

OMAN

SHORT TAKES

AL NUMANI WATCHES DEMO OF FULL SCALE SHIELD EXERCISE



MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Head of Office of the Supreme Commander, on Monday watched proceedings of the practical demonstration 'Full Scale Shield Exercise 2024' at Muscat International Airport.

The exercise was carried out by military and security services in cooperation with Oman Airports company, in the presence of government officials and leaders of the military and security services. The demo included many scenarios and complex situations to measure the readiness and response of various sectors.

It also tested the level of coordination and integration among the parties concerned and the ability to unify national efforts to deal with exceptional and emergency situations in a way that ensures the safety of civil aviation. — ONA

OMAN AT UAE SESSION OF ARAB MEDIA COMMITTEE

ABU DHABI: Represented by the Ministry of Information, the Sultanate of Oman on Monday took part in the 102nd regular session of the Permanent Committee for Arab Media. The meeting was held in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The meeting dealt with many topics, most notably the Palestinian issue. It looked into steps to follow up the Arab media action plan, the role of Arab media in addressing the phenomenon of terrorism, and ways to apply professional media excellence.

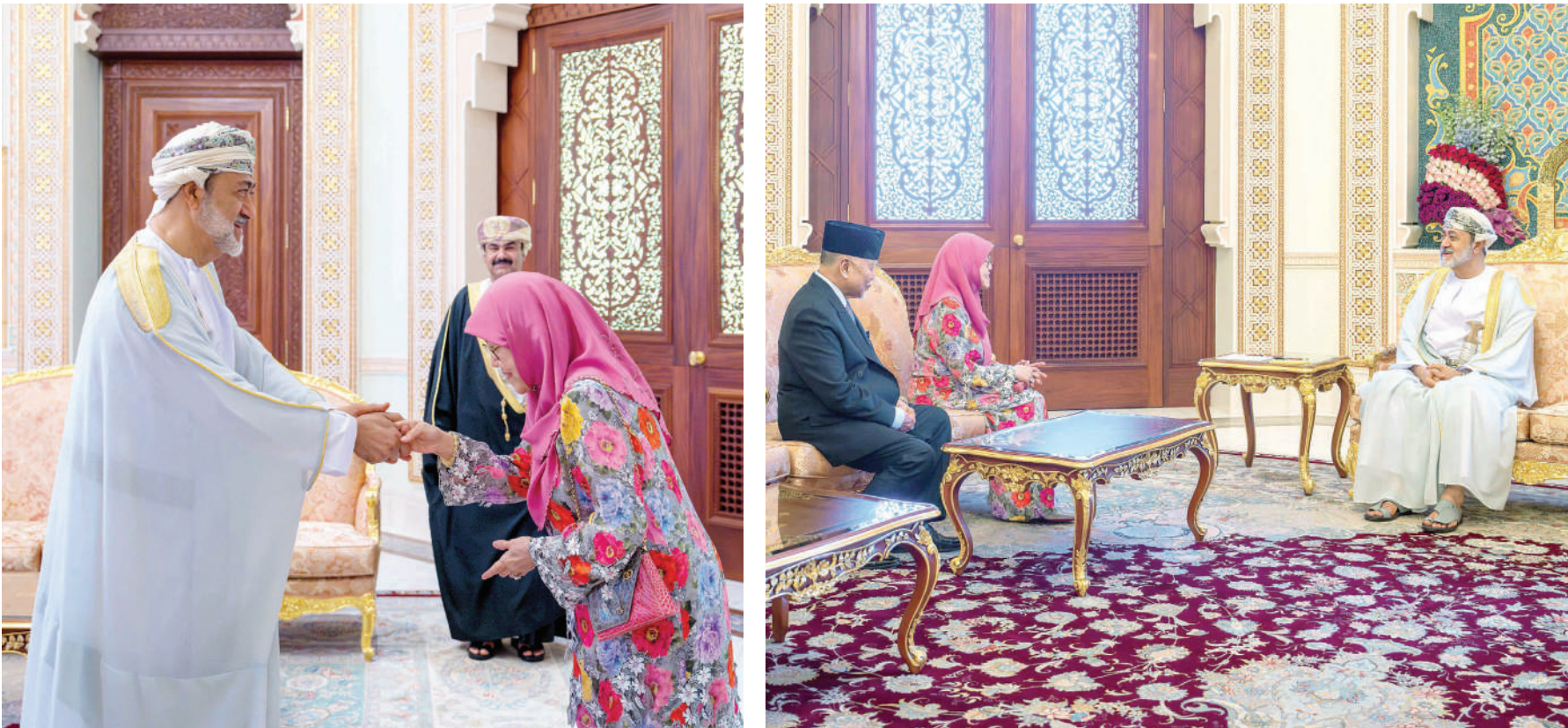
The meeting also sought ways to enhance the capabilities of Arab media professionals.

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation to the meeting was headed by Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information. — ONA



MOHAMMED SAID AL BALUSHI
Head of Oman's delegation at the UAE meeting

HIS MAJESTY GIVES AUDIENCE TO PRINCESS HAJAH MASNA



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave an audience at Al Barakah Palace on Monday to Princess Hajah Masna, Ambassador-at-Large at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brunei Darussalam. During the audience, the princess conveyed the greetings and best wishes of Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei Darussalam to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people. In turn, His Majesty the Sultan asked the princess to convey his greetings to the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam and his people. — ONA

Oman, Brunei celebrate 40 years of relations

A reception was held in Muscat on Monday to mark the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Brunei Darussalam, in the presence of Princess Hajah Masna, Ambassador-at-Large at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brunei Darussalam.

The event, which was held at Al Bustan Palace Hotel, was also attended by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, officials, ambassadors of ASEAN countries, and officials from the Bruneian side.

In her speech, Noralizan Abdul Momin, Ambassador of Brunei Darussalam to the Sultanate of Oman, highlighted the depth of relations between the two countries in various common fields.

She stressed the joint desire of the two countries to develop these relations in various fields, especially in education, culture, investment, energy and many others.

The ceremony witnessed the launch of



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy with Princess Hajah Masna in Muscat on Monday. — ONA

a commemorative logo symbolising the depth and strength of diplomatic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Brunei Darussalam.

The logo was inspired by the flags of the two countries and the number 40, indicating the 40th anniversary of the diplomatic relations. — ONA

Ministry of Labour launches 45 new 'Ejada' features

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 9

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) organised a media briefing on Monday to shed light on the 'Ejada' system for measuring individual and institutional performance, aiming to highlight its significance and the efforts made to develop and improve it.

Nadia al Maharbi, Director of the Performance Department, provided a comprehensive explanation of the 'Ejada' system, presenting it as an integrated framework for measuring and evaluating the performance of individuals and institutions.

The ministry noted that recent enhancements to the system include strengthening governance, refining mechanisms for applying the distribution curve model, and launching four training packages to prepare trainers to implement the system in government units.

Key improvements include aligning sector goals with annual and institutional objectives starting from 2025, expanding nominations for senior positions, introducing a "System Implementation



'Ejada' system will introduce additional incentives to strengthen the link between institutional and individual performance.

Compliance Rate" indicator, implementing the distribution curve by raising instead of lowering performance levels, mandating internal committees for performance approval, and refining the achievements section to make it more objective for senior position evaluations at the end of each year.

Nadia presented a set of facts and statistics about the 'Ejada' system, highlighting key achievements such as the disbursement of rewards amounting to RO 25 million and the inclusion of 54,000 outstanding employees within the system. It

was also noted that the system encompasses four million job objectives, 11 million key results, and 44,000 recorded achievements. Regarding personal objectives, 670,000 personal goals have been incorporated into the system.

Additionally, the ministry unveiled a comprehensive communication plan to raise awareness among officials and employees, introducing clear interim evaluations displayed on employees' personal profiles instead of merely showing performance levels, in line with principles of

transparency and credibility.

Mohammed al Hinai, Project Manager of the 'Ejada' system, explained that performance evaluation is conducted in two phases: a quantitative assessment during the year and a qualitative assessment at its conclusion. He highlighted that the system has responded to suggestions from officials and employees, modifying the distribution curve to prevent negative impacts on evaluations. He also revealed plans to add over 45 new features to the system to enhance the accuracy of performance measurement and governance.

Al Hinai added that the 'Ejada' system will introduce additional incentives to strengthen the link between institutional and individual performance, launching a package of rewards focusing on areas such as initiative, innovation, and customer service.

The ministry has allocated RO 3 million to honour outstanding employees, including proactive and innovative employees as well as the "Employee of the Month" for excellent services.

He noted the system's continuous expansion reflects decision-makers' belief in its importance and its pivotal role in improving the quality of government work. He also announced upcoming projects tied to the system, including the 'Ejada' Human Resources Management Matrix and new indicators aimed at addressing challenges such as unemployment and boosting local content. Additionally, new awards will be introduced for outstanding government units, with a recognition ceremony planned for February 2025 to honour 45 top-performing customer service outlets.

To ensure transparency in evaluations, satisfaction surveys measuring public contentment with government services will be launched, with over 230,000 beneficiaries participating since the system's inception. In a groundbreaking move, Al Hinai confirmed that, for the first time, the percentage of decisions made with community and stakeholder participation will be tracked, enhancing the quality of services provided by government units.

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Oman affirms commitment to gender equality and women empowerment. — Photo by Saleh al Sharji

OMAN REAFFIRMS GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT

OHOOD AL JILANIYAH
MUSCAT, dec 9

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), hosted the high-level meeting on progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 30 years, at the St Regis Al Mouj Hotel on Tuesday.

The meeting was organised in partnership with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the League of Arab States, and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, and was attended by officials and sector representatives from 22 Arab states. The annual update of the gender justice matrix was also launched, to celebrate the legislative achievements made in Arab countries on gender justice issues.

Shaikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development, said: “The Royal attention accorded by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to support human rights issues in general and women’s rights in particular guaranteed full protection of women’s rights as stipulated by the Basic Law of the State. Omani women accounted for 39 per cent in the judiciary in 2023 compared to 29 per cent in 2022 while Omani women holding senior administrative positions reached 21 per cent in 2023 compared to 16 per cent in 2020.”



ONE DEAD, THREE INJURED IN SALALAH

A building under construction collapsed in Salalah on Monday, leaving one person dead and three others injured, according to the Civil Defense and Ambulance Authority (CDAA). In an online statement, the CDAA said its rescue teams provided emergency medical care to the injured, who have sustained moderate to critical injuries. All three were transferred to a nearby hospital for further treatment, the authority added.

‘My journey under the Sultans of wisdom’ launched

MUSCAT: The National Museum organised a ceremony on Monday to launch the English version of the book ‘My Journey Under of the Sultans of Wisdom’ by late Mohammed Mohiuddin bin Abdulaziz.

The event was held under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal bin Hamad al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat, and was attended by cultural enthusiasts.

Dr Tariq Mohiuddin Mohammed Ghulam, the son of the late author, in his speech said: “The idea for the book began in 2016, when His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik suggested it to our father, as a means of documenting a critical period in Oman’s history. Since then, our father dedicated his time to research, writing,



Sayyid Saud al Busaidy patronised the book launch event of Dr Tariq Mohiuddin Mohammed Ghulam

and composing the book, even learning how to use a computer to write the book’s texts himself. At the end of 2019, His Majesty Sultan Haitham personally reviewed the first draft and

provided valuable comments and guidance that enriched the work.”

He added: “The greatest thing our father did for this book was his vision of it as a bridge connecting the younger generations to the challenges faced by Oman’s leaders and people during a pivotal period in its history. These moments have now been recorded in this book, with the hope that they will inspire future generations.”

The event included a visual presentation highlighting the contents of the book, which documents the author’s personal memoirs from his career spanning the 1950s to the 1990s, addressing key transformations in the history of the Sultanate of Oman and his diplomatic

contributions during his time at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The book is a memoir that documents the modern history of the Sultanate of Oman, taking the reader on a historical journey from the 1950s to the 1970s.

It recounts the lives of prominent figures and details life in old Muscat, as well as analysing major historical events that shaped the reigns of the late Sultan Said bin Taimour and the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos.

Despite the economic differences between the two reigns, the wisdom, resilience and peaceful vision of international relations were prominent features of their leadership.

Digital transformation in higher education

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, DEC 9

THE Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) has launched a series of strategic development projects to enhance Oman’s IT infrastructure, reflecting the Sultanate of Oman’s commitment to digital transformation.

These initiatives, spearheaded under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, aim to modernise government services, improve efficiency and support education and scientific research.

Part of the Ministry’s Digital Transformation Plan (2021–2025), the projects focus on building an integrated digital infrastructure that streamlines procedures, reduces costs and elevates the quality of services for students, academics, employees and investors.

Some of the key highlights include:

- IT infrastructure project, network development project, technical systems project, contact centre and cloud data centre.

Dr Yaqoub bin Juma al Raisi, Director-General of Planning and Head of the Digital Transformation Team, emphasised that these initiatives are more than technological upgrades — they are transformative tools to drive innovation and improve service delivery. The Ministry collaborated with leading technology companies, including



Dr Rahma launched strategic projects to develop digital infrastructure in Oman

Mustafa Sultan, Huawei, Vigotsu, and Omantel, to execute these projects.

Dr Al Raisi also announced forthcoming initiatives in change management, risk management, and business continuity, ensuring sustainability and long-term impact. These efforts align with Oman’s strategic vision to enhance technical policies, develop data governance and create an advanced educational environment.

This digital transformation positions Oman as a leader in adopting innovative technologies, bolstering its competitiveness on the global education map, and paving the way for sustainable economic and social development.

The initiatives mark a significant leap forward in the evolution of higher education and scientific research in the Sultanate of Oman.

RGO CELEBRATES RETIREES’ DAY WITH HONOURS

— ONA

MUSCAT: The Royal Guard of Oman (RGO) commemorated Retirees’ Day with a grand ceremony at the Training Battalion Shooting Range, celebrating the dedication and service of its retired personnel.

The event was presided over by retired Major General Khalifa al Junaibi, who expressed gratitude to the retirees for their contributions to national security and development. Highlights of the day included a shooting competition, poetry



The RGO commemorated Retirees’ Day at the Training Battalion Shooting Range

recitations honouring military service, and an awards ceremony recognising individual retirees and team achievements. Additionally, the RGO introduced the ‘Electronic Dishes’ system, a modernised training tool designed to enhance military readiness and precision.

The ceremony underscored the RGO’s commitment to maintaining strong ties with its retired personnel and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. — ONA

Winners of National Research Award announced

MANAH: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation on Monday announced that 13 published scholarly papers won the 11th edition of the National Research Award. The ceremony took place at Oman Across the Ages Museum in the Wilayat of Manah, Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah.

The announcement was made during the 11th Annual Researchers Forum titled Innovation and Entrepreneurship, currently held under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman

Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit. As many as 274 participants contested the award, including 167 from the category of holders of PhD or its equivalent, senior specialists and physicians.

The contest participants also included 107 emerging researchers. From this category, 207 research papers were shortlisted for the final stage of the competition.

Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, said in her speech that the current



274 participants contested for MoHERI’s National Research Awards

session of the Annual Researchers Forum focuses on the role of innovation and entrepreneurship in supporting the development of a knowledge-based economy, in a bid to enhance integration between research, innovation, economic sectors and society.

Dr Rahma explained that the ministry sought to consolidate this role through the programmes and projects being implemented within the tenth five-year plan (2021-2025).

