

OMAN
Observer
DAILY

HEALTHY LIFESTYLE CAN REVERSE DIABETES

ENGAGE IN EXERCISE TO KEEP SUGAR IN CONTROL

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HIS MAJESTY GREETES EMIR OF QATAR

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, on his country's National Day.

In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health, happiness and long life to Shaikh Tamim. His Majesty also prayed to the Almighty Allah for the return of this occasion on him and the people of Qatar, at a time they have realised aspirations of further progress and prosperity. His Majesty also wished the partnership and cooperation relations between Oman and Qatar further progress.

COUNCIL DISCUSSES DRAFT BUDGET

MUSCAT: The State Council on Tuesday discussed the report of its expanded Economic and Financial Committee on the draft version of the State Budget for fiscal year 2025.

The draft budget will be forwarded to the Council of Ministers, along with the recommendations of the State Council and the Majlis Ash'shura, in line with the provisions of Article (52) of the Council of Oman Law.

The discussions took place during the State Council's 4th session of the 2nd regular sitting of the Eighth Term. The meeting was held under the chairmanship of Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.

Angola President to begin Oman visit tomorrow

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

MUSCAT: President Joao Lourenco of the Republic of Angola will pay an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman on Thursday.

A statement to this effect was issued by the Diwan of Royal Court, reading as follows: "In a bid to promote the joint interests between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Angola in various spheres, President Joao Lourenco of the Republic of Angola will pay an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman, starting from Thursday, 19 December 2024.

The visit stems from the two countries' keenness on pushing the bilateral relations towards wider horizons to achieve further progress and prosperity.

The visit will explore aspects of cooperation between the two countries and means of promoting them in various fields to meet aspirations of the two countries' peoples and achieve the desired goals." — ONA

President Joao Lourenco

PRESIDENT OF BELARUS VISITS SOHAR FORT

President Aleksandr Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus visited Sohar Fort in the Wilayat of Sohar, Governorate of Al Batinah North, on Tuesday. Upon his arrival at Sohar Fort, the President of Belarus and his delegation were received by Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North. **SEE ALSO P3**

Ukraine kills top Russian general

MOSCOW: A top Russian general accused by Ukraine of being responsible for the use of chemical weapons against Ukrainian troops was assassinated in Moscow by Ukraine's SBU intelligence service on Tuesday morning in the most high-profile killing of its kind.

Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov, who was chief of Russia's Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Protection Troops, was killed outside an apartment building along with his assistant when a bomb hidden in an electric scooter went off, Russia's Investigative Committee, which probes serious crimes, said. An SBU source confirmed to Reuters that the Ukrainian intelligence agency had been behind the hit. "The liquidation of the

Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov

chief of the radiation and chemical protection troops of the Russian Federation is the work of the SBU," the source said. The source said that a scooter containing explosives was detonated, killing both Kirillov and his aide, as they stepped out of a building on Ryazansky Prospekt in Moscow. Unverified video footage of the attack circulating on social media

showed two men exiting the building to get into a car followed by a large explosion as the two men remained on the pavement. Reuters could not independently verify the footage.

Kirillov, 54, is the most senior Russian military officer to be assassinated inside Russia by Ukraine and his murder is likely to prompt the Russian authorities to review security protocols for the army's top brass and to find a way to avenge his killing.

Former president Dmitry Medvedev, now a senior Russian security official, was cited by the state RIA news agency as saying that Ukraine's military and political leadership now faced imminent revenge for Kirillov's murder. — Reuters

Roses named after Royals star attraction of first Oman flower fest

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabiyousef](#)

Roses named after the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik are the key attractions of the 1st Oman Flower Festival which is all set to begin at Qurum Natural Park on December 23 as part of the Muscat Nights Festival.

Organised by Muscat Municipality, the one-month-long festival will feature more than one million flowers sourced from across the globe and the artistry of internationally renowned floral designers from France, Netherlands and the USA. It will have beautifully

crafted Show Gardens specially created by an international team from Singapore, Thailand, China and the USA.

Sam Lemheney, who is an industry leader in floral designing worldwide, said that an array of floral wonders are being designed to give the visitors an unforgettable view of the floral marvels from all over the world. The festival comes in the backdrop of Oman, the first GCC country, to join the World Association of Floral Artists (WAFA).

"The first edition of the Muscat Flower Festival is an attempt to transform the Qurum Natural Park into an impressive floral spectacle. With our international expertise

Sam Lemheney with Hanan bint Abdullah al Shraiqiyah

and local talents perfectly blended, we are pretty sure that this is going to be a celebration of the beauty of nature, arts and diverse environments."

The festival will also showcase Oman's own celebrated floral

designer, Madhvi Ramesh Khimji and her group of local designers.

Hanan bint Abdullah al Shraiqiyah, Technical Supervisor of Muscat Flower Festival, said that the festival will offer an opportunity to explore a variety of hands-on activities that combine art, nature and creativity as this event is designed to showcase a fusion of global floral artistry and local culture.

"Oman's first flower Festival will feature a plethora of activities from crafting floral bracelets and crowns to painting flower pots and sculpting clay animals and objects. The young and young at heart can unleash their creativity and connect with nature.

It promises to be an adventure for all ages, incorporating interactive experiences that ignite curiosity, foster a love for nature, and create lasting memories," Hanan said.

She furthered that the festival will also host a bustling marketplace, featuring local vendors, where visitors can purchase fresh flowers, handmade crafts, and floral-inspired food and beverages.

The festival, which will run up until January 21, 2025, will include a Grand Floral Centrepiece, Roots of Wonders, Canopies of Dreams, measuring 9 metres in height on the highest point of the display, this stunning piece of art will surely captivate all festival goers.

PROSPECTS FOR PROMISING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

MINING AND FOOD SECURITY FOCUS AREAS



THE Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Angola seek to promote areas of bilateral cooperation in various fields and open new horizons for cooperation in a manner that serves their common interests and achieves promising and solid strategic partnerships. The upcoming official visit of President Joao Lourenco of the Republic of Angola to the Sultanate of Oman this Thursday represents a new chapter of political relations and bilateral cooperation between the two countries. It is also an important step to foster trade and economic ties in a manner that serves their common interests.

Within the context of the bilateral relations, a number of visits were made during the past period that contributed to achieving more rapprochement and exploring opportunities for cooperation and prospects for partnership between the two countries.

One of the most important visits was made by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth to Angola last May 2024. During the visit, a cooperation agreement in the field of investment was inked.

In addition, a delegation from the State Council also visited Angola in October 2023 to participate in the meetings of the 147th General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Oman and Angola started to develop economic and trade relations recently, as there are no agreements or memoranda of understanding signed between the two countries in this field, which is reflected in the figures of the volume of trade and investment between them.

The inter-trade statistics show that the volume of trade exchange between the two countries amounted to approximately RO 3.2 million by the end of 2023, compared to 2022, when it was about RO 1.3 million, recording an increase of 145.1 per cent. The trade balance between the two countries in 2023 was in favour of the Sultanate of Oman, with a surplus of about RO 1.9 million.

Statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that the total Omani exports to the Republic of Angola in 2023 amounted to more than RO 3 million, compared to RO 1.3 million in 2022, recording an increase of 131.9 per cent. This surge is attributed to the export of electrical cables to the Republic of Angola.

Statistics indicate that the volume of trade exchange between the two countries reached about RO 1.97 million during the first ten months of 2024, as the value of Omani exports to Angola amounted to RO 1.9 million, while the value of Omani imports from Angola amounted to RO 69,400.

As far as the volume of cumulative Angolan investment licensed in the Sultanate of Oman is concerned, there are two registered companies with Angolan participation until September 2024.

The size of the invested capital increased from RO 24,000 in 2023 to RO 44,000 until



Ali bin Said al Kathiri, Non-resident Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Angola



The bilateral relations between Oman and Angola are cordial and promising, yet, they are still in their early stages of development compared to the Sultanate of Oman's relations with other countries...Omani companies can participate in mining projects and develop the infrastructure related to this sector, given that Angola enjoys rich resources and precious minerals, such as diamonds, gold, and copper

ALI BIN SAID AL KATHIRI

September 2024, recording an increase of 83.3 per cent. Although this reflects an increase in the interest of Angolans in establishing companies in the Sultanate of Oman, the number of companies and the invested capital is still small.

Ali bin Said al Kathiri, Head of Oman's Mission to South Africa, said the official visit of the Angolan President to the Sultanate of Oman would contribute to boosting economic and trade cooperation as it will explore the joint investment opportunities in sectors such as energy, mining, agriculture and industry.

He pointed to the potential of signing agreements or memoranda of understanding that would boost trade exchange and open markets between the two countries.

He added that the visit will pave the way for cooperation in energy sector through the exchange of expertise in the fields of oil, gas and renewable energy and studying joint investment opportunities in energy and sustainability projects.

He pointed out that the visit would upgrade the political and diplomatic coordination through the exchange of views on a set of regional and international issues, noting that the two countries seek to enhance cooperation in international organisations to back common issues. He explained that among the



Dr Frederico Cardoso, Ambassador of the Republic of Angola to the Sultanate of Oman



Angola has fertile agricultural lands and a suitable climate for growing various crops, while the Sultanate of Oman is a growing market for agricultural products. Cooperation would contribute to enhancing food security for both countries. Oman and Angola also seek to enhance maritime connectivity to facilitate trade, strengthen economic relations, develop sustainable tourism, and exchange expertise

DR FREDERICO CARDOSO

areas of cooperation are infrastructure and transportation as the two sides will discuss partnership opportunities in infrastructure projects, developing ports and logistics services, and enhancing maritime and air links between the two countries to facilitate trade and tourism movement.

Al Kathiri said: "The bilateral relations between Oman and Angola are cordial and promising, yet, they are still in their early stages of development compared to the Sultanate of Oman's relations with other countries".

He affirmed that the two countries seek to develop bilateral relations on a solid foundation, so they share a vision based on mutual respect and the desire to upgrade economic and development partnerships. Although the volume of trade exchange between the two countries is still limited, there are great opportunities for expansion in a number of common areas, said Al Kathiri, who affirmed that fostering cooperation between the two sides comes within international and regional frameworks, in a manner that serves the common interests and enhances stability in both Africa and the Middle East. He pointed out that there are many lucrative economic opportunities for investment between the Oman and Angola, including natural resources.

He added that the Sultanate of Oman enjoys a huge experience in managing oil resources and renewable energy, which enables it to provide innovative technologies and expertise to enhance productivity and sustainability in Angola, which in turn is one of the largest oil producers in Africa.

In mining, the Head of the Mission said: "Omani companies can participate in mining projects and develop the infrastructure related to this sector, given that Angola enjoys rich resources and precious minerals, such as diamonds, gold, and copper".

He pointed out that food security is one of the important sectors that provide opportunities for cooperation between the two countries.

In this context, he said: "The Republic of Angola has fertile agricultural lands and a suitable climate for growing various crops, while the Sultanate of Oman is a growing market for agricultural products. Cooperation in this field would contribute to enhancing food security for both countries".

He explained that Oman and Angola also seek to enhance maritime connectivity between them to facilitate trade, strengthen economic relations, develop sustainable tourism, tourism infrastructure, and exchange expertise in tourism marketing.

They also seek to foster cooperation in food processing and heavy industries, with a focus on enhancing the added value of natural resources.

Ambassador Al Kathiri stressed that the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Angola can be strategic partners in enhancing regional and international trade, especially through their large ports and logistics facilities.

Dr Frederico Cardoso, Ambassador of Angola to Oman said that the first visit of President João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço of the Republic of Angola to the Sultanate of Oman and his meeting with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will constitute an unequivocal signal given by the highest representatives of both countries, of the reciprocal interest in strengthening the bilateral relations and establishing direct communication channels, effective institutional and legal mechanisms of cooperation, which will convert the countries' intentions into concrete achievements

In a statement to Oman News Agency, the ambassador added that the official visit by the President of Angola to the Sultanate of Oman also constitutes the culmination of other important actions already carried out in the bilateral domain, as well as a great incentive to increasingly reinforce the ties of friendship that unite the countries' governments and their peoples.

He pointed out that as members and partners in several international organisations, in the concert of nations, the relations between the Republic of Angola and the Sultanate of Oman have always been based on mutual respect, friendship and cordiality. — ONA

SHORT TAKE



The ceremony was held under the auspices of Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman. — ONA

RAO MARKS BORDER CAMP OPENING

MUSCAT: The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) celebrated the opening of “Al Hashman Camp” of the Border Guards Brigade.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO).

The camp’s opening was part of modernisation plans adopted by the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF) and other departments of the Ministry of Defence. It was a step forward in providing the requirements of sustainability aimed to boost the national roles and tasks undertaken by the RAO and its formations.

After unveiling the camp’s memorial plaque, the RAO Commander and the attendees listened to a briefing about the roles, tasks and national duties of the Border Guards Brigade, which operates in collaboration with other brigades, formations and units of the Royal Army of Oman.

Then, the RAO Commander toured the camp’s facilities and listened to a briefing about its advanced equipment and supplies that fit with the duties assigned to it. — ONA

President of Belarus visits Sohar Fort

PRESIDENT Aleksandr Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus and his accompanying delegation visited Sohar Fort in the Wilayat of Suhar, Governorate of Al Batinah North, on Tuesday, as part of his official visit to the Sultanate of Oman. Upon his arrival at Sohar Fort, the President of Belarus and his delegation were received by Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North.

The President and his accompanying delegation listened to a briefing about Sohar Fort, its history, its archaeological features and its heritage components that stand testimony to many important events in Omani history.

The President went on tour of the corridors of the fort, which is a symbol of Oman’s ancient history and glorious events. The fort is a major landmark in Al Batinah North Governorate.

The Governor of Al Batinah North presented the guest with a souvenir commemorating the visit.

During the visit, President Aleksandr Lukashenko was accompanied by Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) (Head of the Mission of Honour) and members of the Mission accompanying the guest. — ONA



President Aleksandr Lukashenko went on tour of the corridors of the fort, which is a symbol of Oman’s ancient history and glorious events. — ONA

Explores investment opportunities at Sohar Port

SUHAR: President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus visited Sohar Port in North Al Batinah Governorate as part of his official trip to the Sultanate of Oman, highlighting potential investment and trade cooperation.

The tour extended to OQ Refineries and Petroleum Industries, where Lukashenko learned about the operations of the OQ Polymer Complex, one



of Oman’s largest petrochemical hubs. The facility produces 880,000 tons of polyethylene and 300,000 tons of polypropylene annually, supplying products to about 80 countries worldwide.

Accompanying the president were Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, President of the Oman Investment Authority and Head of the Honorary Mission, along with other officials. — ONA

Ecological park for baobab trees established

MIRBAT: Acting in cooperation with an initiative undertaken by the “Environment Conservation Society” (under establishment), the Environment Authority implemented a campaign to plant 160 baobab trees in the Wilayat of Mirbat.

The campaign was the first step in establishing an environmental park for baobab trees in the Sultanate of Oman.

The baobab park will be added to a set of sites for domesticating wild trees in different governorates of Oman under the supervision of the Environment Authority. The new project, which seeks to



The new project is being carried out in conjunction with the “National Campaign to Plant 10 Million Wild Trees” in the governorates of Oman. — ONA

preserve and spread the species of such rare plants, is being carried out in conjunction with the “National Campaign to Plant 10 Million Wild Trees” in the governorates of Oman.

Eng Zahran bin Ahmed al Abdussalam, Director-General of Environment in Dhofar Governorate, said that the establishment of the new environmental park in Hasheer Plain, in the Wilayat of Mirbat, stems from the area’s proximity to the most important sites of natural growth of baobab trees in the governorate, including Wadi Hanna.

