

5.5m acres of new arable land

Oman's pursuit of sustainable development and food security has become a critical part of its national agenda, in line with the broader goals of Oman Vision 2040, which emphasises economic diversification. As of 2023, the country's total agricultural holdings reached 355,000 acres, reflecting ongoing efforts to increase cultivated land. Even more promising is the potential for further expansion, with 5.5 million acres identified as arable land suitable for reclamation. **DETAILS ON P13**

SUNRISE - 06:07 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:52 AM

DHUHR - 11:56 PM

ASR - 03:14 PM

MAGHRIB - 05:40 PM

ISHA - 06:51 PM



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P13

\$890 MILLION
INVESTED IN OMAN'S
AGRICULTURE AND
FISHERIES SECTORS

P12

LEWANDOWSKI AND
TORRE AT THE DOUBLE
AS BARCELONA THRASH
SEVILLA 5-1

P20

CAN OMAN COMPETE
AS A WEDDING
DESTINATION?
EXPERTS SAY YES!

MUSCAT

OMANI EXPERT
WINS ARAB AWARD

Dr Thuraya bint Said al Saririyah has received the Arab Women's Excellence Award (4th Edition) in appreciation for her outstanding contributions in the field of environmental action. As an ecology activist, Dr Thuraya secured the award due to her consistent efforts to protect the environment and promote sustainability. Currently acting as Assistant Director-General for Nature Conservation at the Environment Authority (EA), Dr Thuraya represents the Sultanate of Oman at many meetings and councils, including Unesco's International Coordinating Council for Man and Biosphere Reserves (MAB-ICC).

DETAILS ON P3

NIZWA

RO 7 MILLION
CONTRACTS SIGNED

Investment contracts worth more than RO 7 million were signed with several companies in the wilayats of Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. The contracts are expected to generate an investment return of more than RO 2.7 million. The ceremony took place under the auspices of Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology. The signing of the contracts aimed to boost economic growth and enhance commercial services in the wilayats of Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. **SEE P13**

NEW DELHI

INDIA, CHINA AGREE
ON BORDER PATROLS



India said that it had struck an agreement with its neighbour China for military patrols in highly contested border zones, aiming to resolve issues that flared when their armies clashed in 2020. The announcement comes a day before Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to attend a BRICS summit in Russia, which Chinese President Xi Jinping is also due to attend. After the 2020 border skirmish, which killed at least 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers, both sides pulled back tens of thousands of troops and agreed not to send patrols into a narrow dividing strip, known as the Line of Actual Control.

KAZAN

PUTIN SET TO MEET
UN CHIEF IN RUSSIA

Russia's President Vladimir Putin will meet UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Thursday during his first trip to the country since April 2022, the Kremlin announced. The meeting will take place on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in the central Russian city of Kazan, a forum Moscow hopes to use to show the West that attempts to isolate Russia over the Ukraine offensive have failed. Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov told reporters on Monday that Putin would hold bilateral talks with Guterres on October 24, without providing details of what the pair would discuss.

OMAN-PAKISTAN DRILL 'MOUNTAIN LYNX 1'



The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) and units from the army of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on Monday implemented the practical demonstration of the Omani-Pakistani joint drill 'Mountain Lynx 1'. The event was held under the auspices of Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the RAO. The stages of the demonstration reflected the participating units' ability to operate in full harmony and implement the designated plans and training objectives.

UN ocean target to
be missed by eight
decades: Experts

LONDON: The UN nature target to protect and restore 30 per cent of nature by 2030 will not be achieved in ocean environments until 2107, an analysis by Greenpeace has found. As the UN Biodiversity COP16 in Cali, Colombia, opened on October 21, the international campaign group released a report warning of the slow rate of progress towards the goal.

The target was agreed at the last biodiversity COP in Montreal in 2022, where nations agreed to protect nature across land and seas. The Global Ocean Treaty was then agreed in 2023 to enable nations to take action that works towards meeting commitments to protect marine environments within the wider nature target. The Greenpeace paper outlined

the current efforts and set out the key obstacles to reaching the goals. It found that in the 32 years since the Rio Earth Summit, where the UN Convention for Biological Diversity was established, less than 3 per cent of the world's ocean has been fully protected from human activities.

This includes less than 1 per cent of the high seas—the vast areas of the ocean beyond national jurisdiction. It comes as Greenpeace UK writes to British ministers urging the government to take a leading role at the Cali biodiversity talks by pushing for ambitious action to put targets back on track.

In the UK, the report said only two of the 386 marine protected areas (MPAs) are fully protected from all fishing activities. — **dpa**



People look out to the Atlantic Ocean from Sleat Head in Ventry, Ireland. — **Reuters file photo**

Rains expected in
Dhofar, Al Wusta

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The latest indicators suggest that there will be an impact on the weather in the Sultanate of Oman from Monday to Thursday. On Monday afternoon, rains were reported from the wilayats of Madha and Suhar. The areas expected to be affected are Dhofar and Al Wusta governorates and Al Hajar Mountains.

Weather maps and numerical forecasts indicated that clouds are likely to gradually form from Monday evening over parts of Al Wusta and Dhofar governorates, leading to scattered rain.

Chances of clouds forming and scattered rain, possibly accompanied by thunder, will persist from Tuesday to Thursday. Additionally, there will be activity

of cumulus clouds and scattered rain, sometimes with thunder, over Al Hajar Mountains.

Specialists at the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre are monitoring the weather conditions and advising citizens and residents to stay updated on the weather.

On Tuesday, scattered rain, sometimes with thunderstorms, is expected, and the rainfall will be in the range of 10-20 mm in Dhofar Governorate on the mountains and coasts, as well as in central coasts and Al Hajar Mountains. On Wednesday, rainfall of 10-25 mm is expected over Al Hajar Mountains and 10-30 mm over Dhofar Governorate's mountains and coasts, along with scattered rain on the central coasts, sometimes with thunder and an amount of 10-30 mm of rainfall.

Blinken to make push to
defuse Mideast conflicts

ARAB LEAGUE HEAD EYES LEBANON CEASEFIRE

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will make another push for a ceasefire when he heads to the Middle East on Monday, the State Department said, seeking to kick-start negotiations to end the Gaza war and also defuse the spillover conflict in Lebanon. Blinken's trip to the region, his 11th since the October 7, 2023, attack on Israel by the Palestinian group Hamas that triggered the Gaza war, comes as Israel intensifies its military campaign in Gaza and in Lebanon.

Israel has raised the stakes by assassinating the leaders of Hezbollah in Lebanon, including its veteran Secretary-General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, and of Hamas in Gaza while showing no sign of reining in its ground and aerial offensives. Blinken will discuss with regional leaders the importance of ending the war in Gaza, ways to chart a post-conflict plan for the Palestinian enclave, and how to reach a diplomatic solution to the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, the State Department said in a statement.

US envoy Amos Hochstein held talks with Lebanese officials in Beirut on Monday on conditions for a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah after Israel struck branches across Lebanon of a financial



A Palestinian drinks water from a plastic bag in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Monday. — **AFP**

institution linked to the group. He said that it was "not enough" for both sides to commit to UN resolution 1701, which ended the last round of conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006 and which calls for southern Lebanon to be free of any troops or weapons other than those of the Lebanese state.

DANGEROUS

The Secretary-General of the Arab League, Ahmed AbulGheit, hopes for an "immediate" ceasefire in Lebanon which will end the ordeal of the people. "We will not wait too long to achieve the desired breakthrough because the situation is dangerous," Abul Gheit told reporters after meeting Lebanese

House Speaker Nabih Berri. The Arab League official also criticised the failure of the UN Security Council to take action against Israel's attack on UN peacekeepers and posts in southern Lebanon. He called for the immediate implementation of UN resolution 1701. The resolution prohibits the presence of Hezbollah in the border area with Israel and gives sole authority to the Lebanese army and United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) south of the Litani River.

The UN mission monitors the border area between Lebanon and Israel. More than 10,000 UN soldiers from more than 50 countries are involved.

— **Agencies**

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Oman participates in ICCA congress in UAE

ABU DHABI: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, is currently taking part in the 63rd International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), being held in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Oman's delegation is headed by Azzan bin Qassim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

The conference provides a platform that brings together pioneers, innovators and specialists in the tourism sector with the aim of exchanging expertise and successful experiences on ways to employ modern technologies and adopt best practices of sustainability and inclusion, in addition to expanding networks of cooperation and professional relationships at the local, regional and international levels.

Oman's participation in this event aims at highlighting its potential and infrastructure in conference tourism and business tourism in general. It also aims at enhancing the role of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in supporting the economy and devising strategies aimed at developing the national economy and attracting visitors to enhance the local tourism sector and attract investors to establish prominent economic investment projects that promote the tourism sector in various fields.

— ONA

Plans on to boost safety measures on Al Jabal Street

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MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY will undertake a study to implement and improve safety measures on Al Jabal Street (Amerat-Bausher Mountain Road) by appointing a consultancy.

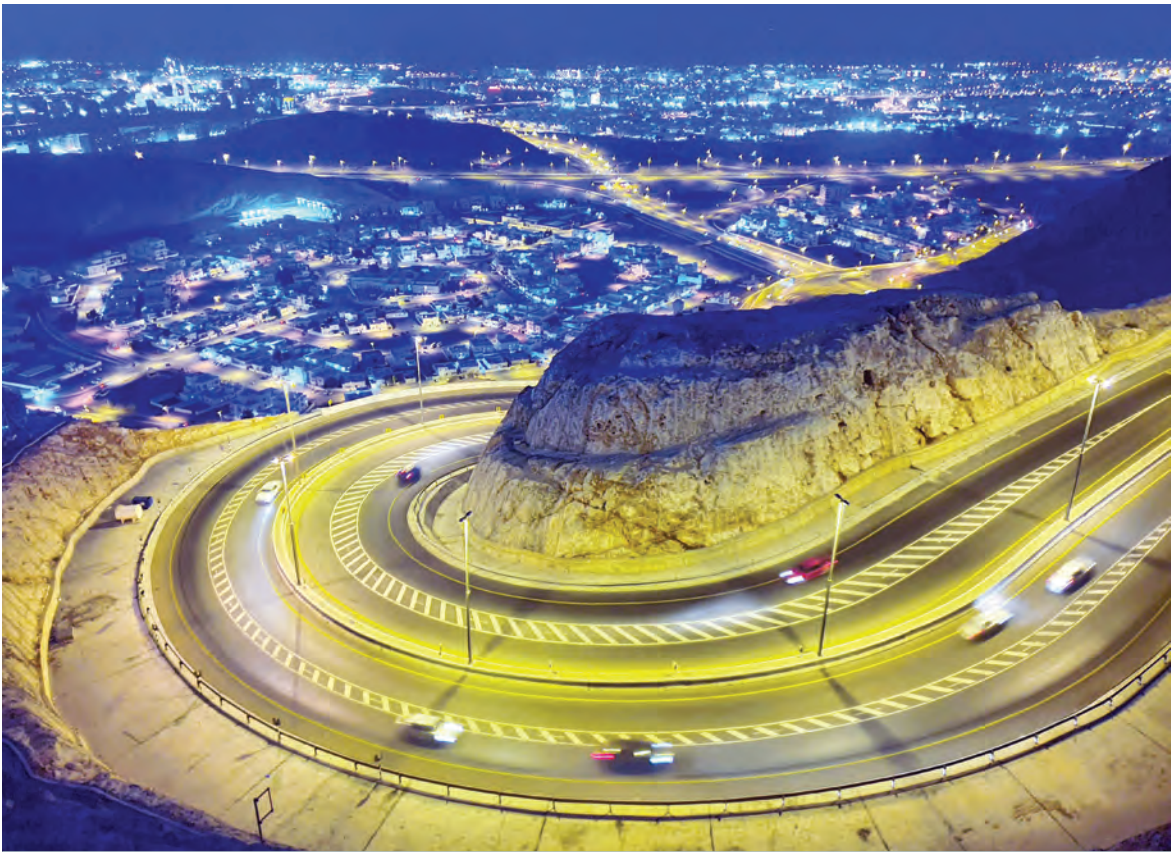
“The consultancy will be involved in an in-depth safety study and implementation of advanced traffic safety measures, improving road geometry and road surface drainage and effective traffic control devices,” the Municipality said in a tender statement.

The last date to receive the tender document is November 7 and the last date for submission is November 26. It may be noted that the project has often been described as one of the milestones since the Blessed Renaissance.

However, the road has been challenging for motorists as it is very steep, especially on the Bausher side.

One of the most common suggestions put forward by motorists and local citizens includes constructing a tunnel if it is feasible and possible, and constant police patrol on the section.

The Greater Muscat Structural Plan has provisions to link the Wilayat of Al Amerat, which is separated from the rest of the city by mountains, through a road tunnel in addition to the existing mountain road.



The consultancy will be involved in an in-depth safety study and implementation of advanced traffic safety measures

Ahmed al Dughaisi of the Plans to implement advanced safety measures on Amerat-Bausher Road said: “This tunnel will change the face of Al Amerat. This will also help link the suburb with Ruwi through a Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS). The road tunnel project will raise the value of land in Al Amerat with the availability of new prospects for the business and tourism sectors.”

OAB Celebrates Omani Women’s Day, Launches Program to Empower Female Leaders

Muscat: Under the patronage of Her Highness Sayyida Meyyan bint Shihab Al Said, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) organized a joyful celebration for Omani Women's Day at the St. Regis Hotel, under the theme “Empowering Omani Women: Leadership, Faith, and Innovation.” The event was attended by a large gathering of successful women, including the bank's executive leaders, employees, clients, and female entrepreneurs.

The event included various activities, such as visual presentations highlighting the royal attention given to empowering Omani women and shedding light on their honorable roles and contributions in all fields. Moreover, the “Women's Leadership Development Program” was launched as a new initiative by OAB to nurture national female leaders and enhance women's participation in the sustainable growth of the Sultanate of Oman, in line with the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040.

The program is being implemented in collaboration with Springboard and Aspire Institute, two prestigious international organizations in the field of training and development, adhering to the highest global standards. The program aims to empower women in senior leadership positions and strengthen their skills in strategic planning, decision-making, and achieving both personal and professional success.

A panel discussion was held on the topic of women's empowerment and the inspiring success stories they have achieved in various fields. The discussion featured the participation of Lamya Al-Haj, Associate Professor at Sultan Qaboos University; Samra Al-Harthy, Director of Economic and Investment Research at the Oman Investment Authority; and Abeer Sultan, Executive Director, the Office of the Managing Director.

Sulaiman Al-Harthy, Chief Executive Officer, said: “The Sultanate of Oman's celebration of Omani Women's Day is a recognition of their contributions and inspiring creativity in all fields. We are all proud of the positive role Omani women play in raising generations with genuine Omani values and their significant contribution to the comprehensive development of this beloved nation. They have left clear marks in all areas and have demonstrated excellence in the roles and positions they have been entrusted with in both the public and private sectors since the early days of the Blessed Renaissance and up to the present day.”

He added: “OAB has remained committed to supporting the pioneering role of women in the banking and financial sectors by investing in training and developing the skills of its promising talents. The bank's creative work environment has provided a favorable climate for success, paving the way for women to take on leadership positions at various levels, including the Board of Directors, senior and middle management, and across different departments. The bank prioritizes enhancing women's economic and social participation in all fields, in line with the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040. It places special emphasis on encouraging women's involvement in initiatives and programs aimed at preparing future leaders and supporting entrepreneurs.”