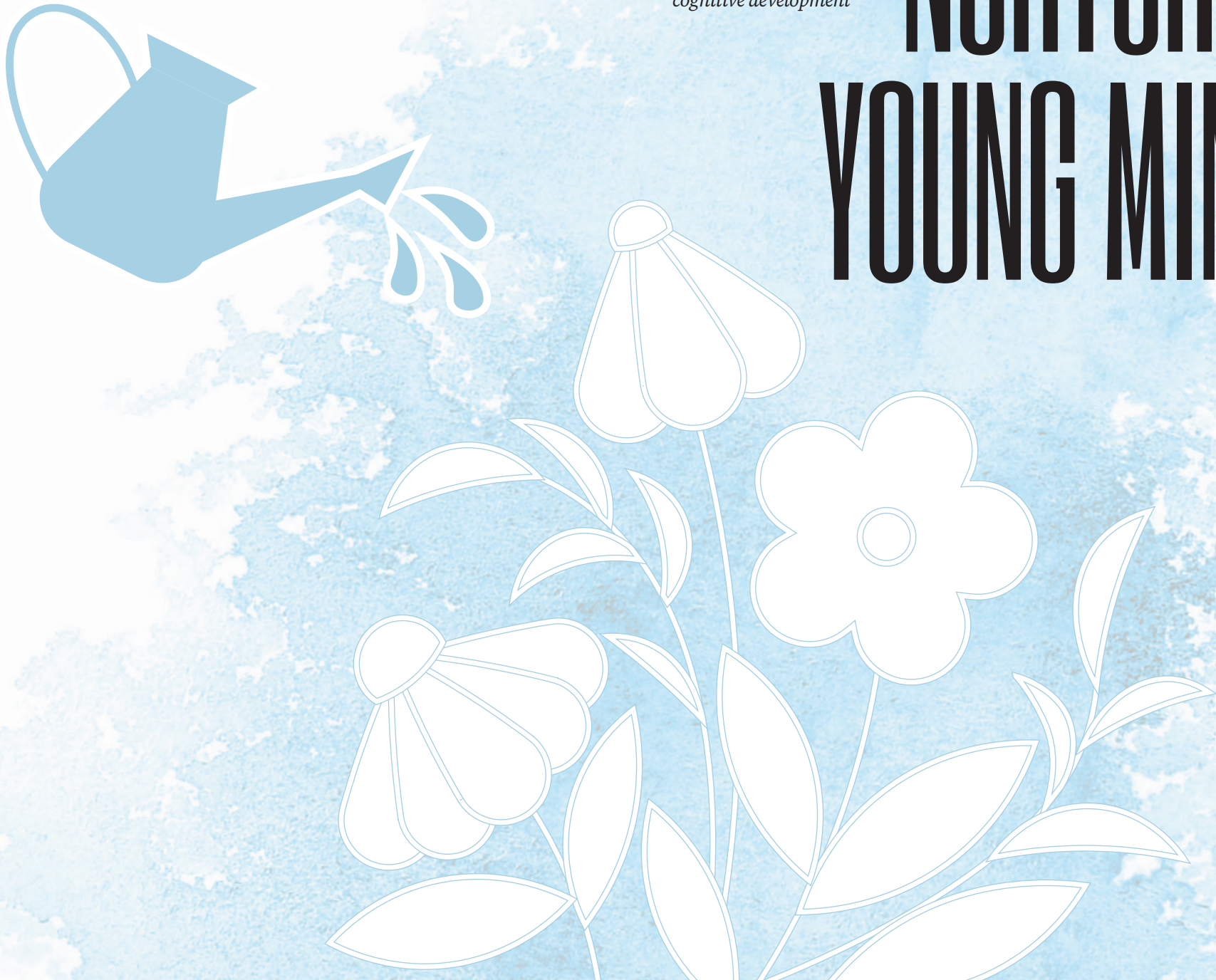
The minister spoke about the recent launch and activation

of a Programme to Support the Establishment and Operation of Innovation and Technology Transfer Centres at higher education institutions. She added that the programme focuses on three main packages of services, namely “business incubators and accelerators,” “modelling laboratories” and “technology transfer and development offices.” It also underlines the importance of raising awareness about registering intellectual property rights and how to benefit from outcomes. — ONA

SPOTLIGHT

Parenting style adopted plays
a pivotal role in shaping a
child's emotional, social, and
cognitive development

NURTURING YOUNG MINDS



KABEER YOUSUF

CHILDREN REPRESENT THE FUTURE, carrying forward traditions while shaping the society they live in. The way parents nurture them lays the foundation for future generations, shaping role models and setting the tone for the world ahead. Every action of parents and their child-rearing practices profoundly impacts a child's growth.

A balanced parenting approach — combining warmth with appropriate boundaries and support — promotes emotional and intellectual development, helping children thrive.

Children are life's adornment and one of the greatest blessings from God. How parents and close family members nurture these little flowers in the garden of life determines the future of the world. Thus, raising a child is one of the most critical responsibilities a parent undertakes, profoundly influenced by cultural, societal and individual factors.

Dr Moniza Hasnat, a paediatric specialist in Muscat, explains that the parenting style adopted plays a pivotal role in shaping a child's emotional, social and cognitive development.

"A child's growing brain needs more than just rules and discipline. It requires a nurturing environment with a helper, a friend, and an emotionally available caregiver," she says. Such environments make children feel secure, understood, and valued, fostering healthy brain development.

Dr Hasnat outlines four key parenting styles: They are:

Strict rules and high standards enforce discipline, but may instil fear in children. A combination of warmth and clear boundaries fosters confidence and resilience and lenient approaches encourage self-esteem but may lead to impulsive behaviour.

Also minimal guidance can negatively impact self-esteem and academic performance.

"Parents must aim for a balanced approach, providing emotional availability alongside structure to ensure well-rounded growth," she adds.

Children mirror emotions and internalise their parents' words, shaping their inner voice.

Positive, respectful communication helps nurture self-esteem and self-worth, influencing how children interact with the world.

Teaching children core values such as love, tolerance, empathy and patience requires modelling behaviour, direct instruction, and a supportive environment.

Practicing patience with children helps them manage frustration and build resilience.

Adolescence brings critical brain development and emotional challenges. Teenagers are vulnerable to stress and mental health struggles, requiring parents to be nurturing, attentive and consistent.

"Our love, patience, and presence can make all the difference,"

says Dr Hasnat. "Active listening and unwavering support give teenagers the stability they need to navigate this transformative stage."

Parenting is both an art and a science, where the ultimate goal is to raise emotionally healthy, confident individuals ready to embrace life's challenges and make the world a better place.

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Exploratory mission to monitor biodiversity in Jabal Samhan Nature Reserve

EA CONCLUDES BIODIVERSITY EXPLORATION

SALALAH: A team from the Environment Authority (EA) concluded a three-day exploratory mission in the Jabal Samhan Nature Reserve, located in the Dhofar Governorate.

The team, consisting of biodiversity experts, covered approximately 110 kilometres, starting from Ras Jabal Samhan and extending to Wadi Anzur.

During the mission, the team documented rare plant species, migratory birds, and wildlife such as the Arabian leopard, Nubian ibex, and Arabian gazelle. Environmental systems specialist Saeed bin Mohammed al Shahri highlighted the ecological richness of the reserve, noting the unique environmental conditions that support diverse flora and fauna. — ONA

GHAFF TREE RESERVE TO COME UP IN AL SHARQIYAH SOUTH

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority (EA) issued a decision to establish a protected zone in the Al Sharqiyah South Governorate under the name Ghaff Tree Reserve. Managed by modern effective methods, the new reserve will prepare and implement programmes designed to combat desertification and improve soil quality to protect the Ghaff trees areas and expand the vegetation cover by planting local trees and plants in select areas to stimulate biodiversity.

The new reserve will adopt programmes to monitor and protect biodiversity, reduce negative human impacts on the reserve as well as protect endangered species. The reserve will also seek to provide natural water sources to support trees, plants and wildlife, developing systems to monitor and manage sustainable water consumption in coordination with relevant authorities.

In addition to tapping carbon credits stored in trees and other natural resources through the technologies utilised in the reserve, modern technologies will be used to manage the reserve and enhance the growth of trees and plants to ensure the availability of carbon credits.

CAA ensures air traveller security, says CAA chief

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, DEC 9

THE eighth edition of the ‘ICAO Security Week 2024 and the High-Level Ministerial Meeting,’ hosted by the Sultanate of Oman, opened on Monday at the at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), in the presence of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance.

Speaking on the occasion, Eng Nayef bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), said, “This event embodies our firm commitment to developing the aviation industry and enhancing aviation security and safety standards in various fields. It offers a key platform for aviation and security experts and decision-makers worldwide to share ideas and experiences and discuss the latest developments and innovations in this vital sector.”

He said Oman is among the leading countries in this field at the regional and international levels and has made tangible steps in regulating the aviation sector to ensure the safety and security of passengers and enhance the stability and security of global airspace. Oman has made great strides in the field of aviation, through the development of advanced infrastructure and airports, the qualification of local competencies and the issuance of regulations in line with the best international standards.



Sultan bin Salim al Habsi opened the eighth edition of the ‘ICAO Security Week 2024

The meeting will discuss strengthening cooperation, coordination and communication at the international level to ensure the security of international civil aviation, coordinating the response to emerging threats, solutions and means of cooperation to deal with these challenges and discussing and exchanging best practices in the field of aviation security and facilities.

The event aims to address critical issues affecting global aviation security, recommend initiatives aimed at addressing challenges to international aviation security and reiterate the importance of a joint approach among member states to support joint efforts related to counter-terrorism issues, including the protection of critical

civil aviation infrastructure, enhancing global aviation security and facilities and ensuring the safety of passengers and crew personnel.

Salvatore Shakikitano, President, Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), stressed the leading role played by Oman in enhancing aviation security at the regional and international levels. He praised the efforts of the Oman Civil Aviation Authority in hosting the event and the distinguished hospitality.

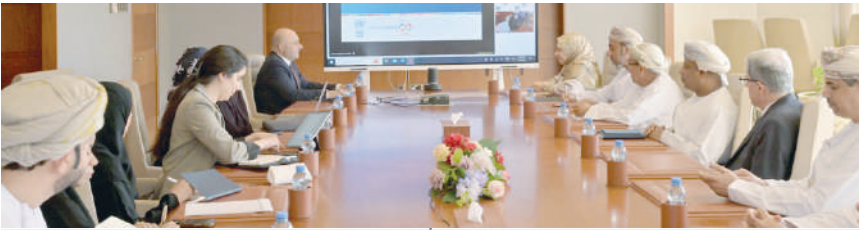
Shakikitano stressed that the aviation sector is facing increasing challenges, most notably cyber threats and the complexity of air networks, which require innovative solutions and continuous international cooperation. “Our success depends on how well we can anticipate emerging threats while ensuring that passenger and cargo movement is efficiently facilitated.

The ICAO Council President noted the outstanding achievements of the Middle East in the field of aviation security, where countries in the region recorded an effective implementation rate of 75.92 per cent of ICAO’s standards for the Global Aviation Security Audit Programme (USAP) audits. He also noted that this region leads the world in the number of ICAO-accredited trainers, which reflects the strength of capacity building and regional cooperation, indicating that the region is free of any major security concerns thanks to joint regional efforts.

Oman, ESCWA boost higher education cooperation

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI), in collaboration with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), discussed strengthening existing cooperation and explored future partnerships.

A key focus was the Oman Declaration Conference on Higher Education, scheduled for October 2025 at Sohar University, in collaboration with Unesco, the American University of Beirut, and several other Arab and international universities. This landmark event will address strategies



Dr Rahma during her meeting with Dr Salim Araj stressed the need for innovative educational models

to align higher education with labour market demands.

Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, received Dr Salim Araj, Regional Director of ESCWA, at the Ministry’s

General Diwan. During the meeting, Dr Rahma emphasised the need for innovative educational models offering diverse options to meet labour market needs.

Dr Salim Araj shared an initial vision for the conference,

which will spotlight topics such as the role of artificial intelligence in education, the state of higher education in the Arab world, private sector skill requirements, and the need to revise regional higher education policies. He highlighted the importance of forging a strong partnership with Omani institutions to leverage ESCWA’s expertise in aligning education with the evolving labour market.

Dr Araj also underscored the significance of analysing graduates’ current skill sets and developing actionable recommendations to support evidence-based decision-making by policymakers. — ONA

ANNOUNCEMENT

UPDATING SUPPLIERS & CONTRACTORS DATA IN 'VENDOR MANAGEMENT SYSTEM OF NAMA GROUP'

Nama Group would like to draw the attention of all contractors and suppliers dealing with the Group to update their data in the I-Supplier Registration System ([www.nama.om](#)). Kindly diligently respond to any notifications and emails you receive in this regard.

Please be informed that starting from **January 1, 2025**, suppliers and contractors who have not completed their profile data will not be allowed to participate in tenders. In addition, the Group companies will not be able to complete financial procedures of suppliers from issuing purchase orders (PO) and pay dues.

For further clarifications and inquiries, please contact the Procurement Departments of the respective Group subsidiary or via the following email:

Fatma.AIMahrouqi@holding.nama.om

Thank you for your cooperation.

TO ENSURE A SMOOTH OPERATION, UPDATE YOUR DETAIL BY SCANNING QR CODE

Ministry of Health

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health (Al Buraimi Hospital) invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tender :

Tender Ref:	Description	Last Date for Collection of Bidding Document	Last Date for Submission of Tenders	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non Refundable)
4504/2024	Proposed Car Parking Shed of OPD - Buraimi Hospital	Before 10AM on 29/12/2024	Before 10AM on 19/01/2025	Specialized companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the Second degree	10 R.O Small & Medium Enterprises 25 R.O Local Companies 25 R.O International Companies

Please note the following:

- Companies wishing to participate in the Tender can purchase the tender documents electronically through the website ([etendering.tenderboard.gov.om](#)), provided that they are registered in the system.
- Companies must submit their bids electronically via the above-mentioned website, provided that a **Bid Commitment Declaration**, and bids received without the required Declaration will not be considered.
- Bids shall be placed in sealed and waxed envelopes in the tender box at the Office of the Head of Financial Affairs Department.
- The concerned entity is not obligated to accept the lowest bid or any other bid.
- For inquiries related to the above tender, please contact through the website of the Esnad system for electronic tendering: ([etendering.tenderboard.gov.om](#))

SYRIA

SHORT TAKES



An Israeli soldier stands next to a military vehicle, near the ceasefire line between Syria and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. — Reuters

WAR MONITOR
REPORTS ISRAELI
STRIKES IN COASTAL
PROVINCES, GOLAN

BEIRUT: A Syria war monitor said on Monday that overnight Israeli strikes targeted military positions and depots in several parts of the country, after rebels ousted president Bashar al Assad. “Since the initial hours after the announcement of the fall of the former regime, Israel began launching intensive air strikes, deliberately destroying weapons and ammunitions depots,” said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The targets of the overnight strikes included “air defence weapons depots and ammunition depots” belonging to the Syrian military in the coastal Latakia and Tartus provinces, said the Observatory. The Britain-based monitor, which has a network of sources inside Syria, said Israel also launched strikes in the country’s south targeting Tal al Hara near the Israeli-annexed Syrian Golan Heights, and military positions in Izraa, in Daraa province.

Further Israeli strikes destroyed warehouses holding “anti-tank weapons” in the Qalamoun area in the Damascus countryside, the Observatory added. Israel rarely comments on individual strikes in Syria but has repeatedly said it will not allow Iran to expand its presence in the country.

The overnight raids came after the Observatory said Israeli strikes on Sunday hit a security compound of military, intelligence and customs buildings in the city of Damascus. It said Israeli strikes also hit elsewhere including army positions and weapons depots near the Mazzeh military airport on the city’s outskirts. The Observatory also said Israel on Sunday “bombed former military sites” in southern Syria’s Quneitra province. It also said “ground forces penetrated... and took control of former regime force observation points” in the Mount Hermon area, further north closer to the Lebanese border. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday he had ordered the Israeli military to “seize” a demilitarised buffer zone on the border with Syria after Assad’s overthrow, while Israel’s military imposed a curfew for residents of five Syrian towns in the area. The Israeli leader said a 50-year-old “disengagement agreement” between the two countries had collapsed and “Syrian forces have abandoned their positions”.

As a result, he said, “I directed the IDF yesterday to seize the buffer zone and the commanding positions nearby. We will not allow any hostile force to establish itself on our border.” — AFP

SYRIANS SEARCH FOR RELATIVES
MISSING IN JAILS

DAMASCUS: Syrian rescuers searched a jail synonymous with the worst atrocities of ousted president rule, as people in the capital flocked to a central square on Monday to celebrate their country’s freedom. Assad fled Syria as rebels swept into the capital, bringing to a spectacular end on Sunday five decades of rule over a country ravaged by one of the deadliest wars of the century. He oversaw a crackdown on a democracy movement that erupted in 2011, sparking a war that killed 500,000 people and forced half the country

to flee their homes. At the core of the system of rule was a brutal complex of prisons and detention centres used to eliminate dissent by jailing those suspected of stepping out of the ruling party’s line.

On Monday, rescuers from the Syrian White Helmets said they were searching for secret doors or basements in Saydnaya prison, looking for any detainees who might be trapped. “We are working with all our energy to reach a new hope, and we must be prepared for the worst,” the organisation said in a statement. Aida Taha, aged 65, said



Members of the Syrian civil defence group search for prisoners at Saydnaya prison, Syria. — Reuters

she had been “roaming the streets like a madwoman” in search of her brother, who was arrested in 2012. She said she went to Saydnaya,

where she believes some prisoners are still underground. “The prison has three or four underground floors,” Taha said. “They say that the doors won’t open because they don’t have the proper codes.” “We’ve been oppressed long enough, we want our children back,” she added.

In central Damascus on Monday, despite all the uncertainties for the future, the joy was palpable. “It’s indescribable, we never thought this nightmare would end, we are reborn,” 49-year-old Rim Ramadan, a civil servant at the finance ministry, said. “We were afraid for 55 years of speaking, even at home, we used to say the walls had ears,” Ramadan said, as people honked their car horns and rebels fired their guns into the air. “We feel like we’re living a dream,” she added. — AFP

New era starts in Syria
after 13 years of civil war

DAMASCUS STIRRED back to life on Monday at the start of a hopeful era after rebels seized the capital and President Bashar al Assad fled the country, following 13 years of civil war and more than 50 years of his family’s brutal rule. Heavy traffic returned to the streets and people ventured out after a nighttime curfew, but most shops remained shut. Rebels milled about in the centre.

Firdous Omar, from Idlib in the northwest, among fighters in central Umayyad Square, said he had been battling the government since 2011 and was now looking forward to laying down his weapon and returning to his job as a farmer. “We had a purpose and a goal and now we are done with it. We want the state and security forces to be in charge.”

The lightning advance of a group alliance was a generational turning point for the Middle East. It ends a war that killed thousands of people, caused one of the biggest refugee crises of modern times and left cities bombed to rubble, swathes of countryside depopulated and the economy hollowed out by global sanctions. Millions of refugees could finally go home from camps across Türkiye, Lebanon and Jordan.

