



54 years of comprehensive development

His Majesty to preside over military parade

HIS MAJESTY Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, will preside on Monday over the military parade, to be staged at Al Sumoud Ground of the Sultan's Special Force on the occasion of the 54th Glorious National Day.

Symbolic units representing the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO), the Sultan's Special Force (SSF), the Royal Oman Police (ROP), the Royal Court Affairs (RCA), and the joint military musical band will take part in the military parade.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received cables of greetings on the occasion of the 54th Glorious National Day from kings, leaders, crown princes, heads of states, organisations and senior officials from various Arab and foreign countries.

In their cables, the well-wishers expressed their heartfelt sentiments and best wishes of good health, happiness, and long life to His Majesty the Sultan. They prayed to Allah the Almighty to grant His Majesty success to achieve aspirations of further progress and prosperity.

His Majesty the Sultan has also received greetings from HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of

Majlis Ash'shura, Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, and Lt Gen Said bin Ali al Hilali, Head of the Internal Security Service.

His Majesty has also received greetings on this glorious anniversary from members of the Royal Family, ministers, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), the Royal Oman Police (ROP), and other security units, members of the State Council and the Majlis Ash'shura, under-secretaries, Omani ambassadors, shaikhs, dignitaries, and loyal citizens. They expressed their sentiments and best wishes on this dear occasion, praying to Allah the Almighty to protect His Majesty and grant him success.

Meanwhile, the Sultanate of Oman will today celebrate the 54th Glorious National Day, marking milestone accomplishments in different areas. The citizens of Oman and various state institutions have rendered an indispensable contribution to the continuous achievements in the path of the comprehensive development during the renewed renaissance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, who has outlined a wise and sound vision that leads to progress and prosperity in all fields.

His Majesty's directives to all state institutions to continue improving the missions entrusted to them and to develop appropriate conditions to upgrade performance at all levels have contributed positively over the past five years to achieving success in various targets of Oman Vision 2040. The government of His Majesty the Sultan has managed to improve the state's economic and financial performance. — **ONA**

HM PARDONS 174 PRISONERS

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, has issued a Royal pardon to a number of prisoners convicted of different cases. They included 174 citizens and foreign prisoners, according to an official source at the Royal Oman Police (ROP). The Royal pardon of His Majesty the Supreme Commander coincides with the 54th National Day. It also comes in consideration of families of the prisoners.

THE CORRESPONDENT REFLECTS ON OMAN'S ACHIEVEMENTS AT 54



As the Sultanate of Oman celebrates its 54th National Day, The Correspondent sheds light on the nation's journey of progress, resilience and unity. This special feature encapsulates the spirit of Oman's identity and its remarkable achievements over the decades. The feature begins with a historical overview of the Sultanate of Oman, tracing its rich heritage and the pivotal moments that have shaped the modern nation. To get a digital copy of the magazine, it can be downloaded at [www.omanobserver.om](#) or by finding the link shared across our different digital media channels. For those who want a keepsake of this edition, a printed copy of the magazine will be released the following day.

Only 2-state solution can bring ME peace: Sayyid Badr

MUSCAT: The Foreign Ministry held the fifth annual meeting at the Diplomatic Club on Sunday with ambassadors and heads of Diplomatic Missions and international organisations accredited to the Sultanate of Oman.

The meeting was aimed at exchanging views on a set of current regional issues, and the topics raised in relation to the development process and Oman Vision 2040, in addition to Omani foreign policy.

During the meeting, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, commended the valuable efforts made by the heads of missions in maintaining and continuously developing relations with the Sultanate of Oman.

On the political level, the minister stressed that the vision of a two-state solution is the only option for achieving peace, and that the Palestinian people alone have the final say in determining the form of sovereignty of the Palestinian state they seek.

He also expressed the Sultanate of Oman's appreciation for the countries that have taken steps towards formal recognition of the State of Palestine, which has added momentum to the large global majority in this regard.

The meeting addressed the tragic situation in the Gaza Strip and the severe suffering of the brotherly Palestinian people as a result of the military operations launched by the Israeli occupation forces, which have

gone far beyond and violated the rules of international law and international humanitarian law. The situation in Lebanon was also addressed.

The foreign minister also reviewed a set of ideas that could help confront current challenges and achieve global justice and peace, including those calling for the need to update and renew the United Nations Security Council and the veto powers held by permanent member states. He pointed out that this system dates back to the Cold War era, and that it is clear at the present moment that it constitutes an obstacle to achieving international justice, while protecting the interests of one state that continues blatantly to violate international law. **TURN TO P2**

OMAN

SHORT TAKES

HM INVITED FOR GCC SUMMIT IN KUWAIT



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from Shaikh Meshal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, inviting His Majesty to attend the 45th Summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) leaders, scheduled to be held in Kuwait in December.

The message was received by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, in Muscat Governorate on Sunday when he received Abdullah Ali Abdullah al Yahya, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Envoy of the Emir of the State of Kuwait.

During the meeting, they discussed bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries, ways to enhance them in various fields, and a number of regional and international developments of common interest.

MAJLIS ASH'SHURA OFFICE REVIEWS MINISTERIAL REPLIES



MUSCAT: The office of the Majlis Ash'shura on Sunday held its first meeting of the second annual convening for the 10th term to review reports from the permanent committees, including the report of the Youth and Human Resources Committee and the report of the Public Services and Utilities Committee.

The meeting also reviewed the Health and Social Committee's evaluation of the annual reports of the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Health for 2023, in addition to a letter from the Head of the Public Services and Utilities Committee regarding a visual presentation on the draft National Social Housing Plan.

Further, the meeting discussed ministerial replies to inquiries raised by some office members.

The meeting was chaired by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, in the presence of office members and Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of the Majlis Ash'shura. — ONA

CONFERENCE BOOSTS SCIENTIFIC TERMINOLOGY



Arabisation conference enhances scientific terminology industry

MUSCAT: The 14th Arabisation Conference was held on Sunday in Muscat Governorate under the title "Employing Scientific and Technical Terminology in Their Specialised Spaces."

The conference aims at enhancing the industry and dissemination of unified terminology and dictionaries, which contributes to supporting the Arabic language to keep pace with modern scientific and technical developments.

The opening ceremony of the two-day event was held under the auspices of Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture.

The conference is organised by the GCC Centre for Translation, Arabisation, and the Promotion of Arabic and the Arabisation Coordination Office of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO). — ONA

HIS MAJESTY GREETES MOROCCO, LATVIA

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Mohammed VI of the Kingdom of Morocco on his country's Independence Anniversary.

In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere

sentiments and best wishes to King Mohammed VI and the people of Morocco, wishing Morocco further success and prosperity.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has also sent a cable of greetings to President Edgars Rinkēvičs of the Republic of

Latvia on the occasion of the Proclamation Day Anniversary of the Republic.

In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Rinkēvičs and his country's people.

Media conference discusses AI revolution

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, NOV 17

THE FOURTH international conference on communication, media and the Artificial Intelligence revolution was inaugurated on Sunday under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information.

The conference, organised by the Department of Media at Sultan Qaboos University, is taking place over three days at the Intercity Muscat Hotel under the title 'Fourth International Conference (Communication, Media and the Artificial Intelligence Revolution: Present and Future).' It features the participation of more than 70 local and international researchers and speakers presenting a total of 60 scientific papers.

The main objective of the conference is to discuss the impact of artificial intelligence on the media and content industry, as well as to anticipate future challenges and opportunities.

In his opening speech, Dr Abdullah emphasised the significance of artificial intelligence, saying: "Artificial intelligence is transforming many aspects of our lives, especially in the creative and content industries.

The media sector, in particular, is experiencing significant changes, some positive, such as the creation of new jobs and improvements in content production processes, and some negative, such as job losses and the proliferation of misinformation."

He added: "One of the most notable advantages is that artificial intelligence assists media organisations in analysing audience trends through big data and tailoring content to individual needs.

These advancements coincide with two important events: the 50th anniversary of the commencement of Sultanate of Oman TV broadcasting, which began in 1974, and the recent enactment of the media law, which strikes a balance between freedoms and responsibilities."

During his speech, Professor Abdullah bin Khamis al Kindi, Chairman of the Conference Preparatory Committee and Head of the Department of Media at



The conference was inaugurated under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information. — ONA

Sultan Qaboos University, highlighted the increasing importance of discussing the role of artificial intelligence in the media industry. He mentioned using artificial intelligence applications to draft his speech, indicating the profound changes occurring in the media sector.

Al Kindi pointed out the significant rise in the use of artificial intelligence in the media, with projections estimating a surge from \$10 billion in 2022 to over \$30 billion by 2030.

He also noted that approximately 80 per cent of social media users receive customised content through artificial intelligence algorithms.

However, he cautioned about the challenges associated with this revolution, such as algorithmic bias, fake news dissemination, privacy threats, and the potential erosion of journalistic values.

Dr Alexandra Wick, Associate Professor of Journalism at RMIT University in Australia, delivered the keynote address at the conference, focusing on the impact

of generative AI on the news industry and educational institutions. She highlighted the growing use of generative AI technologies for creating text, images, and artwork, emphasising the need for responsible education to ensure ethical usage of AI in journalism.

In collaboration with the Artificial Intelligence Journalism Foundation for Research and Foresight (AIJRF), the conference launched the "AI Content Creators Challenge" (GEN AI Youth), a competition involving over 50 trainees.

The initiative aims to enhance the AI skills of young media professionals and journalists in Omani press organisations.

Dr Mohammed Abdul Dhaheer, Chairman of the Challenge, highlighted the Sultanate of Oman's potential for AI sector growth and integration into various economic sectors. He emphasised the challenge's goal of promoting AI culture and enabling media professionals to utilise AI tools in their daily work.

Only 2-state solution can bring ME peace: Sayyid Badr

FROM P1

Regarding the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, the minister underlined the flexibility enjoyed by the Omani economy within the framework of the diversification policy, investment attractiveness, and opportunities to support innovation and technology projects and build human skills and capabilities.

He referred to the Social Protection Law, which provides a vital safety net for various segments of society. He also touched on the Research and Innovation Law, which establishes a national system to encourage research and innovation.

The foreign minister stressed that the government of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sultan of Oman, is committed to creating the best possible opportunities for investors and entrepreneurs, and supporting success, while taking into account the need to



Sayyid Badr expressed his thanks and appreciation to the ambassadors and members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Sultanate of Oman and the organisations for their efforts in strengthening relations. — ONA

protect the welfare of those who are not in a position to achieve these opportunities.

At the end of the meeting, Sayyid Badr expressed his thanks and appreciation to the ambassadors and members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Sultanate of Oman and the organisations for their efforts

in strengthening relations and cooperation with the Sultanate of Oman.

On their part, the heads of missions expressed their sincere appreciation for the gesture of the foreign minister and his keenness to hold this fruitful annual meeting.

They affirmed their support

for the existing partnership with the Sultanate of Oman.

The meeting was attended by Khalid bin Hashil al Muselhi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs, and Najib bin Yahya al Balushi, Head of the Protocols Department at the Foreign Ministry. — ONA

A partner in progress to a nation on the move

On the occasion of **Oman's 54th National Day**, Khimji Ramdas Group and its Social Foundation, Eshraqa extend our heartfelt congratulations to **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik** and the people of Oman.

As Oman continues to flourish, we remain at the forefront, contributing to sustainable, future-focused initiatives that drive the progress and prosperity of the nation under Oman Vision 2040. Together, we are building a legacy of innovation and excellence.



KR
كيمجي رامداس
KHIMJI RAMDAS



Felicitations to
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik
and the people of Oman on the occasion of the
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of the Renaissance

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Haj mission meets operating firms

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

THE RECENTLY formed Omani Haj Mission for the year 1446 AH met with representatives of Haj and Umrah companies accredited in the Sultanate of Oman. They reviewed the most important developments of the Haj season for the year 1446 and examined the statistics and results of the electronic system for registering pilgrims.

The two-week long registration window came to an end on Sunday, November 17. Following this, the Ministry would launch the scrutinising process, and the results would be acknowledged to the applicants in due course.

Ahmed bin Saleh al Rashdi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA) and Head of the Omani Haj Mission for the year 1446 AH, addressed the duties of Haj companies towards the pilgrims. He discussed responsibilities and rights, the need for constant communication with the mission, adherence to the services booklet, and controlling the legal aspects and spatial and temporal timings.

He also reviewed the indicators of the Haj companies in terms of evaluating the contents of the regulations and procedural mechanisms for registering Haj companies. Additionally, he discussed the impact of penalties and sanctions on controlling the management of the Haj season, as well as



The quota of pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman has been set at 14,000 pilgrims including 470 pilgrims allocated to residents.

the agreement of partners in companies on service packages and contracts for pilgrims in the holy cities of Saudi.

Hamoud bin Abdullah al Amri, Director of the Haj Affairs Department at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, confirmed that the quota of pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman has been set at 14,000 pilgrims. A quota of 470 pilgrims has been allocated to residents of the Sultanate of Oman, including 235 for Arabs and 235 for non-Arabs.

He also reviewed the ease of dealing with the Saudi Haj portal, evaluating housing options in Medina and Mecca for pilgrims in terms of quality and price, and developing camps in the holy sites during the last three seasons. He also discussed security and guard ser-

vices in the Mina and Arafat camps.

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA) has launched three initiatives to measure and evaluate companies' readiness.

The aim is to enhance the quality of services of Haj companies' partners and ensure their readiness to meet the needs of pilgrims efficiently and safely.

These initiatives focus on setting accurate standards for evaluating performance and promoting continuous improvement.

Abdulaziz bin Masoud al Ghafri, Deputy Head of the Omani Haj Mission for Haj Affairs and Haj Companies, reviewed the most prominent observations of the competent authorities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on Omani Haj companies.

MoH launches health accreditation system



The ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, in the presence of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health. — ONA

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Sunday marked the launch of the Omani System for Accreditation of Health Institutions (OSAHI), which will be applied to all government, civil, military and private health institutions.

OSAHI, recognised by the International Society for Quality in Health Care (ISQua), aims to develop healthcare service procedures and improve quality.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, in the presence of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health.

The new system seeks to help health institutions in



Oman meet their obligations by upgrading the quality of healthcare.

The system was established to be compatible with local reality, aligned with international regulations for the next stage of domestic growth. Besides catering to

the needs of patients, the system also ensures the safety of healthcare workers.

OSAHI launch ceremony, held at Al Bustan Palace Hotel, was attended by ministers, under-secretaries and officials. — ONA

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Advertisement No. (36/2024)

International Companies specialized in the field and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date
PRE-24-097 (Re-Call)	Construction of Balance Works of Road Improvements of Dama Street in Al Seeb - (Re-Tender)	12/12/2024	29/12/2024
PRE-24-261	Correcting the Street Levels with Protection Works of Channel in Falaj Al Sham	12/12/2024	29/12/2024
PRE-24-322	Supply of Road Bollards for Muscat Municipality	12/12/2024	29/12/2024
PRE-24-319	Purchasing Golf Car	27/11/2024	02/12/2024

1. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.

2. Clarification and Support:

- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).

Ashkharah waterfront plan gets RO 5m

The Al Sharqiyah South Governorate has claimed that the Al Ashkharah Development Project waterfront project will enhance the region's tourism attractiveness and economic development.

Recently, the Tender Board allocated RO 5,786,000 for the project spread 74,172 sqm of space, which will include a bicycle track of 1,800 metres. Other facilities include paved service roads and parking spaces distributed along the facade, multi-use yards, parallel pedestrian paths, garden areas, hanging restaurants and cafes, sitting areas, shower rooms, and guard rooms.

The project aims to improve public facilities and support the local economy by encouraging commercial activities such as restaurants, cafes, and markets. Al Ashkharah in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali is a tourist destination known for its cool weather.



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C invites interested companies to participate in the following tender

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Tender Price (OMR)
NESC/ 2024/020	Conduct International Benchmark Study for Electricity Utility Retail Business and reflect recommended improvements in the Company's Business plan	27/11/2024	11/12/2024	Specialist	26.250

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -

Participation	- Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion may obtain Tender documents. - The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. - The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply). - To obtain the tender document and payment procedure, please visit www.supply.nama.om, under NESC VENDOR / E-Tender.
Enquiries	- Any inquiry can be sent to procurement@supply.nama.om using the inquiry form found in the tender document (05) Five working days before bid submission date. - Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.
Tender Submission	Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER and supplier guidelines available at NESC Website www.supply.nama.om, under NESC VENDOR / E-Tender.
Guarantee	- The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of (1%) of the tender value valid for a period of not less than Ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF PROCUREMENT COMMITTEE, Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C. - The hard copy of the bid bond should be deposited in the Tender Box at the Nama Electricity Supply Company Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 10:00 AM on the day specified for bid submission or any extended deadline. - Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected.
Terms and Conditions	- The Tender shall be valid for a period of (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. - If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date. - NESC is not bound to accept the lowest Tenderer. - Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization - NESC gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.
Incentives and exemptions	- Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from Tender fees - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from bid bond requirements. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from registration fees on business opportunities platform and supplier registration with Nama Group.



