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OMAN BEAT
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IN LAST 16

HM, King of the Belgians hold talks

His Majesty accorded official reception protocols



AN OFFICIAL reception ceremony was held at the Royal Palace in Brussels on Tuesday for His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on the occasion of his state visit to the Kingdom of Belgium.

As the motorcade of His Majesty the Sultan headed to the Royal Palace Square, it was surrounded by a group of motorcycles. Before reaching the main square of the Royal Palace, a group of horse riders surrounded the parade. Then, a cavalcade of knights from the Royal Belgian Cavalry lined up on both sides of the path.

Upon His Majesty's arrival at the Royal Palace, King Philippe Leopold Louis Marie, King of the Belgians, and his spouse, Queen Mathilde Marie Christine Ghislaine, Queen of the Belgians, were at the forefront of His Majesty the Sultan's welcoming party. The royal couple welcomed His Majesty the Sultan, wishing him and his accompanying delegation a pleasant stay. Then, accompanied by the Belgian monarch, His Majesty the Sultan inspected the guard of honour.

After that, King Philippe Leopold escorted His Majesty to the dais of honour, where the Omani Royal Anthem and the Belgian Royal Anthem were played. Then, the King and His Majesty the Sultan headed to the interior of the palace and posed for a commemorative photo in the reception area of the Royal Palace.

Afterwards, the two leaders headed to the main hall, where His Majesty the Sultan shook hands

with a group of Belgians who welcomed him. The King and Queen also shook hands with the official Omani delegation.

Later, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Philippe Leopold Louis Marie held a bilateral meeting. During the meeting, the two monarchs underscored their joint keenness to boost cooperation and partnership relations in a manner that contributes to stimulating the two countries' economies and expanding vistas of cooperation and exchange of benefits. Then, His Majesty the Sultan signed the Visitors Book.

Later, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Alexander De Croo, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium, held an official session of talks at the Belgian Prime Minister's Office (Le Lambermont).

The session discussed areas of investment and economic cooperation and means of promoting them to serve joint interests. The two sides exchanged views on international developments and global changes, as well as investment opportunities available in various sectors.

HM, King of Belgians hold bilateral talks

Talks focus on boosting bilateral cooperation

To stimulate economies and expand JVs

HM, Belgium PM discuss economic ties

Exchange views on global developments

TOWN HALL VISIT
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, accompanied by King Philippe Leopold Louis Marie, visited Brussels Town Hall. His Majesty viewed this ancient historical edifice, famous for its unique architectural design and for being the only remaining building from the Middle Ages. — ONA

King of Belgians hosts dinner

IN HONOUR of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, King Phillippe Leopold Louis Marie, King of the Belgians, and his spouse Queen Mathilde Marie Christine Ghislaine, Queen of the Belgians, hosted an official dinner at the Royal Castle of Laeken.

Prior to the dinner, the official delegation accompanying His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with the King and Queen of the Belgians, while members of the Belgian side greeted His Majesty. The Belgian Royal Anthem and the Omani Royal Anthem were then played.

His Majesty the Sultan delivered a speech on this occasion, stating:

"Your Majesties, we are so pleased to visit your great country and to be here with you in beautiful Brussels. We take immense pride and deep satisfaction



in expressing our heartfelt gratitude for the highly constructive and insightful dialogue, as well as the comprehensive and fruitful consultations we have had the privilege of engaging in with Your Majesty and the Prime Minister today.

TURN TO P4

HIS MAJESTY, KING PHILLIPPE EXCHANGE ORDERS AND MEMENTOS



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Phillippe Leopold Louis Marie, King of the Belgians, exchanged orders and commemorative gifts at the Royal Palace in Brussels on the occasion of His Majesty's state visit to the Kingdom of Belgium.

DETAILS ON P2

SPLENDID WELCOME FOR HM



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Upon His Majesty's arrival at the Royal Palace, King Phillippe Leopold Louis Marie, King of the Belgians and his spouse Queen Mathilde Marie Christine Ghislaine, Queen of the Belgians were at the forefront of His Majesty the Sultan's welcoming party. The Royal couple welcomed His Majesty the Sultan, wishing him and his accompanying delegation a pleasant stay.

Then, accompanied by the Belgian monarch, His Majesty the Sultan inspected the guard of honour.

After that, King Philippe Leopold escorted His Majesty to the dais of honour, where the Omani Royal Anthem and the Belgian Royal Anthem were played.

Then, the King and His Majesty the Sultan headed to the interior of the palace and posed for a commemorative photo in the reception area of the royal palace.

Afterwards, His Majesty



Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Phillippe Leopold Louis Marie, King of the Belgians held a bilateral meeting.

During the meeting, the two monarchs underscored their joint keenness to boost cooperation and

partnership relations in a manner that contributes to stimulating the two countries' economies and expanding vistas of cooperation and exchange of benefits.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan signed the Visitors Book. — ONA



HM, King of the Belgians exchange orders, mementos



BRUSSELS: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Philippe Leopold Louis Marie, King of the Belgians, exchanged orders and commemorative gifts at the Royal Palace in Brussels on Tuesday on the occasion of His Majesty's state visit to the Kingdom of Belgium.

His Majesty the Sultan conferred "Al Said Order" on King Philippe Leopold Louis Marie and "Oman First Order" on Queen Mathilde Marie Christine Ghislaine, Queen of the Belgians, in commendation for the King of the Belgians and his spouse and in manifestation of the advanced relations of friendship, cooperation and partnership between the two countries and their peoples.

His Majesty also conferred Royal orders on some Belgian officials.

Meanwhile, King Philippe Leopold Louis Marie awarded His Majesty the Sultan "Order of Leopold", the highest Belgian order, in commendation of His Majesty the Sultan and in acknowledgment of the two countries' distinguished relations.

The Belgian Monarch also awarded Royal orders to members of the official delegation accompanying His Majesty.

Furthermore, the two leaders exchanged some commemorative gifts.

The ceremony was attended by the official delegations of the two sides and several senior Belgian officials. — ONA





HM visits iconic Brussels Town Hall



MAI AL ABRI
BRUSSELS, DEC 3

HIS Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq visited the Brussels Town Hall, a significant landmark in the Belgian capital, as part of his state visit to Belgium. The visit was an important moment in strengthening the diplomatic and cultural ties between the Sultanate of Oman and Belgium.

The Brussels Town Hall, renowned for its stunning Gothic architecture, was an ideal backdrop for His Majesty the Sultan's visit. Located in the heart of the Grand Place, a Unesco World Heritage site, the hall stands as a testament to the rich history and cultural heritage of Brussels.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq was accompanied by King Philippe Leopold Louis Marie, King of the Belgians. Commemorative gifts were exchanged, and memorial photos were taken for His Majesty the Sultan and the Belgian monarch on the balcony overlooking the outer square of Brussels Town Hall.

Children of members of the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Brussels, the GCC and Arab missions, as well as attendees from Belgium and other nationalities, participated in welcoming His Majesty the Sultan, waving the flags of the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Belgium. His Majesty the Sultan and the King waved back to them from the balcony of Brussels Town Hall.

His Majesty was welcomed by the Mayor of Brussels, who accompanied him as he signed the guest book, marking a memorable moment in the historic building.

One of the defining features of the City Hall is its towering 96-metre-high spire, which crowns the structure. The spire offers magnificent views of the Grand Place and surrounding areas, providing a panoramic perspective of the city's rich historical landscape. The tower is topped by a statue of Saint Michael, the patron saint of Brussels, adding to its iconic status.

The Brussels Town Hall is a symbol of Brussels' medieval past and its continued importance as a political and cultural hub. Its architectural beauty stands as a testament to the city's rich heritage, and its role in European governance and history remains a significant aspect of Brussels' identity.

As a key landmark in the heart of the city, the Brussels Town Hall continues to be a focal point for both locals and visitors, embodying the cultural pride and shared values of Belgium.

The Brussels Town Hall remains one of the most iconic buildings in the city, symbolising its historical significance while also contributing to its vibrant present.

It stands as a reminder of the importance of preserving cultural landmarks and fostering mutual respect among nations, as both Oman and Belgium look forward to a prosperous future of continued collaboration.



King of Belgians hosts dinner

FROM PAGE 1

“These discussions have truly reflected a spirit of collaboration and mutual understanding, which will pave the way for meaningful progress and shared aspirations.

“The deep-rooted relations between our two countries are not only strong but well-established. These relations have been reinforced and continue to flourish through high-level visits, most notably marked by Your Majesty’s esteemed visit to Oman in February 2022. This visit was a milestone in our relations and witnessed the official inauguration of Duqm Port. It also marked the ceremonial launch of the Hyport’s Green Hydrogen Production Project, symbolising a new era of cooperation and sustainable development.

“In some ways, it seems as though just weeks have passed since your last visit. But when I reflect upon all that has been accomplished, I am truly delighted that such enormous progress has been achieved just within the last two years.

“Since then, our political, cultural and economic cooperation has not only grown but has also evolved into a robust partnership that fosters mutual understanding and respect.

“Belgium is now Oman’s second biggest trading partner in the EU, and our bilateral trade continues to expand. Through joint efforts and a commitment to common goals, we have built a dynamic relationship that continues to flourish and adapt to the challenges and opportunities of our time.

“The clearest demonstration of our achievements is reflected in the Port of Duqm, which has witnessed tremendous transformation since first partnering with the Port of Antwerp in 2010. Indeed, Duqm has blossomed in terms of innovation, infrastructure and connectivity.

“Looking ahead, we hope our shared commitment to international norms will enable us together to overcome global challenges, from humanitarian crises to climate change, and to uphold international



law.

“So, Your Majesties, at the end, we must express our profound appreciation that Oman can count Belgium as a dear friend. Thank you for your hospitality and for the support you have extended to Oman during this visit and throughout our flourishing journey of friendship. We hope to have the privilege of welcoming Your Majesties back once again to Muscat very soon to continue celebrating the progress of our joint partnership. Thank you, Your Majesties.”

In response, the King of the Belgians delivered a speech, stating: “Your Majesty, the history of your country is as vast and deep as the

ocean it borders. With over three thousand kilometres of coastline and enjoying a strategic position, Oman is the link between East and West. For centuries, your people have braved unforgiving seas to develop trade links, even in the most faraway places. This underscores just how important cultural and commercial exchanges with the rest of the world were, and continue to be.

“This unique environment between seas, mountains and vast stretches of desert was the cradle of a flourishing pacifist culture, deeply rooted in hospitality and respect for tradition.

“Your Majesty, our visit in February 2022 and the welcome

you gave us were an opportunity to strengthen the economic and diplomatic ties between our two countries.

“It is in this spirit that I am honoured by your visit to Belgium and look forward to seeing our relations develop. Let us jointly develop other areas of mutual interest, including innovation, defence, the space industry and observation, health and academic and cultural exchanges.

“It gives me great satisfaction to see the strategic partnership forged almost ten years ago with the Port of Duqm being continued between Asyad and the Consortium Antwerp Port. More recently, I had the

pleasure of attending the conclusion of the agreement between DEME and OQ for the development of green hydrogen. These two major projects are the fruits of an ambitious and innovative partnership between Belgium and Oman.

“The strategic position of the Port of Duqm and its ambition to become a global energy hub make it an essential crossroads for trade between Europe and Asia.

“Your Majesty, the global challenges we face today, be it on the European continent or in the Middle East, prompt us to strengthen our relationship more than ever.

“Our collective security is threatened by tensions and conflicts all around us. While strengthening our defence capabilities, both our countries firmly stand for the respect for international law, with the ultimate aim of maintaining global stability.

“As a haven of peace and stability, the Sultanate of Oman has always acted to promote consensus. Your country is an architect of peace, working discreetly to promote tolerance and dialogue in a region blighted by numerous conflicts.

“You are open to the views of others, without abandoning the values of justice and harmony you embody. The model of coexistence and harmony that characterises your society should be a source of inspiration to all in these particularly challenging times.

“Your keen sense of discreet and effective mediation, as well as your detailed understanding of the forces at work in the region, were put to good use to ensure the safety of one of our compatriots at a moment of great danger.

“Thanks to your diplomacy, his life and those of other Europeans were saved. We will be forever grateful.”

The dinner was attended by members of the official delegation accompanying His Majesty the Sultan and some senior officials in the Kingdom of Belgium. Musical pieces were played during the dinner. — ONA

His Majesty, Belgian Prime Minister hold talks



HIS Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Alexander De Croo, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium, held an official session of talks at the Belgian Prime Minister’s Office (Le Lambermont) on Tuesday. The session discussed areas of the investment and economic cooperation, and means of promoting them to serve joint interests.

The two sides exchanged views on

international developments and global changes, as well as investment opportunities available in various sectors.

The session was attended from the Omani side by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy,

Foreign Minister, Dr Hamed bin Said al Aufi, Head of Private Office of His Majesty the Sultan, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals and Rua bint Issa al Zadjaliyah, Ambassador of Oman to Belgium. Meanwhile, it was attended from the Belgian side by Tinne Van der Straeten, Minister of Energy, Pascal H Grégoire,

Ambassador of Belgium to Oman, Theodora Gentzis, President of the Board of the Belgian Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Tom Neijens, Diplomatic Adviser to the Prime Minister, Francis Corneille, Director of the Middle East and North Africa Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Geert Muylle, Ambassador and Special Envoy for Energy Security and Critical Raw Materials at the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. — ONA

OMAN

SHORT TAKE



Armenia President Vahagn Khachaturyan with Hamoud bin Salim al Tuwaih

Oman Ambassador presents credentials to Armenian President

YEREVAN: President Vahagn Khachaturyan of the Republic of Armenia received Hamoud bin Salim al Tuwaih, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus who presented his credentials as a non-resident Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Republic of Armenia in the Armenian capital Yerevan, on Tuesday. During the meeting, the ambassador conveyed the greetings and wishes of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the President of the Republic of Armenia alongside his wishes for continued health and happiness for the president and further progress and prosperity for the Armenian people. For his part, the President of the Republic of Armenia asked the ambassador to convey his greetings and good wishes to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people for continued glory and progress under His Majesty’s wise leadership. During the meeting, the president welcomed the ambassador, wishing him success and hoping that the bilateral relations between the two countries would see further development. — ONA

Oman wins top award of Int’l Social Security Association



The main prize was awarded to the Sultanate of Oman in response to its recent project on expanding social protection coverage.