GREAT VICTORY
The group’s leader, Ahmed al Sharaa, better known as Abu Mohammed al Golani, vowed to rebuild Syria. “A new history, my brothers, is being written in the entire region after this great victory,” he told a huge crowd at ancient Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. With hard work Syria would be “a beacon for the Islamic nation”. Assad’s prime minister, Mohammed Jalali, said he would be willing to meet with Golani and was ready to provide documents and assistance for the transfer of power. The fate of Syria’s army would be “left to the brothers who will take over the management of the country’s



Syrian people react, as they gather in front of Parliament, in Vienna, Austria. — Reuters

affairs”, he said. “What concerns us today is the continuation of services for Syrians.”

On Sunday, elated inmates poured out of jails. Reunited families wept in joy. Newly freed prisoners were filmed running through the Damascus streets holding up their hands to show how many years they had been in prison. The White Helmets rescue organisation said it had dispatched emergency teams to search for hidden underground cells still believed to hold detainees. One of the final areas to fall to the rebels was the Mediterranean coast.

Looting took place in the coastal city of Latakia on Sunday but had subsided on Monday, residents said, with few people in the streets and shortages of fuel and bread. Two residents said that so far the situation had panned out better than they had expected. One said a friend had been visited at home by rebel fighters who told him to hand over any weapons he had, which he did. Near Latakia, rebels had yet to enter the Assad family’s ancestral village of Qardaha, site of a huge mausoleum for Assad’s father who took power in the 1960s. — Reuters

EU urges ‘orderly, peaceful and inclusive transition’ in Syria

BRUSSELS: The European Union called on Monday for a peaceful political transition in war-torn Syria after the ouster of Bashar al Assad by rebels. “Now more than ever, it is imperative that all stakeholders engage in an inclusive, Syrian-led and Syrian-owned dialogue on all key issues to ensure an orderly, peaceful and inclusive transition,” the 27-nation bloc said in a statement. The EU said it was “critical to preserve the territorial integrity of Syria and to respect its independence, its sovereignty, as well as state institutions, and to reject all forms of extremism”. “We urge all actors to avoid any further violence, to ensure the protection of civilians and to uphold international law, including international humanitarian law,” the statement said. It called for the “protection of members of all minorities, including of Christian and other non-majority confessions, as well as the safety

of foreign nationals and respect of diplomatic representations in Damascus”.

The end of Assad’s rule follows a 13-year-old civil war sparked by a brutal crackdown on pro-democracy protests. The war killed more than 500,000 people and forced half the pre-war population to flee their homes, many millions of them abroad. European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen held talks with Jordan’s King Abdullah II about the situation on Monday and said she would talk to other regional leaders in the coming days.

Meanwhile, any political transition in Syria following the fall of president Bashar al Assad must include accountability for him and others behind crimes committed under his rule, the UN rights chief said on Monday. “Any political transition must ensure accountability for perpetrators of serious violations and guarantee



A Syrian who lives in Türkiye shows his temporary ID document as he waits in a queue at Cilvegözü crossborder gate before entering in Syria at Reyhanli district in Hatay. — AFP

that those responsible are held to account,” Volker Turk told reporters in Geneva. His comments came after Assad fled Syria as rebels swept into Damascus, triggering celebrations

across the country and beyond at the end of his rule.

Syria’s war has killed more than 500,000 people and forced half of the population to flee their homes. Turk

described “the most serious human rights violations... including torture and the use of chemical weapons”. The sudden and dramatic shift in Syria brought “hope that this would be an opportunity for the country to build a future grounded in human rights, freedom and justice”, Turk said. He added that “reform of the security apparatus will be key”. “This transition must also ensure that the tragedy of missing people is addressed,” he said, pointing out that more than 100,000 people had disappeared during the civil war. Highlighting that hostilities were still reportedly ongoing in parts of Syria, Turk said it was “imperative that all parties abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law”. In particular, he said, “all measures must be taken to ensure the protection of all minorities, and to avert reprisals and acts of revenge”. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Britain's PM Keir Starmer meets Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud, in Riyadh. — Reuters

STARMER LANDS IN GULF TO TALK TRADE, MIDEAST

LONDON: Britain's leader Keir Starmer made his first trip to the Gulf as prime minister, seeking to attract investment from the region's oil-rich states, Downing Street announced. Starmer was set to visit the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, before stopping off in Cyprus on his way back to London in a bid "to build closer ties and drive long-term UK growth".

The trip to Abu Dhabi and Riyadh comes as his Labour government pursues a free-trade deal with the Gulf Cooperation Council's six nations. "There is huge untapped potential in this region, which is why, while here, I will be making the case to accelerate progress on the Gulf Cooperation Council Free Trade Agreement," Starmer said in a statement. The meetings would aim to "deepen our research and development collaboration" and partner on projects in areas including defence and artificial intelligence, Starmer added.

A Downing Street press release called the UAE and Saudi "some of the UK's most vital modern-day partners". — AFP

MACRON EYES BROAD ALLIANCE TO FORM NEW GOVT



French President Emmanuel Macron gestures as he waits at the Elysee Palace, in Paris. — Reuters

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron has called for a "meeting of different political forces" to hammer out a programme for a new government, the Greens party leader said on Monday amid a political crisis triggered by Prime Minister Michel Barnier's ouster. Macron had suggested a "new method" to put together an executive, Greens chief Marine Tondelier said after meeting him at his Elysee Palace office.

New polls are ruled out until the summer, leaving Macron this time around to call for a "meeting of different political forces to discuss a platform" that could unite them in government, Tondelier said. Until now, Macron had only been meeting party leaders individually. But cobbling together any majority will be tricky in a parliament almost evenly divided between the NFP left-wing alliance, Macron's centrists and conservatives, and the far-right National Rally (RN). Macron was "very clear about the fact that as far as he is concerned, the RN is not within the circle of parties willing to talk", Tondelier said on Monday. — AFP

S KOREA PRESIDENT YOON BANNED FROM FOREIGN TRAVEL AS CRISIS DEEPENS

SEOUL: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol has been banned from leaving the country over a failed attempt at imposing martial law, a justice ministry official said on Monday, amid growing calls for him to step down and a deepening leadership crisis. Yoon has apologised for the botched attempt and said he was leaving his political and legal fate to his ruling People Power Party (PPP) but has not resigned. He has become a subject of

criminal investigation, according to local media reports.

On Monday, the defence ministry said Yoon was still legally commander in chief, but growing dissent among senior military officers against the president has thrown into question his grip on power. Oh Dong-woon, the head of the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials, said he had barred Yoon from foreign travel when asked at a parliament hearing

what actions have been taken against the president. A justice ministry official, Bae Sang-up, told the committee the travel ban order had been executed.

The panel was established in 2021 to investigate high-ranking officials including the president and their family members but it does not have authority to prosecute the president. Instead, it is by law required to refer the matter to the prosecutors' office. — Reuters

Zelensky makes case for diplomatic end to war

PRESIDENT

Volodymyr Zelensky made the case on Monday for

a diplomatic settlement to Russia's 33-month-old war in Ukraine and raised the idea of foreign troops being deployed in his country until it could join the Nato military alliance. The remarks at a joint press conference with German opposition leader Friedrich Merz were the latest to signal Kyiv's increasing openness to war negotiations, with Donald Trump preparing to return to the White House on January 20. The US president-elect, who has said he wants to end the war quickly, called on Sunday for an immediate ceasefire and negotiations to end the "madness", after he met Zelensky and French President Emmanuel Macron for talks in Paris.

"Ukraine wants this war to end more than anyone else. No doubt, a diplomatic resolution would save more lives. We do seek it," Zelensky told reporters in Kyiv on Monday. He said he discussed a "freezing" of the lines in the war when he met Macron and Trump. Russia controls nearly a fifth of Ukrainian territory after launching the 2022 attack that unleashed the biggest conflict in Europe since World War Two. Zelensky said he told the two leaders that he did not believe Putin actually wanted to end the war and that the Russian president would need to be forced. "You can only exert force if Ukraine is strong. A strong Ukraine before any diplomacy means a strong (Ukraine) on the battlefield," he

The remarks at a joint press conference with German opposition leader Friedrich Merz were the latest to signal Kyiv's increasing openness to war negotiations, with Donald Trump preparing to return to the White House on January 20



Firefighters work at the site of a car maintenance workshop heavily damaged by a Russian air strike, in Zaporizhzhia. — Reuters

said, implying Kyiv needed help to become stronger.

FOREIGN TROOPS

Zelensky also returned to an idea raised in February by Macron, who floated the possibility of European nations sending troops to Ukraine. There was no consensus on the matter among the European leaders. "We can think and work on Emmanuel's position. He suggested that some part of troops of a country be present on the territory of Ukraine, which would guarantee us security while Ukraine is not in Nato," Zelensky said.

"But we must have a clear understanding of when Ukraine will be in the EU and when Ukraine

will be in Nato," he added. Kyiv, which has made a concerted push to obtain an invitation to join Nato, has insisted throughout the war that it needs security guarantees to prevent Russia launching another attack once the current hostilities are halted.

"If there is a pause while Ukraine is not in Nato, and even if we had the invitation, and we would not be in Nato, and there will be a pause, then who guarantees us any kind of security?" Zelensky asked at the press conference.

Russia has demanded that Ukraine abandon its Nato ambitions and sees Kyiv's membership of the alliance as an unacceptable security threat. — Reuters



GAZA POWER OUTAGE THREATENS PATIENTS

GAZA: The director of northern Gaza's Kamal Adwan hospital said that the lives of more than 100 patients were in danger after electricity, oxygen and water supplies were cut. Hossam Abu Safiyeh said recent Israeli shelling and bombing had severely damaged the hospital and cut the water and electricity supply to parts of it. "The outage of electricity and water persists, and we urgently appeal to the international community for assistance," he said. "The situation is extremely dangerous. We have patients in the intensive care unit and others awaiting surgeries. Access to the operating rooms is only possible after restoring electricity and oxygen supply." Safiyeh said the hospital currently had 112 wounded patients, including six in intensive care and 14 children. — AFP

GANG MASSACRES

Almost 200 killed in Haiti capital violence



UN says 184 people were killed in brutal violence in Haiti's capital, the United Nations said, with reports that a gang boss orchestrated the slaughter of voodoo practitioners. The killings were overseen by a "powerful gang leader" convinced that his son's illness was caused by followers of the religion, according to the Committee for Peace and Development (CPD). CPD and UN said that the massacre took place in a neighbourhood of Cite Soleil. — AFP

EVACUATION CALL

Philippines Kanlaon volcano erupts again



A volcano in the central Philippines erupted for a second time this year, prompting emergency evacuations after it spewed a huge column of ash into the sky, authorities said. Mt. Kanlaon, an active volcano straddling the Southeast Asian country's central provinces of Negros Occidental and Negros Oriental, sent an ash cloud into the sky. The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology raised its alert level to 3 on a scale of 5. — Reuters

BLAZE VICTIMS

Toll in Hague building climbs to six



The death toll from an explosion and fire that destroyed an apartment block in The Hague climbed to six, revealing that a teenage girl was among the victims. Rescue workers pulled a sixth body from the rubble in the early hours of Monday.

The sixth body was "recovered from the cellar of the collapsed building," the fire service said. The fire was so intense that identification has only been possible via DNA tests. — AFP

OPINION

Syrians need inclusive peace for progress and stability



IN THE wake of the recent developments surrounding the exit of Bashar al Assad, Oman has emerged as a significant voice advocating for peace and stability in Syria. The geopolitical landscape of the Middle East is shifting dramatically, and Oman's diplomatic approach reflects its long-standing commitment to dialogue and conflict resolution. Oman has historically maintained a neutral position in regional conflicts, often acting as a mediator.

Following Assad's reported departure from power, Oman's Foreign Ministry issued statements emphasising the importance of unity among Syrian factions and the need for an inclusive political process. This approach aligns with Oman's broader foreign policy strategy, which prioritises diplomacy over military intervention.

With the fall of Assad's regime, there is an urgent need for reconstruction and stabilisation efforts in Syria. Oman has called upon international stakeholders to support initiatives that promote humanitarian aid and infrastructure rebuilding.

The country advocates for a collaborative effort involving both regional players and

global powers to ensure that Syria can recover from years of civil war.

Oman stresses the necessity of dialogue among various Syrian groups to foster reconciliation. The Omani government believes that any sustainable peace must involve all segments of Syrian society, including those who opposed Assad as well as those who supported him during his rule.

This inclusive dialogue is seen as essential to prevent further fragmentation and violence within the country.

The implications of Assad's fall extend beyond Syria's borders. Oman recognises that stability in Syria is crucial for regional security, particularly concerning neighbouring countries like Iraq, Türkiye and Lebanon. By promoting peace in Syria, Oman aims to mitigate potential spillover effects that could destabilise these nations.

Oman's call for peace underscores its role as a mediator in Middle Eastern affairs. By advocating for dialogue, stability and reconstruction efforts, Oman seeks not only to assist Syria, but also to contribute positively to regional harmony.

Oman has consistently advocated for peace

Oman has called upon international stakeholders to support initiatives that promote humanitarian aid and infrastructure rebuilding

in the Middle East, particularly in relation to the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This advocacy is rooted in a broader commitment to international peace and security, as well as a belief in dialogue and tolerance as essential tools for resolving conflicts.

Oman has called for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, emphasising the need for justice for the Palestinian people. Oman supports the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the borders established prior to the 1967 war. This position aligns with the two-state solution framework that many international actors endorse as a viable path towards lasting peace.

Oman expresses strong support for the United Nations and its efforts to promote peace and security globally. The Sultanate of Oman recognises the UN's role in embodying the aspirations of people around the world, including those affected by conflicts in the Middle East.

By aligning its foreign policy with UN principles, Oman aims to contribute positively to international diplomatic efforts.

WHY YOUNG ITALIANS ARE LEAVING IN DROVES

JUDITH RENOULT

Billie Fusto is not after a fat pay cheque: he is training to be an archivist and wants nothing more than “a quiet life” at home in Italy. But like tens of thousands of other young Italian graduates, the 24-year-old fears he has little choice but to emigrate. More than a million Italians have left in the past 10 years -- a third of them aged 25 to 34 -- national data shows. Those leaving blame low salaries and little recognition for their skills. The proportion of graduates leaving in particular is on the rise.

“I'm not looking for wealth... or big responsibilities,” said Fusto, who comes from Calabria in southern Italy, and is studying for a masters in Rome. “I want a quiet life, in which I don't have to worry about whether I have 15 euros to go shopping,” he said.

“And currently, in Italy that's not guaranteed.” While migration has become a hot-button issue, for every young foreigner who comes to settle in Italy, nearly nine young Italians leave, according to a report by the Italian North East Foundation.

“It is not normal that our country does not ask itself why, and does not remedy this haemorrhage,” Renato Brunetta, President of the National Council for Economics and Labour (CNEL), said during the report's presentation in October.

Some, particularly from Italy's poorer south, move to the country's wealthy northern regions to try their luck. The share of graduates among them has increased from 18 to 58 per cent in the last two decades. But even in the industrialised north, working conditions can be less than attractive than elsewhere.

Italy is one of the few OECD countries where real wages have decreased compared to 2019.

The youth unemployment rate is also higher than the European average, at 17.7 per cent in October, compared to 15.2 per cent across the EU.

Workplaces in Italy are seen as unmeritocratic. There is no national minimum wage, and salaries do not rise in line with the number of years spent in higher education.

Elena Picardi returned to Rome after studying political science in France -- but her hopes of finding a job in Italy are fading fast.

“More often than not, when it comes to Italian offers, either the salary is not specified or it is generally lower,” the 24-year-old said.

The difference can amount to several hundred euros per month for the same position in other European countries. “I would like to contribute to the future of my country, and stay close to my family,” Picardi said. “But why should I sacrifice my prospects when... my profile is more valued (abroad)?”

The Italian “brain drain” cost the country an estimated €134 billion between 2011 and 2023, according to the North East Foundation.

Of those who do return, many say it is because they want to be closer to their families, their report said. Others stay at home out of necessity rather than choice.

The average age for leaving the family home in Italy in 2022 was 30, according to Eurostat — among the oldest in the European Union, with only Spain and Greece. — AFP

Oman-Japan: Bridging cultures, building futures

THE JAPANESE Embassy in Oman has been a cornerstone of cultural diplomacy, fostering deep ties between the two nations. Its contributions transcend traditional diplomatic functions, creating platforms for meaningful cultural exchange and mutual appreciation. By engaging Omanis and promoting a shared understanding, the embassy has built a cultural bridge that continues to thrive.

One of the embassy's most influential initiatives involves hosting events at the ambassador's residence or in key Omani locations. These gatherings bring together Omanis from diverse backgrounds, including government officials, educators and cultural figures.

