

HM greets Czech President

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Petr Pavel of the Czech Republic on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Petr Pavel, the government and people of the Czech Republic. His Majesty also wished the Czech Republic stability and prosperity and for the bilateral cooperation further development.

SUNRISE - 06:10 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:54 AM

DHUHR - 11:56 PM

ASR - 03:11 PM

MAGHRIB - 05:36 PM

ISHA - 06:47 PM



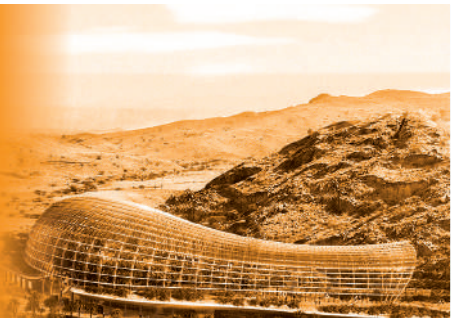
P10

AFGHANS A CROWNED EMERGING CUP CHAMPIONS



P13

MHT UNVEILS INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES AT BOTANIC GARDEN



P20

HOW CALLISTHENICS IS SHAPING OMAN'S FITNESS CULTURE



MUSCAT

OMAN, ESTONIA INK AGREEMENT

The governments of the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Estonia signed an agreement for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income. The agreement was signed on behalf of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman by Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Chairman of the Tax Authority, and on behalf of the Government of Estonia by Ingrid Amer, Ambassador of Estonia to Oman. The agreement aims to regulate tax imposition mechanisms. **SEE ALSO P3**

FIRST \$600M IRON ORE PLANT PLANNED

Under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Vale, a global leader in iron ore production, and Jinnan Iron & Steel Group, a prominent Chinese steelmaker in advanced separation technologies, announced a strategic partnership to establish Oman's first iron ore concentration plant in SOHAR Port and Freezone. With a combined investment surpassing \$600 million, the facility aims to position Oman as a key supplier in the global Direct Reduction grade iron ore market, advancing the country's ambitions in the steel industry. **DETAILS ON P13**

TOKYO

JAPAN VOTERS SPURN PM ISHIBA'S LDP



Japan's ruling coalition is set to lose its parliamentary majority, exit polls for Sunday's general election suggested, raising uncertainty over the make-up of the government of the world's fourth-largest economy. A poll by Nippon TV showed Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which has ruled Japan for almost all of its post-war history, and junior coalition partner Komeito would get 198 of the 465 seats in the lower house of Japan's parliament. That would be well short of the 233 needed to maintain its majority and would be its worst election result since the coalition briefly lost power in 2009.



US Vice-President and Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris speaks during a stop part of the campaign's "Souls to the Polls" push in Philadelphia. — AFP

Algerian President begins state visit today



MUSCAT: President Abdelmadjid Tebboune of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria will pay a three-day state visit to the Sultanate of Oman from today (Monday).

A statement to this effect was issued by the Diwan of Royal Court. It reads as follows: "In affirmation of the fraternal ties binding the Sultanate of Oman and the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune of Algeria will pay a three-day state visit to Oman, starting from today (Monday), October 28.

"The visit comes within the context of the joint cooperation to achieve further welfare and growth in a manner that serves the two countries and meets their aspirations.

"During the visit, the two leaderships will discuss all matters that contribute to the joint Arab action. They will also exchange views on a set of regional and international developments.

"May the Almighty Allah grant the leaderships of the two countries success for the good of their peoples and the Arab and Muslim nations." — ONA



UN to meet over Israel's strike on Iran

OMANI, IRANIAN FMS REVIEW REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

MUSCAT/NEW YORK: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, had a phone call with Dr Abbas Araghchi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, on Sunday. They discussed the latest developments in the region and the Israeli aggression on Iran. Sayyid Badr affirmed the Sultanate of Oman's rejection and condemnation of any actions that undermine the sovereignty of states and the rule of international law or threaten security and stability in the region.

He underscored the importance of enhancing dialogue and diplomatic cooperation between the countries of the region to maintain regional security and prevent escalations. Dr Abbas Araghchi expressed his appreciation for the attitudes of



People demonstrate in support of Palestinians in Gaza, near the Israeli Consulate in Istanbul, Turkiye, on Sunday. — Reuters

the Sultanate of Oman, praising the diplomatic efforts it is undertaking to achieve peace and harmony across the region, stressing the need to enhance joint cooperation to prevent the expansion of conflicts and intensify action and cooperation to address causes of

those conflicts.

The United Nations Security Council is expected to meet on Monday to discuss Israel's attack on Iran, diplomats said on Sunday. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi called on the Security Council to meet over the attack and diplomats said

the council was likely to discuss the situation on Monday. "Israeli regime's actions constitute a grave threat to international peace and security and further destabilise an already fragile region," Araghchi said in a letter to the 15-member council on Saturday. "The Islamic Republic of Iran, in alignment with the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and under international law, reserves its inherent right to legal and legitimate response to these criminal attacks at the appropriate time," he wrote.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appealed "to all parties to cease all military actions, including in Gaza and Lebanon, exert maximum efforts to prevent an all-out regional war and return to the path of diplomacy," his spokesperson said in a statement on Saturday.

SEE ALSO P6

19,360 CITIZENS VOTE TO SELECT TOPICS

MUSCAT: The Secretariat-General of the Council of Ministers announced the outcome of the voting launched to select topics for discussion at the forum titled 'Together We Progress'. The voting process, aimed at activating communication between the government and society, took place between October 16 and 23. The process saw the participation of 19,360 citizens (men and women) from different governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. The topic of 'Economy and Development' secured the largest number of votes (63 per cent), followed by the topic of 'Governorates Development' (25 per cent) and the topic of 'Private Sector and Investment' (12 per cent). Apart from the topics already set in the questionnaire, the topic of 'Social Protection System' topped the list as the most requested for discussion by society. The Secretariat-General of the Council of Ministers will later announce the start of registration for citizens to attend the forum's activities via an electronic link. — ONA

Podcasts dominate in US elections

WASHINGTON: Former president Donald Trump sat down for what could be one of the most consequential interviews of this US election cycle: not with the New York Times or the Washington Post, but with Joe Rogan, host of the world's top podcast. Locked in a too-close-to-call race for the White House, both Trump and Democratic

rival Kamala Harris have in large part eschewed traditional news media to chase new audiences — a sign, experts say, of a shifting US media landscape. Podcasts, once dominated by true crime and lifestyle shows, now offer candidates a highly effective way to target otherwise hard-to-reach audiences, on often friendly terms and with hosts who have

huge influence on their listeners' views. With a growing audience of millions — many of them young and potentially first-time voters — the medium's appeal is clear. Rogan's podcast has a staggering 17.5 million subscribers on YouTube alone, and 14 million on Spotify. The average age of his listeners is just 24, according to Media Monitors. — Reuters

Oman and Algeria share common visions and stances



THE SULTANATE OF OMAN and the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria share stable relations and consensus in visions and stances towards many regional and international issues.

Relations between the two countries are marked by solid cooperation between the government and private sectors in many fields, including energy, renewable energy, mining, industry, petrochemicals, pharmaceutical production, transport, logistics, food security and desert farming

The Sultanate of Oman and the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria join hands in developing commercial and economic relations under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, who will begin a three-day state visit to Oman on Monday, October 28. It is hoped that the two sides will discuss means to step up cooperation in the fields of investment, energy and mining. It is expected to unveil lucrative opportunities, including the prospects of establishing joint projects.

The relations between Oman and Algeria are deep-rooted. The visit made to Algeria by the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said in 1973 contributed to strengthening ties, which were further consolidated through the visit of late Algerian president Chadli Benjedid to Oman in 1990. As part of mutual respect, Algerian Prime Minister Abdelaziz Ben Djerad visited Oman to offer his condolences on the death of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said in January 2020.

JOINT COMMITTEE

Meanwhile, the joint committee formed by the governments of the two countries on February 23, 1991, is expected to play a greater role in developing bilateral cooperation, notably in the fields of energy, renewable energy, mining, industry, petrochemicals, pharmaceutical production, transport, logistics, food security, desert farming, food processing industries, fertilisers, information technology and tourism. During a meeting held in June 2024 in Algeria, the two sides agreed to prepare a joint vision for establishing an investment fund to operate across diverse sectors.

Within the framework of the eighth session of the Joint Committee, a symposium was held for Omani businesspeople and their Algerian counterparts. The symposium saw the participation of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), a number of CEOs and representatives of the "Invest Oman Lounge". The session included B2B meetings during which the two sides explored scopes for establishing joint projects. They also approved a number of



Saif bin Nasser al Badaai, Ambassador of Oman to Algeria said the relations between Oman and Algeria are deep-rooted, and the two countries have insightful political visions and coordination on Arab and international issues. — **ONA**

recommendations and agreed to follow up their implementation.

The volume of trade exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria amounted to about RO 41 million by the end of 2023. This figure reflects a good level of trade cooperation compared to other Arab countries in North Africa. It is also an incentive for further growth and partnership in various economic fields. The total exports of Oman to Algeria until the end of July 2024 amounted to (RO 37,348,252), while the value of Oman's imports from Algeria during the end of July 2024 amounted to (RO 509,272), and the value of re-exports to Algeria until the end of the same month stood at (RO 375,063).

There are a number of joint ventures that represent the economic cooperation between the two sides, such as the cooperation between Algerian National Hydrocarbons Company "Sonatrach" and Bahwan Group to produce ammonia and urea in the city of Arzew in Oran Province, with total investments amounting to approximately (\$3 billion), as the contribution of Bahwan Group stands at 51 per cent. This project is considered the most important in the economic partnership between Oman and Algeria, and it reflects the commitment of the two countries to upgrade cooperation in the fields of industry and energy.

ENERGY SECTOR

In addition, "Abraaj" and "OQ" are striving to set up investment projects in the energy sector in Algeria. The Sultanate of Oman and the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria are keen to boost trade and economic relations, including exploring investment in areas of energy and mining, as well as pharmaceutical industries, taking into consideration the remarkable

development witnessed by the pharmaceutical sector in Algeria. Previously, Algeria covered only 15 to 20 per cent of its pharmaceutical needs, but this figure has now risen to about 80 per cent, making it one of the countries exporting advanced medicines such as insulin. This sector represents a promising opportunity for cooperation between Oman and Algeria, as Oman can benefit from Algerian expertise in developing pharmaceutical industries and expanding export markets.

In the agricultural sector, desert farming in Algeria is one of the sectors with promising growth, as 3 million hectares have been prepared for agriculture in the long term, and the current project aims to cultivate one million hectares. Agricultural products in the Algerian desert are characterised by high quality. As for fertilisers, which represent a strategic product for the Algerian economy, Algeria exports quantities of them to African countries, in addition to a huge project to produce phosphate, which makes it one of the largest producers of phosphate in the world with an annual production of up to 1.5 million tonnes.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

In the field of renewable energy — one of the promising areas of cooperation between the two countries — Algeria has recently begun setting up major projects in this field in cooperation with the European Union. Therefore, the two countries can exchange expertise and technologies in developing renewable energy projects, such as solar and wind energy, and explore joint investment opportunities in this vital sector, which represents one of the most prominent future solutions to meet sustainable energy needs.

On the cultural and scientific side, Algeria offered for the first time this year 10 PhD scholarships and 25 Bachelor's scholarships for Omani students. Meanwhile, the Omani Programme for Cultural and Scientific Cooperation offers three study seats for Algerian students. The Omani programme is currently being developed to increase the number of scholarships allocated to Algeria to 10 seats. The number of Algerian community members in the Sultanate of Oman is estimated at about (2,469) until mid-2024, including about 400 engineers and technicians in the oil and energy sectors.

Saif bin Nasser al Badaai, Ambassador of Oman to Algeria, said: "The relations between Oman and Algeria are deep-rooted, and the two countries have insightful political visions and coordination on Arab and international issues. Therefore, this visit, the first of its kind, can be described as a historic visit, and it would strengthen bilateral relations in the future and open up wider horizons, thanks to the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Abdelmadjid Tebboune and their keenness to push the bilateral partnership forward." He said that this visit will boost the relations between the two countries in a way that serves their peoples.

The Ambassador added that since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in the early 1970s, they have been witnessing continuous development, as the agreement to establish the joint committee was signed between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria. He explained that the committee held eight sessions, the last of which was in the Algerian capital last June.

FIRST STAGES

The Ambassador stated that in July 2024, it was announced that negotiations were progressing to establish a Hyundai factory in Algeria. The project aims to establish a line for manufacturing vehicle bodies and a line for painting operations. The project is scheduled to produce, in its first stages, three models of passenger cars, two models of utility vehicles, and one model of electric cars. The number of companies registered in the Sultanate of Oman with Algerian participation until the end of 2023 amounted to (423), compared to (251) companies in 2022, marking a growth rate of (68.5 per cent), he further added.

Saif bin Nasser al Badaai, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, concluded his statement saying: "Culture is the essence of the Omani vision, and we are keen to place the presence of Oman in all Algerian cultural institutions and spaces as one of our most important goals. Therefore, we sought to allocate a special corner for it in the library of the Grand Mosque of Algiers, which was opened this year (2024). Oman also recently presented valuable books for the mosque. We were keen to have the Omani Encyclopedia placed on the shelves of the library of the Algerian Supreme Council for the Arabic Language this year as well". — **ONA**

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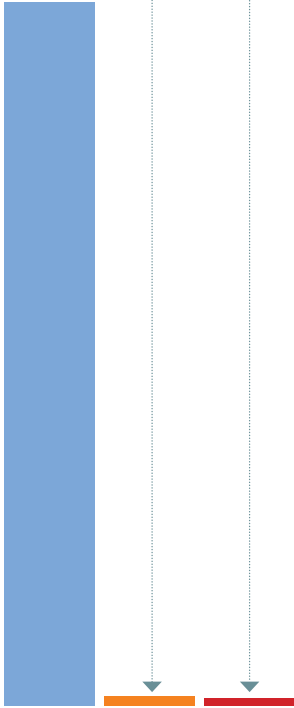
RO 37,348,252

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Foreign Minister receives copies of credentials of ambassadors

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received at the general diwan of the Foreign Ministry on Sunday copies of credentials of several ambassadors from Arab and foreign countries appointed to the Sultanate of Oman.

The ambassadors were Abdi Aden Korio, Ambassador of the Republic of Kenya; Tharwah Neimat, Ambassador of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; and Warunee Pan-krajang, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Thailand.

Sayyid Badr wished the ambassadors success in carrying out their duties and expressed hopes for further development and growth in bilateral relations with their respective countries.

The meetings were attended by several officials from the Foreign Ministry. — **ONA**

OMAN, CAMBODIA STRENGTHEN TIES IN RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

MUSCAT: Represented by the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, the Sultanate of Oman held official talks in Muscat with the Kingdom of Cambodia to discuss means of enhancing cooperation in the fields of endowments and religious affairs.

The Omani side at the talks was headed by Dr Mohammed Said Al Maamari, Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs, while Dr Osman Hassan, Prime Minister in charge of Islamic Affairs in the Kingdom of Cambodia, headed his country's side. — **ONA**

OMAN, ESTONIA INK PACT ON AVOIDANCE OF DOUBLE TAXATION

MUSCAT: The governments of the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Estonia signed an agreement on Sunday in Muscat Governorate for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income. The agreement was signed on behalf of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman by Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Chairman of the Tax Authority, and on behalf of the Government of Estonia by Ingrid Amer, Ambassador of Estonia to Oman. The agreement aims to regulate tax imposition mechanisms and provide legal protection for investors from double taxation.

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 27

The Social Protection Fund (SPF) has revised the eligibility criteria for disability benefits. This change follows a ministerial decision issued by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aafi, Minister of Energy and

Minerals, Chairman of the Board of Directors of SPF.

Under the new regulations, individuals with a permanent disability who hold a disability card issued by the Ministry of Social Development may qualify for the benefit.

Eligible conditions include

Autism Spectrum Disorder, Down Syndrome, mental disability with an IQ score below 70 (as determined by a standardised IQ test), visual disability with vision of 2/60 or less in both eyes (even with corrective aids), hearing disability with a hearing threshold of 61 dB or higher in both ears (despite

corrective aids), as well as severe physical disability assessed through functional performance.