RIYADH: Represented by the Social Protection Fund (SPF), the Sultanate of Oman won the main award dedicated by the International Social Security Association (ISSA) to the best practices in the Asia-Pacific region. The award was conferred on Oman during its participation in the ISSA meeting held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The main prize was awarded to the Sultanate of Oman in response to its recent project on expanding social protection coverage. The project constitutes a comprehensive national platform for launching various social care efforts and activities. It provides mechanisms for the reconstruction of social insurance and retirement systems operating in the Sultanate of Oman. It also seeks to improve the quality of life and promote social justice through a comprehensive set of social



protection policies and programmes. Oman, represented by the SPF, also received 8 certificates of merit within the ISSA competitions for best practices at the Asia-Pacific region level. Three of the SPF projects received certificates of merit, with special commendation. The winning projects were titled as follows: (1) “Internal Change Management” — with focus on smooth transition of human capital; (2) “Linking Environmental, Social and

Institutional Governance Standards in Investments” and (3) “Media Preparation for the Issuance of the Social Protection Law”. Four more projects of the SPF received certificates of merit. They were titled: (1) “Social Protection Benefits: Towards Comprehensive Protection”; (2) “The Mystery Shopper”; (3) “Financial Integration Methodology for Pension Funds in the Sultanate of Oman” and (4) “Delegation of Authority Matrix”. — ONA

Minister interacts with Al Sharqiyah South students

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, DEC 3

THE Al Sharqiyah South Governorate hosted a dialogue session where school students interacted with Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health. It was jointly organised by the Ministry of Health, the United Nations Children’s Fund (Unicef) and the Ministry of Education (MoE). The session comes within the framework of Oman’s World Children’s Day celebrations, to enhance dialogue with the younger generations about their issues and future aspirations. The session was attended by Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South, Sumaira Chowdhury, Unicef Representative in the Sultanate of Oman, and officials . Dr Al Sabti stressed the importance of involving children and youth in discussions that concern their future, saying: “These sessions represent a unique platform for listening to students’ opinions and exchanging ideas about issues that affect them. Children and youth are the pillars of the future, and we must provide



Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, with students.

them with the necessary support to be active participants in shaping their vision for the future.” The students discussed a range of topics with the minister, including children’s rights and health services provided to them and the most prominent achievements of the Ministry of Health in this field. They also discussed the role of youth in facing climate challenges through innovative projects that contribute to reducing the effects of climate change, emphasising the need to empower youth to become true leaders in environmental issues. Dr Al Maawali said; “Celebrating World Children’s

Day through these meetings reflects the Sultanate of Oman’s commitment to enabling children to express their opinions on legislative and rights issues that concern them. Children are not just recipients, but rather essential partners in decision-making and contributing to building a brighter future for Oman.” Chowdhury said: “Hearing the voices of children and youth in these dialogue sessions gives them the motivation to actively participate in building a world that reflects their aspirations and values. We are grateful for the efforts of the Sultanate of Oman in supporting children’s rights and implementing

international laws that guarantee their protection and meet their basic needs.” She pointed out that this session comes within the framework of Oman’s Sustainable Development Goals and Oman Vision 2040, stressing that listening to the aspirations of the new generation is an important step towards building a human-centred future. The session emphasised the principles of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, which are based on non-discrimination, the right to life, survival, and development, and ensuring that the child’s voice is heard and his or her opinions are respected. The Convention obliges States to develop their policies and procedures in line with the best interests of the child while assuming responsibility before the international community to achieve this. This initiative comes as part of the ongoing efforts to enhance partnerships between different sectors in the Sultanate of Oman and highlight the role of children and youth as essential partners in achieving Oman Vision 2040.

وزارة المالية
Ministry of Finance

وزارة التجارة والصناعة وترويج الاستثمار
Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion

السلطنة
Sultanate of Oman

Request for Qualifications for the

Development and Management of the "Oman Business Platform" under a Public-Private Partnership Agreement

As part of public-private partnership initiatives to enhance investment in infrastructure and public services, the Ministry of Finance, in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, invites specialized local and international companies to participate in the development and management of the **Oman Business Platform project**.

Interested companies can obtain the RFQ document by sending an email to: Invest.easy@mof.gov.om

RFQ NO	Deadline for clarification	Deadline for obtaining qualification document	Deadline for submitting qualification documents
MOF-PPP-RFQ-03	22nd January 2025	28th January 2025	3rd February 2025 (2 pm) Oman Time Zone
For more information, don't hesitate to contact us at: Invest.easy@mof.gov.om (Sunday to Thursday, 8 am to 2 pm Oman Time Zone)			

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy with Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Indian Minister of External Affairs, in New Delhi on Tuesday.

India-Oman Strategic Consultative Group holds 13th meeting

NEW DELHI: The Strategic Consultation Team between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India held its 13th meeting in the Indian capital, New Delhi, on Tuesday.

The Sultanate of Oman was represented by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, while the Indian side was represented by Arun Kumar Chatterjee, Under-Secretary of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs for Consular Affairs.

The meeting discussed ways to foster bilateral cooperation in the economic fields, trade and investment exchanges, culture and education as well as the arrangements for celebrating the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 2025 and organising the Indian Ocean Conference in Muscat in February 2025. On the sidelines of the meeting, Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy met with Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Indian Minister of External Affairs. They exchanged views on the prospects for future cooperation and regional and international developments.

In a dialogue session on the long-standing Omani-Indian relations, held at the headquarters of the India Research Foundation, Al Harthy praised the strategic partnership between the two countries, stressing the importance of enhancing cooperation in innovation and sustainable development to serve common interests. The meetings were attended by Shaikh Ahmed bin Hashel al Maskari, Head of the GCC and Regional Neighbourhoods Department at the Foreign Ministry, Issa bin Saleh al Shaibani, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of India, and a number of officials from both sides. — ONA

WORK BEGINS ON THE MUTTRAH CABLE CAR PROJECT

MUSCAT: Work has started on the Muttrah Cable Car project, according to a source connected to the main contractor. Speaking to the Observer, the source said cable car services will have three stations starting at the fish market, Riyam Park and Kalbuh Park, and are expected to be the longest in the Middle East over the sea.

Rakaez Investments is the main contractor for the project and specialises in site surveying, assessing the topography, soil conditions and potential obstacles for the route, customised designs based on terrain, capacity needs and desired speeds, setting up of steel or concrete towers that will support the cable lines, laying the cable lines across the towers, among others.

The route will span around 5 km, with ticket prices estimated between RO 4-6 per person, depending on the distance.

The Muttrah Cable Car is touted to be the longest of its kind in the Middle East, offering breathtaking views over the sea. Once completed, the cable car is expected to attract a significant number of tourists and contribute to the tourism infrastructure in the Sultanate of Oman.



OAA Museum wins iconic Versailles design award

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 3

THE OMAN Across Ages Museum has won the Versailles World Architecture, Design Award for the best exterior design for the most fascinating museums in the world. This was unveiled by the Unesco in Paris on Tuesday.

The museum was in the lead of seven newly opened or reopened museums that serve the theme of innovation, reflect local heritage and environmental efficiency and leave a positive impact on their surroundings. Oman Across Ages Museum is thereby termed as “the most beautiful museum in the world for the year 2024”, thanks to monument’s unique exterior design.

It is worth noting that the design of Oman Across Ages Museum was inspired by the Al Hajar Mountains range. It therefore stands in full harmony with its natural surroundings. The copper facades of the museum symbolise Oman’s ancient history of metal extraction and related industries.

The distinctive shape of the museum harmonises with the surrounding geographical elements, thus manifesting a balance between modern design and traditional character. This edifice remains a witness to the antiquity of Omani culture



The Oman Across Ages Museum has won the Versailles World Architecture, Design Award for the best exterior design for the most fascinating museums in the world.

and its continuous innovation. The Prix Versailles is an international series of architectural awards celebrating contemporary projects worldwide, recognising excellence in design, innovation and sustainability. The annual “World’s Most Beautiful” achievements highlight exceptional architecture and design projects that elevate and beautify living environments. The Prix Versailles is presented annually by Unesco, in

collaboration with the International Union of Architects (UIA) and the International Union of Design (IUD). At the intersection between multiple disciplines, the members of the Prix Versailles World Jury are tasked with awarding twenty-four World Titles from among the Selected Sites – in the categories of Airports, Campuses, Passenger Stations, Sports, Museums, Emporiums, Hotels and Restaurants.

UNIFIED SPORTS DAY SEES WIDE PARTICIPATION FROM STUDENTS

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education, represented by the Omani School Sports Federation, organised the Unified Sports Day for the schools of the Sultanate of Oman (Shwayat Riyada) in all government and private schools on Tuesday.

Over 900,000 boys and girls from more than 2,400 government and private schools took part in the event.

The sports day witnessed the participation of Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, at the Heritage District School in the Wilayat of Nizwa in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah.

The aim of the sports day is to spread awareness about physical fitness, break from daily routine, achieve harmony among students with faculty members and parents, enhance the values of citizenship and

social responsibility, and reduce the risks of social media and gaming.

The programme included athletics, table tennis, badminton, gymnastics, chess, bicycles and games such as volleyball, basketball, handball, football and swimming.

It is worth noting that the Unified Sports Day for the Schools of the Sultanate of Oman is being implemented for the third consecutive year at the level of all schools in the Sultanate of Oman, as the idea came from the Directorate of Al Dhahirah, which implemented the event before organising it in all public and private schools.



Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, at the event



Al Amerat hosts Al Ardah to mark National day

TEXT & PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

More than hundred camels from several parts of the Sultanate of Oman participated in the Al Ardah camel show in the Wilayat of Al Amerat last week. The event began with “Al Tagroodah and Al Hambal” where participants greeted the audience while singing local poems inspired by Omani heritage.

Participants began showcasing their skills while wearing traditional attire. Each round starts with two participants demonstrating their skills over a distance of up to 800 metres, then returning to the starting point where all participants gather.

‘Al Ardah’ requires high skills, the most important of which is that the participants are familiar with professional methods of taming camels and preparing them to enter the show arena.



Dozens of people interested and passionate about watching such traditional shows have flocked to the show. Although these shows require special skills, there is enthusiasm from the youth who did not hesitate to participate in this event. With the participation of youth, these events emphasise the necessity of teaching these skills to this age group with the aim of preserving this traditional heritage for future generations. It is worth noting that Unesco has registered the ‘horse and camel Ardah’ on the World Heritage List. With this the Sultanate of Oman has achieved a great accomplishment in preserving the intangible cultural heritage. The government continues to support all programmes that contribute to preserving this cultural heritage to preserve it from extinction and pass it on to future generations.

SHORT TAKES



Mourners hold smoke flares during a funeral ceremony, at a cemetery in Kyiv. — AFP

UKRAINE PUSHES NATO FOR INVITE AS TRUMP LOOMS



VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY
Ukrainian President

BRUSSELS: Ukraine insisted on Tuesday that Nato membership was the only “real guarantee” for its security as foreign ministers from the alliance looked set to rebuff Kyiv’s push for an invite ahead of Donald Trump’s return to the US presidency. Trump has vowed to press for

a quick deal to end Russia’s war, leaving Kyiv scrambling to position itself ahead of his January inauguration.

Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky has said getting security guarantees from the Western alliance and supplies of key weaponry are prerequisites for Kyiv to start talking about halting its fight. “We are convinced that the only real guarantee of security for Ukraine, as well as a deterrent to further Russian aggression against Ukraine and other states, is Ukraine’s full membership in Nato,” the foreign ministry in Kyiv said.

Zelensky said that Kyiv was hoping Nato foreign ministers meeting in Brussels with Ukraine’s top diplomat would issue “recommendations” to grant his country a membership invitation. “But we have no illusions — there are some sceptical countries,” he said. — AFP

NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE DRAWS FRANCE POLITICAL CRISIS

PARIS: France headed into a new political crisis on Tuesday as opposition lawmakers threatened to topple the minority government of Prime Minister Michel Barnier in a no-confidence vote after just three months in office. A standoff over an austerity budget, which has caused jitters in financial markets, follows permanent tension since the 73-year-old was appointed by President Emmanuel Macron in September.

The far-left France Unbowed (LFI) opposition party said it would bring a no-confidence motion after Barnier used executive powers to force through social security legislation without a vote. Marine Le Pen’s far-right National Rally (RN), which has demanded changes in the 2025 budget, said it would back the move.

Two no-confidence motions will be put forward. One by the far right is unlikely to pass, but one proposed by the hard-left should go through with backing from RN lawmakers. “Blocking this budget is, alas, the only way the constitution gives us to protect the French people from a dangerous, unfair and punitive budget,” Le Pen said on X. — AFP

POLITICAL PRESENCE

Trump to attend reopening of Notre Dame



Notre Dame cathedral will reopen in Paris on Saturday with incoming US president Donald Trump set to attend the ceremony marking the resurrection of the Gothic masterpiece five years after a devastating fire. The Republican confirmed he had accepted an invitation from French President Emmanuel Macron to attend the re-opening of the 850-year-old edifice which was nearly lost to flames. It will be Trump’s first foreign trip since his re-election. — AFP

TRENDING DESTINATION

Canary Islands breaks migrant record



The number of migrants arriving in Spain’s Canary Islands by boat from West Africa hit a new annual record in 2024. A total of 41,425 migrants entered the seven islands located in the Atlantic off the northwestern coast of Africa between January 1 and November 30. That is already more than the previous record of 39,910 migrants who arrived in the archipelago of 2.2 million people during all of 2023. — AFP

HEALTH ALERT

Unknown disease kills 143 in Congo



An unknown disease killed 143 people in Democratic Republic of the Congo’s southwestern province in November, authorities said. Infected people had flu-like symptoms, including high fever and severe headaches, Remy Saki, deputy governor of Kwango province, and Apollinaire Yumba, provincial minister of health, said. A medical team has been sent to the Panzi health zone to collect samples and carry out an analysis in order to identify the disease. — Reuters

South Korea president declares martial law



Soldiers try to enter the main hall of the National Assembly, Seoul. — AFP

SOUTH KOREA’S President Yoon Suk Yeol on Tuesday declared martial law, accusing the opposition of being “anti-state forces” and saying he was acting to protect the country from “threats” posed by the North. The National Assembly was sealed late on Tuesday night and helicopters were seen landing on the roof, as army chief General Park An-su took charge as martial law commander and immediately issued a decree banning “all political activities”.

Hundreds of protesters gathered outside parliament demanding to be let inside as police guarded the building and special forces attempted to enter. Democratic South Korea is a major ally for the United States in Asia, and a spokesman for the US National Security Council said Washington was “monitoring the situation closely”.

