the war, Norway ultimately enjoyed a massive financial windfall. In 2022 and 2023, it reaped nearly kr1.3 trillion (\$111 billion) in additional revenue from gas exports, according to recent estimates from the finance ministry.

Why, then, has Norway allocated only a little more than \$3.1 billion for support to Ukraine in its 2025 budget? Combined with what it contributed in 2024, Norway's support for Ukraine amounts to less than 5 per cent of its two-year war windfall. For comparison, Germany – Europe's largest single contributor – provided \$16.3 billion in military, financial and humanitarian support for Ukraine from January 2022 until the end of October 2024, and the United States has contributed \$92 billion. But while Norway's two-year windfall is larger than the US and German contributions combined, Norway's support for Ukraine as a share of GDP, at 0.7 per cent, ranks only ninth in Europe, far behind Denmark (2 per cent) and Estonia (2.2 per cent).

Not only does Norway have the capacity to be making far more of a difference to the outcome of the war and the subsequent civilian reconstruction; it has an obvious moral obligation to do so. Given that its excess revenues are a direct consequence of Russia's war, surely a greater share of them should go to those fighting and dying on the front lines to keep their country free.

Instead, Norway's government has effectively decided to be a war profiteer, clinging greedily to its lucky gains. To their credit, opposition parties have proposed higher levels of support for Ukraine, ultimately pushing up the sum that the government initially proposed.



Norway have the capacity to be making far more of a difference to the outcome of the war and the subsequent civilian reconstruction



HÅVARD
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No party, however, has come anywhere close to suggesting a transfer of the total war windfall to Ukraine.

The Norwegian government's position is puzzling, given that Norway shares a border with Russia and has long relied on its allies' support for its defence. Its own national security would be jeopardised if Russia wins the war or is militarily emboldened by a peace agreement skewed in its favour.

Moreover, it is not as though Norway would be immiserated by transferring its war windfall to Ukraine. This windfall represents about 6 per cent of its sovereign wealth fund, the world's largest, with assets valued at \$1.7 trillion – or \$308,000 for every Norwegian.

True, Norway channels all government revenue from oil and gas production to its sovereign wealth fund, and no more than 3 per cent of the value of the fund can be drawn down and transferred to the government budget each year. This rule helps limit the effects on inflation and the exchange rate, and ensures that the fund exists in perpetuity.

But as a macroeconomic and national savings instrument, the drawdown rule was not designed with wartime demands in mind. It therefore should not be seen as an obstacle for a larger transfer

to Ukraine. Since such a transfer would not enter the Norwegian economy, it would have no domestic inflationary or other macroeconomic implications.

This is not the first time that Norway's hoarding of its war windfall has been an issue. But it is the first time that we have been given an official estimate of the windfall's value.

The finance ministry has assigned a number to natural-gas export revenues in excess of what they would have been had gas prices remained around their five-year pre-attack average. Although such counterfactuals will always be subject to uncertainty and debate, the official estimate is the closest we will get to a value for Norway's war windfall.

In fact, the actual number is probably much higher, as the estimate does not include excess revenues resulting from higher oil prices following the attack.

With Europeans wringing their hands about the implications of Donald Trump's return to power, Norway's government and parliament should transfer the windfall to Ukraine in the form of military and financial support. Norway has a powerful national-security interest in doing the right thing.

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SPORTS

FINAL ON SATURDAY



OMAN TO FACE SAUDI ARABIA; KUWAIT TO TAKE ON BAHRAIN IN SEMIS TOMORROW

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 29

The Gulf Football Federation meeting was held on Sunday after the conclusion of the group stage of the Arabian Gulf Cup Kuwait 2024 “Gulf 26,” with Oman, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait advancing to the semis.

During the meeting, the Competitions Committee of the Gulf Football Federation, chaired by Khaled al Muqrin, confirmed the schedule for the semi-final matches of “Gulf 26,” set for Tuesday without any changes to the venues.

The first match will see Oman face Saudi Arabia at Jaber al Mubarak Stadium in Sulaibikhat at 6:30 PM Muscat time. The second match will feature Kuwait against Bahrain at Jaber Al Ahmad International Stadium at 9:45 PM Muscat time on Tuesday.

The organising committee’s proposal to postpone the tournament’s final to January 4 (Saturday) instead of Friday (January 3) was approved by all participating federations.

It is worth noting that the Kuwait Football Federation had proposed adjusting the semi-final match schedule to allow fans of the four teams to attend games at larger-capacity venues due to high demand. However, the Competitions Committee decided to keep the semi-final schedule unchanged, postponing only the final match.

The Oman Football Association had threatened to withdraw from the Arabian Gulf Cup due to the Gulf Federation’s consideration of rescheduling the semis after determining the semi-finalists.

The Omani team qualified for the semi-finals after an impressive performance in the group stage. They drew 1-1 with Kuwait, defeated Qatar 2-1, and drew 1-1 with the UAE, securing the top spot in Group A with 5 points.

The Omani team is preparing to face Saudi Arabia, who finished second in Group B, in a match where the “Reds” aim to achieve victory and advance to the final. The match is expected to witness a large crowd, especially from Oman, to support the team in this crucial encounter.

The Omani national team is striving to win its third Arabian Gulf Cup title, having previously claimed the trophy in 2009 and 2017.

It is noteworthy that ticket sales for the semi-final matches experienced overwhelming demand, with over 130,000 requests received through the online platform. As a result, ticket sales have been postponed to 12 noon on Monday, with tickets exclusively available via the “Hayakom” app and official websites.



THREE FLIGHTS TO FLY
RED WARRIORS FANS



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 29

THE OMAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION (OFA) has purchased all 5,600 tickets allocated for Oman team fans for Oman’s forthcoming semi-final against Saudi Arabia in the 26th edition of the Arabian Gulf Cup on Tuesday, according to officials.

Three flights from Muscat to Kuwait will be arranged, according to the source, for Omani fans to support the team in this crucial match against Saudi Arabia.

The national team campaign “We are all with the national team,” which is run by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth in coordination with the OFA, will be the main source for fans to register and confirm their attendance over the next two days.

After securing a slot in the semi-finals, the fans expect the national football team to reach the final and claim their third title after their wins in 2009 in Muscat and 2018



in Kuwait. Oman’s coaching staff, headed by Rasheed Jaber and his assisting team, is working on turning these dreams into reality while rectifying minor defensive mistakes from previous matches.

Furthermore, the coaching staff will focus more on the attacking side of the Saudi Arabia team, as they are the top team in this tournament with eight goals from the group stage.

Jaber will highlight the team’s latest preparations for the upcoming match against Saudi Arabia, accompanied by one of the players, in a press conference on Monday at the media centre.

The Oman team resumed training sessions on Sunday after a day’s rest following the tough match against the UAE, which ended in a 1-1 draw. Coach Rasheed may rely on the same style and starting players for Tuesday’s match against Saudi Arabia, including Essam al Subhi, Abdulrahman al Mushefri, Al Munther al Alawi, and Harib al Saadi, alongside other players.

SHORT TAKES



OMAN SAIL SQUAD
READY FOR HONG
KONG CHAMPIONSHIP



HASHIM AL
RASHDI
Head Coach
Performance and
Team Leader

MUSCAT: Five young sailors from Oman Sail are training ahead of the 2024 Optimist Asian & Oceanian Championship in Hong Kong. The event, which began on Sunday at the Clearwater Bay Country Club Marina, brought together over 133 sailors from 19 nations in Asia and Oceania for five days of racing in the

Optimist dinghy. Representing Oman will be four male sailors, Khamis al Mashaikhi, Tamim al Balushi, Hasan al Wahaibi, and Firas al Nabhani, and one female sailor, Hadeel al Mushaifri – all high-performing athletes from Oman Sail’s Sailing Schools. The delegation is led by Hashim al Rashdi and coached by Sultan Abdulaziz al Zadjali.

Hashim al Rashdi, Head Coach Performance and Team Leader, said, “This is an exciting opportunity for our sailors to test themselves in a highly competitive fleet of their peers from across the wider region. Optimist is the first racing boat for many, and having an event like this in which to hone their skills at a young age is invaluable for their future careers on the water. We will look to perform at our maximum capacity this week and go into the event hopeful of a positive outcome.”

The Optimist Asian & Oceanian Championship comprises two championships, raced concurrently. The Optimist Individual Asian & Oceanian Championship (IAOC) and the Optimist Asian & Oceanian Team Racing Championship (TRAOC).

The individual championship will be raced in a qualifying series followed by a final, while the team event will see four sailors from each team racing together. The 2024 Optimist Asian & Oceanian Championship is organised by the Hong Kong Optimist Dinghy Association along with the Sailing Federation of Hong Kong, China, under the authority of the International Optimist Dinghy Association (IODA).



