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SOHAR ALUMINIUM, OAPIL INK MOU TO EXPLORE LOW CARBON ALUMINIUM MANUFACTURING



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LEWANDOWSKI TREBLE POWERS BARCA PAST VALENCIA



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LOOKING INTO THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF SCHOOL THEATRE ON KIDS



MUSCAT

MoH SIGNS DEAL ON CLOUD HOSTING

The Ministry of Health, represented by the Directorate-General of Health Services of Muscat Governorate, signed a cloud hosting project agreement with Oman Digital Data Company (Oman Data Park). The agreement strengthens the partnership between the public sector and other sectors to develop and provide high-quality health services. The Oman Data Park will support the electronic training and administrative platform 'Athar' for the Directorate-General of Health Services of Muscat Governorate. The platform provides high-quality training services to develop skills and enhance the competencies of health workers.

DETAILS ON P3

OMAN CONDOLES KENYA OVER FLOODS



In a statement by the Foreign Ministry, the Sultanate of Oman expressed its condolences to the Republic of Kenya on the victims of the floods which claimed tens of lives. Oman also wished the injured a speedy recovery as rescuers were digging through mud with shovels on Tuesday to recover victims' bodies as the number of people still missing rose steadily after rains triggered heavy flooding and landslides across Kenya. At least 48 people were killed and a further 84 remained missing after a mudslide and flash floods hit the town of Mai Mahiu in central Kenya early on Monday, the Kenya Red Cross said. Survivors in Mai Mahiu described an onslaught of water that swept away houses, cars and railway tracks. SEE ALSO P7

Low pressure trough to bring rains from Thursday

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH @lakshmioman

The forecasts and analyses of the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre indicate that the Governorate of Dhofar will be affected by clouds advection starting from Tuesday evening until Saturday, associated with scattered rains of varying intensity.

It is expected that heavy

rains ranging between (30-80 mm) on Thursday will lead to the flow of wadis. Additionally, the forecasts indicate that the Sultanate of Oman will be affected by a trough of low pressure starting from Thursday to Saturday. Thus, clouds conviction expected gradually during the day on Thursday over the governorates of Al Buraimi, Musandam, Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Batinah



The Wilayat of Rustaq received heavy rain on Tuesday.

North, Al Batinah South and Muscat, then extending during the evening to cover the governorates of Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South and Al Wusta.

Rains of varying intensity, ranging between (20-60 mm), are expected during the period leading to the flow of wadis. The peak of the weather condition will be on Thursday. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA)

advises all to take precaution during rainfall that will cause flash flood.

It urges the public to check visibility level and sea state before sailing and follow the issued weather bulletins and reports.

Meanwhile, the northern governorates experienced rainfall as a result of local cloud formation over Al Hajar Mountains.

UN CHIEF CALLS FOR 'INDEPENDENT' PROBE OVER GAZA MASS GRAVES

A Palestinian child peeps from the entrance of a tent in an area housing displaced people in Rafah on Tuesday. — Reuters

UNITED NATIONS: United Nations chief Antonio Guterres expressed alarm on Tuesday over reports of mass graves discovered in Gaza including at two hospitals and allegations those buried there were unlawfully killed, as he demanded an independent investigation.

"It is imperative that independent international investigators with forensic expertise are allowed the immediate access to the sites of these mass graves to establish the precise circumstances under which the Palestinians lost their lives and were buried or reburied," Guterres said.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed on Tuesday to go ahead with a long-promised assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah, whatever the response by Hamas to the latest proposals for a halt to the fighting and a return of Israeli captives.

Expectations that a ceasefire agreement could be in sight have grown in recent days following a renewed push led by Egypt to revive stalled negotiations between Israel and Hamas.

However, Netanyahu said that with or without a deal, Israel intended to pursue the operation in Rafah, where more than one million Gaza Palestinians displaced from their homes amid Israeli military operations elsewhere since October have been seeking shelter.

Earlier, a person close to Netanyahu said Israel has been waiting for Hamas to respond to the latest ceasefire proposals tabled by Egypt, one of several foreign mediators, before sending a team to Cairo to continue talks.

With US Secretary of State Antony Blinken due to arrive in Tel Aviv following a visit to Riyadh, pressure has been building for an agreement to stop the war that has devastated Gaza as it nears the end of its seventh month.

But so far there has been little sign of agreement on the most fundamental difference between the two sides — the Hamas demand that any deal must ensure a withdrawal of troops and a permanent end to the Israeli operation in Gaza. — Agencies

Students can travel free in public buses

BALQEES AL ORAIMI MUSCAT, APRIL 30

College and university students in Muscat and Salalah can travel free in public buses for a period of two years and the move is aimed to facilitate access to educational institutions and promote mobility among the youth.

This was announced during the opening of the second session of the Oman Ports Conference "Oman on the Logistics Performance Index."

In addition to this, an initiative providing free public transport for citizens from Muscat and Salalah for three days starting from May 2 seeks to promote the use of public transport and improve accessibility within urban areas.

Speaking on the occasion, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, emphasised the transformative role of the logistics system in Oman's socio-economic landscape. He underscored the system's resilience and adaptability. SEE ALSO P14

Global plastic pollution talks make modest progress

OTTAWA: Negotiations on a future global treaty to tackle soaring plastic pollution ran overtime into Tuesday amid tense debates over whether the world should seek to limit the amount of plastic being made.

As the week-long talks in the Canadian capital of Ottawa ended before dawn, countries agreed to continue their work in ad hoc meetings before the final summit starting on November 25 in Busan, South Korea.

That work will include searching for forms of funding

to help developing countries implement the treaty. Countries also agreed to devise a process to identify plastic chemicals that are hazardous and plastic products that are wasteful, such as single-use plastic containers.

But they failed to establish a formal process to review how much virgin plastic is produced or to determine how much might be considered unsustainable.

The hoped-for treaty to be agreed in Busan could be the most significant deal relating to climate-warming emissions and



A prop depicting a water tap with cascading plastic bottles is displayed by activists near the Shaw Centre in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. — Reuters

environmental protection since the 2015 Paris Agreement.

"This is a small step on a very long path," said Sivendra Michael, lead negotiator for the Pacific island nation of Fiji. "We literally have seven months remaining to deliver on this promise."

More than 50 countries supported a proposal by Rwanda and Peru for assessing what a sustainable level for plastic production might look like. Plastic production is on track to triple by 2050, but today's levels already "are unsustainable and far

exceed our recycling and waste management capacities," said Rwanda's chief negotiator Juliet Kabera. As some parties objected to limiting plastic production, a group of 28 countries issued a pledge to see through the treaty effort with production caps included.

The "science is clear: we must first address the unsustainable levels of plastic production if we want to end plastic pollution globally," said Christophe Bechu, France's minister for ecological transition. — Reuters

Arabia Falcon Insurance العربية فالكون			
CONDENSED UNAUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE FIRST QUARTER 2024			
DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE FIRST QUARTER 2024			
Dear Shareholders,			
On behalf of the Board of Directors of Arabia Falcon Insurance SAOG, I have the pleasure to present to you the financial results of the company for the first quarter ending March 31, 2024.			
Business overview			
Although the business activities have not improved significantly compared with previous years, there are some noticeable improvements in the macroeconomic outlook due to the stable oil prices and improvement in government finances and Oman economy outlook, accordingly; the insurance sector is expected to start showing improvement 2024 and thereafter. The insurance sector is expected to show 6% average growth in the coming few years. On the sales side the improvement started to show in the market from last year. However, the growth in claims was much higher than the growth in premiums, which caused technical losses for most companies operating in the market. The first quarter results show a change in high claim trend that started post covid toward healthy and controlled claims. During the quarter the insurance industry observed a growth in premiums compared to the same period last year. The total premium underwritten by the insurance companies was down by 16%, RO 161.5 million in Q1 2024 against RO 191.6 million of last year same period (source: Financial Services Authority portal).			
Income and Technical Results			
The international financial reporting standard IFRS17 replaced the old IFRS4 for reporting insurance contracts for all comparative results starting third quarter 2023.			
a. Gross written Premium decreased by 2% from RO 7.675 million in Q1-2023 to RO 7.492 million in Q1-2024.			
b. Net insurance service results inclusive of net insurance finance expense Increased by 164% from RO 629k loss in Q1-2023 to 400k profit in Q1-2024.			
c. Investment income increased by 3% from RO 487K in Q1-2023 to RO 500K in Q1-2024 due to the improvement in interest rates on bank deposits.			
d. The net profit for the year was RO 631K compared with RO 353K loss in the previous year, an increase of 279% due to the improvement in technical results and lower claims recorded in Q1 2024 compared with same quarter last year.			
e. The shareholder's Equity was RO 20.723 million on March 31, 2024, compared with RO 18.956 million on March 31, 2023.			
Outlook for 2024			
This year is expected to be challenging in terms of the increase in reported claims, Management took necessary measurements to tackle the increase in claims.			
The Management is committed to growing the insurance portfolio profitably and keeping control of the expenses with the main objective of delivering better technical profit at year-end.			
The company will continue implanting the strategy of digital transformation and heavy investment is planned to be the leader in the market in terms of digitalization and service quality. Meanwhile, AFIC will remain focused on increasing its shareholders' equity while maintaining compliance with all regulatory requirements.			
Acknowledgements			
I take this opportunity to wish all the success to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik bin Taimur towards further development and prosperity of the Sultanate. We would like to thank the Capital Market Authority and all Regulatory bodies for their continuous guidance and support.			
We highly value our clients and business partners.			
On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would also like to thank the management team and all the employees of the company.			
We would like to convey our sincere thanks to the shareholders of the company for the confidence they have put in the Company and in its Board and for the support over the years.			
Chairperson of the Board Arabia Falcon Insurance SAOG H.H Sayyida Meyyan bint Shihab bin Tariq Al Said			
Unaudited interim financial statements for the period ended 31 March 2024			
	Unaudited 31 Mar 2024 RO	Unaudited 31 Mar 2023 RO	Audited 31 Dec 2023 RO
ASSETS			
Property and equipment	149,767	224,183	175,183
Right-to-use asset	-	78,407	19,602
Goodwill	555,883	555,883	555,883
Intangible assets	228,799	276,661	251,409
Investments fair value through other comprehensive income	10,104,935	9,442,332	7,706,473
Investments fair value through profit or loss	1,543,604	2,136,993	2,530,150
Deferred tax asset	210,585	177,272	210,585
Reinsurance contract assets	11,198,750	11,191,192	11,519,473
Other receivables	2,642,465	979,718	730,207
Term deposits	24,900,357	23,416,487	25,444,383
Cash and bank balances	2,879,096	3,453,183	6,097,825
Total Assets	54,414,241	51,932,311	55,241,173
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES			
EQUITY			
Capital and reserves			
Share capital	10,330,166	10,330,166	10,330,166
Share premium	1,749,442	1,749,442	1,749,442
Legal reserve	1,474,030	1,336,819	1,410,978
Contingency reserve	6,377,570	5,989,391	6,305,987
Investment fair value reserve	380,723	206,778	387,439
Investment finance reserve	(131,985)	-	(264,501)
Retained earnings	543,239	(656,180)	47,356
Total shareholders' equity	20,723,185	18,956,416	19,966,867
LIABILITIES			
Lease liabilities	5,892	89,606	26,328
Insurance contract liabilities	31,860,289	31,246,930	31,925,426
Reinsurance contract liabilities	820,560	47,375	2,275,627
End of service benefits	190,043	-	186,723
Other payables	487,420	1,274,988	643,876
Provision for taxation	326,852	316,996	216,326
Total liabilities	33,691,056	32,975,895	35,274,306
Total Equity and liabilities	54,414,241	51,932,311	55,241,173
Net Assets per share	0.200	0.184	0.193
b. Net insurance service results inclusive of net insurance finance expense Increased by 164% from RO 629k loss in Q1-2023 to 400k profit in Q1-2024.			



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MoH signs agreement for cloud hosting project

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health, represented by the Directorate-General of Health Services of Muscat Governorate (DGHS-Muscat) signed on Tuesday a cloud hosting project agreement with Oman Digital Data Company (Oman Data Park).

The agreement was signed by Dr Thamra bint Said al Ghafriyah, DGHS-Muscat Director-General, and Khaled bin Nasser al Abri, the General Manager of Corporate Support at Oman Data Park.

The DGHS-Muscat Director-General underscored the importance of strengthening the partnership between the public sector and other sectors to develop and provide high-quality health services. She also commended the noble initiative

Oman Data Park presented to support the electronic training and administrative platform "Athar" for the Directorate-General of Health Services of Muscat Governorate.

The platform provides high-quality training services to develop skills and enhance the competencies of health workers. It also works to improve the basics of vocational training by providing digital tools that contribute to enhancing the quality of health services.

The platform serves as the main gateway for employees of the Directorate to stay updated on training updates, professional development programmes. It also facilitates the process for employees to apply for missions, study leaves and training grants.

The activation of the platform has brought about a qualitative transformation in the field of training and various administrative services. Training materials have become accessible to all employees under the Directorate, serving as the primary electronic reference for training data of employees and as a measure of their training proficiency.

