

OMAN
Observer
دولة عمان



11
REAL MADRID
CLOSE ON LEADERS
BARCELONA WITH
3-0 WIN AT GIRONA

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PAGES 20 BAISAS 200

SUNRISE 06:38 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR 05:17 AM
DHUHR 12:04 PM
ASR 03:06 PM
MAGHRIB 05:26 PM
ISHA 06:41 PM


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INBRIEF

HM GREET'S NAMIBIA'S
PRESIDENT-ELECT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to President-elect Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah of the Republic of Namibia, on the occasion of winning the presidential elections of her country. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of success to the President-elect in leading the people of her country towards the realisation of further progress and prosperity.

MESSAGE FROM KING
OF NETHERLANDS

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from His Majesty King Willem-Alexander of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, related to the good relations between the two friendly countries and areas of cooperation in many fields, on Sunday. The message was received by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, when he received Stella Kloth, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Sultanate of Oman. The ambassador of the Netherlands conveyed the King's greetings and his best wishes to His Majesty, wishing him continued health and wellness and further progress and advancement for the Omani people. SEE P2

HM HOCKEY CUP
FINAL ON DEC 24



Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Harib bin Thuwaini al Said will preside over the final match of His Majesty the Sultan's Hockey Cup for 2024. The final will be played on Tuesday (December 24) at Oman Hockey Stadium in the Wilayat of Al Amerat.

Cooperation contributes
in overall development

Council of Ministers and State Council hold joint meeting



The Council of Ministers and the State Council on Sunday held a joint meeting at the premises of the Council of Ministers in Muscat Governorate. — PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI

THE COUNCIL of Ministers and the State Council on Sunday held a joint meeting at the premises of the Council of Ministers in Muscat Governorate. HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, and some members of the Council of Ministers received Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, and members of the State Council's Office. The meeting took place within the context of joint coordination between the Council of Ministers and the Council of Oman, as stipulated in the Basic Law of the State and the Law of the Council of Oman. It was held in pursuance of measures for supporting ongoing cooperation among all institutions

in a manner that leads to the realisation of the public interest. At the outset of the meeting, HH Sayyid affirmed that the institutions of the state operate in an integrated trend to implement economic and social plans and programmes, and contribute to Oman's comprehensive development. HH Sayyid Fahd explained that, in appreciation of the constructive role played by the State Council, the Council of Ministers is keen to keep the State Council regularly updated about the efforts made by the government in implementing the state's general policies, improving performance and introducing modernisation in all areas and sectors. HH Sayyid Fahd added that the Council of Ministers values the State Council's

national expertise and experts who, he said, contribute to the preparation of studies that serve the public interest. On their part, the State Council Chairman and members of the State Council Office commended the pace of constructive cooperation between the government and the council. They stressed that the forthcoming stage will see more joint coordination with the Council of Ministers towards attaining the desired goals. The two sides discussed mechanisms for supporting integration among state institutions, activating the role of the State Council in developing purposeful community awareness and the need to exert more efforts to safeguard the country's accomplishments. — ONA SEE ALSO P2

Oman calls for national
reconciliation in Syria

MUSCAT/AMMAN: The Sultanate of Oman is closely following the developments in the Syrian Arab Republic and stresses the need to respect the will of the brotherly Syrian people and fully preserve the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Syria. In a statement, the Foreign Ministry of the Sultanate of Oman called on all parties to exercise self-restraint, avoid escalation and violence to achieve national reconciliation and fulfil the aspirations of the brotherly Syrian people for security, stability, development and prosperity. Earlier, Syrian rebels declared they had ousted President Bashar al Assad after seizing control of Damascus on Sunday, forcing him to flee and ending his family's decades of rule after more than 13 years of civil war. The rebels said they had



Members of the Syrian community wave Syria's national flags near Domplein to celebrate the end of the regime on Sunday.

entered the capital with no sign of army deployments. Thousands of people in cars and on foot congregated at a main square in Damascus waving and chanting 'Freedom,' witnesses said. People were seen walking inside the Al Rawda Presidential Palace, with some leaving carrying

furniture from inside. Leading rebel commander Abu Mohammed al Golani said there was no room for turning back. "The future is ours," he said in a statement read on Syria's state TV after his forces took over Damascus. The pace of events stunned Arab capitals and raised concerns about a new wave of instability in a region already in turmoil following the spread of conflict after the October 7, 2023 attack and the ensuing Gaza war. When the celebrations fade, Syria's new leaders will face the daunting task of trying to deliver stability to a diverse country with competing factions that will need billions of dollars in aid and investments to rebuild. Syria's long civil war, which erupted in 2011 as an uprising against the rule, turned cities to rubble and killed hundreds of thousands of people. SEE ALSO P6

VISIT TO ROYAL OPERA HOUSE MUSCAT



Her Highness The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, accompanied by Intisar El Sisi, Spouse of the Egyptian President, on Sunday visited the Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM). HH The Honourable Lady and Spouse of the Egyptian President viewed ROHM's building, which is considered an Omani civilisational and artistic edifice. It is also regarded as an architectural masterpiece inspired by Omani architectural heritage. During the visit, they were briefed on the house's programmes and objectives, which aim to communicate with the peoples of the world through music. They also visited the House of Musical Arts and viewed the exhibits in the Exhibition of Musical Arts "Oman and the World". DETAILS ON P3

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SHORT TAKES

HM RECEIVES MESSAGE FROM KING OF NETHERLANDS



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The ambassador of the Netherlands conveyed the King's greetings and his best wishes to His Majesty, wishing him continued health and wellness and further progress and advancement for the Omani people. — ONA

HOLY QURAN COMPETITION WINNERS ANNOUNCED



The competition is aimed at encouraging Omanis to memorise the Holy Quran and pursue the guidance of its teachings. - ONA

MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science on Sunday announced the names of winners of Sultan Qaboos Holy Quran Competition (32nd edition).

The first winners in each category were announced as follows: Younis bin Abdullah al Majrifi in Level 1 for memorising the entire Holy Quran; Ibrahim bin Said al Sawafi in Level 2 for memorising 24 consecutive parts of the Holy Quran; Mohammed bin Khalfan al Ghuzaili in Level 3 for memorising 18 consecutive parts; Maisam bint Ahmed al Habsiyah in Level 4 for memorising 12 consecutive parts; Jinan bint Yaqoub al Shabibiyah in Level 5 for memorising 6 consecutive parts; Said bin Salim al Wahaibi in Level 6 for memorising 4 consecutive parts and Wid bint Khalid al Maamariyah in Level 7 for memorising 2 consecutive parts.

The competition is aimed at encouraging Omanis to memorise the Holy Quran and pursue the guidance of its teachings, in addition to enhancing the presence of the Sultanate of Oman in international Quranic contests. — ONA

COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, STATE COUNCIL HOLD JOINT MEETING



MUSCAT: The Council of Ministers and the State Council on Sunday held a joint meeting at the premises of the Council of Ministers in Muscat. HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, and some members of the Council of Ministers received Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, and members of the State Council's Office. — ONA

Sayyid Fahd receives OPEC Secretary-General

HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, received on Sunday Haitham bin Faisal al Ghais, Secretary-General of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and his accompanying delegation, currently visiting the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, HH Sayyid Fahd affirmed that the Sultanate of Oman appreciates the great role of OPEC in coordinating and unifying the petroleum policies of its member states and determining the best ways to protect their interests.

He pointed to Oman's continuous cooperation with the organisation to ensure the success of its efforts to achieve stability in the global oil markets, highlighting Oman's effective contribution to the establishment of the joint alliance between OPEC and its non-member states (OPEC+) since 2016.

The meeting reviewed aspects of cooperation between Oman's government and OPEC and the efforts made to ensure a balance in energy supplies to serve the global economy, as well as exploring appropriate means to protect the interests of the organisation.

On his turn, the Secretary-General of OPEC stressed that the Sultanate of Oman,



The meeting reviewed aspects of cooperation between Oman's government and OPEC. — ONA

under its wise leadership, contributes to supporting OPEC's efforts, as it actively participates in the organisation's meetings as an observer and works to coordinate policies related to oil markets. He lauded the achievements made by the Sultanate of Oman in many fields.

The Secretary-General of OPEC underscored the importance of this visit, which aims at discussing means of supporting the organisation's goals.

The meeting was attended by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Afi, Minister of Energy and Minerals. — ONA

SHORTTAKES



OMAN, UK
STRENGTHEN
MILITARY RELATIONS

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office here on Sunday Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Knighton, Chief of UK Air Staff, and his accompanying military delegation. Gen Al Numani welcomed the British guest, who expressed his appreciation for the Sultanate of Oman's efforts in promoting cooperation to achieve the two countries' common interests. The two sides exchanged views on several topics of common interest. The meeting was attended by the UK Ambassador to Oman.

Meanwhile, Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) also received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Knighton. During the meeting, the two sides discussed several military topics of common interest.

Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo), in his meeting with Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Knighton exchanged views on several military matters of common interest. The meeting was attended by Senior Rafo officers and the Defence Attaché at the British Embassy in Muscat. — ONA

OMAN, CYPRUS
HOLD POLITICAL
CONSULTATIONS

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Cyprus held the fourth round of political consultations at the general diwan of the Foreign Ministry.

The session was chaired by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, and Andreas S Kakouris, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Cyprus.

During the session, the two sides discussed bilateral relations and underlined the joint keenness to continue promoting cooperation in all areas.

They also touched on a set of regional and international issues of common concern.

The session was attended by Agis Loizou, Ambassador of the Republic of Cyprus to the Sultanate of Oman and a number of officials from both sides. — ONA

Winter festivals enhance tourism experience in Oman

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 8

The third edition of the Sohar Festival, which will continue until January 3, is taking centre stage with the start of the winter season and winter tourism.

The winter weather provides an excellent opportunity to organise events and festivals that enhance the tourism experience in the Sultanate of Oman. It also significantly contributes to promoting domestic tourism by attracting visitors from different regions and providing them with the chance to enjoy distinctive cultural and entertainment experiences.

The festival, held in the Wilayat of Suhar, reflects the governorate's commitment to promoting domestic tourism and stimulating economic activity. The Sohar Festival builds upon the successes of previous

editions, continuing to provide various events that meet the aspirations of different segments of society and highlight cultural and national identity.

This year's festival offers a diversity of events, including more than 35 events on the Grand Theatre, 40 events on the Children's Theatre, and 105 events in the heritage villages, along with three international marine competitions.

Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North and Chairman of the Main Committee of the Third Sohar Festival, highlighted the prominent additions to this edition, such as dancing musical fountain shows and spray paths that create a refreshing winter atmosphere for visitors.

The Sohar Festival 2024 presents a golden opportunity to support the local economy in Al Batinah North Governorate, providing platforms



This year's festival offers a diversity of events, including more than 35 events on the Grand Theatre, 40 events on the Children's Theatre, and 105 events in the heritage villages, along with three international marine competitions.

for traders, business owners, and productive families to showcase their products. The festival has attracted 160 job seekers and supported 120 productive families and small and medium enterprises from the governorate, contributing to job opportunities and increased

income under the supervision of the General-Directorate of Social Development and the Directorate of Labour in Al Batinah North Governorate.

This year, the festival also organised a special entertainment day for people with disabilities as

part of the accompanying events, demonstrating its commitment to providing a comprehensive experience for all attendees.

The festival plays a significant role in enhancing the governorate's position as a tourist and cultural destination, offering diverse activities that combine heritage, arts and sports. It reflects the commitment of organisers to provide a rich experience that meets visitors' aspirations and highlights the authentic Omani identity, while also stimulating economic and tourism activities in Al Batinah North Governorate. Leveraging the winter weather in the Sultanate of Oman contributes to stimulating tourism, enhancing community well-being, and providing new opportunities for economic growth. By investing in winter tourism, Oman can establish itself as a distinctive tourist destination.

Honourable Lady, Intisar El Sisi visit Opera House

HER Highness The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, accompanied by Intisar El Sisi, Spouse of the Egyptian President, on Sunday visited the Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM).

HH the Honourable Lady and the spouse of the Egyptian president viewed ROHM's building, which is considered an Omani civilisational and artistic edifice. It is also regarded as an architectural masterpiece inspired by Omani architectural heritage. During the visit, they were briefed on the ROHM's programmes and objectives, which aim to communicate with the peoples of the world through music.

They also visited the House of Musical Arts and viewed the exhibits in the Exhibition of Musical Arts "Oman and the World". The exhibition includes various artistic



During the visit, they were briefed on the House's programmes and objectives, which aim to communicate with the peoples of the world through music. — ONA



artefacts, musical instruments, costumes of participants in operas and the musical library, which comprises rare books and manuscripts. It is worth noting that the ROHM, during

the upcoming 2025 season, will host a special festival celebrating the prominent 20th-century Egyptian singer, actor and composer Mohamed Abdul Wahab and highlighting

milestones from his life and artistic works. This event is part of a series of programmes prepared by the ROHM to celebrate Egyptian art and musical icons. — ONA

GIS forum showcases spatial technologies

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, DEC 8

Under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Ali al Muttawa, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning for Urban Planning, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning hosted the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Forum.

The event brought together specialists and stakeholders from both public and private sectors, aiming to exchange expertise, explore cutting-edge GIS technologies, and underscore their pivotal role in sustainable urban development and efficient resource management.

The forum highlighted several key objectives, including emphasising the critical role of GIS in analysing spatial data and supporting strategic decision-making for sustainable development, exploring innovative solutions using advanced digital tools and technologies to tackle spatial challenges, and sharing local and international experiences through discussions on innovative projects that enhance geographic infrastructure.

The forum also featured a series of working papers that delved into the latest



The GIS Forum brought together specialists and stakeholders aiming to exchange expertise and explore cutting-edge GIS technologies.

GIS applications and initiatives. These included demonstrating how GIS supports urban planning and sustainability through precise data analysis and showcasing applications that streamline addressing systems, improving accessibility for citizens and residents.

Other topics discussed were illustrating AI's role in enhancing data accuracy and analytical capabilities, reviewing the ministry's experience in leveraging 3D technologies for efficient port planning and management, and transitioning basic maps

from Clarke1880 to WGS84 for improved accuracy and global alignment. Detailed surveys in historic areas like Al Hamra to gather precise data were also highlighted.

Launching automated systems to ensure continuous improvement in spatial data quality and achieving a 93.9 per cent information security index rating—reflecting a commitment to secure data management — were also discussed.

A significant milestone of the forum was the signing of an agreement between the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and Oman Data Park. Represented by Dr Mohammed bin Ali al Muttawa and Eng Maqbool bin Salim al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Data Park, the agreement aims to elevate GIS infrastructure by transitioning the ministry's main data centre to a secure cloud environment, establishing systems to ensure data integrity and operational continuity during crises and facilitating advanced government services that meet modern demands. The GIS Forum marks a critical step in the Sultanate of Oman's digital transformation journey, integrating modern technology with geographic information systems to achieve comprehensive sustainable development.



TACKLING SOCIAL ISOLATION AMONG THE ELDERLY

In Oman, the elderly population reached 228,981 in 2023, marking significant growth driven by advancements in healthcare and improved living standards.

AHMED AL KAABI

THE ELDERLY form a cornerstone of society, yet many face challenges like social isolation and the loss of their societal roles, which significantly impact their quality of life.

Dr Hilal al Habsi, from the Sociologists Association, highlights the need for greater awareness and actionable solutions to ensure the well-being of this vital demographic.

Al Habsi observes that the disconnect between generations has widened due to the prevalence of virtual communication.

“We provide care for the elderly and fulfil our religious duties towards them, but there is a gap in daily practices that makes them feel disconnected from us despite our physical presence,” he explains.

This disconnection often leaves seniors isolated within their families, negatively affecting their mental and physical health.

