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HIS MAJESTY GREETES KING OF BHUTAN

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck of Bhutan on his country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to King Wangchuck and the people of Bhutan.

OMAN TO GET WEF'S FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION CENTRE

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, supported by the Ministry of Economy, has signed a cooperation agreement with the World Economic Forum to establish a Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution in the Sultanate of Oman. This partnership marks Oman as the sixth country in the Middle East and the 22nd globally to host such a centre, expected to begin operations in Q1 2025.

The agreement was signed by Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and Sebastian Backup, Head of Networks and Partnerships and Member of the Executive Committee of the World Economic Forum.

Dr Al Shidhani highlighted that this collaboration underscores Oman's commitment to leveraging advanced technologies for sustainable development, aligning with the strategic goals of Oman Vision 2040. He noted that the centre will help transfer knowledge, localise technology and strengthen Oman's status as a regional technology and innovation hub. The centre's initial focus will include fostering technical innovation through the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and advanced technologies, in line with the National Digital Economy Programme's initiatives and projects. **SEE ALSO P13**

PRESIDENT OF BELARUS VISITS NATIONAL MUSEUM



President Aleksandr Lukashenko at the National Museum on Monday. — ONA

Syria must have a credible transition: UN

DAMASCUS: The United Nations told the leader of the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group which toppled Bashar al Assad that Syria must have a “credible and inclusive” transition. The UN special envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen who arrived in Damascus on Sunday, has met Abu Mohammed al Jolani — who now goes under his real name Ahmed al Sharaa — Pedersen's office said on Monday in a

statement on Telegram. He also met interim prime minister Mohammed al Bashir, it said.

Pedersen met them after Saturday's international meeting on Syria in Jordan, and stressed “the need for a credible and inclusive Syrian-owned and led political transition based on the principles of United Nations Security Council resolution 2254 (2015)”. The UN

envoy also underlined “the intention of the United Nations to render all assistance to the Syrian people”, and was briefed on their “challenges and priorities”, the statement added. It said Pedersen had several engagements planned in the days ahead, but did not elaborate. Assad was toppled by a lightning 11-day rebel offensive that swept down from northwest Syria, with fighters

entering the capital on December 8. Abandoned by his Russian and Iranian backers, Assad fled into exile in Moscow, bring to an end five decades of abuses by his clan.

The HTS group that led his overthrow is a former branch of Al Qaeda in Syria, and the United States and other Western governments still classify it as a “terrorist” group. — AFP

Women to take leadership roles



Her Highness the Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, with Tasmu graduates at the Royal Academy of Management (RAM).

HER HIGHNESS The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, presided over the graduation ceremony of a new batch of the Tasmu Initiative, which aims to develop the leadership capabilities of Omani women cadres. The ceremony took place at the Royal Academy of Management (RAM) on Monday. Upon the arrival of the Honourable Lady at the Academy's building, she was received by Dr Ali bin Qassim al Lawati, President of the Royal Academy of Management, and those in charge of the Academy.

PARTICIPATION

In cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development, the new batch saw the participation of 50 women from the public and private sectors and civil society institutions. The Tasmu Initiative, the first national programme of its kind dedicated to women leaders, seeks to enhance the Sultanate of Oman's comprehensive development process. It includes advanced training, meetings, and field visits. On the sidelines of the ceremony, the Honourable Lady toured the Academy's departments and listened to a briefing about the institution's goals and specialised programmes designed to develop performance and draw out future strategic plans. She also took note of the Digital Academy and the international indices display panel. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the Honourable Lady signed the Visitors' Book. The Royal Academy of Management presented a commemorative gift to the Honourable Lady, who expressed her thanks to those in charge of the Tasmu Initiative.

The Honourable Lady also valued the sincere efforts to develop the capabilities of Omani women in various fields. She wished all success in making further accomplishments. For their part, the organisers of the initiative expressed their delight at the auspicious visit of the Honourable Lady, thanking her for gracing the ceremony. They valued her great support to Omani women and expressed their best wishes to her. — ONA

OMAN

ROYALBLESSINGS



HONOURABLE LADY
PRESIDES OVER
TASMU GRADUATION

MUSCAT: Her Highness The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, presided over the graduation ceremony of a new batch of the Tasmu Initiative, which aims to develop the leadership capabilities of Omani women cadres. The ceremony took place at the Royal Academy of Management (RAM) on Monday. — ONA



Al Dakhiliyah unveils new visual identity to boost tourism

AMAL AL RIYAMI
MANAH, DEC 16

The Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah launched its new visual identity, ‘Al Dakhiliyah, Sincerely Oman’, in an official ceremony at the Oman Across Ages Museum. The event, which will span three days, marks a key milestone in aligning the governorate’s vision with ‘Oman Vision 2040, aiming to integrate cultural heritage into the country’s economic diversification strategy, especially within the tourism and entrepreneurship sectors.

The promotional identity highlights Al Dakhiliyah’s deep cultural roots and stunning natural landscapes, which are central to its identity. Through this initiative, the governorate seeks to position itself as a top destination for cultural

and heritage tourism, emphasising its historical landmarks and the ‘Purple Economy’ concept that connects heritage with economic development.

The launch ceremony was held under the auspices of Shaikh Ghosn bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of the State Audit Institution, and attended by Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, along with a number of dignitaries and representatives from both public and private sectors.

The identity, which reflects the governorate’s commitment to preserving and promoting its heritage, seeks to create a lasting impression in the minds of visitors, inviting them to explore Al Dakhiliyah’s authentic beauty. It encompasses both tangible heritage, such as castles, markets



and handcrafts, and intangible heritage, including local arts and customs. The identity also highlights the governorate’s ongoing efforts to preserve its cultural landscape while fostering sustainable tourism.

Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, emphasised that this promotional identity is not just a marketing tool



but a reflection of Al Dakhiliyah’s world heritage and natural assets. He also noted that the project resulted from extensive community involvement and discussions with academics, entrepreneurs and residents, and that it would play a key role in attracting tourists and investors.

As part of the strategy, the

Regional Urban Strategy for Al Dakhiliyah Governorate 2040 aims to safeguard cultural and natural resources, including the identification of 30 areas to preserve cultural heritage and rehabilitate historical neighbourhoods like Harat Al Aqr into unique tourist attractions.

The launch ceremony was complemented by an exhibition showcasing current and upcoming investment projects in the governorate, reflecting its economic and cultural diversity. This included the participation of small and medium enterprises and factories.

Through these initiatives, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate is committed to fostering a prosperous and sustainable future, supporting tourism, entrepreneurship and the preservation of its rich heritage.

Lukashenko highlights
role of cultural ties

PRESIDENT Aleksandr Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus and his accompanying delegation on Monday visited the National Museum, within the context of his official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

The President of Belarus and his accompanying delegation toured the museum and took note of its galleries that highlight Oman’s cultural heritage from the earliest human settlement in Oman to the present day. At the outset of the visit, Jamal bin Hassan al Mousawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, gave a presentation summarising areas of cultural cooperation between the National Museum and the Belarusian side.

Then, the President toured the museum’s different galleries, which represent important aspects of the history and civilisation of Oman. Most notably, he toured the Land and the People Gallery, the Prehistory and Ancient History Gallery, Splendours of Islam Gallery, Oman and the World Gallery, and the Renaissance Gallery. President Aleksandr Lukashenko also went on a tour of the Sultan Qaboos bin Said’s Corner (the Dearest and Purest of Men) and viewed the original Letter No 1 (Letter of Will) addressed by the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos to the Royal Family Council through the Defence Council.

At the conclusion of the visit, the guest recorded a note in the museum’s senior visitors’ register, in which he underscored the importance of visiting the museum to enhance cultural cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Belarus.

The President of the Republic of Belarus was accompanied during his visit to the National Museum by Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (Head of the Mission of Honour), and several members of the Mission of Honour. — ONA



The President of Belarus and his accompanying delegation toured the museum and took note of its galleries that highlight Oman’s cultural heritage. — ONA



OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The Fisheries Forum was held under the theme ‘Sustainability, Food Security, and Food Safety’

SAHAM FISHERIES FORUM HIGHLIGHTS FOOD SECURITY

SAHAM: The Directorate General of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources in Al Batinah North, in collaboration with the Sunan Al Bahr Committee, hosted the Fisheries Forum under the theme ‘Sustainability, Food Security, and Food Safety.’

The forum, sponsored by Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, featured various activities focused on the importance of the fisheries sector. These included the ‘Environment for Protecting the Marine Environment’ event, held at Saham’s beaches and port, alongside lectures, seminars, and events such as ‘Little Fisherman.’

The forum also showcased artisanal fishing tools, marine arts performances, and an exhibition on marine fishing. Several individuals and entities were honoured for their contributions to the success of the forum’s activities. — ONA

JOINT OMANI-SAUDI MILITARY DRILL ‘SOLIDARITY/1’ BEGINS



RIYADH: The activities of the joint Omani-Saudi military drill ‘Solidarity/1’ kicked off on Monday in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The drill, which will be ongoing till December 26, is participated by a force from Oman Coast Regiment of the 23rd Infantry Brigade of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO). From the Saudi side it is participated by a force from the 2nd Regiment of the 20th Brigade. Solidarity/1 includes the implementation of several joint military plans and field training. Conducting the drill comes within the framework of the RAO training plans to exchange expertise and enhance military cooperation between Oman and Arab and friendly countries. — ONA

Oman, Pakistan discuss maritime cooperation



Admiral Naveed Ashraf and the military delegation also visited the Military Technological College

MUSCAT: Rear Admiral Saif Nasser Al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), received in his office at Al Murtafaa Garrison on Monday Admiral Naveed Ashraf, Chief of Naval Staff in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and his accompanying military delegation. During the meeting, the two sides discussed a set of military topics, especially in the

maritime field.

The meeting was attended by some senior RNO officers and the Military Attaché at the Embassy of Pakistan in Muscat.

Admiral Naveed Ashraf, Chief of Naval Staff of Pakistan’s Navy, and his accompanying military delegation also visited the Military Technological College (MTC).

He was accompanied during the visit by Rear Admiral Saif Nasser Al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO). Upon the delegation’s arrival at the college, they were received by the Acting Commandant of the MTC.

The visiting delegation was briefed on the college’s education and service facilities. — ONA

‘DUQM PIONEERS’ PROGRAMME TO BOOST ENTREPRENEURSHIP

DUQM: The Tawasul Duqm Foundation has launched the inaugural ‘Duqm Pioneers’ programme in collaboration with key organisations, including the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED). The two-day initiative is designed to empower entrepreneurs by enhancing investment opportunities



and fostering partnerships with major companies.

Salim bin Ali al Shehri, Director of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority in Al Wusta Governorate, highlighted the programme’s role in equipping entrepreneurs with essential skills and promoting sustainable economic growth.

The event features specialised training workshops, discussions on investment challenges, and success story reviews. Aligned with the Oman Vision 2040, the programme underscores Duqm’s commitment to creating an environment conducive to the growth of small and medium enterprises, ensuring a robust and diversified economy. — ONA

Al Batinah South boosts tourism investments

AL BATINAH South Governorate has emerged as a promising destination for tourism investments, owing to its strategic geographical location, robust connectivity with prominent governorates of Oman, and high population density. These attributes contribute significantly to the governorate’s reputation as a flourishing tourist hotspot.

Dr Al Moatasim bin Nasser al Hilali, Director of the Department of Heritage and Tourism, in Al Batinah South Governorate, revealed that 67 usufruct lands have been allocated for tourism investments.

Among these, 18 lands are currently hosting projects, while another 18 are in various procedural stages. The remaining 31 lands are open for investment opportunities and are distributed across the six wilayats of the governorate. Notable projects underway include a tourist camp in the Al Abyadh Sands area and another in the sands of Khabat Al Jaadan.

The governorate boasts 411 historical landmarks, including castles, forts, towers, walls, old neighbourhoods, and mud houses. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) has restored 40 sites to date, such as 3 castles, 7 forts, 9 towers, and 18 historic mosques, alongside a historical wall and a heritage house.

Efforts to enhance heritage-based tourism are evident in partnerships with private entities for site management. Nakhal Fort, the wall and tower of Burj Al Khamis have been entrusted to specialised companies, with Al Mansour Castle in Al Rustaq recently following suit. Additional opportunities include Barka Fort, Al Awabi Fort, and sites like Al Hazm Castle and Bait Al Numan Castle.

The tourism sector in Al Batinah South saw remarkable growth in 2024, with 28 new facilities added. These include 19 guest houses, 8 green lodges, and a hotel apartment facility, collectively introducing



The tourism sector in Al Batinah South Governorate saw remarkable growth in 2024

95 new rooms and apartments this year. The governorate also supports a vibrant tourism ecosystem with 104 travel agency offices and 64 tour operators actively promoting the governorate’s attractions.

The moderate year-round weather in certain areas of Al Batinah South enhances its appeal for sustainable tourism projects. Key destinations benefiting from this climate include Balad Sait village, and Jabal Dhawi in Wadi Al Sahtan in the Wilayat of Al

Rustaq, the villages of Wakan and Hadash in the Wilayat of Nakhal.

Al Batinah South’s natural beauty, coupled with its growing investment opportunities and commitment to heritage preservation, solidifies its position as a dynamic player in Oman’s tourism landscape.

The blend of historical richness, modern facilities, and sustainable tourism projects makes it a compelling destination for investors and visitors alike. — ONA

"Tender Announcement"

Supply of Food Parcels for the “Ramadan Iftar Program” for the Year 1446 AH / 2025 AD for Al Mahrah Governorate and Surrounding Areas in the Republic of Yemen

Tender No. 2/2024

Oman Charitable Organization (O.C.O.) announces a tender for the supply of 27,900 (twenty Seve thousand and nine hundred) food parcels for the “Ramadan Iftar Program” for the year 1446 AH / 2025 AD, and distributing them to all the districts of Al Mahrah Governorate and the surrounding areas according to the attached list of locations (16 locations).

Specialized merchants and suppliers wishing to submit their bids for this tender can obtain the terms and conditions from the Financial Department of Oman Charitable Organization against payment of nominal fees, during the period from Sunday 8 December 2024 to Wednesday 11 December 2024. The last date for bid submission and acceptance shall be Tuesday17 December 2024.

Bids shall be deposited in the tender box at the Financial Department, O.C.O. Headquarters Building at the Wilayat of Baushar, Muscat Governorate, Al Khuwair 33, Southern Street No. 47, near Sultan Said bin Taimur Mosque.

Bids shall be placed in closed envelopes sealed with red wax and addressed to H.E. the Chairman of the Projects and Tenders Committee of O.C.O. before the specified date.

“O.C.O. is not obligated to award the tender in whole or in part or to consider the lowest price.”

SHORT TAKES



A Russian concert titled 'Vecherka', a folkloric gathering introduces attendees to an ancient Russian leisure tradition

NATIONAL MUSEUM HOSTS CULTURAL EVENTS TO PROMOTE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE

MUSCAT: The National Museum, represented by its Learning Centre and supported by BP Oman, is currently hosting a series of global cultural events titled 'Russian Express' to promote and spread the Russian language.