On his turn, the General Manager of Corporate Support at Oman Data Park affirmed that the company will provide technical support by offering cloud hosting for the platform for a duration of two years. This support ensures the continuous operation of the electronic platform and enhances the security of its data to the highest possible extent. — ONA

OMAN PARTICIPATES IN ARAB ECONOMIC FORUM



Oman was represented during the forum by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, and Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry. — ONA

DOHA: The Sultanate of Oman took part in activities of the 3rd edition of the Arab Economic and Cooperation Forum with Countries of Central Asia and Azerbaijan, hosted by the State of Qatar in Doha.

Oman was represented during the forum by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, and Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary

of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry.

The forum aimed to press ahead with political coordination and consultation between Arab countries and countries of Central Asia and Azerbaijan. It also targeted boosting cooperation in economic, cultural and social fields, in addition to activating partnerships and initiatives

between the two sides.

Oman's delegation comprised Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Arab Republic of Egypt, Sayyid Ammar bin Abdullah al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the State of Qatar, and several officials from the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

— ONA



The agreement was signed by Dr Thamra bint Said al Ghafriyah, DGHS-Muscat Director-General, and Khaled bin Nasser al Abri, the General Manager of Corporate Support at Oman Data Park. — ONA

ISWK student creates app for book exchange

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Touched by the hassles that children face in sourcing books and various other academic resources, a young expat has come out with an app where one can freely exchange books and other study materials for free.

Krish Kamath, a class 11 student of Indian School Wadi Kabir (Cambridge), created "TradeReads," a community-driven platform allowing users to exchange books and various other academic resources. It is proving to be a boon for those who wish to get original titles and a relief for those who are concerned about the disappearing book-reading habits of children.

"I found a common problem among students of different ages in accessing used books which resulted in students having to pay absurd prices and bear shipping costs, not knowing their neighbours might have the book they needed," said Kamath.

He claims that the app bridges the gap between individuals seeking books with those who



Krish Kamath



TradeReads,' a community-driven platform allowing users to exchange books and various other academic resources

KRISH KAMATH
A student of ISWK

have books to share.

To set the ball rolling, it is simple and all the students have to do is to download the app from the Google Play Store or App Store, sign up with their e-mail or number, and one is set to enjoy the benefits of having pre-loved books from across the country

and even beyond.

Krish is not only a mobile app developer, but also an AS Level STEM student and Head Boy at Indian School Wadi Kabir Cambridge, who has made a name for himself through both academic excellence and technological innovation.

TotalEnergies Celebrates a Century of Progress and Partnership in Oman



Under the esteemed patronage of His Excellency Engineer Salim bin Nasser al Afi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, TotalEnergies marks its 100-year anniversary with a grand celebration in Oman. The event was graced by the presence of distinguished ministers, government officials, and leaders from the private sector, commemorating a century of innovation, commitment, and collaborative success in the energy sector.

"The Middle East has been central to our operations, where we have fostered long-standing relationships based on trust, mutual understanding, and pragmatic win-win solutions," said Mr. Sergio GIORGI, the Country Chair of TotalEnergies Oman. TotalEnergies has consistently demonstrated its multi-energy capability by delivering innovative solutions that accelerate the shift towards renewable energy. This approach is exemplified by the Marsa LNG project in Oman, which sets a new standard for low-carbon LNG production powered by solar energy.

TotalEnergies' impact on local communities is profound. In Oman, the company has pioneered the supply of solar power to the Sharqiyah desalination plant, making it the first in the GCC to produce drinking water using clean energy. This initiative not only supports sustainable development but also ensures the provision of essential resources in an environmentally friendly manner.

Looking to the future, TotalEnergies Oman is committed to aligning with the Sultanate's vision

of increasing renewable power penetration. "Our goal is to be a long-term partner in the Middle East, providing energy that our clients need while aiming for net zero by 2050," Mr. Sergio GIORGI added. This vision includes significant investments in both traditional and renewable energy sources to support a balanced energy transition.

TotalEnergies' strategy integrates state-of-the-art technology and artificial intelligence to optimize renewable power generation, reflecting the company's ongoing commitment to innovation. "Oil and gas have laid the foundations, but electricity will power our future. We are poised to lead the charge towards a sustainable energy future, reducing carbon emissions and reaching carbon neutrality by 2050," said Mr. Sergio GIORGI, the Country Chair of TotalEnergies Oman.

The company's operational strategies are deeply rooted in sustainability, aiming to enhance the local environment and biodiversity. TotalEnergies places a high priority on safety, empowering every employee to maintain the highest safety standards.

As TotalEnergies looks towards the next century, it remains dedicated to maintaining its legacy of innovation and leadership within the energy sector, adapting to evolving market demands through digital technologies and AI. The company's pioneering spirit continues to drive its progress, ensuring it remains at the forefront of the global energy market.





MSX signs Net Zero 2050 Pledge

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 30

The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) participated in the annual conference of the Arab Capital Markets Federation 2024, held in the Qatari capital, Doha.

The opening session was held under the auspices of Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, and brought together over 250 delegates.

These delegates represented Arab stock exchanges, brokerage firms, settlement and clearing companies, asset management institutions, government financial institutions, central banks, investment banks, regulatory bodies, data providers in financial markets and regional associations.

The conference discussed issues of sustainability, investor relations, Islamic finance, financial technology, digital assets and artificial intelligence applications in Arab financial markets.

On the sidelines of the conference, the Muscat Stock Exchange, along with three other Arab exchanges, became the first to sign the Net Zero Pledge outside of regular climate conferences. This brings the total number of global signatories to 15.

Haitham bin Salem al Salmi, CEO of the Muscat Stock Exchange, commented, “I am



Haitham bin Salem al Salmi, CEO, MSX

delighted to announce that the Muscat Stock Exchange has signed the Net Zero Pledge by 2050 and joined the Exchange Zero Net initiative of the United Nations Sustainable Stock Exchanges (UNSSE) programme. This significant step is an important contribution to global efforts to combat climate change and promote sustainability principles. It supports a green and sustainable economy in achieving net neutrality goals and embodies our deep commitment to protecting the earth.”

He continued, “The Muscat Stock Exchange believes that sustainability is a shared responsibility. We recognise that climate change poses a serious threat to our future. Therefore, we are announcing a series of strategic steps to achieve our

ambitious goal. This includes developing an annual reduction plan for net zero emissions. We will design a plan to gradually reduce carbon emissions until we reach net zero by 2050. This plan will encompass multiple actions, including improving the energy efficiency of our offices and facilities, exploring the use of renewable energy sources, supporting sustainability projects within our listed companies, and providing support and encouragement to listed companies to reduce their emissions.”

“We will also work to ensure transparency and disclosure about environmental, social and governance (ESG) standards and the efforts made by listed companies. This will further encourage them to adopt

“
This significant step
is an important
contribution to global
efforts to combat
climate change and
promote sustainability
principles

**HAITHAM BIN
SALEM AL SALMI**
CEO MSX

sustainable practices,” Al Salmi added.

The CEO concluded by stating, “The Stock Exchange’s commitment to achieving net zero goals, increasing reliance on clean energy, and implementing green development will contribute to strengthening the Muscat Stock Exchange’s position as a global leader in sustainability. This aligns with the Stock Exchange’s operations and objectives, which will attract more investors and those interested in sustainable practices. It will also enhance economic growth. Our steps will inspire future generations to adopt sustainable practices and protect the planet. This fosters integration and harmony in efforts made to combat climate change and achieve sustainable development, in line with Oman Vision 2040 for a sustainable economy.”

Preparations for Haj underway

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Preparations for Haj are currently underway as the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs began talks with the competent authorities in Oman as well as in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

A coordination meeting was held between the Omani Haj Mission and the Military Haj Delegation to discuss developments in the procedures related to the services provided to Omani pilgrims in the holy sites. The meeting was attended by Ahmed bin Saleh al Rashdi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs; Sultan bin Said al Hinai, Head of the Omani Haj Mission; and Brigadier General Hassan bin Ali al Majini, Head of Moral Guidance and Military Protocol at the Chief of Staff of the Sultan’s Armed Forces representing the Military Haj Mission.

They discussed various matters pertaining to the pilgrimage. Oman is planning to send as many as 14,000 pilgrims. In order to facilitate the pilgrimage of believers from the Sultanate of Oman this year, Oman has formed a Haj Mission under the chairmanship of Sultan bin Said al Hinai, the current head of the mission, earlier in 2024.



A coordination meeting was held between the Omani Haj Mission and the Military Haj Delegation to discuss developments in the procedures related to the services provided to Omani pilgrims. – **ONA**

AL ATHEL A SOURCE OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

TEXT & PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

Tamarisk or Al Athel is a perennial tree scientifically called “Tamarix Aphylla”. This tree is related to the Tamaricaceae family. It looks usually evergreen because it has a great ability to grow in extremely harsh climatic conditions and it could grow even in salty and dry soil. People in desert regions used to plant these trees around their settlements against strong dust winds.

This tree has large, rough-skinned roots that reach great depths, and is distinguished by its slim branches. These branches have few leaves that remain green throughout the year. This tree is known by many names, one of its famous names is the ‘sea salt’ tree. Just as it resists drought, it also has the ability to resist the salinity of water and soil.

Al Athel is a small- to medium-sized tree, with slender branches and leaves that closely resemble a pine tree. Its leaves often secrete a salt-like substance, especially during the summer season when temperatures rise to their highest levels. This tree consumes large amounts of water. It reaches a height of more than five metres, and when Tamarisk trees gather together in one area, they can form a dense forest. Now, after the rain, this tree can be seen bright with the colours of its pink and white flowers. The more appropriate amounts of water are available to it, the more this will help it grow and green.

Al Athel is widespread in many desert areas and semi-arid environments around the world. Among these regions are the Mediterranean regions and the central regions of the continent of

**Tamarisk is used to treat
wounds, infections,
liver disorders, digestive
disorders and diabetes.
The leaves of this tree
contain a group of acids
that have therapeutic
properties, including
phenolic acid and
flavonoid acid**

Asia. Tamarisk trees also grow in mountainous and coastal areas.

There are approximately 50 species of Tamarisk trees. Each of which has characteristics and features that differ from the others. The most famous of these species are ‘Tamarix chinensis’, ‘Tamarix ramosissima’, ‘Tamarix gallica’ and ‘Tamarix odessana’.

Tamarisk is used to treat wounds, infections, liver disorders, digestive disorders and diabetes. The leaves of this tree contain a group of acids that have therapeutic properties, including phenolic acid and flavonoid acid.

Tamarisk or Al Athel can be seen mostly in Muscat, Al Batinah, Al Sharqiyah North and South, Al Dhahirah and Al Dakhiliyah. This tree attracts bees to build hives and therefore an excellent source of natural honey, which is good for sore throat, irritable bowel syndrome, depression and anxiety.

Thanks to the recent rains, these trees are sprouting in plains and mountainous areas giving it a green cover. Omanis living in these areas expect that the honey production season will be better than previous years. People must not cut the trunks and branches of this tree and use them for cooking or camping purposes.



The height of Al Athel tree reaches 5 metres





Tech conference highlights AI and cybersecurity

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 30

The National University of Science and Technology, Oman, hosted the First International Conference on Advanced Technology (ICAT 2024) on Tuesday. It will continue on Wednesday.

The two-day event will focus on exploring the applications of AI and cyber solutions for achieving sustainability in engineering and healthcare. The inaugural function, held at the Hormuz Grand Hotel in Muscat, was graced by the presence of Dr Ali bin Amer al Shidhani, Under-Secretary for Communication and Information Technology at the Ministry of Transport, Communication and Information Technology.

The ICAT 2024 reflects the National University's commitment to fostering global innovation and technological advancements in engineering and health sciences. The conference served as a platform for experts, scholars, and visionaries



Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology and Dr Ali Al Bimani, Vice-Chancellor of National University, at the conference in Muscat on Tuesday.

to exchange knowledge and delve into groundbreaking research in the fields of AI and cybersecurity.

The conference featured prominent international keynote speakers and dedicated paper presentation sessions centred around the theme "Applications of AI and Cyber Solutions for

Sustainability in Engineering and Healthcare." During the inaugural speech, Dr Ali Al Bimani, Vice-Chancellor of National University, highlighted the immense potential of modern technologies like AI, machine learning, and deep learning to drive innovation, enhance quality of life, and address pressing global

challenges. He acknowledged the corresponding challenges that must be addressed across various domains.

Dr Al Bimani elaborated on how AI revolutionises engineering through design optimisation, predictive maintenance, and autonomous operations. This, in

turn, contributes to sustainable urban development and efficient manufacturing processes. Similarly, AI is transforming healthcare by improving diagnostics, personalising treatments, and providing continuous patient support through advanced systems.

Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing ICAT 2024 brought together academia, researchers, industry leaders, and other stakeholders. The conference will foster knowledge sharing, encourage research in developing technology, and identify future needs critical for driving Oman and the region's digital economy.

MOU WITH SRM

A significant outcome of the conference was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the National University and SRM University in India. This partnership will focus on collaborative research, exploring solutions for emerging technologies, and shaping the future direction of

AI research and applications.

Dr Nasser bin Mohammed al Fannah from the MoTCIT delivered another keynote address on the National Programme for Digital Economy. He outlined the program's pillars, action plans, and goals aligned with Oman's Vision 2040.

