

HM thanked by Algeria President

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a cable of thanks from President Abdelmadjid Tebboune of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, in reply to His Majesty's congratulatory cable on the occasion of being re-elected for a new presidential term. In his cable, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune expressed his appreciation for His Majesty's sincere sentiments. He also expressed his pride over the distinguished relations binding the two countries and their peoples.

SUNRISE - 06:01 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:46 AM

DHUHR - 12:00 PM

ASR - 03:22 PM

MAGHRIB - 05:54 PM

ISHA - 07:04 PM



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SCIENTISTS UNLOCK SECRET OF 'GIRL WITH PEARL EARRING'

MUSCAT

OMAN AIR TO FLY TO ROME

Oman Air has made its most significant new route announcement in the last five years with the launch of flights to Rome. Starting from December 20, the airline will offer four weekly flights from Muscat, offering travellers in Oman their first-ever direct connection to the 'Eternal City'. With one-way fares starting from just RO 75, it's the perfect opportunity to explore one of the world's most historic and captivating cities. "Our new direct flights to Rome represent an exciting step in our transformation. Marking our second destination in Italy, this key route not only enhances our European offerings, but also marks the start of our strategy to maximise the utilisation of our narrow-body fleet," said Con Korfiatis, CEO of Oman Air.

CRUDE PRICE HITS \$78.81 A BARREL

Oman oil price for December delivery on Monday reached \$78.81, comprising a rise by 35 cents compared to the price of last Friday which stood at \$77.81. The average price of Oman oil for October delivery stabilised at \$77.54 per barrel, thus \$6.31 per barrel lower than September delivery. World oil prices rose further on Monday as tensions escalated in the Middle East one year after the deadly Hamas attacks on Israel, while stock markets diverged. Brent North Sea crude came close to surpassing \$80 per barrel for the first time since late August.

BUCHAREST

OMAN, ROMANIA EYE TRADE BOOST

The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Romania held the 4th session of political consultations in Bucharest. The Omani side was headed by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, while Traian Laurențiu Hristea, Secretary of State for Global Affairs and Diplomatic Strategies of Romania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, headed his country's side. The two sides discussed bilateral relations in the fields of investment, commercial exchange, education and information technology.

TUNIS

TUNISIA'S SAIED SET FOR VICTORY



President Kais Saied was poised to win Tunisia's election by a huge margin, though low voter turnout reflected widespread discontent in the country. Exit polls showed Saied, 66, expected to rout his challengers with 89 per cent of the vote. His rival Ayachi Zammel trailed far behind with just 6.9 per cent, while Zouhair Maghzaoui was expected to win just 3.9 per cent, according to exit polls broadcast on national television on Sunday. But the turnout was only 27.7 per cent of the nearly 10 million eligible voters.

RO 186m deals to boost infrastructure in Sultan Haitham City

VINOD NAIR @vinod_nair

The Urban October conference launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning on Monday saw the signing of several agreements for Sultan Haitham City in the presence of HH Sayyid Taimour bin Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO). More than 80 agreements worth RO 186 million were signed at the conference, which will also



Dignitaries at the Urban October conference.

present investment opportunities in Sultan Haitham City, revealed Dr Mohammed bin Ali al Muttawa, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning for Urban Planning. He also said that the Greater Muscat Structure Plan is awaiting final approval, following which it will enter the implementation stages. During the conference, six partnership and cooperation agreements were signed as part of the first phase of Sultan Haitham City, with

a total value exceeding RO 70 million. Additionally, an agreement was signed for the fifth package to establish networks for electricity, water, sewage, irrigation, broadband, telecommunications, and district cooling services, with an investment value exceeding RO 82.7 million. The project, to be completed within 24 months, will be implemented by Towell Infrastructure Company.

TURN TO P5

ISRAEL STEPS UP BOMBINGS IN SOUTH LEBANON

Oman, UK call for end to military escalation

MUSCAT/BEIRUT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Monday received a phone call from David Lammy, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs of the United Kingdom (UK).

The two ministers discussed the historical and strategic relations between the two countries and the keenness to continue developing economic interests and in the energy fields, including renewable energy, in addition to security and defence cooperation.

The two sides discussed the regional developments, stressing the need to intensify regional and international efforts to stop the military escalation and prevent the deterioration of the humanitarian situation. The two sides also expressed their concern over the increasing number of civilian casualties in Lebanon and in the Palestinian territories, especially the Gaza Strip, as well as the increasing risks to the stability of the region.

The two ministers underscored the importance of collective action within the framework of the international community's responsibilities to achieve and establish a comprehensive and just political solution to the Palestinian cause as a basis for security and stability in the region. They underlined the need to open urgent and safe humanitarian corridors for relief supplies to the Gaza Strip, back and empower the Palestinian National Authority, and resume full international support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees.

Meanwhile, Hezbollah fired rockets at Israel's third-largest city, Haifa, on Monday as Israeli forces looked poised to expand ground raids into south Lebanon on the first anniversary of the Gaza war, which has spread conflict across the Middle East.

SEE ALSO P6



Displaced people arrive in Khan Yunis after being given notice by Israeli forces to evacuate from the eastern parts of the city in the southern Gaza Strip on Monday. — AFP

Oman welcomes French President's call

The Sultanate of Oman has welcomed the French President's call to stop supplying weapons to Israeli occupation forces during the ongoing fighting in the Gaza Strip. "Oman considers this call an important step within the context of international efforts aimed to stop the escalating war and protect innocent civilians from the impacts of the conflict," said Oman in a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry today. The statement stressed that the international community should take firm stands to stop the violence and terminate military escalation in the

region. It called for adherence to international and humanitarian law, including the "cessation of all forms of military support that fuel the conflict and prolong human suffering". The Sultanate of Oman urged all parties to resort to dialogue and endorse a just and comprehensive political solution that guarantees the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, most notably the establishment of their independent state with Al Quds Al Sharqiyah (East Jerusalem) as its capital, in accordance with international legitimacy resolutions. — ONA

Asteroid mission 'Hera' launches despite hurricane

MIAMI: Europe's Hera probe launched on Monday on a mission to inspect the damage done by a Nasa spacecraft when it smashed into an asteroid during the first test of Earth's planetary defences.

Despite fears that an approaching hurricane could delay the launch, the probe blasted off on a SpaceX rocket into cloudy skies from Cape Canaveral in the US state of Florida just before 11:00 am local time.

Hera's mission is to investigate the aftermath of Nasa's Double Asteroid Redirection Test (DART), which deliberately crashed into the Dimorphos asteroid in 2022 roughly 11 million kilometres from Earth. The fridge-sized DART spacecraft successfully knocked the asteroid well off course, demonstrating that humanity may no longer be powerless against potentially planet-killing asteroids that could head our way.

The European Space Agency (ESA) said the Hera craft will investigate what it has called the "crime scene" in the hopes of learning how Earth can best fend off future space rocks.

The launch was met with applause from teams on the ground, according to an ESA broadcast.

Poor weather ahead of Hurricane Milton had put the launch into doubt, with SpaceX warning on Sunday that there was only a 15 per cent chance of a launch.

Milton is the latest hurricane to hit the Gulf of Mexico after the deadly Hurricane Helene. It has been classified as "an extremely dangerous category 4 hurricane" and is expected to slam into Florida in the coming days.

The launch had also faced a potential delay due to an anomaly involving a Falcon 9 rocket during the launch of SpaceX's Crew-9 astronaut mission late last month. — Reuters



A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket lifts off from launch complex-40 carrying the European Space Agency Hera spacecraft, in Cape Canaveral, Florida, on Monday. — Reuters



‘Elmam’ programme to enhance government sector performance

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 7

The Royal Academy of Management has successfully concluded its ‘Elmam’ programme, an initiative aimed at enhancing the skills and capabilities of new government employees. The programme, held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, is a key part of the Academy’s efforts to strengthen the administrative efficiency of the Sultanate of Oman’s government sector. The ‘Elmam’ programme, organised in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, saw the participation of 200 newly recruited government employees with less than a year of experience.

The programme focused on developing essential competencies in leadership, ethics and modern government management, all in line with Oman Vision 2040, which aims to drive sustainable development across the country. Dr Fathiya bint Abdullah al Rashdiyah, Vice-President for Programme Affairs at the Royal Academy of Management, explained that the participants were divided into five groups, with 25 members each, to ensure focused and effective learning.

The five-day training covered a broad range of topics, including leadership, critical thinking,



The programme, held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, is a key part to strengthen the administrative efficiency of Oman’s government sector

self-development, innovation, and digital transformation, all designed to equip new employees with the skills necessary to excel in their roles within the public sector. The programme also placed a strong emphasis on institutional loyalty, teamwork, and effective communication, crucial elements for improving the overall performance of government institutions.

Additionally, participants were introduced to the latest developments in artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and performance indicators, with a special focus on the digital transformation currently reshaping government operations. Dr Fathiya noted that the training not only aimed to build technical and leadership skills but also fostered a deeper understanding of national trends and policies. The curriculum

included modules on ethical work conduct, the fundamentals of government service and the importance of innovation and creativity in achieving strategic objectives.

The ‘Elmam’ programme aligns with the Academy’s broader mission of preparing the Sultanate of Oman’s public sector for future challenges, a vision outlined by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. As the latest addition to the Academy’s initiatives, the programme reflects a commitment to integrating international best practices, ensuring that the Sultanate of Oman’s government sector is equipped to adapt to the rapidly changing global landscape.

Abdulaziz al Raisi, Assistant President for Studies and Development, stated that such training programmes for new employees are of great

importance, especially in light of the technological changes we are witnessing today. He emphasised that preparing these young people is essential for them to become the future leaders of the Sultanate of Oman. He added that one of the key objectives of the programme is to provide participants with a general understanding of Oman Vision 2040 and future directions in specific technological areas such as artificial intelligence, as well as focusing on the ethics of government employees’ duties. “We aim to hold these training sessions regularly while developing the programme to address other aspects that concern young men and women in the future,” he said.

Munira al Balushi, from the National Centre for Statistics and Information, said: “The ‘Elmam’ programme for new employees in the government sector comes in line with the rapid advancements the world is witnessing in fields such as artificial intelligence, modern technologies, and machine learning. The programme aims to transition from traditional government models to modern digital governments, in pursuit of keeping up with the paths of advanced countries and achieving Oman Vision 2040. We are fully prepared to train these young Omanis, who are capable of overcoming the challenges we face today, to collectively reach our goals by 2040.”

MoHERI launches programme to support technology transfer



The programme includes organisational structures affiliated with higher education institutions and aims to support innovators and entrepreneurs.

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, OCT 7

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research, and Innovation (MoHERI) has launched a programme to support the establishment and operation of innovation centres and technology transfer under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

The programme includes organisational structures affiliated with higher education institutions and aims to support innovators and entrepreneurs in benefiting from scientific research and technological innovations, transforming them into successful projects.

It consists of innovation incubators and accelerators, laboratories and modelling centres, and technology transfer and localisation offices.

Dr Rahma confirmed during her speech at the ceremony that the Sultanate of Oman is experiencing a renewed renaissance in all fields, particularly in higher education and scientific research. She emphasised that interest in scientific research is crucial for progress, aligning with the vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik as outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

Innovation centres are essential for investing in knowledge and entrepreneurship, supporting the national economy by providing quality services to

ensure the success of innovative projects and addressing challenges they may face during various growth stages. The programme aims to strengthen the national system of creativity and innovation, ultimately contributing to the achievement of Oman Vision 2040.

The programme was designed to enhance scientific capabilities, create an innovative environment for entrepreneurship, and improve Oman’s ranking in global indicators such as the Global Innovation Index, the Global Competitiveness Index, and the Global Entrepreneurship Index.

Its goals include establishing innovation centres, empowering existing centres in higher education institutions, enhancing their readiness, and developing innovative solutions to national priority challenges.

Additionally, the programme seeks to build entrepreneurship and innovation skills, support the national economy through innovative startups, bridge the gap between academia and industry, and foster sustainable partnerships.

By facilitating communication between innovators and investors through networking, the programme aims to position Oman as a hub for innovation and technology on a regional and global scale, aligning with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, fostering a knowledge economy, and elevating the global ranking of universities in Oman.

NDC HOSTS SECRETARY-GENERAL OF ARAB LEAGUE

MUSCAT: The National Defence College (NDC), Academy of Strategic and Defence Studies, on Monday hosted Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the Arab League, who delivered a lecture titled “Regional and International Variables and their Impact on Joint Arab Action”.

The lecture formed part of the curriculum of the 12th National Defence Course.

Rear Admiral Ali bin Abdullah al Shidi, Commandant of the National Defence College, welcomed the Secretary-General of the



The Secretary-General regional and international variables and events influence the functioning of the Arab League. – ONA

Arab League. He expressed his appreciation for the Secretary-General’s constant keenness to expand the knowledge of the NDC course participants through his lectures.

In his lecture, the Secretary-General of the Arab League spoke about the current international situation and its impact on joint Arab action. He pointed out that regional and international

variables and events influence the functioning of the Arab League.

The lecture also dealt with the obstacles and incentives for joint Arab action, as well as modern technology and its impact on the concepts of war.

In conclusion, the Secretary-General of the Arab League replied to queries raised by participants in the 12th National Defence Course.

The lecture was attended by senior officers of the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF) and representatives of military and security units, the NDC and civil departments. — ONA

ROP celebrates passing out of new batch of police recruits

NIZWA: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) on Monday celebrated the passing out of a new batch of police recruits and female police officers. The ceremony took place at the military parade ground of the Police Recruits Institute at the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences in the Wilayat of Nizwa. It was held under the auspices of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy.

The passing out batch gave the salute to the chief guest. Then, the commander of the column asked the chief guest to inspect the front row of the parade. The batch passed in front of the dais in parade formation.

Later, the chief guest handed out awards to the top graduates.

The graduates played the Royal Oman Police anthem and chanted thrice: ‘Long live His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander.’ The ceremony concluded with a military salute to the chief guest. Then, the commander of the column asked for permission to leave the parade ground.

The ceremony was attended by Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqli, Inspector General of Police and Customs, senior officers of the ROP and military and security units, directors of government institutions and departments in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, and parents of the graduates. — ONA



The graduates chanted, ‘Long live His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander.’ – ONA





STARGAZING FOR THE PUBLIC TODAY

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Oman Astronomical Society (OAS) is organising a stargazing event at Bandar Al Khairan in Yiti Hills today (October 8), aiming to allow the general public to experience the beauty of the cosmos under the night skies.

Starting at 5:40 pm, this two-hour session will provide an extraordinary opportunity to observe stars, planets, and other celestial wonders in a dark setting.

Speaking to the Observer, Abdulwahab bin Sulaiman al Busaidi, an Astro scientist, said that this is a rare opportunity for the public to observe the multitude of stars and the galaxy with technological assistance and comprehend the vast skies.



Starting at 5:40 pm, this two-hour session will provide an extraordinary opportunity to observe stars. – Photo for illustrative purpose

“We are organising the stargazing event for the public, both for hobbyists and common people, with the aim of experiencing the stars and objects in space and understanding the vastness of the universe to gain knowledge of astronomical events,” he said.

People are advised to arrive on time at 5:40 pm as the place is a little challenging and requires time to climb up the hill to get a better view of the stars.

OAS is a voluntary, non-profit scientific association established by a ministerial decision in June 2008, concerned with an interest in astronomy and space sciences, and gathering those interested in these sciences in the Sultanate of Oman for the purpose of exchanging and developing knowledge.

‘Encourage sustainable future through plastic bag ban’

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
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The Environment Authority (EA) continues its efforts to monitor the implementation of the targeted stages outlined in Resolution No. (8/2024), which bans the use of plastic shopping bags.

Ibtisam al Halwani, Head of the Chemical Materials Classification and Management Department, emphasised the importance of implementing this decision to protect the Omani environment, wildlife, and to align with sustainable development goals and Oman Vision 2040.

