

Oman at Climate Action Summit

The Sultanate of Oman is participating in the World Leaders Climate Action Summit held in the Azerbaijani capital, Baku. Oman's delegation was headed by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Auli, Minister of Energy and Minerals. The summit, which was attended by heads of states and governments, discussed expanding the scope of cutting greenhouse gas emissions and focused on the issue of financing the Climate Change Loss and Damage Response Fund.

SUNRISE - 06:20 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 05:02 AM

DHUHR - 11:56 PM

ASR - 03:05 PM

MAGHRIB - 05:27 PM

ISHA - 06:40 PM



MUSCAT

RO 25 MILLION DEAL TO BUILD FUEL TANKS

Shinas Port signed an agreement with Zuhoor Al Khaleej company to build fuel tanks and manage supply and storage services. The agreement, valued at RO 25.6 million, provides for building tanks with a total capacity of more than 100,000 tonnes per litre. The agreement was signed by Abdul-baqi bin Ahmed al Kindi, CEO of QSS Maritime (the operating company at Shinas Port), and Wahid Inat Mansour Yan, Chairman of the executing company. Khater bin Ali al Maamari, Executive Director of Shinas Port, said that the agreement stems from a strategy to expand business operations at the port, notably by developing storage and fuel supply services and providing tanks for various petroleum products.



PROMOTING HEALTH SECURITY

The opening of the Medical City Hospital for Military and Security Services - Muscat is a step forward in achieving integration among all health institutions and realising many objectives, including 'health security', said Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health. In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Dr Hilal said that such projects based on solid foundations place the Sultanate of Oman among the ranks of developed countries distinguished for quality of health services. **DETAILS ON P3**

National system to evaluate performance of schools

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, NOV 12

In a move to improve the quality of school education in the Sultanate of Oman, the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQAE) on Tuesday announced the launch of the National System for Evaluating School Performance, scheduled for December 2.

The launch will be held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth. This is part of a comprehensive strategy aimed at raising the efficiency of educational institutions in the country, whether government or private, and to develop the education system according to the highest international standards.

Addressing a media

The new system seeks to maintain the quality of school education and higher education so that it could continue to keep pace with international standards. The system also encourages educational institutions to develop their own internal schemes to ensure top quality

DR JOKHA BINT ABDULLAH AL SHUKAILIYAH
CEO, Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

conference, Dr Jokha bint Abdullah al Shukailiyah, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQAE), said that this comes in response to the requirements of Royal Decree No (9/2021) which defines the competencies of the authority and that the new system seeks to maintain the quality of school education and higher education so that it could continue to keep pace with international standards. The system also encourages educational institutions to develop their own internal schemes to ensure top quality.

Dr Jokha said that this national system stems from a comprehensive strategy devised by the authority to enhance the efficiency of education in public and private schools.

TURN TO P2

ISRAEL POUNDS BEIRUT SUBURB AGAIN

BEIRUT: The Israeli military pounded Beirut's southern suburbs with air strikes on Tuesday, mounting one of its heaviest daytime attacks yet on the area after the defence minister ruled out a ceasefire until Israeli goals were met. Smoke billowed over Beirut

as around a dozen strikes hit the southern suburbs from mid-morning. An Israeli army warning posted on social media told residents who were near Hezbollah facilities to leave. There were no immediate reports of casualties. In northern Israel, people

were forced to take shelter as attack drones were launched from Lebanon, the military said. One hit the yard of a kindergarten in a Haifa suburb, where the children had been rushed into a shelter, rescue workers said. None were hurt.

SEE ALSO P6

IWC PORTUGIESEER AUTOMATIC.



Portugieser Automatic 42, Ref. IW501705
Conceived 85 years ago as an instrument watch with marine chronometer precision, the Portugieser has evolved into a timeless yet dynamic paragon of understated elegance. A slimmer case now makes the Portugieser Automatic 42 even more refined, while double-box glass sapphire crystals showcase the IWC-manufactured 52011 caliber with a power reserve of 7 days and the elaborately crafted dial in a new color called Dune.
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IWC
SCHAFFHAUSEN



With the participation of 450 business leaders, OAB organizes the 3rd edition of 'CEO Summit'

Muscat: With the participation of over 450 business leaders, experts, and change-makers, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) organized the third edition of its annual "CEO Summit" at the St. Regis Al Mouj Muscat resort. The "CEO Summit" serves as a platform that brings together decision-makers to exchange knowledge and is an eagerly anticipated event in the business community. The creative insights of participants, along with inspiring discussions and panel sessions included in the summit's agenda, contribute to accelerating transformation across various sectors and supporting the social and economic goals of the Sultanate of Oman.

In his opening speech at the summit, Sulaiman Al Harthi, Chief Executive Officer of OAB, said: "We are pleased to host this distinguished group of change-makers and outstanding speakers, from whom we draw inspiration to chart our path to success. Their visionary insights lead us toward sustaining growth. At OAB, we aspire to enhance our leadership in supporting change and keeping pace with the rapidly evolving financial and banking sector in our contemporary world. Banking services have seen significant transformation, with a growing shift of individuals and institutions toward digital services, which have become highly reliable, fast, and easy to use for completing transactions."

Al Harthi added: "With its ambitious vision, which clearly anticipates the radical changes taking place in the financial sector, OAB strengthens its participation in sustaining the growth of this sector in the Sultanate of Oman. The bank holds a distinguished position in the development of modern banking services, a comprehensive shift toward



digitalization, and enriching the customer experience. It also enhances its role in shaping talent and nurturing future leaders who are capable of keeping up with developments and successfully achieving the social, economic, and environmental goals of Oman's future vision 2040." The CEO of OAB also shared his leadership experience and valuable insights on achieving success.

In her speech, Ms Randa Al Sadek, Chief Executive Officer of Arab Bank Plc and Deputy Chairman of OAB Board of Directors, highlighted "the power of adaptability and the importance of embracing change in today's rapidly evolving world." Ms Randa Al Sadek is a seasoned banking expert known for her leadership and strategic abilities. She was

recently honored as one of the most influential women in business in the region by Forbes Middle East and has held key positions in several prestigious banks.

The summit included a panel discussion moderated by Dr. Lamyra Al Haj, associate professor at Sultan Qaboos University and an expert in leadership and organizational development, where His Excellency Tahir Salim Al Amri, CEO of the Central Bank of Oman, discussed the latest trends and changes in monetary policies, the economic outlook for Oman, and the role of the banking sector in supporting economic growth. He also highlighted the initiatives of the Central Bank to enhance the technological transformation in the banking and financial sectors.

OMAN

EVALUATION OF SCHOOLS IN LINE WITH VISION 2040

FROM PAGE 1

She added that the assessment will be conducted through a comprehensive review that “targets a set of standards and indicators that must be met by each institution”.

The authority also tested the system in a number of Omani schools in different contexts, to ensure its compatibility with the needs of schools, and its ability to bring about tangible improvements in their performance. This system was prepared in cooperation with the School Education Quality Assurance Centre, to include precise implementation mechanisms that work to achieve sustainable improvement of educational performance. She said that the authority, represented by the centre, has issued the National System for Evaluating School Performance after many stages of experimentation and in-depth review of regional and international practices, in addition to consultations with local and international institutions of expertise in the area.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Thuraya bint Saif al Hosniyah, Director-General of the School Education Quality Assurance Centre, said, “The new system will contribute to the realisation of a positive shift in the performance of schools in the Sultanate of Oman.” She added that the assessment will include field visits by specialists in education, who will draft reports reflecting areas of strength and scopes for improvement.

She stressed the importance of cooperation between the authority, the Ministry of Education and relevant authorities in implementing the system, in order to ensure integration between the parties concerned and enhance the quality of education in Oman. She added that the system seeks to build permanent partnerships that contribute to achieving a qualitative shift in the educational environment, so that it becomes capable of meeting the needs of society and the expectations of parents.

As part of its efforts to achieve sustainable excellence, the authority explained its keenness to cooperate with regional and international educational institutions to enhance the exchange of expertise and knowledge, ensuring the application of best practices in improving the quality of education in the Sultanate of Oman. This cooperation represents an opportunity to enhance the capabilities of Omani schools and prepare them to meet global challenges in the field of education.

The launch of the National System for Evaluating School Performance comes within the framework of the commitment to achieving Oman Vision 2040, which places education, learning and scientific research among the strategic priorities. Through this system, the authority aspires to promote a stimulating and innovative educational environment that contributes to developing students’ skills at the academic and personal levels, and pushes them towards comprehensive growth that meets the needs of the future labour market. This system also contributes in meeting the aspirations of society and parents to obtain high-quality education for their children.

She said that the new system is not limited to performance evaluation only, but also contributes in enhancing the educational environment in a sustainable manner, which is positively reflected on society and the economy. Through this system, the authority aspires to create an educational community based on excellence and sustainable development, capable of providing an educational experience that rises to the aspirations of students and their families.

Royal Office Minister receives Saudi Arabia’s naval chief

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office received in his office on Tuesday Lt Gen Mohammed Abdulrahman al Gharibi, Chief of Staff of the Saudi Royal Naval Forces and his accompanying delegation, currently visiting the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, the two sides touched on a set of topics of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO).

Meanwhile, Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies (ASDS) received in his office at Bait Al Falaj Garrison on Tuesday Lt Gen Mohammed Abdulrahman al Gharibi, Chief of Staff of the Saudi Royal Naval Forces and his



The two sides touched on topics of mutual interest

accompanying delegation. During the meeting, the two sides discussed several topics of common interest, particularly in the academic areas. The meeting was attended by Brigadier Nasser bin Abdullah al Qatabi, Head of the



ASDS Chairman receives Saudi military official

Centre for Strategic and Defence Studies, Commodore Khalid bin Amer al Salti, Director of Studies and Academic Affairs, some ASDS senior officers and the Military Attaché at the Saudi embassy in Muscat.

— ONA

Students showcase solar, water purification tech

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH @patkaushal

A PROTOTYPE

of locally developed solar-powered system designed for the production of green hydrogen and purified drinking water was showcased for a large audience of academicians, students, visitors and distinguished guests in Salalah on Monday.

The project centres around a solar-powered purification system that meets Omani standards for safe drinking water. Purified water from this system is subsequently used in a solar-driven electrolysis process, producing green hydrogen at a voltage of 1.9V and achieving an output rate of 152 ml per minute.

“Key performance metrics—including pH, Total Dissolved Solids (TDS), Total Suspended Solids (TSS), Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD), and Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD)—were closely monitored, alongside the efficiency of hydrogen production, to ensure optimal system performance. To enhance overall efficiency, the system also incorporates waste heat recovery methods,” said Dr Rakesh Namdeti, faculty member at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), Salalah.

The project is developed by Chemical Engineering students Abdullah Salim Suhail, Hamid



The project centres around a solar-powered purification system that meets Omani standards for safe drinking water.



bin Awadh bin Mustahail al Shehri, and Musab bin Ali bin Saleh al Oraimi under the guidance of Dr Namdeti and Lakhyar Lakhayar Amer al Amri, with experimental support from Duaa bint Salim bin Musallam al Kathiriyah and Dr Arlene Abuda Joaquin.

Commenting on the project's sustainability, Dr Namdeti said, “An in-depth life cycle assessment and cost-benefit analysis revealed the project's economic and environmental viability, positioning it as a competitive alternative to conventional technologies.” “This integrated model not only supports Oman's objectives in

renewable energy, economic diversification, and water security but also addresses growing global demands for sustainable energy solutions,” he said.

He put emphasis on the fact that the project is a working model under which in-house generated solar energy is used for producing drinking water and green hydrogen.

By offering a viable solution to water scarcity and clean energy production, this project underscores Oman's role in the global clean energy movement and presents a sustainable approach to the intertwined challenges of water and energy

security.

The innovative project was showcased during Dhofar University's Sustainable Week 2024.

The transformative project aims at sustainable water and energy solutions aligning closely with Oman Vision 2040 goals. “The event was organised by the College of Commerce and Business Administration. It brought together innovators and industry experts for a week focused on advancing environmental sustainability and resource management,” said Dr Mariam Anil, Assistant Professor in the Department of Management.

Connection between neuroscience and food perception in focus

KABEER YOUSUF @KABIYOUSEF

The connection between one's neuroscience, food perception, and marketing was the focus of an interactive seminar held in collaboration with the Italian Trade Agency, IULM University, and Sultan Qaboos University on Tuesday.

The seminar is part of the Italian Cuisine in the World event, taking place from November 10 to 17 in Muscat. Held under the auspices of HH Sayyidah Basma al Said, the event aims to provide insights into how the human brain influences food preferences.

Professor Vincenzo Russo, Full Professor of Consumer Psychology

and Neuromarketing at IULM University in Milan, conducted hands-on activities and multi-sensory experiments to demonstrate how neuromarketing strategies can enhance consumer experiences.

In an interview with the Observer, Prof Vincenzo Russo said that the event is an opportunity to showcase how neuroscience can improve communication skills, making consumers more aware of their choices, especially concerning food.

“It was a great honour to participate as a spokesperson for IULM University and as an ambassador of neuromarketing on this day dedicated to the Mediterranean Diet. Thanks to the collaboration of Dr Fiamma Rivetti



Professor Vincenzo Russo said that the event is an opportunity to showcase how neuroscience can improve communication skills

and Dr Greta Rondi. Representing IULM here in Oman was significant, as it allowed us to explore the role that science and culture can play in promoting healthy and responsible eating. Special thanks to Sultan Qaboos University for the warm welcome and to the Italian Embassy in Muscat and Ambassador Pierluigi d'Elia for the support that made this important moment of cultural and scientific exchange possible,” Professor Russo said.

Throughout the week, Chef Domenico De Gregorio known for blending tradition with innovation will be in Muscat. He will participate in a special evening at the Italian Residence, delighting guests with Italian recipes and live cooking.

SHORTTAKES

OMAN PARTICIPATES
IN CITYSCAPE
EXHIBITION



The event is one of the world’s largest real estate exhibition, looking to envision the Future of Living. — ONA

RIYADH: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP), is currently taking part in the Cityscape Global Exhibition 2024, being held till November 14 in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The event is one of the world’s largest real estate exhibition, looking beyond traditional real estate to envision the Future of Living.

The exhibition features multiple stages where creative minds from around the world converge, enabling individuals, companies, and exhibitors to connect with leading figures in investment, development, design, and innovation.

Oman is participating in this event through four mega projects, namely Sultan Haitham City, Al Khuwair Downtown and Waterfront Development Project, Oman Mountain Destination Project and the integrated residential neighbourhood projects.

The Sultanate of Oman seeks, through its participation in this event, to showcase the investment opportunities available in future projects in the real estate sector, attract foreign capital and investments, in addition to strengthening partnerships and cooperation with global investors in the fields of real estate, architecture, design and urban planning. — ONA

JAPANESE
ARCHAEOLOGIST
HONOURED

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

Eng Ibrahim bin Said al Kharousi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage, presided over the ceremony honouring Japanese professor and geologist Prof Kondo Yasuhisa, who has been leading archaeological excavations in historic settlements across Musandam Governorate and Tanuf.



**PROF KONDO
YASUHISA**

Prof Kondo, who has explored Oman’s archaeological treasures seasonally for the past 17 years, was awarded the Japanese Foreign Minister’s Commendation in recognition of his contributions to strengthening bilateral relations between Oman and Japan through archaeology.

Over his years of fieldwork, Prof Kondo has conducted surveys in areas such as Arain, Tanuf, cave-side settlements in the Canyon area in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, and in Musandam Governorate, enhancing the nation’s heritage inventory.

Speaking to the Oman Daily Observer, Prof Kondo noted that Oman has strong potential for archaeological tourism, appealing to nature-loving tourists. He emphasised that Oman’s rich cultural heritage, integrated with tourism, could position the country as a future hub for archaeology.

Prof Kondo underscored the importance of raising public awareness of Oman’s heritage by publicising these achievements.

The ongoing archaeological surveys in Musandam Governorate and Tanuf are part of a continuous national heritage inventory project, conducted in collaboration with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature. The project is financially supported by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS).

Medical City Hospital aims
to achieve health security

THE opening of the Medical City Hospital for Military and Security Services - Muscat, is a step forward in achieving integration among all health institutions and realising many objectives, including ‘health security’, said Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health.

In a statement, Dr Hilal said that such projects based on solid foundations place the Sultanate of Oman among the ranks of developed countries distinguished for quality of health services.

The minister pointed out that Sultanate of Oman is pressing ahead with the modernisation of health services and development, with special focus on the well-being of Omani citizens.

Dr Hilal explained that the Medical City for Military and Security Services - Muscat constitutes an advanced facility manned by an elite cadre of health specialists.



**DR HILAL BIN
ALI AL SABTI**
Minister of Health

“This edifice will provide great to attract, recruit and train national human resources.