Al Ameri tops MENA drift
championship in Muscat

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 29

AHMED AL AMERI claimed first place in the Mena Drift Cup, which concluded in the Muscat Drift Arena at the Oman Automobile Association headquarters last week. The association organised the championship in collaboration with Muscat Municipality as part of the Muscat Nights, and witnessed extensive participation from 32 professional drivers representing Oman, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, India, Belarus and El Salvador.

The championship’s closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Faisal al Rawas, OCCI Chairman, in the presence of Ahmed al Hamidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, and the head of the main organising committee for the 2024 Muscat Nights.

During the finals held on Saturday, 16 drivers advanced after intense competition in the first stage. The final results saw Omani driver Ahmed bin Salim al Ameri crowned champion, while Nasser al Harbali from El Salvador secured second place, and Omani driver Tariq bin Ali al Shihani finished in third.

On the local level, competitor Ahmed al Ameri claimed first place, while Tariq al Shihani secured second place, and Ali al Shihani finished in third place.

Mohammed al Raisi, a marketing official at the Oman Automobile Association, emphasised that the Mena Drift Cup is the first event of its kind within the Muscat Nights activities. He noted that over 30 participants from 10 countries competed alongside nine prominent Omani drivers.

Al Raisi added, “The qualifiers took place on Friday, while the finals on Saturday featured four Omani drivers in challenging technical tracks, creating an electrifying atmosphere for the audience.” He highlighted the association’s commitment to organising events like freestyle championships, drifting, burnout, and black fire competitions, contributing to Oman’s growing recognition on the international motorsport stage.

Al Raisi revealed that, for the first time, the association organised events outside Muscat, holding an earlier event in Dhahirah Governorate, specifically in the Wilayat of Ibri. Future activities are planned for the Wilayat of Suhar in Al Batinah North, reaffirming, “Wherever you go in Oman,

you’ll find motorsport enthusiasts.”

He noted that the audience for these events is no longer limited to youth but now includes all societal segments, including women, children, and families, reflecting the sport’s growth in Oman. He thanked Muscat Municipality for their significant efforts in ensuring the success of these events.

Motorsport enthusiast Mohsin Ambusaidi shared his positive impressions after attending a motorsport competition in Oman for the first time, saying, “It was an exceptional experience for me, and I hope to see more of these events organised regularly in the future.” Ambusaidi highlighted the large fanbase for motorsports in Oman, evident from the significant turnout and enthusiasm among both citizens and residents. He added, “What stood out to me was the packed family area, reflecting the widespread appeal of these events.” Regarding the organisation, Ambusaidi praised the outstanding level of management, describing it as “putting Oman on the map for global motorsport events.” He expressed his eagerness to attend similar events in the future to enjoy the thrilling atmosphere and unique experience.

Bumrah gives India a shot at victory, but Australia lead by 333

MELBOURNE: Indian seamer Jasprit Bumrah unleashed more destructive bowling but Australia stubbornly battled back to reach 228-9 on Sunday, leading by 333 runs in an absorbing fourth Test.

Bumrah scythed through the middle order on day four in Melbourne to record figures of 4-56 off 24 overs and hand India an outside chance of victory in a match the home side have mostly dominated. However, India’s hopes were diminished by a stubborn, unbeaten final-wicket stand of 55 from 17.5 overs.

Nathan Lyon was at the crease on 41 while number 11 Scott Boland had seen off 65 balls to be 10 not out at the close. Up by 105 runs on the first innings, Australia were rocked by losing four wickets for 11 midway through the second session to slump to 91-6. Marnus Labuschagne and Pat Cummins responded with a vital partnership of 57, taking the steam

out of Bumrah’s assault.

A charmed Labuschagne scored 70, to back up his first-innings 72, while Cummins produced a captain’s knock of 41 -- giving him a career-high combined 90 runs for the Test.

Both teams are seeking to go 2-1 up in the series heading into the fifth and final Test in Sydney.

Australia remain in the stronger position on a pitch showing signs of variable bounce.

“Their middle to lower order batting has been exceptional for the last four or five series we’ve played against them, so never comfortable with any amount of runs,” said Labuschagne after play ended.

“At one stage we probably would have taken a 270 lead, and now the lower order has just put us in an amazing position with 333.

The conditions were exploited brilliantly by Bumrah, who continued his dominance across a series in which he has claimed 29



India’s Jasprit Bumrah celebrates with KL Rahul and teammates after taking the wicket of Australia’s Travis Head in Melbourne on Sunday. — Reuters

wickets. The 31-year-old powered past 200 Test victims and he boasts the lowest average at 19.45 of all 85 bowlers to have reached that milestone. Labuschagne was beaten on numerous occasions by Bumrah’s jaggling deliveries but kept his nerve in a 139-ball knock.

The Australian number three was fortunate, on 46, to survive a straightforward dropped chance in the slips by Yashasvi Jaiswal.

Jaiswal also couldn’t grasp a sharp chance under the helmet offered by Cummins in the final over before tea. Labuschagne was trapped lbw by lively seamer Mohammed Siraj before Mitchell Starc was run out for five.

Spinner Ravindra Jadeja had Cummins caught behind, heralding the 10th-wicket stand which could yet prove pivotal to the outcome.

Siraj, who took 3-66, sparked the earlier collapse, dismissing first innings centurion Steve Smith for

13. Bumrah was at his best when removing Travis Head, Mitchell Marsh and Alex Carey cheaply in rapid-fire fashion.

All-rounder Marsh was caught behind without scoring, continuing a series in which he has made little meaningful contribution.

“It just happened so quickly,” said Labuschagne of Australia’s middle-order collapse.

“As a new batter coming in, it’s very difficult to start in any Test match, but let alone when Bumrah’s got his tail up with the ball nipping around.” Australia lost both openers before going to lunch at 53-2.

Teenage opener Sam Konstas was unable to match the fearless deeds from his debut first innings of 60, this time bowled for eight by Bumrah.

Usman Khawaja was bowled for 21 by Siraj, having been dropped early on by the butter-fingered Jaiswal at leg gully. —AFP

SPORTS



Premier League - Leicester City v Manchester City

MAN CITY STOP THE ROT WITH VICTORY AT LEICESTER

MANCHESTER CITY provided Pep Guardiola some relief with a 2-0 victory at Leicester to secure just a second win in 14 games for the crisis-hit English champions on Sunday.

Savinho and Erling Haaland struck either side of half-time as City ended a run of eight away games without a win.

The performance was still far from the standards that Guardiola's side have set in winning an unprecedented four consecutive English top-flight titles.

But the effusive celebrations of Haaland's header 16 minutes from time showed that three points was all that mattered for the visitors to at least temporarily halt their remarkable slump.

Victory lifts City up to fifth but they are still 11 points behind leaders Liverpool, who have two games in hand.

Defeat leaves Leicester still rooted in the bottom three.

Guardiola made just one change from the 1-1 Boxing Day draw against Everton as Kevin De Bruyne replaced his Belgian international colleague Jeremy Doku.

De Bruyne's fitness struggles have played a part in City's slump and he immediately showed what Guardiola's men have been missing for most of the season.

Rico Lewis picked out De Bruyne, who cushioned a cross into the path of Haaland but his low effort was well saved by Leicester's stand-in goalkeeper Jakub Stolarczyk.

Leicester have now lost their last four games after a bright start to Ruud van Nistelrooy's reign.

The Foxes were left to rue not taking their chances to inflict more misery on a City side still showing a clear lack of confidence.

Any time the home side crossed into City territory in the first half they appeared a major threat.

Jamie Vardy would surely have won a penalty had he not strayed offside before being brought down

by Stefan Ortega, while James Justin's header hit the post after a goalmouth scramble.

City, though, got the crucial opening goal on 21 minutes.

Stolarczyk should have done better than to parry Phil Foden's long-range effort into the path of Savinho, who swept the rebound into the roof of the net for his first City goal. Chances continued to come and go for Leicester early in the second half.

Justin should have levelled but his mishit finish from close range allowed Manuel Akanji to clear off the line. Vardy then had the biggest chance to level when he prodded over Stephy Mavididi's brilliant in-swinging cross.

However, they were hit by a City sucker punch to end the defending champions' miserable run on the road. Savinho was the creator this time as his cross perfectly picked out Haaland, who powered home his 19th of the season ending his four-game goal drought. — AFP





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MERCHANDISEEXPORT

Oil exports of the GCC states declined by 20.5 per cent in 2023.

GCC MERCHANDISE EXPORTS DROP BY 14.5% IN 2023

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, DEC 29

Merchandise exports from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) declined 14.5 per cent in value to \$823.1 billion in 2023, down from \$962.6 billion a year earlier, according to a recent report published by the GCC Statistical Centre.