Al Abdussalam pointed out that, as part of the campaign, baobab seeds were transported and planted in nurseries before being re-planted in the environment park, which houses about 160 baobab trees. — ONA

Conference explores role of AI in higher education admissions

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, DEC 17

The 41st Conference of the Arab Organisation of University Admissions and Registration in Arab Countries, which kicked off on Monday, explores the role of AI in enhancing admission and registration procedures.

As many as 30 scientific papers will be presented during the conference, with the participation of 150 experts from Oman and beyond. The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

The 3-day conference discusses moral and regulatory challenges related to the use of AI technologies, as well as the role of technology in developing admission and registration systems. Furthermore, the conference covers the topic of utilising technology



The 3-day conference discusses moral and regulatory challenges related to the use of AI technologies, as well as the role of technology in developing admission and registration systems.

to support students with disabilities and to enhance the use of AI in universities.

The conference aims to discuss a set of key issues related to admissions and registration processes in Arab universities, with a focus on investing in modern technology, especially artificial intelligence including improving the quality of operations using artificial intelligence technologies, ethical challenges and legislation required to use artificial intelligence in education and

anticipating the future of admissions and registration systems and developing them using technology.

Dr Ali bin Saud al Bimani, President of the National University of Science and Technology, expressed his pride in hosting this qualitative conference in the Sultanate of Oman for the first time. He said: “We are pleased to be part of this prominent event that brings together experts and admission and registration officials from Arab universities.”

Barzman Celebrates 20 Years of Excellence in the Water Bottling Industry

Muscat, Oman — Barzman, the leading bottled drinking water brand of International Foods and Beverages LLC, proudly marks 20 years of excellence since the establishment of its natural drinking water bottling operations in 2004. Over the past two decades, Barzman has become a trailblazer in the industry, setting new standards through its innovative approach to producing high-quality drinking water sourced from underground wells rich in hydrating natural minerals.

Since its inception, Barzman has achieved remarkable milestones by continuously improving its production processes to ensure top-tier quality. The company remains at the forefront of technological advancements, adapting to modern trends while maintaining an unwavering commitment to excellence. Barzman’s contribution extends beyond its core business, as it plays an active role in various community support programs, cementing its position as a vital part of Omani society.

In 2009, Barzman took a significant step forward with the launch of its state-of-the-art factory in the Al Mawaleh area. This facility, which features a total bottling capacity of over 130,000 bottles per hour, followed the company’s initial operations in the village of Barzman in the Sharqiya governorate.

Barzman has also led the way in meeting consumer needs, becoming the first company in the GCC to introduce 250ml water bottles as a user-friendly alternative to plastic cups. The brand’s commitment to sustainability was further demonstrated with the launch of environmentally friendly no-label packaging concept under the slogan “Redefined for Tomorrow,” marking a first-of-its-kind initiative in the GCC.

Quality remains a cornerstone of Barzman’s operations, encompassing everything from water filtration, purification, and treatment by transportation, storage, and distribution. The company’s expansive warehouse network and advanced fleet of vehicles ensure efficient logistics across the Sultanate, while its multiple distribution channels ensure product availability at every retail outlet. Additionally, the Barzman App provides customers with an effortless online purchasing experience, enhancing convenience and accessibility.

Looking ahead, Barzman is committed to maintaining its values of quality and innovation, staying attuned to the evolving needs of its consumers. With a strong focus on sustainability and product excellence, Barzman continues to lead the water bottling industry in Oman.

SPOTLIGHT

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 17

DIABETES is one of the most common non-communicable diseases, and the number of people suffering from this disease increases every year. It is one of the main priorities of public health.

Adherence to the treatment prescribed by the doctor and following a healthy lifestyle helps the patient control diabetes and protect their health from complications.

Prevention or delay of diabetes focuses on lifestyle modification, which means modifying your daily habits to help control blood sugar levels and reduce other risk factors.

This includes eating according to principles, engaging in physical activity and appropriate exercise, along with maintaining good health habits.

Over the past three decades, there has been an alarming rise in diabetes, reflecting the sudden increase in obesity rates exacerbated by the impact of marketing unhealthy foods, lack of physical activity and economic difficulties.

The Sultanate of Oman is one of the countries with diabetes rates exceeding the global average, estimated at 9.3 per cent in 2019. The prevalence of diabetes among adults in Oman is about 11.4 per cent, according to the National Health Survey in 2017.

Therefore, concerted efforts and cooperation of all sectors in supporting and financing health policies, increasing awareness efforts and providing a supportive health environment have become an urgent requirement to achieve the desired goal.

A scientific study revealed that a patient's adherence to dietary guidelines for diabetes is vital for continuous control of blood sugar levels and long-term health outcomes. However, switching to a healthy diet often means abandoning acquired eating habits and many related small behaviours. Adherence to medications requires very few well-defined and brief daily procedures.

Dr Waseem al Sheikh, an endocrinologist and diabetes specialist, stated that early diagnosis of diabetes and immediate treatment of complications improves the quality of life and enhances the healthcare of the patient.

Furthermore, statistics indicate an increase in the prevalence of diabetes globally, with more than 800 million adults diagnosed worldwide, according to new data published in The Lancet on World Diabetes Day.

In the medical sector, dealing with common diseases like diabetes is considered a qualitative shift and a fundamental pillar. To reduce the risk of diabetes, a healthy lifestyle must be followed, including working to reduce weight to the ideal range, maintaining physical activity, following a balanced diet, avoiding causes of cardiovascular diseases, and managing stress and anxiety.

Diabetes is a disease that requires extreme caution because uncontrolled diabetes can lead to heart disease. Diabetes significantly increases the risk of heart problems such as coronary artery disease, heart attack, stroke and arterial narrowing. If you have diabetes, you are more likely to experience heart disease or stroke.

The more you know about the factors affecting your blood sugar, the better equipped you are to control your diabetes. If you are struggling to keep your blood sugar within your target range, ask your diabetes healthcare team for help.



HEALTHY LIFESTYLE CAN REVERSE DIABETES



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SHORT TAKES



The initiatives aim to enhance the health sector and support the neediest groups in society.

Sharqiyah Desalination Company supports health initiatives

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, DEC 17

Sharqiyah Desalination Company implemented three community initiatives to support the health sector in the Wilayat of Sur, under the auspices of Shaikh Dr Hilal bin Ali al Habsi, Wali of Sur, and in the presence of the Deputy Wali, Dr Saleh bin Hamad al Alawi, Director of Social Responsibility, and Dr Mohammed bin Ibrahim al Farsi, Chairman of the Oman Cancer Association, and with the participation of a number of officials and those interested in health and social affairs in the Wilayat.

These initiatives aim to enhance the health sector and support the neediest groups in society. Dr Saleh bin Hamad al Alawi, Director of Social Responsibility at Sharqiyah Desalination Company, confirmed that these initiatives come from the company’s commitment to its social responsibility towards the local community. He said: “Supporting the health sector reflects our keenness to improve the quality of life for the neediest groups, as we believe in the importance of effective participation in supporting the national efforts made by those in charge of the health sector. Our initiatives this year seek to improve the health services provided and raise awareness of the importance of community solidarity, especially with regard to people with special needs and cancer patients.”

“Through the social responsibility portal, we are working hard to enhance integration between private sector institutions and the local community. Our annual strategy has been carefully developed, and our teams are keen to implement it accurately to achieve its goals of providing sustainable and effective support to the needy groups.” The Oman Cancer Association praised the role of the Eastern Desalination Company in supporting the association and stressed that This type of partnership with the private sector represents an important tributary to the sustainability of the association’s programmes aimed at raising health awareness and providing treatment services to patients.

EA hosts symposium on radiation monitoring



The symposium seeks to support efforts to protect human health against radiation hazards. — ONA

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority (EA) is organising a two-day symposium on radiation monitoring in the environment. The symposium, held in Muscat, seeks to support efforts to protect human health against radiation hazards, endorse the best practices on addressing the rapid pace of environmental challenges and enhance awareness among various segments of society.

The symposium began on Tuesday under the auspices of Brigadier Eng Ali bin Saif al Muqbali, Chairman of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA). It seeks to foster cooperation and exchange of knowledge among experts and specialists in manner that contributes to the development of policies and standards on environment monitoring and radiation control. Many researchers, specialists and decision makers are taking part in the symposium. — ONA

Foreign Ministry holds meeting with Ambassadors of EU, UK, Switzerland

MUSCAT: The Foreign Ministry on Tuesday held an annual meeting with ambassadors of the European Union (EU), the United Kingdom (UK) and Switzerland. The meeting was chaired by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister.

The meeting laid emphasis on strengthening the parties’ strategic partnership and promoting cooperation in a manner that better serves their interests and sustainable development tracks.

The meeting addressed major issues and developments on the regional and international arenas, including humanitarian crises, security challenges, the repercussions of climate change.

It also looked into ways to enhance food security and sustainable energy.

Sayyid Badr underlined the importance of activating joint action and international cooperation to address these challenges, notably by utilising

available opportunities and intensifying efforts to achieve stability and global peace. The meeting stressed the need to enhance collective response to global challenges.

It highlighted the importance of adhering to the principle of respecting the sovereignty of countries and applying international law as a fundamental pillar for resolving conflicts and ensuring sustainable security and development. — ONA

ROHM to present Sword of Wisdom this weekend

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, DEC 17

THE Maidan of Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) had different sets of drums, and for about 10 minutes a set of drummers of ‘Sword of Wisdom’ created an unforgettable experience for the spectators and the members of the media. They will be officially performing on Thursday and Friday. They have performed in about 40 countries and 100 cities.

“Muscat is a beautiful country, and all the buildings are white, and it is like a painting. Oman and its people are open and kind; we feel great to be back again,” said Liu Ruo-Yu, the founder of U Theatre.

“We are excited to bring our production here. Symbolically, the sword faces oneself, and it cleanses. Theatre Royal Opera has stated that ‘Sword of Wisdom’ features awe-inspiring drumming, martial arts, acrobatic excellence, and dynamic percussion theatre. This is Taiwan’s extraordinary U-Theatre and the 28-member team. The members have training for 10 to 20 years, said Liu Ruo-Yu. “The team will narrate the compelling story of the ‘Brave One’ as he faces his fear of the unknown, digs deep to find

“We are excited to bring our production here. Symbolically, the sword faces oneself, and it cleanses. Theatre Royal Opera has stated that ‘Sword of Wisdom’ features awe-inspiring drumming, martial arts, acrobatic excellence, and dynamic percussion theatre

LIU RUO-YU



‘Sword of Wisdom’ created an unforgettable experience for the spectators and the members of the media

the courage to face these fears, and searches for the wisdom to use the ‘sword,’ a metaphor for courage, in the right way,” explained the director, Huang Chih-Chun.

The director, an expert in martial arts, also explained the importance of meditation. The U-Theatre has a unique approach to productions, with training methods rooted in meditation and inspired by nature, undertaken high up in the mountains above Taipei. “There are no houses on top of the mountains, so the members commute daily

for the training,” said Liu Ruo-Yu. The aesthetic beauty of their performances has long been associated with excellence.

“We have the martial arts, the meditation, and the modern performing arts integrated, and you will see that in ‘Sword of Wisdom.’

U Theatre is a performing arts group based in Taiwan, founded in 1988 by Liu Ruo-Yu on Mount Laochuan in the Muzha District of Taipei. In 1993, Huang Chih-Chun joined the group as the percussion director.

Sustainable development projects discussed

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
SUR, DEC 17

Within the framework of enhancing cooperation and partnership between various state institutions to achieve sustainable development goals, Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South, met with Dr Mansoor bin Talib al Hinai, Chairman of the Public Services Regulatory Authority (PSRA) in the presence of the walis, members of the Majlis Ash’shura and Municipal Council, and specialists from the Authority.

The meeting was held with the aim of enhancing integration between Al Sharqiyah South and the Public Services Regulatory Authority, to unify efforts and achieve the aspirations of society in line with Oman Vision 2040 and the Sustainable Development Goals. The meeting reflects the trend towards developing strategic projects in the fields of energy, water and sanitation, by finding innovative solutions to current challenges, and raising the efficiency of services provided to subscribers. The meeting reviewed the most

prominent development projects being implemented, most notably the smart meters project, which is one of the modern projects that aim to improve energy consumption efficiency and enhance the performance of the electricity network. The project contributes to developing the operational experience and facilitating the monitoring through advanced technologies that provide higher accuracy in measuring consumption.

Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South, stressed the importance of strengthening the partnership between state institutions to ensure the achievement of sustainable development goals.

Dr Mansour bin Talib al Hinai, Chairman of the Public Services Regulatory Authority, pointed out the importance in discussing strategic plans and future projects. “We are committed to providing high-quality services and harnessing smart meters to achieve energy efficiency, while ensuring the development of other services such as water and sanitation to support sustainable development.”



MUSCAT GOVERNORATE

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (42/2024)

Muscat Municipality invites Companies specialized in the field and registered with General Secretariat of **Tender Board**, to participate and obtain tender documents from the website via the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date
PRE/24/037	Removal, Supply & laying of Road Marking at Muscat Governorate	06/01/2025	26/01/2025
PRE/24/073	Consultancy Services for Design of Development and Maintenance Works a long of Al Sifa Road	06/01/2025	26/01/2025
PRE/24/332	Replacing of Existing Poles Lights of DAMA SEAFRONT A'SEEB	06/01/2025	26/01/2025
PRE/24/342	Consultancy Services for Super-vision for Design and Construc-tion of Hawiyat Najm Park in Wilyate Quriyat	06/01/2025	26/01/2025
PRE/22/140 (Re-Call)	Design & Construction of Internal Roads at Ghala, LUMP SUM CONTRACT (RE Tender)	06/01/2025	26/01/2025
PRE/24/072 (Re-Call)	Design and Construction of In-ternal Roads in Al Mabela South Commercial Area (Lump Sum Contract)	06/01/2025	26/01/2025

1. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.

2. Clarification and Support:

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

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



China's FM Wang Yi speaks during the symposium at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing. — AFP

CHINA, US CAN ACHIEVE ‘GREAT THINGS’, SAYS WANG

BEIJING: China's foreign minister said on Tuesday that Beijing and Washington can achieve “many great things” if they work together, ahead of next month's inauguration of president-elect Donald Trump. Wang said China's policy towards the United States “has not changed” during a Tuesday address in Beijing that reflected on the country's diplomatic work in the past year and its expectations for the future.

