

Musandam welcomes first cruise ship

The Musandam Governorate on Monday celebrated the welcoming of the first cruise ship of the winter season, marking the beginning of a vibrant tourist period. Arriving from Dubai, UAE, and en route to Muscat, the vessel brought 638 tourists and 1,180 crew members from around the world. The welcoming programme showcased Musandam's rich heritage, featuring traditional performances and an exhibition spotlighting local artisans, productive families, and small businesses. **SEE P3**

SUNRISE - 06:15 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:58 AM

DHUHR - 11:55 PM

ASR - 03:07 PM

MAGHRIB - 05:31 PM

ISHA - 06:43 PM



Established 1981. Editor-in-chief: Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili

OMAN OBSERVER

www.omanobserver.om editor@omanobserver.om

P12

SOLANKE HITS
BRACE IN SPURS
SECOND-HALF
BLITZ



P15

MUSK CALLS
ON SOVEREIGN
FUNDS TO
INVEST IN AI



P20

NISHAT KHAN'S
PERFORMANCE
IS A PATHWAY
TO THE STARS



MUSCAT

'ISHRAQ' FUND
LAUNCHED

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA), the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science and Bank Nizwa, in cooperation with Oman National Investments Development Company, launched 'Ishraq Endowment Investment Fund' with a capital of RO 10 million. The launch of the endowment fund was held under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. The fund offers innovative and promising investment opportunities by facilitating access to investment opportunities that are compatible with Sharia provisions and supports the financial goals of individuals and companies, and enhances shared responsibility towards community welfare. **DETAILS ON P3**

Royal Decrees ratify agreements with Venezuela, Suriname

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik of Oman issued two Royal Decrees. Royal Decree No (55/2024) ratifies an agreement between the Sultanate of Oman and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on mutual exemption

of visa requirements for holders of diplomatic, special and service passports. The agreement was signed in New York on September 23, 2024. Article (1) ratifies the abovementioned agreement in accordance with the version

attached to this Decree. Article (2) states that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. Royal Decree No (56/2024) ratifies an agreement between the Government of the Sultanate

of Oman and the Government of the Republic of Suriname on mutual waiving of visas for holders of diplomatic, special and service passports. The agreement was signed in New York on September 26, 2024. Article (1) ratifies the

abovementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this Decree. Article (2) states that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

4TH OMAN SCIENCE
FESTIVAL KICKS OFF



The 4th edition of Oman Science Festival 2024 themed 'Sustainable Resources' kicked off at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) on Monday under the auspices of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health. Present at the opening ceremony were Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shibaniyah, Minister of Education, Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development and Dr Moosa Mohammed Al Maqrif, Minister of Education in Libya. As many as 141 institutions are taking part in the event by showcasing their innovations in diverse fields. Additionally, five international institutes namely are also take part of the festival. **DETAILS ON P3**

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, on Monday opened the 16th annual meeting of the International Forum of Sovereign Wealth Funds (IFSFW) in Muscat Governorate. The meeting is hosted by the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Oman Investment Authority (OIA). The event will see the participation of representatives of 50 sovereign funds from 46 countries around the world Speaking at the opening ceremony, HH Sayyid Theyazin said that the Sultanate of Oman's hosting of the meeting affirms its high status among nations. The event reflects Oman's ability to build bridges of cooperation and strengthen strategic partnerships with all. He added that "Choosing Oman to host the event constitutes a



A commemorative silver coin and postage stamp were issued by OIA, in cooperation with the Central Bank of Oman.

clear testimony to the country's global standards in governance and sustainability, commitment to wealth management standards and its dedication to

the skills of wealth development and investment. "It is a good coincidence that the hosting of this event happens at a time Oman

has been able to overcome economic challenges and pursue its march of stability and prosperity with steady steps, with the blessing of the Almighty Allah and the insightful vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sultan of Oman," said HH Sayyid Theyazin. He pointed out that the best evidence of this is Oman's success in upgrading its credit rating as an "Investment Grade" country. Oman has thus opened up new vistas to global investments that stem from a great legacy, ambitious future vision and promising opportunities in all vital sectors, he added. HH Sayyid Theyazin added: "We believe that this meeting is not just a passing occasion, but rather a valuable opportunity to showcase the diverse investment potential that abound in Oman. **TURN TO P5**

'Net 3' to
speed up
zero-carbon
emission
goals

The National Net-Zero Programme launched a new package of projects and initiatives called 'Net 3' in Muscat on Monday, aimed at an orderly transition to zero-carbon emission goals The event was held under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit. Dr Abdullah al Amri, chairman of the Environment Authority, stated that the launch of the 'Net 3' package is part of efforts to meet Oman's ambitious climate targets. He added that the third phase of net-zero, known as "Net-Zero 3," has been launched to reduce carbon emissions and achieve net-zero. He explained that these projects and initiatives cover key sectors, including energy, industry, transport, cities, and buildings. They are divided into enabling initiatives, projects with limited reductions, and high-impact reduction projects to achieve the net-zero targets in the near term and by 2050. **SEE P3**

OMAN WINS GOLD



The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), won gold medal at the level of countries participating in the 36th International Biennale of Black and White Photography, while photographer Hatem bin Dhahi al Rashidi won bronze medal at the individual level with his photo entitled 'The Camel's Rise.' A ceremony was held in the Indian city of Jaipur on Monday to honour the winning countries.

Harris and Trump in final campaign blitz

PITTSBURGH: Bitter rivals Kamala Harris and Donald Trump embark on a final frenzied campaign blitz with both hitting must-win Pennsylvania on the last day of a tight and volatile US presidential election campaign. Republican Trump has promised a "landslide" as he seeks a sensational return to the White House, while Democrat Harris said the "momentum" was on the side of her bid to be America's first woman president. But the polls suggest a different story on the eve of Election Day — total deadlock in surveys nationally and in the seven swing states where the result is expected to be decided. The world is anxiously watching the election, which is set to have profound implications for conflicts in the Middle East and Russia's war in Ukraine, and for tackling climate change. Now a race of dramatic twists, including two bids to kill Trump and Harris's shock late entrance, is coming down to the most viciously fought-over battleground. Harris will spend the whole day campaigning in the rust-belt state of



Chocolate bars with the faces of Democratic presidential nominee Vice-President Kamala Harris and Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump are displayed at a store in John F Kennedy International Airport, New York. — Reuters

Pennsylvania, culminating in a huge rally in Philadelphia featuring singer Lady Gaga. Trump will travel to North Carolina, Pennsylvania and then Michigan. In a sign of how crucial Pennsylvania is to occupying the Oval Office, Trump and Harris will hold duelling rallies in the industrial city of Pittsburgh. Pennsylvania is the single biggest swing state prize under the

US Electoral College system, which awards influence in line with population. Both sides say they are encouraged by early turnout numbers, with over 78 million people having voted already, around half of the total number of ballots cast in 2020. The closeness of the 2024 White House race reflects a deeply divided United States, as it chooses between two candidates whose visions could scarcely be more different. Former president Trump has doubled down on his dark and violent rhetoric in his pursuit of a second term which would make him the first convicted felon and, at 78, the oldest major party candidate ever elected. Vice-President Harris, 60, has meanwhile made an astonishing rise to the top of the Democratic ticket after President Joe Biden dropped out of the race in July. They have both embarked on a zig-zag through the swing states, with raucous rallies, podcast interviews to reach reluctant voters, and stunts such as Trump riding in a trash truck and Harris appearing on television comedy show "Saturday Night Live." **SEE ALSO P7**

OMAN

SIGNIFICANTSTEP

DIRAYA FORUM
BRIDGES EDUCATION,
INDUSTRY FOR
TOURISM GROWTH



The forum was held under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, NOV 4

The inaugural Diraya Specialised Tourism Forum commenced on Monday at Oman Tourism College in Muscat, marking a significant step toward bridging the gap between higher education and the demands of Oman's growing tourism sector.

This forum aims to elevate human capital, address sector-specific challenges, and enhance Omani leadership within tourism, aligning educational programmes with market needs for sustainable development.

Held under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and organised in partnership with Oman Tourism College and the Oman Society for Human Resource Management, the forum is the first in a series intended to align academia with industry requirements. Dr Hamad bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Dean of Oman Tourism College, emphasised that this initiative is a pioneering effort by the ministry to reduce the gap between educational outcomes and market demands. Through Diraya, Oman Tourism College aims to foster collaborative solutions, address challenges, and spread sector-specific knowledge under the slogan 'Let Us Be Informed in Various Fields Related to the Tourism Sector.' The forum featured four discussion sessions covering vital topics such as human resource challenges, developing advanced leadership capacities, and aligning academic and vocational programmes with the tourism sector's needs. A concluding session shared research findings on tourism in Oman, stressing the importance of educational output in supporting sustainable tourism development and boosting competitiveness.

On the forum's sidelines, a job fair organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, in collaboration with Oman Tourism College, connected employers with job-seekers to support national talent and align career opportunities with specialisations within the sector.

The Diraya forum is a pioneering platform for exchanging best practices between academia and industry, fostering collaborations, and creating a knowledge base to support tourism's growth in Oman. Organisers envision this forum as an annual gathering, drawing both national and international expertise to discuss, innovate, and offer solutions that contribute to Oman Vision 2040's goals, reinforcing tourism as a vital economic driver and a cornerstone of sustainable development.

Influencers play key role in promoting Salalah's tourism boom

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

In today's digital age, influencers have become vital players in promoting tourism, especially in destinations like the Wilayat of Salalah. By harnessing their substantial social media followings, influencers provide real-time updates, showcase picturesque landscapes, and highlight local events, drawing global attention to the Sultanate of Oman's natural and cultural beauty.

The Observer recently connected with several social media influencers who are driving Salalah's tourism

narrative. These influencers offer a unique perspective, bringing local attractions closer to a worldwide audience. For example, Omani influencer Amal underlined social media's edge over traditional outlets. With over 400,000 followers and a high viewership rate, Amal al Naweerih uses her platform to present Salalah as a premier destination for family-friendly tourism. By covering key events and scenic locations, she effectively serves as a virtual tour guide, making it easier for tourists to plan their visits. "Influencers are quick to share



Amal Al Naweerih

information, helping people worldwide learn about Dhofar's attractions," Amal explains. "We simplify travel for tourists, guiding them to Salalah's most popular spots," she says. As these influencers connect with both local residents and global audiences, they play an active role in shaping the perception of Salalah as



Ansar Mohammed

a vibrant tourist hub. Through their engaging content, they not only promote tourism but also inspire community involvement in causes such as climate change awareness, health initiatives, and social welfare projects. Ansar Mohammed, an accountant based in Salalah for 14 years, has amassed over 31,000 Instagram followers by



Amelia German

sharing engaging vlogs that feature Salalah's lush landscapes, public events, and hidden gems. His khareef (monsoon season) videos, which received over a million views, not only boost tourism but also provide useful tips for both local and international tourists. "Social media has changed how people



Iqra Hussain Shaikh

consume information," says Ansar. "Today, most prefer quick content like Instagram reels or short vlogs that convey essential details within 90 seconds. This quick format resonates with modern travellers and gives them instant insights into what Salalah has to offer." Similarly, British influencer Amelia German, with

a following of over 132,000 on Instagram, emphasises how quickly social media allows information to spread. Her posts encourage a healthy lifestyle and participation in events, such as the recent Ironman held at Hawana Resort. Amelia believes that influencers can drive new tourist demographics to Salalah, appealing to fitness enthusiasts and adventure seekers globally. "Social media is instant, and it has the power to attract diverse tourists," she shares. "Events like Ironman promote Salalah in international sports circles, broadening its appeal beyond

traditional tourist segments." Iqra Hussain Shaikh, another key influencer, connects directly with millions of followers across platforms, leveraging her background as a pharmacist to promote healthcare awareness alongside tourism. Raised in Salalah, Iqra highlights the city's beauty throughout the khareef season and collaborates with other influencers to showcase its scenic spots. Her commitment to tourism goes hand in hand with her work in raising awareness about health issues, making her a multi-dimensional voice in the influencer landscape.

Royal Navy of Oman
marks its annual day

THE ROYAL Navy of Oman (RNO) on Monday marked its annual day, which falls on November 3 each year. The ceremony took place at the military parade ground in Said Bin Sultan Naval Base under the auspices of HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs.

The event included the graduation of the general education diploma officers' course, university officers' course, and limited service officers' course. During the ceremony, the chief guest presented awards to the top graduates. Various military and musical performances were staged by the parade column, highlighting the progress witnessed by the RNO under the reign of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander.

The ceremony was attended by members of the Royal Family, ministers, commanders of the Sultan Armed Forces (SAF), military and security units, members of the State Council, senior officers from SAF, military and security departments, Military Attachés from embassies of Arab and foreign countries and RNO personnel. — ONA



RNO marked its Annual Day under the auspices of HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said



SHORTTAKES

ISHRAQ ENDOWMENT INVESTMENT FUND LAUNCHED



Dr Al Maamari launched Ishraq Endowment Investment Fund

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA), the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science and Bank Nizwa, in cooperation with Oman National Investments Development Company, on Monday launched ‘Ishraq Endowment Investment Fund’ with a capital of RO 10 million.

Launching the endowment fund was held under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. The Fund offers innovative and promising investment opportunities by facilitating access to investment opportunities that are compatible with Sharia provisions. The Fund supports the financial goals of individuals and companies, and enhances shared responsibility towards community welfare. This initiative is closely aligned with national aspirations to empower society and promote sustainable development. — **ONA**



Restaurants were closed for not adhering to health requirements.

MILITARY TECHNICAL COLLEGE, PAKISTAN’S NUST SIGN MOU

MUSCAT: The Military Technical College (MTC) has signed an international memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Pakistan’s National University of Science and Technology (NUST), reinforcing its commitment to advancing research and fostering academic collaboration in technical and engineering education.

Brigadier General Eng Mohammed bin Aziz al Siyabi, Dean of the Military Technical College, signed on behalf of the college, while Major General Dr Radwan Riyadh, Vice-President for Research, Innovation, and Marketing, represented Pakistan’s NUST. — **ONA**

Eight-day Oman Science Festival focussing sustainability kicks off

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

The fourth edition of the Oman Science Festival (OSF) themed ‘Our Sustainable Resources’ kicked off at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) on Monday. Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, inaugurated OSF, which will continue until November 10.

The eight-day festival this time will have more events aiming to deliver science to students and community members in easy and interactive ways that stimulate creative thinking, and provide positive trends towards science, innovation and scientific research.

Over 141 institutions from the Sultanate of Oman, as well as 5 institutions from abroad, are taking part in OSF, which will feature 520 workshops, scientific presentations, competitions, lectures, sketches, and scientific



Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Monday. Dr Musa al Maqrif, Minister of Education of Libya, was also present.

experiments.

Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, said the festival seeks to spread scientific culture among all segments of society.

He also added that the diversity of the pavilions comes from the diversity of themes. There are pavilions dedicated to biodiversity, smart future, health and life, space, smart cities, cybernetics, natural resources, sustainability, carbon neutrality, wonders of the universe, military technologies, mobile planetarium, artificial intelligence, hackathons, and scientific innovations.

Dr Faisal al Busaidy, Director-General of Information Technology at the Ministry of Education, said to Observer: “The fourth edition of the OSF is launched with a new vision, as it focuses on sustainable resources in all their dimensions

and provides an opportunity for all visitors to learn about many aspects related to sustainable development and sustainable resources. The Ministry of Education welcomes all visitors to this scientific celebration and we hope that the events and programmes will be purposeful and achieve the desired goals.”

The fourth edition of OSF reflects the directions of Oman Vision 2040 and the National Innovation Strategy to make the Sultanate of Oman the best destination among 20 countries in the innovation index by 2024. Dr Musa al Maqrif, Minister of Education of Libya, who is currently visiting Oman, expressed his joy to be attending the opening ceremony of OSF. He stressed the importance of such events in promoting scientific culture among young people, and it is an ideal platform to encourage innovation and creativity.

‘Net 3’ to speed up zero carbon emission goals

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, NOV 4

THE National Net-Zero Programme launched a new package of projects and initiatives called ‘Net 3’ in Muscat on Monday, aimed at an orderly transition to zero-carbon emission goals

The event was held under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

Dr Abdullah al Amri, chairman of the Environment Authority (EA), stated that the launch of the ‘Net 3’ package is part of efforts to meet Oman’s ambitious climate targets. He added that the third phase of net-zero, known as “Net-Zero 3,” has been launched to reduce carbon emissions and achieve net-zero. He explained that these projects and initiatives cover key sectors, including energy, industry, transport, cities, and buildings. They are divided into enabling initiatives, projects with limited reductions, and high-impact reduction projects to achieve the net-zero targets in the near term and by 2050.

Dr Maryam al Busaidy, Head of the National Net-Zero Programme, highlighted the stages of the programme, current projects, and initiatives. “Three new projects and initiatives have been signed and approved as part of the net-zero initiatives. The National Net-Zero Programme has worked diligently over the past few months in collaboration with various sectors, military, and security agencies. Today, we have reached an additional 108 projects and initiatives,



Dr Khamis al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, and Dr Abdullah al Amri, EA Chairman, at the event to launch Net 3 in Muscat on Monday. — **Photo by Huda al Bahri**

bringing the total to 212 projects and initiatives from various sectors. The programme continues to expand its scope for tracking these projects and initiatives, and several initiatives will support the implementation of the national strategy for an organised transition toward achieving net-zero by 2050.”

Dr Maryam al Busaidy also highlighted the key achievements of the National Net-Zero Programme including the monitoring of 104 projects and initiatives, the endorsement of the national strategy within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, activation of the net-zero clock in key sectors, and implementing an alignment plan with the national

programme.

She also emphasised the adoption of the National Strategy for an Orderly Transition to Net-Zero under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

In the transport sector, significant growth has been seen, with 36 projects aimed at promoting the use of electric vehicles, enhancing public transportation, and planting trees along roadsides through 11 new projects. The cities and buildings sector aims to build green, sustainable cities with 26 projects focused on infrastructure development, urban planning, and studying renewable energy sites.

Musandam welcomes first cruise ship of winter



638 tourists, 1,180 crew members were on board as Musandam welcomed the first cruise ship of winter season.

enhanced the experience.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al Kamzari of Musandam’s Department of Heritage and Tourism noted, “Cruise ships during the ‘Musandam Winter’ season play a crucial role in diversifying our income sources and strengthening the local economy.