Medical City Hospital for Military and Security Services - Muscat would efficiently operate alongside its counterparts in improving health services in the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

It will be a motivating environment for education and research on health studies, besides playing an essential role in providing healthcare for military and security personnel and their families,”

said Dr Hilal.

He noted that the hospital would efficiently operate alongside its counterparts in improving health services in the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

‘From Farm to Table’ programme targets awareness

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, NOV 12

The General-Directorate of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate on Tuesday launched an awareness programme under the slogan ‘From Farm to Table’, targeting all members of society in the governorate.

The programme comes within the framework of the Directorate’s efforts to enhance awareness about food safety and quality. It includes three main axes aimed at comprehensive education for all groups, from school students to food establishment owners and consumers.

The focus is on three main areas, designed to meet different needs and address multiple aspects in the field of food safety and quality: school awareness, vocational training, and the safe food basket. Jassim bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Director of the Food Safety and Quality Department at the Directorate, explained that the programme aims to educate the community on the importance of assessing food risks, identifying potential sources of these risks, and ways to prevent them to protect public health.



The programme includes a number of educational activities.

He emphasised that this programme is part of the Directorate’s ongoing efforts to ensure food safety and enhance health awareness among community members.

The programme includes various educational and awareness activities, such as educational lectures featuring interactive images and videos that convey information in a simple and effective way, along with the distribution of awareness brochures containing tips and guidelines for handling food risks. The programme also provides educational materials explaining how to avoid food risks associated with both fresh and processed

products.

As part of the programme, specialised workshops will be organised to address the health requirements for food establishment owners and workers, focusing on the effective application of food safety standards to ensure a clean and safe work environment.

Al Humaidi stated that the aim is to enhance public health awareness about food risks and their impact on health, stressing the importance of improving individuals’ behaviours towards food safety to ensure a healthy and sustainable environment.

Al Saleel Nature Reserve opens for investment

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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Investment opportunities have been opened up for Al Saleel Nature Reserve Park, which was established in 1997.

The Nature Reserve is situated between a mountain range and the Sea of Oman, with the Rimal Al Sharqiya to the south, covering an area of over 220 square kilometres.

The announcement to invest and manage some of the ecotourism projects in the Nature Reserve was made by the Environment Authority on Tuesday. The Environment Authority stated that it would offer a new investment package for companies, specialised institutions and investors wishing to invest in and manage some of the ecotourism activities at Al Saleel. Interested entities



The Nature Reserve lies between a mountain range and the Sea of Oman, covering an area of over 220 square kilometres.

are invited to submit their proposals. The investment and management model is to be agreed upon at a later stage.

The available investment opportunities include establishing and operating an eco-tourism camp, investing in beekeeping sites and managing the tourist tour activities within the reserve facilities, such as safari trips.

The announcement also mentioned that priority would be given to investment proposals from institutions owned by members of the local community.

As part of the terms and conditions, applicants must submit an implementation and investment plan for ecotourism at the nature reserve, along with a copy of the valid commercial register that aligns with the targeted investment activity. Information about the organisation, including its structure and experience in ecotourism and management,

must also be included.

According to the Environment Authority, around 57 species of birds, including migratory and endemic species, have been recorded in the reserve. The bird species include the bulbul, hoopoe, wild dove, sparrow, great grey shrike, pterocles, bald vulture and steppe eagle.

Additionally, more than eight types of animals, such as the Arabian gazelle (Gazella gazella), Arabian ibex (Hemitragus jayakari), red fox (Vulpes vulpes), wild rabbit (Lepus capensis) and several small mammals, are known to inhabit this area. Eight types of reptiles have also been recorded in the reserve, including the Sinai agama, Egyptian spiny and tailed lizards, and 166 species of insects.

The Social Protection Law ushered several landmark reforms with the aim of establishing an inclusive and comprehensive social welfare system in line with Oman Vision 2040

A GOLD STANDARD WELFARE MODEL

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, NOV 12

AS the country gears up for national day, citizens and residents of Oman have many reasons to celebrate. Breaking new ground in Oman’s modernising social welfare landscape was the promulgation of the Social Protection Law in July 2023.

Overseen by the Social Protection Fund (SPF), the law ushered several landmark reforms with the aim of establishing an inclusive and comprehensive social welfare system in line with Oman Vision 2040.

One of the key highlights of the Social Protection Law is the introduction of various cash benefits for different segments of society. These include an Elderly Benefit of RO 115 targeted at senior citizens above the age of 60 and a Children’s Benefit offering monthly assistance of RO 10 for each child under the age of 18.

The law also introduced a benefit of RO 130 targeted at individuals with disabilities, and an orphan and widow benefit that provides financial aid of up to RO 80 per month. This is in addition to a family income support benefit that aims to assist low-income families.

As of February 2024, the Social Protection Fund in Oman reported a total of 1,534,870 registered beneficiaries. This includes 1,266,785 children registered for the Children’s Benefit, 175,123 individuals enrolled in the Elderly Benefit programme, and 47,095 individuals registered for the Disability Benefit.

Also, the Social Protection Law plays a supporting role in the various paternal leave reforms introduced by the Labour Law last year. As per the stipulations of the Labour Law, the SPF will be responsible for the cost of paternal leaves through the collection of monthly contributions to the Social Protection Fund.

These include the introduction of a seven-day paid parental leave for Omani and non-Omani fathers, a first in the GCC region. In addition to the extension of paid maternity leaves from 7 weeks to 14 weeks. Both leaves can be extended by an upward of 98 days of unpaid, job-protected leave which can be shared between both parents.

Addressing the International Labour Organization earlier this year, the CEO of SPF, Dr Faisal bin Abdullah al Farsi, highlighted the significance of parental leave. “The introduction of the parental leave branch under the Social Protection Law is not only aimed at increasing

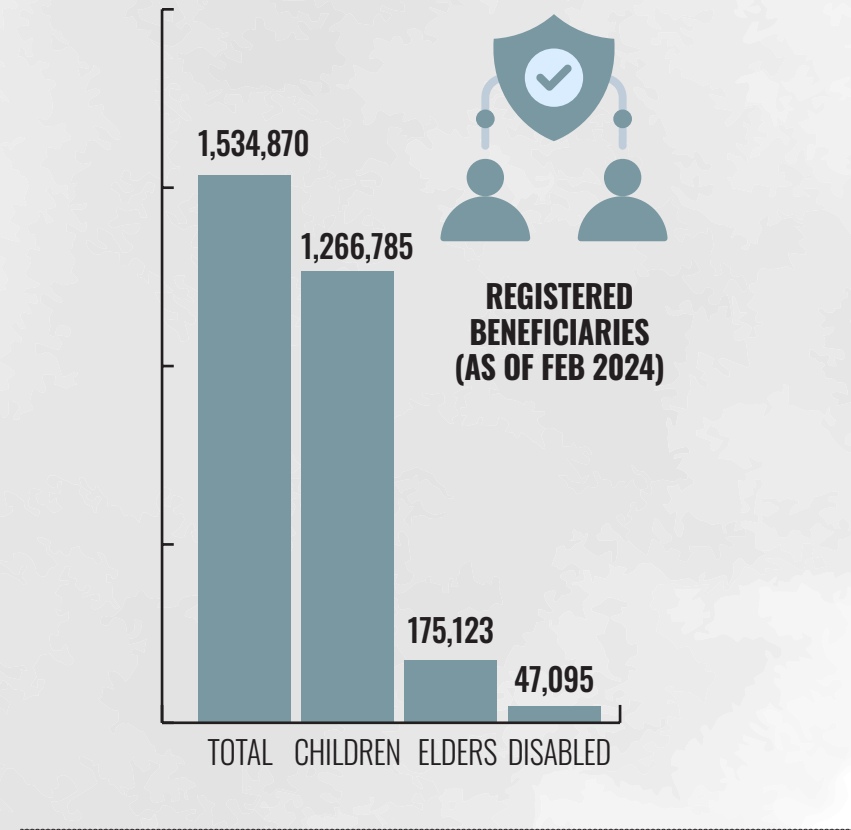
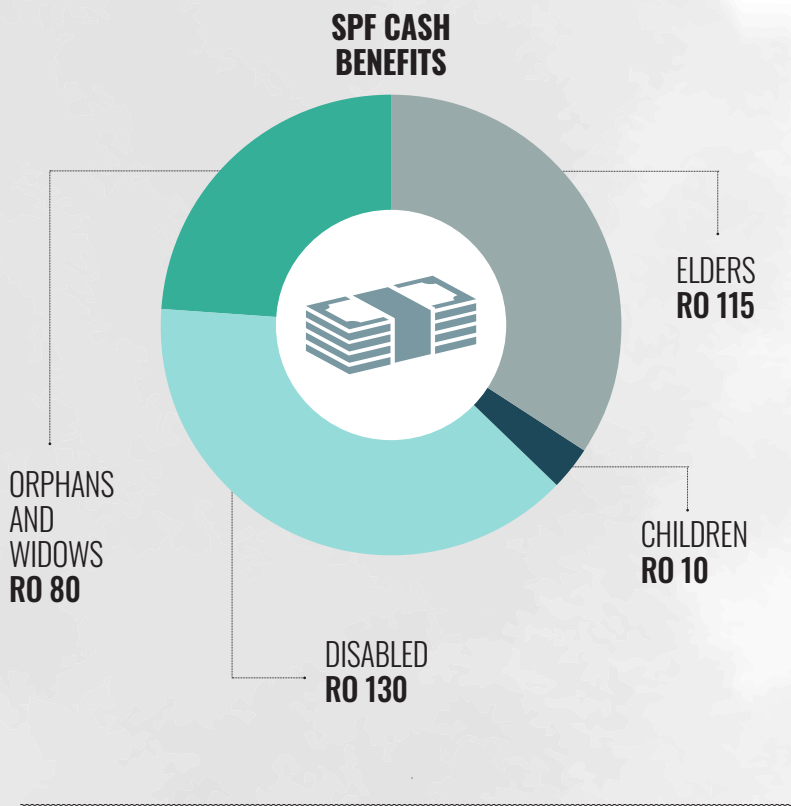


women’s participation in the workforce, but also at improving the well-being of families and ensuring the future prosperity of our nation, ensuring close alignment with national objectives and international social security standards of the International Labour Organization.”

Another major reform in Oman’s Social Protection Law is the introduction of a Savings System for expatriates, replacing the traditional end-of-service gratuity. According to the new system, employers will be required to contribute 9 per cent of the expatriate employee’s basic salary monthly into a savings account which will be invested by the Fund. Employees are then eligible to receive the end of service payment as a lump sum or through scheduled instalments.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) hailed the reform as a groundbreaking initiative in the region. In a statement, ILO Regional Director for the Arab States, Ruba Jaradat, said, “The new legislation sets a new vision for social protection in Oman and paves the way towards universal social protection, establishing Oman as a reference for other countries in the region. Inclusive, comprehensive, equitable and sustainable social protection systems are critical for countries in the region to further ongoing social and economic transformations.”

To enhance efficiency, the Social Protection Law merged eleven existing pension and social insurance systems into a single entity (the Unified Social Protection Fund). Overseen by the Social Protection Fund, the merger aims to reduce redundancy, simplify access to benefits, and provide standardised protections for the workforce by unifying assets and obligations.



11 PLANS TO 1

TO ENHANCE EFFICIENCY, THE SOCIAL PROTECTION LAW MERGED ELEVEN EXISTING PENSION AND SOCIAL INSURANCE SYSTEMS INTO A SINGLE ENTITY (THE UNIFIED SOCIAL PROTECTION FUND)

CHEER FOR EXPAT

EMPLOYERS WILL BE REQUIRED TO CONTRIBUTE **9%** OF THE EXPATRIATE EMPLOYEE’S BASIC SALARY MONTHLY INTO A SAVINGS ACCOUNT

FIRST IN GCC

- A SEVEN-DAY PAID PARENTAL LEAVE FOR ALL FATHERS, FIRST IN THE REGION
- PAID MATERNITY LEAVE 14 WEEKS

Stiff penalties for obstructing journalists at work

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The new Media Law, issued by Royal Decree 58/2024 on Sunday, has a strong protection net to ensure that all journalists in the Sultanate of Oman can continue serving the nation and society seamlessly.

Article 50 of the law states that anyone who disrupts or interferes with a radio or television broadcast or disrupts the activities of media outlets shall be punished by imprisonment for a period of

not less than one year and not more than three years. They will also be subject to a fine of not less than RO 50,000 and not more than RO 100,000, or by one of these two penalties.

The penalty shall be doubled in both its minimum and maximum limits if the crime was committed with the intent to harm national security or disrupt the defence of the homeland.

Article 51 states that whoever engages in an activity subject to the provisions of this law or the regulations without obtaining



a license, in violation of the license, or after its expiry, shall be punished by imprisonment for a period of not less than one year and not more than three years, and by a fine of not less than RO 10,000 and not more than RO 20,000, or by one of these two penalties.

The minimum and maximum penalty shall be doubled in the event of repetition, and the court shall, in all cases, order the closure and confiscation of the equipment, devices, and tools used in committing the crime.

Article 52 stipulates impris-

onment for not less than three months and not more than one year, and by a fine of not less than RO 5,000 and not more than RO 15,000, or by one of these two penalties if any information violates the controls set by the Ministry of Information (MoI) or is inconsistent with public morals or aims to mislead the public regarding investigations or trials unless publication is based on a final judicial ruling or any news, statement, information, or other matter for which the (MoI) has issued a directive prohibiting publication.

Need for sustainable ideas for greener future

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

OMANI YOUTHS need to be inculcated with greener, sustainable ideas for a better, environmentally friendly society of tomorrow, says Dr Amer al Mataani, President of the Board of Directors, Environment Society of Oman (ESO).

Speaking to the Observer on the sidelines of the recently held Namat awards that recognise children with creative and sustainable ideas for environment protection held under the auspices of Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, Dr Al Mataani said the youth has an incredible opportunity to shape a more sustainable future.

He said that initiatives like Namat empower them to lead change by addressing real-world environmental challenges through creativity, collaboration, and dedication.

“Our youths have a bigger role to play in environment protection and their ideas and actions today will be the foundation of a greener, healthier Oman for future generations. We encourage you to embrace this responsibility with passion and vision, knowing that your contributions can drive lasting, positive impact in our communities and beyond,” he said.

ESO is aiming to expand community engagement by strengthening the connections between school projects and local community participation. By continuing to support



Youths have a bigger role to play in environment protection and their ideas and actions will be the foundation of a greener future.

and showcase the efforts of schools and students, ESO hopes to inspire more community involvement and amplify the message of sustainability across Oman.

ESO is also aligning its initiatives with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to drive a more impactful conservation movement among Oman's youth and local communities.

The Namat Competition is an annual initiative organised by the ESO and supported by Veolia Oman, celebrating the environmental innovation and commitment of Omani government schools.

Launched in 2019, Namat aims to inspire students from Grades 5 to

12 to develop sustainable projects addressing challenges like water management, waste reduction, and energy conservation.

This year's event, the fourth edition, saw the participation of 164 schools nationwide, with the top projects receiving recognition for their creativity and impact. The winners were honoured at a prestigious ceremony. By fostering a collaborative approach that involves students, staff, and local communities, Namat encourages environmental responsibility and aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to drive awareness, engagement, and lasting conservation efforts across Oman.

TENDER NOTICE

The Ministry of Economy Announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fees In Omani Riyals	Last Date For Tender Submission
2024/18	Providing cleaning services for the Ministry's buildings in 2025	LO: 25 SME: 10 RE: 25	22/12/2024

First

All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender tender from the following website: www.etendering.tenderboard.gov.om

The bidders must submit their offers electronically via the website.

Second

Tenders that does not meet the above conditions shall not be considered. The ministry shall have the right to reject any tender, and shall not be obliged to award the tender for the lowest bid without giving reasons.

For inquiries regarding tenders, please contact through the website of the electronic tendering system; <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

For inquiries regarding the technical support of the electronic tendering system, please contact via e-mail and phone :

etenderhd@mtc.gov.om
 + 96824402200

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MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY
Advertisement No. (35/2024)

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

Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date
PRE-24-153 (Re-Call-3)	Maintenance of Pumps Room at Al Qurum Natural Park (Re-Tender 3)	07/12/2024	23/12/2024
PRE-24-129 (Re-Call)	Design and Build of Al-Mabelah Bazar (Re-Tender)	07/12/2024	23/12/2024
PRE-24-314	Paving of Parking for Orchestra Building in Al Seeb	07/12/2024	23/12/2024
PRE-24-316	Application to Survey Study on the Satisfaction of Visitors to the Muscat Nights Festival 2024-2025 regarding the Events and Services at its Various Locations	24/11/2024	28/11/2024
PRE-24-315	Design and Construction of Mobile Toilets in the Bama Area in the Wilayat of Quriyat	04/12/2024	15/12/2024
PRE-24-009	Fencing the Vehicles Yard at Wilayat of Quriyat	07/12/2024	23/12/2024

1. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.