Prof Syedali Mirjalili, an AI expert from Torrens University Australia, presented solutions for overcoming optimisation challenges in real-world situations.

ICAT 2024 received an overwhelming response with over 80 presentations submitted from more than 15 countries worldwide. The conference garnered generous support from leading establishments like ASYAD, Oman LNG, OQGN, Arabian Industries, Huawei, Al Siraj Holdings, and Oman Arab Bank.

The conference hosted over 150 delegates, including 70 international attendees and speakers from over 12 countries, including Australia, the US, Turkey, Japan, India and Malaysia.

Knowledge Oman Academy launched

MUSCAT: Knowledge Oman, the award-winning community knowledge sharing platform, announces its upcoming ground-breaking, the KO Academy, an initiative aimed at bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge taught at universities and practical skills required by the industry, ultimately addressing the critical need gaps for job-seekers in Oman. The KO Academy seeks to equip individuals with specific skills that empowers participants to seize the vast employment opportunities available in the evolving job market.

"We have completed 16

years of our mission on connecting the community with Knowledge. Our next mission is to empower the youth with practical skills that is required by the industry" announced Knowledge Oman Founder, Tariq bin Hilal al Barwani, who recently returned to lead the community platform after few years of break.

According to recent statistics in higher education, Oman has witnessed a significant increase in the number of graduates over the past decade. While this demonstrates the nation's commitment to education, it also highlights the emerging

challenge of aligning graduates' skills with the demands of the job market. In response, KO Academy aims to bridge this gap, ensuring that job-seekers possess the skills and competencies required by employers.

"In today's rapidly evolving world, the employment landscape is constantly transforming, demanding individuals to adapt and acquire new skill sets. Our initiative aims to address this ever-growing demand by providing comprehensive sessions in various fields. Through strategic partnerships with industry

leaders, the initiative will offer practical sessions comprising of workshops, conferences equipping participants with specialised skills that are highly sought after by employers," added Tariq.

This educational initiative aligns with Oman Vision 2040, which recognises education and employment as key pillars for the nation's sustainable development. By investing in such learning, and development programs, Oman aims to create a highly skilled workforce that can drive economic growth and innovation, contributing to the realisation of the national vision.

SALE OF VEHICLE / EQUIPMENT

Leading Construction Co. in Oman intends to dispose of their used vehicles and equipment, in **'as is where is'** condition. The items identified are presently located at their Barka Khazaen and will be offered for inspection to the public **on 5/5/2024, 6/5/2024 and 7/5/2024 between 08:00 am to 12:00 pm and 03:00 pm to 05:00 pm.**

Last date for submission of closed tender is **7/5/2024 at 05:00 pm** at our Khazaen office In Barka state.

Interested parties may contact at
Tel: (+968) 26983767 / 26983777 / 26983703
Mobile: (+968) 91354151

IMF delegation to hold talks with Oman officials

MUSCAT: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) commenced its meetings on Tuesday in Muscat in preparation for the 2024 Article IV consultations. It is hosted by the Sultanate of Oman represented by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) and the Ministry of Finance.

IMF experts are set to conduct a series of meetings with officials and specialists from CBO, the Ministry and a number of government and private sector institutions.

The meetings will discuss the recent economic and financial developments, recent inflation developments, financial stability risks, financial sector developments, including initiatives to promote SME financing and fintech, and other topics related to the financial and monetary policies in the Sultanate of Oman.

— ONA



IMF experts are set to conduct a series of meetings with officials and specialists from government and private sector



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA) TENDER

Tender Number	Tender Title	Company Grade:	Tender Fee	Dates		
				Distribution Till	Last Day to receive Clarifications	Bid Submission Date
1/2024	Design, supply, implementation, management & support of OAAAQA Core Services digital transformation solution	Excellent and First	40 OMR	15/05/2024	22/05/2024	26/06/2024

The Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation & Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA) is hereby inviting all local, regional & international specialized bidders to participate in this TENDER as per the following instructions, in addition to all terms of TENDER enclosed in the TENDER documents.

For project brief, please visit the below link:

<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

A. Purchase of Tender Documents

The Bidders may obtain the TENDER document by registering the company at eTendering System (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

B. Submission

All Proposals should be SUBMITTED ONLINE AT e-TENDERING System (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Proposals to be accepted for evaluation which will be submitted through the eTendering System ONLY.

C. Correspondence

Tender Inquiry:

All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online through the eTendering System ONLY.

eTendering System Inquiry:

All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number:

etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200

All correspondence pertaining to the OAAAQA tender must be directed to the following email address and phone number:

tenders@oaaaqa.gov.om and +968 24121706

OAAAQA Business Hours

Sunday – Thursday, 7:30 - 14:30 Oman Time, (+4 UTC)

OAAAQA Business Hours are to be considered in all correspondences.



Palestinian parties met for talks in Beijing

BEIJING: China said on Tuesday that rival Palestinian groups Hamas and Fatah met in Beijing recently for “in-depth and candid talks on promoting intra-Palestinian reconciliation”. “Representatives of the

Palestine National Liberation Movement and the Islamic Resistance Movement recently came to Beijing,” foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian said, referring to the groups by their formal names. “The two sides

fully expressed their political will to achieve reconciliation through dialogue and consultation, discussed many specific issues and made positive progress,” he added, without specifying when the sides had met. Beijing has been calling for an immediate ceasefire since the start of the current war in October last year, when attacks by the Palestinian groups resulted in the deaths of about 1,170 people in Israel, according to a tally

based on Israeli official figures. Israel’s retaliatory offensive has killed at least 34,535 people in the Gaza Strip, mostly women and children, the health ministry in the territory said on Tuesday. Beijing said on Tuesday the two factions had “agreed to continue this process of dialogue with a view to achieving Palestinian unity at an early date”. “The two sides highly appreciated China’s firm support for the just cause of the

Palestinian people to restore their legitimate national rights,” Lin said. He did not identify the representatives from the rivals who met in Beijing. But one analyst said that, in contrast to Western efforts to sideline the groups, Beijing’s “strategic objective is to legitimise them as a political faction”. “Palestinian unity, in Beijing’s view, is the first and necessary step for a peace process that leads

to a Palestinian state,” Ahmed Aboudouh, an Associate Fellow at Chatham House’s Middle East and North Africa Programme, said. “Most importantly, China wants to keep the momentum of positive discourse about its role in the Middle East,” he added. China has historically been sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and supportive of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. — **AFP**



A Palestinian woman stands at the entrance of a tent in an area housing displaced people in Rafah. — **AFP**

Israel warns of Rafah ground offensive regardless of truce deal

TEL AVIV: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed on Tuesday that the military would launch a ground offensive on Gaza’s far-southern Rafah city “with or without” a truce deal being negotiated. The premier issued the warning despite strong concerns raised by top ally Washington and before US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was set to arrive in Israel on his latest Middle East crisis tour. “The idea that we will halt the war before achieving all of its goals is out of the question,” said Netanyahu, who was vowed to destroy Palestinian groups over their October 7 attack that sparked the deadliest ever Gaza war. “We will enter Rafah and we will eliminate the battalions there

Netanyahu issued the warning despite strong concerns raised by top ally Washington and before US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was set to arrive in Israel

with or without a deal, in order to achieve the total victory,” he told families of some of the captives still being held in Gaza, his office said. Netanyahu’s comments came as Palestinian movement Hamas was weighing the latest plan for a truce proposed in Cairo talks with US, Egyptian and Qatari mediators that had raised cautious hopes for an end to the

fighting. The Palestinian group said it was considering a plan for a 40-day ceasefire and the exchange of scores of captives for larger numbers of Palestinian prisoners. The group, whose envoys returned from Cairo talks to their base in Qatar, would “discuss the ideas and the proposal”, said a source, adding that “we are keen to respond as quickly as possible”. Sources in Egypt earlier told Al-Qahera News, a site linked to Egyptian intelligence services, that Hamas envoys were due to “return with a written response”. An Israeli official said that the government “will wait for answers until Wednesday night”, and then “make a decision” whether to send negotiators to Cairo. As diplomacy continued,

Israel kept up its bombardment that has flattened swathes of Gaza. A correspondent reported several air strikes in Gaza City, Khan Yunis and Rafah as well as overnight artillery shelling. Israel’s retaliatory offensive has killed at least 34,535 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in the Palestinian territory. As the Gaza war has roiled the region and its human toll has sparked international outrage, political momentum has built in the search for a post-war solution to the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said that irreversible steps towards establishing a Palestinian state would be an essential component of any lasting ceasefire. — **AFP**

■ FLARES FOR CEASEFIRE



A demonstrator holds up flares during a pro-Palestinian demonstration in the courtyard of the Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po) building in Lyon, central Eastern France. In an echo of tense demonstrations rocking many top US universities, students at Sciences Po Paris have staged a number of protests, with some students furious over the Israel-Hamas war and ensuing humanitarian crisis in the besieged Palestinian territory of Gaza. — **AFP**

UNRWA chief seeks probe into staff treatment by Israel

GENEVA: The head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) called on Tuesday for countries to back an independent investigation into alleged killings and detentions of its staff and damage to its premises once the conflict ends. UNRWA has accused Israel of targeting its facilities during more than seven months of conflict in the Gaza Strip, and said 182 of its staff there had been killed and more than 160 of its shelters hit, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of people fleeing Israeli bombardment. After briefing UN member

states in Geneva, UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini told reporters he wanted the countries to back an independent investigation “to look into this blatant disregard of the United Nations in order to avoid that this becomes also in the future the new standard.” Lazzarini said Israel blocked him from entering Gaza last month, and that he plans to visit again on Sunday. He voiced hope that Israel would let him in. UNRWA is the biggest humanitarian aid provider in Gaza where its 13,000 staff there also run



Humanitarian aid falls through the sky towards the Gaza Strip. — **Reuters**

schools and social services for the refugees who make up the majority of Gazans. Health authorities in Gaza say more than 34,000 Palestinians have been killed in the offensive, intended by Israel to eliminate the Palestinian groups. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has called for UNRWA to be shut down, saying it seeks to preserve the issue of Palestinian refugees. Meanwhile, Judges at the International Court of Justice on Tuesday ruled against issuing emergency orders to stop German arms exports to Israel, adding

they remained deeply concerned about conditions in Gaza. But the Court did also not grant a German request to throw out the case, so it can move forward. A review of the agency’s neutrality said Israel had yet to provide evidence for its accusations that a significant number of UNRWA staff were members of groups and Lazzarini said that all but a handful of countries had now unblocked funds they had paused after the Israeli allegations. The agency has also raised \$115 million in private funding, he said. — **Reuters**



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In brief

NEW YORK



JUDGE HOLDS TRUMP IN CONTEMPT FOR GAG ORDER VIOLATIONS

The New York judge presiding over Donald Trump's hush money trial fined the former president on Tuesday for defying a gag order and warned that further violations could result in jail time. Judge Juan Merchan held Trump in contempt of court for breaching an order that he not publicly attack witnesses, jurors or court staff and their relatives.

Merchan fined Trump \$1,000 each for nine specific violations of the gag order, and instructed him to remove seven "offending posts." The judge also warned the former president that he could be sent to jail if he continues to violate the gag order. — AFP

MANADO



VOLCANO ERUPTS, THOUSANDS EVACUATED OVER TSUNAMI THREAT

Indonesia's remote Mount Ruang volcano erupted several times on Tuesday, authorities said, issuing the highest level of alert and ordering thousands of people to evacuate due to the threat of a tsunami from debris sliding into the sea. The country's volcanology agency had warned the threat from the volcano was not over after it erupted more than half a dozen times this month.

The volcano sent a tower of ash more than five kilometres into the sky, it added, as well as a fiery column of lava. The national disaster agency BNPB estimated 11,000 to 12,000 people had to be relocated from near Ruang's crater. — AFP

PRAGUE



CZECH GOVERNMENT UPS RETIREMENT AGE IN PENSION REFORM

The Czech government on Tuesday approved a pension reform allowing the retirement age to rise above 65 to respond to the needs of an ageing society, Prime Minister Petr Fiala said.

The reform, expected to take effect in 2025, will be submitted to parliament where the government has a majority.

"The reform will ensure dignified pensions to people who are in their thirties and forties today," Fiala said. "Had we not approved it, the system would not be sustainable and it would collapse sooner or later," he added. The reform reckons that an average Czech will spend 21.5 years in retirement. — AFP

Russia says shot down US-made missiles

MOSCOW: Russia said on Tuesday it had shot down six US-supplied tactical missiles launched by Ukraine, with officials in annexed Crimea saying some were downed over the Black Sea peninsula.

Washington has said it had supplied the arms to Ukraine, which has been asking for more powerful weapons for months as it struggles to contain advancing Russian forces.

Moscow's defence ministry said it had destroyed six Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) rockets "in the last 24 hours", without saying where they were shot down.

The Russian-installed head of Crimea, Sergei Aksyonov, said one of the missiles was downed in the village of Donskoye, outside the main city of Simferopol.

"After an ATACMS missile was shot down, undetonated submunitions scattered," Aksyonov said on Telegram.

"If you find such a weapon, do not pick it up or come close and call emergency services or the police," he warned.