Yoon’s stunning announcement — South Korea’s first declaration of martial law in more than 40 years — came as his party and the opposition bicker over the budget. “To safeguard a liberal South Korea from the threats posed by North Korea’s communist forces and to eliminate anti-state elements plundering people’s freedom and happiness, I hereby declare emergency martial law,” Yoon said in a live televised address to the nation.

Yoon did not give details of the North’s threats, but the South remains technically at war with nuclear-armed Pyongyang. “With no regard for the livelihoods of the people, the opposition party has paralysed governance solely for the sake of impeachments, special

I will restore the country to normalcy by getting rid of anti-state forces as soon as possible... the current situation in South Korea is “on the verge of collapse, with the National Assembly acting as a monster intent on bringing down liberal democracy

YOON SUK YEOL
South Korea’s President



A television screen shows South Korea’s President Yoon Suk Yeol speaking during a news broadcast in Goyang, northwest of Seoul. — AFP

investigations, and shielding their leader from justice,” Yoon added.

“Our National Assembly has become a haven for criminals, a den of legislative dictatorship that seeks to paralyse the judicial and administrative systems and overturn our liberal democratic order,” Yoon said.

With martial law imposed, all military units in the South have been ordered to strengthen their emergency alert and readiness postures, Yonhap news agency reported. China, a key ally of North Korea, urged its nationals in the South to stay calm and exercise caution.

The decree by martial law commander Park also banned “actions that deny or seek to overthrow the liberal democratic system, including the spread of fake news, public opinion manipulation, and false propaganda”.

The president labelled the opposition, which holds a majority in the 300-member parliament, as “anti-state forces intent on overthrowing the regime”.

Yoon described the imposition of martial law as “inevitable to guarantee the continuity of a liberal South Korea,” adding that it would not impact the country’s foreign policy.

“I will restore the country to normalcy by getting rid of anti-state forces as soon as possible,” he said, without elaborating further other than the martial law in place. He described the current situation as South Korea “on the verge of collapse, with the National Assembly acting as a monster intent on bringing down liberal democracy”.

Yoon’s People Power Party and the main opposition Democratic Party are bitterly at odds over next year’s budget.

Opposition MPs last week approved a significantly downsized budget plan through a parliamentary committee. The opposition has slashed approximately 4.1 trillion won (\$2.8 billion) from Yoon’s proposed 677 trillion won budget plan, cutting the government’s reserve fund and activity budgets for Yoon’s office, the prosecution, police and the state audit agency. Yoon, a former prosecutor, accused opposition lawmakers of cutting “all key budgets essential to the nation’s core functions, such as combatting drug crimes and maintaining public security... turning the country into a drug haven and a state of public safety chaos.” The imposition of emergency martial law comes as Yoon’s approval rating dropped to 19 per cent in the latest Gallup poll last week, with many expressing dissatisfaction over his handling of the economy and controversies involving his wife, Kim Keon Hee. — AFP

HM’s Belgium visit to enhance cooperation across sectors



THE 46-year-old diplomatic relationship between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Belgium has been characterised by mutual respect, shared values, and a commitment to enhancing cooperation across various sectors.

Oman and Belgium established formal diplomatic relations in 1978, laying the groundwork for a relationship that has evolved over decades. The historical context of these ties is essential to understanding their current dynamics. Both countries have engaged in numerous exchanges at various levels, with notable visits including King Philippe’s trip to Oman in February 2022.

The current state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Belgium marks another significant milestone in this enduring partnership. This visit is expected to further solidify the ties between the two nations and open new avenues for collaboration.

As both nations look forward to enhancing their strategic partnerships, this visit will undoubtedly pave the way for future collaborations that serve their respective

interests. This reciprocal engagement underscores a commitment to fostering bilateral relations that benefit both nations.

One of the most promising areas of collaboration is economic cooperation. The trade volume between Oman and Belgium has seen substantial growth, reaching over RO 48 million. Moreover, significant projects have emerged from this partnership. The Duqm Port project represents a joint venture that enhances logistical capabilities and facilitates trade routes between Oman and Europe.

Additionally, the Hyport Duqm green hydrogen project aims to establish an international alliance focused on producing green hydrogen for Belgium and its neighbouring countries. This initiative not only aligns with global sustainability goals but also positions both nations as leaders in renewable energy production.

Cultural cooperation is another vital aspect of Oman-Belgium relations. The exchange of ideas, traditions, and cultural practices fosters greater understanding between the peoples of both nations. His Majesty the

The Hyport Duqm green hydrogen project aims to establish an international alliance focused on producing green hydrogen for Belgium and its neighboring countries

Sultan’s visit will provide an opportunity to discuss cultural initiatives that can enhance people-to-people connections and promote mutual appreciation.

On the political front, Oman’s strategic position as a mediator in regional conflicts has proven beneficial for its international relationships. Notably, Oman’s efforts facilitated an agreement between Belgium and Iran regarding detained citizens — a testament to its diplomatic influence.

The future prospects for Oman-Belgium relations appear bright as both nations seek to expand their cooperation into new areas such as clean energy regulation frameworks and investment opportunities. His Majesty’s state visit signifies not only a continuation but also an elevation of these bilateral ties into new realms that could yield long-term benefits for both countries’ economies and societies. The state visit by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Belgium represents a pivotal moment in strengthening Oman-Belgium relations across multiple dimensions including economic, cultural, political, and environmental.

SLOW DOWN TO SPEED UP FOR A PRODUCTIVE, HAPPIER LIFE



HYESHA BARRETT

The author is a Master Life Coach and NLP practitioner based in Muscat

In this era of fast-paced notifications and instant gratifications, the mantra of “doing more in less time” has become the norm. If we are not busy doing things, going places, seeking the next achievement or fulfilling our expectations, then we are simply not doing enough. Unfortunately, when we move too fast, we often miss seeing what we have accomplished.

Today’s world has conditioned us to believe that speed equates to efficiency, productivity and success. However, evidence suggests that slowing down can actually enhance our efficiency and overall quality of life.

In essence, the concept is about mindfulness and intentionality. When we rush through our to do lists, our professional obligations or daily chores, the focus remains on the outcome, the destination, rather than the unfolding of the steps, the understandings, the journey. Such is that the quality of the end result is often compromised and generally subpar. We like to believe we are multi-taskers capable of jumping from one train of thought to another, switching in between activities — however a rushed mind is undeniably more prone to errors, misunderstandings and stress.

From stepping back and engaging in our tasks more mindfully, we cultivate a deeper vision of the “bigger picture” and a breadth of possibilities often arise. Upon reflection and introspection, we gain the clarity to gauge the opportunities that sometimes don’t show themselves when our vision is skewed. This enhanced focus can only lead to better decision-making, increased productivity and more effective outcomes.

When we take a break from our screens to go for a little walk, take some deep breaths, practice some grounding and centring techniques, more often than not a wave of creativity takes over us. We find ourselves in a fertile space for innovation, as the simple act of slowing down allows the generation of new ideas. Creativity thrives in environments where there is room for exploration and play.

Slowing down also promotes better health — mentally, emotionally and physically. Constantly rushing can lead to elevated stress levels, burnout and a countless stream of health issues. By intentionally making time for relaxation, self-care and connection, with ourselves and others, not only reduces worry but also enhances our efficiency, resilience, relationships and overall happiness. The paradox of slowing down to speed up invites us to reconsider our approach to productivity and well-being. While it may seem counterintuitive, slowing our pace can lead to a happier life. We can create opportunities from the plethora of infinite possibilities laid out before us, we just need to make the time to see them. In this world that often prioritises haste, let’s dare to slow down to savour the moment, ultimately allowing us to speed up when it truly matters.

So much for Trump’s fantasy of a quieter ME



Buildings lie in ruin in Lebanon, near the Israel-Lebanon border, following the ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah, as seen from Metula, on Tuesday. — Reuters

LAST WEEK I argued that the blows Israel inflicted on Iran and its most important proxy, Hezbollah, would have vast consequences for the military balance in the region. It has only taken a few days for those consequences to start showing up. Donald Trump reportedly wants the region’s conflicts quieted down by the time he comes to office. Hey — good luck with that.

For starters, with Iran and Hezbollah weakened by Israel, the leader they were protecting most, the beleaguered Syrian president, Bashar Assad, took a body blow in the past few days when anti-government rebels in Syria swept in from their countryside redoubts and swept out Assad’s army from virtually all of Aleppo, the second largest city in Syria. Alas, though, many of these Syrian rebels are not boy scouts — the group leading the charge, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, is a former al-Qaida affiliate — and if Assad were toppled from power in Damascus, Syria, it could draw Israel in and destabilise the whole Levant.



THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

The author is reporter, and NYT columnist

Interestingly, Turkey, which backs some of these rebel groups and had been restraining them, may have given the green light for the attack. Turkey has long been Iran’s arch-rival for regional domination.

At the same time, a Western intelligence source tells me, a rancorous debate is afoot within Iran’s leadership over who is responsible for letting Hezbollah drag both Iran and Hezbollah into a devastating war with Israel — on behalf of Hamas — when Israel had not even attacked Hezbollah. As a result, Hezbollah’s rocket forces, meant to deter Israel from ever bombing Iran’s nuclear facilities, have now been devastated.

In Lebanon, Hezbollah, which had become the army of the Shiites of Lebanon and imposed itself as the sacred third part of the country’s trinity — “the army, the people and the resistance” — to which every Lebanese leader had to pay homage, has dramatically lost support.

Israel was so surgical in its bombing in Lebanon, trying to hit only Hezbollah targets and pro-Hezbollah neighbourhoods, that it sent the message: “If you live in

places that are loyal to the Lebanese state, you are safe, but if you stay in places Hezbollah controls, you are not safe,” explained Hanin Ghaddar, an expert on Hezbollah at The Washington Institute.

The message to Lebanese Shiites: Move away from Hezbollah and sign up for the new trinity: the people, the army and the state.

I would not count Hezbollah out, but it is going to be hard-pressed to come up with the money from Iran to pay for the reconstruction of all the neighbourhoods and villages it controlled that have been devastated.

And without that money and a resupply of arms from Iran, the other Lebanese political parties will surely try to remove Hezbollah’s veto power in the Cabinet over who can be Lebanon’s next president and prime minister.

A senior US official remarked to me, though, that precisely because Iran is so wounded now, it may feel that the only way to protect itself is by making a mad dash for a nuclear bomb. The Middle East will be anything but “over” when Trump arrives. — **The New York Times**

Of a memory that will never fade



SAMUEL KUTTY

The writer is a freelance journalist and author who worked in Oman and India

MANY MEMORIES faded over time, but some remain as sharp and sore as ever. For me, one such memory turned 40 years on December 3, 2024. The day remains unforgettable in my life.

In the chilly intervening night of December 2 and 3, 1984, a deadly gas engulfed the central Indian city of Bhopal. Newspaper offices received “top priority” flashes about the “accident” followed by bulletins indicating that some “fatal” gas had leaked in the city. But soon it became apparent that the accident was much bigger than it initially appeared to be.

By about 6 am, there was confirmation that a disaster had struck Bhopal. People were dropping dead like flies! The death toll could be thousands!

Tonnes of methyl isocyanate used in the production of pesticides from the Union Carbide plant swept through the city of over two million people after one of the tanks storing the deadly chemical reportedly shattered its concrete casing.

I was then a trainee journalist at a newspaper in Indore nearly 200 km away from Bhopal. The editor of the newspaper convened an emergency meeting of all the staff and formed a team to rush to Bhopal.

Though I was too young to report on a calamity of this magnitude, the editor conceded to my request and allowed me to proceed to the fated city.

But let me admit the fact that initially I did not realise the intensity of the disaster.

I happily complied with my editor's order, as I found it an opportunity to amass spot reporting experience of a calamity and also meet my cousin, who was living in Bhopal.

Alas! We never thought that we would be arriving in a city reminiscent of the infamous Chernobyl nuclear meltdown. We were horrified to hear about the rising toll of human loss.

We found dead bodies still lying on the ground at many places. They were slowly being picked up and loaded aboard a waiting truck. We found carcasses of hundreds of cattle and animals all over the streets.

The killer gas spread through the city, sending residents scurrying through the dark streets. No alarm ever sounded a warning, and no evacuation plan was prepared. When victims arrived at hospitals breathless and blind, doctors did not know how to treat them.

We drove to the government-owned Hamidia Hospital only to see a sight that was something straight out of Dante's Inferno. Dead bodies were piled on the hospital's pathways, and hundreds of men, women and children were found lying on the beds and in the corridors. Their eyeballs were swollen, red and bursting, and every breath brought agony to their burning lungs.

Many others were wailing, screaming and searching for the bodies of their loved ones. Thousands more poured in within hours. Most of them were the city's poor, living in the sprawling settlements.

After interacting with the doctors on

Let me admit the fact that initially I did not realise the intensity of the disaster. I happily welcomed with my editor's order, as I found it an opportunity to get experience in on-the-spot reporting. Trainees hardly get opportunities to cover major events!

duty, we realised that none of them knew how to treat the victims because they had never faced a situation like this. The staff at the hospital was not able to attend to the innumerable people arriving in the hospital.

As we were talking to the survivors, we were told of rumours spreading that a second wave of poisonous gas, even deadlier than the first one, had broken loose, and the new exodus further swelled the rush of panic-stricken residents. The panic was indescribable!

Four years later, in 1988, when I shifted my residence from Indore to Bhopal to join another newspaper in the ill-fated city, the air was still heavy with stories of loss and resilience.

Again, when I revisited the city in 2018, I still found the scars of that apocalyptic night everywhere, etched into the faces of the survivors and the walls of their homes. Now even after four decades, I believe the wounds of the city have not healed.

The tragedy reminds us of the fact that small, silent disasters are still unfolding in thousands of communities all over the world, especially in the Third World, where minimal safety and environmental regulations attract polluting industries.

The generation today may not even be aware of the ghastly scene, nor do they know the plight of the survivors of this “man-made” disaster. The fact is that it has changed the lives of thousands and even shaped the political and cultural history of a city that was central to India.

RELIEF AS DELHI SCHOOLS REOPEN BUT SMOG PERSISTS

ABHAYA SRIVASTAVA

Teenage student Aniksha is relieved to be back in class in India's capital -- even if the choking smog that prompted her school to close last month has yet to dissipate.