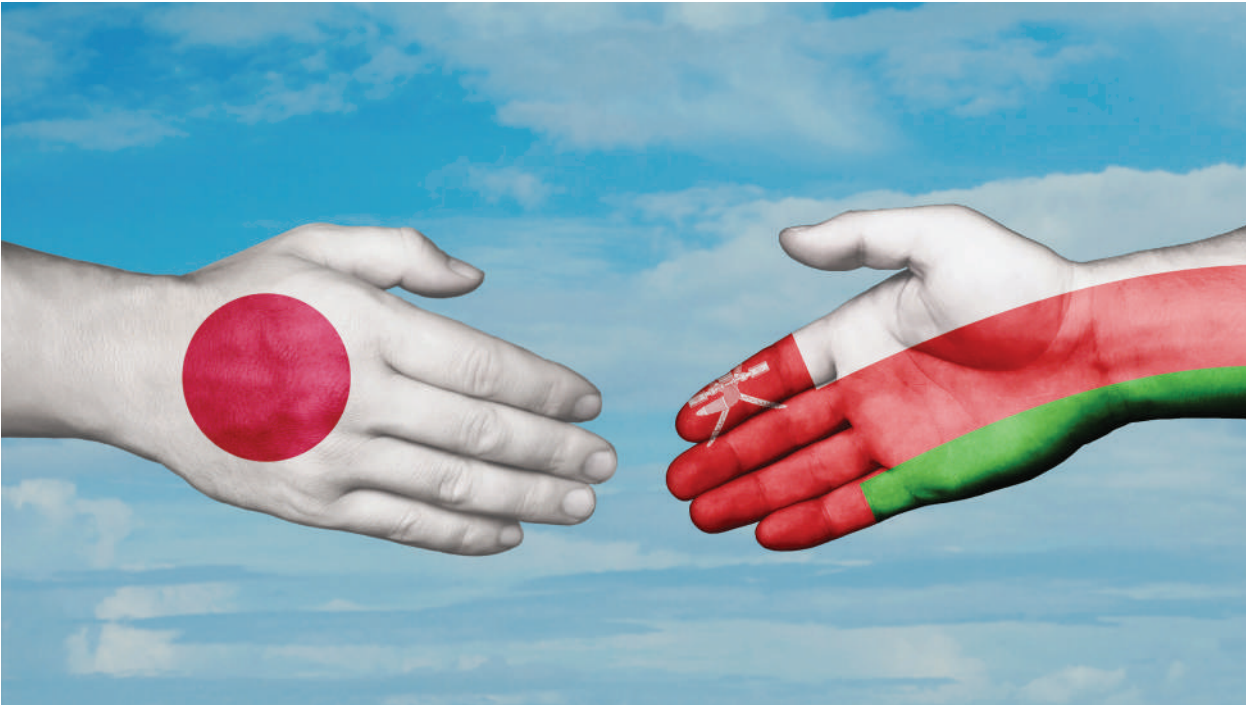
Such events promote dialogue and collaboration, strengthening the bond between Oman and Japan. Special dinners with visiting Japanese dignitaries further enrich this cultural exchange, offering opportunities for Omanis to connect with Japanese traditions and values.

In the academic realm, the embassy's outreach at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has left a significant mark. Through collaborations with faculty, such as my own courses, the embassy has introduced Japanese principles of harmony, perseverance and innovation to students. Takuya Matsunaga, a representative of the Japanese Embassy, first reached out to me as an Omani faculty member two years ago, introducing me to researcher Thomas Yamazaki. Together, they designed a series of talks on Japanese culture, which Yamazaki has delivered three times in my Language and Culture class.

His lectures on Japanese cultural values have been met with remarkable enthusiasm. Yamazaki was impressed by how deeply engaged the students were, with many speaking Japanese phrases fluently and expressing their admiration for Japanese creativity and discipline through their knowledge of manga and anime.

This indicates that beyond the embassy's efforts, anime has played a vital role in shaping Omanis' fascination with Japan.

Popular series like Naruto, Attack on Titan and One Piece have captivated the imaginations of Omani youth, sparking an interest



Expo 2025 in Osaka, Japan, represents a unique opportunity for Oman and Japan to deepen their collaboration



DR NAJMA AL ZIDJALY

The Japanese Embassy has left an indelible mark on Oman's cultural and academic landscape as it exemplifies the power of diplomacy to unite nations, enrich individual lives and create a legacy of connection

in Japanese language, values and aesthetics. Anime's universal themes of perseverance, friendship and self-discovery resonate deeply with Oman's own cultural values, creating a unique connection between the two cultures. This widespread admiration for anime complements the embassy's cultural initiatives, further strengthening the bond between Oman and Japan.

The embassy's support extends beyond cultural exchanges. It regularly sends educational advisers to SQU to provide information on studying in Japan and the various funding opportunities available. These advisers help students navigate scholarships, academic programmes and application processes, making Japan an accessible destination for higher education. This initiative has inspired many young Omanis to pursue their academic dreams in Japan, including my own niece, strengthening the cultural and academic ties between the two nations.

This enthusiasm has also manifested in the Japanese Club at SQU, a student-led initiative that organises events like tea ceremonies and cosplay competitions. Many active members of the club have been inspired by these experiences and dream of pursuing postgraduate studies in Japan. They are among the many young Omanis whose

academic aspirations have been shaped by the embassy's efforts to make Japan a cultural and educational beacon. The fascination of young Omanis with Japanese culture reflects the success of these efforts. This admiration is rooted in shared values such as discipline, respect and hospitality, which resonate deeply with Omani traditions. By celebrating these commonalities, the embassy has nurtured a lasting connection that goes beyond cultural trends.

Looking ahead, the Japanese Embassy continues to play a pivotal role in strengthening bilateral ties. Expo 2025 in Osaka, Japan, represents a unique opportunity for Oman and Japan to further deepen their collaboration. The embassy's ongoing initiatives ensure that cultural diplomacy remains a cornerstone of this partnership, inspiring future generations to build on the foundation of mutual understanding and respect.

Through its programmes and initiatives, the Japanese Embassy has left an indelible mark on Oman's cultural and academic landscape. It exemplifies the power of diplomacy to unite nations, enrich individual lives and create a legacy of connection. As Oman and Japan move forward together, their partnership stands as a model for international collaboration and cultural exchange.

Knowing cultures creates awareness



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is senior editor of Observer

WE LIVE in one world, yet we hardly know what is going on in others minds, let alone the happenings in other countries.

Being an expatriate, however, gives you an opportunity to mingle with people of other nationalities, which gives you a personal perspective and cultural insight.

One of the first aspects we learn is that emotions are the same, obviously, but how we react and respond may vary.

Why do we need this experience? It is simple. It is an opportunity life has given to understand humanity. We can judge and stay in our bubble or go and explore sincerely and be there. Stories differ; so do the challenges.

For instance, I had the opportunity to attend the seventh anniversary of OK Nuri, the Oman-Korea friendship group. It was wonderful to see the number of cultural events that were taking place because one need not even have to travel to the country to experience the culture. People have been learning the Korean language too, being right here in Oman. In fact, there is a school teaching the Korean language and culture. What's more? A former student who studied in South Korea is now teaching the Korean language at a university in Oman.

This is what Bell State University says:

“Foreign language study enhances listening skills and memory. Foreign language study offers a sense of the past: culturally and linguistically. The study of foreign languages teaches and encourages respect for other peoples; it fosters an understanding of the interrelation of language and human nature.” Learning another language or a culture makes us culturally aware. Of course it can be an added qualification in the field of communications and an asset in the corporate world.

We get to learn about traditions of the world and gain a new perspective on the world and its people. We learn to respect others’ sentiments and traditions.

We get a better understanding of world politics. I remember listening to my friend when the war broke out in Ukraine. She was worried about her elderly mother. And this week it was my friend from Syria. The fear of his parents’ safety stopped him from everything. It was much later when he could breathe easy and communicate with others, that is, after knowing they were safe.

An expatriate is an individual who carries concerns about their family members back home. There have been cases of anxiety reaching the point of breakdown. Just this weekend a group of friends sent their

We get to learn about traditions of the world and gain a new perspective on the world and its people. We learn to respect others’ sentiments and traditions.

counterpart back home after taking him to the hospital, and the doctors advised it is best he goes back home for further counselling and treatment as he would have his family’s support as well. So that was one expat who had to leave with dreams interrupted.

Communication is a subject that we look at as a profession so often, but a lot of times we overlook the need for communication at a personal level.

A common challenge an expatriate faces is loneliness if they are on their own in a foreign country. Of course it is part of the challenge they took up when they chose to work abroad. But everyone needs to share their thoughts, and today technology has made it so much easier to stay connected with their loved ones back home.

Sometimes there is a deep bond that develops beyond nationality. A conversation with a voluntary group that looks after the elderly brought up the story of an expatriate tailor who had been in the community for so long that as he got older, the volunteers started looking after his welfare as well.

It is all because humanity has a link to emotions and can be more powerful than making economic sense. And if humanity can be given more importance, there could surely be sustained peace.

‘DAVID V GOLIATH’ BATTLE AT ICJ CLIMATE HEARINGS

RICHARD CARTER

HALFWAY through marathon climate change hearings at the world’s top court, battle lines are being drawn between developed countries urging judges to stick to current legal obligations and vulnerable nations pleading for more.

History is being made at the International Court of Justice, with the largest-ever number of countries and institutions seeking to sway judges crafting a legal framework for the global fight against climate change. Most major economies, including the United States, China and India, have argued that the court should not tamper with the existing United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Speaking in the panelled splendour of the ICJ’s Great Hall of Justice, the representative for the US said this framework was “the most current expression of states’ consent to be bound by international law in respect of climate change.” Margaret Taylor urged the 15-judge ICJ panel “to ensure that its opinion preserves and promotes the centrality of this regime.” Representatives from fellow top polluters China and India struck a similar chord, as did Australia and Germany.

India was perhaps the most explicit, warning the court against piling on more legal obligations on states. On the other side of the debate were representatives of tiny island nations, some taking the ICJ floor for the first time in their country’s history, many in colourful national dress.

After months or even years of deliberation, the ICJ will produce a non-binding advisory opinion — a fresh blueprint for international climate change law. Statements from rich countries and top polluters have sparked fury from campaigners. They accuse them of “hiding behind” existing agreements such as the 2015 Paris Agreement, seen by many as insufficient to tackle the problem.

At the heart of the issue is money.

The United Nations asked the ICJ to rule on two distinct questions.

First, what were the obligations of countries in the fight against climate change? Second, what were the consequences for states that have harmed the environment, particularly of the most vulnerable countries? Developing countries have been left frustrated by the money handed down to combat the effects of climate change — the most recent example being the \$300 billion annually by 2035 pledged at the COP29 in Baku. The text “encourages” developing countries to “make contributions” that would remain “voluntary”.

Many smaller countries put a powerful case before ICJ judges for more equitable contributions that would in some cases be their only lifeline.

One of the more colourful pleas came from John Silk representing the Marshall Islands.

“When I walk our shores, I see more than eroding coastlines, I see the disappearing footprints of generations of Marshallese who lived in harmony on these islands,” Silk told the court.

“The Marshallese people have a saying: ‘Wa kuk wa jimor’, meaning ‘We are in this canoe together.’” “Today, I extend this principle to our global community.” — AFP

Challenges, opportunities in adopting AI in govt

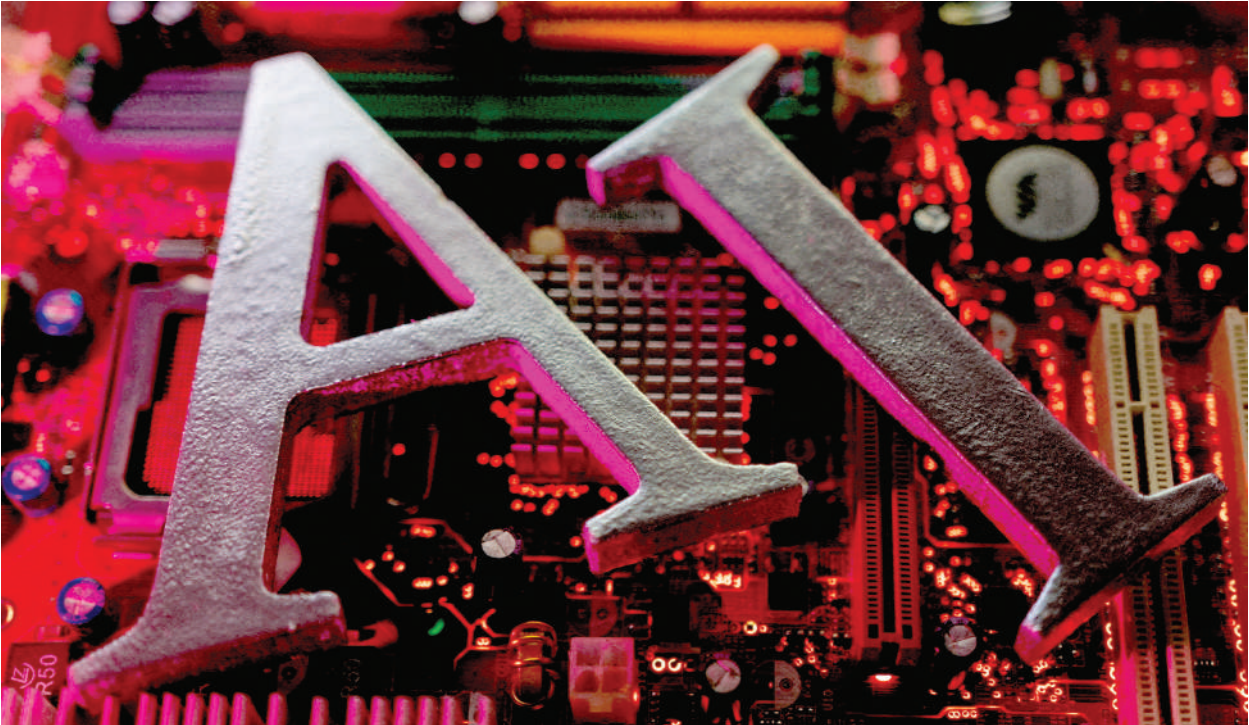
AS ARTIFICIAL intelligence (AI) systems develop at unprecedented speed, their applications are becoming deeply ingrained in our personal, public and professional lives. It is now easy for anyone to incorporate AI tools into daily tasks. A clear example is the widespread use of generative AI models, such as ChatGPT, for everything from simple searches to more complex activities. This shift has challenged the dominance of established search engines like Google, pushing even major tech companies to find new ways to retain technological edge. Consequently, we must adopt a broad perspective, one that balances seeking out opportunities with remaining vigilant about the challenges ahead.

Although major tech companies are facing new pressures, they are also working tirelessly to overcome these hurdles. This should inspire us, especially in the governmental context, to pursue AI adoption guided by our national development goals. Our aim is to achieve high standards of living, sustainability and long-term benefits.

Some might question the connection between the intense global competition in AI and the push to expand AI adoption within the public sector. Yet this link is clear when viewed through the lens of opportunities and challenges. We, too, operate in an environment shaped by research, innovation and digital capabilities. AI stands as a key element of this competition, offering numerous opportunities while simultaneously presenting a range of potential difficulties.

It is not hard to identify where AI can be integrated into our national sectors. At the same time, we must remain alert to the accompanying challenges related to security, investment and economic stability. Embracing AI is no longer optional; it is crucial for advancing scientifically, economically and even militarily. This fact is underscored by the well-known statement from President Vladimir Putin, who noted that leadership in AI will define a nation’s strength.

In the past, we have discussed AI’s potential in various national fields and recognised Oman’s progress in



harnessing digital opportunities. For example, AI plays a significant role in the newly launched Omani satellite, demonstrating our commitment to advanced digital applications. We continue to see digital achievements in both training programmes and practical implementations across the country.

Yet a persistent question remains: Are we truly on the right track, efficiently seizing opportunities and skillfully adopting AI technologies across all sectors, while fully aware of the challenges? While the efforts of those who have advanced our digital landscape are commendable, we must not settle for modest achievements. In a world of fierce competition, we must push beyond our current comfort zone. The accelerating pace of digital innovation demands that we double our efforts, broaden the scope of AI applications, and follow purely national guidelines to ensure the security, prosperity and success of our digital ecosystem.

There are concrete steps we can take. First, AI education and training must start early, becoming an integral part of school and university courses. This was one of the key recommendations from the recent international conference “Communication, Media and the AI Revolution: Present and Future” hosted at Sultan Qaboos University.

Secondly, emerging national digital enterprises, particularly small and medium-sized businesses, should be empowered to partake in this AI-driven transformation. By involving local enterprises in the digital implementation process, we ensure data security, stimulate internal economic activity and build national expertise.

Thirdly, as AI increasingly automates tasks such as translation, data analysis, medical diagnostics, programming, transport and even high-level management roles, we must adapt. Over time, many traditional jobs will be redefined. To meet this challenge, we need to identify new roles suitable for human talents and ensure that individuals can flourish amid ongoing digital advancement.

The government has a pivotal role in driving this message forward, accelerating understanding of the changing landscape, identifying new opportunities, creating them where needed and preparing for the challenges ahead.

With our renewed national vision, our human and material resources, and careful long-term planning, we can achieve a comprehensive digital transformation powered by AI.

With proper preparation, diligence and strategic foresight, the nation stands ready to succeed in the digital era.



DR MUAMAR AL TOBI

The author is an academic and researcher

SPORTS

KEENCONTEST



DING BEATS GUKESH IN 12TH GAME TO LEVEL SCORE IN WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

SINGAPORE: Defending champion Ding Liren bounced back strongly on Monday to beat his teenage challenger in the 12th game and level the score in the homestretch of their World Chess Championship match.

India’s Gukesh Dommaraju was forced to resign after finding his king cornered by the Chinese title holder’s white pieces which had advanced deeply into enemy territory.