These amendments also encompass individuals with any other disability as determined by the Council, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Development.

Women's endowment is a long-term investment

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

WOMEN'S ENDOWMENT represents a long-term investment in human development, as it contributes to empowering women to be more independent and self-reliant, benefiting their families and society as a whole, according to Rashida bint Sulaiman al Hasaniyah, a religious guide and representative of Women's Endowment.

Speaking at the Women's Endowment Forum organised by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs at the lecture hall at Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque on Sunday, Rashida stressed that the endowment contributes to instilling the values of giving and solidarity across generations. This enhances the sustainability of development and ensures continuity of benefit to society over time.

The forum aimed to introduce women's endowment for education and guidance, raise awareness of partnership in women's endowment, contribute to the share of women's endowment, and provide an appropriate environment for women to activate their religious roles.

The three-day event, organised by the Women's Education and Guidance Department at the Ministry under the slogan 'Year of the Mosque', coincides with celebrations of Omani Women's Day and supports women in their educational and legal guidance journey. It emphasises the importance of endowment as a powerful and influential tool in building generations and raising the youth.

Highlighting the importance of endowment, Rashida said that women's endowment represents an aspect of community solidarity that our true faith calls for. The endowment is a sustainable source of funding and support that enhances women's capabilities, qualifies them to face the challenges of the era, and enables them

The forum aimed to introduce women's endowment for education and guidance as well as raise awareness of endowment partnership

to contribute to the development of their families and society.

"The importance of women's endowment does not lie only in its role as a means of educational and advisory support, but its impact extends to future generations. Thanks to this endowment, generations of women are being built who are capable of achieving success and contributing to community development," Al Hasani added.

The forum will continue on its second and third days with four dialogue sessions covering the role of legitimate educational endowment for women in carrying out its pioneering role, honourable historical

models of legitimate educational endowment for women and its role in the renaissance of society in various countries, prospects for developing legitimate educational endowment for women to meet the needs of the modern era, and financing legitimate educational endowment for women, along with its challenges and solutions.

The opening was presided over by Shaikha Tamima bint Mohammed al Mahrouqiyah, Adviser to the President of the National Records and Archives Authority for Planning and Development, in the presence of women from various governmental and private bodies.

SPOTLIGHT



MARTIAL ARTS

SIHAM AL SAIDI

MARTIAL ARTS are often praised for promoting discipline, focus and self-defence. However, questions arise: Are they truly instilling confidence in young minds, or are they inadvertently fostering a readiness for conflict? Taekwondo, one of the most popular self-defence sports, is celebrated for instilling discipline, confidence and respect in its practitioners. This duality sparks debate among parents and coaches about the positive and potentially concerning impacts of martial arts on children. For some, martial arts are a safe space for children to build confidence. Um Fahad, a mother of two, shares, “My son was shy and struggled with self-esteem. Through martial arts, he’s become more confident and focused in both school and social situations.” She believes that martial arts encourage self-control, resilience and respect — qualities crucial for personal growth. Coach Mohammed al Kharousi, a Taekwondo coach from Al Suwaiq Champions for Martial Arts with over 10 years of experience, supports this view. “Martial arts teach children that physical strength is a tool for self-defence, not aggression. They learn discipline, respect and emotional management. Confidence grows from knowing they can defend themselves if necessary, but they’re also taught never to misuse this skill,” he explains. Al Kharousi highlights that martial arts offer an outlet for energy while cultivating self-discipline and confidence. However, not all parents share this optimism.

Nora al Saidi, the mother of a 9-year-old, is hesitant about enrolling her child in martial arts. “While I understand the benefits, I worry it might make him think aggression is an answer to conflicts,” she says, reflecting a common concern that children might misinterpret physical training as a licence for aggressive behaviour.

Psychologist Afrah al Balushi adds that without proper guidance, martial arts training could lead to overconfidence or competitive aggression. “If not balanced with clear instructions on when and where to apply their skills, children might develop a ‘fight first’ mentality, especially if they lack emotional maturity,” she cautions.

The influence of martial arts on young minds often depends on the values imparted by instructors.

Coach Al Kharousi stresses the crucial role of mentors: “We teach children that martial arts are about self-respect, not dominance. Parents should seek schools that emphasise mental and emotional growth, not just physical prowess.” He even plans to visit schools to demonstrate how Taekwondo can empower children to defend themselves against bullying, an initiative gaining popularity within the educational community. Ultimately, martial arts

like Taekwondo can be powerful tools for building confidence in young people.

However, thoughtful guidance from both parents and coaches is essential to ensure that martial arts reinforce positive behaviour, helping children grow into confident, compassionate individuals.

KOREAN EMBASSY HOLDS RECEPTION ON NATIONAL DAY



MUSCAT: The Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Muscat held a reception on Sunday evening on the occasion of the Korean National Day and the Republic Armed Forces Day. The ceremony, which was held at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, was attended by a number of officials, heads of diplomatic missions accredited to the Sultanate of Oman, and a number of officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. — **ONA**

Sarb season boosts tourism

BY BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, OCT 27

DHOFAR Municipality is making the most of the Sarb season to drive tourism and economic activities, spotlighting the governorate's unique appeal during this enchanting period. The 'Sarb' season, which began from September 21 and extends for three months, follows Dhofar's famed khareef season. Locally known as the spring season, Sarb offers clear skies, bright sunshine, and a mild climate, providing the perfect setting for domestic tourists to explore Dhofar's vibrant landscapes.

Characterised by low humidity, clear skies, and blooming flowers, Sarb season transforms the governorate's terrain, unveiling vast green plains and gentle sea waves that attract families and nature lovers alike. The governorate becomes a magnet for tourists seeking to escape the heat and enjoy Dhofar's picturesque beauty and tranquil environment.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohsen al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, emphasised the importance of international events during Sarb. He noted that plans are already in motion to host global professional competitions next year, building on the success of past editions. This strategic focus aims to strengthen tourism and stimulate economic growth, encouraging more international visitors to experience the unique charm of Dhofar during the Sarb season.

Beyond its tourism appeal, Sarb is a critical economic season for Dhofar's local communities. Farmers, fishermen, and livestock breeders benefit from the period's favourable conditions, which enhance agricultural productivity and marine yields. Mountainous and plain areas reliant on seasonal autumn rains experience a surge in crop harvests, particularly corn, local beans, and cucumbers. Honey production also sees a boost during Sarb, along with an increase in high-nutrient fish varieties such as Sharkha, Kanaad, sardines and Shaari.

One of the hallmark traditions of the Sarb season is 'Khateel Al Ibil,' the springtime



Sarb offers clear skies, bright sunshine, and a mild climate, to explore Dhofar's vibrant landscapes

grazing ritual. During this period, camel owners transport their camels from plains or sheltered areas behind the mountains, known locally as 'Al Qatn,' to reopened grazing lands. The ritual is a vibrant display of traditional culture, accompanied by poetic chants and age-old customs that reflect the deep cultural roots of Dhofar's people.

Among the must-visit areas during the Sarb season is Jabjat, an area celebrated for its scenic plains and mesmerising natural beauty. As Sarb progresses, the lush greenery of the plains gradually shifts to a golden hue, creating a stunning visual spectacle. Visitors find solace in the tranquillity of Jabjat, which embodies the season's magic and serenity, leaving them with an indescribable sense of peace.

Dhofar Municipality's efforts to enhance the Sarb season showcase its commitment to promoting the governorate as a year-round destination, leveraging its natural beauty and cultural richness to attract both domestic and international visitors. Through a blend of tourism activities, traditional events, and economic opportunities, Dhofar is poised to make the most of its spring season and further strengthen its tourism and economic prospects.

OSFA HOLDS LABOUR LAW WORKSHOP FOR ITS MEMBERS

MUSCAT: The Oman Switzerland Friendship Association (OSFA) held an exclusive workshop for its members covering the key changes in Oman's Labour Law on October 17.

Coinciding with Omani Women's Day, the workshop saw Raya al Harthy as a guest presenter, and partner of the law firm Trowers and Hamlins, specialising in International Dispute Resolution and Litigation. The workshop was held at The Zubair Corporation and was available online for Switzerland-based members.

Those attending were treated to an openly interactive and informative workshop from Raya, covering aspects such as Omanisation, female-specific laws, Special Leave, Termination, Expat Employees, and the introduction of the Social Protection Fund (formerly known as PASI). Hani al Zubair, Chairman



Participants at the Labour Law workshop held by OSFA in Muscat.

of the Oman Switzerland Friendship Association, extended his gratitude to Raya for her time towards sharing her inputs to the workshop, and to Majid al Touqi, partner in Trowers and Hamlins, for attending the session and adding great value to the discussion.

OSFA was established in 2016, with a vision to implement sustainable programmes to improve mutual knowledge and understanding between the Sultanate of Oman and Switzerland. Over the years, it has created oppor-

tunities for its members to exchange ideas, learn from experiences, share expertise, and create friendships, subsequently encouraging the social and economic development of both countries.

Anyone interested in becoming a member of the Association and being eligible to attend future workshops and events, can visit [www.omanswiss.org](#) to register. Membership is open to anyone residing or working in either Oman or Switzerland (except those working for government entities).

Government Communication Centre reviews Social Protection Scheme

MUSCAT: The Government Communication Centre organised a media meeting in cooperation with the Social Protection Fund for active news networks.

The meeting reviewed the social protection scheme, its operating mechanisms, details, the mechanism of providing support and services, and its diverse benefits. A presentation held during the meeting highlighted the Social Protection Fund's role in enhancing the social and economic stability of the beneficiaries.

The presentation also underscored the Fund's role in achieving sustainable



The presentation underscored the Fund's role in achieving sustainable development.

development.

The meeting comes within the framework of the efforts exerted by the Government Communication Centre to enhance transparency

and interaction between government institutions and the media, and achieve greater integration in transferring information and rendering services to the public. — **ONA**

INTERNATIONAL TENDER NOTICE


Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries
Wealth and Water Resources

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following International Tenders:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are Eligible to Participate	Tender Document Fee (R.O)
794/2023/ MAFWR/ HQ-90- Recall -1	MAINTENANCE WORKS FOR WADI DAYQAH DAM AT WILAYAT QURIYAT IN MUSCAT GOVERNORATE SULTANATE OF OMAN	Monday 14/10/2024	Sunday 3/11/2024	Monday 25/11/2024	Specialized companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board with excellent	(80/-) Omani riyals for international & local companies ----- (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
367/2024/ MAFWR/ HQ-24- Recall -1	CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR DESIGN OF MARINE RESEARCH CENTRE AT KHASAB, MUSANDAM GOVERNORATE SULTANATE OF OMAN	Thursday 17/10/2024	Thursday 7/11/2024	Wednesday 27/11/2024	Specialized companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board with excellent and first grades	(300/-) Omani riyals for international & local companies ----- (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
109/2024/ MAFWR/ HQ-24- Recall -1	THE DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION AND DEPLOYMENT OF A MARINE FARM ARTIFICIAL REEF COMPLEX IN AL MUSSANAH & SAHAM OF THE SULTANATE OF OMAN	Sunday 27/10/2024	Tuesday 5/11/2024	Sunday 17/11/2024	Specialized companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board with excellent	(40/-) Omani riyals for international & local companies ----- (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration for local companies , and for International company that not have head quarters in the Sultanate of Oman should attach Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman (as required in the tender)and addressed to the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: **+968 24402200** or etenderhd@gstb.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

WORLD

SHORTTAKES



Rescue personnel and residents search for landslide casualties in Batangas province, Philippines. — Reuters file photo

PHILIPPINES STORM DEATH TOLL RISES TO 110

MANILA: Rescuers in the Philippines searched a lake and scoured isolated villages on Sunday to locate dozens of missing people as the death toll from Tropical Storm Trami hit 110. Trami rammed into the Philippines on October 24, forcing over half a million people to flee their homes, while at least 42 people remain missing in the storm's aftermath, according to the national disaster agency.

The agency announced on Sunday night that at least 110 people were reported dead, though no provincial breakdown was provided for the death toll. Trami is the deadliest storm to hit the Southeast Asian country so far this year "especially with the reported number of casualties", Ariel Nepomuceno in the Office of Civil Defence said. Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos vowed on Sunday that help was underway for the residents of Camarines Sur province, located in the hardest-hit region of Bicol. — AFP



Thai oarsmen row royal barges during the Royal Barge Procession along the Chao Phraya River in front of Wat Arun in Bangkok. — AFP

THAIS TURN OUT FOR ROYAL BARGE PAGEANTRY

BANGKOK: Thousands of well-wishers lined the banks of Bangkok's Chao Phraya River on Sunday to watch King Maha Vajiralongkorn ride a glittering royal barge procession to mark his 72nd birthday. A flotilla of 52 ornately decorated boats, paddled by more than 2,000 oarsmen decked out in scarlet and gold, carried the king and Queen Suthida in formation through the heart of the Thai capital to a Buddhist ceremony at Wat Arun, the city's ancient Temple of Dawn.

Royal barge processions date back hundreds of years, but are held rarely, saved for the most significant occasions — most recently, the king's coronation in 2019. During the 70-year reign of the previous king, Bhumibol Adulyadej, only 16 barge processions were held. King Vajiralongkorn turned 72 in July, completing his "sixth cycle" in the 12-year astrological calendar — a milestone regarded by Thais as important and auspicious. Normally the intricately ornamented barges are kept in a museum. — AFP

JAPAN RULING PARTY PROJECTED TO MISS MAJORITY IN ELECTION

TOKYO: Japan's ruling party fell short of a majority for the first time since 2009 in snap elections on Sunday, media projections showed, in a blow to new Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba. Worse still, it was touch and go whether Ishiba's conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) could secure a parliamentary majority with its long-term coalition partner, the Komeito party.

"We are receiving severe

judgement," Ishiba told national broadcaster NHK late on Sunday.

Voters "expressed their strong desire for the LDP to do some reflection and become a party that will act in line with the people's will," he said. Former defence minister Ishiba, 67, called the election after being narrowly selected last month to lead the LDP, which has governed Japan for almost all of the past 70 years. But voters

in the world's fourth-largest economy have been rankled by rising prices and the fallout from a party slush fund scandal that helped sink previous premier Fumio Kishida.

Footage from the LDP headquarters after the polls closed on Sunday showed gloomy faces as the projections based on exit polls said Ishiba's justice and agriculture ministers were likely to lose their seats — AFP



A woman walks with children while crossing from Lebanon into Syria on foot at the Masnaa border crossing. — Reuters

NEW EVACUATION CALL FOR SOUTH LEBANON VILLAGES

BEIRUT: The Israeli military on Sunday told residents of several villages in south Lebanon to leave immediately, warning that it would strike Hezbollah targets there. "For your safety, you must evacuate your homes immediately and move to the north of the Awali River," military spokesman Avichay Adraee said in a post on X that included names of more than a dozen villages in south Lebanon.

Lebanon's health ministry said at least eight people were killed and 25 others wounded Sunday in an Israeli strike near the southern city of Sidon. The

strike hit a densely-populated area in a Sidon suburb that saw an influx of families displaced from areas further south. It was the first strike there since the Israel-Hezbollah war erupted last month.

"The Israeli enemy's raid on Haret Saida resulted in a... toll of eight killed," the health ministry said, revising an earlier toll of two dead. The official National News Agency said a child was among the victims. Surrounding shops and buildings were also damaged as paramedics rushed to the site of the attack to search for survivors. — AFP

Israeli strikes kill dozens in north Gaza

CAIRO: Israeli military strikes killed at least 45 Palestinians across the Gaza Strip on Sunday, most of them in the north of the enclave, Palestinian health officials said, as efforts to secure a ceasefire in the more than year-long war resumed in Qatar.

The directors of the CIA and Israel's Mossad intelligence agency will meet with Qatar's prime minister on Sunday in Doha, an official briefed on the talks said. The negotiations will seek a short-term ceasefire and the release of some captives in exchange for Israel's release of Palestinian prisoners, the official said.

The talks aim to get Israel and Hamas to agree to a halt in fighting for less than a month in the hope it would lead to a more permanent ceasefire. A Palestinian official close to the mediation effort said: "I expect Hamas would listen to the new offers, but it remains determined that any agreement must end the war and get Israeli forces out of Gaza."