New Delhi and the surrounding metropolitan area is home to more than 30 million people and is blanketed by a thick and acrid haze each winter.

The public health crisis has grown steadily worse over the years and weeks-long school closures across the capital, aimed at shielding vulnerable children from the harmful skies, are now an annual occurrence.

But for the students like Aniksha it is a dreary ritual that disrupts their learning for weeks and keeps them stuck at home, isolated from friends.

"It's boring to stay at home," Aniksha, who uses only one name, said on the grounds of her government school in the capital's west.

"I'm happy that class is back," the 13-year-old added. "You can do more in school. You can interact with the teachers and also get their help."

Nearly two million students across Delhi were out of schools for more than two weeks last month as the skies overhead turned a sickly yellow-grey.

At the peak of the smog, levels of PM2.5 -- dangerous cancer-causing microparticles that enter the bloodstream through the lungs -- surged more than 60 times the World Health Organization's recommended daily maximum.

Delhi's government gave schools the option to reopen last week, and many have resumed in-person classes in the days since.

But the crisis has not abated, with PM2.5 levels still 16 times the WHO limit on Tuesday, and the city regularly ranking as the world's most polluted by monitoring company IQAir over the past few days. Schools are directed to offer online alternatives during smog closures to minimise disruption to lessons.

In practice, remote learning highlights the gulf between the city's prosperous classes and its mass of urban poor. "Online teaching doesn't help much, many children don't have smartphones or struggle for network," language teacher Vandana Pandey, 29, said. Pandey said the school closures also did nothing to protect the health of students at her government school, who did not have the means to shield themselves from the poisonous air.

"They come from humble backgrounds," she said. When they don't have school, they are either playing outside or helping out their parents. They are not staying at home," she said.

Delhi is enveloped each winter by a mix of factory emissions and vehicle exhaust alongside smoke from seasonal crop burn-offs by farmers. The toxic melange builds and lingers for weeks thanks to cooler temperatures and slow-moving winds. — AFP

Last chance for the SDGs?

THE world is losing a winnable battle. UN Secretary-General António Guterres warns that the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are on the verge of becoming “the epitaph for a world that might have been.” Can the patient be resuscitated?

Decisions made in the coming days will have a significant bearing on the answer. On December 7, governments will announce their funding pledges for the International Development Association, the branch of the World Bank Group that delivers finance to the world's poorest countries (with annual per capita incomes below \$1,315). IDA replenishment happens every three years, which means that commitments made today span the critical investment period for salvaging the SDGs. Unfortunately, it isn't looking good, with several key donors failing to pull their weight.

The 78 countries covered by the IDA are where the battle for the SDGs will be won or lost. Home to 500 million people surviving on less than \$2.15 per day, they account around for 70 per cent of extreme poverty and over 90 per cent of world hunger. Worse, it is children who are on the front lines. In a recent ODI report, my co-authors and I estimate that some 257 million children in IDA-eligible countries are growing up hungry, with devastating consequences for their health and educational prospects.

Recent setbacks have compounded already severe challenges, triggering major reversals. After being hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic, IDA countries have been buffeted by post-pandemic economic slowdowns, rising food prices and surging public debt. Over half are falling further behind rich countries as global inequalities widen.

Poverty reduction has slowed from an already inadequate pace, and progress against hunger has stalled. Debt service is crowding out vital investment, with repayments now outweighing spending on health and basic education.

Against this bleak backdrop, access to affordable development



The 78 countries covered by the IDA are where the battle for the SDGs will be won or lost.



KEVIN WATKINS

The writer is a former CEO of Save the Children UK, is a visiting professor at the Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa at the London School of Economics

finance has been shrinking. Real (inflation-adjusted) financial transfers to Africa from donors have fallen, and rising real interest rates have priced most IDA countries out of sovereign bond markets (or otherwise subjected them to punitively high borrowing costs).

The IDA is the single most powerful multilateral financial weapon in the anti-poverty arsenal. In the last fiscal year, it provided \$31 billion in support for member countries and was by far the largest source of development finance for Africa, which benefits from zero-interest grants, concessional loans repayable over 30-40 years, or both.

Such finance is an SDG lifeline, because it is overwhelmingly directed to areas with demonstrated benefits for the poor, such as social protection, investments in child and maternal health, and education. With a generous replenishment, the IDA could help lift millions out of extreme poverty, extend opportunities for improved health and learning, and support adaptation to climate change.

Moreover, for donors seeking value for money, the IDA has a unique advantage: every \$1 received can deliver \$3.50. The IDA can leverage the World Bank's AAA credit rating to secure low-interest financing by issuing

bonds and lending the proceeds to developing countries. When donors deliver funds through bilateral aid programmes or global health funds, the money that comes out mirrors the money that goes in. But the IDA offers a much bigger bang for the buck.

The IDA also mitigates damaging international-aidpractices. Currently, only around 8 per cent of poverty-related development assistance is delivered through government budgets. The rest arrives through project funds controlled by donors, leading to fragmentation, weak coordination and high transaction costs for governments. Hence, Ethiopia had to manage 454 aid transactions for agriculture alone in 2021. By contrast, the IDA delivers support through national budgets for nationally-owned programmes, which is why governments across Africa strongly support it.

The World Bank has rightly made the case for a major IDA increase. Last year, the bank's president, Ajay Banga, called on donors to provide more than \$120 billion, which would make this replenishment “the biggest of all time.” Sadly, that ambition has faded, with current pledges implying a replenishment of less than \$105 billion — smaller than the previous one, in real terms.

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SPORTS

FIBACOLLABORATION



OBA ENHANCES NATIONAL CAPABILITIES THROUGH SPS PROGRAMME

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 3

The Oman Basketball Association (OBA) organised the 'Sports Performance Specialist' (SPS) programme in collaboration with the The programme, held over two days at the Seeb Club headquarters and Wawan Hall, was part of the association's strategy to enhance athletic performance and reduce injuries. It targeted 33 trainees, including physical therapists, sports teachers and basketball coaches.

The programme was inaugurated by Eng Khalfan al Naabi, OBA Chairman, in the presence of Vice-President Abu Bakr al Jahwari and Acting Secretary Said al Habsi. It covered key topics such as common basketball injuries and their prevention, designing training programmes to improve players' physical performance, and focusing on principles of strength and conditioning to equip fitness coaches with specialised skills.

Abu Bakr al Jahwari, Chair of the Technical Development Committee, emphasised that the programme represents a crucial step towards developing national competencies in strength and conditioning. He stated, "Through this programme, we aim to equip coaches with advanced scientific knowledge that helps reduce injuries, particularly non-contact injuries, while enhancing players' physical performance."

He added that the participation of 33 trainees from various fields reflects the association's commitment to developing Omani basketball in line with the highest international standards.

Al Jahwari noted that the programme included both theoretical and practical sessions, with the theoretical components conducted at the Seeb Club headquarters and the practical sessions hosted at Wawan Hall. He stressed the importance of collaboration with local sports institutions, pointing out that partnerships between the association, local clubs and the private sector contribute significantly to the success of such initiatives.

From his perspective, Amir Eid, the programme's international instructor, highlighted that this initiative aligns with Fiba's efforts to develop physical training. He explained that the programme was designed in three progressive levels, with a strong emphasis on practical application. "The programme aims to prepare qualified personnel capable of driving real change in player development and raising the standards of physical training in local basketball," he added.

Through this programme, the OBA underscores its commitment to achieving athletic excellence by investing in national talents and enhancing training standards to advance Omani basketball.



Oman beat Canada to secure spot in last 16



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 3

OMAN PROGRESSED to the next round of the Socca World Cup 2024 following their crucial 3-1 win over Canada on Monday night at the Sports Makers Stadium at Oman Automobile Association (OAA).

The victory propelled Oman to nine points in Group A, ensuring direct qualification to the knockout stage as group leaders. Oman will face Qatar in their concluding group match on Wednesday, with the game scheduled to start at 8 pm. Oman lead the group with nine points from three victories against

Italy, the USA and Canada. Qatar are in second place with seven points, while Italy are third with four points.

Faisal al Hadi opened the scoring for Oman in the 15th minute, putting the hosts ahead 1-0. Canada's Goran Zivkovic was sent off in the 18th minute, reducing Canada to five men. In the second half, Motaism al Shamsi doubled Oman's lead in the 22nd minute. Although Ryan Lindsay scored for Canada in the 35th minute to narrow the gap, Mahmood al Balushi sealed the win with a 37th-minute goal, concluding the game 3-1 in favour of Oman.

In other groups, Germany secured their place in the next round with a dominant 7-3 victory over Libya in Group B, finishing

with nine points. Serbia are currently second in the group with six points.

Greece are leading Group C with five points, while Iraq and Cyprus are tied with four points each. Brazil are on top of Group D with six points after victories against Colombia (3-0) and Egypt (2-1).

Poland and Türkiye are co-leaders, both with six points, in Group E. Mexico and Albania share the lead with six points each in Group F. Uruguay are topping Group G with six points, while Croatia lead Group H with seven points, followed closely by Hungary with five points.

The competition is heating up as teams gear up for the knockout stages, with Oman looking strong to continue their campaign.

Wide participation as OOC marks Olympic Day

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 3

The Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), represented by the Oman Sports and Active Society Committee, organised the 2024 Olympic Day in Muscat Governorate on Tuesday morning.

Over 300 school students from different age groups took part in the sporting event held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher and Muscat Grand Mall amid a wide participation and a great interaction from the participants who showed remarkable enthusiasm and interaction with the event.

The event witnessed a multitude of sports activities that included swimming, football, volleyball, basketball, tennis, table tennis, athletics, weightlifting in addition to a drawing and colouring competition and a cultural competition among the participating students.



This is in addition to events that aimed to to encourage the students to discover their sports talents in an encouraging and stimulating atmosphere.

The activities attracted a great turnout that reflects the importance of such events in promoting physical activity and incorporating it in everyday life of society members.

The event was sponsored by Muscat Grand Mall and Aster Al Raffah Hospital as the

medical partner. The activities focused on instilling Olympic values into the students including fair play, respect for others and attaining mind-body balance. The event also aimed to highlight the importance of sports not only as a means of competition, but also as a tool for individual and social development.

The OOC was keen to provide a safe and enjoyable competitive environment that encourages participants to enjoy sports competitions and

enhances their passion for physical activity.

The Olympic Day is part of the OOC's commitment to promoting community sports, raising awareness of the importance of physical activity in improving public health and encouraging positive values. By organising the event, the OOC seeks to engage the entire community in a sporting experience that combines entertainment and benefit as well as enhancing social cohesion and encouraging healthy lifestyles.

The Olympic Day is an international sporting event celebrated by the national Olympic committees on June 23 each year to commemorate the founding of the International Olympic Committee. This day was celebrated for the first time in 1948 with the aim of spreading the Olympic values and promoting sport as an essential part of the lives of individuals and societies.

SPORTS

T20SERIES



MUQEEM TAKES 5 FOR 3 AS PAKISTAN CRUSH ZIMBABWE

BULAWAYO, Zimbabwe: Pakistan wrist spinner Sufiyan Muqeem starred in a series-clinching 10-wicket Twenty20 international rout of Zimbabwe in Bulawayo on Tuesday.

The 25-year-old took five consecutive wickets for the loss of only three runs as Zimbabwe crumbled to 57 all out in 12.4 overs after making a promising start.

Pakistan then sped to 61-0 off 33 balls through Saim Ayub (36) and Omaid Yousuf (22) to follow up a 57-run victory last Sunday in the first of three matches.

Victory completed a white-ball double for the tourists, who won a one-day international series 2-1 last week.

Pakistan captain Salman Agha said: “Losing the toss did not concern us because we had plans and executed them really well. The bowling of Sufiyan was outstanding.

“We have a young side full of quality players and the way they are performing is very heartening for me.”

Zimbabwe skipper Sikandar Raza admitted his team were “all hurting and in a pretty bad place at the moment.

“My biggest concern is whether we are learning our lessons when we suffer defeats because we seem to be making the same mistakes match after match.”

Zimbabwe openers Brian Bennett (21) and Tadiwanashe Marumani (16) — the only batters to reach double figures — built a 37-run partnership in four overs.

Then, both fell within five balls, and the home team lost their 10 wickets for just 20 runs as Muqeem wreaked havoc.

Marumani was caught by Tayyab Tahir at cover point and Bennett by Irfan Khan at deep square leg at the Queens Sports Club.

All-rounder Raza, often the batting saviour for Zimbabwe, made just three before his off stump was uprooted by Abbas Afridi.

Raza was among four bowlers who had no success trying to contain Ayub and Yousuf. The openers struck 10 boundaries, including a six each, between them.

A four from Ayub past backward point sealed victory.

Pakistan complete the T20 series against Zimbabwe on Thursday. They then travel to South Africa for an eight-match all-formats tour, including two Tests. — AFP



Bangladesh on top after Rana fifer against Windies

NAHID RANA'S first Test five-wicket haul nudged Bangladesh ahead of the West Indies before the tourists' usually suspect batting line-up displayed a measure of resilience to claim the upper hand on the third day of the second and final Test at Sabina Park.

Rana led the rout of the home side's first innings for 146 on Monday with impressive figures of five for 61, giving the visitors a lead of 18 runs.

Buoyed by that effort, the Bangladesh top-order batting then displayed the sort of shot-making confidence previously unseen in this brief series to reach stumps at 193 for five in the second innings, a lead of 211 with five wickets in hand.

Given that the highest successful run-chase in a Test match at Sabina Park is just 211, achieved by the West Indies against Sri Lanka in 2003, history would appear to be on the side of the tourists forcing a series-levelling victory over the final two days.

Starting the day at 70 for one, West Indies were swiftly undermined by the 22-year-old Rana, who added four more victims to the dismissal of Mikyle Louis the previous evening.

Rana was well supported by fellow seamer Hasan Mahmud (2 for 19).

Keacy Carty top-scored with 40 while captain Kraigg Brathwaite, the first wicket of the day when he was caught in the gully off Rana, contributed 39.

“We knew it was coming at some stage,”

said Bangladesh bowling coach Andre Adams. “When you bowl 150 k's (km/h) you are going to take wickets eventually.

“We've got to look after him. That's why he didn't play in the first Test match. Luckily he has guys out there like Taskin (Ahmed) and Hasan as fellow seamers to keep him focused on the field.”