He said that economic working groups and cooperation on cross-border drug control “fully prove that as long as China and the US cooperate, we can accomplish many great things”. The China-US relationship may sour further after Trump is inaugurated on January 20, with the president-elect vowing more tariffs to punish what he calls unfair trade practices by China -- something Beijing firmly denies. Wang said Beijing hoped the Trump administration would “make the right choices, work with China in the same direction, eliminate disruptions, overcome obstacles and strive for stable, healthy and sustainable development of bilateral relations”. — AFP



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan meets with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in Ankara. — Reuters

EU ANNOUNCES EXTRA FUNDING FOR TÜRKIYE

ANKARA: The EU is to give Türkiye an extra one billion euros in funding to care for the refugees it is hosting, European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen said on Tuesday. “An additional one billion euros for 2024 is on its way,” she said at a joint news conference in Ankara with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The funds would support the healthcare and education needs of refugees in Türkiye and “contribute to migration and border management, including voluntary returns of Syrian refugees”, she said. Türkiye is hosting nearly three million refugees who fled across the border in search of safety after the civil war in 2011. Ankara is hoping the shift in power in Damascus will allow many of them to return home. “As things evolve on the ground, we can adapt this one billion to the new needs that might occur in Syria,” she said. — AFP

BILL TABLED IN PARLILAMENT

India proposes simultaneous mega polls



India's ruling party on Tuesday tabled a parliamentary bill to synchronise state and national elections, a proposal that would vastly extend what is already the world's largest democratic exercise. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) say the concurrent polls proposed by the “One Nation, One Election” bill would cut costs. The bill “proposes aligning the election cycles” of the national parliament in New Delhi with state assemblies, justice ministry said. — AFP

SOUTH KOREAN AUTHORITIES FAIL TO RAID PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE AGAIN

SEOUL: South Korean investigators probing President Yoon Suk Yeol's short-lived martial law declaration failed to gain entry to his office to seek evidence on Tuesday after presidential office security staff denied them entry, Yonhap news agency reported. Yoon was impeached on Saturday over his martial law decree and suspended from his presidential duties. Yonhap said that investigators looking for evidence about the legality of Yoon's martial law decision waited

for about seven hours to be let in, but the presidential office security service denied them entry. A joint investigation team including police and the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials (CIO) was trying to access computer servers of the presidential office's security service to get records of phones including one used by the police commissioner, Yonhap said, citing the team. This would be the second time authorities have tried and

failed to raid the presidential office over the declaration of martial law that was reversed within hours after a standoff with parliament. An attempt on December 11 ended without entry, but the presidential office voluntarily submitted some data. The presidential office's security service said it would express its position on Wednesday concerning cooperation with raids, Yonhap reported. The police and the presidential office did not have an immediate comment. — Reuters

UN expects 1mn Syrians return in first half of 2025

THE United Nations said on Tuesday it expects around one million people to return to Syria in the first half of 2025, following the collapse of president Bashar al Assad's rule. Assad fled Syria just over a week ago, as his forces abandoned tanks and other equipment in the face of a lightning offensive spearheaded by the Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS), ending five decades of rule by Assad's family. The rule was marked by the mass jailing and killing of suspected dissidents, and nearly 14 years of civil war that left more than 500,000 people and forced half of the population to flee their homes.

The ousting of Assad sparked celebrations around Syria and beyond, and has prompted many to begin returning to their war-ravaged country. “We have forecasted that we hope to see somewhere in the order of one million Syrians returning between January and June of next year,” Rema Jamous Imseis, the Middle East and North Africa director for the UN refugee agency UNHCR, told reporters in Geneva. She said the recent developments had brought “a tremendous amount of hope... for the largest displacement crisis we have on planet Earth to finally be resolved”. But she stressed that “we also have to recognise that a change in the regime doesn't mean that there is an end to the humanitarian crisis already there”. Pointing to “immense challenges”, she called on countries that have been hosting the millions of Syrian refugees to refrain from hastily sending them back. “No



A displaced man (L) embraces his uncle upon returning home after 12 years to the Baba Amr district of Homs. — AFP

one should be forcibly returned to Syria and that the right of Syrians to maintain access to asylum must be preserved,” Imseis said.

Almost immediately after Assad's fall, a number of European countries said they would freeze pending asylum requests from Syrians, while far-right parties have been pressing for the deportation of refugees back to Syria. “What we're saying to governments that have suspended asylum proceedings is... please continue to respect the right to access territory, to lodge an asylum claim,” Jamous Imseis said. “People simply cannot after 14 years of displacement, pack a bag overnight and return to a country that has been devastated by conflict,” she said. “Give us and Syrian refugees time to assess whether it's safe to go back... It's simply too early to see how safe it's

going to be.”

At the same time as many people are returning to Syria, Jamous Imseis pointed out that more than a million people had become newly displaced in Syria in the past three weeks, “mostly women and children”.

“Risk profiles which existed prior to December 8 may no longer need that same level of protection, or do not have that same threat or fear of violations against their rights, whereas now with this regime change, we have other vulnerable groups that have emerged in that process,” she said.

Syria's new rulers stepped up engagement on Tuesday with countries that deemed ousted president Bashar al Assad a pariah, with the French flag raised at the embassy for the first time in over a decade. — AFP



APPALLING CONDITIONS IN NORTH GAZA

GAZA: World Health Organization said that a humanitarian team finally reached one of northern Gaza's only functioning hospitals at the weekend to deliver fuel, food and medicines, and found “appalling” conditions. Kamal Adwan Hospital is located in Beit Lahia, a city at the centre of an intense Israeli military operation aimed at preventing Hamas from regrouping in northern Gaza.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on X that after multiple attempts, the United Nations health agency reached the facility “two days ago, amid hostilities and explosions in the vicinity of the hospital during the mission”. — AFP

MISUSE OF FUNDS

Indonesia raids central bank in probe



A team from Indonesia's anti-graft body has raided the country's central bank headquarters over a probe about the misuse of funds, officials said on Tuesday. “Indeed, there was a raid by our investigators last night at the BI office” in the capital Jakarta, KPK spokesman Tessa Mahardhika Sugiarto said on Tuesday. The central bank also confirmed the raid took place late on Monday and that it was related to the alleged graft case. — AFP

REMOTE RELIEF

Aid reaches Pakistan valley hit by clashes



Aid flights landed in a remote Pakistan valley where thousands of people are stranded because of clashes that have killed almost 200 people. Residents have reported food and medicine shortages in parts of Kurram district. Faisal Edhi, the director of private welfare organisation Edhi, said “two patients who require urgent surgery” would be transported back to the city of Peshawar and that “more flights would keep coming” throughout the week. — AFP

DISCIPLINECARD



Italy's PM, Giorgia Meloni (R), speaks during a debate, at the Chamber of Parliament in Montecitorio palace in central Rome. — AFP

MELONI HAILS ITALY'S NEW-FOUND POLITICAL STABILITY

ROME: With France and Germany rocked by political turmoil, Italy's Giorgia Meloni on Tuesday lauded the stability of her government, saying it gave her a "precious card to play" in EU affairs. Addressing parliament ahead of a summit of EU leaders later this week, the prime minister hailed Italy's "extraordinary" stability compared to past Italian governments, and "also compared to the political turbulence that several large European nations are facing". Meloni, the leader of the far-right Brothers of Italy party, expressed hope her country's relative lack of turmoil would lead to increased foreign investment, and a reduction in the "brain drain" of talent abroad. "The added value of this stability is certainly a precious card to play also within the European Council," she said. A member of Meloni's party, Raffaele Fitto, has just secured a top job in the new executive of the EU, the European Commission. Speaking to MPs on Tuesday, she urged a "pragmatic, constructive and open approach with the new Trump administration". — AFP



BAYROU HOPES TO FORM NEW GOVT

French PM Francois Bayrou speaks during the questions to the Prime Minister session at the National Assembly in Paris. The new French prime minister has told National Assembly, the lower house of parliament, that he hopes to form a new government in the coming days. France's previous government fell earlier in December after it failed to find enough support. — Reuters

SPECIAL ELECTION LOSS ADDS TO MISERY FOR CANADA PM TRUDEAU

OTTAWA: Canada's ruling Liberals lost a special election in the western province of British Columbia, provisional results showed on Tuesday, deepening the political woes of beleaguered Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. The minority Liberal government was rocked on Monday when Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland unexpectedly resigned, citing policy differences with the prime minister whom she said had asked her to take

on a lesser post. A string of opinion polls over the last 18 months suggests the Liberals are going to be crushed at the next election by the official opposition Conservatives. In the 2021 election, the Liberals had won with 39% of the vote, just ahead of the Conservatives on 36%. Elections Canada said the Conservatives had taken 66% of Monday's vote in the constituency of Cloverdale-Langley City with the

Liberals in second on 16%. The election was held to fill a vacant seat. The defeat marked the third time in a row that the Liberals had lost a special election to the Conservatives. Angry Liberal legislators met Trudeau on Monday night, with some repeating calls for him to go. Trudeau aides declined to answer questions about what he might do next. Global News said Trudeau was not in a mindset to resign. — Reuters

Ukraine says detained agents working for Russia

UKRAINE'S SBU security service said on Tuesday it had uncovered a network of agents working for Russian military intelligence who tried to find where Ukraine hides Western-supplied F-16 fighter jets. The SBU said it "neutralised a large-scale agent network" of 12 agents and their informants, who "tried to identify the locations of secret military airfields where, according to the Russians, F-16 aircraft might be based."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Tuesday called for a "real, lasting peace" that Russia could not break and said he hoped for an end to the war next year. Zelensky spoke in a video address to the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) summit in Tallinn, which brought together representatives from 10 northern European countries this week. "We all understand that next year could be the year this war ends. We must make it happen," Zelensky said. "We need to establish peace in a way that (Russian President Vladimir) Putin can no longer break, a peace that's not just a pause, but a real, lasting peace," he added.

US president-elect Donald Trump has vowed to push for a quick deal to halt the fighting when he assumes office in January. That has sparked fears in Kyiv and Europe that Ukraine could be pushed to make concessions to Moscow. The members of the JEF summit also stressed the importance of a fair and lasting peace. "A comprehensive, just and lasting peace requires full and unconditional withdrawal of all Russian forces and military assets from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders," they said in a joint statement on Tuesday. Russia has used North Korean troops at the heart of an "intensive offensive" in its western Kursk region seeking to push out Ukrainian forces, Ukraine's commander-in-chief Oleksandr Syrsky said on Tuesday. Kyiv has been occupying part of the border region since August when it launched a shock cross-border incursion to seize Russian territory. "For three days in a row, the enemy has been conducting intensive offensive operations in the Kursk region, actively



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky (R) and Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk shake hands at the end of their press conference in Lviv on Tuesday. — AFP

using North Korean army units," Syrsky said in an address to local officials. Intelligence agencies in Ukraine, the United States and South Korea have all said Pyongyang has deployed around 10,000 troops to Russia to fight alongside its army. "North Korean mercenaries have already suffered heavy losses. The Ukrainian defenders are steadfastly holding the defence, destroying enemy personnel and equipment," Syrsky said, without providing further details. Ukraine said on Monday its forces had killed or wounded at least 30 North Korean troops in Kursk. At least 10,000 North Korean forces have been deployed to help the Russian army, according to western estimates. The reports of a fresh

Russian counter-offensive in Kursk come with Moscow's forces advancing in eastern Ukraine. Russia's army early on Tuesday claimed to have seized another small village in the eastern Donetsk region, around 10 kilometres south of the resource-rich hub of Kurakhove, which Moscow is also on the brink of capturing. Syrsky said the "most difficult situation" is currently around Kurakhove and the mining city of Pokrovsk -- two areas Russia is aiming to seize. He said the "operational and strategic situation remains difficult" across the 1,170-kilometre front line, a day after Russian President Vladimir Putin said Russia's troops had seized "the strategic initiative" across the front. — AFP

Red Cross loses contact with over 350 of its people in Mayotte

GENEVA: The French Red Cross said on Tuesday it was out of contact with most of its people in France's Indian Ocean territory Mayotte, days after Cyclone Chido ripped through the islands. Cyclone Chido barrelled into the archipelago at the weekend, leaving health services in tatters, power and mobile phone services knocked out and the airport closed to civilian flights, while there is mounting concern about how to ensure supplies of drinking water. The French Red Cross said it had 300 volunteers and 137 employees in Mayotte. "Since the cyclone, due to communication breakdowns and power cuts, (the French Red Cross) has been struggling to reach them. To date, it has been able to contact 70," a spokeswoman said. The fact that many were so far unaccounted for "does not mean at this stage that they are missing", she stressed, adding that efforts to reach the rest

were being stepped up. The Geneva-based International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which comprises the French Red Cross and 190 other national societies, had earlier warned that many Red Cross volunteers were missing. "We are talking about more than 200 volunteers already affected and... missing," IFRC spokesman Tommaso Della Longa said. "They don't have any contact with them." He said that "French Red Cross colleagues already deployed some teams and some humanitarian aid before the cyclone hit. "But then of course, being prepared for such a heavy impact is very complicated," he said, describing the logistics as "a nightmare". Della Longa warned that "even shelter is lacking at the moment, and then you need to organise distribution". "So this will take time, without mentioning the search and rescue



Rescue workers operate in storm-hit Mayotte, France.

operation and people that can still be under the rubble," he said. "The hope here is that humanitarian aid can enter as soon as possible,

but most importantly the search and rescue operation will find the largest number of people still alive." According to the latest official toll,

21 people are confirmed to have been killed by Cyclone Chido in Mayotte. Meanwhile, France said it will impose a nighttime curfew on the Indian Ocean island of Mayotte. French President Emmanuel Macron, who chaired a crisis meeting on Monday night, has described the situation as a "tragedy" and promised to visit Mayotte in the coming days. Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau, who on Monday visited the island, said that Mayotte has been "completely devastated", with 70 per cent of inhabitants affected. "The toll will be heavy, too heavy," Retailleau warned. He announced the arrival "in the coming days" of 400 additional gendarmes to reinforce the 1,600 gendarmes and police officers present on the archipelago, while specifying that there had "not really been any looting" so far. — AFP

OPINION

Why you should learn more about AI today?



**KHALID ALSAFI
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The writer is an innovator and an insights storyteller

ARTIFICIAL Intelligence (AI) is no longer a futuristic concept — it is already transforming our lives at a pace faster than we think. From virtual assistants like Siri and Alexa to personalised recommendations on Netflix and Spotify, AI is seamlessly woven into our daily routines. Globally, the AI applications market is growing at an unprecedented rate. According to Grand View Research, it is expected to surge from \$515 billion in 2023 to over \$1.8 trillion by 2030. In fact, a recent PwC report estimates that AI will contribute \$15.7 trillion to the global economy by 2030, further emphasising its rapid integration and impact. At its core, AI refers to machines designed to mimic human intelligence — analysing data, solving problems, and learning patterns. While current AI systems, known as “Narrow AI,” focus on specific tasks like language processing or facial recognition, rapid advancements in AI research are paving the way for Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) and, eventually, Artificial Super Intelligence (ASI). These developments may seem distant, but today’s breakthroughs demonstrate how close we are to fundamental shifts in the way we live and work.

AI is already revolutionising industries at a remarkable pace. In healthcare, AI systems can detect diseases like breast cancer with an accuracy that exceeds radiologists. In agriculture, AI-powered drones analyse crop health, while predictive algorithms optimise irrigation and fertiliser use.

As AI adoption accelerates, it inevitably transforms the job market. A World Economic Forum report highlights that AI and automation will create 97 million jobs globally by 2025 while displacing 85 million roles. Professor Kai-Fu Lee, in his influential book AI Superpowers, notes that jobs involving repetitive and routine tasks — such as assembly line work, bookkeeping, and even customer service — are particularly at risk. However, he emphasises that AI cannot replace human creativity, empathy, and leadership. The challenge lies in transitioning workers to higher-value roles that leverage uniquely human skills. For Oman, this technological transformation holds immense potential. The recent opening of the 4th Industrial Revolution-4IR Center, a partnership between the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) and the World Economic Forum (WEF), signals Oman’s commitment to leading in this AI-driven future, with the National Programme for AI and Advanced Technologies recently approved by the Council of Ministers and other initiatives.

This 4IR centre will foster innovation, accelerate AI adoption across industries, and empower the workforce with digital skills. Oman’s digital economy is a cornerstone of its economic diversification strategy, offering opportunities for local businesses to optimise logistics, improve energy management, and enhance tourism experiences through AI-powered tools. However, embracing AI also

By investing in upskilling and reskilling programmes, such as Makeen, particularly in AI-related fields like data science and machine learning, Oman can ensure its people are ready for emerging opportunities rather than displaced by automation

requires Oman to address its impact on the workforce. A recent Deloitte report estimates that up to 30 per cent of jobs worldwide will be impacted by AI and automation within the next decade. Oman’s ability to remain competitive hinges on preparing its workforce for this shift. By investing in upskilling and reskilling programmes, such as Makeen, particularly in AI-related fields like data science and machine learning, Oman can ensure its people are ready for emerging opportunities rather than displaced by automation. Despite its immense potential, AI presents challenges that must be managed carefully. The ethical use of AI is critical, as concerns about algorithmic biases, data privacy, and job displacement cannot be ignored. Balancing the rapid advancement of AI with policies that prioritise transparency, inclusivity, and trust will be essential for its sustainable adoption.