Al Halwani told the Observer, “This initiative aligns with international efforts to manage chemicals and agreements to combat plastic pollution, positioning Oman among countries taking action to address this global issue.” Efforts include collaborating with government agencies responsible for implementing the ban, forming technical teams in Muscat Governorate and other governorates. These teams include representatives from various relevant authorities to ensure effective implementation.



The ban aims to reduce plastic pollution, promote environmental sustainability, and gradually phase out all plastic shopping bags

The Authority’s awareness efforts involve media coverage, lectures, and publications educating the public about the dangers of plastic, the ban on plastic shopping bags, and the importance of environmentally friendly alternatives. Awareness videos are shared on social media and displayed at Oman Airports in partnership with the Oman Airports Administration.

Samples of environmentally friendly bags are being distributed as substitutes

for plastic bags through collaboration with local factories. Violators of the ban face fines ranging from RO 50 to RO 1,000, which double for repeat offences.

The ban aims to reduce plastic pollution, promote environmental sustainability, and gradually phase out all plastic shopping bags. This decision is part of a comprehensive strategy to address environmental challenges from plastic waste and build a sustainable future for Oman.

Indian military official visits MSC

MUSCAT: Vice Admiral Vennam Srinivas, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Southern Naval Command of the Republic of India and his accompanying military delegation on Monday visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). The guests were received upon their arrival at the centre by Commodore Adil bin Hamoud al Busaidi, Head of the MSC. Members of the visiting delegation were briefed on the tactical roles and tasks carried out by the centre in the safety of the Omani maritime environment. They also toured the centre’s facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies used in carrying out its national duties. — **ONA**



Ruppell’s Weaver adds touch of beauty

TEXT AND PHOTOS
BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

It moves among the leafy branches of trees, diligently working to build its beautiful nests. These nests hang with a wide opening at the bottom, which the female bird inspects to choose the most suitable and strongest ones for laying her eggs during the seasonal breeding season.

The Rüppell’s Weaver (*Ploceus galbula*) is a bird commonly found in the forests and valleys of Dhofar Governorate in the south of Oman, especially during the spring season, locally known as the ‘Al Sarb’ season.

According to bird life studies, this bird was formally described by a German naturalist and explorer named Wilhelm Peter Eduard Simon Rüppell, particularly in northeast Africa. He discovered the



‘Rüppell’s Weaver’ as a common species in the ‘Modat valley’ on the coast of Eritrea in 1831.

Adult male ‘Rüppell’s Weaver’ birds are yellow with red eyes and a chestnut mask that may appear black from a distance. Females and non-breeding males have dull colouring. Studies indicate that “breeding Rüppell’s Weaver often nests in colonies of several males, but single-male colonies may occur. In Yemen and the south of Oman,

colony size varies from 4 to 50 nests.

Nest sites include a variety of tree species, often thorny species, and are often built over water.” Males are polygamous and will breed with up to three females, typically building up to eight globular nests woven from grass or long strips of palm fronds. Initially, the nests lack an entrance tunnel, but a tunnel of 50 mm may be added later. Two or three eggs are laid, varying in colour from white to blue, usually heavily spotted, sometimes only finely speckled, with brick-red markings. The female incubates the eggs, and in Rüppell’s Weaver, the male feeds the young chicks by regurgitation while the female broods them. After four days, both sexes feed the chicks.

The breeding season of this bird attracts many birdwatching and photography enthusiasts in Oman.

Youth explore ecotourism in Western Al Hajar



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The ‘Basmatna Gheer’ volunteer team launched the ‘Capture Nature’ programme, targeting the Western Al Hajar Mountain Star Light Reserve to explore nature and promote ecotourism.

The attendees were a group of youth passionate about photography, drawing, and content creation.

According to the team, ecotourism is one of the most important sources of income diversification in Oman, as the country boasts stunning natural landscapes and rich biodiversity.

The two-day programme held on October 4 to 5, included activities such as stargazing, where participants had the chance to observe stars and planets in a clear, light-pollution-free sky.

Participants engaged in hands-on activities such as olive harvesting while learning about cultivation methods, as well as had the opportunity to attend a traditional pottery-making workshop.

Samia al Balushi, Basmtna Gheer member explained, “Tagging ancient trees helps in tracking their health and monitoring them

regularly, which contributes to their protection from deterioration or unintended removal.”

She pointed out that it plays a role in raising awareness about the importance of preserving these rare and historical trees, while promoting environmental conservation through the placement of barcodes on each tree. Ancient trees can also serve as an attraction for ecotourism, as tagging provides valuable information about these trees to visitors and those interested.

The team feels the initiatives represent an important step toward promoting ecotourism in Oman and highlighting the beauty of the Omani landscape and its environmental diversity.

“Through cooperation between government agencies and volunteer organisations, a balance between tourism development and environmental conservation can be achieved, ensuring a sustainable future for generations to come,” the team stated.

Basmtna gheer is an environmental volunteer group that works on raising awareness about climate change efforts and advocates for grassroots action for the local community to achieve a sustainable future for youth.



The two-day programme saw the participants engaged in hands-on activities such as olive harvesting, cultivation methods as well as traditional pottery-making

مدائن
madayn

BIDDING ANNOUNCEMENT

The Public Authority for Industrial Estates (MADAYN) is pleased to announce a tender in Buraimi Industrial City for investors, contractors and developers to construct and develop an integrated fuel station.

Opportunity Number	Project Name	Last date of buying	Date of submission	Fee (R.O)
2/2024	Constructing and Developing an Integrated Fuel Station	06/10/2024	17/10/2024	20

The following procedures apply:

- Tender Documents can be obtained from Madayn Support Department at Buraimi Industrial City (Tel: 25657768 / 25657764) during official working hours, against non-refundable fee as mentioned above.
- Completed bids according to the terms of the tender document shall be deposited in the Bid Box at Buraimi Industrial City administration office before 12 pm on the specified date.
- For further inquiries, please contact us at, 25657756

25657779



AHMED KAABI

Planting trees in homes is an effective way to help mitigate the effects of climate change.

With the growing global concerns about environmental degradation and rising greenhouse gas emissions, it has become essential to think of local solutions. One of the most prominent solutions is to dedicate part of the home space for tree planting.

Trees act as one of the best natural agents for air purification, as they absorb carbon dioxide, and release oxygen in return. By planting a tree, an individual can help reduce carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, leading to improved air quality and reduced pollution levels.

Dr Rashid al Yahyaei, Professor, Department of Plant Sciences at the College of Science Agriculture and Marine, explains what is termed ‘amateur gardening’ in home gardens, public spaces, and schools. This, he says, is a positive and necessary trend that significantly contributes to improving the environment.

He emphasises that this practice represents an important step in combating climate change, as planted trees absorb carbon dioxide, which is one of the main greenhouse gases. He added that this step is not only beneficial to the environment but also provides green spaces that enhance the aesthetic appeal of homes and cities.

Al Yahyaei points out that planting in home gardens should be fruitful and of nutritional value, such as palm trees, mangoes, and lemons, which can meet family nutritional needs and contribute to

“
Amateur gardening is not only beneficial to the environment but also provides green spaces that enhance the aesthetic appeal of homes and cities

DR RASHID
AL YAHYAEI
Prof, Dept of Plant Sciences
College of Science
Agriculture and Marine

achieving a level of self-sufficiency.

Regarding public gardens and streets, he stressed the importance of utilising the diverse native plants of Oman, as it boasts more than 1,400 plant species well-suited to local climatic conditions. He emphasised that these native species require minimal water, reducing the energy consumption needed for irrigation and lowering the emissions associated with garden maintenance.

He further explained that for every tree planted in public gardens and streets, there is a native Omani counterpart, which is often more beautiful and sustainable compared to imported plants. He highlighted that native trees need little water, meaning they require less maintenance energy, making them eco-friendly and contributing to the absorption of more carbon dioxide, thus enhancing the environmental benefits of these practices.

Al Yahyaei stresses the importance of encouraging individuals to plant home gardens, not only to achieve food security but also to improve the local environment. He explained that using native plants in home gardens helps reduce emissions and energy consumption, which is a critical step in combating climate change.

Regarding individuals’ awareness of the importance of addressing climate change risks through gardening and planting, Dr Al Yahyaei added, “We should not

wait until we reach a stage where we are accountable for every carbon molecule we consume or release into the air.”

He noted that this trend has already started to emerge in some countries and may become widespread in most nations in the coming years. Therefore, each person must be aware of the importance of reducing energy consumption and contributing to carbon absorption by expanding green spaces, whether at home or in public places.

Making tree planting part of a family’s culture can shift lifestyles towards sustainability. The planting spaces do not necessarily have to be large; even a small tree can make a tangible difference. Encouraging children to participate in the planting process and care for it helps instil environmental awareness in them from an early age.

Dedicating a small piece of land at home for planting trees is not just a simple contribution to improving the environment but an investment in a healthy future. Trees, by providing shade and cooling the air, help reduce the need for cooling devices, thus reducing electricity consumption from sources that may not be environmentally friendly. Trees also contribute to preserving biodiversity and providing shelter for small animals and birds, enhancing ecosystem stability and helps prevent the degradation of natural resources.



OMAN, BAHRAIN AGREE TO ENHANCE COOPERATION

MUSCAT: Eng Badr bin Salim al Maamari, Secretary-General of the Tender Board, on Monday received a delegation from the Kingdom of Bahrain. The visiting delegation is headed by Eng Jamal Abdulaziz al Alawi, Secretary-General of Bahrain Tender Board.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed partnerships and cooperation opportunities in the tenders field. They also discussed means of enhancing cooperation.

The visiting delegation lauded the Sultanate of Oman's role in augmenting the efficiency of government spending for projects and procurements. They also praised Oman's role in boosting local content and developing SMEs. — ONA



Eng Badr bin Salim al Maamari, Tender Board Secretary-General holds talks with Bahrain delegation.



EGYPT EMBASSY CELEBRATES 51ST ANNIVERSARY

The Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt in Muscat held a reception on Sunday on the occasion of the 51st anniversary of the October victories. The ceremony was attended by many senior officers of the Sultan's Armed Forces and heads of diplomatic missions accredited to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Dhofar honours creative minds

SALALAH: The Omani Writers and Literati Association, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, hosted a ceremony at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah to honour the winners of the Association's Award for Literary Creativity for School Students. This marks the second session of the award in Dhofar Governorate.

The event was graced by His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, who presented awards to the winning students as well as to supporting bodies and institutions.

Dr Saeed bin Bakhit Bait Mubarak, Chairman of the Association's Board of Directors in Dhofar, in his speech, emphasised the importance of nurturing young talent to cultivate a future generation of thoughtful writers. He



highlighted the Association's efforts, alongside the Ministry of Education, to discover and foster creative talents among school students.

The award aligns with the Ministry's goals of refining students' skills, fostering a passion for literature among all societal groups, and encouraging a spirit of literary competition. — ONA

Conference on Omani literary heritage today

IBRA: The Wilayat of Ibra in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate will host the first international conference titled 'Employing Heritage in Omani Literature' starting on Tuesday. The conference concludes on Thursday. Organised by the Omani Writers and Authors Association in cooperation with the Office of the Governor of Al Sharqiyah North and A' Sharqiyah University, the conference is sponsored by Shaikh Suba'a bin Hamdan al Saadi, Secretary-General of the Secretariat-General of National Celebrations. It will bring together participants from 12 countries, alongside Oman.

The conference focuses on preserving cultural identity and passing on traditional values through literature. It aims to craft stories that resonate with modern audiences while honouring Omani literary and cultural heritage. The programme includes six scientific sessions featuring 25 research papers, exploring ways to integrate heritage into contemporary literary forms like short stories, novels and traditional arts. This event serves as a platform for showcasing the rich literary traditions of Oman, aiming to contribute to academic studies and ensure the preservation of the nation's cultural legacy. — ONA



Sultanate of Oman سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التراث والسياحة
Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

Announcement of an International Tender

Tender No.	234/2024/MHT/HQ-59	Tender Name	Appointment of a Tourism Representation Company in the Republic of France, Belgium, and Swiss French
Fees of Tender Documents (Non-refundable)	25 O.R		
Tender Document Sales End Date	27/10/2024		
Last Date for Bid Submission	19/11/2024		
Grade	International		
E-Tendering Portal	https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om		

- Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents.
- The Tenderers must acknowledge commitment to the bid.
- The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids
- The bid submission period starts after the end of the inquiry period shown in the e-tendering system, until the last date for submitting bids before (10:00 am, Oman time).

Support and inquiries	For more information, related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering system: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
	For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om or 24402200
For further information	Email : solic@mh.gov.om Phones : 22088348 - 22088085

RO 186m deals to boost infrastructure in Sultan Haitham City

FROM PAGE 1

For the fourth package of the city, an agreement was signed to construct main roads, tunnels, and culverts with an investment value of RO 63.2 million. This project, awarded to Sarooj Construction Company, is set to be completed in 30 months. Furthermore, an agreement was signed to build three transformer stations (11/33 kV) within the sixth package, covering an area of 7,500 square metres in districts 6, 8, and 9 of Sultan Haitham City, with an investment value exceeding RO 6 million. The project will be carried out by Al Faniah Oman Company within 15 months.

As part of Urban October, the Basmat competition will be launched at Sultan Haitham City, aligning with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's vision of involving youth and encouraging their innovative and creative contributions to shaping Oman's future. The competition aims to engage youth in creating diverse imprints in architecture, arts, technology, environment, culture and society in Sultan Haitham City, which is envisioned as a city for all and a legacy for the future.

HH Sayyid Taimour inaugurated new neighbourhoods in Sultan Haitham City. This included the launch of Al Nuha Neighborhood (A13), developed by Tibiaan Real Estate on an area of over 58,000 square metres, comprising 116 residential units with an investment value exceeding RO 13.4 million.

The conference focuses on six main themes, which feature more than 40 papers presented by prominent local and international experts in urban planning and related fields. Moreover, it will host over 60 local and international speakers and showcase successful global experiences in urban planning. The first day of the conference addressed the theme of 'Engaging Youth in Planning', highlighting the importance of early investment in involving youth in urban planning to contribute to the creation of a better urban future. It also discusses the role of architectural competitions in developing youth skills and competencies. The second theme addressed the topic of 'Recreation in Cities'.

An exhibition, featuring 40 pavilions that showcase models of future projects, including Sultan Haitham City, the Khuwair Downtown project, and the Muscat Structural Plan, along with comprehensive residential community projects, was held on the occasion.



الهيئة العمانية للاعتماد الأكاديمي وضمان جودة التعليم
Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA)
Announcement of Extension of Distribution Date of a public tender
TENDER NOTICE

Tender Number	Tender Title	Company Grade:	Tender Fee	Dates		
				Distribution Till	Last Day to receive Clarifications	Bid Submission Date
2/2024 (re-launch)	Development of AI Simulation & Media Center (Smart Solutions in Managing Training Workshops)	First/ Second/ Third	OMR 25	10 October 2024	17 October 2024	31 October 2024

The Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation & Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA) is hereby inviting all local, specialized bidders to participate in this TENDER as per the following instructions, in addition to all terms of TENDER enclosed in the TENDER documents.

For project brief, please visit the below link:
<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

A. Purchase of Tender Documents
The Bidders may obtain the TENDER document by registering the company at eTendering System (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

B. Submission
All Proposals should be SUBMITTED ONLINE AT e-TENDERING System (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
Proposals to be accepted for evaluation which will be submitted through the eTendering System ONLY.

C. Correspondence Tender Inquiry:
All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online through the eTendering System ONLY.

e. Tendering System Inquiry:
correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200
All correspondence pertaining to the OAAAQA tender must be directed to the following email address and phone number: tenders@oaaaqa.gov.om and +968 24121663

OAAAQA Business Hours
Sunday – Thursday, 7:30 – 14:30 Oman Time, (+4 UTC)
OAAAQA Business Hours are to be considered in all correspondences.