The two-day programme began with the opening of the 'Russia' exhibition. The exhibition showcases photographs of Russia's natural landscapes, models of wooden and stone architecture, and unique perspectives of Russian cities. Additionally, an evening concert titled 'Vecherka', a folkloric gathering that introduced attendees to an ancient Russian leisure tradition, also took place. The evening also featured a musical performance by the State Academic Northern Russian Folk Choir, led by Svetlana Ignatieva — an honoured artist of the Russian Federation, and professor at the Department of Choral and Solo Folk Singing at the Gnessin Russian Academy of Music.

Founded in 1926 in the city of Veliky Ustyug, the choir is deeply rooted in Pomor traditions and performed exclusively by women's voices.

Alexander Sumin, a lecturer at the Russian Language and Culture Institute at Moscow State University (Lomonosov), delivered a lecture on Monday for beginners in learning the Russian language at the National Museum. The lecture also focused on the works of poet Alexander Pushkin, whose 225th birth anniversary is being celebrated this year.

This project is supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation and organised in the Sultanate of Oman in collaboration with the governmental entity 'Rosconcert'. — ONA

Conference on social care and SDGs held

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 16

SULTAN QABOOS UNIVERSITY, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), recently organised the Third International Scientific Conference on Social Care Policies and Programmes and Their Role in Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The two-day event witnessed the participation of over 190 researchers, specialists, and interested parties from various countries, including the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Algeria, Libya, Sudan, Tunisia, India, Britain and Finland.

The conference was held under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, and attended by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development.

With the presentation of 116 research papers, the event was structured around key themes including social care policies aligned with Oman Vision 2040, international experiences in achieving sustainable development goals, social justice, environmental studies, and strategies for addressing current and future global challenges.

Shaikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development, highlighted the Ministry's focus on social care policies related to childhood and elderly care. He also underscored efforts to enhance children's rights, provide safe environments, and develop innovative approaches to services for persons with disabilities.

Additionally, the conference addressed national policies for



Social care policies form the foundation for social development plans that improve the quality of life for individuals and communities. Regular reviews of these policies are essential to address changing global dynamics and to ensure social security and political stability.

DR WAFAL MAAMARI
Head of the Department of Sociology and Social Work and Chair of the Conference



The conference was attended by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development.

women's empowerment, showcasing Oman's progress in promoting gender equality and fulfilling international commitments. The event also emphasised the need to foster collaboration between academic institutions and executive bodies to exchange expertise and enhance social care policies. By aligning with Oman Vision 2040, the conference aimed to integrate social care strategies into sustainable development frameworks, ensuring meaningful contributions to societal well-being.

Dr Wafal al Maamari, Head of the Department of Sociology and Social Work and Chair of the Conference, reflected on the critical role of social care in achieving sustainable development. "Social care policies form the foundation for social development plans that improve the quality of life for individuals and communities. Regular reviews of these policies are essential to

address changing global dynamics and to ensure social security and political stability," she stated.

The conference further explored international, regional and Arab experiences in social care policies, while emphasising the importance of interdisciplinary studies. It highlighted the link between environmental studies and climate justice in achieving sustainable development goals, reinforcing the necessity of integrating social work into broader developmental objectives.

The event concluded with a strong focus on generating actionable recommendations to benefit both the Omani and global communities. It sought to inspire a sense of responsibility and raise awareness about the vital role of social care in achieving sustainable development, ultimately contributing to a brighter and more equitable future for all.

Muscat Nights to offer complete family experience with colourful offering

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

Come December 23, the nights of Muscat will be all brightened up and colourful offering a complete family extravaganza in terms of fun and frolic as a plethora of activities catering to one and all is being flown in from across the world.

Besides offering a venue for over 700 small and medium enterprises and productive families which is all set to participate in the festival, the one-month-long festival is all geared up for catering to people from all walks of life as the activities include numerous entertainment and tourism events spread across various locations, including Al Qurum Natural Park, Al Amerat Public Park, Al Naseem Public Park, Oman Automobile Association, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), Al Hail Beach, Wadi Al Khoudh, as well as several cultural centres and shopping malls. The festival will be on until January 21, 2025.

In order to make the festival hassle-free and enjoyable to people from all walks of life, the Muscat Municipality has appointed more than 500 people who speak different languages at various festival venues to help manage the largest event of its kind in the capital. Speaking to the Observer, a media spokesperson from the Muscat Municipality, the organisers of the event, said that these locations have been chosen to ensure accessibility for residents and visitors across different areas of the capital.

"We are giving the final touches



The one-month-long festival is all geared up for catering to people from all walks of life.

to the one month long family festival called Muscat Nights 2024. More than 700 Small and Medium Enterprises, along with highly creative families, are participating in the festival to present their products and services to attendees. This provides not only an opportunity for these companies to showcase their offerings to the nearly one million anticipated visitors but also makes a complete family festival," he said.

Major venues and activities include Flower Festival, Food Festival, Global Village, Drone Shows, Laser and Light Shows, Al Qurum Carnival, Equestrian Championships and Theatrical Performances at Qurum Natural Park. At Al Amerat Public Park, there

will be Hybrid Show, Heritage Village, Amusement Rides, Air and Acrobatics Games, Theatrical Performances, Consumer Exhibition, Al Amerat Carnival and Children's Carnival.

Other locations are Al Naseem Public Park, Oman Automobile Association, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, Sur Al Hadeed Beach, Cultural Centres and Malls among others.

The Muscat Nights Festival 2024 promises to delight residents and visitors over its 30-day run. It also plays a pivotal role in enhancing Oman's position as a top winter tourism destination in the region while providing local SMEs abundant opportunities to benefit from the influx of thousands of daily visitors.



شركة المجموعة العمانية الدولية ش.م.ع.م
OMAN INTERNATIONAL GROUP SAOC



خدمات المرافق والمباني
FACILITIES MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Notice of Annual General Meeting of Oman International Group SAOC

We, the Board of Directors of Oman International Group SAOC (the "Company") hereby invite the shareholders of the Company to attend the Annual General Meeting of the Company to be held at the Al-Rawahy Complex, Wattayah, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman on Monday, 30 December 2024 at 11.00 am, and if the quorum of the meeting is not complete, then the second AGM is determined to be held on Thursday, 2 January 2025 at 11:00 am in the same previously mentioned location to consider and to approve the following agenda:

Agenda for the Meeting

1) The consideration and approval of the Report of the Directors for the financial year ended 30 September 2024.

2) The consideration and approval of the financial statements and auditors' report for the year ended 30 September 2024.

3) The approval of the final dividend for the financial year ended 30 September 2024.

4) The consideration and approval of the Board of Directors' remuneration for the financial year ended 30 September 2024 in accordance with the attached Schedule of Director's Sitting Fees .

5) The consideration of a sitting fee meeting for the Board of Directors for the next financial year ending on 30 September 2025.

6) The consideration and approval of related party transactions which were entered into by the Company with third parties during the year ended 30 September 2024.

7) The consideration and the approval of related party transactions, which are expected to be concluded during the year ending 30 September 2025.

8) Electing new board members for the company. A Candidate who wishes to nominate himself shall fill out the MOCI's Standard Application Form in this regard, and submit it to the Head Office of the Company prior to the AGM of two working days.

9) The approval of the appointment of the auditors of the Company, and to determine the auditors' remuneration for the financial year ending on the 30 September 2025.

In accordance with the provisions of the Company's Articles of Association, a shareholder entitled to attend and vote at the meeting convened by this Notice is entitled to authorise another shareholder to attend the meeting and vote on his/ her behalf at the meeting.

If you wish to appoint a proxy, please complete and submit the attached proxy form to the Company's office.

To prevent delay in starting the meeting, shareholders are required to arrive about half an hour before the scheduled time for starting the meeting.

For further information, please contact our Finance Manager, Mr. Louis D' Souza on telephone no. 24576911.

Chairman

Auditors

Legal Adviser

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



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

SRI LANKA
PRESIDENT IN INDIA
IN FIRST TRIP

NEW DELHI: Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake vowed to bolster ties with India on Monday on his first overseas visit as head of state, with a red carpet welcome by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Leftist Dissanayake, who came to power in September on a pledge to fight corruption, said the ties between the nations held a “significant place” in their foreign policy, adding that Modi had “assured us of full support”. Modi said he was “happy” that India was Dissanayake’s first foreign visit, saying after their meeting it would “add new energy and speed” to ties.

“We faced an unprecedented economic crisis two years ago and India supported us immensely to come out of that quagmire,” Dissanayake added. Dissanayake said he had held “productive discussions” with India’s finance and foreign ministers, as well as national security adviser Ajit Doval. “These engagements reaffirm the commitment to deepening the partnership between our two nations,” Dissanayake said. — AFP

UN ENVOY URGES
INCLUSIVE SYRIAN
TRANSITION



Geir Pedersen, UN Special envoy to Syria, speaks to the members of the media during his visit to Sednaya prison, Syria. — Reuters

DAMASCUS: The UN’s Syria envoy urged an inclusive Syrian transition based on a nine-year-old Security Council resolution during a meeting with the commander of Syria’s new administration, Ahmed al Sharaa, the envoy’s office said on Monday. Syria’s ruling General Command, in a separate statement about Sunday’s meeting with the UN’s Geir Pedersen, said they had discussed the need to review Security Council Resolution 2254, saying it needed to be updated to “suit the new reality”.

The meeting marked one of the most significant international encounters yet for Sharaa, leader of the Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) which has emerged as the ruling power in Damascus since toppling Bashar al Assad just over one week ago. The new administration in Damascus has set out few details on its thinking for the next steps for Syria. Pedersen briefed Sharaa on the outcome of an international meeting convened in Jordan on Saturday, the statement said. — Reuters

SENATE APPROVAL

Philippines ratifies defence pact with Japan



The Philippines ratified a key defence pact with Japan, which allows them to deploy troops on each other’s soil. The pact was ratified by the Philippine senate with no negative votes, Senate President Francis Escudero said. “Ratifying the agreement further affirms the strategic partnership between the two countries and their mutual goal to enhance contribution to regional and international peace and stability,” the senate added. — AFP

HRW ACCUSES
SUDAN RSF OF
WIDESPREAD
PHYSICAL
VIOLENCE

NAIROBI: Human Rights Watch (HRW) on Monday accused the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and allied groups, at war with the army, of committing widespread physical violence against women in southern Sudan.

It is the latest such report by international monitors alleging violence during Sudan’s 20-month war which has led to what the United States called the world’s worst humanitarian

crisis. In its new report, HRW said it had documented dozens of cases since September 2023 involving women and girls aged between seven and 50 who were subjected to physical violence in South Kordofan state.

The latest details follow a separate report last week from the New York-based watchdog which more broadly accused the RSF and allied groups of carrying out numerous abuses in South Kordofan state from

December 2023 to March 2024. These attacks, it said, “had not been widely reported” and constituted “war crimes”.

The United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan said both sides have committed abuses including torture.

Speaking to reporters in RSF member Mohamad Mokhtar said that they had carried out “medical checks” on women to verify the allegations. — AFP

Seoul court begins review
of Yoon impeachment

SOUTH

Korea’s Constitutional Court on Monday began reviewing the impeachment of President Yoon Suk Yeol over his December 3 martial law proclamation, starting a process to decide if he will be removed from office, while investigators plan to question him this week on criminal charges.

The court will hold the first public hearing on December 27, spokesperson Lee Jean told a news conference, after the court’s six justices met to discuss plans for reviewing the impeachment by the opposition-controlled parliament on Saturday. The court has up to six months to decide whether to remove Yoon from office or to reinstate him. The first hearing will be “preparatory” to confirm major legal issues of the case and the schedule among other matters, Lee said. Yoon is not required to attend that hearing, she said. In 2017, the court took three months to issue a ruling to strip then-president Park Geun-hye of the presidency following her impeachment for abusing the powers of her office. Yoon and a number of senior officials also face potential charges of insurrection for the short-lived martial law. A joint team from the police, the defence ministry and an anti-corruption agency are planning to call Yoon in for questioning at 10 am (0100 GMT) on Wednesday in connection with the charges, a police official said.

The presidential security service declined to accept summons for



The court has up to six months to decide whether to remove Yoon from office or to reinstate him. The first hearing will be “preparatory” to confirm major legal issues of the case and the schedule among other matters.



A man criticising South Korea’s President Yoon Suk Yeol holds a placard in front of the Constitutional Court in Seoul. — AFP

Yoon to appear saying it was not in the position to do so, Yonhap news said. An anti-corruption agency said the summons was also sent by express registered mail. Yoon, himself a career prosecutor before becoming president in his first run for elected office, has named a former prosecutor, Kim Hong-il, to lead a team of attorneys in the impeachment review and in criminal investigations, local media reported. Kim could not be immediately reached for comment. The government, led by acting president Han Duck-soo, has continued to try to reassure international partners and investors, while political parties pledged to cooperate in efforts to stabilise the situation.

Early on Monday, the finance minister, Bank of Korea governor

and top financial regulators met and pledged round-the-clock monitoring of financial and foreign exchange markets. Yoon’s surprise martial law declaration and the ensuing political crisis spooked markets and South Korea’s diplomatic partners, worried over the country’s ability to deter nuclear-armed North Korea. Members of parliament have also raised concerns that the martial law debacle has been damaging at a time South Korea needs to be preparing for the second Donald Trump presidency in the US, the country’s biggest ally. Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok and ruling People Power Party floor leader Kweon Seong-dong discussed tackling economic challenges, including heightened uncertainty for the trade-dependent country created by Trump’s pledge to hike tariffs. — Reuters



GAZA MOURNS DEAD AFTER STRIKES

GAZA: Relatives of Palestinians killed by Israel in Khan Yunis gathered around their white-shrouded bodies on Monday before carrying them to their graves. Palestinian health officials said on Sunday at least 20 people, including children, were killed in the strike at the school sheltering displaced families in the city in the southern Gaza Strip.