KEY NATIONAL MILESTONES IN 2024

JANUARY

- 01HM The Sultan Issues Royal Decree establishing National Fund for Emergencies
- 09The Council of Ministers gives green light to the 'National Product Loyalty Programme' to encourage consumers to go for Omani products
- 14HM The Sultan Arrives in Musandam Governorate
- 18The Honourable Lady visits Al Buraimi Governorate
- 21HM the Sultan lays the foundation stone for the Oman Cultural Complex

FEBRUARY

- 01Royal Orders for annual budget to provide blood glucose electronic sensors for diabetic children
- 06Emir of Kuwait arrives in Oman
- 07HM The Sultan presides over the opening of Duqm Refinery in the presence of the Emir of Kuwait
- 08HM The Sultan Heads to the United Kingdom
- 24HH The Honourable Lady extends greetings on Omani Teacher's Day

MARCH

- 21HH Honourable Lady, Spouse of The Sultan of Oman extends greetings on Mother's Day

APRIL

- 23HM The Sultan gives audience to ruler of Dubai
- HM The Sultan, UAE President hold official talks

MAY

- 14HM The Sultan, Emir of Kuwait hold official talks
- 28The Royal directives provide for the establishment of a secondary market at Muscat Stock Exchange, named 'Promising Companies Market'
- HM The Sultan, King of Jordan hold talks

JUNE

- 12Royal Decree Establishes Oman Endowment Foundation

AUGUST

- 26Consultancy services were awarded for the implementation of the project to update flood risk maps

NOVEMBER

- 10New rules for private daycare for the elderly
- Royal Decree promulgates Media Law
- 11HM The Sultan visits Medical City for Military and Security Services
- Oman launches its first Satellite (OL-1)

CAMEL RIDE MARKING
54TH NATIONAL DAY



Adventurer Ahmed al Mahrouqi expressed his desire to celebrate the 54th National Day in a traditional manner.

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Adventurer Ahmed al Mahrouqi is commemorating the 54th anniversary of the Sultanate of Oman with a camel journey starting from Farq, just a few kilometres before Nizwa. Speaking to the Observer from his campsite at Wadi Al Abyadh in the Wilayat of Niizwa, Ahmed said the the journey will take him from Farq to the Wilayat of Adam.

Two camels, Rahal and Thuraya, are accompanying him on the journey. “I needed to start my journey at 7 am, passing by the Oman Across Ages Museum in the Wilayat of Manah, going through Al Bashayeer, and finally reaching Adam, where I would conclude the journey at the Wali’s office in Adam,” explained Ahmed.

He expressed his desire to celebrate the 54th National Day in a traditional manner. “Camel riding is a part of our heritage, and it is how our ancestors travelled,” he emphasised.

Preserving this heritage also highlights the importance of camels. In the past, camels were referred to as the “ships of the desert” and served as a primary mode of land transportation. Camel caravans were well-known for trade, especially those carrying frankincense. Last December, the Islamic World Heritage Committee of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) added the Royal Camel Corps to the list of the Islamic World Heritage.

This international recognition acknowledges the role of the Royal Camel Corps of the Royal Court in safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage of Omani breeds, caring for camels, and showcasing this ancient cultural legacy. Recently, the Food and Agriculture Organization reported on “Camels: Heritage and Sustainability,” an event held this month in Suhar, which celebrated the economic significance of camels in Oman and emphasised the importance of preserving and sustaining camel breeds.

A PATH TO FINANCIAL
STABILITY, GROWTH



VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

THE ECONOMIC downturn following the drop in oil prices from 2014 and the Covid-19 pandemic led the government of Oman to introduce a Medium-Term Fiscal Balance Plan (MTFB) in 2020. Approved by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, the plan aimed to streamline financial resources based on national priorities.

The MTFB focused on establishing financial sustainability in the Sultanate of Oman, reducing national debt, enhancing government spending efficiency and increasing revenues from non-oil sectors. It emphasised strengthening the country’s financial reserves, improving government asset revenues and improving fiscal discipline.

A key initiative within the plan was the establishment of a social assurance system aimed at safeguarding low-income seg-

ments and families under the Social Security Scheme. This ensured social support during times of economic strain.

The plan also sought to invigorate the private sector, fostering economic growth and creating job opportunities.

Measures included streamlining the process for obtaining labour permits, consolidating municipal services and permitting non-Omanis to own residential properties in specific areas outside the Integrated Tourism Complexes (ITCs).

In line with fiscal reforms, Oman introduced the Value Added Tax (VAT) in 2020, exempting essential goods such as food, medicines and household items from the tax. This helped maintain the lowest inflation rates in the GCC.

Additionally, the MTFB highlighted the need for a personal income tax, which, once introduced, was designed to have a minimal impact on the economy, especially for individuals earning less than RO 2,500 per month. A vital part of the reform

process was the implementation of the Social Protection Law, ensuring monthly assistance to all societal segments, from children to the elderly, creating a comprehensive social safety net.

To boost tourism, the government made travellers from over 100 countries eligible for visa exemptions for stays of up to 14 days, which played a crucial role in Oman’s swift recovery from the pandemic. This reform has notably contributed to an uptick in foreign tourist arrivals, helping Oman become one of the few countries to recover quickly from the challenges posed by the 2020-2022 crisis.

Apart from the MTFB, Oman also introduced significant reforms, such as new laws regulating marriages between Omanis and foreigners, updates to the School Education Law, and the creation of a National Fund for Emergency Cases to address disasters like floods, earthquakes, and other emergencies that threaten public infrastructure and facilities.

A thought for the elderly on 54th National Day

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

Commemorating the 54th National Day of the Sultanate of Oman, the Oman Medical Specialty Board (OMSB) organised an awareness campaign entitled ‘Elderly Health’ with the aim of providing better care for the elderly in the country.

The event took place at The Village in Al Hail and involved resident doctors from the Emergency Medicine Programme, Orthopaedics, Family Medicine, and Psychiatry. These doctors provided medical consultations and health advice to enhance health awareness among the elderly and promote their well-being.

Dr Khalid al Balushi, a representative of the



The event involved resident doctors from the Emergency Medicine Programme, Orthopaedics, Family Medicine, and Psychiatry.



OMSB, stated, “Through this campaign, our goal is to raise awareness about the importance of preventive and therapeutic care for the elderly. We want to support their health by educating

them on ways to prevent chronic diseases, especially on this special day as the country celebrates its 54th anniversary.”

The campaign also aimed to encourage society to

provide necessary support and care for the elderly, as well as promote healthy lifestyles for them. It targeted all members of society, including citizens, residents, and visitors, to spread

awareness about the importance of supporting elderly health and encouraging the adoption of healthy habits.

Dr Al Balushi emphasised that these efforts align with the vision of the Oman

Medical Specialty Board to improve the health environment in the community. The Board aims to achieve this through awareness campaigns that promote the provision of essential health and psychological care for the elderly, creating an integrated community that supports their health and ensures a healthy and safe life for them.

The campaign included various events and activities, such as health consultations on cardiac health, osteoporosis, and psychological issues like depression and Alzheimer’s. Additionally, a medical examination corner was set up for measuring blood pressure, sugar levels, cholesterol, and haemoglobin, along with a first aid corner.

FISCAL REFORMS BOOST RATINGS

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, NOV 17

OMAN'S FISCAL health is showing remarkable improvement, as confirmed by the latest upgrade from S&P Global Ratings. The ratings raised the country's long-term foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings to 'BBB-' from 'BB+'. This marks the second upgrade in 2024, reflecting the ongoing success of Oman's economic reforms and its progress towards financial stability as part of Oman Vision 2040.

Assigning a stable outlook for Oman, the rating agency emphasised the positive impacts of the government's fiscal and economic reform programmes. Notable measures such as the introduction of VAT, subsidy reforms and the comprehensive fiscal stability programme launched in 2022 have contributed to improved fiscal metrics.

These reforms, coupled with continued efforts to diversify the economy, have strengthened the country's resilience to oil price volatility, a key vulnerability given the global energy market's fluctuations. The improvement in fiscal health has been complemented by other positive economic developments, including a rise in state revenues.

According to the Ministry of Finance, the state general revenues reached RO 7.154 billion by July 2024, slightly lower than the same period in 2023, but with a notable 9 per cent increase in net oil revenues. This was driven by higher oil prices, averaging \$83 per barrel, and oil production levels of 1.2 million barrels per day, contributing to a significant boost in government revenues.

Various international ratings agencies and market pundits have highlighted Oman's reduced public sector debt and strengthened government finances, underpinned by rising oil revenues and prudent fiscal management.

While Oman remains exposed to the structural challenges of global oil price shifts, the country's strategic approach to fiscal reforms has bolstered its creditworthiness.

Also laudable are the government's ongoing efforts to stabilise its fiscal position and enhance economic diversification, which are key to achieving the long-term objectives of Oman Vision 2040.



Oman is set to sustain its positive economic trajectory with its commitment to fiscal stability and Oman Vision 2040 long-term goals

The latest ratings upgrade is a testament to its ability to adapt to changing economic conditions, manage its public finances effectively and create an attractive environment for foreign direct investment (FDI). These advancements underscore Oman's concerted efforts to improve its

fiscal landscape, with initiatives that support economic diversification and stabilise government finances. The combination of strong fiscal policies, economic reforms and prudent financial management has significantly enhanced Oman's credit profile, positioning it as a more resilient and attractive

destination for investment. With a continued commitment to fiscal stability and Oman Vision 2040 long-term goals, the country is set to sustain its positive economic trajectory, as evidenced by the credit rating upgrade, marking a new chapter in its economic resilience and growth.

OMAN: A TOP CHOICE FOR EXPATRIATES

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

From its exciting shorelines to majestic mountains, from the vast deserts to its architectural grandeur, the Sultanate of Oman, without doubt, one can say is a slice of paradise on earth.

Though it may seem like an exaggeration, having lived in Oman for over two-and-a-half decades, I can confidently say that the country embodies all these qualities. My deep passion for Oman stems from both personal experiences and professional engagements during my time here.

With its fascinating maritime history and seafaring traditions spanning millennia, and the Omani empire once stretching as far south as Zanzibar in the late 17th century, and maintaining political neutrality, the Sultanate of Oman today is one of the safest countries amid its location in a volatile region.

Oman follows a policy that is based on a vision of peace and maintaining friendship with all countries. It is a policy of non-interference and diplomatic balancing. And it embraces dialogue and tolerance as guiding principles in addressing all issues.

Oman offers a lot for expats whether they are from Europe, Asia, or Africa. Those who are looking for relocation, the country has many professional opportunities, from corporate



The Sultanate follows a policy based on a vision of peace and maintaining friendship with all countries

positions to hospitality, a high standard of living and an advantageous tax system, and for others, Oman is undoubtedly one of the best-kept secrets with its stunning beauty.

The country is peaceful, quiet and safe and its people are incredibly friendly, respectful and welcoming. Oman offers a blend of traditional Arabian culture with a touch of modernity. This balance provides a comfortable

environment for expatriates, making it an attractive place for those who appreciate cultural richness without feeling overwhelmed by rapid modernisation.

Home to nearly 2.2 million foreigners from different countries, equalling over 43 per cent of the total population, Oman is consistently ranked as one of the best countries for expats.

In the Expat Insider 2024 survey,

Oman ranks 12th with high marks for friendliness, security and ease of settling in.

The survey by InterNations gathered responses from over 12,500 expatriates of 175 different nationalities living in 174 countries or territories.

"Expats in Oman are highly satisfied with the friendliness of locals, ease of settling in and personal finance," InterNations confirmed in its report.

The survey ranks the best countries to live in based on factors such as quality of life, ease of settling in, working abroad, personal finance and expat essentials.

In 2024, the survey covered 53 destinations, with Panama topping the list, followed by Mexico, Indonesia, Spain and Colombia rounding out the top five. Kuwait ranks last, with Turkiye, Finland, Germany and Canada also placing in the bottom five.

Oman's ranking in the Peace Index has climbed to 37th position in 2024, marking a significant improvement in its global standing. This rise underscores its on-going efforts to foster peace and stability within its borders.

For any expat, building a home is one of the most exciting and rewarding thing that can be done in a foreign country. However, the process can be complex due to the various laws and regulations involved.

In Oman foreigners are allowed to buy and can have full ownership of the land or building for both residential and commercial purposes in the Integrated Tourism Complexes (ITCs).

When it comes to the cost of living in the country, it is relatively low, and expats can find affordable housing in most cities. They can enjoy a variety of leisure activities, from shopping in the mega hypermarkets and traditional souks.

Social Protection Fund A PILLAR OF SOCIAL WELFARE

BALQEES AL ORAIMMI
MUSCAT, NOV 17

OMAN PLACES great importance on protecting and caring for its citizens through comprehensive policies and programmes aimed at providing social security and enhancing the quality of life.

The Social Protection Fund (SPF) serves as one of the main pillars of this approach, playing a pivotal role in delivering aid and insurance programmes that ensure a dignified life for vulnerable groups in society.

Recently, the fund released a statistical report summarising achievements and initiatives implemented up to October 2024, offering an overview of the efforts to provide social care and protection.

Statistics indicate that the number of beneficiaries from social protection benefits in Oman has exceeded 1.49 million.

These beneficiaries represent diverse segments of society, including the elderly, orphans, widows, people with disabilities and low-income families.

These figures highlight the fund's efforts to reach different groups and provide suitable support tailored to the specific needs of each category.

The data shows that around 167,527 elderly individuals benefit from the fund's programmes, demonstrating a commitment to caring for this vital segment of the community.

Additionally, there are 1,232,283 beneficiaries from child support initiatives, which aim to meet children's needs and ensure they grow up in a healthy and stable environment.

Furthermore, about 41,256 individuals with disabilities benefit from the fund's services, an essential step towards integrating this group into society and meeting their unique needs.



Beneficiaries from child support initiatives aim to meet children's needs and ensure they grow up in a healthy and stable environment

#Over 577,000 individuals registered, ensuring comprehensive worker coverage

#Programmes aid 167,527 elderly individuals and 1,232,283 children

#Over 1.49 million beneficiaries from diverse groups

#41,256 individuals with disabilities receive specialised aid

#Over 121,169 pensions disbursed, including survivor, living pensions

#14,331 families benefit from income support

#Programmes ensure monthly allowances for 28,179 individuals

The SPF offers insurance programmes designed to provide a sustainable income for individuals and families in need.

According to statistics, the total number of pensions disbursed has reached approximately 121,169, reflecting the fund's commitment to ensuring a steady income for beneficiaries.

These programmes include survivor pensions, with around 30,992 beneficiaries, in addition to living pensions, serving about 90,173 beneficiaries.

The Social Protection Fund has dedicated a portion of its efforts to supporting low-income families,

providing financial assistance to improve living standards and reinforce social stability. Approximately 14,331 families benefit from family income support, alongside an additional 42,510 beneficiaries through other income support initiatives.

These numbers reflect the fund's commitment to alleviating financial burdens on these families and providing the necessary assistance to improve their living conditions.

The fund ensures the continuity of monthly allowances, benefiting around 28,179 individuals. This measure is vital to guaranteeing

ongoing support for low-income families and individuals. The system promotes financial stability for low-income families and reaffirms the fund's commitment to providing long-term assistance to beneficiaries.

The statistics reveal that the number of insured individuals (those registered in insurance systems) has exceeded 577,000, reflecting the fund's expansion in providing insurance services and reaching a significant portion of workers across various sectors.

This expansion is a critical step towards achieving the goal of offering a comprehensive and sustainable social safety network for all workers.

This statistical report demonstrates the positive impact of the SPF's programmes on Omani society.

The increase in beneficiaries of services and benefits underscores the fund's success in reaching vulnerable groups and providing the necessary financial support.

The continuity of monthly support and the expansion of insurance programmes contribute to enhancing social and economic stability for families in need.

These programmes are not limited to financial support; they also encompass a comprehensive support system aimed at promoting equal opportunities for all members of society. Providing aid to the elderly, orphans and low-income families is a testament to the fund's active role in strengthening social cohesion and family bonds.

The SPF represents a cornerstone in the nation's strategy to promote social welfare and ensure a dignified life for various groups.

The statistics issued up to October 2024 highlight the fund's success in achieving its goals and expanding the beneficiary base, reflecting the government's commitment to supporting its citizens and ensuring social security for them.

SME growth boosted by government support

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

In the past four years, Oman has experienced significant growth in its small and medium enterprises (SMEs), a sector that plays a critical role in diversifying the national economy. According to the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), the number of registered SMEs has surged, thanks to government efforts that have introduced a range of incentives and privileges designed to stimulate the Omani market.

SMEs are crucial to the global economy, contributing between 35 per cent to 45 per cent of GDP, while also being major job creators, export drivers, and sources of innovation. Recognising this, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has placed significant emphasis on developing SMEs as part of a broader economic vision, particularly under Oman Vision 2040, which aims to empower entrepreneurship and establish SMEs as key pillars of the economy.

Halima al Zariyah,



The Startups Programme focuses on leveraging innovation and technology to propel Omani startups onto the global stage

Chairperson, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, noted that emerging businesses have an essential role in driving economic growth. They provide not only local employment opportunities but also compete in global markets.