Ding’s victory put both players at six points apiece, with only two more games to go in the classical format chess at Singapore’s Resorts World Sentosa.

“It’s a very important 12th game. It’s maybe the best game I played in recent times,” Ding told reporters after the match.

After Sunday’s loss, the champion said he regained his energy with more sleep and some caffeine.

“Today, I took a cup of coffee before the game which helped me feel much more energetic... a small cup of espresso,” said Ding, a native of Wenzhou city.

Ding, 32, took control of the board early on after making the first move and dominated his opponent throughout.

With the champion building a strong centre, Gukesh’s pieces were powerless to make any breakthrough.

TWO MORE GAMES

The 18-year-old challenger seemed to gain the momentum for the title when he forced Ding to resign in the eleventh game on Sunday to take a 6-5 lead.

But it was not to be, and he has to wait, with two more games to be played on Wednesday and Thursday after a rest day on Tuesday.

“Obviously, it’s not pleasant to lose this game,” said a dejected Gukesh.

“At least the score is still tied and there are two more games remaining. So let’s see.”

Ding’s comeback on Monday was reminiscent of the 2023 World Championship, in which he overcame a 5-6 deficit by winning Game 12 against Ian Nepomniachtchi in Kazakhstan.

He eventually forced a tie-breaker against the Russian and won, becoming the first Chinese player to be crowned world champion

If both Ding and Gukesh are tied in 14 games, the match will move to a rapid-fire tie-breaker, which will be played on December 13.

At his age, Gukesh is the youngest player in history to compete in the World Chess Championship, and he is looking to surpass Garry Kasparov as the youngest undisputed world chess champion. — AFP



Ding Liren of China and Gukesh Dommaraju of India during a press conference.

Dhofar, Al Shabab seal spots in HM Cup quarters

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 9

DHOFAR SECURED a place in the quarterfinals of His Majesty’s Cup football championship after defeating Al Salam 1-0 at Sohar Sports Complex on Sunday. Dhofar started the game with clear dominance, creating several dangerous opportunities, most notably Hamad al Habsi’s shot, which Al Salam goalkeeper Khalifa al Maamari saved in the 20th minute. Just a minute before the end of the first half, Mohammed al Habsi scored the only goal of the match, capitalising on a pass from Sultan al Marzouqi.

In the second half, Al Salam attempted a comeback through counterattacks, but a lack of focus denied them the equaliser. Dhofar’s defender, Abdul Salam Amer, almost scored an own goal in a moment of confusion. On the other hand, Dhofar missed chances to double the lead, including Abdullah Zaher’s shot in the 77th minute, which Al Salam’s goalkeeper parried away.

Al Salam suffered a setback when Bangaly Soumahoro was sent off in the 91st minute, allowing Dhofar to maintain their lead until the final whistle and secure a well-deserved qualification to the quarterfinals.

AL SHABAB EDGE OMAN CLUB

Al Shabab advanced to the quarterfinals after defeating Oman Club 4-3 in a penalty shoot-out. The match, held at Seeb Sports Stadium, ended 1-1 after regular and extra time.

The first half saw an energetic start from both teams as they vied for control. Al Shabab held the upper hand, creating several chances, including a missed opportunity by Issam al Sabhi in front of goal. In the dying moments of the first half, the referee awarded a penalty to Oman Club after a handball, but Mahmood al Hassani missed, sending the ball wide. The half ended in a goalless draw. Al Shabab started the second half strongly, and their pressure paid off in the 55th minute when



Al Shabab and Oman Club players in action during the Round of 16 match.

Issam al Sabhi converted a precise cross from Mahmood al Mashifri into a goal. Oman Club responded positively, and their efforts were rewarded when Al Munthir al Alawi scored the equaliser in the 61st minute, following an improved team performance. Despite numerous attempts from both sides, the second half ended 1-1, leading to extra time.

The extra periods featured exchanges of chances, with Al Munthir al Alawi coming close for Oman Club, but Al Shabab’s goalkeeper made a brilliant save. Neither team managed to find the winning goal, taking the game to penalties. In the shoot-out, Al Shabab emerged victorious, winning 4-3, and securing their place in the quarterfinals.

QUARTERFINALS SCHEDULE

The first-leg matches of the Sultan’s Cup quarterfinals are set for January 18, with the return legs scheduled for January 28 and 29. The standout fixture will be between Dhofar and Al Nasr, with the winner of this tie facing the victor of the Sohar and Al Shabab clash in the semifinal.

In another match-up, Seeb will take on Ibri. The winner of this encounter will meet the victor of the Al Nahda-Saham tie in the semifinal. The semifinal first-leg matches will take place on February 7 and 8, with the return legs scheduled for February 17 and 18. These matches will determine the two finalists who will compete for the prestigious title.

Jaber announces Oman probables ahead of Gulf Cup

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 9

Oman’s national football team head coach, Rasheed Jaber, has announced a 31-member probables squad for a domestic training camp starting on Tuesday and running until December 17. This camp will serve as the team’s final preparation ahead of their participation in the Arabian Gulf Cup Gulf 26, scheduled to take place in Kuwait from December 21 to January 3.

Oman have been drawn into Group A alongside hosts Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE. Group B comprises defending champions Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Yemen. The Red Warriors will kick off their Gulf 26 campaign against Kuwait on December 21, followed by matches against Qatar on December 24 and the UAE on December 27 in their concluding group-stage matches.

The announced squad features the return of key players, including forward Al Munther al Alawi from Oman Club, who has been absent



The announced squad features the return of key players, including forward Al Munther al Alawi from Oman Club after a long absence.

from the national line-up for an extended period. Other notable names include Salah al Yahyaei, who is back after an injury, defender Amjad al Harthy, and Waleed al Musallami of Al Nasr Club, who has impressed with his performances in recent league matches.

During the camp, the Red Warriors will play a friendly

match against Yemen on December 16 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. This game will provide the coaching staff with a final opportunity to assess player readiness and finalise the starting line-up ahead of the Gulf Cup tournament. After the game, the team’s delegation will head to Kuwait to take part

in the Arabian Gulf Cup.

The Red Warriors recently completed a five-day training camp in Muscat, focusing on physical conditioning and technical drills. This earlier camp featured promising talents from Oman’s Olympic and Under-20 teams, offering them a platform to showcase their abilities for potential inclusion in future squads.

OMAN SQUAD:

Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Fayez al Rushedi, Ibrahim al Rajhi, Bilal al Balushi, Mohammed al Musallami, Ahmed al Khamisi, Thani al Rushedi, Khalid al Buraiki, Ahmed al Kaabi, Ali al Busaidy, Amjad al Harthy, Mulham al Sunaidy, Harib al Saadi, Arshad al Alawi, Abdullah Fawaz, Ahd al Muskhaiei, Salah al Yahyaei, Abdul Rahman al Mushefri, Jameel al Yahmadi, Hussain al Shahri, Essam al Subhi, Abul Salam al Shukaili, Nasser al Rawahi, Al Munther al Alawi, Mamoon al Oraiimi, Al Faraj al Kiumi, Motaz Abdo Rabah, Zaher al Aghbari, Ghanim al Habshi, Sultan al Marzooq and Waleed al Musallami.

33RD EDITION



The Red House were declared the overall champions.

INDIAN SCHOOL SUR HOLDS ANNUAL ATHLETIC MEET FOR PRIMARY SECTION

SUR: Indian School Sur (ISS) hosted its 33rd Annual Athletic Meet for the primary section with great enthusiasm on the school grounds on December 5. The event was a vibrant celebration of sportsmanship, teamwork, and resilience, showcasing the school's dedication to fostering holistic growth among its young learners.

The chief guest for the occasion was Sami bin Said al Orami, Head of Scouts and Guides Department, Ministry of Education, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate. He was welcomed with a grand Guard of Honour by the Scouts, Guides and members of the Student Council, followed by a bouquet presentation by Jami Srinivasa Rao, President of the School Management Committee.

Other dignitaries present were Dr Ramkumar Lakshmi Narayanan, Convenor, School Management Committee; Nishreen Basheer, Treasurer; and members Pradeep Kumar AV, Advocate Saeed TP and Shabeeb Mohammed, along with ISS Principal Dr S Srinivasan.

The event began with a soulful prayer song performed by the school choir, followed by a warm welcome address delivered by Saeed TP. The flag hoisting ceremony, led by the chief guest, symbolised the unity and spirit of the school community. Following this, the chief guest officially declared the sports meet open, igniting a wave of excitement among the participants.

A ceremonial torch relay symbolising passion and perseverance was conducted with great fervour. The torchbearers were Harshini Mahendran and Siddharth Pradeep were introduced as exemplary athletes for their outstanding achievements in various sports disciplines. An inspiring oath-taking ceremony, led by Siddharth, emphasised the values of fair play, integrity, and sportsmanship, setting the tone for the competitions to follow.

The sporting events commenced with a thrilling 50-metre sprint, showcasing the agility and determination of the young athletes. Students from UKG added charm to the event with their demonstrations of various sports activities, displaying exceptional coordination and discipline. Relay races and mass drills performed by Grades I to IV, including an eye-catching ribbon drill and dumbbell drill, highlighted teamwork and synchronised effort.

INDIVIDUAL CHAMPIONS

The event concluded with a grand prize distribution ceremony, where the chief guest, along with the dignitaries, presented medals and trophies to the young athletes for their stellar performances. Individual champions from Classes I to IV were announced, bringing immense pride and joy to the winners.

Aayan Sunil was awarded the individual champion's trophy in the Class I boys' category, while Chaitradri Adda received it in the girls' category. Lezin Muhammed was the individual champion in the Class II boys' category, and Krithika A won in the girls' category. Rufus Blesson Koshy earned the individual champion's trophy in the Class III boys' category, while Khadiza Binte Khalid was the girls' champion.

Muhammed Sajjat clinched the individual champion's trophy in the Class IV boys' category, with Naadavi receiving it in the girls' category.

The Red House were declared the overall champions, claiming the coveted trophy, while the Blue House secured the runner-up position.

The school management expressed their heartfelt gratitude to the chief guest, dignitaries, principal, faculty, parents and students for their invaluable contributions to the success of the event.



South Africa's Temba Bavuma (L) and South Africa's Keshav Maharaj (2nd L) celebrates with teammates after the dismissal of Sri Lanka's Kamindu Mendis (R) during the fourth day of the second Test at St Georges Park in Gqeberha, South Africa.

Bavuma hails team effort after SA seal series win

SOUTH AFRICAN captain Temba Bavuma said his team's 109-run win in the second Test against Sri Lanka at St George's Park on Monday was a big step forward for a largely inexperienced group of players. "For a lot of the guys it was a proper taste of what Test cricket is about," said Bavuma of a hard-fought match which went into the fifth day.

"It's rare when you get to play for five days and it's also rare when the game is always in the balance. There were times when we were on top and times when Sri Lanka were getting the momentum on their side."

The win put South Africa on top of the World Test Championship table, which is based on average points gained.

South Africa can make certain of qualifying for the final at Lord's in England next June if they beat Pakistan in a two-match series which starts on December 26.

"The championship table looks good," said Bavuma during the post-match presentation.

"We see ourselves at number one with two games to go. I don't know what the maths looks like but we're playing good cricket and we want it to continue."

Bavuma was named player of the series after scoring 327 runs in four innings, with a century and three fifties, but said other individuals in the team were making major contributions.

Three South Africans made centuries and three bowlers had five-wicket hauls, including left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj, who took five for 76 to seal Monday's win.

"It's always a good sign when guys are putting in match-winning performances. It speaks to the hunger and desire amongst the team." Sri Lankan captain Dhananjaya de Silva said his team had improved on their performance in Durban, where they were beaten by 233 runs after being blown away for 42 in the first innings.

"The guys fought hard but it was not good enough," said De Silva. "The bowling attack that South Africa had kept asking questions."

De Silva said Sri Lanka were improving in away Test matches.

"We're getting better but we need to be 100 per cent better in every department," he said.

Sri Lanka lost their remaining five wickets for 33 runs on Monday. Their hopes of an upset win were extinguished when overnight batsmen De Silva and Kusal Mendis were dismissed inside the first 10 overs of the day.

De Silva and Mendis, the team's last recognised batsmen, resumed on 205 for five, still needing 143 runs to win.

Maharaj made the first breakthrough when Mendis edged a low catch to Aiden Markram at slip. He made 46 in a 97-run sixth wicket partnership with De Silva.

Kagiso Rabada then had De Silva caught behind for 50, exposing the Sri Lankan tail.

The last three wickets fell quickly with Maharaj claiming two more scalps and Marco Jansen finishing the match with his first ball of the day when Lahiru Kumara was caught off a wild slog. — AFP

Badminton tourney concludes at Falcon Academy

MUSCAT: The badminton tournament, organised by the Friends of Shuttle Badminton Darsait, concluded with great flair at the Falcon Badminton Academy on December 6.

The organising committee, comprising of Krishnan Kutty Nair, Dr Rajesh Rajendran, Lijo Antony, Moncy Francis, and Shanavas Nasar, ensured the event was conducted in a professional manner.



The tournament was organised by the Friends of Shuttle Badminton Darsait.

The tournament featured 20 teams divided into four pools, kicking off with league matches on December 4.

A closing ceremony immediately followed the final, providing a fitting conclusion to the tournament. Saji Abraham, tournament coordinator and organiser, expressed gratitude to the officials, committee members, and parents for their unwavering support and dedication. Special thanks were extended to Koshy Thomas, who played a pivotal role in securing sponsorship for the event.

Eight teams advanced to the quarterfinals, including

school students Aman and Rian, aged 10 and 12, who displayed remarkable talent. Noteworthy performances in the league matches saw teams Dijesh and Said, Dr Rajesh and Praveen Pinto, Moncy Francis and Lijo Antony, and Krishnan Kutty and Shanavas advancing to the quarterfinals without losing a match.

The quarterfinals were fiercely contested, with Aman and Rian putting up a spirited fight against Kutty and Shanavas. Despite their best efforts, the experienced duo of Kutty and Shanavas

secured their semifinal spot with exceptional teamwork and brilliant cross-court smashes in a nail-biting decider.

Dr Rajesh and Praveen Pinto also advanced after defeating the second-seeded duo, Jyothilal and Sabir. Moncy and Lijo overcame stiff resistance from Udayan and Sumesh, while Dijesh and Said showcased excellent coordination to defeat Rajesh Das and Sumesh.

The final match was a spectacle of skill and determination, as the veteran-youth pair of Krishnan Kutty and Shanavas Nasar faced off

against the formidable duo of Moncy Francis and Lijo Antony. With the crowd's enthusiastic support, Kutty and Shanavas took an early lead in the first game. However, Moncy and Lijo's never-say-die attitude turned the tables, snatching the game with a nail-biting score of 22-20 after trailing 7-11 midway.

In the second set, Kutty and Shanavas initially commanded the game, building a significant lead of 9-3. But Moncy and Lijo mounted a stunning comeback, rallying with consecutive service points to take a 12-10 lead. From there, the winning duo maintained their dominance, closing out the match with a convincing 21-12 victory, much to the delight of the audience. Udayan, Sudheer, Krishnan Kutty Nair and Hemanth, distributed the prizes while Anurag delivered a vote of thanks. The championship celebrated not only competitive spirit but also camaraderie, making it a memorable event for participants and spectators alike.

SPORTS

QUICKRECOVERY



Chelsea's Cole Palmer celebrates scoring their fourth goal against Tottenham Hotspur. — Reuters

CHELSEA FIGHT
BACK TO EDGE OUT
TOTTENHAM IN
THRILLER

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, DEC 9

The recovery came quickly for Chelsea from the shock of conceding two goals within the first 11 minutes to eventually emerge 4-3 winners in this London derby against Tottenham Hotspur. With just four points behind Premier League leaders Liverpool — who have a game in hand — Chelsea fans consider their side to be contenders for the league title.

Chelsea manager, Enzo Maresca, however, feels differently. He said: “To be serious, we are not ready but we focus on trying to improve. The fans can dream because from the outside, it is quite clear, inside the reality is we are not ready.”

He was full of praise for his star player Cole Palmer who is the first Premier League player to score 12 times from the spot without ever missing one. His performance has been excellent throughout the season and he has already placed himself for the player of the year award.

Maresca said: “Cole belongs to that group who are not normal players — they are top players. They do things that are not normal and we say, ‘How do they do that?’ It’s because it’s Cole and he is top and we can expect that from Cole.”

He further added: “To come to this stadium against this team and then concede two goals and continue in the same plan shows how the players in this moment are mentally strong.”

This fast paced game began with Spurs going into the lead after just five minutes. It came in a rapid counter attack in which Marc Cucurella made the first of his two costly slips allowing Brennan Johnson to speed down the right and cross to the near post for Dominic Solanke to stroke into the net.

Six minute later, Spurs doubled the lead when another slip by Cucurella (who soon changed his boots) gave space to Dejan Kulusevski who beat three defenders before shooting left-footed, low in the near corner.

Chelsea responded quickly and cut the deficit with Jadon Sancho’s shot from 20 yards going in off the post. A quarter of an hour into the second half, Chelsea found the equaliser. Moises Caicedo was tripped in the box by Yves Bissouma and Palmer hammered in the penalty.

Chelsea were lucky that Caicedo was not sent off before they equalised. His high boot on Sarr’s shin was reckless but he was not even shown a yellow card despite a check by VAR.