Aksyonov posted a photograph of a metal ball which he said was part of the destroyed missile. Russia did not say if the missiles caused any damage in Crimea.

Earlier, an official from Russian-occupied southern Ukraine, Vladimir Rogov, said that air defence had been in operation over Simferopol and the town of Dzankoi, in northern Crimea.

Ukraine has regularly attacked Crimea during Moscow's more than two-year offensive. But it did not comment on Tuesday's attack.

Last week, the United States said it had sent ATACMS missiles to Ukraine in February.



Local residents look at damage at a site of a Russian missile strike, in Kharkiv. — Reuters

Washington has said it had supplied the arms to Ukraine, which has been asking for more powerful weapons for months

Ukrainian forces are now awaiting the arrival of new US weapons, green-lighted by President Joe Biden after months

of being blocked by political wrangling in Congress.

Meanwhile, Kyiv authorities on Tuesday began taking down a Soviet-era monument celebrating friendship with Russia — more than two years into an attack by Moscow which has cost tens of thousands of lives. "City municipal services have begun dismantling" the monument, the mayor's office said on social media.

The monument commemorates the signing in 1654 of a treaty binding Ukraine to Russian rule.

The structure — a series of stone sculptures depicting the treaty's Ukrainian and Russian signatories — was installed in a park in central Kyiv as part of an memorial complex celebrating the "friendship" between Russians and Ukrainians.

Since the attack began in 2022, Kyiv authorities had already taken down two bronze statues depicting a Ukrainian and a Russian worker at the same site.

"The dismantlement could take several days since the structure is quite massive.

It includes around 20 pieces" weighing between six and seven tonnes each, the mayor's office said. — AFP



King Charles III and Queen Camilla receive a bouquet of flowers after a visit to the University College Hospital Macmillan Cancer Centre in London. — AFP

Charles resumes public duties as he fights cancer

LONDON: King Charles III on Tuesday reportedly told fellow cancer patients "I'm well", as he carried out his first official public engagement since being diagnosed with the condition.

The British head of state appeared relaxed as he and his wife Queen Camilla met patients and staff at the University College Hospital Macmillan Cancer Centre in central London.

He talked to patients receiving chemotherapy at a day unit, including 60-year-old Asha Millen, who has bone marrow cancer. "I said, 'How are you?' and he said, 'I'm well'", she told reporters afterwards.

Charles, 75, suspended most of his duties in February after cancer was found while he was being treated for an enlarged prostate the previous month.

The exact nature of his cancer has not been disclosed but doctors said last week they were "very encouraged" by the progress of his treatment as an out-patient and "positive" about his recovery.

His daughter-in-law Catherine, Princess of Wales, 42, underwent abdominal surgery in January and said in March that she was receiving chemotherapy.

Again, no details were given about what type of cancer she has. Kate, as she is widely known,

is married to Charles's elder son and heir Prince William.

Tuesday's event was the first in a number of planned engagements in the coming weeks and designed to raise awareness of the importance of early cancer diagnosis and highlight innovative research, Buckingham Palace said.

Charles, who succeeded his mother Queen Elizabeth II in September 2022, was officially crowned king on May 6 last year.

He has been seen attending church services since his diagnosis and at selected audiences. He has also continued his official state business. — AFP

Kenya's Ruto orders evacuations after floods

NAIROBI: Kenyan President William Ruto on Tuesday deployed the military to evacuate everyone living in flood-prone areas after 171 people were killed due to heavier than usual rainfall since March.

Monsoon rains, amplified by the El Nino weather pattern, have devastated the East African country, engulfing villages and threatening to unleash even more damage in the weeks to come.

In the worst single incident that killed nearly 50 villagers, a makeshift dam burst in the Rift Valley before dawn on Monday, sending torrents of water and mud gushing down a hill and swallowing everything in its path. The tragedy in Kamuchiri village, Nakuru county, was the deadliest episode in the country since the start of the March-May rainy season.

Ruto, who visited the victims of the Kamuchiri deluge after chairing a cabinet meeting in Nairobi, said his government had drawn up a map of neighbourhoods at risk of flooding.

"The military has been mobilised, the national youth service has been mobilised, all security agencies have been mobilised to assist citizens in such areas to evacuate to avoid any dangers of loss of lives," he said. People living in the affected areas will have 48 hours to move, he added.

"The forecast is that rain is going to continue and the likelihood of flooding and people losing lives is real and therefore we must take preemptive action," he said. "It is not a time for guesswork, we are better off safe than sorry." — AFP



Young men inspect a destroyed car carried by waters in an area heavily affected by torrential rains and flash floods in the village of Kamuchiri. — AFP

The analysis paralysis of indecisiveness



Hyesha Barrett
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The writer is a life coach and NLP practitioner

Indecisiveness, the chronic inability to make decisions, is a hurdle that affects various aspects of our life. Whether it's choosing between two job offers, picking a restaurant for dinner, which Netflix show to watch or making significant life choices, indecisiveness can paralyse us, leaving us stuck in a cycle of uncertainty and anxiety.

In essence, indecisiveness stems from a fear of making the wrong choice. The worry of failure or making a decision that leads to undesirable outcomes can leave us trapped in a state of analysis paralysis. This fear is often fuelled by perfectionism, the desire for optimal outcomes coupled with the pressure to meet external expectations and validations. Consequently, we often procrastinate or avoid making decisions altogether, hoping to avoid unpredictable consequences.

Moreover, the abundance of choices in today's society exacerbates indecisiveness. An excess of options can lead to decision-making difficulties and dissatisfaction. When faced with numerous alternatives, we may struggle to evaluate each option, leading to confusion and indecision. One fundamental is to limit your choices.

Indecisiveness, not only impedes personal

progress but also affects interpersonal relationships and professional endeavours. In social settings, indecisive individuals may appear unreliable or disengaged, as their inability to commit to plans or express preferences can strain friendships and romantic relationships. In the workplace, indecisiveness can hinder productivity and leadership effectiveness, as timely decisions drive initiatives forward, without which might lead to missed opportunities.

Overcoming indecisiveness requires a proactive approach and a willingness to confront underlying fears and thought patterns. One effective strategy is to set clear priorities. By identifying what matters most and outlining specific factors to consider, we can restructure the decision-making process and alleviate overwhelm. Additionally, breaking down complex decisions into smaller, manageable steps will make tasks less daunting, all the while facilitating continual momentum and progress.

Cultivating self-awareness is also essential for combating indecisiveness. By recognising patterns of avoidance or perfectionism, we can challenge irrational beliefs and develop a more balanced perspective on our decision-making skills. Practicing mindfulness techniques, such as

OVERCOMING INDECISIVENESS REQUIRES A PROACTIVE APPROACH AND A WILLINGNESS TO CONFRONT UNDERLYING FEARS AND THOUGHT PATTERNS.

meditation or journalling, can help us tune into our intuition and cultivate inner clarity amidst external noise.

Embracing a growth mindset is paramount in overcoming indecisiveness. Viewing decisions as learning opportunities rather than rigid judgments will allow us to embrace uncertainty and adapt to changing circumstances. By reframing setbacks as stepping stones to growth, we will develop resilience and conviction in our decision-making abilities.

Indecisiveness is a common challenge that affects us all. Some key components to diminish indecisiveness entails clarifying your end goals and working backwards while setting clear, small and manageable action steps. Practising making little decisions, trusting your instincts, evaluating your options and accepting imperfection are vital elements to becoming more decisive. Limit your choices, seek feedback and take ownership of your successes and failures. Learn from outcomes and use them to inform future choices.

By confronting your fears, setting priorities, and cultivating self-awareness, you will undoubtedly break free from the paralysis of indecisiveness and move forward through life with more certainty, clarity and confidence.

Mali's junta unwavering despite dissent

CAMILLE LAFFONT

The national phase of a months-long “inter-Malian dialogue” is set to begin in six days' time, with the country's military junta banking on the conclusions to bolster its increasingly contested legitimacy.

Weakened by security and economic crises and criticised for their failure to transfer power back to civilians, Mali's authorities have cracked down on mounting dissent, while still managing to retain support from a section of the population.

The West African nation has been ruled by juntas since back-to-back coups in 2020 and 2021, with the military promising to hand back power through the ballot box in February under pressure from regional bloc ECOWAS.

But the colonels sparked domestic and international criticism after failing to uphold this commitment and postponing the election until an unspecified date — citing a precarious security situation aggravated by militant groups which has not yet been stabilised.

After muzzling opponents, journalists and human rights activists, the military authorities suspended the activities of political parties in April and dissolved several civil society organisations calling for elections to be held.

But in the eyes of some Malians, the increasingly critical political class “suffers from a credibility deficit due to corruption and broken promises” under previous regimes, said Mahamadou Konate, a university professor in the capital Bamako.

He added that this view had been amplified by communications from the military government.

The junta is also counting on the inter-Malian dialogue, launched in December, to strengthen its peace efforts after ending a major 2015 deal with armed separatist groups in the north.

The talks' first recommendations, seen by AFP, unsurprisingly call for the extension of the so-called “transition” period and, in some regions, for junta leader Colonel Assimi Goita to stand as a candidate in the presidential election.

The “dialogue” has been boycotted by the majority of the opposition, which sees it as a pretext for the regime to prolong its rule.

But a fringe of public opinion “believes that elections would not be a guarantee of development or any kind of relief, and sees no urgency in them”, Aly Tounkara, Executive Director of the Centre for Security and Strategic Studies in the Sahel, said.

— AFP

Understanding the gulf between Zionism and Judaism



Karim Easterbrook

The author is former School Principal Cambridge UK

Owing to the genocide taking place in Palestine there has been a rise in anti-Jewish violence and anti-Jewish sentiment, especially in Europe. For Jewish people this gives rise to a fear that they might once again face a Nazi Holocaust. Such a fear is always uppermost in the minds of Jewish people.

This persecution of Jews is misguided and is based on the misconception that Zionism is synonymous with Judaism and that Israel is a Jewish State rather than a secular Zionist State. These misconceptions have caused and continue to cause a dangerous confusion, especially dangerous for Jews. Most Jewish people throughout the world do not regard themselves as Zionists and many oppose the very existence of Israel. To explain the difference between Zionism and Judaism it is firstly important to understand that Judaism is an ancient religion founded several thousand years ago whilst Zionism is a nationalistic political ideology founded in the late 19th Century.

Jews who oppose the existence of Israel and condemn Zionism are often referred to as ultra-orthodox Jews as though they are in some way different from other Jews. All Jews follow the religion of Judaism and this is how we should define what it is to be Jewish. Moreover being Jewish does not mean that you belong to a specific race no more so than being Christian or Muslim does. Nor does it mean that you adhere to a political ideology. These are Zionist constructs.

Central to their opposition is the conviction that the return to the Holy Land (Palestine) must be a purely spiritual and divine act, unaided by human intervention or political manoeuvring and not brought about by the use of military power and violence. They draw upon interpretations of sacred texts, particularly using the Midrash, to support their stance, contending that any attempt to



Judaism teaches that the establishment of Israel by human agency represents an usurpation of divine authority and a violation of their religion.

expedite their Messianic redemption through secular means is tantamount to rebellion against God's will. Judaism

SADLY ADOLF JELLINEK'S PROPHECY THAT ISRAEL WOULD BECOME THE PLAYTHING OF GREAT POWERS HAS PROVEN TO BE TRUE AND IS THE ROOT CAUSE OF THE PALESTINIAN CONFLICT.

teaches that the establishment of Israel by human agency represents an usurpation of divine authority and a violation of their religion.

The fervent opposition of Jews to the State of Israel is not merely a political stance but a theological imperative—a steadfast assertion of their faith in divine providence and an unwavering commitment to the destiny of the Jewish people as laid down in their religious texts.

Theodore Herzl is regarded as the founder of Israel and is revered in Israel as a Jew, but many forget or

choose to forget that he did not believe in God or in Judaism. The State he sought to create would be a secular state based on the idea of Jewish “national” and “ethnic” identity and incorporating those features he found most attractive in 19th century Europe, particularly Germany.

His plan immediately brought opposition from Jews who rejected the idea of a separate Jewish nationalism and considered themselves full members of the societies in which they were born and lived. German Jews before the rise of Nazism and before the Zionist-Nazi Pact of 1933 (the Haavara or Transfer Agreement) were especially proud of their German heritage.

The Jewish opposition to Zionism is possibly best demonstrated by Adolf Jellinek who was seen as the greatest Jewish preacher of his age and a standard bearer of Judaism from his position as rabbi at the Leopoldstadt Temple in Vienna in the 19th century. He deplored the creation of what he called a “small state like Serbia or Romania outside Europe which would most likely become the plaything of one Great Power against another and whose future would be very uncertain.”

This, however, was not the real basis for his opposition. He argued that it threatened the position of Jews in Western countries and that “almost all Jews in Europe” would vote against the scheme if they were given the opportunity. He stated: “We are at home in Europe and feel ourselves to be children of the lands in which we were born, raised, and educated, whose languages we speak and whose cultures constitute our intellectual substance. We are Germans, Frenchmen, Englishmen, Hungarians, Italians, etc. with every fibre of our being. We long ago ceased to be genuine full-blooded Semites in the sense of a Hebrew nationality that has long since been lost.”