WORLD

SHORTTAKES



Officials check the latest updates in the vote count, in Tunis. —AFP

TUNISIA’S SAIED SET FOR LANDSLIDE ELECTION WIN

TUNIS: President Kais Saied was poised on Monday to win Tunisia’s election by a huge margin. Exit polls showed Saied, 66, expected to rout his challengers with 89 per cent of the vote. Supporters of Saied, the exit polls prompted celebration on Sunday night, with hundreds taking to the streets of Tunis. “What we need now is a drop in prices. We want better education, health and above all safety,” said Mounir, 65 Ahead of the vote, Saied called on Tunisians to “vote massively” to usher in what he called an era of “reconstruction”. He cited “a long war against conspiratorial forces linked to foreign circles”, accusing them of “infiltrating many public services and disrupting hundreds of projects” under his tenure. Celebrating the exit polls at his campaign’s office in the capital, he warned of “foreign interference” and pledged to “build our country and we will rid it of the corrupt and conspirators”. — AFP



India’s PM Narendra Modi (R) and Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu during a joint media briefing at the Hyderabad House. — AFP

MALDIVES LEADER IN INDIA TO STRENGTHEN TIES

NEW DELHI: Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu was given a red carpet welcome on his first state visit to India on Monday, a trip Prime Minister Narendra Modi said marked a “new chapter” to reset troubled ties. India on Monday rolled out a financial support to bolster Male’s struggling economy, with Muizzu and Modi discussing “energy, trade, financial linkages and defence cooperation”, India’s foreign ministry said. “Your visit is a new chapter in our ties,” Modi told Muizzu, who was given an honour guard including cavalry and a marching band. “India will always be there for the progress and prosperity of the people of Maldives.” Muizzu, in a speech alongside Modi that included the virtual inauguration of an Indian-supported airport runway and social housing, said he had held “extensive discussions... charting a path for the future collaboration between our two countries”. He also thanked India for budgetary support “instrumental in addressing foreign exchange issues”, including a \$357 million and \$400 million currency swap agreement. — AFP

BILATERAL TIES

Philippines, S Korea boost defence cooperation



South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr agreed to boost defence cooperation. The two leaders discussed a range of issues during talks at the Philippine presidential palace where they signed agreements on nuclear energy. “President Marcos and I opened a new chapter of our partnership by elevating our relationship to a strategic partnership,” said Yoon. — Reuters

SWOLLEN RIVERS

Deadly floods swamp India, Bangladesh



Torrents of water rushing downstream from the Himalayas have killed at least 20 people in India and Bangladesh in floods and landslides. In India’s northeastern Meghalaya state, “relentless rainfall-induced floods and landslides” had caused a swath of destruction, the chief minister’s office said. In neighbouring Bangladesh, at least 20,000 people have been forced to flee their homes. — AFP

CHOSEN PRESIDENT

Ethiopian lawmakers select new president



Ethiopian lawmakers on Monday chose Foreign Minister Taye Atske Selassie as the country’s new president. Atske Selassie replaced Sahle-Work Zewde who had served as president since 2018. Taye becomes the fifth president since Ethiopia adopted its current constitution in 1995. He can hold the office for a maximum of two six-year terms. He has previously served as ambassador to the UN and Egypt. — AFP

ISRAEL STEPS UP GAZA BOMBING ON WAR’S FIRST ANNIVERSARY



A Palestinian boy stands on the rubble of a house destroyed in Israel’s military offensive, in Khan Yunis. — Reuters

Israeli strikes endanger civilians on Lebanon border

HUMAN Rights Watch on Monday said Israeli strikes near the main Lebanon-Syria border crossing were putting civilians at “grave risk” as they prevented them from fleeing and hampered humanitarian operations. The Israeli military said that its jets struck Hezbollah positions near the Masnaa border crossing in Lebanon’s eastern Bekaa Valley.

Syrian transport ministry official Sleiman Khalil said on Monday that the road was still “completely cut off to vehicle traffic”, but people could still cross on foot. Human Rights Watch said the strikes were “impeding civilians trying to flee and disrupting humanitarian operations”, adding: “the situation places civilians at grave risk.” “An Israeli attack on a legitimate military target may still be unlawful if it can be expected to cause immediate civilian harm disproportionate to the anticipated military gain,” it said in a statement.

The head of the United Nations refugee agency, Filippo Grandi, said on Monday that the flow of people “has declined, but still hundreds of people are coming through, and they’re also coming through other border points”.

Red Crescent volunteers are “helping people transport their goods across the border” while the road remains cut, Grandi added during a visit to Syrian side of the crossing, known as Jdeidet Yabus.

Lebanese authorities said on Friday that more than 370,000 people had crossed from Lebanon into Syria since September 23, most of them Syrian nationals.

More than 774,000 Syrian refugees were registered with the United Nations in Lebanon before the latest escalation, although the tiny country



A plume of smoke billows following an Israeli air strike on the village of Khiam in southern Lebanon near the border. — AFP

Human Rights Watch said the strikes were impeding civilians trying to flee and disrupting humanitarian operations. The situation places civilians at grave risk

said it hosted some two million — the world’s highest ratio of refugees per capita. HRW’s Lama Fakih said that “by making a border crossing inaccessible at a time when hundreds of thousands of people are fleeing fighting and many others are in need of aid, the Israeli military threatens considerable civilian harm.” Even if the crossing were used for military purposes, “Israel would need to take into account the expected civilian harm compared to the anticipated military gain”, she added in the statement. Lebanon’s health ministry said

on Monday an Israeli strike in south Lebanon overnight killed 10 firefighters. “An Israeli strike overnight targeted a local firefighting centre in Baraasheet where 10 civil defence members were present,” municipal official Reda Ashour said. The health ministry reported the “killing of 10 firefighters” who were “in the building ready to go out on rescue missions”, adding efforts to remove the rubble were ongoing. The latest report brings to 115 the number of rescuers killed in a year since the start of cross-border fire. — AFP

MEASURING *PRESIDENCY*



Georgia's President Salome Zourabichvili attends the Independence Day celebrations in Tbilisi. — Reuters file photo

GEORGIA RULING PARTY TO IMPEACH PRESIDENT

TBILISI: Georgia's ruling party will renew attempts to impeach pro-Western President Salome Zourabishvili, who is seeking to unite opposition forces ahead of parliamentary elections, the speaker of parliament said on Monday. Last year, lawmakers from the ruling Georgian Dream party failed to secure enough votes to remove Zourabishvili, whom they accused of making foreign trips without government permission to lobby for European Union membership for Georgia.

"The parliamentary majority decided to initiate another impeachment procedure," parliamentary speaker Shalva Papuashvili told a news conference.

Over the last two years, Zourabishvili has been at loggerheads with the Georgian Dream government, which faces mounting accusations of democratic backsliding and derailing Tbilisi from its EU membership path. On Monday, she announced consultations with opposition parties to agree on a joint candidate for prime minister. — AFP



RESCUERS SEARCH AFTER FLOODS

A rescue worker with a dog searches for victims after the floods and landslides in the village of Buturovic Polje, Bosnia and Herzegovina. —Reuters

Florida orders evacuations as Hurricane Milton strengthens

WASHINGTON: Hurricane Milton intensified rapidly on Monday, with dangerous winds and storm surges forecast for Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula before the massive storm is set to slam into Florida by Wednesday. The storm comes close behind deadly Hurricane Helene, which hit the same areas, and some Florida residents have been ordered to evacuate again.

The US National Hurricane Center said Milton was "an extremely dangerous Category 4 hurricane," on a scale of five, packing maximum sustained winds of 240 kilometres an hour. It warned of storm surges raising water levels by 1.5 metres along the Yucatan Peninsula and large, destructive waves

on the coast.

Rainfall of 25 cm, with localised spots of up to 38 cm, is expected to cause havoc in Florida, bringing flash flooding in urban areas. Emergency workers are still racing to provide relief in the aftermath of Helene, which killed more than 225 people in several states across the US southeast.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has declared 51 of the state's 67 counties under a state of emergency, predicting Milton could have "major, major impacts." President Joe Biden was briefed on Milton and said in a statement his administration was readying "life-saving resources." Milton is forecast to move north of the Yucatan Pen-



Local residents form a long line before the opening of a shopping warehouse ahead of Hurricane Milton's expected landfall, in Florida. — AFP

insula and across the southern Gulf of Mexico, the NHC said. Its storm surge will "raise water levels by as much as 0.6 to 1.2 metres above ground level" along the northern Yucatan coast and cause "large and destructive waves," it said on Monday.

Hurricane Helene hit the Florida coastline as a Category 4 storm, dumping torrential rainfall and causing flash flooding in remote towns in states such as North Carolina.

The storm, which struck Florida on September 26, was the deadliest natural disaster to hit the United States since 2005's Hurricane Katrina.

Communities, particularly those in remote mountainous areas, have

been left without power and drinking water.

However, relief efforts have been hit by a wave of false claims and conspiracy theories.

Among the litany of disinformation is the falsehood pushed by Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump that relief funds have been misappropriated by his rival for the White House, Democrat Kamala Harris, and redirected toward migrants.

"It's frankly ridiculous and just plain false ... it's really a shame that we're putting politics ahead of helping people," Deanne Criswell, head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) said. — AFP

Ukraine hits Crimea as Russia claims gains

KYIV: Kyiv said on Monday its forces had struck a large oil terminal overnight on the Crimean peninsula as Moscow claimed the capture of another village in east Ukraine. Kyiv has ramped up strikes targeting Russia's energy sector in recent months aiming to dent revenues used by Moscow to fund its attack, now grinding through its third year. "At night, a successful strike was carried out on the enemy's offshore oil terminal in temporarily occupied Feodosia, Crimea," the Ukrainian military said in a post on social media.

Russian-installed authorities in Crimea said a fire had broken out at an oil facility in the Black Sea port town of some 70,000 people and that there were no casualties. The defence ministry said that 12 Ukrainian attack drones had been downed over the peninsula overnight, out of a total of 21 deployed by Kyiv against Russian targets. "The Feodosia terminal is the largest in Crimea in terms of transhipment of oil products, which were used, among other things, to meet the needs of the Russian occupation army," the Ukrainian military said, vowing to continue such attacks.

Ukraine insists the strikes are fair retaliation for Russian attacks on its own energy infrastructure that have plunged millions into darkness. Russia's defence ministry meanwhile claimed the capture of a village in eastern Ukraine close to the strategically important city of Pokrovsk.

The defence ministry in a briefing said it captured the village of Grodivka, a settlement in the Donetsk region near Pokrovsk, as Russian troops close in on the key logistics hub. The settlement with an estimated pre-war population of around 2,000 is the latest in a



Ukrainian firefighters try to extinguish the fire in a house following an air attack, eastern Donetsk region. — AFP

series of towns in the Donetsk region to have fallen to Russian forces, as they push towards Pokrovsk. Last week, Ukraine's army said that it had withdrawn from the mining town of Vugledar also in the Donetsk region, handing Russia one of its most significant territorial advances in weeks. In a wave of separate attacks on Monday, Ukrainian authorities said three civilians had been killed in overnight Russian attacks.

The governor of Kherson later said a Russian strike on the town had wounded 19 people and damaged an educational facility and various residential buildings were damaged.

And in the Zaporizhzhia region, which Russia claimed to have annexed alongside three other Ukrainian regions in 2022, three people were wounded after Russian attacks on infrastructure facilities, local authorities said. — AFP

France finance minister vows to adhere to EU spending rules

LUXEMBOURG: France's new Finance Minister Antoine Armand was set to convince his EU counterparts that Paris is serious about reining in its ballooning deficit and complying with the bloc's budget rules. The new minister will present the national budget on Thursday, which Paris hopes will tackle France's "colossal" debt through spending cuts and new taxes.

On Monday, Armand was in Luxembourg to reassure his eurozone counterparts of France's policy priorities, including bringing the deficit under control. "We have prepared a budget to strengthen the country's financial and national sovereignty," Armand said during a media briefing hours before his first meeting with EU finance ministers. He stressed that respecting EU rules is "a question of international credibility". Armand will also have to persuade the markets that he will achieve his goals.

Brussels has already rebuked France for breaking budget rules, placing the country in a formal procedure in July because its deficit is above the three per

cent limit eurozone members are supposed to adhere to. France must submit a multi-year plan to reduce its public deficit, but Paris obtained a delay after a new government took time to be formed following snap elections.

Paris has to now submit its budget plan to the European Commission by October 31. Armand was optimistic about France's push to reduce the deficit below EU rules. "Our objective is to bring our deficit below the three per cent mark by 2029," he said, which is two years longer than his predecessor Bruno Le Maire's promise earlier in 2024.

"The prime minister has given me an extremely clear mandate: to defend French and European interests in the world in economic and financial matters," Armand said.

French Prime Minister Michel Barnier called France's debts of over 3.2 trillion euros -- more than 110 per cent of GDP -- "the true sword of Damocles... hanging over the head of France and of every French person". — AFP



Nobel Assembly and the Nobel Committee announce Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, in Stockholm, Sweden. — Reuters

MEDICINE NOBEL PRIZE GOES TO US SCIENTISTS

STOCKHOLM: US scientists Victor Ambros and Gary Ruvkun won the 2024 Nobel Prize in Medicine on Monday for the discovery of microRNA and its crucial role in how multicellular organisms grow and live. Their work helped explain how cells specialise and develop into different types even though all the cells in an individual contain the same set of genes and instructions for growing. The Nobel Assembly said that the laureates discovered a new class of tiny RNA molecules, which play a crucial role in gene regulation. — Reuters

OPINION

Theatre remains relevant in the age of mass media



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

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

It has literally been a dramatic week in Oman. The 8th Omani Theatre Festival just concluded at the Oman Convention Centre and Salalah is hosting the Dhofar International Theatre Festival 2024. To top it all off, the Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) also begins its new season with a dramatic rendition of ‘Un ballo in maschera’, an opera by Giuseppe Verdi. All of this showcases the continuing popularity of theatre in the modern age. It also answers cynics who wonder what the role of drama could possibly be if infotainment is available across all sorts of digital and electronic formats, at a time of one’s choosing. Theatre is one of the oldest forms of literature and public entertainment. Across the world, there have been examples of drama in different cultures. From Kalidasa’s and Bhasa’s Sanskrit plays in the 2nd century BCE in India, the Yüan dynasty plays of the 13th century CE in China and the now-lost Mayan plays of South America, theatre has a rich tradition is various parts of the world. Of course, typically, western drama is seen to have started with the Greeks, especially Sophocles’ tragedies. Over time, drama has undergone various

twists and turns in history, depending on the current social situations at the time. But the one thing that has not changed is that it continues to vitalise societies and remain relevant, in spite of the vast changes around it. Today’s world of mass media definitely poses an important challenge. In a sense, theatre is the oldest form of mass media. It disseminates information to the public, which typically would have been non-literate. It is an ancient form of communication because it took from oral stories, dramatised them, added some morals and presented it as a teaching tool to share morality and taught correct ways of living. Drama has always faced challenges to its medium, even from the time of the invention of the printing press. It was feared that people may not actually go to theatres to watch a play if there were now books to read. A similar kind of concern faces the dramatic community and theatre as a form today. In an age of instant gratification, with multiple storytelling techniques available at the touch of a button, why would people wait for a play to come to a theatre and pay to watch it? Part of the reason for the popularity of

Drama continues to be a popular medium of entertainment and information as it brings a community together and holds up the values of a society in creative ways

theatre, in spite of its many challenges, is the immediacy of the art form. This is a story being told by real people, behaving in ways that we intrinsically understand. It is also about community experience. As it is now being documented, the demand for live concerts is at an all-time high. People want to get together, share an experience and its emotions in a way that they cannot do by watching a show on a streaming service, alone at home. Theatre also provides that opportunity to share feelings. Of course, the challenges facing theatre are not going away. As for almost all art forms, the secret to its survival is innovation. Using more technology for staging, including projection mapping and making the experience more personalised by using VR (Virtual Reality) and AR (Augmented Reality) formats would bring in younger audiences. So would making drama more interactive – almost in the way that ancient theatre used to be. Drama continues to be a popular medium of entertainment and information because it brings a community together. It holds up the values of a society in creative ways. More innovation may help to keep this literary form in a robust condition.