The rise in the elderly population underscores the urgency of addressing these issues.

Globally, their numbers soared from 260 million in 1980 to 761 million in 2021, with projections of 1.6 billion by 2050.

In Oman, the elderly population reached 228,981 in 2023, reflecting rapid growth due to advances in healthcare and improved living standards. However, studies, such as one by the University of Michigan’s School of Medicine, show that one in four seniors experiences social isolation, leading to severe psychological and physical problems, particularly among men.

Regarding the role of social identity, social roles profoundly shape an individual’s sense of purpose and identity.

As people age, these roles diminish, often resulting in feelings of uselessness and isolation.

Al Habsi stresses the importance of integrating the elderly into family and community life to combat these feelings, stating, “The elderly are present among us, but we are not present with them.”

Recommendations for change
Al Habsi proposes several measures to enhance the quality of life for the elderly and address their isolation:

THESE ARE:

- Actively involve seniors in family roles, appreciating their wisdom and experiences. Establish geriatric clinics and expand home care services to ensure comfort and safety.
- Organise social events and recreational activities to foster interaction and a sense of belonging.
- Educate the public on the dangers of social isolation and the value of supporting the elderly.
- Provide psychological and social initiatives to help seniors remain active contributors to society.
- By prioritising these initiatives, societies can bridge the gap between generations, ensuring the elderly remain integrated, valued and connected in their golden years.

FAMILY INTEGRATION

HEALTHCARE ACCESS

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

PUBLIC AWARENESS

SUPPORT PROGRAMMES

SHORT TAKES



Dhofar’s aromatic wadis and frankincense trees provided a unique, sensory-filled experience

FRANKINCENSE SEASON IN DHOFAR ATTRACTS OVER 51,000 VISITORS

SALALAH: The Dhofar Governorate, globally renowned for its pristine beaches, verdant landscapes, and the Khareef Dhofar Season, witnessed over 51,000 visitors during its annual Frankincense season. This cultural extravaganza highlighted one of the governorate’s oldest and most valued traditions — the harvesting and trade of frankincense, which has deep historical roots in the Arabian Peninsula.

Visitors were invited to immerse themselves in the journey of frankincense, beginning with demonstrations of ancient harvesting techniques by skilled locals, followed by interactive workshops explaining its usage in perfumery, medicine and religious rituals. Guided tours through Dhofar’s aromatic wadis and frankincense trees provided a unique, sensory-filled experience. — ONA

EXHIBITION CELEBRATES AL BURAIMI’S WILDLIFE

AL BURAIMI: The ‘Green Pickup’ exhibition in the Wilayat of Al Buraimi offered visitors an extraordinary blend of environmental awareness and artistic expression. This unique event spotlighted the governorate’s ecological treasures, showcasing its rich biodiversity through a combination of photography, visual art and educational activities.

Attendees marvelled at the detailed wildlife photographs capturing Al Buraimi’s rare flora and fauna, while botanical art installations inspired a deeper appreciation for nature. The event also featured live demonstrations of sustainable farming practices, eco-friendly crafts, and workshops on waste management.

Local artists unveiled a series of nature-inspired works, many of which were created using recycled materials. The exhibition emphasised the delicate balance between preserving the environment and fostering cultural creativity, leaving a lasting impression on all who attended. — ONA

OMAN DOWN SYNDROME ASSOCIATION MARKS A DECADE OF ACHIEVEMENTS

MUSCAT: Marking its 10th anniversary, the Oman Down Syndrome Association (ODSA) held a grand event celebrating a decade of dedication to supporting individuals with Down syndrome and their families.

Over the years, the association has spearheaded initiatives aimed at enhancing education, healthcare access, and social inclusion for those it serves. The anniversary event featured heartwarming testimonials from parents and educators who shared success stories of empowerment and progress.

A highlight of the event was an exhibition showcasing the artistic and creative talents of individuals with Down Syndrome, including paintings, crafts and musical performances. Interactive workshops offered guidance to families on topics ranging from inclusive education to navigating healthcare systems. The association’s leadership emphasised its future goals, including expanded partnerships with schools and workplaces to promote integration and independence. This milestone also served as a reminder of the importance of building a society that values diversity and provides equal opportunities for all its members. — ONA

Oman hosts first forum for electronic resources

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, DEC 8

OMAN marked a significant milestone in scientific advancement with the First Scientific Forum for Electronic Resources, held under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

The forum was organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI), represented by the Oman Research and Education Network (OMREN), in collaboration with Clarivate, a global leader in data and analytics for scientific innovation.

The forum served as a road map to bolster scientific research strategies in Oman, enhance the quality of scientific publications, and align with cutting-edge global trends. The event witnessed the participation of university presidents, college deans, and representatives from various academic and research institutions across the Sultanate of Oman. A central objective of the forum was to evaluate Oman’s scientific research positioning against global benchmarks and to leverage international best practices.

Key topics included analysing national research performance indicators, improving these



Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah patronised the meeting of the First Scientific Forum for Electronic Resources

metrics, and emphasising the importance of advanced research tools like the Web of Science database for strategic planning and performance analysis.

Highlights of the forum included four working papers addressing critical themes like the role of high-quality research data, the vision for scientific research as a pathway to innovation.

The other papers included current performance and emerging trends in Omani research and AI-supported research strategies for future development. A notable focus was the integration of artificial intelligence, showcasing its ability to analyse research data with precision, foster innovative solutions and craft advanced strategies. Discussions underscored AI’s potential to elevate Oman’s global scientific standing.

Recommendations from the forum emphasised the need for increased collaboration among academic and research institutions, enhanced investments in research infrastructure, and encouragement for publishing in high-impact journals. Strengthening international partnerships was also highlighted as a vital step to improve Oman’s research ranking and academic reputation.

This inaugural forum aligns closely with Oman Vision 2040, serving as a pivotal platform to foster knowledge exchange and strategic dialogue among researchers and decision-makers. It is a testament to Oman’s commitment to positioning itself as a leader in scientific research and innovation.

Muscat Nights welcomes Flower Festival

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

Emulating the world-class flower festivals from across the globe, Oman’s first flower festival will kick off as part of the Muscat Nights Festival organised by Muscat Municipality, which runs across multiple venues in Muscat from December 23 to January 21, 2025, according to the Muscat Municipality sources.

The festival will showcase a wide collection of internationally renowned floral designers from countries as diverse as France, Netherlands, US, alongside florists and designers from Oman and the rest of the region. Madhvi Ramesh Khimji, acclaimed floral artist from Oman along with her group of local designers have been confirmed to be a part of the month-long floral fest.

The Sultanate of Oman, being the first country in



GCC to be a member of the World Association of Floral Artists (WAFA), will see for first time a flower festival of this stature taking place in the country. Some of the attractions of the festival experience includes a Grand Floral Centrepiece, Roots of Wonders, Canopies of Dreams, measuring 9 metre in height on the highest point of the display which will surely captivate all festival goers.

Speaking to Observer, Hanan bint Abdullah al Shuraiqiyah, Technical Supervisor of the Muscat Flower Festival, Muscat

Municipality, said that the first edition of the Muscat Flower Festival would be a sure-shot to entertain families who can also explore a variety of hands-on activities that combine art, nature and creativity.

“From crafting floral bracelets and crowns to painting flower pots and sculpting clay animals and objects, the young and young at heart can unleash their creativity and connect with nature. It promises to be an adventure for all ages, incorporating interactive experiences that ignite curiosity, foster a love for nature, and create lasting memories,” she said.

Alongside, there will be an array of shops where local vendors would offer local varieties of frankincense as well as perfumery besides various sellers who offer fresh flowers, handmade crafts, seeds and the like besides floral-inspired food and beverages for a grab.



Recall

TOYOTA & LEXUS

RECALL DATE: 9/12 / 2024

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production*	#Number of Affected Commodities
Toyota - Land cruiser	March 2,2021 through November 25,2022	3725
Lexus - LX600	July 8, 2021through November 25, 2022	901

*Not all vehicles in this production period, are affected
#Subject to revision, based on the information received from the manufacturer, from time to time.

Recall consequence

The subject vehicles are equipped with a specific V35A (3.5 L) engine that contains crankshaft main bearings which allow the crankshaft to rotate within the engine assembly while running. During a specific production period, there is a possibility that engine machining debris of a particular size and amount may not have been cleared from the engine during manufacturing and subsequently contaminated the engine assembly during the production process. For these engines in the subject vehicles, the pressure on the main bearings due to the engine configuration is such that, if the aforementioned machining debris adheres to the bearings and operation of the engine continues at higher loads over time, failure of the bearings may occur. This can lead to potential engine knocking, engine rough running, engine no start and/or an engine stall. In the subject vehicles, an engine stall while driving leads to a loss of motive power.A vehicle loss of motive power while driving at higher speeds can increase the risk of a crash.

Recall Action

To check & replace Engine assembly.

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pocp.go>

SAUD BAHWAN Group

Saud Bahwan Automotive LLC
CR 1703412
Contact details: Toll free - 80073000, Mobile- 99851135
Working days: Sunday - Thursday
Working Time: 8:00 - 17:00 hrs.

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خط المستهلك
Consumer line
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80077997

SYRIA

WORLDREACTIONS



People celebrate at Umayyad Square in Damascus. — AFP

NATIONS URGE STABILITY AS SYRIANS OUST ASSAD

PARIS: As rebels toppled Syria’s longtime ruler Bashar al Assad in a lightning offensive, here are key reactions from around the world:

‘Return to stability’: China
Beijing “is closely following the development of the situation in Syria and hopes that Syria returns to stability as soon as possible”, the foreign ministry said.

‘Time for unity’ France
Welcoming Assad’s ouster, France called on Syrians to “reject all forms of extremism”. “While the regime has never ceased to pit Syrians against each other, and Syria is fractured and fragmented, the time for unity has come,” foreign affairs minister spokesman Christophe Lemoine said, urging a peaceful political transition.

‘Full protection for minorities’: Germany
“The country must not now fall into the hands of other radicals, whatever form they take,” German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said. She urged “full protection for ethnic and religious minorities such as Kurds, Alawites or Christians” and political inclusivity.

‘Country in turmoil’: Turkiye
Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said the overthrow of the Assad regime was not sudden but rather the result of the grinding civil war. “Of course, this didn’t happen overnight. For the last 13 years, the country has been in turmoil,” Fidan said at conference in Doha.

‘Work together’: UAE
A senior United Arab Emirates official urged Syrians on Sunday to collaborate in order to avert a spiral into chaos. “We hope that the Syrians will work together, that we don’t just see another episode of impending chaos,” presidential adviser Anwar Gargash said at the Manama Dialogue in Bahrain.

‘Political solution’: UK
Britain’s Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner told Sky News that while Assad “wasn’t exactly good” to the Syrian people, “we need stability in that region”.
“Dictatorship and terrorism creates problems for the people of Syria, who have faced so much already,” she said. “That’s why we have to have a political solution where the government is acting in the interests of the Syrian people.” — AFP

SYRIANS LIGHTNING OFFENSIVE: 10 DAYS TO THE FALL OF DAMASCUS

BEIRUT: On Sunday, Syrians declared the end of President Bashar al Assad’s rule, saying they have toppled him as they swept into Damascus and sent him fleeing.

The rebels’ rapid advance in the last days had reignited a years-long war that had begun in 2011 when Assad repressed anti-government protests but which had become largely dormant. Here is a recap of their lightning offensive:

NOVEMBER 27
Fighters launch a surprise attack on the Syrian army in the northern province of Aleppo, sparking clashes that kill more than 130 people in 24 hours.

The attack is launched by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) — which controls much of the northwest Idlib area and slivers of neighbouring Aleppo, Hama and Latakia

provinces — and its allied factions.

NOVEMBER 28
The offensive by HTS comes during a sensitive time for Syria and the region, with a fragile ceasefire between Hezbollah and Israel taking effect in neighbouring Lebanon. Rebels also cut the highway linking Aleppo to Syria’s capital Damascus.

NOVEMBER 29, 30
Fighters shell government-held Aleppo and enter the northern city in a blitz assault against forces of Syrian government. The rebels seize control of most of Aleppo within a day and hold more than 80 towns and villages in the north.

DECEMBER 1 - 2
The war monitor’s head says “Aleppo city is out of control of Syrian regime forces” for the

first time in more than a decade. The United States and its allies France, Germany and Britain call for “de-escalation”, urging for the protection of civilians and infrastructure in Syria.

DECEMBER 5
The rebels captured Hama, Syria’s fourth largest city, after days of fierce fighting with Assad’s forces. Syrian rebel chief Abu Mohammed al Jolani says there would be “no revenge” after Hama’s seizure.

DECEMBER 6
The rebels are within striking distance of Syria’s Homs, known as the “capital of the revolution”. HTS leader Jolani says the goal of the offensive was to overthrow Assad’s rule, reiterating “our right to use all available means to achieve that goal”.

DECEMBER 7
The rebels take Homs, and HTS leader says: “Damascus awaits you”. Defence ministry denies news of the army’s withdrawal from around Damascus.
Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says Syria “is tired of war, blood and tears”.

DECEMBER 8
The army and other security forces pulls out of Damascus international airport after Assad reportedly flees the country, says the Observatory. Rebels enter Damascus and declare the end of Assad rule, sending residents streaming into the streets celebrating.
Syrian Prime Minister Mohammed al Jalali says he is ready to “cooperate” with any leadership chosen by the people and for any handover process. — AFP

REBELS HAIL END OF ASSAD RULE IN SYRIA

REBELS took Damascus on Sunday after a lightning offensive, sending President Bashar

al Assad fleeing and ending five decades of Baath party rule in Syria. Residents in the capital were seen cheering in the streets as the rebel factions heralded the departure of Assad, saying: “We declare the city of Damascus free.” Images from Damascus showed rebels firing into the air at sunrise, with some flashing the victory sign and crying. Some people climbed atop a tank in celebration, while others battered a toppled statue of Assad’s father, Hafez. “I can’t believe I’m living this moment,” tearful Damascus resident Amer Batha said by phone. “We’ve been waiting a longtime for this day,” he said, adding: “We are starting a new history for Syria.”

Assad’s reported departure comes less than two weeks after the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group challenged more than five decades of Assad family rule with a lightning offensive. “After 50 years of oppression under Baath rule, and 13 years of crimes and tyranny and (forced) displacement... we announce today the end of this dark period and the start of a new era for Syria,” the rebel factions said on Telegram. Prime Minister Mohammed al Jalali said he was ready to cooperate with “any leadership chosen by the Syrian people”.

The head of war monitor the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Rami Abdel Rahman, said:



Syrians celebrate the taking over of the capital Damascus by Syrian rebel fighters in Beirut’s Triq al Jdideh neighbourhood. — AFP

Before the announcements, Damascus residents had described a state of panic as traffic jams clogged the city centre, with people seeking supplies and queueing to withdraw money. But on Sunday morning saw chants and cheering, with celebratory gunfire and shouts of “Syria is ours and not the Assad family’s”

“Assad left Syria via Damascus international airport before the army security forces left” the facility.

HTS said their fighters broke into a jail on the outskirts of Damascus, announcing an “end of the era in the prison of Sednaya”, which has become a by-word for the darkest abuses.

The rapid developments came just hours after HTS said it had captured the strategic city of Homs.