The pace of AI’s growth may seem overwhelming, but the opportunity it presents is too significant to ignore. Learning about AI today means preparing for a future where it will underpin economies, industries, and innovation. For Oman, the strategic investment in AI-driven solutions and digital upskilling ensures a path toward progress and resilience.

The question is not whether AI will impact our lives but whether we are ready to embrace and harness it. By acting now, we hold the power to build a smarter, more inclusive future — one where AI is not just a tool but a catalyst for human advancement.

Five years on from the pandemic, long Covid keeps lives on hold

JULIA ZAPPEI

Three years ago, Andrea Vanek was studying to be an arts and crafts teacher when spells of dizziness and heart palpitations suddenly started to make it impossible for her to even take short walks.

After seeing a succession of doctors she was diagnosed with long Covid and even now spends most of her days in the small living room of her third-floor Vienna apartment, sitting on the windowsill to observe the world outside.

The first cases of Covid-19 were detected in China in December 2019, sparking a global pandemic and more than seven million reported deaths to date, according to the World Health Organization. But millions more have been affected by long Covid, in which some people struggle to recover from the acute phase of Covid-19, suffering symptoms including tiredness, brain fog and shortness of breath. Vanek tries to be careful not to exert herself to avoid another “crash”, which for her is marked by debilitating muscle weakness and can last for months, making it hard to even open a bottle of water.

“We know that long Covid is a big problem,” said Anita Jain, from the WHO’s Health Emergencies Programme.

About six per cent of people infected by coronavirus develop long Covid, according to the global health body, which has recorded some 777 million Covid cases to date.

Whereas the rates of long Covid after an initial infection are declining, reinfection increases the risk, Jain added.

Chantal Britt, who lives in Bern, Switzerland, contracted Covid in March 2020. Long Covid, she said, has turned her “life upside down” and forced her to “reinvent” herself.

“I was really an early bird.... Now I take two hours to get up in the morning at least because everything hurts,” the 56-year-old former marathon runner explained.

About 15 per cent of those who have long Covid have persistent symptoms for more than one year, according to the WHO, while women tend to have a higher risk than men of developing the condition. A lack of understanding by those around her also make it more difficult.

“It’s an invisible disease.... which connects to all the stigma surrounding it,” she said.

“Even the people who are really severely affected, who are at home, in a dark room, who can’t be touched anymore, any noise will drive them into a crash, they don’t look sick,” she said.

The WHO’s Jain said it can be difficult for healthcare providers to give a diagnosis and wider recognition of the condition is crucial.

More than 200 symptoms have been listed alongside common ones such as fatigue, shortness of breath and cognitive dysfunction. — AFP

‘Now I can die in peace’

“NOW I CAN DIE IN PEACE,” declared the late French lawyer Gilles Duvere after the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel, and Yoav Galant, former Israeli Defence Minister, on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

For Duvere, this was a moment of triumph, a day he considered a “holiday” after years of tireless effort to hold the two figures accountable. The ICC’s landmark decision was announced on November 21, 2024, just five days before Duvere’s passing. A staunch advocate for human rights, Duvere dedicated his life to humanitarian causes, with the Palestinian issue at the forefront of his mission.

Even in the final days of his life, weakened by illness, Duvere remained resolute. Speaking to the media, including Al Jazeera, he hailed this legal milestone as a victory for justice. His unwavering commitment to the Palestinian cause made him a prominent voice in international courts and a steadfast defender of Palestinian rights.

While Arab nations often proclaim their commitment to the Palestinian cause, it was Duvere, a French lawyer, who first brought the issue to the ICC in 2009. He launched a legal campaign to secure international recognition for the State of Palestine, achieving a significant breakthrough in February 2021, when the ICC ruled that Palestine is a sovereign state with legal jurisdiction over the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. Driven by his belief in the justice of the Palestinian struggle, Duvere led a coalition of 350 non-governmental organisations and 40 lawyers who submitted a formal request for justice to the ICC on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. This effort focused on addressing war crimes committed during the Gaza War of 2008-2009.

Duvere’s dedication never wavered. In 2014, during Israel’s 51-day assault on Gaza, he filed a complaint against Israel over its extensive airstrikes, which numbered more than 60,000. This



ZAHIR
AL MAHROUQI

The writer is author of ‘The Road to Jerusalem’

Duvere’s legacy exemplifies the enduring impact of courage and principle. As a tireless advocate for oppressed peoples, particularly Palestinians, he left behind a legacy of struggle and justice. His achievements remind the world of the power of perseverance and moral conviction.



Gilles Duvere

legal action sparked global media attention and intensified pressure on the ICC. It ultimately contributed to Palestine’s accession to the Rome Statute in 2021, a key step toward establishing jurisdiction over Israeli war crimes. This accession later enabled the ICC’s decision to issue arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Galant.

Despite working on this case for over a decade, Duvere redoubled his efforts after the events of October 7, 2023, when new atrocities were committed against Palestinians. Within a month of the conflict, Duvere mobilised a coalition of human rights groups and over 500 lawyers from across the globe to bring fresh lawsuits before the ICC. In November 2023, he filed multiple cases against Israeli officials, accusing them of crimes against civilians.

What motivated Gilles Duvere to dedicate his life to the Palestinian cause, even as some Arabs distanced themselves from it? His profound sense of humanity. Duvere believed that standing with the Palestinian people was a moral obligation requiring courage and integrity. This belief resonated with countless individuals worldwide, turning the Palestinian keffiyeh into a symbol of freedom and Gaza into an emblem of resistance.

Duvere’s commitment to humanity was evident throughout his career. Beginning as a nurse, he later pursued law and became a lecturer at the University of Lyon 3. He edited the journal Law: Ethics and Care, authored several legal

publications, and actively engaged in issues related to healthcare, social justice, and international law — particularly those concerning Palestine. His advocacy extended beyond Palestine; as a Christian, he represented Islamic organisations in cases of racial discrimination and Islamophobia, including the Grand Mosque of Lyon, which faced baseless accusations from the US Department of Defense.

Though Gilles Duvere did not live to see Netanyahu or Galant arrested, he passed away with the satisfaction that his efforts had brought justice closer. His persistence, even in the face of countless setbacks, inspired his colleagues. Algerian lawyer Abdel Majid Merari, one of Duvere’s closest collaborators, described him as the “dynamo” of their legal team, praising his relentless pursuit of evidence and coordination despite his declining health.

Duvere’s legacy exemplifies the enduring impact of courage and principle. As a tireless advocate for oppressed peoples, particularly Palestinians, he left behind a legacy of struggle and justice. His achievements remind the world of the power of perseverance and moral conviction. As he once said, “The absence of water, food, medical care, and electricity, combined with the forced transfer of populations and dehumanising rhetoric, constitutes the very definition of genocide.”

In his final moments, even as he faced a life-threatening operation, Duvere’s focus remained on the Palestinian cause, discussing the plight of the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in East Jerusalem.

Gilles Duvere’s legacy raises a vital question: Who is the real “human”? Is it the one who defends the oppressed, transcending differences in religion and belief, or the hypocrite who prioritises trivial matters over the lives and rights of the innocent? Duvere’s life and work stand as a powerful testament to humanity’s highest ideals.

Translated by Badr al Dhafari. The original version of this article was published in Oman Arabic newspaper on December 16, 2024.

Why I feel time is moving faster than usual?



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TIME is passing much faster than I ever realised that it would. This year specifically, I feel it passed so quickly, like it was never there. This feeling of “time flies” has its impacts in more ways than we realise. It is really creeping many of us out.

The feeling that time is moving faster today than in the past is a common sentiment. This acceleration of time is almost imperceptible each year. Looking back two years ago does not feel like four years, but like a bunch of memories that seems like a year at most.

Time advances every moment we live. When we were teenagers, time seemed never-ending, and as we grew into youths, we found that even half an hour looked like an age.

When we ask why time moves so fast, we should also know what the time is. My pursuit for the ‘time concept’ reached me at Alan Burdick’s Why Time Flies. The book takes the readers through an exciting journey in time – from the smallest measure to the largest. From the history of how time is has been measured at the planetary and atomic levels, the award-winning book also opens up a well of fascinating queries like, “Are we born into time, or is time born into us, or does time tick

faster as you grow older?” Though the book is not an easy read, and is mostly serious and scientific, Burdick’s research helps us as it takes us to the International Bureau of Weights and Measures in Paris, the place where time is set.

Time is an earth-based thing, though early humans didn’t have the same sense of “time” that we have now. “Time is an intangible thing that could be viewed from the past, the present and the future. The past resides in memories, the now immediately transitions into the past, and the future relies on imagination,” it reveals.

Time flies, but mostly when you’re not really looking at it. Days and nights seem to be shorter, and our watch goes faster than it used to. Birthdays, anniversaries and holidays all seem like they are racking up quickly. “It feels like Christmas was both yesterday and a million miles ago. That’s all in your head. Time is set because we implicitly agree on it,” Burdick explains.

Ask any elderly person, he or she will tell you that time moved so fast. At the same time, it makes you wonder why this should be so, given the fact that you always find them sitting in the same chair all day long.

Feeling like time is moving too fast is a common experience, especially in our busy lives. None of us knows how much time we have, but, interestingly, we do actually have a lot of control over how we experience that time

For myself, I can say that life has passed at just about the speed necessary. It’s been two years since I retired. The days are going by very fast. I get up, do a few things, and suddenly it is evening.

My career as a working journalist spanned nearly four decades. When I finally retired, I was ready for the new phase. While maintaining my regular habit of reading and writing, I explored new ways to pass my time, which landed me in farming.

As a grandfather, I try spending time with my two grandkids. I love to see the two little angels coming home and spending time with them. It’s a great pleasure, as I missed a lot of this during the period of my employment.

As you grow older, all the seasons may come and go faster. This happens as a matter of the time that you have lived regardless of everything else. None of us knows how much time we have, but, interestingly, we do actually have a lot of control over how we experience that time.

Despite all this, let me still say, time does not pass either quickly or slowly. It simply passes, as it always has. It is not out to get you. It is your perception of time that needs to change, if you are not happy with it.

how mexico is trying to avoid a migrant crisis under trump

SOFIA MISELEM AND
HERIKA MARTINEZ

Mexico is scrambling to prevent a crisis at its border with the US ahead of another Donald Trump presidency during which he has vowed mass deportations.

US authorities estimate that there are around 11 million unauthorised people living in the US, mostly from Mexico and Central America.

Trump, who takes office on January 20, threatened last month to impose steep 25-per cent tariffs on imports from Mexico over the influx of migrants as well as drug trafficking.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum is trying to appease Trump by preventing migrants reaching the border between the two countries.

She spoke with Trump on November 27 and said she had explained that under her government’s strategy, migrant caravans were “attended to” before reaching the border.

Several migrant caravans that left southern Mexico for the US border since November have dispersed, in most cases after receiving permits to stay in the country.

Mexico is applying a policy of “containment and wearing (migrants) down,” Stephanie Brewer, Mexico director of WOLA, a US-based organisation that promotes rights in the Americas, said.

Since Sheinbaum took office on October 1, Mexican authorities have intercepted nearly 5,400 undocumented migrants a day.

That is up from 3,400 at the end of the term of her predecessor, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, official figures from December 3 showed.

During Trump’s first term, Lopez Obrador deployed thousands of border guards to block Central American migrants, pleasing the Republican.

A rush to the border by migrants trying to enter the US before the start of Trump’s second term predicted by some activists has failed to materialise.

Hostels in the Mexican frontier city of Ciudad Juarez have been half-empty for months, reflecting tougher immigration policies introduced by outgoing US President Joe Biden.

Migrants are now supposed to schedule an appointment at an official port of entry.

The number of US border patrol encounters with migrants crossing over from Mexico illegally fell to around 54,000 in September, from a peak of nearly 250,000 in December 2024, according to the US government.

Juan Fierro, director of the El Buen Samaritano (The Good Samaritan) hostel in Ciudad Juarez, said that he had received no new migrants in three months because, he believes, they are being detained in Mexico and returned to the country’s south.

In another plank of her strategy, Sheinbaum sent Foreign Minister Juan Ramon de la Fuente to the United States this month to discuss defending the rights of Mexicans – including an estimated six million undocumented migrants living there.

“I am here to send a very clear message to the entire community of Mexicans in the United States: you are not alone,” he said. — AFP

Disability inclusion via social media, advocacy

AS we mark Disability Awareness Month this December, it is essential to reflect on the ongoing efforts to improve the lives of individuals with disabilities globally. This month serves as a reminder of the need for awareness, empowerment and active participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of society.

In my recent research on the digital experiences of Omanis with disabilities, I have sought to contribute to this conversation by highlighting how these individuals advocate for their rights, raise awareness and foster inclusion online. Through my writing, I aim to integrate Omanis with disabilities into the international discourse on disability, social media and activism.

A key finding of my research is that social media, particularly X, has become an invaluable tool for people with disabilities in Oman. It provides a platform to challenge stereotypes, demand rights and connect with others. People with disabilities in Oman use social media to share their personal stories, raise awareness about accessibility issues and celebrate their achievements. One prominent example is Shaikha al Jassasi, a leading social media influencer in Oman, whose posts about her travels and public speaking engagements demonstrate that disability is not a barrier to success.

Omanis with disabilities also use X to participate in national events, such as sharing photos on the viral #Omani_Eid_Snapshot, which highlights their involvement in cultural life. This online participation challenges the dominant narrative of disability as something that separates people from society. It shows that individuals with disabilities are active contributors to their communities.

However, academic research also highlights some of the challenges of social media for individuals with disabilities. The pressure to present a “perfect” image online can be overwhelming, leading to unrealistic expectations and potential negative impacts on mental health. This issue, while not unique to people with disabilities, can be particularly taxing for



There is an opportunity for constructive dialogue that could help frame their messages in a way that better aligns with the real, everyday needs of people with disabilities.



DR NAJMA
AL ZIDJALY

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

them, as they are often seen as representatives of the entire disability community.

My research highlights another conundrum: The contrast between the way disability is represented by Omanis with disabilities themselves and the portrayal of disability in posts by the Ministry of Social Development is stark. Some of the ministry’s posts and actions, while well-intentioned and aimed at promoting inclusion, may inadvertently either construct Omanis with disabilities as agentless in need of support or fail to fully address the accessibility needs of the community. For example, initiatives like educational symposiums are often presented as a primary way to engage people with disabilities, but they may overlook the importance of basic accessibility infrastructure, such as ramps or parking spaces.

As a result, people with disabilities sometimes feel that these efforts, while symbolic, fall short of making a tangible difference in their daily lives.

Notwithstanding the shortcomings, I believe there is an opportunity for constructive

dialogue that could help frame their messages in a way that better aligns with the real, everyday needs of people with disabilities. By ensuring that accessibility is prioritised alongside awareness-raising efforts, the ministry could help to bridge the gap between public initiatives and the lived realities of the disability community. The ministry could also reframe their posts about the disability community more agentively by not portraying them as helpless but rather as capable of making their own dreams come true. This could lead to more meaningful, inclusive actions that move beyond symbolic gestures to create lasting, positive change.

Ultimately, my academic work is driven by the belief that disability is an aspect of human diversity that should be recognised and celebrated. By making the voices of Omanis with disabilities part of the international dialogue on disability, I hope to contribute to a more inclusive world. Through writing and research, I aim to ensure that people with disabilities are seen and heard, both online and offline to make inclusion a reality, not a mere fleeting dream.