The death toll from Israel's retaliatory campaign in Gaza is approaching 43,000, Gaza health officials say, with the densely populated enclave in ruins. At least 43 of those killed on Sunday were in northern Gaza, where Israeli troops have returned to root out Hamas fighters who it says have regrouped there. Twenty people were killed following an airstrike on houses in Jabalia, the largest of the Gaza Strip's eight historic refugee camps, which has been the focus of an Israeli military offensive for more than three weeks, medics and the Palestinian official news agency Wafa said.

An Israeli airstrike on a school sheltering displaced Palestinian families in Shati



Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli strike on a school sheltering displaced people, in Gaza City. — Reuters

camp in Gaza City, killed nine people and wounded 20 others, with many in critical condition, medics said. Footage circulated on Palestinian media showed people rushing to the bomb site to help evacuate the casualties. Bodies were scattered on the ground, while some carried wounded children in their arms before loading them in a vehicle.

Three local journalists were among those killed at the school in Shati — Saed

Radwan, head of digital media at Hamas Al-Aqsa television, Hanin Baroud, and Hamza Abu Selmeya.

The Gaza government media office described their deaths as an "assassination." This raised the number of Palestinian journalists killed by Israeli fire since October 7, 2023 to 180, it added. On Sunday, Israel's military said it had killed more than 40 gunmen in the Jabalia area in the past 24 hours. — Reuters

TRUCK ACCIDENT

Uganda fuel tanker explosion toll up to 24



The death toll following a fuel tanker explosion near the Ugandan capital Kampala last week has risen to 24, the government said on Sunday. The "devastating accident" in the town of Kigogwa, about 25 kilometres north of Kampala, resulted in "11 reported dead at the scene", said Communications Minister Godfrey Kabyanga. He added that "13 more have since died in Kiruddu hospital and Bombo military hospital bringing the number to 24". — AFP

KING'S TOURS

King Charles to resume foreign tours



King Charles III's cancer diagnosis will not prevent him flying abroad next year for foreign visits, a Buckingham Palace official said, as the monarch wrapped up a tour of Australia and Samoa. "We're now working on a pretty normal looking full overseas tour programme for next year, which is a high for us to end on, to know that we can be thinking in those terms," the official said late on Saturday. — AFP

REFORMS ELECTION

Uzbekistan set to elect loyal parliament



Uzbekistan votes in a parliamentary election that, in the absence of opposition parties, is certain to produce a legislature loyal to President Shavkat Mirziyoyev despite constitutional reforms bringing some procedural changes. The main change introduced under the 2023 constitutional reform is a switch to a mixed election system, in which only half of the 150 deputies are elected by voting for political parties. The other 75 candidates will be elected individually. — Reuters

SEEKINGSTABILITY



A man casts his ballot at a polling station to vote in Bulgaria's general election in Sofia. — AFP

BULGARIA HOLDS ANOTHER SNAP ELECTION

SOPIA: Bulgarians were voting on Sunday in their seventh snap election in four years, but opinion surveys suggest it is unlikely to break a political deadlock that has slowed economic reforms in the European Union's poorest member state. Bulgaria has been plagued by short-lived governments since 2020, when anti-graft protests helped to end a coalition led by the centre-right GERB party.

Latest opinion polls suggest that, once again, no single party will win a parliamentary majority, setting the stage for a fresh round of difficult and prolonged coalition talks.

"People want security and stability. We have sunny weather today, so people should go out and vote. We will see what will happen after the polls close," GERB leader Boyko Borissov told reporters after casting his ballot.

Bulgaria needs a period of stable, well-functioning government to accelerate the flow of EU funds into its creaking infrastructure and nudge it towards adoption of the euro. — Reuters



THOUSANDS RALLY AGAINST RACISM

A woman holds a Cape Verde flag next to the photograph of Moniz during a demonstration against police violence following the fatal shooting of 43-year-old Cape Verde-born Portuguese resident Odair Moniz, in Lisbon. Police said that Odair Moniz was shot dead while trying to escape after attacking officers with a knife. — Reuters

Putin says Moscow will respond if West helps Ukraine to strike deep

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin said on Sunday that Russia's defence ministry was working on different ways to respond if the United States and its Nato allies help Ukraine to strike deep into Russia with long-range Western missiles.

The 2-1/2-year-old Ukraine war has triggered the biggest confrontation between Russia and the West since the depths of the Cold War, and Russian officials say the war is now entering its most dangerous phase.

Russia has been signalling to the United States and its allies for weeks that if they give permission to Ukraine to strike deep into Rus-

sian territory with Western-supplied missiles, then Moscow will consider it a major escalation.

Putin said on September 12 that Western approval for such a step would mean "the direct involvement of Nato countries, the United States and European countries in the war in Ukraine" because Nato military infrastructure and personnel would have to be involved in the targeting and firing of the missiles.

Putin said that it was too early to say exactly how Russia would react to such a move but that Moscow would have to respond accordingly and different options were being examined.



Russia's President Vladimir Putin attends a meeting on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Kazan. — Reuters file photo

"(The Russian defence ministry) is thinking about how to respond to the possible long-range strikes on Russian territory, it will offer a range of responses," Putin told Russian state TV's top Kremlin reporter, Pavel Zarubin.

With Russia advancing at the fastest rate in eastern Ukraine since the first months of the war, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has been pleading with the West to allow Kyiv to fire deep into Russia with Western missiles.

The United States has not said publicly if it will allow Ukraine to strike Russia, but some US officials are deeply sceptical that doing so would make a significant differ-

ence in the war. Ukrainian forces already strike deep into Russia on a regular basis with long-range drones. Putin casts the war as a battle between Russia and the declining West.

Ukraine and its Western allies say Putin unleashed an imperial-style war against its smaller neighbour and have repeatedly said that if Russia wins the war then autocratic countries across the world will be emboldened.

Just weeks before the US presidential election, Putin changed Russia's nuclear doctrine in what the Kremlin said was an attempt to signal Russia's concern over Western discussions. — Reuters

Trump takes election pitch to storied NY arena

DONALD TRUMP rallies supporters on Sunday at an iconic New York arena while Kamala Harris goes neighbourhood to neighbourhood in Philadelphia just over a week before America votes in an extraordinarily close White House race. Trump's gathering at the nearly 20,000-seat Madison Square Garden is expected to draw a blitz of coverage in the Republican's home metropolis, which is still very much a Democratic stronghold.

Both candidates are making closing pitches to voters in one of America's most divisive and suspense-filled electoral fights, with polls suggesting a dead heat ahead of the November 5 vote.

Harris, 60, has planned a packed day of campaigning in the biggest city in must-win Pennsylvania, including stops at a Black church and barbershop as well as a Puerto Rican restaurant.

A senior Harris campaign official said Sunday's visit was set to be the vice-president's 14th trip to Pennsylvania since she jumped to the top of the ticket after President Joe Biden's shock withdrawal in July.

Harris will go before supporters to make what her campaign called her "closing argument" on Tuesday in Washington at the park where Trump rallied supporters before the January 6 riot.

Trump's rally at a venue dubbed "The World's Most Famous Arena" is set to include backers and surrogates like billionaire Elon Musk, who has personally hit the campaign trail for the ex-president. It is a storied arena in US sporting and cultural life that has hosted the Rolling Stones, Madonna and U2 plus several Democratic and Republican presidential conventions over the decades.

The latest high wattage surrogate for Harris, former first lady Michelle Obama, aired her "genuine fear" on Saturday that Trump could retake the White House. She



Police officers stand outside Madison Square Garden on the day of a rally for Republican presidential nominee and former US president Donald Trump, in New York. — Reuters

said Harris would be an "extraordinary president," but Obama also spoke of a sense of frustration and anxiety that few on the vice-president's team dare express after she lost some momentum in recent weeks. "My hope about Kamala is also accompanied by some genuine fear," Obama said, ripping into Trump's record and asking, "Why is this race even close?"

With more than 40 million people already casting early ballots, Americans are deciding between electing the country's first-ever woman president or the oldest

major candidate ever.

Trump, 78, still refuses to accept his defeat in the vote four years ago and is expected to reject the result if he loses again — potentially pitching the United States into chaos. Trump swept Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania — three usually Democratic states — in his shock victory in 2016 only to see Biden reclaim them four years later. He hopes to claw back one or more of the trio, and win the so-called Sun Belt swing states in the country's south to propel him back into power. — AFP

Georgian ruling party wins parliamentary election

TBILISI: The ruling Georgian Dream party received more than 54% of the vote in Georgia's parliamentary election on Saturday, the electoral commission said on Sunday, though the outcome was disputed by opposition parties. The result, with over 99% of precincts counted, dealt a blow to pro-Western Georgians who had cast the vote as a choice between a ruling party that has deepened ties with Russia and an opposition aiming to fast-track integration with the European Union.

Three separate monitoring missions - the 57-nation Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE); US nonprofit groups the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI); and a Georgian election monitor - all reported significant violations

ISFED, a Georgian election monitoring group, said its observers had filed over 200 complaints to electoral authorities, although it said it had not seen significant violations in the counting of votes

during Saturday's vote.

The violations, including ballot-stuffing, bribery, voter intimidation and physical violence near polling stations, could have had an impact on the results, the groups said on Sunday.

However, the three monitoring missions all stopped short of saying the elections had been stolen or falsified - claims on which opposition groups doubled down on Sunday.

"We continue to express deep concerns about the democratic backsliding in Georgia," said Antonio López-Istúriz White, head of the European Parliament's delegation to the OSCE mission.

"The conduct of yesterday's election is unfortunately evidence to that effect," he told a news briefing.

ISFED, a Georgian election

monitoring group, said its observers had filed over 200 complaints to electoral authorities, although it said it had not seen significant violations in the counting of votes, most of which were tallied electronically. The electoral commission and Georgian Dream party did not respond immediately to requests for comment on the allegations, but on Saturday both hailed a free and fair election.

Electoral commission data showed it winning by huge margins of up to 90% in some rural areas, though it underperformed in bigger cities. "It is a rare case in the world that the same party achieves such success in such a difficult situation - this is a good indicator of the talent of the Georgian people," Ivanishvili told cheering supporters on Saturday night. — AFP

OPINION

Why literary awards still matter



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is Assoc Prof, Dept of English Language and Translation, SQU

THE 2024 Nobel Prize in literature was awarded to South Korean novelist and short story writer Han Kang. The Noble Prize committee, in its remarks on the award, said that Kang was awarded for her “intense poetic prose that confronts historical traumas and exposes the fragility of human life”. She is the 18th woman to have won this award. At a time when global recognition can come in many forms, even the Nobel Prize seems to have lost some of its value and sheen. This is owing to two important reasons: the access of a variety of opinions on the Internet makes one particular award less consequential, and there is a general distrust of western-based organisations which are not always seen to be objective in their evaluations and worldview. For example, in the sciences, a common criticism is the lack of diversity in terms of gender and region – in the STEM areas,12 per cent of awardees have been women so far and 13 per cent of awards have gone to universities in the developing world, according to PBS (Public Broadcasting Service). The picture in literature is not very

different. 18 women have won the award since its inception in 1901. 80 per cent of all the awards have been to writers in European languages, with French on top of the list. But in spite of the general skepticism surrounding these awards, they still matter – largely because they lead to exposure and visibility. Just being nominated for a literary prize, studies show, increases readership by at least 60 per cent. The exposure can be seen by the book’s reach – it is stocked at airports, it becomes popular on social media interactive sites like Goodreads, and it begins to be talked about by students and teachers in literature classes, maybe even beyond. Literary prizes are also important because they shed light on a particular region and its people with Kang’s award, for example, a whole milieu of Korean literature will share the limelight, along with the author’s own novels like ‘The vegetarian’ and ‘Human acts’. A CNN report stated that these novels had sold more than 70,000 units within the first 12 hours of winning the award. It is a fact that even Kang recognises: “I grew up with Korean literature, which I feel very close to. So I hope this news is

Studies show that being nominated for a literary prize increases readership by at least 60 per cent. Awards themselves are valuable because they lend credibility to writers from across the world and reflect on the variety of cultures around us

nice for Korean literature readers, and my friends and writers,” she said after the announcement was made. The literary award also comes at a time when there is increasing interest in all things Korean – K-pop, Korean drama and Korean cosmetics have all been ruling on multiple spaces and there is curiosity about Korean society and culture. An award to Kang contextualises this interest even more by giving a background, history and insight into this world and its people. Without the vital role played by translators, these works would never be known to an international, largely English readership. It is in recognition of this fact that the Booker prize for literature has a specific route for literature in translation as well. This is why these awards matter. Conversations about visibility and recognition are important to ensure that there is wider equality and representation in institutions that establish such awards as the Nobel prize. But the awards themselves are valuable because they lend credibility to writers from across the world and reflect on the variety of cultures around us that are waiting to be explored.

SAHARA FLOODS BRING MOROCCO BACK TO LIFE

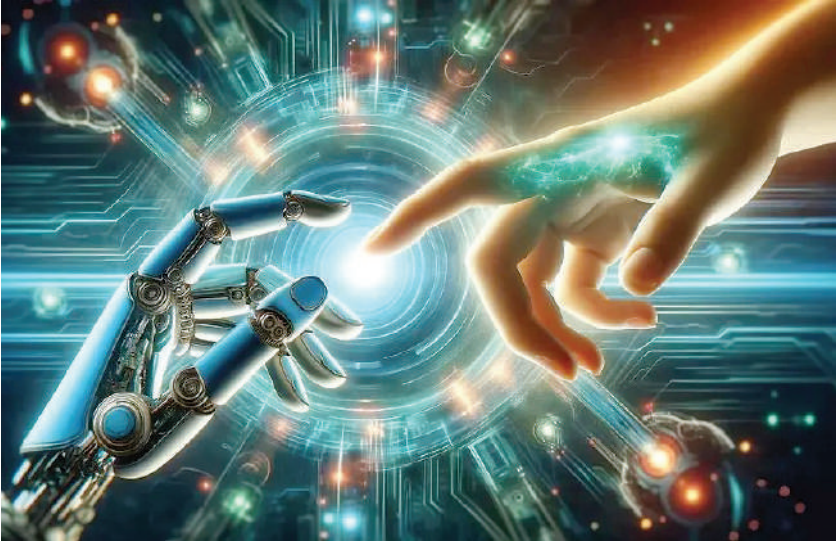
HICHAM RAFIH

In Morocco’s southeastern desert, a rare down-pour has brought lakes and ponds back to life, with locals -- and tourists -- hailing it as a gift from the heavens. In Merzouga, an attractive tourist town some 600 kilometres southeast of the capital Rabat, the once-parched golden dunes are now dotted with replenished ponds and lakes. “We’re incredibly happy about the recent rains,” said Youssef Ait Chiga, a local tour guide leading a group of German tourists to Yasmina Lake nestled amidst Merzouga’s dunes. Khalid Skandouli, another tour guide, said the rain has drawn even more visitors to the tourist area, now particularly eager to witness this odd transformation. With him, Laetitia Chevallier, a French tourist and regular visitor to the region, said the rainfall has proved a “blessing from the sky”. “The desert became green again, the animals have food again, and the plants and palm trees came back to life,” she said. Locals said the basin had been barren for nearly 20 years. Last year was Morocco’s driest in 80 years, with a 48-per cent drop in rainfall, according to an October report from the General Directorate of Meteorology (DGM). But in September, torrential rains triggered floods in southern parts of Morocco, killing at least 28 people, according to authorities. The rare heavy rains come as the North African kingdom grapples with its worst drought in nearly 40 years, threatening its economically crucial agriculture sector. Neighbouring Algeria saw similar rain and flooding in early September, killing six people. North African countries currently rank among the world’s most water-stressed, according to the World Resources Institute, a non-profit research organisation. The kingdom’s meteorological agency described the recent massive rainfall as “exceptional”. It attributed it to an unusual shift of the intertropical convergence zone -- the equatorial region where winds from the northern and southern hemispheres meet, causing thunderstorms and heavy rainfall. “Everything suggests that this is a sign of climate change,” Fatima Driouech, a Moroccan climate scientist, said. — AFP