This influx fosters tourism investment and helps promote Musandam’s natural beauty and Omani heritage on a global stage.”

Khasab Port anticipates receiving around 46 cruise ships during the 2024-2025 season. Last season saw 52 cruise ships and welcomed 76,156 tourists, underscoring Oman’s appeal as a premier cruise destination with its strategic maritime location along the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea, Sea of Oman, and the Arabian Gulf. — **ONA**

SPOTLIGHT



EMBRACE
OUTDOORS
SAFELY

BALQEES AL ORAIMI

OMAN'S CAMPING season offers an unparalleled opportunity to immerse in the beauty of nature. With winter's moderate weather drawing enthusiasts from all over, locals and tourists alike escape to the country's breathtaking landscapes, enjoying a unique blend of recreation and adventure across Oman's mountain ranges, lush valleys, and pristine beaches.

Among the country's top camping destinations, Jabal Shams, known as the 'Mountain of the Sun' and Oman's highest peak, is particularly popular, offering stunning views over deep valleys.

Wadi Shab's scenic waters and greenery provide a tranquil camping experience, while Al Mughsail Beach in Salalah, with its turquoise waters and white sands, offers an oceanfront paradise. For those drawn to the desert, Rimal Al Sharqiya provides the quintessential desert camping experience, with vast dunes ideal for stargazing under Oman's open skies.

Camping in Oman is fun and fulfilling, yet



- Choose your camping site carefully
- Pack essential safety equipment with you
- Care for environment and cleanliness

preparation is essential for a safe experience. Choosing your campsite carefully is important, factoring in the terrain and weather conditions to avoid risks such as flooding in valley regions during the rainy season.

Ensuring you have essential safety gear like first aid supplies, durable tents, flashlights, and area maps helps make camping both safer and more comfortable. A reliable tent suited for Oman's variable conditions is crucial, especially in mountainous areas where temperatures can drop unexpectedly.

Environmental responsibility is equally important. Campers are encouraged to practice "leave no trace" principles by collecting waste and respecting the natural surroundings, avoiding harm to plants or disturbance to wildlife. Ahmed bin Ali al Saadi, a wildlife conservation expert, highlights the need for conscientious camping: "Camping is a chance to connect with nature responsibly — preserve the environment and leave no trace."

Campfires, a staple for many campers, should be used with caution. Fires should be lit only in designated areas and completely extinguished before departure to avoid accidental wildfires. Sticking to safe practices also means steering

clear of hazardous or restricted areas, as some sites pose risks that can be dangerous to unprepared campers. For those venturing into remote areas, informing a friend or family member of your camping plans and expected return can be vital in emergencies.

Beyond recreation, camping in Oman promotes wellness, offering a break from daily routines and a chance to reconnect with nature. Being outdoors is shown to reduce stress and boost both physical and mental well-being.

"Camping is an opportunity to disconnect from daily pressures and find renewal in nature," explains ecotourism expert Salim al Kindi. "Oman's diverse landscapes offer a serene escape for reflection, relaxation, and rejuvenation."

As Oman continues to develop its natural tourism sector, it seeks to balance this growth with environmental protection. Efforts by local authorities and responsible campers to safeguard Oman's landscapes ensure camping remains a cherished activity that brings adventure, wellness, and respect for nature together under the Sultanate of Oman's winter skies. With the season in full swing, Oman's landscapes invite campers to explore responsibly, enjoyably, and safely.

Youth Dialogue to promote culture

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, NOV 4

THE Youth Dialogue Session 2024, in its third edition, kicked off at the Nizwa Cultural Centre, organised by Al Dakhiliyah Governorate and the Department of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The session running for three days from November 4 welcomes a wide range of university and college students, along with young people interested in cultural and sports affairs within the governorate. This event aligns with the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to support the development journey and strengthen community partnerships.



The third edition of Youth Dialogue Session is on till November 6

The session aims to address challenges such as limited funding and access to facilities in the

cultural and sports sectors, with a focus on leveraging successful initiatives from both local

organisations and international best practices. It seeks to foster investment ideas that support community roles in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The first day discussions centred on three key topics namely developing the theatre and cinema sector, advancing visual arts, and promoting sports tourism. The second day will address the governance of civil society institutions related to culture and sports. On the final day, recommendations will be presented with the participation of decision-makers from local community institutions.

Khadija bint Said al Khiyariyah, Director of the Oman Vision 2040 Follow-up Unit and Implementation Office in Al Dakhiliyah, said: “The s session

aligns with the governorate's focus on supporting the cultural and sports sectors. It serves as a vital platform for exchanging ideas and addressing challenges, providing young people with a voice in shaping the future of the governorate and realising the goals of Oman Vision 2040.”

Younis bin Ayoub al Harrasi, Senior Sports Activity Specialist in the Department of Culture, Sports and Youth, added, “This third edition of the Youth Dialogue Session seeks to meet the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 by highlighting cultural and sports sector development. It also aims to enhance civil society institutions by discussing governance mechanisms to overcome legislative challenges in this important sector.”

Oman committed to wealth management standards

FROM P1

It reflects Oman's keenness to strengthen relations with various sovereign funds in different countries around the world, establish strategic partnerships that benefit all and contribute to the realisation of the goals of Oman Vision 2040 that envisages a prosperous present and a bright future for the next generations of Omanis, thanks to the wisdom of the country's leader.”

NATIONAL ECONOMY

For his part, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), said that OIA's investment portfolios contribute to the consolidation of the national economy, generate employment and business opportunities and develop future industries in cooperation with different government institutions and private sector establishments.

This has reinforced Oman's position and raised its rating to the level of ‘Creditworthiness’, thus reflecting the robustness of the financial standing and the transparency of OIA's operations, said Al Murshidi.

Al Murshidi stressed that Oman's hosting of this meeting introduces the investment capabilities that prevail in Oman and highlights its efforts and commitment to achieving sustainable investment partnerships with the largest global sovereign wealth funds. The event also underlines Oman's persistent efforts to

open up new channels of cooperation in various sectors and present itself as a lucrative investment destination.

In his speech, Obaid Amrane, Acting Chairman of the International Forum of Sovereign Wealth Funds, said that major economic developments take place in the global arena in today's world, including the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) in a rapidly evolving environment, evoking hope in some cases and portending risks in others.

This, he said, requires everyone to keep up with the speed of such evolving scenarios by making cautious decisions that could help diminish cyber threats and use artificial intelligence in a strategic and responsible manner.

He advised all to maintain a balance between investing in these opportunities and technical developments on one hand and, on the other hand, shouldering the responsibility of securing global financial stability. This is in addition to reinforcing the principles of ‘Santiago’ and sound governance, he added.

INNOVATION

American businessman Elon Musk spoke about innovation and artificial intelligence as a driving force for change and sustainability in the global economic arena.

In a speech on the occasion, Elon Musk stressed the need to give priority to human principles and ethical dimensions of safety in the current approach to develop economic

intelligence technologies.

In his speech aired via a video call, Elon Musk stressed the importance of sovereign wealth funds investing in sustainable development projects in the sectors of innovation and artificial intelligence. He also laid emphasis on the role of modern technology in enhancing investments and achieving economic returns for member countries.

For his part, American businessman Robert Smith underscored the significance of optimally exploiting artificial intelligence technologies in transactions of governments or the private sector. He noted that many investment portfolio companies currently make use of these technologies in their daily operations.

Oman Investment Authority designated ‘Al Mandoos Al Omani’ as the logo for the meeting. Inspired by the deep-rooted Omani heritage, Al Mandoos, a solid decorative wooden box for collecting and storing precious items, has been in use throughout the stages of Omani history.

On the occasion of Oman hosting the IFSWF meeting, a commemorative silver coin and postage stamp were issued by OIA, in cooperation with the Central Bank of Oman. The exceptional designs of the coin and the stamp reflect the essence of authentic Arab art and Oman's ancient maritime history, as well as the innovative talent of Omanis and their rich cultural heritage. They embody the key elements of Omani heritage, themed ‘Oman is the land of opportunities.’ — ONA



MALAYSIAN NATIONAL DAY

MUSCAT: The Malaysian Embassy in Muscat hosted a distinguished reception at the Crowne Plaza Hotel to mark Malaysia's National Day.

The event welcomed an array of dignitaries, including government officials, diplomatic mission heads accredited to Oman, and representatives from the Foreign Ministry. — ONA

العمانية للاستثمارات التعليمية والتدريبية
oman education & training investments

Directors Report

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Directors of Oman Education & Training Investment Co. S.A.O.G., it is my pleasure to present the Annual Report of the Company for the financial year ending August 31, 2024.

First: The Orientations and lines of Action for the current stage:

Oman Educational and Training Investment Company SAOG aspires through its vision to be among the best investment companies in the Sultanate of Oman. It has enhanced its investment opportunities through the following:

1. Sohar University jumped 10 points to be among top 100 Arab Universities and has been awarded 5 Star rating. In addition, the University is now ranked second locally after SQU, and the first private university to enter the QS ranking global university classification, as it was included in the category (1001-1200) universities worldwide. The University has rigorous plans in place to further improve at both Arab and world QS ranking. This achievement comes as a translation of the efforts made by the university at various scientific and research levels, which contribute to achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040. The Chairman and Members of the Board of Directors and the Chairman and Members of the Board of Governors dedicate this global achievement to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, may God protect and preserve him. And to the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, represented by Her Excellency Professor Dr. Rahma bint Ibrahim Al-Mahrouqiyya, for the unlimited support for the sector of higher education, scientific research and innovation, which contributed to Sohar University obtaining this global status within the global rankings of universities.
2. Appointing a consultant for the Innovation Center/Commercial Complex project within the Sohar University campus and approving the award of the consulting services tender to one of the specialized offices throughout the project implementation period, estimated at 27 months
3. A distinguished achievement for Sohar University in the Times Higher Education Arab University Rankings, as it was classified as the best higher education institution in the Sultanate of Oman in terms of research quality.
4. Sohar University hosted the International Conference on Environmental Law and the Sustainable Development Plan 2030 in its fifth edition under the title Towards Building a Sustainable Economy in the Middle East Region and North Africa, under the patronage of His Excellency Dr. Mahad Baaween, the Minister of Labor, in the presence of a number of officials and specialists in the field of the environment at the local and global levels. The conference was sponsored by the United Nations Environment Program and in technical cooperation and partnership with the Middle East and North Africa Law Policy Program (SADER) and the UNESCO Chair in Environmental Law at Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Doha, Qatar. The conference discussed 4 main axes: the first axis talked about international environmental law and sustainable development goals, the second axis: local and regional approaches and the multi-stakeholder approach in addressing the latest developments in the field of adopting environmental, social and governance standards throughout the region, while the third axis discussed teaching environmental law. To implement the sustainable development goals, and the fourth axis is practical applications that talk about the current.
5. Sohar University and the UNESCO Regional Office in Doha signed a Letter of Intent to cooperate in implementing the Green University and Green City project as a means of achieving sustainable development goals. The project will be launched by Sohar University in cooperation with the public and private sectors, the industrial sector and the community. The university is committed to making its campus greener and reducing its carbon footprint in line with the Sultanate of Oman's commitment to the 2050 Zero Emissions Program. As part of the targeted project, Sohar University will collaborate with the Office of His Excellency the Governor of North Al Batinah to develop several initiatives. The university also recently expressed interest in joining the Sohar Industrial Alliance for 0% carbon emissions, and thus the university is committed to being an active member of this alliance, which will help the local industry promote the efficient use of energy and thus reduce its carbon footprint. Sohar University believes that through cooperation and unified efforts, much can be done to support the Omani environment's efforts towards sustainability.

Consolidated and separate statement of financial position as at 31 August 2024

	31 August 2024	Group (Restated) 31 August 2023	(Restated) 31 August 2022	Parent Company 31 August 2024	31 August 2023
	RO	RO	RO	RO	RO
ASSETS					
Non-current assets:					
Property and equipment	30,318,832	31,975,829	31,556,604	101,295	120,095
Right-of-use assets	115,012	126,267	139,536	-	-
Investment in subsidiaries	-	-	-	6,400,000	6,399,050
Investment in an associate	158,726	-	-	-	-
Total non-current assets	30,592,570	32,102,096	31,696,140	6,501,295	6,519,145
Current assets:					
Inventories	28,885	29,894	33,116	-	-
Due from subsidiaries	-	-	-	11,162,087	6,229,648
Fee and other receivables	587,792	5,084,314	863,081	2,234	1,713
Cash and bank balances	18,804,229	6,668,289	5,763,147	19,786	14,582
Total current assets	19,420,906	11,782,497	6,659,344	11,184,107	6,245,953
Total assets	50,013,476	43,884,593	38,355,484	17,685,402	12,765,098
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES					
Equity:					
Share capital	7,000,000	7,000,000	7,000,000	7,000,000	7,000,000
Legal reserve	4,429,923	4,380,370	4,122,420	2,333,333	2,289,686
Property revaluation reserve	6,406,623	6,406,623	5,301,623	-	-
Retained earnings	9,440,863	3,824,072	2,521,474	7,876,632	2,993,147
Total equity	27,277,409	21,611,065	18,945,517	17,209,965	12,282,833
Non-current liabilities:					
Deferred grants related to assets	13,067,329	13,539,661	14,011,993	-	-
Deferred tax liabilities – net	1,277,030	1,167,375	933,990	-	-
Lease liabilities	118,844	123,022	134,122	-	-
Employees' end of service benefits	1,747,935	1,245,403	1,138,903	73,433	35,743
Students' deposits	54,219	96,313	120,344	-	-
Total non-current liabilities	16,260,157	16,171,774	16,339,352	73,433	35,743
Current liabilities:					
Deferred grants related to assets	472,332	472,332	472,332	-	-
Current portion of lease liabilities	11,940	11,003	10,380	-	-
Due to a subsidiary	-	-	-	53,942	100,753
Trade and other payables	4,389,212	4,966,902	1,929,999	348,062	345,769
Income tax payable	1,602,426	651,517	657,904	-	-
Total current liabilities	6,475,910	6,101,754	3,070,615	402,004	446,522
Total liabilities	22,736,067	22,273,528	19,409,967	475,437	482,265
Total equity and liabilities	50,013,476	43,884,593	38,355,484	17,685,402	12,765,098
Net assets per share	0.390	0.309	0.271	0.246	0.175

The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests them. The request to be made at P.O. Box 44, P.C. 311, Tel: 26850120, Fax: 26721258

Second: Internal Control System and its Suitability:

The company has a highly effective and efficient internal control system, where the Board, through the Audit and Risk Management Committee and the Internal Audit Unit, follows up on the compliance of all group companies with their internal systems and regulations while adapting to new regulations and laws.

Third: Omanization:

The Company fulfills a Omanization rate of 93% in administrative staff and 35% in academic staff and has stepped up the efforts in training the Omani staff whether inside or outside Oman.

Fourth: Financial Statement:

By reviewing the balance sheet of Oman Education and Training Investment Company SAOG for the financial year ending 31/8/2020, the following is noted: -

1. The group achieved results of 7,766,344 OMR for the period ending 31/8/2024 compared to 2,960,541 OMR for the period ending 31/8/2023, an increase of 4,805,800 OMR and a percentage of 162 %, as a result of the increase in tuition fees income and student housing fees by 56% and an amount of 9,100,731. OMR
2. An increase in salaries and wages by 30% by amount of 2,752,042 OMR as a result of appointing new teachers at Sohar University, in line with the increase in the number of students at Sohar University.
3. An increase in administrative and general expenses by 12%, an increase of 313,419 OMR resulting from an increase in maintenance, energy, teaching tools, legal and consulting fees.
4. Increase in fixed assets consumption by 1% and by an amount of 9,438 OMR.
5. write-off was recorded in buildings under construction of 822,129 OMR in application of International Accounting Standard No. 36.
6. Recording the release of a deferred grant related to assets in the amount of 472,332 OMR
7. Purchase of fixed assets and assets for the group (computers, laboratory equipment, furniture and equipment) during the period in the amount of 271,546 OMR.

Fifth: Future Outlook

Joint Program in Management with the Indian Institute of Management:

- A Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between the University and the Indian Institute of Management (IIM – Rotak) to offer a joint program in Bachelor of Management, where the same program will be taught at Sohar University. Thus, the Indian Institute of Management will recognize the same bachelor's degree certificate issued by Sohar University for all graduates of this program. The goal is to attract international students, especially students from the Indian community and other communities in Oman and outside Oman to study at Sohar University, which will increase the number of international students studying at the university.

Establishing a scientific incubator funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation

- Work is underway on the scientific incubator at Sohar University funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, which aims to embrace student innovations and projects in a way that helps transform them into entrepreneurship and establish small and medium-sized companies for them. Work is ongoing to embrace a number of student entrepreneurs

Project of a college specialized in health programs

- The university is working on a project to offer academic programs that serve the health sector. The university has communicated with a number of institutions from inside and outside the Sultanate in the health education sector with the aim of reaching a proposal to offer qualitative programs in the Sultanate that provide a different type of education in the health sector. The aim of such a project is to attempt to offer globally accredited qualitative programs that meet the needs of the local and regional market for academic programs related to the health sector. Accordingly, a number of universities and specialized bodies were met to study the expected cooperation in this regard.

Finally, on the occasion of the 54th National Day, I would extend my overwhelming thanks and respect to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin [Tarik Al-Said, may Allah protect him and guide his Government with care and wisdom, I would also like to extend my profound thanks to the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation as well as the Financial Services Authority, Board of Directors, as well as to the University Executives, Academic and Administrative staff for their great effort for the current year and for a successful future.