The establishment of the Promising Companies Market on the Muscat Stock

Exchange (MSX) exemplifies the government's commitment to supporting SMEs. This initiative encourages small and medium enterprises, including family-run businesses, to transition into joint-stock companies, enabling them to access financing for expansion, foster internal growth, and ensure long-term sustainability.

The Promising Omani Startups Programme, a key initiative overseen by His Highness Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, focuses on leveraging innovation and technology to propel Omani startups onto the global stage.

In collaboration with key stakeholders, the programme aims to spread the startup culture throughout educational institutions and increase public awareness of their importance.

Supporting the rapid growth of SMEs, the Entrepreneurship Indicators Bulletin reveals that 10,388 institutions registered for the Entrepreneurship Card in the first half of 2024, and a total of 28,587 SMEs are now holders of active cards.

This card grants access to numerous privileges from various government and private sector entities, providing essential support for entrepreneurs at all stages of their business journeys.

The capital market has also become a focal point for SME development. Through a package of incentives, the Capital Market Incentive Program provides SMEs with the financial resources necessary to expand



Emerging businesses have an essential role in driving economic growth.

HALIMA AL ZARIYAH,
Chairperson,
SMEDA

their operations, whether by launching new public joint-stock companies or converting existing entities into publicly traded firms. This initiative serves both to boost domestic and foreign investments and to deepen Oman's capital markets.

In addition, the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has made significant strides by reducing service fees for Omani-owned SMEs in the Special Economic Zone in Duqm, reinforcing Oman's commitment to fostering an investment-friendly environment.

These efforts create opportunities for entrepreneurs to tap into the growing demand for goods and services in rapidly developing governorates.

Furthermore, the Small and Medium Enterprises Sector Strategy 2023-2025 reflects the government's commitment to supporting the sector in alignment with Oman Vision 2040. This strategy focuses on overcoming challenges, identifying growth opportunities, and developing initiatives that contribute to the growth of SMEs.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Police officers keep watch near an entrance to the Wuxi Vocational College of Arts and Technology, China. — Reuters

EIGHT KILLED IN SECOND MASS ATTACK IN CHINA

BEIJING: A former student went on a stabbing rampage at a vocational college in eastern China, killing eight people and injuring 17, police said on Sunday, just days after the deadliest attack in the country in a decade. Saturday's knife attack took place at the Wuxi Vocational College of Arts and Technology in Yixing, part of Wuxi city in the eastern province of Jiangsu. The suspect, a 21-year-old man, was arrested at the scene and confessed, police said. Also on Saturday, authorities in the southern Chinese city of Zhuhai said they had charged a 62-year-old man after he rammed his car into a crowd outside a sports stadium, killing 35 people and injuring 43 on Monday night. In both cases, the suspects lashed out with fatal violence against unrelated bystanders after suffering an economic loss, according to the sparse details released by police. At least six other high-profile knife attacks have been recorded this year across China. — Reuters



India's PM Narendra Modi (L) and Nigeria's President Bola Tinubu, pose for a photograph at the Presidential Palace in Abuja. — AFP

INDIA AND NIGERIA RENEW TIES AS PM MODI VISITS ABUJA

ABUJA: India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Nigeria's President Bola Tinubu met to renew what they called the "strategic partnership" between the giants of Asia and Africa on Sunday. Nigeria's capital Abuja was Modi's first stop in a tour that will take the Indian premier on to the G20 summit in Brazil, and to Guyana. The visit was billed by New Delhi as a meeting of the largest democracy in the world and the largest in Africa, "natural partners" as both push for a more central role in world affairs. Modi was welcomed to the Nigerian presidency by a military pipe band and honour guard, before entering closed door talks with Tinubu. "Our cooperation is very strong and there are many new possibilities as well for us to take our cooperation forward," Modi said in preliminary remarks as talks got underway. "We have always worked together to address challenges such as terrorism, separatism, piracy and drug trafficking." — AFP

LONGER MONSOON

Bangladesh deaths from dengue cross 400



Bangladesh is battling its worst outbreak of dengue in years, with more than 400 deaths as rising temperatures and a longer monsoon season drive a surge in infections, leaving hospitals struggling to cope. At least 407 people have died from related complications in 2024, with 78,595 patients admitted to hospitals nationwide. By mid-November, 4,173 patients were being treated, with 1,835 of them in Dhaka, the capital, and 2,338 elsewhere. — Reuters

SENEGAL VOTES FOR LAWMAKERS IN TEST FOR NEW PRESIDENT

DAKAR: Senegal headed to the polls on Sunday to vote in a legislative election that the president hopes will give his party the clear majority it needs to implement an ambitious agenda for reforms. The heated campaign period has revived concerns about unrest as political rivals clashed, sometimes violently. The West African nation saw some of the worst political violence in recent history ahead of the presidential election in March.

Voting in his home town of Ndiagianao, President Bassirou Diomaye Faye urged the electorate to remain calm no matter the outcome. "I once again call on voters... to show serenity, commit to the peaceful route, and to accept the popular will that will be expressed through the ballot box." More than 7 million registered voters will have the chance to vote for candidates for the 165-seat assembly, choosing between 41

registered parties or other entities. At stake is Faye's mandate to make good on promises to crack down on corruption and improve livelihoods that helped sweep him to power in April following a landslide election victory. Top priorities for Senegalese voters are jobs and the economy, as inflation has squeezed livelihoods and the nation's growing youth population struggles to find employment. — Reuters

Israel's deadly strikes kill dozens in Gaza, Lebanon

STRIKES by the Israeli military killed dozens in Gaza on Sunday, the civil defence said, while also hitting near Beirut's international airport. Israel has been fighting on two fronts since September, intensifying attacks on Lebanon's Hezbollah after nearly a year of cross-border clashes alongside its war in the Gaza Strip.

In the latest violence in the besieged Palestinian territory, the civil defence agency said Israeli air raids killed at least 46 people. The deadliest strike, in the middle of the night in Beit Lahia in the north, killed 26 people, including women and children, and left at least 59 others buried under the rubble, said civil defence spokesman Mahmud Bassal.

Another strike killed 10 people in the Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza, where a separate strike on a house claimed the life of a woman, he said.

An Israeli drone strike killed five people in the southern city of Rafah, Bassal said, adding another strike killed three women and a child in the Nuseirat camp. Gaza's health ministry on Sunday said the overall death toll in more than 13 months of war had reached 43,846.

Meanwhile, footage showed several strikes hit Hezbollah's south Beirut stronghold, shortly after the Israeli military warned people to evacuate.

Columns of smoke were seen rising over the capital's southern suburbs, where Lebanon's only international airport is located. Further south, overnight Israeli air strikes and shelling hit the flashpoint town of Khiam, the Lebanese state-run National News Agency reported.

Following the bombardment, the Israeli



Palestinians flee during an Israeli military operation, in Beit Lahiya in the northern Gaza Strip. — Reuters

army said about 20 projectiles were seen crossing from Lebanon into Israel, and that some of them were intercepted.

In Lebanon's east, the health ministry said an Israeli strike in the Bekaa Valley killed six people including three children.

Hezbollah said it fired a guided missile that set an Israeli tank ablaze in the southwestern Lebanese village of Chamaa. In eastern Lebanon, funerals were held for 14 civil defence staff killed in an Israeli strike on Thursday.

Lebanese authorities say more than 3,452

people have been killed since October last year.

A UN-backed assessment on November 9 warned famine was imminent in northern Gaza, amid the increased hostilities and a near-halt in food aid.

Israel has pushed back against a Human Rights Watch report this week alleging that its mass displacement of Gazans amounts to a "crime against humanity", as well as findings from a UN Special Committee pointing to warfare practices "consistent with the characteristics of genocide". — AFP

TYPHOON BATTERS PHILIPPINES' POPULOUS ISLAND

MANILA: Super Typhoon Man-yi pummelled the Philippines' most populous island, with the national weather service warning of flooding, landslides and huge waves as the storm sweeps across the archipelago nation. Man-yi was still packing maximum sustained winds of 185 kilometres per hour, with gusts reaching 305 kph, after making its first landfall late on Saturday on the lightly populated Catanduanes island. More than 1.2 million people fled their homes ahead of Man-yi, including several thousand in the capital Manila, as the weather forecaster warned of a "life-

threatening" impact from the powerful storm. Man-yi uprooted trees, brought down power lines and smashed flimsy houses to pieces after hitting Catanduanes in the typhoon-prone Bicol region. The weather service forecast "significant weakening" as Man-yi traversed the mountainous island. But it said severe flooding and landslides were expected as Man-yi dumped "intense to torrential" rain over provinces in its path. Forecasters also warned storm surges reaching more than three metres could swamp vulnerable coastal communities, including in Manila. — AFP



Children play near strong waves from the Pasig River amid Super Typhoon Man-yi, in Manila, Philippines. — Reuters

VEHICLE BLAST

Iraq blast kills three security personnel



A blast from an explosive device killed three members of Iraq's security forces and wounded three others in the northern province of Salaheddin, officials said. Sunday's blast killed an army regiment commander, another officer and a security service member, said Zulfiqar al-Bayati, mayor of Tuz Khurmatu. A security official confirmed the death toll, adding the victims had been in a vehicle when the explosion occurred. — AFP

BUILDING COLLAPSE

Tanzanian rescuers search for survivors



Tanzanian rescue workers dug through the ruins of a collapsed building for a second day on Sunday, hoping to pull survivors from beneath the rubble. The four-storey block came down in the east African country's busy Kariakoo market, in the centre of the commercial capital Dar es Salaam. Five people have been confirmed dead from the disaster, the fire brigade said. It is said that at least 70 people had been retrieved alive from the site. — AFP

CASESREVIEWED



Detainees walk towards their relatives after their release outside the Yare prison, in Venezuela. — AFP

VENEZUELA FREES 225 DETAINED IN POST POLL UNREST

SAN FRANCISCO DE YARE: Venezuelan authorities freed 225 people this weekend who were detained in protests against the disputed re-election of President Nicolas Maduro in July, the prosecutor’s office said. The releases were “granted and executed for people prosecuted for the violence that occurred after the 28 July elections,” the office said in a statement, after prosecutors launched a large-scale review of their cases. Human rights group Foro Penal had independently confirmed the release of 107 people by Saturday evening.

Over 2,400 people were arrested during the unrest that followed the re-election of Maduro, which the opposition alleged was fraudulent.

Prosecutors announced on Friday the review of 225 cases after Maduro said a “rectification” was needed in case procedural errors were identified. “Anyone responsible for criminal actions... will be punished, anyone who has not had such responsibility will be subject to a review,” said Attorney General Tarek William Saab. — AFP



A CLIMATE CALL FROM AMAZON

Climate activists hold banners ahead of the G20 Summit in Praia de Botafogo beach in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Amazon is vital to curbing climate change because of the vast amount of climate-warming carbon dioxide its trees absorb. Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has vowed to end deforestation in his country. — Reuters

Xi meets Biden, vows to work with Trump team

CHINESE President Xi Jinping vowed to work with the incoming US administration of Donald Trump as he held his final talks with outgoing President Joe Biden on conflicts. Biden met Xi for about two hours at a hotel where the Chinese leader was staying, on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Lima, Peru, for their first talks in seven months.

“China’s goal of a stable, healthy and sustainable China-US relationship remains unchanged” after Trump’s election, Xi said as he met Biden, acknowledging “ups and downs” between the countries.

“China is ready to work with the new US administration to maintain communication, expand cooperation and manage differences.”

Biden told Xi that the two leaders have not always agreed but their discussions have been “frank” and “candid.” Two months before Trump returns to the White House, US officials see magnified risks of conflict during the transition.

Biden told Xi that maintaining leader-to-leader talks would be vital even after he left office, said Biden national security adviser Jake Sullivan.



US President Joe Biden meets with China's President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the APEC Summit in Lima, Peru. — Reuters

The president-elect has vowed to adopt blanket 60% tariffs on US imports of Chinese goods as part of a package of “America First” trade measures.

Beijing opposes those steps. The Republican also plans to hire several hawkish voices on China in senior roles, including US Senator Marco Rubio as secretary of state and Representative Mike Waltz as national security adviser.

Biden and Xi did agree that human beings, not artificial intelligence, should make decisions over the use of nuclear weapons, according to the White House,

the first time the countries are known to have raised the issue.

The US and Chinese presidents also talked about North Korea, an ally of China whose deepening ties with Russia and deployment of troops in Moscow’s war with Ukraine have raised concerns in Washington, Beijing and European capitals.

“President Biden pointed out that the (People’s Republic of China’s) publicly stated position with respect to the war in Ukraine is there should be no escalation, no broadening the conflict,

and the introduction of (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea) troops runs foursquare against that,” said Sullivan.

“He also pointed out that the PRC does have influence and capacity, and should use it to try to prevent a further escalation or further expansion of the conflict with the introduction of even more DPRK forces.”

Other major issues raised at the meeting included a recent China-linked hack of the telephone communications of US government and presidential campaign officials. — Reuters

Japanese troops to train with Australia, US militaries

SYDNEY: Japanese troops will begin regular deployments in northern Australia as part of military cooperation with Australia and the US, Australia’s Defence Minister Richard Marles said on Sunday.

Around 2,000 US Marines are already hosted in Darwin, the capital of the Northern Territory, for six months of the year amid growing concern among Washington and its allies about China’s growing military power in the Indo Pacific region.

“Today we are announcing that there will be regular deployments of Japan’s amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade to Australia,” Marles said at a televised press conference in Darwin, alongside US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin and Japanese Defence Minister

Around 2,000 US Marines are already hosted in Darwin, the capital of the Northern Territory, for six months of the year amid growing concern among Washington and its allies about China’s growing military power

Gen Nakatani. “Having a more forward leaning opportunity for greater training with Japan and the US together is a really fantastic opportunity for our defence,” Marles told Sky News on Sunday, according to a transcript.

The deployment has special significance given Darwin was a major base for Allied forces in World War Two and was heavily bombed by Japanese forces. The wartime air raids on the port city are sometimes described as Australia’s Pearl Harbour.

Austin said on Sunday he was confident the US will provide the capabilities set out in the AUKUS deal, which will see Australia buy US nuclear submarines and develop a new class of nuclear-powered submarines with the US and Britain.

The US Defence Department was focused “on a smooth and effective transition” to the incoming administration of president-elect Donald Trump, Austin said.

“I’m really proud of the things that this administration has accomplished over the last four years, in terms of what we’ve done in this region to strengthen alliances and to work with countries that share the vision of a free and open Indo Pacific,” Austin added.

Meanwhile, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba have agreed to continue developing trilateral cooperation with Washington under the new US administration of president-elect Donald Trump. — Reuters

Russia pounds Ukraine with ‘massive’ aerial barrage of missiles and drones

KYIV: Russia on Sunday pummelled Ukraine with a “massive” aerial barrage of missiles and drones, killing at least nine people across the country in the largest attack in months that Kyiv called “hellish.” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Moscow launched 120 missiles and almost 100 drones, targeting Kyiv as well as southern, central and far-western corners of the country. Civilians were killed in the Mykolaiv, Lviv, Kherson, Dnipropetrovsk and Odesa regions. “A hellish night,” the spokesman for Ukraine’s airforce Yuriy Ignat said on social media, saying Kyiv downed “144 targets”.

“A massive attack on our country,” Zelensky said. “Over the past week, the aggressor used nearly 140 missiles of various types, more than 900 guided aerial bombs and over 600 strike drones,” he said, accusing Moscow of trying to “intimidate us with cold and blackouts”. The attack came just two days after German Chancellor Olaf Scholz called Russian leader Vladimir Putin for the first time in almost two years. “This is war criminal Putin’s true response to all those who called and visited him recently,” Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga said after the attack. “We need peace through strength, not



A destroyed car among debris in the courtyard of a damaged house following a missile attack in Odesa, Ukraine. — AFP

appeasement.”

Kyiv had slammed Scholz for calling Putin, as have many in Germany itself. But on Sunday, Scholz reaffirmed his country’s support for Ukraine, saying that no decision on ending the war would be taken without Kyiv. “Ukraine can count on us” and “no decision will be taken behind Ukraine’s back”, the chancellor said at Berlin airport before flying off to a G20 meeting in Rio de Janeiro. Ukraine has been on the backfoot militarily in eastern Ukraine, where Moscow’s forces have made steady advances. Journalists heard explosions in the early morning in Kyiv and lose to Sloviansk in the

Donetsk region.

Ukraine’s energy operator DTEK on Sunday announced emergency power cuts in the Kyiv region and two regions in the east. Russia’s relentless aerial bombardment has destroyed half of Ukraine’s energy production capacity, President Volodymyr Zelensky has said.

Earlier, Ukraine’s Energy Minister German Galushchenko said on Telegram that Russian forces were “attacking electricity generation and transmission facilities throughout Ukraine”. With the harsh Ukrainian winter fast approaching, the country is already suffering from major energy shortfalls. — AFP

Oman’s achievements speak for themselves



EDITORIAL

AS Oman celebrates its 54th National Day today, it is an opportune moment to reflect on the significant achievements that have marked the nation's journey under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

On this day, Omanis express loyalty and gratitude to the Renewed Renaissance which kicked off on a high note when His Majesty the Sultan upon the people of Oman to do their best to enrich development and foster progress in all fields.