DR MUAMAR BIN ALI AL TOOBI

The author is a writer and researcher



OMANI academic and researcher Our wonder at artificial intelligence (AI) in 2023 is akin to the astonishment we once felt for electricity and computers, technologies that transformed humanity in the past. As Mark Twain famously said: “History may not repeat itself, but it often rhymes”. The recent surge in generative AI applications, especially in 2023, captured global attention, evoking an initial sense of wonder. This kind of wonder is natural with anything new and groundbreaking; the first encounter with a novel technology always stirs a unique excitement. For AI, its algorithms had long been confined to limited uses, but the steps tech companies took to unleash this ‘digital genie’ triggered a media storm, with many considering AI a new form of “creation” or “digital consciousness” that could rival human existence. In 2023, I personally witnessed a wave of interest from various sectors, individuals and organisations alike. I was inundated with invitations for television appearances, as seen during my interviews on Al Jazeera, as well as frequent requests for radio appearances, sometimes on a weekly basis. I also received invitations to write for newspapers, speak at conferences and

participate in seminars on AI. I made every effort to engage in these public discussions to contribute to raising digital awareness, even though balancing these commitments was quite challenging. Though I’ve been connected to AI for many years, the philosophical question of AI consciousness didn’t truly strike me until 2019. I began to ponder whether AI could ever attain consciousness or intelligence like humans. By deeply analysing AI’s structure and its reliance on mathematical algorithms, I realised AI operates as a digital brain processing vast amounts of data fed into it. While AI can process this data with remarkable speed, sometimes faster than the human brain, this ability is relative to the conditions and assumptions at play. What became clear to me is that AI functions as a digital, thinking brain, but it is still a product of human-designed algorithms and data inputs. This recognition sparked the first wave of awe and curiosity, like the dawn of the steam engine or the discovery of fire thousands of years ago. I concluded that intelligence isn’t confined to biological manifestations like the human brain, but at the same time, AI doesn’t possess true consciousness or awareness. I articulated this view in an

article I published in Oman Arabic newspaper in the second quarter of 2023. Some disagreed, citing AI’s unprecedented conversational abilities - such as those demonstrated by generative AI models - which seem to engage in debate and discussion far beyond what traditional systems like search engines or chat applications could achieve. This difference of opinion reflects the enduring impact of our initial wonder at AI and the human mind’s deep-seated drive to explore the unknown. Many AI enthusiasts argue that we are nearing an era where AI will have consciousness, potentially posing a threat to humanity or leading to a scenario where machines replace humans. However, while we are seeing some elements of this technology in its early stages, much more scientific understanding is needed to grapple with these complex questions. What is clear is that we are approaching the digitisation of human systems and the ‘humanisation’ of AI, which could lead us to an advanced form of general AI. The biggest impact it may have been in transforming society from an industrial to a digital one, much like the initial wave of excitement we experienced in 2023. Yet, as time passes, this wonder may fade, and AI will become a normal part of our lives. This shift is already evident among the public and experts, as we see a growing understanding of AI’s mathematical foundations and its reliance on large datasets and complex algorithms. As our amazement with AI fades, the question arises about what will inspire our next wave of wonder. It may not be AI itself, but rather the integration of biological and digital systems, perhaps in the form of breakthroughs in our genetic structure, which could revolutionise healthcare and improve human well-being. Thus, our future amazement may not be centred on AI but on the convergence of biological and digital systems that repair human bodies and create safer scientific advancements.

Empowering youth drives nation to a brighter future



ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHANI
aljahdhani22@gmail.com

An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

AMONG THE highest priorities of the nation-building march is to sustain the nation’s comprehensive development, covering all spheres of life and empowering its youth as the backbone of society. Every country approaches this priority mission differently, with focus varying based on government priorities and interests. As a result, the pace of development undoubtedly differs from one nation to another. However, when examining the Sultanate of Oman’s experience in this regard, the case is both distinct and unique. Oman’s nation-building journey has emphasised building its people as the most precious resource. Since the beginning of the Omani Blessed Renaissance, led by the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, significant attention has been accorded to the development of Omani people. His Majesty believed that developing people was the cornerstone of building new Oman. This commitment to the Omani people continues under the reign of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. Reflecting His Majesty’s belief in the importance of youth, they have always been empowered to drive national development forward in various spheres of life. Before ascending to the throne, His Majesty chaired the main committee for Oman Vision 2040, which focused on nurturing youth, developing their abilities, and involving them in the decision-making process.

Calling upon the Omani youth to contribute to the future vision of Oman, His Majesty stated, “I salute every young man and woman with ideas who would like to be heard, and I invite them to put those ideas forward because when the future vision is discussed, it is the future of their children. We don’t differentiate between our youth at home and abroad.”

More than one-third of the participants in the planning and development phases of Oman Vision 2040 were youth, indicating the government’s commitment to including the next generation in shaping the Sultanate of Oman’s growth, driving its development march and achieving its vision. As a key segment of society, youth were given a prominent role in building this vision and expressing their concerns and future demands. They were given the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process throughout the different vision-drawing phases. During the vision-making process, youth made a commendable impact, beginning with the preparation and diagnosis phase, identifying key issues, and culminating in the declaration of the initial document of Oman Vision 2040. Approximately 35-40 per cent of the 41,000 participants in all vision development phases were youth. The bright minds and aspirations of Omani youth stand as a source of ongoing pride in the journey of Oman Vision 2040. They represent the energy of the present and the leaders of the future.

As Oman continues to invest in its young population, the nation stands poised for a bright future, driven by the energy, creativity, and determination of its youth. With the right support and opportunities, Omani youth will undoubtedly play a crucial role in shaping a prosperous and sustainable future for the country

After ascending the throne, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik emphasised the value of youth in nation-building. In his second speech to the people of Oman, His Majesty pointed out, “Youth are the wealth of a nation, its inexhaustible resource, and the arms that build it. They are its present and future. We will always listen to them and understand their needs, interests, and aspirations, which will undoubtedly receive the attention they deserve.”

This Royal confidence in Omani youth has strengthened over the years as they have demonstrated their capability to shape Oman’s future. Youth have marked thousands of national, regional, and international achievements, making the nation proud. World records attest to the excellence of Omani youth in various fields, thanks to the government’s ongoing efforts to empower them. Empowering Omani youth is a multifaceted endeavour that encompasses education, participation, engagement and confidence. As Oman continues to invest in its young population, the nation stands poised for a bright future, driven by the energy, creativity and determination of its youth. With the right support and opportunities, Omani youth will undoubtedly play a crucial role in shaping a prosperous and sustainable future for the country. Empowering Omani youth has become a central principle of national policy. Empowering youth is not just a moral obligation; it is an investment in the future.

Georgia thrown into political turmoil after disputed vote

IRAKLI METREVELI

Georgia plunged into political turmoil on Sunday after the ruling party declared victory in parliamentary elections decried by the opposition as “falsified”. The European Union had warned that Saturday’s vote, seen as a crucial test of democracy in the Caucasus country, would determine Tbilisi’s chances of joining the bloc.

The result sets the stage for a political showdown that analysts warn could derail Georgia’s European aspirations. Official tallies from more than 99 per cent of precincts showed the ruling Georgian Dream party winning 54.08 per cent of the vote, while a union of four pro-Western opposition alliances garnered 37.58 per cent, according to central election commission chair Giorgi Kalandarishvili. “The elections took place in a calm and free environment,” he added.

The result gives Georgian Dream 91 seats in the 150-member parliament — enough to govern but short of the supermajority it had sought to pass a constitutional ban on all main opposition parties.

“Our victory is impressive,” Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze said in a statement, accusing the opposition of “undermining the country’s constitutional order.” An exit poll by a United States pollster, Edison Research, had forecast the opposite result. Opposition parties alleged incidents of ballot stuffing and intimidation during voting, and called the results “fraudulent”.

Tina Bokuchava, leader of the opposition United National Movement (UNM) that campaigned on a pro-European platform, said the results were “falsified” and the election “stolen.” “This is an attempt to steal Georgia’s future,” she said, declaring that the UNM did not accept the results.

Nika Gvaramia, leader of the liberal Akhali party, called the way the vote was held “a constitutional coup” by the government. “Georgian Dream will not stay in power,” he said.

Pro-Western President Salome Zurbishvili said there had been “deeply troubling incidents of violence” at some polling stations.

Analyst Gela Vasadze of the Georgian Strategic Analysis Centre said the Caucasus country is plunging “into political instability for an indefinite period” and that its EU hopes had “dimmed.”

“The situation is revolutionary, but opposition ranks lack charismatic leaders who could channel popular anger into a protest wave capable of bringing about political change.”

Georgia was gripped by mass demonstrations earlier this year against what the opposition saw as government attempts to curtail democratic freedoms and steer the country of four million off its pro-Western course and towards Russia’s orbit. — **AFP**

The biodiversity crisis is a security crisis

OUR LONG-TERM prosperity and the well-being of future generations are in jeopardy, as biodiversity loss and the collapse of critical ecosystems not only threaten our environment, but also raise risks for the economy, public health, national security, and global stability. At the 2024 United Nations Biodiversity Conference, currently taking place in Cali, Colombia, leaders must finally meet this crisis with the level of political commitment and funding that it warrants. Biodiversity is often understood in terms of the variety of life on Earth — the number of species of plants, animals, and microorganisms. Its significance cannot be overstated. Biodiversity underpins the ecosystem services that sustain human life, such as water purification, flood control, and climate regulation. The rapid decline of species and ecosystems — one million plant and animal species are on the brink of extinction — thus amounts to an existential threat.

If left unaddressed, biodiversity loss will accelerate climate change and amplify its consequences, contributing to more natural disasters and market shocks. It will also leave our agricultural systems increasingly vulnerable to hazards — from pests and pathogens to extreme weather — and deplete the ocean of critical fish stocks. This will affect both the price and availability of food, causing scarcity in the Global South and compounding insecurity in already-fragile societies.

These trends will leave a growing number of people with little choice but to flee their homes in search of better living conditions. According to the Institute for Economics and Peace, natural disasters and other ecological threats could displace as many as 1.2 billion people by 2050. These “environmental refugees” could destabilise destination countries, strain international relations, and challenge security



If left unaddressed, biodiversity loss will accelerate climate change.



HAILEMARIAM DESALEGN

The writer is a former prime minister of Ethiopia

frameworks. As the planet’s total habitable area shrinks, and competition for resources grows, conflict will become all but inevitable.

Biodiversity loss also threatens public health, which is inextricably linked to the ecosystems that surround us. Many diseases — including emerging infectious diseases such as mpox — can be tied directly to changes in biodiversity. As the destruction of habitats forces wildlife into closer contact with human populations, the risk of zoonotic diseases like Covid-19 rises. To prevent such a future, all countries must recognise biodiversity loss as a security issue. This means integrating biodiversity considerations into defence and foreign policymaking. And it means financing the response — including investments in practices that protect ecosystems, and ambitious measures to address the root causes of biodiversity loss, such as habitat destruction and climate change — as robustly as they would for any other security crisis.

It is estimated that tackling the biodiversity crisis will require an additional \$700 billion per year by 2030. Fortunately, at the 2022 UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15), world leaders agreed to close this gap by phasing out or

repurposing harmful subsidies worth \$500 billion and raising the remaining \$200 billion. Financing from developed economies to their developing counterparts is supposed to reach at least \$20 billion per year by 2025 and at least \$30 billion per year by 2030.

That might seem like a lot, but it is peanuts compared to the cost of inaction. According to projections by the Environmental Change Institute at the University of Oxford, the shocks to the global economy caused by biodiversity loss and ecosystem damage could cost as much as \$5 trillion over just five years. The world’s biodiversity-financing needs are also dwarfed by its current defence spending, which totalled \$2.24 trillion in 2022. Since investing in nature amounts to one of the most cost-effective long-term defence strategies, it should be embraced by the world’s major defence spenders, beginning with the United States.

As with any good security strategy, finance must be paired with international cooperation. The consequences of biodiversity loss know no borders. Countries must work together to protect critical habitats, enforce environmental regulations, and promote sustainable development practices.

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SPORTS

SHORT TAKES

TAJIKISTAN EDGE
OMAN IN AFC U17
QUALIFIERS



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 27

Oman suffer a shock 2-0 defeat against Tajikistan in the concluding match of Group J in the AFC U-17 Asian Cup qualifiers for the Saudi Arabia 2025 finals. With this victory, Tajikistan secure the direct spot from the group to the finals, while Oman must wait to see if they qualify as one of the best second-placed teams from other groups. All ten group winners, along with the five best-placed runners-up, will advance to the 20th edition of the finals, scheduled to take place in Saudi Arabia from April 3-20, 2025.

Oman missed a golden opportunity to at least secure a draw, which would have been enough for the team to advance to the Asian finals. Tajikistan, however, completed their campaign perfectly with three successive victories over Singapore, Guam and Oman. The other two teams, Singapore and Guam, had already been eliminated.

The first half of the clash between Oman and Tajikistan ended in a goalless draw, with both teams displaying fierce competition. However, Tajikistan broke the deadlock in the 71st minute through Muhammad Nazriev, who then struck again 10 minutes later to secure their win and qualification for the finals.

Oman began their campaign in the Asian qualifiers with a strong performance, defeating hosts Singapore 5-0 before showcasing an impressive display with an 18-0 win over Guam. Oman hold six points and sit in second place, competing for one of the five best second-placed team spots alongside Iraq, China, Vietnam and Qatar, who currently top this position among the ten groups.



Afghans A crowned Emerging Cup champions

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroopchh01

PLAYER OF the tournament Sediqulla Atal hit a match-winning 55 from 55 balls to guide Afghanistan A to their first-ever Emerging Teams Asia Cup T20 title at Oman Cricket Academy ground in Al Amerat on Sunday night. Afghanistan A chased the modest target of 134 runs set by Sri Lanka A in the final with the loss of three wickets.

Batting first, Sri Lanka A made a disastrous start as they slumped to 4-15 inside the powerplay in 4.2 overs. Right-arm off-break bowler AM Ghazanfar and medium pacer Bilal Sami struck double blows each on Sri Lanka's top order at the start. Sami took the first wicket in the second over when he had Yashoda Lanka (1) caught by Afghan captain Darwish Rasooli. Player of the final Ghazanfar then came into act when he had Sri Lanka cap-

tain Nuwanindu Fernando stumped for 4 runs as the total was 7-2.

Sami then castled the defence of Lahiru Udara, semifinal hero against Pakistan, on 5 runs as Sri Lanka fell to 3-13 in 4 overs. Ghazanfar bowled Ahan Wickramasinghe (4) as Sri Lanka lost their fourth wicket.

Sahan Arachchige then started the rescue act with Pavan Rathnayake as the fifth-wicket pair added 50 runs in 46 balls. Sahan remained not out on 64 from 47 balls with six boundaries. Pavan was run out for a 21-ball 20. Nimesh Vimukthi made a 19-ball 23 before getting run out as Sri Lanka recovered to post 133 for 7 in 20 overs.

For Afghanistan A, Ghazanfar bowled tight, taking two wickets for 14 runs in his 4 overs, while Sami had the figures of 3-22 in 4 overs. In reply, Sri Lanka stunned Afghanistan when Zubair Akbari was clean bowled in the first delivery by Sahan Arachchige. Zubair had smashed a match-winning 137-run opening wicket

partnership with Sediqulla Atal in the semifinal against India.

Spinner Dushan Hemantha made the next breakthrough when he had Afghan captain Rasooli caught by Lankan captain Fernando with the score at 43 for two in 6.2 overs. Rasooli made 24 from 20 balls with two fours and a six. The third Afghan wicket was down when medium pacer Ehsan Malinga bowled Karim Janat after a fighting 33 off 27 balls with three towering sixes. The score read 95-3 in 15 overs, requiring 38 runs more to win from 30 balls.

Opener Sediqulla continued his brilliant innings with newcomer wicketkeeper Muhammad Ishaq as they marched towards victory. Sediqulla reached his fifty in style with a huge six over spinner Vimukthi and smashed the next ball for a four to put the match firmly under the control of Afghanistan. They needed only four runs in the last two overs. Ishaq hit the winning four in the first ball of the 19th over bowled by Malinga.

Seeb, Ahli Sidab win in Basketball League

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 27

The opening round of the 2024-2025 Oman Basketball League, held on Friday and Saturday at Al Amal Sports Club, saw dominant performances by Seeb and Ahli Sidab against Salalah Club.