Hassan bin Ihsan bin Nasseb Al-Nasseb
Chairman of Board of Directors

Consolidated and separate statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 31 August 2024

	Year ended 31 Aug 2024	Group (Restated) Year ended 31 Aug 2023	Year ended 31 Aug 2024	Year ended 31 Aug 2023
	RO	RO	RO	RO
Income:				
Tuition and training fees	24,441,028	15,429,568	-	-
Dividend income from subsidiaries	-	-	7,750,000	3,065,000
Other income	777,945	688,674	29,920	14,000
	25,218,973	16,118,242	7,779,920	3,079,000
Expenses:				
Salaries and staff related costs	(11,934,125)	(9,182,083)	(314,195)	(274,756)
Administrative and other operating expenses	(2,988,593)	(2,675,170)	(419,440)	(411,669)
Depreciation on property and equipment	(1,105,373)	(1,095,931)	(19,153)	(13,074)
Impairment loss on property and equipment	(822,129)	(123,700)	-	-
Release of deferred grants related to assets	472,332	472,332	-	-
Depreciation on right-of-use assets	(11,255)	(13,269)	-	-
	(16,389,143)	(12,617,821)	(752,788)	(699,499)
Profit from operations	8,829,830	3,500,421	7,027,132	2,379,501
Finance cost	(10,027)	(7,992)	-	-
Finance income	552,749	115,307	-	-
Bargain purchase gain from investment in an associate	217,254	-	-	-
Share of loss from investment in an associate	(152,528)	-	-	-
Profit before income tax	9,437,278	3,607,736	7,027,132	2,379,501
Income tax expense - net	(1,670,934)	(647,188)	-	-
Profit for the year	7,766,344	2,960,548	7,027,132	2,379,501
Other comprehensive income				
Items that will not be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss				
Surplus on revaluation of land	-	1,300,000	-	-
Tax related to revaluation surplus	-	(195,000)	-	-
Total other comprehensive income for the year	-	1,105,000	-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year	7,766,344	4,065,548	7,027,132	2,379,501
Earnings per share	0.111	0.042	0.100	0.034

WORLD

SHORTTAKES



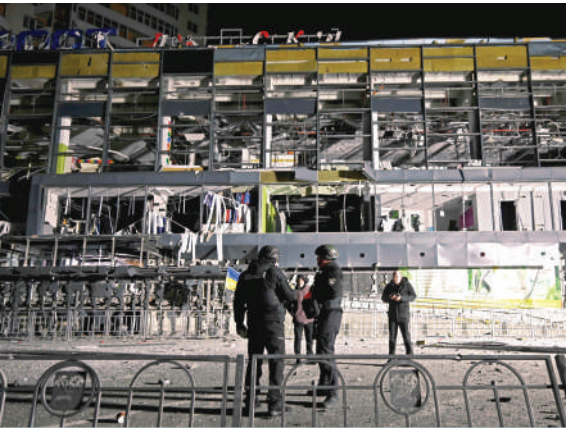
S Korean FM Cho Tae-yul shakes hands with High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell prior to a meeting, in Seoul. — Reuters

BORRELL VISITS SEOUL AMID ALARM OVER NORTH KOREA

SEOUL: The dispatch of North Korean troops to Russia as Moscow wages war in Ukraine highlights the need for security cooperation between the European Union and South Korea, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on Monday.

The deployment “regrettably illustrates the importance of our shared security agenda,” he said before talks with South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul in Seoul. The EU and South Korea are holding their first Strategic Dialogue meeting after Washington and Seoul sounded the alarm about North Korea sending troops to help Russia.

Borrell also met South Korean Defence Minister Kim Yong-hyun and expressed concern over the development, the South Korean defence ministry said. “Russia’s aggression against Ukraine is an existential threat,” Borrell said. “The Republic of Korea is best positioned to understand it. We are united in our support to Ukraine.” He said that he was visiting South Korea to take security and defence cooperation between the EU and Seoul to “the next level”. — Reuters



Ukrainian law enforcement officers stand next to a destroyed supermarket building, in Kharkiv. — AFP

German FM vows ‘rock-solid’ support on Ukraine visit

KYIV: German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock visited Kyiv on Monday to underscore Berlin’s “rock-solid” support for Ukraine whose forces are buckling under a large-scale Russian offensive in the east of the country.

Baerbock’s eighth trip comes at a critical moment in the nearly three-year war as Kyiv voices mounting frustration with Western support.

Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky has criticised the West for what he says is its muted response to the deployment of thousands of North Korean troops to bolster Russia’s war effort in Ukraine, a major escalation in the conflict.

“Germany, together with many partners worldwide, stands rock-solid by Ukraine’s side,” Baerbock said in a statement as Ukraine heads into what could be its toughest winter of the war. “We will support the people of Ukraine for as long as they need us so they can follow their path to a just peace,” she added. — AFP

EU HAILS RE-ELECTION OF MAIA SANDU IN MOLDOVA TENSE VOTE

CHISINAU: The European Union on Monday welcomed the re-election of Moldova’s pro-European President Maia Sandu, in a tense vote that has laid bare divisions in the former Soviet republic bordering war-torn Ukraine. Backed by the country’s large diaspora, Sandu won 55.41 per cent of votes, according to near-complete results published by the election commission. Her rival, Alexandr Stoianoglo, who is supported by

the pro-Russian Socialists, won 44.59 per cent. Sunday’s key vote was overshadowed by allegations of Russian meddling. It took place just two weeks after a referendum in which Moldavans voted by a razor-thin margin to back joining the EU. “Moldovans have shown once again their determination to build a European future despite hybrid attempts to undermine democracy,” EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell posted on X on Monday. European

Commission president Ursula von der Leyen also congratulated Sandu on her re-election and the country’s “European future”. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky also congratulated Sandu, saying: “Only true security and a peaceful, united Europe can guarantee each person and every family the confidence to face tomorrow with hope and certainty.” Sandu owed her victory to Moldovans living abroad, many of them in EU countries. — AFP

Israel to cut ties with UN Palestinian aid agency

ISRAEL FORMALLY notified the United Nations of its decision to sever ties with the agency supporting Palestinian refugees, it said on Monday, after lawmakers voted to ban the organisation vital to the occupied territories. The ban, which sparked global condemnation including from key Israeli backer the United States, should come into force in late January, with the UN Security Council warning it would have severe consequences for millions of Palestinians.

Israel has accused a dozen employees of the agency, UNRWA, of participating in the October 7, 2023 attack by Hamas, the deadliest in Israeli history. UNRWA fired nine employees in the wake of the attack that sparked the Gaza war following the accusations. “On the instruction of Foreign Minister Israel Katz, the ministry of foreign affairs notified the UN of the cancellation of the agreement between the State of Israel and UNRWA,” the foreign ministry said in a statement. “UNRWA, the organisation whose employees participated in the October 7 massacre and many of whose employees are Hamas operatives, is part of the problem in the Gaza Strip and not part of the solution,” Katz was quoted as saying.

October 7 attack on Israel resulted in the deaths of 1,206 people, according to Israeli official figures. Israel’s retaliatory campaign has killed 43,341 people in Gaza, a majority of them civilians, according to figures from the territory’s health ministry, which the United Nations considers to be reliable.

Jonathan Fowler, an UNRWA spokesman, said that the ban would probably cause the collapse of aid efforts to Gaza.



Palestinians carry an aid box distributed by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), in Deir Al Balah. — Reuters file photo

“If this law is implemented, it would be likely to cause the collapse of the international humanitarian operation in the Gaza Strip — an operation of which UNRWA is the backbone,” Fowler said. “It would also be likely to cause the collapse of essential services provided by UNRWA in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including education, healthcare, and sanitation.”

Residents of Nur Shams camp in the occupied West Bank were fearful for the future after an Israeli raid last week damaged the UNRWA office there. The 13,000

inhabitants of the camp near the northern city of Tulkarem depend heavily on UNRWA.

A series of probes, including one led by former French foreign minister Catherine Colonna, found some “neutrality related issues” at UNRWA but stressed that Israel had not provided evidence for its chief allegations. The agency, which began its operations on May 1, 1950, was tasked with assisting some 750,000 Palestinians who had fled or been expelled from their homes during the war. — AFP



People clear mud from a street in Alfajar, in the region of Valencia, eastern Spain. — AFP

SPAIN DREADS MORE FLOOD DEATHS AS RAIN EXPECTED

VALENCIA: Spanish rescuers plunged into inundated garages to find bodies on Monday as the toll stands at 217 dead — almost all in the eastern Valencia region — and Spain dreaded the discovery of more corpses in its worst such disaster in decades.

National weather service AEMET announced the end of the emergency for Valencia but placed part of the northeastern Catalonia region on the highest red alert for torrential rain on Monday. Catalan trains were suspended until further notice, Transport Minister Oscar Puente announced, while flights

were delayed and diverted at Barcelona’s El Prat airport.

Thousands of soldiers, police officers, civil guards and firefighters spent a sixth day distributing aid and clearing debris to find bodies. But relief works only reached some towns days after the disaster and in many cases volunteers were the first to provide food, water, sanitation and cleaning equipment. Divers concentrated their search for missing bodies in garages and a multi-storey car park in the town of Aldaia capable of holding thousands of vehicles. — AFP

GOVERNMENT CHANGES

Sudan’s ruling council reshuffles cabinet



Sudan’s army leader Abdel Fattah al Burhan, at war with paramilitaries, has announced a cabinet reshuffle that replaces four ministers including those for foreign affairs and the media. In a post on its official Facebook page, Sudan’s ruling sovereignty council said Burhan had approved replacement of the ministers of foreign affairs, the media, religious affairs and trade. It coincides with rising violence in Al Jazira, south Khartoum, and Darfur. — AFP

VOLCANIC ACTIVITY

Indonesia volcano eruption kills 10



A volcano in eastern Indonesia erupted overnight, killing at least 10 people as it spewed fireballs and ash on surrounding villages, officials said as they raised the alert to its highest level. Mount Lewotobi Laki-Laki, a 1,703-metre twin volcano located on the popular tourist island of Flores, erupted shortly before midnight, forcing authorities to evacuate villages. Residents described their horror when the crater started shooting rocks at their homes. — AFP

CLIMATE FOCUS

Prince William arrives in South Africa



Britain’s Prince William landed in Cape Town on Monday for a four-day trip to South Africa centred on his annual Earthshot Prize for environmental innovators. The heir to the British throne will attend a global wildlife summit and meet with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa. He will participate in the awards ceremony for the Earthshot Prize, which gives five winners 1 million pounds each to pursue projects on environmental issues. — Reuters

US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 2024



WHITE HOUSE RACE

THE US ELECTION BY NUMBERS



Supporters cheer as they listen to US Vice-President and Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris in East Lansing, Michigan. — AFP

WASHINGTON: Swing states, electoral college votes, candidates up and down the ballot, and millions of potential voters: Here is the US election, broken down by numbers.

TWO

In the end, the presidential race comes down to a binary choice, with the two candidates from the major parties — Democrat Kamala Harris and Republican Donald Trump — seeking to lead a polarised America.

FIVE

November 5 — Election Day, traditionally held on the Tuesday following the first Monday in November.

SEVEN

Harris and Trump are courting voters in Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, concentrating their campaign efforts there in a push to ensure victory.

34 AND 435

Voters won't just decide the White House occupant on Election Day — they will also hit refresh on the US Congress. Thirty-four Senate seats and all 435 spots in the House of Representatives are up for grabs.

538

There are 538 electors in total scattered across the 50 states and the District of Columbia. To take the White House, a candidate must win 270 votes.

774,000

The number of poll workers who made sure the 2020 election ran smoothly, according to the Pew Research Center.

75 MILLION

As of November 2, more than 75 million Americans had voted early, according to a University of Florida database.

244 MILLION

The number of Americans who will be eligible to vote in 2024, according to the Bipartisan Policy Center. — AFP

Harris and Trump battle to the wire in swing states

THE presidential race appears to be hurtling toward a photo finish, with the final set of polls by The New York Times and Siena College finding Vice-President Kamala Harris showing new strength in North Carolina and Georgia as former president Donald Trump erases her lead in Pennsylvania and maintains his advantage in Arizona. It has been decades since the polls have shown the nation facing a presidential race that is so close across so many states in both the Sun Belt and the Rust Belt. The tightly contested landscape means the race remains highly uncertain as the campaign enters its final hours.

Harris is now narrowly ahead in Nevada, North Carolina and Wisconsin, the polls show, while Trump leads in Arizona. The polls show them locked in close races in Michigan, Georgia and Pennsylvania. But the results in all seven states are within the margin of sampling error, meaning neither candidate has a definitive lead in any of them.

Both candidates have multiple pathways available to capture the 270 Electoral College votes required to claim victory, assuming that polls are not dramatically underestimating the support for one or the other. In such a close race, even a small systemic polling error could tip the contest decisively in either direction. But there are signs that late deciders are breaking for Harris: Among the 8% of voters who said they had only recently decided on their vote, she wins the group by 55% to 44%.

Trump has been gaining ground in Pennsylvania, where Harris had a 4-percentage-point edge in all previous Times/Siena polls in the state since she entered the race. The race is now tied, indicating an increasingly competitive contest



Vice-President Kamala Harris on stage during a campaign rally at Jenison Field House in East Lansing. — NYT

Both candidates have multiple pathways available to capture the 270 Electoral College votes required to claim victory, assuming that polls are not dramatically underestimating the support for one or the other

in the state, which strategists in both campaigns believe could tip the election.

Rates of early voting are particularly high in North Carolina, where more than half the voters said they had cast a ballot. Harris wins early voters in the state by 8 percentage points, perhaps contributing to her 3-percentage-point edge in the survey of the state. Despite recent devastation there from Hurricane Helene, more than 9 out of 10 North Carolina voters said that the storm and its aftermath have had no impact on their ability to vote. The only state where the poll found Trump winning with people who said they had voted was Arizona. Forty-six per cent of

voters there said they had voted, and Trump wins that group, 50% to 46%.

The polls also reveal a shift in the issues being prioritised by voters in the final stretch of the race. The economy still remains their top concern but in states like Wisconsin. And in Arizona, where Trump leads, immigration also continues to rise as a crucial issue driving voters' choices.

The survey shows that Trump has continued to hold on to the core of the coalition that supported him in his past two presidential bids — white voters who did not attend college, and men — while expanding his support among younger, non-white and newer voters. — NYT

AMERICANS FLOOD THE EARLY VOTE



People cast the election in early voting in Detroit. — NYT

AN anxious America, weary from a vitriolic campaign season and worried about the state of the nation's democracy, is voting with determination, with roughly 75 million people having cast ballots in the early voting period. In North Carolina, nearly 4.5 million voters set an early in-person voting record in the state amid devastation from Hurricane Helene. Georgia voters also set a record with 4 million voters casting an early ballot. In Pennsylvania, 1.7 million people voted by mail amid increasingly caustic litigation over whose mail ballots should count. Nine states have seen more than 50 per cent of eligible

voters already vote. Projections from early voting indicate that the overall turnout for the election will probably be between the roughly 60 per cent of eligible voters who turned out in 2016 and the two-thirds of eligible voters who voted in 2020, according to Michael McDonald, a professor of politics at the University of Florida who tracks voting. While overall turnout is likely to be slightly lower than the modern high-water mark set in the 2020 election, it still puts the country on pace for a historical high compared with almost all other previous years. — NYT

What to know about the electoral college

VOTERS are already casting ballots for local offices, state legislators, governors, every member of the US House and one-third of the US Senate. They are also choosing the next president, but with a twist: Americans will actually select the electors, who will, in turn, elect Kamala Harris or Donald Trump and their running mates. Yes, there are really two elections: one in which voters cast their ballots, and a second in which the electoral votes are cast and counted. Or, in other words, the winner of the most votes nationally is not assured victory.

This is the way it has been done for more than 200 years, and it is likely to endure, even though a majority of Americans would prefer to have the winner of the most votes nationally rise to the presidency. The Electoral College is made up of 538 elected members, one for each US senator and US representative, plus three for Washington, D.C. A presidential candidate needs to win a simple majority of them (270) to win the White House. The electors meet



Electoral College votes are brought forth for certification at a joint session of the US Congress. — NYT

and cast votes for president and vice-president in mid-December.

With an even total number of electors, it is possible to have a tie (269-269). In that case — which happened in 1801 — the decision goes to the freshly elected House of Representatives, with each state voting as one unit. The newly elected Senate decides on the vice-president, with one vote per senator. "This is a very unique and bespoke system that I think nobody would create again today," said Wendy R. Weiser, vice-president for democracy at

the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law School.

The delegates believed that the electors would ensure that only a qualified person became president. They also believed that this approach would serve as a check on the public, which might easily be swayed by misinformation, especially from foreign governments.

Each state's number of electors is equal to the number of senators and representatives in its congressional delegation, so the minimum is three. In 48 states, the winner takes all the electoral votes. In Maine and Nebraska, two electoral votes are apportioned to the winner of the popular vote, and each remaining electoral vote is awarded to the winner of the popular vote in each of the state's congressional districts. After a state's electors have certified the vote in December, they send a certificate to Congress. Congress then counts and certifies the vote on January 6. The vice president presides over a special session as the results from each state are recorded." — NYT

OPINION

Time to look back to see how far we’ve come



OMAN COMMEMORATES its 54th National Day on November 18. It is time to take stock but not to rest on our laurels. This occasion not only serves as a reminder of the nation's rich history and cultural heritage but also highlights the remarkable achievements made under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. The month of November thus becomes a time for reflection on progress, unity, and future aspirations.

Hence, the tone for this celebration emphasises a new approach to governance that strengthens collaboration among various state institutions. The integration between these institutions is seen as vital for implementing strategies that benefit citizens and enhance national development.

This approach underscores a commitment to partnership in shaping Oman's present and future, which is essential for sustaining development and safeguarding national achievements. And if we talk about the achievements, the list is endless.

In October last year, Oman conducted its Majlis AshShura Council's 10th-term elections, marking a significant milestone in democratic participation. For the first time, citizens voted using the “Antakhib” electronic app, which showcases advancements in technology and electoral

processes within the country.

A key achievement highlighted during this period is the promulgation of the Social Protection Law. This law aims to provide adequate insurance coverage for various segments of society, ensuring that all citizens can lead dignified lives.

These programmes offer cash benefits to vulnerable groups such as the elderly, children, people with disabilities, orphans, and widows.

Additionally, family income support and social insurance programmes address issues related to disability, death, work-related injuries, maternity leave, and job security. Such initiatives are crucial for enhancing societal well-being and reflect an understanding of diverse community needs. Education remains at the forefront of Oman's development agenda as articulated in Oman Vision 2040. The emphasis on education as a cornerstone for national growth is evident through ongoing efforts to improve educational standards and access across all levels.

By linking educational curricula with economic growth requirements, Oman aims to prepare its youth for future challenges while fostering innovation and scientific advancement.

The Royal philosophy regarding education recognises it as foundational not only for individual success but also for societal progress. By investing in

This occasion not only serves as a reminder of the nation's rich history and cultural heritage but also highlights the remarkable achievements made under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

education and research capabilities, Oman seeks to cultivate competitive human resources capable of contributing meaningfully to both local and global contexts.