Homs is about 140 kilometres from the capital and was the third major city seized by the rebels, who began their advance on November 27, reigniting a years-long war that had become largely dormant. US President Joe Biden was keeping a close eye on the “extraordinary events” unfolding in Syria, the

White House said.
The Britain-based Observatory confirmed “the doors of the infamous ‘Sednaya’ prison... have been opened for thousands of detainees who were imprisoned by the security apparatus throughout the regime’s rule”. Assad’s government had previously denied the army had withdrawn from areas around Damascus. Reports that Assad had fled were followed by the premier saying he was ready to “cooperate” with a new leadership and any handover.
“This country can be a normal country that builds good relations with its neighbours and the world... but this issue is up to any leadership chosen by the Syrian people,” Jalali said in a speech broadcast on his Facebook account. — AFP

UN voices ‘cautious hope’ for Syria at its ‘watershed moment’

GENEVA: The UN envoy for Syria said the country was at “a watershed moment” on Sunday after rebels declared they had taken the capital, Damascus. Describing Syria’s drawn-out civil war as a “dark chapter (that) has left deep scars”, special envoy Geir Pedersen said: “Today we look forward with cautious hope to the opening of a new one — one of peace, reconciliation, dignity and inclusion for all Syrians”. “Today marks a watershed moment in Syria’s history — a nation that has endured nearly 14 years of relentless suffering and unspeakable loss,” he said, extending his “deepest solidarity to all who have borne the weight of death, destruction, detention and untold human rights violations”.
President Bashar al Assad’s reported flight from Damascus comes less than



“The clear desire expressed by millions of Syrians that stable and inclusive transitional arrangements are put in place, that Syrian institutions continue to function

GEIR PEDERSEN
The UN envoy for Syria

two weeks after the group Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) launched a lightning offensive challenging more than five decades of domination by the Assad family. Assad had ruled Syria since 2000, when he inherited power from his father. Since 2011, he had overseen a crackdown on the democracy movement, which began with peaceful protests.

The Assad government’s repression of the protests morphed into one of the bloodiest wars of the century, killing hundreds of thousands of people and displacing millions. Pedersen acknowledged in a statement that “the challenges ahead remain immense”, stressing however: “This is a moment to embrace the possibility of renewal... (and) a path toward a united and

peaceful Syria.”
The UN special envoy emphasised “the clear desire expressed by millions of Syrians that stable and inclusive transitional arrangements are put in place, that Syrian institutions continue to function”.
He said the Syrian people should be helped to realise their “legitimate aspirations... (to) restore a unified Syria”. The statement said Pedersen had heard from many Syrians, including armed groups and civil society organisations, and had noted “a will to protect their fellow Syrians... against retribution and harm”. He appealed to all armed parties to “maintain... law and order, protect civilians and preserve public institutions”. He urged Syrians “to prioritise dialogue, unity and

respect for international humanitarian law and human rights as they seek to rebuild their society”. “There must be a collective effort to secure peace and dignity for all”.
Meanwhile, the EU’s top diplomat on Sunday hailed the fall of Syria’s Bashar al Assad and said it pointed to the weakness of some of his supporters, including Russia.
“The end of Assad’s dictatorship is a positive and long-awaited development. It also shows the weakness of Assad’s backers, Russia and Iran,” Kaja Kallas said in a post on X.
She added that the EU’s priority was to “ensure security” in the region and pledged to work with “all the constructive partners” in Syria and more broadly across the area. — AFP

CLASHESCASUALTIES



Members of Sudan's armed forces appear for new recruits in the eastern city of Gedaref. — AFP

RESCUERS SAY
28 KILLED IN
KHARTOUM BOMBS

PORT SUDAN: A Sudanese network of volunteer rescuers said that 28 civilians were killed on Sunday when a fuel station in an area of Khartoum under paramilitary control came under shelling. The Sudanese army, which has been fighting the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) since April 2023, has been advancing towards the capital in recent weeks, in a bid to regain control of Khartoum.

On Sunday, a fuel station in RSF-held southern Khartoum was hit by shelling, said the South Belt Emergency Response Room. The youth-led volunteer group said “28 people were confirmed dead” and “the number of injured reached 37, including 29 burns cases” and some shrapnel injuries.

The war has killed tens of thousands of civilians and displaced over 11 million, creating what the United Nations has described as the world’s largest displacement crisis. In late November, the Sudanese army said it had retaken the Sennar state capital, Sinja, south of Khartoum, five months after paramilitaries had seized it. — AFP



PALESTINIANS AMID FEAR AND FAMINE

A Palestinian boy sits atop the rubble of a building, destroyed in an Israeli strike, in the Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip amid the ongoing shelling of Israeli forces into the Palestinian enclave. Israel’s retaliatory offensive has killed 44,708 people in Gaza, the majority civilians, according to figures from the territory’s health ministry which the UN considers reliable. — AFP

GHANA’S
FORMER
PRESIDENT
MAHAMA
WINS HISTORIC
ELECTION
COMEBACK

ACCRA: Ghana’s former president John Dramani Mahama won a historic comeback election victory on Sunday after voters appeared to punish the ruling New Patriotic Party over its management of an economic crisis. NPP candidate Vice-President Mahamudu Bawumia on Sunday conceded defeat in the weekend presidential election.

Defeat in Saturday’s election ended eight years in power for the NPP under President Nana Akufo-

Addo, marked by the west African state’s worst economic turmoil in years, high inflation and a debt default. For Mahama, president from 2012-2017, it was his third attempt to reclaim the nation’s top post after falling short in 2016 and 2020 elections. “The people of Ghana have spoken, the people have voted for change at this time and we respect it with all humility,” Bawumia said.

In what was a speedy concession with official vote tallies still coming

in, Bawumia said he had called National Democratic Congress (NDC) candidate Mahama to congratulate him. Blaring horns, waving flags and cheering, Mahama supporters were already celebrating outside the party campaign headquarters in the capital Accra. With a history of democratic stability, Ghana’s two main parties, the NPP and NDC, have alternated in power equally since the return to multi-party politics in 1992. — AFP

Trump calls for immediate
Ukraine, Russia ceasefire

US president-elect Donald Trump called on Sunday for an immediate ceasefire and negotiations between Ukraine and Russia to end “the madness”, prompting Ukrainian President Volodymr Zelensky and the Kremlin to list their conditions. Trump made his comments just hours after meeting Zelensky in Paris for their first face-to-face talks since Trump won last month’s US election. Trump has vowed to bring about a negotiated end to the conflict, but so far has not provided details.

“Zelensky and Ukraine would like to make a deal and stop the madness,” Trump wrote on his social media platform Truth Social, adding that Kyiv had lost some 400,000 soldiers. “There should be an immediate ceasefire and negotiations should begin.” “I know Vladimir well. This is his time to act. China can help. The World is waiting!” Trump added, referring to Russian President Putin.

Trump, in Paris for the reopening of Notre-Dame Cathedral, sat down with Zelensky on Saturday for about an hour, along with host President Emmanuel Macron. Trump and Zelensky shook hands and smiled, but it was unclear how the conversation had gone. Accounts of the talks from the French and Ukrainian sides said only that the discussions had been good and productive. Zelensky reacted to Trump’s message on Sunday saying peace was not just a piece of paper, but needed guarantees.

“When we talk about effective peace with Russia, we must first and foremost talk about effective guarantees for peace. Ukrainians want peace more than anyone else,” he said on X. “It (the war) cannot simply end with a piece of paper and a few signatures. A ceasefire without guarantees can be reignited at any moment, as Putin has already done before. To ensure that Ukrainians no longer suffer losses, we must guarantee the reliability of peace and not turn a blind eye to occupation.” It appeared Trump’s figure of 400,000 Ukrainian soldiers lost in the war meant both killed and wounded. Zelensky said 43,000 soldiers had been killed in the war and that there had been 370,000 wounded soldiers.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov



French President Emmanuel Macron accompanies US president-elect Donald Trump and Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky as they leave after a trilateral meeting, in Paris. — Reuters

convened a conference call with reporters to address Trump’s comments. Peskov said Russia was open to talks, but that they had to be based on agreements reached in Istanbul in 2022 and on current realities on the battlefield where Russian forces have been pushing forward at their fastest rate since the early days of the war in 2022. Putin has said repeatedly that a preliminary agreement reached between Russian and Ukrainian negotiators in the first weeks of the war at talks in Istanbul, which was never implemented, could serve as the basis for future talks.

“Our position on Ukraine is well known,” said Peskov. “The conditions for

an immediate stop to hostilities were set out by President Putin in his speech to the Russian Foreign Ministry in June of this year. It is important to recall that it was Ukraine that refused and continues to refuse negotiations,” he said.

Putin has said that Ukraine must not join the Nato military alliance and that Russia should be left fully in control of four Ukrainian regions his troops partially control at the moment for a peace deal to be done. Peskov noted that Zelensky had banned contacts with the Russian leadership through a special decree, which Peskov said would have to be revoked if talks were to proceed. — Reuters

South Korean opposition plans new impeachment push

SEOUL: South Korea’s main opposition party said on Sunday it will try again to impeach President Yoon Suk Yeol after his declaration of martial law. Meanwhile police arrested the defence minister in charge of the martial law operation, and the interior minister resigned. Both they and Yoon are being investigated for alleged insurrection.

Yoon averted impeachment late on Saturday as huge crowds braved freezing temperatures in another night of protests outside parliament to demand the president’s ouster. Opposition parties proposed the impeachment motion, which needed 200 votes in the 300-member parliament to pass, but a near-total boycott by Yoon’s People Power Party (PPP) doomed it to failure.

Lee Jae-myung, leader of the main opposition Democratic Party (DP), said on Sunday that they will try again on December 14. “Yoon, the principal culprit behind the

insurrection and military coup that destroyed South Korea’s constitutional order, must either resign immediately or be impeached without delay,” Lee told reporters. “On December 14, our Democratic Party will impeach Yoon in the name of the people.”

In exchange for blocking his removal from office, Yoon’s People Power Party (PPP) said that it had “effectively obtained (Yoon’s) promise to step down”. “Even before the president steps down, he will not interfere in state affairs, including foreign affairs,” PPP leader Han Dong-hoon said on Sunday after a meeting with Prime Minister Han Duck-soo. This will “minimise the confusion to South Korea and its people, stably resolve the political situation and recover liberal democracy”, Han told reporters.

But Lee and the National Assembly speaker Woo Won-shik, both from the opposition



South Korea’s main opposition Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung (C) speaks during a press conference at the National Assembly in Seoul. — AFP

Democratic Party (DP), on Sunday called the arrangement illegal. “For the prime minister and the ruling party to jointly exercise presidential authority, which no one has granted them, without participating in constitutional processes to address unconstitutional martial

law, is a clear violation of the Constitution,” Woo said. “The power of the president is not the personal property of President Yoon Suk Yeol,” said Lee. “Isn’t this another coup that destroys the constitutional order?”

Kim Hae-won, a constitutional

law professor at Pusan National University Law School, called it an “unconstitutional soft coup.” “In reality, a political party is merely a private political entity, and handing over the president’s functions to an entity that is neither a constitutional institution nor a state body seems like an action that disrupts the state’s rights,” Kim said. Massive crowds -- police said there were 150,000 people, organisers one million -- gathered outside parliament to pressure lawmakers to oust the president. Many wore elaborate outfits, carrying home-made flags and waving colourful glow sticks and LED candles as K-pop tunes blasted from speakers. Early on Sunday, police arrested Kim Yong-hyun, who quit as defence minister on Wednesday and was slapped with a travel ban, reports said. Interior Minister Lee Sang-min on Sunday tendered his resignation which was accepted, Yoon’s office said. — AFP

OPINION

Intangible heritage is crucial to preserving the future



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

SHABAB Oman’ has just been registered under Unesco’s ‘Register of Good Safeguarding Practices’. In addition, the popular leaf, henna, has also been recognised as being part of the ‘Intangible cultural heritage of humanity’. The request for listing of the latter was made by various countries, including Oman. What unites the two is that they both belong to an intangible heritage of a nation. Intangible heritage is defined as products or processes which include “nonphysical intellectual wealth, such as folklore, customs, beliefs, traditions, knowledge and language”. As the name suggests, it is different from physical heritage which could include art and architecture. This is a timely recognition because languages, rituals and customs are important to preserve. They reflect our past and who we are today. In many ways, they are more important than buildings like historical monuments because they focus on common people, not the select few who would be remembered by history. Intangible heritage is what remains when

all else is gone. It points to the songs, the rhythms of daily life, the small rituals that we follow even today without knowing exactly why. It reflects the wonders, anxieties and beliefs of a community through history. ‘Shabab Oman’, for example, recreates historical journeys embarked upon from Oman to various corners of the world using traditional maritime technology and techniques. As the ship travels to new destinations, it informs a new audience about Oman’s historical association with the seas and creates awareness about Omani civilisation and culture. In doing so, it also documents and archives the traditional sea faring methods for future generations. Similarly, henna also plays an important role in social customs and traditions. An important element of social occasions in Oman and elsewhere, henna is associated with joy, ceremony and festivity. Used in births and marriages, henna is also important for its medicinal properties, mainly cooling in hot, tropical parts of the world. When applied to the hair or peripheries like feet and hands, it cools down the temperature of the

The vagaries of time have taken away much knowledge but protecting what remains is one of the most significant ways of preserving and asserting cultural identity

body. Henna is often applied accompanied to the tune of songs and chants which include social commentary and advice. Some songs even pertain to the production and preservation of the henna tree itself, building on identity and a shared ancestral history. In fact, the designs of a henna on the hand are often inspired from textiles and buildings, creating a continuity between the world and its inhabitants. Knowledge of the past is the first step to preserving the future. As is well known, a nation without a past is one without a future. Heritage, tangible or intangible, creates much needed roots, serving as a reminder of what is most important. In an age of globalisation when everything appears to be similar, it is important to focus on the unique features that make a community distinct. There is a wealth of knowledge that our ancestors have created over time. The vagaries of time have taken away much of this knowledge but protecting what remains is one of the most significant ways of preserving and asserting cultural identity.

POPE LOOKS TO HIS LEGACY, CREATES 21 NEW CARDINALS

CLEMENT MELKI

A visibly bruised Pope Francis created 21 new cardinals from five continents on Saturday, including bishops from Algiers, Tehran, Tokyo and Abidjan -- many of whom may one day help choose his successor. In the tenth such consistory since he became pope in 2013, Francis, 87, greeted the assembled cardinals-to-be with a large bruise on his right jaw, which a Vatican source said was caused after he fell from his bed. “The Lord is looking to you, who come from different backgrounds and cultures, and represent the catholicity of the Church,” the pope told the group inside St. Peter’s Basilica. The pope, who has suffered increasing health problems in recent years, appeared short of breath during the ceremony, but smiled and chatted with some of the cardinals. The Vatican did not issue an official communication about the bruise, nor did it respond to a request for more information. “He is calling you to be witnesses of fraternity, artisans of communion and builders of unity,” Francis told the new cardinals. The Argentine pope -- the first pontiff from Latin America -- has championed a grassroots Church that values its faithful even far from the Vatican, and has sought to promote the clergy of developing countries to the highest ranks. This year, Francis has selected five bishops from Latin America (Ecuador, Chile, Brazil, Peru and Argentina), and two from Africa (Ivory Coast, Algeria) to become cardinals. The Asia-Pacific region, where Catholicism is growing the fastest, is represented with promotions of the archbishop of Tokyo and the bishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Melbourne, Australia. Francis has also selected Belgian prelate Dominique Joseph Mathieu, who serves as the archbishop of Tehran-Isfahan in Iran. With the new promotions, Francis has chosen nearly 78 per cent of the 140 so-called “elector” cardinals. Twenty of the new group are under the age of 80, making them eligible to vote in the conclave that would be called to choose a new pope in the event of Francis’s death or resignation. But there is no guarantee that his appointments would share his views. The pope has exclusive responsibility for naming cardinals, the so-called ‘Princes of the Church’, whose role is to assist him in the government or Curia of the Holy See. Some cardinals live in Rome and hold functions within the Curia, but most continue to exercise their ministry in their dioceses. Held underneath the soaring dome of St. Peter’s, the cardinals-to-be knelt before Pope Francis to receive their biretta, or square scarlet cap, and a ring. Francis implored the new cardinals to “make every effort to walk in the path of Jesus”, warning them not “to to be dazzled by the allure of prestige, the seduction of power”. Following the ceremony, the new cardinals were to participate in the traditional “courtesy visit”, in which members of the public can meet them. The cardinals will then gather for a mass Sunday morning at St. Peter’s. — AFP

Gaza’s disabled face ‘impossible times’ of chaos

WHEN the Israeli military ordered evacuations in part of the northern Gaza Strip about a year ago, Zuhair Abu Odeh rushed out with his 9-year-old daughter, who uses a wheelchair, in search of a safer place. In his haste, he ran her chair into a crack in a road, jamming a wheel and forcing them to abandon it. Abu Odeh and his sons carried his daughter, Lara, on their backs for 4 1/2 hours until they reached Nuseirat, 9 miles to the south. “We’re living through impossible times,” Abu Odeh, 46, said in a phone interview from a makeshift shelter in Khan Yunis, where the family has since fled. The war has forced most of Gaza’s roughly 2 million residents from their homes, an experience defined by daily struggles to find food, water, clean bathrooms and power. But it has been particularly punishing for people with disabilities and their families. The suffering of disabled people — the blind, deaf, physically and cognitively impaired — has been compounded by steep shortages in devices to aid them, like wheelchairs and hearing aids, and in damage to roads, sidewalks and homes with accessible features. Until Abu Odeh found Lara a new wheelchair in February, he and his children carried her to the market, the hospital and the beach. While the chair has brought some relief, it has still been difficult to push through dirt paths in the makeshift camps set up for people seeking shelter.