Seeb secured a sweeping victory with a score of 127-35, while Ahli Sidab defeated the same team 81-28.

In the match between Seeb and Salalah, Seeb displayed clear dominance, achieving a massive 127-35 win. The team excelled from the start, taking advantage of scoring opportunities through standout players like Ahmed al Maamari, Rashid al Zuhaihi, Aslam al Jami, Abdulrahman al Shoaibi and Marwan al Hadidi.

Seeb started the game strong, opening with six points by Marwan al Hadidi, professional player Aslam al Jami and Waqas al Hinai. Salalah's Faisal Abdul Nabi responded with two points, but Seeb continued its aggressive offense, adding four more points through Moawiya al Harthi and Rashid al Zuhaihi, ending the first quarter with a 31-10 lead.

Seeb maintained control in the second quarter, scoring seven points



in the first two minutes via Aslam al Jami, Ahmed al Maamari and Hassan al Faraji. Salalah attempted to close the gap with a three-pointer by Bashar Bait Farid, but Seeb quickly responded with six more points through Ahmed al Maamari, increasing the lead to 44-12. Seeb wrapped up the quarter with 12 additional points, while Salalah managed six, leaving the first half at 56-18 in Seeb's favour.

Seeb continued to dominate in the third quarter, scoring 31 points compared to Salalah's 11, extending their lead to 87-29.

The final quarter saw no major changes, as Seeb continued their offensive momentum, scoring 40 more points, while Salalah managed just six. The game concluded with a resounding 127-35 victory for Seeb.

In the second match, Ahli Sidab comfortably defeated Salalah 81-28, with several players standing out.

Ahli Sidab opened the scoring with two points from Haitham Bani Araba under the basket, followed by two consecutive three-pointers. Haitham Bani Araba added another basket, while Salalah scored their first two points of the game. Ahli Sidab extended their lead with 18 more points, ending the first quarter 28-2.

In the second quarter, Ahli Sidab added four points. Salalah responded with three points. Ahli Sidab's offense remained strong, adding 19 more points, while Salalah scored two ending the half with Ahli Sidab leading 52-7.

The third quarter Ahli Sidab adding 16 points while Salalah managed 10, bringing the score to 68-17 by the end of the quarter.

In the final quarter, Ahli Sidab added 13 more points, while Salalah scored 11. The game ended with Ahli Sidab securing an 81-28 victory.



Sultanate of Oman
MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects:-

Tender No.	Project Category	Tender	Last Day to Purchase Tender Documents	Last Date of Tender Submission
34/2024	Constriction & maintenance	RENOVATION OF MCSY HQ BUILDINGS AT AL KHUWAIR	02/11/2024	18/11/2024
35/2024	Constriction & maintenance	RENEW AND MAINTENANCE FOR THE BUILDINGS OF CAMEL RACING FIELD AT MWILAH, SOHAR	02/11/2024	18/11/2024
Re-tender 28/2024	Constriction of ports roads bridge rail way dams and maintenance	DESIGN AND BUILD CONTRACT OF ASPHALT ROADS AND ALLIED WORKS IN CAMEL RACE TRACK AT AL MUDHAIBI IN NORTH SHARQIYA GOVERNORATE	02/11/2024	18/11/2024
Re-tender 29/2024	Constriction of ports roads bridge rail way dams and maintenance	DESIGN AND BUILD CONTRACT OF ASPHALT ROADS AND ALLIED WORKS IN CAMEL RACE TRACK AT BIDIYAH IN NORTH SHARQIYA GOVERNORATE	02/11/2024	18/11/2024

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone **24402200** or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om

SHORT TAKES



120 PADDLERS SET TO COMPETE AT WTT CONTENDER TODAY

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 27

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) in coordination with World Table Tennis (WTT), is all set to host WTT contender which kicks off today at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat.

The six-day tournament featured participation of 120 paddlers, referees and officials representing 22 countries across the world including China, Croatia, France, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Iran, Japan, South Korea, Poland, Romania, Singapore, Serbia, Slovakia, Sweden, Chinese Taipei, Yemen, Bahrain, Palestine, Egypt, Czech and the hosts Sultanate of Oman.

OTTA completed all organisational and logistics preparations to ensure a suitable environment for the players and team's staff. The paddlers and officials from different parts of the world arrived in Muscat to commence their training sessions ahead of competitions start during the evening session on Monday.

This is the second international event hosted in Muscat for this current year. During last August and September, OTTA hosted WTT Feeder Muscat 2024 with nearly 100 participants taking part in the event.

Four paddlers from Oman will represent the national team in this world-class event including: Muhannad al Balushi, Badr al Jassasi, Ghasan al Ghassani and Nasser al Balushi.

The domestic paddlers are well trained under the watchful eyes of the Iranian coach Omid Shams Sharhabaki. This championship represents a major opportunity for Oman's players to gain experience and improve their international rankings.

The event offers a total cash prize of \$80,000 in five disciplines including men's and women's singles/doubles and mixed doubles.

Top ranking paddlers will vie for the events titles including Lin Shidong (ranked #7) from China, OH Junsung (ranked #32) from South Korea, Japanese paddler Yukiya UDA (ranked #40) and beside many other players across the players.

At the women's top seeding players, Satsuki Odo from Japan (ranked 17), Qian Tianyi from China (ranked 18), KIM Nayeong (ranked #39) from South Korea and many other paddlers.

Sajjad bin Mohammed Baqir, the tournament director, affirmed that all the preparations are complete to commence the competitions on Monday.

Seeb dominate Al Futowa 5-0 in AFC Challenge Cup



Pics by Abdulwahid al Hamadani

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 27

SEEB Club secured a well-deserved 5-0 victory over Al Futowa in a match held on Saturday at Seeb Sports Stadium, as part of the first round of Group C in the AFC Challenge Cup.

The first half witnessed clear

dominance from Seeb, who imposed their style of play from the very first minute, relying on the midfield trio's precise passing to connect the lines of the team. Seeb's offensive efforts intensified, with a notable attempt in the 11th minute when Arshad al Alawi's powerful shot narrowly missed the left post. Despite Seeb's control, Al Futowa goalkeeper Abdulrahman Boltif excelled in blocking



several dangerous attacks, making it difficult for Seeb to score early on.

However, Seeb broke through in the 32nd minute when Zahir al Aghbari received a perfect pass from Arshad al Alawi and fired a shot that deflected off an Al Futowa defender into the net. In the final minutes of the first half, Abdulrahman al Mushaifri came close to adding a second goal, but Boltif brilliantly saved his effort in the 37th minute. The first half ended with Seeb leading 1-0, while Al Futowa's timid attempts posed no real threat to goalkeeper Bilal al Balushi.

The second half started with Seeb pressing for more goals, determined to extend their lead. On the other hand, Al Futowa struggled to break out of their defensive zone, relying only on counterattacks that were thwarted by Seeb's alert defence, led by Mohammed al Musallami and Ahmed al Khamisi.

The turning point came in the 65th minute when Moussa Coulibaly committed a rough foul against Abdulaziz al Muqbali, earning a second yellow card followed by a red, reducing Al Futowa to ten men. Seeb capitalised on their numerical advantage, taking full control of the game. In the 73rd minute, Ali al Busaidy doubled Seeb's lead with a powerful shot from outside the box, making it 2-0. Just two minutes later, Zahir al Aghbari added the third goal, exploiting the Syrian defence's confusion to fire the ball into the net (75').

Seeb's relentless attacks continued amidst Al Futowa's defensive collapse, with Abdulaziz al Muqbali scoring the fourth goal with a precise header in the 78th minute. As the game neared its conclusion, Jameel al Yahmadi capped the scoring spree with a goal from inside the penalty area in the 87th minute, sealing the 5-0 victory.

With this emphatic win, Seeb now tops Group C with 3 points, ahead of Bahrain's Al Ahli and Palestine's Hilal Al Quds, both with 1 point. Meanwhile, Al Futowa remains at the bottom of the group with no points.

Kukkiwon show on taekwondo thrills spectators in Muscat

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroopchh01

A full house of taekwondo fans in the Sultanate of Oman were treated to a taekwondo master-class demonstration as the much-famed 'Kukkiwon' taekwondo demonstration team wowed the spectators with a breathtaking performance in Muscat on Sunday evening.

The display of taekwondo skills and magic was performed as a special show during the closing ceremony of the fourth Taekwondo Championship for the Korean Ambassador's Cup which took place at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Saturday and Sunday. The championship was co-hosted by the Korean Embassy and the Oman Taekwondo Committee.

The Kukkiwon performance showcased impressive taekwondo techniques, adding an air of festivity to the martial art competition. In his congratulatory remarks, Ambassador Kim Kiejoo of Korea praised all participants

The Kukkiwon performance showcased impressive taekwondo techniques, adding an air of festivity to the martial art competition.



for their passion and dedication to taekwondo, highlighting the vital role of taekwondo in strengthening sports exchanges, thereby promoting people-to-people exchanges and bilateral relations between Korea and Oman.

"We want to spread the message of unity and peace across the world

under the difficult situation at many parts of the globe at the moment," Min Haeng Lee, coach of the Kukkiwon Demonstration Team, told Oman Observer.

The team of 17 martial art players made the closing ceremony of the championship exceptional with mind-boggling taekwondo tech-

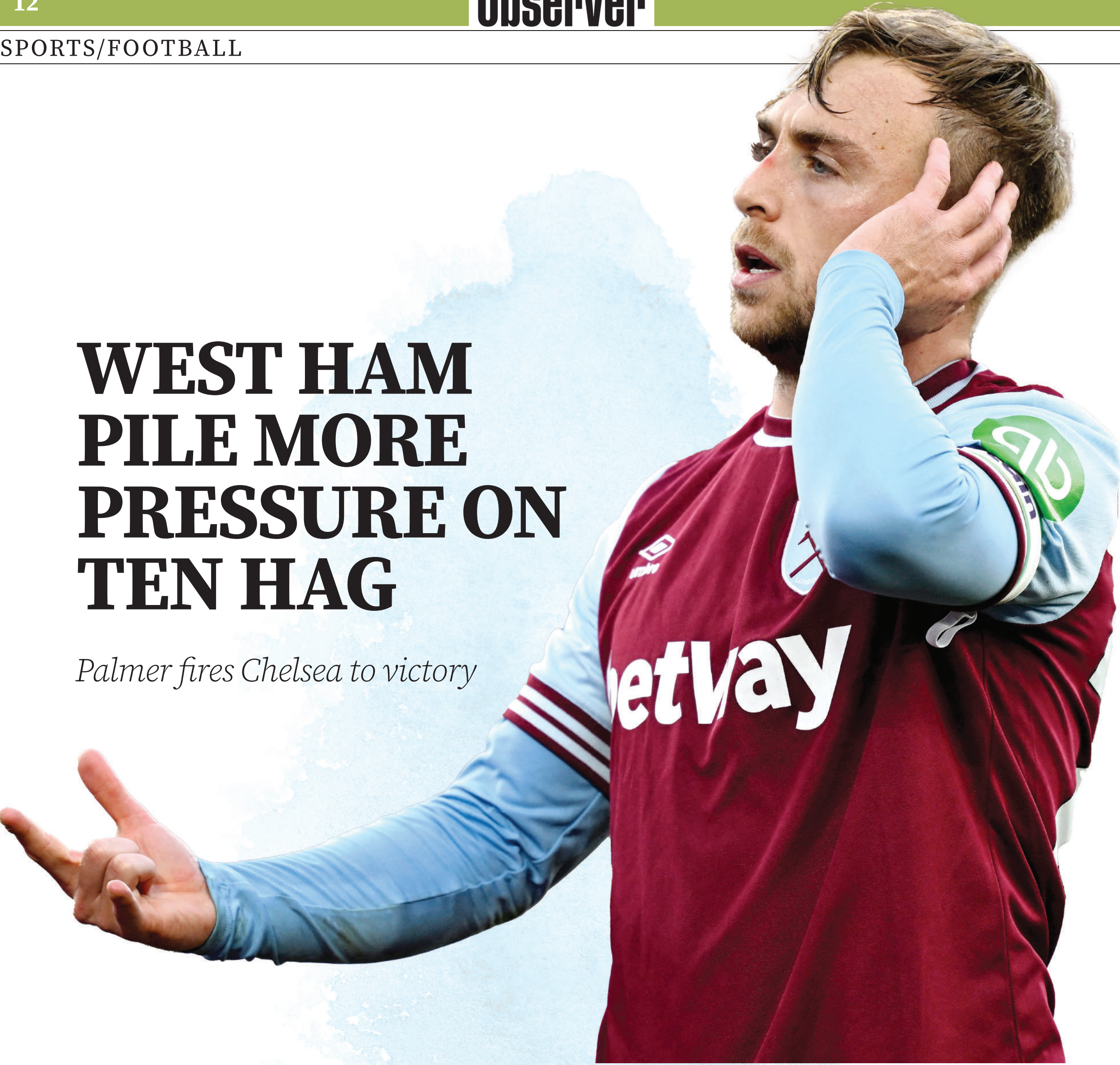
niques, featuring smashing boards in the air, twisting and kicking and outstanding discipline.

Launched in 1974, the Kukkiwon Taekwondo demonstration team has played a pioneering role in sharing taekwondo, the martial art heritage of Korea, with the people around the world over the past five decades, and Taekwondo has become one of the most popular martial arts among young Omanis, invigorating exchanges between Oman and Korea in culture and sports sectors.

MAJAN CLUB CHAMPIONS

The Embassy of the Republic of Korea and the Oman Taekwondo Committee co-hosted the fourth Taekwondo Championship for Korean Ambassador's Cup at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on October 25-26.

Around 200 taekwondo players from various clubs across Oman participated in the competition, and the Majan club won the Ambassador's cup for the best club.



WEST HAM PILE MORE PRESSURE ON TEN HAG

Palmer fires Chelsea to victory

Jarrod Bowen celebrates scoring their second goal. — Reuters

WEST HAM PILED more pressure on beleaguered Manchester United boss Erik ten Hag with a dramatic 2-1 win on Sunday as Cole Palmer inspired Chelsea to a victory by the same scoreline over Newcastle. Tottenham were beaten 1-0 at Crystal Palace, who picked up their first win of the season. Liverpool can go back to the top of the table with victory away at Arsenal in the biggest clash of the Premier League weekend later on Sunday.

Ten Hag was left to rue a familiar lack of ruthlessness as United's fourth league defeat in nine games will spark further speculation on how long he will be given to turn the Red Devils' fortunes around. The visitors should have been out of sight by half-time at the London Stadium. Alejandro Garnacho hit the woodwork inside two minutes and Edson Alvarez also headed off his own crossbar. But it was Diogo Dalot who missed the biggest chance when the Portuguese international somehow fired over with the goal gaping after rounding Lukasz Fabianski.

Under-fire West Ham boss Julen Lopetegui showed his disgust with the Hammers' first-half display by making three substitutions at the break. Crysencio Summerville was one of those introduced and he slid in to open the scoring against the run of play on 74 minutes.

Casemiro brought United level nine minutes from time with a header from point-blank range. But there was late drama when VAR intervened for a foul on Danny Ings by Matthijs de Ligt.

Jarrod Bowen smashed in the resulting spot-kick to take West Ham above United, who sink



Chelsea's Cole Palmer celebrates scoring the goal. — Reuters

to 14th in the table. Chelsea had been beaten in the Premier League for the first time since Enzo Maresca's first match in charge at Liverpool last weekend despite an impressive performance. The Blues got back to winning ways with Palmer at the heart of their best work.

The England international had a goal marginally ruled out for offside inside the first five minutes. Palmer was the creator for the opening goal, despite not being credited with the assist, as his sumptuous ball over the top freed Pedro Neto, who picked out Nicolas Jackson to slot in his sixth goal of the season.

Newcastle are now winless in five league games as the pressure mounts on Eddie Howe ahead of a rematch against Chelsea in the League Cup on Wednesday. The Magpies did get back on level terms before half-time as Alexander Isak tapped in Lewis Hall's cross at the end of a well-worked move. Palmer took just two minutes into the second period to make the decisive impact with a driving run forward and powerful finish that beat Nick Pope at his near post.