When His Majesty the Sultan came to power in January 2020, Oman's foremost problem was a looming fiscal crisis spurred by over-dependence on oil and natural gas revenues, compounded by the collapse in prices during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, things have improved significantly these past years.

The recovery has been characterised by a commitment to economic reform, social development, and environmental sustainability, all aligned with the ambitious goals set forth in Oman

Vision 2040. One of the most notable accomplishments has been the improvement in Oman's economic performance. The government has successfully increased its gross domestic product (GDP) while simultaneously reducing public debt.

Oman's improved financial management has not gone unnoticed by international credit rating agencies. Standard & Poor's upgraded Oman's credit rating from BB+ to BBB-, while Moody's revised its outlook from stable to positive, maintaining a Ba1 rating. These upgrades reflect a renewed confidence in Oman as a safe investment destination after years of challenges stemming from fluctuating oil prices and the impact of the pandemic.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) has surged as well, reaching RO 25.05 billion at the end of 2023 — an increase of over 21 per cent compared to the previous year.

This influx of investment underscores Oman's appeal on the global stage and highlights its strategic initiatives aimed at attracting international business.

Oman has also made strides in social welfare through initiatives such as launching a unified social protection system and restructuring benefits for citizens. These efforts are part of a broader strategy to enhance social protection and ensure sustainable development for future generations.

Environmental sustainability has also gained prominence, with Oman advancing significantly in global rankings related to environmental performance — climbing from 149th place in 2022 to 50th place in the Environmental Performance Index for 2024.

This progress reflects ongoing investments in renewable energy projects that aim to diversify energy sources and reduce carbon emissions. Education remains a cornerstone of Oman's development strategy.

Sultan Qaboos University achieved notable recognition by advancing its global ranking for universities for 2025, moving up by an impressive 92 places to rank at 362nd globally.

CULTURAL EXPERTS URGE UN TO SHIELD LEBANON’S HERITAGE

Hundreds of cultural professionals, including archaeologists and academics, called on the United Nations to safeguard war-torn Lebanon's heritage in a petition published on Sunday ahead of a crucial Unesco meeting.

Several Israeli strikes in recent weeks on Baalbek in the east and Tyre in the south — both strongholds of Hezbollah — hit close to ancient Roman ruins designated as Unesco World Heritage sites.

The petition, signed by 300 prominent cultural figures, was sent to Unesco chief Audrey Azoulay a day before a special session in Paris to consider listing Lebanese cultural sites under “enhanced protection”. It urges Unesco to protect Baalbek and other heritage sites by establishing “no-target zones” around them, deploying international observers and enforcing measures from the 1954 Hague Convention on cultural heritage in conflict.

“Lebanon’s cultural heritage at large is being endangered by recurrent assaults on ancient cities such as Baalbek, Tyre and Anjar, all Unesco world heritage sites, as well as on other historic landmarks,”

The petition calls on influential states to push for an end to military action that causes destruction of damage to sites, as well as adding protections or introducing sanctions

says the petition. It calls on influential states to push for an end to military action that causes destruction of damage to sites, as well as adding protections or introducing sanctions.

Change Lebanon, the charity behind the petition, said signatories included museum curators, academics, archaeologists and writers in Britain, France, Italy and the United States.

Hezbollah and Israel have been at war since late September, when Israel broadened its focus from fighting Hamas in the Gaza Strip to securing its northern border, even as the Gaza war continues.

Enhanced protection status gives heritage sites “high-level immunity from military attacks”, according to Unesco.

“Criminal prosecutions and sanctions, conducted by the competent authorities, may apply in cases where individuals do not respect the enhanced protection granted to a cultural property,” it said.

In Baalbek, Israeli strikes on November 6 hit near the city’s Roman temples, according to authorities, destroying a heritage house dating back to the French mandate and damaged the historic site. The ruins host the prestigious Baalbek Festival each year, a landmark event founded in 1956 and now a fixture on the international cultural scene, featuring performances by music legends like Oum Kalthoum, Charles Aznavour and Ella Fitzgerald. — AFP

A celebration of pride

EVERY year, Oman's National Day brings people together in pride, joy, and gratitude. Celebrated on November 18th, it's more than just a public holiday, it's a heartfelt tribute to the strength, independence, and unshakable spirit of the Omani people. It's a day to look back on the country's rich history, embrace its vibrant culture, and reflect on the incredible journey that has shaped Oman into the nation it is today.

Oman's National Day holds a special place in the hearts of its people for two important reasons. It marks the country's independence from Portuguese rule in 1650s, making Oman the oldest continuously independent Arab state.

It's also a day to honour the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, whose reign from 1970 to 2020 transformed Oman into a modern and prosperous nation.

During his leadership, Oman developed strong infrastructure, advanced healthcare, and accessible education, all while staying true to its rich cultural heritage.

Today, under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Oman continues to build on its remarkable history, balancing modern progress with the preservation of its cherished traditions.

National Day is a powerful reminder of the strength, determination, and unity that have guided Oman's path over the years.

As National Day draws near, Oman comes alive with vibrant colours and festive excitement. Streets, buildings, and public spaces are decorated in the national colours of red, white, and green, with lights brightening landmarks and giant flags waving proudly.

Families, businesses, and even cars join in the celebration, creating a lively and joyful atmosphere that reflects the deep pride and unity of the Omani people.

Military parades are a highlight of the celebrations, bringing together impressive displays of strength and unity. These parades feature perfectly coordinated marches by the armed forces,



National Day is a powerful reminder of the strength, determination, and unity that have guided Oman's path over the years.



DR KHALFAN BIN HAMED AL HARRASI

including the army, navy, air force and royal guard. Adding to the excitement are camel-mounted troops, military vehicles, and thrilling flyovers by fighter jets and helicopters, blending Oman's modern achievements with its rich traditions.

As night falls, the skies come alive with vibrant fireworks displays in cities like Muscat, Salalah and Suhar. These stunning shows, set to patriotic music, bring people together in celebration. Families and friends gather at parks, beaches, and city squares to enjoy the festive atmosphere and share their pride in the nation.

National Day also highlights Oman's cultural traditions, with captivating performances like the Al Razha and Al bar'ah sword dances. These traditional displays, featuring rhythmic movements, drumming, and poetic recitations, beautifully showcase Oman's rich heritage and deep sense of unity.

Cultural exhibitions bring to life the incredible talent of Oman's artisans, showcasing beautiful pottery, intricate weaving, stunning silverwork, and traditional henna art.

Music is also at the heart of these events, with traditional instruments like the oud and rebab setting

the tone for songs that celebrate Oman's achievements and dreams. These gatherings are more than just festivities—they are a tribute to the values and traditions that make up the essence of Omani culture.

Schools and community centres are at the heart of National Day celebrations. Students get involved in flag-raising ceremonies, put on lively performances, and take part in art contests that highlight their creativity and love for the country. These activities not only keep younger generations connected to Oman's rich history and traditions but also bring people of all ages together to celebrate and share in the pride of being Omani.

Oman's National Day celebrations are wonderfully diverse, with everything from military parades and cultural performances to family picnics and acts of charity. These events bring people together, showcasing the unity and pride that define Oman while honouring its rich traditions and looking forward to a bright future. Together, let us honour the legacy of those who built Oman and the leadership that continues to guide it. Let us celebrate a nation that stands tall in unity and pride, a nation that continues to inspire the world. Happy National Day, Oman!

Celebrating a journey of progress, unity and pride



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHAMI
aljahdhami22@gmail.
com

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

NOVEMBER 18 MARKS a momentous occasion for Omanis everywhere; the 54th National Day of the Sultanate of Oman. This annual celebration is not just a reminder of Oman's history but is also a tribute to the remarkable progress the nation has made in more than five decades. It is a day for Omanis to express their loyalty, gratitude, and pride in their country, honouring the legacy of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and continuing the vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

The National Day provides an opportunity for people to reflect on their country's journey since the start of the Blessed Renaissance in 1970. Under the leadership of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, Oman underwent a period of remarkable transformation. Once isolated and underdeveloped, Oman emerged as a beacon of peace, prosperity and progress. His vision to modernise the country while preserving its rich heritage laid the foundation for the success Oman enjoys today.

The late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos was the architect of Oman's Renaissance. His leadership transformed Oman into a modern, forward-thinking nation while staying true to its traditions. His legacy is not only seen in the development of the country's physical infrastructure but also in the peace and harmony that Omani

society enjoys today. The 54th National Day is a time to reflect on his tireless efforts, his vision for a peaceful and prosperous Oman, and the lasting impact of his leadership.

As His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik continues this legacy, he has reaffirmed the nation's commitment to further development, political stability, and economic growth. The 54th National Day is a time to celebrate not only the past achievements but also the ongoing efforts of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the Omani people in shaping a bright future for the country.

With a deep understanding of Oman's history and values, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has continued the country's march towards further modernisation and development. His leadership has been characterised by a commitment to strengthening Oman's economy, maintaining its political stability, and ensuring the welfare of all citizens.

His Majesty has placed a strong emphasis on the importance of innovation, sustainability, and diversification of the economy through the Oman Vision 2040 initiative. This vision aims to reduce the country's dependence on oil, create more job opportunities, and build a diversified, knowledge-based economy. Under His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's leadership, Oman continues to thrive as a

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country

model of peace, unity and progress in the Arabian Peninsula.

The National Day celebrations are a time for Omanis to come together in unity, regardless of age, gender, or background, to celebrate the country's rich history, and shared values.

It is not only a time to honour the past but also to look forward to a future filled with promise and opportunity. The country is moving steadily towards realising the goals of Oman Vision 2040, which aims to create a more diversified and sustainable economy, improve the quality of life for all citizens, and enhance Oman's position on the global stage.

The success of Oman's Renaissance has been driven by the collective efforts of the government and its people. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's leadership continues to inspire a sense of pride and purpose in the Omani people, who are working together to build a prosperous future. As the nation celebrates this significant milestone, there is a renewed commitment to preserving the achievements of the past and advancing towards a brighter, more prosperous future for generations to come.

Omanis have many reasons to be proud of their country: from its stunning natural landscapes to its rich cultural heritage, from its history of peaceful diplomacy to its reputation for political stability and social welfare. Oman is a land that fosters unity, pride, and a sense of belonging.

Happy National Day to one and all.

FIFTH OF DENGUE CASES DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

DANIEL LAWLER

Climate change is responsible for nearly a fifth of the record number of dengue cases worldwide this year, US researchers said, seeking to shine a light on how rising temperatures help spread disease.

Researchers have been working to swiftly demonstrate how human-driven climate change directly contributes to individual extreme weather events such as hurricanes, fires, droughts and floods that have battered the world this year. But linking how global warming affects health—such as driving outbreaks or spreading disease—remains a new field.

“Dengue is a really good first disease to focus on because it’s very climate sensitive,” Erin Mordecai, an infectious disease ecologist at Stanford University, said. The viral disease, which is transmitted via bites from infected mosquitoes,

causes fever and body aches and can, in some cases, be deadly.

It has typically been confined to tropical and sub-tropical areas but rising temperatures have led to mosquitoes encroaching on new areas, taking dengue with them

It has typically been confined to tropical and sub-tropical areas, but rising temperatures have led to mosquitoes encroaching on new areas, taking dengue with them.

For the new study, which has not yet been peer-reviewed, a US team

of researchers looked at how hotter temperatures were linked to dengue infections in 21 countries across Asia and the Americas.

On average, around 19 per cent of current dengue cases around the world are “attributable to climate warming that has already happened,” said Mordecai, the senior author of the pre-print study.

Temperatures between 20-29 degrees Celsius are ideal for spreading dengue, Mordecai said.

Elevated areas of Peru, Mexico, Bolivia and Brazil that will warm into this temperature range could see dengue cases rising by as much as 200 per cent in the next 25 years, the researchers found.

The analysis estimated that at least 257 million people are currently living in areas where global heating could double the rate of dengue during that period. This danger is just “another reason you should care about climate change,” Mordecai said. More than 12.7 million dengue cases were recorded worldwide this year as of September, nearly double 2023’s total record, according to World Health Organisation figures.

But Mordecai said a “massive amount of under-reporting” meant the real number was likely to be closer to 100 million. The research was presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene in New Orleans.

Another set of research, also not peer-reviewed, raised hopes of a potential tool to help fight the rise of dengue. It involves breeding mosquitoes infected with a common bacterium that can block the insect’s ability to transmit dengue. — AFP

Inclusive finance is the key to climate action

AT the top of the list of measures to be agreed at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Baku, Azerbaijan, is the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) on climate finance, which will support climate action in developing countries after 2025. The main concern will be setting contribution targets for developed countries, but another crucial question has been overlooked: who will have access to these funds?

Not nearly enough climate finance has reached low-income communities in the world's most vulnerable countries. These are the places disproportionately affected by global warming, despite contributing the least to causing the problem. An estimated 75 per cent of the \$4.8 trillion channelled into climate action over the past decade has been invested in high-income countries. Between 2003 and 2016, less than 10 per cent of international, regional, and national climate funds flowed to local actors.

This must change. Many of the 3.3 billion people who live in regions highly vulnerable to climate change lack the resources they need to protect themselves, their families, or their livelihoods. Providing climate finance to low-income households and businesses has well-known benefits: they can recover more quickly from weather shocks, diversify their income-generating activities, and invest in the green technologies needed to build resilience and advance the energy transition. While agreeing a new climate-finance target is a critical first step toward securing funding, addressing how to channel more of it to local communities must be a central part of the conversation at COP29, and on the road to COP30 in Belém, Brazil.

One possible solution is to develop more inclusive financial services. Over recent decades, an ecosystem of investors, regulators, and financial institutions has evolved to take



One possible solution is to develop more inclusive financial services



SOPHIE
SIRTAINE

The writer is
CEO of CGAP

large-scale funding and deliver it in small-ticket financing to low-income households while managing risk. Equally important, these institutions have billions of long-term customers in climate-vulnerable countries and communities. They have built relationships with these people, understanding their needs and how best to serve them. From that foundation, it is possible to create products that will effectively boost climate adaptation and resilience.

Many innovative programmes have already been implemented. Low-cost heatwave insurance protects hundreds of thousands of poor women in India against soaring temperatures. Contingent credit lines help farmers in Bangladesh manage flood risks. And thanks to a mobile layaway product, smallholder farmers in Mali, Senegal, and Tanzania can pay in instalments for climate-smart inputs and sustainable-agriculture training programmes.

In addition to bolstering climate adaptation and resilience, inclusive financial products and services can help drive investment in mitigation and contribute to a just green transition. In Bangladesh, for example, electric cookstove manufacturer ATEC has deployed a cook-to-earn model, which involves paying customers shares of ATEC’s revenue from the sale of carbon

credits, based on customers’ usage data. By incentivising people to adopt and continue using this green technology, they are creating a virtuous cycle.

Wide adoption of such nascent initiatives could accelerate climate action at the grassroots level. Ensuring that low-income and otherwise disadvantaged people can access the funding provided by developed countries would promote resilience to extreme weather and transform the fight against global warming.

Inclusive finance could also help alleviate the global climate-finance gap, as the sector has a proven track record in mobilising private capital for development projects. What was an NGO-driven and grant-oriented sector 30 years ago is now a massive commercial industry. To achieve global climate goals, we can no longer ignore the people most exposed to the dire consequences of rising temperatures. The NCQG, while important and necessary, is only the starting point. As developed countries set new climate-finance targets at COP29, they must also make a more concerted effort to ensure this funding reaches those who need it the most. Inclusive finance is an obvious part of the solution that could achieve so much more than it is today.

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ART/LIFE



L I F E S T Y L E

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CAIRO FILM FESTIVAL

Film’s ‘search for Palestine’ takes centre stage



Rashid Masharawi's director of “Passing Dreams”

Cairo: The tale of a distinctly Palestinian road trip — through refugee camps and Israeli checkpoints — takes centre stage in director Rashid Masharawi’s latest film, which debuted at this year’s Cairo International Film Festival. “It’s a search for home, a search for Palestine, for ourselves,” Masharawi told AFP on Wednesday after the world premiere of his new film “Passing Dreams”. It kicked off the Middle East’s oldest film festival, which opened with a traditional dabkeh dance performance by a troupe from the war-torn Gaza Strip.

Masharawi’s film follows Sami, a 12-year-old boy, and his uncle and cousin on a quest to find his beloved pet pigeon, which has flown away from their home in a refugee camp in the occupied West Bank.

Told that pigeons always return to their birthplace, the family attempts to “follow the bird home” — driving a small red camper van from Qalandia camp and Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank to the Old City of Jerusalem and the Israeli city of Haifa. Their odyssey, Masharawi says, becomes a “deeply symbolic journey” that represents an inversion of the family’s original displacement from Haifa during the 1948 war that led to the creation of the State of Israel — a period Palestinians refer to as the Nakba, or “catastrophe”.

“It’s no coincidence we’re in places that have a deep significance to Palestinian history,” the director said, speaking to AFP after a more intimate second screening on Thursday. The bittersweet tale is a far cry from Masharawi’s other project featured at the Cairo film festival: “From Ground Zero”.

The anthology, supervised by the veteran director, showcases 22 shorts by filmmakers in Gaza, shot against the backdrop of war.