In 2024, the Ministry of Labour (MoL) introduced comprehensive labour market regulations designed to bolster Omanisation in the private sector. The achievements related to Omanisation in 2024 reflect a robust commitment by the Omani government to enhance local employment opportunities through strategic regulations, financial incentives, and rigorous compliance monitoring mechanisms.

These efforts are expected not only to increase the number of employed Omani citizens but also contribute positively to the overall economy by fostering a more skilled workforce aligned with national development goals.

As November unfolds with celebrations surrounding Oman's National Day, it serves as an opportunity to reflect on past accomplishments while looking forward to future endeavours underpinned by unity and collective effort.

The achievements made thus far highlight Oman's commitment to sustainable development across various sectors — governance, social welfare, education — and set a promising trajectory toward realising its vision for 2040.

AI ASSISTANT TRANSFORMS STUDENT ANSWER-WRITING

DR SMITHA SUNIL K NAIR

The emergence of Generative AI (GenAI) has sparked considerable interest and discussion within the field of education in recent times, particularly in higher education institutions (HEIs). As educators navigate the integration of this transformative technology, understanding its impact on teaching and student learning becomes crucial.

In a step towards personalised learning, a custom GPT-enabled virtual assistant powered by ChatGPT was piloted to help students refine their answer-writing skills. Inspired by research on the transformative potential of GenAI in education, this initiative addresses a common challenge for students: time-constrained exams, where organising thoughts and structuring responses can be daunting.

This virtual assistant piloted in a BSc (Hons) Computer Science programme module, tailored to enhance students' answer-writing skills, aligns with the flipped teaching model by providing structured and elaborated answers matching classroom instructions with guided practice.

Using course materials in the learning management system (LMS), the assistant processes answers to the mock questions, offering answers that mirror the instructor's explanatory approach, making guidance relevant and familiar to students. The link to the custom GPT shared with students made it accessible without the need for a pro version of ChatGPT. The tool showcases how educators can leverage ChatGPT to support student learning beyond the classroom, bridging technology and teaching practices. “The assistant has been incredibly helpful in guiding me on how to answer questions based on the learning materials available on the LMS,” says Tuqa Mohammed Al Badawi of Middle East College.

Designed to adapt to individual learning paces, this assistant not only builds students' confidence in articulating answers but also promotes self-directed learning. Students receive constructive feedback that improves their analytical and critical-thinking abilities, which are crucial for academic success. As more faculty members explore AI's role in education, this implementation offers valuable insights into enhancing technology-led teaching methods.

The writer is Asst Professor, Dept of Computing and Electronic Engineering, Middle East College

The 2024 Nobel Prize and its implications for AI

THIS YEAR'S Nobel Prize announcements brought surprise and shock to some scientists, as the Nobel Prizes in Physics and Chemistry were awarded for contributions related to artificial intelligence (AI).

This decision marked a precedent, as some scientists argue that AI has limited connections to traditional fields like physics and chemistry. They see these fields as classical sciences focusing on theoretical phenomena that encompass the universe, life, and the nature of existence.

In contrast, others view AI as emerging from computer science, which continuously evolves with practical rather than theoretical advancements, making AI the latest leap in computational growth.

Nobel Prizes in Physics were awarded to Geoffrey Hinton and John Hopfield for their foundational contributions to AI, particularly in machine learning, deep learning, and neural networks. The Nobel Prize in Chemistry went to David Baker for his pioneering work in computational protein design and to Demis Hassabis and John Jumper for developing AI-driven techniques to predict protein structures.

This shift underscores AI's rising impact across fields where traditional methods struggled to unlock complex secrets, like predicting intricate protein structures, a process once time-consuming but now rapidly achieved with AI. Such breakthroughs demonstrate AI's potential to tackle challenges in other scientific areas, revealing mysteries long out of reach.



DR MUAMAR BIN ALI AL TOBI

The writer is an academic and researcher

We are entering an era that not only advances scientific knowledge but redefines our understanding of life itself.

The emphasis on AI's achievements, highlighted by the Nobel Prizes, brings attention to AI's transformative role, especially in protein structure prediction. However, this points to a broader scientific revolution where AI delves into even more surprising fields, such as genetics, pushing boundaries in ways previously unimaginable.

The 2024 Nobel Prize honours are more than celebratory, they signal AI's crucial role in future research, with AI's ability to expedite discoveries leading us into new territories across disciplines, from astrophysics to precise biological sciences.

This acknowledgement also highlights the importance of collaboration between public institutions and private enterprises to develop AI-based solutions for global challenges.

For digital economy investments, the Nobel Prize fuels commercial investment in AI, aiming for financial returns

and contributions to societal, environmental, and health-related issues.

The Nobel Committee's decision serves as a strong message to the global scientific community: AI is not merely a tool; it's a transformative force capable of addressing humanity's most complex issues. This recognition inspires increased investment in AI research and motivates a new generation of scientists to explore AI's vast potential.

SUBSTANTIAL BENEFITS

However, awarding the Nobel Prize for AI contributions raises important ethical and social questions. While AI offers substantial benefits, it also brings challenges, particularly concerning biases, social inequalities due to job displacement, and accelerating military competition.

Reflecting on the 2024 Nobel implications, it is clear that implementing these technologies requires a strong ethical framework, with governance to ensure responsible AI applications and research.

As AI increasingly integrates into daily life and decision-making, addressing these concerns becomes ever more critical.

While some may view the Nobel Committee's shift as unconventional, it is a positive step that allows the scientific establishment to adapt to our digital age demands. These awards, recognising AI's contributions, will likely encourage global efforts to harness AI for solving pressing human issues, motivating scientific institutions and governments to create similar awards for AI-driven advancements.

Appreciating art...



LAKSHMI
KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The writer is a
senior journalist
and a
radio anchor

IT IS November, and the national flags are flying high, bringing in memories of celebrations each year marking the National Day of the Sultanate of Oman. The temperature is pleasant, and everyone is in a pleasant mood. It is a perfect time to appreciate art, and rightfully so; we have just enjoyed the third edition of Muscat Art. Art is an amazing experience, just like poetry and poets; some like to use the right measures and others break all the rules. After all, writing and painting are ways to express oneself. It is lovely to create your own space to give time to project your work, and then it is time to look inward to create space for your thoughts and ideas.

Then we, the viewers, have the opportunity to see it on the canvas. For the poets, the page they write on becomes the canvas, and for entrepreneurs, it is their project that is the outcome. There are artists who are not shy to show their work to others, and then I came across a young Omani artist who doesn't even let others know about her talent and skill, let alone show her paintings and life-like sketches. She brushed off my compliments, saying she is not trained.

"Who wants to know?" I replied, adding that people would be enchanted. Her qualifications in art would be the last thing on the viewer's mind because her works are so beautiful. Her subjects vary from her grandmother to a man reading a newspaper on the sofa to simple subjects like figs and ice cream. Her images have energy, and you

realise there is happiness and energy oozing out of her paintings. So what does one gain from seeing art and artworks? Viewing art rewards the brain, writes Shenandoah Art Therapy, adding that when we view art, we are processing emotion and activating the pleasure centre in our brain (Bergado, 2014).

Viewing art allowed chemically addicted women in recovery to reconnect with their feelings and engage deeper in their recovery (Feen-Calligan et al., 2008). Apparently, viewing art increases empathy, tolerance, and critical thinking skills. Arlington Museum writes that "art's visual, emotional, and cognitive stimulation can benefit the brain. And art's effect on the brain reduces anxiety, bolsters neuroplasticity, improves focus, and more." Most of the art exhibitions in Oman have free entry, and there are numerous expos.

The opportunity to see paintings must be taken because the benefits are numerous. It may be that you might not like all styles or be able to relate to some of them, but they will all make us think. The interesting part is that we develop a connection with the artists even though we might never meet them. There are artists who have become historical figures today, and we feel a connection with them. Could it be that their paintings connect us to their minds? Another factor, of course, is that art is a therapy on its own.

Artists go into their zone because they apply focus, where it almost becomes meditative. So you could be experiencing it,

Art is an amazing experience, just like poetry and poets; some like to use the right measures and others break all rules. After all, writing and painting are ways to express oneself

viewing it, consuming it, or expressing it — whatever the situation may be, the benefits are many.

The art experience can trigger the release of a range of neurochemicals, hormones, and endorphins, according to S C Versillee, which could result in inner peace. So obviously, art has an impact on our thoughts. The process of creating and appreciating art promotes brain plasticity, the brain's ability to form and reorganise synaptic connections, writes East End Arts.

They go on to explain the three parts of the brain that play an important role in the experience of art: "The visual cortex, which is at the back of our brain, processes visual details, extracting colour, movement, and shape from what we see; the frontal lobe, which is integral to our conscious thoughts; this area is what helps us understand and attribute meaning to art by linking visual information to our existing knowledge and experiences; and then the amygdala, the almond-shaped structure that helps in emotional processing, and this is what allows us to connect with art on a deeply emotional level."

Even great works of photography move us emotionally, but I suppose in art, there is an element of artistic interpretation and imagination, even extending to daydreaming elements. So let us embrace art with all its benefits, and if there is an instinct of creativity in young minds, let us nourish them.

CAN JAVIER MILEI DEFUSE ARGENTINA'S ECONOMIC TIME BOMB?

HERNAN NESSI

Argentina's libertarian president, Javier Milei, a political outsider who won election last year, brandishing a chainsaw as a blunt symbol of his plans to cut spending, is defying long odds to stabilise the embattled economy and keeping a lid on voter anger. After years of economic crises, debt defaults, soaring inflation, and currency crashes, Milei's success is giving an adrenaline shot to long-moribund local bonds and sparking a wild rally in the markets some 11 months into his administration.

The wild-haired economist, a poster child for the global far-right and neoliberalism, has scored key economic wins in recent months, helping pull the country's debt out of distressed territory for the first time in half a decade. His government, packed with more moderate conservatives, has tamped down triple-digit inflation, rebuilt central bank reserves, strengthened a beleaguered peso, overturned a deep fiscal deficit, and lured dollars back to the banks.

Despite the painful austerity, Milei's government has made sure to ring-fence and even boost spending on specific welfare programmes that have so far helped head off fiery protests in the streets, even with poverty levels that have risen over 50 per cent

And while a tough cost-cutting austerity drive has pushed up poverty and hurt economic growth, Milei's theatrical and straight-talking style — while not for everyone — has kept many voters on his side and propped up his ratings in opinion polls. Despite the painful austerity, his government has ensured to ring-fence and even boost spending on specific welfare programmes that have so far helped head off fiery

protests in the streets, even with poverty levels rising over 50 per cent. The economy remains a potential tinderbox, but Milei's success to date has convinced markets. The S&P Mervel stock index is at record highs, while bonds have soared this year from around 20 cents on the dollar to some now nearing 70 cents.

So, what has Milei done, and how has he convinced Argentina to swallow a painful dose of austerity?

Milei's government has managed to do something few thought possible without sparking riots in the South American country: cutting public spending by billions of dollars and posting regular fiscal surpluses after years of deficits. The central bank is working to build up depleted foreign currency reserves, which were deep in the red when the government took over in December. The central bank has added a net \$19 billion this year, with foreign exchange purchases gaining speed in recent weeks after a mid-year lull. — Reuters

A new paradigm for standing forests

WITH THIS year's global summits on biodiversity (COP16), climate change (COP29), and desertification (COP16) fast approaching, the consequences of the climate emergency are evident everywhere. Floods have ravaged Central Europe, super-typhoon Yagi has just struck Southeast Asia, and Hurricanes Helene and Milton have wreaked havoc in the southeastern United States. Hotter, drier conditions have created ideal conditions for wildfires like those that have raged across Brazil, South Africa, and Colombia, while droughts have pushed people into food insecurity this year in Africa.

If the scale and speed of our response to climate change are inadequate to the threat, this new normal will only worsen, jeopardising hard-won development gains in low- and middle-income countries. In addition to curbing emissions from burning fossil fuels, one of the biggest priorities must be to protect and conserve the world's remaining tropical forests.

Tropical forests store significant amounts of carbon, and their demise would result in a massive 1° Celsius increase in global average temperatures, not to mention the loss of untold biodiversity and the depletion of ecosystem services such as atmospheric rivers that supply water to food crops around the world. Scientists warn that the degradation of several of these forests is approaching a tipping point where the remaining forest will be unable to sustain itself or recover.

Individuals, countries, and NGOs are stepping up to protect and preserve the world's forests from devastation. But we will need a combination of economic and environmental solutions to address the complex, rapidly changing factors driving illegal deforestation.

Fortunately, such solutions are at hand. In Brazil, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's administration has already significantly curbed deforestation. Between August 2023 and July 2024, tropical forest loss in the Brazilian Amazon was cut by 46



AJAY BANGA

The writer is
President of the
World Bank Group



FERNANDO
HADDAD

The writer
is Minister of
Finance of Brazil



MARINA SILVA

The writer is
Minister of
Environment and
Climate Change
of Brazil



Individuals, countries, and NGOs are stepping up to protect and preserve the world's forests from devastation.

per cent compared to the previous 12 months. At the global level, Brazil, which holds the G20 presidency this year, has emphasised nature-based solutions to climate challenges as part of its agenda, paving the way for further progress at COP30 in Belém in 2025.

For its part, the World Bank Group is supporting similar public and private efforts across developing economies. The goal is to design strong policies, build credible institutions, and mobilise investments in the infrastructure needed to conserve and manage forests sustainably. Making forest finance more widely available and more affordable is key.

The World Bank Group is also working to turn the vast potential of carbon markets into an income stream for developing countries committed to reducing emissions and conserving their forests. Already, 15 countries are benefiting from a pipeline that could produce more than 24 million carbon credits by the end of 2024 – a win for both the climate and development.

But those engaged in these efforts have long been dogged by the question of how to support the conservation of standing forests over the long term. While forest carbon markets have created new revenue streams, they usually reward only those countries, communities, or project developers focused on reducing their emissions from

deforestation. Thus, forests that are not under immediate threat offer no financial reward.

One solution is the proposed Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF), a large-scale, performance-based mechanism that would use blended finance to generate financial returns and reward countries for protecting their standing forests. Instead of carbon credits, the TFFF would provide predictable long-term financial support linked to a country's hectares of standing forests, thus aligning economic incentives with environmental outcomes.

Led by the Brazilian Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, and in partnership with other tropical-forest countries, developed economies, and non-traditional sponsors, the TFFF aims to leverage sovereign and philanthropic funding to mobilise more private capital, thus expanding forest finance beyond purely public-sector tools. Crucially, it would allow private investors to support a global public good by quantifying and verifying the underlying asset on terms aligned with their business models. This is the kind of bold, innovative solution that we need if we want to make a real difference in the fight against climate change. One of the biggest advantages of the TFFF is that it is not expected to depend on scarce donor grants and recurrent replenishments.

©Project Syndicate, 2024

SPORTS

CRUSHING WIN



Dhofar vs Saham. — Ammar al Balushi

DHOFAR DOMINATE SAHAM IN OMAN BASKETBALL LEAGUE

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, NOV 4

Dhofar Club achieved a significant victory over Saham Club by 83-21 in their match at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in the Wilayat of Bausher, as part of the 2024-2025 Oman Basketball League. Dhofar started the match strongly, as they scored 26 points without Saham being able to score any points. The start was successful for Ibrahim al Muqbali and Abdulrahman al Balushi, who contributed to imposing the rhythm in favour of Dhofar, in addition to Walid al Hattali, Zayed al Balushi and Ahmed Abu Hamar, who scored successive points to widen the gap early on. Saham suffered from a loss of focus and were unable to exploit the opportunities, so the first quarter ended with Dhofar's superiority with a score of 26-0. In the second quarter, Dhofar continued their strong performance, with Ahmed al Wahaibi and Mohammed al Musalhi scoring 4 points at the start of the quarter, deepening the gap further. With Saham trying to close the gap, they managed to score 4 points after two shots from under the basket by Mehad al Sulaimi and Nasr al Battashi. Despite this, Dhofar maintained their performance, with Mohammed al Mahri adding two points for his team to bring the score to 34-4, before Zayed al Balushi and Riyadh al Jahouri returned to add new points, ending the first half with a comfortable lead for Dhofar by 42-8. Dhofar entered the third quarter with greater strength, as their players continued to control the course of the match. Ibrahim al Muqbali and Abdulrahman al Shibli managed to score 6 points through precise three-point shots, while Saham responded with limited attempts that resulted in 4 points through Younis al Amri and Sulaiman al Ghazali. Dhofar did not stop increasing the lead, as Waleed al Hattali and Abdulrahman al Shibli added 4 points after accurate shots, which widened the gap further to end the third quarter at 56-17. In the last quarter, Dhofar completed their dominance as they scored through Zayed al Balushi and Ibrahim al Muqbali by adding 6 points to raise the score to 62-17. Successive scoring from Mohammed al Mahri, Abdulrahman al Shibli and Riyadh al Jahouri enabled Dhofar to end the match with a big margin of 83-21.

Oman defeat England in HK Sixes ‘Bowl Final’

IN A SPECTACULAR showcase of power hitting, Oman cemented their status as one of the premier teams at the 2024 Hong Kong Sixes cricket tournament, defeating England in the ‘Bowl Final’ held at Mong Kok on Sunday. Led by Vinayak Shukla, Oman's victory marked their second successive win over the formidable English side in this year's edition. Sri Lanka emerged as the tournament champions, defeating Pakistan to secure the coveted ‘Cup’ title, while Oman claimed an unexpected title in the ‘Bowl’ competition, which featured teams finishing third in the group stage of the 12-nation tournament. In the ‘Bowl Final’, England aimed to avenge a previous defeat to Oman in the group stage of the ‘Bowl’ competition. Batting first, England posted a score of 123 runs for the loss of just one wicket. Jordan Thompson led the charge with a blistering 55 runs off 18 balls, which included six sixes, while Ravi Bopara contributed a rapid 51 runs off just 12 deliveries. Mujibur Ali was the lone wicket-taker for Oman, finishing with figures of 1/7. In response, Oman's Asif Khan and Vinayak Shukla formed a match-winning partnership, guiding the team to victory with a ball to spare. Asif, named the player of the match, remained unbeaten on 47 runs off 17 balls, while Shukla dazzled with a swift 38 runs off just 12 balls. It was a memorable event for Shukla, who emerged as the tournament's top scorer, amassing 275 runs at an impressive average of 137.50 over six innings, while teammate Hassnain Ali boasted the highest strike rate at 415.38. Shukla also won player of the match awards on two occasions.