During the event, Zahra Abdulamir, Acting Chief Risk Officer at OAB, delivered a speech in which she said: “As we celebrate Omani Women's Day, we take pride in the programs launched by OAB to enhance women's position in the labor market. These programs have led to successful projects that contribute to economic growth, and many talented women are now playing a tangible role in the development of various Omani institutions and companies. One of our most notable initiatives is the ‘Arab Pioneers Leadership Development Program.’ Continuing with these efforts, the bank has launched the ‘Women's Leadership Development Program,’ aimed at empowering women in leadership roles and enhancing their skills to achieve personal and professional success.”

She also expressed joy over the wide participation of women within the bank's continuously expanding customer base and their benefit from the advanced banking services provided by the bank to enrich the customer experience, as well as the unique advantages and offers designed specifically for OAB credit cardholders.

She further highlighted the large number of female entrepreneurs who are joining and benefiting from OAB's innovative programs, initiatives, and services tailored to support small and medium enterprises (SMEs), such as the “Tumouhi” program for comprehensive financial services for entrepreneurs and the SMEs development training program. She also cited the SMEs Competition held by the bank, which aims to spotlight the experiences of female entrepreneurs and support their projects to achieve further growth and expansion.

The event included the distribution of OAB awards to the female entrepreneurs who participated in the women's SMEs competition organized by the bank. A commemorative gift was also presented by OAB to Her Highness Sayyida Meyyan bint Shihab Al Said, the patron of the celebration. The attendees enjoyed the exciting entertainment segments presented during the event, accompanied by music.

OAB continues to strengthen its leading position in the Omani banking market through a comprehensive transformation towards digital and modern services that meet the aspirations of all customer segments and enrich their banking experience. The bank also places great importance on nurturing the promising talents of women, developing their capabilities, and enhancing their participation in leading our beloved nation toward a promising future.





SHORT TAKES



SAYYID BADR HOLDS TALKS WITH POLISH OFFICIAL

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received in his office Andrzej Szejna, Secretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland. The meeting comes within the framework of the guest’s visit to the Sultanate of Oman to conduct political talks.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral cooperation and exchanged views on several regional and international matters of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, and a number of officials from both sides. — **ONA**



Lankan ambassador bids farewell

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Monday received in his office Ahamed Lebbe Sabarullah Khan, Ambassador of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty. Sayyid Badr expressed his appreciation for the efforts exerted by the Ambassador in boosting relations, wishing him success. — **ONA**



Accreditation authority board meets

MUSCAT: The Board of Directors of ‘Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Educational Quality Assurance’ on Monday held its fourth meeting of the year (2024) during which it discussed the Authority’s project to align the “Programme Accreditation Guide” with the “Institutional Accreditation Guide”. The meeting was chaired by Dr Rahma Ibrahim al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. — **ONA**

Dialogue session explores impact of e-games on children

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), through its Department of Social Studies, organised a dialogue session on ‘Electronic Games in the Life of the Child’, under the auspices of Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development. The session aimed to explore the reasons behind children’s use of electronic gaming applications and to analyse their psychological, educational, social, religious, and behavioural impacts. It also sought to develop a comprehensive vision for mitigating the effects of these applications on children. The event featured three presentations: ‘Religious Responsibility for Dealing with the Effects of Electronic Gaming Applications on Children’ by Shaikh Ibrahim al



The Al Nokheda programme aims to empower both educators and students.

Omani wins award in environmental activism

MUSCAT: Dr Thuraya bint Said al Saririyah has received the Arab Women Excellence Award in its fourth session, in appreciation of her distinguished contributions in the field of environmental activity at the level of Arab countries, and her continuous efforts to protect the environment and promote sustainability.

Dr Thuraya, who is currently the Assistant Director General for Nature Conservation at the Environment Authority, has represented the Sultanate of Oman in many meetings and councils, including the International Coordinating Council for Man and



Dr Thuraya bint Said al Saririyah

Biosphere Reserves of Unesco, a natural expert among the Sultanate of Oman’s experts in the Unesco

World Heritage Committee, and the Chair of the Specialised Group of Plant Experts for the Arabian

Peninsula in Western Asia of the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

She chaired several national teams, most notably the technical team for preparing the development of the environmental strategy in the Sultanate of Oman, the head of the technical team for the national initiative to plant 10 million trees, and the head of the supervision and governance team for participation in the 29th Climate Summit.

She also contributed to the completion of a number of projects in declaring nature reserves and preparing national reports related to nature conservation. — **ONA**

Workshop focuses on steps to fight human trafficking

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THE VARIOUS strategic initiatives taken by the Sultanate of Oman are the focus of the high-level workshop organised by the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking (NCCHT) in cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The workshop began at the Diplomatic Club on Sunday.

The five-day training workshop, titled ‘Training of Trainers on Combating Human Trafficking,’ aims to prepare a group of specialised trainers in combating the crime of human trafficking or TIP (Trafficking in Persons).

It involves the participation of employees from various government institutions and is part of the annual plan of the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking.

“Through this international workshop, we aim to enhance the capabilities of national cadres in this field and to uphold the Sultanate of Oman’s commitment to international standards for the protection and promotion of human rights,” a high-ranking official from the NCCHT stated.

“Human trafficking is a form of modern slavery. It is a crime and a violation of human rights. Human trafficking, or TIP, involves the movement or recruitment of men, women, and children through deception or coercion for the purpose of exploitation,” she added.

According to reports released by the NCCHT, it is estimated that up to 800,000 men, women, and children are trafficked across international borders each year. Globally, 71 per cent of enslaved people



The five-day training workshop aims to prepare a group of specialised trainers in combating the crime of human trafficking.

are women and girls.

It is the third most profitable criminal activity, after drug and arms trafficking. Victims are often deceived with promises of jobs, education, and marriage, with young women and children being the primary targets of traffickers.

In Oman, the issue is relatively less prevalent compared to many other countries, thanks to the National Committee for Combating Human Trafficking.

The committee develops and implements National Action Plans to control and prevent trafficking, organises public awareness programmes, provides training for law enforcement personnel, and contributes to the establishment of care

and rehabilitation programmes.

In the upcoming days of the workshop, the various protection methods provided by the NCCHT will be assessed, including Dar al Wefaq, which means the Protection House (Dar Al Wefaq).

The Dar al Wefaq centre has been established to offer immediate protection to victims of human trafficking, assess their psychological, social, and health status, provide appropriate treatment and rehabilitation, and enhance communication and coordination among professionals to improve the quality and efficiency of services provided.

The workshop will continue until Thursday, October 24.

Sawafi, Secretary of Fatwa at the Office of the Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman.

‘The Psychological Reality of Children Using Electronic Gaming Applications’ by Dr Hoda Anwar Khamis, a family and community medicine consultant specialising in mental health.

‘The Roles of Educational Institutions in Addressing the Reality of Children’s Use of Electronic Gaming Applications’ by Nila bint Mohammed al Balushiyah, an educational consultant and certified human development trainer.

The session concluded with a panel discussion moderated by Noura bint Hamad al Subhiyah, Director of the Department of Social Studies at the Ministry of

Social Development.

The panel included contributions from Shaikh Ibrahim al Sawafi, Dr Khawla al Wahaibi (Family Consultant at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital), Dr Hoda Anwar Khamis, Nadia bint Rashid al Maktoumiah, and Nila bint Mohammed al Balushiyah.

The session was attended by specialists from various sectors, including the Royal Oman Police, and the Ministries of : Social Development, Education, Health, Awqaf and Religious Affairs, Transport, Communications and Information Technology. It also included civil society representatives, private sector members, government school students, and parents. — **ONA**

OMAN

Airbus and helicopters roadshow enhances aviation safety practices

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 21

Al Sharqiya Aviation (ASA), the private air transport arm of the Mohammed Al Barwani Group of companies, recently hosted the first Airbus Helicopters Safety roadshow in Oman.

The event, which aimed to enhance aviation safety practices, took place with representatives from the Oman Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and the Oman Transport Safety Bureau (OTSB).

Eng Ahlam al Jahdhami, CEO of ASA, said: “This safety

roadshow has been conducted in Saudi Arabia with resounding success, and this marks its first presentation in Oman.

We are thrilled to host it as part of our commitment to fostering collaboration among helicopter operators and working closely with the government. I would like to thank our guests for attending this roadshow.”

Tamer Gendy, COO of ASA, said: “We believe that this event contributes to aviation safety and operational excellence.

It is critical that we adhere to the highest standards of safety



The event took place with representatives from CAA and OTSB

in the industry and build upon them, ensuring the safety of crew and passengers alike.”

This initiative aligns with ASA’s ongoing efforts to promote a culture of safety within the aviation sector in the Sultanate of Oman and further strengthens its role as a leader in helicopter operations in the Middle East.

For its part, a CAA official said: “Since our establishment, the CAA has worked through its regulatory efforts to maximise safety in the air. We are pleased with this initiative from ASA and look forward to seeing its impact within the industry.”



New batch joins ROP

The Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences received a new batch of citizens with vocational specialisations on Sunday. The new batch will receive military and scientific training at the Institute of Police Recruits.



CHARM OF OLD NEIGHBOURHOODS

The village of Sayja in the Wilayat of Samayil, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate is distinguished by its old neighbourhoods, each of which had three gateways locally known as Sabahat, which used to open at dawn and close after Maghrib prayer. — ONA

RAM’s programme aims to boost govt leadership

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, OCT 21

THE ‘FUTURE of Work in Government in the GCC Countries’ programme, launched by the Royal Academy of Management (RAM), aims to boost the capabilities of government leaders across the GCC region. This initiative seeks to enhance collaboration to achieve shared strategic goals, serving as a key step towards administrative development in line with Gulf visions for sustainability and human resource growth.

Dr Ali bin Qassim al Lawati, President of the Royal Academy of Management, highlighted that the programme is a result of cooperation with the General Secretariat of the Cooperation Council and a strategic partnership with Said Business School at Oxford University.

It emerged from the 21st meeting of Directors General of Public Administration Institutes in the GCC and a thorough analysis of the needs of middle-level leaders.

The programme aims to unify the efforts of GCC countries to develop middle management, which is crucial for implementing strategic visions. Dr Al Lawati emphasised that this initiative reflects the Gulf countries’ commitment to collaborative efforts, skill-sharing, and achieving both economic and administrative objectives.

The programme is delivered through two learning tracks: distance learning and in-person sessions, which include workshops, field visits, and discussions with experts and government leaders. These sessions are conducted in Arabic and English over a 15-week period, covering 10 educational units.

The content is designed to address the specific needs of middle management and to help them navigate institutional challenges for effective leadership development.

The programme focuses on empowering leaders to address challenges in the



The programme aims to unify the efforts of GCC countries to develop middle management

evolving work environment, translating strategies into actionable plans, and strengthening the role of middle management as a bridge between teams.

It encourages innovation and adaptation to the rapidly changing workplace by developing national strategies and measurement tools for sustainable development. Participants also benefit from knowledge-sharing and building connections with leaders from across the Gulf.

Participants shared their positive experiences.

Mishaal al Sabousi from the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs commended Oman for its dedication to fostering cooperation among GCC countries.

Youssef bin Saleh al Butahi from Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Haj and Umrah highlighted the programme’s role in supporting the exchange of expertise across government sectors. Latifa al Azran from Bahrain’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs

appreciated the interactive workshops and hands-on learning experiences that enhanced their skills in negotiation and management in the digital age.

The programme targets middle management employees from government institutions across the six GCC countries, involving 65 participants.

This group plays a crucial role in aligning organisational activities with national strategies by supervising plans, tracking progress, addressing challenges and reporting outcomes to senior management.

This initiative is implemented by the Royal Academy of Management (RAM) in collaboration with the GCC General Secretariat and Said Business School at Oxford University.

It reflects a commitment to investing in Gulf leadership and aligns with the ambitions of Gulf nations to enhance government performance and competitiveness on both regional and global scales.

Budding artist secures top honours at Citizenship Forum

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
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In a remarkable achievement, Najla al Hattali, a final-year student of the Mass Communication Department at UTAS Salalah, has brought pride to her university and community by winning top honours at the Digital Citizenship Forum.

The event, held at UTAS Al Musannah on Monday, witnessed participation from various university branches and educational institutions across the Sultanate of Oman, with nearly 70 students showcasing their talents.



Artist Najla al Hattali explaining her artwork.

Najla secured the first prize in the category of traditional art and painting, impressing the judges with her creativity and dedication. Her painting also earned her third place among all the exhibits at the forum, which included activities such as debates, poster presentations and exhibitions of traditional handicrafts and software development.

The forum focused on the theme of integrating digital citizenship into educational curricula and addressing future challenges.

Najla, an avid artist since her school days, often draws inspiration from nature and human figures for her artwork.

Speaking about her achievement, she expressed her gratitude, saying, “This is for my university, and I am happy for this opportunity that came my way. I am thankful for the support I received from all quarters.”

She expressed happiness over the timing of the event, which coincided with Omani Women’s Day just two days later. “The award makes me think of bigger achievements, as I need to work harder to set and achieve my goals,” she said.

Dr Said bin Hamed al Rubaii, Vice-Chancellor of UTAS, attended the forum and appreciated the students’ work.

SEZAD, Aqaba deal to boost economic zones

THE PUBLIC Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (SEZAD) in Oman and the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority in Jordan signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) aimed at fostering economic and investment development in both countries' special economic zones.

The MoU was signed in the Wilayat of Al Duqm, with Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Vice-Chairman of SEZAD, representing Oman, and Naif Hamidi al Fayeze, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners for Aqaba Special Economic Zone, representing Jordan.

This agreement focuses on collaboration in areas of mutual economic interest, including attracting investments, sharing expertise in laws and regulations, and developing management systems for special economic zones. The two authorities will explore the potential for joint projects and seek to create an institutional framework that enhances the competitiveness of both zones on a global scale.

Key areas of cooperation include urban planning, facility management, and investment environments, with a particular



emphasis on smart city applications. Both parties will also exchange experiences related to managing and developing their respective zones, focusing on best practices in infrastructure, transportation, and logistics. The MoU also encourages the two countries to collaborate on promotional activities, regional and international conferences, and training programmes for employees working in special economic zones. Both parties will exchange research and case studies on zone management, with the goal of improving operational efficiency and investment attraction.

In the logistics sector, the agreement highlights the importance of opening new export channels and enhancing

the flow of goods between Oman and Jordan. By coordinating their transport facilities, the two zones aim to reduce export costs and strengthen their presence in regional and international markets.

On the sidelines of the MoU signing, Naif Hamidi al Fayeze and his delegation toured key projects in Duqm, including Duqm Port, the Dry Dock, and the Karwa Car Factory, which are considered vital to Oman's economic diversification efforts.

This MoU is expected to pave the way for increased investment and collaboration between the two countries, furthering economic growth in both regions and enhancing the role of their special economic zones in global trade and investment networks. — ONA



The stages of the demo reflected the participating units' ability to operate in full harmony. — ONA

RAO HOSTS PRACTICAL DEMO OF OMAN-PAKISTAN DRILL

AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR: The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) and units from the army of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan today implemented the practical demonstration of the Omani-Pakistani joint drill 'Mountain Lynx 1'.

The event was held under the auspices of Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of RAO.

The stages of the demo reflected the participating units' ability to operate in full harmony and implement the drawn-up plans and training objectives. Military exercises form part of Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) annual training plans and programmes. The practical demonstration was attended by several senior officers of SAF and the army of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. It was also attended by the military attaché of Pakistan's embassy in Muscat and several RAO personnel. — ONA

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OMAN'S FUTURE

FIXED AND ATTRACTIVE
RETURN

Auction of RO 75 Million (with Greenshoe Option) 5 Years at 4.75% p.a.