Oil and other hydrocarbon products, which amounted to 64.7 per cent of exports in 2023, declined 20.5 per cent to \$525.5 billion in 2023, compared to \$661.1 billion in 2022.

Furthermore, the value of non-oil national-origin exports declined by 6.1 per cent, to reach \$158.8 billion in 2023 compared to \$169.2 billion in 2022.

Ammunition and related parts represented the highest decline, dropping by a sharp 51.9 per cent to \$92.8 million in 2023 versus \$192.9 million in 2022.

This was followed by chemical exports, which decreased 24.4 per cent to \$34.9 billion in 2023, down from \$46.3 billion in 2022.

Plastics and rubber products slumped by 22.9 per cent from \$37.7 billion in 2022 to \$29.1 billion in 2023. Exports of metal products experienced a decline of 20.5 per cent to \$536.5 billion compared to \$674.8 billion in 2022.

However, several export items experienced significant growth.

The export of artistic and collectible Items grew 110.4 per cent to \$1.7 billion in 2023, versus \$0.8 billion in 2022. Footwear, feathers, artificial flowers, and 'products made from human hair increased by 38.4 per cent, from \$0.5 billion in 2022 to \$0.7 billion in 2023.

Similarly, pearls, precious stone and precious metals exports increased by 29.3 per cent, from \$62.1 billion in 2022 to \$80.2 billion in 2023.

Exports of optical and medical instruments and watches dipped 9.8 per cent, from \$3.5 billion in 2022 to \$3.8 billion in 2023. Transport equipment exports grew 9.7 per cent, from \$19.4 billion in 2022 to \$21.3 billion in 2023.

Moreover, the value of re-exported goods increased by 4.9 per cent in 2023, amounting to approximately \$138.8 billion compared to \$132.3 billion in 2022.

In 2023, China ranked as the leading importer of GCC goods accounting for 19.2 per cent of total exports, with a value of \$158.3 billion in 2023.

India was in second place with a 12.2 per cent share, followed by Japan with 11 per cent, South Korea with 5.6 per cent, and the United States with a 4.4 per cent share of total exports.

Oil & gas sector employs more Omanis, local firms

THE Ministry of Energy and Minerals, in cooperation with its partners, is working to implement several projects aimed at enhancing local content, which is key to driving the sustainable development of the Omani economy.

Dr Ali bin Salem al Rajhi, Director General of Planning, pointed out that the Ministry is currently working on a number of programmes and projects to enhance local content in line with the National Policy for Local Content, which was approved by the Council of Ministers in March 2023. In addition to a review of the current strategy, a new identity for local content (Majd) has been unveiled, while a Local Content Certification project has been initiated as well.

To enhance local content in the minerals sector, the ministry has worked to implement specialised training programmes to develop the skills and competencies of national cadres, in addition to developing job opportunities, qualification and training in the sector.

SMEs operating in the oil & gas sector have also growth 16 per cent as of the second quarter of this year, underscoring support extended to small businesses.

Meanwhile, Omanisation in operating companies reached 92 per cent, while for contracting companies, the ministry is currently targeting 130 jobs to quickly raise the Omanisation rates in the sector, up from 69 per

The Ministry is currently working on a number of programmes and projects to enhance local content in line with the National Policy for Local Content

DR ALI BIN SALEM AL RAJHI
Director General of Planning

Local content development is key to driving Oman's economic diversification.

cent presently. Additionally, the Ministry, in cooperation with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, helped supervise the National System Readiness Laboratory to support the green hydrogen sector. It was organised by Hydrogen Oman Company (Hydrom). The laboratory seeks to enhance local value and maximise local investments in supporting sectors, such as the logistics sector, the workforce and contractors.

According to Dr Al Rajhi, the Ministry also supported the development of several projects in the field of non-metals production, notably the Pottery Innovation Unit project, the Omani Sarooj Factory project and an initiative to develop a cement mixture for 3D printers.

He pointed out that Oman

abounds with metallic mineral ores such as: copper, chromium, iron ore and manganese, in addition to industrial ores such as marble, limestone, gypsum, silica and others.

These resources have created enormous opportunities to support the national economy.

The Ministry has also developed a social responsibility strategy in the oil and gas sector. This strategy enables operators and contractors to coordinate their social investments in a way that ensures the promotion of the concepts of sustainability and community service.

The Ministry has worked to develop the general framework for social responsibility and study the projects submitted by various parties to ensure the selection of the most appropriate ones. — ONA

Yamna eyes ammonia bunkering hub at Oman port

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 29

Oman's Port of Salalah is among five international ports being explored by global green hydrogen investment company Yamna as potential hubs for green ammonia bunkering.

UK-based Yamna is currently developing a global portfolio of assets dedicated to producing green hydrogen and other derivatives designed to advance the energy transition around the world. In the Sultanate of Oman, Yamna is a key member of a consortium that has secured a land block to develop a major green ammonia project in Dhofar Governorate.

The company is now exploring the potential for developing a global network of green ammonia bunkering hubs to support the decarbonisation of the maritime industry.

"At Yamna, we play a key role as an upstream player,

Adding to Salalah Port's appeal as a bunkering hub for green ammonia is an existing ammonia export terminal.

producing green ammonia at the most cost-competitive locations.

By collaborating closely with partners across the ammonia bunkering ecosystem, we are driving the transition to a sustainable maritime future," the company stated in a recent post.

According to Yamna, potential green ammonia bunkering hubs in the making include Port of Salalah, a state-of-the-art gateway that already

has existing ammonia export infrastructure. Additionally, Salalah Port – among other Omani ports – is the subject of a feasibility study aimed at developing a bunkering and production hub for low-carbon fuels.

Other international ports in Yamna's sights are: Port of Rotterdam (Europe's largest bunkering port with existing ammonia import terminals), Suez Canal (a strategic location for international maritime logistics), Port Algeciras (Spanish port ideal for developing a green maritime corridor between the Mediterranean and Rotterdam), and Jurong Port in Singapore (presently the world's largest bunkering hub).

Yamna envisions a significant role for itself in the rollout of a global ammonia bunkering network.

"We are contributing to global efforts on developing an ammonia bunkering value chain by: Producing cost-

competitive green ammonia;

At locations that are well-connected to existing and future bunkering hubs; With a capacity to supply a large volume of green ammonia."

Already, Yamna is backing large-scale green hydrogen and ammonia projects in four locations: Oman, Morocco, Norway and East Africa.

It has also established a partnership with Electric Power Development Co Ltd. (J-Power), a Japanese power generation company, to jointly develop and invest in green hydrogen and derivatives projects globally.

In Oman, Yamna has joined hands with EDF Group and J-Power to successfully bid for a land block for developing a 1 million tonnes per year capacity green hydrogen project.

The consortium plans to install around 4.5 GW of wind and solar capacity, supported by battery storage and 2.5 GW of electrolyser capacity.

OMAN

RETAILJOBS



People shop on Oxford Street in London, Britain. — Reuters

ALMOST 170,000 UK
RETAIL JOBS AXED IN
2024 AMID PAIN ON
HIGH STREET

LONDON: Almost 170,000 retail workers lost their jobs during 2024 after a challenging year for high street firms in Britain, according to data.

End-of-year figures compiled by the Centre for Retail Research showed the number of job losses spiked amid the collapse of major chains such as Home base and Ted Baker.

It said its latest analysis showed that a total of 169,395 retail jobs were lost in the 2024 calendar year to date.

This was up 49,990 — an increase of 41.9 per cent — compared with 2023.

It is the highest annual reading since more than 200,000 jobs were lost in 2020 in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic which forced retailers to shut their stores during lockdowns.

The centre said 38 major retailers went into administration in 2024, including household names such as Lloyds Pharmacy, Homebase, The Body Shop, Carpetright and Ted Baker.

Around a third of all retail job losses in 2024, 33 per cent or 55,914 in total, resulted from administrations.

It recorded that the remainder of the jobs lost were through “rationalisation”, as part of cost-cutting programmes by large retailers or small independents choosing to close their stores for good.

Professor Joshua Bamfield, director of the Centre for Retail Research, said: “The comparatively low figures for 2023 now look like an anomaly, a pause for breath by many retailers after lockdowns if you like.

“The problems of changed customer shopping habits, inflation, rising energy costs, rents and business rates have continued and forced many retailers to cut back even more strongly in 2024.”

Independent retailers, small businesses generally with between one and five stores, shed 58,616 jobs in total during the year.

Experts have said small high street shops could face a particularly challenging 2025 because of Budget tax and wage changes.