SPORTS

LOGOUNVEILING



Oman will host the 41st Gulf Club Handball Championship from February 15 to 24, 2025.

DRAW OF 41ST GULF CLUB HANDBALL IN MUSCAT TODAY

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 17

Muscat city will host the draw for the 41st Gulf Club Handball Championship which will take place on Wednesday as Oman Club is gearing up to host the championship from February 15 to 24, 2025.

The draw ceremony will be held under the auspices of Shaikh Sultan bin Hamid al Hosni, Member of the Majlis Ash'shura representing the Wilayat of Al Khabourah and former Chairman of Gulf Handball Organising Committee. The draw ceremony will be attended by Moosa bin Khamis al Balushi, Chairman of Oman Handball Association (OHA), besides members of the Board of Directors, Jihad bin Abdullah al Shaikh, Vice-Chairman of Oman Club and



SHAIKH SULTAN
BIN HAMID AL
HOSNI

Head of the Organising Committee as well as members of Oman Club's Board of Directors and representatives of the participating Gulf clubs.

The agenda of the draw function will include a speech from the organising committee, the unveiling of the championship logo and an explanation of the draw procedures.

A total of eight teams will participate in the championship including Oman Club and Seeb Club from the Sultanate of Oman, Al Noor Club (Saudi Arabia), Al Rayyan (title holders) and Al Arabi Club from Qatar, Kuwait SC (Kuwait), Dibba Al Huson Club (UAE) and Al Najma Club (Bahrain).

The teams will be divided into two groups with matches to be played in a single round-robin format. The top two teams from each group will advance to the semifinal stage.

Oman post close win over Yemen ahead of Gulf Cup

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 17

THE Oman national football team edged Yemen 1-0 in the friendly match on Monday night as part of the team's domestic preparatory camp in Muscat ahead of the 26th Arabian Gulf Cup which is scheduled to take place in Kuwait from Saturday to January 3. The only goal in the match was netted by Ali al Busaidy in the 68th minute from a free kick. Oman head coach Rasheed Jaber began the match with a starting line-up that comprised of Fayez al Rushaidi as goalkeeper besides Ahmed al Kaabi, Mulhem al Sunaidy, Mohammed al Musallami, Harib al Saadi, Hussain al Shahri, Zahir al Aghbari, Abdullah Fawaz, Thani al Rushaidi, Issam al Subhi and Ahed al Musheikhi.

The warm-up game was the final test for the Red Warriors ahead of their assignment in the Gulf Cup where the coaching staff fine-tune their squad and finalise their tactical setup before the Gulf Cup. The coaching staff made multiple substitutions during the game to evaluate player readiness bringing on Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Ali al Busaidy, Al Munthir al Alawi, Abdulsalam al Shukaili, Khalid al Buraiki, Amjad al Harthy and Ghanim al Habshi.

Oman began the first half with a controlled performance as the first significant opportunity came in the 10th minute when Hussain al Shahri delivered a cross to Issam al Subhi whose attempt was blocked by Yemen's goalkeeper Mohammed Adnan.

Oman continued to dominate possession and in the 20th minute, Issam al Subhi broke through the defence and set up Mulham al Sunaidy but his shot was comfortably saved. Oman's closest chance in the first half came just before the break when Harib al Saadi struck a direct free kick that hit the right post.

In the second half, Yemen responded strongly with a powerful strike from Abdulwasea al Matari in the 58th minute but Oman goalkeeper Ibrahim Al Mukhaini made a crucial save. Ten minutes later, Ali al Busaidy broke the deadlock with a well-placed free kick into the net, giving Oman the lead.

Despite attempts from both sides to score neither team could find the target again and Oman held on to secure the 1-0 victory.

On the other hand, Oman team will depart for Kuwait on Wednesday with



Oman team players pose before the start of friendly against Yemen at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.



the delegation to be headed by OFA Vice-Chairman Mohsin al Masroori. Oman have been drawn into Group A alongside hosts Kuwait, Qatar and UAE. Group B comprised defending champions Iraq,



Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Yemen. The Red Warriors will begin their campaign against Kuwait on December 21 followed by matches against Qatar on December 24 and the UAE on December 27.

Oman edge Bahrain in thrilling two-run victory in Gulf Cup T20

MUSCAT: Oman staged a nail-biting two-run win against Bahrain in their crucial group stage encounter of the Gulf Cup T20 Championship on Tuesday at the ICC Academy ground in Dubai, keeping their title defence alive. It was Duleep Mendis-coached side's second victory after their loss to the hosts UAE in the previous game. Oman had begun their title defence with a win over Qatar in the six-nation tournament.

The win meant that Oman stayed in the hunt for a final spot, now sitting third in the standings, level on points with Kuwait and Bahrain, all with 4 points. Kuwait hold the advantage with a superior net run rate (NRR) of 0.601, while Oman follow with 0.217, and Bahrain is just behind with 0.178. UAE, with 6 points from three matches, lead the group. On Tuesday, Oman, out to bat,



Mohammed Nadeem plays a shot.

set a modest total of 130/8 in their 20 overs. Mohammad Nadeem top-scored with a resilient 47 off 49 balls, helping Oman recover from early setbacks. A key fifth wicket partnership of 50 runs between Nadeem and



Shakeel Ahmed in action.

Vinayak Shukla (33 off 24 balls) kept the momentum going after Oman were reduced to 52/4 in ninth over. Shukla's quick 33 and Sufyan Mehmood's 11, helped Oman a 130 with Wasim Ali chipping in with 10. Bahrain's bowlers kept the

pressure on, with Imran Khan (2/19), Imran Anwar (2/29) and Rizwan Butt (2/23) being the most successful. Abdul Majid took one, as they restricted Oman to a modest total. Chasing 131, Bahrain faced early setbacks as Oman's bowlers, led by Mehran Khan and Mohammad Nadeem, struck early blows, leaving them 46/2 in eight overs. Prashant Kurup (5) was dismissed by Khan, and Sarfaraz Ali (11) followed shortly after. Asif Ali, however, countered with a brilliant 52 off 44 balls, supported by Ahmer Bin Nasir (25). Aamir Kaleem's crucial wicket of Asif Ali and Samay Shrivastav's two key strikes, including Haider Ali (16) and Ahmer Bin Nasir, swung the game in Oman's favour. Bahrain's collapse continued, with Shakeel Ahmed dismissing both Imran Anwar (0) and Sai

Sarthak (2), leaving Bahrain struggling at 113/7. Bahrain needed 14 to win in the final over against Shakeel and stole nine off 4 balls including a six by Rizwan Butt but a runout off the penultimate ball of Junaid Aziz meant Bahrain required five to win off the last ball and they could score only 2 as Bahrain fell short, finishing at 128/8 in 20 overs. Oman now gear up for their next challenge against Saudi Arabia on Wednesday before their crucial match against Kuwait on December 20. The top-two teams in the league format will vie for the title the next day. BRIEF SCORES: Oman 130/8 (Mohammed Nadeem 47, Vinayak Shukla 33; Imran Khan 2/19, Imran Anwar 2/29, Rizwan Butt 2/23) beat Bahrain 128/8 (Asif Ali 52, Ahmed Bin Nasir 25; Shakeel Ahmed 2/20, Samay Shrivastav 2/25).

SPORTS

STARACTS

LOOKMAN, BANDA NAMED AFRICAN PLAYERS OF YEAR



Nigeria forward Ademola Lookman was named 2024 African men's player of the year, while Zambia's Barbra Banda picked up the women's award. —Reuters



Cameroon and the winner in a 1-0 quarterfinals win over Angola.

A few months after the Afcon, the London-born attacker scored a hat-trick as Atalanta overcame Bayer Leverkusen 3-0 in the Europa League final in Dublin.

"This is something incredible. To the youth of Africa I say — never give up. Turn pain to power," Lookman said after receiving the award.

The runners-up included South African Ronwen Williams, who won the best goalkeeper and best club player awards.

Instead of the traditional three nominees for the best player award, there were five given the closeness of the voting among the coaches and captains of African national teams.

The other runners-up were Morocco full-back Achraf Hakimi, Ivory Coast winger Simon Adingra and Guinea forward Serhou Guirassy.

BANDA BEST WOMAN

Zambia forward Banda won the women's player of the year award in recognition of her many goals for American club Orlando Pride and her country.

Banda scored four goals for Zambia at the 2024 Paris Olympics, including a hat-trick in a group-stage loss to Australia.

Her 13 regular season goals and four in play-offs helped Orlando Pride win the National Women's Soccer League for the first time.

The runners-up were Morocco forward Sanaa Mssoudy and Nigeria goalkeeper Chiamaka Nnadozie, who were both winners in other categories. — AFP

MARRAKESH, Morocco: Nigeria forward Ademola Lookman was named 2024 African men's player of the year at a ceremony in Marrakesh on Monday, while Zambia's Barbra Banda picked up the women's award.

Lookman succeeds compatriot Victor Osimhen, who last year became the first Nigerian winner since Nwankwo Kanu in 1999.

The 27-year-old owes his achievement to consistently excellent performances both for Nigeria and current Serie A leaders Atalanta.

His three goals helped Nigeria reach the 2024 Africa Cup of Nations final, where they led hosts the Ivory Coast before losing 2-1 in Abidjan.



Australia's Pat Cummins celebrates after taking a wicket with teammates on the fourth day of third Test against India at the Brisbane Cricket Ground. — Reuters

India avoid follow-on as third Test heads for draw

INDIA'S Jasprit Bumrah and Akash Deep pulled off an unlikely 10th-wicket partnership on Tuesday to avoid the follow-on and put the third Test against Australia in Brisbane on course for a draw.

When the pair came together the tourists still needed 33 runs to make Australia bat again at the Gabba on another day marred by rain delays.

But under gloomy skies, the two managed to see off Australia's much-vaunted pace attack to frustrate the home side on day four.

Deep scored the crucial runs with an edge to the boundary just past the outstretched hand of Nathan McSweeney off Australian captain Pat Cummins.

He celebrated two balls later by smashing Cummins over deep mid-wicket for a massive six before umpires took them from the field for bad light with India 252-9, trailing by 193 runs. The five-match series is currently locked 1-1.

Opener KL Rahul, who top-scored with 84, said the batting of the lower order showed how much fight this India team has.

Deep was not-out 27 and Bumrah was on 10. "The lower order scoring runs is something that we discuss in our meetings," Rahul said.

"The bowlers work really hard on their batting as well so it's good to see them get that partnership.

"To avoid that follow-on makes a huge difference."



India's Akash Deep hits six on fourth day of third Test at Brisbane Cricket Ground. — Reuters

DESPERATION

Missing pace spearhead Josh Hazlewood, who was only able to bowl one over on Tuesday after picking up a match-ending calf injury, Cummins (4-80) and Mitchell Starc (3-83) toiled hard to eke out wickets.

After losing almost all of Saturday and Monday due to rain, play was halted three more times on Tuesday.

During that time India were able to edge closer to the follow-on target despite losing wickets at crucial times.

But Deep and Bumrah battled hard and put on 39 runs under dark skies and in light

rain. "I think the only way to force the game was to enforce the follow-on," Australia's bowling coach Daniel Vettori said. "There was a desperation to get that final wicket."

Resuming the morning at 51-4, Rahul and India captain Rohit Sharma saw out the first half-hour and took the score to 74 before Rohit edged a Cummins delivery that moved slightly off the seam to wicketkeeper Alex Carey.

Rahul took advantage of Smith's first-ball lapse and brought up an impressive half-century with a lovely cover drive, shortly before a shower sent the players scurrying from the field for 25 minutes.

He added 51 runs to his overnight total before Smith made amends with a stunning catch to dismiss Rahul, diving to his right and taking a one-handed catch at first slip 20 minutes before lunch.

Nitish Kumar Reddy and Ravindra Jadeja put on 53 and looked increasingly comfortable. But just when it looked like the pair would take the score to the 246 needed to avoid the follow-on, Cummins broke through when Reddy played on for 16, leaving Jadeja with only the bowlers to try to avoid the follow-on.

Rain forced an early tea and after the break Jadeja began to take control, farming the strike and moving to 77 before he holed out to Mitchell Marsh at deep square leg.

Bumrah and Deep then came together for their memorable partnership. — AFP

New Zealand crush England to send Southee out on a high

HAMILTON, New Zealand: New Zealand tore through England's batting on Tuesday to crush the visitors by 423 runs in the third Test and send Tim Southee into retirement on a triumphant note.

It was New Zealand's equal-highest victory by runs and a complete reversal from the first two Tests, which England won easily to clinch the three-match series.

The hosts sealed a dominant performance in Hamilton by claiming seven wickets in 41.2 overs on day four as England crumbled for 234.

Playing on his home ground at Seddon Park, seamer Southee finished with 2-34 in his 107th and final Test, ending the career of one of New Zealand's finest players.



New Zealand's Tim Southee gestures to the crowd as he leaves the field in his final Test after victory during day four of the third Test against England in Hamilton. — AFP

He finishes with 391 Test wickets, second only to Richard Hadlee among New Zealanders.

"I want to thank New Zealand Cricket for everything you have done. My family, who are there for the ride and see the ups and downs," said the 36-year-old. "And my teammates — these guys have made the ride so much more enjoyable, I have loved every minute.

"And finally the fans. It is always great to turn out in front of numbers. This week has been pretty special to play at Seddon Park in front of a great crowd."

New Zealand only needed to take nine second-innings wickets for an emphatic victory because England skipper Ben Stokes did not bat.

Stokes suffered a hamstring

injury on Monday and limped off in distress, having torn the hamstring in the same left leg just a few months ago.

The scale of the latest injury has not been revealed but that, and the way England capitulated in Hamilton, ended their series on a sour note.

Stokes said England were "completely outplayed".

"The first two games of the series, our skill completely outdid New Zealand's skill. This game was basically a flip around of that," said Stokes.

"It's severely disappointing as a team because we obviously want to win every game we go out and play.

"We're just disappointed that we were nowhere near our best." — AFP

SPORTS

Seeb, Sohar and Al Salam shine in OVL

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 17

SEEB Club began their journey in the new Oman Volleyball League (OVL) season with a deserved 3-0 victory over Al Shabab Club in a match held at Al Amal Club's court.

The first set saw complete control from Seeb, as their players imposed their rhythm early on with strong performances, ending the set 25-14. In the second set, Seeb continued their dominance, capitalising on Al Shabab's defensive errors to secure an identical 25-14 result. The third set was more competitive, with Al Shabab attempting to rally back into the match. However, Seeb's experience proved decisive, concluding the set 25-23 and earning Seeb their first three points in the league.

SOHAR BLANK SAHAM

In another match held at Sohar Club's court, Sohar Club claimed a 3-0 win over Saham Club, showcasing strong teamwork and high levels of coordination.

Sohar dominated the first set, leveraging excellent serving and attacking performances to win 25-18. They maintained their superiority in the second set with organised defence and quick ball delivery, ending the set 25-16. The third set was more competitive as Saham fought to close the gap, displaying



Al Salam and Majees players in action during the Oman Volleyball League match.

a high fighting spirit. However, it wasn't enough to prevent Sohar from sealing the set 25-22 and securing the three points.

AL SALAM EDGE MAJEES

Meanwhile, Al Salam Club achieved a hard-fought 3-2 victory over Majees Club in a thrilling

match held on Monday at Sohar Sports Complex.

Majees started strong in the first set, excelling in both defence

and attack to win 25-20. Al Salam bounced back in the second set, relying on powerful serves and quick attacks to win 25-19. In the third set, Majees regained momentum, taking advantage of Al Salam's defensive positioning errors to clinch the set 25-23. Al Salam responded strongly in the fourth set, imposing complete control and winning 25-18 to force a decisive fifth set.