Sadly his prophecy that Israel would become the plaything of Great Powers has proven to be true and is the root cause of the Palestinian conflict.

New hunger figures sound alarm

Despite an alarm sounded by international agencies worldwide, food insecurity is plunging millions into extreme hunger, triggered by wars and conflicts, extreme weather events and economic shocks.

The staggering statistics in the 2024 edition of the Global Report on Food Crises (GRFC) once again point to the enormity and scale of the current situation, and the need to invest in solutions that “secure food security, stability, and peace for all”.

According to the latest report, 2023 was the fifth consecutive year with a rising number of people suffering acute food insecurity, with as many as 281.6 million people facing high levels of acute food insecurity across 59 countries and territories. More confounding is the fact that in five countries, 705,000 people are at the highest level of food insecurity and hunger.

The report found wars and conflicts as the primary drivers of food insecurity, affecting 20 countries and 135 million people- almost half of the global population. The war-torn Gaza has the highest number of 577,000 people facing catastrophic hunger ever recorded by the GRFC.

The current situation in the war-torn Gaza accounts for 80 per cent of those facing imminent famine, along with South Sudan, Burkina Faso, Somalia and Mali.

When it comes to Sudan, which has been lashed by civil war over the past year, it has created the world's largest internal displacement and food crisis, with millions facing hunger and malnutrition, particularly women and children.

According to the report, by July 2024, around 1.1 million people in Gaza and 79,000 people in South Sudan will fall into the worst phase of food insecurity, facing famine.

“This global crisis demands an urgent response. Using the data in this report to transform food systems and address the underlying causes of food insecurity and malnutrition will be vital,



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyvp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE GAZA STRIP ACCOUNTS FOR 80 PER CENT OF THOSE FACING IMMINENT FAMINE, ALONG WITH SOUTH SUDAN, BURKINA FASO, SOMALIA AND MALI

as will finance,” said António Guterres, UN Secretary-General, during the launch of the report.

Extreme weather events were the primary drivers in 18 countries where over 77 million people faced high levels of acute food insecurity, up from 12 countries with 57 million people in 2022. As reported by GRFC, a food crisis emerges when acute food insecurity necessitates immediate intervention to safeguard lives and livelihoods at local or national levels, surpassing local resources and capacities to respond adequately.

Populations enduring prolonged food insecurity or malnutrition are particularly susceptible to food crises, exacerbated by structural factors that heighten vulnerability to shocks.

It is not long ago that World Food Programme Executive Director Cindy McCain warned of a severe global hunger crisis affecting over 700 million people who are uncertain about when or if they will have their next meal.

“This is the humanitarian community's new reality- our new normal - and we will be dealing with the fallout for years to come,” she said, adding that “at the root of the soaring numbers is a deadly combination of conflict, economic shocks, climate extremes and soaring fertiliser prices.”

As the GRFC report points out, acute malnutrition worsened in 2023, particularly among people displaced because of conflict and disasters. Children and women are at the forefront of these hunger crises, with over 36 million children under five years of age acutely malnourished.

The report calls for urgent long-term national and international investment to transform food systems, boost agricultural and rural development, and advocate for peace and the prevention of conflict to become integral parts of the longer-term transformation of food systems.

The fact, however, as Guterres highlighted, is that “in a world of plenty, children are starving to death,” and only “with commitment and concerted action, we can create a world where hunger has no home.”

A CURIOUS PRINCE!



Britain's Prince William, Prince of Wales, reacts as he is shown a sample of low carbon tarmac during his visit to visit Low Carbon Materials in Seaham, north east England on Tuesday, to learn more about how they are working to create low-carbon construction material alternatives since becoming a 2022 Earthshot Prize Finalist. – AFP

The pandemic financing countries need

Pandemic preparedness was on the agenda at last week's Spring Meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, held in Washington, DC, a little over four years after the World Health Organisation declared Covid-19 a global pandemic. Millions of people died, and billions of dollars were spent in the intervening period, but some important lessons of the pandemic remain unlearned.

One glaring example is that low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are still unable to invest in medical countermeasures before they are approved.

The United States and the United Kingdom employed this “at-risk” strategy to great effect during the Covid-19 crisis. LMICs need the same opportunity. When a pandemic strikes, governments must act swiftly and invest heavily in technological solutions that may be unproven.

Expanding vaccine production when medical trials were ongoing, rather than waiting for regulatory approval, proved critical during the Covid-19 pandemic. The US and the UK, in particular, made early and substantial investments in developing and producing vaccines, securing doses at-risk.

In exchange for bearing much of the risk of technological failure, these countries were first in line when the vaccines were found to be effective — a boon for their own citizens. But these investments also helped other



Rachel Glennerster

The writer is Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago, served as Chief Economist of the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office during the Covid-19 pandemic

COVID-19 TAUGHT THE WORLD THAT ESTABLISHING NOVEL FINANCIAL MECHANISMS IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC IS PRACTICALLY IMPOSSIBLE

countries by accelerating vaccine development and production.

At the time, I was working in the UK government, running analyses showing the cost-effectiveness of at-risk investment. America's Operation Warp Speed, for example, which cost \$13 billion as of December 2020, paid for itself if it shortened the pandemic by just 12 hours. Moreover, increased investment in production capacity could have sped up global vaccination efforts by a year, saving an estimated \$1.75 trillion.

We clearly need to do better when the next pandemic strikes. This could move forward even without a coordinated global investment — a daunting challenge. Instead, our analysis showed that it would have been cost-effective for individual countries, including LMICs, to invest at-risk in expanded vaccine production during Covid-19.

Vaccines would have been made available faster, fewer people would have died, and economies would have recovered sooner. (That said, high-income countries can and should take the lead in research and development spending, which does benefit from coordination.)

I spent much of the spring and summer of 2020 trying but failing to persuade LMICs to follow the UK's lead; most of these countries did not purchase vaccines at-risk.

A World Bank working paper

found that 60-75 per cent of the delay in Covid-19 vaccine deliveries to LMICs was attributable to their signing purchase agreements later than high-income countries.

While it is undoubtedly difficult to do something new in a crisis, conversations with various stakeholders revealed two problems: politicians feared being accused of corruption if the vaccine failed, and institutions like the World Bank could not provide loans to purchase a vaccine that did not exist yet.

To overcome these problems, multilateral development banks (MDBs) must establish financing mechanisms to enable at-risk purchases in a pandemic, as well as mechanisms for high-income

countries to de-risk these loans. Unlike the vaccine donations and pledges during Covid-19, which were too little too late, these measures would actually provide LMICs with sufficient resources to respond to the next pandemic.

When LMICs need to purchase vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics at the scale required to fight a pandemic, MDBs are their only realistic source of finance. But current procurement rules prevent purchasing these countermeasures at-risk.

The rules must therefore be revised to allow for such purchases, in recognition of the unique challenges of a global health crisis. MDBs can also coordinate with stakeholders to create model

procurement contracts and establish indemnity and liability frameworks to streamline processes and minimise delays.

High-income countries can help by guaranteeing these loans in case the vaccine candidates fail. This would reduce the financial risk for LMICs and alleviate politicians' concerns about their potential liability.

In exchange for this relatively modest burden on their balance sheets, high-income countries can facilitate significant investments that promise substantial global health benefits and large economic returns.

During Covid-19, many of us in the UK government recognised that this was one of the most effective ways to use our limited aid money and even proposed such a measure, to no avail.

Covid-19 taught us that developing novel mechanisms in the midst of a pandemic is practically impossible. International policymakers must establish the necessary frameworks now to ensure that LMICs can purchase medical countermeasures at-risk in the next pandemic in order to shorten its duration and improve equitable access to health care.

As our work at the University of Chicago's Market Shaping Accelerator shows, any delay risks millions of lives and trillions of dollars. ©Project Syndicate, 2024



Expanding vaccine production proved critical during the pandemic.

Sport

OMAN FENCERS CLAIM TWO GOLD AT GCC YOUTH GAMES

WALEED AL JAHWARI
DUBAI, APRIL 30

Oman fencing team added three medals, two gold and one silver, on Tuesday at Zayed Sports Complex in Fujairah, to conclude the competitions with 11 medals, which is part of first edition of GCC Youth Games, being held in UAE from April 16 to May 2. Oman's medal tally rose to 58 medals. Oman athletes were able to collect 18 gold, 13 silver and 27 bronze medals from 15 sports.

Oman national fencing team was able to snatch the gold medal in the men's epee, a silver medal in men's foil, and gold in women's epee.

The men's team included Ahmed bin Anwar Kaskas, Said bin Khaled al Shuaibi, Ali bin Hamad al Busaidy and Ammar bin Mohammed al Azizi.

The women's team included Jana bint Mohammed al Sharjiyah, Salma bint Said al Dughaihiyah, Ghazal bint Yousef al Falitiyah and Israa bint Saif al Siyabiyah.

The Oman fencers claimed eight medals on Monday. Ahmed Kaskas snatched gold, while Said al Shuaibi claimed bronze in the men's epee. Ahmed Kaskas won silver in the men's foil while Said al Shuaibi and Ali al Busaidy bagged a bronze each. Jana al Sharji won the gold in the women's epee and Salma al Dughaihi won the bronze. Israa al Siyabi grabbed silver in the women's foil.

SWIMMERS CLAIM 2 BRONZE

Omani swimmer Moath Khamis snatched the bronze medal in the 50m freestyle race. Hussain Tariq won bronze in 200m breaststroke, Mohammed Abdulrahman finished



sixth in 200m medley race, Mishal Salim finished fifth in 50m freestyle and the Oman men's swimming team finished fourth in 4x100 freestyle.

Oman fencer Said al Shuaibi expressed his happiness after bagging two bronze medals. "I am happy to obtain two bronze medals on the first day, and two medals as a team on the second day. We sought to win the gold, but the competition was strong and we did well. We prepared for this participation by internal camps and we benefited, we hope to record

more achievements in the coming participation."

Ahmed bin Anwar Kaskas, who won gold and silver medals on the first day of the competitions, and two gold medals in team category, said: "The results were good on the first day, as we succeeded in winning a large number of medals. We expected to win more medals, but the game system, they held more than one game at the same time, was an obstacle for us to participate in more than two games. We thank



the technical staff and the Oman Olympic Committee for their great work."

Israa al Siyabi, who won silver medal in foil weapon on the first day, and a team gold on second day, said: "I am satisfied with what we have achieved. We aspired to win the gold but we were unlucky at the last moment. We benefited a lot, we hope to obtain other participations in the future in order to develop the technical level. We thank the OOC for all their efforts."



Spain's Rafael Nadal celebrates after winning against Argentina's Pedro Cachin during the third round of the 2024 ATP Tour Madrid Open tournament at Caja Magica in Madrid. – AFP

Nadal battles past Cachin to keep clay dream alive

MADRID: Rafael Nadal said he is doing his best to "keep dreaming" after he extended his stay at the Madrid Open by winning a three-hour tussle with Argentina's Pedro Cachin 6-1, 6-7 (5/7), 6-3 on Monday.

Contesting his home tournament one last time before retirement, the five-time champion gave the world number 91 his shirt after Cachin asked him for a memento from the match.

"Some moments good, some moments not good. I found a way to be through. I think in the third set with some mistakes I was still able to be a bit unpredictable," Nadal said of his roller-coaster third-round victory.

"Now I'm enjoying. Let's see how I wake up tomorrow. Playing at home means everything to me, just try my best to keep dreaming."

Nadal's reward is a Tuesday last-16 clash with the 30th-seeded Jiri Lehecka, who beat the Mallorcan in a practice session a week ago.

Top-seeded Jannik Sinner beat world number 72 Pavel Kotov 6-2, 7-5. Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik beat American Ben Shelton 3-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-4 to reach the fourth round, where he will face number three seed Daniil Medvedev.



Tunisia's Ons Jabeur reacts during the match against Latvia's Jelena Ostapenko at Caja Magica. – AFP

OJA takes part in AIPS Congress in Barcelona

ADIL AL BALUSHI
BARCELONA, APRIL 30

Oman, represented by delegates from Oman Journalists Association, (OJA) took part in the 86th edition of the AIPS Congress which is underway in Santa Susanna, Spain. The delegation was headed by Salim bin Hamed al Jahwari, Vice-Chairman of OJA and Chairman of the Sports Press Committee. The delegation included also Ahmed bin Saif al Kaabi, a member of the Sports Press Committee and a member of the Executive Bureau of the Asian Sports Press Association, and Adil bin Ibrahim al Balushi, a member of the Sports Press Committee.

The opening ceremony of the congress was held on Sunday and it featured an opening speech by Joan Campolier, Mayor of Santa Susanna, located within the Barcelona city. The mayor welcomed all participating journalists from five continents and across the world. "We are pleased to welcome you all to this sports city which is hosting a major international sports event with the attendance of a large number of sports journalists from various parts of the world. We are very happy to welcome you here. Santa Susanna annually hosts many different international sports events and activities in all team and individual sports. This city is known as the bodybuilding capital as it hosts



OJA takes part in 86th edition of AIPS Congress in Santa Susanna, Barcelona.



major international championships in this sport."

Patrick Torrent, the executive director of sports tourism events in Catalonia, gave a visual presentation that included some details about the capabilities, infrastructure and sports facilities of the city of Barcelona to host various sports events.