Chelsea went into the lead in the 73rd minute with Palmer dribbling past three players before his deflected pass went to Enzo Fernandez for a fine left-footed half volley shot. That lead was then extended to 4-2 with another penalty to Chelsea when Sarr lunged into Palmer who converted the spot kick with a delightful, ice-cool chip sending the goalkeeper the wrong way in the 84th minute.

Spurs got a consolation goal in the 6th minute of added time when Heung-Min Son scored from a James Maddison pass.

Spurs manager, Ange Postecoglou, said: “I don’t see them (his team) lacking confidence and belief but both penalties were out of desperation. They’re desperate to turn it around. There’s still plenty to play for between now and January to make sure we keep performing.”



The first day's winners in the Oman Golf Trophy 2024 with the officials at the Ghala Golf Club in Muscat.

Kita tops chart after Day 1
of Oman Golf Trophy

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 9

The first day of the Oman Golf Trophy 2024 concluded with impressive performances, setting the stage for an exciting tournament. Atsushi Kita emerged as the standout performer of the day, securing the title of Day 1 Winner with an outstanding score of 45 points.

Organised by the Foreign Ministry in collaboration with various government and private entities, this championship marks the culmination of a series of competitions that began in April and spanned eight countries, including Italy, Austria, Germany, India, South Africa, Japan and France.

Hosted at the iconic Ghala Golf Course in Oman, the tournament kicked off with intense competition and remarkable on-course achievements. Highlights included Gary Stangl's exceptional precision on the 5th hole, earning him the Nearest the Pin award. Riyaad Dinath showcased his power and accuracy to secure the Longest Drive title in the Men's category on the 13th hole, while In the Ladies' category, Hiroko Ozaki displayed impressive skill, claiming the longest drive on the 16th hole. Additionally, Hikaru Yakushiji earned recognition for the 2nd Shot Near the Pin on the 18th hole.

The Oman Golf Trophy, renowned for its world-class competition and breathtaking courses, is set to continue with two remaining rounds. The second round will take place at La Vie Golf Club, followed by the grand finale at Al Mouj Golf, a course ranked among the top 100 globally. The

tournament features over 79 participants, including 48 players who qualified from 79 stages conducted across eight participating countries, drawing a total of 5,500 competitors.

Jonas Lange, a participant from Hamburg, Germany, said: “My first impression is that the event very well organised. From the moment I arrived, everything has been seamless. The course itself is absolutely stunning — meticulously maintained, with breathtaking views. Playing here feels like a privilege, and the entire experience has been pure fun so far,” he remarked, highlighting his admiration for the event's setup.

Lange added, “the hosting is pretty much perfect the organisers have done an incredible job ensuring everything runs smoothly. Everyone I've interacted with has been exceptionally friendly and welcoming, which makes the entire environment very comfortable. It's clear that a lot of thought and effort have gone into creating an event of this calibre.”

On the level of competition, Lange noted the impressive skills on display. “The level of competition is quite high, definitely a challenge for my current playing abilities. But that's what makes it exciting — it pushes you to improve. What I particularly appreciate is that the competition is well-balanced. It allows players of varying levels to compete together, which creates a dynamic and inclusive atmosphere.”

When discussing his own chances of reaching the finals, Lange took a humble and realistic stance. “Let's see how the next two rounds go today. I wouldn't say I have

the best chances, considering the talent on the course. However, it's not just about winning—it's about enjoying the experience and learning from it. Competing against such skilled players is inspiring in itself, and I'm looking forward to seeing how far I can go.”

Lange underscores the global appeal and meticulous planning of the Oman Golf Trophy, which has successfully attracted participants from various countries while offering a platform for cultural and competitive exchange.

Pustov Atma, a participant from Graz, Austria, shared his admiration for the Oman Golf Trophy, praising its exceptional organisation by the organiser. “The course is both challenging and stunning, making it a perfect venue,” he said.

Atma expressed his appreciation for Oman's hospitality and the unique opportunity to play alongside participants from various nations. “The level of competition is very high, which makes it both challenging and exciting,” he added.

Participating in his first tournament in Oman, Atma described the experience as enjoyable and memorable, noting that while his chances of reaching the final remain uncertain, he is focused on savouring every moment of the event.

Beyond the competition, the Oman Golf Trophy serves as a platform for fostering international collaboration in trade, diplomacy, and cultural exchange. The event exemplifies Oman's vision of leveraging sports to build meaningful and lasting global connections.



Players in action during the opening day of the Oman Golf Trophy 2024 at the Ghala Golf Club in Muscat on Monday.



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IPP CONTRACTS

Mustafa al Ajmi (right), Renewable Energy Engineer – PDO, with fellow panelists.

PDO TO ANNOUNCE AWARDS FOR SOLAR AND WIND PROJECTS

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 9

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the nation’s biggest oil and gas producer, is set to award contracts later this week for a new solar Independent Power Project (IPP), as well as a pair of wind farms, as part of its strategy to decarbonise its operations in line with Oman’s Net-Zero goals.

According to a key official, the new solar PV project — dubbed North Oman Solar IPP — will be a 100 MW capacity plant similar to the groundbreaking Amin Renewable Energy Project that came into operation in May 2020. The latter venture made national history as the first utility-scale solar PV project launched in the Sultanate of Oman at the time.

Taking part in a panel discussion during the Net-Zero Week Oman 2024 forum, organised by Solar Quarter Middle East last week, Mustafa al Ajmi, Renewable Energy Engineer at PDO, said the North Oman Solar IPP will come up near Qarn Alam in the central part of PDO’s Block 6 licence.

Also finalised for implementation are two wind farms, named Riyah-1 and Riyah-2 respectively of 100 MW capacity apiece — that will come up in the Nimr area in the south of PDO’s concession.

To be located not far from each other, the two wind farms are the product of a two-year wind campaign that garnered significant data on wind speeds in the area.

Based on data collected by six wind masts installed around the location, it was assessed that wind speeds average a remarkable 8 metres per sec at heights of 100 metres, he stated.

US FDI in Oman tops \$13 bn, bolstered by FTA

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, DEC 9

THE Oman-United States Free Trade Agreement (FTA), signed in 2006 and enforced on January 1, 2009, celebrated its 15th anniversary on Monday, December 9, 2024, with a symposium organised by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Speaking at the symposium, Jose W Fernandez, Under-Secretary for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment, stated, “We commend the annual trade surpassing \$3 billion since 2021, the \$13 billion in US investments in Q2 2024, and the Sister Ports initiative as clear indicators of the robust economic activity and cooperation between our nations. We call for even stronger ties and greater shared prosperity.”

The agreement has played a key role in enhancing bilateral relations, fostering collaboration across multiple sectors. Oman’s reputation as a model of moderation and balance has cemented its status as a reliable partner for the United States in the region.

Ana Escrogima, US Ambassador to Oman, reflected on the partnership’s progress over the years.

“Today we reflect and appreciate all that we have achieved in the past 15 years. We all agree that the FTA has deepened trade ties year by year. Just last year, US foreign direct investment to

Dignitaries from Oman and the US attending the symposium on Monday.

The agreement has played a key role in enhancing bilateral relations, fostering collaboration across multiple sectors. Oman’s reputation as a model of moderation and balance has cemented its status as a reliable partner for the United States in the region.

Oman increased by 36.3 per cent, strengthening our position as Oman’s second-largest foreign investor and creating opportunities for Americans and Omanis,” she said. Escrogima emphasised the broader impact of the agreement, describing it as an “ecosystem of partnership, trade, and trust” built over nearly two centuries.

She highlighted this ecosystem as the FTA’s greatest accomplishment, capable of driving future trade growth.

The FTA has significantly

boosted trade between Oman and the United States by eliminating tariffs on most consumer and industrial products. This reduction encouraged the flow of goods, transforming Oman’s trade balance from a deficit of approximately RO 108 million in 2009 to a surplus of RO 487 million in 2022.

Faisal al Rawas, CEO of OCCI, said: “Over the past fifteen years, Oman and the United States have made significant strides in strengthening foreign trade and joint investment.

By simplifying export procedures for both American and Omani companies and providing a legal framework that instills confidence in investors from both countries, doors have been opened for products, goods, and services to access each other’s markets.

This progress has been accompanied by collaboration

in various areas of mutual economic interest.”

Rebecca Olson, CEO of the Oman American Business Council (OABC), underscored Oman’s exclusive position as one of only 14 countries globally to have a free trade agreement with the United States. “Fifteen years ago, Oman was given duty-free access to the largest market on earth,” she said, highlighting the unique opportunities the FTA has created.

The agreement has also attracted increased US foreign direct investment (FDI) in Oman, particularly in the energy, logistics and infrastructure sectors. In Q2 2024, the United States emerged as Oman’s second-largest foreign investor, contributing \$13 billion.

These investments have driven economic growth, enhanced infrastructure, and fostered skills transfer and workforce development.

Aligned with Oman Vision 2040, the FTA has supported the country’s economic diversification efforts. It has stimulated growth in non-oil sectors such as manufacturing, logistics and tourism.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Oman have benefited from improved access to the US market, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship.

The agreement’s alignment of Oman’s trade and investment laws with international standards has enhanced transparency and governance.

Muscat Declaration strengthens global aviation security

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 9

THE International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) has issued a draft of the Muscat Declaration on Aviation Security and Cybersecurity during its 2024 Security Week, currently taking place at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. This marks the first time the prestigious event is being held outside ICAO’s headquarters in Canada. The official announcement of the declaration is expected on December 11, 2024.

The declaration outlines a global strategy to enhance aviation security and cybersecurity amid evolving threats. Ministers, aviation officials and industry leaders from around the world have convened in Muscat to address pressing aviation security challenges and reinforce international cooperation.

The Muscat Declaration builds on ICAO Assembly Resolutions A41-18 and A41-19, reaffirming global commitment to securing international air travel.

KEY PRIORITIES IN THE DECLARATION

The Muscat Declaration builds on ICAO Assembly Resolutions A41-18 and A41-19, reaffirming global commitment to securing international air travel. It stresses that aviation is vital to global connectivity, economic development and tourism,

necessitating robust and unified security frameworks.

Among its core priorities are: Countering Emerging Threats: Strengthening defences against insider threats, cyberattacks, and other aviation-related risks; Legal and Regulatory Frameworks: Encouraging countries to ratify international conventions aimed at combating unlawful acts targeting civil aviation; Resource Allocation and Workforce Development: Ensuring adequate funding and specialised training for aviation security professionals; and Information Sharing and Risk Management: Establishing mechanisms for real-time intelligence-sharing to enable proactive threat management.

CYBERSECURITY AS A STRATEGIC FOCUS

Given the aviation sector’s growing reliance on digital infrastructure, the declaration

places cybersecurity on equal footing with physical security.

It calls for immediate actions such as: Implementing ICAO’s Aviation Cybersecurity Strategy and Cybersecurity Action Plan; Conducting regular cybersecurity training for aviation personnel; Strengthening partnerships between governments, industry players, and international organisations; The declaration underscores that safeguarding aviation infrastructure is essential for global stability and economic growth. It warns that any security lapse could disrupt international trade, tourism, and connectivity.

ENHANCING REGIONAL COLLABORATION

The Muscat Declaration highlights the importance of regional cooperation through ICAO-led initiatives, including: The Comprehensive Regional Implementation Plan for Aviation

Security and Facilitation in Africa (AFI SECFAL Plan); The Cooperative Aviation Security Programme — Middle East (CASP-MID); The Cooperative Aviation Security Programme — Asia Pacific (CASP-AP); These programmes aim to harmonise aviation security measures while boosting operational capabilities across member states.

ICAO Security Week 2024 continues with high-level discussions, technical workshops, and strategy sessions on aviation security, cybersecurity, and industry best practices. The event underscores Oman’s growing role as a strategic hub for international aviation and its commitment to advancing global aviation security standards. The event coincides with two major anniversaries: the 80th year of the International Civil Aviation Organisation and the 50th anniversary of Annex 17 — Aviation Security.

ADVERTORIALS

BEYONDADVOCACY



The carnival celebrated individuals with disabilities as well as their families.

NATIONAL FINANCE SUPPORTS VILLAGE OF HAPPINESS CARNIVAL

MUSCAT: Demonstrating its ongoing commitment to inclusivity and the empowerment of individuals, National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman's leading finance company, extended its support to the Village of Happiness Carnival, a two-day event held on December 6 and 7 at the Civil Aviation Club.

The carnival celebrated individuals with disabilities as well as their families, creating a welcoming space enriched with educational, interactive and entertaining activities.

Hosted by HH Sayyidah Hujaija bint Jaifer al Said, Chairperson of the Association for Children with Disabilities, and Founder of Links Oman, and held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of SQU, the festival stood as a strong testament to unity and societal progress.

Commenting on the initiative, Tariq al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer of National Finance, stated, "At National Finance, we believe in the power of inclusivity to transform lives and communities.

The Village of Happiness Carnival is a celebration of the unique talents and boundless potential of individuals with disabilities — a powerful reminder that their contributions motivate and inspire us all. Supporting initiatives like these is not only a reflection of our core values but a step towards fostering a more equitable society, where everyone has the opportunity to thrive."

He added, "By empowering individuals with disabilities, we aim to change the narrative from one of limitation to one of possibility and value. A healthy, inclusive society is the foundation for sustainable development, and we are proud to play a proactive role in creating a future that embraces diversity. At National Finance, we will continue to strive to build a community where individuals with disabilities are empowered to excel, achieve and lead, contributing to the nation's development while living lives of dignity and purpose."

Through its partnership with the Village of Happiness, National Finance aims to amplify the voices and talents of individuals with disabilities, providing meaningful opportunities to showcase their abilities and contributions while fostering greater integration within the community.

This initiative goes beyond advocacy, challenging stereotypes and cultivating a culture grounded in empathy, understanding, and respect.

VOLKSWAGEN OMAN OFFERS LIMITED TIME TRADE-IN OFFERS

MUSCAT: Volkswagen Oman, represented by Premium Motors, has announced a limited time trade-in offer on its Certified Used Cars, providing customers with an exclusive opportunity to upgrade to high quality, pre-owned Volkswagen vehicles.

Running from October 20, 2024, to December 21, 2024, this promotion combines value, reliability, and convenience, ensuring every customer drives



away satisfied. Volkswagen Certified Used Cars undergo a rigorous inspection

process to guarantee safety, performance and reliability. With extended warranty options, complimentary roadside assistance, and detailed vehicle history reports, these vehicles offer assured peace of mind.

As part of this exclusive offer, customers can choose from a diverse selection of certified pre-owned Volkswagen models tailored to various preferences and budgets, with all prices inclusive of VAT.

NBO welcomes startups to its fintech programme

THE National Bank of Oman (NBO) has announced the selection of five innovative startups for its Fintech Accelerator Programme, reinforcing its position as the Sultanate's first bank to spearhead such an initiative.

Such step underscores NBO's commitment to advancing innovation and empowering fintech entrepreneurs while shaping the future of banking in the country.

With ThemarIP, Archon, Pyra.AI, Saree3, and InstaSpace selected, these startups are recognised for their forward-thinking approaches and for their potentials to enhance banking operations while driving efficiency and optimising customer experiences.

The startups engaged in an introductory and progress meeting with Abdullah Zahran al Hinai, Chief Executive Officer of NBO, marking the start of their collaborative journey, where he stressed the Programme's significance in shaping the future of banking.

Commenting on the significance of this initiative, Mustahil Ahmed al Mamari, Assistant General Manager and Head of Strategy and Transformation at NBO: "The Fintech Accelerator Programme reflects NBO's dedication to driving innovation and supporting entrepreneurs who are shaping the future of banking. We are proud to support with these talented teams, providing them with the resources and mentorship necessary to bring their visionary ideas to tangible reality." He added: "The NBO Fintech Accelerator supports Oman's fintech



These startups are recognised for their forward-thinking approaches.

Such step underscores NBO's commitment to advancing innovation and empowering fintech entrepreneurs while shaping the future of banking in the country

ecosystem, aligning with our in-country value goals.

By empowering local talent and startups, we contribute to economic diversification and sustainable development, driving impactful innovation in the financial sector and beyond, in line with Oman Vision 2024." Among the selected startups, Pyra. AI focuses on enhancing financial reporting systems

through artificial intelligence. Archon provides AI-driven data analysis to support fraud detection and credit scoring decision-making.

ThemarIP is a personalised investment platform that leverages open banking to align customer savings with tailored investment strategies.

Saree3 offers a payment service platform that supports small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and InstaSpace uses artificial intelligence to streamline contract management solutions for businesses, banks, and enterprises.

As part of the Programme, participants benefit from expert mentorship, tailored business development sessions, and access to a vast network of industry leaders.

OTE opens exclusive Nexen showroom in Ghala

MUSCAT: The OTE Group recently celebrated the grand opening of the state-of-the-art Nexen exclusive showroom in Ghala, Oman. This landmark event marks a significant step forward in enhancing access to premium Nexen tyres and expert automotive services in the Sultanate of Oman.

The launch event was attended by esteemed guests, including business leaders, automotive enthusiasts and representatives from the OTE Group and Nexen Tyre.



This event marks a significant step forward in enhancing access to premium Nexen tires.

The new showroom, strategically located in Ghala, offers a comprehensive range

of Nexen tyres, tailored to meet the diverse needs of customers across Oman.