Government Development Bonds

On behalf of the Government of Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank of Oman announces the 72nd issue of Government Development Bonds (GDBs) to be auctioned. The 72nd issue of GDBs will be issued on Tuesday, 5th of November 2024, carrying a coupon rate of 4.75% per annum for a maturity period of 5 years (maturing on 5th of November 2029). These Bonds will be auctioned and priced on Sunday, 3rd of November 2024. Investors may apply for these Bonds through licensed commercial banks by completing the application form.

Security of Capital

The GDBs are direct and unconditional obligations of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman.

Fixed Returns

Interest shall accrue from the date of issue, and will be paid semi-annually on the 5th of May and 5th of November of every year until maturity. The first payment will be made on 5th May 2025. Interest payments will cease once the Bond matures.

Liquidity

The bonds will be listed and can be traded before maturity in the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) at the prevailing market price.

Collateral Advantage

The Bonds can be used as a collateral security to obtain loans from any licensed commercial bank.

Who Can Invest?

The 72nd issue of GDBs is offered to all categories of investors, residents and non-residents.

How to buy the bonds?

Investors may obtain bonds through any licensed commercial bank operating in the Sultanate of Oman, upon the submission of an eligible application form. Investors must provide their MCD Investor Code in the application form.

Bank Account Details

The investor must provide the same Bank Account details registered with Muscat Clearing and Depository Co. S.A.O.C. (MCD).

MCD Investor Code

Anyone without an MCD Investor Code can obtain it from MCD's website (www.mcd.gov.om) or via the Oman Stocks app at least one day before applying through the commercial bank.

For any enquiries:

Tel: +968 24822222

E-mail: mcd.support@mcd.om

TRA amends postal services laws

MUSCAT: The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has issued a decision to amend the executive regulation of the Law Regulating Postal Services.

The step fits with the rapid developments taking place in the postal services sector, which witnessed major updates, including the introduction of e-commerce technologies aimed at upgrading the quality of services provided to beneficiaries.

The draft regulation includes a new classification of licences and the re-definition of each category, depending on the geographical scope of the services offered to clients.

It also reschedules fees for each category of the licence, including renewal fees.

The draft regulation sets the terms, conditions and obligations of parties interested in obtaining necessary licences for providing postal services.

The regulation dedicates a special chapter to the quality of postal services. — ONA

MOORE STEPHENS LLC

NOTICE ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF LIQUIDATION OF
XYLEM WATER SOLUTIONS MUSCAT LLC
(AS APPEARED IN OFFICIAL GAZETTE NO 1567)

Moore Stephens LLC, announces the liquidation process of Xylem Water Solutions Muscat LLC, bearing commercial registration number 1177220, in accordance with the decision taken by the Company's Shareholders on 1 October 2024. The liquidator alone have the right to represent the Company under liquidation before third parties, and all parties are to confirm with the liquidator for all matters concerning the company's business at the following address:
**Office No. 41, 4th Floor, Building No. 1022, Way No. 1013;
Al Walaj Street, Al Qurum
P O Box 933, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24061000, Fax: 24061099, Email: liquidation@moore-oman.com**
By this announcement, the liquidator calls the company's creditors to submit their claims against the company, together with the supporting documents, to the above address within 180 days from the date of publishing this announcement for the first time, and any debtors should settle the company's rights with the liquidator on the address above.
**Moore Stephens LLC
Official Liquidators of XYLEM WATER SOLUTIONS MUSCAT LLC
(Under voluntary liquidation)**

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Economy

TENDER NOTICE

The Ministry of Economy
Announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fees in Omani Riyals	Last Date For Tender Submission
2024/16	Provide Project manager	LO: 25 SME: 10 RE: 25	10/11/2024

First

All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender tender from the following website: www.etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
The bidders must submit their offers electronically via the website.

Second

Tenders that does not meet the above conditions shall not be considered. The ministry shall have the right to reject any tender, and shall not be obliged to award the tender for the lowest bid without giving reasons.

For inquiries regarding tenders, please contact through the website of the electronic tendering system; <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

For inquiries regarding the technical support of the electronic tendering system, please contact via e-mail and phone :

etenderhd@mtc.gov.om

+ 96824402200

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Vietnam's Luong Cuong takes his oath as Vietnam's President at the National Assembly, in Hanoi.

VIETNAM NAMES CUONG AS NEW PRESIDENT

HANOI: Vietnam's rubber-stamp parliament unanimously approved army general Luong Cuong as the country's new president on Monday, the fourth person in the job in less than two years. The president in Vietnam occupies a largely ceremonial role, which includes meeting foreign counterparts. All 440 National Assembly deputies at Monday's session voted to pass the nomination, according to state television.

Cuong takes over as president from To Lam, who has unusually held the role alongside his position as general secretary during recent upheaval linked to a major anti-corruption campaign. As the Communist party's general secretary, Lam is the most powerful figure in Vietnam's leadership structure. For decades in Vietnam, all changes were carefully orchestrated with an emphasis on stability.

But a major anti-graft purge since 2021 swept up several high-level figures. Ex-President To Lam was named general secretary of the Communist Party in August following the death of his predecessor, Nguyen Phu Trong. — AFP



A unit of the Mozambican anti-riot police fires tear gas at protesters, in Maputo.

MOZAMBIQUE POLICE DISPERSE VOTE PROTEST

MAPUTO: Police in Mozambique fired tear gas on Monday to disperse a small crowd in Maputo where shops were closed ahead of a planned protest against alleged electoral fraud. Several dozen people, including journalists, scattered as heavily armed police walked down a main street, according to videos posted on social media and reporters at the scene. Opposition leader Venancio Mondlane, who ran for president in October 9 elections, called the protest to contest early results showing the ruling Frelimo party ahead. Tensions rose after two Mondlane associates were shot dead in Maputo on Saturday. Lawyer Elvino Dias and Paulo Guambe, a candidate from the small Podemos party which backs Mondlane, were in a car that was surrounded by other vehicles and then they were shot dead, witnesses said. The head of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, said he had "deep concern" over "reported cases of post-election violence and in particular the recent killings." — AFP

SEOUL DEMANDS 'IMMEDIATE WITHDRAWAL' OF NORTH'S TROOPS

SEOUL: South Korea summoned the Russian ambassador on Monday to criticise Pyongyang's decision to send thousands of soldiers to support Moscow's war in Ukraine, the foreign ministry said, calling for their immediate withdrawal. About 1,500 North Korean special forces soldiers are already in Russia acclimatising and likely to head to the front lines after, Seoul's spy agency said, with additional troops set to depart soon, Pyongyang's first such deployment

overseas. South Korea has long claimed the nuclear-armed North is supplying Russia with weapons for use in Ukraine, and Seoul expressed alarm over the troop deployment, which comes after Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a military deal in June.

Seoul expressed its "grave concerns regarding North Korea's recent dispatch of troops to Russia and strongly urged the immediate withdrawal of North Korean forces",

vice foreign minister Kim Hong-kyun told Russian ambassador Georgiy Zinoviev.

Seoul's spy agency released detailed satellite images showing the first batch of 1,500 North Korean special forces from the elite "Storm Corps" had arrived in Vladivostok on Russian military vessels.

Any military cooperation between the two countries violates multiple Security Council resolutions, Kim said. — AFP



An excavator clears the rubble at the site of an overnight Israeli airstrike, in Beirut southern suburbs. — AFP

UN SAYS ISRAEL 'DEMOLISHED' WATCHTOWER

BEIRUT: UN peacekeepers in Lebanon said the Israeli army "deliberately" damaged one of their positions in southern Lebanon, in the latest incident reported by the force that remains deployed in all positions. An Israeli "army bulldozer deliberately demolished an observation tower and perimeter fence of a UN position in" southern Lebanon, UNIFIL said in a statement, adding that its forces remain in all positions "despite the pressure being exerted".

Germany on Monday demanded Israel "clarify every incident" involving the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL), including the reported

destruction of a UNIFIL observation tower and fence. Israel launched ground and air attacks on Lebanon in September, saying it wanted to crush Hezbollah. Berlin voiced "great concern" about the latest in a series of incidents reported by the Blue Helmet force, which have sparked international condemnation. The German government expects "the Israeli side to clarify every incident" and to release "the results of the investigations into this specific incident", said foreign ministry spokeswoman Kathrin Deschauer. UNIFIL has accused Israel of attacking their members multiple times in recent weeks. — AFP

Blinken back to Mideast to push for Gaza truce

US SECRETARY of State Antony Blinken headed back to the Middle East on a new push for an elusive Gaza ceasefire two weeks before US elections, seeing a new opportunity from Israel's killing of Hamas's leader. It will be the 11th trip to the Middle East by the top US diplomats since war broke out a year ago, with Blinken on his last visit to Israel in August warning it may have been the "last chance" for a US-led ceasefire plan. That push did not succeed, and the conflict has escalated and expanded since then, with Israel pounding targets in Lebanon and warning of a new strike directly on Iran.

Israel's retaliatory campaign in Gaza has killed 42,603 people, also mostly civilians, according to data from the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory, figures the UN considers reliable. Last month, Israel expanded its military operations to Lebanon, where at least 1,470 people have been killed since then, according to Lebanese health ministry figures.

Blinken's trip comes days after he and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin warned Israel that the United States could withhold some of its billions of dollars in military aid unless more humanitarian assistance is allowed into Gaza, where the UN warns more than 1.8 million people are facing "extreme hunger." Blinken is set to fly first to Israel and then tour other countries in the Middle East through Friday.

The State Department did not list his other stops but on previous trips he has visited a number of Arab countries, especially Qatar and Egypt, the key intermediaries in ceasefire negotiations.

Blinken "will discuss the importance of bringing the war in Gaza to an end, securing



Palestinians who were injured during an Israeli operation arrive at Al Ahli Arab hospital. — AFP

the release of all captives and alleviating the suffering of the Palestinian people," a State Department statement said. It said Blinken would also discuss post-war arrangements critical for a peace deal and seek a "diplomatic resolution" in Lebanon, where the United States has stopped short of urging an immediate ceasefire.

Meanwhile, visiting US envoy Amos Hochstein said on Monday the basis of a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah was

a 2006 United Nations resolution but that it would require more than just commitments from the warring parties. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 states that only the Lebanese army and UN peacekeepers should be deployed in southern Lebanon, while demanding the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanese territory. Attention has focused on the resolution during the latest Israel-Hezbollah war that erupted last month after nearly a year of cross-border fire. — AFP

COURT BILL

Pakistan passes constitutional amendments



Pakistan's government passed constitutional amendments on Monday giving lawmakers more power to appoint top judges. Under the judicial reforms, Pakistan's chief justice will now be selected by a parliamentary committee and have a fixed term of three years. New benches will be formed of senior judges to weigh exclusively on constitutional issues. As the bill passed, PM Shehbaz Sharif said it was "a historic day... affirming the supremacy of Parliament". — AFP

SCHEDULED VISIT

Macron to visit Morocco from Oct 28 to 30



French President Emmanuel Macron will head to Morocco next week for a three-day state visit, the Moroccan royal palace said. "This visit reflects the depth of bilateral relations based on a deep-rooted and solid partnership," the palace said. Macron was invited to the country by Moroccan King Mohammed VI in late September. The monarch had called the visit an opportunity for "a renewed and ambitious vision covering several strategic sectors". — AFP

FLIGHTS SECURITY

India seeks to bolster law after threats



India's aviation minister said he wanted to tighten laws after more than 90 fake bomb threats against Indian airlines in the past week triggered travel chaos and terror. Ram Mohan Naidu said "safety and security" were the priority and that airport checks had been increased. Some threats led to planes being diverted to Canada and Germany, and fighter jets scrambled to escort aircraft in the skies above Britain and Singapore. — AFP

LEGALPUSH



Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni appears at Villa Doria Pamphilj in Rome. — AFP

ITALY PM SEEKS TO SAVE ALBANIAN MIGRANT DEAL

ROME: Italy's hard-right government said it would pass a new law to overcome legal opposition to a migrant deal with Albania, as Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni accused judges of political bias. A decree, set to be adopted at a cabinet meeting on Monday, would enshrine in law the government's definition of 22 countries as "safe", which would mean Rome can fast-track applications from asylum seekers from those countries.

The move follows a ruling by Italian judges on Friday against the detention of the first migrants sent for processing in Albania. This dealt a major blow to the government's flagship policy, which is being closely studied by other European nations. Rome has repeatedly said that other European Union countries are interested in the scheme as a way of processing asylum requests in countries outside the bloc. The judges pointed to a recent European Court of Justice ruling which stipulates that EU states can only designate whole countries as safe, not parts. — AFP



CUBA GRID COLLAPSES AGAIN

A Turkish-flagged power barge is docked as the country's electrical grid collapsed again on Sunday, according to Cuba's energy and mines ministry, in the latest setback to the government's efforts to restore power to the island, in Havana, Cuba. The blackout sparked some small protests around the Caribbean island. — Reuters

Pentagon chief visits Kyiv in show of support

US DEFENSE Secretary Lloyd Austin announced \$400 million in new arms for Ukraine on Monday during a visit to Kyiv just two weeks ahead of a US presidential election that is casting uncertainty over the future of Western support. Austin's trip, his fourth and likely final visit as President Joe Biden's Pentagon chief, was expected to focus on US efforts to help Kyiv shore up its defences as Russian forces gain ground in eastern Ukraine. But despite the show of solidarity with Kyiv, it was not expected to answer some of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's loudest calls for changes to US policy, like lifting Washington's restrictions on using US-supplied weapons to hit targets far deep in Russian territory. As Biden's administration winds down, Austin signalled continuity in US support.

"The United States understands the stakes here, Mr President," Austin told Zelenskyy during a meeting, as he announced the new cash for additional munitions, armoured vehicles and anti-tank weapons.

As Austin stepped off the train in Kyiv after an overnight journey from Poland, Ukrainian officials reported new Russian attacks overnight on the Ukrainian capital that damaged residential buildings and injuring at least one civilian. Austin's visit comes ahead of the November 5 US presidential vote, in which former president Donald Trump, the Republican candidate, is seeking re-election in a close race against Vice-President Kamala Harris, the Democratic candidate.

Trump has signalled he would be more reluctant than Biden to continue to support Ukraine, which could deprive Kyiv of its biggest military and financial backer.

Austin played down such concerns. "I've seen bipartisan support for Ukraine over the last 2½ years, and I fully expect that we'll



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy welcomes US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin before their meeting, in Kyiv. — Reuters

continue to see the bipartisan support from Congress," he said.

Meanwhile, Kyiv has been seeking to keep its war in focus in the West, even as the expanding conflicts in the Middle East grab the international spotlight. Zelenskyy last met Austin last Thursday at Nato headquarters in Brussels, where he pitched his "victory plan". He received pledges of continued support but no endorsement from key allies of

his call for an immediate Nato-membership invitation. Asked on Friday in Brussels about the victory plan, Austin said: "It's not my position to evaluate publicly his plan." Kyiv may need to start making tough decisions about how to employ its stretched fighting forces, including whether it will hold onto territory Kyiv seized in Russia's Kursk region in a surprise offensive this summer, experts say. — Reuters

Trump hits N Carolina, Harris in swing state push

ASHEVILLE: Former US president Donald Trump hits the campaign trail in hurricane-hit North Carolina on Monday, having heavily criticised the government's disaster response after at least 124 people were killed there by storm Helene. Emergency services are still distributing food and water in the worst-affected parts of the state almost a month after Helene slammed into the southeastern United States, leaving more than 240 dead in its wake.

Trump will hold a campaign rally in the city of Greenville, while his Democratic rival Kamala Harris is set to address supporters in other battleground states Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania. The two candidates are locked in a neck-and-neck race for the White House with just over two weeks until Election Day. Polls show the contest is too close to call, including in the seven swing states that decide US elections. In

Trump will hold a campaign rally in the city of Greenville, while his Democratic rival Kamala Harris is set to address supporters in other battleground states Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania

North Carolina, emergency services continue to address the storm's aftermath, with urban search-and-rescue teams still at work in some areas.