“We’re barely holding on,” Abu Odeh said. “We can’t tolerate this agony anymore.” Lara was originally diagnosed with cerebral palsy, but an orthopaedist said he believed that was wrong and suggested spinal surgery could give her the ability to walk. Her parents, who lived in the northern Gaza town of Beit Hanoun, spent days preparing paperwork and working connections to send her to the Israeli-occupied West Bank for surgery. But since the October 7 Hamas-led attack that ignited the war in Gaza, they have made no progress because of Israeli restrictions on leaving Gaza. “I don’t need food or any other



Lara, centre, 9, and her mother, Manal Abu Odeh, left, in Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip. — The New York Times



ADAM RASGON

The writer is a reporter for The New York Times

kind of assistance,” said Manal Abu Odeh, Lara’s mother. “What I need is to bring Lara to Ramallah,” the West Bank city where hospitals have resources well beyond Gaza’s broken health care system. Before the war, 56,000 people in Gaza were registered as living with disabilities, with nearly half suffering from a physical impairment, according to the Palestinian Authority. The United Nations said 21 per cent of households in Gaza reported at least one family member having a disability before the October 7 attack. While no new estimate has been released, experts believe the conflict between Israel and Hamas has permanently disabled thousands more. Doctors have amputated people’s limbs throughout Gaza. At the end of last year, Unicef said medical workers and UN staff members reported that around 1,000 children had lost one or more of their limbs; in September, the World Health Organization reported that more than 22,500 had suffered “life-changing” injuries, requiring rehabilitation “now and for years to come.” Disabled people, humanitarian officials said, were some of the most neglected in the

war. “People with disabilities in Gaza are at the highest risk, but they’ve been forgotten far too often,” said Muhannad Alazzeah, 54, a member of the UN committee on the rights of people with disabilities. In 2012, Israel ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which requires member states to take “all necessary measures” to ensure that people with disabilities are protected, including in armed conflicts. Alazzeah said Israel was not living up to its obligations to move disabled people from the line of fire, ensure the delivery of sufficient equipment and specialised medications, and help injured people leave Gaza. In a statement, COGAT, the arm of the Israeli defence ministry that coordinates the entry of aid into Gaza, said it has permitted the entry of more than 28,000 tonnes of medical supplies, including medicine, wheelchairs and crutches. It also pointed to Israel’s recent decision to allow some patients and escorts to travel through Israeli territory to access medical treatment abroad. In one of the most recent cases in November, Israel allowed more than 200 patients and their escorts to exit Gaza. — The New York Times

Does disability mirrors inability?



ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI

The write is author, translator and a communications professional

THE word ‘disability’ mirror images of people who cannot walk, talk, see, or perform tasks that most people take for granted. If someone cannot see, does not mean they lack vision. Why do some people consider disabled individuals as abnormal?

Disabled people share the same emotions, attitudes, and needs as anyone else. Disabilities are not a punishment; they are part of the diverse and beautiful spectrum of human existence. Everyone is created differently, and it is beyond the control of individuals to choose their circumstances. It is simply their fate to live with certain challenges. However, even in those challenges, they are blessed with unique talents, perspectives, and strengths.

The creativity of disabled individuals is a powerful force that breaks through barriers and challenges traditional boundaries. Far from being limited by their circumstances, many people with disabilities tap into their unique perceptions and experiences to create art, innovate in technology, and inspire social change. Hence, why do some people misunderstand or judge disabled individuals? In fact, studies and history have shown that many individuals with disabilities possess exceptional talents and intelligence. People should never be judged based on their appearance or condition. Disability does not mean someone is incapable of contributing

to society. Some of the world’s most brilliant minds and influential figures have been disabled: inventors, scientists, actors, and more.

Take, for example, the remarkable American writer, Helen Keller. Despite being both blind and deaf, she became a powerful advocate for the disabled community, travelling the world to improve education and opportunities for those facing physical challenges. She didn’t let her disabilities define her; instead, she used them to drive herself to greatness. She once said, “I am conscious of a soul-sense that lifts me above the narrow, cramping circumstances of my life. My physical limitations are forgotten, my world lies upward, the length and breadth, and the sweep of the heavens are mine!”

Or think about Tom Cruise, a Hollywood icon who battled dyslexia, a reading disability, from the age of seven. Rather than let it hinder his career, he overcame it with determination and dedication, becoming one of the biggest movie stars in the world. And Thomas Edison, the great inventor, didn’t learn to read until he was 12 years old due to learning disability. His story reminds us that where there’s a will, there’s a way.

Closer to home, many disabled individuals are making invaluable contributions to our communities. Whether working in government, private industries, or running their own businesses, these individuals demonstrate that their abilities go far

Disability does not mean someone is incapable of contributing to society. Some of the world’s most brilliant minds and influential figures have been disabled... inventors, scientists, actors, and more

beyond their disabilities. Their resilience, confidence, and unwavering spirit are what drive their success. They prove that disability does not limit potential.

To truly support disabled people, society must step up — both public and private organisations should make it easier for them to access the services they need. Special care and attention should be given, especially in situations where patience is required, such as waiting in long lines or dealing with complex procedures. Understanding these unique challenges will help ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to thrive.

Kindness is a universal language, which the deaf can hear and the blind can see. Whether it is through government initiatives, non-profit organisations, or individual efforts, it is significant that we extend compassion and respect to disabled people in every corner of our society. Like all of us, they have an insight, energy, and dedication to contribute in countless ways.

To all those living with disabilities, never let the opinions or behaviours of others steal your inner peace. It is not your fault if others fail to accept you for who you are. You owe no apology for something beyond your control.

You are not defined by your condition, but a person who continues to grow, flourish, and reach new heights, regardless of the obstacles. Let your disability be the source of your greatest strength and turn it into your most powerful ability.

FROM CANADA, PROFESSOR TRIES TO KEEP GAZA UNIVERSITY ‘ALIVE’

BEN SIMON

University professor Ahmed Abu Shaban often gets up at 3:00 am in Toronto to remotely teach his students in Gaza — motivated by loyalty to his trapped pupils, and a deep sense of guilt.

Shaban, an academic who fled Gaza days after October 7, 2023, said he has an obligation to students in the Palestinian Territory desperate to study in defiance of unimaginable challenges.

He also said he has a responsibility to help preserve higher education in Gaza, while the world is focused on the humanitarian emergency. But the 50-year-old conceded that guilt also weighs on him. “Guilty for leaving Gaza,” he said. “Like we just abandoned our country, our people, our institution.”

Shaban is still the dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine at Al Azhar University, which was destroyed — along with most university buildings — by Israeli air strikes.

Shaban crossed to Egypt shortly after the war began. Canadian contacts arranged a posting at Toronto’s York University, where he is a visiting professor in the Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change. In a campus office with empty book shelves and mostly bare walls, Shaban explained that he felt compelled to help make Al Azhar operational in some form.

He wanted “to give the very clear message for the whole world: Yes, they just destroyed our infrastructure. Yes, they destroyed our buildings... but we are still alive and we will just continue,” he said. “This is actually a responsibility for our students, for our nation, and for our independent state in the future.”

Shaban, who is on Al Azhar’s board, said its pre-war enrolment was 14,000 students.

When registration opened for online courses earlier this year he expected 1,000 students to join.

“We got 10,000,” he said.

“It was really, for me, shocking because, just imagine: you live in a tent, you have no electricity, you have no internet. You have nothing at all.

“But you still have the hope to go to sign up for online courses and to walk for five (km) to get Internet connection and even to communicate, to sit and study. And sometimes you risk your life even while you are searching for internet.”

Shaban conceded his personal schedule is “stressful,” as he tries to work in two time zones.

One day last month, he was up at 3:00 am to join a workshop on Gaza’s food system, before an Al Azhar board meeting at 6:00 am. He then headed to his Toronto office to prepare a guest lecture on the Gaza war. On evenings and weekends he records and uploads lectures for his Palestinian students. — AFP

Dollar diplomacy we need

AMID THE recent maelstrom of political news was an important development for the future of technology-enabled public money. During the BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, the Bank for International Settlements revealed that it was withdrawing from the digital-asset and payments initiative Project mBridge.

Conceived in 2022 as a clearinghouse for central-bank digital currencies, mBridge had anchored the BIS’s own work toward a global interbank settlement system to connect CBDCs beyond the control by any single government. Capitalising on the efficiency gains of blockchain technology, mBridge offered an answer to all who are disenchanted with sluggish and unaffordable cross-border payments. As recently as June, the BIS had doubled down on the initiative, adding Saudi Arabia to its roster of founding central banks and advancing it out of the pilot phase.

Doubtless buffeted by the geopolitical headwinds coming out Kazan, BIS General Manager Agustín Carstens told a Group of 30 meeting in late October that, “we cannot directly support any project for the BRICS because we cannot operate with countries that are subject to sanctions.” Carstens’s comments reflect a growing tension in Western capitals. While many support efforts to use new technology to make the financial system more efficient and egalitarian, they don’t want to usher in a world order that is no longer grounded in Western law and norms. US intelligence agencies have long highlighted this trade-off when warning about rogue states that are building sanctions-proof alternative settlement mechanisms or using virtual assets to facilitate bilateral trade (such as between Russia and China). In Kazan, BRICS leaders made no secret of their efforts to create a new financial order and jettison the dollar, echoing long-standing Russian calls for a single blockchain-based BRICS currency to fortify trade against Western sanctions.

The uncomfortable question facing Western policymakers is whether their vision of a borderless



As matters stand, roughly 90 per cent of foreign-exchange flows are still dollarised.

digital economy enshrined in Western values is truly best served by a public-led model in which central banks take centre stage and organise commerce at the supranational level. After all, a privately led, publicly refereed system has been the norm for the past 80 years. It was intermediated private money that exported Western rules and norms, creating a financial bulwark beyond Nato members’ borders and hard-coding US sanctions and anti-money-laundering measures into global banking and trade. Banks and multinationals have carried dollars to almost every corner of the planet, simultaneously serving as envoys for the US currency and financial system. For decades, this system has stymied money launderers, state sponsors of terrorism, drug traffickers, and other criminals, pushing them to find ever more creative methods of evasion.

However, rogue actors’ rapid adoption of unregulated forms of digital money has invigorated discussions – among both BRICS and Western leaders – about overhauling the existing global financial architecture. It is no surprise that the BRICS have been at the forefront of projects like mBridge, given its potential to upend the established Bretton Woods order. But rather than shying away from mBridge and successful pilots of new global trade and payments rails, Western leaders

should be considering how to make the most of them.

Just as the old international financial rails served Western policy objectives, so can the new digital ones. With mBridge already demonstrating that blockchain technology can connect the global economy through Internet-speed transactions, the only question now is how to strike the right balance between public and private involvement.

The answer may be deceptively simple: The most promising alternative to the BRICS vision is to keep the existing architecture but modernise the rails that distribute the dollar, euro, and pound. As matters stand, roughly 90 per cent of foreign-exchange flows are still dollarised, but the Financial Stability Board’s latest assessment of cross-border payments stresses that the fragile, slow, and expensive legacy fiat-currency system needs an upgrade. With consumer cross-border payment costs rising, America’s not-so-secret weapon to address the system’s deficiencies and counter its adversaries’ ambitions is simply to embrace regulated digital dollars and allow the private sector to keep doing what it has been doing.

Can Western policymakers match BRICS leaders’ enthusiasm for digitisation and take steps to regulate digital dollars?

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ANDREW GALLUCCI

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SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



OMAN PADEL TEAMS READY TO SHINE AT GULF CUP IN KUWAIT

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 8

The Oman Padel Men's and Women's teams will take part in the third edition of the Arabian Gulf Cup in Padel, which begins on Wednesday and runs until Sunday in Kuwait. The Oman Women's team will work hard to defend their title from the first and second editions, while the Men's team will aim for a strong performance and a positive result.

The Oman Padel Committee (OPC) unveiled details of this participation at a press meet on Sunday at the headquarters of the Oman Olympic Committee. The OPC also announced new sponsors, including SATA LLC (Porsche Oman) and Omantel.

Fatma al Nabhani, Oman national Padel team player and OPC board member, announced the players who will represent the national teams. The Men's team includes Dr Khalid al Nabhani, Younis al Rawahi, Munir al Rawahi, Abdullah al Barwani, Zakaria al Suleimani, Nabil al Shibani, Abdullah al Ghassani and Sami Habib. The Women's team comprises Fatma al Nabhani, Sara al Balushi, Maryam al Balushi, Aisha al Suleimani, Ruaa al Swedi, Ithar al Balushi, Lina al Zadjali and Noof Dawood.

Fatma affirmed the importance of the tournament, stating: "This event is an opportunity to strengthen Oman's presence in the Gulf, reflecting our commitment to developing the sport and supporting our athletes to achieve the best possible results."

"This is the first official participation of the Men's team in the Gulf Padel Cup, presenting a new challenge and a unique opportunity to gain experience and compete at high levels. We have worked hard over the past period to properly prepare the Men's team, and we are confident in their ability to deliver an honourable performance that showcases the sportsmanship and advanced skills of our players," she added.

Dr Khalid, captain of the Men's national team, said: "The Oman Padel team is fully prepared for the Gulf Padel Cup. We have worked intensively over the past period to ensure the best performance in this important tournament, especially since it is the first time the Men's team is participating. We aim to achieve further success with the Women's team, who have delivered outstanding results in previous editions."

"One of the key factors that helped raise our readiness was the recent local tournaments, especially the Al Barwani Padel Cup, which provided an excellent opportunity to compete at high levels. This helped refine the players' skills and improve team cohesion. It also allowed us to identify strengths and weaknesses in our performance, which has helped us make adjustments in our technical and tactical training. Furthermore, the coaching staff selected many players from this event," he added.

The five-day event will follow a group-stage format, with teams competing in the first round within groups. The top two teams from each group will qualify for the final phase.