Bangladesh rallied from the early loss of Mahmudul Hasan Joy at the start of the second innings with 46 from Shadman Islam and a 39-ball 42 from captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz, who promoted himself to number four in the order, taking the initiative from a West Indies team which lost the plot in the final session when they insisted on ultra-aggression and paid the price with a succession of boundaries. — AFP

Fifth annual sports festival for disabled begins

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 3

The fifth Annual Festival for Persons with Disabilities 2024, themed Determination and Challenge, was inaugurated under the organisation of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, represented by the General-Directorate of Sports Activities.

The festival was held under the auspices of HH Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation at SQU. Events are being hosted at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in the Wilayat of Bausher and will continue until December 4. The festival aims to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society, highlight their capabilities and talents, and provide educational, training, and sports platforms that contribute to developing their skills and improving their quality of life.



The chief guest tours the festival village. RIGHT: A participant during a sports event. — Abdulwahid al Hamadani



The opening ceremony featured two visual presentations. The first reviewed the festival's history and key milestones, while the second, titled Beyond Borders, showcased the potential and capabilities of persons with disabilities. HH Sayyidah Dr Mona toured the festival village,

exploring its facilities, accompanying events, and the health exhibition that highlights activities by participating organisations and key services for persons with disabilities.

Hamood al Jabri, Assistant Director-General of the Directorate-General for Youth at the Ministry

of Culture, Sports and Youth, emphasised that the annual festival aims to showcase the creativity and achievements of this community in collaboration with governmental and private sector partners. He added that the festival provides a unified venue for services offered to persons

with disabilities, making it easier for beneficiaries and their families to access them.

Al Jabri noted that this edition stands out for hosting all events at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, incorporating Gulf-wide participation and new training programmes, including workshops to prepare participants for international competitions.

The festival includes 11 major sports events, such as badminton, running, wheelchair basketball, goalball for the visually impaired, boccia, deaf football and traditional games. Additionally, there are eight diverse cultural programmes, including art exhibitions for persons with disabilities featuring photography and fine arts, workshops on accessory design, chair painting, virtual reality experiences and Arabic calligraphy training.

SPORTS

ASIAN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE



OUNAS’ LATE PENALTY SECURES AL SADD’S PROGRESS TO LAST 16

HONG KONG: Adam Ounas scored an injury time penalty to earn Al Sadd a 2-1 win over Saudi Pro League side Al Nassr on Monday that takes the Qatari outfit into the knockout rounds of the Asian Champions League Elite.

The win means Al Sadd join Saudi trio Al Nassr, who were missing Cristiano Ronaldo for the loss in Riyadh, Al Hilal and Al Ahli in booking their spots in the last 16 of the revamped continental championship. Al Ahli needed a pair of Ivan Toney penalties to salvage a 2-2 draw with Esteghlal as the Jeddah-based club's perfect record was ended at home while Persepolis defeated Al Shorta 2-1 and Al Wasl drew 1-1 with Al Rayyan.

Al Ahli's draw is the first time the Jeddah-based club have dropped points in the competition after five consecutive wins had guaranteed their place in the last 16 of the competition.

Matthias Jaissle's side have 16 points from six games and continue to lead the standings by three points from Al Hilal, who face Qatar's Al Gharafa on Tuesday. The top eight finishers in the western and eastern league tables progress to the round of 16, which will be played in March.

Half of those spots on the western side of the draw are now filled with Al Sadd's late win taking Felix Sanchez's side through to the knockout rounds. Afif, the reigning Asian Player of the Year, gave Al Sadd the lead after charging from the halfway line to calmly slot past goalkeeper Bento in the 53rd minute.

Al Sadd's Romain Saiss turned Wesley's wicked cross from the left past into his own net in the 80th minute but when Afif was brought down in the area in injury time Ounas stepped up to hit the winner.

Al Ahli, meanwhile, were twice forced to fight back after going behind, trailing for the first time when Rafael Silva put Iran's Esteghlal ahead three minutes before the interval with a volley past Edouardo Mendy.

Toney levelled from the penalty spot eight minutes into stoppage time after a foul by Didier Ndong on Fahad Al Rashidi but Esteghlal went back in front six minutes into the second half when Mohammad Hossein Eslami's strike bounced over Mendy.

Eslami's sending off with nine minutes left increased the pressure on the visitors and, with four minutes left, a second Toney penalty salvaged a point for the hosts.

In Doha, Oston Urunov and a 103rd minute penalty from Giorgi Gvelesiani secured Persepolis's first victory in the competition against Al Shorta after Mohannad Ali had given the Iraqis a 19th minute lead with a well-judged lob. — Reuters



India and Malaysia players fight for the ball in the second semifinal of the Men's Junior Asia Cup at Hockey Oman Stadium in Al Amerat on Tuesday.

India set up Pakistan final in Men’s Junior Asia Cup

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroop_ath

MARQUEE TEAMS India and Pakistan booked a final showdown in the Men's Junior Asia Cup 2024 hockey championship after beating their semifinal opponents at the Hockey Oman Stadium in Al Amerat, Muscat on Tuesday night. India made a technically sound performance against Malaysia to prevail 3-1 while Pakistan scraped past a fighting Japan 4-2. India opened scoring in the 10th minute as Dilraj Singh struck a field goal. India led 1-0 at the half-time as both teams missed some chances.

Rohit increased the lead for India in the 45th minute from a penalty corner. Sharda Nand Tiwari made it 3-0 from another penalty corner in the 52nd minute after a series of saves from Malaysian goalkeeper Mohammed Rafaizul.

Azimuddin Kamaruddin returned one goal for hard-working Malaysia from a penalty stroke in the 57th minute. Both the teams earned seven penalty corners in the match. India's five of the seven penalty corners came in the last quarter. The PR Sreejesh-coached team guarded their 3-1 advantage during the final minutes to set up a final showdown against Pakistan on Wednesday. The match will kick-off at 7 pm (Oman Time).

PAKISTAN PREVAIL
In the first semifinal, Pakistan broke free



Japan and Pakistan players in action during the first semifinal.

in the final quarter to overcome a stiff challenge from Japan. Tied 2-2 at the end of third quarter, Pakistan took the decisive lead in the 48th minute when Hannan Shahid netted his second field goal. Star player Sufyan Khan made no mistake from a penalty stroke in the 52nd minute as Pakistan sealed their final entry with a 4-2 result.

Earlier, after a barren first quarter, Pakistan went ahead in the 27th minute with a field goal from Hannan. Japan levelled the score after three minutes through a field goal from Tsubasa Tanaka.

After the half-time break, Pakistan took the lead again when Basharat Ali struck from a penalty corner in the 38th minute. Japan

drew parity three minutes later as Rakusei Yamanaka converted a penalty corner to make it 2-2.

In the 9-10 placement match, Oman edged Chinese Taipei 3-2 in penalties after a 1-1 draw at the regulation time.

Teng-Kuan Wang put Chinese Taipei in the lead in the third minute with a field goal. Oman restored parity in the last minute of first quarter as Hudhaifa al Balushi netted a field goal. In the shoot-out, Chinese Taipei could only manage two goals from their five penalties while Oman scored three goals from their four attempts.

In 5-8 position matches, Bangladesh thrashed Thailand 7-2 while China prevailed over South Korea 3-2.

Oman claim gold in World Military Showjumping in Qatar

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, DEC 3

The Oman military team achieved gold medal in its first participation in the 24th edition of World Military Showjumping Championship in Qatar, organised by the International Military Sports Council (CISM), with the participation of 15 countries from November 27 to 30.

The gold medal was claimed by knight ‘Sergeant’ Madin bin Said al Youfsi from the Royal Cavalry, after securing a time of 45.66 seconds without errors on the back of ‘Hari Ab’, followed in second place by the Emirati knight ‘First Lieutenant’ Said al Mazmi with 47.14 seconds, and Italian Berremo Graduato finished third in 47.62 seconds.



World Military Showjumping podium ceremony in Qatar.

‘HEROES DE LA GARDE’ SNATCHES ZAYED CUP
On the other hand, ‘Heroes De La Garde’ secured a distinguished achievement at the Abu Dhabi Racing Club track in the United Arab Emirates for a distance of 1,600 metres in ‘grass’ category.

‘Heroes De La Garde’ snatched the title of the Zayed Cup for the UAE National Day, the horse owned by Shaikh Nasser bin Mohammed al Hashar, under the supervision of Ibrahim bin Zaher al Hadhrami and the leadership of Conor Beasley.

‘Heroes De La Garde’ added this victory to the recently-won award for the best Arabian horse in the third edition of the Emirates Racing Authority Awards ceremony held in November.



BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$71.86
BRENT \$72.41
LIGHT \$68.70

THE DIFFERENCE...

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Banking that is proudly human

NEWINVESTMENT



The Al Kamil Solar IPP will add 280 MW of renewable energy capacity to the national grid. Image for illustration only.

OMAN INVITES DEVELOPERS FOR 280 MW AL KAMIL SOLAR PV PROJECT

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 3

Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (PWP), Oman’s sole procurer of power and water capacity and output, has initiated the qualification process for its fourth solar photovoltaic (PV) Independent Power Project (IPP).

The Al Kamil Solar IPP, to be developed in partnership with the private sector, will add 280 megawatts (MW) of renewable energy capacity to the national grid. The project will be located in Al Kamil W’al Wafi, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, on a land area spanning 3.2 million square metres.

Scheduled for commercial operation by the fourth quarter of 2027, the project represents an estimated investment of approximately RO 85 million. Once operational, it is expected to generate around 863 gigawatt-hours (GWh) of clean energy annually, contributing significantly to Oman’s renewable energy targets. Additionally, the project is set to reduce CO2 emissions by approximately 282,000 tonnes per year, aligning with Oman’s Net-Zero emissions goal by 2050 and Oman Vision 2040 sustainability agenda.

To advance this initiative, PWP has issued a Request for Qualification (RfQ), inviting developers to demonstrate their technical and financial capabilities.

The RfQ documents are available for purchase electronically via PWP’s e-tendering system, with the final date for purchase set for December 16, 2024. Interested developers must submit their qualifications by February 3, 2025, before 10:00 AM Gulf Standard Time. Notably, the opportunity is exclusively for developers and excludes Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) contractors.

PWP’s pivotal role as Oman’s sole buyer and seller of electricity and water output under Royal Decree 78/2004 underscores its commitment to diversifying the energy mix and promoting sustainable energy solutions.

Oman issues new ship and port security regulations

OMAN has introduced a new regulatory framework to bolster ship and port security under Ministerial Resolution No 423/2024.

The initiative, spearheaded by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, aims to enhance maritime safety and ensure compliance with international standards outlined in Maritime Law No 19/2023. Captain Majid bin Saif al Barhi, Director-General of Maritime Affairs, highlighted the regulations’ emphasis on comprehensive security planning.

“Ships and ports are now required to develop integrated security plans based on rigorous risk assessments,” he stated.

The framework also mandates advanced monitoring systems to enforce adherence to global security requirements. Key elements include the issuance of international compliance certificates to ISPS Code-compliant entities, targeted training programmes for



The new framework aims to enhance maritime safety and ensure compliance with international standards.

maritime personnel and the establishment of national and local security committees to strengthen coordination among stakeholders.

“This regulation represents a milestone in enhancing the security of Oman’s

maritime sector,” Al Barhi noted, emphasising its role in positioning Oman as a regional logistics hub while ensuring a secure environment for maritime trade. Director of Maritime Legislation, Ayman bin Rashid al Maamari, added,

“The regulations aim to protect individuals, facilities and cargo from security risks while ensuring seamless maritime operations.” He underscored the alignment with Oman’s investment-friendly policies in the maritime sector. — ONA

Oman joins 1st Gulf-Jordanian investment conference

MUSCAT: Oman is set to participate in the inaugural Gulf-Jordanian Investment Conference, scheduled to begin on Wednesday at the King Hussein Convention Centre in Jordan.

The event aims to deepen economic ties and explore joint investment opportunities between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and Jordan.

Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and the GCC Federation of Chambers, highlighted the conference’s importance in fostering partnerships between the two countries.



FAISAL BIN ABDULLAH AL RAWAS
Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry

“This platform will explore strategic collaborations in areas such as tourism, logistics, agriculture and food security,” the OCCI chairman stated.

The event will feature two key sessions.

The main session, titled “Strengthening Gulf-Jordanian Economic Relations”,

will address investment opportunities and challenges, while the first working session will focus on Jordan’s investment landscape, with discussions on tourism, medical tourism and logistics.

OCCI’s delegation, led by Rashid bin Amer al Musalhi, First Deputy Chairman of OCCI, will also attend the 65th meeting of the GCC Chambers’ Board of Directors, discussing initiatives to enhance regional economic and industrial cooperation.

The conference underscores Oman’s commitment to strengthening regional partnerships and exploring new economic opportunities. — ONA

Major 750-bed tertiary hospital planned in Sultan Haitham City

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 3

One of Oman’s biggest tertiary hospitals is planned for implementation at Sultan Haitham City – part of a raft of healthcare initiatives that will augment the City’s status as an iconic integrated urban development. Officially named ‘Seeb Tertiary Hospital’, the 750-bed hospital project is being overseen by the Ministry of Health.

Bids for the Design Works / Services package, floated by the government, closed last month, with a significant number of local and international civil and engineering construction participating in the tender.

Seeb Tertiary Hospital is envisioned as



Seeb Tertiary Hospital is envisioned as a modern referral institution.

a modern referral institution with end-to-end healthcare facilities encompassing a comprehensive range of disciplines.

The 750 beds will be distributed across a wide array of specialties comprising Medical (including Neurology, Cardiology, Hematology and Infectious Diseases), Surgical (General, Thoracic, Hepato-Biliary, and Transplantation), Head & Neck), ENT, Ophthalmology, Dental & OMFS, Orthopaedics, Neurosurgery, Plastic Surgery, Burns, Trauma Surgery, Rehab, General Critical Care, Coronary Care, and Psychiatry, among others.

A further 90-plus beds will be earmarked for the daycare requirements of the Neuro, ENT, Ophthalmology, Dental, Plastic & Hand, Medical, Ortho and Radiology specialties. Significantly, as many as 44 major and day-car Operation Theatres (OT) are planned

within the hospital, catering to a variety of specialties.

This is in addition to around 195 OPD rooms.