Women wept as the bodies of the family members were carried away on medical stretchers by men who laid them on the ground to perform funeral prayers. “People were safe, staying in their homes (shelters) after they prayed the dinner prayer. Israel offensive has killed almost 45,000 people in the Gaza Strip. — Reuters

POST-REVOLUTION VOTE

Bangladesh to hold elections in late 2025



Bangladesh’s interim leader Muhammad Yunus, who heads the caretaker government, said that general elections would be held late next year or in early 2026. The microfinance pioneer is leading administration to tackle what he has called the “extremely tough” challenge of restoring democratic institutions in the nation of about 170 million people. “Election dates could be fixed by the end of 2025 or the first half of 2026,” he said. — AFP

OPERATOR SHARE

Britain approves Royal Mail takeover



Britain’s centuries-old Royal Mail is set to pass into foreign ownership after the UK government approved the takeover of its parent company by Czech billionaire Daniel Kretinsky’s EP Group. The takeover of International Distribution Services (IDS) is worth £3.6 billion. The deal “protects workers and key services whilst seeing Royal Mail continue to be headquartered in Britain, securing jobs and tax receipts in the UK”, the government said. — AFP

CREDIBLE CONCERNS



A demonstrator holds the EU flag during a protest outside the Georgian parliament, in Tbilisi. — AFP

EU TO SANCTION GEORGIAN OVER CRACKDOWN

BRUSSELS: EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said on Monday Brussels had put forward a list of Georgians to sanction over a crackdown on pro-Western protesters, but Hungary was set to block the measures. “We have proposed the list for sanctions for these people who are... using really force and violence against the opposition,” Kallas said ahead of a meeting of EU foreign ministers. “But everybody needs to agree to the list, and we are not there yet.” Georgia’s authorities have forcefully clamped down on pro-EU demonstrators taking to the streets in recent weeks to protest the government’s decision to shelve its push to join the bloc. Brussels says there are “credible concerns” of torture and has called for the immediate release of detainees after more than 400 were arrested. But despite a raft of EU states seeking to take a tougher line, Hungary’s nationalist leader Viktor Orban has rejected attempts to sanction Tbilisi. — AFP



RESCUERS RACE TO FRANCE 'S MAYOTTE

French military unload medical and emergency equipment from the A440M military aircraft, aboard which rescue teams were transported in an emergency response, bringing aid to the small French Indian Ocean territory of Mayotte, almost cut off from the world after the passage of cyclone Chido. At least 14 people were killed in Mayotte when a fierce cyclone battered the territory with officials warning it will take days to know the full toll. — AFP

ROMANIAN GOVERNMENT TALKS HAMPERED BY DEMAND FOR FISCAL CLARITY

BUCHAREST: One of the four Romanian parties due to join a coalition government demanded clarity over taxation and spending plans on Monday, hampering the talks as the country races to stem the political chaos after the presidential election was annulled. The four pro-European parties reached a firm commitment to form a governing majority after the December 1 parliamentary election in which three ultra-nationalist and hard-right groupings, some with overt

pro-Russian sympathies, won more than a third of the seats. But on Monday the opposition centrist Save Romania Union (USR) said it needed transparent discussions over the budget plans before the government talks could continue. The party and the current ruling Social Democrats (PSD) have forecast the fiscal deficit will reach 8.6 per cent of economic output this year, the EU’s highest. The talks between the USR, PSD, their current coalition partners

the centre-right Liberals, and the ethnic Hungarian party are due to continue. “There is no fiscal space left to continue with this type of governing,” USR negotiator Cristian Ghinea told reporters. While the current government could stay on in an interim capacity, it would not be able to approve a budget plan for 2025 or put forward to hold a new presidential election after Romania’s top court annulled the vote after accusations of Russian meddling. — Reuters

Ukraine reports N Korean losses on Russia’s Kursk

UKRAINE said on Monday that North Korean units fighting for Russia sustained losses of at least 30 soldiers killed or wounded around several villages on the front in Russia’s Kursk region over the weekend. The Ukrainian military spy agency’s statement came after President Volodymyr Zelensky said that Russia was using North Korean troops in significant numbers for the first time to conduct assaults in Kursk, a Russian region where Ukraine launched a cross-border incursion in August. The statement is the first time Kyiv has claimed North Korean losses on this scale and in some detail. It said the casualties occurred around the villages of Plekhovo, Vorozhba and Martynovka in the Kursk region. It provided no evidence. It was not possible to independently verify the figures. The Kremlin declined to comment on the Ukrainian assertion, referring the question to the Russian Defence Ministry which has made no comment on the subject. Russia has neither confirmed nor denied the presence of North Koreans on its side. Pyongyang initially dismissed reports about the troop deployment as “fake news”, but a North Korean official has said any such deployment would be lawful. “Due to the losses, the assault groups are being replenished with fresh personnel, in particular from the 94th separate brigade of the DPRK army, to continue active combat operations in Kursk region,” the Ukrainian agency wrote. Kyiv first said North Korean forces turned up in Russia’s Kursk region in October and later reported unspecified clashes and casualties. It estimates there are 11,000 North Koreans in total, adding to a force of tens of thousands of Russians. Ukraine, nearly a fifth of which is controlled by Moscow’s forces, has carved out an enclave in the Kursk region which its troops have been battling to hold as a potential bargaining chip for any potential peace negotiations. Meanwhile, President Vladimir Putin said on Monday that the large number of men signing up for the Russian military voluntarily was turning the tide of the



Servicemen of the Ukrainian Armed Forces take part in a tactical medicine exercise, in Donetsk region, Ukraine. — Reuters

Ukraine war in Moscow’s favour and said he hoped his army would keep advancing. Putin, who said Russian forces had pushed the Ukrainian army out of nearly 200 settlements this year and held the initiative along the entire frontline, made the comments in a speech at the Defence Ministry at a time when his army is advancing at the fastest pace since 2022, according to open source maps. “I would like to point out at once that the past year was a landmark year in achieving the goals of the special military operation (in Ukraine),” Putin told top generals. “Russian troops have a firm grip on the strategic initiative along the entire line of contact.

This year alone, 189 population centres have been liberated,” he said. He said roughly 430,000 Russians had signed army contracts this year, up from roughly 300,000 the year before, a factor he said had huge importance for Russia’s war effort. “This flow of volunteers is not ending. And thanks to this...we are seeing a turning point on the frontline,” said Putin. Andrei Belousov, Putin’s defence minister, told the same audience that Russian troops had pushed Ukrainian forces out of almost 4,500 square kilometres of territory this year and were advancing an average 30 square kilometres per day. — Reuters

Germany’s Scholz asks parliament to clear way for snap election

BERLIN: Chancellor Olaf Scholz asked Germany’s parliament on Monday to declare it has no confidence in him, taking the first formal step towards securing an early national election following his government’s collapse. The neoliberal Free Democrats’ departure from Scholz’s three-way coalition over their refusal to take on more debt has left Scholz’s Social Democrats and the Greens governing without a parliamentary majority just when Germany faces its deepest economic crisis in a generation. Addressing parliament, Scholz framed the snap election as an opportunity for voters to set a new course for Germany, casting it as a choice between a future of higher investment and one of cuts that he said the conservatives were promising. Scholz, who served as finance minister for four years in a previous coalition with the

conservatives before becoming head of a new government in 2021, accused other parties of wanting to block the investments Germany needed. “Shortsightedness might save money in the short term, but the mortgage on our future is unaffordable,” he told lawmakers. Scholz remains as caretaker leader until a new government can be formed after the planned Feb. 23 election, and already the campaign is turning to arguments over which urgent measures he should pass with opposition backing before then. Rules drawn up to prevent the series of short-lived and unstable governments that played an important role in helping the Nazis rise to power in the 1930s means that the path to new elections is long and largely controlled by the chancellor. After Scholz loses the vote, he can request a dissolution of parliament from President Frank-



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz speaks at lower house of parliament Bundestag in Berlin, Germany. — Reuters

Walter Steinmeier, who has already endorsed his timetable. Scholz has outlined a list of urgent measures that could pass with

opposition support before the election, including 11 billion euros of tax cuts and an increase in child benefits already agreed

on by former coalition partners. Measures to tackle fiscal drag - the tendency of inflation to shift taxpayers into higher tax brackets - and high energy prices look less certain. “We’re only going to discuss proposals that must urgently be dealt with,” said senior conservative legislator Thorsten Frei. The conservatives, far ahead in the polls under their leader Friedrich Merz, have hinted they could back measures to better protect the Constitutional Court from the machinations of a future populist or anti-democratic government and to extend a popular subsidised transport ticket. “Important decisions need to be made that are being blocked by the opposition,” SPD co-chair Saskia Esken told the Augsburg Allgemeine newspaper. “We’re still waiting on energy price cuts. Friedrich Merz should move on this.” — Reuters

OPINION

Oman at the forefront in strengthening bilateral ties



THE Sultanate of Oman has been strengthening its diplomatic relations with key friendly countries and this is evident from the increasing number of state visits.

Following the visits of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Türkiye and Belgium, the recent visit of the Algerian President to Oman, the country’s foreign diplomacy has now received a boost with the state visit of Aleksandr Lukashenko, President of the Republic of Belarus.

The friendly relations between the two countries were established over the last 30 years, offering several avenues for businesses from both sides. Both countries have laid strong foundations for a sustainable future through ambitious national plans that clearly emphasise the social welfare and security of citizens.

Oman and Belarus are also determined

to create cordial relations with all countries regardless of their political and economic status through initiatives that include peaceful negotiations, which will offer scope for economic developments through foreign investments in various sectors.

While Belarus can supply the Sultanate of Oman with products related to mechanical engineering, the chemical industry, the food and light industry, and advanced medical treatment for Omani patients who wish to travel abroad, Oman’s progress in renewable energy and urban planning will benefit Belarus because as nations, we face the same threats of global warming and climate change.

It may be noted that Roman Gulovitchenko, Prime Minister of Belarus, visited the Sultanate of Oman in October and held high-level meetings with officials and businessmen. Several agreements were signed during the course of this year.

Oman’s foreign policy is based on a strong commitment to dialogue and tolerance as a means to address various challenges and issues, which has gained the respect of countries and peoples.

Oman’s foreign policy is based on a strong commitment to dialogue and tolerance as a means to address various challenges and issues, which has gained the respect of countries and peoples.

Oman has become an oasis of peace and a trusted destination to play the role of a mediator to resolve disputes and reach understanding through dialogue.

The success of the Sultanate of Oman’s policy began from within as the government harnessed the potential of strong human development.

In light of the changes and events around the world and the conflicts transpiring in the Middle East region, politicians, researchers and specialists in political and security affairs confirm the success of the Sultanate of Oman’s policy in dealing with various issues which gained it the trust of governments and peoples as a mediator and promoter for peace.

LIBYAN FARMER PIONEERS UNIQUE DATE VARIETY

ISLAM ALATRASH

In the Libyan countryside, farmer Ismail Ben Saoud has launched an agricultural experiment, banking on Mejhoul dates – a premium variety cherished across the Arab world but untested in such a humid coastal climate. Ben Saoud’s five-hectare farm in Misrata, western Libya, stands out in the landscape that is dotted by olive and citrus trees.

Eight years after taking the leap, he says his 700 palm trees now produce high-quality Mejhoul dates which he hopes will reach international markets soon.

“People have claimed that these palms couldn’t survive here, especially near the sea,” said Ben Saoud, 42. “But with persistence and careful experimentation, we are proving them wrong.”

Mejhoul dates, native to Morocco’s semi-arid regions, are famed for their large size, tender texture and rich sweetness. Traditionally thought unsuitable for Mediterranean climates, the variety has exceeded Ben Saoud’s expectations. Using organic fertilisers and refining techniques over time, Ben Saoud now anticipates reaching full production capacity in just two years.

“The harvest has been very satisfactory,” he said about this year’s output. “Another year or two and it will be optimal. We improve from year to year.”

For Libyans and others across the Arab world, dates are a treasured food. A staple sweet during festivities, they hold cultural as well as religious value, traditionally eaten to break the daily fast during Ramadhan. Mejhoul dates go for up to 80 Libyan dinars (around \$16) per kilogramme in local markets, far more than the price tag attached to other varieties, as low as six and up to 20 dinar. But for many customers, Mejhoul prices match their quality, with an unwavering demand among Libyans preferring locally produced goods.

Decades of near-exclusive reliance on oil revenue left many of Libya’s sectors underdeveloped. But many have been striving to bring around Libyan agriculture.

In Misrata, a major port city and commercial hub about 200 kilometres from the capital Tripoli, supermarkets are stocked with a variety of date products.

They run the gamut from molasses and pastes used in traditional pastries like makroudhs, to novel concoctions such as stuffed dates smothered in chocolate.

“The quality of Libyan dates has improved noticeably since the 2011 war,” said Najwa, an Egyptian nurse on vacation, shopping for her favourite varieties.

“There’s more care put into growing and preparing them now.” — AFP



Does science lead world on the path to progress?

WE have grown accustomed to a logical reality affirming that we, as humans, guide science and shape its trajectory, using it to define our path and evolution.

We know that science emerges from a region of doubt, where perplexing questions arise. Yet this logical path has reached new twists that surpass traditional skepticism, moving beyond the relative philosophy still bound by the human mind.

Tasks are now entrusted to a non-human, digital brain - an AI-that lacks the logic of doubt and instead embraces open-ended probabilities, foretelling a new future for science in which it leads humanity and shapes its destiny.

In a previous article, I mentioned how the world’s astonishment at artificial intelligence has shifted. Previously, we were amazed by AI’s nature and its unique form of intelligence. Now, the wonder resides in its scientific contributions, its general and objective role that promises to transform human civilisation.

One such transformation will be through digital biological evolution, a development that will rekindle the sense of wonder surpassing our initial awe at AI itself.

Genomics and genetic engineering represent highly complex sciences that the human mind has strived to establish and decode. We might consider this field akin to the legendary ‘philosopher’s stone’, granting humanity something like immortality by uncovering life’s secrets and repairing its flaws. The complexity stems from vast biological data and the intricate genetic entanglements interacting with the nitrogenous bases that form DNA.

Alongside genetic mutations and their influence on our life paths - traced through genetic analysis - AI now stands ready to address the challenges of genetic complexity. Asking “Where is science leading us?” no longer hesitates: science itself is increasingly wielded by AI.

Armed with the universal language of mathematics, AI harnesses the data of existence, including our biological data. It delves deeply into our biological world, bringing about a new state of wonder. Through these tools, we might grasp a ‘philosopher’s stone’ that helps us accurately predict future health, identify emerging diseases and find ways to preempt them. Future generations



Science and the path to progress



DR MUAMAR BIN ALI AL TOBI

The writer is an academic and researcher

may benefit from genetic pre-adjustments, ensuring bodies free of certain diseases or disabilities. Still, all this amazement remains relative and will eventually collide with the law of mortality.

With AI’s assistance, science aims to find ever more precise and rapid solutions to problems in gene engineering and related advanced fields. AI algorithms, applied to enormous biological datasets, enable faster progress. Consider gene editing via CRISPR-Cas9: this tool can correct the genetic system responsible for health issues, many of which stem from inherited genetic mutations we cannot accept or reject at will. AI accelerates this scientific leap by navigating the intricacies of gene editing more efficiently, expanding humanity’s potential beyond digital surprises into the profound astonishment hidden within our biological code.

Among the AI-driven tools paving the way is ‘DeepCRISPR,’ employing deep learning algorithms to predict unintended off-target sites based on DNA sequences. Meanwhile, tools like ‘CRISPR-Net’ help choose the most suitable molecules for genetic editing, reflecting the growing precision and sophistication AI brings to this field.

These rapid scientific

developments in biology achieved through coupling digital intelligence with genomic knowledge allow us to read and interpret our internal biological library. We can uncover secrets that might only reveal themselves in the future through diseases that today seem insoluble. By assisting in drug development and effective treatments, AI-driven genetics ushers in a promising era.