2. Clarification and Support:

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

جامعة الشرقية
A' SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Tender Committee at A'Sharqiyah University is pleased to invite companies experienced in supplying furniture and curtains to participate in the following tender:

Tender details:

Tender No.	Description	Document Collection Deadline	Site Visit Date	Bids Submission Deadline	Document Fees	Remarks
ASU/04/ 24/25	Supply and Installation of Materials of Furniture, Curtains & Drapes for Students Accommodation Buildings at A'Sharqiyah University Campus in IBRA	19/11/2024	24/11/2024 10 am	03/12/2024	200.00 OMR	The company must be classified as excellent grade

- Specialized companies interested in this assignment can obtain the tender document from the Procurement and Contracts Department at A'Sharqiyah University in Ibra during working days from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM.
- Bids must be submitted in closed, sealed envelopes with red wax, addressed to the Tender Committee at A'Sharqiyah University, Ibra. The envelopes should clearly indicate the tender subject and reference number but must not display the bidders' names.
- The main submission envelope should contain the following:
 - A separate sealed envelope with the technical proposal (1 original copy, 1 copy, and 1 soft copy on a USB flash drive).
 - A separate sealed envelope with the commercial proposal (1 original copy, 1 copy, and 1 soft copy on a USB flash drive).
 - A separate sealed envelope containing the tender bond.
- A'Sharqiyah University is not obligated to accept the lowest bid.
- ASU general terms and conditions of tenders shall apply on all submitted bids.
- http://www.asu.edu.om/downloads/purchase_terms_conditions.pdf
- For further details, feel free to contact us via phone at 25401115, 25401116, or by email at [azza.rashid@asu.edu.om]

Night of Bollywood music

MUSCAT: The eighth edition of the Funkar Musical Extravaganza, held at the Sur Ballroom of Hotel Holiday Muscat, was a spectacular celebration of music, warmth, and joy. Titled 'Pyar Hua Ikrar Hua,' the event captivated music lovers with a perfect blend of Bollywood classics and contemporary hits, showcasing the works of legendary music directors from the past to the present.

The evening began with the traditional lighting of the lamp by dignitaries, followed by a mesmerising Kathak dance rendition of Ganesh Vandana by Ms Vaibhavi Gandhi. The talented members of the Funkar Group, enthralled over 150 music enthusiasts.

WORLD

SHORTTAKES



Supporters of the Alliance du Changement (Alliance for Change), celebrate in Plaine Magnien. — AFP

OPPOSITION IN MAURITIUS CLAIMS ELECTION TRIUMPH

PORT LOUIS: Mauritius opposition leader Navin Ramgoolam said on Tuesday his alliance had secured a landslide election victory, after the incumbent prime minister conceded he faced a “huge defeat”.

Ramgoolam, now set for a third term as prime minister, told crowds of jubilant supporters that his Alliance of Change had made a clean sweep of parliamentary seats on the island of Mauritius in Sunday’s vote.

“The court of the people has delivered its verdict and a new Mauritius awakes,” the 77-year-old said to boisterous cheers and blaring horns. He claimed his side had won all 60 of the National Assembly seats for the island that were up for grabs, in a victory over prime minister Pravind Jugnauth.

Ramgoolam now faces the task of uniting the Indian Ocean archipelago, touted as one of Africa’s most stable and prosperous democracies, after a tense and hotly-disputed election. “I hope PKJ resigns soon. He was beaten 60-0,” Ramgoolam added. — AFP



Displaced Palestinians make their way after fleeing the northern part of Gaza. — Reuters

ISRAEL FAILS TO MEET US AID DEMANDS

GENEVA: International aid groups said that Israel had failed to meet a series of US demands intended to improve the humanitarian crisis in Gaza by a Tuesday deadline.

The United States told its ally Israel in a letter on October 13 that it must take steps to improve the aid situation in war-ravaged Gaza within 30 days. If not, it could face potential restrictions on US military aid.

“Israel not only failed to meet the US criteria that would indicate support to the humanitarian response, but concurrently took actions that dramatically worsened the situation on the ground, particularly in Northern Gaza,” a group of eight aid groups including Oxfam, Save the Children and the Norwegian Refugee Council said in 19-page report.

On Friday, global food security experts released a rare warning of imminent famine in parts of northern Gaza unless immediate steps were taken to ease the situation. — Reuters

NORTH KOREA RATIFIES LANDMARK DEFENCE TREATY WITH RUSSIA

SEOUL: North Korea has ratified a landmark defence pact with Russia, state media reported on Tuesday, deepening security cooperation that has seen Pyongyang send thousands of troops to help Moscow fight Ukraine. The agreement formalises months of tightening military bonds between two nations that were Communist allies throughout the Cold War. Seoul and ally the United States have accused the

nuclear-armed North of sending thousands of soldiers to Russia, where they have been outfitted with Russian uniforms and are, according to reports, massed on the border near Kursk.

The deal “was ratified as a decree” of leader Kim Jong Un, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

The notice comes after Russian lawmakers voted unanimously last week to ratify the deal, which

President Vladimir Putin later signed. “The treaty will take effect from the day when both sides exchanged the ratification instruments.” North Korea has become one of the most vocal and important backers of Russia’s offensive in Ukraine.

Pyongyang has long been accused by Western nations of supplying Moscow with artillery shells and missiles for use in Ukraine. — AFP

Israeli strikes pound Beirut suburbs heavily

THE ISRAELI military pounded Beirut’s southern suburbs with air strikes on Tuesday, mounting one of its heaviest daytime attacks yet after the defence minister ruled out a ceasefire until Israeli goals were met. Smoke billowed over Beirut as at least 10 blasts were heard across the city. The strikes followed an Israeli army warning identifying 12 sites in the southern suburbs and saying it would take action against them soon. In northern Israel, people were forced to take shelter as attack drones were launched from Lebanon, the military said.

There were no immediate reports of casualties in Beirut. Residents have largely fled the area since Israel began bombing it in September. Footage of one strike shared on social media showed two missiles slamming into a building of around 10 storeys, demolishing it and sending up clouds of debris.

The conflict between Israel and the Lebanese Hezbollah had been rumbling on for a year before Israel went on the offensive in September, pounding wide areas of Lebanon with air strikes and sending troops into the south.

Meeting with Israel’s general staff for the first time, Israel’s newly appointed Defence Minister Israel Katz said on Monday there would be no ceasefire in Lebanon until Israel achieves its goals.

“Israel will not agree to any arrangement that does not guarantee... Israel’s goals of the war in Lebanon - disarming Hezbollah and its withdrawal beyond the Litani River and returning the residents of the north safely to their homes,” he said. Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar had said earlier on Monday



Smoke billows over Beirut suburbs, after an Israeli strike, as seen from Baabda, Lebanon. — Reuters

there had been “a certain progress” in ceasefire talks, whilst adding the war was not yet over.

The Lebanese government has repeatedly called for a ceasefire based on the full implementation of a UN Resolution that ended a war between the group and Israel in 2006.

The resolution calls for the area south of the Litani to be free of all weapons other than those of the Lebanese state. Lebanon and Israel have accused each other of

violating the resolution.

Israel’s offensive has driven more than 1 million people from their homes in Lebanon, sparking a humanitarian crisis.

Since hostilities erupted a year ago, Israeli attacks on Lebanon have killed 3,243 people and injured 14,134, the Lebanese health ministry said. Hezbollah attacks have killed roughly 100 civilians and soldiers in northern Israel, the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights and southern Lebanon over the last year. — Reuters



An aerial photo shows rescuers ferrying stranded residents from their flooded houses at a village in Ilagan town, Isabela province. — AFP

FIFTH STORM BEARS DOWN ON PHILIPPINES

MANILA: The Philippines prepared on Tuesday to evacuate potentially tens of thousands of people as the fifth major storm in three weeks bore down on the archipelago shortly after the onslaught of Typhoon Toraji. Now a weakened tropical storm, Toraji blew out to sea overnight after causing relatively limited damage and no reported deaths.

But Tropical Storm Usagi is now just two days away from the coast of Luzon, the archipelago nation’s largest and most populous island, and gaining strength, the national weather agency said. “It’s looking like it

will follow the track of (Yinxing),” civil defence chief Rueli Rapsing of Cagayan province said, referring to a typhoon that struck the northern tip of the country last week.

“We preemptively evacuated 40,000 people that time, so we could be looking at the same scenario and evacuate 40,000 individuals again,” he said.

Rapsing said the water level of the Cagayan river, the country’s largest, was four metres above normal, preventing more than 5,000 people who were previously evacuated from returning home. — AFP

MASSIVE CRASH

35 killed in south China car ramming



A driver has killed 35 people and wounded 43 others in southern China, a day after the car ploughed down people exercising in a sports centre in the city of Zhuhai. Preliminary investigations suggested that the driver, surnamed Fan, had been “triggered by his dissatisfaction with the division of property following his divorce”, the police said in a statement. Chinese President Xi Jinping has urged “all-out efforts” to treat the injured people. — AFP

SECRET OPERATION

Fukushima nuclear debris arrives at lab



Radioactive debris removed by a robot from Japan’s stricken Fukushima nuclear plant has arrived at a research lab near Tokyo. The announcement comes after operator Tokyo Electric Power Company said that a trial debris removal operation using a specially developed device had been completed. Removing this debris is seen as the most daunting challenge because of the dangerously high radiation levels. — AFP

RETALIATE RIGHT

Senegal prime minister calls for vengeance



Senegalese PM Ousmane Sonko called for vengeance following what he described as attacks against supporters of his Pastef party by the opposition during the campaign for parliamentary elections. Sonko spoke of clashes in the capital Dakar, the northern city of Saint-Louis and the central town of Koungheul. He blamed the attacks on supporters of Dakar mayor Barthelemy Dias, who heads a rival coalition and was convicted of homicide in 2011. — AFP

REVIVINGSCHOOLS



A man stands next to vehicles damaged in deadly floods in Catarroja, Valencia, Spain. — Reuters

SPAIN’S VALENCIA STRUGGLES AFTER DEADLY FLOODS

CATARROJA: Thousands of students in Spain’s eastern Valencia region returned to classes, two weeks after floods killed over 200 people and devastated towns in the area. Controversy over the regional government’s handling of the floods still rages, and a teachers’ union accused it of exaggerating the number returning and leaving the clean-up to teachers and pupils. Twenty-three people remain missing in the Valencia region after heavy rains caused rivers to overflow, sending tides of muddy water through densely populated city suburbs, drowning people in cars and underground car parks, and collapsing homes.

A total of 47 schools in 14 affected municipalities reopened to more than 22,000 children on Monday, the region’s education department said. Last week, it said it expected around 70% of students in the worst-affected areas to return this week. “The schools that have opened their doors today have followed cleaning and disinfection protocols to ensure maximum safety for students, teachers and staff,” it added. — **Reuters**



SERBIANS DEMAND RESIGNATIONS

People attend a protest in front of the Serbian government building in Belgrade, Serbia. Thousands of protesters gathered in front of the Serbian government building demanding arrests of those responsible for an accident at a railway station in the northern town of Novi Sad in which 14 people were killed. — Reuters

World leaders meet for climate talks, big names missing

BAKU: Dozens of world leaders convene in Azerbaijan on Tuesday for COP29 but many big names are skipping the UN climate talks where the impact of Donald Trump’s election victory is keenly felt.

More than 75 leaders are expected in Baku over two days but the heads of some of the most powerful and polluting economies are not attending this year’s summit.

Just a handful of leaders from the G20 — which accounts for nearly 80 per cent of planet-heating greenhouse gas emissions — are expected in Baku, including UK Prime

Minister Keir Starmer.

The British leader will unveil an “ambitious” update to the UK’s climate goals, and said he wanted his country “to show leadership on the climate challenge.”

Joe Biden, Xi Jinping, Narendra Modi and Emmanuel Macron are among G20 leaders missing the event, where uncertainty over future US unity on climate action hung over the opening day.

“It’s not an ideal situation,” acknowledged Steven Guilbeault, Canada’s environment minister. “But in 30 years of COP, it’s not the first time that we’ve faced obstacles,” he said. “Certainly, everything is still possible.”



Britain’s PM Keir Starmer attends the climate change conference COP29 in Baku. — Reuters

Washington’s top climate envoy John Podesta is seeking to reassure countries in Baku that Trump’s re-election will not end US efforts on global warming, even if the issue will be “on the back burner”.

The host of the UN climate summit in Azerbaijan on Tuesday defended fossil fuels and the right of countries to exploit them as dozens of world leaders arrived for the COP29 conference.

In the opening address, President Ilham Aliyev said Azerbaijan had been subject to “slander and blackmail” for its use of fossil fuels and that no country should be judged for its

natural resources.

“Quote me that I said that this is a gift of the God, and I want to repeat it today here at this audience,” Aliyev told delegates.

“Oil, gas, wind, sun, gold, silver, copper, all... are natural resources and countries should not be blamed for having them and should not be blamed for bringing these resources to the market, because the market needs them.” The remarks were slammed by environmental groups.

The meeting’s top priority is landing a hard-fought deal to boost funding for climate action in developing countries. — AFP

Blinken in emergency Brussels trip on Ukraine

US SECRETARY of State Antony Blinken was set to head on an emergency trip to Brussels to discuss how to support Ukraine with European allies in the race before Donald Trump takes the White House. The top US diplomat under outgoing President Joe Biden will meet “with his Nato and European Union counterparts to discuss support for Ukraine in its defence against Russia’s aggression,” State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said in a statement.

Trump’s election on November 5, coupled with a political crisis in Germany, have escalated fears in Europe on the future of assistance for Ukraine as it battles Russians. Trump has in the past voiced admiration for Russian President Vladimir Putin and scoffed at the \$175 billion in US assistance committed for Ukraine since Moscow’s 2022 attack.

The Biden administration has made clear it plans in its remaining weeks to push through the more than \$9 billion of remaining funding appropriated by Congress for weapons and other security assistance to Ukraine.

French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday renewed his calls for Europe to assume more responsibility for its own defence, saying it had for “too long avoided bearing the burden of its own security”.

Speaking alongside Nato chief Mark Rutte, Macron said he was “delighted” that other nations were falling in line with his longstanding call to collectively invest more in defence.

Nato chief Mark Rutte called on Western countries to ramp up support for Ukraine in its fight against Russia, saying Kyiv required more than just being kept “in the fight”. “We must do more than just keep Ukraine in the fight,” Rutte told reporters.

German Foreign Minister Annalena



Rescuers work at the site of an apartment building hit by a Russian missile strike in Dnipropetrovsk region, Ukraine. — Reuters

Baerbock warned on Monday that Putin could take advantage of the US post-election transition to press his advantage. “We don’t have time to wait until spring,” she said. Both Ukraine and Moscow have seen a spike in drone attacks. The New York Times reported that Russia has amassed 50,000 troops, including North Koreans, to attempt to dislodge Ukrainian forces.

Trump in his first term aggressively pushed Europe to step up defence

spending and questioned the fairness of Nato, the US-backed transatlantic alliance dating from the Cold War that has been robustly defended by Biden.

“It is safe to say that whatever approach the US leadership takes towards Ukraine, Europe will have to step up, and we will have to take the lead in supporting Ukraine’s defence efforts and macro financial stability,” said Olena Prokopenko of the German Marshall Fund of the United States. — **AFP**

Rubio tipped for secretary of state in Trump cabinet

WASHINGTON: US President-elect Donald Trump announced new members of his incoming administration, and was expected to pick Senator Marco Rubio as secretary of state.

Both Rubio and Congressman Michael Waltz, who has been lined up for the powerful National Security Advisor role, have notably hawkish views on China, which they see as a threat and challenge to US economic and military might.

The two appointees, both from Florida, would be key architects of Trump’s “America First” foreign policy, with the incoming president having promised to end the wars raging in Ukraine and the Middle East, and avoid any more US military entanglements. The 78-year-old Republican tycoon has

The two appointees would be key architects of Trump’s “America First” foreign policy, with the incoming president having promised to end the wars raging in Ukraine and the Middle East, and avoid any more US military entanglements.

vowed his second stint in power will result in a radical shake-up of the federal government. Trump announced immigration official Tom Homan as the country’s “border czar” on Monday, tasking him with fulfilling his key domestic promise of mass deportations of undocumented migrants.

US media also reported that Stephen Miller was set to be his deputy chief of staff with a broad portfolio. New York congresswoman Elise Stefanik, a hardline defender of Israel, got the nod for UN ambassador, Trump’s transition team said in a statement. In a further announcement, Trump’s team said Lee Zeldin, an early political ally, would be proposed as Environmental Protection Agency

(EPA) chief with a mandate to slash climate and pollution regulations that are considered red tape by businesses.