The final set was filled with excitement until the last moments, with both teams exchanging points evenly. However, Al Salam managed to edge out Majees with a narrow 17-15 victory, securing a well-deserved win in one of the most intense matches of the preliminary round.

AL BASHAYER FIGHT BACK

In the same round, Al Bashayer Club defeated Masirah Club 3-1 at Al Amal Club's court.

Masirah started the match strongly, winning the first set 25-22 with a balanced performance. However, Al Bashayer regained control in the subsequent sets, implementing a fast and organised style of play to win three consecutive sets 25-19, 25-17, and 25-17.

The Oman Volleyball League this season includes a total of 56 matches. The participating clubs will compete in 28 first-round matches, after which the top five teams will advance to a two-phase league comprising 20 additional matches.

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FOOD SECURITY



State-owned Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) is overseeing the implementation of the project.

OMAN UNVEILS \$12 MILLION TUNA FARMING PROJECT

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, DEC 17

OMAN has unveiled a tuna fattening project using floating cages, an initiative designed to enhance food security and drive economic diversification. Located in Qurayat, the project underscores Oman's strategic efforts to leverage its maritime resources while aligning with global sustainability standards.

With an investment of \$12.22 million and a promising Internal Rate of Return (IRR) of 17.3 per cent, the project aims to meet the growing international demand for high-quality seafood. Utilising 10 grow-out nets, the innovative aquaculture model ensures optimal conditions for tuna production, positioning Oman as a competitive player in the global fisheries market.

Oman's fish and seafood sector is forecast to reach \$473.7 million in value by 2024, supported by a strong Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 5.32 per cent between 2024 and 2029. These figures highlight the sector's potential to become a vital driver of economic growth and a cornerstone of the country's non-oil revenue diversification strategy.

The project is being led by Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) in partnership with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the Oman Investment Authority.

By combining innovation with sustainable practices, the initiative is expected to create new employment opportunities, strengthen local industries and bolster Oman's reputation as a leading player in sustainable aquaculture.

Oman wellheads facility to boost ICV in oilfield sector

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 17

A MAJOR oil and gas development project aimed at enhancing wellhead production is set to boost Oman's oil and gas sector, as well as drive sustainability and In-Country Value (ICV). Desert Sand Oil & Gas, a 100% Omani service provider, has partnered with JMP Petroleum Technologies, Inc to launch the Oman Wellheads Manufacturing Facility, backed by a \$45-million investment aimed at strengthening Oman's oil and gas infrastructure.

The partnership will establish a state-of-the-art facility producing up to 300 wellheads annually, driving technological advancement, job creation and sustainability in the sector.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP FOR GROWTH
The collaboration combines Desert Sand Oil & Gas's operational expertise with JMP Petroleum's advanced wellhead technology. The project will address the growing demand for efficient oil and gas extraction solutions in the region.

In an interview with the *Observer*, Khalid al Junaibi, CEO of Desert Sand Oil & Gas, emphasised the strategic alignment between the two companies. "Our partnership with JMP Petroleum brings cutting-edge wellhead solutions that optimise resource extraction while reducing operational costs," he stated. "By leveraging our shared expertise, we aim to enhance Oman's oilfield performance while fostering local talent and technological development."

INVESTMENT BREAKDOWN
The \$45-million investment will be allocated across multiple areas critical to the project's success. A significant portion will fund research and development to ensure wellhead designs meet local environmental and operational conditions. Infrastructure



The project will address the growing demand for efficient oil and gas extraction solutions in the region.

upgrades, including manufacturing facilities and wellhead installation systems, will also be prioritised.

Additionally, the investment will support sustainability measures such as reducing emissions and water usage through innovative technologies. A portion of the budget will cover operational costs, including logistics, maintenance and workforce training programmes.

"Our investment strategy is designed to ensure long-term success by balancing technological innovation with sustainability," Al Junaibi explained.

ENHANCING IN-COUNTRY VALUE (ICV)
Boosting in-country value is a core objective of the Oman Wellheads manufacturing facility. Local procurement, workforce development and partnerships with Omani businesses are key focus areas. Desert Sand Oil & Gas aims to source materials and services from local suppliers, strengthening the domestic economy while reducing import dependency.

"We are committed to training Omani professionals, fostering local expertise and

supporting businesses through partnerships and procurement," Al Junaibi added. "By building a skilled workforce and creating sustainable job opportunities, we can ensure long-term economic impact."

The company will also collaborate with educational institutions and technical training centres to transfer knowledge and technical skills to local engineers and technicians, ensuring the sustainability of operations

SUSTAINABILITY GOALS
The integration of clean energy technologies is central to the project's sustainability plan. Desert Sand Oil & Gas intends to adopt renewable energy sources to reduce its carbon footprint while complying with international environmental standards.

"By adopting cleaner energy solutions, we aim to reduce our carbon emissions while meeting future energy demands," Al Junaibi explained.

"This positions us as a forward-thinking company committed to sustainable development."

Pricing IPOs requires balancing key factors for success: Expert

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, DEC 17

THE Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) has recently witnessed a wave of new listings, sparking discussions around pricing strategies and the fairness of initial public offering (IPO) prices.

Speaking to the *Observer*, an economic expert specialising in financial markets outlined the key factors that influence IPO pricing, emphasising the importance of balancing investor appeal with the fair valuation of companies and the broader economy.

IPO Pricing: How is it determined?
The expert identified three critical elements that play a central role in determining IPO pricing.

Market Yield Averages and Comparison with Peers: One of the most significant factors in attracting investors is the expected



Long-term strategies are necessary to boost daily market liquidity and attract a more diverse pool of investors, both local and international.

return on investment. The expert explained that IPO prices must be competitive, offering better yields compared to dividend returns and growth rates of similar companies, both in the domestic market and in neighbouring markets.

"For instance," he noted, "when companies like Abraj Energy Services in Muscat or ADNOC Drilling in Abu Dhabi went public, ensuring attractive expected yields was crucial in determining their pricing and attracting investors."

Market Conditions and Economic Outlook: The overall economic climate heavily influences IPO pricing.

The expert stressed that timing is critical:

- In periods of economic growth and stability: Investor sentiment is typically more optimistic, allowing companies to price their IPOs closer to or above their fair value.
- In times of economic downturn or uncertainty: Pricing needs to be adjusted downwards to compensate for increased risk and to draw in cautious investors.

"When investor sentiment leans towards caution," he added, "high

IPO pricing can lead to failure. Flexibility and alignment with prevailing conditions are therefore essential."

Offering Size Relative to Market Liquidity and Depth: The success of large IPOs depends significantly on the market's capacity to absorb them.

"A company with a listing size of \$2 billion cannot succeed in a market where daily trading averages are as low as \$8 million," the expert explained. "In such cases, extraordinary measures are required to stabilise supply and demand."

He further noted that some countries inject liquidity into their markets or provide direct government support during major listings to bolster stability and project the resilience of their economies.

The expert highlighted the importance of establishing

a regulatory and strategic framework for IPOs to ensure their success. Drawing on international examples, he pointed to several measures that could be implemented in the MSX.

The Financial Regulatory Authority, he noted, should consider introducing conditions tailored to the size and type of the IPO, with sufficient flexibility to align offerings with market conditions.

He also underscored the need for a comprehensive divestment strategy, including appointing an official to oversee IPO processes.

Successful listings, he argued, require seamless coordination between all stakeholders to serve the national economy effectively.

Likewise, he stressed the importance of adopting long-term strategies to boost daily market liquidity and attract a more diverse pool of investors, both local and international.

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NEW INDIA ASSURANCE LAUNCHES CUSTOMER CARE CENTRE IN OMAN

MUSCAT: In a landmark move to enhance customer service and engagement, New India Assurance, Oman Operations, inaugurated its state-of-the-art Customer Care Centre. The launch ceremony was held at The New India Assurance Co Ltd, Head Office, Al Hamriyah, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman and was honoured by the presence of Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to Oman, as the Chief Guest.

The Customer Care Centre is part of New India Assurance's vision to streamline customer interaction by providing efficient, round-the-clock service. Equipped with advanced technology and a skilled team, the centre is ready to meet the diverse needs of its clients.

The Call Centre will be managed 100% by Omani staff fluent in Arabic, English and Hindi, ensuring that customers from diverse backgrounds feel comfortable and confident in their interactions. This initiative not only supports Omanisation but also reflects New India Assurance's commitment to fostering local talent and providing exceptional service.

Majid bin Abdulrahim bin Jaafer al Bahrani, Chairman of Abdul Aziz and Brother's LLC, Chief Agents for New India Assurance, was unable to attend the event due to prior commitments. However, his unwavering support and leadership have been instrumental in making this initiative a reality.

Speaking ahead of the launch, Majid al Bahrani remarked, "This Customer Care Centre is a testament to the strong relationship between New India Assurance and its clients in Oman. We are committed to ensuring the best service experience for all policyholders."

The new Customer Care Centre is designed to offer convenience and accessibility: Direct Call Line: Clients can now reach the centre at +968 2483 8800 for assistance with their policies, claims, or any queries. WhatsApp Support: For quick and simple queries, customers can send a message via WhatsApp to the same number, +968 2483 8800.



MEETHAQ ISLAMIC BANKING HONoured WITH LEADERSHIP AWARD

MUSCAT: Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat, has been honoured with the esteemed Global Islamic Finance Award (GIFA) for Market Leadership.

This prestigious recognition highlights Meethaq's unwavering commitment to advancing the Islamic Banking landscape in the Sultanate of Oman. The accolade underscores Meethaq's dedication to providing top-tier Sharia-compliant services and innovative solutions tailored to



the diverse needs of individual and institutional customers. Since its inception, Meethaq has remained steadfast in its mission to excel consistently delivering financial

solutions that align with evolving customer requirements. Speaking on the recognition, Ali bin Ahmed al Lawati, Assistant General Manager, Meethaq Corporate Banking, expressed his delight, stating: "We are immensely honoured to receive this prestigious award, which reflects Meethaq's enduring journey of accomplishments and successes. We extend our gratitude to the GIFA team for recognising Meethaq's leadership in the Islamic banking sector."

Festival of joy benefits with Toyota Corolla

OWN a Toyota Corolla now and enjoy exclusive Festival of Joy benefits. Get service 5 years / 50,000 kms (whichever is earlier), insurance 1 year and chance to win 1 out of 16 units of iPhone 16 Pro Max.

The campaign is valid up to January 23, 2025 (Terms & Conditions apply. Customers can visit any Saud Bahwan Automotive showroom for exact details.)

The Toyota Corolla continues to set the gold standard in the automotive world, effortlessly blending elegant design, advanced technology and a beautifully crafted interior. Since its debut, the Corolla has become an icon synonymous with reliability, versatility and pure driving satisfaction.

From its sleek, dynamic exterior to its sophisticated, well-appointed cabin, the Corolla exemplifies the perfect harmony of style, spaciousness, comfort, fuel efficiency and power.

The Corolla offers two impressive engine options designed to thrill and perform. The 2.0-litre Dynamic Force engine packs a powerful 168 horsepower and 20.39 kg-m of torque, paired with a Direct Shift CVT transmission, delivering a more immersive and engaging driving experience. For those seeking an

The Toyota Corolla continues to set the gold standard in the automotive world, effortlessly blending elegant design, advanced technology and a beautifully crafted interior



The Corolla offers two impressive engine options designed to thrill and perform.

exceptional balance of power and fuel economy, the 1.6-litre four-cylinder engine option generates 121 horsepower and 15.7 kg-m of torque, also equipped with a smooth CVT transmission for an economical yet responsive drive. Inside, the Corolla's interior is as refined as it is inviting.

The minimalist yet sophisticated design emphasises space, comfort and elegance, making each journey a pleasure.

Newly cushioned, ergonomically designed seats, a spacious armrest and ample legroom create a

premium experience for both driver and passengers.

Rear-seat passengers will appreciate the added comfort of rear AC vents, while a host of thoughtful amenities—such as a moon roof, a 4.2-inch multi-information display (MID), a 7-inch display audio system, cruise control and a six-speaker sound system enhance every drive.

Toyota's unwavering commitment to safety shines in the Corolla, equipped with a suite of advanced safety features to keep you and your loved ones protected.

NBO, First Exchange to enhance remittance services

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) is delighted to announce signing a pivotal agreement to partner with First Exchange, a leading financial services provider specialising in international remittances, foreign currency exchange, and payment services.

The agreement was signed by Abdullah bin Zahrán al Hinai, Chief Executive Officer of NBO, and Dr Ghazi bin Nasser al Alawi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of First Exchange.

The partnership facilitates easier and safer methods for customers to send money by integrating First Exchange's services with NBO's advanced API Banking Portal. This



collaboration is also in line with NBO's long-term vision to build enduring partnerships and expand its digital landscape capabilities in the market, ensuring innovative solutions that meet the evolving needs of

customers.

The collaboration will allow First Exchange to route all remittance transactions through NBO's Payment Hub, ensuring fast and secure money transfers across borders.

NBO's API Banking Portal offers First Exchange a strong platform to expand its digital payment options with fast payment and transfer services across its retail branches and digital channels.

Dr Ali al Shukaili, Assistant General Manager and Head of Digital & E-Channels at NBO said: "It gives us a great pleasure to join hands with First Exchange to provide enhanced financial services using innovative technology. With our API Banking Portal, we ensure customers enjoy smooth, secure, and efficient remittance services, when using digital platforms or visiting our branches."

Abraj joins 2024 IADC Drilling ME Conference and Exhibition

MUSCAT: Abraj Energy Services, Oman's leading oil and gas services provider, participated in the 2024 IADC Drilling Middle East Conference and Exhibition as the platinum sponsor to showcase its competitive solutions, innovative technologies, commitment to safety, and leadership in advancing the oil and energy industry.

Held under the auspices of Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the conference and

exhibition took place from December 10–11, hosted by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) in collaboration with the Oman Society for Petroleum Services (OPAL).

Abraj contributed significantly to the annual event by engaging speakers and participants in panel sessions and technical workshops.

Key topics included enhancing drilling and maintenance efficiency, maximising local content and in-country value, and safety standards in drilling performance.



Abraj's participation emphasised its role in promoting sustainable practices.

In addition, Abraj emphasised fostering emerging local qualified personnel to contribute to innovation development in drilling.

Eng Saif al Hamhami, CEO of Abraj Energy Services, stated, "Our participation in the 2024 IADC Drilling Middle East Conference and Exhibition is an ideal opportunity to exchange knowledge and expertise in the oil and energy drilling field. It also enables us to discuss the most prominent challenges facing this industry.

Together with our partners, we are committed to supporting sustainable practices and health, safety, and security aspects, along with empowering the emerging generation to contribute to innovation development and create a suitable environment for future growth."

Among Abraj's key contributions, Dr Ilyas Ahmed, HSE Manager, participated in the panel session on "Advancing Safety Performance with New Methods and Technologies."

BUSINESS

GLOBAL VOYAGE



File picture of the majestic Amerigo Vespucci.

ICONIC TALL SHIP TO VISIT OMAN NEXT MONTH

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 17

THE Italian Navy’s training ship, Amerigo Vespucci, billed as ‘The Most Beautiful Ship in the World’, is set to call at Port Sultan Qaboos in Muscat next month – a landmark visit that underscores the Sultanate of Oman’s appeal as a destination for cruise ships and classic sailing vessels.

The magnificent tall ship, with its stunning vintage design and soaring masts, will dock at Port Sultan Qaboos during the second week of January, according to Khimji Ramdas Shipping, which is facilitating the maiden port visit.

Doubling as a Maritime Heritage Ambassador for Unesco and Unicef, as well as the Italian Republic, the Vespucci is currently at the tail end of a two-year-long global voyage that covers 30 ports in 28 countries in five continents.