On Sunday, the White House said the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) had "approved more than \$300 million in assistance across the state, including \$118 million in individual assistance to more than 87,600 households." The immediate aftermath of the storm left many without access to power, drinking water or shelter, leading Trump to sharply criticise US President Joe Biden and his vice-president, Harris.

Biden and Harris have rejected the allegations, accusing Trump of spreading misinformation about the response for political gain. "There's been a reckless, irresponsible and relentless promotion of disinformation and outright lies," Biden said after Helene and before a second major storm, Milton, slammed into Florida.

As of Sunday, power had been restored to most of North Carolina, barring about 5,000 customers in remote western counties. Schools are due to reopen in some of the hardest hit areas this week, and municipal services say water supply has been restored in many areas — although some continue to face "boil water" advisories. Harris and Trump are virtually tied in the battleground states, according to a New York Times polling average, and North Carolina is no different — Harris stood at 49 per cent in the state, to Trump's 48 per cent, on Sunday. Early voting is already underway in several states, including North Carolina, where more than a million people had cast their ballots as of Sunday. Harris on Sunday appeared to acknowledge the closeness of the race, saying she would leave "nothing on the field" in her push to win the election. — AFP

Moldova president hails EU referendum win after Russia meddling claims

CHISINAU: Moldova's pro-Brussels President Maia Sandu on Monday said her camp "won justly in an unjust struggle" in an EU referendum and first-round presidential elections marked by claims of Russian interference. The referendum on joining the EU passed with a razor-thin majority in the key electoral test for the former Soviet republic bordering war-torn Ukraine.

Sandu said late on Sunday that Moldova had witnessed "an unprecedented assault" on its democracy, blaming "criminal groups, working together with foreign forces hostile to our national interests". The Kremlin, in turn, called on Sandu to "prove" election interference in the

country of 2.6 million people and alleged "anomalies" in Moldova's vote count. Sandu, 52, a former World Bank economist and Moldova's first woman president, managed to top the first round of presidential elections held at the same time as the referendum on Sunday. But she will face a tough second round on November 3 against Alexandr Stoianoglo, a former prosecutor backed by the pro-Russian Socialists.

"We have won the first battle in a difficult fight that will determine the future of our country," Sandu told reporters, calling on Moldovans to vote in the second round. "We heard you: we know we must do more to fight corruption," she added. Sandu, who



Moldova's incumbent President and presidential candidate Maia Sandu attends a press conference in Chisinau.

beaten Moscow-backed incumbent in 2020, applied for her country of 2.6 million people to join the European Union following Russia's attack of Ukraine in 2022. With more than 99 per cent of the votes counted, the "yes" vote was slightly ahead at 50.46 per cent.

The European Union on Monday said voting was marred by Russia's "unprecedented interference and intimidation".

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk hailed Moldova as a "brave nation", while European Parliament president Roberta Metsola congratulated the country for its "bravery". In the presidential election, Sandu gained more than 42 per cent of the vote,

while Stoianoglo picked up a higher-than-expected 26 per cent. "We have a huge chance to win on November 3 and we will win," he told journalists at his party's headquarters, calling the vote result a "resounding and shameful failure" for the government.

Sunday's twin votes revealed "profound divisions", according to Crisis Group's senior EU analyst Marta Mucznik, who added that the impact of pro-Russian disinformation campaigns was "evident".

"Both Brussels and Chisinau must brace for rising tensions and reconsider their strategies if they are to effectively promote the prospect of EU membership," she said. — AFP

OPINION

Attract the flow and not spoil the show



FOR OMAN, sustainable tourism is not an empty slogan but rather a concrete road map to preserve its unique culture, maintain its natural and historical wonders, and provide livelihood to the people.

For centuries, travellers and tourists have been able to relish the pristine nature of Oman due the plethora of policies and legislations by the government of Oman to protect its environment from the risks of overtourism. That the world is watching the transformation of Oman as a sustainable destination is evident from the praise by the senior official of United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

Any tourist or observer of the tourism sector in Oman will see Oman is among the main countries that strive to achieve tourism development in its sustainable sense. While some believe that the country is slow to achieve this, the steps taken in the country are quite appropriate to avoid the negative impacts on Omani society.

Oman seeks to systematically implement sustainable development goals in cooperation with private-sector institutions and civil society through its various

sectors, specifically tourism. This goes in line with the 10th Five-Year Plan as well as the National Tourism Strategy (NTS) 2040 and The National Programme for Enhancing Economic Diversification (Tanfeedh).

The Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) is significant as it is the first executive financial plan of Oman Vision 2040. It will serve as the cornerstone and springboard to achieve fiscal balance and sustainability, economic diversification and growth.

The government has identified tourism as a key feature to help reduce Oman's reliance on oil-based revenues. The NTS plans to increase visitors to the country by more than 400 per cent, from 2.6 million in 2015 to 11.7 million in 2040.

Another NTS target is to expand and diversify accommodation across the country. It aims to increase the number of rooms to 80,000. All this is not without environmental costs. While investments are no doubt important for economic growth businesses must note that without an environment there is no tourism.

Oman has been actively promoting sustainable tourism practices to preserve its natural beauty while accommodating growing tourist numbers. Efforts include

Oman is actively promoting sustainable tourism practices to preserve its natural beauty while managing the increasing influx of tourists

eco-friendly accommodations, conservation programmes for marine life, and initiatives aimed at protecting cultural heritage sites. These measures not only enhance visitor experiences but also ensure that tourism development aligns with environmental sustainability goals.

As global travel trends continue to evolve post-pandemic towards more experiential travel focused on nature and culture, Oman stands poised to attract a growing number of visitors seeking authentic experiences away from crowded tourist hotspots.

While continuing to push investments in new airports, roads, resorts and hotels, stakeholders must not forget the impact on biodiversity and Oman's ambitious goal to achieve net-zero goals by 2050. The praise of UNWTO bestows more responsibility on the tourism sector to live up to its expectations on sustainable practices.

As the world moves more towards more experiential travel focused on nature and culture, Oman stands poised to attract a growing number of people seeking authentic experiences away from crowded tourist hotspots. The challenge is to attract the flow and not spoil the show.

MUSHROOM HUNTERS SEEK NEW SPECIES, RECOGNITION

HUW GRIFFITH

You can't walk very far through a forest in this part of the US without stumbling upon a mushroom, an eruption from a vast fungal kingdom that all life depends on, but about which we know very little. Some are tall and thin with a helmet top, others are great flourishes of brain-like folds; some seem like they should be sheltering fairies in a storybook. Many look like they could be delicious in the hands of a skilled chef; others... decidedly not. But the dozens of species that enthusiasts and experts collected on a recent morning represent just a tiny fraction of life that is neither flora nor fauna.

"Mushrooms are not plants," said Amy Honan, who teaches mycology and fungal ecology at Oregon University.

"Fungi are more closely related to animals than they are to plants."

Plants make their own food through photosynthesis, but mushrooms have to eat something else.

"They spit out different enzymes, so they break down their food outside of their body, and they slurp it up like a smoothie," Honan said.

Of the at least 2.5 million species of fungus thought to exist on Earth, scientists have described around 150,000 — six per cent — Honan said during a field trip near Port Angeles in Washington state. Compared with what we know about plants and animals, that's practically nothing.

"We know about 98 per cent of the vertebrates that are on the planet," she said. "We know about 85 per cent of plants that exist on the planet. We know about 20 per cent of invertebrates."

This paucity of fungal knowledge is troubling because of the vital — and largely unseen — role that they play. Fungi evolved before plants and created the conditions to allow vegetation to move from the sea to the land.

"Fungi are essential for all terrestrial ecosystems. They confer all kinds of benefits to plants, from salt tolerance, heavy metal tolerance, disease resistance," Honan said.

"Basically, without fungi... plants would not exist. We need plants for oxygen, so the world would not exist in its current state."

It would also be chock-full of dead things. "Fungi break down all dead organic material, so they recycle all that carbon and other nutrients," facilitating the life cycle of plants and animals.

There is a burgeoning awareness of the importance of fungi, whose role is set to come up for discussion at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity COP16 meeting in Colombia, which kicks off on Monday. — AFP



ZAHIR AL MAHROUQI

The writer is an Omani writer and the author of 'The Road to Jerusalem'



Arundhati Roy

IN A WORLD often overwhelmed by oppression, certain voices rise above, speaking fearlessly for truth and justice.

One such voice is Arundhati Roy, the celebrated Indian author, whose relentless defiance of injustice has garnered her international admiration. Her recent recognition, the 2024 PEN Pinter Prize, honours her for her literary courage and moral clarity.

Awarded annually to writers whose works display exceptional bravery, this prestigious prize highlights Roy's role in addressing global issues through her intellectual and creative prowess.

The award citation praised her 'extraordinary ability to tell stories of injustice with intelligence and beauty,' describing her as a voice that transcends India's borders to reach global audiences.

In keeping with the tradition of the PEN Pinter Prize, Roy was given the opportunity to share the award with another activist. She chose Egyptian political prisoner Alaa Abdel Fattah, currently serving a prison sentence, as her co-recipient.

During the ceremony at the British Library in London on October 10, Roy also

announced that she would donate her share of the prize money to the Palestine Children's Relief Fund, underscoring her dedication to the Palestinian cause and her commitment to global human rights.

Roy is perhaps best known for her Booker Prize-winning novel, The God of Small Things (1997), but she has also made a name for herself as a fierce activist. She has never hesitated to speak out against injustice, and her outspoken criticism of government policies — especially those related to human rights and environmental issues — has made her a target for controversy.

CHALLENGES

Despite the risks and challenges she faces, Roy remains unwavering in her pursuit of justice. She stands as a champion for the oppressed, advocating for human rights regardless of nationality, race, or religion. Her pen is her weapon, and she wields it with courage, refusing to back down in the face of criticism or danger.

One of the most prominent examples of Roy's fearless activism is her stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Her statement, "Palestine will be free," resonated with many, further cementing her reputation as

a defender of the Palestinian cause. Roy has long-viewed Gaza as the 'moral compass of the world' and has publicly condemned Israel's actions, labelling them as acts of occupation, apartheid, and genocide.

Roy's critiques extend beyond Israel and India; she has been a vocal critic of American foreign policy, particularly regarding its wars in the Middle East. She was one of the few prominent voices to condemn the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

In a 2001 article for The Guardian, she described the US military actions as acts of terrorism rather than self-defence. She exposed the hypocrisy of US President George W Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who launched airstrikes in the name of peace, all while claiming to be leaders of peaceful nations. Roy's rejection of such narratives has made her one of the most outspoken critics of Western interventionism.

What sets Roy apart is her steadfastness in the face of global injustice, even as some voices within the Arab world side with the Israeli occupation. Paradoxically, some Arab commentators have been more vocal in supporting Israel than Zionist voices themselves. Yet, amid this noise, Roy's unwavering defence of the oppressed, especially the Palestinians, stands out.

Her title as a "fighter" is well earned — not because she engages in physical battles, but because of her relentless moral struggle for human freedom.

Roy's activism offers a powerful lesson to those who claim to champion justice while sowing division and discord. True activism, as Roy has shown, transcends boundaries of nationality, race, and religion.

It is about standing for the freedom of all people — whether they are Palestinians, Guantanamo detainees, or the disappeared in Syria, Libya, or Egypt. Through her fearless advocacy, Roy reminds the world that even in times of oppression, there are still free people willing to speak truth to power.

Translated by Badr al Dhafari
The original version of this article was published in the print edition of Oman Arabic newspaper on October 21

The equation of absence and presence



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
[@lakshmioman](#)

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

THE PRESENCE and absence of people, animals, and things make a difference in our lives. When we were young, we played people, places, and things, and it was all about naming. It was a great way to increase our general knowledge; little did we know that at a personal level, we can easily lose people and animals and move to new places in a blink of an eye.

Such was life. Their presence filled our space and time, and their absence leaves you to lead on your own the uncharted waters. The absence can cast a huge void. But family members tend to prepare the younger ones by creating habits so in their absence their little ones will be in automatic mode until life's experience teaches him/her to be innovative and find new means to evolve to the everchanging situations. During the process, having others to talk to and share thoughts can be a gift from life. When we are young, there is no reason for us to think about the absence of a loved one in our life until the sudden harsh reality occurs. Even sunsets made us sad because our young minds instinctively knew something was coming to an end - the day. The day that would be a memory. The absence could be just out of sight

or out of participation. They could be on your horizon but not connected. Lately, it came to mind that in a painting, if something is not present, the subjects in the painting can bring into your mind the one who is absent. When the artist depicts the shadow, the viewer knows there is light and the direction of the light. The absence can make a strong statement.

When there is a high rate of goodness, we know there is an absence of negativity; in the presence of disharmony, there is chaos; and when there is a lack of quality, then there can be no presence of respect. A rain can bring down buildings, erase city plans, and move landscapes; it is the same rain that is revered as one of the sources of life. The famous saying has a certain quality: "Absence makes heart grow fonder." One of the universal observations is that we do not realise the true value of something until we lose it. It is only when we lose someone close that we realise the heaviness of silence. Our hearts go empty too. How often do we really wonder and seek answers for the absence of motivation? Why do some people sink into oblivion? Is it because they did not have enough choice? Or do they plan in such a way that they like to merge with the surroundings and not stand out?

When we are young, there is no reason for us to think about the absence of a loved one in our life until the sudden harsh reality occurs. Even sunsets made us sad because our young minds instinctively knew something was coming to an end - the day. The day that would be a memory

They probably are not on the lookout for the spotlight. Some prefer the inward journey rather than the external presence. The absence and presence exist in each other because, without absence, one will never know the value of presence. We only know the value of light in darkness. And in light, we have to work hard to create darkness. We want darkness only to sleep because during the waking hours we seek light. We are naturally inclined to draw a comparison between light and knowledge and darkness and ignorance. We feel enlightened as we learn new things, and when we stop learning, the darkness falls all around, making our personal world narrow and dark. We long for the presence in the absence, wishing we had another opportunity to do things in the right way if we had one more chance. That chance depends because our lives and world have their own mysteries. And it is for us to unravel them. There is no guarantee that we will have a second chance. The elders know it, but their words are often brushed aside and defined as old-fashioned. But the elders speak from experience. But, no matter what, there is hope, and where there is hope, we can find our way to balance the two elements- absence and presence.

FOCUS ON GENDER INEQUITY AS COMMONWEALTH SUMMIT BEGINS

KIRSTY NEEDHAM

A meeting of Commonwealth countries began in Samoa on Monday with a focus on the income inequality, violence and structural discrimination faced by women, described by Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland as a "plague in our world". Leaders and officials from 56 countries with roots in Britain's empire will attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in the small Pacific Islands nation. At a forum on Monday, women politicians said gender inequality remains widespread among the group, which spans top economies such as Britain, Canada and Australia, the world's most populous nation India, and 14 "least developed" states in Africa and the Pacific. Scotland, who took office in 2016 as the first woman to hold the post, urged women to work together more and said her last few years in the role had not been easy. "Significant hurdles still exist, despite the numerous successes that we have had, and in too many of our societies gender-based violence

persists and in some cases, it continues to rise," she said. "Income inequality, structural discrimination and restriction of women from leadership opportunities are still a plague in our world," she added. Born in Dominica, Scotland was the first woman attorney general in Britain. "Many of us thought that we had delivered the change - never take your foot off the pedal... never take for granted these advances that have been made, because they can very quickly be taken away from you," she said.