There will also be dedicated areas for a range of common facilities, including Clinical Physiology, Main Laboratory, Radio-Diagnostic Imaging & Radiology Department, Blood Bank, Nuclear Medicine & Molecular Imaging Department, Oncology Services including Radiotherapy Services, Endoscopy / Bronchoscopy Suites Unit, Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation Centres including Hydrotherapy Pool, Medical Stores, Central Stores, Medical Waste Management, Central Theatre Sterile Supply Department (CSSD), Catering, and Mortuary.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES

BankDhofar launches integrated educational platform



DR KHALID BIN SALIM AL HAMADANI
Chief Human Resources Officer at BankDhofar.

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, represented by the Performance Academy, announced the launch of a digital education platform focused on financial literacy to raise the level of financial awareness among individuals in the Sultanate of Oman. The initiative is carried out in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance (MoF), represented by the National Programme

for Fiscal Sustainability and Financial Sector Development (Estidama) and with the participation of a number of government entities; the Ministry of Education (MoE), the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI), the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), represented by Youth Centres. BankDhofar’s initiative to spread financial literacy among the community is achieved by leveraging the expertise and skills of its employees to create educational and informative content that can be accessed through digital learning platforms.

The platform offers a variety of training programmes and interactive courses covering various aspects of the financial sector, such as basic money management, online payments, credit and insurance products, investing and financial planning for the future. The platform also provides specialised educational tools and resources to support employees, entrepreneurs and SMEs and enhance their skills to manage their finances efficiently.

Sohar International’s CTO delivers insightful sessions



DR SAID AL SHIDHANI
Chief Transformation Officer at Sohar International

MUSCAT: Sohar International, Oman’s best bank, continues to strengthen its commitment to societal development through strategic initiatives that enhance learning and professional growth within the local community. In line with this commitment, Dr Saud al

Shaithani, Chief Transformation Officer at Sohar International, recently conducted two expert-led sessions at Muscat University centred on Customer Experience (CX).

These sessions, designed for undergraduates, alumni, and postgraduate participants, aimed to equip emerging business leaders with critical skills to optimise customer satisfaction and drive long-term loyalty.

Emphasising the significance of initiatives like the Customer Experience Program Dr Al Shaithani emphasised the importance of programmes like the Customer Experience initiative, stating, “Through such efforts, Sohar International endeavours to bridge the gap between academic theory and real-world application, providing students with a comprehensive understanding of customer experience and its significant impact on sustainable business growth.

In today’s highly competitive environment, where customer expectations are continually evolving, a well-rounded approach to CX is essential.

ME NETWORK OPERATORS’ GROUP FORUM LAUNCHES IN OMAN

MUSCAT: The Middle East Network Operators’ Group and Peering Forum (MENOG 24) began at the Grand Millennium Hotel here on December 1, 2024. Hosted by AWASR, a leading Omani telecommunications provider specialising in high-speed fibre-optic broadband services, the five-day event brings together leading experts, policymakers, and stakeholders to discuss advancements in Internet infrastructure, exchange insights, and foster collaboration across the Middle East. Eng Adnan al Alawi,

CEO of AWASR, states: “We are honoured to host MENOG 24 in Muscat. This event provides an important platform for addressing the challenges and opportunities facing the Internet in the Middle East. By fostering collaboration between experts, policymakers, and stakeholders, we can build a future-proof Internet that supports the region’s digital transformation journey.” Organised by the RIPE NCC, the Regional Internet Registry (RIR) for Europe, the Middle East,

and Central Asia, MENOG 24 serves as a vital platform to explore the latest developments in Internet technology and best practices. The agenda includes sessions focused on IPv6 adoption, routing security, network innovation and measurements, and emerging challenges in the region’s Internet landscape. Oman has been very active in implementing digital transformation initiatives, notably through the National Programme for Digital Economy.

Geely Auto unveils the GX3 PRO in Oman

GEELY Auto International Corporation proudly introduces the all-new GX3 PRO, an SUV that redefines versatility and style for the modern driver. The grand launch event, held on November 25, 2024 at 7:00 PM at the Al Athaiba Exclusive Geely Showroom, was a moment of excitement and innovation. The ceremony was graced by the presence of Riyadh Ali Sultan, General Manager of Towell Auto Centre, accompanied by Geely’s distinguished representatives. With a competitive price of just ro 4,399, the GX3 PRO is set to revolutionise mobility in Oman.

Designed to deliver an exhilarating driving experience, this striking SUV combines cutting-edge features with unmatched performance, making it the perfect companion for Oman’s diverse roads and vibrant lifestyles. Setting a new standard for versatile SUVs, the GX3 PRO seamlessly combines bold design, advanced functionality, and exceptional reliability. Engineered to excel on Oman’s diverse roads, it features standout styling, superior comfort, and robust safety and performance capabilities. Designed to adapt to the region’s dynamic lifestyles, the GX3 PRO



GX3 PRO is poised to enhance driving experiences across Oman.

With a competitive price of just ro 4,399, the GX3 PRO is set to revolutionize mobility in Oman.

is poised to enhance driving experiences across the Sultanate of Oman. Geely’s signature design is present in the GX3 PRO, which includes bold elements such as a prominent “Energy Chord” grille and a wing-shaped bumper for a striking front profile. The SUV also has Boomerang-shaped LED daytime running lights that add beauty to the vehicle while also ensuring enhanced visibility for safer driving. Completing the body of the SUV is a set of 16-inch aluminium alloy wheels and blackened accents, making it equally suitable for

congested city streets or outdoor adventures. Inside, the GX3 PRO boasts a roomy cabin with an 8-inch floating centre display and a three-spoke multi-function steering wheel. The design is very practical, as it incorporates 26 compartments for storage of various objects and a 4/6 split-folding rear seat to meet different needs. The interior can boast such environmentally friendly materials as low-odour adhesives and a CN95 air filter, ensuring a cleaner and healthier atmosphere inside the cabin for all passengers.

Asyad Group showcases breakbulk expertise

MUSCAT:Asyad Group has once again showcased its exceptional logistics expertise and global capacity by completing the successful transport of four oversized coils for OQ Refinery & Petroleum Industries Company (OQ RPI) from Laem Chabang Port in Thailand to Sohar Port. This high-profile breakbulk operation, executed with meticulous precision – from expert packing at the origin to smooth unloading in Sohar—demonstrates Asyad’s ability to provide seamless, door-to-door logistics solutions for heavy lift cargo. The specialised nature of the cargo demanded expert handling, further underscoring Asyad’s expertise in managing complex logistics operations efficiently and positioning it among the leading global end-to-end logistics providers, delivering exceptional client-focused results while maintaining quality and safety standards. Juma al Maskari, Director of Asyad



This breakbulk operation demonstrates Asyad’s ability to provide seamless, door-to-door logistics solutions for heavy lift cargo.

Logistics, emphasised the importance of tailored logistics solutions and global presence: “This successful move highlights our extensive capabilities and the strength

of our in-house expertise to analyse the challenge and derive safe and competitive solution for our client. Our ability to handle heavy lift cargo efficiently reflects our capacity to deliver customised solutions that meet the specific needs of our clients. These operations reinforce Oman’s growing role as a strategic logistics hub for global trade. It also reflects the significance of SOHAR Port, recognised as one of the leading ports in the region due to its advanced infrastructure. This infrastructure enables the efficient handling of heavy and complex shipments. The role of C. Steinweg Oman, the operator of the general cargo terminal at the port, is crucial in facilitating handling and storage operations. This, in turn, enhances the port’s competitiveness and supports both local and global supply chains.”

Lincoln Aviator: Enjoy luxury and versatility on every drive

MUSCAT: The Lincoln Aviator is a strikingly luxurious SUV that redefines what it means to drive in style and comfort. Powered by a robust twin-turbocharged 3.0-litre V6 engine paired with a smooth 10-speed SelectShift automatic transmission, the Aviator delivers a powerful 400 horsepower and 562 Nm of torque. This refined performance allows for effortlessly swift acceleration, while its three-row seating and

off-road capability make it a perfect blend of luxury and versatility. Every drive in the Aviator is an experience of tailored elegance, thanks to its Lincoln drive modes, which offer five distinct settings: Normal, conserve, excite, slippery and deep conditions. These modes allow drivers to customise their driving dynamics, with each selection vividly displayed on the 12.3-inch configurable LCD instrument cluster, enhanced by



The Aviator delivers a powerful 400 horsepower and 562 Nm of torque.

clear, dynamic graphics. Making every journey smooth and enjoyable, the Aviator comes equipped with advanced technology that “sees” rough roads before you even feel them. With adaptive suspension and road preview, an advanced forward camera constantly scans the road for potholes or uneven surfaces, adjusting the suspension in real-time for an exceptionally smooth ride.

Safety and driver-assistance come standard in the Aviator, courtesy of Lincoln Co-Pilot360. Features like traffic jam assist manage speed and lane positioning during heavy traffic, while evasive steer assist provides extra steering support to help avoid sudden obstacles. Reverse brake assist enhances peace of mind by stopping the vehicle if sensors detect an obstacle while backing up.

BUSINESS

SHORT TAKES



The decrease reflects varied performance across property types and regions.

REAL ESTATE PRICES DROP 1.9% IN Q3

MUSCAT: Residential real estate prices in Oman declined by 1.9% in Q3 2024 compared to the same period last year, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The decrease reflects varied performance across property types and regions.

Residential apartment prices saw the steepest drop at 12.9%, followed by a 6.5% decline in other housing categories and a 1% decrease in residential land prices. Villas, however, posted a 2.5% year-on-year increase, signalling sustained demand in this segment.

Quarter-on-quarter, the general real estate index edged up by 0.3%. Villas recorded a 3.5% rise, residential land prices grew by 0.3%, and other home prices increased by 2.3%, offsetting a 5.2% decline in apartment prices.

Regionally, most governorates experienced year-on-year declines, with Musandam (-26%), Al Buraïmi (-1.7%) and Muscat (-7%) leading the downturn. In contrast, Al Batinah North saw an 18.8% increase, with Al Batinah South (+3.1%) and Al Sharqiyah North (+5.3%) also recording gains. — ONA

FUNDING BOOST FOR OMAN’S FIRST SOLAR PANEL PROJECT

MUSCAT: National Finance has partnered with Sheida Industries to bolster Oman’s first solar panel manufacturing project, aligning with Oman’s Net-Zero 2050 goals and Oman Vision 2040.

The financial support will help Sheida Industries procure essential raw materials to sustain production at its state-of-the-art facility in Sohar Industrial Area.

Sheida Industries, a 100% Omani-owned company, is pivotal to the country’s renewable energy ambitions, offering high-quality solar panels to support large-scale projects like the Manah I & II and Ibri III Solar IPPs, each with a capacity of 500 MW.

Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, CEO of National Finance, remarked: “We are proud to support Sheida Industries as they lead Oman’s renewable energy transition.

“Our partnership reflects our commitment to sustainability and aligns with the government’s vision for clean energy.”

With a target of generating 30% of electricity from renewables by 2030, Oman is prioritising solar energy to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels.

KPC targets \$10 billion investments annually in energy sector

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, DEC 3

SHAIKH Nawaf al Sabah, Deputy Chairman and CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), delivered an insightful keynote address at the GPCA Forum, outlining KPC’s strategies for navigating the evolving energy landscape.

His speech emphasised the vital role hydrocarbons continue to play in global energy demands, the company’s ambitious production targets, and its focus on petrochemicals as a driver of economic diversification.

Shaikh Nawaf began by discussing the future energy mix, noting that while renewable energy sources are expected to play a greater role, hydrocarbons will remain indispensable.

By 2040 and 2050, even with the full utilisation of renewables, nuclear and coal, hydrocarbons are projected to account for a quarter of global energy demand.

KPC’s focus is to meet this demand sustainably and efficiently. Global oil consumption currently stands at approximately 100 million barrels per day, a figure expected to remain steady through 2040.



KPC’s focus is to meet this demand sustainably and efficiently. Global oil consumption currently stands at approximately 100 million barrels per day, a figure expected to remain steady through 2040.

SHAIKH NAWAF AL SABAH
Chairman and CEO
Kuwait Petroleum Corporation

Shaikh Nawaf underscored KPC’s readiness to adapt to market fluctuations and maintain production levels to secure energy supplies.

KPC has set ambitious production capacity goals, aiming to achieve 3.2 million barrels per day by 2024 and 4 million barrels per day by 2035.

Shaikh Nawaf highlighted the significance of these targets, noting that production capacity differs from actual production levels, which are influenced by OPEC+ agreements.

To meet these goals, KPC has allocated \$9–10 billion annually

for the next several years. These investments will support the maintenance of production infrastructure, deployment of enhanced oil recovery techniques, and adherence to the company’s commitment to low production costs and minimal carbon intensity.

Kuwait, Shaikh Nawaf proudly noted, boasts the lowest production costs globally, under \$10 per barrel, along with the lowest carbon intensity.

He identified petrochemicals as a cornerstone of KPC’s diversification strategy, aligning with broader Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) economic goals.

Despite increased recycling efforts and a shift towards alternatives like glass, petrochemical demand continues to grow due to its integral role in industries ranging from manufacturing to healthcare.

KPC is poised to triple its petrochemical production capacity by 2040, leveraging the sector’s resilience and growth potential.

Shaikh Nawaf emphasised that the company’s downstream petrochemical operations are crucial to generating value from Kuwait’s hydrocarbon resources.

KPC’s integrated approach ensures that petrochemical operations align closely with upstream activities, optimising feedstock utilisation and maximising efficiency.

The company’s Equate joint venture, a partnership with Dow Chemical, exemplifies its success in creating globally competitive petrochemical enterprises.

A significant portion of Shaikh Nawaf’s speech focused on KPC’s commitment to sustainability.

After eight decades of oil production, Kuwait’s reservoirs require advanced techniques, such as gas injection and submersible pumps, to maintain output.

While this increases production complexity, Kuwait’s naturally favourable geology ensures its oil remains among the most cost-effective and energy-efficient to produce.

Shaikh Nawaf also stressed KPC’s proactive stance on low-carbon production. By integrating modern technologies and maintaining rigorous environmental standards, KPC is ensuring that its operations meet global sustainability expectations while supporting Kuwait’s economic growth.

Local firms showcase food security initiatives

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, DEC 3

THE Oman AgroFood 2024 exhibition has brought together key Omani companies to showcase their contributions to the Sultanate of Oman’s food and agricultural sector.

The event provided a platform for businesses to present their innovations, highlight their role in enhancing food security, and foster opportunities for local and international collaboration.