AIPS CONGRESS

The AIPS congress agenda commenced on Monday under

the chairmanship of Gianni Merlo, President of the International Sports Press Association, in the presence of presidents and representatives of member sports federations from various countries around the world. The congress discussed several diverse topics, including the participation of journalists and media representatives in 2024 summer Olympic Games in Paris and discussions about the new system for European championships in the coming years.

Besides that, a panel discussion titled 'Defending Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Sports Media Coverage' took place and Luni Ezder, President of the International Federation of University Sports (FISU), presented a brief show on the upcoming events of the FISU.

Another session was organised on 'Artificial Intelligence and its Positive and Negative Effects on Sports Journalism Sector'.

At the end of the opening congress day, various short films by young reporters for a duration of 100 seconds were screened describing each country's participation in all the editions of the Olympic Games.

The first morning session began with a workshop on the participation of journalists in the 2024 summer Olympic Games in Paris. The presentation covered a detailed explanation of the requirements for registering journalists and the

registration process on the Paris Olympics platform, as well as clarifying the logistics between competition venues and working hours at the main and subsidiary media centres in different cities of France.

Following that, presentation on the new system for European championships in the coming years was delivered. It highlighted the new technical regulations for these competitions and informing journalists of the changes related to the promotion and qualification system in the competitions.

Later on, a panel discussion titled 'Defending Gender Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in Sports Media Coverage' took place in presence of women sports journalists. They discussed their experiences in highlighting investigations and sports coverage of women's athletic achievements, emphasising that female athletes are now receiving their full rights, with equal participation in various major sports events.

FISU President, Leonz Eder, delivered a presentation on FISU's projects and achievements over the last 75 years, along with their ambitious plans for the future. President Leonz Eder expressed his gratitude to the numerous journalists present for their dedication and perseverance, reminiscing about his own time as a journalist.



Pant included in India's T20 World Cup squad, Rahul misses out

BENGALURU: India have included wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant in their 15-man squad for the Twenty20 World Cup in the West Indies and United States in June, the country's cricket board (BCCI) announced on Tuesday.

Pant was involved in a near-fatal crash in December 2022 that required him to have multiple surgeries and he missed last year's Indian Premier League (IPL) as well as India's 50-overs World Cup campaign on home soil. The 26-year-old has slowly returned to his best after his comeback in this year's IPL, scoring three fifties and racking up 398 runs in 11 matches to convince selectors.

The Delhi Capitals skipper was not the only player rewarded for his IPL heroics, as Chennai Super Kings batsman Shivam Dube also made the squad after scoring 350 runs in nine matches.

Shubman Gill, Rinku Singh, Khaleel Ahmed and Avesh Khan were named in the reserves, but there was no place for wicketkeeper-batsman KL Rahul.

Sanju Samson got the nod instead and will back up Pant.

India will be led by Rohit Sharma as they bid for a second title in the June 1-29 tournament following their triumph in the inaugural edition in 2007.



Hardik Pandya, who has struggled to hit top form in the IPL after returning from an ankle issue sustained during last year's 50-overs World Cup, will be Rohit's deputy in a strong line-up that also includes Virat Kohli and youngster Yashasvi Jaiswal.

Mohammed Siraj and Arshdeep Singh will bolster the pace bowling department spearheaded by Jasprit Bumrah while Yuzvendra Chahal is part of a four-pronged spin attack alongside Ravindra Jadeja, Kuldeep Yadav and Axar Patel.

India made the semifinals two years ago in Australia, losing to eventual champions England.

They begin their campaign against Ireland in Group A, with the match to be played in New York on June 5, before they battle Pakistan in one of the event's highly-anticipated matches four days later. — Reuters

Salt, Chakravarthy help Kolkata hammer Delhi

KOLKATA: Phil Salt's attacking 68 and bowling figures of 3-16 by Varun Chakravarthy helped Kolkata Knight Riders hammer Delhi Capitals by seven wickets at a hot and humid Eden Gardens in the IPL on Monday.

Chakravarthy, a mystery spinner, led Kolkata's disciplined bowling to restrict Delhi to 153-9 as players, who remained drenched in sweat, and fans braved the intense heat in the colonial-era capital.

Players from all the 10 IPL teams are keen to impress their national selectors with just one day left for countries to name their teams for the T20 World Cup in June.

The in-form Salt, an England wicketkeeper-batsman, led the chase with an opening stand of 79 with Sunil Narine and the two-time champions reached their target with 3.3 overs to spare.

"It is high-risk but it is also about putting the odds in your favour and not taking the risks you don't want to," Salt said of his attacking game. "You just have to keep backing yourself and keep taking the right options."

The mercury in the afternoon soared above 41 degrees Celsius (106 degrees Fahrenheit) for the third time this month, forcing the normally bustling streets to stay empty at noon. But the sports-mad city witnessed a near-packed house at the 66,000 capacity stadium for the evening game and their home team did not disappoint with their sixth win in nine matches to move closer to booking a play-off spot.

'LEARN FROM MISTAKES'

Delhi elected to bat first but lost regular wickets including Prithvi Shaw for 13 and fellow opener Jake Fraser-McGurk, out for 12 off let-arm quick Mitchell Starc.

Skipper Rishabh Pant attempted to resist the slide in his unconvincing knock of 27 before he was dismissed by man of the match Chakravarthy.

Chakravarthy rattled the middle and lower-order to make Delhi slip to 111-8 before number nine Kuldeep Yadav claimed an unbeaten 35.

"I think that (batting first) was a good option but as a batting unit, we did not bat well enough.



150 was definitely below par," said Pant. "That is part and parcel of cricket. We have a long break ahead, where we can learn from our mistakes."

Salt, who moved into the top five batsmen this IPL season with 392 runs, put the chase on track along with fellow opener Narine as the two clobbered 23 runs off the first over from

Lizaad Williams. He reached his fourth half-century of the season in 26 balls with a six off Khaleel Ahmed but fell to spinner Axar Patel after his 33-ball knock laced with seven fours and five sixes.

Skipper Shreyas Iyer, who made 33, and Venkatesh Iyer, who hit the winning six in his 23, steered the team home in an unbeaten stand of 57. — AFP



Archer recalled to England squad for T20 World Cup

LONDON: Paceman Jofra Archer was on Tuesday recalled to England's squad for the defence of their T20 World Cup crown after a year out of action.

The 29-year-old, who has endured a string of injuries since his international breakthrough in 2019, has not played competitive cricket for a year but has recovered from a right elbow injury. He takes his place in a 15-man provisional squad captained by Jos Buttler for the tournament that starts on June 1 in the West Indies and the United States.

The same group will play take on Pakistan in a four-match T20 series beginning at Headingley on May 22.

Veteran seamer Chris Jordan, also born in Barbados, returns to the squad alongside uncapped spinner Tom Hartley but there is no place for Chris Woakes, a World Cup winner in both the 20-over and 50-over formats.

England begin the defence of the title they won in Australia in 2022 against Scotland in Barbados on June 4. — AFP

England provisional squad for T20 World Cup and Pakistan series: Jos Buttler (capt, wk), Moeen Ali, Jofra Archer, Jonny Bairstow, Harry Brook, Sam Curran, Ben Duckett, Tom Hartley, Will Jacks, Chris Jordan, Liam Livingstone, Adil Rashid, Phil Salt, Reece Topley, Mark Wood

SA pick Nortje and uncapped duo of Rickelton, Baartman

CAPE TOWN: South Africa have included fast bowler Anrich Nortje and the uncapped duo of batter Ryan Rickelton and seamer Ottniel Baartman in their 15-man squad for the T20 World Cup in the United States and West Indies from June 1-29.

Nortje, 30, has not played a T20 international for over a year due to persistent injuries, and his return in the Indian Premier League this season has seen him record a woefully high economy rate of 13.36 runs per over across six matches.

Rickelton, who can also keep wicket, has been rewarded for his fine form in SA20 this year, where he was the leading scorer with 530 runs at an average of 58.88, while Baartman took 18 wickets in eight matches in the T20 competition.

“Selecting this group was extremely tough considering the amount of T20 cricket that has been played recently and the form that has been on show

ROB WALTER
South Africa
white-ball coach



Aiden Markram will captain the squad, which also includes power hitters Heinrich Klaasen, David Miller, Quinton de Kock and Tristan Stubbs.

South Africa have elected to take three frontline spinners in Bjorn Fortuin, Keshav Maharaj and Tabraiz Shamsi, with Markram also a useful slow bowling option.

"Selecting this group was extremely tough considering the amount of T20 cricket that has been played recently and the form that has been on show," South Africa's white-ball coach Rob Walter said in a media release on Tuesday.

"I am nonetheless proud and confident that we have named the strongest possible squad that no doubt has every chance of success

in the West Indies and USA."

South Africa, who have never won a World Cup in either the 50- or 20-overs format, will prepare for the tournament with a three-match T20 series in the West Indies. They have Bangladesh, Netherlands, Nepal and Sri Lanka in their Group D at the World Cup and open their campaign against the latter in New York on June 3. — Reuters

SOUTH AFRICA SQUAD:

Aiden Markram (captain), Ottniel Baartman, Gerald Coetzee, Quinton de Kock, Bjorn Fortuin, Reeza Hendricks, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, David Miller, Anrich Nortje, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tabraiz Shamsi and Tristan Stubbs.

LEWANDOWSKI TREBLE POWERS BARÇA PAST VALENCIA



The first half, we didn't have much space in attack, but most important is if you lose one or two goals, we can always score three or four

ROBERT LEWANDOWSKI

Barcelona's Polish striker



Barcelona's Polish forward #09 Robert Lewandowski celebrates after scoring his team's third goal during the Spanish league match between FC Barcelona and Valencia CF at the Estadi Olímpic Lluís Companys in Barcelona. — AFP

BARCELONA: Robert Lewandowski hit a second-half hat-trick to power Barcelona to an entertaining 4-2 win over 10-man Valencia on Monday in La Liga.

The champions' victory denies leaders Real Madrid the chance to take the crown by simply beating Cadiz next Saturday. Los Blancos are 11 points clear of Barcelona with five matches remaining.

Fermin Lopez sent the hosts ahead before Valencia striker Hugo Duro levelled and Pepelu netted from the spot to turn the game round.

Valencia goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili was sent off late in the first half for handball and Lewandowski equalised soon after the break before adding another two late on.

It rained all day in drought-ridden Barcelona and the threat of a soaking left the Olympic Stadium half empty, with an attendance of 30,000. The small crowd might also have been a response to last weekend's Clasico defeat, which laid out the red carpet for Real Madrid to whisk away Barcelona's title, as well as the detested Monday night slot.

La Liga rescheduled the game at only a week's notice, meaning many could no longer attend.

Those who were present enjoyed a surprisingly entertaining clash, with Barca coach Xavi Hernandez triumphant in his first match after deciding to stay in charge next season.

"I think the team did well... we lacked calmness, tranquility, but I'm satisfied with the team's attitude," Xavi told DAZN.

Visitors Valencia, eighth and striving for European football next season, carved out the best early chances.

Hugo Duro's flick from close range was saved by Marc-Andre ter Stegen. On-loan Real Madrid winger Peter Federico dragged a shot wide when barrelling through on goal.

Barcelona took the lead when Lopez headed home from Raphinha's whipped cross.

Valencia were quickly level after a grievous error by Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen, who ran out of his box to try and intercept a long ball.

He got there first but botched his attempted dink over Duro's head and the striker controlled the ball and held off Ronald Araujo to roll home.

KEY ERRORS

It soon got worse for Barcelona, with Araujo — crucially sent off in the Champions League quarter-final defeat by Paris Saint-Germain — foolishly giving away a penalty by felling Federico. Valencia midfielder Pepelu fired the penalty down the middle to put Los Che ahead.

The game turned Barcelona's way shortly before the break when

SPANISH LA LIGA TABLE AFTER MONDAY'S MATCH (PLAYED, WON, DRAWN, LOST, GOALS FOR, GOALS AGAINST, POINTS):

Real Madrid	33	26	6	1	71	22	84
Barcelona	33	22	7	4	68	39	73
Girona	33	22	5	6	69	40	71
Atletico Madrid	33	20	4	9	62	39	64
Athletic Bilbao	33	16	10	7	53	33	58
Real Sociedad	33	13	12	8	46	35	51
Real Betis	33	12	13	8	41	39	49
Valencia	33	13	8	12	37	38	47
Villarreal	33	12	9	12	54	55	45
Getafe	33	10	13	10	41	45	43
Osasuna	33	11	6	16	37	49	39
Alaves	33	10	8	15	31	38	38
Sevilla	33	9	11	13	42	46	38
Las Palmas	33	10	7	16	30	41	37
Rayo Vallecano	33	7	13	13	27	42	34
Real Mallorca	33	6	14	13	27	39	32
Celta Vigo	33	7	10	16	37	50	31
Cadiz	33	4	14	15	23	46	26
Granada	33	4	9	20	36	61	21
Almeria (R)	33	1	11	21	32	67	14

NOTE:
■ Top four qualify for Champions League; team in fifth qualifies for the Europa League. The sixth-place team goes into the Europa Conference League play-offs
■ Bottom three are relegated (R)

SPANISH LA LIGA RESULTS ON MONDAY	
Barcelona 4 (Lopez 22, Lewandowski 49, 82, 90+3)	
Valencia 2 (Duro 27, Pepelu 38-pen)	
PLAYED SUNDAY	
Cadiz 1 (Mascarell 59-og) Real Mallorca 1 (Muriqi 12)	
Granada 3 (Pellistri 29, Uzuni 48, Boye 90+4) Osasuna 0	
Villarreal 3 (Sorloth 18, 74, Mosquera 69) Rayo Vallecano 0	
Real Betis 1 (Isco 38-pen) Sevilla 1 (Salas 56)	
PLAYED SATURDAY	
Las Palmas 0 Girona 2 (Lopez 26, Dovbyk 57-pen)	
Almeria 1 (Lozano 41) Getafe 3 (Greenwood 27, 48, Mata 61)	
Alaves 3 (Simeone 48, Guridi 54, Benavidez 86) Celta Vigo 0	
Atletico Madrid 3 (De Paul 15, Correa 52, Simon 80-og)	
Athletic Bilbao 1 (N. Williams 45)	
PLAYED FRIDAY	
Real Sociedad 0 Real Madrid 1 (Guler 29)	

Valencia's goalkeeper erred.