Samoaan Prime Minister Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa is the first woman to lead a Pacific Island member country of the Commonwealth. Over half of the Commonwealth's members are small states, many of them island nations facing the threat of rising sea levels caused by climate change. The leaders are expected to make a declaration on protecting the ocean, with climate change a key topic for discussion. The Commonwealth's head, Britain's King Charles, will arrive mid-week. In a speech in Australia on Monday, he said the Commonwealth group "has the diversity to understand the world's problems and the sheer brain power and resolve to formulate practical solutions". "I see a family of some 2.5 billion people striving for peace, justice and mutual respect. — AFP

Understanding parental pressure on students

ON THE occasion of the Omani Women's Day, several schools encouraged female students to 'dress up for their future careers' for a day. Although she has shown a natural talent in entrepreneurship, gaming, and playing the piano, at the moment, my daughter wants to become a chef and hopes to undergo future training at a five-star restaurant in Paris. Hence, she chose her outfit accordingly. "I think many kids will show up as doctors wearing scrubs or as lawyers dressed in suits," she thought out loud while preparing for the special event. When she returned home from school that day, my daughter was happy that few other girls turned out to have an interest in pursuing a culinary career as well. She also told us about having to comfort a student who had been crying at the playground. "Mama, baba, this girl told us that her parents had forced her to wear a doctor's costume but she said she wants to become an artist! Maskeena!" I am treading carefully here as I do realise that we, as parents with good intentions, want the best for our children, including in view of their future financial security. From years of experience, I also learned that young minds need guidance when navigating possible career pathways, especially considering today's many options and distractions. But does this parental love mean that we truly understand what suits our children best, or are we consciously or subconsciously projecting our dreams on them? For example, my mother was a talented ballerina, and my father graduated cum laude in Physics at a very young age. Bravo, but that does not automatically mean that you will see me or my child performing at the Royal Opera House or becoming a brilliant engineer. Also, do we want our children to become doctors, lawyers or engineers because of the social status



Does parental love mean that we truly understand what suits our children best.



BREGJE VAN BAAREN

The writer used to work for the Directorate-General of Scholarships and the HEAC at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation in Oman

attached to these professions, the high income, or both? Do we want them to do something they love, or do we consider this to be a 'luxury for dreamers'? Do we understand the diverse requirements of the ever-changing economy and, thus, the job market well enough to advise our kids properly? We often seem to think we know our children better than anyone, but do we beat a more objective aptitude test conducted by professionals and the valuable experience that derives from job shadowing and internships? A couple of years ago, I kept running into two mothers at every major higher education exhibition held in the country. Both of them were highly successful Omani doctors who have undoubtedly added much value to society. However, they never brought their children to any of these events - instead, they were 'shopping' for them. One of these ladies' daughters was selected for a scholarship to study Biomedicine. She ended up excelling in her field, while anyone with a degree in Biomedical

Sciences usually still has the option to study medicine at the graduate level. However, the mum, not the student, kept on requesting to change the area of specialisation. I also sat in on interviews conducted by reputed medical schools with Omani students, during which a few suitable candidates 'self-selected' themselves. They did not perform well on purpose. One day, I witnessed a distressed father insisting that his daughter continue to study medicine on a scholarship even though she failed in all subjects. And, probably, the worst case involved a girl ending up in a mental health institute because of being pushed by her family to study something that did not suit her. Of course, these stories are exceptions as I am still in touch with many students who successfully pursued medicine because they love helping people, and our nation will always need good doctors. I also know students whose mums or dads are famous doctors but were allowed to pursue different careers.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



MARTINEZ STRIKE EARNs INTER 1-0 WIN OVER ROMA

ROME, Italy: Inter Milan secured a 1-0 victory at AS Roma on October 20, 2024, courtesy of a second-half goal from Lautaro Martinez in a tightly contested Serie A match.

Martinez made the breakthrough on the hour mark, controlling the ball on the edge of the area before firing it into the net.

Inter are now second in the table with 17 points, two behind leaders Napoli, while Roma are 10th with 10 points.

There were numerous chances for both sides to break the deadlock in the first half, but Roma keeper Mile Svilar and his Inter counterpart Yann Sommer made several impressive saves to keep an intense opening period goalless.

Inter's Hakan Calhanoglu had to leave the field after 12 minutes with an apparent injury, and he was followed off shortly after by Italy international Francesco Acerbi.

Following Martinez's goal, both sides battled to seize the momentum.

Svilar made a one-handed save to deny Inter's Denzel Dumfries, while Sommer dived to block a powerful snapshot from Matias Soule in the dying moments of the match, securing all three points for Inter.

Ivan Juric defended his team's performance despite the loss. "I think we started too timid, I didn't like the first 15 minutes, but after that we did really well until the goal. The goal was just an accident and you pay a heavy price for that at this level," he told DAZN. "We had a lot of chances, but we also made too many technical errors and that was a gift to Inter. "We definitely need to raise the quality level in the final third and that will make us more effective." — Reuters

Seeb defeat Sohar to top league

Al Nahdha stun Saham



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 21

LEAGUE LEADERS Seeb defeated Sohar 3-1 in the conclusion of the eighth week matches at Seeb Stadium while Al Shabab earned a crucial 1-0 victory over Ibra. Al Nahdha beat Saham 2-0 while Sur registered a 1-0 win over Al Nasr. Earlier on Saturday, Bahla managed to secure a thrilling 2-1 win over Al Rustaq while the match between Al Khabourah and Oman Club ended in a 2-2 draw.

With the conclusion of the eighth round matches, Seeb and Al Nahdha remained at the top with 21 points, with preference to the Muscat-based team by goal difference. Oman Club in third place is the closest team to the league leaders with 17 points while Al Nasr is in fourth position with ten points. Bahla, Al Shabab and Al Khabourah are in the middle order with seven points. Al Rustaq, Sur and Ibri are at the bottom of the league with four points.

The competition is very tough between Seeb and Al Nahdha as they remain unbeaten teams in the league. Both teams are working hard to continue their winning ways and are waiting for the defeat of their opponent to go top in the table. Seeb will start their Asian AFC Challenge League 2024/25 season assignment on Saturday. Seeb will host group C teams including five-time Bahraini league champions Al Ahli, Hilal Al Quds and Syrian league winners Al Futowa SC. Seeb will begin their campaign with a match against Syria's Al Futowa SC on Saturday.

Al Shabab registered its second win in the league against Ibri, who are struggling at the bottom of the league table. Bahla, who returned to the top-tier league benefiting from Dhofar's drop from the Omantel league this season, registered a thrilling win and moved up to fifth position while the defeat cost Al Rustaq dearly as they dropped to the danger zone at tenth position with four points.

The seventh week star of the Omantel league was Essam al Subhi from Al Shabab Club after his top show with the team in the recent matches. The eighth week star will be determined in the next round. The forthcoming round of matches will take place on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday as Al Nasr will take on Bahla while Sohar will face Al Nahdha. Ibri will play against Sur while Al Shabab challenge Saham.

Pakistan A thump Oman by 74 runs to earn first win

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, OCT 21

Hosts Oman slumped to their second loss as Pakistan A beat them by 74 runs in their Group B encounter of the ACC Men's Emerging Teams Asia Cup on Monday. Deciding to bat first, Pakistan Shaheens posted a challenging total of 185-5 in their 20 overs.

Oman, who lost against the UAE in their opening match on Saturday, could only manage 111-7 in their 20 overs against a disciplined bowling attack of Pakistan A. The win earned the first points for Pakistan A, who had lost to India A by 7 runs in their opening match.

Pakistan A were dealt a double blow by young Oman medium pace bowler Muzahir Raza, who sent back Mohammad Haris (3) and Yasir Khan (3) in the third over of the match, leaving the score at 13-2.

Omais Yousuf and Qasim Akram added 50 runs from 28 balls as Pakistan raced to 79-2 in 10 overs,



gathering momentum. Qasim Akram made a steady 48 off 38 balls before being bowled by spinner Samay Shrivastava. Akram hit two fours and three sixes. Yousuf made 25 from 21 balls before being caught and bowled by Oman medium pacer Sufyan Mahmood.

Rohail Nazir then pushed the scoring with an explosive 41 not out (3x4, 2x6) from 20 balls, and Arafat Minhas' quickfire 31 off 15 helped Pakistan A finish strong.

In reply, Oman made a steady start but lost opener Aamir Kaleem for 11, lbw to Qasim Akram with the score at 28-1 in 5.2 overs. Karan Sonavale (5) followed, and later captain Jatinder Singh (24) was out, leaving Oman at 52-3 in

9.4 overs.

Pakistan A's bowlers kept a tight grip throughout the innings. Zaman Khan (2-17) led the charge, and disciplined efforts by Shahnawaz Dahani (1-13) and Sufyan Muqeem (1-15) stifled Oman's chase. Wasim Ali (28) and Hamad Mirza (14) were the only other notable contributions from Oman batters.

Rohail Nazir's all-round performance, including two catches and a blistering knock, earned him the Player of the Match award as Pakistan A cruised to a comfortable win. Pakistan A's 74-run victory over Oman is their largest margin of victory in terms of runs in T20s, surpassing their previous 60-run win against NZ A.

AFGHANISTAN A TOP GROUP A In Group A, Afghanistan A registered their second victory to top the group with four points after a four-wicket win over Bangladesh A on Sunday night.

Chasing 165 for victory, Sediqlah Atal smashed 95 off 55 balls

with 9 fours and 5 sixes as Afghanistan A reached the target in 19.1 overs.

Bangladesh A posted a competitive 164-4 in their 20 overs. Parvez Hossain Emon made a quick-fire 54 off 32 balls, supported by Towhid Hridoy (42 not out) and Shamim Hossain (38 not out).

Afghanistan's bowlers, particularly Qais Ahmad (1-26) and Sharafuddin Ashraf (1-9), helped limit Bangladesh A's scoring in the middle overs.

In reply, Afghanistan A lost three wickets for 52 in 6.3 overs. Opener Atal stood firm to keep the momentum in the chase.

Ripon Mondol (2-26) and Al Islam (2-29) tried to stall Afghanistan's momentum, but Atal's brilliance ensured they stayed on course. Shahidullah (19) and Mohammad Ishaq (10) also chipped in as Afghanistan A sealed the win with five balls to spare.

Atal was named Player of the Match for his match-winning innings.

SHORTTAKES



LAMENS WIN MAIDEN TITLE IN JAPAN AS KASATKINA TRIUMPHS IN CHINA

TOKYO: Suzan Lamens of the Netherlands won her first WTA Tour title when she beat Australia's Kimberly Birrell 6-0, 6-4 in the Japan Open final on Sunday.

In China, meanwhile, world number 11 Daria Kasatkina withstood a fightback from 17-year-old Mirra Andreeva to win the Ningbo Open 6-0, 4-6, 6-4 after an all-Russian final.

World number 125 Lamens made a terrific start in Osaka when she took the first set in just 21 minutes.

The second was a tougher battle but the 25-year-old sealed the contest when Birrell hit a return wide on match point.

"It couldn't have been better for me and I love to play here," Lamens said.

Both semi-finals in Japan took place on Sunday morning after rain washed out on Saturday.

At Ningbo, Kasatkina reeled off the first seven games in a row before her 19th-ranked opponent got on the scoreboard.

Andreeva levelled the match by breaking the 27-year-old Kasatkina at 5-4 in the second.

The teenager then stretched out to a 3-0 lead in the final set.

As both players tired, Kasatkina battled back in a match of momentum shifts before falling to the floor in a mixture of elation and exhaustion as she clinched the title after 1 hour 54 minutes.

Andreeva burst into tears at the prize presentation ceremony and was consoled by her good friend and countrywomen Kasatkina.

"I saw you crying a lot, it's okay, you're gonna have a lot more finals," Kasatkina told Andreeva.

"I hope we can share some of them." It was an eighth career WTA Tour title for Kasatkina, who will move into the top 10 when the new world rankings are published on Monday. — **AFP**

Al Felaj and Al Bashayer end second camel race



WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, OCT 21

THE SECOND race of 22nd edition of the annual camel races for the 2024-2025 season was concluded on Sunday, which was continued for three days with 89 rounds to be held in Barka and Adam fields.

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

The second race is the third event out of 23 events that OCRF's Board of Directors recently announced for the season. Of 13 general races, three races each are sponsored by Shell Oman and Occidental Oman.

Other events feature camel beauty contests, milking competitions and Ardah (traditional races).

The race included 46 rounds that were held at RCC field in al Felaj in Barka, and 43 rounds that took place at Al Bashayer race track in the Wilayat of Adam.

As many as 3000 camels vied for the race prize, cash prize for the top 10 and chance to sell the winning camels to the GCC countries.

The first day on Friday witnessed 36 rounds divided equally between Barka and Adam, that were dedicated to 'Hagayeg' category (for two-year-old camels over a distance of 3 km).

On the second day of competition's 27 rounds, 12 rounds were held in Adam and 12 rounds in Barka for the 'Laqaya' category (three-year-old over a distance of 4

km). The Barka field hosted three rounds for human riders race for 2 km.

The third day was witnessed 26 rounds divided equally between Barka and Adam; 12 rounds for 'Al Ythaa' category (four-year-old for 5 km), six rounds for 'Al Thanaya' category (five-year-old over a distance of 6 km) and eight rounds for 'Al Hawl' category (above six years for 6 km).

The third race, forth event, will be held on November 8, with 89 rounds at RCC field in Barka and Al Bashayer race track.

OCRF said only purebred camels owned by Omanis can take part in the forthcoming competitions. The participants have to register online so that the federation can transfer money to the owner's bank account in case of winning the prize. In all rounds, the top 10 winners will receive cash awards.

Rabada fastest to 300th Test wicket, as Bangladesh all out for 106

MIRPUR, BANGLADESH: South Africa posted 140-6 on Monday in an action-packed first day of the opening Test, after Bangladesh collapsed to 106 all out with Kagiso Rabada celebrating being the fastest to take 300 Test wickets.

The visitors took the lead, reaching 140-6 in 41 overs in reply at stumps at Mirpur, with Wiaan Mulder and Kyle Verreynne not out for 17 and 18 respectively.

Bangladesh won the toss and opted to bat but four of their top six batsmen failed to reach double figures, with opener Mahmudul Hasan Joy top-scoring with 30 on a lively pitch.

Seamers Rabada, Mulder and left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj took three wickets apiece for South Africa.

Bangladesh were teetering at 40-4 when Rabada bowled Mushfiqur Rahim on 11, as the South African celebrated reaching the 300-wicket landmark.

He managed the feat in 11,817 balls, the fastest of all time, beat-



South Africa players celebrate the winning. — **AFP**

ing Pakistan's Waqar Younis (12,602 balls).

Rabada soon made it 301 Test wickets, removing Litton Das for one, with Bangladesh crumbling, all out for 106 in 40.1 overs.

Rabada said he was "really surprised at how the wicket played out".

"Test cricket should offer a fair contest between bat and ball, where bowlers get something if they bowl well, and batters can score if they apply themselves," he said.

"With 16 wickets on day one, I'd say it's leaning towards the bowlers," he added.

STILL IN OUR HANDS

Right-arm seamer Hasan Mahmud brought Bangladesh the first success in the first over after the innings change, removing South African captain Aiden Markram for six off seven deliveries.

Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam — Bangladesh's main seamer in the absence of Shakib Al Hasan — then boosted his team after he bagged a

five-for, to become only the second Bangladeshi to take 200 wickets in Tests after Shakib.

"Many bowlers have 200, or 300-400 wickets," Taijul said. "But we don't play many Test matches — still, I'm one of the Bangladeshi bowlers who have 200 wickets, and I'm happy for this."

He kept the team's spirits up, saying it was possible the match was "still in our hands" to win.