In a dedicated corner, Farha al Kindi, CEO of Al Mina Fisheries Products, emphasised the company’s dedication to innovating traditional fish products since its establishment in 2019. Operating under the Bronze Rozna initiative, Al Mina is managed by a team of Omani women who are committed to elevating the quality and appeal of traditional Omani fish products.

“Our mission is to enhance traditional fish products, making them more appealing to consumers while maintaining their distinctive quality and taste,” Al Kindi stated.

The company’s offerings include salted fish, fish powder, pickled squid, fish achaar, fish in coconut sauce, and other innovative items like fish in Indian masala and dried kash fish. With a factory capable of producing 5 tonnes per month, the company is focused



A number of Omani food sector firms are participating in the 3-day expo.

The event provided a platform for businesses to present their innovations, highlight their role in enhancing food security, and foster opportunities for local and international collaboration.

on expanding its reach to international markets under a trusted Omani brand.

Dr Hadi bin Mohsin al Lawati, CEO of Osool Poultry SAOC, highlighted the company’s commitment to strengthening

facilities management company, Omdaad, in Oman.

This collaboration marks a major milestone in improving local infrastructure and expanding Imdaad’s regional footprint.

Abdullatif Almulla, Chairman of Imdaad, highlighted the significance of this partnership: “Joining hands with Oris underscores our commitment to growth and leadership in the region. Omdaad will redefine facilities management in Oman by offering top-quality services tailored to diverse sectors.”

Nasser bin Rashid al Shibli, Chief Real Estate Officer at Ominvest, added: “Omdaad represents a transformative step

Oman’s food security by breeding parent poultry and producing high-quality fertilised eggs.

The company commenced commercial production in July 2021, achieving an annual capacity of over 175 million fertilised eggs, supplying both local and international markets.

The company’s facility in the Ghaftien area of the Wilayat of Haima spans 47 square kilometres and includes six breeding farms, 12 production farms, and an advanced feed mill with a capacity of 20 metric tonnes per hour.

A fully equipped on-site laboratory ensures rigorous quality control.

Dr Al Lawati noted, “Osool Poultry’s efforts align with Oman Vision 2040, contributing to food security, economic



Omdaad will deliver a comprehensive suite of integrated services.

in advancing Oman’s facilities management sector. This partnership with Imdaad brings innovative solutions and world-class services that align with Oman

diversification and regional development.”

At a dedicated corner, Asyad Group showcased its integrated logistics solutions that support Oman’s food industry, with a particular focus on cold chain logistics. Leveraging its extensive assets, including free zones and ports, the company highlighted its ability to provide end-to-end solutions for food storage and transportation.

Recently, Asyad established Asyad Logistics to manage shipping and re-shipping operations.

The group also operates one of the largest warehouses in Halban, designed to accommodate various temperature ranges for food products, alongside dry storage facilities in Muscat and Salalah.

These efforts align with Oman’s vision of enhancing logistics capabilities and promoting the country as a re-export hub.

Oman AgroFood 2024 has once again proven to be a vital platform for showcasing the contributions of Omani companies to the food and agriculture sectors.

By highlighting innovative solutions, fostering collaboration, and providing opportunities for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to present their capabilities, the event underscores its role in promoting economic growth and sustainability.

OPINION

Why Mexico’s global trade sweet spot may turn sour



LIAM PROUD

The author is a Breakingviews Associate Editor, based in London. He focuses on banking, finance, private equity and deals

THE last time Donald Trump was in the White House, Mexico’s economy did surprisingly well. The Spanish-speaking country, and global CEOs who have rebuilt their supply chains around it, will be hoping that the US president-elect’s initial hostility once again amounts to nothing. That looks too optimistic.

As in 2016, Trump’s 2024 election campaign was full of alarming pledges from the perspective of the United States’ southern neighbour, whose \$1.9 trillion economy is the world’s 13th largest, according to the International Monetary Fund. Last week, he promised to impose a 25% tariff on Mexican goods on his first day in office until the country clamped down on drugs and migrants crossing the border.

Perhaps surprisingly, the government of new President Claudia Sheinbaum seems relatively sanguine, touting a friendly phone call with Trump later in the week. Economy Minister Marcelo Ebrard, who was Mexico’s foreign secretary during Trump’s first term, has talked up his country’s negotiating power, stating that tariffs would cost US jobs and hurt growth, since firms from General Motors to Stellantis have sites in the Latin American economy.

History supports a relaxed attitude. Trump entered the White House in 2017 promising to radically reshape the North American Free

Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to US workers’ advantage and build a border wall at Mexico’s expense.

In reality, the 2018 United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) contained relatively little to worry its southernmost signatory. Multinational companies, particularly carmakers, subsequently rejigged their supply chains to send more wares through Mexico or make them there — a process known as nearshoring. In early 2023, for example, Germany’s BMW said it would invest \$870 million to extend its site in the central state of San Luis Potosí.

Trade has boomed. Last year, Mexico sent \$475 billion of goods exports to the United States, surpassing China. A Brookings Institution analysis concluded that the number of Mexican jobs supported by intra-North American trade rose by about 2 million between 2017 and 2022. In short, Trump’s combative rhetoric from eight years ago turned out to be bluster.

It would be unwise for Sheinbaum to bet on a repeat, however. Trump’s choices for his cabinet suggest he is shunning some of the moderating influences that characterised parts of his first term. Howard Lutnick, Trump’s nominee to lead the Commerce Department and trade policy, has criticised the USMCA for hurting auto manufacturing jobs.

Mexico’s success under the agreement,

Multinational companies, particularly carmakers, subsequently rejigged their supply chains to send more wares through Mexico or make them there — a process known as nearshoring.

meanwhile, makes it a more conspicuous target. The country’s trade surplus with the United States rose 140% between 2016 and 2023 to \$152 billion, using US Census Bureau data, while China’s fell by a fifth to \$279 billion.

If trends continue at the same rate, the US trade deficit with Mexico would exceed its shortfall with China in absolute terms by 2027, according to calculations.

The Latin American country also seems entangled with the People’s Republic. Economy Minister Ebrard has tried to defuse this point, claiming recently that just 0.4% of Chinese investment into North America goes to Mexico.

But those numbers reflect the economies’ vastly different sizes and levels of financial-market sophistication. The trade figures are more nuanced.

China accounts for a fifth of goods shipped into Mexico, UN Comtrade data shows, up from 15% in 2012. It’s difficult to tell from the statistics what proportion of those goods head onwards into the United States. The Bank of Mexico argued in a recent analysis that it was tiny.

The danger for Sheinbaum is that Trump and Lutnick don’t bother to try and find out, and instead jump to the conclusion that Chinese manufacturers are using Mexico to gain cheap access to the US market. — Reuters

INDIA’S SLOWDOWN FLASHES AN EARLY-WARNING SIGNAL

INDIA’S world-beating economic growth is getting a reality check. Output rose 5.4% during the three months to the end of September, its slowest pace in nearly two years, belying hopes that a good monsoon would boost spending. Perhaps it’s a blip. But there are looming pressures that could all deal blows to rosy assumptions about the world’s fifth-largest economy.

Weak factory production and consumer demand dinged the Reserve Bank of India’s 7% headline estimate. Manufacturing crawled in at 2.2% in the country which aspires to assemble a quarter of all iPhones by 2028, up from 14% in the last financial year.

Earnings at top companies disappointed too: only around half the firms in the Nifty 50 index beat analysts’ estimates, the lowest since March 2020, per data compiled by LSEG. Tight-fisted shoppers ate into profits of giants like Reliance Industries and Hindustan Unilever.

A national election in April and May caused New Delhi to hit the brakes on infrastructure spending, a heavy lifter of growth in recent years. Some of the country’s 28 states have been cutting back capital expenditure to offer election-winning cash handouts. All that coincided with a clampdown on unsecured credit by the central bank, which now finds itself squashed between inflation running at 6.2%, above the target range, and sliding economic growth. Its rate-setting panel is scheduled to meet this week.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s administration calls the latest print a one-off and hopes festive spending and benign crude will lift the number in the second half of the financial year.

A more sceptical view is that India has returned to its pre-Covid slow lane after three years of revenge spending. Market shares are churning too, with some demand moving to smaller players in the informal economy which the data is less good at capturing.

More pain looms. US prosecutors’ indictment of Gautam Adani on fraud charges, which he denies, is likely to curb expansion by his conglomerate, a rare private-sector contributor to investment spending.

The threat of higher levies under the Trump administration could increase dumping of Chinese goods in India and hurt exports. Cooling growth might accelerate outflows of offshore funds in favour of the People’s Republic, which is administering boosters to shore up its economy.

— Reuters

Digital divide: Looking beyond infrastructure

IN today’s hyper-connected world, merely having technology isn’t enough — it’s about mastering it. As artificial intelligence reshapes business, augmented reality transforms education, and digital payments replace cash, a new and more dangerous divide is emerging.

This time, the gap isn’t between the connected and disconnected, but between those who can harness these digital tools to thrive and those who merely possess them. It’s a divide that threatens to leave entire generations behind, even as they hold smartphones in their hands.

Most of the world is faced with this divide, as infrastructure challenges are dwarfed by social ones.

Oman perfectly exemplifies this new reality, as a country that has undergone enormous digital transformation to get the nation connected — resulting in a 95.2% internet penetration rate, according to World Bank data. But its rural and ageing population are still being left behind.

Despite Oman’s emerging ICT sector, the challenge of connectivity has shifted from hardware distribution and internet access to digital literacy, cultural relevance, and genuine utility.

In a world that shows no sign of slowing down its digital transformation, not being tech-savvy can seem like a death sentence. It could mean a business failing to keep up with consumer expectations or someone being socially excluded. While digital technology is the answer to barrierless connection, it also has the power to alienate.

At its core, digital services are designed to be intuitive to those who are digital natives, but large swathes of the world’s population are not.

As a result, you may find a rural farmer who spends hours travelling to the nearest bank, while an urban professional manages all their finances through their phone.

A senior citizen struggles to book medical appointments online, while their digitally native grandchildren effortlessly navigate social activities through apps. This is a reality that



Most of the world is faced with this divide, as infrastructure challenges are dwarfed by social ones.



HANI ELKUKHUN

The writer is CEO MEA, Beyond ONE

nations, such as Oman, now face.

Communities hold the key to transcending these barriers. When digital tools align with existing social structures — be they professional networks, neighbourhood groups, or shared interests — adoption follows. Rural farmers connecting through digital platforms access not only financial education, but also weather alerts, crop pricing, and collective bargaining power.

This community-centred approach demands a shift in how we design digital solutions. Rather than creating universal platforms that users must adapt to, technology should mould itself around established human patterns. Banking apps should speak the language of local markets.

Healthcare portals should reflect cultural approaches to wellness. Professional networks should mirror the informal connections that drive real business relationships. This is real inclusion.

The next phase of digital evolution will be measured not by processing power or connection speeds, but by how seamlessly

technology integrates into everyday life. Success will be being able to video chat, coordinate community activities and manage household admin on one platform.

Or find customers, recruit prospective employees and procure materials through the same digital channels.

As we build these bridges across the digital divide, scalability must balance with personalisation. Universal access will need to accommodate individual contexts.

The technology itself should fade into the background, leaving only stronger, more connected communities in its wake. This vision of digital inclusion extends beyond commercial opportunities or philanthropic missions. It represents a fundamental rethinking of how technology serves humanity.

When digital tools amplify existing community bonds instead of replacing them, we move closer to true technological democracy. The advancement of digital technology is paving the way to a limitless future.

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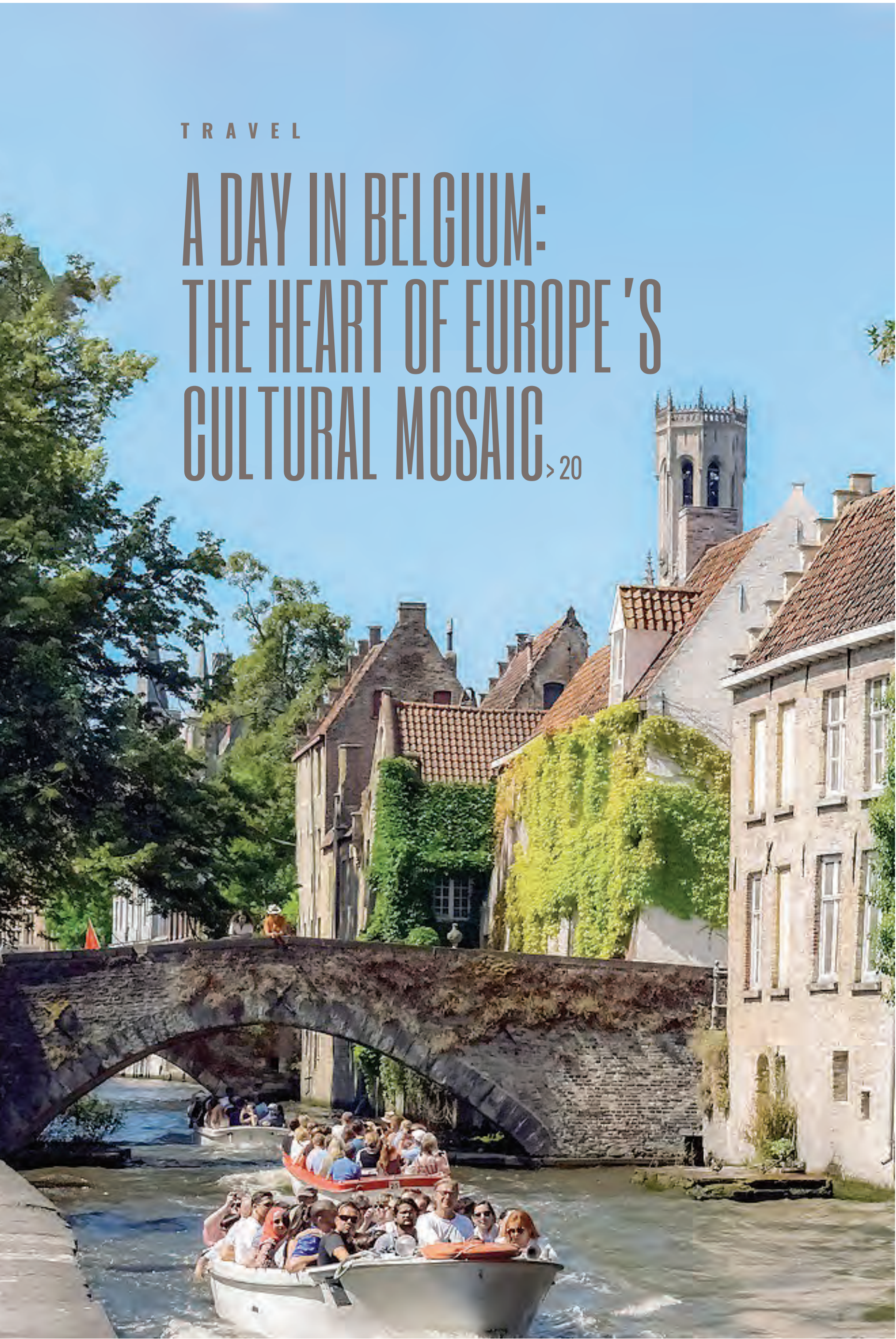
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ART/LIFE



TRAVEL

A DAY IN BELGIUM: THE HEART OF EUROPE'S CULTURAL MOSAIC

> 20

ENTERTAINMENT

First Billboard Arabia Music Awards Set for Historic Ceremony in Riyadh



THE INAUGURAL Billboard Arabia Music Awards will take place on December 11, 2024, at the King Fahad Cultural Centre, marking a significant milestone in the region's music scene. This pioneering event is part of the debut Riyadh Music Week and will celebrate over 40 prestigious awards, honouring both established and rising stars based on listener opinions and digital streaming data from platforms including Spotify, Anghami and YouTube.