Top nominations, including for Stefanik, Zeldin as well as the secretary of state, would need approval by the Senate, but Trump is hoping to bypass oversight from the upper chamber by making appointments while it is in recess. He has turned the issue into a loyalty test, insisting that any Republican seeking to be the leader of the Senate “must agree” to recess appointments.

Trump will be inaugurated in January, and had made one appointment, naming his campaign manager Susie Wiles as his White House chief of staff, a position that does not require Senate confirmation. — **AFP**

OPINION

Tiny organisms, massive impact on environment



RUMAITH
AL BUSAIDI

The writer is an environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development. Follow her on X @rumaithabusaidi

AS COP 29 unfolds, the global community faces a pivotal moment in addressing the escalating climate crisis. Dubbed the “Finance COP,” this conference zeroes in on mobilising substantial funds, particularly for developing nations that bear the brunt of environmental degradation. The urgency is palpable. Developing countries are advocating for a significant increase in climate finance, seeking to elevate commitments to at least \$1 trillion annually by 2035.

“Without the private sector, there is no climate solution. The world needs more funds, and it needs them faster,” emphasised COP 29 president’s opening remarks. His words reflect a consensus that government resources alone are insufficient; unlocking private capital is essential to finance the transition to a low-carbon economy. Among the innovative solutions introduced at the conference, microbial technologies have emerged as a promising avenue for both environmental impact and investment opportunity.

On the conference’s opening day, a

groundbreaking study unveiled by an international team of scientists advocated for deploying microbial technologies as effective tools against the climate catastrophe. Microorganisms, though often overlooked, play a pivotal role in Earth’s ecological balance. They drive biogeochemical cycles, regulate greenhouse gas emissions, and influence carbon sequestration in soils and oceans. Enhancing microbial activity offers significant opportunities for climate mitigation and presents attractive prospects for investment.

Microbial strategies uniquely meet both environmental and financial goals, positioning them as low-risk, high-reward opportunities for private investors. Enhancing microbial activity in soils and oceans can boost carbon sequestration, reducing atmospheric CO₂ levels while improving soil health—a key consideration for sustainable agriculture and food security. Methanotrophic bacteria can oxidise methane, a potent greenhouse gas, converting it into less harmful substances. This presents a direct approach to addressing methane emissions, which

Capitalising on the power of microbes and mobilising the necessary funds can accelerate progress toward a sustainable future.

are a critical focus due to methane’s substantial global warming potential.

To facilitate the deployment of these microbial technologies, the study’s authors propose the formation of a global, science-based task force. The convergence of finance and microbial innovation at the conference exemplifies the multifaceted approach needed to tackle the climate crisis. Now is the time for both investors and policymakers to recognise microbial innovation as a critical lever in the fight against climate change. By embracing these scientific advancements, stakeholders can collaborate to fund solutions that not only mitigate environmental challenges but also promote economic growth and stability.

This conference presents a unique opportunity to integrate financial strategies with microbial solutions. Capitalising on the power of microbes and mobilising the necessary funds can accelerate progress toward a sustainable future. By uniting financial resources with scientific ingenuity, we can confront the climate crisis head-on and forge a resilient, sustainable future.

BEES HELP TACKLE ELEPHANT-HUMAN CONFLICT

ROSE TROUP BUCHANAN

“We used to hate elephants a lot,” Kenyan farmer Charity Mwangome says, pausing from her work under the shade of a baobab tree.

The bees humming in the background are part of the reason why her hatred has dimmed.

The diminutive 58-year-old said rapacious elephants would often destroy months of work in her farmland that sits between two parts of Kenya’s world-renowned Tsavo National Park.

Beloved by tourists — who contribute around 10 per cent of Kenya’s GDP — the animals are loathed by most local farmers, who form the backbone of the nation’s economy.

Elephant conservation has been a roaring success: numbers in Tsavo rose from around 6,000 in the mid-1990s to almost 15,000 elephants in 2021, according to the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS).

But the human population also expanded, encroaching on grazing and migration routes for the herds.

Resulting clashes are becoming the number one cause of elephant deaths, says KWS.

But a long-running project by charity Save the Elephants offered her an unlikely solution — deterring some of nature’s biggest animals with some of its smallest: African honeybees.

A nine-year study published last month found that elephants avoided farms with the ferocious bees 86 per cent of the time.

The deep humming of 70,000 bees is enough to make many flee, including a six-tonne elephant, but Loise Kawira calmly removes a tray in her apiary to demonstrate the intricate combs of wax and honey.

Kawira, who joined Save the Elephants in 2021 as their consultant beekeeper, trains and monitors farmers in the delicate art.

The project supports 49 farmers, whose plots are surrounded by 15 connected hives.

Each is strung on greased wire a few metres off the ground, which protects them from badgers and insects, but also means they shake when disturbed by a hungry elephant.

It has been effective, but recent droughts, exacerbated by climate change, have raised challenges.

For those who can’t afford bees, Save the Elephants offers other solutions, such as metal-sheet fences that clatter when shaken by approaching elephants, and diesel- or chilli-soaked rags that deter them.

It is not always enough.

“I have tried planting but every time the crops are ready, the elephants come and destroy the crops,” Mwalada said. — AFP

Steps to reduce Oman’s debt add economic resilience

OMAN HAS made great strides toward reducing the total public debt. Over the last four years, Oman under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has once again proven that it possesses all capability to turn potential into reality.

Internationally, the world economies went through a stagnant state; a condition marked by a lack of growth and development. This was due to two main reasons: a sharp drop in oil prices and the spread of Covid-19 pandemic, both of which have a significant effect on economies around the world.

To face these circumstances, Oman, during the last years of the reign of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, had no recourse left but to borrow money from international sources.

But, by the time His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq ascended the throne, Oman’s public debt had already reached the highest point of more than RO 15 billion by 2020.

Without adopting the fiscal intervention, Oman could have faced far-reaching economic consequences, potentially impacting the country’s financial stability.

Other countries that fall into a state of being under obligation to pay or repay its debts make strenuous efforts in the face of such difficulties. Countries adopt a series of austerity measures that would adversely affect the welfare of the people.

Oman, however, has been able to sort out its financial issues by paying off loans in phases. As a result, the total public debt has dropped from RO 15.3 billion at the end of 2023 to RO 14.5 billion.

This contributed to a decline in the public debt-to-GDP ratio from 36.5 per cent at the end of 2023 to 33.9 per cent during the first half of this year.



Without doubt, Oman affords abundant possibilities for further growth and development, required to keep up with modern advancements taking place elsewhere in the world



DR MUSALLAM
AL MA'ANI

The author is Dean of Al Zahra College for Women, Oman

Oman has adopted a set of policies and measures to achieve financial stability and reduce the financial burden. This includes controlling government spending, while increasing government revenues by imposing new taxes and modifying the tax structure

From the early days into the throne, His Majesty the Sultan has put economic reforms as his top priority. It has been His Majesty’s firm belief that the economy merits attention before other sectors.

The measures and practices as per the Royal directives aim at optimising and controlling spending to achieve efficiency and reduce unnecessary expenses, leading eventually to the rationalisation of expenditure.

To this effect, Oman has adopted a set of policies and measures to achieve financial stability and reduce the financial burden. This includes controlling government spending, while increasing government revenues by imposing new taxes and modifying the tax structure.

Hand in hand with such measures, policies with an aim to stimulate economic growth have been introduced to create an environment conducive of economic growth for foreign investors, while providing incentives for small and medium enterprises.

Another important step taken by Oman has been to diversify the economy by relying on other

sources of income and reducing dependence on the oil sector, so that the country’s investment portfolio is balanced by dividing funds among different sectors such as tourism, industry, and agriculture.

All such measures are taken in line with Oman Vision 2040, which further pays special attention to transparency and accountability, to ensure that resources are carefully spent and government spending strictly adheres to allocated budgets.

Oman can now enjoy reasonable self-esteem and confidence and satisfaction in the country’s ability to handle economic contingencies as the total public debt is declining.

In fact, Oman, lucky to have a leadership marked by keen discernment and a capacity for sound judgement, shall have a strong and diverse economy.

Characterised by careful management of resources, thrifty and efficient use of material resources, and frugality in expenditures, the country’s economy witnesses a rapid growth and expansion, along with nation-wide practical and industrial significance.

One year on... what’s it like for Gaza children?



SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

The writer is a freelance journalist and author who has worked in India and Gulf countries

ALTHOUGH LIFE was tough even before the war in the tiny strip of Gaza, the misery, beyond the destruction of critical infrastructure, including roads, schools, and hospitals, is being further compounded by massive loss of life.

As difficult as all this deadliest conflict for children in modern times is to read and to watch, it's important the world does not look away. The horrors of Gaza are almost unspeakable!

This confirms what António Guterres, UN Secretary-General, said earlier: “If there is a hell on earth, it is the lives of children in Gaza. There are few places in the world that evoke such a strong visceral response as Gaza.”

In all wars, it is children who suffer the most. No matter how much the soldiers try to limit this. Since the attack on October 7, 2023, and the unrelenting bombardment of the Gaza Strip that followed, children have been killed, abducted, maimed, and exposed to deeply distressing events.

According to the latest UN report, during the first six months of Israel's war in Gaza, nearly 70 per cent of the fatalities were women and children, of which 44 per cent were children, with the biggest single category aged five to nine, followed by those aged 10 to 14, and then those aged up to and including four. The UN estimates that some 40 per cent of the people in Gaza have

lost their identification cards and other documents, making it harder to identify unaccompanied children and reunite them with their families.

The report conforms the Oxfam report that too revealed that more women and children have been killed by Israel in Gaza over the past year than in any other conflict over the past two decades in a single year.

However, a study by The Lancet Journal showed that the figures being made available to the world could be inexact due to the peculiar circumstances, including the destruction of infrastructure and limited resources in the Gaza Strip, that make data collection difficult.

A social worker in Gaza said in his observations on the situation in Gaza that people are “crammed together in such a small area and sustaining continuous bombardment with no escape. It's casualties beyond belief.”

It is not a fly-on-the-wall comment by an onlooker. This is the ground reality, as the United Nations confirms that “there are unprecedented levels of killings, death, injury, starvation, illness, and disease.”

In this is the short film “One Year In,” which provides a raw insight into life in Gaza that is rarely seen in the mainstream media. In addition to sharing stories of the realities of life in Gaza, the film released by the Medical Aid for Palestinians calls for “meaningful action from the international community to enforce a ceasefire, uphold international law, and protect Palestinians

It is not a fly-on-the-wall comment by an onlooker. This is the ground reality, as the United Nations confirms, there are unprecedented levels of killings, death, injury, starvation, illness and disease

from potential genocide.”

At the beginning of this month, Unicef warned that the situation unfolding in North Gaza is apocalyptic. “The entire Palestinian population in North Gaza is at imminent risk of dying from disease, famine, and violence,” it cautioned the world leaders.

Depriving children of access to food and essential services puts their lives at risk, as do attacks on civilian areas and infrastructure, including health centres, schools, and water and sanitation systems.

As reports indicate, Gaza's children are suffering record levels of psychological trauma and terror. Many are left with no place to stay and are facing an acute shortage of food and safe drinking water.

The children of Gaza deserve the chance to heal. They still have dreams, they still have hopes, and they still have aspirations. But what is lacking is the right support mechanism.

As Unicef insists, “A child is a child. Children everywhere must be protected at all times and must never come under attack.” Or the judgement and the revenge of those children, after their survival, may be unsparing, indiscriminate, and terrible, too!

All parties to the conflict should comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. The atrocities in Gaza must end, but this cannot happen through words; it must happen through action.

After all, events in Gaza represent a deeply rooted moral failure for which all must share some blame!

SRI LANKA’S LEFTIST PRESIDENT FACES PARLIAMENT TEST

AMAL JAYASINGHE

Sri Lanka’s new leftist leader has drawn strong support from an unexpected source as he aims to increase his parliamentary seats from three to a majority in Thursday’s elections. President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, 55, an admirer of Karl Marx and Che Guevara, is supported by the nation’s largest private sector trade and industry body.

Dissanayake assumed office in September following public discontent over the 2022 economic crisis. The Ceylon Chamber of Commerce (CCC) has endorsed the socialist agenda of his People’s Liberation Front (JVP), aligning with its proposals for economic recovery. Some business leaders speculate Sri Lanka could adopt economic models similar to those of China or Vietnam under Dissanayake, whose party logo features the international communist symbol of the hammer and sickle. “In the first term of Dissanayake, I would say they will be far better than Vietnam in terms of having a full democratic setup,”

Business leaders have speculated the country could follow the economic models of China or Vietnam under Dissanayake, whose party sports the hammer and sickle motif of the international communist movement in its logo

said Imran Furkan from Australia-based geopolitical risk analysis firm Tresync. “Democracy is deeply rooted in Sri Lanka, unlike in Vietnam, which has been communist for a long time.”

Furkan expects the JVP to secure a comfortable victory in the parliamentary elections and implement reforms, including austerity measures introduced by the

previous right-wing leader Ranil Wickremesinghe, as part of a \$2.9 billion IMF bailout.

Dissanayake’s party, which held only three seats in the previous parliament, faces little challenge this time. “Campaigning from the opposition side is very low,” PAFFREL head Rohana Hettiarachchie said, though he noted that this year’s campaign has remained peaceful.

CCC chief Duminda Hulangamuwa not only supports the new administration’s plans but has accepted an honorary role as Dissanayake’s economic adviser.

Hulangamuwa recently told reporters that the president is committed to advancing the IMF bailout, which requires reforms for loss-making state enterprises, subsidy cuts, and ending tax holidays.

Dissanayake’s policy focuses on reforms to bring macroeconomic stability and inclusive growth, according to Hulangamuwa. Ex-president Wickremesinghe’s policies had alleviated shortages of essentials like food, fuel, and medicines, ending hyperinflation and returning the country to growth, but they left many Sri Lankans struggling financially. — AFP

Middle powers will make a multipolar world

CHINA’S RISE has challenged America’s undisputed hegemony

over the world economy – a status the United States has enjoyed since the Soviet Union’s collapse. While some American national-security elites seek continued US primacy, others seem resigned to an increasingly bipolar world. A more likely outcome, however, is a multipolar world where middle powers exert considerable countervailing force, thus preventing the US and China from imposing their interests on others.

Middle powers include India, Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa, Turkiye and Nigeria – all large economies with a significant footprint in the global economy or in their regions. They are far from rich and account for a significant share of the world’s poorest people, yet they also have large, consumption-oriented middle classes and considerable technological capabilities. The combined GDP (in purchasing-power-adjusted terms) of the six countries mentioned already exceeds that of the US and is projected to grow by 50 per cent by 2029.

Typically, these countries have distinctive foreign policies that reject clear alignment with either the US or China. Contrary to what many in the US believe, middle powers have no strong affinity for China, nor do they want to align with it at the expense of their relationship with the US. In fact, their closer ties with China have often been driven by US policy. America’s weaponisation of its trade and financial might has impelled them to hedge their bets.

The middle powers are unlikely to form a formidable bloc, primarily because their interests are too diverse for a common economic or security agenda. Even in formal groupings, their collective impact has been limited. The BRICS (originally Brazil, Russia, India, China, and



The leaders of the middle powers do not want a world where they are forced to take sides.

later South Africa) was launched in 2009 with high expectations but has achieved little beyond providing photo opportunities for its leaders.

Yet, it is difficult to see how such a diverse group could act cohesively. The worst outcome might be that the grouping could reinforce autocratic tendencies among its members, even those who are democratically elected.

Many economists and political scientists hold that a stable global economy requires a hegemon, like the US after 1945 or Britain during the gold standard. According to the theory of “hegemonic stability,” a superpower is needed to shoulder the costs of running an open world economy, such as keeping sea lanes open or enforcing trade rules. Consequently, multipolarity is often seen as a path to chaos and economic disintegration.

But this view is increasingly outdated. Though the degree of openness will vary by country, no nation today has an interest in completely isolating itself from the global economy. Governments must balance the benefits of open trade with support for their industries to develop new capabilities. Each country is best suited to determine its own terms of engagement with the world economy.



DANI RODRIK

The writer is Professor of International Political Economy at Harvard Kennedy School, is President of the International Economic Association and the author of Straight Talk on Trade: Ideas for a Sane World Economy

An ideal scenario would be a world where the US, possibly with China, provided essential global public goods – such as concessional finance and technology access for climate mitigation. But this is not our current reality.

The US and other major economies are poorly positioned to supply the global public goods the world needs, and the disposition in their capitals is unlikely to change soon.

Moreover, as many middle powers have observed, hegemonic power can be wielded coercively. It can be used to enforce self-serving rules or punish countries that do not align with the hegemon’s foreign-policy goals, as seen with the internationalisation of US sanctions against Iran and Russia.

The most crucial contribution of middle powers may be to demonstrate the viability of a multipolar world and diverse development paths. They offer a vision for the global economy that does not rely on the dominance of either the US or China.