Firms will see an increase in national insurance contributions as well as a reduction in discounts for business rates — the property tax affecting high street firms — next year.

Alex Probyn, president of property tax at real estate adviser Altus Group, said: “The cut in the business rates discount from April 1 will disproportionately affect independent retailers who will see their bills rise on average by 140 per cent adding an extra £5,024 (\$6,028) for the average shop.”

The current 75 per cent discount to business rates — due to end on March 31, 2025 — will be replaced by a less generous discount of 40 per cent.

There will still be a maximum discount of £110,000. — **dpa**

Thawani partners with
Takaful for motor cover

THAWANI Pay, Oman's leading platform for smart payment solution, has partnered with Takaful Oman Insurance to introduce a motor insurance product through the Thawani App.

The collaboration aims to transform customer experience by enabling users to easily obtain motor insurance, with plans to expand into comprehensive offerings in the near future. Harnessing the power of technology, the partnership is poised to set new benchmarks for accessibility and convenience in the insurance sector.

Majid al Amri, Founder and CEO of Thawani Pay, stated, “Thawani has been at the forefront of innovation in Oman and our collaboration with Takaful Oman opens new avenues for our users, allowing them to access motor insurance directly through the Thawani App.

“This join venture simplifies the insurance process and enhances accessibility, empowering our expanding user base with seamless transactions and payment options.

“Together, we are redefining the insurance experience, making it more convenient and integrated into their daily lives.”

Neelmani Bhardwaj, CEO of Takaful Oman Insurance



Thawani has been at the forefront of innovation in Oman and our collaboration with Takaful Oman opens new avenues for our users, allowing them to access motor insurance directly through the Thawani App.

MAJID AL AMRI
Founder and CEO of Thawani Pay



The collaboration aims to transform customer experience by enabling users to easily obtain motor insurance.

commented, “We aspire to be the most technologically advanced insurer, delivering exceptional customer experiences through innovative digital solutions. Partnering with Thawani aligns perfectly with this goal, as they share our commitment to innovation and customer-centricity.

By streamlining the policy purchase process, insurance is more accessible than ever and significantly expands our market reach. This collaboration promises to transform how customers interact with insurance services, providing a seamless and flexible experience

that meets their evolving needs.”

Merging Thawani Pay's innovative platform with Takaful Oman Insurance's industry expertise, this partnership represents a significant advancement in insurance services in Oman. Customers can conveniently obtain motor insurance through the Thawani App, conducting transactions and making payments via cards registered on the app or their Thawani wallet, ensuring a smooth and hassle-free experience.

For more information about this partnership, please visit Thawani or Takaful Oman.

New French FM eyes 2025 deficit slightly above 5%

PARIS: France's delayed 2025 budget bill will target a deficit of “slightly above 5 per cent” in order to protect growth, the country's new finance minister said in a newspaper interview.

Eric Lombard, previously head of Caisse des Depots, the investment arm of the French government, will be tasked with steering through parliament a budget after the previous government lost a no-confidence vote in early December amid a backlash against its belt-tightening proposals.

Lombard's deficit objective for next year is higher than the 5 per cent targeted by the last government. But it would still represent a drop from this year when the deficit is expected to widen to above 6% of gross domestic product.

“We need to amend this (budget) bill to establish a good budget. With a deficit slightly above 5% so as to protect growth,” Lombard said



Minister for Economy, Finance and Industry Eric Lombard

in a statment to La Tribune Dimanche. “To protect growth, the reduction of the deficit must come more through reductions in public spending than through taxation,” he said, adding that any tax increases should be “very limited”. He said he would consult all political parties in the French parliament and that the discussions would

contribute to the government's budget proposals. Lombard was named last Monday as part of Prime Minister Francois Bayrou's government.

Bayrou, who, like predecessor Michel Barnier, lacks a working majority in parliament, has said he aims to have a budget ready by mid-February.

Bayrou's new team will be under immediate pressure to slim down a deficit expected to end the year at above 6% of gross domestic product.

Parliament is in recess until January 13. Once lawmakers return, however, Bayrou and his team will likely be living day-to-day, under the constant threat of no-confidence motions.

French President Emmanuel Macron will hope Bayrou can stave off no-confidence votes until at least July, when France will be able to hold a new parliamentary election.

Bayrou had struggled for 10 days to put together a government as he looks to stave

off potential no-confidence votes from the far right and left.

In his other appointments, Conservative Bruno Retailleau remained interior minister, while Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot and Defence Minister Sebastien Lecornu also remained in their posts.

Bayrou has had a rough start since he was named prime minister on Friday, December 13. He came under fire for flying on a private jet to the southwestern town of Pau, where he remains mayor, to attend its council meeting, while leaving his interior minister to fly to the storm-ravaged overseas territory of Mayotte.

An opinion poll published on December 19 found 64% were dissatisfied with his appointment as prime minister.

Last week, he invited all mainstream parties for talks to form a government, excluding the far-right National Rally and hard-left France Unbowed.

— **Reuters**

BankDhofar honours over 90 employees with new qualifications

BankDhofar, the second largest bank in the Sultanate of Oman in terms of the size of its branch network, hosted an event in honour of more than 90 employees who successfully obtained academic and professional qualifications in various specialisations.

The event was held under the auspices of Tahir bin Salim al Amri, Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO). Also in attendance were BankDhofar's Acting CEO and a number of senior management officials.

Commenting on the significance of the event, Dr Khalid bin Salim al Hamdani, Chief Human Resources Officer, said: “BankDhofar continuously seeks to raise the skills and competence of its employees by providing



These partnerships have served to keep the government sector informed about the bank's extensive wealth of knowledge and experience while also encouraging collaboration and the exchange of expertise.

scholarships and appropriate training and development opportunities.

These specialised developmental opportunities contribute to refining their job skills and subsequently drive towards enhancing their productivity and performance.”

Al Hamadani added that the emphasis on training and development is not only a requirement but a reflection of BankDhofar's commitment to advancing Omanisation goals as set out in Oman Vision 2040.

Several developmental programmes have been initiated to support this strategy including the employment and graduation of over 109 employees from the “Ruwad”

programme first launched by the bank seven years ago.

The aim of the programme was to qualify graduates across all specialisations and equip them with skill sets related to leadership, finance, communication, digitalisation and other relevant fields.

He stressed that this has not only enabled them to take up various employment opportunities within the Bank but has also contributed to enhancing Omanisation in various departments. BankDhofar's effectiveness in achieving Omanisation targets serves as a model for the rest of the banking sector to follow, particularly at the middle and executive levels.

OMAN

BILATERALTIES



The Omani-Saudi Partnership Forum seeks to foster cooperation and explore investment opportunities in health, education, technology and consulting.

OMANI-SAUDI PARTNERSHIP FORUM EXPLORES BILATERAL COOPERATION

MUSCAT: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) organised on Sunday, December 29, 2024, the Omani-Saudi Partnership Forum, which aims to open new horizons for joint cooperation and explore promising investment opportunities in various sectors, especially in the fields of health, education, technology and consulting.

The forum discussed investment opportunities and enhancing cooperation between the private sectors in the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, OCCI Chairman said: “The Omani-Saudi Partnership Forum represents one of the manifestations of the continuous development of relations between the two countries at various levels, as this development stems from the keenness and care of the leaderships of the two countries, who possess insightful visions that seek to achieve the desired economic integration in a way that positively reflects on achieving the aspirations of the two brotherly peoples.”

He lauded the efforts of the Federation of Saudi Chambers, the Omani-Saudi Business Council and other business forums, in supporting partnerships between the private sectors of the two countries.

For his part, Saud al-Qablan, Deputy CEO of the Services Exports Sector in Saudi Arabia, said the partnerships will contributing to achieving common goals set out in the Kingdom’s Vision 2030, and Oman’s Vision 2040.

He also reviewed the successes achieved by the Kingdom in hosting major global events such as the 2034 World Cup, as well as organising Expo 2030 in Riyadh, noting that these achievements represent important milestones in enhancing the Kingdom’s position on the international scene and reflect the progress it has made in building a strong and advanced economy.

On the occasion, OCCI economic researcher Shaikha al Alawi made a presentation on the theme, “Explore the Omani Market”, which outlined attractive sectors for investment in Sultanate.

— ONA

RUSSIA SAYS IT WILL STOP GAS EXPORTS TO MOLDOVA

MOSCOW/CHISINAU: Russian energy giant Gazprom said on Saturday it would suspend gas exports to Moldova from 0500 GMT on Jan. 1 due to unpaid debt by Moldova, which is bracing for severe power cuts.

It said the company reserved the right to take any action, including terminating the supply contract with Moldova.