However, with these bright prospects come unsettling gaps. Our biological data, in the age of digital proliferation, may be vulnerable if not safeguarded by legal and ethical frameworks.

Genetic analysis, akin to a unique biological fingerprint, can expose personal secrets to those who hold such data and know how to decode it. This could lead to malicious uses like designing biological weapons or transforming private genetic information into security data exploited by hostile entities.

Thus, it is crucial to impose legal boundaries that limit ‘genetic theft’, the systematic appropriation of biological data. A thorough and independent exploration of these issues is necessary, guided by scientific understanding of the biological system and complemented by societal and security awareness.

When things go against your wish



ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI

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

LIFE is full of tough challenges, many of which are unexpected — and many of which can be difficult to overcome without inner strength, effective coping skills, and support.

Life is an uncertain roller coaster. You can choose to embrace it and enjoy the ride, joyfully learning from your experiences along the way, or you can choose to rebel against all of life’s challenges, hating every moment of your journey. The latter deprives you of growth and development, while the former gives you the opportunity to learn from those challenges and become a better person by having experienced them.

Challenges come in different forms. Whether you lose your job, an opportunity, or a relationship, loss is an unavoidable part of life.

Regardless of how it happens, loss marks one of life’s biggest challenges. It can be unexpected and disruptive. However, loss also gives you the opportunity to reflect on what is truly important, allowing you to keep moving forward.

Sometimes, we are tested not to show our weaknesses, but to discover our strengths. What really matters is that you don’t let these challenges, or anyone break you down. You must stand on your own feet and stand up for yourself. There are those

who would give anything to see you fail, but you must never give them satisfaction. Hold your head high, smile, and stand your ground.

In this regard, Mahatma Gandhi wisely advised, “You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty. Honest differences are often a healthy sign of progress.” One might feel exhausted, tired of all the anxiety, negativity, and stress. Too often, the mind is consumed with demanding thoughts, and every muscle in the body seems to be under pressure. This really hurts; you feel constant tension and fatigue.

No matter where you find yourself, there is always room for improvement. Challenges in life are inevitable, but they can be used to your advantage. Each challenge presents an opportunity for personal growth and self-improvement. Always remember that our minds are incredibly powerful — they can either bring us down or lift us up in an instant. How we think about things changes everything.

You may not be responsible for everything that happened to you in the past, or everything that is happening to you now, but you are responsible for undoing the thinking patterns that these circumstances create. It is all about thinking better so you

Always remember that life will attempt to break you down sometimes; nothing and no one can completely protect you from this reality. Thus, you must stand back up and put yourself out there again.

can ultimately live better.

The key is to understand that no matter what happens, you can choose your response, and that response dictates pretty much everything that follows. Truly, the greatest weapon you have against anxiety, negativity, and stress is your ability to choose one present thought over another. In other words, you need to train your mind to make the best of what you have in front of you, even when it is far less than you expected.

Yes, you can change the way you think! And once you do, you can master a new way of being. As Leonardo da Vinci, an Italian artist and engineer, said, “I love those who can smile in trouble.” You must let go and accept the feeling of not knowing exactly where you are going next. It is when you are suspended in the air, with no destination in sight, that you force your wings to fully open, so you can fly. What truly matters is spreading your wings, for the winds will carry you forward.

Always remember that life will attempt to break you down sometimes; nothing and no one can completely protect you from this reality.

Thus, you must stand back up and put yourself out there again. All it takes is time, effort, and patience. Do not let disappointments overwhelm you, and never let stress define who you are.

LIBYANS HOPE SYRIANS FARE BETTER THAN THEY DID AFTER KADHAFI

RIM TAHER

Libyans watched the fall of Syria’s Bashar al Assad with a mixture of apprehension and hope, wishing “their brothers” in the Levant a better outcome than their own.

Ten years after the downfall and death of Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi, the North African country remains plagued by division and instability. “It’s now been 14 years since the people of Syria have been waiting for their turn to come,” said 47-year-old history and geography teacher Al Mahdiyya Rajab.

“Their Arab Spring was stopped in its tracks” in 2011, she said. “At last they have been delivered from more than half a century of tyranny.” After a lightning 11-day offensive, an Islamist-led rebel coalition dominated by the radical Hayat Tahrir al Sham group in Syria swept into Damascus to end more than 50 years of rule by the Assad clan.

As in Libya in October 2011, when the death of Kadhafi was announced after he had ruled for 42 years, Syrians took to the streets to celebrate the “victory of the revolution”. Residents of Libya’s capital Tripoli, like 55-year-old activist Sami Essid, drew comparisons between Syria and the first days of the post-Kadhafi era.

“In the beginning there was hope,” he said. “The people were satisfied, peaceful and happy.” In 2012, Libya held its first ever free election, choosing 200 members of the national congress or parliament. This was followed in 2013 by municipal elections. Both polls were considered to have been a success. But then in August 2014, after weeks of violence, a coalition of militias seized Tripoli in the west of the country and installed a government, forcing the elected parliament into exile in the east.

Despite Fayez al Sarraj being appointed premier in December 2015 under a UN-mediated deal, the east-west split only deepened.

In parallel, armed militias and foreign interference mushroomed. Some cities saw a surge in radical organisations, including the IS group.

Essid said the main thing Libya and Syria have in common is “the people rising up against injustice, tyranny and dictatorship”.

But in Libya, he said, “we discovered that the struggle for power and the country’s riches were the objective all along”. “We hope we will not see division and militias emerge in Syria, as happened in Libya,” he said.

“The danger in Syria is that there are different faiths, and this can lead to power struggles and communities being divided.”

Today Libya — which has the largest hydrocarbon reserves on the African continent — has two governments. It is divided between a UN-recognised government based in the capital Tripoli and a rival administration in the east, backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar who also controls the south. — AFP

Pocket novels for agitated and story-hungry age

WHEN the news is one report of human suffering — or environmental degradation, or violation of democratic norms — after another, people might be forgiven for averting their eyes from the headlines in favour of getting a better night’s sleep. The only problem: In a democracy, tuning out means giving the foxes full run of the henhouse.

In recent years, I’ve been looking for a solution to this conundrum. How is it possible to be a well-informed citizen and simultaneously a calm, mostly cheerful, more or less sane human being? The closest thing I’ve found to a workaround is the right dosing. I follow the news during daylight hours. At night, I read a book.

Sometimes it’s a poetry collection I can finish in an evening. Sometimes it’s a memoir or a thick, juicy novel that will carry me through a week or two.

Often it’s an essay collection, a genre which comes with those lovely, built-in stopping places that make it easier to close the book and avert a wrestling match with the clock.

But more and more I find myself picking up a novella or a short novel, something I can read in full on a rainy Sunday afternoon or in the lamplight hours between supper and bedtime.

This has nothing to do with any kind of reading log or yearly numbers goal. I am not an ambitious reader. I am a slow reader, and that’s a serious liability for someone who loves books and is running out of years.

I attribute my plodding ways to having spent four years studying Latin, an inflected language that requires reading one word at a time, “not eyeful by eyeful,” as my Latin professor was fond of saying. I long ago lost my ability to read Latin, but I still read word by word, a habit I formed when time felt limitless.

I can hardly imagine that feeling now.

A full-size novel is a shaggy beast, often wild and uncontained. In their



MARGARET RENKL

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spareness, novellas and short novels — I’m counting any story longer than about 80 pages and any novel shorter than about 200 — reward a word-by-word reading. This form combines the gift of poetry, with its often compressed, elliptical language; the short story, with its tight narrative propulsion; and the novel, with its expansive cast and wandering ways.

Short books offer something to read when you want to surrender to a story for longer than an hour, but not for days and days.

They are hefty enough to immerse yourself in and often short enough to finish before midnight, even with a distracted, 21st-century attention span. Even with a headline-weary mind.

Last week, WBUR’s Deborah Becker asked the Irish novelist Claire Keegan if she had any theories about the success of “Small Things Like These,” her best-selling short novel from 2020 that has just been made into a film and is the Oprah’s Book Club pick for December.

“I do think that people probably are inclined towards my works because they aren’t long-winded,” Keegan answered, “and they do seem to move people.”

Where this genre can make its greatest impact, I think, is in stories that confront human evil. Someone who is too heartbroken by the world to take on “Sophie’s Choice” or “Schindler’s List” might be able to manage Lily Tuck’s new Holocaust novella, “The Rest Is Memory.” The book is exactly as harrowing as longer Auschwitz novels inevitably are, but its beautiful, spare, unflinching language and its insistence on the primacy and persistence of human dignity — and, yes, its brevity — make a brutal story more bearable.

In this time when neo-Nazis openly march on the streets of Nashville and demonstrate in Columbus, Ohio, confronting

this history is nothing less than a moral responsibility.

Tuck’s novella conveys a truth that is shaped by deep research, intense humanity and carefully plotted narration.

If journalism is the rough draft of history, then fiction is the coherent version, the one that draws meaning from it. History without the ragged edges.

This is clearly an idiosyncratic, random and extremely incomplete list of great books. In truth, I simply wandered around my house, pulling some short novels I love from the shelves. My parameters: Is it possible to read this book in its entirety on a languorous weekend afternoon? Or in an evening or two? Increasingly, the short novel seems to me to be the ideal literary form for our tired, distracted but still story-hungry age.

Maybe the whole notion is foolish. Ours is a multifarious culture, peopled by many kinds of readers and many more kinds of non-readers, and that’s exactly as it should be in a big, loud, messy democracy. Some of you all are out there taking heart from cozy mysteries or Victorian novels or Mary Oliver’s poems. Some of you are consoled by seed catalogues or travel brochures or Americana records or old Peanuts comic strips. Maybe you’re one who needs them all, in endless combinations, just to get through these dark nights.

So take my advice with a heaping helping of scepticism.

But if you have not yet found a source of solace that makes the long winter nights feel shorter, or at least not quite so dark, then turn off the machines and set your chair next to a good lamp. If you like to underline beautiful passages, keep a pen nearby.

In a small book with each perfect word in its perfect place, feel your own sorrows fade as you surrender to the spell of a story. — The New York Times

SPORTS

Salalah lift HM Cup for Youth for fourth time in a row



Salalah Club officials receive the HM Cup for Youth for the season 2022/2023. — Pics by Abdulwahid al Hamadani

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 16

SALALAH CLUB lifted the HM Cup for Youth for the season 2022/2023 as their fourth time title in a row. The announcement was made during the annual awards ceremony organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) on Monday under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yusef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in presence of officials and dignitaries at Al Bustan Palace Hotel.

The Dhofar-based club managed to enter their names in the honour list by winning the coveted cup for the fourth consecutive time. Besides the coveted His Majesty's Cup for Youth trophy, Salalah Club were also presented with a cash cheque of RO 30,000. Seeb remained as runners-up and they received the silver shield with a cash prize of RO 27,000.

Saham jumped one spot from the last edition as they received the bronze shield and a cash prize of RO 25,000. Oman Club climbed one position also from fifth to finish in fourth place. Masirah dropped from third to fifth place while Nizwa club took sixth spot to



register a comeback after one-year absence. Ahli Sidab jumped one spot to claim seventh place award. Qurayat returned back to the winning list and ended in ninth place after their absence last year while Al Bashayer club dropped to 10th place after reaching sixth in the last edition.

CLUBS' VALUABLE PARTNERSHIP
Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, delivered a speech during the ceremony as he said: "His Majesty's Cup for Youth is an annual event that recognises clubs for their commendable efforts in empowering youth to engage in various sports, cultural and youth activities. The competition also highlights the clubs' valuable partnership with the community and their role in fostering development. I am pleased to convey the gratitude and appreciation of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth for the significant role played by club management boards in supporting and nurturing youth."

He added: "The competition is a true translation of the continuous care for youth sector by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin

Tarik. One of its key objectives is to motivate clubs to continue enhancing their activities to serve as hubs for youth, responding effectively to their aspirations and ambitions."

As many as 44 clubs vied for the His Majesty's Cup for Youth in 2023 including: Khasab, Bukha, Dibba, Al Salam, Sohar, Saham, Majees, Al Suwaiq, Al Khabourah, Al Musannah, Al Shabab, Nakhal, Al Nahdha, Ibri, Yanqul, Bahla, Nizwa, Al Bashayer, Samayil, Fanja, Al Hamra, Al Wusta, Salalah, Al Nasr, Al Ittihad, Dhofar, Sur, Al Talea, Jaalan, Al Oruba, Al Wahda, Masirah, Al Kamil W'al Wafi, Al Ittifaq, Al Mudhaibi, Dima W'attayeen, Bidiyah, Seeb, Bausher, Oman Club, Qurayat, Muscat, Ahli Sidab and Al Amerat.

The HM Youth Cup has special significance to sports and youth sectors. The competition appreciated the efforts and the role of the clubs in serving the community specially in terms of sports and youth. It provided major support to clubs in achieving their desired goals. The Cup offered as a golden opportunity to develop human resources and bring about sustained growth in the sports sector notably by encouraging fair competition and utilising free time in a way that benefits youth and society.

ZERO COMMUNICATION



Jason Gillespie

GILLESPIE OPENS UP ON EXIT AS PAKISTAN TEST COACH

BRISBANE: Jason Gillespie said on Monday he felt no longer wanted as Pakistan’s Test coach and was left out of major decisions, having quit the post last week.

The 49-year-old Australian former fast bowler was appointed in April for two years but differences with the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) took their toll.

Gillespie said he was not informed of the decision to remove performance coach Tim Nielsen, also an Australian.

“Nielsen was told his services were no longer required and I had zero communication from anyone and that was the moment I thought: well, I’m not really sure they actually want me to do this job,” Gillespie told Australian broadcaster ABC in Brisbane.

He added: “For a decision to then be made (about Nielsen) and the head coach doesn’t get a text message, phone call or email about a decision that’s a pretty big decision.

“It just left me thinking well I’m really not sure if the PCB wants me.”

The PCB accepted Gillespie’s resignation, the second in two months after former South Africa opener Gary Kirsten quit as white-ball coach over differences with selectors.

Gillespie had the worst possible start to his coaching stint when Pakistan were whitewashed 2-0 by Bangladesh.

That was followed by an innings defeat against England in the first Test in Multan.

The defeat prompted the PCB to make sweeping changes, removing Gillespie from the selection panel and dropping star players Babar Azam, Shaheen Shah Afridi and Naseem Shah.

Pakistan won the remaining two Tests to seal the series 2-1.

Gillespie refused to join the team for the two-Test series in South Africa starting in Centurion from December 26.

Gillespie said he was upset over the reduction of his role.

“In essence I was basically hitting catches and that was about it on the morning of a game,” he told ABC.

“You want to be able to have clear communication with all stakeholders, including selectors and knowing what the team is as head coach at least a day before the game so you can help plan and prepare the players.”