What I’m thinking about on the first anniversary of the war



THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

Netanyahu wants to keep this war going to have an excuse to postpone testifying in December at his corruption trial, to postpone an independent commission of inquiry as to how his government failed to prevent the worst attack on Jews since the Holocaust, as well as to forestall new Israeli elections and maybe even to tilt our presidential election to Donald Trump

So what am I thinking about on this anniversary of the Hamas-Hezbollah-Iran-Israel war? Something my strategy teacher, Prof John Arquilla of the US Naval Postgraduate School, taught me: All wars come down to two basic questions: Who wins the battle on the ground? And who wins the battle of the story? And what I am thinking about today is how, even after a year of warfare, in which Hamas and Hezbollah and Israel have inflicted terrible pain on one another’s forces and civilians, no one has decisively won the battle on the ground or the battle for the story. Indeed, one year after October 7, this is still the first Arab-Israeli war without a name and without a clear victor – because neither side has a clear win or a clean story. We can and should sympathise with Palestinian statelessness and Arabs in the West Bank living under the duress of Israeli settlements and restrictions, but to my mind, there is nothing that can justify what Hamas attackers did on October 7 – murdering, maiming, kidnapping and abusing any Israeli they could get their hands on, without any goal, any story, other than to destroy the Jewish state. If you believe, as I do, that the only solution is two states for two indigenous peoples between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, the Hamas rampage set that back immeasurably. And what story is Iran telling? That it has some right under the UN charter to help create



Palestinians walk beneath the tilted minaret of a destroyed mosque in the Shujaiya neighbourhood of Gaza City on Monday, on the first anniversary of the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip between Israel and Hamas. — AFP

failed states in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Iraq so it can cultivate proxies inside them for the purpose of destroying Israel? And by what right has Hezbollah dragged Lebanon into a war with Israel that the Lebanese people and government had no say in and are now paying a huge price for? But this Israeli government does not have a clean story in the Gaza Strip, either. This was always going to be the ugliest of Israeli-Palestinian wars since 1947, because Hamas had embedded itself in tunnels underneath Gaza homes, schools, mosques and hospitals. It could not be targeted without significant civilian casualties. Therefore, as I argued from the start, it was doubly incumbent on Israel to make clear that this was not just a war to defend itself but also to destroy Hamas in order to birth something better: the only just and stable solution possible, two states for two people. The Israeli government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu steadfastly has refused to do that, so much so that a year later, it still has not told its people, its army or its US arms supplier what it wants to build in Gaza in place

of Hamas other than “total victory.” That’s a forever war that will undermine both Israel and America’s credibility and embarrass Israel’s Arab allies. But the lack of a good story is hurting Israel in other ways. Israelis are being asked to send their sons and daughters to fight everyday against Hamas and Hezbollah foes – yet cannot be sure if they are going to war to save the state of Israel or the political career of their prime minister. Because there is more than enough reason to believe that Benjamin Netanyahu wants to keep this war going to have an excuse to postpone testifying in December at his corruption trial, to postpone an independent commission of inquiry as to how his government failed to prevent the worst attack on Jews since the Holocaust, as well as to forestall new Israeli elections and maybe even to tilt our presidential election to Donald Trump. Netanyahu’s far-right Jewish supremacist partners have told him they will topple his government if he agrees to stop the war in Gaza before an undefined “total victory” over Hamas and if he tries to bring the

West Bank’s Palestinian Authority, which has embraced the Oslo peace process, to help govern Gaza in the place of Hamas – something that Hamas greatly fears. This absence of a story is also hurting Israel strategically. The more Israel has a legitimate Palestinian partner, like a reformed Palestinian Authority, the better chance it can get out of Gaza and not preside over a permanent insurgency there, the more allies will want to help create an international force to fill any vacuum in southern Lebanon and the more any Israeli military strike against Iran would be understood as making Israel safe to try to make peace with the Palestinians – not safe for an Israeli annexation of the West Bank and Gaza, which is what some of Netanyahu’s far-right partners are seeking. I cannot guarantee that there is a legitimate Palestinian partner for a secure peace with Israel. But I can guarantee that this Israeli government has done everything it could to prevent one from emerging – by strengthening Hamas in Gaza at the expense of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. It is simply insane to me that the United Arab Emirates is telling Israel that it would send military forces to Gaza to stabilise the peace there, in conjunction with the US and other international forces – help pay for Gaza’s reconstruction and open a road for relations between the Jewish state and the whole Muslim world – and yet Netanyahu up to now has said no to both because all of this would require that Israel open talks with a reformed Palestinian Authority on a two-state solution and that this Palestinian Authority would formally invite the UAE and others to help secure Gaza. So on this first anniversary of the October 7 attack, I find myself most preoccupied with the fact that Israel is fighting a multi-front war and Israelis still don’t know whether they are fighting to make Israel safe for a Jewish democracy or safe for the prime minister’s political survival, safe for the ultra-Orthodox to never have to serve in the military and safe for the prime minister to declare to the world he is defending the frontier of freedom in Gaza and Lebanon while sustaining a morally rotten and economically draining settlement engine in the West Bank.

— The New York Times

Messages coming from the war zone...



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

ONE can choose not to look at the images coming from the war zones or look at them to know the reality. The world has seen many wars between countries, and crossfires across the borders are the norm, but here is a war that is referred to as genocide, crossing 365 days.

In this case, the war is on the occupied territories of Palestine. In their update, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs says only two stabilisation centres remain functional for severely malnourished children across the Gaza Strip as catastrophic hunger grips a significant portion of Gaza's population. After all, since October 7, last year, close to 41,000 people have been killed and more than 94,000 people have been injured. Over 10,000 people are missing or could be buried under the rubble.

According to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, as per the statistics reported in September 2024, the population in Gaza is 2.1 million, and the internally displaced persons add up to 1.9 million. When other countries talk about human resources development, during this crisis of one year, the people and UN agencies are struggling to handle the humanitarian crisis.

Displaced families face significant challenges in accessing basic services, with critically low access to water, according to recent humanitarian assessments. Jordan, Egypt, and the UN co-organised a 'Call for Action' confer-

ence to urgently strengthen the humanitarian response in Gaza, as fuel shortages and access constraints continue to severely disrupt the delivery of life-saving aid.

Now, the war has expanded to include Lebanon. No amount of news clips can prepare you for a situation where your family and friends are caught in the war zone. My friend, Anne Bouji, and I exchange regular morning messages, and I look forward to her lighthearted messages every day. But now our thoughts are different.

As the situation gets tense in Lebanon, a text message to her brought in this reply. Anne replied, "We are okay, but the fear and tension in the air is dreadful. When the Israeli jets fly low over the city and break the sound barrier, the buildings shake. Our neighbours on the other side of the city are really suffering with these targeted strikes and the pager explosions. The south of Lebanon is a true battle zone, with hundreds of thousands fleeing the area, many coming to Beirut. Some go to family here and others go to schools that are trying to accommodate families who are displaced and have nothing. Our world has gone mad."

This was then at the beginning. Since then, the situation has escalated, and Anne reflected on her thoughts with me. She was worried how October 7, 2024, would turn out. She wrote on October 7, 2024, "Today... as anxious as I was

Jordan, Egypt and the UN co-organised a "Call for Action" conference to urgently strengthen the humanitarian response in Gaza, as fuel shortages and access constraints continue to severely disrupt the delivery of life-saving aid

yesterday about the possibility of IDF increasing their target range in Beirut, it seems I was wrong. That may be because they are mourning the loss of their loved ones today and have plans for us tomorrow or later in the week. I don't quite know how to describe today. There is such a lot of anger in the air. The traffic is manic, with horns sounding constantly; people are shouting all around us, the sirens of ambulances are trying to rush through the traffic. Even the sky is angry looking. There is no rain forecast for today, but the sky is black. That, of course, may be the smoke from the various buildings that were bombed overnight, and behind it all is the constant sound of drones. We heard a lot of missile strikes last night from as early as about 9 pm."

There was something happening on the street next to us, she wrote, but I don't know what. "A siren/alarm was going for ages, the area was flooded with light, but it wasn't a strike. Perhaps someone tried to break into a shop? No idea and have no inclination to find out if it means going out and about. Selfishly, as long as we are okay here, for now, that is all I am worried about. When did I become so selfish?"

These words made me reflect on how the world takes away peace of mind and small moments of happiness. Small or big, conflicts bring out the worst in us. It makes us vulnerable, insecure because it puts us in survival mode.

ACTIVE LEARNING: HOW TO ACTIVATE IT?



DR RASHID AL BALUSHI

The author is an Associate Professor of Linguistics, SQU

The simplest definition of active learning is that "the students must be active in seeking knowledge and developing their skills."

Active learning includes several strategies that are described as 'student-centred', meaning that the ultimate goal of education is to get the students to do the learning on their own, with the guidance of the instructor. This means that instructors must abandon the 'direct approach' to instruction and must adopt approaches like the 'discussion approach', the 'problem-based approach', the 'project-based approach', and the 'experiential approach', as well as other approaches that are more or less suitable for different disciplines.

Nonetheless, regardless of the discipline, the most effective approach to learning is the problem-based approach, not only because problem solving is the highest-level intellectual skill but also because every

If we want the students to be good learners after they graduate, then we must teach them how to be good problem-solvers.

discipline includes topics and issues that revolve around phenomena that must be investigated to find solutions to the problems in that discipline.

This means that the success of this approach depends on the

instructor's ability to 'problematised the content' of the course. Now, the ability to problematise the content of a course requires that the instructor have training in education and that they be a specialist in the discipline of the course. These two requirements allow the instructor to utilise their increasing awareness of the problems in the discipline, as well as their vast knowledge of the topics of the course, to transform the course content into a list of problems that the students have to examine, analyse, and try to find solutions to. In other words, the specialist instructor knows the discipline of the course better and will be in a better position to problematise the content of the course.

When courses are assigned to non-specialist instructors who are not aware of the problems in the disciplines of those courses, courses are delivered using the direct approach, where the instructor reads the textbook, summarises the content, and presents it to the students on slides for them to copy into their notebooks, without much activeness on their part.

Another advantage of the problem-based approach is that the students become increasingly capable of solving problems in general. In fact, this is how education should be if we are interested in lifelong learners who are equipped with the skills that allow them to engage in 'research' as "creative and systematic work undertaken to increase the stock of knowledge" (Wikipedia). In other words, if we want the students to be good learners after they graduate, then we must teach them how to be good problem-solvers.



NAZIH OSSEIRAN

The writer is the Middle East Correspondent at the Thomson Reuters Foundation



Mourners, including colleagues, pray over the body of Al Jazeera Arabic journalist Ismail Al Ghoul, killed along with his camera operator Rami Al Refee, in an Israeli strike on July 31. — AFP file photo

PALESTINIAN

journalist Islam al Zaanoun was so determined to cover the war in Gaza that she went back to work two months after giving birth. But, like all journalists in Gaza, she wasn't just covering the story — she was living it.

The 34-year-old, who works for Palestine TV, gave birth to a girl in Gaza city a few weeks after the beginning of the Israeli offensive last October. She had to have a Caesarean section as Israeli airstrikes pounded the strip. Her doctors performed the operation in the dark with only the lights on their cellphones to guide them.

The next day she went home but the day after that she had to flee the fighting, driving further south with her three children. Nine days after giving birth, she was forced to abandon her car and continue on foot.

"I had to walk eight km to get to the south with my children," she said. "There were bodies and corpses everywhere, horrifying sight. I felt my heart was going to stop from the fear."

Just 60 days later, she got back in front of the camera to report on the war, joining the ranks of Palestinian journalists who have provided the world's only window on the conflict in the absence of international media, who have not been granted free access by Israeli authorities.

"Correspondents have reporting in their blood, they don't learn it, so they cannot be far from the coverage too long," Al Zaanoun said.

As of October 4, at least 127 journalists and media workers had been killed since the

conflict began, according to the US-based Committee to Protect Journalists. This has made the past year the deadliest period on record for journalists since the press watchdog started keeping records in 1992.

Press freedom advocacy group Reporters Without Borders has recorded more than 130 Palestinian journalists killed in Gaza in the past year, including at least 32 media workers who it says were directly targeted by Israel.

To date, CPJ has determined that at least five journalists were directly targeted by Israeli forces in killings which CPJ classifies as murders. They include Reuters journalist Issam Abdallah, 37, who was killed by an Israeli tank crew in southern Lebanon last October, a Reuters investigation has found.

CPJ is still researching the details for confirmation in at least 10 other cases that indicate possible targeting.

Lieutenant Colonel Richard Hecht, the Israel Defence Forces' international spokesman, said at the time of Abdallah's killing: "We don't target journalists." He did not provide further comment.

More than 41,600 people have been killed in Gaza and almost 100,000 have been wounded since October 7, according to Gaza's health ministry.

For journalists like Al Zaanoun, the challenges are not limited to staying safe while reporting. Like the rest of the 2.3 million people in the strip, media workers have been displaced multiple times, gone hungry, lacked water and shelter and mourned dead neighbours and friends. Food is scarce, diapers are expensive,

and medicine is lacking, Al Zaanoun said. As well as her professional desire to keep reporting, she needs to put food on the table because her husband has not been able to work since the war started. "If I don't work, my kids will go hungry," she said.

Like all Gazans, she fears for her safety and does not dare defy Israeli evacuation orders.

"We had no protection really. Had we decided to stay in the northern areas that would have definitely cost us a very high price and that is what happened to our friends," she said.

The Israel-Hamas war falls under a complex international system of justice that has emerged since World War Two, much of it aimed at protecting civilians. Even if states say they are acting in self-defence, international rules regarding armed conflict apply to all participants in a war. Article 79 of the Geneva Conventions treats journalists working in conflict settings as protected civilians if they don't engage in the fighting.

In March, senior leaders at multiple global media outlets signed a letter urging Israeli authorities to protect journalists in Gaza, saying reporters have been working in unprecedented conditions and faced "grave personal risk".

What CPJ has called "the most dangerous" war for journalists has reverberated across the world, striking fear into reporters who are concerned about the setting of deadly precedents.

Abdalle Ahmed Mumin, a veteran freelance reporter and the Secretary-General of the Somali Journalists Syndicate, said he had experienced violence before but was shocked by what was happening in Gaza.

SPORTS

53RD EDITION



HM CUP MATCHES TO BEGIN ON OCT 23

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, OCT 7

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, represented by the Oman Football Association (OFA), on Monday unveiled the draw of the 53rd edition of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sultan of Oman's Cup football championship 2024-25.

The championship witnesses the participation of 25 clubs, with 12 clubs from the Omantel League: Seeb, Al Nahdha, Oman, Sohar, Al Rustaq, Al Nasr, Sur, Ibri, Al Shabab, Bahla, Saham and Al Khabourah. Thirteen clubs from the First Division League include Dhofar, Al Salam, Salalah, Fanja, Bausher, Nizwa, Al Wahda, Al Mudhaibi, Al Ittihad, Ahli Sidab, Muscat, Al Taleaa and Samayil.

HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais bin Tariq al Said was the chief guest for the draw ceremony in the presence of OFA Chairman Salem al Wahaibi.

The competition begins with the preliminary round matches played in a single-match knockout system. The round of 16 is played in a single-match knockout system. The quarterfinals and semifinals are played in a two-match knockout system (home/away). The final match is played in a single-match system.

Eighteen clubs will take part in the preliminary round, nine of which will qualify for the round of 16. All clubs start from the preliminary round except seven clubs that were directly promoted to the round of 16, which are Dhofar (champions of the previous edition), Seeb (champions of the Omantel League), Al Nahdha (second in the Omantel League), Oman Club (third in the Omantel League), Sohar (fourth in the Omantel League), Al Rustaq (fifth in the Omantel League) and Al Nasr (sixth in the Omantel League).