The ceremony included a ribbon-cutting event, a detailed showcase of Nexen's innovative tire range and an opportunity for guests to engage with tyre experts on-site.

Guests praised the modern facility and its commitment to providing world-class tire solutions, coupled with exceptional service.

"This new showroom is a testament to our dedication

to offering the best in automotive solutions to our valued customers," said the spokesperson, Nexen Tyre .

"We are proud to represent Nexen Tyre in Oman and look forward to serving the community with the highest standards of quality and service."

The Nexen exclusive showroom in Ghala is now open to the public, promising a seamless and personalised experience for all tire-related needs.

Bank Muscat showcases employment & training opportunities

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, recently participated in the annual career fair hosted by the College of Banking and Financial Studies (CBFS). This event brought together over 20 institutions from various sectors, highlighting the collaborative spirit within the Sultanate of Oman's business community.

The inauguration ceremony was held under the auspices of Mahmoud bin Abdullah al Owaini, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance, and presence of Said Salim al Aufi, General Manager of Human Resources & Administration at

Bank Muscat, along with esteemed officials from the College and representatives from participating organisations.

At its dedicated stall, Bank Muscat's team showcased a range of career and training opportunities available at the Bank. They provided insights into the Bank's human resources development initiatives, emphasising the diverse specialties offered to students and recent graduates. Attendees received detailed information on job openings, training programmes and the application processes.

Bank Muscat remains committed to participating in career and



This event brought together over 20 institutions from various sectors.

training fairs organised by higher education institutions.

These events represent a vital opportunity to share the Bank's

employment and training policies, as well as to guide prospective candidates on how to apply for the various vacancies and training opportunities available annually, particularly in financial disciplines.

Such exhibitions serve as essential platforms for interaction between government and private institutions and aspiring students, allowing for the dissemination of information regarding employment and training policies.

Bank Muscat takes pride in being a leading financial institution in the Sultanate of Oman, emphasising its dedication to the development of national human resources

through specialised policies and programmes.

In its pursuit of fostering innovative initiatives, Bank Muscat continuously seeks to provide learning and skill development opportunities. The Bank's programmes are designed to cultivate a nurturing environment for creative ideas and leverage the experiences of others.

With a strategic focus on human resources development, Bank Muscat identifies departmental needs annually, ensuring alignment with the latest developments and manpower requirements across all banking specialties.

BUSINESS

AVIATIONSECURITY



The four-day event brings together over 600 officials, ministers, and civil aviation experts from across the globe.

ICAO SECURITY WEEK 2024 KICKS OFF IN OMAN

MUSCAT: Under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance (MoF), the eighth edition of the “ICAO Security Week 2024 and High-Level Ministerial Meeting” commenced at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. Organised by the Sultanate of Oman’s Civil Aviation Authority in partnership with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the four-day event runs from December 9 to 12, 2024, bringing together over 600 officials, ministers and civil aviation experts from across the globe.

In his conference, held for the first time outside ICAO’s headquarters in Montreal, focuses on strengthening global aviation security. Key discussions include combating terrorism, protecting critical aviation infrastructure and enhancing passenger safety. Participants will share best practices and explore strategies for addressing emerging security challenges such as cyber threats.

In his opening remarks, Eng Nayef bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), expressed pride in Oman’s role as the first country to host this global event outside ICAO’s base. He praised Oman’s international recognition for its contributions to global aviation security.

“This event embodies our firm commitment to developing the aviation industry and enhancing safety standards. It serves as a platform for aviation and security experts worldwide to exchange ideas and discuss innovations in this vital sector,” Al Abri stated.

He highlighted Oman’s advancements in aviation security, citing robust infrastructure, skilled local talent and regulatory frameworks aligned with global standards. “Oman has become a regional and international leader in aviation security, ensuring the safety of passengers and stability of international airspace,” he added.

Al Abri also announced a high-level ministerial dialogue aimed at defining the global aviation security road map through the “High-Level Ministerial Declaration on Aviation Security and Cybersecurity.”

Salvatore Sciacchitano, President of ICAO’s Council, commended Oman’s leadership in hosting the event and its commitment to aviation security. He noted that this year’s conference includes a ministerial segment for the first time, underscoring international cooperation in securing air travel.

Sciacchitano also unveiled the second edition of the Global Aviation Security Plan, which will guide Member States in tackling evolving threats such as cyberattacks and complex air network operations.

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, DEC 9

JASSIM bin Mohammed al Budaiwi, Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), presided over celebrations marking Gulf Statistics Day here on Monday, December 9, 2024. The event, organised by the GCC Statistical Centre, was also attended by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Oman’s Minister of Foreign Affairs.

This year’s celebration was held under the theme “Future of Statistics Towards Sustainable Gulf Development,” reflecting the critical role statistics play in supporting developmental efforts by providing reliable data and indicators for decision-makers and assessing developmental achievements.

In his remarks, the Secretary-General affirmed that celebrating

Gulf Statistics Day highlights the strong attention given by the leaders of GCC countries to the statistical sector, recognising the vital role of statistical information in shaping public policies, supporting decision-making, and developing comprehensive plans and programs that foster the growth and prosperity of the Gulf society.

He affirmed that the GCC highly values the essential role played by the GCC Statistical Centre in providing vital statistical information across various developmental fields.

The centre has successfully supported decision-makers in GCC countries with crucial indicators to track joint Gulf progress, benefiting Gulf citizens. Additionally, the centre has implemented programmes to support national statistical efforts, monitor the



A number of dignitaries representing Oman and the GCC attended celebrations marking the GCC Statistics Day on Monday.

implementation of resolutions, and conduct studies to measure the Gulf Common Market, in collaboration with national statistical centres across the GCC.

Al Budaiwi highlighted that the next phase of joint Gulf cooperation calls for an evaluation of achievements using accurate and reliable performance indicators to

OQGN to support Oman, Belgium energy alliance

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 9

OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), the operator of Oman’s natural gas transportation network, says its partnership with Belgium-based energy infrastructure group Fluxys will help contribute to the strategic development of a green energy corridor between the Sultanate of Oman and Belgium.

Last week, Hydrom – the orchestrator of Oman’s green hydrogen industry – signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Belgian Hydrogen Council – a grouping of Belgian hydrogen sector stakeholders, aimed at fostering collaboration between the two countries across the wider clean energy ecosystem.

The MoU was signed against the backdrop of the official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Belgium. In a post, OQGN – part of OQ Group – said it intends to leverage its partnership with Fluxys, currently a 4.9 per cent shareholder in the Omani company, to support this initiative.

It referenced in this regard an MoU signed by the two parties in October last year aimed at exploring strategic cooperation in the development of hydrogen and carbon dioxide (CO2) infrastructure projects in support



OQ Gas Networks aims to leverage its partnership with Belgian energy infrastructure group Fluxys to help foster the growth of a green energy ecosystem between Oman and Europe.

of Oman’s decarbonisation objectives.

“At OQGN – Oman’s exclusive owner and operator of the natural gas transmission network – we are driven to expand in the fields of hydrogen and carbon capture.

We are committed to strengthening our strategic partnership with Belgium based Fluxys to achieve our goals of developing a comprehensive hydrogen infrastructure, in alignment with Oman Vision 2040, and supporting the achievement of net-zero emissions by 2050,” the publicly

traded Omani company said.

OQGN, majority-owned by the government through integrated energy group OQ, also affirmed its goal to venture into the hydrogen and CO2 infrastructure space.

Auguring well for these objectives is its dominant role in the ownership and management of the country’s 4,223km-long gas transmission network, which transported a record 42 billion cubic metres of gas in 2023.

A future hydrogen pipeline network is envisioned to link Salalah and Al Jazir in Dhofar Governorate with Al Duqm in (Al

Wusta Governorate) and Sur and Suhar in the north of the country.

CO2 pipeline infrastructure, on the other hand, will be designed to support Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) projects as part of Oman’s decarbonisation goals.

A CO2 network will likely link Salalah with oilfield areas in the south of the country, with similar segments connecting Sur, Muscat and Suhar with oilfield hubs in the north.

“OQGN with its partners is collaborating, conceptualising and developing hydrogen and CCUS pipeline infrastructure in line with Oman Vision 2040 and Oman’s Net-Zero Emissions target by 2050,” it said.

It noted in particular the potential of its partnership with Fluxys to support a future “green hydrogen corridor” from Oman to Belgium and Europe beyond.

“This partnership is a natural fit between the two countries with shared visions and aspirations in growth into renewables and decarbonisation, and would unlock huge potential in Oman and Europe,” it added.

Headquartered in Brussels, Fluxys operates over 28,000 km of pipelines across Europe, Latin America and the Middle East. The company also manages LNG terminals in in Belgium, France, Greece and Chile, besides operating underground gas storage facilities in Belgium.

Oman advances digital investment policies

MUSCAT: The Digital Cooperation Organisation (DCO), in collaboration with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the World Economic Forum, and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, hosted a workshop focused on enhancing policies to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) in Oman’s digital economy.

Discussions centred on enabling FDI in emerging technologies, boosting digital adoption across government, private and academic sectors, and strengthening Oman’s digital infrastructure. The initiative aligns with the



The initiative aims to position Omani companies for international market expansion and increased digital service exports.

National Digital Economy Programme and Oman Vision 2040, aiming to position Omani companies for international market expansion and increased digital service exports.

Mohsen bin Salem al

Araimi, Acting Director of the Technology Industry Department at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, highlighted the value of DCO and World Economic Forum’s continued support.

He emphasised that attracting digital investments would generate job opportunities, expand the knowledge economy and contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Hajar al Haddawi, Senior Advisor to DCO’s Secretary-General, underscored efforts to support digital investments and address industry challenges, aiming to build a resilient digital economy fostering growth and

prosperity. Matthew Stevenson, Head of Investments and Services at the World Economic Forum, stressed the importance of collaborative consultations in shaping investment-stimulating policies and driving innovation within Oman’s digital sector.

Throughout 2024, Oman’s ministries have launched several initiatives to attract FDI, participated in international tech events, and promoted the digital economy’s components to global investors.

Established in November 2020, the DCO is the first international governmental organisation dedicated to advancing a sustainable digital economy.

Reliable statistics a foundational tool for development in GCC

move forward with future visions.

Here, the importance of joint statistical work and its outputs emerges as a key enabler in assisting decision-makers across various sectors to analyse and make informed decisions.

Intisar bint Abdullah al Wahibiah, Director-General of the GCC Statistical Centre, stated that this annual event underscores the importance of statistics in shaping a brighter future for GCC nations and their people.

Reliable data and information play a significant role in implementing sustainable development initiatives and highlighting the scope of Gulf cooperation in enhancing citizens’ well-being. She added that Gulf Statistics Day is not merely an occasion but a moment to reflect on the tangible progress achieved by

the GCC in various fields.

Over the years, the GCC statistical framework has accumulated experiences and expertise, positively impacting development efforts across member states. The GCC Statistical Centre continues to prioritise statistics as a foundational tool for development and a reliable source of data for GCC countries.

Al Wahibiah highlighted that since its establishment in 2013, the GCC Statistical Centre has developed a comprehensive statistical system aimed at building and strengthening the statistical and institutional capacities of member states.

This has led to sustained improvements in the quality and quantity of statistical outputs through collaborative programmes and harmonisation of national statistical strategies with international best practices.

OPINION

Make time management a priority in 2025



**TARIQ
AL BARWANI**

*The author is
the founder of
Knowledge Oman*

TIME or money, which of the two is important? Obviously it's time, because money wasted can be made again in one way or another. Yet time that is lost is gone forever.

With spending time, one can earn more money, but one cannot buy time with all the money that is there in the world, because time is invaluable, period.

I know this may be a debatable topic, where some may say that money is important up to a certain point, and then time takes over. Yet, truth be told, money is depending on time, and not vice versa. For me personally, I would trade time (if possible) to be able to make more money.

For those who know me personally, time has been one of the biggest challenges in my life, for there are many things I wish to achieve and work on, yet there is literally very little to no time to do so. I am not complaining; it's just a practical fact that I continue to live and manage with.

Last week, my article revolved around New Year's Eve resolutions that many people around the world make without success. You probably did; I had tried in some phase of my life, and many others continue to make, yet the result is mostly the same — baseless wishes or aims that are mostly short-lived.

We concluded the article on suggestions

to improve by making the year a journey of intentional action and reflection. Please refer to my last week's article for winning tips that one can adopt to achieve good progress/success.

This week, I would like to focus on time being an important yet scarce resource that one needs to manage efficiently in order to be productive.

It is reported that over 32% of adults feel overwhelmed by time-related stress — sounds familiar? You're not alone. Many people complain about the same thing, and thus, the sheer number of books, seminars, workshops, and training that are available on the same topic, i.e., time management.

The good news is that managing time is not difficult; one needs to only be disciplined. With practice, I can confidently state that you will notice some positive changes in terms of your productivity at the end of the tunnel.

You may sway every now and then, but that's normal, and it's okay. It happens to me personally and to many other "time management gurus" you may know of. There's too much distraction that keeps creeping into our lives, and one cannot simply avoid the same.

Though sharing time management techniques may require more than one article to achieve, I would like to share a few basic

The good news is that managing time is not difficult; one needs to only be disciplined. With practice, I can confidently state that you will notice some positive changes in terms of your productivity at the end of the tunnel.

steps that one could utilise to help kick-start time management.

First, have clear priorities, i.e., the important things you need to work on. Second, put the priorities in a day plan, i.e., create a to-do list for the things you wish to do. Third, ensure you allocate time for each of these activities.

Fourth, celebrate every now and then, even on the little wins you achieve from the to-do list.

Lastly, set a time at the end of the day to reflect and adjust accordingly. This may be basic, but this will help you achieve some progress, and trust me, with every little progress, one can get closer to bigger achievements.

2025 is just a few weeks away. Making New Year's resolutions is something many people await, plan and celebrate.

Though I continue to advise not to depend on and wait until New Year's Eve for making the necessary changes for life improvement, yet I would recommend you start from now (as a positive excuse) and make it a continual habit to achieve profound success with the positive changes.

Manage your time efficiently, so you can make space for the great things that you wish to work on. Until we catch again next week, stay positive and continue winning.

PUTIN FACES HARD CHOICES IF UKRAINE WAR DRAGS ON

VLADIMIR PUTIN will not stop unless he is stopped. If Ukraine cannot hold the front line, the Russian president will have no incentive to end the war he started. His troops will keep advancing until they pummel Kyiv into submission.

But if Ukraine can stop Russia on the battlefield, other scenarios will open. Though Moscow can probably fight for a long-time, the costs will mount — especially if inflation rises further or the oil price falls. A credible Western plan to support Kyiv could then bring the Russian president to the negotiating table and help secure a decent ceasefire deal.

The Russian war economy is unlikely to collapse. But Putin may face tough choices if the fighting drags on for several more years.

In particular, he may have to inflict higher prices and taxes on the population — not to mention sending more young men to their deaths.

He may also need to cut government spending on social security, education and health. If he slashes subsidies to shield the economy from high interest rates, households may struggle with their mortgages and some companies may go bust.

Such a scenario is not inevitable. And even if it materialises, Putin will not sue for peace. Although the Russian people prefer peace to war, they do not want a deal that would humiliate the country, opinion polls suggest.

What is more, the Russian president does not have to do what the people want, as he has no political rivals. That said, the prospect of a painful war of attrition may make him more open to compromise if US President-elect Donald Trump launches peace talks next year.

Although the International Monetary Fund projects growth of 3.6% this year, the Russian economy is not healthy. Interest rates at 21% and the 6% fall in the rouble over the past year are signs of trouble.

Putin has put Russia on a war footing. Next year, the country will spend 17 trillion roubles (\$170 billion) — or 8% of its output — on defence and security. That is almost three times as much as in 2021, the year before the Ukraine war. As workers have been redeployed to arms factories and the front, the economy has maxed out. Unemployment is only 2.4%

Inflation may well be much higher than the official 8.5%. The Russian people think it is 15.3%, according to a survey for the central bank.

Meanwhile, the price of a basket of fast-moving consumer goods rose 22% in the year to September, according to the Russian research firm Romir. And the price of butter rose 34% in the first 10 months of this year. No wonder there has been a spate of butter thefts. — Reuters

A fiscally low-cost solution to China's challenges

THE Chinese stock market has rallied recently in anticipation of another round of government stimulus. This is understandable, as the authorities have rolled out multiple monetary and fiscal stimulus packages to stave off deflation and boost GDP growth. But with public debt already well above historical norms, there is limited room for further fiscal intervention without risking a future debt crisis.

Given this constraint, China should focus on policies that stimulate entrepreneurship, investment and economic growth without adding to the government's debt burden.

Policymakers could take several steps to bolster investor and consumer confidence while maintaining fiscal discipline.

First, adopting a more liberal capital-market regime that makes it easier for private-sector firms to be listed on domestic stock exchanges can boost investment beyond those waiting to launch an initial public offering.

Currently, Chinese securities regulators follow a paternalistic model, selecting firms they deem "suitable" for investors.

This approach often excludes firms that are not yet profitable — a standard that would have disqualified global giants like Alibaba, Tencent, Amazon and Tesla from going public in China at the time of their IPOs.