The exits of Gillespie and Kirsten means Pakistan have now had seven different coaches across formats in the last three years. — AFP



New Zealand’s Kane Williamson bats while being watched by England wicketkeeper Ollie Pope (R) on day three of the third Test match between New Zealand and England at Seddon Park in Hamilton, New Zealand. — AFP

NZ march towards big win after Williamson century

ENGLAND MADE a wretched start to their unrealistic chase of 658 to win the third Test on Monday after a Kane Williamson century rammed home New Zealand’s advantage.

The tourists were 18-2 after openers Ben Duckett and Zak Crawley were both removed in the six overs bowled before stumps on day three in Hamilton.

It left New Zealand, dismissed late in the day for 453, needing eight more wickets to secure a consolation victory after England easily won the first two Tests.

It may only be seven wickets required, with doubt over whether the injured Ben Stokes will bat.

The England captain is being assessed for a hamstring injury suffered while bowling which forced him to immediately leave the field.

Any prospect of England reaching what would be a world-record fourth-innings score were quickly quashed when Duckett charged down the pitch and played on for four.

It handed a first wicket of the match to seamer Tim Southee, playing his 107th and final Test before retiring.

Crawley was trapped lbw for five to complete a miserable series in which he fell to paceman Matt Henry in all six of his innings, totalling just 52 runs in the process.

Jacob Bethell was at the crease on nine and Joe Root was yet to score.



New Zealand’s Kane Williamson bats as England’s wicketkeeper Ollie Pope (L) reacts on day three of the third Test match. — AFP

“We wanted to try to get more wickets and then set ourselves something that we were going to be realistic that we could smash down,” England batting coach Marcus Trescothick said.

“We’re still in with an opportunity but it’s obviously pretty tough.”

MASTERFUL WILLIAMSON

Rain wiped out the first session at Seddon Park but it didn’t prevent Williamson advancing from his overnight 50 to a 33rd Test ton, before departing for 156.

Williamson put on 105 for the third wicket with Rachin Ravindra (44) and departed after tea when top-edging a sweep off Shoaib Bashir (2-170).

New Zealand’s greatest run-scorer struck 20 fours and one six as he took his tally of

Test runs at Seddon Park to 1,614, the most by any batter at any New Zealand venue.

He has scored centuries in five successive Tests at the ground, where he boasts an average of 94.94 from 21 innings.

Williamson warned victory wouldn’t necessarily come easily and hopes spinner Mitchell Santner could be a decisive figure.

“When they bowled some spin it sort of spun and bounced, but the wicket is still a good one,” Williamson said.

“As the ball gets a bit softer and the wicket becomes a bit friendlier to bat on, there’ll be some hard yards out there.

“It has to be a big push tomorrow.”

Daryl Mitchell hit out near the end of New Zealand’s innings, caught in the deep for 60 to hand part-time spinner Bethell a first Test wicket and, ultimately, England’s best bowling figures for the innings of 3-72.

Santner holed out off Root on 49 to fall just short of back-to-back half-centuries for the match.

Southee scored two in his last Test knock, failing to add to his career tally of 98 Test sixes.

Williamson wants New Zealand to send Southee out a winner.

“He’s just an outstanding servant of the game and a huge player for us over the years, those achievements are there for everybody to see,” Williamson said.

“His leadership and how he carried himself throughout his Test career, it’s been a big part of why this team’s been in a pretty strong place for some time.” — AFP

India struggle as rain plays havoc with third Australia Test

BRISBANE: Brisbane’s weather came to India’s rescue as most of Monday’s play was lost because of rain on the third day of the third Test against Australia at the Gabba.

A rattled India limped to 51-4 at stumps on a day when the Australians were only able to bowl 17 overs at the visitors and players left the field seven times due to downpours.

KL Rahul was on 33 at the end of a wet day along with skipper Rohit Sharma, who was yet to score.

Needing 245 to avoid the follow-on, India lost three early wickets in the first session, after earlier bowling Australia out for 445.

Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill and Virat Kohli all fell to Australia’s opening bowlers Mitchell Starc and

Josh Hazlewood. They then lost Rishabh Pant just before tea, which was called early because of another downpour that then kept the players off the field for over two hours.

When they did return, bad light saw the Australians throw the ball to off-spinner Nathan Lyon and part-timer Travis Head. But after only 2.5 overs, umpires Richard Kettleborough and Richard Illingworth decided that the light was not good enough and called an end to play. With most of the first day also lost to rain on Saturday, Head and Steve Smith’s second-day centuries ensured that India cannot realistically win the Test.

More rain is forecast for Tuesday and Wednesday, raising India’s hopes of salvaging a draw and



Australia’s Mitchell Marsh and Mitchell Starc celebrate taking a wicket. — Reuters

heading to Melbourne with the series locked at 1-1. However, Australian batsman Mitchell Marsh stressed there was enough time for a result. “We know we have to take 20 wickets to try and win this Test match,” he said. “I guess all the conversations and all the planning will be how do we do that.

“There’s two days to go so there’s still plenty of time to get a result, so let’s hope the weather stays away over the next two days.”

BUMRAH A BRIGHT SPOT FOR INDIA

Australia resumed the third day on 405-7 and were eventually bowled out for 445, wicketkeeper Alex Carey the last man out after an enterprising 70. Pace spearhead

Jasprit Bumrah, who was easily India’s best bowler with 6-76, said the younger bowlers of his team were on a steep learning curve.

“We as a team are going through a transition as new players are coming in and it’s not the easiest place to play cricket over here,” Bumrah said.

“It’s my job to help the others — I have played a bit more than them so I am trying to help them.”

India’s first target was to avoid the follow-on and so raise their chances of holding out for a draw.

But their reply got off to a terrible start when Jaiswal, who edged Starc’s first ball for four runs through gully, chipped the next ball straight to Mitchell Marsh at square leg. — AFP

SPORTS

TITLECONTENDERS



Chelsea's Marc Cucurella celebrates after the match. — Reuters

NARROW WIN
FOR CHELSEA IN
LONDON DERBY

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, DEC 16

Chelsea can consider themselves as genuine title contenders after a 2-1 win against Brentford. It was their seventh consecutive win — in all competitions — and in the Premier League they are just two points behind the leaders Liverpool.

Despite dominating the match for long-periods and almost entirely throughout the first half their victory margin was narrow after several chances to score were wasted. They will also suffer the loss of their full-back Marc Cucurella who will miss the next match after given the red card for a tackle on an opposition player at the full-time whistle.

Chelsea manager, Enzo Maresco, said: “At the end of the game we can manage those (Cucurella) moments a different way. But overall, with the team’s spirit, sometimes you can get some yellows. I didn’t see the second yellow card. The referee said it was for a bad attitude. Marc will be banned (away to Everton, next game), Pedro Neto was suspended tonight. There are things we must do much better.”

Chelsea controlled the game from the start, dominating possession but Brentford were compact and resolute. They frustrated Chelsea and despite their poor away form – just one point from eight games compared to 22 from 24 at home — their defence remained solid for large parts of the game and they were seldom caught out of position.

In a rare attacking move Brentford did have a fine chance in the 29th minute but Mikkell Damsgaard’s shot was well blocked by Levi Colwill. By that time Chelsea had eight attempts but Brentford held firm. Mark Flekken made good saves to deny Nicolas Jackson, Cole Palmer and Enzo Fernandez.

It wasn’t until two minutes before the end of the first half that Chelsea took the lead with Cucurella taking advantage of a slight misstep from Mads Roerslev. Noni Madueke sent a perfect in-swinging cross from the right and Cucurella timed his run to get ahead of right-back Roerslev to angle his header just inside the near post and into the bottom corner from seven yards. It was his first goal in the league for Chelsea.

Brentford lifted their game in the second half and managed more attacking moves. A volley from a completely unmarked Christian Norgaard was superbly tipped over the bar by Robert Sanchez. They were also unlucky half-way through the half when Fabio Carvalho hit the crossbar from close range.

But in the 80th minute Chelsea doubled their lead. Moises Caicedo won possession and gave the ball to Fernando who then passed to Jackson for the Chelsea striker to slam the ball low inside the near post with Ethan Pinnock unable to stop him.

Brentford eventually found the net in the 90th minute when substitute Kevin Schade played Bryan Mbeumo in with a short pass for him to beat Sanchez on a one-on-one. Thereafter, Chelsea survived a nervous seven added minutes.

Brentford manager, Thomas Frank, said: “We played a very good game. We were unlucky not to get something out of it. Our second half was fantastic. We went toe to toe with one of the favourites for the title.”

MAN UTD DEEPEN
GUARDIOLA’S GLOOM



Manchester United's Amad Diallo scores their second goal against Manchester City at the Etihad Stadium. — Reuters

MANCHESTER UNITED scored two late goals on Sunday to deepen the pain for beleaguered Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola as Chelsea moved just two points behind Premier League leaders Liverpool.

Elsewhere on a day of high drama in the English top flight, Wolves manager Gary O’Neil and Southampton boss Russell Martin were both sacked, paying the price for their teams’ struggles.

In the marquee game of the day at the Etihad, City defender Josko Gvardiol opened the scoring but Bruno Fernandes levelled from the penalty spot in the 88th minute and Amad Diallo struck two minutes later to seal a 2-1 win.

Defending champions City — who have dominated English football over the past decade — now have just one win in 11 games in all competitions and Guardiola is desperately searching for answers.

“I don’t have a defence, I’m the boss, I’m the manager. I have to find a solution and I don’t find a solution,” said the Catalan after the low-quality encounter.

“This is a big club, when you lose eight out of 11, something wrong is happening. What can I say? The schedule is tough, the injured players? No.

“I’m the boss, I’m the manager and I’m not good enough. It’s as simple as that.”



Manchester United's Amad Diallo celebrates after the match. — Reuters

Guardiola’s men trail leaders Liverpool, who have a game in hand, by nine points and sit outside the Champions League places, in fifth spot.

Injury-ravaged City were far from their best at the Etihad but appeared to be on course for a vital win as the clock ticked down against their neighbours before they self-imploded.

Matheus Nunes’ sloppy back pass was cut out by Diallo and the Portuguese midfielder then chopped down the United winger in his attempt to make amends.

Fernandes coolly converted from the penalty spot to equalise.

Diallo then raced onto a simple long ball over the top of City’s flat-footed defence, finishing neatly to complete a remarkable turnaround.

The win is a huge relief for new United boss Ruben Amorim, who had won just one of his first four Premier League matches.

“I think for the fans it has a deep meaning, especially in this context, in this moment,” the former Sporting Lisbon boss said after his first experience of a Manchester derby.

“We had a difficult moment one week ago against Nottingham (Forest) at home with a storm. It was a really tough moment after the game. Today, we are more happy, but it’s three points that we have to continue.”

United finished the day 13th in the Premier League table — where they started

— after Tottenham hammered bottom club Southampton 5-0.

TOTTENHAM’S ROMP

Enzo Maresca’s high-flying Chelsea beat Brentford 2-1 at Stamford Bridge to close to within two points of long-time leaders Liverpool, who have 36 points.

Tottenham’s romp on the south coast was the latest chapter in a topsy-turvy season for Ange Postecoglou’s men, who have now won seven and lost seven of their 16 top-flight matches.

James Maddison opened the scoring in 36 seconds and further goals followed for Son Heung-min, Dejan Kulusevski and Pape Sarr in a staggering 25-minute spell.

England midfielder Maddison grabbed a second goal deep into first-half stoppage time to make it 5-0 but there were no additions in the second half.

Shortly after the match Southampton issued a statement saying they had made the “difficult decision to part ways” with Martin with the club rooted to the bottom of the Premier League, nine points from safety.

Wolves, also in the relegation zone, fired O’Neil after a fourth straight defeat.

In the early kick-off, Ismaila Sarr scored twice as Crystal Palace moved four points clear of the relegation zone following a 3-1 victory at Brighton. — AFP



Tottenham Hotspur's James Maddison celebrates scoring their fifth goal with teammates. — Reuters

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PROACTIVEECONOMY



Oman's inflation rate has remained moderate, reflecting the government's effective economic management.

OMAN MAINTAINS ONE OF THE WORLD'S LOWEST INFLATION RATES

MUSCAT: Oman has successfully maintained one of the lowest inflation rates globally, thanks to proactive economic policies aimed at balancing financial, economic and social stability. Despite global inflationary pressures caused by the pandemic and geopolitical tensions, Oman's inflation rate has remained moderate, reflecting the government's effective economic management.

The pandemic-induced disruptions in 2020 led to supply chain issues and rising costs in services and food commodities.

These challenges were further exacerbated by the Ukraine crisis, affecting energy prices, shipping and essential goods such as grains, vegetable oils and dairy products. Global inflation surged to record highs in 2022 due to these combined factors.

Oman's government adopted timely measures to mitigate the impact of global inflation on local markets. As a result, the country maintained a stable inflation rate within the targets set in its Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025).

Data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information revealed that Oman's average inflation rate stood at 1.7% from 2021 to 2023 and fell below 1% by the end of 2023. In 2024, the inflation rate averaged around 0.8% from January to October.

Inflation rates varied across Oman's governorates, with Al Batinah South Governorate recording the lowest at 0.4%, followed by Muscat Governorate and Dhofar Governorate at 0.6%.

Pact boosts Oman’s fourth industrial revolution

THE Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, supported by the Ministry of Economy, has signed a cooperation agreement with the World Economic Forum to establish a centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution in the Sultanate of Oman. This partnership marks Oman as the sixth country in the Middle East and the 22nd globally to host such a centre, expected to begin operations in Q1 2025.

The agreement was signed by Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and Sebastian Backup, Head of Networks and Partnerships and Member of the Executive Committee of the World Economic Forum.

Dr Al Shidhani highlighted that this collaboration underscores Oman's commitment to leveraging advanced technologies for sustainable development, aligning with the strategic goals of Oman Vision 2040. He noted that the centre will help transfer knowledge, localise technology and strengthen Oman's status as a regional technology and innovation hub.

The centre's initial focus will include fostering technical innovation through the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and advanced technologies, in line with the National Digital Economy Programme's initiatives and projects. A key priority will be establishing regulatory frameworks for data governance and AI, ensuring secure cross-border data management and boosting confidence in emerging technologies.

Efforts will also be directed towards sustainability and climate solutions,



The agreement was signed by Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani and Sebastian Backup.

developing AI-based policies and applications to address environmental challenges.

Additionally, the centre will facilitate international cooperation by connecting with global networks of Fourth Industrial Revolution centres, promoting the exchange of expertise and accelerating digital innovation.

Sebastian Backup emphasised that the agreement opens extensive avenues for collaboration between Oman and the World Economic Forum. He noted that the centre would enable joint efforts in enhancing digital innovation and implementing sustainable digital solutions.

The partnership aims to accelerate the adoption of emerging technologies and AI applications by adhering to international standards and utilising the World Economic Forum's global network of digital experts. It will facilitate policy discussions among government bodies, businesses

and academic institutions, fostering collective efforts towards technological advancement.

The agreement also focuses on creating a pilot environment for developing governance principles and regulatory frameworks, helping mitigate risks associated with Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies. Oman will actively engage with the World Economic Forum's platforms, participate in its global community and implement an expertise exchange programme.