The matches will start on October 23. The winners of the Al Mudhaibi and Al Salam match will host defending champions Dhofar in the round of 16. Al Nasr will host the winners of the Al Taleaa and Nizwa match from the knockout round. Oman Club will host the winners of the Al Shabab and Muscat match. Sohar will face the winners of the Al Ittihad and Bausher match.

Seeb will play against the winners of the Fanja and Al Wahda match. The winners from the Ibri and Salalah match will host Al Rustaq. The winners from the Al Khabourah and Bahla contest will face Al Nahdha. The winners from the Sur and Saham match will host the winners from Ahli Sidab and Samayil.

Ahli Sidab set up Al Nasr semis, Seeb take on Salalah



Ahli Sidab and Al Nasr players in action during the Oman Hockey League match at Oman Hockey Stadium in Al Amerat.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCTOBER 10

SALALAH Club secured a well-deserved 4-2 victory over Seeb Club, while Ahli Sidab edged Al Nasr 1-0 on Sunday to book a spot in the semifinals of the Oman Hockey League.

Based on these results, Ahli Sidab will face Al Nasr, and Salalah will meet Seeb in the semifinals.

In the first match, Salalah players capitalised on their chances, while Seeb attempted a comeback but couldn't do enough to stop their opponents' brilliance.

The first quarter started at a fast pace from both teams, with Salalah Club taking control of the midfield early on. In the seventh minute, Samir Hlais opened the scoring for Salalah after a quick counter-attack, finishing with a power-

ful shot into Seeb's net, putting his team ahead 1-0. Seeb tried to respond quickly with some organised attacks, but Salalah's defence held firm, ending the first quarter with Salalah leading by a single goal.

In the second quarter, Salalah continued to dominate the match. Just five minutes into the quarter, Osama Khamis doubled the score for his team, placing Seeb under significant pressure. Despite Seeb's attempts to get back into the game, Salalah's solid defence and strong midfield presence prevented any real threats to their goal. The second quarter ended with Salalah leading 2-0.

As the third quarter began, Samir Hlais returned to further affirm his team's dominance, scoring his second and his team's third goal in the 31st minute. Just two minutes later, Seeb responded with a goal by Hussein al Hasani, narrowing the gap and reigniting the competition. The third quarter ended with Salalah leading 3-1.

In the final quarter, Seeb continued their efforts to equalise and managed to score another goal through Ahmed al Balushi in the 49th minute, making the match even more thrilling. As the game neared its conclusion, Talal Mohammed sealed the victory for Salalah with a fourth goal in the 55th minute, finalising the score at 4-2.

Ammar nets winner

In another match, Ahli Sidab secured an important 1-0 win over Al Nasr in a fierce contest at the Oman Hockey Stadium in Al Amerat. The first quarter was cautious from both teams, ending in a goalless draw. In the second quarter, Ammar al Shaibi scored the only goal of the match for Ahli Sidab in the 27th minute.

Al Nasr attempted to make a comeback in the third quarter, but Ahli Sidab's defence and goalkeeper stood strong. Despite continuous efforts from Al Nasr in the final quarter, the match ended with a 1-0 victory for Ahli Sidab.

Eighth edition of Al Bashayer Camel Festival to kick off on February 10

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, OCTOBER 7

The eighth edition of the Al Bashayer Festival for Purebred Arabian Camel Racing 2025 will be held at Al Bashayer Square in the Wilayat of Adam from February 10 to 15. The annual festival is considered one of the most important sporting events held in the Sultanate of Oman, attracting a large number of camel owners and trainers from across the GCC countries.

The Al Bashayer annual event is supported by His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan.

The Al Bashayer Camel Festival 2025 will take place over six days



A race during the seventh edition of Al Bashayer Camel Festival.

with Oman and GCC participants, and the Al Bashayer Square Committee for Arabian Camels will soon reveal the details of the eighth edition of the festival.

During the seventh edition of the festival, which continued for six days with Omani and GCC participants, competitors took part in 74 rounds across different categories to win valuable prizes, including 20 cars and 15 trophies, such as cups and golden and silver swords.

Twenty-five rounds were held for the 'Hagayeg' category (two years old, 4 km), with six cars for the winners. Twenty rounds were for the 'Lagaya' category (three years old, 5 km), with five cars for the winners. Fifteen rounds were for the 'Yathaa' category (four years old, 6 km), with four cars for top winners. Three races were

for the 'Thanaya' category (five years old, 8 km). Four races were allocated for the 'Al Hawl' category (six years and above). Additionally, three races were held for human riders over a distance of 12 km.

In a challenging 12-km race with human riders, 'Al Muheat,' owned by Saad bin Hamed al Junaibi, was the champion for 2023 and 2022.

'Dorah' and 'Samha,' coached by UAE's Mohammed bin Zaytoon al Mehairi, snatched the Al Bashayer Cup and the golden sword in the organisations category.

'Eltemas,' coached by Oman's Hilal bin Abdullah al Shedi, claimed the second cup and an SUV in the individual category. 'Al Dhabi,' owned by UAE's Mohammed bin Sultan al Katbi, bagged the silver sword and an SUV in the individual category.

T20 OPENER



ARSHDEEP, VARUN
HELP INDIA HAMMER
BANGLADESH

GWALIOR, India: India’s Arshdeep Singh and returning Varun Chakravarthy rattled the Bangladesh batting to set up a dominant seven-wicket win for the hosts in the first T20 international on Sunday.

Left-arm quick Arshdeep and spinner Chakravarthy took three wickets to help bowl out Bangladesh for 127, a total India overhauled with 49 balls to spare in Gwalior and lead the three-match series 1-0.

It was India’s first win in the format at home after they were crowned T20 World Cup champions in Barbados in June.

Opener Sanju Samson and skipper Suryakumar Yadav — both scoring 29 — started the chase with a blazing stand of 40 for the second wicket to take the steam out of the opposition attack at a new venue hosting its first international.

“We just tried to back our skills and what we decided in the team meeting, we just walked the talk,” said Suryakumar.

“The way the guys showed their character on the field, first time playing on a new ground, and the way we batted, showed our character.”

Samson, a wicketkeeper-batsman, smashed six boundaries but Suryakumar fired up the home crowd with his 14-ball knock laced with two fours and three sixes.

Suryakumar smashed Mustafizur Rahman for a six over long-on but fell next ball caught at long leg.

Hardik Pandya then clubbed 39 off 16 balls with five fours and two sixes, sharing an unbeaten stand of 52 with debutant Nitish Kumar Reddy, who made 16. But it was the Indian bowlers who made an early impression after the hosts elected to field first and Arshdeep backed his captain’s decision with two wickets inside three overs.

Litton Das top-edged an angling delivery from Arshdeep to be caught at short cover and soon fellow opener Parvez Hossain Emon inside-edged the ball onto his stumps.

“In T20s, the first six overs are very important but we didn’t start well,” Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto said. “We need a better plan for the next matches.” — AFP

Masood, Abdullah tons
lift Pakistan in first Test

SKIPPER

Shan Masood and opener Abdullah Shafique both cracked centuries as Pakistan scored an impressive 328-4 on the opening day of the first Test against England in Multan on Monday.

Masood’s brilliant 151 was his first hundred for four years, while Shafique also returned to form with 102 as the pair put on a solid 253-run stand for the second wicket after Pakistan won the toss and batted.

England, led by Ollie Pope in the absence of the injured Ben Stokes, briefly fought back when they removed both Masood and Shafique in the space of just two runs in the third session.

The visitors then took the second new ball at 308-3 and dismissed Babar Azam, trapped leg-before by fast bowler Chris Woakes for 30. Saud Shakeel was unbeaten on 35 at the close of play, with nightwatchman Naseem Shah yet to score.

England’s attack toiled hard in the Multan heat, with fast bowler Gus Atkinson the most successful with 2-70. Woakes and spinner Jack Leach both took a wicket each.

Masood had been under pressure to make runs, with his last hundred coming against the same opponents at Manchester in 2020 — 14 Tests and 27 innings ago.

He pushed Woakes for a single to complete his fifth Test hundred off just 102 balls with two sixes and 13 fours in a dominant display of batting.

Shafique was equally assured as the pair made England’s three-pronged pace attack and two spinners toil on a batting-friendly pitch.

“Thanks to the management that they backed me in my lean phase,” he said.

“I am happy that I have contributed today. As a batting unit, we have done well but we still need to carry on tomorrow,” Shafique said.

‘PRETTY HAPPY’

Assistant coach Jeetan Patel was satisfied with the hard work put in by England’s bowlers.

“The toil the bowlers put in today was great,” said former New Zealand spinner Patel. “They tried different things to take wickets, with different fields.”

“We are pretty happy with what we have ended up with. We would have liked them six down or all out but it’s a sub-continental pitch.”

England took a wicket in the fourth



Pakistan’s captain Shan Masood (R) and Abdullah Shafique run between the wickets during the first day of the first Test against England, at the Multan Cricket Stadium in Multan. — AFP

over when Atkinson forced opener Saim Ayub to glove a shorter ball down the leg side to wicketkeeper Jamie Smith with the total on eight.

The visitors thought they had a second when pace bowler Brydon Carse, on debut, trapped Masood in front on 16 and umpire Kumar Dharmasena gave him out.

However, a review showed the ball had pitched outside the leg stump.

Masood went on the attack against

Shoaib Bashir, hitting the off-spinner for four boundaries before two more off Atkinson took him to his 11th Test fifty.

Shafique survived being run out on 34 when Pope missed the stumps with his diving throw with the batsman well short of his ground. He smashed two fours and a six off Bashir to reach his sixth Test half-century.

Both teams picked three fast bowlers and two spinners. — AFP

India maintain Pakistan stranglehold, Windies cruise

DUBAI: India carved out a 13th win in 16 T20 meetings with old rivals Pakistan at the Women’s World Cup on Sunday as former champions West Indies thrashed Scotland.

India captain Harmanpreet Kaur produced a steely 29 to steer her side to a scrappy six-wicket victory.

West Indies, the 2016 champions, cruised past Scotland, also by six wickets with 50 balls to spare.

Set 106 to win after restricting Pakistan to 105-8 in their 20 overs, India were looking comfortable at 61-1. But two wickets in two balls by Pakistan captain Fatima Sana opened the door before Kaur took her side to the brink of victory.

With India two runs short, however, she slipped and appeared to rick her neck, leaving the field unbeaten on 29 from 24 balls.

Sajeevan Sajana hit the winning runs from the next delivery as India closed on 108-4, winning with seven balls to spare.

“We have been very disciplined, followed the plans,” said India’s Smriti Mandhana. “In the field we were

The Scots struggled to 99-8 in their 20 overs before the West Indies chased down their target with 50 balls remaining, securing victory, an impressive boost to their net run-rate and top spot in Group B.



India’s captain Harmanpreet Kaur plays a shot during the ICC Women’s T20 World Cup match against Pakistan at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium. — AFP

very good. Better start with the bat would have been good, but we will take that win.”

Nida Dar top-scored for Pakistan with 28 from 34 balls but there was little else to cheer after Sana had won the toss and elected to bat on a wicket that produced some awk-

ward bounce. “We were not up to the mark in the batting. We were 10-15 runs short,” said Sana.

‘FIREPOWER’

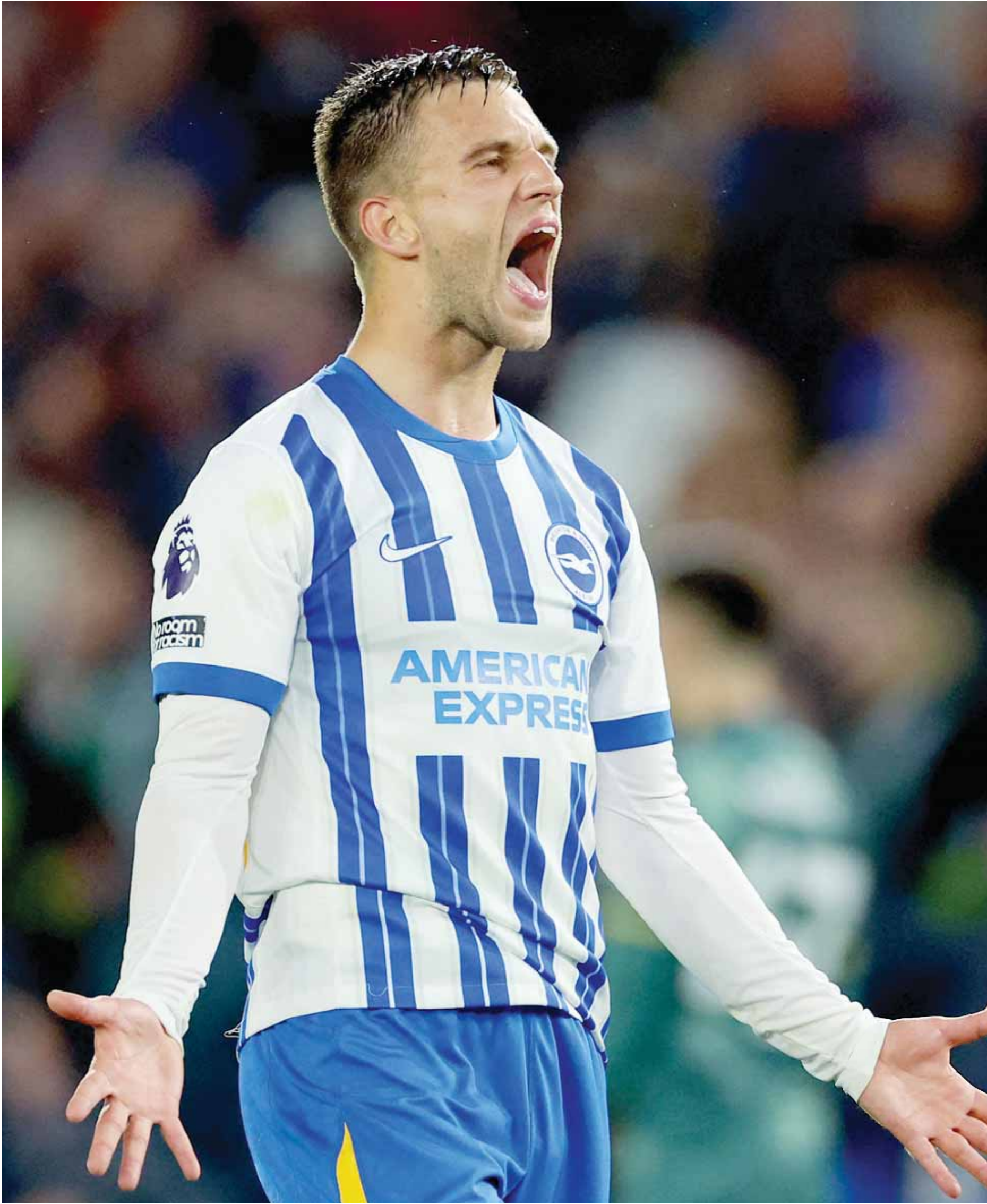
West Indies recovered from their opening 10-wicket rout by South Africa to easily defeat Scotland.

The Scots struggled to 99-8 in their 20 overs before the West Indies chased down their target with 50 balls remaining, securing victory, an impressive boost to their net run-rate and top spot in Group B.

Qiana Joseph top-scored with 31 from 18 balls, hitting three fours and a six. Deandra Dottin cracked two sixes in her undefeated 28 from 15 balls while sharing an unbroken fifth-wicket stand of 42 with player of the match Chinelle Henry.

Henry made a brisk 18 from 10 balls including two fours and a six having earlier returned figures of 1-10 from four overs of fast bowling.

“We did pretty well with the ball, limited the boundary balls,” said West Indies skipper Hayley Matthews. — AFP



Brighton & Hove Albion's Joel Veltman celebrates after the match. —Reuters

Brighton hit back from 2 goals down to beat Spurs

ANDY JALIL

TOTTENHAM

Hotspur manager, Ange Postecoglou branded his team's defeat at the south coast as the worst since he took over as head coach of the London side. His players threw away a 2-goal lead in the first half to go down 3-2 after Brighton had found the net for all their goals in a space of 18 minutes in the second half.