Shifting to an IPO system like that in the United States, where regulatory oversight emphasises accurate and complete disclosures rather than picking winners, could remove these barriers, enabling dynamic companies to access the funding they need to expand their workforce and increase investment.

By facilitating public listings, policymakers could create valuable exit opportunities for early-stage investors, attracting more capital from domestic and international private equity and venture capital funds. This would help to cultivate firms that could become future giants.

Moreover, allowing prominent private-sector firms such as Ant Group, JD.com, and ByteDance



A woman cycles past the Beijing Stock Exchange building in Beijing, China. — Reuters



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to go public — even on overseas stock exchanges — would send a powerful signal that the Chinese government values private-sector entrepreneurs and recognises their vital contributions to innovation and economic growth.

This could inspire a new generation of innovators, helping China reclaim its position as a global leader in entrepreneurship.

Second, introducing a statute of limitations on financial crimes could significantly enhance investor confidence with minimal impact on government revenue.

Far from encouraging or condoning corruption or tax evasion, setting a clear time frame for prosecuting crimes or filing lawsuits would strike a necessary balance between ensuring accountability and maintaining economic stability.

This imperative is especially relevant in China, where, decades ago, it was nearly impossible to obtain permits, land, or funding without resorting to bribery.

While statutes of limitations already exist within the Chinese legal system — for example, private parties typically have three years

to file lawsuits over financial damages — local governments often prosecute infractions committed 20 or even 30 years ago, discouraging entrepreneurship and causing successful businesspeople to consider emigration.

Establishing a reasonable statute of limitations would foster a fairer, more predictable business environment and encourage entrepreneurs to remain in the country.

Third, transparent and consistent policymaking is essential for reducing uncertainties that deter domestic and foreign investors. China's ban on after-school tutoring serves is a cautionary tale. Before the ban was announced during the summer of 2021, the Chinese edtech sector had established itself as a global leader, leveraging information technology to offer scalable learning opportunities for children and adults.

Many companies in the sector were publicly traded unicorns with valuations above \$1 billion. But the unexpected policy shift dealt a major blow to the industry.

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29 years old Indian female, MBA holder with 2 years experience. Seeking a suitable position. Currently in Muscat on visit visa. Contact: 78641071, shazashakeel@gmail.com

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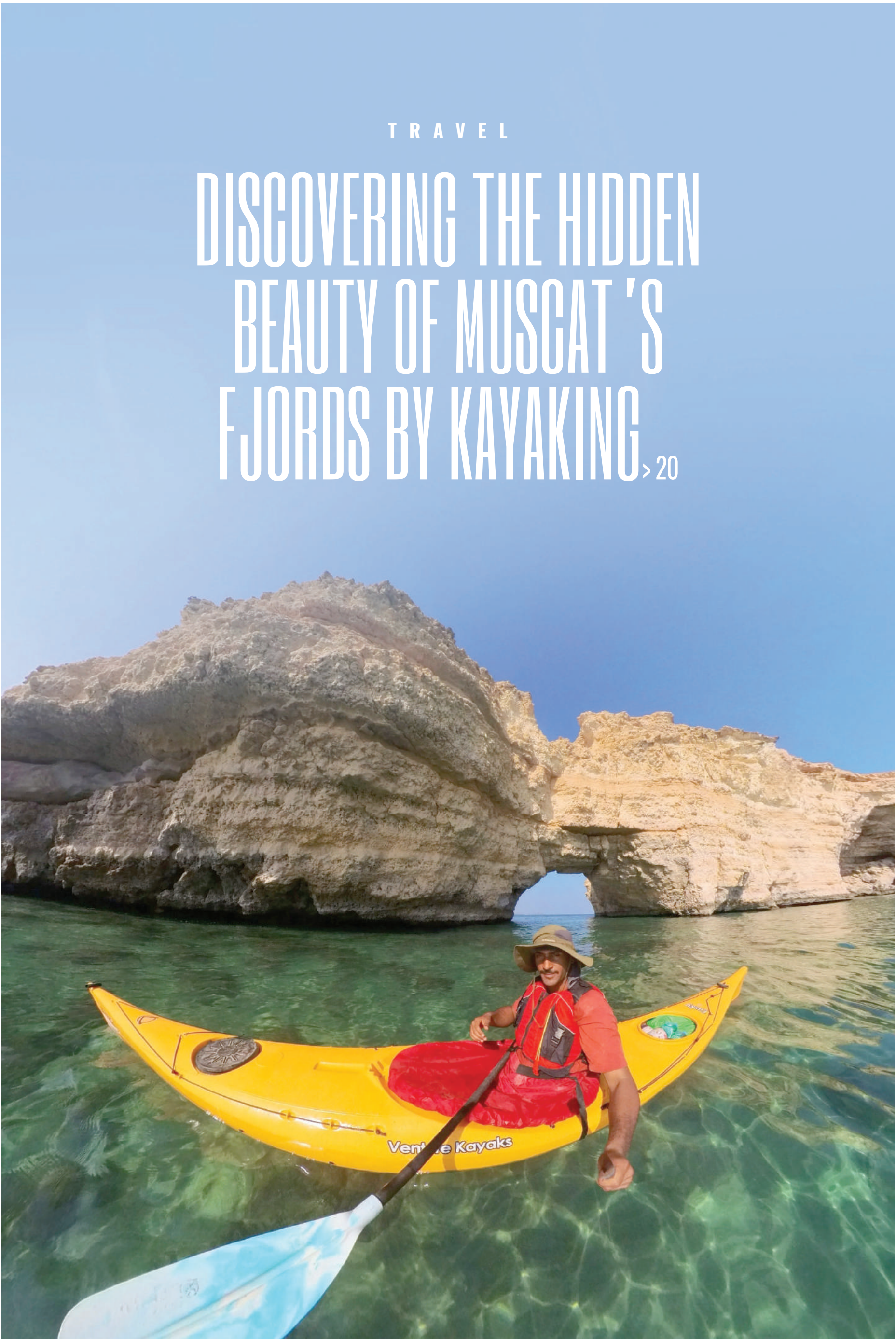
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ART/LIFE



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LIFESTYLE

V&A to open Cartier show featuring pieces worn by late queen, Rihanna



LONDON'S Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) is to open an exhibition dedicated to Cartier featuring items worn by the late queen Elizabeth II and pop singer Rihanna.

Among the items included in the display, opening in April 2025, are precious jewels, historic gemstones, drawings from the V&A and Cartier Collection, pieces from museums and private collections, and works lent by King Charles III from the Royal Collection.

Highlights include Queen Elizabeth II's Williamson diamond brooch featuring a circular pink diamond of 23.6 carats, as well as the Scroll Tiara, commissioned in 1902 and worn by Clementine Churchill, wife of former prime minister Winston Churchill, to the coronation of Elizabeth II, and by Rihanna on the cover of W magazine in 2016.

Another feature is Grace Kelly's engagement ring that she wore in her final film, "High Society" (1956).

Cartier was established in 1847 and became known as "the jeweller of kings and the king of jewellers."

Featuring more than 350 objects, the new display will chart the evolution of the house's legacy of art, design and craftsmanship since the turn of the 20th century.

Exhibition curators Helen Molesworth and Rachel Garrahan said: "Cartier is one of the most famous jewellery houses in the world.

"This exhibition will explore how Louis, Pierre and Jacques Cartier, together with their father Alfred, adopted a strategy of original design, exceptional craftsmanship and international expansion that transformed the Parisian family jeweller into a household name.

"With its world-class jewellery collection, the V&A is the perfect stage to celebrate the pioneering achievements of Cartier and its transformative ability to remain at the centre of culture and creativity for more than a century.

"We are excited to be able to share with visitors some of Cartier's most famous creations as well as revealing previously unseen objects and archive material that further enriches our understanding of a jewellery house that continues to influence the way we adorn ourselves today."

From 2025, the V&A will also play host to exhibitions about French queen Marie Antoinette and design and disability.

Cartier will be staged at the Sainsbury Gallery at V&A South Kensington from April 12, 2025, to November 16, 2025.

The Cartier Collection is currently on view in "Cartier, The Power of Magic" at Shanghai Museum East until February 17, 2025. — PA Media/dpa

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



ENTERTAINMENT

A new live album from Grammy-winning Mexican singer Natalia Lafourcade offers an intimate glimpse into the artist's process, capturing a singular moment she says bridges to her next creative chapter. — AFP



ART

Swiss-Cameroonian Koyo Kouoh, currently curator of the Zeitz-MOCAA museum in Cape Town, will be the curator of the 2026 Venice Biennale of Contemporary Art, the first African woman to be appointed to this position, the foundation has announced. — AFP



LIFE

A Palestinian woman carries her cat as displaced people from Beit Lahia arrive in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS

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Statue of an emperor that lost its head is getting it back



AN ANCIENT bronze thought to be a likeness of Roman emperor Septimius Severus is to be reunited with its long lost torso after a Danish museum agreed that its sculpture of a bearded man’s head had been looted and should be returned to Turkey.

The torso, which for years stood in the Roman Court of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, was returned to Turkey in 2023 after its seizure by investigators who said it had been looted. Since then, the Turkish government has been petitioning the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, requesting the return of the 2,000-year-old head to complete the statue. Last week, the Danish museum said its researchers had concluded that the artifact, which has been in its collection since 1970, was likely to have been excavated illegally from Bubon, a site in the southwest of Turkey that

investigators say was heavily looted in the 1960s.

The Danish museum said it had made its decision after prolonged research. “Exceptionally strong arguments and scientific documentation are required to separate a work from the museum’s collection,” Gertrud Hvidberg-Hansen, the museum’s director, said in a statement. “In the case of this object, both criteria were present.”

Severus was a wily general who outmaneuvered four rivals to assume the emperor’s seat, and he ruled Rome from 193 A.D. until his death in 211 A.D. His intact statue had been part of a group of bronzes that experts believe was set up 2,000 years ago as a shrine to the imperial cult in Bubon, when the region was a distant part of the Roman Empire. As part of the cult, the emperors were worshipped as gods. —NYT



Rihanna Steals the Fashion Awards

SHE WASN’T even nominated, and Rihanna still stole the show Monday night at the Fashion Awards in London.

Arriving last, as has become her wont at such events as the Met Gala and the Alaïa show, and there as a plus-one to support her partner, ASAP Rocky, who received the Cultural Innovator award, the artist and Fenty mogul made her entrance in a turquoise wrap coat and faux fur hat from Christian Lacroix’s fall 2002 couture collection. With that she wore a black corset, black leather opera gloves and sheer black tights. The effect was kind of haute Flintstone meets the Folies Bergère.

As for ASAP Rocky, he wore Bottega Veneta — a navy chore coat, matching pants and a red leather tie — and called the honor “surreal.” That was also an accurate description of the Royal Albert Hall, where the awards were held and where a crimson disco ball cast a new light on a familiar scene. But it was Rihanna’s enormous hat, jauntily tilted and visible from every vantage point, that summed up the point of the night: The business of fashion may be serious, but wearing it should be fun.

Her look was as laudable as the actual winners, who included Alex Consani as model of the year, the first transgender woman to receive the recognition; Grace Wales Bonner as British menswear designer of the year; Simone Rocha as British womenswear designer; and Jonathan Anderson of Loewe and JW Anderson as designer of the year for the second year in a row.

That choice wasn’t a big surprise, especially given Anderson’s moonlighting this year as costume designer on the Luca Guadagnino films “Queer” and “Challengers” and the multiple wild rumors surrounding his future job prospects, but some of the other outfits were. Here’s what else caught our eye.

MORE METHOD DRESSING
Nicola Coughlan and Simone



Ashley proved that while you can take the girls out of “Bridgerton,” you can’t take “Bridgerton” out of the girls’ wardrobes. Coughlan channeled her character, Penelope Featherington, post-glow-up in an off-the-shoulder black velvet Gaurav Gupta gown with exaggerated aqua satin panniers, while Ashley summoned a whiff of Kate Sharma in strapless ivory Prada with a bell-shaped miniskirt — and billowing train. Lady Whistledown would

approve.

SUITING THE MOMENT
Venus Williams, in a Thom Browne overcoat and plunging jumpsuit, and Rita Ora, in an oversize double-breasted gray jacket from her collaboration with Primark, a British high street brand, and a pink tie, were ready for business. Ora said her look, which included bleached blond eyebrows and a mullet, was an homage to David Bowie. As he once sang, “Fa-fa-fa-fashion.”

MUSK-FLUENCE?
Jodie Turner-Smith, who accompanied Burberry’s creative director, Daniel Lee, accessorized her buttery, bias-cut (yup) Burberry gown, encrusted in silver sequins and beads, with two bunches that jutted, antenna-like, from the top of her head. Just in case, you know, she needed to radio her spaceship to make a quick getaway. Or contact Elon Musk.

BRAND BUILDING
Why waste a good social media snap? Sabato De Sarno of Gucci, who took home a special recognition award in honor of a campaign focusing on London, brought model Yanan Wan to the event, each of them doing their best impression of a walking billboard in head-to-toe “Ancora red,” the color De Sarno has made a Gucci signature since taking over as creative director last year. Michèle Lamy, who presented the Cultural Innovator award to ASAP Rocky and is the partner and muse of Rick Owens, went full batwing goth. That’s not just advertising. It’s commitment.

SEASON’S GREETINGS
Ellie Goulding, in a pristine white Moncler Genius puffer coatdress (a puffer coatdress! Who knew?), and Gemma Chan, in snowy Self-Portrait x Christopher Kane, looked as if they had just stepped off a sleigh after a ball at the North Pole. Santa would definitely approve. —NYT

FEATURES

BY HAMDOON AL HASHMI
Instagram: @7amd0on

MUSANDAM, often dubbed ‘the Norway of the Middle East’, boasts dramatic cliffs and azure waters, drawing numerous tourists eager to explore its breathtaking fjord system. As a land of stunning landscapes, Oman offers a plethora of adventures to those who seek them.

While Musandam definitely has its own unique beauty, one should not miss appreciating the unique fjords of Muscat. With their enthralling vistas and tranquil waters, the areas of Yiti, Bandar al Khairan all the way to Jabal Sifah deserve equal recognition.

As part of my own exploration of Oman, I decided to embark on a kayaking journey through the stunning fjords of Oman. This trip spans three days, starting from a fishermen’s village in Qantab and leading to Bandar Khairan, a marine reserve known for its breathtaking cliffs, mangroves, and snorkeling spots where you can also spot plenty of sea turtles. Suffice to say, it’s a magical experience that I think at some point, everyone who visits Muscat should experience.

DAY 1: A MAGICAL START

Starting from Qantab, excitement bubbled within me as I navigated through the swelling sea waves. Within mere moments, I was elated to encounter two turtles amidst the shimmering waters. The towering cliffs lining my route displayed the unparalleled beauty that this region has to offer, showcasing why this kayaking path is arguably the best around Oman’s capital.

Just minutes from the village, I stumbled upon a secluded cove, a hidden treasure that even locals seldom explore. It felt like an undiscovered paradise, waiting for adventurers to unearth its secrets.

After navigating through another picturesque cove, I finally completed my first day by kayaking along the Gulf of Oman, entering the breathtaking Yenkit Fjord. The day culminated with a hike to a stunning viewpoint overlooking the fjord, perfectly timed with the sunset. The views were mesmerising, providing a magnificent end to an exhilarating day.

DAY 2: A MORNING IN THE FJORDS

Awakening to the harmonious sound of fishermen echoing through the air, I began my day camping near their boats and gear before continuing my journey to Bandar Khairan. Renowned for its incredible fjords, this marine reserve is a prime kayaking destination that holds great potential for tourism, particularly during winter months when icy temperatures deter visitors from places like Canada and Norway. With water temperatures averaging between 23 and 30 degrees Celsius, Oman presents an inviting alternative for kayaking enthusiasts.

Upon paddling out of Yenkit Fjord into Bandar Khairan, I was once again captivated by the dramatic rock formations. The distinctive red stones cascading into the coastline felt like a testament to nature’s artistry.

Arriving at the next fjord, I took time to explore the mangroves, crucial to the local ecosystem. These rich habitats play a significant role in capturing carbon dioxide and greenhouse gases, storing them in their flooded soils for centuries.

Next, I headed towards a popular



DISCOVERING THE
HIDDEN BEAUTY OF
MUSCAT 'S FJORDS
BY KAYAKING



snorkelling spot, where a vibrant array of marine life greeted me. Schools of Sergeant major fish swam alongside turtles, presenting a delightful spectacle.

As the day wrapped up, I had the opportunity to connect with an expert in abseiling and adventure activities. We discussed the potential for creating an abseiling experience in the region, featuring rappelling over a massive cave and landing safely onto a local boat, with visions of jumping into the sea for future adventures.

DAY 3: THE ABSEILING ADVENTURE

On my final day, I met with three locals from the fjord region, two of whom were licensed adventure activity guides, including a coach.

After gearing up at the bay, we set off for Horse Bay on an island within the reserve. Ascending the rocky terrain, we identified a suitable location to establish natural anchors for our abseiling adventure. During our exploration, we were delighted to spot at least four turtles gliding gracefully beneath us!

The thrill began as we rappelled over the cave, which, although not our final descent point, provided an exhilarating first exploration into this dramatic landscape.

As my journey came to a close, I felt immense gratitude for the local community who supported my adventure, ensuring smooth logistics and wholeheartedly embracing my suggestions to experience the intrigue of abseiling.