The Test is the first international cricket fixture in Bangladesh since a student-led revolution toppled autocratic premier Sheikh Hasina in August.

Bangladesh are missing all-rounder Shakib after security fears forced him to cancel plans to return home.

Shakib announced his retirement from international cricket last month but said that he wanted to play one last red-ball series at home.

The 37-year-old was also a former lawmaker in the government ousted by the revolution, making him a target of public anger. — **AFP**



Bournemouth's Ryan celebrates scoring their first goal with Kluivert and Antoine.

LEWANDOWSKI AND TORRE AT THE DOUBLE AS BARCELONA THRASH SEVILLA 5-1



Barcelona's Pedri celebrates with Lamine Yamal. — Reuters

ROBERT Lewandowski and substitute Pablo Torre each scored twice to help leaders Barcelona thrash visitors Sevilla 5-1 in LaLiga on Sunday in a confidence boost for Hansi Flick's side ahead of key clashes against Bayern Munich and Real Madrid. Barca were dominant throughout the encounter at the Lluís Companys Olympic Stadium and effectively killed off the game with three goals in 15 first-half minutes starting with a Lewandowski penalty after Raphinha was fouled from behind in the 24th minute. Pedri fired a bullet strike from the edge of the box into the top corner to double their lead four minutes later and Lewandowski slotted home a first-time effort from close range to net the third for the Catalan side in the 39th minute. It was another superb performance from Barca's attacking trio of Lamine Yamal, Lewandowski and captain Raphinha who have scored 21 of Barca's 33 LaLiga goals this season. Polish striker Lewandowski has reached 12 league goals in 10 games, double the amount of Kylian Mbappe and Ayoze Perez who are the joint

“Winning like this is very important for the games to come. Today we had to leave with more than just the three points, we needed that good feeling we got. The coach told us that there was going to be spaces at the edge of the box and we took advantage of that.”

PEDRI



Yamal holds the LaLiga player of the month trophy.

second highest scorers in LaLiga. In the second half, Torre climbed off the bench to score the fourth with a shot from inside the box in the 82nd minute and, right after Stanis Idumbo netted a consolation for Sevilla in the 87th, he wrapped up the scoring with a free kick into the far corner. Barcelona are on top of the LaLiga standings on 27 points,

three ahead Real Madrid in second and seven clear of Atletico Madrid in third. Sevilla are 13th on 12 points. “Winning like this is very important for the games to come,” Pedri told Movistar Plus. “Today we had to leave with more than just the three points, we needed that good feeling we got. The coach told us that there was going to be spaces at the edge of the box and we took advantage of that.” Following a disappointing first LaLiga defeat at Osasuna, Barca have earned back-to-back league wins. Their victory over Sevilla was their ninth in 10 LaLiga games this season, as they prepare for a difficult week when they will host Bayern Munich in the Champions League on Wednesday before travelling to face rivals Real Madrid in LaLiga on Saturday. They were missing several key players on Sunday who were sidelined by injuries, including Ronald Araujo, Andreas Christensen, Ferran Torres and Marc-Andre ter Stegen. Yet they had a big reason to celebrate as talisman midfielder Gavi came off the bench in the second half to play his first minutes after 348 days out with a torn knee ligament. — Reuters

BUSINESS

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The new facility will help unlock new value from Oman's natural gas resources. Picture for illustration only.

OQGN adds first-ever gas blending station to national network

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, OCT 21

OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), the exclusive operator of Oman's gas transportation system, has announced the successful integration of a first-of-its-kind gas blending station into its national network.

The new facility will help enhance the majority state-owned operator's ability to harness additional value from the country's gas resources, notably by separating natural gas into its higher value-creating components. To integrate the gas blending station into its network, OQGN executed a Remote Techno Plug (RTP) operation on its 48" tie-ins at Gas Network Hub (GNH) to the newly constructed gas blending station.

"This process was the first of its kind to be executed in Oman for 48" gas transmission pipelines and the completion of the tie-ins embarks our journey towards enabling an added value in the gas chain by segregating the lean and rich gas," OQEG revealed in a report of its financial performance for Q3 2024. **TURN TO P15**

RO 7 million investment contracts in Al Dakhiliyah

BUSINESS REPORTER
NIZWA, OCT 21

AL Dakhiliyah Governorate has signed a series of investment contracts worth more than RO 7 million, aimed at promoting economic growth and enhancing services across several wilayats. The deals, which promise an investment return of over RO 2.7 million, were signed in the presence of Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

The contracts, signed by Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, with various companies, mark a significant step in the government's strategy to foster public-private partnerships, attract investments and create job opportunities for citizens.

One of the key projects is the development of an integrated public transport station in the Wilayat of Nizwa. The station, strategically located in the commercial heart of Nizwa's Farq area, will feature five main elements: a bus and taxi station, two business centres, a shopping mall and an internal transport station.

This project serves as a model of public-private collaboration and is expected to enhance economic activity and improve the quality of life in the region.

Al Hajri emphasised the governorate's commitment to strengthening its infrastructure to attract investors, supporting tourism and improving services in cities. "We are focused on enhancing the visitor experience to boost tourism activity year-round while



One of the key projects is the development of an integrated public transport station in the Wilayat of Nizwa.

creating employment opportunities for young people," he said.

In addition to the transport station, the contracts include leasing prime locations along major roads and public spaces in Nizwa, Samayil, Al Hamra, Manah, Adam, Bidbid, Izki, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and Bahla.

These areas will host printed and electronic advertising platforms, which will contribute to local economic development by promoting tourism and business activities.

Al Hajri also noted that the governorate is keen to keep pace with global trends by developing strategies that align with Oman Vision 2040. "Our goal is to support sustainable economic development by leveraging

our governorate's geographical and cultural advantages," he said, adding that the governorate aims to create an attractive environment for innovation and investment.

Eng Badr bin Mohammed al Nadabi, CEO of Mwasalat, highlighted the importance of the agreement for public transport development. "We look forward to collaborating with the authorities in Al Dakhiliyah and the private sector to provide sustainable, efficient and safe transport services," Al Nadabi said.

He added that Mwasalat will manage the new transport station in Nizwa and operate intercity bus routes to enhance connectivity across the governorates, which will further support commercial and tourism growth.

\$890 million invested in Oman's agriculture and fisheries sectors in 2023

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, OCT 21

OMAN has made significant strides in boosting its agriculture and fisheries sectors with a total investment of \$890.669 million in 2023, according to the latest report from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

These investments are part of the government's broader strategy to achieve food security and support economic diversification under Oman Vision 2040.

The red meat sector saw considerable development this year, with two major projects starting operations. Al Hiyari Food Industries in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate launched with a \$44.2 million investment, producing 30,000 tonnes of red meat annually.

Meanwhile, in Muscat Governorate, Al Haddad Trading led the sector with the largest investment, allocating \$389.6 million to produce 22,000 tonnes of red meat per year.

Feed production also witnessed robust investments. Al Tohfah International in Ibbri, Al Dhahirah Governorate, began operations with \$44.2 million, producing 150,000 tonnes of



These investments are part of the government's broader strategy to achieve food security and support economic diversification under Oman Vision 2040.

feed annually.

Additionally, Al Shomookh Company in Barka, Al Batinah South Governorate, invested \$15.6 million in its feed production facility, with an annual output of 60,000 tonnes.

Oman's poultry production sector received significant attention. Investments included \$10.4 million by Al Etqad Trading and Milling in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, producing

10,000 tonnes of poultry feed each year, and \$5.2 million by Al Khalij Feed Manufacturing in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate.

The concentrated feed production sector also experienced notable development, with Al Mona for Concentrated Feed Manufacturing in Al Batinah North Governorate investing \$44.2 million to produce 3,200 tonnes of feed annually.

Salalah Projects Company in Al Dhahirah Governorate invested \$51.9 million, producing 4,500 tonnes of concentrated feed per year, and Seih Al Makan Company in Al Dakhiliyah invested \$1.6 million to produce 600 tonnes annually. The fisheries sector also saw substantial progress. In 2023, the ministry completed eight reports assessing the status of fish storage facilities in coastal regions, including Al Khabourah, Al Musannah, Al Suwaig, Saham, Suhar, Liwa and Shinas. These reports play a key

role in ensuring the efficiency and safety of Oman's fish supply chain, meeting both local and international standards.

Moreover, on August 20, the ministry launched the Acila vessel, a state-of-the-art fishing boat equipped for a wide range of fishing activities, including large surface fish, small surface fish and deep-sea fishing. This new vessel is expected to further boost Oman's fisheries production capabilities and enhance its contribution to the national economy.

Announcement of the tender TND GSI G3 0001/10/2024 for the supply of Butterfly valve

GS INIMA (AL GHUBRA) LLC has been awarded with the Engineering, Procurement and Construction of AL GHUBRAH III IWP in Oman, for CAPITAL DESALINATION COMPANY S.A.O.C.

Omani companies are invited to quote their most competitive price for the supply of **BUTTERFLY VALVE DIA 1000**.

To participate in the bidding please send copy of CR, copy of VAT certificate and copy of SME card (if any), via e-mail: ghubrah.3.site@inima.com, subject: **TND GSI G3 0001/10/2024** by **24th October 2024** 1:00 PM.

A reply with bid documents will be sent to candidates on the same day.

Bid closing date: **30th October 2024** 1:00PM

ADVERTORIALS



OAB CONTRIBUTES TO FINANCING THE HAFEET RAILWAY PROJECT

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has participated in the syndicated term loan facility along with Omani and Emirati banks to secure a syndicated loan of RO 577 million for Hafeet Rail Company. This loan will fund the construction of the first railway line linking the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

This railway project is one of the most strategic initiatives currently underway, aimed at significantly boosting economic growth and enhancing commercial and logistical activities between the two countries.

Through its involvement in this financing, OAB reaffirms its commitment to supporting major development projects across Oman, offering innovative banking services and solutions that contribute to the growth of various sectors and align with the economic diversification goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

Sulaiman al Hinai, Chief Wholesale Banking Officer of OAB, stated: “We are proud to have contributed to the successful arrangement of the RO 577 million syndicated loan for Hafeet Rail. This loan supports one of the largest and most vital strategic projects in Oman, with total investments exceeding RO 961 million. The trust placed in this project by local, regional and international banks is a testament to the strength of Oman’s economy.”

Al Hinai emphasised that the railway line is the first of its kind between Oman and the UAE, reflecting the ambitious strategic visions of both nations to enhance trade and economic integration within the region and achieve sustainable growth. The project will also play a key role in strengthening social cohesion and fostering closer relations between the two countries.

He added: “At OAB, we are proud to be involved in this consortium, which underscores our position as a leading financial institution with a strong financial foundation, excellent credit rating and vast experience in financing major strategic projects in various sectors across Oman.

“Over the past decades, OAB’s banking and commercial financing portfolio has encompassed numerous flagship projects in sectors such as energy, infrastructure, real estate, tourism, healthcare, and more.

“Recently, the bank has expanded its portfolio to include new strategic projects in the oil and sustainable cities sectors, further supporting the nation’s growth and sustainable development objectives in line with Oman Vision 2040.”

Toyota Corolla now with Akeed campaign benefits

TOYOTA Corolla fans can now own a Corolla and get exclusive benefits. Get service from 2 years/20,000 km up to 10 years/100,000 km (whichever is earlier), insurance 1 year and chance to win 1 grand raffle – all-new Toyota Prado.

The campaign is valid up to October 31, 2024 (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms & Conditions apply. Customers can visit any Saud Bahwan Automotive showroom for exact details.)

The Toyota Corolla continues to set the benchmark in the automotive industry, combining stylish design, advanced features and a meticulously crafted interior.

As one of the most iconic sedans since its debut, the Corolla has become synonymous with reliability, versatility and customer satisfaction.

From its sleek exterior to its well-appointed cabin, the Corolla is a vehicle that embodies the perfect balance of style, space, comfort, fuel efficiency and power.

Under the hood, the Corolla offers two powerful engine options.

The 2.0-litre four-cylinder Dynamic Force engine delivers an exhilarating 168 hp and 20.39 kg-m of torque, paired with a Direct Shift CVT transmission for a more immersive and dynamic driving experience.



The Toyota Corolla continues to set the benchmark in the automotive industry, combining stylish design, advanced features and a meticulously crafted interior.

For those seeking even greater fuel efficiency, the 1.6-litre four-cylinder engine option provides 121 hp and 15.7 kg-m of torque, also paired with a CVT transmission, offering a smooth and responsive drive with impressive economy.

Inside, the Corolla is as refined as it is striking. The minimalist yet sophisticated interior design blends space and functionality, creating a sense of elegance and comfort.

Ergonomically designed seats with new cushion materials, a spacious armrest and generous legroom ensure a premium experience for both front and rear passengers.

Rear-seat comfort is further

enhanced by thoughtful features such as rear AC vents, while a moonroof, 4.2-inch multi-information display (MID), 7-inch display audio system, cruise control and a six-speaker sound system are just a few of the features that make every journey enjoyable.

Toyota’s unwavering commitment to safety is evident in the Corolla, equipped with a comprehensive suite of advanced safety features.

These include four SRS airbags, Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Brake Assist, Electronic Brake-force Distribution (EBD), and a Tyre Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS), ensuring peace of mind for every occupant.

BANKDHOFAR OPENS FOUR BRANCHES IN DIFFERENT UNIVERSITIES

MUSCAT: BankDhofar continues its strategic plan to expand its branch network in order to provide the best banking services and establish a close relationship with its customers. Therefore, the bank opened new branches in four different universities, namely A’Sharqiyah University, Nizwa University, Sohar University and Al Buraimi University.

These branches serve a large number of students and employees on campus, saving them time and effort in light of university life and its many demands, as BankDhofar offers special accounts for women and youth that provide comprehensive banking solutions, exclusive offers at many stores, and various digital services.

A vertical purple card has also been designed exclusively for women. The branch of A’Sharqiyah University in Ibra



was opened under the auspices of Professor Fouad Shadid, President of A’Sharqiyah University, while the branch of Sohar University was opened under the auspices of Dr

Hamdan bin Suleiman al Fazari, President of Sohar University.

The branch of Nizwa University was opened under the auspices of by Professor Ahmed bin Khalfan al Rawahi, President of Nizwa University, while the branch of Al Buraimi University was opened under the auspices of Yousef bin Abdul Rahim al Farsi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Al Buraimi University.

A’Sharqiyah University is one of the most important universities in the Sultanate of Oman, with about 8,000 students in 2024 enrolled in various majors such as Engineering, Applied Health Sciences, Business Administration, Literature, Humanitarian Sciences, Law and others.

Sohar University is the first private university in the Sultanate of Oman and was established in September 2001.

Introducing the all-new Jetour T2 8AT: Where adventure meets innovation

MUSCAT: The highly anticipated all new Jetour T2 8AT is set to redefine SUV driving in Oman, bringing cutting-edge technology, enhanced comfort and an exhilarating driving experience to local roads. As part of the Jetour Plus Series, the T2 seamlessly blends modern luxury with rugged capability, perfect for those who crave exploration without compromising on style or comfort.

Derived from the words “Jet” and “Tour,” which symbolise convenience and travel in Mandarin, the Jetour brand is committed to crafting top-tier SUVs that turn everyday journeys into seamless experiences. The Jetour T2 8AT encapsulates the brand’s core values — style, intelligence, spaciousness and versatility — while catering to drivers seeking modern amenities, comfort, and a touch of accessible luxury.