Russia supplies Moldova with about 2 billion cubic metres of gas per year, which is piped via Ukraine to the breakaway region of Transnistria where it is used to generate cheap power that is sold to government-controlled parts of Moldova.

Moldovan Prime Minister Dorin Recean condemned the Russian decision, which is a precursor to a total shutdown of Russian gas exports via Ukraine and to Europe, where it flows further to Slovakia, Austria, Hungary and Italy, once a current transit deal with Ukraine expires on December 31. Moldova will be hit the hardest by the shutdown. “This decision confirms once again the intention of the Kremlin to leave the inhabitants of the Transnistrian region without light and heat in the middle of the winter,” Recean wrote on Facebook, accusing Russia of using energy as a political weapon.

DIFFERENCE OVER DEBT

Russia, which is critical of Moldova’s West-leaning central government, has said Moldova should pay a debt on past supplies. According to Russian calculations, the debt stands at \$709 million. Moldova has put the debt at \$8.6 million. — Reuters

CEO TALK

From academia to industry: A leap of faith

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 29

WHEN Ahmed Subhani transitioned from his stable role as a college lecturer to the unpredictable world of entrepreneurship, the odds seemed stacked against him. Today, as the Founder and CEO of Falcon Eye Group, he reflects on a journey marked by resilience, innovation and a relentless pursuit of purpose.

In an interview with the Observer, Ahmed shared the challenges he overcame, the milestones he achieved and the vision that continues to drive his business forward.

A LEAP OF FAITH

Ahmed’s entrepreneurial journey began with a bold decision to leave academia. “Transitioning from teaching to running a business was daunting,” he recalled. “There were fears — of failure, of stepping into uncharted territory — but I believed that growth lies outside our comfort zones.” With the unwavering support of his family, he ventured into waste management in Al Dhahirah Governorate, a modest start that would eventually lead to a diversified conglomerate operating across Oman and the GCC.

His decision to embrace the unknown paid off, as he discovered leadership qualities he hadn’t realised he possessed. “Overcoming obstacles wasn’t easy, but every challenge taught me resilience and adaptability,” he said.

MILESTONES THAT MATTER

Falcon Eye Group’s growth reflects Ahmed’s strategic vision and commitment to innovation. From its beginnings in waste management, the group expanded into sectors such as healthcare, fashion, retail, human resource consultancy and real estate. Each venture was a calculated



The resilience of my team and the support of my family have been instrumental. Leadership is not just about making decisions; it’s about inspiring people to move towards a shared goal

AHMED SUBHANI
Founder and CEO of Falcon Eye Group

step towards fulfilling unmet needs in the market. One achievement Ahmed holds especially dear is the establishment of Care24, a rehabilitation centre.

“Care24 is more than a business — it’s a mission to contribute to humanity’s well-being. Seeing the positive impact it has made on people’s lives is profoundly fulfilling,” he said.

Another defining moment in Ahmed’s career was his election as an expat to the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry committee. “Serving in the chamber was a validation of the trust and respect I earned within the community. It was a milestone that symbolised collaboration and progress,” he added.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS

For Ahmed, leadership has been a constant learning curve. “Building the business from scratch in Al Dhahirah Governorate with limited resources was one of the toughest challenges,” he admitted. Expanding to Muscat and beyond required strategic planning and the ability to navigate competitive markets.

Diversifying into multiple sectors posed its own complexities. “Understanding different markets while ensuring each venture aligned with our core values was no small task,” Ahmed said. Yet, these challenges taught him valuable lessons about perseverance and staying true to his vision. He emphasised the role of teamwork in overcoming obstacles.

“The resilience of my team and the support of my family have been instrumental. Leadership is not just about making decisions; it’s about inspiring people to move towards a shared goal,” he remarked.

INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION

Ahmed views his role as a leader as an opportunity to shape a positive company culture. “Every

day is a new opportunity to learn and grow, not just for me but for the entire team,” he said. By promoting open communication and fostering autonomy, he has cultivated an environment of trust and collaboration within Falcon Eye Group.

To aspiring CEOs, Ahmed offered this advice: “There are no shortcuts to success. Empower your team to take ownership of their roles and lead with patience and integrity. The journey may be long, but the lessons are invaluable.”

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Looking ahead, Ahmed’s vision for Falcon Eye Group revolves around innovation, sustainability and creating lasting value. “We aim to lead in quality and customer satisfaction while contributing to society, especially through initiatives like Care24,” he shared.

For the industry as a whole, Ahmed sees technology and sustainability as key drivers of future growth. “We want to be at the forefront of these changes, leading with purpose and ensuring we make a meaningful impact,” he said.

BALANCING ACT

Amid the demands of leadership, Ahmed prioritises personal growth and well-being. He finds inspiration in reading, traveling and attending exhibitions, which broaden his perspective and fuel his creativity.

“Balancing professional responsibilities with personal well-being is essential for effective leadership,” he noted.

As Falcon Eye Group continues to grow, Ahmed Subhani’s story serves as a testament to the power of resilience, vision and purpose. From a classroom in academia to the helm of a diversified business empire, Ahmed’s journey inspires others to step out of their comfort zones and embrace the challenges that come their way.

Launch of workshop in 3D printing at OPAZ

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 29

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) launched a workshop on Engineering Design in the World of 3D Printing. The workshop aims to enhance the design and innovation skills of the Authority’s employees using the latest technologies.

Haitham bin Khalifa al-Shakili, Manager of the Quality and Innovation Department said that organising this workshop aligns with the Authority’s interest in promoting the use of artificial intelligence and modern technologies across various operations. It also seeks to enable the Authority’s employees to benefit from 3D printing technologies in the field of engineering design, contributing to improved work quality and faster project implementation.

He added that the workshop provides participants with a unique opportunity to learn about advanced design methods in 3D printing. It is also suitable for all those interested in developing their technical skills. He emphasised that 3D printing



OPAZ has extensive experience in using 3D printing and encouraging projects within its zones to adopt modern construction methods.

allows for greater opportunities in business development, speeding up project execution and testing engineering models before the implementation phase, thereby reducing costs associated with design modifications.

He explained that there are many applications for 3D printing in the engineering sector and the training workshop aims to explore them, enhance the skills of participants and build qualified

personnel in this field.

He noted that the two-day workshop, organised by the Quality and Innovation Department and the IT Department at OPAZ, discusses the fundamentals of engineering design using specialised software.

It also covers how to transform ideas into 3D models and use 3D printers to create innovative prototypes. He highlighted that the training, delivered by specialised

experts, focuses on empowering participants to master 3D printing in the engineering sector and learn new technical skills through inspiring interactive experiences.

OPAZ has extensive experience in using 3D printing and encouraging projects within its zones to adopt modern construction methods. Last year, the Authority won the 3D Printing Technology Award at the Comex Technology Exhibition 2023 for its use of 3D printing technology in constructing a commercial café and its facilities, as well as a residential unit with its amenities in the Fishermen’s Village in the tourist area of the Special Economic Zone at Al Duqm (SEZAD).

This award reflects the Authority’s commitment to developing modern electronic programmes, applications and adopting artificial intelligence technologies in its various operations. This positively impacts the services provided by the Authority and the zones it oversees, simplifying procedures, and delivering fast, comprehensive services to investors.

OPINION

Breathing new life into air: Understanding CO₂ capture



NAJAH
AL RIYAMI

The author is a Media and Communication Master's graduate skilled in diverse writing formats, specialising in storytelling, branding and in-depth journalism.

THE race to achieve net-zero is heating up, and the Sultanate of Oman is stepping into the spotlight with cutting-edge Direct Air Capture (DAC) technology, using chemical or physical processes to extract CO₂ directly from the air.

DAC is a costly method to capture CO₂ because it is energy and sometimes water intensive, it captures CO₂ at its source and can remove it from the very air we breathe, making it a significant effort and technology to utilise in our steps to decarbonise.

The physical processes involve fans or blowers pulling air into the DAC system, passing through physical systems and filters designed to selectively capture the CO₂, by exploiting their differences from other gas properties.

One process, called ‘pressure swing absorption,’ (PSA) involves utilising a material that absorbs CO₂ at higher temperatures; requiring physical forces to bind the CO₂.

Another method involves ‘temperature swing absorption’ (TSA), which uses heat to separate the CO₂. Finally, cryogenic separation -a more energy intensive method- utilises extreme cold temperatures to separate the CO₂.

Solvent-based direct air capture systems pass air through chemicals that remove the CO₂. Most commercial techniques use a liquid

solvent — usually amine-based or caustic—to absorb CO₂ from a gas. Existing systems use a combination of heat and vacuum to remove the captured CO₂ and return the chemicals to the direct air capture process.