During its passage through the Gulf region, the majestic tall ship is scheduled to stop over at Doha and Abu Dhabi ports before arriving in Muscat on a visit spanning several days. It sails onward to Safaga (Egypt) and Larnaca (Cyprus) before concluding its world tour at La Spezia in Italy in February.

Named after the famed Italian explorer and navigator Amerigo Vespucci, who participated in two historic voyages to the New World in the early part of the 16th Century, the training was first launched in February 1931.

Notably, the Americas get their name from this legendary figure. Spanning an overall length of 101 metres (including its expansive bowsprit), the vessel’s sprawling three-main masts are reminiscent of ships built during the golden age of sailing.

During a major refurbishment carried out in 2016, the 4,000-tonne ship was outfitted with modern facilities that included an electric propulsion system. The ship carries a crew of around 270 sailors on most sailings.

CPA CHAIRMAN TOURS MUSANDAM MARKETS

MUSANDAM: Salim bin Ali al Hakmani, Chairman of the Consumer Protection Authority, conducted a field tour of Musandam Governorate’s markets as part of ongoing efforts to ensure compliance with consumer protection laws.

During his visit, Al Hakmani met with Shaikh Abdulaziz al Mayasi, Wali of Dibba, and Mohammed al Shehhi, Shura Council representative for Dibba, alongside municipal council members, officials from the Oman Chamber of Commerce and In-



dustry in Musandam, and other key officials. Discussions centered on

enhancing cooperation between relevant institutions, monitoring market practices, and strengthening consumer rights protections.

Al Hakmani toured several commercial centers and shops across various sectors in the Wilayat of Dibba. He inspected compliance with the Consumer Protection Law and its executive regulations, ensuring suppliers displayed price lists and adhered to fair trade practices. The inspection aimed to verify market conditions and address consumer concerns.

On the sidelines, Al Hakmani engaged directly with consumers, listening to their feedback and suggestions. He also met with suppliers, urging them to uphold legal standards, cooperate with the Authority, and take responsibility for safeguarding consumer interests.

The visit is part of a broader initiative involving field tours across Oman’s governorates to strengthen market oversight, enhance institutional cooperation, and improve consumer protection services.

Nama Water to create 846 permanent jobs by 2025

NAMA Water Services (NSW) has announced 479 job openings for Omani youth in operations and maintenance roles through its permanent contractors. Applications are open via the ‘Tawteen’ digital platform until December 25, 2025.

Qais bin Saud al Zakwani, CEO of Nama Water Services, highlighted the company’s commitment to Oman Vision 2040 through sustainable employment initiatives.

“These new job opportunities align with the goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040. This initiative supports the company’s strategic objectives and complements government efforts to provide sustainable employment opportunities for Omanis,” he said.



QAIS BIN SAUD AL ZAKWANI
CEO of Nama Water Services.

The company plans to create 846 permanent positions by the end of 2025, raising its Omanisation rate from 55% to 83%. “This step is not only about job creation but also about contributing to the sustainable development and future prosperity of the Sultanate of Oman,” Al Zakwani added.

Nama Water Services collaborates with the Governance Committee for the Public Services Sector and the Ministry of Labour’s

Training and Development Centre to fill roles in the water and wastewater sectors.

The initiative also includes specialised training programmes to boost skills and prepare young Omanis for careers in the industry. “We are actively working to create job opportunities and foster professional growth through advanced training and leadership programmes.

“By strengthening our workforce, we can ensure the delivery of cutting-edge solutions that meet the evolving needs of our customers,” Al Zakwani affirmed.

The CEO encouraged eligible candidates to apply and take advantage of the career development and training opportunities available through the company’s strategic initiative.

SOHAR Port partners with SQU for talent development

SUHAR: SOHAR Port and Freezone, in partnership with Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), has launched a student exchange programme aimed at fostering national talent and advancing sustainable development.

The initiative provides students and recent graduates with hands-on experience in marine engineering and port management, equipping them with the skills needed to address real-world industry challenges.

The programme includes a research project focusing on sustainability in marine structures and protection techniques.

To enhance learning, students will participate in a week-long intensive programme at the Port of Rotterdam, featuring workshops and site visits for practical exposure.

Mohammed al Shizawi, Acting CEO of



The initiative provides students and recent graduates with hands-on experience in marine engineering and port management

SOHAR Freezone and VP of People and Support Services, said: “At SOHAR Port and Freezone, we are committed to empowering Omani youth by providing them with an environment that enhances their skills and contributes to sustainable development.

“This programme is a testament to our dedication to developing local talent through international partnerships, and we aim to equip participants with the knowledge and experience needed to address real-world challenges and foster innovation in the logistics and industrial sectors.”

Set to conclude by year-end, the programme underscores the importance of collaboration between academia and industry, supporting infrastructure sustainability and strengthening the local talent pool.

Oman, Korea bolster ties through knowledge-sharing

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 17

THE Korea-Oman Renewable Energy Business Roundtable and Knowledge Sharing Programme (KSP) Kick-off Meeting highlighted Korea’s commitment to fostering sustainable development through policy consultation and knowledge-sharing.

Delivering a keynote address, Jun Sik Park, Deputy Director of Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency’s (KOTRA) Frankfurt Office, detailed the structure and objectives of the KSP, emphasising its role as a platform for economic cooperation and policy innovation.

KSP, a knowledge-driven economic cooperation initiative, is designed to share Korea’s development experiences with partner countries’ policymakers.

“The vision of KSP is to build economic cooperation and sustainable development with partner countries,” Park stated. He underscored that Korea’s



Speakers pose for a photo during the KSP kick-off meeting.

development models are adapted to local contexts, ensuring that solutions are tailored to meet the specific needs of partner nations like Oman.

The programme covers a broad

spectrum of consultation areas, including infrastructure, export promotion, socio-economic development strategies, energy and green growth, ICT, financial services and economic crisis

management.

“We share both best practices and various development experiences to offer the most relevant policy solutions,” Park explained.

KSP’s implementation relies on three key Korean agencies: the Korea Development Institute (KDI), responsible for socio-economic policy development; KOTRA, managing investment-focused projects; and the Korean Export-Import Bank, facilitating financial partnerships with multilateral development banks like the World Bank.

Since 2014, KOTRA has conducted 83 projects in 36 partner countries, expanding its outreach to developed nations like Spain and the UK.

Park outlined the KSP policy consultation cycle, which spans eight to ten months and includes five key stages: demand submission, workshops, field studies, policy training in Korea and a final high-level policy dialogue.

Monitoring and evaluation are integral to the process, ensuring

quality and relevance through continuous expert assessments from both Korea and partner countries.

Interested government ministries, including the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, can apply by submitting a project concept paper. Applications are reviewed by Korea’s Ministry of Economy and Finance, with accepted proposals commencing within two years.

Park encouraged Omani policymakers to explore KSP’s official platform, ksp.go.kr, to access a wealth of successful case studies. “Our aim is to create sustainable, context-specific solutions through active collaboration and shared expertise,” he concluded.

The KSP initiative underscores Korea’s dedication to fostering global economic partnerships through policy innovation and collaborative growth, paving the way for enhanced energy cooperation between Oman and Korea.

OPINION

Cost-cutting by Citigroup means fewer promotions



ANDY JALIL
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The author is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

CITIGROUP'S annual promotion round is set to be 75 per cent smaller in 2024, in an attempt to keep a lid on costs following a year of restructuring. The US bank might elevate only 2,000 employees in it's year-end promotions later this month, citing people familiar with the matter. That's only a quarter of the 8,000 it has promoted in previous years.

Citi has recently emerged from a radical restructure as chief executive Jane Fraser looked to right the course of the bank. The overhaul simplified Citi's business around five core divisions and slashed thousands of management jobs.

Each year, Citigroup and other Wall Street banks unveil new classes of managing directors. Promotions also usually include moves up the ranks from analysts through to directors. However, promotions this year are only likely for those taking on new responsibility or roles. Pay rises for newly promoted staff are also likely to be capped at 15 per cent.

"Citi made firm-wide changes to our organisational structure earlier this year, which included promotions and other role changes for a substantial number of colleagues, and managers have received guidance to take that effort into consideration at year-end," a spokesperson for the bank

said.

"That said, promotions are a key part of our talent strategy and while our year-end process is still underway, the notion that we will see a significant decline in promotions across the bank or other re-levelling is false," they added.

Citigroup has looked to balance cost-cutting with growing important divisions that have lagged its rivals', including investment banking and wealth management. Project 'Bora Bora', as the overhaul was known included the marquee hire in February of former JPMorgan dealmaker Vis Raghavan as head of banking. Bank of America's Andy Sieg joined in September 2023 to lead the wealth management unit.

Since his appointment, Raghavan has continued to shake up Citigroup's investment bank. He has appointed key dealmakers to a new executive committee and hired former JPMorgan equity capital markets head Achintya Mangla to head a new financing division.

Citigroup said last year that it planned to eliminate around 20,000 jobs from its global headcount of 229,000 employees, as part of its overhaul. It has cut some senior debt capital markets bankers in London, despite a banner year for the unit. Its head of ECM in Europe, Suneel Hargunani, left after more than 20 years at the bank.

However, Citi has also handed out

Citi has recently emerged from a radical restructure as chief executive Jane Fraser looked to right the course of the bank. The overhaul simplified Citi's business around five core divisions and slashed thousands of management jobs

retention bonuses to dozens of staff within its wealth unit, Bloomberg reported.

Citigroup has appointed BlackRock managing director and senior portfolio manager Kate Moore to be the chief investment officer of its wealth business. Moore is due to join the company in February. She will oversee the chief investment office of Citi Wealth, as well as its global investment committee and sustainable investing team.

Moore replaces Steven Wieting who became interim CIO for Citi's wealth group after David Bailin left the bank in May after a 15-year career at Citi. Moore arrives at Citi after eight years at BlackRock.

Most recently, she was head of thematic strategy for the fund giants \$50 billion global allocation business.

Prior to that, she was chief investment strategist for JPMorgan's private bank and worked in senior roles at Bank of America Merrill Lynch and Morgan Stanley. She is the latest in a string of senior hires made by Citi as part of wealth boss Andy Sieg's revamp of the business. Since he took over Citi's wealth business in September 2023, Sieg has tapped ex-employer Merrill Lynch for recruits including global head of investment solutions. Citi boss Jane Fraser has flagged wealth management as a key growth area for the wider business. But the bank has lagged behind JPMorgan, Morgan Stanley, Bank of America and other rivals.

OIL WILL AID RATHER THAN HINDER TRUMP-MBS RELATIONS

Donald Trump and Mohammed bin Salman each have contradictory objectives in 2025. The US president-elect wants to apply "maximum pressure" on Iran, but won't want the spike in oil prices that may accompany it.

The Saudi crown prince is sick of forgoing oil revenue by pumping 3 million barrels below his 12 million barrel daily capacity — but will be wary of a price crash if he opens the taps.

Even so, there's a way for their relations to bloom. On the face of it, there's much for MbS and Trump to disagree about.

If the new president delivers on pledges to slash permitting times and enable fossil fuel companies to "drill, baby, drill", then oil prices could pitch even further below the \$100 a barrel level at which the Saudi budget balances.

Unlike Trump's first term, MbS has been getting closer to Iran via talks brokered by another Trump foe — China.

And Saudi's predominantly youthful 33 million population is naturally sympathetic towards Palestinians — which might jar if Trump brokers a ceasefire deal that seems overly generous to Israel.

Still, MbS-Trump relations are likely to be significantly warmer than the crown prince's frosty relations with President Joe Biden.

Trump and adviser Elon Musk were seen recently at an Ultimate Fighting Championship bout with Yasir al Rumayyan, boss of Saudi's \$925 billion Public Investment Fund. And oil dynamics may help rather than hinder.

At 13 million barrels, US daily oil production is the highest in the world.

But according to Goldman Sachs, the crude price required in the key Permian region to drill new wells and manage a 15% return is the \$70 a barrel at which it traded in late November.

Most US oil production is on private land rather than the public areas Trump controls.

With forecasters like the International Energy Agency anticipating a price-sapping supply glut of 1 million barrels a day in 2025, and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and affiliates like Russia keen to unwind production cuts, it's possible the US oil flood is more like a trickle.

As such, MbS and Trump's interests may align. Imagine the US tries to shrink the \$53 billion of annual oil revenues Iran made in 2023 via tougher sanctions. — **Reuters**

The right medicine for Pakistan's ailing economy

PAKISTAN'S long history of fiscal mismanagement has saddled the country with a crushing debt burden. Interest payments on the public debt consume a staggering 60% of government revenue.

And external-debt repayments coming due over the next five years amount to nearly \$70 billion, dwarfing the \$11 billion in foreign-exchange reserves held by the central bank.

No wonder that some experts have started calling for a default and restructuring. Many others are still urging strict adherence to the three-year austerity programme approved by the International Monetary Fund in September to balance the books.

Neither default nor austerity is likely to work, however, and both would inflict unnecessary pain.

External debt restructuring is the wrong medicine for Pakistan, because the problem is not the external interest burden but rather the volume of repayments falling due.

Only 10% of interest payments go to private creditors, given that almost all – more than 85% – of Pakistan's external debt is owed to official creditors at concessional rates. So, even if the Pakistani government stopped paying interest to external private creditors altogether, this would barely make a dent in its overall bill.

Around half of Pakistan's public-debt stock is owed to multilateral creditors such as the IMF and the World Bank, and thus cannot be restructured unless these institutions launch a new debt-relief scheme like the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative of the 1990s.

And with remaining obligations to bilateral creditors (mainly China, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) already being rolled over under the IMF programme, halting repayments would provide little benefit and could entail high costs in terms of damage to diplomatic and trade relations and access to



External debt restructuring is the wrong medicine for Pakistan, because the problem is not the external interest burden but rather the volume of repayments falling due.



AASIM M HUSAIN

The writer is a former Deputy Director of the Middle East and Central Asia Department at the International Monetary Fund

future financing.

Restructuring domestic debt, on the other hand, could lower Pakistan's interest bill, but would cause severe economic pain.

Nearly two-thirds of the government's domestic obligations are held by banks, where these securities comprise around 60% of assets.

Even a modest haircut of 10% would wipe out the banking system's capital, though the impact would vary from institution to institution. Banks would be unable to repay depositors, triggering financial turmoil and a sharp economic contraction.

If restructuring won't help, what about the new IMF austerity program, which seeks to increase the tax-to-GDP ratio by three percentage points over three years? To be sure, addressing the country's chronic revenue shortfalls is of paramount importance.

Only around 1% of Pakistanis pay any income tax at all, and the government's revenue collection – at around 12% of GDP – is among the world's lowest.

The agriculture, retail, and real-

estate sectors, which constitute the bulk of the economy, are effectively outside the tax net. No country can function like this.

But the IMF programme aims to raise the tax-to-GDP ratio by two percentage points in the first year alone – a breakneck pace that is wildly unrealistic. Pakistan has never achieved an adjustment of this scale in a single year. Even if, by some miracle, the government did manage it, the negative effects on economic activity and poverty rates would be crippling.

Nor is any relief in sight on the spending side. The government's non-interest spending relative to GDP is to be held below its average level over the past decade, which was already among the lowest of the world's emerging economies and insufficient to meet basic development needs. Even if this austerity could be achieved, its social and political sustainability is far from assured.

In short, restructuring is bad medicine, and the IMF programme is good medicine, albeit at a lethal dose. But there is a third way.