The World Economic Forum's Fourth Industrial Revolution Centres operate as a global network connecting public and private stakeholders. These centres implement initiatives that spread technological benefits while managing associated risks, integrating innovation labs, think tanks and policy forums to support technological progress worldwide.

— ONA

OCCI’s franchise programme to empower Omani SMEs

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, DEC 16

THE Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has launched the third edition of its highly successful Franchise Programme, an initiative designed to empower small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and drive economic diversification in Oman. Held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, the event was attended by OCCI board members, key officials and leaders from Oman's private sector.

The Franchise Programme aims to support local businesses by introducing franchising as a sustainable and scalable business model, aligning with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Through workshops, consultations and partnerships, the Programme equips entrepreneurs with the knowledge and tools to develop their



Dignitaries at the unveiling of OCCI's 3rd franchise programme.

businesses, access new markets and foster innovation. By enabling SMEs to adopt proven business models, the initiative helps create sustainable job opportunities, diversify the economy and increase Oman's contribution to global markets.

Shaikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), underscored the importance of the Programme, saying: "The Franchise Programme is a flagship initiative of OCCI that empowers Oman's private sector by providing entrepreneurs with the tools and strategies to succeed in a competitive market.

By promoting franchising as a business model, the Programme supports economic diversification and strengthens Omani businesses in line with Oman Vision 2040."

Since its launch, the Franchise Programme has achieved significant milestones. The first edition reached nine governorates and introduced franchising to 311 entrepreneurs, resulting in six companies advancing to the final development stage.

The second edition provided specialised training to 155 participants across Muscat Governorate, Al Batinah North Governorate and Dhofar Governorate, which led to six franchise agreements that supported scalability and new partnerships.

The latest edition expanded its reach nationwide, registering 454 brands, of which 56 met eligibility criteria. This phase facilitated 23 franchise development agreements and 16 franchise granting agreements, a significant leap for Omani businesses seeking growth. Eng Hamoud bin Salem

al Saadi, Second Vice Chairman of OCCI and Chair of the Franchise Programme Initiative, highlighted the success of the Programme: "Over the last three editions, the Franchise Programme has helped Omani entrepreneurs embrace franchising opportunities and expand their businesses regionally and globally.

The overwhelming response to the third edition, with over 450 registrations, reflects the growing recognition of franchising as a key driver for private sector growth."

The Programme has also been instrumental in nurturing local brands. Companies like Froz by Jebel Al Jaleed United, Seven Fries by Al-Salih for Ideal Projects and Perf by Happy Ice Cream are standout success stories that have leveraged the Programme to establish strong franchise systems and expand their operations.

The third edition celebrated six Omani companies, including Froz, Steam Room by Taqdeer Advanced Company and Seven Fries, for meeting all franchise requirements.

ADVERTORIALS

STRONG SUPPORT



This sponsorship reflects Sohar Islamic’s ongoing strategic collaboration with the Bousher Waqf Foundation.

SOHAR ISLAMIC PLATINUM SPONSOR OF OMAN WAQF CONFERENCE

MUSCAT: Demonstrating its strong commitment to socio-economic advancement through responsible financial practices, Sohar Islamic, the Islamic banking arm of Sohar International, underscored its dedication to the development of the Waqf sector by serving as the Platinum Sponsor of the inaugural Oman Waqf Conference.

This significant two-day event, held on December 16 and 17, 2024, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center, was organised by the Bousher Waqf Foundation in partnership with the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, under the esteemed auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance (MoF).

This sponsorship reflects Sohar Islamic’s ongoing strategic collaboration with the Bousher Waqf Foundation and its continued efforts to support initiatives that drive transformative impact and foster long-term societal benefit.

Through this partnership, Sohar Islamic reinforces its role as a key enabler of sustainable socio-economic development, aligning with its broader mission to empower the community and contribute to the country’s financial and philanthropic ecosystem.

Under the theme ‘Innovation and Sustainability’, the conference brought together thought leaders, industry experts and stakeholders from the Waqf sector to explore forward-thinking strategies that expand the role of endowments.

Sohar Islamic’s active participation included hosting a dedicated stall to engage with attendees and share its insights on progressive endowment strategies.

AmCham Oman launches free US-Oman FTA guide

THE Oman American Business Council (AmCham Oman/OABC) is proud to announce the launch of the most expansive US-Oman Free Trade Agreement (FTA) Guide ever published.

Released as part of the celebration surrounding the 15th anniversary of the US-Oman Free Trade Agreement, this comprehensive 24-page guide provides businesses with invaluable tools to maximise opportunities under the landmark trade agreement.

The FTA Guide offers access to detailed trade data, inspiring success stories and practical insights to help companies in Oman and the United States leverage the agreement effectively.

This milestone publication is available free of charge and will be regularly updated to maintain its relevance in an ever-evolving global trade



This comprehensive 24-page guide provides businesses with invaluable tools to maximise opportunities under the landmark trade agreement.

landscape.

“The US-Oman Free Trade Agreement is one of just 14

US FTA’s in the world, putting Oman in an exclusive club of 20 countries that trade freely with the United States,” said Rebecca Olson, CEO of the OABC.

“The FTA has played a pivotal role in fostering economic growth and deepening bilateral ties between our two countries over the past 15 years.

This Guide is a testament to our commitment to supporting the business community as they attempt to utilise the US Oman FTA, ensuring companies have the tools and knowledge to unlock its full potential.”

The launch of this guide is not only a celebration of the past 15 years but also a step towards building stronger trade partnerships for the future.

By providing clear guidance and showcasing real-world success stories, OABC aims to empower businesses to capitalise on the opportunities the FTA provides.

Key contributions to the guide include data from the US Department of the Trade Representative, who provided essential trade statistics and inspiration drawn from CIPE Bahrain’s Economic Diversification and Access to Finance project, supported by the US Department of State’s Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI).

Additionally, the work of AmCham Jordan on the US Embassy in Oman-sponsored Spotlight on the US-Oman FTA programme played a part in the guide’s creation.

The guide is available for free download and is designed to be shared widely among the business communities of both countries.

An Arabic version of the guide will be launched in early 2025. For more information or to download the guide, please visit [www.oabc.org/fta](#).

BANKDHOFAR LAUNCHES EASYMANDATE SOLUTION SUITE

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, the second largest bank in the Sultanate of Oman by branch network, has introduced an innovative E-mandate solution designed to simplify the collection of recurring payments for both individuals and businesses.

This new EasyMandate solution aims to enhance efficiency and effectiveness, reduce operating costs and improve cash flow, reflecting the bank’s commitment to providing cutting-edge digital solutions in line with Oman’s digital transformation goals, particularly in the banking sector.

The EasyMandate process allows for the periodic debiting of customers’ accounts for transactions such as monthly loan installments and house rent.

It also facilitates the registration and confirmation of e-mandates provided by customers through Corporate Internet Banking and Mobile Banking, supporting sustainability efforts by reducing paper usage.

In addition to this, a paper-based mandate creation is also available through BankDhofar’s Corporate Internet Banking platform, EasyDebit solution where corporate



customers can initiate paper-based debit mandates digitally. Previously, this paper-based mandate creation was only available through BankDhofar branches.

Omar Salim Hamed al Hikmani, Assistant General Manager of Operations at BankDhofar, stated, “The BankDhofar’s

EasyMandate and EasyDebit solutions support the government’s digital transformation initiative, enhancing BankDhofar’s role as a key player in advancing Oman’s financial system.

It aligns perfectly with our objectives to offer seamless, secure and innovative digital solutions to our customers.”

Omar Salim Hamed al Hikmani emphasised BankDhofar’s continuous commitment to delivering exceptional customer experiences through innovative digital solutions that facilitate digital payments.

BYD inaugurates third showroom at Mall of Oman

MUSCAT: Accelerating a new chapter in Oman’s automotive landscape, World Auto Business has brought BYD’s electric mobility experiences closer to automotive enthusiasts with the inauguration of BYD’s third showroom at the Mall of Oman.

This is Oman’s first automotive showroom within the premises of a shopping mall. This innovative showroom concept offers visitors a unique opportunity to explore BYD’s high-tech electric and hybrid vehicles. It invites customers to embark on electrifying journeys with vehicles that seamlessly blend technology, performance and sustainability.

The inauguration was graced by A D Huang, General Manager of BYD Middle East and Africa Auto Sales Division, Husam al Mandhari, Director, Mall Management, Mall of Oman, Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan, Managing Director — Corporate, Saud Bahwan Group and senior representatives from BYD.

Highlighting this milestone, a BYD representative described it as a pivotal step in the brand’s expansion in Oman, stating that BYD’s vehicles are not merely products but future-inspired innovations where cutting-edge technology meets practicality to create sustainable, high-performance solutions designed for the demands of modern city life.

The representative also emphasised how the showroom enhances the overall customer experience, allowing families to engage in enriching edutainment encounters while making informed



Showroom inauguration by A D Huang, General Manager, BYD Middle East and Africa Auto Sales Division, Husam al Mandhari, Director, Mall Management, Mall of Oman and Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan, Managing Director — Corporate, Saud Bahwan Group.

decisions about their automotive choices.

Stepping into the showroom, visitors have an opportunity to enter a world of unique storytelling and automotive advancements. The ultra-dimensional exhibition space showcases BYD’s futuristic DNA through high-tech interiors, immersive aesthetics and interactive displays.

A centerpiece of the showroom experience is the 98-inch LED screens, which deliver captivating presentations on BYD’s transformative technologies, including the revolutionary Blade Battery, DM-i Super Hybrid technology and the e3 platform.



Interior of the showroom.

Visitors can also explore advanced solutions such as the Disus Body Control system and the e4 (Yisifang) platform, designed to offer consumers the benefits of cutting-edge automotive innovation.

Every aspect of the showroom reflects BYD’s commitment to innovation, from earthy dome-like elements to illuminated floors and high-contrast mirror reflections.

These design elements create a harmonious balance, emphasising the brand’s forward-thinking identity.

BYD’s range of vehicles available in Oman includes the dynamic electric models Han, Atto 3 and Seal, as well as the DM-i-powered hybrid Song Plus DM-i and Qin Plus DM-i, catering to a wide spectrum of customer preferences.

The recent unveiling of BYD’s new-age EV showroom in Al Wattayah heralded the beginning of Oman’s e-mobility era and was followed by



Guests at the event.

the inauguration of BYD’s second showroom at Al Mouj.

As BYD sets its sights on the future, World Auto Business LLC remains committed to providing an exceptional customer journey, ensuring a smooth transition from conventional vehicles to the cutting-edge technology of tomorrow.

Visit the BYD showrooms at Al Wattayah, Al Mouj and Mall of Oman today to explore the future of mobility first-hand.

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BUSINESS

BREAKTHROUGH



Noof al Lawati

OMANI POSTGRAD STUDENT HONoured FOR GH2 INNOVATION

MUSCAT: A young Omani postgraduate student has received a prestigious award from Imperial College London for developing an innovative organic material for a photoanode-based device designed for green hydrogen (GH2) production from water. The breakthrough technology, which features an advanced organic photoanode, holds the potential to transform the global energy landscape by making green hydrogen production more efficient.

Noof al Lawati, the engineer behind this achievement, completed her Master's degree at Imperial College London and her Bachelor's degree at the University of Nottingham in the UK. She shared her journey with the Observer.

Noof expressed pride in receiving the Best Performance in the MSc Research Project Prize from Imperial College London, recognised as Europe's top university and the world's second-ranked institution.

This award was presented during Noof's Master's programme in Advanced Chemical Engineering with Biotechnology. Her research focused on developing an organic photoanode that achieved a breakthrough in both stability and performance.

This innovative material enables the creation of a standalone device capable of operating without an external electrical power source, representing a major leap forward in renewable energy technology.

Organic photoanodes play a critical role in photoelectrochemical devices, which can convert solar energy into electrochemical energy which directly drives the water-splitting reaction, producing oxygen and green hydrogen. "Green hydrogen is essential for building a sustainable world, enabling renewable energy to be stored and distributed as needed," said Noof.

"With further development and commercialisation, this technology has the potential to significantly impact the global energy transition and support Oman's move towards sustainable energy solutions."

Earlier in her academic journey, Noof was also honoured by the University of Nottingham with the Frank Whitt Chemical and Environmental Engineering Student Prize for being the Most Outstanding Student in her final year.

FINANCE MINISTRY ALLOCATES RO 35M WORTH OF TREASURY BILLS

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Finance allocated government treasury bills worth RO 35 million this week, covering two maturity periods.

Bills worth RO 10 million were issued for a 28-day maturity at an average accepted price of RO 99.685 per RO 100, with a minimum accepted price matching this value. The average discount rate stood at 4.10625%, while the average yield reached 4.11923%.

For the 91-day maturity, bills worth RO 25 million were allocated at an average accepted price of RO 98.900 per RO 100, with the lowest



accepted price also at RO 98.900.

The average discount rate was 4.41209%, and the average yield reached 4.46116%.

Treasury bills are short-term financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, with the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) managing the issuance. They

offer secure investment options for licensed commercial banks.

The repo interest rate with the CBO on these bills is set at 5.25%, while the discount rate for treasury bill facilities stands at 5.75%.

These bills provide high liquidity, allowing banks to trade them through repo transactions either with the CBO or among themselves in the inter-bank market.

They also serve as a benchmark for short-term interest rates in the local financial market and help the government manage its financial needs efficiently. — ONA

KSP Oman to boost energy grid efficiency

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 16

THE launch of the 2024-2025 Knowledge Sharing Programme (KSP) Oman marked a major milestone in strengthening renewable energy collaboration between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Korea.

Co-hosted by the Embassy of Korea, Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals, and the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA), the initiative aims to enhance Oman's power grid efficiency through renewable energy integration.

Delivering the keynote address at the event, Tae Hyun Choi, Senior Advisor and Head of the Korean Delegation for the KSP Consultation with Oman, emphasised that the project would offer tailored solutions for Oman's renewable energy sector.

The initiative will analyse Oman's power system to support



KSP Oman is a very important step towards global carbon neutrality and energy security in Oman

TAE HYUN CHOI
Senior Advisor and Head of the Korean Delegation for the KSP Consultation with Oman

its expanding renewable energy portfolio, aligning with global carbon-neutrality goals.

"KSP Oman is a very important step towards global carbon neutrality and energy security in Oman," Choi stated.

"The successful conclusion of this programme could contribute to exploring practical and sustainable solutions while addressing power and sustainability challenges."

Choi shared Korea's experience in overcoming power grid management challenges, noting that its renewable energy production nearly doubled between 2014 and 2023, despite complex infrastructure and geopolitical constraints.

Korea now targets increasing its renewable energy portfolio from 9% to 20% by 2030.

"Korea has faced significant challenges in managing its power system due to its unique conditions," he explained.

"However, our successful management efforts serve as

valuable lessons that can inform Oman's renewable energy strategy."

Choi also encouraged active participation from Omani energy sector stakeholders, urging them to engage in consultations and collaborate closely with their Korean counterparts throughout the project.