OMAN BATTERS RAIN DOWN SIXES
Oman's earlier encounter against England was a highlight of the tournament, where they exhibited a remarkable display of batting packed with punch and power as they smashed 20 sixes in their quota of six overs. Winning the toss, England opted to send Oman in to bat—a decision that would soon backfire. After a first-ball single, Oman batters launched into action, belting three sixes and a four in the first over, bowled by Ed Barnard. Shukla was the destroyer-in-chief, launching Jordan Thompson for four consecutive sixes and a boundary off the first five balls of the second over, reaching a remarkable 51 runs off just 10 balls before retiring, as per tournament rules. If Shukla's explosive start wasn't enough, England were soon met with another barrage from No. 3 batter



Oman emerged Bowl Champions (third place) in the Hong Kong Sixes tournament.

Hassnain Shah, who unleashed a flurry of four sixes in the third over, propelling Oman to a staggering total of 90 runs within just three overs. Asif Khan, who had been quiet until then, quickly joined the onslaught, hitting two sixes in the fourth over and adding two more in the fifth. By the time Samit Patel, the former England all-rounder, bowled the final over, Oman had amassed a jaw-dropping total of 159 runs without losing a wicket. Asif finished unbeaten on 44 runs off 16 balls, while the four batters collectively smashed 20 sixes and six fours, culminating in a record-setting total that became the highest score of the 2024 Hong Kong Super Sixes. In contrast, England struggled in their reply, managing only 92 runs for the loss of four wickets, resulting in a hefty 67-run defeat. The standout performer for England was Ed Barnard, who scored 57 runs off 16 balls, hitting nine sixes. **JOURNEY TO THE ‘BOWL’ TITLE**
Oman's journey in the tournament began with setbacks, losing preliminary matches to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. However, they rebounded in the ‘Bowl’

group stage, winning all three matches against New Zealand, India, and England, securing a spot in the ‘Bowl Final’ against second-placed England. In their ‘Bowl’ group stage, Oman's batting prowess was on display against India, as Shukla's explosive batting helped them chase down a target of 120 runs, concluding with a six-wicket victory. Oman's remarkable performance at the 2024 Hong Kong Sixes not only earned them the ‘Bowl’ title but also restored pride following a disappointing campaign at the ICC T20 World Cup earlier in the year. The two successive wins against England provided Oman some consolation after a heavy defeat at the hands of the former World Cup winners during the T20 World Cup group match in Antigua earlier in June. The Hong Kong title is a testament to the team's resilience and skill, marking a significant achievement in Oman's cricket history. The 2024 Hong Kong Cricket Sixes was the 20th edition, making a return after a seven-year hiatus. **Oman team:** Vinayak Shukla (captain), Asif Khan, Hassnain Ali Shah, Mujibur Ali, Shoaib Al Balushi, Zikria Islam.

Sur, Al Nasr secure crucial wins in low-scoring OL round

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, NOV 4

The Sur team achieved an important 1-0 victory over Al Shabab on Sunday at the Sur Sports Complex, marking the conclusion of the 10th round of the Omantel League. This win earned Sur three valuable points, raising their total to seven points and lifting them to 11th place, while Al Shabab remained in 10th place on goal difference, with the same points. The match began cautiously, with both teams exchanging attacks in the opening minutes. Sur soon adopted a defensive approach, playing from the back and sending long balls toward the attacking line. Al Shabab, on the other hand, focused on build-



ing up between the midfield and forward lines, but their attempts posed no real threat to goalkeeper Salim al Dawoodi's net. Sur nearly opened the scoring in the 17th minute when Mohammed bin Nasser al Mukhaini received the ball inside the penalty area and shot powerfully, but it went slightly over the crossbar, keeping the score level. Al Shabab responded swiftly just three minutes later when Cosmos fired a strong shot, but it was directly within reach of Al Dawoodi, who handled it skilfully. Sur continued their varied offensive attempts, utilising wing play and crosses, which led to a breakthrough in the 28th minute. Moath al Araiimi delivered a precise cross into the penalty area, which Mahmoud al Alawi

headed into the net, scoring the match's only goal. Following this, Al Shabab attempted to equalise but failed to breach Sur's solid defence, ending the first half with Sur leading 1-0. At the start of the second half, Al Shabab intensified their offensive pressure and increased the pace of their play, striving to reach Sur's goal and score an equaliser. The second half saw several genuine opportunities for Al Shabab, but the brilliance of Sur goalkeeper Salim al Dawoodi, along with the defence led by Omran al Farsi, kept them away from scoring. In the 80th minute, Sur came close to doubling their lead when substitute Dimitro broke free with only the Al Shabab goalkeeper to beat. However, he hesitated, allowing

an Al Shabab defender to intervene and clear the ball before it crossed the goal line. Al Shabab continued their efforts to equalise, but Sur's resilient players denied them any success. **AL NASR IN FOURTH SPOT**
In another match, Al Nasr secured a 1-0 victory over Al Khabourah at the Rustaq Sports Complex. The winning goal came from Marwan Taib in the 54th minute, adding three vital points to Al Nasr's tally, bringing them to 14 points and keeping them in fourth place in the league standings. Al Khabourah's score remained at 10 points, leaving them in fifth place. This round was marked by a lack of goals, with only four goals scored across five matches.

CAREER-HIGHRANK



Paris Masters winner Alexander Zverev of Germany and runner-up Ugo Humbert of France alongside swimmer Florent Manaudou during the trophy presentation in Paris. — Reuters

ZVEREV OUTCLASSES HUMBERT IN PARIS MASTERS FINAL

PARIS: Third seed Alexander Zverev eased past home favourite Ugo Humbert 6-2, 6-2 in the Paris Masters final on Sunday and will return to his career-high number two in the world rankings. German Zverev will leapfrog Carlos Alcaraz in Monday's official rankings for the first time since suffering a serious injury at the 2022 French Open. "That was a performance to match the occasion," Zverev said. "It was pretty good I have to say. I knew I had to play like this to win. Ugo is an incredible player. Plus him playing in Paris, I think he played even better than he usually does."

"I knew that once the crowd gets involved it would be very, very difficult. I had to take that away early. I did that and I'm happy about it." The Roland Garros runner-up broke first as he took the opener helped by a number of unforced errors by Humbert.

His performance was just as powerful in the second set as the 27-year-old went on to win the Paris Masters for the first time.

"I want to thank my team. The work we've done over the past two and a half years to be back in this position, everyone had to sacrifice so much. To be able to play on these beautiful courts again," Zverev added.

"There was never a 100 per cent guarantee that I'd be back at this level after Roland Garros two years ago when I basically broke everything in my ankle that's possible."

"To win the title here in Paris means the world to me but I'm sure it also means the world to everybody sitting in my box. They've done so much to help me lift this title."

In winning his seventh ATP Masters 1000 title, Zverev joined Boris Becker as the only German champions in the tournament's history.

He has the most match wins on the ATP Tour this season (66), one ahead of world number one Jannik Sinner. — Reuters



Cummins helps Australia grind past Pakistan



SKIPPER PAT Cummins kept his cool under pressure with a gritty unbeaten 32 to steer Australia to a nervy two wicket defeat of Pakistan in the first of three one-day internationals on Monday. Chasing 204, they reached the target with 99 balls to spare at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, surviving a huge scare when they lost three wickets in five balls. "Wonderful match but it got a little tighter than I would have liked it there," said Cummins.

With Mitchell Marsh and Travis Head on paternity leave, the world champions had a new-look opening partnership in Jake Fraser-McGurk and Matt Short.

But Short lasted just four balls before top-edging to Saim Ayub off Shaheen Shah Afridi while Fraser-McGurk's luck ran out on 16, slapping Naseem Shah to Irfan Khan at mid-on.

The experienced Steve Smith steadied the ship alongside Josh Inglis.

They put on 85 for the third wicket before Smith was undone by Haris Rauf on 44, well caught by Ayub at backward point.

Inglis followed for 49 soon after going for a big hit off Afridi, taken by Khan on his knees. And when Rauf removed Marnus Labuschagne (16) three balls later, then Glenn Maxwell for a golden duck, Australia were suddenly 139-6 and it was game on.

Mohammad Hasnain bowled Aaron Hardie (10) and Sean Abbott (13) was



guilty of a lazy run out, leaving the hosts needing 19 runs and two wickets left, with Cummins and Mitchell Starc (two) seeing them home.

"Really happy with how the guys bowled, everyone played their roles beautifully," Cummins added.

"Obviously we need to try and find some partnerships (in the batting)."

FIGHT Earlier, Starc took 3-33 Pakistan were dismissed for 203. Newly appointed skipper Mohammad Rizwan top-scored with 44 but they

struggled against some precision bowling, all out in the 47th over after Australia won the toss and sent them in.

"We need to play teams like that," said Rizwan. "We decided whatever the situation we will fight and show courage. "The luck was with Australia and that's why they won."

In Pakistan's first 50-over game since last year's World Cup, Starc broke through in the third over with Ayub chopping onto his stumps.

That brought Babar Azam to the crease, unburdened by the captaincy after quitting last month.

He upped the tempo before Starc struck again, with Abdullah Shafique caught behind for a tame 12.

Azam put on 39 with Rizwan before spinner Adam Zampa entered the fray and broke the partnership, bowling Azam for 37 with his fourth delivery.

His replacement Kamran Ghulam lasted just six balls, no match for a brutal Cummins bouncer, gloving to wicketkeeper Inglis to leave Pakistan struggling on 70-4 after 19 overs.

A patient Rizwan played himself in, but the wickets kept falling.

Salman Agha was smartly taken at square leg for 12 by Short off Abbott and Rizwan then departed attempting a sweep from part-time spinner Labuschagne.

Afridi hit an entertaining 24, but Starc again struck, rattling his middle stump, before a late flurry, with Shag adding a quick-fire 40. — AFP

Oman face Netherlands after win over UAE in tri-series

MUSCAT: Oman's revamped cricket team, featuring a mix of experienced players and fresh talent, opened its home tri-series in the ICC Cricket World Cup League 2 (WCL 2) with a commanding six-wicket victory over UAE.

The win on Friday has set an encouraging tone for Oman, who will now look to secure a second successive win when they face The Netherlands on Tuesday at the Oman Cricket Academy ground.

With head coach Duleep Mendis at the helm, Oman fielded a 'new-look' squad that included four ODI debutants — Muzahir Raza, Ashish Odedara, Hammad Mirza, and Samay Shrivastav.

Though not all debutants are fresh-faced youngsters, their presence has injected a renewed

energy and approach to the side. This blend of new and seasoned players proved effective against a more experienced UAE line-up, as Oman clinched an important victory in their ongoing WCL 2 campaign. Oman captain Jatinder Singh's decision to bowl first paid off, as UAE faltered early, finding themselves at 18/2 within the first eight overs.

Leg-spinner Shrivastav then turned the screws on UAE's middle order with an impressive spell, taking 4/25, including two wickets in a single over that sparked a rapid collapse.

UAE were eventually bundled out for 128 runs in 41.3 overs. Supporting Shrivastav, Shakeel Ahmed picked up 2/22, while Raza, Aamir Kaleem, Jay Odedra and Karan Sonavale claimed a



Ashish Odedra hit a fifty against the UAE.

wicket each, underscoring Oman's collective strength in bowling.

Oman's chase, however, had its moments of tension. Losing Jatinder early, they found themselves under pressure at 21/3 by the 12th over. But Ashish Odedara's composed, unbeaten 54 off 127 balls anchored the innings and steadied the ship. He was ably supported by Hammad Mirza, who contributed a crucial 28, and Mohammad Nadeem, who was unbeaten on 19, guided Oman to a comfortable 129/4 in 43.4 overs.

With Friday's victory, Oman have improved their standing in the WCL 2, now positioned sixth in the eight-team table with eight points from nine matches.

Leading the group is the USA, who have accumulated 16 points from 12 matches, followed closely

by Canada, also with 16 points from 12 matches but trailing on net run rate. Scotland are in third place, having earned 13 points from 10 matches, while The Netherlands, Oman's next opponent, are ranked fourth with 12 points from nine games. Namibia are in fifth with 10 points from 12 games, just above Oman's eight points. Nepal, with five points from 11 games and the UAE, anchored at the bottom with four points from nine games, round out the standings.

On Sunday, UAE bounced back from the opening match loss to defeat Netherlands by 26 runs.

Remaining fixtures: Nov 5: Oman vs Netherlands, Nov 7: Oman vs UAE, Nov 9: Netherlands vs UAE, Nov 11: Oman vs Netherlands.

AMBITIOUSJOURNEY



Faiz Mohammad Riaz, Vice-Chairman of OGA, (R) with coach Richard.

FUTURE OF OMAN GOLF IS PROMISING, SAYS FAIZ RIAZ

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, NOV 4

The board directors of Oman Golf Association (OGA) are very keen to continue their ambitious journey to elevate the sport of golf within Oman and across the region. Faiz Mohammad Riaz, Vice-Chairman of OGA, affirmed that the association's focus on creating pathways for young talent, broadening community engagement and fostering partnerships besides the OGA target to establish a formidable national presence in regional championships. In last April, the new board directors of the Oman Golf Association (OGA) were elected for a four-year term (2024-28) and HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said was elected as the chairman. The other elected OGA board members were Faiz Mohammed Riaz as vice-chairman, Ahmed al Jahdhamy as general secretary and Nikhil Sampat as treasurer. The board members comprise from Ghalib al Busaidy, Mubarak Hilal and Jumana al Ghadani.

Faiz Mohammad Riaz extended his sincere appreciation to HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth for the unwavering support. "Their backing has been instrumental in our efforts to elevate the sport of golf in Oman across all levels," he said.

Nurturing young talent is one of the key areas that OGA board is working on as Riaz said: "Investing in young players is vital for the future of Oman's golf. We are committed to nurturing these age groups by establishing specialised technical junior programmes, offering coaching camps domestically and aboard beside taking part in regional and international golf events. All these factors would not only strengthen the national team golfers but also introduce a new generation to the sport by providing them with the skills required to compete on international platforms."

Commenting on the requirements for the national teams to compete in different levels, the OGA vice-chairman said that reaching top positions in Gulf and Arab championships will require a robust infrastructure and some key relevant technical factors.

"To compete at the highest level, we need enhanced infrastructure, advanced training facilities and access to international-level coaching. As part of these efforts, the OGA recently appointed coach Richard, who has brought a fresh perspective and expertise to the team, accelerating the players' progress and preparing them for the forthcoming events and championships," he said. "Recently, at the junior and youth Arab Championship in Tunisia, the boys had delivered top performance. Attending on an regional stage provides invaluable experience and we are proud of their efforts. There is always room for growth and development and the players will undergo further growth," he added.

The OGA took many steps and is equally committed to promoting women's golf in Oman. "We in OGA are dedicated to growing women's golf in Oman by promoting it as a sport for young girls and women of all ages with particular focus on identifying and nurturing young female talent."

"Women's national golf teams were already showing promising performance in the recent competitions. The OGA envisions a future where Omani women will showcase their talent on the Gulf and Arab stages," he said.

"Special thanks to OGA Chairman His Highness Azzan bin Qais al Said, whose leadership and support continue to guide the OGA towards its vision. With a focus on creating pathways for young talent, broadening community engagement and fostering partnerships, the OGA aims to establish a formidable national presence in regional championships. The future of Oman's golf is incredibly promising," Faiz said,

Moving to the sustainability part, he affirmed that the OGA is expanding its marketing efforts and forming private partnerships.

Solanke shines as Spurs blow away Aston Villa



Tottenham Hotspur's Dominic Solanke celebrates scoring their second goal with Brennan Johnson and Pedro Porro. — Reuters

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, NOV 4

DOMINIC SOLANKE, Tottenham Hotspur's record signing of £65m in the summer, struck twice in a space of four minutes to see his side emerge 4-1 winners against Aston Villa. The win puts Spurs within two points of the top-four in the Premier League, a position that qualifies for European Champion's League.

Spurs manager, Ange Postecoglou, whose side lost to Crystal Palace last week in a dismal performance, believes this year's race for fourth could well involve more teams compared to last season when Spurs lost out to Villa to qualify. He said: "You don't fall off cliffs and you don't climb mountains within a week. We are going to have bumps along the way."

He added: "It's how you address them, how you cope with them, how you rebound and learn from them. It looks like there's more congestion in terms of the field. The table is

only important for me at the end of the year. While we're running in the race, I don't like looking either side of me."

The first half hour of the game was somewhat bland and Aston Villa frustrated their opponents by slowing the game down while Spurs lacked deep penetration in their rare attacking moves. Villa took the lead following a 32nd minute corner when Spurs defender Pedro Porro's miscued header was hurriedly parried by his own goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario. The rebound went to Morgan Rogers, directly in front of the goal, to drive in a shot.

SENSE OF URGENCY

Spurs came out for the second-half looking a different side after being booed off at the break. They were now lively and with a sense of urgency. It took them just four minutes to draw level when Heung-Min Son, returning after a two-game absence with a hamstring injury, sent a beautiful cross for Brennan Johnson to shoot inside the back post for his seventh goal of the season.

Son was substituted in the 56th minute

much to his surprise and obvious disappointment showing on his face. Having taken control and keeping much of the pressure on Villa in their quest to take the lead, the home side scored in the 75th minute. Dejan Kulusevski sent a lovely pass to the unmarked Solanke who dinked the ball over an advancing Emiliano Martinez.

Four minutes later, Solanke doubled his effort. It came with Pau Torres gifting the ball to Pape Matar Sarr who put in a through pass to Richarlison and Solanke was ready to tap in the low cross from Richarlison.

Finally, in the sixth minute of the 10-minute added time, James Maddison's brilliant curling free-kick left Martinez standing. It was his 50th Premier League goal and the ninth from a direct free-kick since his debut in 2018.

Villa manager, Unai Emery, said: "We are disappointed, frustrated, but we are accepting it. We know our way, it is 38 matches, the league is very tight. To lose 4-1 is a tough result but the match we played was more or less in line with the expectation I had."

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE

-4,718.173

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL

OMAN \$73.42

BRENT \$75.28

LIGHT \$71.79

Terms and conditions apply

We help your deposits grow for a brighter future!

Higher returns on deposits for customers of the Ladies account at BankDhofar.

bankdhofar

2479 1111

www.bankdhofar.com

Scan to learn more

بنك ظفار
BankDhofar

RO 23.4 million treasury bills issued with attractive yields

MUSCAT: The government has issued Treasury Bills worth RO 23.4 million in its latest tender, offering varied yields across 28-day, 182-day and 364-day maturities.