Oman crowned Socca World Cup champions

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 8

OMAN MADE HISTORY on Saturday night, defeating Kazakhstan 2-1 in a dramatic penalty shootout to secure the Socca World Cup 2024 title. The thrilling final, held at the Sports Makers Stadium at the Oman Automobile Association (OAA), saw Oman become the first Arabian team to win this prestigious global title, cementing their place in the annals of Omani sports history. Croatia claimed the bronze medal after a 2-0 victory over Romania in the third-place playoff.

The match started with Oman taking the lead in the 21st minute. Mutasim al Shamsi doubled the advantage in the 29th minute, but Kazakhstan's Olzhas Taibassarov responded with a goal in the 38th minute, reducing the deficit.

Oman's path to the final was far from easy. In the Round of 16, they triumphed 2-1 over Hungary. They then defeated Albania 2-1 in the quarterfinals and secured their spot in the final with a 3-1 win over Romania in the semifinals. Oman topped Group A with a perfect 12 points from four matches, starting their campaign with a 3-1 victory over Italy, followed by a 1-0 win over the USA, a 3-1 victory over Canada, and a 1-0 defeat of Qatar in their final group match.

Oman's Mutasim al Shamsi was named the tournament's Most Valuable Player, while Norbert Jaszczak from Poland took home the Top Scorer award, having netted eight goals. Romania's Aleandru Samolia earned the Best Goalkeeper award for his outstanding performances throughout the tournament.

Following the final match, HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, the chief guest, presented the trophies and awards to the individual players and top three teams. The ceremony was attended by Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, as well as other dignitaries and invitees.

In a statement after the event, Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas congratulated the



Omani team on their historic victory: "Congratulations to the Oman team for winning the Socca World Cup 2024. This victory reflects the dedication and hard work of the coaching staff and players. I would also like to thank Sports Makers for their excellent organisation of this event,

which has been a year in the making. Oman has great examples of successful youth who can deliver top-tier events, and they deserve our support to organise even more such events in the future. We are committed to bringing more sporting events to Oman in the coming years."

Norris wins in Abu Dhabi, McLaren are F1 champions

ABU DHABI: Lando Norris won the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix on Sunday to deliver McLaren's first Formula One constructors' title since 1998 after teammate Oscar Piastri collided with Max Verstappen on the opening lap and finished 10th.

Carlos Sainz and Charles Leclerc were second and third for Ferrari, McLaren's historic rivals and the only team that could have beaten them to the championship.

"You all deserve this. Thank you so much. It's been a special year," said Norris over the team radio after taking the chequered flag.

"Next year is going to be my year too."

Seven-times world champion Lewis Hamilton finished fourth in his last race for Mercedes, overtaking teammate George Russell on the 58th and final lap. He joins Leclerc at Ferrari next season.

"Lewis, that was the drive of a world champion," said Mercedes boss Toto Wolff.

Red Bull's Verstappen, who



(From L) Ferrari's Carlos Sainz, McLaren's Norris, McLaren's Zak Brown and Leclerc. — AFP

took his fourth successive drivers' title in Las Vegas last month, ended up sixth after collecting a 10-second penalty for a collision that left McLaren's hopes totally in Norris's hands.

Pierre Gasly was seventh for Alpine with Nico Hulkenberg eighth for Haas and Fernando Alonso ninth for Aston Martin. McLaren finished with 666

points to Ferrari's 652 and Red Bull's 589.

EARLY DRAMA

There was drama from the start as Verstappen and Piastri clashed, with McLaren locking out the front row in qualifying but Verstappen right behind in fourth slot. Both cars spun, the Australian resuming at the back of the field while Norris

made a clean getaway from pole position and sped away.

Verstappen said he had been "super unlucky", and had been all the way up the inside of the McLaren into the first corner, but the stewards and Piastri saw it otherwise.

"Move of a world champion, that one," commented Piastri sarcastically, before he was handed a 10-second penalty of his own after running into the back of Franco Colapinto's Williams.

Verstappen served his penalty on lap 30, dropping from third to 11th and seemingly taking a pop at the stewards over the radio.

"Could we ask for 20 seconds, stupid idiots," said the Dutch driver, who was handed two 10-second penalties in Mexico in October.

Leclerc moved through the field from 19th on the grid, up to 12th by the end of the first lap and fourth by the time he pitted at the end of lap 20 with teammate Sainz settled in second and Russell a distant third. — Reuters

SPORTS

SHORTTAKE



British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak exchanges documents with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv. — Reuters

AL NASR, SAHAM SECURE QUARTERFINAL SPOTS IN SULTAN CUP

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 8

Al Nasr team secured their place in the quarterfinals of the Sultan Cup after defeating Nizwa 3-0 on Saturday in a match held at the Al Saada Sports Complex. The first half fell short of expectations, as Al Nasr players delivered an average performance.

The first notable chance for Al Nasr came when Fahad Adel fired a shot that missed the target. Both teams exchanged attacks, with Nizwa having a slight edge through counterattacks, but they failed to pose any real threat to Al Nasr's goalkeeper.

In the 38th minute, Marwan Taib squandered a golden opportunity for Al Nasr with a shot that went wide of the goal. A similar scenario unfolded in the 42nd minute when Marwan's free kick went over the crossbar, leaving the first half to end in a goalless draw.

The second half saw an improvement in Al Nasr's performance as they launched intensive attacks. In the 48th minute, Waleed al Musallami missed a golden opportunity when he went one on one with Nizwa's goalkeeper Salim al Jabri, who made a brilliant save. Nizwa responded with a dangerous chance in the 54th minute, as Syed Mustafa executed a spectacular overhead kick that narrowly missed the goal.

Al Nasr broke the deadlock in the 66th minute through an own goal by a Nizwa defender. The pressure continued, and in the 74th minute, Waleed al Musallami came close to doubling the lead, but his header missed the post.

In the 75th minute, Waleed al Musallami successfully scored the second goal for Al Nasr after a superb pass from Mulham al Sunaidy, which he finished elegantly into Al Jabri's net. Al Nasr wasn't done yet; in the 80th minute, Waleed added a third goal in style, capitalising on a long ball that he intercepted from a Nizwa defender before chipping it over the goalkeeper into the net. The match concluded with Al Nasr securing a commanding 3-0 victory and advancing to the quarterfinals.

SAHAM CLINCHES NARROW VICTORY OVER AHLI SIDAB

Saham secured a hard-fought 1-0 victory over Ahli Sidab to book their place in the quarterfinals of the Sultan Cup. The match took place at the Sohar Sports Complex. The first half was marked by relative control from Saham, who displayed better discipline and organisation, effectively neutralising Ahli Sidab's threats.

Early in the 5th minute, Marwan al Ghafri missed a promising opportunity with a shot that failed to find the net. On the other side, Saham's goalkeeper Hassan al Buraiki made a crucial save in the 12th minute against a dangerous attempt by Omar Ndonj.

Saham capitalised on one of their offensive moves in the 26th minute, with Abdullah al Muraikhi delivering a cross to Ali al Hashmi, who scored the match's only goal with a brilliant header past Ahli Sidab's goalkeeper Ammar al Khamisi. Despite attempts by Ahli Sidab to level the score, including a shot by Mohammed Diallo that deflected off a Saham defender, the first half ended with Saham leading 1-0.

The second half was fast-paced and exciting, with Saham's coach making changes to boost the team's performance. Substitute Salim Habib missed a golden chance to extend the lead in the 53rd minute.

Meanwhile, Ahli Sidab intensified their attacks in search of an equaliser but faced a solid defence and stellar saves by goalkeeper Hassan al Buraiki, including a critical stop in the 58th minute. Despite both teams' efforts, the score remained unchanged until the final whistle, with Saham securing a 1-0 victory and advancing to the quarterfinals.



Real Madrid's Kylian Mbappe celebrates scoring their third goal. — AFP

Madrid close on leaders with 3-0 win at Girona

REAL Madrid narrowed the gap on LaLiga leaders Barcelona to two points with a commanding 3-0 win at Girona on Saturday thanks to goals from Jude Bellingham, Arda Guler and Kylian Mbappe. Second-placed Real have 36 points with a game in hand on Barca, who drew 2-2 at Real Betis.

Girona suffered a sixth loss in 16 league matches and remain eighth on 22 points, two points off the European spots.

Bellingham opened the scoring in the 36th minute by capitalising on a loose ball and firing home from the centre of the box before setting up Guler with a fine through ball to double the lead 10 minutes after the

break.

The England midfielder, who scored for a fifth consecutive LaLiga match, was having an outstanding game but was forced off after taking a knock shortly before Mbappe made it 3-0 with a shot from a tight angle in the 62nd to wrap up the win.

Real boss Ancelotti told reporters Bellingham was alright but they also lost full-back Ferland Mendy to a muscular problem ahead of their Champions League clash at Atalanta on Tuesday.

"(Bellingham) is fine, he is available. We've had the muscle injury to Mendy but the rest of it is just knocks, nothing more," the Italian manager said.

Girona have struggled without key

players through injury and now face difficult matches at home to Liverpool in the Champions League on Tuesday and away to Mallorca next Saturday in LaLiga.

"The team has suffered a lot of injuries. It's costing us more. We still have months to keep growing," Girona defender Miguel Gutierrez told Movistar.

"We have to keep going. We have two very important games. In the Champions League against Liverpool, we're playing to get through.

In LaLiga against Mallorca."

Girona are 30th in the Champions League table, three points behind Real who are 24th and occupy the final qualifying spot for the playoffs. — Reuters

Rampant England pummel New Zealand again to seal series in Wellington

England romped to a second comfortable victory over New Zealand in two weeks to secure a test series triumph on Sunday with skipper Ben Stokes apparently enjoying a Midas touch with his every decision turning to gold.

Stokes delivered the coup de grace at Wellington's Basin Reserve himself, coming on to take the last three wickets at a cost of five runs to dismiss New Zealand for 259 and wrap up the 323-run victory with more than two days to spare.

Seamers Chris Woakes, Brydon Carse and Gus Atkinson all played crucial roles in the victory, the latter with a rare hat-trick on Saturday to help scuttle New Zealand's first innings for 125.

Shoaib Bashir stepped up to



England's captain Ben Stokes bowls during third day. — AFP

remove Tom Blundell after the New Zealand wicketkeeper had marshalled the home rearguard with a defiant 115 on a surface that rarely offers anything for spinners this early in the season.

With the bat, the controversial selection of Jacob Bethell at number three paid dividends in only his second test with an innings of 96, while Ollie Pope thrived with a key knock of 66 despite being dropped down the order as stand-in wicketkeeper.

Most of all, it was the brilliant innings of 123 from Player of the Match Harry Brook on a tricky surface that laid the foundation for England's biggest win by runs over the Black Caps, and a first series triumph in New Zealand since 2008.

"You look down that

scorecard, there's one guy that took it away from us," said New Zealand captain Tom Latham.

"Harry played a fantastic innings there. Credit where credit's due, I thought that was a fantastic innings."

Stokes agreed the fifth-wicket partnership between Brooks and Pope that took England from 43-4 to 280 in the first innings had been crucial.

"Scoring 280 and having five New Zealand wickets at the end of day one really set this game up for us," the New Zealand-born all-rounder said.

"But a lot of that has got to go down to the way that Harry Brook and Ollie Pope took on the New Zealand bowlers and didn't allow their very skilful bowlers to run up and put the ball where they wanted to." — Reuters

SPORTS



Photo by **Mohammed al Buaji**

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, DEC 8

THE FIFTH race of the 22nd edition of the annual camel races for 2024-2025 season concluded on Sunday. The races were held over three days with 89 rounds in Barka and Adam fields. The event was supported by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) and organised by the Oman Camel Racing Federation (OCRF) in cooperation with the Royal Camel Corps (RCC). Recently, the Royal Camel Corps announced regarding purchasing the best camel that won in the fourth race with the best time and bought 10 camels from different categories. The RCC also announced to buy the best camel in the seventh race which will be held in January 2025. The fifth race included 46 rounds at the RCC field in Al Felaj in the Wilayat of Barka and 43 rounds at the Al Bashayer race track in the Wilayat of Adam. On Friday, the first day, witnessed 36 rounds dedicated to the ‘Hagayeg’ category (for two-year-old camels over a distance of 3 km).



On the second day of competition, 27 rounds were held on Saturday, with 12 rounds in Adam and 12 rounds in Barka for the ‘Laqaya’ category (three-year-old camels over a distance of 4 km). Additionally, three rounds for human riders were held over 2 km. On Sunday, the third day witnessed 26 rounds, equally divided between Barka and Adam, with 12 rounds for the ‘Al Ythaa’ category (four-year-old camels over 5 km), six rounds for the ‘Al Thanaya’ category (five-year-old camels over 6 km), and eight rounds for the ‘Al Hawl’ category (camels above six years of age over 6 km).

THE FIRST DAY RESULT READ AS ROUND

Camel's name, Owner, Time ‘minutes/second’			
1	Rahyah	Maktoum bin Saad al Mehri	4:42
2	Ghand	Rashid bin Obeid al Wahibi	4:42
3	Hamloul	Abdullah bin Sulaiman al Rashidi	4:43
4	Daghasha	Nasser bin Salim al Mubahsi	4:44
5	Lahooma	Sultan bin Zayed al Jahafi	4:46
6	Meshghal	Masoud bin Nasser al Yahmedi	4:44
7	Al Dhab	Hamad bin Salim al Ghafili	4:49
8	Taabeer	Said bin Mohammed al Harthy	4:50
9	Al Tayer	Said bin Amer al Mugheiri	4:46
10	Al Shaybah	Saif bin Abdullah al Shafi	4:51
11	Hudua	Said bin Amer al Mugheiri	4:50
12	Musharraf	Nasser bin Salim al Masoudi	4:45
13	Al Taylah	Jassim bin Mohammed al Daree	4:50
14	Jalmoudah	Mohammed al Muhaibi	4:49
15	Laafi	Mohammed bin Ahmed al Wahibi	4:44
16	Ajayb	Hassan bin Jameel al Mubahsi	4:45
17	Moaddah	Said bin Ahmed al Wahibi	4:48
18	Al Shamikh	Said bin Amer al Mugheiri	4:37

SECOND DAY FOR AL LAQAYA FOR 5 KM

1	Salam	Ali bin Rashid al Amari	6:23
2	Jibalia	Hamad bin Mohammed al Wahibi	6:27
3	Oshaq	Ahmed bin Said al Hajri	6:23
4	Al Dana	Hamad bin Mohammed al Wahibi	6:27
5	Yamamah	Salem bin Suhail al Amri	6:27
6	Shaheen	Salem bin Salim al Jahafi	6:25
7	Jabbara	Hamid bin Salim al Sayfi	6:32
8	Rasmiya	Hamood bin Sultan al Maliki	6:36
9	Raddad	Hamad bin Mohammed al Wahibi	6:25
10	Bayan	Ali bin Abdullah al Hashmi	6:29
11	Ezwa	Salim bin Said al Muqbali	6:33
12	Shumeimi	Mohammed al Butini	6:23

HUMAN RIDER - 2 KM

13	Al Shamkha	Amer bin Salim al Zarie	3:14
14	Al Saylah	Amer bin Salim al Zarie	3:11
15	Thameen	Salem bin Said al Zarie	3:09

THIRD DAY ROUNDS

1	Amjad	Royal Camel Corps	8:06
2	Dima	Abdullah bin Twairsh al Wahibi	8:08
3	Shumeimi	Hamad bin Mohammed al Wahibi	8:02
4	Katara	Abdullah bin Twairsh al Wahibi	8:13
5	Shaybah	Amer bin Said al Aamri	8:20
6	Sport	Rakan bin Mohammed al Aamri	8:15
7	Mardhiyah	Abdullah bin Twairsh al Wahibi	10:05
8	Al Dhab	Abdullah bin Twairsh al Wahibi	10:06
9	Mukhtabar	Salem bin Dagmal al Madhooshi	9:59
10	Tasreeh	Royal Camel Corps	10:03
11	Huthoor	Awadh bin Obeid al Wahibi	10:04
12	Mashaakel	Said bin Hadoob al Wahibi	10:24

Oman Camel Racing Federation already announced the next race will be on December 20 over three days with 89 rounds in Barka and Adam fields.