He stressed that knowledge-sharing and joint problem-solving would be key to achieving sustainable energy solutions.

Looking ahead, Choi suggested that Oman consider applying for Korea's Economic Innovation Partnership Programme (EIPP), a multi-year initiative launched in 2020 that has already supported six African nations in sectors such as smart cities, future mobility and advanced manufacturing.

The launch of Knowledge Sharing Programme Oman reaffirms the shared vision of Oman and Korea to build a resilient, sustainable energy future through technological innovation and international cooperation.

SOLARWADI, NAFATH ENERGY TO BUILD SOLAR PLANT AT AOU

MUSCAT: SolarWadi, a leading renewable energy developer in Oman, has announced the signing of an EPC (Engineering, Procurement and Construction) contract with Nafath Energy, a key Omani EPC contractor in the solar energy sector, to execute the solar power plant at the Arab Open University (AOU) in Muscat.

This project marks a significant step forward in achieving both the university's and Oman's ambitious decarbonisation targets.

The solar power plant, designed



to produce over 2 GWh of clean energy annually, will contribute directly to reducing the university's carbon footprint, representing

a model of sustainability for educational institutions in the region.

Once operational in the coming months, the project is set to provide substantial energy savings and reduce reliance on conventional power sources, thus supporting Oman Vision 2040 goals for sustainable energy transition.

Waleed al Hallaj, Head of Business Development MENA of Amarenco, a shareholder of SolarWadi, emphasised the project's importance: "This partnership with

Nafath Energy for the Arab Open University's solar plant underscores the critical role of renewable energy in supporting both local and national decarbonisation goals.

By leveraging Oman's solar potential, this project showcases how sustainable energy solutions can drive down carbon emissions and strengthen energy independence. We're proud to support this milestone, which exemplifies the positive impact of local partnerships on Oman's journey towards a greener future."

Significant potential for collaboration with Oman: JCCME

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, DEC 16

THERE is significant potential for collaboration between Japan and Oman in various sectors, according to a top official of the Japan Cooperation Centre for the Middle East (JCCME), a key institution tasking with promoting Japanese trade and investment in the Mena region.

In an interview with Observer, Omote Takashi, Representative Executive Director of JCCME, highlighted the promising opportunities for collaboration between the two countries.

Takashi is a member of a high-level Japanese delegation representing eight major corporations and institutions taking part in the Oman-Japan Business Forum currently underway in Muscat.



Omote Takashi, Representative Executive Director of JCCME.

The official emphasised that the strong participation from Oman creates a valuable opportunity to accelerate engagement with more Japanese companies in the future.

"To be frank, I was initially unaware of the substantial participation from the Omani

side. However, this experience has shown that with better planning and increased awareness, we could organise larger Japanese delegations next time."

The high level of interest from Oman highlights the potential for stronger bilateral ties. Takashi added, "If Japanese companies and the government recognise this enthusiasm, it could lead to greater acknowledgment of the opportunities available in Oman."

This aligns with the broader strategies of both countries to enhance industrial development and future prosperity."

However, Takashi pointed out that one challenge is the limited understanding Japanese companies currently have of Oman's business environment.

He explained, "There seems to be limited awareness of Oman's economic vision and priorities,

such as Oman Vision 2040, which emphasises innovation and food security.

These are areas where Japan, with its strong ecological expertise and technological advancements, can make significant contributions."

For Omani business people, Takashi highlighted the importance of actively promoting Oman's unique advantages and potential.

"Raising awareness among Japanese business leaders about the opportunities in Oman should be a priority," he said.

This can be achieved by hosting more events, fostering direct dialogue and creating platforms for interaction between businesses from both countries.

Reflecting on his experience in Oman, Takashi said, "Visiting Oman reveals distinct differences and unique opportunities that set it apart from other countries.

This is my second visit and even in limited interactions, I've noticed the significant potential for collaboration. Direct communication and face-to-face dialogue are essential to bridging the gap and creating meaningful connections."

While he acknowledged that opportunities for such exchanges remain limited, he expressed optimism that increasing these interactions will have a lasting positive impact.

"In summary, Oman should focus on showcasing its business environment, aligning with Japan's strengths in innovation and technology, and facilitating more opportunities for direct dialogue.

These efforts will strengthen ties and pave the way for more significant business partnerships between the two countries," Takashi concluded.

Turn your 2025 ideas into successful projects



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The author is
the founder of
Knowledge Oman.

KHALFAN wanted to arrange a surprise event to celebrate his best friend Ahmed's recent graduation from the university. The venue was booked, a special cake was ordered, and an invitation list to friends was sent. Everything seemed to be easy and in order, yet the reality was not in sync.

The venue was not confirmed by the hosting provider, the cake order was cancelled by accident by the bakery and literally about 78% of the guests did not receive the invitation that was sent as an email (probably landed in junk mail). You can imagine how the event turned out at the end.

With all the good intention and a great idea in place, Khalfan ended up in frustration during the day trying to ensure everything continues to go well, instead of enjoying the actual graduation party/celebration with his friend Ahmed. Khalfan's disappointment is not unique and I can confidently state that many people encounter the same, in one way or another.

We all have great ideas and I am pretty sure that many of these ideas are also planned for 2025. Nevertheless, unless these ideas are turned into projects with clear scope and timelines, then doom (and a failure) is just around the corner.

Ideas, big or small, be it for personal or professional purposes, from losing personal weight, gaining professional certificates, attaining promotion at the workplace, starting a new business, building a house, etc., can

easily become overwhelming and frustrating if one doesn't have a clear plan in place.

Turning ideas into projects and then ensuring these projects are managed properly is critical for ensuring the materialisation of the ideas. Project management is not just a skill in business and for the corporates (in my humble opinion). Project management should be for anyone who would like to see their ideas turn into success — trust me, I speak from personal and professional experience, of all those great ideas I have been exposed to over the years.

I periodically meet a lot of people, be they family members, friends, colleagues at work, or also associates from networks I am engaging with, both professional and in community platforms. The kind of ideas we talk about and ultimately generate are noteworthy; nevertheless, the biggest challenge we face is seeing these ideas turn into reality.

The problem is simply due to putting commitment and setting timelines to the same. Research shows that poor planning and organisation waste a lot of resources (money and time included).

According to a Project Management Institute article I read recently, approximately 13% of resources are wasted due to inefficient project management and execution. Why? Because there was no clear project plan and management in place. Having good project management in place can surely help turn most of the ideas into a successful reality.

Excited, motivated, supported, encouraged

We all have great ideas, and I am pretty sure that many of these ideas are also planned for 2025. Nevertheless, unless these ideas are turned into projects with clear scope and timelines, then doom (and a failure) is just around the corner.

and all inspired to get those brilliant ideas off your mind and into action will unlikely become a reality unless you seriously consider putting them all in writing (where you can see), setting timelines (so you can track) and putting them into accountability (so you can assign responsibility).

Without having them jotted/noted into paper (or digitally via your smart device), the ideas may remain temporarily in your mind until other idea(s) or distraction takes over (no thanks to overload information and social media's everlasting distraction).

You don't need many ideas; what you need is a clear plan. A plan that can turn those big, few and prioritised ideas into achievable, focused and time-bounded steps. These all can be materialised with effective project management in place.

How to list, select an idea and then turn them into projects is a subject I would like to explore in depth in my upcoming article so that whether you're tackling a work assignment, a passion project, or just trying to stay on top of life, all will eventually be possible.

2025 is two weeks away. My last article focused on the importance of managing time wisely. This article focused on the importance of turning those initiatives, plans, wishes and aims (i.e., ideas) into projects.

Next week, I will try and share basic steps that one can use in order to manage time and projects successfully. Until we catch up again next week, stay positive and continue winning.

YUAN'S FALL WOULD BE A GIFT TO BANK OF JAPAN

CHINESE leaders are discussing the possibility of letting their currency weaken to blunt the impact of potential US trade tariffs, Reuters reported last week, citing sources. A weaker yuan could pummel currencies across Asia but there could be a silver lining for Governor Kazuo Ueda at the Bank of Japan which meets on Wednesday to decide whether to raise interest rates for the third time this year.

There is little reason to doubt that if President-elect Donald Trump follows through on his threat to impose massive tariffs on imports from China, Beijing will again allow the currency to fall to make its goods cheaper and offset the hit. That could pose a quandary for other exporters in the region; their currencies faced downward pressure as they did during the first trade war.

In late July, when Japan's central bank surprised markets by raising rates to the highest level in 15 years, it contributed to a sharp yen rally, a global unwind of a major carry trade and a sell-off of developed market equities including the biggest rout in Tokyo's Nikkei since 1987 Black Monday.

Japanese currency is more sensitive to moves by the renminbi than global peers.

Assume the United States increases tariffs on Chinese goods by 25 percentage points next year and Beijing responds by devaluing its currency to about 7.5 yuan per dollar, from around 7.27 at present.

Under that scenario, Jain Chandresh, a foreign exchange and rates strategist at BNP Paribas, expects Japan's currency to weaken slightly from its current level to end next year at around 156 yen per dollar. Without tariffs, he says the yen would likely end 2025 at around 140.

Japan's central bank is leaning towards holding rates steady this week, a Reuters poll of economists shows. It makes sense to wait until after Trump takes office next month to see if another trade war materialises. Then Ueda can strike when the moment is right. — Reuters

Public guarantees would boost EU green industry

OVER the past two years, the European Union has made scaling up its cleantech sector a high priority. As European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has emphasised, the sector is essential to the bloc's economic competitiveness, energy security and industrial leadership.

The EU has an innovation edge in several clean technologies, from green hydrogen to long-duration energy storage. But it is difficult to achieve commercial scale for these technologies on the continent.

An investment gap of around €50 billion (\$52 billion) must be filled to manufacture, by 2030, at least 40% of the solar and wind devices, batteries, heat pumps, hydrogen electrolyzers and carbon capture and storage technology the EU must deploy.

When he presented his recent landmark report on European competitiveness, former Italian prime minister Mario Draghi succinctly summed up the problem: "There are too many barriers to commercialising innovations and scaling them up in the European Union."

In particular, the EU needs to develop new production methods and new methods of financing the construction of "first of a kind" plants, which require long lead times, access to large amounts of capital and highly skilled labor.

The United States and China, recognising that green industries can generate jobs and prosperity, have channeled billions of dollars into these sectors.

US President Joe Biden's Inflation Reduction Act, which offers tax credits for domestic cleantech production, is expected to unlock upwards of \$3 trillion in private investment over the next decade, according to analysis by Goldman Sachs. China, for its part, has heavily subsidised its solar industry, among others.

The EU lacks the fiscal firepower



The EU has an innovation edge in several clean technologies, from green hydrogen to long-duration energy storage.



DORIS
HAFENBRADL

The writer is Chief Technology Officer and Managing Director of Electrochaea, a startup offering a power-to-methane solution for energy storage.

of China and the US. So, instead of building these industries through generous subsidies and tax incentives, European policymakers must use government funds in a way that will crowd in private capital. That is where public guarantees come in.

Customers often expect companies selling technology that is unproven at commercial scale to issue extensive warranties in case the product does not perform as advertised.

These warranties are backed by bank guarantees, for which firms are required to hold full collateral.

But cleantech companies need comparatively high levels of investment to develop and expand their businesses and holding large amounts of cash as collateral locks up capital that could be better spent building additional facilities, hiring and training workers, and fulfilling customer orders.

To ease this burden, the public sector could provide counter-guarantees, promising to reimburse part of any payout that a bank makes to a customer. Industry experts have advocated this instrument as a way to decarbonise energy-intensive

industries and de-risk investments in clean technologies.

It also featured prominently in Draghi's report, which calls on the EU to increase substantially "the use of guarantees ... in support of strategic sectors of the economy."

Public guarantees have already proven effective in scaling up cleantech innovation in Europe.

In 2022, Bpifrance, the French public investment bank, guaranteed €51 million of financing for Verkor, a French battery manufacturer.

The guarantee helped Verkor secure private investment and a commitment from Renault to source electric-vehicle batteries from the firm, enabling it to break ground on its first gigafactory, in Dunkirk.

These guarantees are highly efficient, with each euro of public money unlocking up to thousands of euros of working capital for innovators.

For example, a €5 billion guarantee facility created by the European Investment Bank for companies in the wind sector will support up to €80 billion of new investment in this important renewable energy source.

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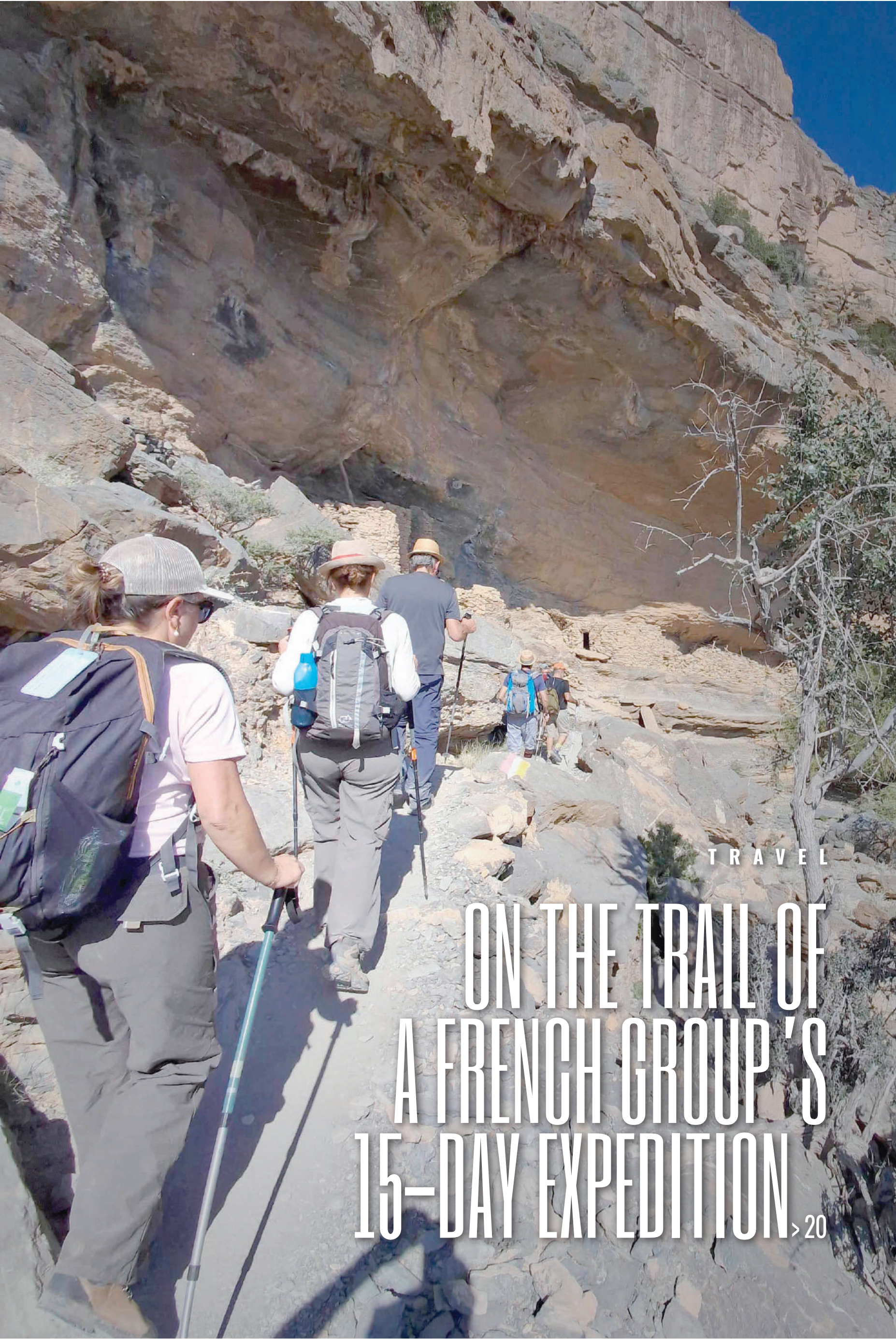
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GRAMMY WINNER

Zakir Hussain, the tabla maestro with 'dancing fingers', dies aged 73 in US



ZAKIR HUSSAIN, whose 'dancing fingers' made him one of the greatest players of the tabla or Indian drums and who became a major force in contemporary world music, has died. Hussain, 73, died in a San Francisco hospital from complications of idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis - a chronic lung disease, his family said in a statement.