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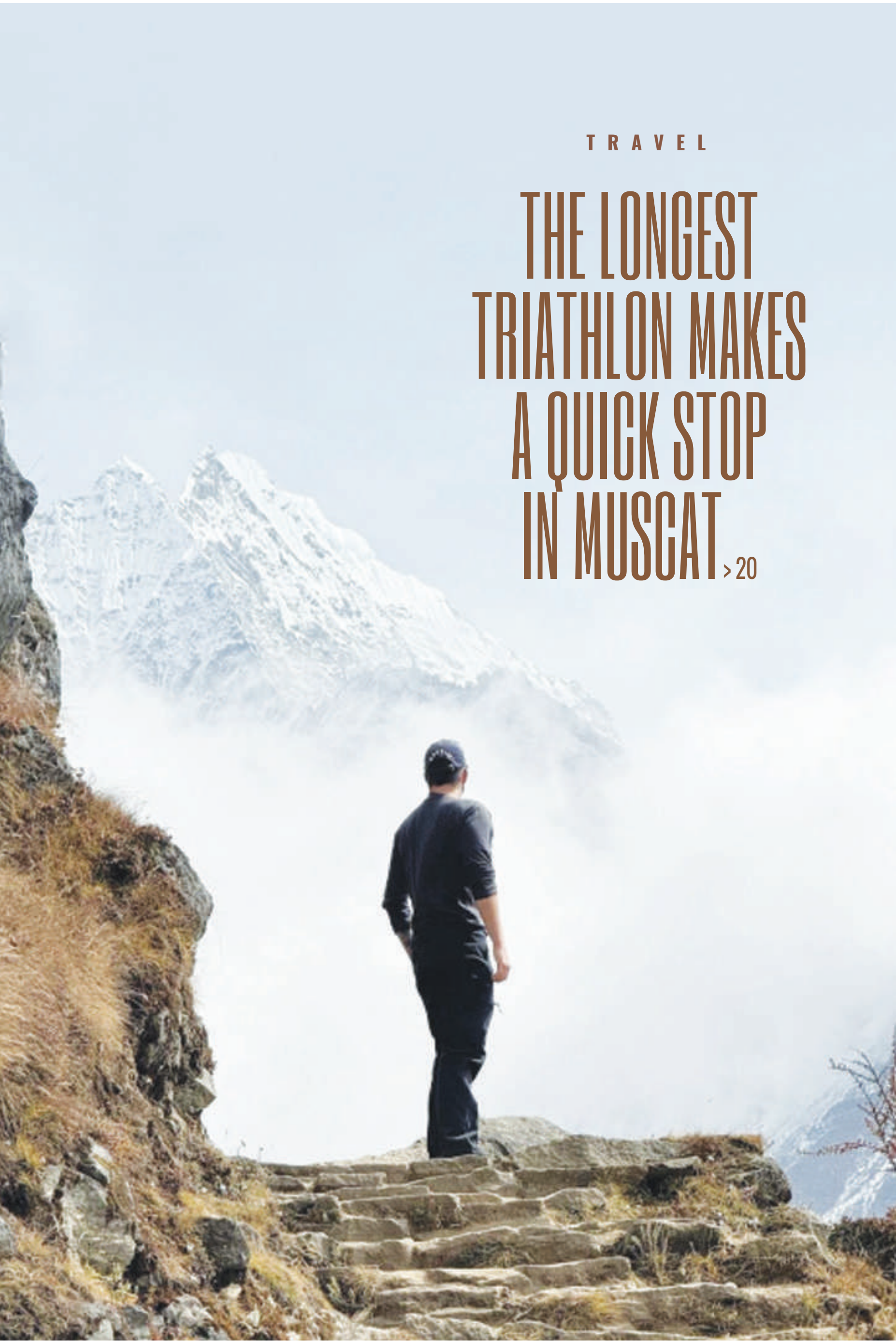


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FASHION

A new woman designer takes centre stage



IN THE fashion equivalent of a nuclear chain reaction, Bottega Veneta announced recently that Matthieu Blazy, its designer of three years and the man who made it into a must-see brand in Milan, was leaving the house. He is expected to become the new designer of Chanel.

Replacing Blazy at Bottega Veneta will be Louise Trotter, currently the designer of French brand Carven, which has yet to name her replacement.

Trotter, who will take up her post at Bottega Veneta at the end of January 2025, will become the only female creative director among the stable of designers at Kering, the group that owns Bottega Veneta as well as Gucci, Saint Laurent, Alexander McQueen and Balenciaga.

Trotter comes to Bottega after spending just shy of two years at Carven, a house she rescued from irrelevance and reinvented as a minimalist's haven of accessible but plush luxury.

Trotter, 55, will inherit a house that Blazy helped transform into the brightest spot in Kering's portfolio. For the third quarter of this year, Bottega's revenues were just under 400 million euros (\$416.6 million), an increase of 4%, at a time when Gucci's revenues dropped 25% and Saint Laurent's 13%.

A Brit, Trotter brings years of experience to Bottega, with previous creative director stints at Lacoste and the English label Joseph. At a time when fashion, and especially fashion shows, are increasingly treated as a subset of the entertainment world, Trotter, like Blazy, is a quiet but decisive (and dryly humorous) presence, known for a more personal, product-first approach to her job, and a sense of materiality and understanding of silhouette.

She is, however, less playfully experimental than her predecessor and possessed of an aesthetic that might be termed gracefully grown up. (Her work tends to be mentioned in the same breath as Phoebe Philo's Celine and the Row.) She should be a reassuring presence at Bottega, despite the fact that she will be its third creative director in five years and despite the current upheaval in the fashion world, with eight different brands naming new designers in the last year.

To that point, Trotter said she was honoured to join Bottega Veneta and "celebrate its timeless vision."

She will make her debut in October 2025 during Milan Fashion Week. — NYT

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



LIFESTYLE

Shoppers queue to collect bags with promotional merchandise as they visit fashion retailer Shein's Christmas bus tour, in Manchester, Britain. — Reuters



ENTERTAINMENT

US-French actor Timothee Chalamet attends the New York premiere of "A Complete Unknown" at the SVA theatre in New York. — AFP



STREAMING

Squid Games Guards are seen at the opening ceremony of the Los Angeles premiere and fan event for Netflix's "Squid Game: Season 2" LA premiere and fan event at Los Angeles City College. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Iconic Structures

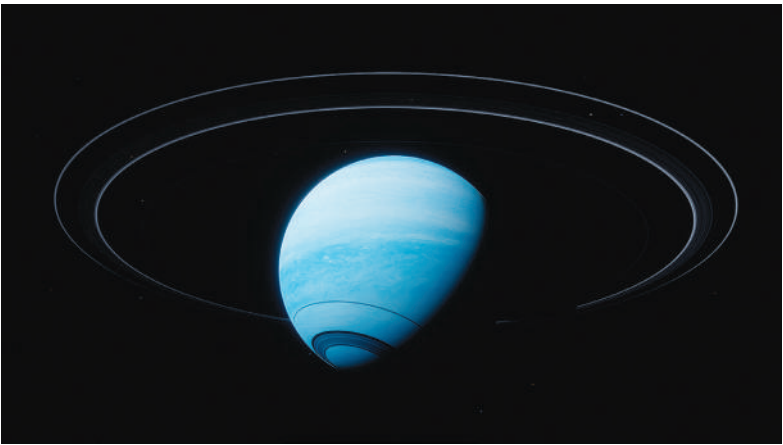


Beauty of Remote Places

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Vast oceans of water may be hiding within Uranus and Neptune



WE MIGHT finally understand what’s going on inside Uranus and Neptune, and the answer is pretty surprising: They may each contain an ocean of water. The idea about the two ice giant planets — so-called because of the freezing conditions in which they formed — was put forward by Burkhard Militzer, a planetary scientist from the University of California, Berkeley, and was published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. It could explain the strange magnetic fields of both worlds.

Earth’s magnetic field is generated in its core, producing a clear north and south pole known as a dipole that roughly aligns with the axis of the planet. “It’s like there’s a big, giant bar magnet inside the planet,” said Heidi Hammel, an astronomer and planetary scientist at the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy.

When NASA’s Voyager 2 spacecraft flew past Uranus in 1986, however, “the magnetic field was hugely tilted and offset from the center of the planet,” Hammel said. At first, scientists thought the disordered field could be explained by a suspected giant impact early in Uranus’ life. But then the spacecraft flew past Neptune three years later and its magnetic field was also significantly tilted.

Militzer’s proposal, based on simulating the motion of 500 atoms to model the interiors of the two ice giants, suggests there is a layer of water about 5,000 miles thick inside the two planets sitting beneath their outer atmospheres. “We think it’s an ocean,” Militzer said. “There’s hydrogen mixed in with it, and it has a high conductivity that’s important for the magnetic field.” — JONATHAN O’CALLAGHAN / NYT



Khiko Basha, makes donkey cheese at her family house in Lazarat village, near Gjirokaster. — AFP

Taste of love: Donkey milk cheese meets success in Albania

“DONKEY milk has the taste of love,” said Fatiko Basha as she caressed her favourite, Liza, before collecting the animal’s milk. It also makes what is reputed to be one of the most expensive cheeses in the world.

On a small farm in Albania’s southern Gjirokaster region, Basha and her husband Veiz use donkey milk to make cheese, curd or whey. For thousands of years, it has been praised for its numerous virtues. The legend says that Cleopatra immersed herself in donkey milk baths that guaranteed her beauty and youth.

Legends aside, it “heals children, is a natural remedy for respiratory tracts, allergies and the immune system”, Fatiko Basha said.

She cleaned one mother’s teats, stroking the animal to try to get her milk flowing, as the foal, Xhoia (“Joy” in Albanian), looked on.

“Regardless of their age, donkeys are like children,” Veiz said with a smile.

They need a lot of affection to produce milk, he said as the donkey started to bray to get his attention.

The donkeys have to be lactating of course, and milking starts when the foal is three months old.

Donkey milk became popular during the Covid-19 pandemic, which was when the Bashas decided to bring several to their farm.

Before long they were selling their milk not just in Albania but in Greece, Montenegro and North Macedonia.

Now, with around 30 females and four males, they plan to enlarge the herd from January, taking advantage of the natural pastures at the foot of the Gjirokaster mountains.

Nor are the Bashas the only ones tapping into the market: across the region, there are around fifteen donkey farms.

Donkey milk may be as exceptional as its producers claim, but it is also rare.

You can expect to get only half a litre of milk (a little less than a pint) per animal per day.



That scarcity is what makes it so expensive, costing between 50 and 60 euros (\$53 to 63) per kilo.

“Donkey milk is white gold,” said Veiz Basha: hard to harvest, but every drop makes you happy.

For the past year, the Basha family has been producing creamy homemade cheese, as well as curd and whey, buying additional milk from local farmers.

“There is a high demand for donkey cheese, which is difficult to prepare,” said their daughter Khiko Basha, who prepares cheese for a local restaurant at her home in the nearby village of Lazarat.

And if the milk is expensive, the cost of the cheese is even higher: to produce just one kilo of cheese you need at least 25 litres of donkey milk -- or more than 1,000 euros’ worth.

Sold at over 1,500 euros a kilo, it has the reputation of being one of the most expensive cheeses in the world.

“The French say that a meal without cheese is a beauty missing an eye, but donkey cheese is really the icing on the cake,” said Jaco Meci, a veterinarian who also produces donkey cheese that features on the menu of Tirana restaurants.

Customers prefer it fresh, 48 hours after it has been prepared, said Elio Troque, owner of the Oxhaket restaurant in the capital.

“Expensive but very tasty, it is the perfect accompaniment to a meal



with good wine,” he added.

In her small workshop, pharmacist Fabjola Meci does not ferment milk to make cheese, but prepares a range of donkey milk cosmetics that have also gained in popularity in recent years.

“Donkey’s milk is a real beauty secret,” the 24-year-old said as she hurried to finish a final order of an ultra-soft day cream.

Meci has launched her own brand, Leva Natural, and with the festive season approaching she said she hoped to soon be able to export her donkey-milk products worldwide.

And she knows how to sell it, insisting: “The donkey’s milk face cream is a delight... Once you’ve used it, it’s hard to give it up.” — AFP

FEATURES

BY KABEER YOUSUF

MITCHELL, known to his friends as Mitch, made a brief stop in Muscat before embarking on the next phase of his grand adventure. In this fleeting visit, he managed to capture a general view of the city, appreciating its unique blend of modernity and tradition. Muscat offered not just a much-needed respite but also a breathing space, allowing him to refuel physically and mentally for the challenges that lay ahead.

At just 16 years old, Mitch became the first British youth to summit Mount Kilimanjaro. Now, nearly 15 years later, he is on a mission to conquer what he has dubbed ‘The Longest Triathlon’ — a remarkable journey spanning nearly 15,000 kilometres from the shores of Dover to the lofty heights of the Himalayas.

His eight-month-long journey, aptly named ‘Limitless’, incorporates all three modes of travel: land, sea and air. Accompanied by his travel partner, Ben Cook, they recently paused in Muscat, sharing tales of their adventure while awaiting a cargo boat that would carry them onwards to Pakistan, or perhaps they would opt for an air route to India.

“It has always been a dream we’ve chased since childhood to become the world’s greatest triathlon champions. Beyond inspiring others to embrace a sporty lifestyle, LIMITLESS serves as a platform for us to uplift millions and showcase the transformative power of positivity and the human spirit,” asserted Mitch.

This unprecedented triathlon, supported by friends and good Samaritans from around the globe, aims to achieve a historic ascent of Mount Everest, completing the longest recorded climb in its history.

In addition to Mitch and Ben, their efforts are bolstered by the ground support of Stan Gaskell and Molly McDonald, who capture and compile their journey through engaging visuals for their followers on various social media platforms.

The first leg of their journey, the ‘Swim’, involved tackling the English Channel, swimming a gruelling 34 kilometres non-stop from England to France. This feat was undertaken in collaboration with Savsim, a small non-profit organisation dedicated to providing mental health support to veterans and individuals grappling with PTSD and similar challenges. Savsim has developed a remarkable therapeutic course to aid those in need, working closely with both ZSL Whipsnade and London Zoo.

The second leg, the ‘Cycle’ phase, commenced in Calais and consists of an adventurous 10,000-kilometre ride across 12 countries and two continents. For the first 4,000 kilometres, Mitch was accompanied by Buddy, his beloved golden retriever, who provided essential morale, comfortably secured in a trailer pulled by Mitch.

Savsim not only offers invaluable courses, but also utilises the skills of veterans by dispatching them to various international locations for anti-poaching and wildlife conservation efforts, with their latest project focused on saving white rhinos in South Africa.

The third phase, the ‘Run/March’, will commence upon the successful completion of their cycling journey. This segment will begin in the coastal town of Digha, India, where Mitch will run or march 900 kilometres from sea level to Kathmandu, Nepal’s capital.

Following a regrouping period in Kathmandu, the fourth stage will consist of a 350-kilometre trek towards the majestic Himalayas and the pinnacle of the world. This leg will be undertaken with the personal support and guidance of the legendary Nimsdai Purja and his exceptional team.

“We will traverse the stunning foothills of the Himalayas along the world’s most



THE LONGEST TRIATHLON MAKES A QUICK STOP IN MUSCAT



famed trekking route to Everest Base Camp. This narrative is about demonstrating that with a slight shift in mindset, every one of us is truly LIMITLESS. Through relentless positivity, we can realise our most ambitious dreams.”

Starting from Everest Base Camp, the fifth stage will see them undertake the historic climb to summit the highest peak on Earth.

This six-month expedition, scheduled to conclude in May 2025, is designed as a collective experience to inspire and unify like-minded individuals. Whether through following their journey on social media, joining for a few days of cycling across Europe, or even trekking to Everest Base Camp, the duo hopes to connect with many along the way.

Ultimately, LIMITLESS is much more than an aspiration to make history; it represents an opportunity to raise funds and awareness for a remarkable non-profit organisation that holds a special place in their hearts. Mitch aims to motivate those who join him on this journey, demonstrating that each individual can challenge their own perceived limits and achieve what may initially seem impossible.