For the 28-day bills, RO 3.1 million was allotted at an average price of RO 99.671 per RO 100, with yields reaching 4.30333% and a discount rate of 4.28917%.

A total of RO 7 million was allotted for the 182-day bills at an average price of



Treasury Bills are highly secure short-term instruments that allow licensed commercial banks to invest surplus funds.

RO 97.686 per RO 100, yielding 4.74974% with a discount rate of 4.63985%.

The 364-day bills, which received the largest allotment of RO 13.3 million, were issued at an average price of RO 95.469 per RO 100, resulting in a yield of 4.75945% and a discount rate of 4.54365%.

Treasury Bills, managed by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) on behalf of the Ministry of Finance, are highly secure short-term instruments that allow licensed commercial banks to invest surplus

funds. The CBO offers liquidity support through discounting and repo facilities, with interest rates set at 5.50% for repo operations and 6.00% for discounting Treasury Bills.

These instruments not only provide secure returns, but also help shape the local money market by setting a benchmark for short-term interest rates. Additionally, the government may use Treasury Bills to cover immediate financial needs when necessary. — **ONA**

OQBI intends to float 49% on MSX

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 4

OQBI (SFZ) SAOG (under transformation) (OQBI), Oman's only integrated producer of methanol, ammonia and LPG products, announced its intention to proceed with an initial public offering (IPO) and to list its ordinary shares for trading on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

The proposed offering is a step towards diversifying the company's shareholder base, broadening the company's network and visibility among key stakeholders and providing liquidity for shareholders.

OQ SAOC owns 100% of the capital of OQBI directly and through its subsidiaries, Takamul Investment Company LLC and OQ Salalah Industries Company SAOC

The subscription period for Category I and Category II investors is expected to commence in November 2024, after receiving the required approval from



The Offering provides investors exposure to Oman's only integrated producer of methanol, ammonia and LPG products.

the FSA. Admission of the shares on the MSX is expected in December 2024.

Details of the offering, the Category I Offer and the Category II Offer (including large retail and small retail thresholds) will be included in the Offering Document which is expected to be published by the company prior to start of the subscription period. The completion of the Offering and Listing of the shares to trading on the MSX is expected in December 2024, subject

to market conditions and obtaining relevant regulatory approvals in Oman, including approval of the Listing.

BankDhofar, Bank Muscat and Morgan Stanley & Co International plc have been appointed as joint global coordinators (JGCs) with each of BankDhofar and Bank Muscat also appointed as issue managers.

In addition, Kamco Investment Company and BSF Capital have been appointed as Joint Bookrunners. **TURN TO P15**

CBO ANNOUNCES AUCTION RESULTS OF 72ND GDB ISSUE



MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) announced the auction results of the 72nd Government Development Bonds (GDB) issue worth RO 98,000,000.

According to a media release issued by CBO's Market Operations Department, the 72nd GDB Issue, which received overwhelming application from investors, has received applications amounted to RO 173,416,500.

The average yield was 4.75 per cent at an equivalent price of RO 100.000, while the highest yield was 4.77 per cent at an equivalent price of RO 99.910 and the lowest was at 4.74 per cent at an equivalent price of RO 100.045.

The 5-year Bond will be issued today (Tuesday), and it will mature on November 5, 2029. — **ONA**

ABRAJ ENERGY SERVICES SAOG

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Abraj Energy Services SAOG, I am pleased to present the condensed interim financial statements for the third quarter of 2024.

The Company is focused on providing services around Oil and Gas Wells, during and post wells construction. From building a wider service portfolio, Abraj now focuses on strategic top-tier services coupled with strong operational efficiency to realize maximum financial returns and sustainable growth. Abraj continues to benefit from the strength of long-term contracts in generating sufficient cash flow for growth.

HSE:

Abraj HSE performance in Q3 2024 was excellent as there was no Loss Time Incident (LTI), no recordable incident or any other major incident in Q3 2024. All Units have achieved Unit KPI target score in Q3 2024 as per defined criteria. In Q3 2024, a dedicated CCTV workshop conducted with site supervisors to enhance their awareness about at-risk behaviors. HSE forum with level 1 contractors conducted in Q3 2024 and shared Abraj HSE performance, KPI and learning from incidents.

Company Financial Performance

Key Financials of your company:-

1. During the nine months ending on September 30, 2024, revenue increased by 7.7% compared to the same in 2023, increasing from OMR 106.1 million to OMR 114.3 million.

2. During the nine months ending on September 30, 2024, the total expenses increased by 4.4% compared to the same period in 2023, rising from OMR 95.0 million to OMR 99.2 million. This increase can be mainly attributed to the increase in Manpower cost and Logistics cost.

3. In the period ending on September 30, 2024, the profit after tax increased by 36 % to OMR 15.0 million from OMR 11.0 million for the same period in 2023

Segment Performances – Q3-2024:

Drilling and Workover

In the current operational cycle, Abraj fleet operating 22 Drilling rigs and 5 workover units in Oman and 2 Drilling Rigs in Kuwait with of 89% utilization for our drilling rigs and 100% utilization for workover rigs. Our national market share remains at 29% for drilling rigs and becoming the leader and national champion of Oman in the drilling rig market.

Abraj committed to provide high-quality services for drilling rigs involves ensuring operational efficiency, safety, and reliability throughout the drilling operations.

Well Services and Others

Abraj has established a strong foothold in the well services sector, capturing a 20% market share in core services. This achievement is largely due to its superior service quality and innovative technology, which have allowed the company to outpace competitors in certain regions.

The company has also made significant inroads in the cementing market, particularly with its major customer, PDO, in Oman. The commissioning and mobilization of a second Frac fleet for PDO-Gas Frac project positions Abraj strategically for future opportunities in hydraulic fracturing.

Looking ahead, Abraj is committed to expanding its well services portfolio and enhancing its regional presence. This will be pursued through successful prequalification, strategic bidding, and the formation of partnerships, ensuring the company remains competitive in a rapidly evolving market

Acknowledgements:

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I take this opportunity to express their sincere and deep gratitude to the vision and wise leadership of the country's leader His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tark for maintaining the sustainable growth and prosperity of the Omani Economy. Abraj Board also appreciates the valuable support and guidance from the various stakeholders such as Government agencies, Shareholders, Clients, Management, Employees, Bankers, and Suppliers.

Ayad Al Balushi
Chairman of the Board

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder in Arabic or English as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request.

CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	30 Sept 2024 (Unaudited) RO'000	31 Dec 2023 (Audited) RO'000
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property and equipment	202,574	191,405
Right-of-use assets	4,881	5,502
Intangible assets	178	231
Deferred tax assets	470	426
Deferred expenses – non-current	74	94
Capex advances	3,302	4,546
Total non-current assets	211,479	202,204
Current assets		
Trade receivables	37,146	39,448
Advances, prepayments, and other receivables	3,583	2,937
Deferred expenses – current	25	25
Inventories	28,531	23,786
Cash and cash equivalents	4,959	8,071
Total current assets	74,244	74,267
Total assets	285,723	276,471
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Capital and reserves		
Share capital	77,020	77,020
Legal reserve	12,220	10,718
Retained earnings	55,230	58,040
Total equity	144,470	145,778
Non-current liabilities		
Term loans – non-current portion	75,922	72,060
Deferred income - non-current portion	1,207	1,094
Deferred tax liabilities	4,245	4,407
Employees' end of services benefits	2,385	2,218
Lease liabilities - non-current portion	4,726	3,565
Total non-current liabilities	88,485	83,344
Current liabilities		
Term loans - current portion	17,483	13,232
Lease liabilities – current	293	2,212
Trade payables	17,429	16,401
Other payables	13,946	12,068
Deferred income - current portion	740	762
Income tax payable	2,877	2,674
Total current liabilities	52,768	47,349
Total liabilities	141,253	130,693
Total equity and liabilities	285,723	276,471

CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE NINE MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 30 SEPTEMBER (UNAUDITED)

	(Unaudited)			
	Three months ended 30 September		Nine months ended 30 September	
	2024 RO'000	2023 RO'000	2024 RO'000	2023 RO'000
Revenue from contracts with customers	36,347	36,425	114,268	106,072
Cost of sales	(27,589)	(27,547)	(85,476)	(82,658)
Gross profit	8,758	8,878	28,792	23,414
General and administrative expenses	(2,204)	(1,640)	(6,353)	(4,872)
Other expenses	32	(154)	(325)	(695)
Other income	-	(14)	-	-
Expected credit loss reversal on trade receivables	-	(17)	-	187
Operating profit	6,586	7,053	22,114	18,034
Finance costs	(1,534)	(1,453)	(4,517)	(4,739)
Finance income	66	29	177	130
Net Finance costs	(1,468)	(1,424)	(4,340)	(4,609)
Profit before tax	5,118	5,629	17,774	13,425
Taxation	(768)	(1,062)	(2,754)	(2,375)
Profit for the period	4,350	4,567	15,020	11,050
Other comprehensive income for the period	-	-	-	-
Total comprehensive income for the period	4,350	4,567	15,020	11,050
Earnings per share				
Basic and diluted earnings per share-Baiza	5.6	5.9	19.5	14.3

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES

MUZN ISLAMIC BANKING REINFORCES SHARIAH COMMITMENT



The meeting reaffirms Muzn’s commitment to uphold Shariah principles across its financial offerings.

MUSCAT: NBO Muzn Islamic Banking recently held its third Shariah Supervisory Board (SSB) Meeting of 2024, reaffirming Muzn’s commitment to uphold Shariah principles across its financial offerings, while reflecting its dedication to ethical and compliant Islamic banking practices.

The meeting was chaired by Mufti Dr Muhammad Zubair Usmani, the Shariah Supervisory Board Chairman, and included members HH Sayyid Dr Adham al Said, Shaikh Dr Abdulrahman bin Abdullah al Saadi, and Shaikh Dr Saleh bin Nasser al Kharusi, who shared their insights to guide Muzn’s operations in alignment with Shariah standards.

The Board focused on innovative Shariah-compliant solutions to cater to customers’ needs; covering key items like reviewing the concept of Istisna financing

Commenting on the meeting, Salima al Marzouqi, Assistant General Manager and Chief Islamic Banking Officer, said, “The Shariah Supervisory Board Meeting reinforces our unwavering commitment to expand Islamic finance in Oman, by working closely with our esteemed Shariah Board members. We spare no effort to ensure that our products and services strictly follow Shariah guidelines, meeting both regulatory standards and the values of our customers.”

Furthermore, the Board focused on innovative Shariah-compliant solutions to cater to customers’ needs; covering key items like reviewing the concept of Istisna financing and developing Islamic financing models exclusive for Initial Public Offerings (IPOs). The Shariah Supervisory Board also reviewed Shariah Compliance Reports for the designated period and expressed satisfaction with Muzn’s adherence to Shariah standards across its product portfolio.

Abraj celebrates progress at Wafra oil field

ABRAJ Energy Services, Oman’s leading provider of oil and gas services, successfully convened a significant Stakeholder Engagement Event in Kuwait. The event celebrated the company’s extended reach and the successful and safe commencement of its operations at the strategic Wafra oil field. This gathering underscored the company’s pivotal role in fostering industry-leading advancements and collaborative endeavours within the region’s oil and gas sectors.

The event was marked by distinguished guests from top industry players, including the Kuwait Gulf Oil Company (KGOC) and Saudi Chevron. It spotlighted Abraj’s innovative approach and advanced drilling solutions tailored to Wafra’s unique demands.

Eng Saif al Hamhami, CEO of Abraj Energy Services, remarked, “This gathering reflects our dedication to nurturing enduring partnerships that enhance our operational excellence and support sustainable practices across all areas of our operations. Through these collaborations, we



The event was marked by distinguished guests from top industry players, including the Kuwait Gulf Oil Company (KGOC) and Saudi Chevron.

The event spotlighted Abraj’s innovative approach and advanced drilling solutions tailored to Wafra’s unique demands.

continue to push boundaries and set new standards within the industry.”

In February 2023, Abraj Energy Services signed a significant contract with Wafra Joint Operations (KGOC and Saudi Chevron), marking a major step in its strategic expansion into the regional market. Demonstrating its commitment to operational excellence and timely delivery, Abraj has successfully deployed two of the three advanced

drilling rigs ahead of schedule. This achievement showcases Abraj’s ability to meet and exceed project timelines, highlighting its dedication to enhancing regional service offerings.

In line with Oman’s vision to sustain economic diversification, Abraj reaffirmed its commitment to the In-Country Value programme, focusing on strategic investments that bolster local capabilities and promote long-term financial benefits.

Elevate every journey with the Lincoln Corsair

MUSCAT: Step into a world of elegance and sophistication with the Lincoln Corsair SUV, designed to make every drive a serene experience. The Lincoln Corsair Reserve all-wheel drive enhances the luxury SUV experience, offering an impressive array of features, advanced technology and meticulous attention to detail.

The two-row Corsair blends refined power with innovative technologies, staying true to Lincoln’s Quiet Flight ethos. With a turbocharged four-cylinder engine – including a 2.0-litre option delivering 250 horsepower and 380 Nm of torque – paired with an advanced 8-speed automatic transmission and SelectShift capability, the Corsair promises a smooth, powerful and responsive ride. Lincoln’s Co-Pilot360 driver-assist suite adds to the ease, making every journey as effortless as it is luxurious.

Beyond performance, the Corsair brings thoughtful design touches for an enhanced ownership experience, such as Lincoln’s signature illuminated entry features,



The Lincoln Corsair Reserve all-wheel drive enhances the luxury SUV experience.

dynamic LED lighting and premium ambient lighting. Inside, the horizontal layout offers a calming aesthetic, while

hand-selected materials add elegance and comfort. With a 10-speaker Lincoln premium audio system, dual-zone climate control and intelligent access, the cabin offers an experience of true luxury.

At the heart of its tech suite, SYNC 4 delivers advanced voice control, a vibrant 13.3-inch touchscreen and navigation for seamless connectivity. The Lincoln Co-Pilot360 2.1 Vision further enhances safety with cutting-edge features like blind-spot detection, lane-keeping assist, a 360-degree camera and intelligent adaptive cruise control.

The Lincoln Corsair is designed for those who seek an exceptional driving experience, combining luxury, performance and advanced technology to elevate every journey.

In Oman, Lincoln vehicles are brought to you by Arabian Car Marketing Co. LLC. Please log on to [www.lincolnoman.com](#), or [www.facebook.com/lincolnoman](#) or [www.instagram.com/lincoln_oman](#) for the latest news, test drive requests and the latest press releases.

MG Motor unveils flagship MG RX9 SUV in Oman

MUSCAT: MG Motor Oman launched the highly anticipated MG RX9, its latest flagship SUV, at the Muscat City Center. With a powerful 2.0-litre turbocharged engine, cutting-edge safety features and a refined interior designed for families and long-distance travellers alike, the MG RX9 is poised to redefine Oman’s SUV segment.

The MG RX9 combines strength with sophistication, boasting a high-performing 234 HP engine paired with a 9-speed automatic transmission, delivering seamless power on every drive. With its 4WD capability, the MG RX9 ensures a stable and secure experience across Oman’s diverse terrains. Designed with the modern driver in mind, this SUV offers an array of advanced safety systems, including Electronic Stability Control, Hill-start Assist and a 360° HD camera



The MG RX9 is poised to redefine Oman’s SUV segment.

system, ensuring top-tier protection on the road.

The interior of the MG RX9 provides an expansive and luxurious space that seats up to seven, featuring dual-tone alloy rims, a 12.3-inch virtual instrument display and an advanced BOSE sound system for a superior in-cabin experience. Connectivity is seamless with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, allowing drivers to stay connected while focusing on the journey. Designed with

convenience and style, the MG RX9 includes a panoramic sunroof, tinted glass for added privacy and sleek hidden door handles, adding to its bold yet sophisticated exterior.

The launch event at Muscat City Center celebrated the

MG RX9’s debut with an immersive showcase of the vehicle’s features, allowing attendees to experience the blend of power, space and modern aesthetics first-hand. MG’s commitment to luxury and practicality is evident in

every aspect of the MG RX9.

On this occasion, Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, remarked, “The launch of the MG RX9 marks a significant milestone for us, bringing to Oman an SUV that blends outstanding performance, refined luxury, and cutting-edge technology.

This model embodies MG’s steadfast commitment to quality, innovation and safety, aligning perfectly with our goal of meeting the evolving expectations of Omani drivers.

At MHD ACERE, we are confident that the MG RX9 will set a new standard in the luxury SUV market, delivering an unmatched driving experience tailored for Oman’s unique landscapes.”

Visit your nearest MG showroom or call 80080111 to learn more and experience the versatility of the MG RX9 for yourself.

MARKETWATCH

POSITIVE TRENDS
CONTINUE ON MSX



KARL JACKSON
karl.jackson@crowe.om

The writer is an Audit, Assurance and ESG Partner with Crowe Oman

An analysis of the third-quarter financial performance of 91 companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) reveals a continuation of positive trajectories across several key sectors, including finance, manufacturing, energy and real estate. While losses persisted in the insurance and tourism sectors, a more granular examination underscores

the disproportionate impact of a small subset of companies on the overall financial health of the MSX listed companies. Just 2 companies within 22 loss-making companies accounted for nearly half of the total losses incurred.

The financial sector exhibited resilience in the reporting period, driven by robust banking performance. Increased lending activities and the favourable interest rate environment contributed a positive impact on net interest income. Bank Muscat maintains its market leadership with an overall profit of RO 171 million up from RO 159 million last year.

However, the overall sector’s performance was tempered by challenges faced by the insurance industry. Notably, LIVA Insurance, despite reducing its losses by RO 5 million this quarter, still carries a significant year to date loss of RO 11 million, due claims from the adverse weather conditions in the UAE. Even excluding LIVA, the sector has underperformed by 12% compared to prior year. While leasing companies demonstrate modest profitability growth, the overall sector outlook remains positive, supported by the banking sector’s strength.

The industrial sector, encompassing construction, manufacturing and real estate, continues to exhibit mixed performance. While certain segments demonstrate resilience, others grapple with persistent challenges.