The new Jetour T2 8AT is more than just an SUV; it’s a symbol of modern driving innovation. China’s first 8-speed

Derived from the words “Jet” and “Tour,” which symbolise convenience and travel in Mandarin, the JETOUR brand is committed to crafting top-tier SUVs that turn everyday journeys into seamless experiences.



automatic transmission is now standard, featuring electronic shift, stop-start functionality, and advanced calibration technology to optimise fuel economy and power performance. This transmission, with its wide speed ratio range of 7.80, ensures smooth and efficient tran-

sitions, whether cruising on highways or tackling off-road terrain.

Built with adventure in mind, the T2’s X-Wheel Drive system (an advanced form of four-wheel drive) offers seamless transitions between two-wheel and four-wheel drive, thanks to

centre and rear limited-slip differentials. Drivers can easily switch between eight driving modes, with animated displays on a 15.6-inch touchscreen to enhance the experience.

The Jetour T2 8AT is powered by a robust 2.0-litre 4-cylinder petrol engine, delivering 254 horsepower and 390 Nm of torque, making it the ideal companion for city driving or off-road escapades. With seat massage functionality, an automatic anti-glare rearview mirror, and practical touches like a bar that locks the back door in place, the T2 combines thoughtful design with state-of-the-art technology.

The vehicle also boasts thoughtful interior features, such as opener cup holders, a Bluetooth speaker holder, and smartly designed cubby spaces. These features, along with the smooth power delivery and advanced engineering, ensure a comfortable, practical, and enjoyable journey.

OMANI WOMEN IN OIL AND GAS SECTOR FETED



There are currently around 3,000 women working in the oil and gas sector in Oman.

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, OCT 21

THE Ministry of Energy and Minerals hosted a ceremony here yesterday, October 21, 2024, to felicitate Omani women working in the oil and gas sector. The event was held under the auspices of Her Highness Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation at SQU.

The ceremony, organised in cooperation with the Oman Energy Association (OPAL), was also attended by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Speaking to the Observer, the Director of the Planning and Economic Studies Department at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Badriya al Hadhrami, commented: “I am very happy to be here on such a day, to have the opportunity to come together with our companies in the energy and minerals sector, to congratulate each other on this achievement and to celebrate this beautiful day together.

“We have been a key partner alongside our male colleagues in the energy and minerals sector over the past period. Indeed, women have proven their competence in many areas within the sector, whether in technical roles, as engineers, or even in senior leadership positions within this sector.”

The event also featured the launch of the ‘You Are the Energy’ Award, which recognises the innovations and achievements of Omani women in the oil and gas sector. Al Hadhrami added, “Today, we are truly delighted with one of the enablers presented at this celebration: the launch of the ‘You Are the Energy’ award.

“This award serves as an additional motivation for us in the sector to bring forth all our energies and to contribute as much as possible to enhancing this sector.”

The celebrations also applauded the contributions of Omani women in supporting sustainability efforts and the transition to clean energy. Additionally, the event featured two panel discussions focusing on the themes, ‘The Role of Women in Leadership’ and ‘Women in STEM’.

Also in attendance were members of various public and private sector energy institutions. According to the ministry, there are currently around 3,000 women working in the oil and gas sector in Oman. Of this figure, 243 hold leadership and supervisory positions, including as CEOs and Deputy CEOs.

ACHIEVING SUCCESS

Yin Tongyu, Chairman of Chery Group, announced impressive performance figures during the conference: “Chery recorded total sales of 1.75 million units from January to September 2024 — a 40% increase year-on-year, with 830,000 units exported. Our success is built not

Chery recorded total sales of 1.75 million units from January to September 2024 — a 40% increase year-on-year, with 830,000 units exported

5.5 million acres of new arable land identified

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, OCT 21

OMAN'S pursuit of sustainable development and food security has become a critical part of its national agenda, in line with the broader goals of Oman Vision 2040, which emphasises economic diversification.

The 2023 Annual Report from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources outlines the significant advancements made in expanding plant and animal production. This progress not only supports the domestic economy, but also enhances Oman's presence in global food markets.

In recent years, Oman's agricultural sector has made notable progress. As of 2023, the country's total agricultural holdings reached 355,000 acres, reflecting ongoing efforts to increase cultivated land.

Even more promising is the potential for further expansion, with 5.5 million acres identified as arable land suitable for reclamation. This offers significant opportunities for continued growth and development within the sector.

By the end of 2023, Oman had successfully cultivated 293,000 acres, a figure expected to rise with the adoption of modern farming techniques and technologies. The sector employs 256,000 workers, underlining its role as a vital source of employment and its importance in securing livelihoods across the nation.

In addition to being a key provider of food, Oman's agricultural industry is critical for economic growth.

A standout example of Oman's agricultural success is its date production. The country is home to 9.1 million date palms, making it one of the world's leading producers of dates. This crop not only serves as a staple of the local diet, but also plays a crucial role in export markets.

To support the sector's continued expansion, the government has significantly enhanced its agricultural infrastructure. Investments include 18 quarantine stations and 26 research units dedicated to plant production



By the end of 2023, Oman had successfully cultivated 293,000 acres, a figure expected to rise with the adoption of modern farming techniques and technologies.

and the movement of bees. This infrastructure ensures the long-term sustainability of Oman's agriculture and supports the nation's food security. Oman's natural advantages, including its diverse climate and ecosystems, also contribute to the success of its agriculture.

The country can cultivate a wide variety of crops, creating a resilient agricultural system.

Oman's honey production has also seen increased attention, with dedicated units established to produce and market this premium product both locally and internationally. In addition to plant production, Oman has made considerable strides in animal production.

The country's 3.2 million acres of natural grazing land in the north and south provide ample resources for livestock. Oman's livestock industry, which includes 4 million of farm animals, is vital to both domestic con-

sumption and the export market.

The government's commitment to animal health is evident in its robust veterinary infrastructure, which includes 5 livestock quarantine stations, 41 mobile clinics, 69 veterinary clinics and a dedicated hospital. 15 quarantine offices regulate the import and export of animals, ensuring high standards of animal welfare are maintained.

Key investments in animal production include the Mazoon Dairy Project, A'Saffa Foods, and Barka poultry farm, which continue to set high industry standards.

These initiatives contribute to Oman's growing reputation as a leader in regional food production.

The 2023 report highlights Oman's dedication to food security and sustainable agricultural growth. The country's achievements in plant and animal production reflect the government's strategic vision, securing Oman's future as a resilient and self-sufficient nation.

As Oman continues to develop these sectors, it not only safeguards its food supply, but also contributes to regional and international markets, in alignment with Oman Vision 2040's goals for sustainable growth.

OQGN ADDS FIRST-EVER GAS BLENDING STATION TO NATIONAL NETWORK

FROM PAGE 13

Earlier, in August, OQGN marked the expansion of its gas transportation system with the commissioning of the South Grid project effectively boosting gas supply to Dhofar Governorate.

Dubbed the ‘Saib Project’, it added 177 km of pipeline capacity from Harweel to Raysut Station in Salalah, helping boost the capacity of the South Grid to 16 mmscmd,

up from 10 mmscmd – an increase of 60 per cent.

Following the addition of the pipeline, the total length of OQGN's national gas transportation system climbed to 4,223 kilometres, up from 4031 kilometres previously.

Meanwhile, natural gas volumes transported by the company across its network climbed to a cumulative total of 32.3 billion cubic metres (bcm) in Q3 2024,

representing a 6-per cent increase over the corresponding Q3 2023 figure of 30.3 bcm.

Revenue earned during the first nine months of 2024 totalled RO 115.3 million, which was down 10.9 per cent compared to earnings of RO 129.4 million for the corresponding period of 2023.

Profit dipped 8.7 per cent to RO 77.2 million, down from RO 84.5 million in 2023, the company added.

Chery Group launches ESG strategy to lead the future of sustainable mobility

AHMED AL KAABI
WUHU, OCT 21

CHERY Group has unveiled its Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) strategy during its main conference, underscoring the company's commitment to becoming a world-leading, green and intelligent mobility technology company. With a focus on sustainability, innovation and global impact, the strategy reflects Chery's determination to address pressing environmental challenges and foster social progress worldwide.

ACHIEVING SUCCESS

Yin Tongyu, Chairman of Chery Group, announced impressive performance figures during the conference: “Chery recorded total sales of 1.75 million units from January to September 2024 — a 40% increase year-on-year, with 830,000 units exported. Our success is built not



The strategy reflects Chery's determination to address pressing environmental challenges and foster social progress worldwide.

only on sales but on quality, earning us recognition as the top Chinese brand in the 2024 J.D. Power Initial Quality Study (IQS). In June, we proudly entered the Fortune Global 500, ranking 385th.”

Yin emphasised that this progress is just the start of Chery's journey: “We pursue a vision to become a global

leader in green intelligent mobility technology.

“As the automotive industry faces unprecedented challenges — ranging from climate change to digital transformation — Chery is committed to driving change through technology, new energy and AI, which are essential trends shaping the future.”

The chairman also highlighted the company's globalisation strategy: “Our ‘In Somewhere, For Somewhere’ philosophy establishes localised teams and talent systems to enhance manufacturing, R&D and sales.

“By integrating into the communities we serve, Chery aims to be a truly local company — contributing to the economy, engaging in social welfare activities and spreading kindness.”

UNWAVERING FOCUS

To maintain long-term competitiveness, Chery is dedicating 20 billion RMB annually to technological innovation, establishing R&D centres across eight global cities, including North America and Europe. With over 300 Yaoguang laboratories and more than 20,000 engineers, the company is advancing breakthroughs in new energy, intelligent connectivity, autonomous driving and AI.

OPINION

Progress of living in an “intelligent world”



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The author is
the founder of
Knowledge Oman

LAST WEEK, my article revolved around the definition of an “intelligent world,” that is, getting everything in the world connected and interconnected, from home devices, systems, streets, buildings, infrastructure, and offices to society as a whole.

We defined what an “intelligent world” literally means and looked at a high-level representation of the concept. I promised at the end of my article last week to shed some light on the progress of the concept, especially after returning back from attending a 5-day jam-packed conference, workshop and tech-led events at the world’s largest technology conference (GITEX) in Dubai.

Briefly, GITEX, which ran from October 14-18 (last week), showcased cutting-edge and latest technologies from the heavyweight innovative solution providers around the world. The focus was primarily on artificial intelligence (AI) innovations, cybersecurity, cloud computing and quantum computing, to name a few.

Truth be told, it would almost be impossible for one to visit every stall (exhibitor), attend every session at the conference and meet and network with professionals without planning the same in advance, for there were a wide array of innovations presented, technology players exhibiting and delegates around the world attending. Approximately from the organisers stats,

there were over 6,500 exhibitors, 1,800 start-ups and 1,200 investors alongside governments from more than 180 countries — proof is in the pudding on the gigantic crowd that was on the floor — a massive flow of information to consume.

I was honoured to get a close look as well as experience at one of the major players (Huawei), who is working very hard behind the scenes to bring the “intelligent world” concept closer to reality.

TRANSFORMATION SOLUTIONS

As one of the largest ICT technology solution providers in the world, Huawei showcased a wide range of advanced digital and intelligent transformation solutions under the theme “Accelerate Industrial Digitalisation and Intelligence,” where it highlighted innovations in the areas of AI, 5G, cloud computing and cybersecurity for many sectors that include but are not limited to manufacturing, healthcare, transportation, education, finance and energy.

Their goal is to simply introduce innovation and support productivity while ensuring operational efficiency is enhanced along the way.

During GITEX, Huawei hosted the “Industrial Digital and Intelligent Transformation” Summit, where it discussed the future of digitalisation and its role in driving economic growth.

Key developments, including collaboration with industry partners and govern-

Their goal is to
simply introduce
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way.

ments, were shared during the summit as part of Huawei’s long-term vision for creating a fully connected, intelligent world. Clearly, the initiatives at the summit highlight Huawei’s ongoing effort to drive digital transformation globally while contributing to societal well-being and economic development.

It was fascinating to observe the Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) at the conference, showcasing their collaborative efforts with Huawei through their strategic association, which primarily focuses on 5G and cloud solutions. As observed during the session, the objective of the collaboration between Huawei and Omantel is to develop cutting-edge solutions that address local industry needs while fostering economic growth at large.

Enabling faster connectivity along with enhanced cloud services is the chief goal Omantel aims to achieve via Huawei’s proven technology, expertise and experience in the field, ultimately creating a solid foundation for living in an “intelligent world”. To conclude, are we getting closer to living in an “intelligent world”? Yes. Are there players actively working behind the scenes to create an infrastructure that supports living intelligently?

Yes, internationally via technology solution providers and locally via telecom operators, as I have witnessed personally during the 5-day journey at the event and my summary with the article today.

BHP’S DAM DISASTER
DEALINGS LEAVE
A BAD TASTE

BHP’S tactics in Brazil may be going too far. On Friday, the miner, partner Vale and their Samarco joint venture in the country outlined a potential 132 billion reais (\$23 billion) settlement with Brazilian authorities over a catastrophic dam failure in 2015. Problem is, it’s essentially an optical illusion. Meanwhile, the Australia-listed company run by Mike Henry is in hot water trying to hinder a related class-action lawsuit in London.

The potential Brazil deal unveiled last week simply defers when and how BHP and Vale would take the financial hit from the collapse of a dam that unleashed arsenic, mercury and other toxic waste, killing 19 people and polluting almost 700 kilometres of waterways.

In theory, the amount implies BHP would be directly on the hook for up to \$12 billion, and

Vale, the remaining amount, after deducting compensation already paid out.

Instead, both companies plus Samarco are in discussions to pay 75% of the potential damages over 20 years.

That would allow Samarco to fully recover — it only restarted mining in 2020 and is operating way below capacity — and pay for the damages using profit that would otherwise go to its two parents.

True, the impact for shareholders at the two miners would be minimised. BHP, for instance, reckons it won’t need to add to the \$6.5 billion it has already set aside.

But that deal would prioritise Samarco’s financial health rather than the needs of states, municipalities and other groups which have already been waiting almost nine years for a broader settlement beyond the \$8 billion already paid. And BHP has the financial firepower to offer an immediate solution: it’ll generate \$9 billion of free cash flow in its current financial year, per LSEG, and its net debt is just 30% of EBITDA.

Moreover, BHP has been called out for hindering a related class-action lawsuit in London seeking up to \$47 billion for more than 600,000 claimants, including 46 Brazilian municipalities.

In July, the law firm representing the claimants, Pogust Goodhead, discovered the miner had paid a Brazilian lobby group to file a case with the country’s supreme court that argues local governments should be barred from pursuing suits abroad. — Reuters

Highlights

In theory, the amount implies BHP would be directly on the hook for up to

\$12 BILLION, and Vale, the remaining amount, after deducting compensation already paid out



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transformation
mentor



The expansion of Salalah Port serves as a prime example of Oman’s enhanced logistics capabilities.

OMAN IS undergoing a remarkable economic transformation, positioning itself as a vibrant hub for foreign direct investment (FDI) in the Middle East.

Driven by a progressive government and a strategic vision for economic diversification, the Sultanate of Oman is cultivating a thriving business ecosystem that presents exciting opportunities for both local and international players. This transformation has been particularly evident in the last 5 years, with significant strides made in various areas.

Oman has made significant progress in digitising its economy and government services. The launch of the National Digital Economy Programme has accelerated the adoption of digital technologies across various sectors.

A key achievement in this endeavour was Oman achieving 53% of its government digital transformation target by September 2023, with 1,545 services digitised.

Furthermore, Oman has made significant strides in diversifying its economy away from oil dependence.

Focus has been placed on sectors like tourism, logistics, manufacturing and

renewable energy.

A key achievement in this regard is the strong recovery witnessed in the tourism sector in 2024, with 2 million visitors by mid-year, representing a 5.2% increase from 2023.