The Billboard Arabia Music Awards will recognise excellence across more than 40 categories, featuring 210 nominations and 96 competing artists. Top contenders include Al Shami, who leads with 14 nominations, along with other notable artists such as Assala Nasri, Ahmad Saad, Tamer Ashour, Elissa, Dystinct, Ayed and Tul8te, showcasing the rich diversity of Arabic music and its growing popularity.

In a spectacular celebration of musical talent, the awards will feature performances by some of the most esteemed names in the industry, including Elissa, Dystinct, Ahmad Saad, Ayed and Tul8te. The event aims to highlight the flourishing music landscape of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, amplifying the voices of artists who resonate strongly with audiences.

The Billboard's Arabia initiative, a collaborative effort between SRMG and Billboard, represents a strategic shift in how music achievements are recognised, focusing on real-time listener engagement and preferences. This approach enhances the credibility of the awards while spotlighting the evolving musical trends in the region.

Mike Van, President of Billboard, expressed enthusiasm about the partnership with SRMG, stating, "The Billboard Music Awards is globally recognised as the pinnacle of musical achievement. We are excited to bring this legacy to the MENA region, providing local artists with a unique platform to amplify their presence on a global stage."

Rami Zeidan, Managing Director of Billboard Arabia, called the event historic and emphasised the commitment to nurturing local talent and celebrating music that resonates with listeners. He noted that "the MENA region is witnessing unprecedented growth in the music industry, making it a focal point for global music platforms."

Tickets for the Billboard Arabia Music Awards are now available for purchase. For more updates and to buy tickets, visit [billboardarabia.com](#). This event promises to be a landmark occasion in the celebration of music within the region, paving the way for future generations of artists.

QUICK FEATURES



ENTERTAINMENT

Indian actor Allu Arjun poses for photos as he attends a promotional event of his upcoming Indian film 'Pushpa 2: The Rule' in Mumbai. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

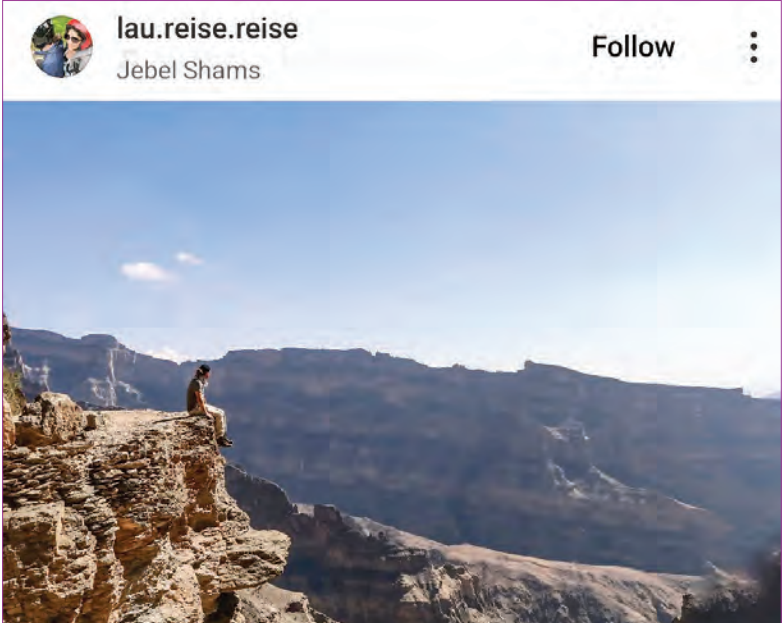
US-French actor Timothee Chalamet poses with the Visionary Tribute award for "A Complete Unknown" during The Gothams 34th Annual Film Awards at Cipriani Wall Street in New York. — AFP



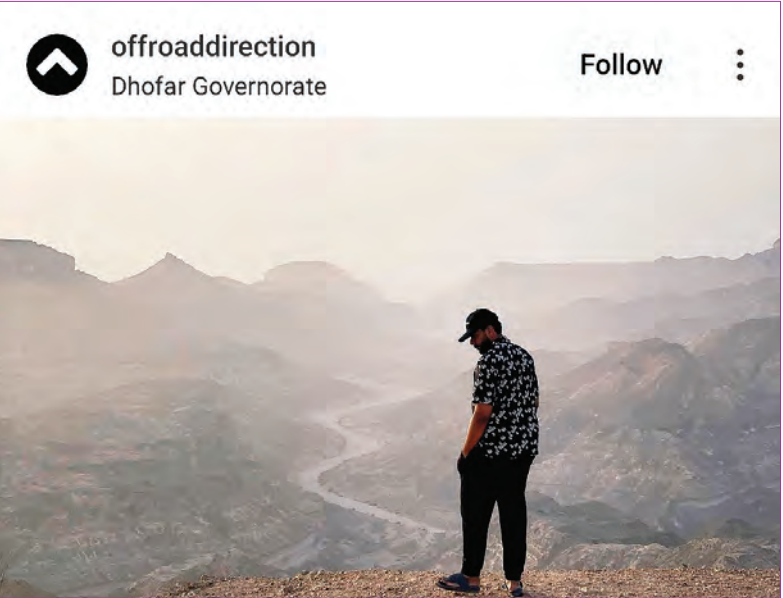
CULTURE

A drone light show is seen over the Wat Arun Buddhist temple along the Chao Phraya River, during the Vijit Chao Phraya 2024 festival in Bangkok. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



View From the Top



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Bradman ‘baggy green’ cap sells for \$250,000 at auction



A “BAGGY GREEN” Test cap worn by Australian great Don Bradman sold for \$250,000 at auction on Tuesday as collectors vied to own a rare piece of cricketing history.

The tattered garment — almost 80 years old — was sun-faded, showed signs of “insect damage” and had a torn peak.

Auction house Bonhams said Bradman wore the cap during India’s 1947-48 tour of Australia, his last Test series on home soil.

In an auction lasting 10 minutes, a flurry of bidding pushed the price from a starting point of \$160,000 to a winning offer of \$250,000 (Aus\$390,000).

The total cost was \$310,000 once “buyer’s premium” fees were tacked on.

Bonhams said it was “the only known baggy green” worn by Bradman during the series, in which he scored 715 runs

in six innings at an average of 178.75, with three centuries and a double-hundred.

Australia’s cricketers are awarded the dark green woollen caps before Test debuts and they are revered by players and fans alike, often the more battered the better.

A different “baggy green” worn by Bradman during his Test debut in 1928 fetched \$290,000 when it went under the hammer in 2020.

That was far less than the \$650,000 paid for Shane Warne’s baggy green when he put it up for sale to help Australian bushfire victims earlier that year.

Bradman retired with an all-time-high Test batting average of 99.94 and has been described by cricket authority Wisden as the greatest to “have ever graced the gentleman’s game”. He died in 2001 aged 92. —AFP



Uniting for the Survival of the World’s Fastest Land Animal

CHEETAHS, renowned for being the fastest land animals, are currently facing a multitude of challenges that threaten their survival. Habitat loss due to agricultural expansion, human-wildlife conflict, and the illegal wildlife trade are among the most pressing issues impacting their populations. As human settlements encroach upon their natural habitats, cheetahs are often forced into smaller, fragmented territories. This not only limits their hunting grounds but also leads to increased encounters with livestock farmers, who view these majestic predators as threats to their livelihood. As a result, it is estimated that fewer than 7,500 cheetahs remain in the wild today.

International Cheetah Day, established in 2010, serves to raise awareness of these challenges and promote conservation efforts dedicated to protecting this iconic species. Each year, this day brings together conservationists and the public to reflect on the significance of cheetah conservation and the need for collective action to ensure their survival. This year’s observance coincides with the premiere of the documentary ‘Return of the Cheetah,’ produced by Discovery Channel, which sheds light on the critical efforts to save cheetahs in the wild.

Dr Laurie Marker, a leading figure in cheetah conservation, plays a pivotal role in these efforts. As the founder and executive director of the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF), she has dedicated her life to safeguarding cheetah populations since moving to Namibia in 1990. Dr Marker’s work focuses on innovative and community-based conservation strategies that address the urgent threats facing cheetahs. She has spearheaded initiatives such as the Livestock Guarding Dog Program, which trains specialised dogs to protect livestock



from wild predators, effectively reducing farmer-cheetah conflicts. Additionally, her efforts in habitat restoration have created thriving ecosystems that can support both wildlife and sustainable agriculture practices.

Dr Marker’s extensive experience and expertise are critical in fostering a better understanding of the ecological importance of cheetahs. She emphasises that protecting these apex predators is essential not only for their survival but also for maintaining biodiversity and promoting sustainable human development. “Protecting cheetahs safeguards biodiversity, strengthens rangelands, and encourages sustainable solutions,” she states.

The documentary ‘Return of the Cheetah’ aims to highlight both the struggles and successes in cheetah conservation. By showcasing the innovative strategies employed by CCF and the powerful stories

of cheetah rehabilitation, the film serves as a vital tool for educating viewers about the urgent need for conservation efforts. It underscores the idea that while progress has been made, much work remains to be done in protecting these magnificent creatures.

With International Cheetah Day serving as a global call to action, it is imperative for communities and individuals to engage in conservation efforts. Dr Marker’s work and the message portrayed in ‘Return of the Cheetah’ act as a rallying point, encouraging everyone to participate in the fight to protect cheetahs and the ecosystems they inhabit. For more information on International Cheetah Day and how to contribute to the cause, visit [www.internationalcheetahday.com](#). Through collective efforts and awareness, there is hope for a brighter future for this iconic species.

FEATURES



A DAY IN BELGIUM: THE HEART OF EUROPE'S CULTURAL MOSAIC

BY MAI AL ABRI

BELGIUM—a country where the vibrant tapestry of diversity weaves together Dutch, French and German languages — stands out as an ideal travel destination in the heart of Europe. This multicultural nation offers an incredibly rich experience for visitors, characterised by its inclusivity, artistic fervour and exceptional culinary delights.

Renowned for its ease of doing business, Belgium serves as a gateway to Europe for many international companies. Its strategic location, coupled with a robust infrastructure, allows businesses to thrive in a stable economic environment. The nation's commitment to innovation and sustainability further enhances its appeal as a business hub.

As a travel destination, Belgium is home to some of the most breathtaking attractions in Europe. The medieval towns of Bruges and Ghent captivate with their cobbled streets, stunning Gothic cathedrals, and picturesque canals, while Brussels — the nation's capital — boasts astonishing Art Nouveau architecture, largely credited to the famed Victor Horta. The Grand Place, a Unesco World Heritage site, stands as a testament to the country's architectural prowess, drawing visitors from around the globe.

Art and culture pulse through the heart of Belgium. From the surrealistic masterpieces of René Magritte to the beloved comic characters of Tintin and the Smurfs, creativity thrives in every corner. Museums, vibrant street murals and annual art fairs reflect the country's unwavering passion for artistic expression. Meanwhile, sports enthusiasts rally behind local heroes, whether it's cheering on the cycling legends during the Tour of Flanders or supporting the national football team,

the Red Devils, during exhilarating matches.

No visit to Belgium would be complete without indulging in its world-renowned cuisine. Delight your taste buds with rich chocolates, the always-popular crispy fries (with their rightful claim to fame as “frites”), and delectable waffles. Sample the national dish of moules-frites (mussels with fries) in cosy cafés or enjoy the hearty carbonnade flamande — beef stew cooked with Belgian ale. Street markets brim with tempting culinary delights, guaranteeing that every meal offers a unique taste of Belgian heritage.

The country's atmospheric weather, often capricious yet enchanting, complements its charm. Fluctuating from sunny skies to sudden showers, Belgians embrace this unpredictability with humour, often equipped with a trusty umbrella, and revel in the beauty of a glorious sunset following a rainy day.

LOOKING AT THE EXPERIENTIAL DETAILS

Landing at Brussels Airport, one would notice right away how the airport is modern and efficient, a welcoming gateway to Belgium. Navigating the airport was a breeze. The train station is conveniently located beneath the terminal, which offers a direct connection to various cities across the country.

Brussels greets travellers with its energetic vibe. The transport system throughout the city is excellent, featuring a reliable network of trams, buses and metro lines.

For anyone travelling to Belgium, one of the first stops should be the iconic Grand Place, a Unesco World Heritage site. Surrounded by stunning guildhalls, one can marvel at the intricate architecture while enjoying a café crème at a nearby terrace. One would also notice the Atomium, a unique structure resembling an iron crystal magnified 165



billion times.

From Brussels, Bruges, often referred to as “The Venice of the North,” is also a must-visit. The city's medieval charm will enchant anyone as they walk through cobbled streets and pass picturesque canals. Meandering through the Market Square, taking in the majestic Belfry tower, the experience becomes even better by taking a leisurely boat ride down the canals, which allows one to

soak in the beauty of this fairytale city.

When in Bruges, it is highly recommended to try their famous chocolates. Visiting local chocolatiers is a must, and each tasting becomes a delightful experience, from rich truffles to creamy pralines.

A visit to Belgium is a whirlwind of stunning architecture, mouthwatering cuisine, and a vibrant blend of cultures. Each city offers its own unique charm.