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Oman establishes net-zero centre

THE Ministry of Energy and Minerals has announced the establishment of the Oman Net-Zero Centre through Ministerial Decision No. 2024-35, issued by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals (MoEM).

The centre is designed to advance the Sultanate of Oman's target of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 by shaping national strategies, overseeing project implementation, and supporting public and private entities in reducing carbon footprints.

Minister Al Aufi emphasised that the centre's creation aligns with the royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq. He stated, "The decision reflects our commitment to supervising and following up on net-zero plans and programmes, enhancing energy efficiency, and supporting relevant entities to meet the net-zero target by 2050."

The Oman Net-Zero Centre will

The centre is designed to advance Oman's target of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

serve as a hub for driving national decarbonisation efforts.

Its primary tasks include refining and updating Oman's net-zero strategy in coordination with relevant authorities, overseeing the implementation of net-zero projects while addressing challenges and recommending improvements, offering expertise and guidance to public and private entities to enhance energy efficiency and reduce emissions, and leading campaigns to promote environmental sustainability and encourage national participation.

Additionally, the centre will spearhead the development of a comprehensive national plan for improving energy consumption

The decision reflects our commitment to supervising and following up on net-zero plans and programmes, enhancing energy efficiency and supporting relevant entities to meet the net-zero target by 2050

ENG SALIM BIN NASSER AL AUFİ
Minister of Energy and Minerals

efficiency and evaluating projects' energy performance.

It will also manage carbon and hydrogen certification requests, ensuring compliance with international carbon trading standards.

To ensure strategic oversight, a high-level Steering Committee chaired by the Minister of Energy and Minerals has been established.

Members include representatives from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Finance, and Economy, the Environment Authority, and the Oman Investment Authority.

The committee will approve strategic plans, monitor progress and ensure alignment with Oman's sustainability goals.

The centre will facilitate the adoption of cutting-edge international technologies and practices while fostering innovation and scientific research.

It will also strengthen national capabilities by supporting capacity-building initiatives and sustainability-focused projects.

OQ SIGNS RO 25.5M INVESTMENT DEALS

The initiative aims to enhance Oman's manufacturing sector and diversify its economy.

MUSCAT: OQ Group has inked seven investment agreements worth RO 25.5 million (\$66.4 million) with local and international firms to establish industrial ventures under the Ladayn Plastic Industries Programme.

The initiative, in partnership with Madayn, the National Program for Private Sector Development (Nazdaher), and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, aims to enhance Oman's manufacturing sector and diversify its economy.

The signing ceremony was held under the auspices of Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), and Ashraf bin Hamad al Mamari, CEO of OQ Group, alongside other senior officials.

Sadiq bin Hassan al Lawati, Executive Director of Marketing at OQ Group, signed agreements for raw material supply with project developers.

Eng Dawood bin Salem al Hadabi, CEO of Madayn, formalised land usufruct agreements with Multibond Metal Company, Sidra International Industries, and National Oasis for 33 years. Additional agreements with Medium Investment Company and Ideal Plastic Company were signed by Mohammed bin Ali al Shezawi, Acting CEO of Sohar Free Zone, and with Ethiopian Ras Peru Company by Ali bin Mohammed Tabuk, CEO of Salalah Free Zone.

"The Ladayn Programme drives industrial investments and creates job opportunities, extending beyond Madayn-affiliated industrial cities," said Eng Dawood bin Salem al Hadabi.

\$300 m polymer plant breaks ground at SOHAR Port

MUSCAT: In a landmark event for Oman's industrial sector, the world's second-largest polymer production plant has begun construction at SOHAR Port and Freezone. Spearheaded by Universal.

Fine Chemicals SPC, the project signifies a \$300 million investment, set to occupy 240,000 square metres and marks a crucial advancement in Oman's economic landscape.

The groundbreaking ceremony, attended by Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, and HH Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, showcases Oman's commitment to technological innovation and sustainable growth.

Utilising advanced technologies, the facility will produce essential polyacrylamide and related monomers for industries like energy, agriculture and wastewater management, addressing global energy and water challenges.

Emile Hoogsteden, CEO of SOHAR Port, commented, "This collaboration not only shapes trade dynamics but also propels Oman Vision 2040 forward. It positions SOHAR Port as a leading global exporter of industrial chemicals and reflects our commitment to innovation-led growth and market expansion.

By connecting businesses to the world and attracting substantial foreign direct investment from Singapore and China, we enhance the port's appeal as a premier

The groundbreaking ceremony, attended by Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, and HH Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, showcases Oman's commitment to technological innovation and sustainable growth.

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investment destination.

Ultimately, we are diversifying the economy beyond traditional sectors while fostering sustainable development and creating career opportunities for the people of Oman."

Echo Liu, CEO of Universal Fine Chemicals SPC, said, "By targeting diverse and expansive markets, our partnership will establish a strong foothold in key economic zones and amplify supply chains while attracting relevant industries.

This innovative polymer manufacturing plant is poised to leverage SOHAR's strategic geographic position and logistics capabilities to stimulate economic growth

and enhance local trade networks. Furthermore, the project extends its reach beyond regional boundaries, focusing on markets in the GCC, the Americas, and the European Union."

Success metrics include achieving production targets, innovating manufacturing technologies and expanding market presence globally.

Environmental sustainability is prioritised, with advancements in water treatment and energy efficiency. This initiative underscores SOHAR Port's dedication to global trade and economic development, positioning Oman as a leader in industrial innovation and sustainable progress.

ADVERTORIALS

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The MG RX9 stands as a testament to superior engineering and thoughtful craftsmanship.

A MASTERPIECE OF MODERN DESIGN, POWER AND VERSATILITY: MG RX9

MUSCAT: MG Motor Oman introduced the MG RX9, a flagship SUV that redefines luxury and performance in its segment. Combining sleek design, state-of-the-art technology, and robust power, the RX9 is crafted to cater to the dynamic needs of modern families, road-trip enthusiasts, and drivers who demand excellence in every journey.

With its striking aesthetics, expansive 7-seater configuration, and an array of advanced features, the MG RX9 stands as a testament to superior engineering and thoughtful craftsmanship, promising an elevated driving experience both on the road and off the beaten path.

Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, expressed his excitement about the new MGRX9, stating: "The introduction of the MG RX9 reflects our commitment to bringing world-class vehicles that combine style, functionality, and cutting-edge technology to Oman.

The RX9 is more than just an SUV; it's a statement of modern innovation and versatile performance, perfectly designed to cater to the diverse needs of our customers. We are confident that this flagship model will set new benchmarks in its segment and resonate strongly with drivers in Oman."

The MG RX9's robust and striking exterior design ensures it stands out on the road. At 1967mm wide, it has the widest body in its class, providing a powerful yet elegant presence on the road.

The vehicle's Starburst Wing Grille, integrated with the sleek headlight design featuring 245 laser-engraved LED light units, further enhances its striking front profile. Complementing this dynamic front face are 21-inch wheels, which not only elevate the vehicle's look but also ensure stability and performance on various terrains.

The MG RX9 comes in Six exterior colours inspired by nature, offering a choice to suit all drivers' preferences.

Inside the MG RX9, drivers are greeted by a luxurious and spacious cabin, crafted for comfort and functionality. This 7-seater SUV offers generous legroom and headroom for passengers and drivers alike, boasting the largest 3-row seating space in its class.

The boot space, which can expand to accommodate 1,026 litres in the 5-seat configuration, provides plenty of room for luggage, making it ideal for long-trips.

In the front, the dashboard features premium materials, including high-quality wood grain or aluminium dashboard trim and soft-plated keys, adding an additional touch of elegance.

ADVANCING CYBERSECURITY FOR OMAN’S DIGITAL FUTURE

MUSCAT: CYSEC Oman 2024, held at Mövenpick Hotel & Apartments Ghala Muscat, gathered government leaders, cybersecurity experts and industry innovators to explore Oman's digital transformation in alignment with Oman Vision 2040.

The event opened with a keynote address on "Oman Vision 2040: Cybersecurity Industry Development," highlighting the essential role of cybersecurity in protecting Oman's expanding digital ecosystem. The speech underscored fostering a resilient

cybersecurity industry as a pillar for achieving Oman Vision 2040 goals.

A high-level government panel discussion, "Cybersecurity and Oman Vision 2040: Building a Secure Digital Future," examined advancements in securing critical sectors.

Panellists discussed strategies for fortifying Oman's digital infrastructure and leveraging emerging technologies for national development.

The summit also featured insights from industry leaders across

banking, telecommunications, oil and gas, and higher education, emphasising collaboration and sharing best practices to counter evolving cyber threats.

Recognising women's contributions to digital transformation, the SheLeaders of Oman Awards honoured female leaders driving cybersecurity and innovation across various sectors.

The prestigious CYSEC Awards concluded the event, celebrating outstanding achievements in cybersecurity.

Make a mark in the luxury Lexus IS

DESIGNED to deliver a pulsating performance, the Lexus IS delivers a dynamic and power-packed experience. Cruise the roads with confidence as the IS pierces through winds with its aggressive looks supplemented with unprecedented luxury innovations.

Meticulously crafted to make every moment memorable, take control of your journey by owning the luxury compact-size sedan.

Built to appeal to the younger and more energetic crowd, the attractively stylish drive is an inspiring blend of luxury and utility that takes the whole experience up a notch.

The exterior boasts an illuminated scuff plate, a chrome metallic finish with bold character lines, the Lexus signature gloss black grille, LED headlights, and LED turning signals.

The IS designs represents Lexus' vision of pioneering luxury and providing a seamless driving experience. Available in three trims, the Lexus IS 300, IS 350 ELITE and IS 350 F Sport is a driver's dream. In the

The IS designs represents Lexus' vision of pioneering luxury and providing a seamless driving experience. Available in three trims, the Lexus IS300, IS 350 ELITE and IS 350 F Sport is a driver's dream.



The attractively stylish drive is an inspiring blend of luxury and utility.

IS 300, experience an exhilarating response with a turbocharged 2.0L 4-cylinder, delivering 241 HP at 5,800 rpm. Unbeatable in its league, offers comfort and agility with its smooth leather-wrapped steering wheel, ventilated seats, electrochromic inside rear view mirror with tilt in reverse mode, a remote engine starter and a smart key for ease of access.

Feel connected and indulge in the drive with IS's built-in 10.3' navigation system and 17-speaker Mark Levinson Premium Surround

System.

Advanced safety features include a tire pressure monitoring system, a speed-sensing door lock function, ISOFIX child seat restraint anchors on the rear, cruise control, front and rear parking sensors, side and knee airbags for the front and rear, and an electric parking brake, among others.

Centred on Lexus brand philosophy and its uncompromising attitude toward luxury, all Lexus vehicles are a powerhouse of innovation.

Enjoy BankDhofar offers with ladies credit card

MUSCAT: As the peak travel season approaches, BankDhofar, one of the leading financial institution in the Sultanate of Oman, is introducing exclusive offers with the Ladies Credit Card, designed to elevate the travel experience of women.

This innovative card offers a range of privileges and benefits, making every journey a memorable one.

The card not only offers the standard benefits of a Visa card but also includes a number of exclusive benefits tailored to meet the needs of the Bank's women customers.

Visa Ladies Credit cardholders can enjoy exclusive rewards.

The Rewards points programme offers a seamless and user-friendly experience,



The card is designed to elevate the travel experience of women.

making it easy for cardholders to track their points, browse rewards, and redeem their points through BankDhofar's mobile app or website.

With a variety of redemption options and an ever-expanding catalogue of premium products and experiences, customers enjoy endless opportunities to indulge, explore and save. These points can then be redeemed, allowing customers to choose from more than 900 airlines and destinations worldwide.

Ladies customers can earn up to 0.75% value back on all purchases made outside Oman. The card offers the extensive benefits of the Visa Ladies Credit Card, including unlimited access to airport lounges in Muscat and Salalah.

Temu, Asyad sign pact to elevate e-commerce fulfillment in Oman

MUSCAT: Temu, the direct-from-factory online marketplace, yesterday announced a strategic partnership with Asyad Express, part of Asyad Group, to enhance delivery service across Oman and improve the fulfillment process for its customers.

This collaboration combines Temu's innovative direct-from-manufacturer business model with Asyad Express's advanced logistics network to offer access to a wide variety of quality products at affordable prices.

As part of the alliance, Temu expands its payment methods to include a new cash-on-delivery option, reflecting the company's



Temu expands its payment methods to include a new cash-on-delivery option.

commitment to providing a seamless shopping experience.

"Temu's mission is to make quality products affordable to more consumers.

We aim to deliver a superior customer experience by working with Asyad Express as a local fulfillment partner," a Temu spokesperson said.

Jason Ashbrook, Vice President of Commercial at Asyad Express, added, "We are pleased to collaborate with Temu to provide quality and reliable services to online shoppers in Oman.

Together, we aim to ensure customer satisfaction in the delivery and fulfillment process."

Asyad Express is dedicated to providing efficient and reliable global express delivery services.

This partnership with Temu aligns with the strategic vision of Asyad Group aiming to reinforce Oman's role as a premier logistics gateway to the GCC and MENA.

By leveraging Asyad Express robust infrastructure and advanced technology, this collaboration will enhance cross-border trade, attract global businesses, and contribute to the economic growth for Oman.

Since launching services in Oman in September 2023, Temu has offered a wide range of products across over 200 categories, from household items to electronics.

BUSINESS

NEWINITIATIVES



The event highlighted new regulatory and supervisory initiatives.

CBO MEETING
EXPLORES FUTURE
OF BANKING IN OMAN

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) hosted its annual banking meeting yesterday at the Royal Academy of Management in Muscat under the theme “Digitising Tomorrow.”

The event highlighted new regulatory and supervisory initiatives while examining the future of banking services in the Sultanate of Oman.

Tahir bin Salim al Amri, Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), emphasised the bank’s proactive steps to enhance financial services and support government-led economic development programmes. He urged banks to align their strategies with emerging opportunities and national economic initiatives.

Al Amri also recognised key government programmes promoting financial sustainability, economic diversification and private-sector growth. He praised the banking sector and Oman Banks Association for their role in advancing Oman’s anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing measures, contributing to a positive evaluation by the Financial Action Task Force.

The meeting highlighted Oman’s improving economic outlook, marked by the licensing of four new banks and several payment service providers.

These developments, coupled with enhanced regulatory frameworks, have bolstered the country’s sovereign credit rating.

Key initiatives discussed included the introduction of digital onboarding through a customer identity verification platform, the “Know Your Customer” system, a phased approach to green financing, and upgrades to payment systems such as the gross settlement system and international bank account numbering.

The event also featured a panel discussion with bank CEOs and payment service providers, focusing on digital transformation and strategies for adapting to rapid technological changes in the financial sector.

Attendees included senior banking executives, officials from licensed financial institutions, and representatives from the Oman Banks Association.

— ONA

CEO TALK

Leadership is creating value and inspiring change

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 8

“LEADERSHIP is not just about managing a company; it’s about creating value and inspiring change,” says Moosa al Subhi, Group CEO of Al Sahari Oil Services Co SAOC. In an interview with the Observer, Al Subhi reflected on his journey to the helm of two successful enterprises, the challenges he has faced and the milestones achieved under his leadership.

FROM PASSION TO PURPOSE
Al Subhi’s journey to becoming a CEO was shaped by his deep interest in problem-solving and his desire to create meaningful impact. “I’ve always been driven by a passion for innovation and strategic thinking,” he explains.