However, to be effective role models, middle powers must act responsibly – both in their interactions with smaller nations and in promoting political accountability at home.

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SPORTS

KEY SUPPORT



TIBIAAN PROPERTIES SPONSORS OMAN AT PAN ARAB GOLF

MUSCAT: In a significant step for Omani golf, Tibiaan has announced its sponsorship of the Oman national golf team for their participation in the upcoming Men's Pan Arab Golf Championship, set to take place on November 20 in Ajman, UAE. This prestigious event will gather elite golfers from across the Arab region, providing Oman's national team with an invaluable opportunity to compete and showcase their skills on an international stage.

This sponsorship marks a new era of collaboration between the Oman Golf Association (OGA) and Omani companies, reflecting the OGA's strategic efforts to build strong partnerships within the local business community. The initiative aims to foster national pride and unity by encouraging Omani companies to actively support and invest in the development of local sports, particularly golf, which is gaining popularity within the Sultanate of Oman.

Faiz Mohammad Riaz, Vice-Chairman of the OGA, highlighted the importance of such partnerships, stating, "We are thrilled to have Tibiaan as a sponsor for our national team. Their support is instrumental in helping our athletes compete internationally, and it's a testament to the strong commitment of Omani businesses to the success of our national sports programmes. We look forward to this collaboration inspiring more local companies to join us in promoting Oman's presence in regional and global sports."

Fahad al Ismaili, Founder of Tibiaan, emphasised the synergy between real estate and golf, saying, "Real estate and golf share a common vision of creating vibrant communities where people can live, relax, and thrive. Just as golf developments enhance the quality of life in neighbourhoods, we at Tibiaan aim to build spaces that foster a sense of belonging and elevate lifestyles. Supporting Oman's national golf team is a natural extension of this mission, as we believe in backing initiatives that promote excellence, both in sports and in our communities. We are excited to help showcase Oman's talent on the international stage."

The championship in Ajman is expected to attract supporters from across the Arab world, further enhancing sports diplomacy in the region and showcasing the talents of Omani athletes on a prestigious platform. Tibiaan's sponsorship highlights a growing trend of local business engagement in sports, supporting the national team's goal of elevating Oman's standing in international golf.

Oman aim to bounce back against Palestine tomorrow



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, NOV 12

OMAN HOPE to make a strong comeback after their recent defeat to Jordan as they prepare to face Palestine on Thursday in the fifth match of Group B in the AFC Asian Qualifiers - Road to 26. The match is set to kick off at 8:00 pm (Oman time) at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. The Red Warriors and Palestine both understand that anything less than a victory could jeopardise their Fifa World Cup ambitions at an early stage or place them in a challenging position.

Oman's players, under the guidance of head coach Rasheed Jaber, are in good form after completing a series of warm-up sessions at Seeb Stadium and Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, the venue for the match.

SEVERAL INJURIES

Oman are currently facing several injuries in the squad, including Salah al Yahaye, Ali al Busaidy, Yazeed al Mashani and Es-sam al Subhi. The coaching staff, led by Rasheed Jaber and his team, have focused



on finding suitable replacements during recent training sessions.

Meanwhile, Bangkok United's Mohsin al Ghassani has returned to Muscat Governorate to join the team's latest training sessions and is expected to be a key player in the attack. During the final training session at Seeb Stadium, coach Rasheed

implemented technical and tactical drills to ensure the players' readiness and team cohesion before these crucial matches against Palestine and Iraq. Earlier warm-up sessions prioritised maintaining the players' fitness levels, as well as developing their strength and endurance.

HOME SUPPORT

The 'Red Warriors' will rely on home support to achieve positive results in the upcoming matches against Palestine and Iraq. Oman will aim to secure vital points in these two games to keep their hopes alive.

Following a tough qualification journey, Oman currently hold fourth place in the standings with three points, behind leaders South Korea, who have 10 points. Jordan and Iraq follow with seven points each. The recent 4-0 defeat against Jordan in Amman highlighted the need for a strong response, and the squad is now focused on turning things around in these must-win home fixtures to keep their World Cup dreams alive.

The coaches' press conference will take place on Wednesday, with a technical meeting scheduled beforehand to discuss match-related matters.

Musandam Governor, Oman Athletics partner to boost sports, tourism

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, NOV 12

The Office of the Governor of Musandam and the Oman Athletics Association (OAA) signed a strategic partnership agreement on Monday at the Kempinski Hotel. Representing the Governor's Office at the signing was Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, while the Oman Athletics Association was represented by its chairman, Said al Hajri.

This agreement aims to support and enhance sports activities and develop sports infrastructure in the Musandam Governorate. The partnership is part of joint efforts to promote sports activities, expand youth participation, and provide a comprehensive sports environment that nurtures talent and improves the fitness of young people. At the conclusion of the event, the Oman Athletics chairman presented a commemorative gift to the Governor of Musandam.

After signing the agreement, Sayyid Ibrahim al Busaidy expressed his apprecia-



tion for this partnership, highlighting its importance in supporting the sports and tourism sectors in Musandam Governorate. He emphasised that this would meet the needs of the youth and local development requirements. Al Busaidy expressed hope that the partnership would be a fruitful step in enhancing the governorate's status as a distinguished tourist destination.

He added that this unique partnership with Oman Athletics will allow the association to be part of the 'Musandam Winter' programme calendar. He looked forward to

seeing these sports activities make a significant impact, with the association contributing to high standards and creating a qualitative leap for the sport in the governorate, benefiting the enthusiastic younger generation interested in sports.

Al Busaidy emphasised that these events would not only be sports activities but also valuable additions to the tourism and economic sectors in Musandam Governorate, attracting visitors and stimulating tourism and economic growth. This would enhance the governorate's position as a distinguished destination for sports and tourism events at the national level.

On his part, Said al Hajri confirmed that the signing of this agreement aligns with Musandam Governorate's preparations for the 'Musandam Winter' event and the association's belief in the importance of sports in supporting tourism and the economy. He added that the agreement aims to organise sports events, including athletics and road races, in the governorate, supporting the sports sector in cooperation with governo-

rate races and Sabco Sports.

Al Hajri explained that the agreement includes organising various sports events, including a road race with multiple distances suited to all levels: 2 kilometres for beginners, 5 km for amateurs, and up to 10 and 21 km for professional runners. The race seeks to attract participants from various parts of the world, including neighbouring countries, allowing them to enjoy Musandam's stunning natural scenery and promoting sports and cultural exchange.

He added that the OAA is coordinating comprehensively with Sabco Sports to ensure this event is organised at the highest level, preparing the race to attract professional racers from different countries, which will raise the level of competition and offer a unique experience for both participants and visitors. All necessary international standards for such events will be adhered to. He noted that this initiative comes as Oman prepares to host other global sports events in the coming years.

PIC by Faisal al Balushi

LEG INJURY



New Zealand's Lockie Ferguson celebrates after taking the wicket of Sri Lanka's captain Charith Asalanka during the second and final Twenty20 international in Dambulla on November 10. — AFP

NEW ZEALAND
HAT-TRICK HERO
FERGUSON OUT OF
SRI LANKA ODIS

COLOMBO: New Zealand fast bowler Lockie Ferguson is out of the one-day international series against Sri Lanka with a leg injury, days after taking a hat-trick against the same opposition. Ferguson went off for treatment straight after becoming the sixth New Zealander to take a Twenty20 international hat-trick during his second over in Sunday's series-levelling win in Dambulla. Seamer Adam Milne replaces the 33-year-old white-ball specialist and will join the squad in Dambulla ahead of Wednesday's first ODI of a three-match series. "We're gutted for Lockie," said New Zealand coach Gary Stead. "He showed in the space of just two overs what an asset he is with the ball and he's also brought a lot of leadership to this group. "We're hopeful his recovery will be short and he'll be back out on the field in no time." New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner said it was a "massive blow". Sri Lanka have their own injury woes, with leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga ruled out due to a hamstring strain. Dushan Hemantha has been drafted in, but Jeffrey Vandersay is expected to take the lead role. "It's a setback, sure, but Jeffrey stepped up when Hasaranga was injured against India and performed admirably," Sri Lankan captain Charith Asalanka said. "We're building strong bench strength, and replacements have been stepping up when called upon". The second and third ODIs are in Pallekele on November 17 and 19. — AFP

Mitchell magic takes Cavs to 12-0 as Bulls beaten

DONOVAN Mitchell scored 36 points as the unbeaten Cleveland Cavaliers came from behind once more to preserve their 100 per cent start to the season with a 119-113 victory over the Chicago Bulls on Monday. The Cavaliers, who overcame a 14-point deficit to beat Brooklyn on Saturday, were again forced to dig deep, battling back from nine points down in the third quarter for a road victory that takes them to 12-0 for the season.

Mitchell led another fine all-round offensive performance from Cleveland, who have emerged as the surprise package of the season and are the only undefeated team in the league.

Six Cleveland players finished in double figures, with point guard Darius Garland adding 17 points and Evan Mobley 15.

Caris LeVert, Georges Niang and Ty Jerome all had 12 points each off the bench.

Chicago meanwhile were left ruing their inability to take full advantage after pulling into an 85-76 lead with just over four minutes remaining in the third quarter.

Instead, Cleveland came roaring back with a 9-0 run to tie the game and then pulled ahead to lead by three points heading into the fourth quarter, before closing out victory by outscoring Chicago 24-21 in the final frame.

Zach LaVine led Chicago's scorers with 26 points while Coby White and Nikola Vucevic had 20 points apiece. The Bulls fell to 4-7 with the loss.

"We dug deep," Mitchell said after the win.

"Honestly, the bench saved us. Starters were a little fatigued and I guess teams are coming at us. But we persevered, and shoutout to the bench for that. It's a group effort.

"For us to continue to be what we want to be, that's what it's going to take. It was a complete team win... every night it's somebody different. We're playing for each other, being selfless. We've got to keep it going."

WEMBY SPARKS SPURS

In other games on Monday, French star Victor Wembanyama cut loose with 34 points, 14 rebounds and six assists to help the San Antonio Spurs to a 116-96 blowout against the Sacramento Kings.

Sacramento started brightly, moving into a 26-22 lead after the first quarter.

But San Antonio took charge in the second quarter, pouring in 38 points including seven three-pointers to move into a lead that they never relinquished thereafter.

All of San Antonio's starters post double-digit points tallies, with Julian Champagnie adding 13 points and veteran Chris Paul 12.

The Oklahoma City Thunder meanwhile



Chicago Bulls' Zach LaVine (8) defends against Cleveland Cavaliers' Donovan Mitchell (45) during the first half at United Center. — Imagin Images

bounced back from Sunday's home defeat to Golden State with a gutsy 134-128 home defeat of the Los Angeles Clippers.

Oklahoma City's defeat on Sunday had been overshadowed by a gloomy injury update to towering young star Chet Holmgren, who was confirmed to have suffered a fractured pelvis after falling to the court against the Warriors.

However the Thunder showed no sign of

a hangover from that loss on Monday, with Shai Gilgeous-Alexander erupting for 45 points in a virtuoso performance.

Jalen Williams added 28 points while Luguentz Dort finished with 19.

In other games on Monday, the Brooklyn Nets downed the New Orleans Pelicans 107-105 on the road, while the Houston Rockets cruised past the Washington Wizards 107-92. — AFP

Gurbaz, Omarzai propel Afghanistan to series win over Bangladesh

SHARJAH: Rahmanullah Gurbaz hit a cracking century and Azmatullah Omarzai showed all round skills on Monday to give Afghanistan a five-wicket victory in the third one-day international and a series win over Bangladesh. Omarzai took four wickets before hitting an undefeated 77-ball 70 and Opener Gurbaz hit a 120-ball 101 as Afghanistan chased down a 245-run target in 48.2 overs in Sharjah. Bangladesh were lifted to 244-8 by Mohammad Mahmudullah, run out off the last ball of the innings for run-a-ball 98, and a solid 66 by stand-in skipper Mehidy Hasan Miraz. The victory gave Afghanistan a 2-1 win in the series in Sharjah. Afghanistan won the first match by 92 runs while Bangladesh took the second by 68 runs.



The series win is Afghanistan's third successive this year, having also beaten Ireland (2-0) and South Africa (2-1) following their wins over England, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in last year's World Cup in India. Bangladesh pacers Mustafizur Rahman (2-50) and Nahid Rana (2-40) had jolted

Afghanistan to 84-3 before Gurbaz and Omarzai added 100 for the fourth wicket.

Gurbaz, who hit seven sixes and five boundaries in his eighth ODI century, fell in the 39th over with 61 needed as Bangladesh pressed.

Omarzai hit five sixes and three boundaries added 58 runs with

Mohammad Nabi (27-ball 34) to avoid any turnaround, hitting the winning six. Afghanistan skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi said he was proud of his team. "I am very happy as a captain," said Shahidi.

"When we lost the toss we were a bit worried because it's tough to bat second in Sharjah but our

batters did very well." Miraz praised Afghanistan. "I think credit goes to Afghanistan the way they played in this series," said Miraz. "Gurbaz and Omarzai did very well and we couldn't get wickets to win the match." Earlier, Bangladesh, without injured skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto, were given a sound 53-run start by Soumya Sarkar (24) and Tanzid Hasan (19) before four wickets fell in for 19 runs in 38 balls. Mahmudullah and Miraz repaired the innings with a 155-run fifth wicket stand as they blunted Afghanistan spinners, who managed just two wickets between them. Omarzai took a career best 4-37, improving on his 3-56 against Sri Lanka at Pallekele earlier this year. — AFP

SPORTS

ARAB WOMEN’S SAILING



OMAN SAIL SQUAD
READY TO TAKE ON
REGION’S BEST

MUSCAT: A five-strong team of female sailors from Oman Sail will head to Bahrain for the 1st Arab Women’s Sailing Championship in Bahrain, beginning on November 12 and wrapping up on November 16, 2024. The team will join sailors from across the region as they lineup alongside



Sultan al Zadjali

athletes from Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates at a new landmark for women’s sailing in Optimist, ILCA 4 and ILCA 6 sailing. Representing Oman will be Marwa bint Salim al Khaifiyah (ILCA), Ibtisam bint Salim al Salmiyah (ILCA), Hadeel bint Yousuf al Mushaifriyah (Optimist), Tarteel bint Zaid al Hasaniyah (Optimist) and Abeer bint Khalil al Zakwaniyah (Optimist). They will be led by Sultan bin Abdulaziz al Zadjali and coached by Hussain bin Said al Jabri. The team has been selected based on previous performance at ranking races and progress throughout the season. All members of the squad represented Oman at the recent Musannah Race Week 2024 where Ibtisam finished third in the ILCA 6 Girls competition.

Sultan bin Abdulaziz al Zadjali, Team Leader, said, “This is a great opportunity for our talented female sailors to gauge their development against their peers from across the region.”

Racing will begin on November 14 after a practice day for all classes on November 12 and a practice race on November 13. All three competing classes will then race each day with the final races being held on November 16 where the prize giving and closing ceremonies will also take place.

Medvedev beats De Minaur to boost ATP Finals bid

FORMER champion Daniil Medvedev brushed aside ATP Finals debutant Alex de Minaur on Tuesday to bounce back from an opening defeat and boost his hopes of making the knock-out phase.

The Russian, who lost his first group-stage match to Taylor Fritz, overpowered De Minaur in Turin to win 6-2, 6-4 and leave his opponent on the brink of elimination.

Australian De Minaur will be knocked out with a match to spare if the other tie in the Ilie Nastase Group between Jannik Sinner and Fritz goes to three sets later on Tuesday.

Medvedev, who lifted the title in 2020, did not face a single break point and broke De Minaur’s serve three times.

The fourth seed will next face world number one and title favourite Sinner on Thursday.

“I decided not to care about it in a good way,” Medvedev said. “If I lose, the season is over, if I win I have another chance on Thursday... I’ll try and do the same the next match, so I don’t care.”

Both players battled to holds in their opening service games but Medvedev broke for a 2-1 lead and never looked back.

He struck 16 winners in the first set and then lost just two points behind his serve in the second.

A break in the ninth game of the second set proved decisive and he closed out victory with another comfortable hold.

ZVEREV MAKES WINNING START On Monday, Alexander Zverev opened his campaign by dispatching Andrey Rublev 6-4, 6-4 in their round-robin opener.

Germany’s Zverev had last faced



Russia’s Daniil Medvedev hits a return to Australia’s Alex De Minaur during their match at the ATP Finals tournament in Turin, Italy, on Tuesday. — AFP

Russian Rublev at the same stage of the finals in 2023 and won by the same score.

Zverev, a two-time winner of this event in 2018 and 2021, moved to second in the John Newcombe group, behind Norway’s Ruud.

The 27-year-old Zverev, the recent winner of the Paris Masters 1000, has climbed back to No.2 in the world this season. After an injury-hit 2022 season he had briefly dropped out of the top 25 in 2023.