Solvent-based direct air capture systems pass air through chemicals that remove the CO₂. From Amine-based solvents that react with CO₂ to form a carbamate compound, to a reaction with Potassium Hydroxide solution that forms Potassium Carbonate in a reversible process, the utilisation of Carbonate-based systems to form bicarbonates that release CO₂ when heated, or the use of ionic liquids that either bind with or dissolve the CO₂.

While still in the experimental stages of DAC, highly porous Metal-organic framework (MOF) hybrid solvents are being explored for their potential to enhance CO₂ absorption.

The world’s first commercial Direct Air Capture (DAC) facility started operation in 2017 in Hinwil, in the canton of Zurich, Switzerland.

With no geological component and operating at a much smaller scale. Today, there are 27 operational Direct Air Capture (DAC) plants worldwide, collectively capturing approximately 0.01 million tonnes of CO₂ per year. The International Energy Agency (IEA) reports that plans for at least 130 large-scale DAC facilities are at various

Existing systems use a combination of heat and vacuum to remove the captured CO₂ and return the chemicals to the direct air capture process.

stages of development. If all proceed, DAC deployment could approach the levels required by 2030 under the Net-Zero Emissions by 2050 Scenario, targeting around 65 million tonnes of CO₂ annually.

Omani startup 44.01 is part of these efforts; specialising in carbon mineralisation with the launch of a DAC and mineralisation project in Oman's Hajar Mountains, set to be the largest peridotite mineralisation activity in the world with aims to utilise Aircapture’s modular DAC to extract up to 500 tonnes of CO₂ annually from the atmosphere.

Occidental Petroleum’s Exploration: Occidental Petroleum (Oxy I’ll) has also expressed interest in establishing a DAC project in Oman with plans to leverage advanced technologies, including digital twin simulations, to enhance the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of DAC operations; aligning with Oxy’s sustainability goals and Oman’s strategic focus on carbon management.

As the world races against time to combat climate change, its efforts towards Direct Air Capture technology marks a significant step towards a sustainable future.

By leveraging its natural resources and innovative partnerships, the Sultanate of Oman is not only addressing the challenges of decarbonisation but also setting an example for global collaboration in the fight for a cleaner, greener planet.

INSURANCE RISKS
WILL BE A PROXY
CARBON TAX



NEIL UNMACK

The author is a Reuters Breakingviews Associate Editor based in London.

A robust global price on carbon is the holy grail of climate change. If emitting activities were artificially made more expensive, proceeds from richer citizens’ carbon usage could help poorer states adapt to already existing signs of global warming.

In 2025 a quasi-carbon price will become increasingly apparent — but in a much more regressive way.

With the world looking increasingly unlikely to restrict temperature rises to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial times, climate change is ceasing to be a hypothetical risk. Take the insurance sector. On average natural catastrophe insured losses were \$63 billion a year between 1993 and 2022, according to Swiss Re. But in the years since 2020 they have topped \$100 billion. Hurricane Milton and European floods mean 2024 losses may exceed that level again.

This is not as bad as it might sound for the insurers themselves. After years in which they faced low returns due partly to low central bank rates, they can now demand higher premiums to cover losses. An index compiled by broker Guy Carpenter of global property catastrophe rates for reinsurance, where insurers farm out the risk of extreme losses, has risen by over 75 per cent since 2017. US property and casualty insurers like Chubb or Allstate have returned over 140 per cent including dividends in the five years until November 2024, according to LSEG data.

Higher insurance costs could conceivably incentivise homeowners and builders to make houses that are less prone to flood, fire or other risks. Yet in Britain 8 per cent of new homes are built in flood zones, even though new houses are not eligible for support from the Flood Re programme, a kind of mutual insurance for vulnerable properties. More importantly as insurance costs rise, fewer people will be able to shoulder the burden. A recent paper estimated that the most disaster-prone houses in the US could face annual increases in homeowner insurance of \$700, by 2053.

Elevated rates are unlikely to subside. Reinsurers used to fret over large, one-off catastrophes once every decade or so. They are now having to cope with much more frequent mid-size losses of \$1 billion or more due to climate change, dubbed secondary events. That can be seen in the record number of US tornadoes due to convective storms, or floods across many countries in eastern and central Europe.

At such high rates, more and more properties will be uninsured, and more insurers may leave markets. In Florida, the largest property insurer is state-backed Citizens Property Insurance. — Reuters

Opportunity Oman: 2025 and beyond

AS the world stands on the cusp of transformative change, 2025 emerges as a defining year for global economies. For Oman, this moment presents an unprecedented opportunity to reshape its future and accelerate its journey towards sustainable prosperity.

The world economy shows remarkable resilience heading into 2025, with OECD projections indicating a 3.3% GDP growth. This positive outlook stems from declining inflation rates, adaptive monetary policies, and robust employment figures.

However, beneath this optimistic surface lie complex challenges that demand careful navigation. Trade dynamics are evolving rapidly, influenced by shifting U.S. policies and their ripple effects across global supply chains. The geopolitical landscape, particularly in the Middle East, continues to shape energy markets and economic stability. While inflation shows signs of easing, concerns persist about price trajectories in essential sectors. Additionally, the world grapples with persistent challenges in gender inequality and the ever-pressing issue of climate change, with the upcoming COP30 in Brazil serving as a crucial platform for global environmental action.

Yet, within these challenges lie remarkable opportunities. The technological revolution continues unabated, with AI, machine learning, and cloud computing reshaping industries from healthcare to manufacturing. Emerging markets are positioned to outpace developed economies, while sustainable development gains unprecedented momentum in global investment priorities.

Oman’s journey towards 2025 is guided by its ambitious Oman Vision 2040, a comprehensive blueprint for economic transformation. The nation is decisively moving away from its traditional oil-dependent



Illustrative image of a solar project.



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model towards a diversified, knowledge-based economy. This transition is supported by bold reforms and strategic initiatives that are reshaping the country’s economic landscape.

The introduction of the Future Fund Oman in 2024, with its \$5.2 billion investment capacity, marks a significant milestone in this journey. This fund, managed by the Oman Investment Authority, targets critical sectors including tourism, manufacturing, green energy,

and logistics, demonstrating Oman’s commitment to diversification.

Key Opportunities for Oman in 2025 In-Country Value (ICV) Initiatives: Oman’s ICV programme seeks to enhance the nation’s economy by promoting local sourcing, developing the skills of the Omani workforce, and stimulating productivity.

This presents opportunities for businesses to participate in local supply chains, invest in training and development, and contribute to Oman’s economic growth. For example, companies engaging in infrastructure projects are required to allocate resources for local subcontractors and workforce training, ensuring long-term benefits for the domestic economy.

Economic Diversification: Oman’s focus on economic diversification opens doors for investments in non-oil sectors such as tourism, logistics, manufacturing, renewable energy, and fisheries. The Duqm Special Economic Zone exemplifies this strategy by fostering manufacturing, logistics, and tourism development.

The Port of Duqm plays a pivotal role by facilitating mineral exports, supporting logistics services, and promoting fisheries and tourism growth. For instance, the recent

establishment of a fisheries hub in Al Duqm aims to create thousands of jobs and enhance food security.

Oman’s diversification efforts extend into space exploration, marked by the successful launch of the “Duqm-1” experimental rocket in December 2024. Spearheaded by Edaq, a subsidiary of the National Space Services Company (NASCOM), this milestone demonstrates Oman’s ambitions to establish a dedicated spaceport and advance space technologies.

This initiative, under the supervision of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), aims to attract global investors and position Oman as a regional leader in space exploration.

Renewable Energy Projects: Oman is investing heavily in renewable energy to diversify its energy mix and foster sustainable development. Key projects include large-scale solar farms in the Wilayat of Ibri and wind energy installations in Dhofar Governorate.

These initiatives not only reduce the nation’s carbon footprint but also generate employment opportunities and attract foreign investment. For example, the Dhofar Wind Power Project, developed in collaboration with international partners, now powers thousands of homes and exemplifies Oman’s commitment to a green economy. Mining and Logistics Hub: Oman’s rich mineral resources and strategic location make it an attractive destination for mining and logistics investments. Redevelopment of copper mines and expansions in logistics infrastructure — such as the Port of Sohar and Salalah — offer significant potential.

The mining sector’s recent partnerships with global companies have already yielded multi-million-dollar exploration agreements, underscoring its growth trajectory.