Newcastle should have left London with a point, though, as Isak botched a huge chance to level 15 minutes from time after rounding Robert Sanchez. Palace began the day in the relegation zone but were good value for the three points at Selhurst Park as Tottenham's struggles on the road continue.

Eberechi Eze's deft flick teed up Jean-Philippe Mateta to fire home the only goal. Eze had a second ruled out for offside in the second half, but Tottenham, without injured captain Son Heung-min, were toothless in attack. Spurs have won just once in five away league games this season as they slip to eighth, four points off the top four. — AFP



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BUSINESS



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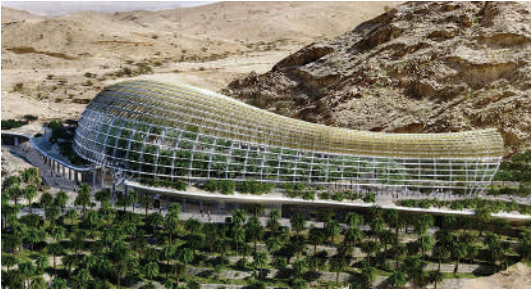
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MHT UNVEILS INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES AT BOTANIC GARDEN



The garden presents a unique chance for investors to engage with two notable venues.

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, OCT 27

The Oman’s Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) announced on Sunday some investment opportunities at Oman Botanic Garden.

Set to become one of the largest and most iconic gardens worldwide, the garden presents a unique chance for investors to engage with two notable venues, including the ‘Hajar Mountains Biome Restaurant/Café’ and the ‘Deserts Pavilion Café’.

The Hajar Mountains Biome Restaurant/Café is poised to offer an exceptional dining experience, surrounded by the stunning vistas of the Al Hajar Mountains.

This venue, located at the cable car arrival station and adjacent to the largest event hall, features a dedicated kitchen area and options for outdoor seating, providing a picturesque backdrop for guests.

Furthermore, the Deserts Pavilion Café offers a distinctive opportunity within a shaded outdoor setting amidst diverse habitats, inviting patrons to enjoy scenic views of the garden’s landscape. The deadline for submissions regarding these investment opportunities is Sunday, November 10. Meanwhile, interested parties are encouraged to reach out for further information and registration details.

Over \$600 million for first iron ore plant

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, OCT 27

UNDER the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Vale, a global leader in iron ore production, and Jinnan Iron & Steel Group, a prominent Chinese steelmaker in advanced separation technologies, announced a strategic partnership to establish Oman’s first iron ore concentration plant in SOHAR Port and Freezone.

With a combined investment surpassing \$600 million, the facility aims to position Oman as a key supplier in the global Direct Reduction (DR) grade iron ore market, advancing the country’s ambitions in the steel industry.

Set to begin operations by mid-2027, the plant will process 18 million tonnes of iron ore annually, yielding 12.6 million tonnes of high-grade concentrate.

Vale will allocate \$227 million to link the plant to its regional agglomerate facilities, while Jinnan will contribute around \$400 million to build, own, and operate the plant.

A central feature of the partnership is innovation in resource efficiency and environmental responsibility. Iron ore imported from Brazil will undergo an advanced upgrade process at the plant, producing high-quality agglomerates with a reduced environmental footprint.

Positioned in SOHAR, the facility leverages Oman’s strategic location, bolstering the country’s role as a supplier to regional and international steel markets.

“The Concentration Plant is a cornerstone investment for Vale as we deepen our presence in the Middle East,” said Gustavo Pimenta, President of Vale. “

Oman’s location, coupled with its political stability and commitment to industrial growth, makes it an ideal partner.

This project strengthens our ability to meet global demand for high-grade iron ore, aligns with our sustainability goals,



Dignitaries during the announcement of a strategic partnership to establish Oman’s first iron ore concentration plant in SOHAR Port and Freezone.

Set to begin operations by mid-2027, the plant will process 18 million tonnes of iron ore annually, yielding 12.6 million tonnes of high-grade concentrate. Vale will allocate \$227 million to link the plant to its regional agglomerate facilities, while Jinnan will contribute around \$400 million to build, own, and operate the plant.

and brings long-term value to Oman and the global steel industry.”

The collaboration marks Jinnan’s first venture in Oman, underscoring the Sultanate of Oman’s attractiveness for high-value industrial projects. Zhang Tianfu, CEO of Jinnan Iron & Steel Group, highlighted the company’s contribution to sustainable steelmaking, saying, “This partnership

brings together Jinnan’s expertise in modern low-carbon steelmaking with Vale’s iron ore production capabilities. Our aim is to redefine steelmaking in the Middle East, bringing efficiency and quality to the forefront, while supporting Oman’s industrial ambitions.”

SOHAR Port CEO, Emile Hoogsteden, echoed the significance of the project: “SOHAR is a global business hub, and this investment aligns with our strategy to attract high-value projects. Through our integrated logistics ecosystem, we are supporting Oman’s role in the global steel industry, enhancing trade and fostering sustainable growth.”

Beyond the steel sector, the plant is expected to generate significant economic benefits, including job creation, technological advancements, and increased export capacity. By incorporating advanced technologies, the facility aims to minimise its environmental impact, in line with Oman’s commitment to sustainable industrial development.

Energy and minerals forum highlights development path in Al Sharqiyah

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Energy and Minerals held an Energy and Minerals Forum on October 27, 2024, in Al Sharqiyah North and Al Sharqiyah South governorates, led by Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and Mahmoud bin Yahya al Thuhli, Governor of Al Sharqiyah North.

The forum aimed to foster local community engagement and support national goals aligned with Oman Vision 2040. It spotlighted ongoing and future projects in the energy and minerals sectors, underscoring the Ministry’s commitment to economic diversification, environmental sustainability, and resource optimisation.

In his keynote, Al Hadhrami detailed the Ministry’s strategies to maximise value across oil, gas, renewable energy, hydrogen and mineral sectors. He emphasised the role of modern technology and robust standards in optimising resource use while supporting economic growth and job creation.

Al Thuhli emphasised the forum’s importance as a platform for knowledge sharing on investment prospects, sustainable practices, and local



The forum spotlighted ongoing and future projects in the energy and minerals sectors.

collaboration. He highlighted its role in building partnerships, especially in addressing sector challenges and aligning with Oman Vision 2040 goals.

Key officials from the Ministry presented sectoral updates and investment prospects. Eng Saud bin Khamis al Mahrouqi, Director-General of Minerals, outlined the minerals sector’s significant growth, with 70.4 million tonnes produced in 2023, 40 million tonnes of which were exported.

Al Mahrouqi introduced upcoming concession areas, slated for bidding in Q4 2024, and initiatives to enhance sector sustainability through advanced compliance systems and Omanisation efforts. He also provided an update on the “Taqa”

platform, designed to streamline licensing and attract investors.

Dr Firas al Abduwani, Director-General of Renewable Energy and Hydrogen, presented Oman’s renewable energy road map, targeting a 30 per cent contribution to the energy mix by 2030. Upcoming projects include a 280 MW solar plant in Al Kamil and a 100 MW wind project in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali.

These initiatives support Oman’s ambition to produce 1.25 million tons of green hydrogen annually by 2030 and to elevate renewable capacity in line with Oman Vision 2040’s sustainability objectives.

Eng Hamoud al Sawafi, Director of Oil Production Regulation, provided insights into Oman’s oil and gas sector, highlighting stable reserves and major projects that boost production, supported by national and international energy companies.

He showcased digital advancements like the National Center for Oil and Gas Data Preservation, which aims to enhance data-driven operations and efficiency.

ADVERTORIALS

FESTIVE SEASON



TANISHQ UNVEILS THE NAV-RAANI COLLECTION — A FESTIVE TRIBUTE TO MODERN QUEENS

MUSCAT: Tanishq, India’s most-loved jewellery brand from the TATA Group, which opened its flagship store in the Sultanate of Oman at the Oman Avenues’ mall earlier this year, is now wooing jewellery lovers with a brand-new collection.

This festive season, Tanishq invites you to celebrate your inner royalty with the launch of the Nav-Raani Collection. Inspired by the grandeur of royal queens, this exquisite collection is designed for the modern woman who embodies strength and elegance, a press note said.

“Handcrafted in pure gold and featuring intricate meenakari enamel work, each piece in this exquisite collection captures the essence of regal heritage while embracing contemporary style.

“From statement necklaces to intricately designed earrings, the Nav-Raani Collection offers a range of exquisite pieces, making it the perfect addition to your festive wardrobe or an ideal Diwali gift. Each item is meticulously crafted to ensure a timeless appeal, perfect for the grandeur of Diwali celebrations,” the note said.

Highlights include an 18 Karat yellow gold necklace set featuring striking red stones, intricate floral Kundan elements, and a detachable pendant, all reflecting grace and ambition. Crafted over 45 days, the collection also includes a 22 Karat yellow gold necklace adorned with peacock feather motifs and an innovative ombre of green Kundan, striking a balance between timeless elegance and modern vibrancy.

With detailed enamel work and ornate jali designs cradling captivating green stones, another piece symbolises the strength and multifaceted nature of women who gracefully juggle various roles in their lives.

“The Nav-Raani Collection is a heartfelt tribute to the queens of today. We wanted to create something that resonates with their grace and power, blending traditional artistry with modern aesthetics. This Diwali, we encourage every woman to embrace her inner queen and adorn herself with jewels that truly reflect her spirit,” said Aditya Singh, head of jewellery international business, Titan Company Limited.

Available for a limited time, the collection is complemented by exclusive festive offers.

Lulu expands its retail presence in Oman & UAE

Lulu is enhancing its footprint across Oman and UAE, making shopping more accessible for residents in suburban areas. Spearheading the retail presence, Lulu opened a hypermarket in Al Khuwair, Muscat Governorate, and a new express fresh market store in Al Quaa, approximately 125 kilometres from Al Ain city.

The newly opened stores offer a global standard shopping experience for the local community. Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, officially inaugurated the new hypermarket in Al Khuwair in the presence of Yusuff Ali M A, Lulu Retail Chairman, while prominent UAE businessman Hamad Salem Thaaloub Salem Alderei opened fresh market in Al Ain’s Al Quaa.

Also present on the occasion were Ananth A V, Director, Shabeer K A, Regional Director of Lulu Oman, and other officials.

“The newly opened Lulu hypermarket enhances the shopping experience and contributes to the overall development of the region.

“This underscores Lulu’s commitment to advancing the nation’s growth,” stated Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Ahmed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality,



Yusuff Ali said that more projects are underway, including the launch of the biggest food sourcing and logistics centre in Khazaen, the largest economic development zone in Oman.

in his inaugural speech.

The new hypermarket is Lulu’s 32nd store in Oman and the 244th in the GCC.

“Lulu currently expanding across the GCC, plans to open three additional outlets in Oman, including Al Duqm, Al Musannah and Samayil. Furthermore, we are launching one of the largest state-of-the-art logistics centres for sourcing and exporting fruits and vegetables in Khazaen, the largest economic development zone in Oman, within the next six months.

“We are immensely grateful to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the government of the

Sultanate of Oman for their outstanding support,” said Yusuff Ali M A, Chairman of Lulu Retail, on the occasion.

It has always been our policy to make the Lulu brand easily accessible to shoppers in different suburbs and outskirts, so they do not need to drive long distances for shopping. We are committed to extending our services to all regions, particularly in outlying districts.

This reflects our dedication to contributing to the overall development of the GCC nations and supporting suburban areas,” he added.

OETC STRENGTHENS SUPPORT FOR SMES AND RIYADA CARDHOLDERS

MUSCAT: With the aim of enhancing In-Country Value (ICV) and supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) through various initiatives, activities and projects, Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) organised an introductory session for holders of the Riyadh Card on Monday, October 21, 2024.

More than 50 Omani SMEs participated in the session, which provided a platform for business owners to interact with officials and specialists. The session also introduced the benefits of the Riyadh Card and the developmental opportunities available for its holders, in addition to showcasing the business opportunities and contracts available in the company’s various projects across Oman.

This initiative comes as part of OETC’s commitment to supporting SMEs and enhancing ICV, while adhering to the regulations and procedures set by the relevant authorities. The company ensures the integration of these enterprises into its projects by allocating no



less than 10 per cent of the total Engineering, Procurement and Construction projects cost to SMEs.

In addition, all tenders issued by OETC with a value of RO 10,000 or less are exclusively awarded to small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Furthermore, the company conducts other initiatives like supporting local products, engaging with Omani companies and employing job-seekers

according to the project’s nature, requirements and location.

Eng Talal al Azri, Tenders, Procurements and Contracts Manager at OETC, emphasised the importance the company places on supporting Omani entrepreneurs, youth and SMEs, highlighting the company’s adoption of policies and procedures that ensure the achievement of the intended goals.

He also pointed out the company’s commitment to implementing plans that positively impact these enterprises and strengthen local communities.

Al Azri added: “As a leading company in the Sultanate of Oman, we bear a great responsibility to support the youth and entrepreneurs, and we collaborate with relevant entities to ensure a certain percentage of our contracts is allocated to Omani companies.

We also strive to transfer knowledge and expertise to ensure the growth and development we aim to see in our SMEs.”

Saud Bahwan Automotive honours young Omani winners of national skills contest

MUSCAT: Saud Bahwan Automotive recently announced the successful completion of the Toyota Service, National Skills Contest, a prestigious event designed to recognise and reward Toyota Oman’s outstanding young Omani national service personnel who demonstrate exceptional skills and dedication.

This annual contest showcases the talent and technical expertise of Toyota’s service staff, highlighting their passion for maintaining the highest standards of customer care.

During the event, participants from Toyota service centres across the country competed in various categories, from technical diagnostics to customer service excellence. The month-long contest had been designed in two segments, including written tests and on-vehicle tests.

The candidates were also required to do actual demonstrations of denting, painting and fault-rectification in order to evaluate their skills.

A panel of judges over the period observed each contestant and evaluated their performance with a scoring sheet, which covered important parameters.

Each contestant brought forth a wealth of knowledge and hands-on expertise, repre-



Awarding young Omani winners of the national skills contest.

senting the pinnacle of Toyota’s renowned commitment to customer satisfaction and vehicle care.

At the conclusion of the National Skills Contest, an award ceremony was held to honour and felicitate outstanding young Omani national Toyota service performers.

Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan, Managing

Director – Corporate, Saud Bahwan Group, handed over the awards to the outstanding performers across the different categories and applauded their passionate efforts.

Speaking on the significance of such a distinctive event, Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan said, “The Toyota Service National Skills Contest is a key function that reflects the

core values of Saud Bahwan Automotive.

“It is a celebration of the dedication and talent of our young Omani national Toyota service personnel, whose passion for excellence aligns perfectly with our objectives for customer satisfaction.

“Through their skills and commitment, they ensure that every Toyota customer experiences unmatched service quality, thereby building trust in our brand.”

The contest not only acknowledges the hard work and talent of the participants, but also serves as a medium of inspiration for the entire service team to continuously outdo expectations and strive for excellence.

By recognising the best in the field, Saud Bahwan Automotive is fostering a culture of learning and growth that is beneficial to both the employees and customers.

This initiative is a testament to Saud Bahwan Automotive’s ongoing investment in training and development, ensuring that Toyota service teams across Oman remain at the forefront of international service standards.

It encourages them to excel at their respective roles while always focusing on delivering exceptional service levels that enhance the joy of owning a Toyota vehicle.

OMAN
BUILDING
CODE

PAVING THE
WAY FOR SAFETY AND
SUSTAINABILITY

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, OCT 27

THE Sultanate of Oman is undergoing a transformative phase in its construction industry with the development of the Oman Building Code (OBC). The comprehensive set of regulations, overseen by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) in partnership with the International Code Council (ICC), aims to enhance building safety, resilience and sustainability. These updates are not just timely but crucial for the nation's growth, aligning closely with Oman's Vision 2040. In an exclusive interview with the *Observer*, Mohammed Amer, Regional Director of Operations at ICC MENA, shares insights into the evolution of the OBC and its potential impact on Oman's construction sector.

KEY PROVISIONS FOR A SAFER

The OBC revisions focus on both structural and non-structural updates that directly influence the safety of buildings and infrastructure in Oman. The non-structural provisions include advanced fire and life safety systems, improved accessibility for people with disabilities, and enhanced health standards.