“I was never sure I was going to get back to this level,” Zverev said on the court in Turin. “Second year in a row for me here. I still want to get better. I still want to improve on a few things. We’ll see how next year goes.”

Rublev held to love in his first three service games. He won a 13th straight point on serve to open the crucial seventh game, but Zverev then won the next four to break to 15.

Zverev did not allow a break point against his serve all match and converted immediately both times he had the chance.

“I thought it was a very solid match from my end,” said Zverev.

“Andrey is an incredible player, but everyone who plays here is an unbelievable player.

“Against anyone here, you have to play your best to have a chance, you have to be solid, mentally strong. I feel like I did that today, I felt like I used my chances quite well and I’m obviously happy with this win.” — AFP

Zverev, a two-time winner of this event in 2018 and 2021, moved to second in the John Newcombe group, behind Norway’s Ruud

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Oman records GCC’s lowest inflation

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, NOV 12

THE Sultanate of Oman has posted the lowest inflation rate in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, with a year-on-year increase of just 0.4% in September 2024, down from 1.1% in August, according to the latest report by Kamco Invest.

This modest rise in inflation reflects Oman’s continued stability amid challenging global conditions, as the GCC overall has managed to keep inflation rates low despite regional geopolitical tensions, including conflicts in Gaza, Lebanon, and Ukraine.

GCC countries have maintained low inflation largely due to subsidies and strict price controls on essentials such as energy and food, shielding consumers from volatile global price swings.

This stands in stark contrast



GCC countries have maintained low inflation largely due to subsidies and strict price controls on essentials such as energy and food.

to the broader Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, where inflation remains in double digits.

According to Oman’s National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the 0.4% rise in inflation in September was driven primarily by increases in categories like goods and services (+4.33%), food and non-alcoholic beverages (+2.81%), health (+2.44%), and entertainment (+0.71%). Within the food category, vegetables saw the most significant hike at 8.15%, followed by fruits at 6.15% and dairy products at 5.5%.

However, some categories, such as transportation (-3.41%) and household goods (-0.59%), experienced price declines. Housing, utilities, and communication costs remained steady.

Regionally, Oman’s inflation rate is markedly lower than other

GCC countries. Kuwait reported one of the highest rates in the bloc at 2.8%, followed by Dubai at 2.5% and Saudi Arabia at 1.7%. Bahrain and Qatar posted rates of 0.9% and 0.8%, respectively.

Across Oman’s governorates, Musandam recorded the highest inflation at 1.5%, while Muscat saw the lowest rise at 0.19%.

The GCC’s controlled inflation is a stark contrast to global trends. The International Monetary Fund has forecast that global headline inflation will ease from 6.7% in 2023 to 5.8% in 2024 and 4.3% in 2025, driven by the delayed impact of monetary tightening policies.

Oman’s performance underscores the impact of policy measures in shielding the economy from inflationary pressures, solidifying the Sultanate of Oman’s position as a stable market in a turbulent global landscape.

Study stresses need to regulate groundwater extraction in Al Najd

SALALAH: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has announced the findings of its updated study on the mathematical model of groundwater storage for Al Najd region of Dhofar Governorate. Conducted from July 2023 to July 2024, this project forms part of the Ministry’s ongoing efforts to develop, evaluate, and monitor the available water resources.

The study highlights a significant supply of groundwater suitable for agricultural use in Al Najd region while emphasising the importance of preserving this resource through the distribution of extraction rates and proposed development projects across various locations to avoid over-concentration in specific areas, such as Al Shisir, which has seen substantial agricultural expansion over the past decade.

The study highlights the need to curb illegal wells in order to effectively regulate and monitor water extraction rates. It recommends expanding the groundwater monitoring network across the Al Najd region, implementing a regular monitoring programme for large-scale farms and unregulated well fields, and continuously updating the database.

The project complements the study initiated in 2014, aligning with ongoing efforts to assess water resources in Al Najd Basin.

These efforts aim to accurately determine the available water resources in the region and explore their sustainable utilisation through a mathematical model that estimates groundwater reserves, ensuring their long-term sustainability.

Eng Ali bin Bakhit Bait Saeed, Director of the Water Resources Department in Dhofar Governorate, shared with the Oman News Agency that the study covered an extensive area of approximately 89,000 square kilometres in Najd.

He further noted that the Ministry has carried out exploratory drilling projects in Al Najd in 2003, 2007 and 2012, aimed at monitoring and assessing the water



Projected water requirements for key current and future development projects in Al Najd are estimated at 275 million cubic metres.

conditions in Al Najd Basin.

He explained that the Al Najd region is distinguished by its rocky desert landscape, with major wadis flowing through it and sand dunes covering approximately 10 per cent of its northern expanse.

The study offered valuable insights into the hydraulic and hydrogeological properties of the region’s groundwater resources. It also assessed the volume of groundwater that can be sustainably extracted, considering the effects of both current and future agricultural development.

He also emphasised the project’s critical role in collecting, analysing, and studying water data for Al Najd region. This includes determining the annual recharge rates for the groundwater reserves, evaluating current and future extraction rates, developing a mathematical model for managing the region’s groundwater resources and stimulating the region’s four primary aquifers.

The modelling process was based on a thorough analysis and documentation of the available data in the Al Najd region, utilising the internationally recognised system. This mathematical model is adaptable to different hydrological conditions.

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شركة المرافق المركزية

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Tender Announcement

Introduction

Centralized Utility Company LLC “Marafiq” intends to develop a 45 MLD SWRO plant for the purpose of supplying industrial water to an international steel manufacturer. Marafiq is a “one-stop-shop” mandated to provide utilities in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm “SEZAD”. It has developed and is operating the Duqm Independent Power and Water Plant; generates power for distribution; as well as producing and distributing potable water for customers in SEZAD.

This international steel manufacturer is planning to develop Hot Briquette Iron “HBI”, low carbon iron feedstock, production plant at the Port of Duqm in the Sultanate of Oman. The purpose of the steel manufacturer plant will be to supply low carbon iron feedstock to global steel producers including Oman.

Marafiq is inviting proposals from experienced local and international Tenderers to provide Proposals to **Design and Build a 45 MLD SWRO Plant to supply industrial water and wastewater disposal system at Duqm Special Economic Zone (SEZAD)** as described below.

Tender Number	Tender Title	Tender Description	Tender Fees	Last Date of Tender Sale	Bid Submission Date
CUC-WSP-00-000-LE-TND-0017	Design and Build 45 MLD SWRO Plant for supply of industrial water and wastewater disposal system at Duqm.	Marafiq intends to obtain proposal from experienced bidders to provide design and build 45 MLD SWRO Plant for supply of industrial water and wastewater disposal system at Duqm, Oman	3,000 OMR	12 th December 2024	16 th February 2025

Request for proposal

The RFP will be made available in electronic form until 11 am, 12th December 2024.

Interested Tenderers shall contact Marafiq via email to tender@marafiq.om with the subject heading “**Design and build 45MLD SWRO at Duqm**” to receive further instructions related to payment of tender fee and collection of RFP Package.

P.O.Box: 80 P.C: 102
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
www.marafiq.om

ADVERTORIALS



This forward-thinking collaboration embraces cutting-edge technology and supports Oman Vision 2040.

ELEVATUS, VODAFONE OMAN TO REDEFINE TALENT ACQUISITION

MUSCAT: Elevatus, a global leader in AI-driven recruitment solutions, and the strategic partner of OSHRM, is pleased to announce signing a new partnership with Vodafone Oman to redefine talent acquisition in Oman's telecom industry.

This forward-thinking collaboration embraces cutting-edge technology and supports Oman's Vision 2040, which aims to spearhead digital transformation and innovation across telecommunications and human capital sectors.

Vodafone Oman, which has achieved 95% Omanisation, is committed to creating Oman's happiest workplace by fostering an inclusive culture that promotes well-being and career development.

As the telecom sector navigates rapid technological advancements, increasing demand for high-speed services, and the need to attract top talent, Vodafone recognized the need for a recruitment strategy that would drive its ongoing growth.

To enhance its recruitment processes and reduce the manual workload involved in screening thousands of resumes, Vodafone Oman adopted Elevatus' solutions to centralize and streamline its recruitment efforts in one cohesive platform.

This will empower the digital operator to leverage AI-powered features to filter through thousands of candidates instantly, create a branded career page without any coding requirements and assess a mass number of applicants within minutes through one-way video assessments.

By partnering with Elevatus, Vodafone aims to significantly reduce recruitment costs, accelerate the recruitment process and enhance the overall candidate experience—from acquisition to onboarding.

The partnership will enable Vodafone Oman to reduce recruitment costs by 96%, cut hiring time by 90%, and save over 40 hours per hire.

Yara Burgan, CEO and Co-Founder of Elevatus, emphasized the importance of this partnership, stating, "Elevatus in partnership with OSHRM, is committed to advancing the Sultanate's goals by providing AI-driven technology that streamlines recruitment and drives digital transformation within the telecom sector.

Our solutions not only transform hiring practices but also empower companies like Vodafone Oman to lead in their industries. This collaboration is a significant step toward fostering innovation and growth in Oman's telecom industry while aligning with the objectives of Vision 2040."

Fahad al Busaidi, Chief Corporate Affairs at Vodafone Oman, shared, "As a digital-first operator, innovation is at the core of everything we do. Our partnership with Elevatus allows us to further enhance our recruitment processes by integrating AI-powered solutions that not only improve efficiency but also align with our mission to drive digital transformation across all aspects of our business.

Kia Tasman redefines pickup truck in Oman

KIA Corporation has officially unveiled the all-new Kia Tasman, the brand's first pickup truck. Marking the latest addition to Kia's extensive lineup, which includes sedan, SUV, commercial and PBV (Platform Beyond Vehicle) models, the Kia Tasman sets the benchmark for Kia's future pickup range.

The Kia Tasman has been designed to push the boundaries of what's possible from a pickup and invites customers to 'Dive into a New Dimension.'

With its purposeful design and cutting-edge technology, combined with class-leading convenience features and an ultra-spacious, comfortable cabin, the Tasman is poised to redefine standards in the sector, allowing drivers to explore new horizons.

Leveraging more than five decades of expertise developing special-purpose vehicles, including off-roaders, the Kia Tasman is a truly transformative pickup truck that effortlessly meets the needs of both work and leisure activities.

"Kia's first-ever pickup truck was created from the ground up to transform the market and respond to the growing preference for lifestyle-oriented trucks with advanced features," Shared an official from Kia Corporation.

"The Kia Tasman is a progressive pickup truck that follows its own path – not the competition. The Kia Tasman combines true pickup values with exceptional capability and practicality, and advanced features that defy conventional thinking.

This essence is instilled in our global slogan 'Dive into a New Dimension', enabling customers to



The Kia Tasman sets the benchmark for Kia's future pickup range.

The Kia Tasman has been designed to push the boundaries of what's possible from a pickup and invites customers to 'Dive into a New Dimension.'

broaden their horizons. It offers world-first solutions for those seeking a lifestyle vehicle for leisure and outdoor activities while meeting the needs of certain business operators, such as traders and farmers" he said.

The Kia Tasman projects power, confidence and capability in equal measure.

An expansive radiator grille and bumper design emphasise the pickup's width, while the hood trim and grille frame the familiar Kia Tiger Face, featuring vertically oriented signature lighting incorporated into the headlamps.

Just as the Kia Tasman's exterior aesthetic breaks free from conventional thinking, the pickup's interior introduces a bold new dimension of design quality for pickup customers.

Purity and simplicity are prioritised in equal measure through a practical cabin that will remain a dependable partner to the user through the years. The robust and rugged space is in keeping with the character of a pickup truck. The interior design leverages concise, symmetrical proportions to create a stable, balanced appearance.

Large air vents featuring a honeycomb pattern – a key theme of the interior – emphasise the functionality of the ventilation. A multi-function steering wheel and the modern, minimalist lower centre dashboard and tunnel sections with carefully positioned buttons provide intuitive control of the Kia Tasman's advanced technology.

DFI LAUNCHES ‘ROOTED IN OMAN. NURTURING THE FUTURE’ CAMPAIGN

MUSCAT: Dhofar Food and Investment SAOG (DFI) proudly announces the launch of its National Day programme, 'Rooted in Oman. Nurturing the Future,' a year-long campaign honouring Oman's 54th National Day. The campaign highlights DFI's dedication to Oman's heritage, cultural pride, and the nation's continued journey toward growth and prosperity.

Through a series of activities over a year, DFI aims to engage communities across Oman, fostering national pride and reinforcing its commitment to a healthy and sustainable future.

Each month, DFI will host a unique event or initiative to engage Omani communities, encouraging a closer connection to the land, culture, and sustainable practices that form the backbone of DFI's mission.

The year-long programme emphasises



national pride and health-focused initiatives that align with DFI's broad range of products – dairy under Asafwah brand, poultry under Dhofar brand and edible oil under Dhofar and Noof brands.

The celebration will begin with a National Day promotion on Asafwah Instagram platform. Unlike traditional

National Day offers, DFI invites everyone where they can answer a simple question about Oman. With 54 winners selected, 53 will receive goody bags with Asafwah Dairy and Juice products, and one grand prize winner will receive an iPhone 16.

Vipul Bahl, Acting CEO of DFI shared his thoughts on the campaign: "We are immensely proud to launch 'Rooted in Oman. Nurturing the Future' as part of Oman's 54th National Day celebration.

This year-long program reflects DFI's core values and commitment to supporting our communities, fostering national pride, and encouraging healthy, sustainable lifestyles.

Through monthly initiatives, we aim to bring people together and contribute to Oman's vibrant future. This programme honours our heritage and inspires our shared vision for a prosperous Oman."

BankDhofar launches corporate cash deposit machines

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, the second largest bank in Oman by branch network, has launched the Corporate Cash Deposit Machine (CCDM), an innovative solution aimed at enhancing cash management convenience for corporate clients across the Sultanate of Oman.

This new service brings the bank directly to corporate premises, allowing businesses to deposit cash securely on-site and avoid the operational risks associated with large cash transactions.

Designed with businesses in mind, the CCDM eliminates



AMJAD BIN IQBAL AL LAWATI
Chief Retail Banking Officer at BankDhofar

security risks, offering peace of mind to corporate clients by allowing them to deposit funds

the need for corporate clients to transport cash to branches, providing on premises access to cash deposit services.

This not only minimises manual cash handling but also mitigates

within the comfort and safety of their own locations.

The machine, with a capacity to process up to 15,000 notes, is ideal for businesses handling substantial cash volumes, processing 600 notes per minute for quick and efficient transactions.

Additionally, the CCDM offers real-time update to the corporate account, enabling businesses to closely monitor cash flow and manage liquidity.

BankDhofar's CCDM is equipped with advanced security features, ensuring note authenticity and preventing fraud, reinforcing

trust in safe cash handling.

Amjad bin Iqbal al Lawati, Chief Retail Banking Officer at BankDhofar, emphasised the bank's dedication to addressing corporate clients' needs by providing convenient, time-saving solutions.

"We recognise the challenges businesses face with cash handling. Our CCDM solution is designed to streamline this process, allowing corporate clients to focus on growth while we take care of their banking needs," he said.

To ensure seamless integration, BankDhofar offers full support,

including delivery, installation, and training for client staff on CCDM use.

With this service, BankDhofar reaffirms its commitment to advancing digital banking services and supporting Oman's corporate sector through innovative financial solutions that address real operational challenges.

A pioneer in cash recycling technology within Oman and the broader Middle East, BankDhofar continues to lead the way in corporate banking advancements, promoting security, efficiency, and growth across Oman.

SHORT TAKES

Bank Nizwa achieves remarkable performance in Q3



SHAIKH KHALED BIN ABDULLAH AL KHALILI

Chairman of Bank Nizwa's Board of Directors.

MUSCAT: Demonstrating its commitment to sustainable growth and industry leadership, Bank Nizwa, the leading and most trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, recorded a strong financial performance during the third quarter, ending September 30, 2024.

With a net profit of RO 12,431 million, reflecting a notable 6% increase, this upward trajectory not only underscores Bank Nizwa's effective strategic initiatives but also highlights its ability to navigate market fluctuations while adhering to its core Islamic banking principles.

Building on this foundation, the bank adopted a proactive approach to expanding its asset base, with total assets reaching RO 1,770 billion, marking a substantial 13% growth compared to RO 1,570 billion as of September 30, 2023. The financing portfolio experienced a 14% increase, rising to RO 1,507 billion, while customer deposits surged by 20% to RO 1,440 billion. These figures are a testament to the bank's strong market position and effective customer engagement strategies.

Shaikh Khaled bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of Bank Nizwa's Board of Directors, said, "These robust financial results reaffirm Bank Nizwa's strong position in a highly competitive landscape. Our continued progress is a testament to the power of our vision and the meticulous execution of our long-term strategy, which is closely aligned with Oman's socio-economic growth aspirations.