Postecoglou said: "We just weren't competitive. We didn't do what we need to do at this level. We didn't win our duels, we lacked intensity, we didn't deliver the things you need to, the basics of the game and paid the price for it.

"You can understand that you are not going to win every game but there's a manner you lose games and that's the first time since I've been here that we've lost the game in that manner. It's unacceptable."

He added: "You understand that at 2-0 obviously they are going to come out and be fairly aggressive in their approach, but that's not the first time we've faced that and we've usually dealt with it pretty well. But today we failed to do things we needed to do. And rightly so, we got punished for that."

Spurs could have been at least five goals up in the first half, such was their dominance during that period. James Maddison could have had the opener when he deflected in a header from Timo Werner from close range but Porro was off side before he had put in the cross.

Shortly before the break Johnson could have had a third goal for Spurs when he received a pass from Kulusevsky but he put the ball high over the bar. That was a glaring miss.

However, Tottenham took the lead in the 23rd minute when Maddison won the ball from Rutter and fed striker Dominic Solanki who then put in a lovely pass to Johnson to sweep in a shot past Bart Verbruggen with his left foot.

Tottenham doubled the lead in the 37th minute when Maddison's low shot from a square pass from Werner was fumbled by Verbruggen as it went into the goal.

Brighton wasted no time after the break to get on the attack and just three minutes after the start when neither Micky Van de Ven nor Destiny Udogie could clear a cross from Kaoru Mito-

ma, Minteh was able to slam in at the far post.

Ten minutes later, Brighton drew level when Rutter took a short through ball from Mitoma and scored into the corner after holding of a weak challenge from Udogie.

Brighton kept the pressure on as the second half progressed while Spurs defence began to look more frail and midway through the half Brighton found the winning goal with Rodrigo Bentancur failing to stop Rutter from crossing and Danny Welbeck rose high for his downward header for the third goal.

A delighted Brighton manager, Fabian Hurzeler said: "I'm really proud with how my team reacted because they took the responsibility, and they showed all their character and personality in the second half. We completely deserved the victory."

MUSANNAH RACE WEEK

OMANI SAILORS LEAD IN THREE EVENTS AFTER DAY TWO



MUSCAT: Day two of Oman Sail's Musannah Race Week saw incredible action across all five categories with Omani sailors ending the day on top in three. Perfect conditions promised great sailing and it certainly delivered. Four races were completed in ILCA 4, ILCA 6 and ILCA 7, while Optimist completed three and RS Venture Connect sailed two, setting up a strong second half to the week as the leaders began to break away.

Oman's Al Mutasim al Farsi put on a masterclass in ILCA 6 sailing on day two, winning three of the four races to soar from fourth place overall to lead. Teammate Al Salim al Hamadani was in equally fine form, winning one and finishing in the top three two more times to rise from fifth to third. Othman al Hammadi of UAE split the two to finish the day in second.

Hatim al Arai is currently fifth, Elyas al Fadhali is sixth, and Meshari al Hadhrami finished in eighth with all to play for on day three.

Speaking back on shore, Al Mutasim al Farsi said, "Today was a very good day for me. I am pleased with my performance and to end the day in first place, and to see my teammates doing well. The fleet is very strong, and we are lucky to have so many talented sailors in this group so the competition will be tough, but we are all focused on doing our best and gaining more experience for the future. The conditions have been excellent and we're looking forward to the next day of racing." Husain al Jabri continues to lead in the ILCA 7 competition with a further three victories to stay ahead of Hamza Al Ali from UAE. Abdulmalik al Hinai is currently third, just one point behind Al Ali, and Ali al Saadi finished in fourth.

In an all-Omani fleet, the four RS Venture Connect crews all switched places on day two.

Ghaliya al Jabri and Malik al Qartobi moved from fourth to first with three victories, bumping Zahir al Atbi and Ahmed al Shukaili into second just two points behind, and Sultan al Wahabi and Adil al Siyabi into third a further three points back. Sami al Sulaimi and Hassan al Lawati will start day three in fourth place but just seven points separate first and fourth meaning it could all change yet again.

It is a UAE one-two in the Optimist competition after four races as Abdulla Yahya recorded one win and one second place to takeover the lead from teammate Khalifa al Romaithi in second. Adison Ein from Thailand moved up to third. Oman's Tamim al Balushi found his form to rise from eleventh to fifth. Hassan Al Wahaibi remains in eighth, and Khamis al Mashaikhi and Firas al Nabhani ended the day in 11th and 12th respectively. The ILCA 4 leaderboard was dominated by India after the first day, but Abdulatif al Qasmi won two races and finished in the top three in two more to move up from fourth to second.

He trails Eklavya Batham of India by just one point while opening a five-point gap to Shashank Batham of India in third. Oman's Saleh al Balushi is currently sixth, just ahead of teammate Firas al Hashmi in seventh and Aws al Busaidy in tenth.

Abdulatif al Qasmi commented, "I sailed well today and feel very pleased with my performance. The first day was difficult with just one race but we found our rhythm today and it shows in the results. There are four Omani sailors in the top 10, and hopefully by the end of Musannah Race Week we will all be high up in the standings."





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OMAN EXPLORES INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES WITH FRENCH DELEGATION



MUSCAT: Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, held a meeting with a delegation of French businessmen aimed at attracting foreign investments and highlighting Oman's investment environment. The discussions focused on enhancing economic ties between Oman and France, exploring opportunities for collaboration and partnerships with French companies.

Juhaina bint Yousef al Balushiyyah, Investment Specialist at the Ministry, delivered a presentation to the delegation, showcasing the incentives Oman offers to foreign investors. The presentation emphasised the advantages of Oman's special economic zones, free zones and investment prospects across various sectors.

The French delegation, representing industries such as energy, transportation, tourism, infrastructure, water, waste treatment, urban planning, events and entertainment, will also meet with several Omani officials and business leaders to discuss partnership opportunities and the potential for establishing their businesses in Oman. — **ONA**

OMAN OIL PRICE RISES 35 CENTS

MUSCAT: The official price of Oman oil for December delivery reached \$78.81. The price of Oman oil witnessed an increase of 35 cents compared to last Friday's price of \$77.81. The monthly average price of Omani crude oil for October delivery reached \$77.54 per barrel, down \$6.31 compared to September delivery.

Meanwhile, international oil prices extended gains on Monday, with Brent nearing \$80 to build on last week's steepest weekly jump since early 2023, driven by fears of a wider Middle East conflict and potential disruption to exports from the major oil-producing region.

Brent crude futures rose \$1.09, or 1.4%, to \$79.82 a barrel by 1316 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate crude futures were up \$1.15, or 1.55%, at \$76.31. WTI had earlier risen by more than \$2. — **Agencies**

Oman ranks high in Environmental Performance Index

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, OCT 7

THE Sultanate of Oman continues to set benchmarks in environmental stewardship, as demonstrated by its impressive rankings in the Environmental Performance Index (EPI).

This index, comprising 58 sub-indicators across various categories, serves as a vital tool for assessing a country's environmental health and the effectiveness of its policies.

According to Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, Oman achieved top rankings that reflect its commitment to preserving natural resources and promoting sustainable practices.

In the fisheries sector, Oman ranked


Our strategic plans are designed to ensure the future of food security in the Sultanate of Oman, as we remain committed to achieving an integrated and sustainable food security system.

DR SAUD BIN HAMOUD AL HABSİ
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

17th globally, 5th in the Arab world, 4th in the Middle East and 1st in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region.

This high ranking underscores the country's dedication to sustainable fishing practices, responsible management of marine resources, and support for local fishing communities.

In agriculture, Oman achieved a global ranking of 29th and claimed a leading position among Arab, Middle Eastern and GCC countries. This recognition reflects ongoing efforts to enhance agricultural practices, increase local production and ensure food security while safeguarding the environment.

Furthermore, the water resources index positioned Oman at 9th globally,



2nd in the Arab world and GCC and 3rd in the Middle East. This achievement highlights the country's effective management of water resources, a critical component in a region characterised by arid conditions and water scarcity.

Dr Al Habsi stated, "Our strategic plans are designed to ensure the future of food security in the Sultan-

ate of Oman, as we remain committed to achieving an integrated and sustainable food security system."

While the EPI rankings are promising, they also highlight the need for ongoing efforts to address environmental challenges. As Oman continues to develop its agricultural and fishery sectors, it is essential to balance growth with environmental sustainability.

One key opportunity lies in the adoption of innovative agricultural techniques and sustainable fishing practices that minimise ecological impact while maximising productivity. The government's focus on attracting local and international investments in these sectors can further enhance Oman's capabilities in environmental management.

ADVERTORIALS

A'SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY VICE-CHANCELLOR MEETS ADMINISTRATIVE, ACADEMIC FACULTY



MUSCAT: Professor Fouad Chedid, Vice-Chancellor, of A'Sharqiyah University, held a welcoming meeting with the university's administrative and academic faculty employees in the main hall of the Student Services Building at the beginning of the academic year 2024/2025.

He welcomed the new members at the beginning of the meeting and wished them an academic year full of hard work, diligence, achievement and innovation.

Then, he presented a visual presentation in which he spoke about the increasing number of students enrolled in the university, the number of students accepted this year, and the number of administrative and academic bodies at the university. He also spoke about the university's current five-year plan and its development in line with the upcoming five-year plan to achieve the university's vision and goals.

The vice-chancellor added that the university seeks to raise its level through the academic and administrative bodies, research and scientific activities, and interaction with the community, stressing the importance of scientific research.

During the presentation, Professor Fouad Chedid spoke about the most important developments at the academic level through the programmes that were submitted for and have been approved by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, in addition to the number of research papers that were published by academic staff members in many scientific research journals and websites. He also pointed out that the university has obtained a number of international classifications, namely the QS classification for universities in the Arab region, the university classification on the Internet (Webometrics), and the SCImago classification for institutions (SIR) for research.

He also reviewed the most important projects that have been completed, the most important of which are the solar power station project and the animal farm dedicated to the veterinary medicine programme affiliated with the College of Applied and Health Sciences and the educational veterinary hospital.

He pointed out to the projects that will be completed soon, such as the female students' dormitory project, which accommodates more than 1,800 students, the classroom building and offices for faculty members.

At the end of the meeting, Professor Fouad Chedid thanked the administrative and academic bodies for attending, wishing them and the university further progress and success.

OQEP hosts IPO roadshow in Al Wusta Governorate

OQEP has recently conducted an IPO roadshow in the Wilayat of Haima, in collaboration with OCCN, Al Wusta Governorate. This event is part of a series of roadshows held across Oman. The event has been graced by the presence of Shaikh Ahmed bin Musallam al Kathiri, Governor of Al Wusta, alongside several dignitaries and businessmen.

This initiative is one of the concerted efforts by the company to familiarise stakeholders with the IPO process.

Dr Anwar bin Sulaiman al Kharousi, the Chief Commercial Officer at OQEP, has delivered a presentation emphasising the significance of IPOs in advancing economic diversification strategies in Oman.

Al Kharousi highlights the role of IPOs in attracting investments to fulfil the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, aimed at enhancing economic diversification policies. The OQEP offering represents one of the largest IPOs in Oman and the Gulf region this year, aimed at broadening the ownership base in government assets.

Al Kharousi notes that the offering is tailored to accommodate individual investors by allocating 40 per cent of the shares to this segment, along with a 10-per cent reduction in share value for Omanis.

In addition, Ali bin Nabil al Makki, the Director-General of



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Strategy, Planning and Economics at OQEP, provides insights into the company's contributions to bolstering the national economy through investments in petroleum exploration and production.

Al Makki highlights the remarkable growth in production, surging from 18K barrels of oil equivalent per day to 250K barrels of oil equivalent per day by the conclusion of 2023. The company's ROI capital stands as the region's highest at an impressive 32 per cent.

Furthermore, OQEP has successfully covered the IPO for the first category (institutions) at a price of 390 baisas per share,

which is the maximum price range.

This represents 40 per cent of the shares available for the IPO. This strong response underscores the value that OQEP shares hold for institutions within and beyond the Sultanate of Oman.

The company has received firm commitments from major investors to subscribe up to RO 156M in the offering at the maximum price of 390 baisas per share, in accordance with the terms of their respective base investment agreements, allocated primarily to major institutional investors from Oman.

AL BATINAH POWER WINS ONE OF THE BEST MSX-LISTED COMPANIES

MUSCAT: Al Batinah Power Company SAOG continues to shine in the energy sector in the Sultanate of Oman. Adding to its prestigious record of achievements the company has won an award as one of the top 7 companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) in the category of small capital companies.

This honour comes as a clear indication of the superior performance and sustainable growth achieved by the company, not only in terms of revenues and profits, but also in achieving strong financial indicators including return on equity, productivity and profitability.

This honour is an exceptional achievement in the company's history, as it comes for the third year



in a row after receiving the same award in 2022 and 2023, which enhances its leading position in the energy sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

This series of awards is a testament to the efficiency of the company's operational strategies

and its ability to adapt to changing market challenges, while maintaining strong and sustainable financial performance. Al Batinah Power Company operates the Sohar 2 combined cycle gas and diesel power plant with a contracted capacity of 736.5 MW.

The plant has been in full commercial operation since April 2013 and is considered one of the pioneering projects supporting the energy infrastructure in Oman.

The company has been listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange since June 2014 after IPO, supported by local and international investors, including the Social Protection Fund and Middle East Investment Company as the main local

shareholders, along with French company Engie, Japanese company Sojitz, and Japanese energy company Yonden. This diversity in the investor base reinforces the great confidence in the company's financial and operational foundations, both locally and internationally.

In a touching statement after receiving the award, Eng Saud bin Hamad al Waili, CEO of Al Batinah Power Company SAOG, expressed his great pride in this recognition, saying: "This achievement reflects the tireless efforts of our dedicated team and our unwavering commitment to operational excellence and innovation in the energy sector."

Enjoy perfect family fun with Ford Expedition with benefits

MUSCAT: Discover unmatched power, space and benefits of the Ford Expedition! For a limited time, drive away with an incredible offer that includes 5 years/100,000 km of free service, a 5-year/100,000km manufacturer's warranty, 5 years/100,000 km of roadside assistance and 1 year of free registration.

This fantastic deal is valid only until November 7, 2024. Under the hood, the Ford Expedition is equipped with a robust 3.5-litre EcoBoost engine, delivering up to 380 horsepower and 637Nm of torque, all while offering best-in-class fuel efficiency.

Paired with a 10-speed automatic transmission, this full-size SUV guarantees smooth, powerful drives on highways or off-road adventures.

Ford has thoughtfully built the Expedition with a focus on safety and convenience. Enjoy peace of mind with features like Collision Avoid-

Highlights

Drive away with an incredible offer that includes 5 years/

100,000 KM of free service, a 5-year/100,000 km manufacturer's warranty, 5 years/100,000 km of roadside assistance and 1 year of free registration.



ance Detection, which helps prevent accidents and the Blind Spot Information System to keep an extra eye on the road.

The Control Trac with Electronic Limited Slip Differential ensures superior handling, especially on rugged terrain.

Inside, the Expedition is packed with modern technology. Stay

connected with SYNC 4, featuring a 12-inch LCD touchscreen and keep your devices charged with multiple USB ports, a 220-volt power outlet and wireless charging. Whether you are heading out with family or on an adventure, the Tri-zone Electronic Temperature Control ensures comfort for everyone, while the Panoramic

Vista Roof provides breath-taking views.

Need to tow? The Ford Expedition leads its class with exceptional towing capabilities and the Trailer Tow Class IV system makes hauling easy.

Plus, loading and unloading are effortless with the available power liftgate. Perfect for families, the spacious Expedition seats up to 8 passengers comfortably, with plenty of room for luggage.