The construction sector remains under pressure, with Raysut Cement’s escalating losses. The company reported a loss of RO 5.7 million, up from the previous year’s RO 3.3 million loss. Galfar also faced setbacks, incurring a loss of RO 4 million compared to a profit of RO 1.5 million in the prior period. Elevated expenses and losses from subsidiaries contributed to these financial difficulties. Oman Refreshments reported a major decline in profitability, with losses amounting to RO 1.9 million compared to profits of RO 6.6 million in the previous year, primarily from the backlash against American products due to the prevailing geo-political situation between Israel and Gaza, decreasing revenue by 37.8%. Dhofar Foods and Investment despite being restructured also experienced a downturn, incurring a loss of RO 3 million up from RO 1.2 million last year, primarily due to increased financing costs and expenses from its subsidiaries.

Conversely, the manufacturing sector has exhibited some signs of revitalisation. Oman Cables profitability surged, reaching RO 17 million, surpassing the previous year’s RO 15 million.

The company’s recent agreement with Omran Group for usufruct of additional land bodes well for future expansion plans. Overall, the industrial sector presents a diversified landscape, with segments like real estate also showing some positive trends with the launch of two new funds supporting the overall sector.

The service sector maintained a relatively stable trajectory, with key players demonstrating consistent financial performance. In the energy sector, Phoenix Power emerged as a dominant force, surpassing Abraj Energy and reporting profits of RO 26 million.

Another highlight of this quarter was Barka Water and Power reporting a profit of RO 2 million compared to RO 58,000 last year, as the company has secured new distribution agreements for up to 8 years. The oil and gas sector also witnessed notable activity, with OQ Gas Networks contributing significantly to profitability, although profits declined to by 15% to RO 38 million from RO 45 million last year.

The recent IPO of OQ Exploration and Production, the largest in Oman, holds significant promise and was oversubscribed by 2.6 times. Interestingly, although still profitable, all 3 petrol stations have reported reduced profitability, with Shell recording a drop of 22%.

Finally, despite all the good news about increased tourist numbers, 3 out of the 4 listed tourism companies are still reporting losses, which may be due to overcapacity and new entrants in the market (e.g. St Regis and Mandarin being the most recent).

Musk calls on sovereign funds to invest in AI

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 4

ELON MUSK

CEO of SpaceX and Tesla, has made a compelling call to action for sovereign wealth funds to ramp up investments in artificial intelligence (AI). Speaking virtually at the largest-ever International Forum of Sovereign Wealth Funds (IFSWF), held in Muscat from November 3-6, Musk joined a roster of global leaders urging funds to embrace AI’s transformative potential.

The Muscat forum, which welcomed more than 50 sovereign wealth funds from 46 countries, is a significant platform established in 2009 to foster international investment cooperation. This year’s event features top-tier speakers including Musk, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA).

OIA’s chairman underscored the forum’s focus on critical themes such as the energy transition, AI, sustainable supply chains and governance, aligning with Oman’s ambitions to lead in the evolving global investment landscape. US businessman Robert Smith highlighted AI’s potential for public and



Elon Musk speaks virtually at the International Forum of Sovereign Wealth Funds being held in Muscat.

private sectors alike, noting its integration into numerous investment portfolios worldwide. Hosting this prominent event not only amplifies Oman’s influence in global finance, but also emphasises its strategic positioning as an investment hub. OIA secured the forum’s location with a decisive 63.64% of votes, underscoring Oman’s appeal for economic collaboration. Oman’s accessibility — within a seven-hour flight from half the world’s population — combined with its rich cultural heritage and advanced infrastructure, makes it an ideal crossroads for fostering international partnerships. Shaikh Nasser al Harthy, OIA’s Deputy President for Operations, spotlighted the

forum’s role in driving economic integration. “This gathering allows Oman to highlight its investment potential and build partnerships that align with our economic diversification goals,” he said. The conference agenda covers a spectrum of investment topics, from the energy transition to sustainable governance, encouraging knowledge-sharing on key global challenges. With input from 15 prominent Omani speakers, the discussions will showcase Oman’s focus on renewable energy, governance and green hydrogen.

Beyond the talks, attendees will experience Oman’s rich culture through excursions to landmarks like Nizwa Fort and the Oman Across Ages Museum, with Muscat’s scenic beauty providing a stunning backdrop. Reflecting Oman’s heritage, the forum’s logo incorporates the Mandoos, symbolising prosperity, creativity and trust — core to OIA’s mission and Oman’s sustainable vision. In a special commemoration, OIA and the Central Bank of Oman will issue a celebratory coin, while Oman Post will release a stamp promoting the country as a “Land of Opportunities.” The event solidifies Oman’s growing role in the international investment arena and underscores its commitment to fostering sustainable, forward-looking economic growth.

Egypt’s Madkour wins wind power contract

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, NOV 4

Egypt-based infrastructure developer Madkour Group has announced that it was been awarded a contract for the construction of a major grid station that will support the evacuation of power from a new wind farm planned for development at Jaalan Bani Bu Ali in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate. The client is the Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), the operator of the country’s national grid.

With this contract, the New Cairo headquartered Madkour Group marks its debut in Oman’s energy infrastructure sector.

In a post, Madkour Group said it will construct a 132kV grid station linked to a wind farm of capacity ranging from 100-200 MW slated to come up at Jaalan Bani Bu Ali. A 132kV overhead line will also be laid connecting the new grid station to the Al Jawabi substation.

“This strategic project is part of the development of the Jaalan Bani Bu Ali wind farm, which has a production capacity of 100-200 megawatts that will contribute to increasing renewable energy generation in Oman and supporting the country’s climate goals. This project reaffirms Madkour’s commitment to Oman Vision 2040 for a sustainable future, through reinforcing the transition



This strategic project is part of the development of the Jaalan Bani Bu Ali wind farm, which has a production capacity of 100-200 megawatts that will contribute to increasing renewable energy generation in Oman and supporting the country’s climate goals. This project reaffirms Madkour’s commitment to Oman Vision 2040 for a sustainable future, through reinforcing the transition to renewable energy

MADKOUR GROUP



The grid station will evacuate power from a new wind IPP to come up at Jaalan Bani Bu Ali in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate.

to renewable energy,” the company added.

Significantly, the Jaalan Bani Bu Ali wind farm is one of five wind-based Independent Power Projects (IPPs) currently under competitive procurement by Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (PWP), the exclusive procurer of power and water in the Sultanate of Oman.

Also slated for commercial launch over the course of 2027 are: Duqm Wind IPP (234-270 MW capacity project to be located at Ras Madrakah in Al Duqm for commercial operation in Q4 2027; Mahout Wind I IPP (342-400 MW project to come up at

Mahout in Al Wusta Governorate for commercial operation in Q4 2027); Dhofar Wind II IPP (114-132 MW scheme planned on Shaleem and Al Hallaniyat Islands in Dhofar Governorate for launch in Q2 2027), and Sadah Wind IPP (81-99 MW farm to be developed at a site located in Sadah in Dhofar Governorate for commercial operation in Q4 2027).

In September, following a comprehensive and rigorous evaluation process, Nama PWP qualified a total 11 applicants to compete for one or more of the five wind IPPs. Awards are anticipated in the first half of next year.

OQBI intends to float 49% on MSX

FROM PAGE 13

The Shariah Supervisory Board of Dhofar Islamic in the capacity of Shariah Advisor of the issuance has issued a pronouncement confirming that, in its view, based on the circumstances as at the date of this pronouncement, the Offering is Sharia compliant.

The Offering provides investors exposure to Oman’s only integrated producer of methanol, ammonia and LPG products (which comprise propane, butane, condensate and cooking gas). The company has strong fundamentals and a demonstrated track record of successful implementation of expansion. The company is

active throughout the natural gas value chain, operating three advanced plants with a combined nameplate production capacity of 1,816 ktpa. OQBI is in a unique position, as it operates in the tax-exempt Salalah Free Zone, close to Oman’s largest port, Port of Salalah, acting as a gateway to markets across Europe, MENA and wider Asia. The company has a differentiated beneficial structure for investors, currently being a 100% government owned entity.

For the year ended in December 31, 2023, the company’s revenue was \$510 million, and its adjusted EBITDA margin was 43.1 per cent.

Commenting on the ITF, Ashraf bin Hamed al Mamari, Group CEO

of OQ, noted: “We are pleased to announce the upcoming public offering for OQ Base Industries, one of our key subsidiaries. This follows the success of three previous offerings, which drew high interest from investors. The strong demand has been fuelled by our solid financial performance, operational strength and attractive dividend policy. This strategic step reflects our commitment to growth and ongoing investment in the energy sector.”

Eng Ali bin Mohammed al Lawati, Chairman at OQ Base Industries, emphasised: “...that offering 49% of the company’s shares to the public is a pivotal

step, advancing OQ’s growth and aligning with its ambitions to expand its product reach to global markets.” He added that this move strengthens governance and transparency within the company.

Khalid bin Khalfan al Asmi, Chief Executive Officer at OQ Base Industries, stated: “We’re pleased to announce OQ Base Industries’ intention to go public. This milestone is a testament to our employee’s dedication and the trust we’ve earned from clients and partners. Oman’s strategic location has been a key strength, supporting our competitive business model and increasing the global appeal of our products.”

OPINION

Basic steps to speak to anyone easily — Part 1



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The author
is the founder
of Knowledge
Oman

YOU MAY be the best at what you do, yet you may not get all the benefits, such as special access, network, job, work, opportunities, and the like, that someone else can (who may also be less capable than you). Why? Just because he/she has a speaking (communication) skill and knows how to utilise the same for creating meaningful relationships that forge tremendous life results.

Yes, last week, we talked about the importance of being able to speak to anyone (at an event, being formal or an informal one). The benefits that one could attain from such an action include, but are not limited to, getting a new job, business, and/or contacts that can help them or anyone they know in profound and positive ways.

We agreed that it may be scary to some (or to many, actually) and is an important skill that one should learn in order to avoid the necessary fear that he/she may encounter at the outset. Well, my article for the coming weeks, starting today, as promised last week, will share basic steps that anyone can follow (with practice, of course) to break the fear they may have and be able to speak to anyone easily.

Let's take a practical example or

scenario that most people encounter. You attend an event where you are in a room or venue that is full of people (mostly strangers). Your level of discomfort starts increasing, and just before you know it, you look for an excuse to leave the event. I bet you find this situation familiar. Don't feel bad. This is a universal situation, and you are not alone. The first step is to realise that this is normal for the inexperienced.

How do you tackle this? Let me simplify some facts for you.

I want you to observe and scan the place. You will notice many people are either busy with their smart phones or talking to someone who may look happy, rude, annoyed, or disinterested altogether. Some are shying away from conversations because they too don't know how to engage in a new conversation, while others are happy to grab these opportunities, and I can tell you confidently that this is what you should aim to achieve if you wish to attain profound results.

So where do I begin? Quite simply, preparing oneself. How? Create a small introduction about yourself — some call this an elevator speech. Ensure you clearly introduce who you are, what

Your level of discomfort starts increasing, and just before you know it, you look for an excuse to leave the event. I bet you find this situation familiar. Don't feel bad. This is a universal situation, and you are not alone.

you do, who you represent, and most importantly, how you can add value. Getting this value right is critical, for it is the base of forming a successful relationship.

Next, ensure you study about the event, meeting and place you're invited to attend. Try and learn everything from the objective, the theme, the people attending, etc.

FEEL COMFORTABLE

The more you know, the better equipped you will be. Lastly, being comfortable personally and making the other person feel comfortable as well is the goal you should strive to achieve if you wish to build a positive conversation and ultimately a relationship.

Clearly having your elevator speech (as a valuable intro), learning everything about the event beforehand and lastly keeping an objective of ensuring everyone (the speaker and listener) is an important first basic step to achieving a successful speaking engagement with anyone.

Next week, I will be continuing my article into the actionable steps that you would need to take to achieve the mission successfully. Until we catch up again, stay positive and continue winning.

CHINA TO HASH OUT
STIMULUS PLAN
WITH US ELECTIONS
IN ITS SIGHTS

CHINA'S top lawmakers gather to hash out a major stimulus package that analysts say could grow even bigger if former US president Donald Trump wins the White House this week.

Beijing has in recent months heeded calls to step up support for the economy after years of inaction, announcing a raft of measures including rate cuts and the easing of some home buying restrictions.

But they have refrained from unveiling a figure for the long-awaited stimulus, disappointing investors after a market rally fizzled when officials repeatedly failed to commit to a top line.

Analysts now hope this number could emerge from this week's meeting of the Standing Committee of National People's Congress, the top body of China's rubber stamp parliament and headed by number three official Zhao Leji.

The standing committee reviews and approves all legislation, including allocating funds out of China's budget.

"We are expecting more details on the proposals to be passed," said Heron Lim of Moody's Analytics, including "how this extra funding would be allocated to address the near-term economic issues".

Nomura economists expect lawmakers this week to approve around a trillion yuan (\$140 billion) in extra budget — mostly for indebted local governments.

Analysts also expect Beijing to approve a one-off one trillion yuan for banks, aimed at writing off non-performing loans over the past four years.

"A lot of money will go to cover losses," added Natixis' Alicia Garcia Herrero. "It's not really a growth push." Concrete measures are expected to be announced when the meeting wraps up on Friday -- in time for Beijing to take stock of results of presidential elections in the United States.

"We believe the US election results will have some impact on the size of Beijing's stimulus package," said Ting Lu, Nomura's Chief China Economist, in a research note. Both candidates in the race have pledged to get tougher on Beijing, with Trump promising tariffs of 60 per cent on all Chinese goods coming into the country.

Nomura economists expect Beijing to adjust the size of its stimulus depending on the outcome.

"In our view, the size of China's fiscal stimulus package would be around 10 to 20 per cent bigger under a Trump win than under the scenario of a (Kamala) Harris win," Lu wrote.

But he said that "the major challenges for Beijing emanate from within rather than outside".

China is battling sluggish domestic consumption, a persistent crisis in the property sector and soaring government debt — all of which threaten Beijing's official growth target of five per cent for this year. The property sector was long a key driver of growth, but is now mired in a sea of debt. Average prices of new residential property ticked up slightly last month, according to a survey of 100 cities by independent researcher China Index Academy. — AFP

Balancing growth and
ocean sustainability

MOST of us have heard of economy and circular economy, but the new word that is gaining attention is the blue economy. This relatively new term was introduced at the UN conference on sustainable development (UNSCD) in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012.

According to the OECD, the blue economy has an estimated value of \$2.5 trillion; it is expected to double in size to \$3 trillion by 2030. It also facilitates the transport of 80% of the world's traded goods. The blue economy creates livelihood by providing 30 million jobs globally through ocean-related economic activities and indirect employment.

Europe, Africa and North America have a vibrant and thriving blue economy with a GDP contribution of \$100 billion and employment for over 2 million people. In their blue economy sectors, the European Union, Portugal, Nordic countries and Africa, along with countries like Kenya, Tunisia and Gambia, are also incorporating blue economy strategies. In Asia, India, China and Vietnam have significant blue economy initiatives.

Small island developing states (IDS) in the Pacific focus on blue economy due to their vulnerability to climate change. In the Middle East, countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman and Egypt are investing heavily in blue economy projects as part of their economic diversification strategies.

The emerging concept of blue economy involves all economic activities related to the seas and oceans, like maritime shipping, fishing, aquaculture, desalination, undersea cables, seabed extractive industries, deep sea mining, marine genetic resources and biodiversity.

It has three unique dimensions: 1) ocean contribution to economies; 2) environmental and ecological sustainability; and 3) ocean growth opportunity for both advanced and emerging economies.

Oceans play a key role in regulating the earth's temperature



The emerging concept of Blue Economy involves all economic activities related to the seas and oceans.



DR MYTHILI
KOLLURU

The author is an
assistant professor
at the College
of Banking and
Financial Studies.

by absorbing carbon dioxide, supporting biodiversity and generating livelihood. A key aspect of the blue economy is its focus on sustainability and environmental protection. The blue economy focuses on economic growth and the preservation of marine ecosystems.

DEVELOPMENT GOALS

It aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 14: "Life Below Water". It is estimated that the blue economy can deliver 21% of the greenhouse emission reduction required to meet the Paris agreement target of limiting average global temperatures by 1.5°C by 2050. The healthy oceans support sustainability goals like climate change mitigation, carbon capture and marine biodiversity.

Since the 19th century, sea surface temperatures have increased by 12%. This warming has sharply increased in frequency and intensity, resulting in marine heatwaves affecting 84% of the oceans.

This could have a devastating effect on the marine ecosystem and result in the loss of critical habitats.

For example, the largest coral bleaching event has started this October 2024; it has affected more than 3/4 of the world's reef area, stretching across 74 countries and territories. The bleaching is triggered by rising ocean temperatures.