Moreover, Oman has implemented several reforms to improve the ease of doing business, including streamlining business registration processes and enhancing investor protection.

Significant investments in infrastructure projects, including new ports, airports and road networks, have improved connectivity and facilitated trade. The new Muscat International Airport Freezone and the expansion of Salalah Port serve as prime examples of Oman’s enhanced logistics capabilities. Oman has made significant strides in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) in recent years.

The country’s efforts to diversify its economy and improve its business environment are yielding impressive results

Recent statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information highlight Oman’s success: by the end of Q1 2024, FDI in Oman reached RO 25.38 billion, marking a 19.3% increase compared to the same period in 2023 (RO 21.27 billion).

This growth underscores the increasing attractiveness of Oman’s investment landscape. The “Invest Oman” Lounge, launched in January 2023, has become a cornerstone of Oman’s FDI strategy, securing 29 investment projects worth RO 1.2 billion, with an additional 59 projects valued at RO 3.2 billion currently being processed.

Key sectors attracting investment include industry, renewable energy and healthcare. One standout project is the polysilicon factory in the Sohar Free Zone, with an investment exceeding RO 520 million and an expected opening date in 2025.

This project exemplifies Oman’s push towards high-value industrial investments.

Oman has implemented several measures to simplify the investment process, including a one-stop shop in the form of the “Invest in Oman” hall, which brings together 15 government institutions, allowing investors to complete all procedures in one location.

Additionally, the Oman Business Platform offers about 50 electronic services, facilitating business setup and operations. A new artificial intelligence-powered KYC service enables foreign investors to register and start businesses remotely.

The Foreign Capital Investment Law of 2019 marked a significant step forward by allowing 100% foreign ownership without capital proof requirements, with an evaluation after the first year ensuring compliance with conditions.

Oman has also developed a comprehensive approach to attract investors, publishing an Investment Incentives Guide covering various sectors and economic zones and implementing the “Tas’eera” project, reducing fees for 137 services and eliminating fees for 20 services.

These initiatives aim to balance fiscal policy with the goals of Oman Vision 2040, which emphasises private sector empowerment and foreign investment attraction.

Oman is targeting six primary sectors for investment: mining, tourism, agriculture, manufacturing, information technology and renewable energy. This diversified approach aims to reduce dependency on oil and create a more sustainable economy. Leading economies investing in Oman include China, India, UK and Egypt.

These nations are contributing significantly to Oman’s growing FDI inflows.

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A Sudanese resident in Salalah, Bsc of administrative sciences with 21 years of experience in the fields of (sales/ management/ logistics and fleet). Contact: +968 98510880.

Sri Lankan Male- (CGMA ACMA+CPA+BBA) Asst. Finance Manager / Chief Accountant, 12+ Experience in Oman & GCC, Expert in Finan. Reporting (MIS), VAT, Audit, Cashflow, Budget, AR AP Recon, IFRS, Payroll, Banking. Contact: 78773250. Email: ali.mohamedown@gmail.com

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ART/LIFE



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CAN OMAN COMPETE AS A WEDDING DESTINATION? EXPERTS SAY YES >20



Q U I C K

F E A T U R E S



ART

This photograph shows creations by British milliner Stephen Jones during the exhibition “Stephen Jones, chapeaux d’artiste” at the Palais Galliera museum in Paris. — AFP

LIFESTYLE

A local man poses for a picture at Yasmina lake, a seasonal lake in the village of Merzouga in the Sahara desert in southeastern Morocco. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Cast member Angelina Jolie reacts on the day of a gala presentation for the film “Maria” at the BFI London Film Festival in London, Britain. — AFP

TRAVELUPDATE

Egypt opens more galleries in long-awaited antiquities museum



Egypt opened a series of galleries to the public on Tuesday in its flagship new museum, but the glittering King Tutankhamun collection and solar boats buried by the Pyramid of Khufu are yet to be unveiled, pending a long-delayed grand inauguration.

More than 20 years under construction, the sprawling Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) next to the pyramids of Giza was initially scheduled to open in 2012 but the launch was repeatedly pushed back due to cost overruns and political tumult.

Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly last week announced a “trial opening” ahead of a formal inauguration. Egyptian officials say a number of world leaders have expressed interest in attending the official opening but have not indicated when this will take place.



The museum’s main entrance hall with its stairway of Pharaonic statues and an annex for commercial shopping opened to the public in February 2023.

Ali Abu Dshish, a member of the Egyptian Archaeologists Union who attended Tuesday’s opening of almost a dozen galleries, said the trial operation of the vast museum was evidence Egypt now had the space to exhibit its antiquities, including those being returned by Western states and museums.

It’s an “important message that we can recover our antiquities, which are spread across various countries in the world,” he said.

Visiting Russian tourist Kseniia Muse said: “We are so happy to be here, to have visited these beautiful sculptures... It is very modern and at the same time you can touch the ancient.”

Tourism is an important source of foreign currency revenue for Egypt. The government has been trying to increase tourist numbers after facing a long-running foreign currency shortage that was exacerbated by external shocks.

Until now, Egypt’s most famous collections have been housed in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo’s Tahrir Square, which has been largely unmodernised and unrenovated since opening in 1902. — Reuters

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Japanese hot spring resort to open in United States



One of Japan's top luxury hotel firms will open an "onsen" hot spring resort in upstate New York that it says will be the first Japanese-run venture of its kind in the United States.

Japanese onsens — bath houses where patrons relax in mineral-rich water of various temperatures — are a major domestic industry beloved by both locals and tourists.

Hoshino Resorts said it will open its new inn in the small town of Sharon Springs in 2028, marking its second foray into the world's largest economy after failing to win over North Americans during Japan's 1980s boom years.

"The biggest lesson we

learned in the 80s is that if a Japanese hotel operator wishes to enter the US market, it must meet strong expectations for its concept to reflect Japanese culture," the firm said in a statement.

"The move will mark the first opening of an onsen inn in the United States by a Japanese hotel firm," it said.

Sharon Springs was once a vibrant hot spring and tourist hub, but it is in need of revitalisation having lost its glory over the past 100 years — making it the perfect location for a new hotel, Hoshino Resorts said. The "ryokan" inn will have up to 70 guest rooms, according to Japanese media. — AFP



Thousands of Liam Payne fans hold memorials worldwide

THOUSANDS of Liam Payne fans have tearfully remembered the late One Direction singer at memorial events in the UK and many other parts of the world.

Directioners, the name given to supporters of The X Factor-formed band, sang and left tributes in London, Glasgow, Paris, Sydney and New York — as well as in the Philippines and Colombia — to celebrate the life of the 31-year-old who died on Wednesday.

On Sunday afternoon in Hyde Park, central London, hundreds of fans queued to leave handwritten notes, balloons and flowers at the Peter Pan statue in Kensington Gardens.

Tess Hayden, 24, who was on holiday with her brother in Dublin when she heard the news, said that she made changes to her schedule so she could be with One Directions fans in London.

The tourist, from the US, said: "Well, my older brother and I had been planning a trip to Dublin for a while, and I knew I was gonna try and come to London at some point at the end of the trip, but when I woke up and heard the news, I was like, 'OK, I'll just go a day earlier [and] try and figure [it] out.'"

She called the news "very surreal" as a death at 31 is "very sad and devastating, and shocking."

Many of the mainly young people at the vigil embraced their friends and family members as they became emotional, while remembering the band they grew up with, as well as singing One Direction chart-toppers such as "What Makes You Beautiful" in unison.

The crowd was so large that at several points organisers asked those who were gathered in the centre to leave their tributes, and head to the back so other fans could get through.

Those who reached the statue of Peter Pan wrote messages, sang or told "Liam, I love you," which garnered applause and shouts of approval from those at the remembrance event.

There was one police car, situated at the end of the queue.

Before the weekend, Payne's father headed to Buenos Aires to arrange the repatriation of his son's body.

Geoff Payne visited the Casa Sur



Hotel on Friday in the Argentinian capital, where the Wolverhampton star fell from a third-floor balcony, and read letters and cards from fans outside.

Speaking in Hyde Park, Lauren Anderson and Natasha Bradley, both 23, reflected on how they had dealt with the grief together.

Bradley said "Lauren's been the one that I've been speaking to the most about it," and she wanted to be around people who were "feeling the same because your parents, they don't really understand how much they really meant to you growing up."

On Saturday, his sister Ruth Gibbins paid a heartfelt tribute to her brother on Instagram saying she does not feel "this world was good enough or kind enough" to him, as well as sharing pictures.

She also wrote "I'm sorry I couldn't save you" and added: "One last time I need you to know, I'm here if you need anything, I'd drive to the end of the universe to bring you back."

That same day, "Britain's Got Talent" auditions restarted in Blackpool following them being rescheduled after Payne's death and former One Direction member Zayn Malik announced he would postpone the US leg of his tour.

Malik, who left The X Factor-formed boy band in 2015 before they went on hiatus in 2016, wrote on X that he was making the decision "given the

heartbreaking loss experienced this week."

"The dates are being rescheduled for January and I'll post them as soon as it's all set in the next few days," he wrote. "Your tickets will remain valid for the new dates. Love you all and thank you for your understanding."

He is set to perform in Edinburgh, London, Wolverhampton, Leeds, Newcastle and Manchester throughout the final two months of this year, and a spokesman for the singer confirmed these dates are unchanged.

Other tribute events to Payne have been held at the Obelisco land mark in Buenos Aires, at the Tuileries Garden in the French capital, at the Stockholm music studio in Sweden where One Direction recorded albums, central Brussels, and the British embassy in Russia.

Payne died of multiple traumas and "internal and external haemorrhage," a post-mortem examination report said.

Argentina's National Criminal and Correctional Prosecutor's Office No 16 said it was investigating the incident as an "inconclusive death."

It said five witnesses were questioned in order to reconstruct what happened at the hotel.

A joint statement from One Direction said they were "completely devastated" and will miss the singer "terribly," adding the memories they shared with him "will be treasured forever." — PA Media/dpa

With luxury properties like St. Regis Muscat and Mandarin Oriental Muscat entering the scene, Oman's wedding market boasts an array of stunning venues adept at hosting celebrations of varying sizes.



Can Oman compete as a wedding destination? Experts say yes



BY YERU EBUEN

LAST WEEKEND, the grand wedding fair held at Shangri-La Muscat marked a significant moment in Oman's blossoming destination wedding industry. The fair was inaugurated in the presence of esteemed dignitaries including Mohammed al Zubair, Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), Sunil VA, Regional Vice-President of Indian Sub-Continent at Oman Air, and Sajida al Ghaithi, Director of Tourism Marketing from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

Comprising three luxurious hotels, the Shangri-la complex was the perfect venue where numerous vendors, suppliers and event producers gathered to highlight Oman's potential as a lavish wedding destination.

With a history of hosting several grand weddings, including significant events attended by 400 to 800 guests, the property flexes its readiness to provide a range of breathtaking locations and on-demand services to ensure every detail is meticulously crafted.

The wedding fair showcased the spectacular offerings of Oman's luxury hotel sector, underlining the country's preparedness to host extravagant celebrations that align with international standards.

"Our focus is not only to maintain our leading position as a wedding destination, but to innovate continuously and offer bespoke services designed to create dream weddings for couples," stated Philippe Kronberg, General Manager of Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah.

Oman has made significant strides in establishing itself as a destination for weddings, particularly catering to the growing demand from international markets. In 2023 alone, Oman successfully hosted six notable destination weddings, primarily attracting couples from India. The first half of 2024 has already seen four additional weddings confirmed, with three more anticipated by year-end, totalling an impressive count of thirteen weddings in just over a year. Each of these events typically draws between 400 and 800 guests, bringing a substantial influx of visitors to Oman and providing a boost to the local economy.

The government's active pursuit of foreign markets, particularly targeting prospective wedding clients from India and Saudi Arabia, further underscores Oman's commitment to becoming a leading wedding destination. By showcasing the country's rich cultural heritage, stunning landscapes and exceptional hospitality, Oman is poised to attract even more couples seeking to celebrate their love in a picturesque setting.

A DIVERSE WEDDING LANDSCAPE

With luxury properties like St. Regis Muscat and Mandarin Oriental Muscat entering the scene, Oman's wedding market boasts an array of stunning venues adept at hosting celebrations of varying sizes. The iconic Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton hotel, has made a name for itself as a top choice for grand weddings, offering elegant ballrooms and an impressive beachfront.

Moreover, Oman caters to both lavish celebrations and intimate gatherings. Resorts such as Six Senses Zighy Bay, Alila Jabal Akhdar, and Anantara Al Baleed in Salalah position themselves as idyllic, luxurious havens for couples desiring a more exclusive experience. The architectural aesthetics infused with Omani heritage provide a remarkable backdrop, merging natural beauty with specialised services aimed at creating memorable events.

Sheraton and JW Marriott are also increasingly targeting international clientele, aiming to promote their properties as luxurious venues suited for every couple's wedding vision. These hotels are actively engaging with wedding planners from abroad, positioning Oman as an attractive site for nuptials that blend local culture with unparalleled luxury.

An innovative trend emerging in Oman's destination weddings is the allure of the desert setting. Pop-up events, such as those organised by Canvas Club, offer a unique experience in the stunning Omani desert. These intimate setups provide couples with the opportunity to craft a narrative that resonates with their personal journeys.

Recognising the potential of wedding tourism, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is committed to establishing Oman as a top wedding destination. With ambitious plans, the ministry is strategically targeting markets such as India and Saudi Arabia, tapping into the large financial impact these nationalities bring. Arjun Chadha, Country Manager for India at Buzz Travel Tourism, noted that Oman's proximity and excellent airline connectivity make it an appealing choice for Indian couples seeking opulent wedding experiences.

SUPPORT FROM GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

The momentum in Oman's wedding tourism sector is strongly supported by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. Initiatives include organising tours for prospective wedding guests to explore Oman's iconic landmarks and cultural jewels, enhancing the overall experience of destination weddings. By spotlighting the Sultanate of Oman's exquisite beauty and warm hospitality, the government is actively competing in a market where countries are vying to attract foreign wedding tourists.

The ministry has also initiated efforts to draw international wedding planners by offering comprehensive logistical support, from accommodation to visa assistance. In an interview with local media, Omar bin Salem al Jabri, Head of Specialised Tourism at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, underscored the importance of collaboration with Oman Airports, the Royal Oman Police and local hospitality businesses to ensure a seamless experience for foreign guests. The potential economic impact of this burgeoning sector has prompted the ministry to implement various incentives aimed at major companies specialising in destination weddings.

The economic impact of wedding tourism extends far beyond the venues themselves, creating a ripple effect across various sectors. Accommodations, catering, transportation, photography, and event management all flourish as wedding ceremonies take place. According to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, wedding tourism contributed millions of rials to the local economy in 2023, emphasising its significance within Oman's broader tourism strategy.

Destination weddings not only fill hotel rooms, but also drive business to local vendors, from florists and bakers to event decorators and transportation services. This growing sector supports local economies and communities by creating jobs and fostering sustainable tourism growth.

THE FUTURE OF WEDDING TOURISM IN OMAN

The future looks promising for Oman as it positions itself as a top-of-mind destination for weddings. The two-day event at Shangri-La Muscat exemplified the local community's enthusiasm for diverse wedding offerings, attracting nearly two thousand registrants.

This response underscores Oman's readiness to position itself on the global stage as a sought-after destination for weddings. As Oman continues to enhance its wedding tourism initiatives, the path towards becoming a premier wedding hub seems bright, backed by both luxury offerings and strong government support aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

The commitment of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the sophistication of the luxurious venues, and the rich cultural backdrop position Oman as a flourishing destination for dreamy weddings, ripe for couples seeking unforgettable experiences in a truly remarkable setting.