The unique sliding second-row seat offers easy access to the third row, even without removing a child safety seat, while third-row passengers will enjoy ample legroom and reclining seats for long journeys. Take advantage of this limited-time offer and experience the unmatched versatility of the Ford Expedition — your perfect companion for any journey! Those interested in experiencing the Ford Expedition can visit their nearest Ford showroom.



HOW E-COMMERCE IS MAKING CHINA'S DEFLATION WORSE

WHEN Lin Yunyun started selling diapers two years ago on Pinduoduo, China's fast-growing e-commerce site, she was not prepared for the relentless nagging about prices. Pinduoduo, popular among Chinese consumers for its discounts, sent "reminders" whenever other sellers dropped their prices below hers. When Lin cut her prices, the site would temporarily promote her products — only to warn her a few days later that more reductions were needed for the site to continue driving customers to her goods. "The platform keeps reminding me to lower prices," said Lin, 28, who lives in Zhangzhou, a city in southeastern China. "If I cut my price any more, I won't make any money." No company embodies China's deflationary moment quite like Pinduoduo. Shoppers flock to the app for its staggering discounts, the result of its unyielding push to lower prices. As the country's sec-



DAISUKE WAKA-
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The author is an Asia business correspondent for The New York Times based in Seoul, covering economic, corporate and geopolitical stories from the region.



CLAIRE FU

The author is a reporter and researcher for The New York Times, covering China.

ond-largest online retailer, it is the shopping destination of choice for those who embrace so-called downgraded spending — a social-media fuelled maxim of Chinese consumers' penny-pinching ways. Rattled by a real estate crisis with no end in sight and a faltering labour market, Chinese consumers are spending less and saving more. Prices are falling, and profits are shrinking. Companies are hesitant to hire more workers or invest in the future, fuelling even more concerns about the economy. After a series of half-measures that have failed to reinvigorate the economy, Beijing has finally signalled that it is ready to take more aggressive action, although it's unclear how far it is willing to go. Late last month, the government announced interest rate cuts and other initiatives to revive the property market, as well as steps to prop up stock markets. And despite hints of additional fiscal spending to put more money into the hands of Chinese consumers, the government has not revealed

any specific plans. Rhodium Group, a research firm, said in a note that policymakers had demonstrated more willingness to act on the economy, but deflationary pressures were among several important issues that remained unresolved. China's gross domestic product deflator, an economic indicator that measures prices broadly across the economy, has contracted for five straight quarters, the longest downturn in a quarter century. Ultimately, this means that the economy may not be growing as fast as the main GDP figure — targeted by Beijing to increase by about 5% this year — would suggest. The government had directed most of its policy focus on supporting production and investment. While this has kept Chinese factories humming, it has left the country and its global trading partners awash in excess goods. An abundance of supply is helping to keep prices low. And that's where Pinduoduo comes in. Because a growing portion of spending in China is happening online, price reductions by the app and other e-commerce platforms copying its success have contributed to a deflationary downturn. About 60% of the country's consumers buy through e-commerce, accounting for more than one-third of all retail spending, according to HSBC. "Pinduoduo is both the consequence and cause of deflation," said Donald Low, a professor of practice in public policy at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Founded in 2015, Pinduoduo has grown more quickly than its more established rivals, recently expanding abroad with its Temu brand. In its most recent quarter, Pinduoduo said revenue had risen 86%. It warned, however, that future profits might take a hit because it planned to invest heavily to support "high-quality" merchants. Colin Huang, Pinduoduo's

founder and one of China's richest men, has said that one of the company's core values is not to sell cheap products, but to offer goods that customers will feel are less expensive than they should be. This year, Lin said Pinduoduo had enrolled her in an "automated price tracking system" to allow the company to lower the price of her diapers whenever it detected similar products available for less. A few months after she opted out of the programme, she discovered that the setting had been turned on again. Pinduoduo, which did not respond to requests for comment for this article, has said that this feature helps to improve the "operating efficiency" of merchants, while providing customers with more competitively priced products. Economists have studied the consequences of e-commerce on pricing for years. In the mid-2010s, economists started citing something called the Amazon Effect, for the influence wielded by the dominant online retailer Amazon.com to drive down prices across the web and at brick-and-mortar stores. Almost all retailers, including Amazon, track each other's prices and then adjust their own using so-called dynamic pricing, when prices move according to market conditions. The conventional thinking was that the Amazon Effect helped to keep prices down. But Alberto Cavallo, a professor at Harvard Business School, argued in 2018 that e-commerce was making prices more sensitive to economic shocks, such as higher energy costs. He noted that prices could rise sharply if the shocks were inflationary. Cavallo said China might be experiencing something similar but in the opposite direction. The economic shock of a slumping economy is applying downward pricing pressure, and the effect is being accelerated by e-commerce platforms. Pinduoduo's success has prompted its two largest rivals, Alibaba and JD.com, to join the low-price competition. — The New York Times

Rattled by a real estate crisis with no end in sight and a faltering labour market, Chinese consumers are spending less and saving more. Prices are falling, and profits are shrinking. Companies are hesitant to hire more workers or invest in the future, fuelling even more concerns about the economy.

OPINION

Don't just make goals; embrace them!



**TARIQ
AL BARWANI**

The author is the founder of Knowledge Oman

“I want to get promoted,” “I want to lose weight and be fit too,” “I want to get a certification by studying abroad,” “I want to travel and see the world,” “I want to clear off all my bank debt and be financially free,” and “I want to become rich” (I know that’s a classic one, but that’s a generic fact that the mass wishes as a goal too).

Does some of these goals resonate with you? I am pretty sure that you, like myself, have many goals you wish to achieve, be they personal and/or professional. My advice, however, is don’t just make goals, for the outcome at the end of the journey may not be fulfilling.

I am speaking out of experience because I have created and achieved many goals over the past 35 years, and I can confidently state that not all were really fulfilling; in fact, some were stressful and a reason for a temporary breakdown too.

Let’s take a hypothetical example. Your goal is to drive from Muscat to Suhar. All that one may possibly think about while driving is looking or focusing on the steering wheel, pressing the accelerator to get the car moving, or applying the brakes to stop the car at the right time (and some may also have their eyes on the car’s dashboard or mobile phone’s Google/digital maps for direction).

Yes, you will reach your destination/goal, yet is driving just focusing on those things?

Obviously not! Your goal just ends there, not fulfilling and definitely not memorable.

Even worse, you may end up with traffic fines, scratches in your car, and/or forbidding unnecessary accidents. Safe driving (while feeling it) as well as finding the best way to reach your destination as a goal (via utilising a digital map to see where there is less traffic and better direction is fulfilling).

Don’t you agree? Imagine having a passenger whom you fight or quarrel with throughout the journey.

Now that’s probably an ideal way to sum up my hypothetical example of a bitter goal, despite achieving it.

Let’s look at some of the practical goals that people achieve but may not be fulfilling (and are temporarily too). How many people have made new year resolutions for a change yet only to see them get back to their old habit?

What about those who were on a weight loss programme that only ended them getting back into their old shape after a few months of looking fit?

What about those that clear their bank debts/loans and then only to end up visiting the bank to top up the loan once again? I can share numerous examples, yet I too have limitations on the words I can share in my weekly articles.

So what should one do in order to have

Highlights

Let’s look at some of the practical goals that people achieve but may not be fulfilling (and are temporarily too). How many people have made new year resolutions for a change yet only to see them get back to their old habit?

a fulfilling goal? Quite simply: don’t just focus on the goal, yet focus on the journey too. Journey here I mean everything from the habit you follow, the process you take, the learning you get, and everything in between to ensure you gain the necessary experience and pleasure of undertaking and successfully achieving a goal.

For example, look at a bodybuilder who wishes to tone up for a tournament or a self-made rich who goes broke but knows all what it takes to get back in the game.

Both did not focus only on their goals but also on the journey to achieve the goals.

To conclude my article this week, I would like to emphasise that setting goals is indeed a vital part of achieving any success. Nevertheless, setting goals without also focusing on the journey can be stressful and painful too.

Appreciating the journey in between you and the goal will help ensure not only you feeling fulfilled after achieving the goal, but also some kind of internal reward too (and momentum for more goals as a positive external force as well). Try doing this next time you set a goal, and don’t forget to send me a thank-you message after seeing the positive result. Until we catch up again next week, stay positive and continue winning.

CHINA’S CONSUMERS REGAIN SOME LOST LUSTRE

INVESTORS panning for consumption bright spots in the world’s second-largest economy will find a bit of good news from this year’s Golden Week. Average daily cross-border travel is forecast to rise 19% from last year, above pre-Covid volumes, per official estimates. More middle-class spending will stir hopes that Beijing’s stimulus might gain traction.

Wealthier travellers were definitely on the move. On the very first day of China’s week-long holiday celebrating the founding of the People’s Republic, trips abroad rose 40% from last year, HSBC research noted.

Long-haul flights topped pre-pandemic levels, online travel agency Trip.com’s advanced bookings showed, including a 30% spike in European travel.

International travellers spent 120% more using accounts enabled through an international card, according to mobile-wallet service Alipay.

Meanwhile, in Macau the numbers of visitors from the mainland rose 6% from 2019 levels during the first three days of the break, per CLSA.

Total wagers in the so-called premium mass segment — the higher-end of the mass market — hit a record high even though bets per person were slightly down, according to a Citi survey, thanks to the overall volume of guests.

These early trends indicate China’s middle class may be more willing to loosen their purse strings than previously thought.

Amid slowing growth and a property downturn, domestic demand has remained anaemic for much of the year: retail sales rose only 2.1% in August, missing analyst forecasts of 2.5%. Indeed, in Hong Kong, once a popular destination for mainland shoppers, the city’s Retail Management Association said the number of visitors from across the border during Golden Week was “like a normal weekend”.

The mainland box office, another closely-watched indicator during the holiday, was slower than last year, with ticket sales hitting the 1 billion yuan (\$143 million) mark a day later than in 2023.

The mixed data suggests that consumption may be perking up in certain pockets of the population. Spending habits are also changing, as travellers eschew splurging on material goods in favour of experiences, Alipay suggested.

Still, Beijing will be grateful for even a partial revival. Right before the holidays, officials unveiled a sweeping package of monetary and property easing measures, and signalled more to come. Hopes of a significant fiscal spending have fuelled a 25% rally in Hong Kong’s benchmark index. Signs that China’s consumers are regaining some confidence will help add to the momentum. — Reuters

Highlights

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Initially spearheaded by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the ICV programme has now been embraced across diverse sectors of the Omani economy.

IN the wake of the 2014 oil price collapse, Oman, like many Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, has been actively seeking ways to diversify its economy and reduce its reliance on oil revenue. At the forefront of this economic transformation is the innovative In-Country Value (ICV) programme, a strategic initiative designed to boost local content and enhance the national economy.

As we stand at the crossroads of economic transformation, guided by Oman Vision 2040, it’s crucial to reframe ICV not as an obligation, but as a catalyst for sustainable growth and foreign direct investment.

At its essence, In-Country Value represents a comprehensive strategy designed to maximise economic benefits within Oman.

This approach aims to retain a greater portion of spending within the country, fostering business growth, enhancing human capital and boosting overall economic productivity.

The ICV framework encompasses several key components:

- Promoting the use of locally sourced goods and services
- Cultivating the skills and capabilities of Omani nationals
- Encouraging investments in domestic infrastructure and assets
- Nurturing the growth and competitiveness of local suppliers
- Advancing training initiatives and research and development efforts

Initially spearheaded by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the ICV programme

has now been embraced across diverse sectors of the Omani economy.

Its primary objective is to generate a ripple effect throughout the economic landscape. By emphasising and prioritising local resources, expertise and capabilities, Oman aims to diminish its dependence on imports, spark innovation, and construct a more robust and adaptable economic framework.

The implementation of ICV has already shown promising results across Oman’s economy. Key sectors such as oil and gas, manufacturing, and renewable energy have seen a significant uptick in local participation and value creation.

For instance, in the oil and gas sector, which has been at the forefront of ICV implementation, the percentage of local content has risen substantially over the past decade.

Specially, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has a long-standing commitment to ICV, with a target of increasing its ICV to 52% by 2030.

This increase in local content translates to several tangible benefits:

- Job Creation:** As companies prioritise local sourcing and development, more opportunities are opening up for Omanis across various skill levels.
- SME Growth:** The emphasis on developing local vendors has led to a flourishing small and medium enterprise (SME) sector, with many new businesses emerging to fill gaps in the supply chain.
- Knowledge Transfer:** International

companies operating in Oman are incentivised to transfer knowledge and technology, enhancing the local skill base.

- Economic Diversification:** By developing capabilities across multiple sectors, Oman is gradually reducing its dependence on oil revenues and building a more diversified economy.

While the ICV programme has shown great promise, it is not without its challenges.

Ensuring that local companies can meet global quality and efficiency standards requires significant investment in training, technology and infrastructure.

Additionally, balancing the drive for local content with the need to remain attractive to foreign investment is a delicate task.

However, these challenges also present opportunities.

The push for higher standards is driving innovation and efficiency improvements across the board.

Moreover, the focus on developing local capabilities is making Oman an increasingly attractive destination for companies looking to establish regional hubs or manufacturing facilities.

Looking ahead, the ICV programme is set to play a crucial role in Oman Vision 2040.

As the country seeks to diversify its economy and reduce its reliance on hydrocarbons, ICV will be a key tool in developing new industries and capabilities.

Several areas show particular opportunity:

- Renewable Energy:** With ambitious targets for solar and wind power, Oman is poised to become a regional leader in renewable energy. ICV policies are helping to develop local expertise and manufacturing capabilities in this growing sector.
- Technology and Innovation:** The emphasis on knowledge transfer and local R&D is fostering a burgeoning tech ecosystem in Oman, with the potential to create high-value jobs and exports.
- Logistics and Supply Chain:** Oman’s strategic location makes it ideal as a logistics hub. ICV is helping to develop local capabilities in this sector, from port operations to last-mile delivery.
- Tourism and Hospitality:** As Oman continues to develop its tourism sector, ICV policies are ensuring that local communities benefit from this growth through job creation and business opportunities.

As we implement ICV, Oman is positioning itself not just as a participant in the global economy, but as a leader in sustainable and inclusive development.