For that project, Masharawi — who was the first Palestinian director officially selected for the Cannes Film Festival for his film “Haifa” in 1996 — “wanted to act as a bridge between global audiences” and filmmakers on the ground. In April, he told AFP the anthology intended to expose “the lie of self-defence”, which he said was Israel’s justification for its devastating military campaign in Gaza.

The war broke out following Palestinian militant group Hamas’s October 7, 2023 attack on southern Israel, which resulted in 1,206 deaths, according to an AFP tally of official Israeli figures.

Israel has since killed more than 43,700 people in the Gaza Strip, according to the Hamas-controlled territory’s health ministry.

“As filmmakers, we must document this through the language of cinema,” Masharawi said, adding that filmmaking “defends our land far better than any military or political speeches”.

Speaking to an enthralled audience, the 62-year-old director — donning his signature fedora — called for change in Palestinian filmmaking. — **AFP**

Q U I C K F E A T U R E S



FESTIVAL

An artist performs during the third day of Nyege Nyege Festival in Jinja. The four-day popular Nyege Nyege Festival in Jinja, Uganda, gathers over 10,000 revellers and artists from across Africa. — **AFP**



ENTERTAINMENT

Bollywood actress Shruti Haasan attends the screening of upcoming Indian Hindi-language historical drama web series ‘Freedom at Midnight’ in Mumbai. — **AFP**



LIFESTYLE

Indian stylist Mohanjeet Grewal, who introduced Indian high fashion to Paris in the 1960s, poses in her shop in Paris. — **AFP**

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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Waiting for Sunset

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British singer Imogen Heap embraces AI



Unlike the bulk of her peers, Grammy-winning British singer Imogen Heap is embracing the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in her music as well to set up a music collaboration platform.

“I am excited about AI because I feel maybe it can help humans harness the now,” she said on the sidelines of the four-day Web Summit tech conference in Lisbon which wrapped up last Thursday.

The two-time Grammy winner recorded the conversation, as she does with all her interactions with journalists, to feed into her own generative intelligence model called Mogen which was originally created to interact with her fans.

“It’s about empowering a chat bot, basically with a knowledge store, to be able to answer on behalf of me, so that I can get on with being human,” said Heap who is best known for her 2005 song “Hide and Seek” that first gained popularity after it was featured in a scene of popular

teen drama series “The OC”.

The 46-year-old singer has used Mogen to create the final part of her new song called “What Have You Done To Me” that was unveiled earlier this month.

“It is interesting because the beginning of the song is done very traditionally in studio, chopped up and everything like that and in a way sounds less human than the AI voice, which sounds bizarrely more human,” she said.

Heap said she would eventually like to create music with the help of Mogen live at a concert or in the studio, with the AI playing the role of production and composition assistant.

“It’s basically like a huge sea of tagged audio and words so that in the future, I can walk into my living room or walk into my barn and create music in real time based on ideas I’ve previously had that can be fed into the system in real time,” she said. — AFP



Mushroom houses for Gaza? Arab designers offer home-grown innovations

AS WINTER DESCENDS on Gaza’s tent cities, emergency housing made from mushrooms could keep out the cold — just one of several sustainable, home-grown innovations put forward by Arab designers at an expo in Dubai.

Lightweight, warm and versatile, mushroom-based structures are an appealing alternative to the flimsy shelters now housing many thousands of Gazans displaced by more than a year of war, according to Dima al Srouri, a member of the ReRoot initiative.

“Right now, there is a huge problem with the shelters that they’re receiving from NGOs,” she said at Dubai Design Week, which featured a range of environment-friendly innovations.

“When the winter comes, when it rains, when it’s too cold, they’re not working really.”

Mycelium, the root-like part of a fungus, can be grown in combination with organic matter to fit different-shaped moulds, producing a strong building material that can be cultivated anywhere.

It’s “a healthy material because it’s fully natural”, urban planning expert Srouri, who is Palestinian, said next to a prototype shelter — a roomy, enclosed structure with windows and a sloping roof.

“It’s something that can provide the solution to extreme weather conditions to protect them from the extreme cold.”

ReRoot’s emergency housing was not the only example of sustainable Arab design at the annual exhibition in Dubai, which closed on Sunday.

Contrasting with the towering high-rises that dominate the city’s skyline, Emirati architect and designer Abdalla Almulla is championing a very different approach: low-rise buildings made from recycled construction waste.

Almulla has teamed up with the Swiss company Oxara, which makes a low-carbon cement replacement, to create structures built with discarded concrete from demolished buildings and roofing made from palm fronds — a nod to the Gulf’s ancient construction techniques.

“When I look back, especially in the region where I’m living, a lot of the architecture and designs were based



on finding what’s surrounding you, finding material around you and then being innovative and creating out of it,” Almulla said. The model is intended as a riposte to the “world of abundance” that has come to characterise modern design, he added.

“Whenever you want... something, you need to ship it from halfway around the world.”

SUSTAINABILITY ‘NOT A LUXURY

As well as the large-scale installations, smaller objects were on display, including furniture made from recycled materials and a 3D-printed electric motorcycle.

Faheem Khan, a Qatar-based designer, developed a bottle that minimises water consumption during Wudu, the ritual washing performed by Muslims before prayer.

Elif Resitoglu of Isola Design, the Milan-based studio that organised the exhibition, said sustainability was a “new thing” for Arab designers.

But they “blended it into their culture”, designing objects that “a Western designer could not actually design”, she said. While the region is more concerned with conflicts than environmental matters, tackling the issue “is not a luxury”, said Al Srouri.

“For me, I always believe that the best way to do activism is through your work,” she said.

“You don’t have to shout out loud on the streets... Sometimes the solution can be through your knowledge and expertise and sharing it to solve other people’s challenges.”

The UAE, a major oil producer which hosted the UN’s COP28 climate talks last year, is one of the world’s largest emitters of CO2 per capita.

It is also in one of the hottest regions in the world, making it especially vulnerable to climate change. According to climate data, the Middle East is warming at a rate nearly twice as fast as the global average. — AFP

A NEW ERA OF OPPORTUNITY FOR OMANI BUSINESS WOMEN



BY ARWA AL HASHIMI

IN RECENT years, Oman has witnessed a remarkable evolution in women's opportunities, largely driven by the government's commitment to enhancing gender equality and supporting female entrepreneurship. Policies aimed at empowering women have fostered an environment where Omani women are encouraged to pursue their ambitions in various fields, particularly in business and leadership. This progressive vision has paved the way for inspiring figures like Khadija al Dhabouni, whose journey is a testament to the growing prominence of women in the Omani economy.

One shining example of this transformative landscape is Akook Jewelries, founded by Khadija al Dhabouni, who has made history as the first Omani woman to open a jewellery store in the prestigious Mall of Oman. Launched in 2020, Akook is not merely a jewellery brand; it embodies a deep-rooted passion for Omani craftsmanship, proudly showcasing the artistry and cultural richness of Oman through every meticulously crafted piece. Khadija's vision

is clear: to elevate Omani craftsmanship to a level where it stands alongside the world's finest jewellery houses, encapsulating the beauty and spirit of Oman in her designs.

CELEBRATING OMANI HERITAGE THROUGH CONTEMPORARY DESIGN

Khadija al Dhabouni's dedication to her craft goes beyond business; it is a tribute to her homeland. "Akook is more than just a business," she explains. "It is my passion and my tribute to Oman. Through our jewellery, we are not merely selling pieces but sharing a piece of our heritage." Each creation not only reflects traditional Omani elements but also incorporates modern elegance, creating a harmonious blend that resonates with today's consumers.

What distinguishes Akook Jewelries is its unwavering commitment to promoting Omani values and identity. With a design team primarily composed of talented young Omani women, Akook infuses every piece with creativity and a fresh perspective. This dedication to local talent showcases a future where Omani women can thrive and assert their identities in the jewellery industry.

Highlighting the significance



Khadija Al Dhabouni has made history as the first Omani woman to open a jewellery store in one of the country's top malls

of Omani symbols, Akook's stunning brooch, "Ako's Treasure '24," features the revered khanjar, celebrating the nation's rich heritage. Crafted with natural diamonds and gold, it serves as a proud emblem of Omani culture that women wear with confidence.

QUALITY AND ETHICAL CRAFTSMANSHIP

Akook Jewelries stands out not only for its cultural significance but also for its commitment to quality and ethical sourcing. Using only internationally certified natural diamonds and pure gemstones, Khadija ensures that each piece is both exquisite and responsibly sourced. This emphasis on quality, coupled with a unique Omani aesthetic, positions Akook as a distinguished brand in the global jewellery market.

With 80 per cent of its designs supervised and implemented by local artisans, Akook also plays a crucial role in supporting and preserving Omani craftsmanship. This commitment to local talent not only nurtures the community but also celebrates a rich cultural legacy, allowing every Omani to take pride in Akook's achievements.

INSPIRING FUTURE

GENERATIONS

Akook's diverse collection includes customisable silver and 18k gold pieces, ensuring there is something for everyone. Each item is a labour of love, crafted with devotion and profound respect for Omani culture. "Our goal is to showcase Omani elegance and creativity to the world," Khadija shares passionately. "We want to share the beauty of Oman's craftsmanship on a global stage, and Akook Jewelries is our heartfelt way of making that happen."

Having expanded from its original location in Shatti Al Qurum to the bustling Mall of Oman, Akook continues to enchant jewellery enthusiasts with its unique fusion of tradition and contemporary design. More than just a jewellery brand, Akook symbolises Omani talent and the emerging empowerment of women across the nation.

As Oman moves forward into a new era, the success of women like Khadija al Dhabouni serves not only as inspiration but as a beacon of hope for future generations of Omani women eager to explore new horizons. Their stories exemplify the positive changes taking place in Oman, where the spirit of innovation and tradition thrives hand in hand.



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We extend our warmest greetings to

*His Majesty
Sultan Haitham
bin Tarik*

-May the Almighty protect and guide him-
On the blessed occasion of Oman's 54th
National Day, may the Divine Grace shower
Oman, its people and its esteemed leader
with ever-increasing prosperity and
progress. Oman is boldly advancing towards
the creation of a sustainable, economically
resilient and socially progressive nation.
In doing so, we wholeheartedly reiterate
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on the occasion of the 54th National Day of the Renaissance*

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CELEBRATING THE **54th OMAN** NATIONAL DAY





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His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik

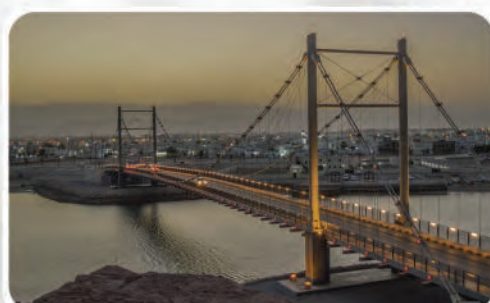
And the people of Oman on the Joyous Occasion of
The 54th National Day

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Oman is making an impressive mark on its journey of peace, progress and stability. Under the wise and visionary leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik, Oman continues to surge ahead. Creating new opportunities with a firm focus on establishing advanced infrastructure and development of national talent. On the momentous occasion of the 54th National Day, Saud Bahwan Group extends its felicitations to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik and the people of Oman.



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Sultan Haitham bin Tarik
– May Almighty Allah protect and preserve him–

Wishing to Oman a strengthening
glory and prosperity



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Congratulations to
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik
and the people of Oman on the occasion
of the 54th National Day.





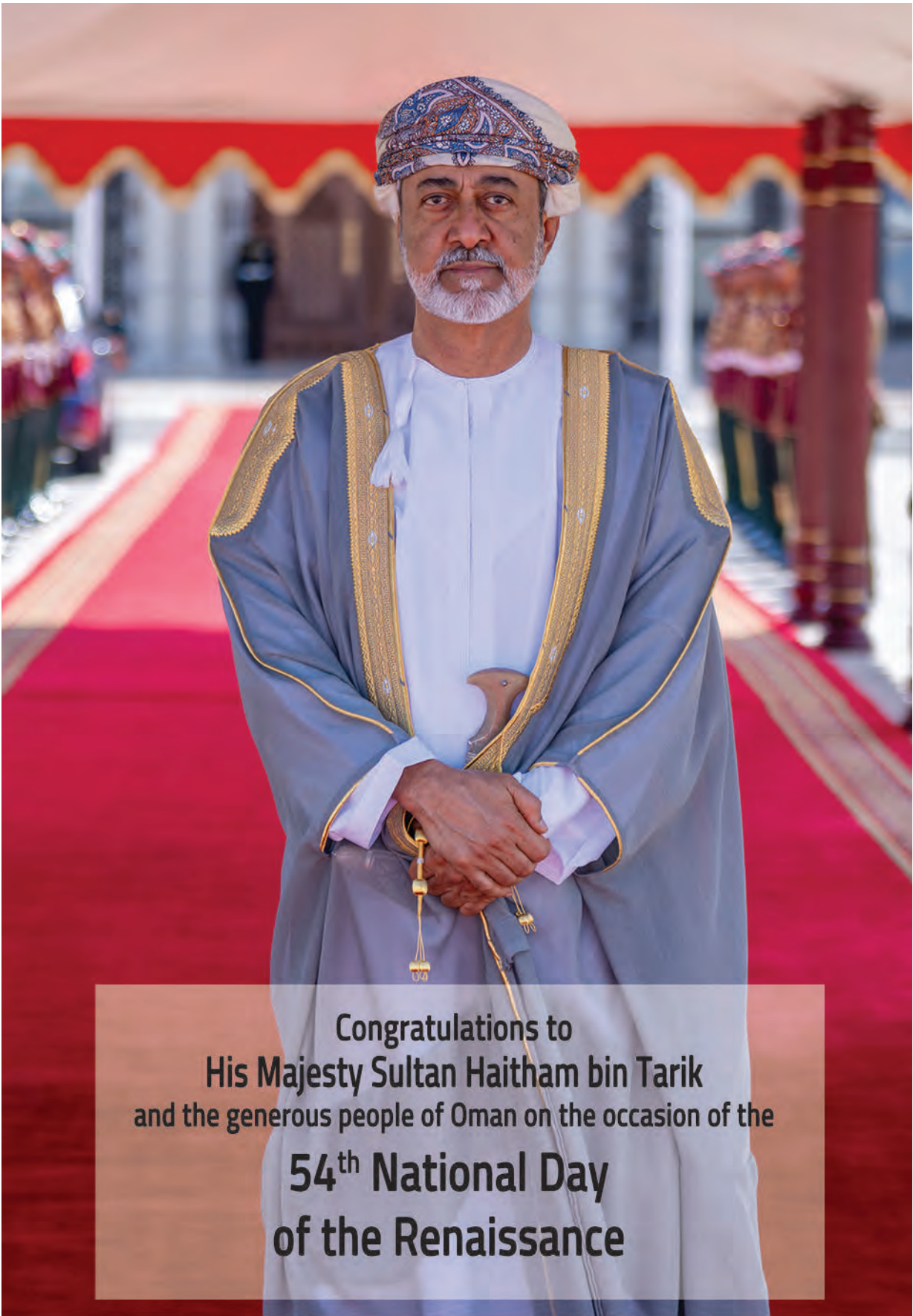
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and the generous people of Oman on the occasion of the
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**His Majesty
Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**
(May the Almighty Allah Protect Him)
and the People of Sultanate of Oman
on the **54th National Day**

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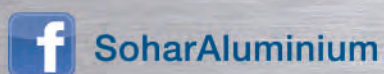
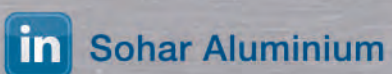


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His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

and the people of Oman continued success
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On the occasion of the **54th National Day of the Renaissance**, we extend our greetings to

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

May Allah protect and preserve him

And to the honorable Omani people, with sincere congratulations and best wishes,
renewing our pledge of loyalty and commitment to His Majesty. We pray that the Almighty grants him strength,
bestows upon him health and wellness, and blesses Oman with further progress and prosperity.

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BUSINESS

SHORT TAKES

OQGN GETS NOD FOR NEW FAHUD-SUHAR LOOP LINE PROJECT



The new loop line is expected to be completed by 2027

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, NOV 17

OQ Gas Networks SAOG (OQGN) has confirmed the approval of a major new infrastructure project designed to expand its gas network capacity. On November 14, 2024, the company received official clearance from the relevant authorities to commence construction of a new 42-inch, 193 km loop line from Fahud to Suhar. This project, one of the largest ever approved by OQGN, is aimed at addressing the increasing energy demands in the wilayats of Suhar and Ibri, in line with Oman’s national energy goals and the company’s long-term infrastructure strategy. Expected to be completed by 2027, the new loop line will enhance OQGN’s northern gas network capacity by an additional 9 million metric standard cubic metres per day (mmscmd), boosting the reliability and efficiency of the network, said Mansoor al Abdali, CEO of OQGN. As part of its ongoing infrastructure expansion, OQGN plans to increase its pipeline network to 4,222 km by the end of 2024, with further extensions scheduled up to 2027. Network capacity is expected to grow substantially, from 69.3 billion SCM in 2023 to 79.7 billion SCM by 2027, with the volume of gas transported projected to rise from 40.5 billion SCM in 2023 to 45.6 billion SCM by 2027. In line with Oman’s energy transition strategy, OQGN is also spearheading the development of hydrogen pipeline infrastructure. As the National Infrastructure Provider for hydrogen pipelines, the company is collaborating with various stakeholders to facilitate hydrogen transportation and support Oman’s ambitious Green Hydrogen production targets.