Mamardashvili miscontrolled the ball on the edge of his box, giving it away to teenager Lamine Yamal.

As the youngster tried to round the goalkeeper, the Georgian touched the ball with his arm outside the area and, after a VAR review, was dismissed.

Replacement Jaume Domenech saved Raphinha's free-kick, but could not keep out Barcelona's equaliser, early in the second half.

Lewandowski headed home from a corner to start Barcelona's comeback. The game lurched from end-to-end, with Domenech saving brilliantly from Araujo's header and Barca substitute Pedri making a last-ditch challenge to stop Diego Lopez from striking.

Eventually, Lewandowski nodded

Barcelona back in front from close range when Araujo's header from a corner dropped into his path.

The Polish international wrapped up his treble in stoppage time with a well-placed free-kick, his 16th league goal of the season.

"The first half, we didn't have much space in attack, but most important is if you lose one or two goals, we can always score three or four," Lewandowski told DAZN.

"If we score a lot of goals, it's a lot easier for everyone."

Barcelona's victory took them two points ahead of neighbours Girona, third, whom they visit next Saturday.

The minnows are chasing Champions League qualification which they could secure with a victory, which could also hand Madrid the title. — AFP



FC Barcelona's Robert Lewandowski scores their third goal. — Reuters

business

MUSCAT
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CRUDE
OIL PRICE

Oman Crude \$ 87.92
Brent Crude \$ 87.64
Light Crude \$ 83.06



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Bank Muscat (S.A.O.G.) First Quarter Results 2024

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to share with you the results achieved by the Bank during the first quarter of the year ended 31 March 2024. The Bank continued to perform well and maintain its leadership position in Oman's financial services sector, demonstrating robust performance across various business segments.

Financial Review

The Bank posted a net profit of RO 54.24 million for the period compared to RO 51.30 million reported during the same period in 2023, an increase of 5.7 per cent.

Net Interest Income from Conventional Banking and Net Income from Islamic Financing stood at RO 95.45 million for the three months period ended 31 March 2024 compared to RO 91.71 million for the same period in 2023, an increase of 4.1 per cent.

Non-interest income was RO 37.25 million for the three months period ended 31 March 2024 as compared to RO 31.50 million for the same period in 2023, an increase of 18.3 per cent. This increase was due to overall improvement in various business lines and volume increase.

Operating expenses for the three months period ended 31 March 2024 was RO 51.80 million as compared to RO 48.70 million for the same period in 2023, an increase of 6.4 per cent.

Net Impairment for credit losses for the three months period ended 31 March 2024 was RO 15.65 million as against RO 14.44 million for the same period in 2023.

Net Loans and advances including Islamic financing receivables increased by 1.0 per cent to RO 9,860 million as against RO 9,762 million as at 31 March 2023.

Customer deposits including Islamic Customer deposits increased by 8.4 per cent to RO 9,750 million as against RO 8,992 million as at 31 March 2023.

Strategic Initiatives & Key Developments

Bank Muscat held its Annual Ordinary General Meeting (AGM) and the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) of the shareholders on 26 March 2024. The appointment of the statutory auditors for the Bank and the external independent Sharia auditors for Meethaq were among the important decisions taken during the AGM. Saud bin Nasser bin Rashid Al Shukaili was elected as a director to fill the vacant seat in the Board of Directors until the next Board term elections, subject to regulators approval. The shareholders also approved the distribution of 15.5 per cent dividend for 2023, based on a cash dividend of RO 0.0155 per ordinary share aggregating to RO 116.349 million on the Bank's existing share capital. At the

EGM, the shareholders approved the renewal of Euro Medium Term Note (the EMTN Programme), including the capital markets Alternatives and the issue of international Additional Tier 1 instruments by the Bank, up to an aggregate amount of US\$ 2 billion.

To keep Muscat Stock Exchange investors abreast of recent developments, Bank Muscat held a conference with them to highlight the Bank's fiscal results and performance for the year 2023. This online meeting also offered the opportunity to answer questions from attendees' regarding the Bank's performance.

During the first quarter, Bank Muscat strengthened its presence in the banking industry through the implementation of new strategies and the expansion of its branch network. This expansion brought the total branch count to 183 alongside 48 Asalah Centers, showcasing the Bank's dedication to executing strategic initiatives aimed at bolstering financial inclusivity.

Bank Muscat continued its substantial investment in digital channels to ensure a seamless banking experience for all customers. This effort resulted in a significant increase in registered users across Internet Banking and Mobile Banking (IB & MB) channels, surpassing 1.9 million as of March, marking a 17.9% rise compared to the 1.62 million registered users in March of the previous year. Moreover, the total number of active phygital machines for conventional and Meethaq services surpassed 870 devices by the end of March 2024.

The convenience of Internet Banking (IB) and Mobile Banking (MB) has been significantly enhanced, with the introduction of numerous services in the first quarter. These services empower customers to conduct transactions conveniently from their workplace or residence. Among the launched services are digital stamping on account statements, generation of online internet banking password feature for Najahi customers, and the capability for parents and guardians to open Themaar Saving Plans for their children online. Other enhancements include the ability to streamline bill payments by grouping up to 10 billers on Internet Banking, stopping unused checks online, creating group transfers for up to 10 beneficiaries, and requesting courier services for both Bank Muscat Prepaid Cards and Shukran Prepaid Cards via Internet Banking and Mobile Banking.

Bank Muscat has integrated the International Bank Account Number (IBAN) into its account numbers, ensuring its visibility on both mobile and internet banking platforms. This initiative aligns with the guidelines set forth by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO). Bank Muscat continued to collaborate with prominent Government Related Entities (GRES) and private sector entities in Oman to

provide financial advisory services and assist with fundraising initiatives. Notably, the investment banking team partnered with Omantel and Nama Electricity and Distribution Company for their international sukuk issuances, attracting substantial interest from investors. Additionally, the team provided advisory services to National Finance for its perpetual bonds' issuance, which garnered strong investor response and was oversubscribed.

Furthermore, Bank Muscat's assets under management saw continued growth during the quarter, reaching approximately US\$ 2.9 billion (RO 1.12 billion). This comprised a diverse investor base, including institutional and retail investors. The Bank Muscat Oryx Fund delivered a net return of around 7.8% in Q1, 2024, surpassing the benchmark by over 5% and outperforming most of its peers in Oman. During this period, the Oryx Fund distributed dividends of RO 0.072 per unit, marking the highest-ever cash dividend disbursed by the Fund. Additionally, the Bank Muscat Money Market Fund, the largest open-ended Fund in Oman, maintained its strong performance in 2024, with the Fund's annualized yield exceeding 5% per annum, the highest since its launch in 2012.

Meethaq continued its upward trajectory, marked by the inauguration of a new branch in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, the Governorate of South Al Batinah. This expansion reinforces Meethaq's footprint, bringing its total branch count to 28 alongside 20 Hafawa Centers spread across the Sultanate.

CSR & Sustainability

During the first quarter, Bank Muscat embarked on new and strategic CSR initiatives, solidifying its position as a leading institution in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Among these endeavors was the launch of the Himam Marathon, for the persons with physical, mental, hearing disabilities, besides people with Autism and Down Syndrome. It aimed to promote social integration for this category by providing them with a platform to showcase and develop their athletic abilities. Furthermore, in its commitment to fostering financial literacy, Bank Muscat inaugurated the Maliyat Academy programme in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. This programme seeks to educate school students on financial literacy and enhance their understanding of financial principles and concepts.

Also, the Bank announced the launch of the Green Sports programme for 2024 and entered into a partnership agreement for the planting of 300 olive trees in the village of Al Manakhir, Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, with the aim of fostering sustainable impact across ecological, social, and economic dimensions.

During Ramadhan 2024, the Bank, in partnership with the Omani Lawyers Association, facilitated the release of 260 new cases

within Fak Kurba initiative, bringing the total to 1557 cases; of individuals who were incarcerated or convicted due to financial obligations. The Bank also organized the annual Ramadhan Souq Al Wathbah to support entrepreneurs.

Awards and Accolades

The first quarter of this year proved to be a period of significant achievements for Bank Muscat and Meethaq Islamic Banking, as they garnered numerous prestigious awards and accolades both domestically and internationally. At the local level, Bank Muscat and Meethaq were honored with Oman's Most Trusted Brands Awards by Apex Media. Also, Bank Muscat received several international recognitions, including the Best Private Bank Award 2024 by Global Finance. It secured four titles from EMEA Finance which were the Best Bank, Best Local Investment Bank, Best Asset Manager, and Best Private Bank in Oman. It also clinched the titles of Best Digital Bank and Best Retail Bank in Oman by MEED, and was recognized as the Best Bank for Sustainable Development Oman 2024 in the Global Banking and Finance Awards.

Similarly, Meethaq achieved notable success by securing a number of global awards during the quarter. These include Oman's Best Domestic Islamic Bank Award by Euromoney Islamic Finance Awards, the Market Leadership in Islamic Banking Award by the Global Islamic Finance Awards (GIFA), the Leading Islamic Banking Brand by Global Brands Magazine, and the Most Innovative Islamic Window for SMEs within the 9th Annual Global Business Outlook Awards.

In Conclusion

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I take this opportunity to thank our shareholders for the trust reposed in the Bank. The Board of Directors welcomes the measures taken by the Central Bank of Oman and the Financial Services Authority to support the financial market in the Sultanate. We express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik for his vision and guidance.

Khalid Bin Mustahail Al Mashani
Chairman

INTERIM CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 MARCH 2024

	Unaudited 31-Mar-2024 RO' 000	Audited 31-Dec-2023 RO' 000	Unaudited 31-Mar-2023 RO' 000
Assets			
Cash and balances with Central Banks	771,725	772,340	746,238
Due from banks	915,340	869,704	689,591
Loans and advances	8,332,555	8,350,080	8,288,766
Islamic financing receivables	1,527,783	1,527,030	1,472,957
Investments securities	2,207,664	1,866,955	1,609,671
Investment in associate	9,218	8,889	8,606
Other assets	166,853	201,073	193,216
Property, equipment and software	77,965	77,300	67,277
Total assets	14,009,103	13,673,371	13,076,322
Liabilities and equity			
Liabilities			
Deposits from banks	1,223,836	1,100,089	1,193,859
Customers' deposits	8,410,076	8,170,075	7,780,036
Islamic customers' deposits	1,340,347	1,267,717	1,211,823
Sukuk	63,094	45,869	46,494
Euro medium term notes	192,853	195,139	192,853
Other liabilities	406,499	477,998	413,164
Taxation	72,486	61,629	65,254
Total liabilities	11,709,191	11,318,516	10,903,483
Equity			
Equity attributable to equity holders of parent:			
Share capital	750,640	750,640	750,640
Share premium	156,215	156,215	156,215
General reserve	410,258	410,258	410,258
Legal reserve	160,474	160,474	139,229
Revaluation reserve	4,904	4,904	4,904
Cash flow hedge reserve	6,115	3,254	-
Cumulative changes in fair value	46,170	41,825	1,153
Foreign currency translation reserve	(3,652)	(3,642)	(3,605)
Impairment reserve / restructured loan reserve	2,136	2,136	2,330
Retained earnings	261,332	323,471	206,395
Total equity attributable to the equity holders	1,794,592	1,849,535	1,667,519
Perpetual Tier I capital	505,320	505,320	505,320
Total equity	2,299,912	2,354,855	2,172,839
Total liabilities and equity	14,009,103	13,673,371	13,076,322
Net assets per share (in RO)	0.239	0.246	0.222
Contingent liabilities and commitments	1,684,592	1,669,583	1,691,577

INTERIM CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE THREE MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

	Unaudited for three months period ended- 31-Mar-2024 RO' 000	Unaudited for three months period ended- 31-Mar-2023 RO' 000
Interest income	151,374	133,786
Interest expense	(63,785)	(51,233)
Net interest income	87,589	82,553
Income from Islamic financing / investments	24,974	23,321
Distribution to depositors	(17,110)	(14,169)
Net income from Islamic financing	7,864	9,152
Net interest income and income from Islamic financing	95,453	91,705
Commission and fee income (net)	24,462	22,408
Other operating income	12,791	9,090
Operating income	132,706	123,203
Operating expenses		
Other operating expense	(46,803)	(44,005)
Depreciation	(4,998)	(4,697)
	(51,801)	(48,702)
Share of results from associate	296	99
Net impairment losses on financial assets	(16,223)	(13,686)
	(67,728)	(62,289)
	64,978	60,914
	(10,738)	(9,619)
	54,240	51,295
Profit before taxation		
Tax expense		
Profit for the period		
Other comprehensive (expense) / income		
Net other comprehensive (expense) / income to be reclassified to profit or loss in subsequent periods, net of tax:		
Translation of net investments in foreign operations	(10)	276
Change in fair value through other comprehensive income (FVOCI) debt investments	(300)	990
Share of other comprehensive income of associate	33	8
Change in fair value of cash flow hedge	2,861	-
	2,584	1,274
Net other comprehensive (expense) / income not to be reclassified to profit or loss in subsequent periods, net of tax:		
Change in fair value of FVOCI equity investments	4,582	742
	4,582	742
Other comprehensive income / (expense) for the period	7,166	2,016
Total comprehensive income for the period	61,406	53,311
Total comprehensive income for the period attributable to:		
Equity holders of Parent Company	61,406	53,311
Profit attributable to:		
Equity holders of Parent Company	54,240	51,295
Earnings per share (in RO)		
- Basic and diluted	0.007	0.007

Pact signed to develop wave energy in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 30

Norwegian wave energy specialist Havkraft AS has signed an agreement with Asyad Group — the Omani state-owned integrated shipping and logistics group — to explore the potential to harness wave energy for the first time in the Sultanate of Oman.