By consistently enhancing shareholder confidence and embracing transformative initiatives, we fortify our leadership and create new avenues for sustainable growth."

He added, "At Bank Nizwa, we relentlessly pursue our growth strategy, developing innovative, Sharia-compliant products and services that cater to evolving customer needs. Our commitment to maintaining the highest standards of compliance and financial resilience ensures we are well-prepared to navigate future challenges."

3RD phase of Unified Treasury Account project completed

MUSCAT: Oman's Ministry of Finance has successfully completed the third phase of its Unified Treasury Account (UTA) project, integrating the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning. With seven entities now included, the project has centralised 95% of government accounts across commercial and Islamic banks, covering 61% of projected state revenues for 2024.

The UTA project aims to streamline government financial operations, ensuring better cash flow management and accurate forecasting.

The Ministry stated that automating government bank transactions has enhanced liquidity efficiency, aligning with fiscal planning targets. Work on the fourth phase of the UTA project is now underway, promising improvements in transparency and financial governance. — **ONA**

SOHAR Port and Freezone joins alliance for industry decarbonisation

MUSCAT: SOHAR Port and Freezone is pleased to announce its membership with the Alliance for Industry Decarbonization (AFID). This alliance is dedicated to expediting the achievement of country-specific Net-Zero goals, promoting the decarbonisation of industrial value chains, and fostering a deeper understanding of renewable energy solutions for the industry.

"Joining the Alliance for Industry Decarbonization is a landmark moment in our sustainability journey," said Dr Abdullah al Abri, Vice-President of Sustainability at SOHAR Port and Freezone.

"This membership aligns perfectly with our strategic objectives and our unwavering commitment to driving positive change. By collaborating with industry leaders and



As an AFID member, SOHAR will enhance its sustainability practices by integrating renewable sources such as green hydrogen and solar power.

New watchdog mooted for health insurance sector

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, NOV 12

AHEAD of the full operationalisation of the Dhamani health insurance platform, scheduled over the course of 2025, officials of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) are weighing a proposal for the institution of a specialised watchdog dedicated to combating potential abuse, manipulation, price-fixing and even monopolisation in the health services sector.

The proposed Oman National Health Bureau (ONHB) has been mooted by OCCI's Health Committee as a safeguard against practices detrimental to the interests of consumers, on the one hand, and service providers, on the other, according to a key official of the Chamber.

"The proposed ONHB's overarching mandate is to ensure that healthcare providers manage their claims processing, payment collection, and revenue generation efficiently," said Murtadha M J Ibrahim al Jamalani, Deputy Chairman – OCCI Health Committee.

"By implementing a robust system, hospitals can increase their cash flow, reduce claim denials, and improve overall financial performance, all while adhering to regulatory requirements and insurance contracts," he stated.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Al Jamalani



By implementing a robust system, hospitals can increase their cash flow, reduce claim denials, and improve overall financial performance, all while adhering to regulatory requirements and insurance contracts.

MURTADHA AL JAMALANI
Chairman - OCCI Health Committee

said the Oman National Health Bureau will serve as an "independent and integrated supervisory authority" with representatives from the Ministry of Health, Financial Services Authority, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Social Development, Royal Oman Police, and OCCI.

ONHB's main functions are to apply corporate governance guidelines, ensure that health providers and hospitals do not engage in manipulation, deter any monopolisation by one or two major players and also handle uninsured cases.

Al Jamalani explained that a sectoral watchdog becomes necessary for several reasons.

For instance, in line with free-market policies, the FSA has left it up to individual insurers to set health

insurance premium rates, credit terms, and other conditions.

Similarly, hospital and treatment fees fall under the purview of healthcare providers.

However, procedures for addressing receivables and outstanding payments remain unclear, potentially giving rise to disputes.

"Outstanding fee receivables for treatment and services provided to insurance company patients over the months and years by health providers are jeopardising the interests of patients, investors, and other stakeholders.

The consequences of these challenges may have an adverse impact on the healthcare and insurance industries, as well as the national economy in general," the official warned.

Furthermore, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Health Committee is keen to work with the FSA, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Labour to formulate a business code of conduct, among other operational manuals, to ensure seamless interactions between all the players involved in the health insurance system.

The grading of hospitals based on their market segmentation is also envisioned.

The plea for a sectoral watchdog comes amid a strong uptick in the performance of the health insurance segment of the insurance industry.



Agricultural projects currently cover 54,000 acres, with plans to expand by an additional 27,000 acres.

their sustainability.

The projected water requirements for key current and future development projects in Al Najd region are estimated at 275 million cubic metres.

This includes 139 million cubic metres allocated to existing agricultural projects, which currently cover 54,000 acres, with plans to expand by an additional 27,000 acres. These projects are concentrated in several key areas, including Thumrait, Hanfeit, Dawkah, Qatbeet, Al Shisr, Saih Al Khairat, Al Mazyouna, Al Hashman and Meitan.

To strengthen these efforts, the Ministry

of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is actively educating farmers on the advantages of implementing smart irrigation systems and selecting optimal irrigation times.

These methods are promoted as vital for reducing water consumption, maximising crop yields, and elevating product quality.

The Ministry further emphasises the critical importance of adhering to regulations, which include obtaining required permits, following established technical standards for well drilling, maintenance, cleaning, and deepening, and observing daily water-use limits.

OPINION

Investor makes last ditch swoop on Revolut shares



ANDY JALIL

The author is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

THE “rigorous” process Revolut went through to secure its banking licence was right, according to former chief secretary to the treasury, John Glen. He said at a Conservatives event at the annual Tory party conference in Birmingham that the digital payments app now had “credibility to grow globally”.

He said: “The UK is brilliant in innovation in financial services. If you look at when I saw the CEO of Revolut, I said, ‘what can I do?’ He says, ‘get me a banking licence’.

“Well, they got their banking licence after several years. It’s right that it was a rigorous process to get licenced, because now they’ve got the credibility to grow globally out of London, and we cannot compete on a sort of quick and dirty regulation.” The fintech firm received its licence in July after a three-year wait for authorisation from the banking watchdog, meaning it will be allowed to offer products like mortgages and credit cards alongside its existing e-money services. Glen’s comments came a week after Revolut announced plans to launch a standalone app based on its wealth management offering.

New report has revealed that Revolut was named in more fraud reports than

any UK bank last year. The firm came under fire for its approach to dealing with financial crime. Revolut said that it found that most scams reported to them start on three social media platforms.

Almost 55 per cent of scam cases in the second half of 2023 came through Facebook, Instagram and X (twitter). Revolut wants the government to take “urgent measures to stop fraud at source” and for tech and telecoms firms to be held liable for scams that result in customers losing money. A United States Private equity firm is mounting a second effort to grow its stake in Revolut at a heavy discount after its previous offer was scuppered by the financial regulator. Jamba Europe, effectively owned by New York-based HOF Capital, has relaunched an offer to buy a “substantial volume” of shares from Revolut investors via the Republic Europe private trading platform.

Republic, formerly known as Seedrs, cancelled Jamba’s original offer on 24 October following pushback from the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). The FCA previously ruled that communication around the office could be seen as a “financial promotion”, which would need specific regulatory approval. Republic’s new letter advertising the offer to shareholders was an “approved financial

New report has revealed that Revolut was named in more fraud reports than any UK bank last year. The firm came under fire for its approach to dealing with financial crime. Revolut said that it found that most scams reported to them start on three social media platforms

promotion”, a person familiar with the matter said. The FCA declined to comment. Jamba was soliciting offers through Republic until 4 November and, like its previous plan, would buy shares starting at the lowest price in a reverse price auction.

Republic said in a letter that Jamba considers £407.86 per Revolut shares a “reasonable reflection of the current market price”, based on previous rounds of trading on the platform.

But shareholders in the banking app have criticised the move given its roughly 38 per cent discount compared to an August employee share sale, which landed Revolut an implied valuation of \$45 billion (£34.7billion).

The latest letter from Republic did not mention the August sale, which was brokered by Morgan Stanley and launched at a price of \$865.42 per share. A previous letter had also referenced an expected capital gains tax raid in the recent Budget, which some Revolut investors considered “opportunistic”.

Revolut had concerns about the offer’s discount and “predatory” use of Budget tax fears, a source close to the matter said. Revolut refused to comment. One revolut shareholder said that given the lack of liquidity on the Republic platform, it would be “nonsense to imply” £407.86 truly reflects the market price.

Copper views Trump win in presidential race through Chinese lens

DONALD Trump’s US presidential election win has not sparked a repeat of the explosive copper rally which followed his unexpected victory in 2016.

That coincided with a market that was heavily short of both futures and options and triggered a mass realignment of fund positioning.

This time, copper was in risk-off mode ahead of what seemed a close-call result.

Fund managers were net long of copper ahead of last week’s election, but only modestly so.

Moreover, the market focus was as much on China as it was on the US as the other big event last week was the meeting of China’s National Peoples Congress (NPC) Standing Committee.

The resulting \$1.4 trillion package to ease local government’s “hidden debt” burden disappointed metal bulls looking for something much stronger from China’s cabinet.

As far as Doctor Copper is concerned, the main question around a second Trump presidency is whether the threat of tariffs will spur China to do more to fire up its sputtering growth engine.

ELECTION WEEK WOBBLES

Copper’s price reaction to the US elections was revealing in what it said about the market’s real focus, namely China. London Metal Exchange three-month copper slid by 4.1% on Wednesday in what looked like a knee-jerk reaction to US dollar strength in the wake of the election results.

By the close of Thursday, copper had clawed back almost all its losses as traders bet the Trump tariff threat to Chinese exports would encourage the NPC Standing Committee to open up the stimulus taps.

Friday’s announcement of what is in essence a debt swap between central and local governments dashed bullish expectations and triggered a renewed sell-off.

Copper closed Friday at \$9,443.50 per metric ton, representing a weekly loss of 1.3%. Although trading was volatile, the net weekly change was small and a far cry from the turbulence of 2016.

Fund positioning was much lighter this time ahead of an election that looked too close to call.

Money mangers held a modest net long position of 20,714 contracts on the CME copper contract as of the close of Nov 5. That had been sharply reduced from 41,127 contracts at the start of October.

TARIFF TURBULENCE

Copper is clearly unsure how to price in the bearish prospect of Trump’s promised 60% tariffs on Chinese goods and the potential bullish offset of more urgent stimulus from Beijing.

Tariffs, which are still several months away, are unlikely to make much difference to direct flows of metal from China to the United States.

The Biden administration has already tripled import duties to 25% on imports of Chinese aluminium and steel products in response to China’s growing exports. — Reuters



DR RAJA TUMATI

The writer is a senior faculty at Oman Tourism College



Many places in Oman offer tourists a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and entrepreneurs should be encouraged in these places to better cater to tourists’ needs.

TOURISM

has a wide range of benefits that go beyond simple travel and leisure, from increasing income and generating jobs to encouraging cross-cultural interactions and environmental conservation. Authentic cuisine, lively marketplaces, exciting festivals, and an unmatched cultural experience pull tourists to a specific location.

Behind all this, an invisible force that takes charge is often overlooked: entrepreneurs. In the tourism industry, entrepreneurship entails seeing opportunities, developing creative concepts, and taking measured risks to launch businesses that satisfy the wants and needs of tourists by creating truly memorable experiences.

Entrepreneurship continuously promotes community involvement in tourism supply chains.

Tourists spend money on hotel stays, transportation, eating, shopping, handicrafts, entertainment, clothing, and other activities. The revenue resulting from these activities can help boost the local economy, generate new jobs, and slow migration to cities.

In addition to providing local communities with economic benefits, entrepreneurs can contribute to preserving customs and promoting cultural awareness, enabling them to deliver visitor experiences that will be treasured.

The best examples of how Omani entrepreneurs incorporated heritage, culture, and customs to offer services are Misfat Al Abriyeen Old House, The

Suwgra Legacy Inn in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Al Hamra Heritage Inn, Homestays in Bidiyah, Kadm Café in Bahla, and Rozna Restaurant in Muscat.

Sustainability is becoming a top priority for policymakers worldwide, and organisations such as the United Nations-Tourism (UN Tourism) recognise its importance. Entrepreneurship is crucial for sustainability, social responsibility, and reducing environmental harm in the travel and tourism sectors.

Entrepreneurs also help create sustainable jobs by hiring locals, working with local tour guides, and designing itineraries that highlight the region’s history, customs, folktales, and festivals.

Young Omanis have great potential to develop their business by capitalising on cultural and natural resources within the Sultanate of Oman.

For example, Omani entrepreneurs can create unique tourism experiences based on Turtle Reserves, Al Wusta Wetland Reserve, Frankincense Trail, and Rose Gardens in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, climbing and trekking in Jabal Shams, and events in Salalah and Muscat.

The hospitality sector is another important area in which entrepreneurs support the enhancement of visitor experiences.

The foundation of tourism is the hospitality sector, which depends heavily on the individuality and meticulousness of business owners.

Small businesses that cater to a specific clientele, such as cafés, restaurants, hotels, and tour operators, are frequently better at providing individualised experiences than

are larger organisations.

This focus on little things can have a significant impact on how visitors feel about a place, including whether they decide to return or suggest it to others. Anat Café in Nizwa, Bait Al Luban Omani Restaurant in Muttrah, Dukanah Cafe in Bausher, Al Diwaniya Omani Sweets in Muscat, and many more are the best examples of providing authentic Omani food experiences to tourists.

Additionally, entrepreneurship helps Oman’s tourism experiential offerings to become more diverse. Conventional tourist locations frequently depend on a small number of well-liked attractions.

Entrepreneurs can introduce new goods and services to increase destination attractiveness.

Through the development of lesser-known areas, entrepreneurs contribute to a more equitable distribution of the monetary benefits of tourism throughout a nation, relieving pressure on busy tourist destinations and offering visitors alternate options.

To date, Omani entrepreneurs have been able to provide tourists with a wide range of inventive goods and services, particularly in close proximity to popular tourist destinations such as Muscat, Nizwa, Suhar and Salalah.

Nevertheless, there remains a need to broaden its reach and provide services to other less-known tourist areas.

Many places in Oman offer tourists a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and entrepreneurs should be encouraged in these places to better cater to tourists’ needs.

By providing unique experiences and tourism services in these areas, Omani entrepreneurs can attract more travellers who seek more than just sightseeing and can provide enduring memories.

These unique experiences help increase a destination’s competitiveness in the global market.

However, to reap benefits, local communities should be trained in specialist areas such as tour guides, adventure travel specialists, hospitality specialists, culinary experts, tour operators, event specialists, front office staff, digital media experts, and technology specialists.

In summary, the significance of entrepreneurship in Oman’s tourism sector cannot be adequately emphasised, as the development of tourism and entrepreneurship are closely related, with each being indispensable to the other.