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, NOV 17

THE small and medium enterprise (SME) sector plays a critical role in Oman’s economic vision, fuelling job creation, innovation, and sustainable growth. For an economy that aims to diversify beyond oil dependence, fostering a robust SME ecosystem is essential. Recognising this, the Omani government has introduced a variety of initiatives to support local entrepreneurs in launching and growing businesses, emphasising the need for accessible financing and streamlined regulatory support. Yet, as highlighted by Sultan al Mahrouqi, a municipal council member representing the Wilayat of Adam, bureaucratic obstacles in securing financial support – particularly through the Development Bank – continue to impede the progress of Omani SMEs. Al Mahrouqi’s statements, articulated in recent social media posts, underscore a growing disconnect between the government’s strategic goals and the on-ground realities facing SME owners.

Although the government has recognised the value of SMEs in driving economic diversification, entrepreneurs are still facing significant roadblocks when attempting to access vital funding. Bureaucratic inefficiencies, convoluted requirements, and delays within the Development Bank’s loan approval process pose substantial challenges. Such obstacles not only slow down the initiation of projects but also create financial strain on entrepreneurs who must wait months to access the capital they need. Addressing these issues is paramount if Oman is to cultivate a vibrant, entrepreneurial economy, he stressed. One of the primary issues identified by Al Mahrouqi is the complexity and length of the application process for Development Bank loans. Entrepreneurs frequently encounter a long list of procedural steps, conditions, and fees, all of which add significant time and cost to the financing process. For many SME owners, particularly those in early stages, these conditions can be overwhelming and detract from their ability to focus on developing and executing business plans.



Bureaucratic obstacles in securing financial support continue to impede the progress of Omani SMEs. Picture for illustration only

The extensive procedural requirements also disproportionately affect small business owners who may not have access to the resources or expertise needed to navigate such a demanding process. Beyond the application process itself, Al Mahrouqi points out that applicants often face repeated requests to modify their submissions, even after meeting the bank’s initial requirements. Such demands, often inconsistent and stemming from unclear guidelines, introduce

Oman unveils ambitious industrial sector ICV plan

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, NOV 17

THE Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) launched yesterday, November 17, 2024, the Local Content Plan in the Industrial Sector, “Tasne’e”, under the auspices of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy. Speaking at the launch, Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, highlighted the economic significance of the manufacturing sector. The contribution of manufacturing industries to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rose to RO 1.8 billion, achieving a growth rate of 10.1 per cent by the end of the first half of 2024, compared to the same period in 2020. Additionally, the manufacturing sector’s growth rate under the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021–2025) has so far reached 7.5 per cent in real terms,” he stated. Dr Masan also emphasised the significance of local content. “Local content serves as a cornerstone for achieving the objectives of the Industrial Strategy 2040, as it aims to increase reliance on local resources and services



Local content serves as a cornerstone for achieving the objectives of the Industrial Strategy 2040, as it aims to increase reliance on local resources and services within the industrial sector

DR SALEH BIN SAID MASAN
Under-Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry

within the industrial sector. This reduces the need for imports, creates new job opportunities, facilitates the transfer of knowledge and technology, and enhances the competitiveness of the Omani economy.” He further added: “In this context, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion has developed a comprehensive plan to empower local content in Omani factories. This plan includes initiatives to increase the share of local components in industrial sector procurement and to develop specialized training programs to enhance the skills of national cadres in alignment with the industrial sector’s needs. It also seeks to encourage major companies to establish strategic partnerships with local firms to transfer knowledge and build capacity.” “This initiative aims to enhance reliance on local products, increase the share of local components in national industries, support small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and improve the efficiency of local supply chains. It also seeks to boost the competitiveness of Oman’s industrial sector, promote investment in value-added manufacturing industries, and achieve Oman Vision 2040’s goals

of economic diversification and reducing dependence on imports,” he shared. According to officials, the Local Content Plan centres on 31 key initiatives classified under three main pillars: The enhancement of local content components, Empowering manufacturers and suppliers, and Empowering Omani products. The event also included the launch of “Itqan”, a programme designed to train and equip Omani youth within the industrial sector, with a focus on practical training opportunities in collaboration with higher education institutions and Omani factories. The programme will include a job seeker training track, an upskilling track for current workers in the sector, and the training of higher education students. Furthermore, the Ministry launched a programme, “Ta’meer” in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, in an effort to promote the use of local content within the construction sector. As a result, several MoUs were signed with real estate developments for the use of local products in large scale construction projects, including the development of several neighbourhoods of Sultan Haitham City.

APSR advances sustainability through strategic energy, water initiatives

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 17

THE Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) continues to play a pivotal role in regulating electricity, water, wastewater, and natural gas transmission sectors in the Sultanate of Oman. The Authority is currently implementing strategic initiatives to bolster economic growth, enhance local value addition, and create employment opportunities for



Dhofar wind power project in Harweel

Omani nationals, aligning with Oman Vision 2040’s focus on energy, innovation, economic development, sustainability, and job creation. In 2023, the Authority achieved significant milestones in Omanisation across the electricity and water sectors, with 10,442 Omanis comprising 79 per cent of the workforce out of 13,248 employees. Additionally, contracts worth RO 35 million were awarded to local SMEs, underscoring its commitment to supporting the

national economy. **SUSTAINABLE ENERGY** The Authority is advancing Oman’s national goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. Key projects include: Ibri 2 Solar Plant (With a capacity of 500 MW, it provides electricity to 33,000 homes and reduces annual carbon emissions by 340 tonnes); Manah 1 and 2 Solar Projects (Each generating 500 MW, collectively producing 1,000 MW); Rooftop Solar Systems. **TURN TO PAGE 30**

Omani SMEs still face hurdles in accessing banking credit

ADVERTORIALS



BANK MUSCAT, GIG GULF LAUNCH OFFER ON COMPREHENSIVE MOTOR INSURANCE PLAN

MUSCAT: In commitment to its customer-centric vision “To Serve You Better Everyday” and dedication to providing customers with the best banking services and solutions, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, and GIG Gulf have introduced an attractive two-month offer for the comprehensive Motor Insurance plan, in collaboration with Precision Tune Auto Care.

Through the exclusive offer, customers can avail a cash voucher when obtaining or renewing a comprehensive insurance policy, which includes a number of services such as changing engine oil and filter, checking and adjusting tire air pressure, cleaning the air conditioning filter, washing and cleaning vehicle, and checking and inspecting the computer battery. The offer starts on November 1 until December 31, 2024.

Customers can benefit from the current offer by visiting G.I.G desks located at the nearest Bank Muscat branch, applying through the online portal (<https://online.gig-gulf.com/car-insurance-bog/GetAQuoteOM.aspx?aff=bmom&sid=3>), or contacting the call centre at 24032666. Both Omanis and expats are eligible to benefit from the comprehensive Motor Insurance plan for either new or renewal purchases of G.I.G comprehensive motor insurance.

On this occasion, Abdullah bin Tamman al Maashani, General Manager – Products, Bank Muscat, said: “We take pride in our partnership with GIG Gulf, a worldwide insurance services provider.

The launch of the current offer came after the success of last year Auto Insurance campaign which featured positive customer feedback.

We invite our valued customers to benefit from the offer and enjoy the various benefits motor insurance plan offers. The bank will continue offering them the best insurance services at affordable and highly competitive premiums. We would like to extend our appreciation to the valued customers for their continuous trust on the different offers, services and facilities.”

Al Maashani further stated: “This offer came in line with the exclusive offer the bank provides its customers with, on Sayyarati Auto Finance.”

The offer starts at a special rate of 3.75 per cent on both new and pre-owned cars for Omanis and expatriates. This year, customers will be able to start paying their instalment after 2 months of loan disbursal.

I would like to stress that Sayyarati has some of the best interest rates in the country, including 4 per cent for a period up to 2 years and 4.25 per cent for loan tenors of 3 years and 4.5 per cent for a 4-year loan tenor. All customers are invited to benefit from the exclusive features offered by Bank Muscat and G.I.G.

Mehdi bin Salim al Harthy - General Manager and Head of Partnerships – Oman, GIG Gulf, said: “We are delighted to continue strengthening our strategic partnership with Bank Muscat and continue introducing various offers for customers.”

BankDhofar publishes 2023 sustainability report

BANKDHOFAR, a premier financial banking institution in Oman, has proudly released its first-ever Sustainability Report for 2023, demonstrating its robust commitment to embedding Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) principles into its core business operations.

The report showcases BankDhofar’s forward-thinking strategy aimed at addressing sustainability risks and opportunities while creating long-term value for stakeholders and fostering a positive impact across the Omani community.

Aligned with international standards and best practices, the report underscores the bank’s significant role in advancing national initiatives, particularly Oman Vision 2040, which harmonises with global frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In the opening remarks of the report, Karumathil Gopakumar Acting CEO of BankDhofar, highlights the report’s central theme: “Our ESG strategy is anchored in a robust corporate governance framework, enabling us to support key national initiatives tied to Oman Vision 2040, which integrates global sustainability priorities such as the SDGs.”

“This strategy serves as a roadmap for all departments, guiding their efforts to enhance performance and achieve set goals, supported by targeted initiatives and mechanisms for tracking progress,” he added.

At the core of BankDhofar’s ESG vision is its dedication to promoting sustainable growth through responsible banking practices that contribute to economic diversification and societal well-being. The bank’s ESG efforts are built around four



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main pillars: Enabling Climate Action, Uplifting Customers and Communities, Focusing on Our People, and Reinforcing Governance.

Each of those pillars plays a crucial role in fostering sustainability and social responsibility

• **ENABLING CLIMATE ACTION**
This pillar focuses on key environmental initiatives, such as developing a greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions inventory, setting science-based GHG reduction targets, and integrating climate strategy within the risk management framework. The aim is to support decarbonisation efforts, develop water and waste

management plans and create net-zero transition strategies for businesses

• **UPLIFTING CUSTOMERS AND COMMUNITIES**
Under this pillar, there is a focus on offering advisory services to support clients in their sustainability journey, particularly in their efforts towards decarbonisation.
The bank aims to develop frameworks that facilitate greater access to financing for small and medium enterprises while ensuring financial inclusion and corporate social responsibility.
Additionally, there is a goal to enhance digital access for all customers.

BEC, HAUFF TECHNIK HOST TECHNICAL SEMINAR

MUSCAT: Bahwan Engineering Company LLC (BEC), in partnership with Hauff Technik GmbH & Co, a leading German innovator in cable and pipe entry sealing systems, recently hosted a technical seminar on November 12 at the Hotel Grand Hyatt, Qurum, showcasing the significance and effectiveness of these advanced technologies to a diverse group of industry leaders.

The seminar drew notable attendees from leading organisations such as Nama Electricity Distribution Company (NEDC), Nama Electricity Generation Company (NEGC), Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), Nama Water and Wastewater Services Company, Muscat Municipality, the Ministry of Health (MoH), and other distinguished contractors and consultants.

The wide-ranging participation



The seminar featured an insightful agenda designed to provide attendees with comprehensive knowledge and practical insights into cable and pipe entry mechanical sealing systems.

underscored the broad relevance and application of Hauff Technik’s solutions across industries including infrastructure, healthcare and utilities.

The seminar began with an enlightening talk by Noura al Balushi from the National University of Science and Technology, who spoke on “Climate Change and Its Impact on Infrastructure Development”.

This session explored how sustainability and environmental considerations are becoming vital in modern construction and infrastructure projects, setting the stage for discussions on resilient and future-proof solutions.

The seminar featured an insightful agenda designed to provide attendees with comprehensive knowledge and practical insights into cable and pipe entry mechanical sealing systems.

Hauff Technik experts provided an overview of their product range, showcasing real-world applications in infrastructure and utility substation projects.

End the year in style with exclusive 0% interest deal on Mini models

MUSCAT: Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, the exclusive importer of BMW and Mini in Oman, has unveiled its exclusive Q4 offer, making Mini ownership more accessible and rewarding than ever before.

For a limited time, customers can enjoy 0% interest financing on all Mini models, with flexible payment terms made possible through a partnership with ahlibank.

This season, the offer includes a robust package designed for

both convenience and long-term value, starting with complimentary Mini service for 5 years or 100,000 km, whichever comes first, and a 5-year or 200,000 km Mini warranty.

FREE REGISTRATION
Additionally, new Mini owners will enjoy free registration for the first year and complimentary services from AutoSpa, which provide extra care and protection for their vehicles, giving Mini fans even more reasons to celebrate.



For a limited time, customers can enjoy 0% interest financing on all Mini models, with flexible payment terms made possible through a partnership with ahlibank.

“At Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, we are passionate about delivering exceptional value and excitement to our discerning clientele,” said Rachid Zamani, Managing Director of Al Jenaibi International Automobiles.
“This season, we’re elevating the excitement for our Mini enthusiasts with a special package that not only makes Mini ownership easier but also more fun and fulfilling with tailored benefits and flexible financing.”
With a special 0 per cent

interest rate for the first two years, this fourth quarter offer provides flexibility and ease to drivers, inviting them to choose payment plans that suit their budget.
Following this initial period, the financing terms remain highly competitive, making it the ideal time to bring home a Mini with confidence and peace of mind.
This limited-time offer is the perfect opportunity for customers to join the Mini family and explore the brand’s spirited driving experience.

A trillion dollar question - fossil fuel subsidies



KARIN STROHECKER

The writer is a Reuters journalist covering emerging markets.

GOVERNMENTS around the globe are ploughing billions of dollars into fossil fuel subsidies to shelter citizens from higher energy costs, but that comes at a fiscal burden, creates inefficiencies, and hampers the goal of reducing overall usage. At the UN's COP29 climate summit in Baku, discussions are ongoing over reducing distortions and inefficiencies created by subsidies - a key to reduce the production and use of fossil fuels, which contribute significantly to climate change and pollution.

HOW MUCH DO GOVERNMENTS SPEND ON FOSSIL FUELS?
The International Energy Agency (IEA) calculated that fossil fuel consumption subsidies stood at \$620 billion in 2023. That is a sharp decline from the record sum of more than \$1.2 trillion in 2022 — the year when energy prices soared sharply in the wake of Russia's attack of Ukraine, which saw subsidies surpass the trillion-dollar threshold for the first time. In general, subsidies are broadly split between electricity, oil and natural gas accounting for a third each, and coal receiving only minimal support, IEA data showed. Other calculations taking

into account the wider ramifications come up with a much bigger number. According to International Monetary Fund (IMF) calculations, whose latest calculations are available only for the record year of 2022, explicit subsidies - or money spent by governments on undercharging for supply costs - amount to \$1.26 trillion. But that makes only up about a fifth of the total amount, which the IMF puts at \$7 trillion in 2022 — or 7.1 per cent of global GDP — once the sum of undercharging for environmental costs and forgone tax revenues is taken into account.

WHY DO GOVERNMENTS SUBSIDISE FOSSIL FUELS?
Governments around the globe are subsidising fossil fuels to protect consumers by keeping prices low. The biggest spenders, according to the IEA, are Russia, Iran, China and Saudi Arabia — countries that can, broadly, afford the costs. But much of that government spending is also present in poorer emerging markets, where energy often makes up a larger share of the inflation basket and price swings hit the least well off the hardest. Debt-laden governments - many of them

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petroleum exporters — trying to shed costly fuel subsidies are running headlong into angry populations reeling from years of increasing living costs. Countries from Nigeria to Angola have struggled to abolish the support and have seen deadly protests erupt in recent years, often triggered by rising fuel prices.

WHAT COULD THE IMPACT OF TACKLING SUBSIDIES BE?
Removing inefficient fossil fuel subsidies could have a positive impact on energy markets, government budgets and efforts to tackle climate change, according to the IEA and the IMF. The Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action — counting policy makers from more than 90 countries among its members — has said that getting pricing of fossil fuel products right was critical to meeting countries' Nationally Determined Contributions' (NDC) targets and achieving global climate change goals set out in the Paris Agreement.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR?
In 2009, the Group of 20 major economies called for a phase-out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies over the medium term and repeated that call in 2012. At COP26 in 2021 and COP27 in 2022, countries agreed to accelerate efforts of the phase-out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies. — **Reuters**

INVESTORS IGNORE THE LAW OF LONG-TERM AVERAGES

THE US stock market has hit 50 new highs so far this year. Investors are now anticipating tax cuts and further fiscal largesse from the next Trump administration. Yet each new peak pushes the market further away from fair value. Advocates of the principle that valuations revert to their long-term average over time anticipate dismal future returns. Unfortunately, their measures have been flashing red for so long that investors have stopped paying attention. That could prove a costly error.

The idea of mean reversion is based on the notion that, over time, both profits and valuations oscillate around a stable midpoint. In a competitive market economy, investment can be expected to rise and fall with profitability. High profits should attract more capital spending, which will eventually drive down returns, and vice versa.

In theory, this effect works at both the individual company and macro level, with aggregate investment moving up and down with the market's valuation.