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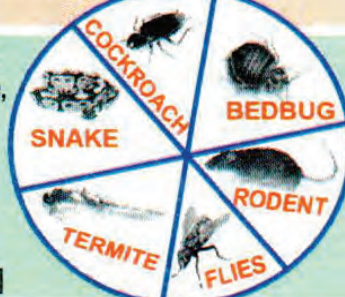
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ANNOUNCEMENT

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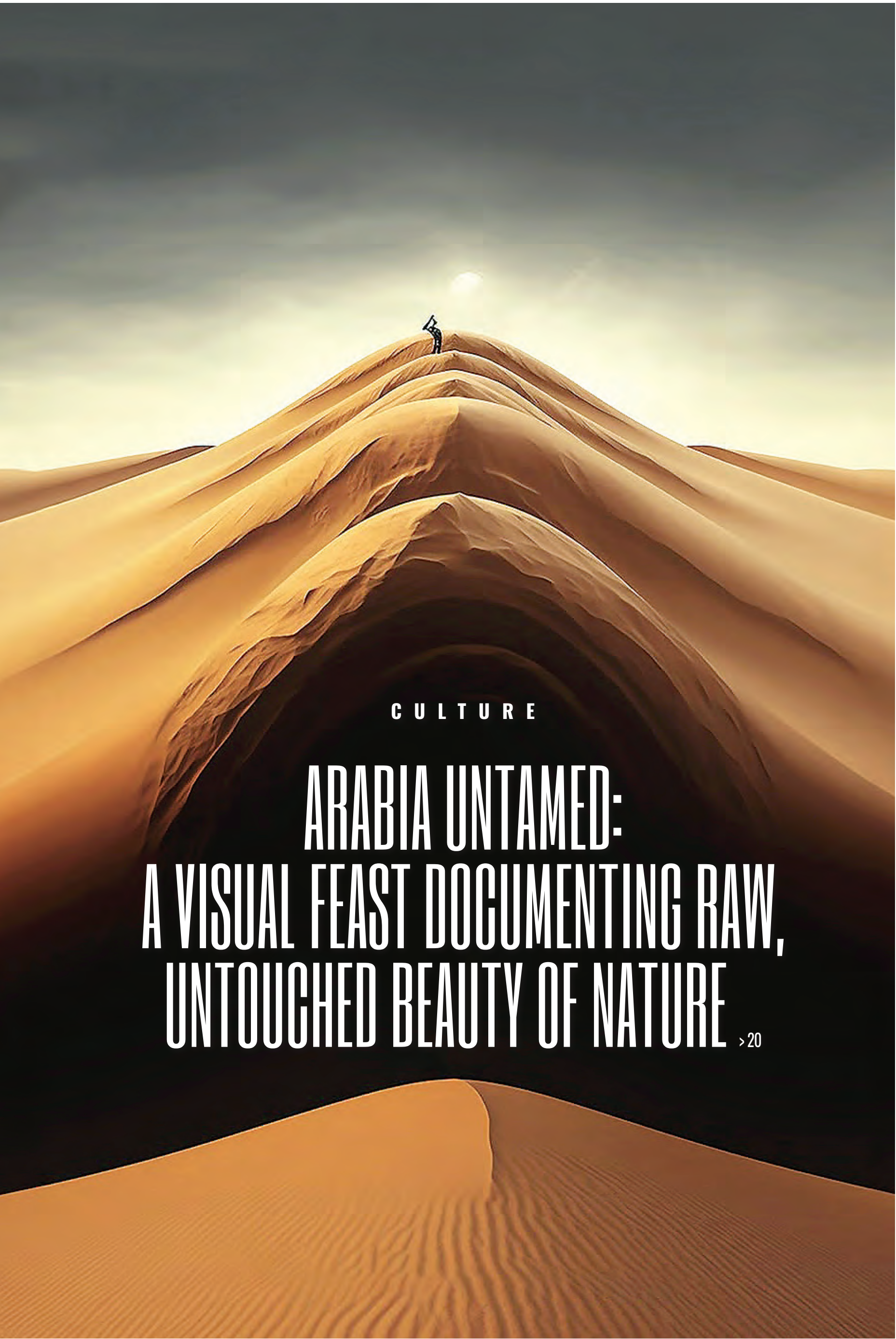


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ART/LIFE



ENTERTAINMENT

‘Wicked’ director wants fans to see characters soar



JON M. CHU, the director behind the musical film “Wicked”, felt pressure from both himself and the rest of the team at Universal Pictures to make a masterpiece.

“For ourselves to fulfill the promise that we had to these characters when we first walked into this, I’m really excited,” he said. “We love the show. We love these characters.”

“Wicked”, based on the Broadway musical hit that tells the story of a green-skinned student of magic who becomes the Wicked Witch of the West, pulled in \$114 million at US and Canadian theatres, and \$50.2 million in international markets during the Nov 22 opening weekend.

Starring Ariana Grande and Cynthia Erivo, the movie is the first installment of a two-part film adaptation of the multi-Tony award-winning Broadway musical of the same name based on the 1995 novel by Gregory Maguire, which is based on the 1939 film “The Wizard of Oz.”

The first installment of “Wicked: Part 1” was written by Winnie Holzman and Dana Fox, with songs from renowned composer Stephen Schwartz.

The fantasy-musical movie also stars Jonathan Bailey, Ethan Slater, Bowen Yang, Marissa Bode, Peter Dinklage and Michelle Yeoh.

The story follows Elphaba played by Erivo, an outcast young woman because of her green skin and Galinda played by Grande, a popular young woman, who become friends at Shiz University in the mystical land of Oz. After meeting the Wonderful Wizard of Oz, their friendship is met with unforeseen challenges.

Chu views the film as an opportunity to normalise Hollywood’s diverse talent, as the film includes actors of colour, actors with disabilities, actors and other historically underrepresented groups.

Making the movie with “real” and “authentic people” in the lead roles was never a question for him.

“To me, it was normalising this stuff. We don’t even have to make it a huge conversation. It just is,” he added.

Following the success of “Wicked,” Chu teases that the second installment of the film will not disappoint.

“If you think you saw everything of Cynthia and you think you saw everything of Ariana, just wait, because the best is yet to come with them. It is juicy and yummy and all the things. I think people will be satisfied with where we end up.”

“Wicked,” distributed by Universal Pictures, will be available for at-home streaming that can be purchased digitally on December 31. — Reuters

QUICK FEATURES



LIFESTYLE

Participants parade during the Calabar Carnival in Calabar on December 28, 2024. Calabar Carnival is an annual carnival held in Cross River State, Nigeria: it is celebrated every December to mark Christmas celebration yearly. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

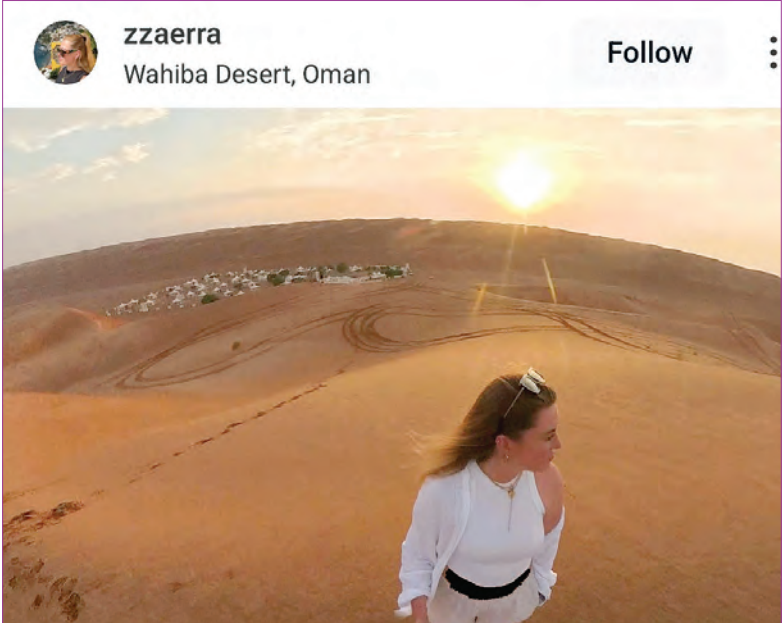
South Korean actor Lee Jung-jae poses for photos ahead of a fan event for the global premiere of the Netflix series “Squid Game Season 2” at Dongdaemun Design Plaza in Seoul. — AFP



FILM

Bollywood actor Naseeruddin Shah attends a prayer meeting for late film director and screenwriter Shyam Benegal in Mumbai. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Exploring the Desert



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This Brazilian Velvet Ant is so dark that it’s ultrablack