“Over the years, I embraced diverse roles that challenged me to grow, lead teams and deliver impactful results. What inspired me most was the opportunity to lead with purpose — to create a positive impact not just for the organisation, but also for the community and stakeholders.”

TURNING CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES
Transforming company culture and regaining trust after a period of underperformance were among the most significant hurdles Al Subhi encountered. “One of the biggest challenges was shifting the company culture towards innovation, collaboration and results-driven values,” he recalls.

To address this, he introduced a competency-based framework, transparent processes, and targeted training programmes to align the team with the company’s vision.

Externally, the focus was on exceeding client expectations and restoring stakeholder



What inspired me most was the opportunity to lead with purpose — to create a positive impact not just for the organisation, but also for the community and stakeholders

MOOSA AL SUBHI
Group CEO
Al Sahari Oil Services Co SAOC

“We turned the company around from losses to profitability, achieving a net profit margin exceeding 30%,” he shares proudly.

Operational efficiency was significantly improved through digital transformation and the adoption of a robust Key Performance Indicator (KPI) system.

“These changes not only optimised costs but also reduced time wastage and improved alignment with organisational goals,” he says.

However, his proudest achievement transcends financial success.

“What holds special significance for me is creating a healthy working environment where everyone feels like part of one family. The respect and trust of my team mean more than any financial metric.”

confidence. “We prioritised consistency, improved service quality, and fostered open communication.

Internally, we built trust by creating an inclusive and empowering environment. Overcoming these challenges was pivotal in restoring confidence and positioning the company for sustainable growth.”

ACHIEVEMENTS THAT REDEFINE SUCCESS
Under Al Subhi’s leadership, Al Sahari Oil Services Co SAOC achieved several notable milestones, including expanding into new markets and implementing innovative technologies.

SHAPING CULTURE AND INSPIRING THE FUTURE
As a leader, Al Subhi believes his role extends beyond driving performance to shaping the company’s culture. “I see myself as a custodian of our values and culture,” he says. “It’s about fostering an environment where innovation thrives and every individual feels valued. A strong culture drives engagement, productivity, and ultimately, success.” Al Subhi is equally passionate about mentoring the next generation of leaders.

“My advice to aspiring CEOs is to stay curious, embrace change and prioritise people. Leadership isn’t about having all the answers; it’s about asking the right questions and building a team that can find solutions together.”

A VISION FOR SUSTAINABILITY
Looking ahead, Al Subhi envisions Al Sahari Oil Services Co SAOC as leaders in innovation and sustainability.

“Our goal is to set benchmarks in operational excellence and environmental stewardship,” he asserts. He also predicts a future where the industry is defined by collaboration, technological advancements and a commitment to sustainable practices that balance growth with responsibility.

BALANCING LEADERSHIP AND WELL-BEING
Balancing the demands of leadership with personal growth is something Al Subhi takes seriously. “Intentionality is key,” he explains.

“I prioritise time for reflection, continuous learning, and maintaining my physical and mental well-being. Whether it’s through reading, networking, or spending quality time with family, these activities recharge me and allow me to lead effectively.”

For Al Subhi, leadership is more than a title — it’s a responsibility to inspire, innovate and create lasting value.

OMAN’S
DOMESTIC
LIQUIDITY
EXPANDS BY RO
3BN

MUSCAT: Oman’s domestic liquidity surged by nearly RO 3 billion, reaching RO 24.692 billion by the end of September 2024, reflecting a 13.9 per cent increase from the same period last year, according to preliminary data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Despite the liquidity growth, the total issued currency fell by 4.5 per

cent to RO 1.545 billion from RO 1.617 billion a year earlier.

Narrow money supply (M1), which includes currency in circulation and demand deposits, recorded a slight increase of 0.7 per cent, reaching RO 5.739 billion.

Meanwhile, quasi-money, comprising savings deposits, time deposits, and foreign currency deposits, climbed by 18.2 per cent to

RO 18.953 billion.

This sharp rise underscores stronger banking sector performance amid economic growth and higher oil revenues.

The expansion in liquidity aligns with Oman’s broader economic recovery efforts, supported by fiscal reforms and ongoing investment in infrastructure and strategic sectors.

— ONA

An inclusive, sustainable and competitive Omani economy: Pankaj Khimji

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, DEC 8

OMAN has positioned itself as a global trade and investment hub as part of a broader quest to transform and diversify its economic base. In an exclusive interview, Pankaj Khimji, Adviser for External Trade and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, discussed the country’s development, challenges and goals. His views demonstrate how Oman is aligning its policies, efforts and foreign collaborations to promote long-term economic growth consistent with Oman Vision 2040.

Oman Vision 2040: Laying the foundation for a diversified economy
Oman’s growth strategy is centred on Oman Vision 2040, a plan for turning the economy into a sustainable and diverse powerhouse. The plan’s top priorities, according to Khimji, are the establishment of a highly skilled Omani workforce, job



It is impossible to overestimate their contribution to improving Oman’s logistical capabilities and establishing the country as a major player in international trade

PANKAJ KHIMJI
Adviser for External Trade and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion

creation and private sector development.

“In this journey, the free zones and industrial areas have been crucial,” he said. Oman is a desirable location for foreign companies because of these zones’ significant incentives, which include tax exemptions and expedited business procedures. He went on to say, “It is impossible to overestimate their contribution to improving Oman’s logistical capabilities and establishing the country as a major player in international trade.”

Reforms to attract investments
Oman has improved its investment climate through bold legislative measures. These initiatives have been anchored by the Foreign Capital Investment Law, which came into force in 2020.

By eliminating minimum capital limitations and permitting 100% foreign ownership, it greatly increases the country’s attractiveness to foreign investors.

In addition to these legislative

changes, the Invest Oman One-Stop-Shop was created to streamline investment processes and provide investors with a smooth experience.

The Future Fund, which is run by the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and co-invests in important regional initiatives, was also highlighted by Khimji. He pointed out that this has boosted investor confidence and spurred expansion in important industries.

Future Growth: Technology, sustainability, and partnerships
The foundation of Oman’s forward-thinking economic policy is its dedication to international collaboration, sustainability and technology. Plans to improve the country’s digital infrastructure and incorporate renewable energy into various businesses were outlined by Khimji.

By bringing Oman’s industrial and commerce sectors into line with international norms, these initiatives hope to foster long-term economic stability. One of Oman’s main concerns with regard to trade has been

the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) talks with India.

“The CEPA covers investment, services and the removal of goods tariffs,” he explained.

“It could yield substantial economic advantages for both India and Oman.”

Similar accords are being aggressively pursued by Oman with other nations, especially those in Southeast Asia and East Africa.

Khimji emphasised these areas as potential destinations for mutual investments and as developing markets for Omani products. These collaborations seek to lessen Oman’s reliance on conventional markets and diversify its economic contacts.

Expanding free zones and industrial areas
The ongoing expansion of free zones and industrial regions is an important part of Oman’s agenda.

These zones not only offer financial advantages, but they help improve Oman’s logistics and commerce infrastructure. Khimji emphasised that Oman’s

strategic location — close to major shipping lanes — gives it a distinct advantage in global trade.

“The government is keen on ensuring that these zones evolve to meet the demands of modern businesses,” said the Adviser. Investments in digitalisation and green infrastructure within these zones will keep them competitive in a fast changing global economy.

Oman’s path to economic growth and diversification is evidence of its tenacity, vision and creative policymaking. The country is establishing a vibrant and inclusive economic framework while managing global issues under the direction of Oman Vision 2040.

Oman is establishing itself as a global leader in commerce and investment by emphasising technology, sustainability and smart international alliances.

Khimji said, “The reforms and initiatives we’ve put in place are just the beginning. Oman is dedicated to creating an economy that is inclusive, sustainable and competitive for future generations.”

OPINION

Should we worry about record-high CO2 emissions?



NAJAH
AL RIYAMI

The author is a Media and Communication Master's graduate skilled in diverse writing formats, specialising in storytelling, branding, and in-depth journalism

THE past year marked a record high in global carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions, reaching an unprecedented 37.4 billion tonnes. This might sound alarming, but don't worry; this peak is a critical step in our world's transition towards a net-zero future.

It is a normal part of the journey in this shift to renewables. As we work to decarbonise the entire energy system on a global scale, our reliance on fossil fuels continues in key sectors such as energy, transportation and heavy industry as these systems transform, piece by piece, into greener alternatives.

Experts have long forecasted this journey to net-zero to include a peak — a tipping point — it accounts for this continued reliance on fossil fuels as we slowly shift our energy foundation into something greener.

The peak also marks a significant moment in history where our decarbonisation efforts and greener energy systems are finally about to overtake the impact of our fossil fuel reliant energy systems. It's a big deal.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) notes that emissions are expected to peak before declining and that this is aligned with projections for a net-zero trajectory by mid-century.

Why the peak despite our efforts to

decarbonise? This peak is due to developing nations seeing rapid economic growth alongside increased global energy demand offsetting gains made through renewable energy adoption; the world's energy needs are expanding alongside our efforts to decarbonise — reaching a peak before plateauing to mark a turning point in the extent of our fossil fuel reliance. This rise in emissions does not mean our collective decarbonisation efforts are failing.

Rather, it reflects the natural inertia of a fossil-fuel-based system as we transition to cleaner, sustainable alternatives.

Our journey to net-zero is marked by this critical peak in global emissions as annual CO2 emissions reach their highest point before steadily declining.

Transformative changes are taking place, with renewable energy technologies like wind and solar rapidly outpacing fossil fuels in terms of cost and scalability.

Alongside this, innovations in green hydrogen, battery storage, and carbon capture and storage (CCS) are ready to accelerate the decarbonisation of hard-to-abate sectors.

Renewable energy sources have grown to account for a significant share of global electricity generation.

As we work to decarbonise the entire energy system on a global scale, our reliance on fossil fuels continues in key sectors such as energy, transportation and heavy industry as these systems transform, piece by piece, into greener alternatives.

In many regions, solar and wind power are already cheaper than coal and gas, accelerating the shift to renewables.

With ambitious climate policies from carbon pricing, subsidies for green technologies, to bans on internal combustion engines as measures designed to bend the emissions curve downward, with growing private sector investment in sustainability and many companies aligning with achieving net-zero emissions within their operations and supply chains.

The inevitable transition to net-zero does have its challenges; rising global emissions underscores our need for accelerated action, countries' efforts to implement robust policies to reduce reliance on coal, oil and gas while scaling up investments in renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure, and developing countries requiring financial and technological support to transition to clean energy without compromising their economic growth.

This record high for emissions is just a reminder of the scale of our climate challenge, and a clear sign that we are nearing a pivotal turning point, and that the big shift in our fossil fuel energy dependency is just around the corner.

TARIFF TURNABOUTS
SEND US CORPORATE
HEADS SPINNING

CORPORATE chieftains know a trade war is coming, but they are unable to prepare for it. The countries, products and tariff rates that Donald Trump intends to target change by the day, sometimes even the hour. Dry runs during the US president-elect's first term in office are the best playbooks available for now. This time, however, probably will be different.

Chief executives, who routinely gripe about uncertainty, are now faced with an abundance of it in their supply chains. Trump keeps abruptly revising his trade-related threats. On the campaign trail, he vowed broad 20% rates, with 60% on Chinese goods.

The blanket approach has morphed into a 25% levy on Mexico and Canada unless they beef up border security and combat drug trafficking. A 100% tariff on Brazil, South Africa and other BRICS nations would punish any move away from the US dollar.

It's easy to interpret such mercurial policymaking as a mere negotiating ploy. For example, Trump already has proclaimed victory following a chat with Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum. Small wonder that businesses are optimistically grasping at such examples as reasons to stay calm.

Trump tries to "provoke strong reactions," the president of Canada's association of auto parts manufacturers said recently.

Contingency plans are nevertheless being

drafted, with some confidence drawn from past experiences. Dick's Sporting Goods Chief Financial Officer Navdeep Gupta told investors last month that the retailer learned from 2018-2019 tariffs to reduce its manufacturing exposure to China.

Hewlett Packard built factories around the world "to respond to changes in the geopolitical environment."

Apparel maker Guess also has moved some production out of China, but it cautioned that it will need to seek more alternative sources if Trump doubles down.

Exposure to Canada and Mexico will be tougher to mitigate. Corie Barry, who runs electronics chain Best Buy, warned that customers would bear the brunt of new taxes on imported components. Produce distributors said duties will increase fresh fruit and vegetable prices.

Carmakers are particularly concerned, given the roughly \$100 billion of parts and 4 million vehicles brought to the United States from Canada and Mexico, according to Wolfe Research.

Not every company can be like Bath and Body Works which has moved 85% of its manufacturing to a cluster of factories in Ohio. Even so, the \$8 billion soap and candles vendor signaled that it is only "relatively well-positioned" for tariffs. In that case, everyone else would be wise to brace for the worst. — Reuters

Unpredictable Earth:
Why we must act now

CLIMATE change has transitioned from a distant environmental concern to a present-day global crisis that requires immediate attention from policymakers, businesses and individuals. Rising global temperatures, erratic weather patterns, and the increasing frequency of natural disasters highlight the urgency of addressing its challenges.

Despite overwhelming evidence, many regions still grapple with inadequately implemented or poorly designed climate policies, reflecting a critical need for action.

Oman, like many nations, faces pressing challenges posed by climate change. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and environmental degradation threaten the country's biodiversity, water resources and coastal infrastructure

In 2024, Oman experienced unseasonal and intense rainfall, leading to widespread flash floods. Governorates like Al Sharqiyah North and Al Sharqiyah South bore the brunt of this devastation, with overflowing wadis causing significant damage to property and loss of life.

Wadi Bani Khalid recorded the highest rainfall, with other wilayats such as Ibra, Al Mudhaibi, and Qurayat also witnessing alarming levels. These events serve as stark reminders of the vulnerabilities induced by climate change.

Despite these challenges, Oman has demonstrated commendable foresight in integrating climate action into its national framework.

Oman Vision 2040 identifies sustainability as a cornerstone for economic and social development.

The country has set ambitious targets, such as achieving 30% of its electricity generation from renewable sources by 2040. Its vast potential for solar and wind energy has spurred innovative projects, including green hydrogen initiatives in the Wilayat of Al Duqm in the Al Wusta Governorate.

These projects aim to position Oman as a global leader in green energy while reducing reliance on fossil fuels. Efforts to conserve biodiversity further illustrate Oman's commitment to environmental protection.



In 2024, Oman experienced unseasonal and intense rainfall, leading to widespread flash floods.



UMAIR WAQAS

The author is Programme Chair Supply Chain Management and Logistics, College of Business, University of Buraimi, Oman

Initiatives to preserve ecosystems such as mangrove forests and coral reefs align with Oman Vision 2040 emphasis on sustainable tourism and environmental conservation.

At the same time, urban planning projects such as Sultan Haitham City and developments in Al Duqm incorporate renewable energy, green architecture, and sustainable waste management, showcasing a holistic approach to balancing development with environmental priorities.

Yet, the impacts of climate change extend beyond Oman's borders, demanding a united global response. The extreme weather events that devastated parts of Oman in 2024 exemplify how climate change knows no boundaries.

Such challenges call for enhanced international collaboration, including cross-border research on climate-resilient technologies, equitable financial support for vulnerable nations and stricter adherence to global climate agreements. Failure to act collectively risks deepening the

crisis, leaving future generations to grapple with its consequences.

Oman's approach reflects a deep respect for its natural heritage and culture. Grounded in a tradition that values harmony with nature, the country's strides toward sustainability offer a blueprint for others. However, the journey is far from complete. Climate change threatens not only Oman's environment but also its way of life, underscoring the need for continued and intensified efforts.