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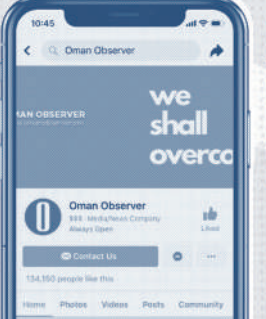
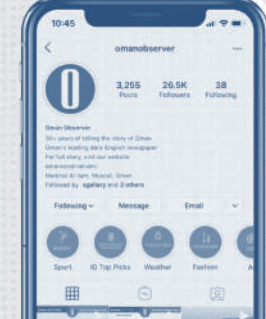
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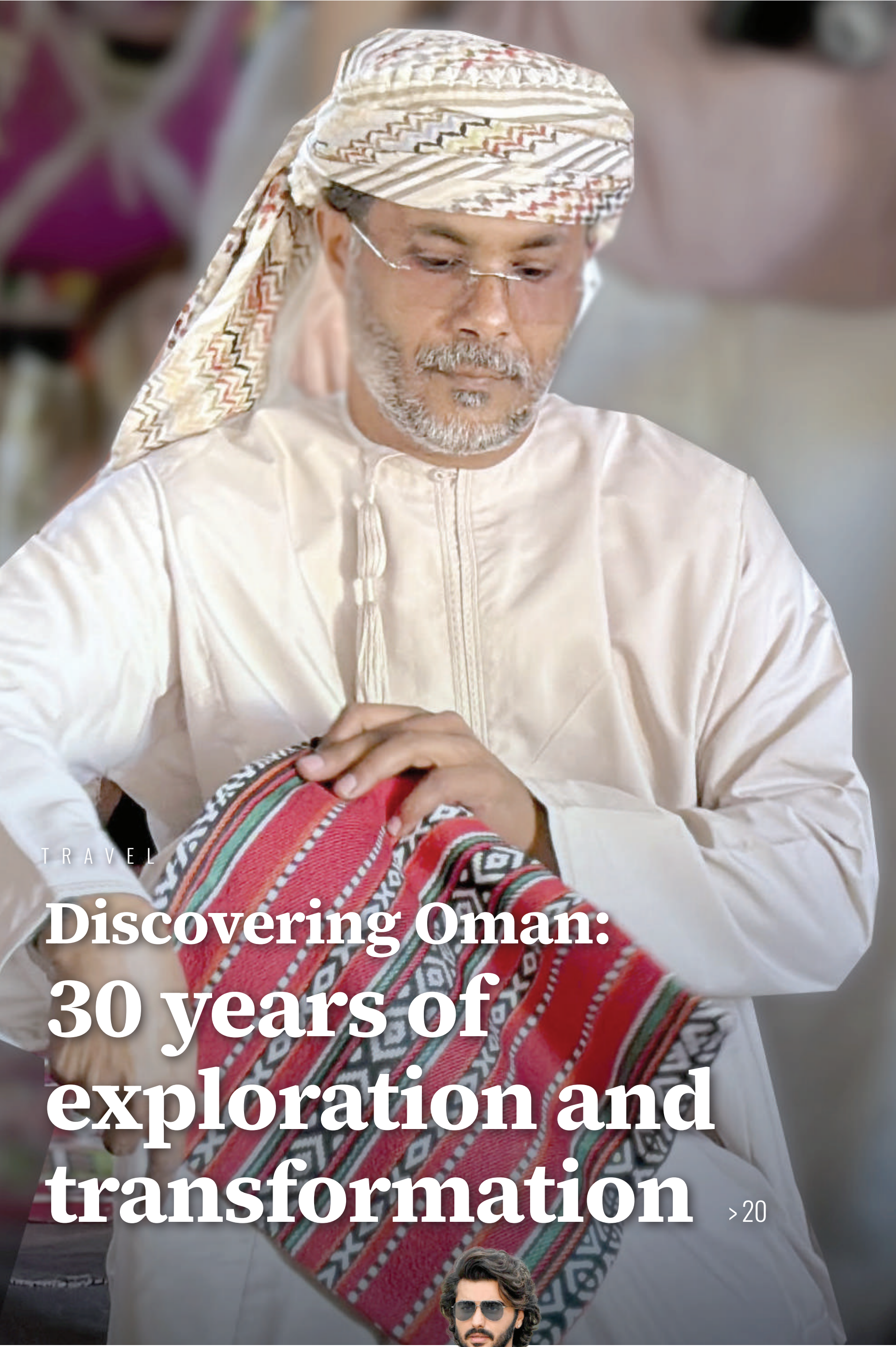
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TRAVEL

Discovering Oman: 30 years of exploration and transformation

> 20

MUSIC

Did Beyoncé’s Grammy Nods Really Top Michael Jackson’s for ‘Thriller’?



Last week, as the news emerged of Beyoncé’s 11 Grammy nominations for her country-Beyoncé-style album “Cowboy Carter,” some fan accounts on social media trumpeted that it had become “the most Grammy-nominated album of all time,” and claimed that Beyoncé had even topped a record set in 1984 by Michael Jackson’s “Thriller,” the mega-blockbuster against which all other hits have since been judged.

Was that true? Not quite. But in some ways her accomplishment was equivalent to Jackson’s.

In the sometimes confusing world of Grammy stats, nominations for an artist can be spread across multiple projects, and the performing artist on a song or an album is not necessarily an award’s nominee — prizes can (and often do) go to collaborators like songwriters, producers or engineers.

And Beyoncé is not the only recent artist to receive 11 nominations in one year. Kendrick Lamar did so for the 2016 awards, as did Jon Batiste for 2022 — but in both cases, they were not all for work on a single album. (Lamar’s nods that year, for example, included his guest appearance on Taylor Swift’s song “Bad Blood.”)

Officially, “Thriller” received a total of 13 nods when the 26th annual Grammy nominations were announced in early 1984. Jackson himself was cited in 11 of them. Of the two others, one was for Bruce Swedien, the album’s renowned engineer. The other cited Quincy Jones and James Ingram, the writers of the song “P.Y.T. (Pretty Young Thing),” which was up for best rhythm and blues song. In a sign of Jackson’s thorough dominance that year, two other “Thriller” songs were nominated in that same category: “Billie Jean” and “Wanna Be Startin’ Somethin’” (“Billie Jean,” credited to Jackson as the sole songwriter, won.)

Ultimately, Jackson collected seven awards for “Thriller,” including album of the year and record of the year (for “Beat It”). Swedien won best engineered recording, non-classical. That night was one of Jackson’s most iconic moments. He attended the show with Brooke Shields and Emmanuel Lewis as guests, and wore a sparkling blue-and-gold military-style jacket, with a crystal glove over his right hand. — **NYT**

QUICK FEATURES

LIFESTYLE

Participants prepare their hot-air balloons in Ponte de Sor, Alentejo, during the FIBAQ international hot air balloon festival. — **AFP**

ENTERTAINMENT

Bollywood actor Arjun Kapoor poses for photographs during the promotion of his Indian Hindi-language action film ‘Singham Again’ in Mumbai. — **AFP**

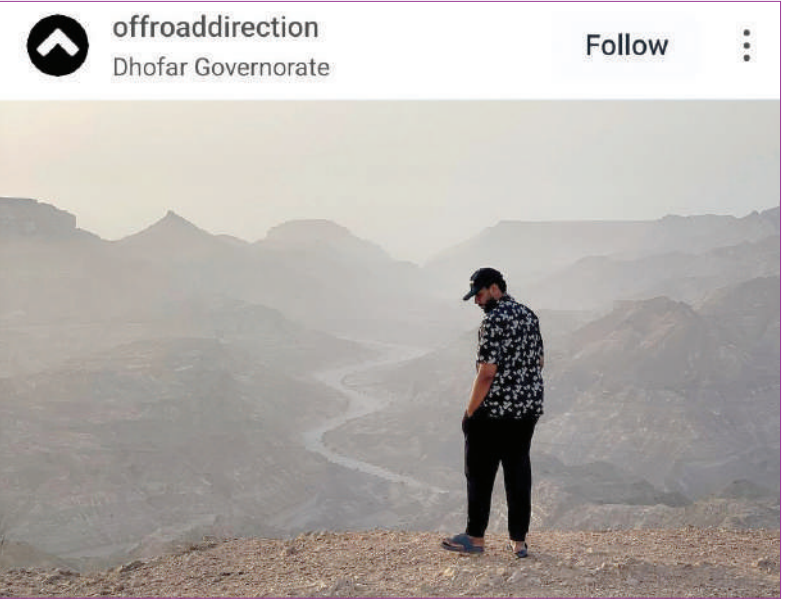
CHANGING WORLD

A vendor carries a bucket of radish across a railway track engulfed in smog in Lahore. Punjab ordered all schools to be shut down in several major cities enveloped by smog. — **AFP**

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



The Abundant Harvest

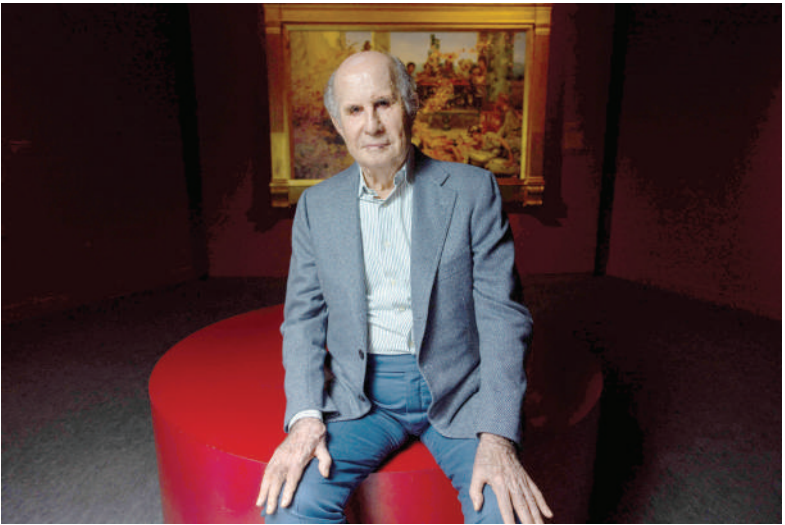


Down The Winding Path

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

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Top art collector displays rare treasures in Madrid



After visiting Europe 60 years ago as a penniless art aficionado, Juan Antonio Perez Simon overcame hardship to amass a remarkable collection, which is on display for the first time in Madrid.

“I have always wanted to share my works with the public,” the Spanish-born millionaire businessman, 83, told in a written exchange. “It makes me profoundly happy.”

Perez Simon’s lifelong passion for art has led to a collection boasting 4,000 paintings, drawings, sculptures and decorative objects.

The new exhibition at Madrid’s grandiose Cibeles Palace — “70 great masters of the Perez Simon collection” — runs to mid-January and is crammed with art treasures, ranging from the 16th century to today. They include works by

masters like Van Gogh, Sisley, Picasso, Rubens, Goya, Monet, Renoir, Magritte and Rothko.

Perez Simon, who has spent most of his life in Mexico where he now lives, has never previously lent his collection to a museum in this way, even if some items have been loaned around the world. After this show, a new site dedicated to 200 pieces of his collection is due to open in Madrid.

It will be an addition to the Spanish capital’s established art institutions — the Prado, Reina Sofia and Thyssen museums — to which millions of visitors flock every year. Perez Simon said the loan would be long-term, although details are still being finalised. Madrid city hall has said he has already agreed to take care of securing, storing and transporting the works. —AFP



Greece’s mussel harvest wiped out by warming seas

WHEN Anastasios Zakalkas pulled up the ropes of his mussel farm in the Aegean Sea last month, the devastation was clear: the lines were not heaving with molluscs as they should be at harvest time but were instead filled with cracked, empty shells.

It is the second time in three years that record sea temperatures have hit the mussel harvest in northern Greece, where farmers said they saw a 90% drop in the 2024 catch. Next year will be a dud too, Zakalkas said, because all the seed for the coming season also perished.

“The destruction we suffered (for next year) was 100%,” 35-year-old Zakalkas said aboard his fishing boat on a balmy morning in late October. “We don’t know how we’ll make a living in the new year. Our main and only job is mussels,” he said. Like other Mediterranean countries, Greece is particularly susceptible to climate change, which this year led to months of above-average temperatures, punishing drought and wildfires. Crops, including chestnuts, apples and cherries have been hit. Scientists say extreme weather linked to global warming could spell bad news for its aquaculture sector too.

A series of heatwaves hit Greece in July, sending sea temperatures in the Thermaic Gulf, its main mussel producing area, above 30 degrees Celsius (86°F) for days — too hot for mussels to survive. Greece last saw mass mussel deaths in 2021 but scientists forecast that it would not be repeated for another 10 years, said Kostas Koukaras, a biologist who studies marine ecosystems.

“This shows, even to those most sceptical, that the climate crisis is here,” he said. As world leaders prepare to meet in Azerbaijan’s capital Baku for this month’s UN climate summit COP29 — dubbed the “climate finance COP” — Koukaras said governments should help producers deal with climate-related costs.



“We’re very close to the collapse of mussel farming in Greece, so the state needs to support these people,” he said.

Greece’s aqua culture production was worth over 619 million euros in 2021, the third in Europe after France and Spain, according to the Hellenic Aquaculture Producers Organization (HAPO).

It is among Europe’s main producers of the Mediterranean mussel and exports nearly all of the 20,000 tonnes farmed annually by small family businesses.

Spain has also seen mussel deaths,

although Koukaras said Greece’s sector was hit hardest because nearly all its farms are concentrated in the same region.

For the 100 or so mussel farming families in Zakalkas’ small town of Kymina, the future looks dim. They are seeking state compensation to pay off debts, while others are looking for work in factories, he said.

“We’re afraid,” said Sotiris Tsaros, another mussel farmer. “If this happens again next year, we’ll all leave and everything I’ve done as a farmer for the last 30 years will be gone.” —Reuters

Rainer Skrovny, an adventurer from Nimza, Austria, first set foot in Oman in 1991 as part of a brief visit to the Gulf region, a place that at the time was largely unfamiliar to Western travellers.



Discovering Oman: 30 years of exploration & transformation



BY QASIM AL MAASHANI

FOR OVER three decades, a unique relationship has blossomed between a seasoned Austrian traveller and Oman, revealing the story of a country that captured his heart and never let go. Rainer Skrovny, an adventurer from Nimza, Austria, first set foot in Oman in 1991 as part of a brief visit to the Gulf region, a place that at the time was largely unfamiliar to Western travellers. Reflecting on his journeys, Skrovny speaks passionately about how Oman's distinct beauty and warmth kept him coming back, year after year.

His first trip was short, just a three-day stopover. "At that time, I had no specific expectations," he shared. "But those three days were enough to know I wanted to come back to explore more. I told my wife that I needed more time to understand Oman." Soon after, Skrovny made good on that promise. The following season, he returned with friends, renting cars and embarking on a road trip through Oman's diverse landscapes, ultimately reaching the enchanting southern city of Salalah.

Travelling in Oman during the early 1990s was a very different experience than it is today. "Infrastructure was minimal, and language barriers were significant," Skrovny recalls. "Most Omanis speak English now, but back then, it was quite basic. Maps and travel guides were almost non-existent, making navigation and planning more of an adventure." Tourism infrastructure was just beginning to develop, and the Omani government had yet to place tourism as a primary focus. In those early days, Skrovny and his companions camped frequently due to the limited availability of hotels and other accommodations.

One experience stands out vividly: "Driving down to Salalah, we stopped in Shaleem. The petrol station there had no electricity; it was manual," he says with a nostalgic laugh. "It was both challenging and charming, an experience you wouldn't find today." This raw authenticity, however, is what hooked Skrovny and inspired him to introduce Oman to a broader audience.

Throughout the 1990s, Oman began to open its doors to more international visitors, and by the end of the decade, tourism started gaining momentum. "We saw more tourists arriving, especially in the northern parts of Oman," he notes. Roads improved, hotels appeared and basic facilities evolved to cater to international travellers. Skrovny and his team even partnered with a local supplier named Mark Tours, who helped them arrange tailored trips. "Our clients began to see Oman as an exclusive, almost untouched destination," he says.

While Oman has become more accessible over the years, the journey has preserved its unique appeal. Even today, there are still travellers who are wary of venturing into the Middle East. "Oman has managed to remain a hidden gem," Skrovny explains, "and that appeals to travellers who are looking for something distinct, something beyond mainstream tourism."

In recent years, Oman has undergone significant developments in tourism and infrastructure, embracing change while

staying true to its cultural roots. Roads and highways now rival those of developed nations, making travel smoother and more efficient. Boutique hotels, resorts and eco-lodges have opened across the country, offering unique experiences and accommodations for all types of travellers. Notable areas like Nizwa have transformed dramatically: once quiet and largely unexplored, the old city of Nizwa now buzzes with life, boasting boutique hotels, cafes and restaurants that attract visitors and showcase Oman's rich heritage.

Skrovny is particularly intrigued by these changes. "Places like Nizwa have become vibrant, breathing life back into the old city," he reflects. "It would be wonderful to see this model replicated in other parts of Oman, preserving history while promoting local culture." He also notes smaller developments that add a modern touch without overshadowing tradition. "I was surprised, for instance, to see espresso shops in tiny fishing villages. It's a small change, but it represents a fascinating evolution."

For those who haven't yet discovered Oman, Skrovny offers a clear message: "Oman is an incredibly safe and welcoming country. Visitors never feel out of place or unsafe, and the hospitality is genuine and warm." While Oman may lack the singular, iconic landmarks of Egypt's pyramids or India's Taj Mahal, it offers an abundance of smaller, equally captivating treasures. "The country is full of unique and beautiful places. It doesn't have a singular landmark, but it has a diverse landscape that continuously fascinates visitors."

He speaks to the allure of Oman's varied environment, from stunning deserts and mountains to serene beaches and wadis, all of which cater to travellers seeking a rich, immersive experience. "Oman has so much to offer. Its beauty is subtle yet powerful, appealing to travellers who appreciate a destination that reveals itself slowly, with layers of discovery."

Through his travels, Skrovny has fostered connections with the Omani people, forming bonds that have lasted decades. "It's the people who make Oman special," he reflects. "Their kindness, generosity and openness are what keep me coming back." His journeys have taken him to Oman's most remote corners and introduced him to communities and landscapes that many tourists might overlook. In a way, his story mirrors the story of Oman itself — a quiet strength, a land that embraces change while retaining the essence of what makes it unique.

As Oman continues to develop its tourism sector, it remains mindful of preserving its natural and cultural heritage. Skrovny's message to potential visitors is simple yet powerful: "Come to Oman. Explore its landscapes, experience its hospitality, and immerse yourself in a place where authenticity is at the heart of everything."

Oman's journey from a hidden gem to an admired destination is a testament to its resilience and vision. With travellers like Skrovny sharing their stories and encouraging others to explore this remarkable country, Oman's reputation as a unique and safe destination grows.