"These non-structural updates are crucial because they ensure that buildings are safer for everyday use as well as during emergencies like fires or natural disasters," said Mohammed Amer. The code's emergency evacuation protocols have also been strengthened, enhancing the ability to respond swiftly during crises.

On the structural side, the code incorporates global standards such as the American Society of Civil Engineers Standard 7 (ASCE 7) for structural loads and the American Concrete Institute Standard 318 (ACI 318) for concrete design.

"The structural updates ensure that our buildings can withstand the unique environmental challenges Oman faces, from extreme heat to occasional flooding," Amer emphasised.

By adopting both performance-based and prescriptive approaches, the code allows for the use of innovative materials and construction methods, making it adaptable to both traditional practices and modern innovations.

ICC'S ROLE IN SHAPING
BUILDING STANDARDS

As a global leader in building safety codes, the ICC has played a pivotal role in shaping the OBC. The ICC's

International Codes (I-Codes) form the backbone of the OBC, covering critical safety areas like plumbing, sewage disposal, and energy conservation. Amer noted, "The I-Codes are designed to ensure public health and safety while also promoting energy-efficient and sustainable building practices."

Amer explained that the ICC's collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) has been essential in tailoring these international standards to fit Oman's local conditions. "Oman's diverse climate, from the coastal governo-



These innovations are not just about staying ahead in construction trends — they are vital for reducing environmental impact and enhancing energy efficiency

MOHAMED AMER
Regional Director
of Operations,
ICC MENA

rates to the desert, presents unique challenges. Our role is to make sure that the global standards are localised to address these challenges," he said. This localisation supports Oman's broader sustainability goals by promoting the use of low-carbon materials and encouraging energy-efficient building designs.

that can withstand extreme heat, humidity, and even flooding. Amer highlighted that the ICC has been conducting workshops with local stakeholders to address these issues. "We've been working closely with Omani designers, engineers, and government officials to identify gaps and ensure the code reflects the realities of construction in Oman," he said. These workshops have been instrumental in refining the code to ensure it meets both international standards and local needs.

A KEY TO SUCCESS

Collaboration with stakeholders has been a cornerstone of the OBC's development. According to Amer, the feedback from designers, engineers, and municipal officials has been invaluable. "The input we receive from local professionals helps us bridge the gap between international standards and practical implementation in Oman. Their experience on the ground is essential for refining the code," he said. This collaborative approach ensures that the OBC is not only practical but also

implementable. "The code is designed to be dynamic, meaning it will continue to evolve as we gather more feedback and as Oman's construction landscape changes," Amer explained. This adaptability is key to ensuring the code remains relevant and effective in the long-term.

ALIGNMENT WITH OMAN VISION 2040

One of the major goals of the OBC is to align with Oman Vision 2040, particularly in the areas of sustainability and innovation. The code integrates modern construction techniques, such as 3D concrete printing and off-site construction, which are gaining traction globally. "These innovations are not just about staying ahead in construction trends — they are vital for reducing environmental impact and enhancing energy efficiency," Amer said. Amer believes that as Oman continues to grow, these advanced methods will play a crucial role in meeting the nation's sustainability goals. "By embedding these techniques into the code, we are fostering a culture of sustainability that will benefit Oman for decades to come," he added.

IMPACT ON LARGE-SCALE INFRASTRUCTURE

The new building code is expected to have a significant impact on large-scale infrastructure projects currently under development in Oman. "By incorporating the latest international standards in fire safety, structural integrity, and materials use, the OBC ensures that major projects like airports and commercial complexes will meet the highest safety and quality standards," Amer noted. This will result in infrastructure that is not only safer for the public but also more resilient, capable of withstanding Oman's unique environmental challenges.

TRAINING AND SUPPORT

To ensure the successful implementation of the OBC, ICC and MoHUP are rolling out comprehensive training programmes for Omani engineers, architects, and regulatory personnel. "Training is crucial for the effective application of these new standards," Amer stated. The training will include User Guides in both English and Arabic, as well as a series of online webinars and in-person sessions in Muscat. Amer emphasised that these initiatives aim to equip construction professionals with the skills and knowledge needed to implement the new code effectively.

OPINION

Sustainable farming practices in Oman



SANTOSH SHINDE

The author is co-founder and CTO of FarmERP

OMAN faces significant hurdles in agricultural sustainability due to its arid climate, where about 90% of the land is classified as arid or semi-arid and only 0.4% is arable. Water availability has plummeted, with per capita resources falling from 2,000 cubic meters in 1990 to under 1,000 cubic meters today. Despite these challenges, Oman is taking commendable steps toward sustainable farming practices that protect the environment, enhance food security, and strengthen the economy.

In line with these efforts, the recently launched Food Security Lab 2024 aims to stimulate local and foreign investment in food security sectors, aligning with Oman Vision 2040. This initiative emphasises digital transformation through the ‘Tharwat’ platform, offering ten electronic services, and the app ‘Salal.’

Additionally, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) is advancing a new onion cultivation project over 20 hectares in the Wilayat of Dhank to boost local production and reduce reliance on imports.

By formalising agreements with local agricultural companies and providing both technical and financial support, Oman seeks to strengthen food security while enhancing agricultural sustain-

ability. To further promote sustainable agricultural practices, MoAFWR is actively investing in research and development aimed at reducing environmental impacts.

A key innovation is the widespread use of drip irrigation, which delivers water directly to plant roots, reducing waste and ensuring optimal moisture levels.

Government initiatives continue to promote efficient water use in arid regions, helping farmers make the best use of limited resources. Farmers and agribusinesses are also diversifying crops to combat the risks of monoculture, introducing various fruits, vegetables and herbs.

This diversification improves soil health, increases pest resilience, and boosts income potential. Practices like crop rotation and intercropping offer both economic and ecological benefits, supporting a sustainable agricultural landscape.

Organic farming is gaining traction as consumers seek healthier options, prompting growers to move away from synthetic fertilisers and pesticides in favour of natural alternatives.

The establishment of organic certification bodies encourages this shift, fostering a growing market for organic products. Another promising practice,

agroforestry, which integrates trees into farming systems, is also emerging as a beneficial approach.

It improves soil quality, enhances carbon sequestration, and provides additional income through timber and fruit production.

Moreover, these systems act as wind-breaks, protecting crops from harsh winds and reducing soil erosion.

The introduction of modern technologies is among the most significant advancements in Oman’s agricultural sector, aiming to reduce the consumption of water and fertilisers.

Precision agriculture tools, such as drones and sensors, are being employed to monitor soil health, moisture levels, and crop growth.

Techniques like soilless cultivation and aquaponics are becoming crucial in addressing the nation’s water scarcity issues, allowing farmers and agribusinesses to maximise crop yields while using minimal resources.

The Al Najd Agricultural City initiative serves as a research and innovation hub, crucial for advancing sustainable agriculture and economic diversification. MoAFWR’s R&D efforts have developed new crop varieties and pest-resistant plants tailored to Oman’s harsh conditions.

In line with these efforts, the recently launched Food Security Lab 2024 aims to stimulate local and foreign investment in food security sectors, aligning with Oman Vision 2040

WHY STABLECOINS WILL ENTRENCH DOLLAR’S SUPREMACY

UNCLE Sam can rest easy for now. A Russian plan to break the grip of the US dollar through a new international payments network met a cool reception at the BRICS summit in Kazan this week, with the emerging market club’s official declaration failing to mention the “BRICS Bridge” initiative by name.

Rather than slipping, in fact, the greenback’s supremacy may be strengthening because of an entirely different monetary innovation: dollar-backed stablecoins.

Russia’s BRICS Bridge would enable the settlement of trade and finance between Brazil, China, India and other members of the group, using their own central bank digital currencies (CBDCs).

A mooted second would introduce a new international currency backed in part by gold. That could threaten not just the reach, but also the value, of the US dollar. The yellow metal would rally, and the greenback wilt, if use of the new monetary unit were to take off.

With the gold price touching an all-time-high of nearly \$2,750 per ounce on the summit’s first day, there was speculation that traders were already front-running the rout. In the end, however, the meeting’s official statement gestured only vaguely towards the project that Moscow bills as a major reorientation of the international monetary system.

Instead, the most important monetary announcement of the week took place in California. On Monday, San Francisco-based US payments firm Stripe announced the acquisition of a little-known crypto startup for \$1.1 billion. Its target — called, coincidentally, Bridge — is a specialist in stablecoins: private, digital currencies pegged to a fiat currency such as the dollar.

This Stripe-Bridge stablecoin tie-up is more likely to define the future world monetary order than the BRICS Bridge CBDC one. It is also likely to strengthen, not weaken, the role of the greenback — and perhaps its value too.

Underlying both initiatives are three trends of the last fifteen years. The first is the spread of mobile telephony. That democratised digital payments and made them possible on the move.

The second is the steep decline in the cost of computing power and Internet bandwidth. That opened up digital settlement in the cloud. The third was innovation in cryptography.

That enabled the development of secure, decentralised digital ledgers such as blockchains, and the cryptocurrencies that can operate on them.

Private, digital currencies like bitcoin were the first to emerge from this revolutionary mix. Two advantages over bank-based currencies make them in principle a killer app. The first is the intrinsically international nature of the Internet, which makes web-based cryptocurrencies global in scope. — Reuters



RAGHURAM G. RAJAN

The author, a former governor of the Reserve Bank of India and chief economist of the International Monetary Fund, is Professor of Finance at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business



A man walks past the International Monetary Fund (IMF) logo at its headquarters in Washington. — Reuters

THE world needs an effective International Monetary Fund. Countries have become hugely indebted following the Covid-19 pandemic, and the risk of new shocks grows as the world warms and new pathogens emerge. Protectionism (sometimes cloaked by security interests) is on the rise, impeding traditional pathways to development.

As economies falter, no one wants to absorb the desperate people who are braving dense jungles or climbing onto rickety, overcrowded boats in search of decent livelihoods.

We need an honest broker to help countries negotiate fair rules for international exchange (including, most immediately, rules on subsidies), to call out violators, to criticise bad policies, and to step in as lender of last resort for those in distress. Unfortunately, the IMF, despite the high quality of its management and staff, is increasingly ill-positioned to perform these tasks.

The institution’s problems lie in its anachronistic governance. Most key decisions, including on country loans, are made by the Fund’s executive board, where G7 members hold most of the power.

The United States wields a de facto veto, and Japan’s voting power exceeds that of China, whose economy dwarfs Japan’s. India’s vote share is far smaller than the United Kingdom’s or France’s, even though

its economy is larger and growing faster than both.

Because the world’s erstwhile dominant powers refuse to let go, the underrepresentation of fast-growing emerging economies persists. At the same time, it is no longer clear that the old powers always have the global interest at heart.

In the immediate postwar era, the United States, as the sole economic superpower, could be trusted to enforce the rules of the game and generally remain above the fray.

But as its worries about being overtaken have grown, it has switched from referee to player. Once a champion of the idea that openness benefits everyone, it increasingly wants openness only on its own terms.

The quality of the Fund’s lending decisions is also likely to deteriorate.

Whenever the Fund lends, it is natural that well-connected countries in economic trouble tend to obtain more relief on easier terms. While there have always been political influences on Fund lending, there has been a greater chance of it succeeding in the past because of outside assistance from powerful board members — think, for example, of the Mexican crisis in 1994, where the US contributed a hefty share of the rescue package. With fiscal resources now tight even in the G7, the IMF increasingly will have to risk its capital as powerful board members with relatively little skin in the game direct loans toward

friends and neighbours.

Worse, such special treatment may not even help the loan recipients, many of whom need tough love. In sum, the IMF’s governance structure will increasingly hurt the Fund’s work. But will redistributing IMF vote shares to reflect the current distribution of economic power not lead to chaos? Won’t China block loans to any country linked to the G7, and vice versa?

Isn’t dysfunctional governance better than absolute paralysis? Perhaps, which is why any reforms affecting countries’ voting power should be accompanied by a fundamental change in IMF governance. The executive board should no longer vote on operational decisions, including individual lending programmes.

Instead, the Fund’s top management should be given free rein to make operational decisions for the benefit of the global economy, with the board setting broad guidelines and periodically examining whether those guidelines have been met.

More to the point, the executive board should become a governance board, much as with corporations.

It would set the organisation’s operational mandate, and appoint and change management and monitor overall performance; but it would not control day-to-day decisions. All operational decisions should be depoliticised.

Indeed, that is what John Maynard Keynes would have preferred to see at the time of the Fund’s founding.

Fearing America’s undue influence, he proposed a non-resident board, which in those days of poor communications and steamship travel implied a non-executive board and an empowered management.

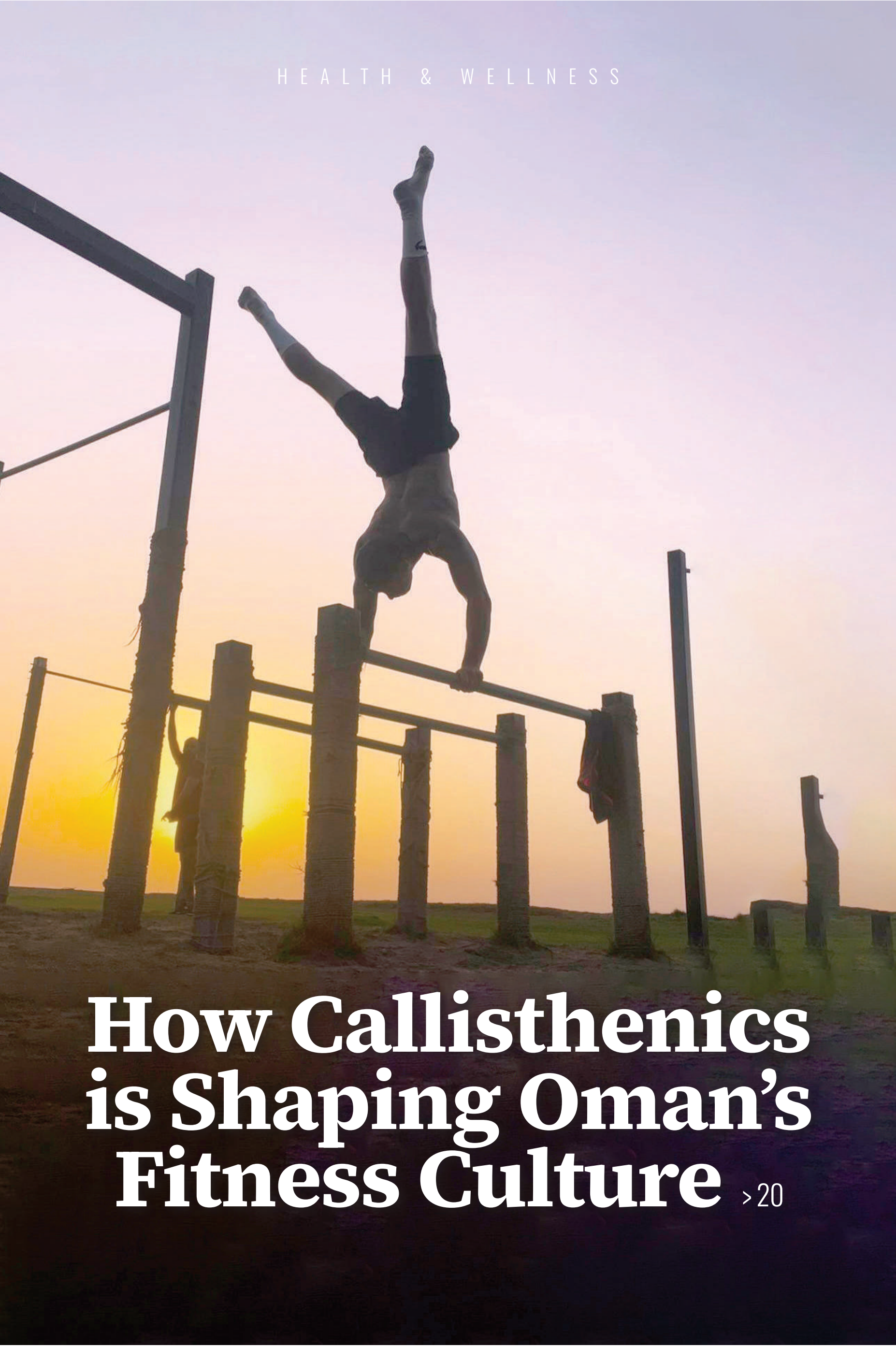
There are some foreseeable objections to this proposal. The first is that powerful countries will refuse to commit their taxpayers’ resources to the Fund unless they can exercise full control over their use. But this is precisely what the dominant board powers already expect the rest of the world to do. What is good for the goose... Another objection is that emerging powers like China might not agree to a change in Fund structure now that they themselves are on the verge of acquiring power.