There are two popular valuation measures based on the principle of mean reversion. The cyclically adjusted price-earnings ratio (CAPE), as popularised by the Yale economist and Nobel laureate Robert Shiller, compares stock prices to average earnings over the previous 10 years, adjusted for inflation.

The measure known as Tobin's Q, created by another Yale economist, the late James Tobin, looks at the market's price relative to the replacement cost of listed companies. Both measures have enjoyed past success in predicting the general direction of the stock market over multiyear periods. But they are most effective at market extremes.

For instance, when US stocks have been valued at a CAPE that is in the measure's cheapest decile, they have on average delivered real annual returns of 12 per cent over the following 10 years. After the market entered CAPE's most expensive decile, annual investment returns over the next decade have been flat on average.

Both CAPE and Tobin's Q correctly identified the US stock market as being extremely overvalued during the internet hype of the late 1990s. The trouble is that, after that bubble burst, neither measure returned to its long-term mean, except briefly in the panic following the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in 2008.

In fact, in every decade since the 1990s US valuations have climbed progressively higher. In 2017, the US stock market entered its most expensive decile on the CAPE measure.

Since then, American stock prices have more than doubled. No wonder investors have lost interest in mean-reverting valuation measures.

There are several explanations for why mean reversion appears to have stopped working. Jeremy Grantham, co-founder of the Boston investment firm GMO (and my former boss), points to the fact that in the United States, the high valuations and profits of recent years have coincided with weak investment. — **Reuters**

Opportunity Oman: Navigating a changing world

THE global economy is a turbulent sea, with geopolitical currents, technological waves, and economic headwinds creating both challenges and opportunities. Oman, however, is navigating this dynamic environment with a steady hand, charting a course towards sustainable growth and prosperity. The Sultanate of Oman's strategic vision, coupled with its commitment to diversification and innovation, is positioning it as a beacon of stability and opportunity in a rapidly changing world.

Oman's approach is multifaceted, balancing the strengths of its existing industries with a forward-looking embrace of new sectors and technologies. In the energy sector, Oman is leveraging its hydrocarbon reserves while simultaneously pursuing ambitious renewable energy targets and pioneering green hydrogen production.

This balanced approach ensures energy security while contributing to global sustainability goals and positioning Oman as a key player in the future energy landscape.

Recent data from the Ministry of Energy and Minerals highlights Oman's continued strength in oil production, with daily output exceeding 1 million barrels.

At the same time, the Sultanate of Oman is making significant strides in renewable energy. The Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) reports that Oman is on track to achieve its goal of 30 per cent renewable energy in its electricity mix by 2030, with large-scale solar and wind projects contributing significantly to this target.

Furthermore, Oman is emerging as a leader in green hydrogen production.

Beyond energy, Oman is strategically positioned as a global logistics hub. The Port of Salalah, a major transshipment centre, handled over 4.5 million TEUs in 2023, according to official data.

Ongoing expansion projects are further enhancing its capacity and efficiency. Oman's strategic location, coupled with its modern port infrastructure and streamlined customs procedures, is attracting significant investment and boosting trade. The free trade agreement negotiation with the UK and India are key example of Oman's



DR YOUSUF HAMED AL BALUSHI
yousufh@omaninvestgateway.com

The author is founder and CEO - Smart Investment Gateway, economists, board adviser & business transformation mentor.



The Sultanate of Oman is investing in food security through initiatives in agriculture and fisheries, promoting modern farming techniques to increase domestic food production.

proactive approach to expanding its global trade network.

To fuel its economic diversification efforts, Oman is actively courting foreign direct investment (FDI). The government is prioritising sectors such as logistics, manufacturing, tourism, renewable energy, and technology, offering attractive incentives to foreign investors through Special Economic Zones (SEZs).

These efforts are yielding positive results, with the Central Bank of Oman reporting FDI inflows of RO 4.6 billion in 2023, a 26 per cent increase from the previous year. This upward trend reflects growing investor confidence in Oman's stable economic environment and promising growth prospects.

Oman's diversification strategy extends beyond traditional sectors.

The Sultanate of Oman is investing in food security through initiatives in agriculture and fisheries, promoting modern farming techniques to increase domestic food production. Furthermore, Oman is leveraging its rich mineral resources, encouraging investment in mining and mineral processing to create value-added industries. The government is also embracing technological advancements, particularly in artificial intelligence (AI).

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology is developing a national AI strategy to guide the development and adoption of AI technologies across various sectors, including healthcare, education, and government services.

Oman's commitment to progress is underpinned by its diplomatic prowess. The Sultanate of Oman maintains a neutral foreign policy, fostering strong relationships with countries around the world. This diplomatic approach facilitates trade, investment, and cooperation in various fields, contributing to Oman's stability and economic growth. While navigating a complex global landscape, Oman faces challenges such as fluctuations in oil prices, regional instability, and global economic uncertainties. However, the Sultanate of Oman is responding with resilience and foresight.

The government is implementing fiscal reforms to ensure long-term economic sustainability, while actively diversifying the economy to reduce reliance on hydrocarbons. Investing in education and training to develop a skilled workforce remains a key priority. Oman's journey is one of transformation and growth. By embracing innovation, diversifying its economy, and navigating challenges with a strategic approach, the Sultanate of Oman is creating a prosperous future for its people. Oman's commitment to sustainable development, coupled with its stable political environment and business-friendly policies, makes it an attractive destination for investment and a key player in the global economy. As the world continues to evolve, Oman stands ready to embrace the opportunities and navigate the challenges, securing its place as a beacon of stability and prosperity in the years to come.

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Galfar order book balloons to RO 890m

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, NOV 17

LEADING OMANI infrastructure and energy sector contractor Galfar Engineering & Contracting SAOG has reported a 50-per cent surge in its order book to a record RO 890 million for the nine months ended on September 30, 2024, up from around RO 589 million a year earlier. The increase has been fuelled by an uptick in contract awards across the oil and gas, rail infrastructure, electricity and water, wastewater, and other civil infrastructure sectors.

“The substantial expansion of our order book to a record RO 890 million, up from RO 589 million in the previous year, underscores our strategic success in securing high-value contracts, particularly within the oil and gas and infrastructure sectors.

“These achievements provide a strong foundation for future financial stability and growth,” publicly traded Galfar noted in the Directors’ Report of the company’s performance during the first nine months of 2024.



The biggest of Galfar’s contract awards this year is linked to the civil construction of the 303-km Hafeet Rail network.

The most lucrative of the contracts bagged by Galfar so far this year was announced in April when a joint venture of the Omani contractor and Trojan Construction Group of the UAE scooped the civil package of the Hafeet Rail project valued at RO 521 million. As part of the award, the JV will undertake

the civil construction of the 303-km-long rail network linking Abu Dhabi with Suhar. In August, Galfar won a major contract worth RO 117 million for the construction of water distribution networks in Al Dhahirah Governorate. The client is state-owned Nama Water Services, which selected the Omani firm

to design and build Package 1 of the water distribution networks for Ibri, Yanqul and Dhank.

Just earlier, in July, Galfar was awarded a contract for the expansion of the Raysut Water reclamation plant by Nama Dhofar Services Company in Dhofar Governorate.

The project is valued at approximately RO 35 million. The parent company generated revenue totalling RO 196.5 million for the nine months on ended September 30, 2024, representing an 11.2-per cent increase compared to RO 176.7 million for the same period in 2023. The company, however, reported a net loss of RO 1 million for the period. Going forward, Galfar foresees opportunities linked to the government’s Public-Private Partnership (PPP) programme.

“The pipeline of projects in sectors such as education, health, transportation and technology continues to grow, and we are prepared to seize these opportunities to drive our revenue and market presence,” the company said.

“With a focus on diversification into new markets, including Construction Technology and Energy, we are establishing pathways for long-term resilience,” it added.

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Happy 54th National Day!

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BUSINESS

Oman strengthens GCC indicators

THE Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf (GCC-Stat) confirmed that the Sultanate of Oman has achieved numerous milestones in its efforts to enhance sustainable development, strengthening the GCC's indicators in achieving sustainable development goals.

The Centre highlighted that Oman's development journey continues with steady progress toward the goals set by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik with the sustainable development goals aligning with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, ensuring a balanced approach that meets present needs while achieving future aspirations.

In celebration of the Oman's 54th National Day, the Centre stated that the statistics and data reflect the significant achievements in the Sultanate of Oman.

Among these achievements, 100 per cent of the population lives in households that can



The Sultanate of Oman has made notable progress according to statistical indicators.

access basic services, 99.8 per cent of the population benefits from safely managed drinking water services, 100 per cent of the population has access to electricity, and 99.9 per cent of births occur under medical supervision. Additionally, 100 per cent of urban solid waste is regularly collected and adequately disposed of. In the economic sector, the Sultanate of Oman has made notable progress according to statistical indicators.

The annual growth rate of real GDP per capita reached 1.5 per cent, while total government expenditure in 2023 amounted to \$30.185 billion. The contribution of the non-oil sector to GDP at current prices was 64.2 per cent, and the per capita GDP was \$21,100. Furthermore, the Sultanate

of Oman successfully controlled inflation, which stood at 0.9 per cent.

The Sultanate of Oman has strengthened its position at the forefront of many global and Arab indicators, ranking first globally in the 2024 Cybersecurity Readiness Index, second globally in the proportion of science and engineering graduates to total graduates in 2023, and eighth globally in the 2023 Quality of Life Index.

The Sultanate of Oman also ranked ninth globally in government spending per student.

Regionally, the Sultanate of Oman ranked first in the Arab world in the 2023 Renewable Energy Regulation Index, second in the 2024 Environmental Performance Index, and fourth in the 2024 Competitive Industrial Performance Index.

Leading the way to a better future

In celebration of the **54th National Day** of the Sultanate of Oman, we wish **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik** and the people of Oman continued success and prosperity in the years to come.

APSR ADVANCES SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH STRATEGIC ENERGY AND WATER INITIATIVES

FROM PAGE 25

(Generating 60 MW of energy from residential and commercial installations); and Dhofar 1 Wind Farm (Generating 50 MW, sufficient to power 16,000 homes).

Several wind energy projects are in the pipeline for implementation.

The list includes: Duqm (Ras Madrakah) Wind Project (234–270 MW); Sadah Wind Project (81–99 MW); Dhofar 2 Wind Project (114–132 MW); and Jaalan Bani Bu Ali Wind Project (91–105 MW). To support electric mobility, the Authority has issued regulations for EV charging stations, prepared technical guidelines for grid integration, and launched the “Sustainable Energy” campaign focusing on sustainable construction, renewable energy, and electric vehicles.

The Authority is enhancing operational efficiency and financial performance within the electricity sector. A landmark project includes linking Oman's northern and southern electricity grids to improve resource sustainability, reliability, and efficiency.

This initiative will eliminate 14 high-cost diesel power plants, and reduce carbon emissions by 474,000 tonnes annually.

Other innovations include direct energy sales frameworks for large customers and promoting competition in supply activities.

WATER AND WASTEWATER SERVICES

APSR is committed to developing reliable water and wastewater networks while enhancing customer experiences. Notable

achievements include: Reduced Connection Fees (Residential water connection fees were reduced from RO 700 to RO 200.

Additionally, several new water projects are in various stages of implementation. Notable is the Ghubrah 3 water desalination plant with a capacity of 300,000 cubic metres/day.

Strategic reservoirs with a combined storage capacity of 350,000 cubic metres are also under development. Water transmission projects linking Suhar and Ibri are also under construction, along with distribution network upgrades in various governorates.

Wastewater projects include advanced treatment and network expansion in several areas, such as Seeb, Al Amerat, Suwaiq and Suhar, aligning with Oman's strategic infrastructure goals. The Authority prioritises high-quality customer services by adopting global best practices. Key initiatives include: Ensuring transparency in service agreements; Establishing clear guidelines for addressing complaints and service standards; and Monitoring service providers through key performance indicators (KPIs), such as billing accuracy and response times.

To safeguard customer rights, the Authority has introduced “Service Level Guarantees” requiring providers to compensate customers if performance standards are unmet. APSR remains committed to fostering sustainable development, supporting Oman's energy transition, and enhancing the quality of life for its citizens while celebrating the nation's 54th National Day with pride.

Congratulations to
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik
and the generous people of Oman
on the occasion of the
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On the occasion of the 54th National Day

We salute the visionary leadership of

His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik

(May the Almighty protect and bless him)

and extend our hearty greetings to the people of Oman.

We honour His Majesty's guidance and progressive policies that inspire a bright and robust future for Oman, marked by unity, prosperity, and sustainable development. May Oman continue to thrive and prosper under His Majesty's wise leadership.



دفتہ للا مجداً

Celebrating **Oman's 54th National Day** and the visionary leadership that guides its progress. Wishing continued prosperity and a **blessed National Day to all.**

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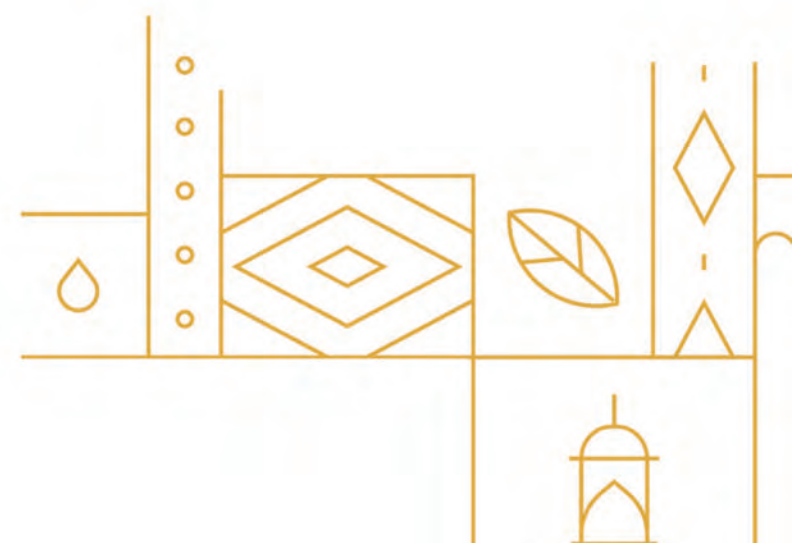


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SPORTS

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OMAN PROPOSAL FOR UNIFIED SPORTS DAY DISCUSSED

MUSCAT: Sayyidah Sanaa bint Hamad al Busaidiyah, Chairwoman of Oman Women's Sports and Gender Equality Committee, along with Vice-Chairwoman Sa'adah al Ismailiyah and committee

member Manal al Kiyumi, participated in the third meeting of the GCC Women's Sports Advisory Committee. The meeting was held in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, under the chairmanship of Lulwa al Marri,

Chairwoman of GCC Women's Sports Advisory Committee for the current term. The meeting included discussions on Oman's initiative to launch a unified sports day for GCC women starting next year.

Oman Sail's Hadeel wins bronze



OMAN SAIL'S women's sailing team has returned from the first Arab Women's Sailing Championship at the Bahrain Maritime Sports Association at Al Jazaer Beach, Zallaq in Bahrain, with a bronze medal for Hadeel al Mushaifri in the Optimist competition. This marks an impressive performance in the debut edition of the championship. Hadeel finished just two points off second place after a series of podium finishes in the final four races where she achieved two second places and two third places. Teammate Tarteel al Hasani finished second in the penultimate race and won the final race, but this was not enough to overcome a difficult start, leaving her in eighth place in a congested fleet. Abeer al Zakwani finished in ninth. The Optimist title was won by Malak al Doseri of Bahrain with seven first places out of 10 races. Madiya al Nayadi of the UAE won silver.

In the ILCA 6 competition, Ibtisam al Salmi was Oman's highest finisher in seventh. Marwa al Khaifi finished 11th, but fourth in the Under 18 category. Ines Gmati of Tunisia dominated the fleet to win overall gold with eight first place finishes, ahead of Ameena Shah of Kuwait and Malak Dardouri of Tunisia. Ines Chellali of Algeria won the Under 18 gold. Camelia al Kubaisi of the UAE finished second and Lulwa al Ali from Bahrain finished third. The team was led by Sultan bin AbdulAziz al Zadjali and coached by Hussain bin Said al Jabri. Sultan AbdulAziz al Zadjali, Team Leader, said, "We are very pleased with the performance of our team. Many of the sailors are still in the early stages of their development but showed how much potential they have. Winning a medal and finishing in the middle of a competitive fleet is an excellent achievement and we are very proud to represent Oman at this level. The Women's Arab Sailing Championship is already an incredibly important event for women's sailing and with the talent on show, we hope the event can grow in the years to come." Hadeel al Mushaifri, said, "This was a very valuable learning experience. I am pleased with my performance, the bronze medal, and to represent my nation in sailing. Oman Sail has been very supportive of my sailing journey, and I am looking to repay this encouragement by continuing to improve. It was great to meet so many female sailors from across the region, learn from those more experienced than myself, and show that sailing is a sport for all."

BUILDING A BETTER TOMORROW, TODAY.

Congratulations to **His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik** and best wishes to the citizens of Oman on the 54th National Day.

As we commemorate our 54th National Day, we reflect on a journey marked by resilience, innovation, and unity. A journey that has transformed our nation into a beacon of hope and prosperity.