THE FIRST thing to understand about velvet ants is that they are not ants. They’re wasps, some of which are wingless, and are named in part for their exteriors. About the size of a board-game die, a species of velvet ant in Brazil is known for its black and white markings that dazzle the eye. It “looks like magic,” said Vinicius Lopez, an entomologist at the Federal University of Triângulo Mineiro in Brazil who studies insect coloration. The effect makes them easy to lose sight of, he said with the help of a colleague who translated his remarks to English. It is perhaps why some refer to them as “sorcerer ants.” A team of scientists led by Lopez found that the black parts on female velvet ants were ultrablack — so matte that they absorbed nearly all visible light. The discovery,

published in the Beilstein Journal of Nanotechnology, makes this species, *Traumatotutilla bifurca*, the first known insect among bees, wasps and ants to display that shade. Ultrablack pigmentation is rare in the animal kingdom. It helps organisms that have it hide from predators, regulate body temperature and attract mates. The markings on female velvet ants also absorb nearly all ultraviolet light, which could be a defence mechanism against predators that can see those wavelengths. But it’s not clear that velvet ants actually need the camouflage. It’s also a mystery why only the females of this species of velvet ant are ultrablack. In the future, the researchers plan to investigate the environmental pressures that caused them to evolve that way. — The New York Times



Bosnia’s ‘Balkan Blues’ earns Unesco recognition

EVERY FRIDAY, folk musician Enes Salman performs the Sevdalinka, an ancient form of love song from Bosnia and Herzegovina that this month was included in Unesco’s National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Sevdalinka, often referred to as the Balkan Blues, is a melancholic urban love song dating back to the 16th century. It is a mix of South Slavic oral poetry and the music of the Ottoman Empire. Salman is one of a few musicians who are keeping the old tradition alive. “I have been playing and singing Sevdalinka since I was 14,” Salman said before a recent performance. Sevdalinka, often performed a capella or accompanied by traditional instruments like a lute, has been carried from generation to generation through performances at family gatherings. In recent years, novel interpretations of Sevdalinka by a few younger musicians have brought it to global audiences. One of them is Damir Imamovic, whose father and grandfather were famous Sevdalinka bards. Imamovic won awards in 2020/2021 for the European best album by world music magazines Songlines and Transglobal. Imamovic promotes Sevdalinka internationally through his SevdahLab project, which drummed up support for the song’s inclusion on the Unesco’s World Heritage list. “I realised how little the public knows about the Sevdalinka genre and wanted to reveal the story behind that music,” he said. Zanin Berbic, 28, an ethno-musicologist who plays saz, a long-necked lute used in Ottoman classical music, says that Sevdalinka tells the story of Bosnia’s history. “Most of my days I spend either singing or playing Sevdalinka songs or reading or talking about them,” said Berbic, who works as a custodian in the music department of Bosnia’s Regional Museum in Sarajevo.



“Sevdalinka is my life.” **REVITALISING INTEREST IN SEVDALINKA** Sevdalinka, the cherished traditional folk music of Bosnia and Herzegovina, captures the heart with its emotional depth, poetic lyrics and melodic beauty. This unique genre, rooted in a rich tapestry of Ottoman, Slavic and local influences, weaves tales of love, longing and nostalgia that resonate deeply with its listeners. While Sevdalinka remains appreciated by many, its popularity among the younger generation is becoming increasingly inconsistent. Some young people are embracing the genre, blending it with modern musical styles to create innovative sounds, yet others gravitate towards global music trends, threatening the tradition’s viability. Several factors contribute to this challenge. Cultural globalisation has exposed youth to a wide array

of musical genres, often shifting their preferences away from traditional forms. Additionally, urbanisation and modern lifestyles have diminished the venues — such as family gatherings and community events — where Sevdalinka is typically performed. Financial constraints and limited resources also pose significant obstacles to preservation efforts. Furthermore, as the younger generations focus more on contemporary issues and entertainment, traditional practices like Sevdalinka risk losing their relevance. In response to these challenges, initiatives such as cultural festivals, educational programs and collaborations with modern artists are being undertaken to revitalise interest in Sevdalinka. These efforts aim not only to preserve this musical heritage, but also to ensure that the beloved tradition continues to resonate with young Bosnians for generations to come. — Reuters

FEATURES

BY YERU EBUE

SET TO debut in 2025, “Arabia Untamed” is poised to transport audiences into the heart of the Arabian Peninsula’s unspoiled beauty. This groundbreaking project is not just a visual feast but a profound exploration of the region’s diverse ecosystems and the innovative conservation efforts underway to protect them.

With its mesmerising landscapes, the series promises to unveil the dramatic contrasts of Arabia — from the sweeping sands of the Empty Quarter to the rugged mountains and shimmering coastlines. But beyond its stunning imagery, “Arabia Untamed” is set to tell compelling stories of resilience, cultural heritage and the urgent need for environmental stewardship.

Under the expert direction of renowned film-maker Mike Slee and in collaboration with local communities and conservationists, this documentary series aims to spotlight the powerful narratives that intertwine nature and culture. The creative team is committed to showcasing authentic perspectives and the deep-rooted connections of the people to their land, making it a project grounded in respect and understanding.

As viewers gear up for this captivating journey into unexplored territories, they can expect to be inspired by the breathtaking visuals and the passionate individuals dedicated to preserving the ecosystem of this remarkable region.

A SHOWCASE OF INCREDIBLE BEAUTY

“Arabia Untamed” follows in the footsteps of the “Oman in Focus” series and aims to weave a rich tapestry of Oman’s cultural heritage and natural beauty. This follows the recent launch of the ‘Jewel of Arabia Expedition’ at the Royal Geographical Society in London, attended by His Royal Highness William, Prince of Wales, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

Mark Evans, the lead of the expedition, expressed his enthusiasm, stating, “The collaboration between ‘Jewel of Arabia’ and the Oman Infocus project aspires to immerse audiences in the heart of Arabia, revealing its pristine wilderness and the heroes dedicated to its conservation.”

“The incredible beauty of Arabia is matched only by the ambition to protect it,” said Julian Oliver, producer of “Arabia Untamed”. “We are not only showcasing the region’s vast wilderness, but also the remarkable individuals dedicated to its preservation. This production, with a strong focus on international distribution, will also highlight the work of talented film-makers across the region, bringing their vision to a global audience,” he added.

Slee, explaining the project’s origins, shared, “Maisa had just completed a blue-chip wildlife film titled ‘Wild Oman: Wonder of Arabia’ and was looking to create a desert wildlife project. So, we bonded over our mutual fascination for the incredible Empty Quarter — the largest sand desert on earth — covering much of Oman, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the UAE.”

The film series, produced by Anel Rademeyer (Wild Oman) and Julian Oliver FRSA, “is more than a documentary; it is a celebration of the wild and unexplored corners of the Arabian Peninsula,” as Slee described it. “As research continues to build our Arabian narratives by weaving together the exploits of early explorers with the life of local communities (now and then), we discover the many modern conservation and wildlife stories that are blossoming throughout Arabia,” he added.

“It began as one film starring Arabia’s Empty Quarter Desert. Now it’s three — including mountains and coastlands. This is how ‘Arabia Untamed’ the series was born!” he said. “We are thrilled to share these vital stories of ecological innovation and to showcase the raw, untouched beauty of this incredible region, my home, with the world. We understand how important it is to showcase these stories to the world,” commented Maisa al Hooti. The series is



ARABIA UNTAMED:
A VISUAL FEAST
DOCUMENTING RAW,
UNTOUCHED BEAUTY
OF NATURE



scheduled to debut in 2025, with additional details on its distribution and future expeditions to be announced soon.

FOSTERING PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR CONSERVATION INITIATIVES

The Middle East, a region renowned for its unique biodiversity and cultural heritage, is grappling with significant environmental challenges that threaten its wildlife and ecosystems. Experts warn that without immediate action, the ecological balance of this fragile region could be irreversibly compromised.

One of the primary issues is habitat loss, driven by rapid urbanisation and agricultural expansion. As populations grow and infrastructure projects increase, natural habitats are being cleared, displacing key wildlife species such as the Arabian oryx and Arabian leopard. Climate change is further exacerbating these challenges, with rising temperatures and altered precipitation patterns leading to more frequent droughts. This instability threatens both local communities and the diverse species that rely on stable environmental conditions.

Additionally, the overexploitation of resources, including overfishing and poaching, along with pollution from industrial activities, is placing immense pressure on wildlife populations. Invasive species are also disrupting local ecosystems, outcompeting native wildlife for resources and diminishing biodiversity. As awareness grows, conservationists and local communities are calling for collaborative efforts to protect the Middle East’s rich natural heritage, highlighting that the future of wildlife and ecosystems in the region hangs in the balance. Without concerted action, the ecological consequences could be severe, affecting both the environment and the livelihoods of those who call this region home.

Films like “Arabia Untamed” are vital in the fight for wildlife conservation, raising awareness of pressing environmental issues through compelling storytelling and stunning visuals. By educating audiences about challenges such as habitat loss and poaching, these documentaries inspire action and foster public support for conservation initiatives.