But if they don’t accept any change, neither will the old powers. The recent 16th General Review of Quotas made little change in the distribution of board power.

Expect more of the same unless the old powers and emerging powers reach a grand bargain. @Project Syndicate, 2024

Classifieds

ART/LIFE



HEALTH & WELLNESS

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AT THE MOVIES

Original ‘Little Prince’ typescript to go under hammer in UAE



A specialist London bookstore is selling an original typescript of Antoine de Saint-Exupery's children's classic "The Little Prince", complete with the author's hand-written corrections and revisions.

The battered book and Saint-Exupery's passport, issued by the French culture ministry, will go on sale at the Abu Dhabi Art 2024 fair which opens on November 20, with an expected price of at least \$1.25 million.

It was acquired earlier this year for an undisclosed sum by rare books specialist store Peter Harrington.

The typescript also contains numerous drawings by the author as well as his famous phrase "One only sees clearly with the heart. The essential is invisible to the eyes".

Sammy Jay, of Peter Harrington Rare Books, said it was one of three known versions of the transcript, one of which is held by the National Library of France (BNF).

"Unlike the other two which were given to people, he kept this one and it was his own working copy of the typescript so that's what makes it extra special," Jay said.

In addition to the handwritten corrections, the version due to be sold includes passages that were later edited out.

Such a book is extremely unusual in the rare books market, where sky-high prices are not the norm.

"You don't usually get something of this status," Jay said, citing the example of the scroll typescript for Jack Kerouac's novel "On The Road", which sold for \$2.4 million in 2001.

"The market for rare and ancient books is very different from any other market in the sense that you don't often sell for millions," he said.

"The Little Prince" remains one of the world's best-selling books having sold more than the first "Harry Potter" and "The Hobbit" combined, according to Jay.

Saint-Exupery wrote his tale about an alien prince and his interstellar travels while in exile in the United States in 1942, having fled France after the Nazi invasion.

The pilot-explorer left the United States in 1943 to fight on the north African front and the book was published the same year in the United States only.

Saint-Exupery disappeared during a flying mission over the Mediterranean in July 1944, and never saw his book's worldwide success. — AFP

QUICK

FEATURES



HERITAGE

Maleku Indigenous man Oscar Quiroz poses for a picture with traditional crafts in a village near the town of La Fortuna, about 170 km north of San Jose. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

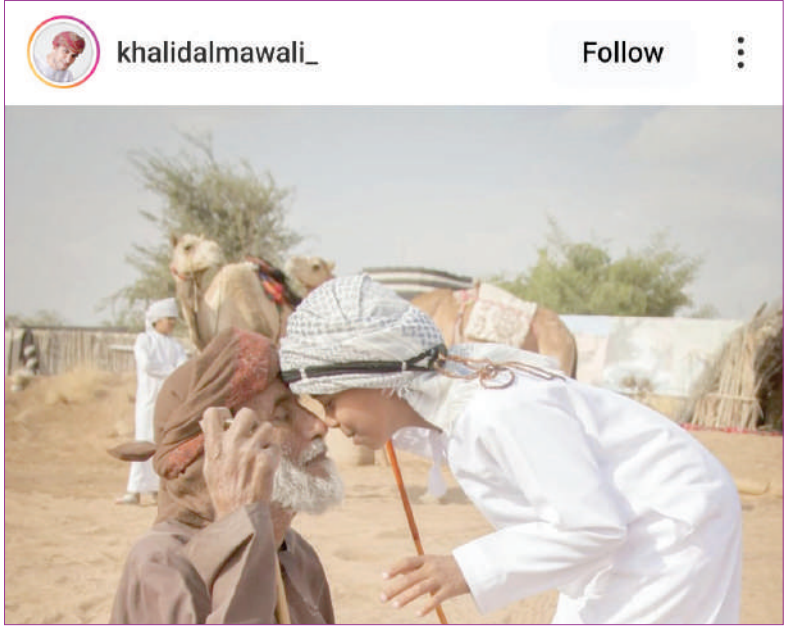
A musician dressed in traditional attire plays during the Ghadames Festival celebrating the cultural and artistic heritage of the Libyan city. — AFP



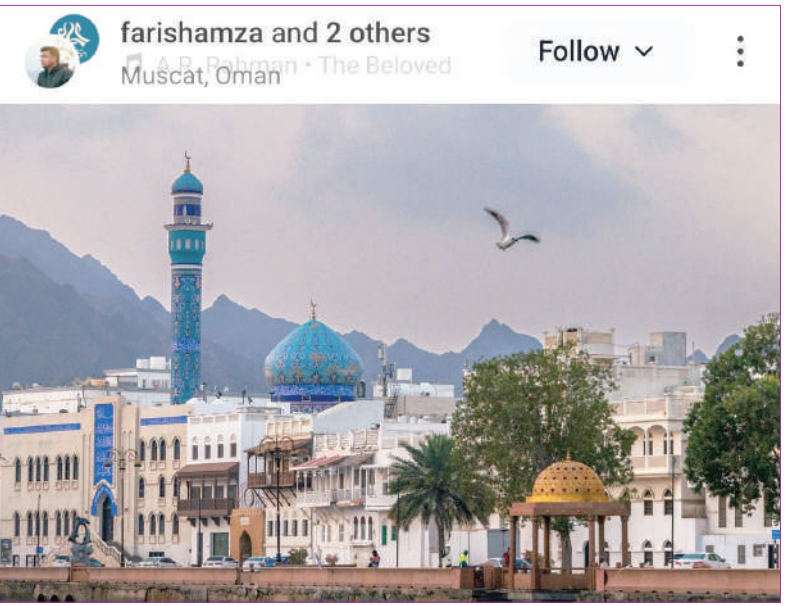
TRAVEL

The building housing the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW-House of the Cultures of the World) museum is reflected in a water basin, in Berlin. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Passing the Tradition



Iconic Lanmark

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A Leggy Tyrannosaur Emerges From a Mexican Desert



For two decades, a collection of crumbling dinosaur bones lay neglected in a drawer at the Museo del Desierto in Saltillo, Mexico — a sight that initially seemed unremarkable. Nick Longrich, a paleontologist from the University of Bath, remarked on their lackluster appearance, likening them to “a pile of rubble.” However, these bones, discovered in 2000 in northern Mexico, held a remarkable secret: they belonged to a new species related to Tyrannosaurus rex, characterised by long-legs, large eyes adapted for low-light hunting, and a robust snout for subduing prey. This newly identified species, named Labocania aguilonae in honour of local palaeontologist Martha Carolina Aguilón, is only the second tyrannosaur species found in Mexico. Longrich and Héctor Rivera-Sylva detailed its sig-

nificance in the journal MDPI Fossil Studies, highlighting its role as evidence of a unique southern lineage of tyrannosaurs, distinct from their northern counterparts. Contrary to the previously understood dominance of species like Tyrannosaurus rex and Albertosaurus in the northern regions, the fossil record suggests that the southern parts of North America hosted a diverse array of tyrannosaurs. This underscores a potential richness in late Cretaceous diversity, with distinct species occupying smaller geographic ranges. While some paleontologists express caution about the completeness of the Labocania fossils for firm taxonomic classification, the discovery hints at a broader and more complex evolutionary history of tyrannosaurs than previously believed. — ASHER ELBEIN/NYT



Fungi finding: mushroom hunters seek new species and recognition

YOU CAN'T walk very far through a forest in this part of the United States without stumbling upon a mushroom, an eruption from a vast fungal kingdom that all life depends on, but about which we know very little. Some are tall and thin with a helmet top, others are great flourishes of brain-like folds; some seem like they should be sheltering fairies in a storybook. Many look like they could be delicious in the hands of a skilled chef; others... decidedly not. But the dozens of species that enthusiasts and experts collected on a recent morning represent just a tiny fraction of life that is neither flora nor fauna. “Mushrooms are not plants,” said Amy Honan, who teaches mycology and fungal ecology at Oregon University. “Fungi are more closely related to animals than they are to plants.” Plants make their own food through photosynthesis, but mushrooms have to eat something else. “They spit out different enzymes, so they break down their food outside of their body, and they slurp it up like a smoothie,” Honan said.

ESSENTIAL Of the at least 2.5 million species of fungus thought to exist on Earth, scientists have described around 150,000 — six per cent — Honan said during a field trip near Port Angeles in Washington state. Compared with what we know about plants and animals, that’s practically nothing. “We know about 98 per cent of the vertebrates that are on the planet,” she said. “We know about 85 per cent of plants that exist on the planet. We know about 20 per cent of invertebrates.” This paucity of fungal knowledge is troubling because of the vital — and largely unseen — role that they play. Fungi evolved before plants and created the conditions to allow



vegetation to move from the sea to the land. “Fungi are essential for all terrestrial ecosystems. They confer all kinds of benefits to plants, from salt tolerance, heavy metal tolerance, disease resistance,” Honan said. “Basically, without fungi... plants would not exist. We need plants for oxygen, so the world would not exist in its current state.” It would also be chock-full of dead things. “Fungi break down all dead organic material, so they recycle all that carbon and other nutrients,” facilitating the life cycle of plants and animals. **COP16 FOCUS** There is a burgeoning awareness of the importance of fungi, whose role is set to come up for discussion at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity COP16 meeting in Colombia, which kicks off on Monday. *The Guardian* newspaper reported last week that a joint proposal by Chile and the United Kingdom could see fungi recognised as “an independent kingdom of life in legislation,

policies and agreements, in order to advance their conservation and to adopt concrete measures that allow for maintaining their benefits to ecosystems and people.” Greater protections would be good news, said mycologist Graham Steinruck, who, along with Honan, is leading a study into fungal biodiversity at a site that was underwater until the removal of a dam a few years ago. As part of the Olympic Peninsula Fungi Festival, he and Honan have taken participants out into the field to show them how to find species of mushroom, and how to record what they are seeing. “I think the more fungi that we go out and discover and document not only tells us about our biodiversity, but also can tell us about ways we can steward the land better,” Steinruck said. Knowing more about these mysterious organisms could also bring benefits to lots of areas of human life. Mushrooms can help us “heal ourselves, and maybe even potentially (help) other things like industries,” he said. — AFP

Emerging from humble beginnings, the Oman Calisthenics Community has become an instrumental force in bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds and industries, all united by a shared goal of improving health and wellness.



How Calisthenics is Shaping Oman’s Fitness Culture



BY YERU EBUEN

ON THE sun-kissed shores of Shatti Al Qurum, a small crowd gathers each evening, the salty breeze a backdrop to their vibrant energy. Young Omani men, alongside a few enthusiastic expatriates, congregate on the sandy beach, forging connections through their shared passion for calisthenics. They transition effortlessly from one spot to another, utilising the nearby benches, railings, and even the sandy ground to perform a repertoire of movements, their laughter mingling with the rhythmic sound of crashing waves. Here, amidst the stunning coastline, the burgeoning calisthenics community in Oman is taking shape, signalling a refreshing shift in the approach to fitness and wellness.

Calisthenics — a form of exercise that emphasises bodyweight training — has gained momentum worldwide, spiralling into a global movement over the past decade. Originating as a street workout culture, it has captivated enthusiasts with its simplicity and the versatility it offers. Unlike traditional gym workouts, where equipment and machines are the norms, calisthenics performers rely purely on their bodies, creating an environment that encourages creativity and personal expression. This adaptability aligns perfectly with the Omani lifestyle, encouraging individuals to make the most out of their natural surroundings.

The journey of calisthenics to Oman is a testament to the universal appeal of fitness that focuses on functional movement. As social media proliferated, showcasing impressive feats of strength and acrobatic skills from cities around the world, the potential of calisthenics became evident. With a rising number of local influencers promoting fitness, it wasn't long before Omani youth began to mirror these trends, leading to gatherings along the coastline — an impromptu centre of training and camaraderie.

Central to calisthenics are foundational movements such as push-ups, pull-ups, squats and dips. These exercises not only build strength, but also enhance coordination and flexibility. As practitioners progress, they can transition into advanced techniques like muscle-ups, planches and handstands — moves that demand not just strength, but also balance and precision. The level of skill varies widely among participants; some are beginners, while others are already impressively adept at performing gravity-defying transitions.

While gyms offer structured environments with specialised equipment, the beauty of calisthenics lies in its accessibility. Individuals can train practically anywhere, with minimal equipment required. Resistance bands, pull-up bars and soft landing mats are often enough to start. Practitioners can sculpt their routines and adapt their training based on available facilities — whether it's a sturdy tree branch or a park bench. This ease of access makes it an appealing choice for many, particularly in a country like Oman, where outdoor activity is often favoured in the heart of nature.

BUILDING THE COMMUNITY

Emerging from humble beginnings, the Oman Calisthenics Community has become an instrumental force in bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds and industries, all united by a shared goal of improving health and wellness. Each member brings their own unique experience to the table — some are natural athletes with a history of competition, while others are simply seeking to stay fit as required by their jobs or through community engagement.

Among the notable figures within the community

are sports athletes like Sultan al Maawali and Qusai al Harthi, both of whom serve as inspirations to their peers. Fitness personalities such as Zahir al Kindi, Waleed al Rawahi and Ali Mohsen have also played pivotal roles in promoting the benefits of calisthenics, often sharing their knowledge and expertise with fellow practitioners.

On special occasions, popular community personalities like Riyadh al Hinai and Fahad al Abri join in, enriching the experience with their presence and encouraging even greater participation.

As the community has gained momentum, it has fostered a spirit of camaraderie and competition. Several competitions have been launched, designed to keep members engaged and motivated in their fitness journeys. These events not only highlight individual talents, but also reinforce the bonds among participants, empowering them to take pride in their progress. Through these competitions, the Oman Calisthenics Community showcases its dedication to encouraging a more active lifestyle and solidifying a culture of fitness in Oman.

Recognising the importance of collaboration, the community has taken steps to partner with established health and wellness institutions across the country. These partnerships allow for greater visibility within the fitness community in Oman, bringing attention to the group's initiatives while helping elevate the overall standard of health and fitness. This growing recognition serves as a testament to the positive impact the community is making, one workout at a time.

Inclusivity remains at the core of the Oman Calisthenics Community's ethos. Newcomers are welcomed with open arms and encouraged to step outside their comfort zones and explore the benefits of bodyweight training. Community leaders are dedicated to nurturing this supportive environment, often conducting workshops tailored to help both members and non-members. Workshops focusing on strength development, body conditioning and rolling techniques are led by the community's finest trainers, including Abdu and Faisal, ensuring that participants receive top-notch guidance and encouragement.

SUPPORTIVE OF EACH OTHER

As word spreads about the group, local influencers and fitness enthusiasts are creating content that not only demonstrates calisthenics techniques, but also promotes an inspiring sense of community.

The emergence of calisthenics as a health and wellness activity in Oman is more than just a trend; it signifies a vital cultural shift. As young Omanis embrace the philosophy of functional fitness through movement-based training, they're finding new ways to stay healthy while building lasting relationships. This grassroots movement, fuelled by a passion for movement and wellness, embodies resilience and adaptability — qualities that resonate deeply within Oman's rich heritage.

With each workout along the coast, the community of calisthenics practitioners in Oman is growing, one nonformal gathering at a time. As they challenge their limits and celebrate their progress together, they're not just sculpting their bodies; they're cultivating a vibrant, inclusive environment where fitness meets camaraderie, underscoring the transformative power of movement in one of the world's most stunning settings.

For anyone looking to learn and get involved, the message is clear: the Oman Calisthenics Community is a safe haven where all are welcome. Together, they champion a movement that transcends mere physical fitness. As the community continues to grow, it lays the foundation for a healthier, more connected Oman, inviting everyone to join in on the journey towards wellness.