While Oman exemplifies how localised solutions can contribute to global climate resilience, the broader challenge requires shared responsibility. As the world contends with this crisis, lessons from Oman Vision 2040 and its innovative projects can inspire collective action. Time remains to mitigate the worst effects of climate change, but the window for meaningful intervention is rapidly closing. The choices made today will determine the future, not just for Oman but for the planet as a whole. The urgency to act is clear, for climate change respects no borders.

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ART/LIFE



ENTERTAINMENT

The ‘Devil Wears Prada’ - and Jimmy Choo, as Elton John musical opens in the West End



TONY AND Grammy-nominated actor and star of U.S. television series “Ugly Betty”, Vanessa Williams, is making her West End debut in music legend Elton John’s musical version of “The Devil Wears Prada”.

Williams (61) plays demanding fashion magazine editor Miranda Priestly, a role made famous by Meryl Streep in the 2006 movie adaptation of Lauren Weisberger’s novel that has also inspired the musical, for which John wrote the score.

“I’ve been in the business for over 40 years. I’m soaking it all in ... I’m very grateful that people have come to see me,” said Williams, who was cheered by the audience as she made her stage entrance.

Actor Matt Henry who plays Priestly’s confidant Nigel says it is the score by 77-year-old Elton John that drives the show.

Following the official opening night on Sunday, John - known for hits such as “Your Song”, as well as musicals including “Billy Elliot” and “The Lion King” - told the audience he has lost his sight following an eye infection earlier this year.

In keeping with a drama about fashion, the costumes are extravagant.

Georgie Buckland, who plays aspiring journalist Andy Sachs, and Williams have twelve changes each, and their outfits include pieces from designers such as Alexander McQueen, Tom Ford and Pamella Roland.

Also making her West End debut, Buckland said performing in heels was a challenge.

“I practised on carpet, so that I could walk on an uneven surface. Because I am not a heels gal,” she said. The highest heels she wears in the production are six and a half inch Jimmy Choos.

Playing well so far with audiences that Williams says are “eating it up”, Elton John hopes the musical will one day open on Broadway.

For now, the show, directed and choreographed by Jerry Mitchell (“Hairspray”/ “Kinky Boots”) is at London’s Dominion Theatre. —Reuters

QUICK FEATURES



MUSIC

Belgian singer, songwriter and producer Paul Van Haver [archive photo] topped the worldwide Top 50 on Spotify, according to the music streaming giant. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

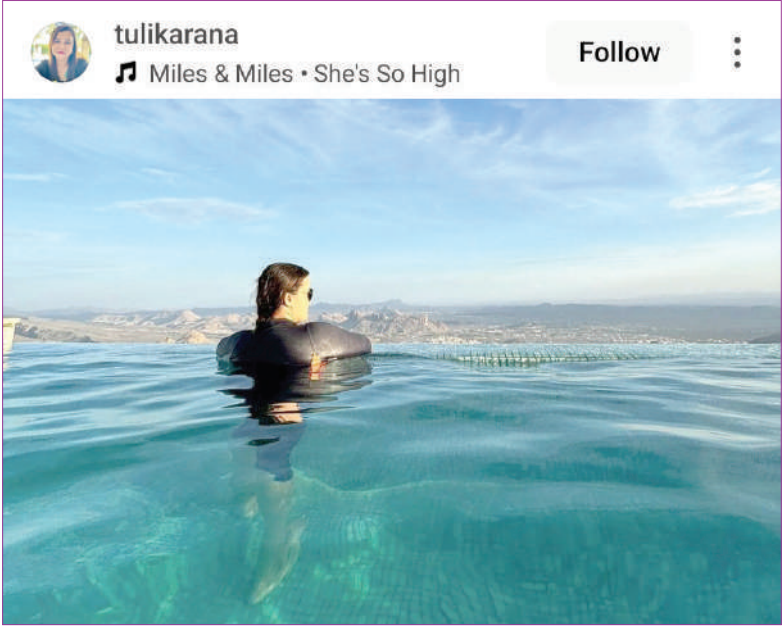
A faithful attends the Saint Barbara’s Day procession between Our Lady of the Rosary of the Blacks Church and the Fire Department in Salvador, Bahia state, Brazil. — AFP



TRAVEL

A picture shows the Maraya (Arabic for “Mirrors”) venue museum near the archaeological site of Al Hijr (Hegra), near the northwestern Saudi city of Al Ula. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



The View From The Top

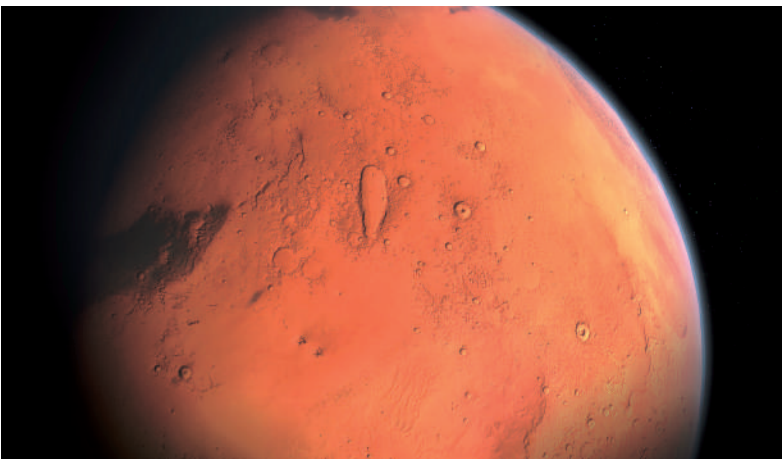


Beauty of Remote Places

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An Asteroid’s Destruction
May Have Given Mars
Rings, Then Moons



SOMETHING’S not quite right about the moons of Mars. They are too small — Phobos is 17 miles across, and Deimos is 9 miles in length. And they aren’t round, but lumpy, misshaped objects. Frankly, they don’t resemble moons at all. “They look like asteroids, they smell like asteroids, as well as looking like potatoes,” said James O’Donoghue, a planetary astronomer in England. Perhaps, then, astronomers have suggested, they are asteroids — two space rocks captured long ago by Mars’ gravity.

A new study makes a case that the moons did indeed start out in asteroid form. But it’s not the genesis everyone was expecting. Using computer-powered simulations, scientists describe a situation in which a large-enough asteroid was captured by Mars and torn apart by the planet’s gravity, forming a debris cloud, and maybe a ring system, around

Mars that ultimately clumped together to form two moons.

The notion that Phobos and Deimos may be captured asteroids has long come up against one major problem: Their orbits are too circular, and too neatly aligned around Mars’ equator. If these moons were once asteroids, their orbits would be expected to be tilted and perhaps oval-shaped. That they aren’t supports the theory that they were forged another way.

Mars, the fourth planet from the Sun, has a thin atmosphere rich in carbon dioxide and frigid temperatures. Its surface features include Olympus Mons, the tallest volcano, and Valles Marineris, a vast canyon.

Mars has two moons, Phobos and Deimos, and is a key focus for exploration and potential life.

— ROBIN GEORGE ANDREWS / NYT



Saudi Arabia bets
on tech to make
deserts bloom

SAUDI ARABIA is investing in green innovation to transform its deserts.

This week, Riyadh is hosting the United Nations COP16 conference on drought and desertification — topics close to home for the Gulf kingdom, whose officials have said they aim to restore 40 million hectares of degraded land.

But while the country is a major investor in climate tech, it has not abandoned its longstanding defence of oil, and critics say its gestures toward environmental friendliness offer only limited benefits.

Saudi Arabia accounts for nearly 75 per cent of Middle East investment in climate technology start-ups worldwide, according to a 2023 report by auditor PwC.

But its investment in green tech skews towards energy, with \$363 million ploughed into climate-friendly energy solutions — nearly 10 times as much as was invested in innovations related to food, agriculture and land-use, PwC said.

On a vast campus in the desert north of Jeddah, one project that could prove useful in the parched kingdom is using microorganisms to reduce the energy cost of treating wastewater.

The treatment facility seeks to “purify and treat wastewater in an energy-neutral or even positive way,” said Peiyong Hong, the environmental science and engineering academic who oversees the facility at the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology.

The process, she said, relies on microorganisms that convert carbon into methane gas, which is collected and used to produce energy for the facility.

The filtered water from the process “can be used to grow micro algae to produce feed for livestock, or to irrigate plants and trees to combat desertification,” she added.

SAND INTO SOIL

Recycled water could prove



valuable to the largely desert country with extremely limited water resources.

As part of its so-called Middle East Green Initiative, Saudi Arabia aims to eventually plant 10 billion trees, according to the project’s website, and rehabilitate more than 74 million hectares of land.

To achieve these ambitions, efficient management of water and soil resources is essential.

Himanshu Mishra, also an environmental science and engineering expert at KAUST, said his team have developed a product they believe is capable of transforming the kingdom’s desert into fertile land.

“We are transforming sand into

soil,” the professor said.

The carbon-enriched compost made from chicken manure — an abundant and underused resource in Saudi Arabia — is developed a step further than normal fertiliser.

Mishra explained his innovation “acts like a sponge to retain these nutrients and water, while promoting microbial biodiversity,” which plants need to thrive.

The professor’s experimental farm has been left teeming with vegetation as a result.

Mishra explained that by selling its carbonated topsoil, made in the kingdom from local waste, Saudi Arabia could become “an exporter of both the product and its technology.” — AFP

FEATURES

BY ARWA AL HASHIMI

DURING winter, it’s a common occurrence to see families or groups of friends gathering together in scenic areas, either enjoying meals or homemade drinks. For non-Arabs, this may simply seem like a picnic, but among Omanis, and in the broader context of the Middle East, this gathering is often referred to as “kashta” — a camping or picnic experience that often involves outdoor gatherings, usually in natural settings such as mountains, deserts, or by rivers and lakes. These gatherings are not only about enjoying nature but also serve as social occasions for families and friends to connect.

There’s a reason why many Omanis love the cooler season. Once the heat of Oman begins to mellow in late October, locals feel as though they are being invited to step outdoors and reconnect with the country’s breathtaking landscapes. It is a time for peaceful adventures — and definitely the season for the timeless tradition of kashta.

The word kashta, familiar across the Arab world, is thought to stem from the Turkish term *kâştaniyola*, meaning a countryside picnic. Depending on the region, different customs may be observed, including folklore storytelling, traditional music, and other cultural expressions that reflect local heritage.

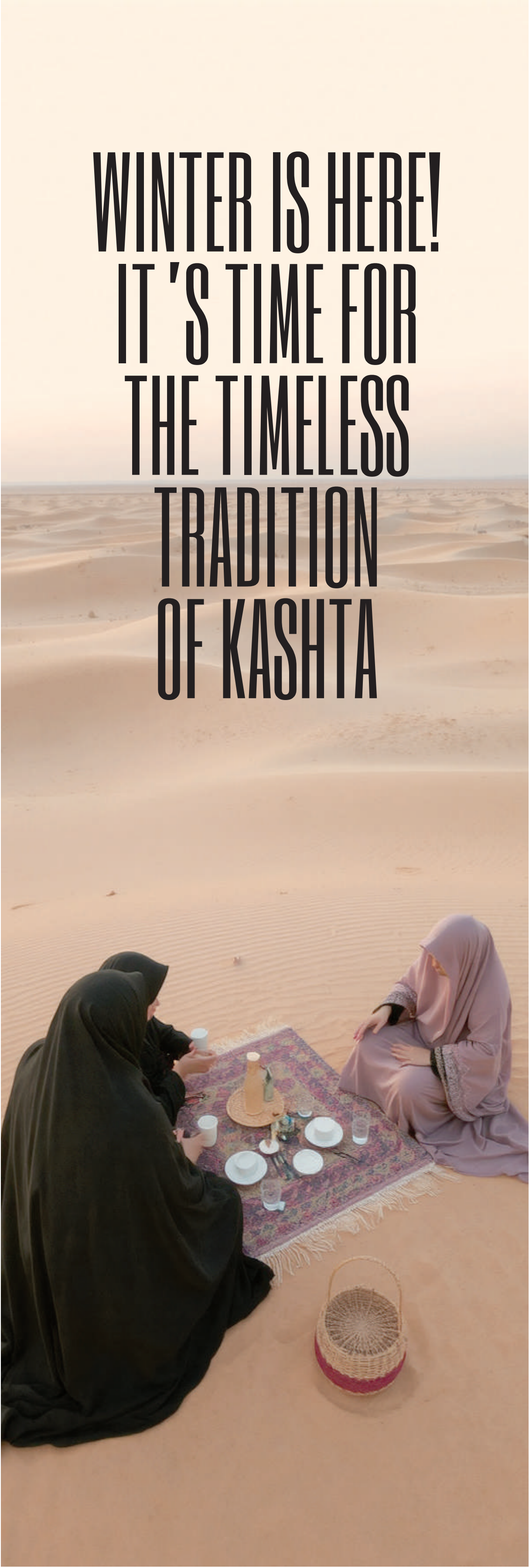
In Jordan, families enjoy barbecues in scenic areas like Wadi Rum. Saudi Arabia hosts “Hawa’ij” camping in the desert, complete with storytelling and traditional food. Iraq highlights Eid celebrations with picnics in parks featuring local dishes is still an extension of the kashta practice. In Lebanon, “Ma’aoūd” involves hiking and enjoying picnics in the mountains, while the UAE’s “Al Khawater” combines barbecues and stargazing in the desert. These traditions reflect the region’s cultural heritage and the importance of connecting with nature and loved ones.

In Oman, kashtas also take many forms, reflecting the beauty and diversity of the land. Some find joy in the vast, golden deserts, with the dunes of Bidiyah offering a serene escape alongside cosy campsites. For those drawn to the cool air and dramatic views of the mountains, places like Jabal Akhdar, Jabal Hat, and Jabal Shams provide perfect retreats. Others are enchanted by the sea, where the gentle lapping of waves and the wide-open horizons of beaches like Sifah, Fins, and Bimmah in Quriyat create a soothing kashta by the shore.

Kashta comes in many forms, offering a variety of experiences to suit different preferences. Some enjoy a brief outing, spending a few hours in nature before returning home, while others prefer to fully immerse themselves in the peaceful atmosphere by staying overnight or even for several days. For these extended stays, they prepare tents and essential camping gear to enhance their comfort.

In recent years, the kashta has evolved to include even more convenient options. Some adventurers have embraced the use of caravans, equipped with cosy beds, private bathrooms, and small kitchens for meal preparation. These additions have transformed the kashta into a more comfortable and enjoyable experience, blending the simplicity of nature with the comforts of modern living.

What makes these outings special is their ability to connect people with nature in its purest form. Whether sitting around a campfire in the desert, breathing in crisp mountain air, or watching the sun set over the ocean, kashtas are cherished moments



of simplicity and togetherness. They offer a break from the noise of everyday life, allowing families and friends to gather, share stories, and make lasting memories.

This season of outdoor living also brings a flourish of activity to local businesses. Winter essentials, from camping gear to the beloved furo coats lined with fur, fly off the shelves. Thoughtfully prepared food, warm drinks, and cosy blankets often become part of the kashta experience, enhancing its comfort and charm.

Arub Al-Ghatrifi, an avid kashta lover, described her feelings: “There’s something magical about each kashta — it never feels the same. Every trip fills me with excitement, as though it were the very first time.”

Others shared how these simple gatherings deepen bonds: “When we’re out there, away from the world, it’s like time slows down. We’re reminded of what truly matters — family, friends, and the beauty of the moment.”

In Oman, winter is more than a season; it’s a gentle invitation to savour life’s simplest joys. Through the beloved tradition of kashta, winter becomes a time to embrace the serenity of nature and the warmth of human connection, creating memories that linger long after the season fades.