A child prodigy, he was known for his dazzling solo performances and a raft of collaborative work with internationally renowned musicians such as George Harrison of the Beatles.

He was nominated for seven Grammy awards, winning four including three this year, according to the Grammy website. He was also the recipient of India's highest honour for performing artists, the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award.

The eldest son of legendary tabla player Ustad Alla Rakha, Hussain began his professional career at the age of 12 accompanying Indian classical musicians.

By 18, he was touring internationally and would go on to work with the likes of Grateful Dead drummer Mickey Hart, cellist Yo-Yo Ma, jazz musician Herbie Hancock and virtuoso guitarist John McLaughlin.

Born into a family of musicians, Hussain was a child prodigy and first performed at a concert at the age of 7. He often toured and performed with his father, Alla Rakha, another legendary player of the tabla, an ancient Indian percussion instrument.

After completing his education in Mumbai, Hussain's international career took off when he moved to the US in 1970. The first waves were created by his groundbreaking work with British guitarist John McLaughlin, violist L Shankar and percussionist T H 'Vikku' Vinaykram.

They formed a band called Shakti that fused Indian classical music with jazz in tracks that remain iconic to this day. The band disbanded and came together again several times with Hussain and McLaughlin remaining constants.

Through his career, Hussain worked with Yo-Yo Ma, Charles Llyod, Bela Fleck, Edgar Meyer, George Harrison, Ravi Shankar, Ali Akbar Khan and others, popularising Indian classical music as a cultural ambassador.

Earlier in 2024 he won three Grammy awards for Best Global Music Performance, best Contemporary Instrumental Album and Best Global Music Album. —AFP/dpa

QUICK FEATURES



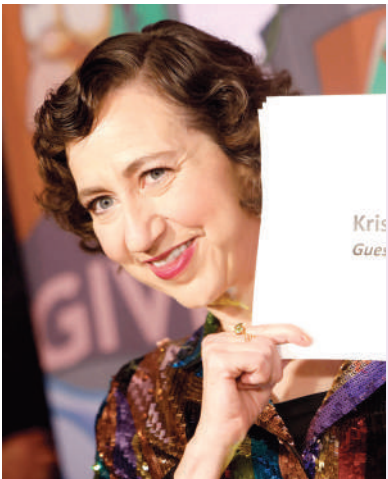
LIFESTYLE

A cosplayer wearing a portrait of Mona Lisa by artist Leonardo Da Vinci poses during the "Xmas Comics and Games" event, a fair focused on comic books culture, at Lingotto Fiere in Turin. —AFP



FILM

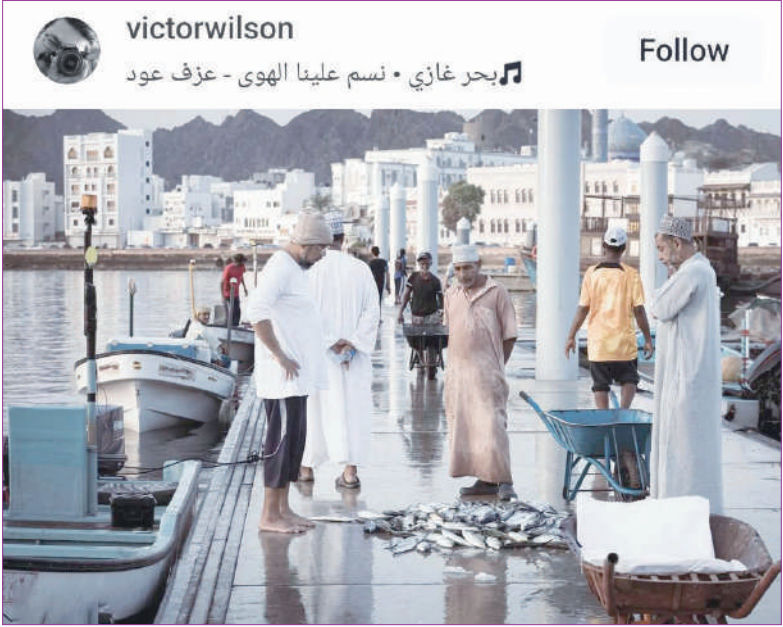
President of the Carthage Film Festival Tunisian director Farid Boughdir poses for a picture during the opening ceremony of the festival's 35th edition at Culture City in Tunis. —AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

US actress and comedian Kristen Schaal attends Disney's The Simpsons Holiday special world premiere screening of 'O C'mon all ye Faithful' at El Capitan Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP

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‘Eyelash viper’, leaf-nosed bat among new species found in Mekong



A VIPER with scales that look like eyelashes and a leaf-nosed bat are among dozens of new species identified in Southeast Asia’s Mekong region last year, WWF said on Monday.

The environmental group regularly publish a list of newly discovered flora and fauna in the region to highlight the area’s biodiversity but also the risks it faces. “The region is still a fertile ground for scientific exploration,” WWF said, warning that “many species are likely to go extinct before they are even discovered” because of mostly human-linked pressures, including deforestation and the wildlife trade.

The Greater Mekong, which comprises Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, is a well-known biodiversity hotspot, home to tigers, elephants and dolphins.

In all, 234 new species of vertebrates and vascular plants – a category that excludes

mosses, algae and fungus – were identified in the region in 2023.

Some were located in remote natural habitats, while others were identified from specimens preserved in natural history museums and botanical gardens across the world.

Among them is an Asian pit viper whose chocolate-brown and mint-green scales give it the appearance of eyelashes around its eyes, WWF said.

Found in limestone formations in a Thai national park, it has been named the limestone eyelash pit viper as a result of its distinctive habitat and markings.

Similarly striking is a bat that weighs in at between five and seven grammes and features a distinctive leaf-shaped nose, used for echolocation. It was documented in Thailand, but is also found in Malaysia, WWF said. — AFP



An evening of virtuosity as piano duel tackles Russian Greats at ROHM

BY GEORGINA BENISON
PHOTOS BY KHALID AL BUSAIDI

A NEW and innovative challenge took place recently at the Royal Opera House Muscat, House of Musical Arts, in conjunction with Salle Gaveau. On stage were a Steinway grand piano, an orchestra, a conductor and two young winners of the Monte Carlo Piano Masters Competition. The programme consisted of two concertos from the Russian Romantic repertoire, performed in chronological order across two halves.

The La Corelli Orchestra, which specialises in opera as well as symphonic scores and is currently supporting performances of “La Fille du Régiment” in the main theatre, took their places on stage. From the Education and Outreach team at ROHM, Maryam al Kaabi and Noor al Mahrouqi appeared in blue Omani dress to introduce the proceedings in Arabic and English and informed the audience that the soloists were competing for votes.

Leader Nicolò Grassi stood for an important tune-up, while a film of Russian pianist Nikolai Kuznetsov speaking earlier was projected at the back. The soloist and Italian-born conductor with strong Russian connections, Alessandro Cadario, then entered for Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto No 1 in B minor and prepared to begin. Unfortunately, the horns faltered in the famous opening of this much-beloved concerto, but Nikolai began the powerful chords with confidence. The balance of sound favoured the piano; however, the acoustics in the hall were somewhat dry, lending a cold quality to the ensemble and contributing to some timing issues between the soloist and orchestra at first. A lovely cello theme was somewhat distracting, as were latecomers being admitted and an intercom broadcast from the back.

Teething problems aside, there was no doubt about Kuznetsov’s superb technique, the energy and passion he conveyed in the tutti



sections, supported by strong brass and timpani. He communicated the music through visible body movement in both the lyrical and virtuosic passages, but the tone of the piano lacked the warmth one expects from a Steinway — perhaps due to the cold acoustics of the auditorium once again?

He performed brilliant cadenzas with nearly perfect accuracy in the faster sections throughout, drawing pin-drop silence from the audience in total absorption and concentration. The ensemble playing settled down during the first movement, leading to a tender slow movement that showcased pizzicato strings and delightful solos passed among the woodwind.

The last movement required the soloist to play almost continuously and Nikolai maintained his expressive physical posture throughout to a stunning final cadenza and climax. After rapturous applause, Nikolai Kuznetsov returned to the piano to perform Astor Piazzolla’s “Libertango” — which left everyone breathless.

Following an interval, the same film projection introduced the slight figure of Hong Kong-born Aristo Sham, who also resides in the States, on his first visit to Oman. He expressed hope that the audience would enjoy his performance of

Rachmaninov’s Piano Concerto No 3 in D minor and its varied emotional palette.

Aristo Sham is a less demonstrative player, both physically and visually, but his playing revealed absolute precision in his finger technique and a profound spectrum of emotional colour. The orchestra had now warmed to Rachmaninov’s style of romantic music — which is highly demanding for both the soloist and orchestra — and the first long, extended cadenza was executed with precision and accuracy. Solo phrases from the wind gradually emerged, including contributions from Luca Ridolfi on bassoon and again from Vanessa Sinigaglia on cello, followed by more subtle emotion expressed from the piano as the music returned to the first theme, tender and poised.

The lengthy second movement, although less famous, saw the strings sounding warmer and more romantic in texture. A splendid climax with percussive explosions and crashes, accompanied by rhythmic tutti chords, propelled the movement onwards, suggesting a filmic or programmatic quality. Aristo brought the melody forth beautifully, conveying the pathos in Rachmaninov’s lyrical themes with clarity of touch.

The famous theme reappeared towards the end, characterised by soaring romantic string playing, swelling and expanding towards the final cadenza and explosive climax.

For his solo encore, Aristo Sham chose something similar — a romantic Rachmaninov tableau with shifting tonalities — to conclude an exciting programme.

Let the voting begin — but how can one compare two different concertos by different composers performed by two individuals? The second certainly benefited from a focused, settled audience and a warmed-up orchestra, whereas the former gained from being the more famous and slightly shorter, work. Both performances were formidable in their different ways, but together the concert was simply the best.

FEATURES

BY DR KHALED ABDUL MALAK

TWO YEARS ago, I hung up my surgeon's gloves and followed my passion to become a tour guide in Oman. Since then, I have primarily welcomed French clients and had the pleasure of working with renowned international television channels, including National Geographic, Discovery Channel, BBC, France3, France5, and Arte.

Recently, I guided a group of seven French nationals, aged between 55 and 65, who were eager for unique adventures in Oman. Over a span of 15 days, we had a packed itinerary that included a seven-day exploration of the stunning landscapes of mountains, wadis and beaches.

The group arrived from France on the morning of November 23, 2024, and we set off directly to Jabal Shams. The weather at this time of year was delightful, and my clients were thrilled to escape the snowy conditions of Paris.

Our adventure began at Wadi Nakhr, often referred to as “Oman’s Grand Canyon”. Unfortunately, we could not reach Nakhr village due to the road being washed away by heavy rains a month earlier, so we parked our cars and continued on foot to Masirat Al Nakhr.

The canyon was breathtaking, with cliffs soaring around one thousand metres on either side of the wadi bed. After about 45 minutes, we took the tributary path on the left bank and soon discovered a sublime natural pool with crystal-clear water. We paused here for a snack before heading back to our cars as dusk approached.

That evening, we spent the night in a house overlooking Wadi Nakhr. The following morning, after a delicious breakfast prepared by Amna, our host's wife, we embarked on the famous “Balcony Walk” of Jabal Shams, enjoying the cool weather and the breathtaking views of the canyon and surrounding mountains.

It took us around an hour and a half to reach our destination, the abandoned village of Sab Bani Khamis, where ancient stone houses clung to the cliffs. This site holds special significance for me; it was here that I accomplished what I believe to be one of the highest free-drop abseils in the world, measuring 385 metres, in December 2010 alongside Mihai Catrinar, my adopted son at the time. I later repeated the abseil with BBC’s Steve Backshall and Aldo Kane, alongside my good friend Justin Halls. I named this majestic drop “Sheikh al Majaneen,” after a title given to me by my old Omani brother, Abou Hmeid, upon our first meeting 25 years ago.

After visiting the village, we took a brief rest under an acacia tree before hiking back to Al Khtaym, where we spent the night. Our next stop was a traditional house in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, where I had arranged one night’s stay.

Upon arrival at Al Khtaym, we packed our bags and set off for the Sayq Plateau. It took us around two and a half hours to reach our next destination in Al Aa’qr, a location that boasted a terrace overlooking Wadi Sallut to the west and Wadi Al Mueidin to the east.

The following day, I planned a hike on a plateau situated between Wadi Qasheh and Wadi Al Hijri. We awoke early and enjoyed breakfast on the terrace to admire the panoramic views and pleasant weather.

By 8 am, we set out for our hike, first driving to the village of Al Greyr before taking a left turn to park our cars. We began



ON THE TRAIL OF A FRENCH GROUP'S 15-DAY EXPEDITION



our trek at 9:15 am, and along the way, we spotted thousands of fossilised seashells embedded in the rocks.

After approximately 45 minutes of walking, we reached the abandoned village of Sab Qasheh, perched dramatically on the cliff edge, hundreds of metres above the wadi below. We took a snack break here before returning to our cars, then headed back to Muscat for the night.

On the following day, I planned to take the group to Al Sharqiyah North Governorate for four days of exploring more stunning canyons. When I asked them about their first impressions of Oman, they responded: “A country that seems desert, arid, between sea and mountains, an enigma seen from afar. But as you draw near, a festival unfolds: wadis, oases, palm groves, waterfalls and natural pools appear before you! The miracle of Oman captures our hearts. Here lies a country of a thousand wonders: unusual ophiolites, winding aflaj and vibrant rocks that intrigue us, enchant us and delight us.”