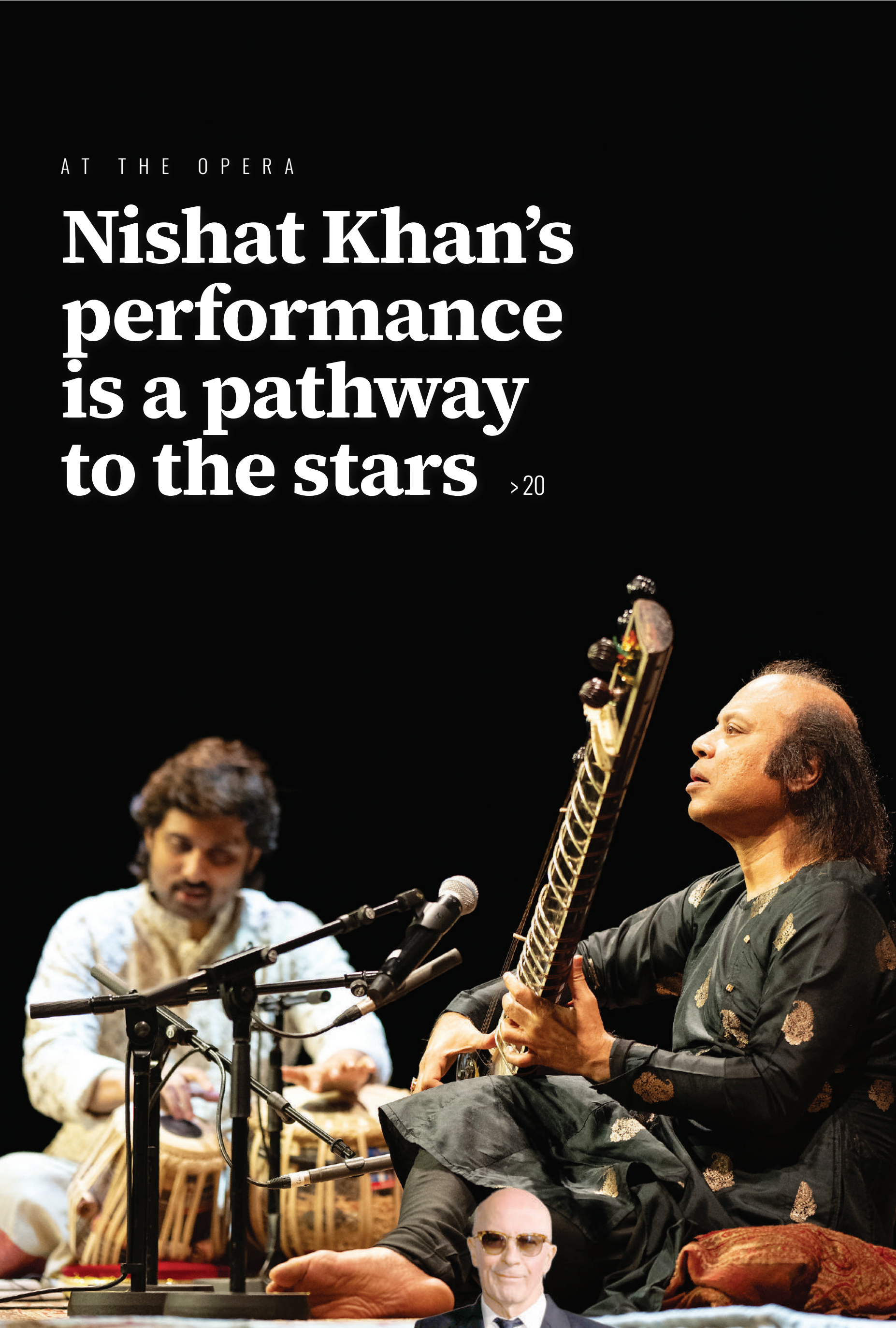
The ocean has absorbed 90% of the heat caused by greenhouse gases. 2023 was also the ocean's warmest year on record. Rising temperatures are also driving changes in species distribution.

This alters the ecosystem and affects fisheries. Rising sea levels are creating many challenges; by 2050, 570 coastal cities are projected to have major challenges due to rising sea levels impacting 800 million people. Infrastructures like ports, harbours and processing facilities are at risk, requiring expensive adaptations.

Along with the backdrop of population increase, tourism, shipping, energy, fishing, climate change and rising sea temperatures, the sustainability of the world's ocean ecosystems is in peril. The blue economy beckons for collaboration across sectors and borders to achieve the preservation of the world's oceans.

Classifieds

ART/LIFE

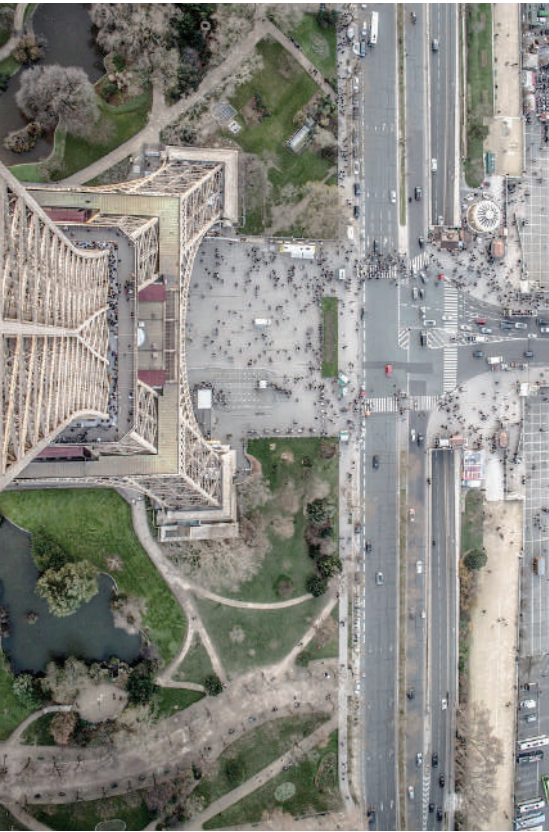


AT THE OPERA

Nishat Khan’s performance is a pathway to the stars >20

CHANGING **WORLD**

Paris to restrict traffic in centre: city hall



Paris authorities said they will limit traffic in the central core of the French capital this week, banning vehicles from transiting through the area.

The city hall under Socialist Anne Hidalgo, who has for years led a drive to restrict traffic and encourage cycling in the car-clogged French capital, published a decree imposing a limited traffic zone (ZTL) in the core of the centre.

The decree applies to the first, second, third and fourth districts in the capital, an area of some 5.5 square kilometres (2.1 square miles) that includes landmarks such as the Louvre museum and Tuileries gardens.

The measure will come into effect on Monday, David Belliard, the Green deputy mayor in charge of transport, said.

Vehicle access to this zone will only be authorised for emergency vehicles, buses, taxis, people with reduced mobility, motorists living or working there and so-called “destination traffic” including those in the area for a specific reason such as a medical appointment, shopping, or cinema visit.

Postponed several times, the implementation of the zone was a campaign commitment of Hidalgo to free up public space in the city centre taken up by cars and reduce pollution, following the example of several large European cities including Madrid, Milan and Rome.

Since the project was announced in May 2021, its scope has been the subject of sometimes thorny discussions with Paris police. But in a sign agreement had been reached, the police co-signed the decree published on Thursday.

Paris City Hall expects a “substantial” decrease in traffic volume of up to 30 per cent on the busiest roads, as well as a decrease in noise and an improvement in air quality thanks to a drop in nitrogen dioxide concentrations.

The system will be enforced via a system of proof of residence and online declarations, with an initial grace period as people get used to the new rules, the city hall said.

Hidalgo has increased cycle lanes in Paris at the expense of cars, notably on the rue de Rivoli, a major street in the city centre. But critics accuse her of merely shifting traffic and causing even heavier concentrations of cars elsewhere. — AFP

QUICK

FEATURES

ENTERTAINMENT

Acrobats perform during the Garden Bros Nuclear Circus show in Hampton, Georgia. The Canadian travelling circus was founded in the 1930s and is currently based in Florida. — AFP

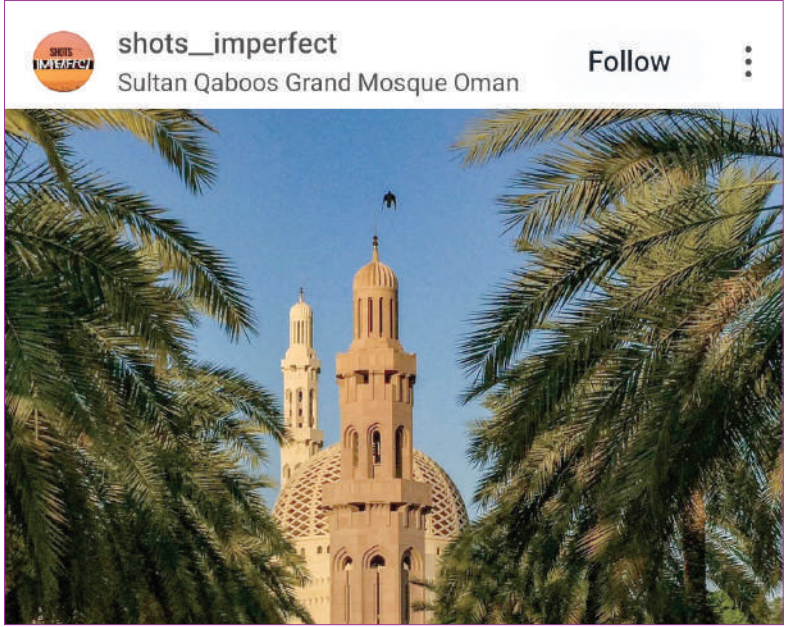
FILM

French director Jacques Audiard holds the French-American Cultural Funds Achievement Award on stage ahead of the screening of “Emilia Perez” on opening night of The American French Film Festival. — AFP

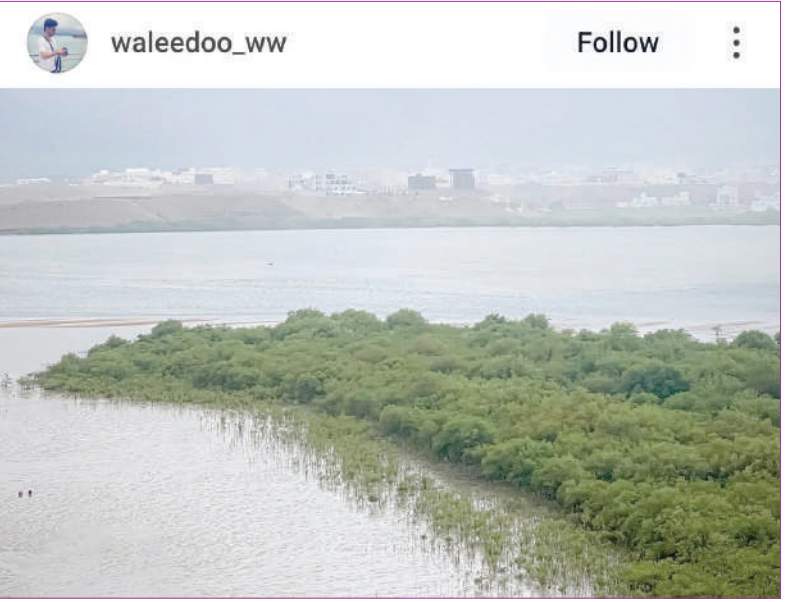
FESTIVAL

Revellers march in costumes from the movie “Beetlejuice” during the 51st Annual Halloween Parade in lower Manhattan, New York. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Sanctuary of Peace



City Escape

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. To be selected, follow us on Instagram and every time you upload or share your photos, make sure to tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.

Andy Warhol artworks stolen in the Netherlands



Two works by artist Andy Warhol were stolen during the night of Thursday to Friday from a gallery in the south of the Netherlands, while two other screenprints were abandoned nearby. The thieves used heavy explosives to break into the MPV Gallery in Oisterwijk in North Brabant province and took off with two screenprints showing former queens Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom and Margrethe II of Denmark, Dutch media NOS reported. “The entrance of the gallery was blown out and there was glass all around the building,” NOS said. Not much is known yet about the theft “but it is strange that explosives were used,” well-known Dutch art detective Arthur Brand said. “That’s not common for art thefts,” said Brand, who has made headlines for recovering

artworks, including a missing Picasso and a stolen Van Gogh. The “Reigning Queens” series by Pop Art pioneer Andy Warhol were on display in the gallery before going on sale at the PAN Amsterdam art fair that runs from November 24 to December 1. Two other works from the same series, showing former Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands and Queen Ntombi Tfwala of Eswatini, formerly Swaziland, were abandoned on the street because the full haul did not fit in the getaway car, NOS said. “The works are worth a considerable sum,” the owner of the gallery Mark Peet Visser told local media Omroep Brabant. Brand, however, said the stolen artworks were “not unique and most likely tens of them were made.” “This makes it easier to sell than unique works, but not that much easier,” he said. — AFP



Will a curfew ease overtourism in Seoul’s historic Hanok Village?

KWON Young-doo, owner of a private art gallery in Seoul’s historic Bukchon Hanok Village, is concerned about an impending curfew policy aimed at mitigating overtourism in the area. The curfew, set for a trial in November and to be officially launched in March next year, will limit tourist access to specific areas of Bukchon from 5 pm (0800 GMT) to 10 am. Fines of up to 100,000 won (\$72) will be imposed on violators. “Who would want to visit?” said Kwon, the owner of the Asian Cultural Art Museum, who moved to the historic area 18 years ago. “They’ll leave with a bad impression of South Korea.” Bukchon Hanok Village, with its narrow winding alleyways in hilly northern Seoul, dates back to the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897). The area has become a popular tourist destination, especially after being featured on a TV show a decade ago. Tourists and Koreans alike are drawn to the neighbourhood for its quaint houses with signature wood columns and doors, a courtyard and tiled roof. However, increased tourism has become more than an inconvenience for the residents, who complain about noise and littering. Some tourists have been caught on surveillance cameras trying to enter private homes or peeking inside without permission, generating friction with locals. Many residents have chosen to leave, leading to a 27.6% drop in the village’s population over the past 10 years, according to the Jongno district office. The area attracted approximately 6 million visitors last year, compared with its resident population of around 6,100. Chung Moon-hun, the Jongno district head, says the goal is to protect the rights of residents and the restrictions will be adjusted if necessary to make it effective. The area where curfew hours and fines



will be imposed is approximately 34,000 square metres, about the size of five soccer fields. But residents are sceptical about the policy’s effectiveness citing loopholes such as exemptions for tourists staying overnight in hanok accommodations. They also blame the proliferation of corporate-run hanok stays for disrupting their lives. Since 2020, authorities have loosened restrictions on traditional Korean houses offering accommodation, resulting in a surge in corporate-run hanok stays in the residential areas, residents say. In 2010, 10 traditional houses were registered in Bukchon under the name Traditional Korean Housing Experience Businesses; by October 2024, that number had ballooned to 116, according to the district office. “People come for just a day to enjoy themselves, and the noise from parties is extremely loud,” said Kim Eun-mee, who lives next to a hanok



stay. Clearing trash in front of her home has become a chore she has to tend to several times a day. “It’s often difficult to maintain a normal daily routine due to disturbances like people dragging suitcases around even during the early hours, which frequently wakes me up.” Lee Dong-woo, CEO of hanok stay booking platform BUTLER.LEE, said the business took off when owners who found it difficult to renovate or maintain old houses entrusted the property to hospitality businesses. “These requests are driving the expansion, not because we are actively evicting current residents to operate hanok stays, which is completely untrue,” Lee who manages 17 hanok stays in Bukchon said. Tourists, meanwhile, are divided over the curfew. Some agree the residents’ quality of life is important. Others chafe at the idea of getting fined for simply walking down a public street. There are also questions about enforcement; how to tell tourists from residents, how to make foreigners pay the fine, and the language barrier. — Reuters

The resonant, metallic timbre of the Sitar juxtaposes well with the grounded European instruments, but whether there is a cultural exchange, or clash between opposing sonic traditions is ultimately for the listener to decide. Judging by the insistent standing ovations received on both nights at ROHMA, it would seem that Omani audiences fall firmly on the side of the former.



BY GEORGINA BENISON

LAST Wednesday and Thursday evenings last week, the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts presented Nishat Khan, the internationally acclaimed Sitar virtuoso, performing two stunning and near sell-out concerts. Perhaps an indication that there is appetite for more programmes from leading Indian musicians at ROHM in future?

The tale of two halves opened in traditional North Indian classical vein, with a trio performing two evening ragas in their full breadth of statement and development, but concise enough to hold the interest of the cross-cultural gathering in attendance.

After the meticulous tune-up required of such a multi-stringed instrument, Sitar Maestro Nishat Khan acknowledged what a great honour it was to be in Muscat, and introduced the night's programme. On tabla he was joined by prodigy of the Farukhabad Gharana, Shariq Mustafa, who shares his grandfather's stylistic heritage, blended with a contemporary mind-set.

The opening alaap — a slow introduction to the notes of the raag — was brief, soon joined by tabla patterns and electronic tempura — a simple drone accompaniment. After a short Jhor section the mathematical parries and musical puns so beloved in Indian classical music began. Maintaining conspiratorial eye contact, Nishat and Shafiq embarked on their improvisational duel in a conversation both technically breath-taking and amusing. The Maestro betrayed a sense of mischief through facial expression one moment, then developed a heart-warmingly subtle embellishment of a melody with intense pathos the next.

It was gratifying to hear the dynamic range possible in the Sitar solos, contrasting with the frenzied virtuoso finger work leading to perfectly calculated cadences. The Maestro took time to explain the Tintaal — 16-beat tabla pattern — which underlies the structure of this Hindustani improvisation. The result; an hypnotic, mesmerising interaction between the two soloists.

The second Evening Raag portrayed a dark, melancholic alaap section, teasing out the minor quality of the scale. The tabla then emphasised and stressed those plaintive 3rds and semitones until an exciting final Jhalla — with foxy interplay of rhythmic patterns in threes, sometimes three times three, always landing bang on target — brought the first half to a close, along with rapturous applause.

The second half of the evening was devoted to something completely different. Nishat Khan's First Sitar Concerto, subtitled, 'Gate of the Moon', was commissioned for the 2013 BBC Proms, performed in the Royal Albert Hall, London, conducted by David Atherton. The interval allowed for complete reorganisation of the stage in preparation for the Belgium-based, European Philharmonia under their founder-conductor, Walter Proost.

Following firmly in the footsteps of his Guru, Ravi Shankar, Nishat set out to compose a Sitar Concerto in Western form using a distinctly Eastern solo instrument at its centre. Its success in achieving an 'exchange of stories from two different cultures' can be considered later.

The first movement opened slowly with pulsing bass-string two-note ostinati, subtly layering the texture until interrupted by

startling yet lush tutti chord bursts, like rays of moonlight in the desert. The Sitar as "unknown traveller" made its first appearance with a running scalic solo, fluttering and glittering above interlocking 6-note syncopated patterns from the strings.

The minimalist, Philip Glass-style of passing themes around and building up the texture was compulsive and hypnotic, like listening to the night sky from shifting perspectives. Meanwhile brass and percussion interrupted with profound interjections when so moved. The composition works well as a large orchestral fabric, but how comfortably does the ethereal Sitar sit within that symphonic language? The same might be asked of a guitar concerto. This movement is a lovely, attractive composition, full of the mysterious promise of its programme title in an entrancing sound world.



The second movement began with a bright, up-tempo episode, with Sitar solos at the centre of the dialogue. It nods at a warm, rich romantic language, with snatches of folk dance in a Neo-Classical style, dissolving away at the end.

The final movement opens with a bold brass and percussion fanfare. The soloist takes over with a contrasting melodic line which in turn is picked up by the orchestra, sometimes shouting angry Stravinsky-like objections, sometimes agreeing concordantly. The extended Sitar cadenzas are technically scalic and challenging, finally coming together in a unison frenzy with big, broad tutti chords — and then silence.

The resonant, metallic timbre of the Sitar juxtaposes well with the grounded European instruments, but whether there is a cultural exchange, or clash between opposing sonic traditions is ultimately for the listener to decide. Judging by the insistent standing ovations received on both nights at ROHMA, it would seem that Omani audiences fall firmly on the side of the former.