Under the wise and sagacious leadership of **His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik**, Oman is a true reflection of peace, tolerance, and harmony. His vision of driving innovation and fostering a business environment that thrives on creativity and collaboration has propelled this nation to great heights.

Together, we at Lulu Group envision a future where our nation stands tall as a global leader, a place where dreams take flight and aspirations soar.

Let us celebrate this momentous occasion fuelling its dreams, pride, progress and continue to build a brighter future for generations to come.



RACE TO DUBAI



MCILROY CLINCHES TITLE WITH DP WORLD TOUR CHAMPIONSHIP WIN

DUBAI: Rory McIlroy won the DP World Tour Championship for the third time and claimed his sixth Race to Dubai title in the process on Sunday, matching the tally of legendary Spaniard Seve Ballesteros.

The 35-year-old from Northern Ireland made a crucial birdie on the par-4 16th hole to break a deadlock with Denmark’s Rasmus Hojgaard.

He then birdied the par-5 18th hole for a three-under-par 69 that took him to 15-under for the four days and was enough for a two-shot win that also secured him a sixth Order of Merit.

The four-time major champion broke down on live television when asked what it meant to equal Ballesteros’ record. “It’s really cool. I think everyone knows what Seve means to European golf. In the European Ryder Cup locker room, all we have are quotes of Seve,” said McIlroy, who is now two behind all-time record holder Colin Montgomerie’s tally of eight.

“We had a Seve shirt from 1995 when he played his last Ryder Cup in our changing room last year... For me to be mentioned in the same breath as Seve, I am very proud.”

Rasmus, who was trying to follow in the footsteps of his twin brother Nicolai and take the trophy back to Denmark for a second year in a row, made a stunning 22-footer par save on the 17th hole, but could not put the pressure on McIlroy on the 18th as he settled for a par and a final round score of 71. McIlroy, who started with a bogey and then made four successive birdies, dropped a couple of shots around the turn to be tied with Hojgaard after 15 holes at 13-under. He finally edged ahead with a stunning second shot on the par-4 16th hole from 137 yards to less than a foot for his fifth birdie of the day and drained a six-footer on the last hole.

‘FITTING END TO 2024’

“I think I would have been miserable for a few weeks if I hadn’t won today. I’ve been through a lot this year professionally and personally. It feels like the fitting end to 2024. I’ve persevered a lot. Had close calls. Wasn’t able to get it done.

“So, to be able to get over the line, when I got off to a great start and didn’t have my best in the middle of the round, was very satisfying. I felt a lot of pressure out there, most of them self-inflicted. But to finish the way I did, I can now go and have a good few weeks off,” added McIlroy.

Including the Zurich Classic that the world number three claimed alongside Shane Lowry, it was McIlroy’s fourth worldwide win of the season.

Hojgaard was disappointed at not winning the title, but happy to have secured the No1 card of the 10 PGA Tour cards on offer at the end of the week for the top 10 players who are not already members. — AFP

Martin denies Bagnaia to win first MotoGP world title



Ducati Italian rider Francesco Bagnaia (R) followed by Ducati Spanish rider Marc Marquez and Ducati Spanish rider Jorge Martin (L) compete during the MotoGP Solidarity Grand Prix of Barcelona at the Circuit de Catalunya in Montmelo on the outskirts of Barcelona. — AFP

SPANISH RIDER Jorge Martin claimed his first MotoGP world championship title after finishing third in the season-ending Barcelona GP on Sunday.

Defending two-time champion Francesco Bagnaia, who started the race 19 points behind Martin, took the chequered flag for the 11th time this season but it was not enough to wrest the title from the Spaniard.

“It sounds amazing,” said an emotional Martin after being addressed as a world champion for the first time.

“I don’t know what to say, I am completely shocked.

“This is for my people, for my family, for the people who are supporting me, this is for them.

“I started crying at the end, it was a very emotional race. It’s been a long journey, a lot of crashes, big injuries but finally we are here.

“I hope we can keep improving and enjoy the moment. This is the most important thing: live the present and enjoy the moment.”

Martin, who will be leaving his Ducati



satellite team Pramac for Aprilia next season, had made himself the favourite for the title with a remarkably consistent season.

He had only won three grand prix all season, but his third-place on Sunday was the 32nd time this season across the 40 sprints and grand prix that he made the podium.

After finishing third in Saturday’s sprint he knew he had only to finish in the top nine to secure the title.

Bagnaia, however, has finished the season in blistering form, his victory in Barcelona giving him his fourth win over the final five races of the season.

Starting from pole, the Italian made a perfect start but was soon under pressure from Marc Marquez who slipped past Martin.

Martin let them battle it out up front, guarding his track position as Aleix Espargaro and Alex Marquez toughed it out behind him.

The race was due to take place in Valencia but had to be moved after the region suffered its worst floods in a generation which have killed more than 220 people.

The race was switched to Barcelona and has been dubbed the Solidarity GP to show support for the people of Valencia, with all proceeds of the event going to the Valencia relief fund. — AFP

Netherlands clinch series with all-round display in third T20I

MUSCAT: The Netherlands reserved their best for the last as they secured an impressive 29-run victory over Oman in the third T20I, sealing the series 2-1 with an all-round display of batting, bowling and fielding.

Oman, who won the toss and elected to field, had hoped to put pressure on the Netherlands’ batting order, but the Dutch proved too strong, posting a competitive total of 147/9 in their allotted 20 overs.

Oman’s chase got off to a poor start as they lost early wickets. Jatinder Singh (6) and Aamir Kaleem (9) were dismissed cheaply, while Ashish Odedara fell for a duck, leaving Oman in dire straits at 13/3.

A brief revival came from Hammad Mirza (9), but he too



The Netherlands players celebrate a wicket against Oman.

fell to Vivian Kingma. At 24/4, the chase seemed all but over.

Sandeep Goud’s dismissal for a duck (0) made it 25/5, and

Oman’s hopes of chasing down the target seemed increasingly slim. However, Shakeel Ahmed mounted a valiant resistance,

scoring a quickfire 45 off 33 balls, hitting three boundaries and two sixes.

His efforts gave Oman a brief glimmer of hope, but wickets kept tumbling at the other end. Mehran Khan (18) and Sufyan Mehmood (23 not out) tried to rebuild, but the required run rate continued to climb beyond their reach.

With Oman at 48/7 in the 10th over, the Dutch bowlers tightened their grip.

Kyle Klein was the standout performer with the ball, claiming four wickets for 16 runs, including the crucial early dismissals of Jatinder, Kaleem and Odedara.

Paul van Meekeren backed up Klein with two wickets for 24, dismissing Mehran Khan and Jay Odedra (0) in quick succession.

Oman’s lower order fell fast and

despite Shakeel’s late fight, the target remained elusive as he was run out and Oman’s innings ended at 118/9.

Earlier, the Netherlands’ innings began with a wobble as Michael Levitt was dismissed for just two runs in the first over by Shakeel Ahmed. However, Max O’Dowd (66 off 55 balls) steadied the ship with a fluent knock, hitting seven boundaries and one six. Teja Nidamanuru provided valuable support, scoring 36 off 24 balls, including two fours and three sixes, as the pair put on a crucial partnership.

Brief scores: Netherlands 147/9 (Max O’Dowd 66, Teja Nidamanuru 36; Shakeel Ahmed 3/24) beat Oman 118/9 (Shakeel Ahmed 45, Sufyan Mehmood 23*; Kyle Klein 4/16, Paul van Meekeren 2/24)



In celebration of the remarkable accomplishments gracing our generous homeland, OQ Group is honoured to extend its most heartfelt congratulations to

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK

May Allah protect him, on the occasion of the 54th National Day.

Under Your Majesty's wise leadership, may the Sultanate of Oman continue to thrive, marked by the achievements of this prosperous era. We pray to the Almighty for the success of Your Majesty's noble aspirations for Oman's continued advancements, as we reaffirm our commitment to realising your vision for a brighter future as outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

SPORTS

Dutch outclass Hungary to enter last 8

GERMANY HIT RECORD SEVEN AGAINST BOSNIA TO TOP GROUP IN NATIONS LEAGUE



Germany's Florian Wirtz (right) celebrates scoring their fourth goal with Jonathan Tah. — AFP

NETHERLANDS OUTCLASSED Hungary with a 4-0 victory in their winner-takes-all Nations League encounter on Saturday while record-setting Germany hammered Bosnia and Hercegovina 7-0.

Netherlands and Hungary went into the match tied on five points each and with the winner set to join Germany in ensuring their progress from Group A3 to the quarterfinals. First-half penalties by Wout Weghorst and Cody Gakpo sent the Oranje on their way, before Denzel Dumfries and Teun Koopmeiners made the game safe in the second period.

“There are always things we can improve upon,” Dutch captain Virgil van Dijk told SBS6. “But in the end, we deserved to win.”

The match at the Johan Cruyff Arena was briefly interrupted in the seventh minute following a medical emergency on the Hungarian bench.

The referee stopped play for some 10 minutes while Hungary’s assistant coach Adam Szalai received treatment, shielded from view by huddled players and staff members, as well as a large white sheet.

Szalai, 36, was stretchered off to applause from spectators and players alike, the Hungarian FA later released a statement saying he was “conscious” and in a “stable condition” at an Amsterdam hospital.

Almost forgotten in the aftermath of the worrying incident was the handball by Tamas Nikitscher as the ball was crossed into the Hungarian box.

The referee consulted the touchline video monitor and promptly restarted play by pointing to the spot, allowing Weghorst to sweep the Netherlands in front.

Denes Dibusz was the busier of the two goalkeepers as the first period wore on and had to be alert to keep out efforts from Tijjani Reijnders and Donyell Malen. In the 11th minute of added time, Dutch dominance told and Malen was clipped by Zsolt Nagy in the box.

Gakpo dispatched the resulting spot-kick, sending Dibusz the wrong way and Netherlands into a two-goal lead. Right-back Dumfries sealed the Netherlands’ spot in the quarters as he latched onto Malen’s flick-on at the back post and fizzed a volley back into the far corner shortly after the hour. Koopmeiners marked his first international match since 2022 by nodding in a fourth in the 86th minute.



Netherlands' Teun Koopmeiners (second right) is congratulated by his team-mates after scoring against Hungary in Amsterdam. — AFP

‘GOOD FUN’

Germany cemented their spot at the top of the group with a 7-0 win over Bosnia — the heaviest in the six-year history of the Nations League. “It was good fun tonight. After a couple of goals we did the work defensively and then everything came together offensively. The more that happens, the more fun we have on the pitch,” German attacker Jamal Musiala told Uefa’s website.

Musiala opened the floodgates after two minutes with a header from Joshua Kimmich’s cross.

Tim Kleindienst scored his first goal for Germany in the 23rd minute and Kai Havertz made the game safe eight minutes before the break, slotting home after a slick one-two with Florian Wirtz.

Wirtz then made it four on 50 minutes with a sublime swerving free-kick from wide on the left, before doubling up seven minutes later.

Substitute Leroy Sane scored Germany’s sixth in the 66th minute and Kleindienst completed the rout just over 10 minutes from time as he guided home a pinpoint cross from centre-half Antonio Rudiger.

The emphatic result leaves Germany five points ahead of Netherlands with only one match left to play.

In Group B1, Georgia played out a 1-1 draw at home to Ukraine and stay two points ahead of the fourth-placed visitors.

The Czechs drew 0-0 in Albania and remain top of the group on eight points, one ahead of Georgia in second and their third-placed opponents. Turkiye stayed top of Group B4 with a 0-0 draw at home to Wales, while Iceland beat Montenegro 2-0. — AFP

Athlete Centres’ hockey championship 2024 concludes

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, NOV 17

The 2024 Second Athlete Preparation Centres Hockey Championship, organised by the Oman Hockey Association, concluded in a competitive atmosphere that showcased exceptional performance and significant growth in the local hockey scene.

The championship witnessed wide participation from 21 sports centres, including 11 male and 6 female centres, distributed across three geographical groups. The teams competed in the governorates of Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah, Dhofar, Al Batinah North and Al Buraimi. Matches were held across three main venues: the Oman Hockey Field in Al Amerat, the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex in Salalah and the Sohar Sports Complex. The championship lasted three days filled with exciting matches.

KEY RESULTS AND AWARDS

The championship delivered high technical levels in both male and female categories. In the Muscat and Al Dakhiliyah groups, the Muscat Centre claimed first place in the male category, followed by Nizwa Centre in second place and Seeb Centre in third. Abdullah al Hosni from Muscat Centre won the best player award, Abdulrahim al



In the female category, Sohar (A) Centre triumphed, with Sohar (B) Centre and Qurayat (A) Centre securing second and third places, respectively. Lujain al Shirawi from Sohar Centre was awarded the best player, Fathiya al Noufali was recognised as the best goalkeeper and Maryam al Shukaili from Sohar Centre emerged as the top-scorer.

Sariri from Ahli Sidab Centre was named the best goalkeeper and Eyad al Alawi from Muscat Centre received the top-scorer award.

In the female category, Sohar (A) Centre triumphed, with Sohar (B) Centre and Qurayat (A) Centre securing second and third places, respectively. Lujain al Shirawi from Sohar Centre was awarded the best player, Fathiya al Noufali was recognised as the best goalkeeper and Maryam al Shukaili from Sohar Centre emerged as the top-scorer.

In the Dhofar group, the Al Nasr (B) Centre led the male category, followed by Salalah (A) Centre and Al Ittihad (A) Centre. Nashwan Mowled from Salalah Centre was named the best player, Kamal Sami



from Al Ittihad Centre won the best goalkeeper and Salem Raed from Al Nasr Centre earned the top-scorer award.

In the female category, Salalah (A) Centre took first place, with Al Nasr (A) Centre and Nasr (B) Centre in second and third, respectively. Lian Abdulwahid from Al Nasr Centre was awarded the best player, Rawan Majdi from Salalah Centre won the best goalkeeper

and Ailul Hamdi from Salalah Centre was the top-scorer. In the Al Batinah North and Al Buraimi group, Salam (B) Centre claimed first place in the male category, followed by Salam (A) Centre and Sohar (A) Centre. Ali al Maamari from Salam Centre received the best player award, Yahya al Hinai earned the top-scorer title and Abdulrahman al Abdulsalam from Saham Centre was named the best goalkeeper.

At the conclusion, Hamad al Batran, Vice-Chairman of the Development and Centres Committee, praised the tournament’s efforts to nurture sports talents. He commended the technical levels demonstrated by the players and emphasised

the centres’ commitment to effective training programmes. Al Batran revealed plans to expand participation by setting up new centres, alongside improving infrastructure and incorporating modern training techniques. He stressed the importance of organising more local tournaments. He expressed gratitude to all contributors to the tournament’s success, including technical committees, referees, coaches, administrators and the supportive role of parents in encouraging young talents. He highlighted teamwork as the key to achieving the association’s vision of positioning Oman as a prominent hockey destination.

Photos by Saleh Al Sharji

Gargash GAC Motor extends its heartfelt congratulations to

HIS MAJESTY
Sultan Haitham bin Tarik
- may God protect and preserve him -

and to the beloved people of Oman on the occasion of the
54th Glorious National Day. We sincerely wish His Majesty continued health,
well-being, and a long life, and we pray for further progress and prosperity for
the Omani nation.



Oman morale high ahead of Iraq clash



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, NOV 17

OMAN WILL aim to build on the victory against Palestine by chasing for the second straight win as they will host Iraq in a crunch match on Tuesday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. The match will kick off at 8:00 pm. The Red Warriors, under guidance of Rasheed Jaber, has been fine-tuning their preparations with daily training sessions since their hard-fought 1-0

A win against Iraq would lift Oman to nine points, positioning them closer to the group leaders. Meanwhile, Iraq will also be highly motivated, having drawn their last match against Jordan.

win against Palestine. Monday's final training session will focus on refining tactics and ensuring the team is ready for this decisive encounter. Reflecting on the task ahead, Oman aim to avenge their narrow 1-0 defeat to Iraq in Basra earlier in the qualifiers. With the team in good form and high morale following last week's victory, Rasheed Jaber is expected to retain much of the starting line-up from the Palestine match. The technical staff will finalise the line-up and strategy in Monday's practice session with a focus on both

technical and tactical drills. A win against Iraq would lift Oman to nine points, positioning them closer to the group leaders. Meanwhile, Iraq will also be highly motivated, having drawn their last match against Jordan. Iraq's delegation arrived in Muscat on Sunday with their first training session scheduled for Monday. Head coach Jesus Casas, who has been at the helm since November 2022, will be eager to get Iraq back on track and secure valuable points to strengthen their campaign for a direct spot in the

2026 Fifa World Cup. The official pre-match press conference and technical meeting will take place on Monday. Both coaches will discuss their teams' final preparations while the technical meeting will cover matters including kit colours, warm-up schedules and security protocols for match day. With both teams targeting a win, fans can expect a keenly contested match as Oman strive to keep their World Cup hopes alive and Iraq look to regain momentum in their qualification journey.

OQEP

Oman, a proud heritage and a bright horizon

Congratulations to
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik
on the occasion of **Oman's 54th National Day.**
May the Almighty protect him and bless him abundantly.

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