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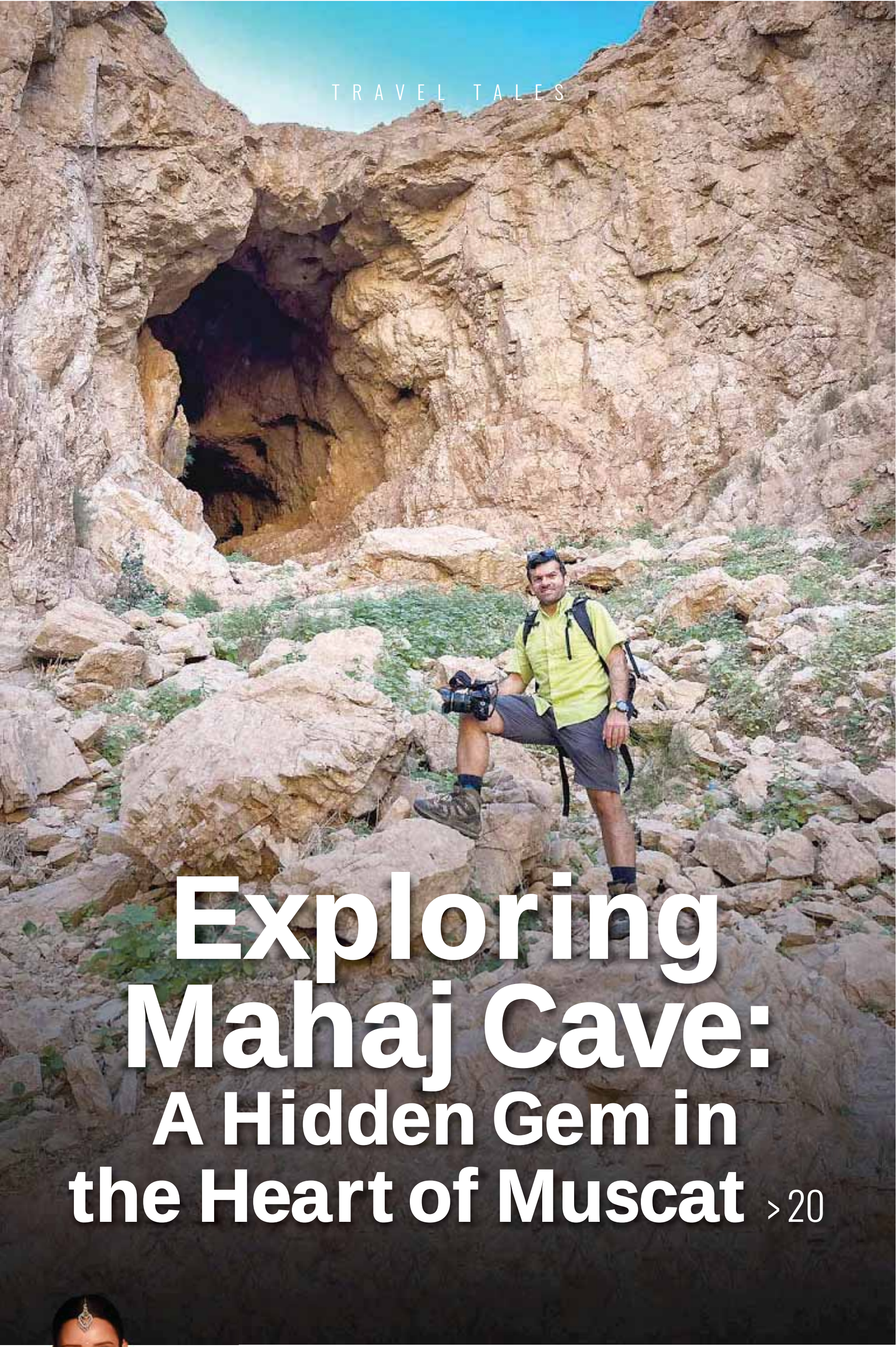
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ART/LIFE



FASHION

Bollywood actress Tripti Dimri presents a creation by Indian designer Manish Malhotra to showcase the collection of Handloom Indian Couture, during a charity event to support cancer survivors, in Mumbai. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



MOVIE

Bollywood film director-producer Rohit Shetty (L) and actor Ranveer Singh pose during the trailer launch of their Indian Hindi-language action film 'Singham Again' in Mumbai. — AFP



CHANGING WORLD

Demonstrators hold candles during a pro-Palestinian vigil within the framework of the first anniversary of the Israel-Hamas conflict in Buenos Aires. — AFP

FILMUPDATE

New 'Joker' film, a dark musical, tops N America box office



Warner Bros.' "Joker: Folie à Deux," a dark new musical Batman spinoff, earned an estimated \$40 million over the weekend to top the North American box office, industry watchers reported on Sunday.

But that was far behind the \$96.2 opening of the original "Joker" in 2019, a movie that earned Joaquin Phoenix a best-actor Oscar and grossed more than \$1 billion worldwide. Industry analyst David A. Gross called it "a weak opening for the follow-up sequel in a superhero series."

"Folie à Deux" — French for "shared madness" — again stars Phoenix as the unbalanced titular villain, this time joined by Lady Gaga (playing the cheerily deranged Harley Quinn) as the two sing, dance and plan assorted acts of mayhem. Todd Phillips directs, and the cast includes Brendan Gleeson and Catherine Keener.

Last week's box office leader, family-friendly sci-fi tale "The Wild Robot" from DreamWorks Animation, slipped a spot to second, taking in \$18.7 million for the Friday-through-Sunday period, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations estimated.

Lupita Nyong'o voices Roz, an intelligent robot who is marooned on an uninhabited island and, to survive, has to befriend a menagerie of woodland animals — and ends up adopting an adorable gosling.

Warner Bros.' "Beetlejuice Beetlejuice" also slipped a spot, to third, earning \$10.3 million.

Michael Keaton again plays the creepily hilarious title character with Winona Ryder reprising her role as Lydia Deetz, backed by "Beetlejuice" newcomers Jenna Ortega, Monica Bellucci and Justin Theroux.

In fourth was Paramount's animated action film "Transformers One," the latest instalment in the toy-based franchise, at \$5.4 million.

And in fifth, for the second straight week, was "Speak No Evil," a psychological horror film from Blumhouse and Universal Pictures, at \$2.8 million.

James McAvoy and Mackenzie Davis star.

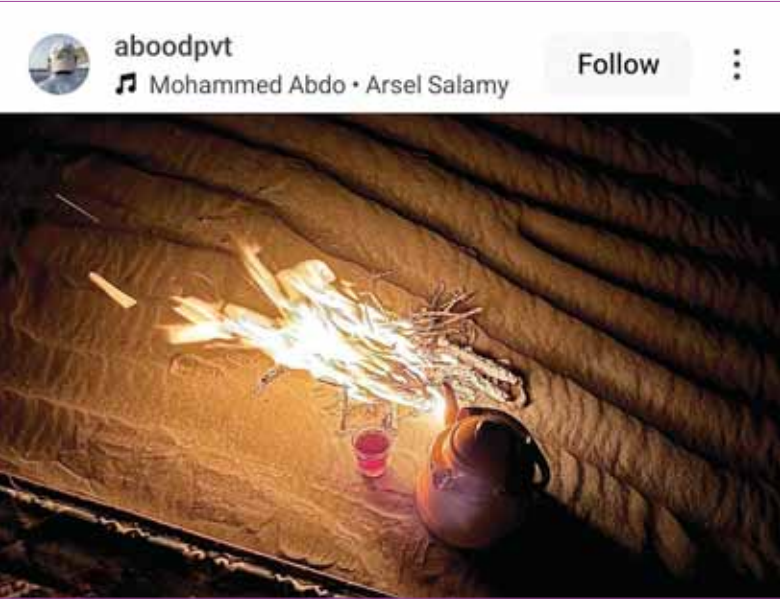
Rounding out the top 9 were:

"White Bird" (\$1.5 million); "Deadpool & Wolverine" (\$1.5 million); "The Substance" (\$1.3 million); "Megalopolis" (\$1.1 million). — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



The Friday Souq



Camping Must-Have

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Guitar bought by teenage George Harrison set to sell for over \$1m



A guitar bought by George Harrison for about £58 (\$76) is expected to fetch more than \$1 million at auction.

The Futurama electric guitar was bought by The Beatles star when he was a 16-year-old apprentice electrician in 1959 and was paid for in 44 instalments after his mother signed a hire purchase agreement at Frank Hussy’s music shop in Liverpool.

Next month, it will go under the hammer in Nashville, Tennessee, in the US, at Julien’s Auctions’ Played, Worn & Torn sale.

Unveiling the instrument at The Beatles Story museum in Liverpool, where it will be on display until October 17, Martin Nolan, executive director of Julien’s Auctions, said: “We know he played this guitar in over 324 shows at the Cavern and

numerous times in Hamburg in Germany in 1960 and 1961.”

The guitar was originally priced at 55 guineas, which would have been about £58 but was £74 with the hire purchase agreement, Nolan said.

He said: “We’re estimating, conservatively, \$600,000 to \$800,000 but I think it should sell for more than a million.”

The auction house sold John Lennon’s Hootenanny acoustic guitar for \$3 million earlier this year and has previously sold an acoustic guitar of Lennon’s for \$2.4 million.

Harrison’s Futurama guitar is being sold by a collector who bought it in 2019, but the instrument almost had a different owner when it was offered in a competition for Beatles fans in Beats Instrumental magazine in 1964. — PA Media/dpa

Scientists unlock secret of ‘Girl With Pearl Earring’

JOHANNES

Vermeer’s “Girl With The Pearl Earring” is one of the world’s most popular paintings – and now scientists believe they know why, by measuring how the brain reacts when the work is viewed.

The Mauritshuis museum in The Hague, which houses the 17th century masterpiece, commissioned neuroscientists to measure brain output when viewing the portrait and other well-known works.

They discovered that the viewer is held captive by a special neurological phenomenon they called “Sustained Attentional Loop”, which they believe is unique to the “Girl With The Pearl Earring”.

The viewer’s eye is automatically drawn first to the girl’s own eye, then down to her mouth, then across to the pearl, then back to the eye – and so it continues. This makes you look at the painting longer than others, explained Martine Munnik, from research company Neurensic that carried out the study.

“You have to pay attention whether you want to or not. You have to love her whether you want to or not,” he said.

By measuring brainwaves, the scientists also discovered the precuneus, the part of the brain governing consciousness and personal identity, was the most stimulated.

“It was predictable that the girl was special. But the ‘why’ was also a surprise to us,” said De Munnik.

He said it was the first known study to use EEG and MRI brain scanning machines to measure the neurological response to artwork.

“The longer you look at somebody, the more beautiful or more attractive somebody becomes,” he noted, which also explains the popularity of the Dutch master’s subject.

“Why are you familiar with this painting and not with the other paintings? Because of this special thing she has.”

- ‘THE BRAIN DOESN’T LIE’ -

The scientists also compared the neurological response when looking at the genuine painting in the museum versus being confronted with a reproduction. They found the emotional reaction experienced by the viewer was ten times stronger for an original than a poster.

To carry out the tests, scientists attached an eye tracker and cap to track brainwaves on 10 subjects that were shown the real paintings but also reproductions. It shows the importance of seeing original art, said Mauritshuis Director Martine Gosselink.

“It’s so important to engage with art, whether it’s photography, or dance, or old masters from the 17th century,” the director, 55, said in an interview.

“It is important, and it really helps to develop your brain... The brain doesn’t lie,” she added. Vermeer often drew the focus onto one spot in his works, with the surrounding details more blurred, she explained.

However, the “Girl With The Pearl Earring” has three such focal points – the eye, mouth and pearl – and Gosselink said this set the work apart from other Vermeer paintings.

“Here we see somebody really looking at you, whereas all other paintings by Vermeer, you see someone writing or doing some needlework, or a person busy doing something,” she said.

“But that’s the big difference with this girl. She’s watching you.” De Munnik, 65, said it would be interesting to carry out similar studies on other famous paintings, such as Da Vinci’s Mona Lisa for example.

Gosselink alluded to a friendly rivalry between the two great works.

“People sometimes call (The Girl With The Pearl Earring) the Mona Lisa of the North, but I think times are changing, so maybe the Mona Lisa is the Girl of the South,” she joked. — AFP



Muscat is home to fascinating rock formations and undiscovered caves, some of which remain largely unexplored. For those looking for a quick weekend adventure, Mahaj Cave in the Wilayat of Al Amerat provides the perfect opportunity to escape into nature without venturing far from the city.



Exploring Mahaj Cave: A Hidden Gem in the Heart of Muscat

BY YERU EBUEN

OMAN’S landscape is a geological wonder, characterised by vast deserts, towering mountains, and remarkable cave systems. From the famous Majlis Al Jinn, one of the largest underground chambers in the world, to the stunning Al Hoota Cave with its underground lake, Oman has earned a reputation as a playground for adventurers. These natural caverns are scattered throughout the country, offering exciting opportunities for explorers, both professional and amateur alike.



However, you don’t have to travel far from the capital to experience Oman’s hidden underground treasures. Muscat is home to fascinating rock formations and undiscovered caves, some of which remain largely unexplored. For those looking for a quick weekend adventure, Mahaj Cave in the Wilayat of Al Amerat provides the perfect opportunity to escape into nature without venturing far from the city.

DISCOVERING MAHAJ CAVE

Nestled in the quiet residential area in Al Amerat, Mahaj Cave is a natural cavity located just off a wadi — a valley carved by seasonal water flows. The cave is not as well-known as the larger caves in Oman, but that only adds to its charm. At just 30 minutes away from iconic landmarks like the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, Mahaj Cave offers a convenient outdoor experience for Muscat residents and visitors alike.

The trek to the cave is short, approximately one kilometre from the car park, but it’s not without its challenges. According to Ali, from OmanTripper, “The trek is relatively short but goes through the wadi, so it’s not straightforward. There’s a bit of scrambling, but I’d still say it’s reasonably straightforward and can be done with younger ones.” Ali’s description perfectly encapsulates the essence of the adventure: it’s accessible but still offers a taste of rugged exploration. While the hike is family-friendly, it’s important to be prepared for some uneven terrain as you navigate the wadi

and make your way to the cave. As you begin your trek from the residential neighbourhood, it’s essential to be mindful of your surroundings. “The starting point is in a residential area, so consider where you park your car and the way you dress,” Ali advises. This reminder is especially important, as Oman’s rural and suburban areas are often sensitive to privacy and local customs. Once inside the wadi, you’ll be greeted by a landscape of rocky outcrops and natural beauty. The cave itself, though smaller in scale compared to Oman’s more famous caves, is a rewarding discovery. Mahaj Cave offers a glimpse into the ancient geology of the region, with its weathered stone formations and cool, shaded interior. The cave’s location in the hills makes it feel like a hidden refuge, a peaceful retreat for anyone looking to escape the city’s hustle and bustle.

A SMALL CAVE WITH BIG POTENTIAL

While Mahaj Cave may be modest in size compared to giants like Majlis Al Jinn or the labyrinthine passages of Al Hoota, it holds its own appeal, especially for those who are new to caving or short on time. Unlike larger caves that require hours of driving and extensive exploration, Mahaj Cave is a quick hike that can be completed in a few hours, making it an ideal option for a weekend adventure. Ali from OmanTripper emphasises the convenience of Mahaj Cave: “It’s a cool place to explore on a quick week-

end trek.” He also mentions another nearby cave, Lasif Cave, located further inside the wadi, which remains on the list for future exploration. This suggests that Mahaj Cave could be the starting point for even more adventures in the surrounding area. Though it lacks the grandeur of Oman’s larger cave systems, Mahaj Cave is an excellent option for those who want to experience the thrill of caving without committing to a long, arduous journey. Its close proximity to Muscat makes it particularly attractive for city dwellers in need of a nature fix. And while it may not have the vast chambers or dramatic stalactites of other caves, Mahaj Cave offers a more intimate connection with the landscape, one that is accessible and enjoyable for adventurers of all ages.

A PERFECT WINTER ADVENTURE

With winter approaching in Oman, now is the perfect time to explore the country’s outdoor wonders. The cooler months bring milder temperatures, making it ideal for hiking, camping, and, of course, cave hunting. While many outdoor enthusiasts focus on the mountains or deserts, caves like Mahaj offer a unique and often overlooked alternative for adventure. Cave hunting, or spelunking, provides a thrilling mix of exploration and discovery. Each cave in Oman has its own unique characteristics, from the massive underground voids of Majlis Al Jinn to the tranquil beauty of Al Hoota’s

underground lake. Mahaj Cave may be smaller, but its accessible location and easy trek make it a perfect introduction to the world of caving. And with more caves like Lasif Cave waiting to be explored nearby, it’s clear that Mahaj is just one part of a broader network of natural wonders in the area. For those looking to escape the city for a few hours and dive into Oman’s rugged landscapes, Mahaj Cave is an excellent choice. Whether you’re an experienced caver or a curious beginner, this hidden gem in Al Amerat offers a taste of adventure without the need for extensive planning or long drives.

ABOUT OMANTRIPPER

Ali, known as the OmanTripper, is a well-known Omani travel blogger and explorer who specialises in sharing detailed insights about Oman’s culture, natural landscapes, and hidden gems. His blog, OmanTripper, provides comprehensive guides for travellers, featuring everything from historical landmarks and off-the-beaten-path locations to cultural experiences and outdoor adventures. Ali has developed a reputation for his passion for showcasing Oman’s unique beauty and heritage, offering practical advice and firsthand knowledge to both locals and tourists. His work has contributed significantly to raising awareness about Oman’s rich travel offerings. Make sure to follow him across his socials: @omantripper for some of the best places to visit in Oman.