The pact was signed on Monday, April 29, 2024, against the backdrop of Oman Sustainability Week (OSW) 2024, currently underway at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. Signing for Asyad Group was Essam al Shaibani, Vice-President for Sustainability, while Havkraft AS was represented by Matt Minshall, Director of Sustainability.

“Harnessing the power of waves for a greener future! Asyad Group partners with Havkraft, during OSW 2024, to bring innovative wave energy power



Representatives of Havkraft AS and Asyad Group at the signing on Monday.

systems to Oman, paving the way for sustainable electricity generation. Our effort will contribute significantly to the national energy strategies and promoting a sustainable and prosperous future,” said Asyad

Group in a post.

Havkraft AS added: “Great progress for Havkraft AS in Oman today during the Oman Sustainability Week — OSW. Agreement signed with ASYAD Group. Solid efforts by our

Director of Sustainability Matt Minshall.”

A specialised company in the marine energy sector, Havkraft is globally renowned for pioneering technologies that enable the production of renewable

electricity from wave energy.

The Norwegian start-up’s big breakthrough came in 2013 when it successfully developed the Havkraft Wave Energy Converter (H-WEC), which is suited for all types of wave climates globally.

Over the ensuing decade, the company has rolled out a number of cutting-edge solutions, including the deployment of a first of its kind floating power-plant powered entirely by wave energy.

According to Havkraft’s Matt Minshall, wave power has the potential to be the “most eco-friendly and cost-effective route to Net-Zero” as an infrastructural investment in a new supersystem for a diversified energy-mix.

“78% of the Earth’s surface is covered by oceans, and waves have the potential for energy with the reliability of a constantly charged battery; and yet the potential is largely untouched.

Predictions indicate the

potential can be greater than the current global electricity requirement; and the immediate accessibility is substantial,” he wrote in a recent opinion piece on wave energy.

Through a synergistic integration of solar, wind and wave power, a ‘supersystem’ is created that contributes to a more resilient and sustainable energy mix while reducing dependence on expensive storage, he pointed out.

“Incorporating this triple-based supersystem aligns seamlessly with providing a comprehensive, resilient, and sustainable approach to energy and by embracing wave power as a fundamental component, countries with suitable wave potential such as Oman can position themselves as leaders in the global shift towards clean energy while realising the vision of a net-zero future by 2050,” he added.

OQ8 fosters diversity, inclusion for sustainable innovation

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, APRIL 30

At the ongoing Oman Sustainability Week at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, Jasim al Ajmi (pictured), Vice-President of Corporate Affairs at OQ8, delivered a compelling insight into the importance of diversity and inclusion in driving sustainable innovation in the energy industry.

In his address, Al Ajmi highlighted OQ8’s proactive approach to diversity, leveraging a workforce of 749 employees representing 32 nationalities with a remarkable 60 per cent



Omanisation rate.

He emphasised how a diverse workforce contributes to business success and community development, citing the company’s extensive investments in local contracts, social projects,

SME empowerment, and goods made in Oman.

Al Ajmi underscored the collective power of diversity in driving innovation, societal progress, and fostering collaboration towards a more sustainable future.

He pointed out that an inclusive work environment not only leads to positive outcomes such as high satisfaction, motivation, and loyalty among employees but also enhances operational efficiency and creativity.

Meanwhile, Yaqoob al Rabaani, Vice-President of HSSE at OQ8, expressed excitement about showcasing

the company’s sustainable development initiatives at Oman Sustainability Week, including zero flaring practices, solar power advancements, and impactful wastewater treatment facilities.

The event will feature interactive presentations and daily discussions at OQ8’s booth, offering insights into their most significant projects and opportunities for stakeholder engagement.

Moreover, OQ8 made a sustainability pledge to plant a sapling for each individual or corporation joining their initiative, aiming to cultivate a forest of 500 saplings post-event.

Marafiq cuts CO2 emissions in Duqm SEZ



Eng Abdullah al Hashimi, Managing Director of Marafiq (centre), at Marafiq’s booth at Oman Sustainability Week.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 30

Marafiq, a subsidiary of OQ Group, announced a reduction in carbon emissions from power plants operating in Duqm Special Economic Zone (SEZAD).

Participating in Oman Sustainability Week, currently being held at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, Marafiq said that its gas-fired plant supplying electricity to SEZAD has brought down emissions levels to internationally accepted standards.

This has led to CO2 emission reductions equivalent to eliminating around 20,000 cars. The gas turbine based power plant was established in Duqm SEZ following an agreement signed with Nama Group to replace diesel-powered generation providing electricity to the SEZ until 2021.

During its participation in Oman Sustainability Week, Marafiq showcased its efforts in the field of sustainability, stressing that its strategy aligns with the government’s vision for achieving net-zero by 2050.

Eng Abdullah al Hashimi, Managing Director of Marafiq, stated, “The Company’s sustainability plan includes all the projects being managed by the company in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

These projects are the Integrated Power and Water Plant, gas turbine plant and the potable water desalination plant.

The commitment to international standards in managing the water network in the Zone has enabled the Company to reduce the non-revenue water (NRW) in the network up to 9.1%, which is marks one of the world records in this aspect.

Accordingly, Marafiq received the Integrated Utilities Company Award for the year 2023, awarded by the Global Economic News Network (BNC Publishing) for the best innovative projects in sustainability in MENA.”

Al Hashimi further added: “Marafiq’s objective in participating in Oman Sustainability Week is to highlight its efforts in the field of sustainability and showcase the modern technologies being used in this field.

Marafiq applies international standards in the field of quality and sustainability in the various projects being managed in SEZAD.”

According to the official, Marafiq has been delivering many other sustainable initiatives in partnership with public and private sector corporations.

Marafiq is also implementing other Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives and supporting the role of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs).

Marafiq is a joint venture between Oman’s OQ Group and Gulf Energy Development Company.

Initiatives launched to enhance Oman logistics sector’s efficiency and growth

BALQEES ALORAIMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 30

His Highness Sayyid Harib bin Thuwaini bin Shihab al Said, Assistant Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers for Conferences, took centre stage on Tuesday morning to sponsor the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology’s celebration of the first Logistics Day.

The event, which also marked the opening of the second session of the Oman Ports Conference “Oman on the Logistics Performance Index”, was organised by *Al Roya* newspaper in collaboration with the Oman Logistics Association.

It served as a platform to shed light on Oman’s progress in developing its national logistics sector and its strategic alignment with the future objectives outlined in the Oman Vision 2040.

During the ceremony, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, delivered an inspiring speech emphasising the transformative role of the logistics system in Oman’s socio-economic landscape.

He underscored the system’s resilience and adaptability over the years, evolving in tandem with the country’s renaissance and receiving steadfast support from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

Al Maawali stressed the crucial role of logistics in economic development, noting that the sector’s growth is pivotal to achieving the ambitious goal of becoming the second-largest



Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, delivers an inspiring speech during the event.

contributor to Oman’s gross domestic product by 2040.

The celebration of Logistics Day holds significant importance, symbolising Oman’s historical engagement in logistics with the arrival of the ship *Sultana* in the United States on April 30, 1840.

This year’s theme, “Growth... Integration... Sustainability,” encapsulates the ethos of sustainable development and collaborative progress in the logistics sector.

The occasion serves as a call to action for public and private enterprises, urging them to synergise efforts, foster integration, and drive growth to realise the objectives set forth in the Oman Vision 2040.

In line with the spirit of celebration and progress, a series of dynamic initiatives were

announced during the event to enhance the efficiency and competitiveness of Oman’s logistics sector:

1. Free Transportation for Students: A programme offering free transportation for college and university students in Muscat and Salalah for a period of two years aims to facilitate access to educational institutions and promote mobility among the youth.

2. Public Transport Open Day: An initiative providing free public transportation for Omani citizens in Muscat and Salalah for three days starting from Thursday, May 2, 2024, seeks to promote the use of public transport and improve accessibility within urban areas.

3. Programme for Enhancing Graduates’ Employability: A comprehensive plan to train and

employ 100 graduates with “Level 3” certificates from the Certified Logistics Institute in the supply chain sector, fostering skills development and addressing labour market demands.

4. Work Experience Programme for School Students: A summer initiative targeting students in the tenth and eleventh grades to gain practical training in logistics companies, offering hands-on experience and exposure to career opportunities in the industry.

5. Introductory Programme on Logistics in Ports: An educational initiative welcoming school students to explore the logistics sector at ports in different governorates, fostering an understanding of port operations and logistics management.

6. Empowerment of Small and Medium Enterprises: Providing innovative solutions and a 25% discount on storage, packaging, and shipping services for entrepreneurs in the logistics sector, supporting small and medium enterprises in their growth and expansion endeavours.

Furthermore, the event showcased the launch of the Otaxi initiative, offering transportation services for guests and attendees, with discounts and special offers in luxury cars and taxi services.

The female taxi training programme, diploma programme in Logistics Management, and workshops to attract investment in the logistics sector highlight Oman’s commitment to continuous improvement, capacity building, and sectoral development in the pursuit of a vibrant and sustainable logistics industry.



OOMCO's EVO wins Gold Award at Oman Sustainability Week

MUSCAT: Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO), Oman's leading fuel marketing company, has been recognised by the Oman Sustainability Week (OSW) for contributing to the transformation of Oman's Electric Vehicle (EV) charging ecosystem and accelerating the national adoption of green technologies.

Electrical Vehicles One (EVO) was established in partnership with OOMCO and Synergy Investment in 2023, was awarded the Gold Award in the eco-mobility category at the annual event focusing on reducing emissions and improving environmental impact.

EVO provides the first-of-its-kind and largest interconnected network of currently 84 EV chargers across Oman.

It also includes a mobile app that serves as an integrated payment platform and EV charger locator.

As a result, EVO removes charging as an obstacle to drivers purchasing an electric vehicle and delivers a seamless usage experience while reducing their carbon emissions.

Driving visitors to the future of automobility in Oman, OOMCO's comprehensive showcase of EVO at OSW featured an EV, a functional EV charger, a hydrogen dispenser, and a co-combustion truck.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds launches its 350th global showroom

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with an annual turnover of \$6.2 billion and retail presence of 350 showrooms across 13 countries, has just unveiled its 4th showroom in the USA at Naperville, Illinois. This brings the global jewellery brand's showroom count globally to 350, with 5 showrooms in North America.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds currently has an extensive retail presence across the USA, Canada, the UK, Australia, India, UAE, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, KSA, Malaysia & Singapore.

The new showroom was inaugurated by Somnath Ghosh, Consul General of India in Chicago in the presence of Shamlal Ahamed, MD-International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, Rakesh Patel of Patel brothers, Joseph Eapen, President of North America operations of Malabar Gold & Diamonds, community leaders, representatives from government and other authorities, management team members from Malabar Gold & Diamonds, customers and well-wishers.

"The launch of Malabar Gold & Diamonds' 350th Global showroom in the USA is a proud occasion for us as it signifies the growing footprint of our brand in the international jewellery arena. Located in the city of



Malabar Gold & Diamonds has just unveiled its 4th showroom in the USA at Naperville, Illinois.

Naperville, this showroom will undoubtedly bring the best of what we have to offer in terms of both jewellery & experience.

Our unwavering commitment to offering every customer complete transparency and an exceptional jewellery shopping experience has propelled us to being one of the most preferred jewellery retailers in the USA and all the other regions in which we operate.

On behalf of Malabar Group, I would like to convey my sincere gratitude to all our customers, management team

members, shareholders and other stakeholders for their contributions in making this occasion truly significant," commented the Chairman of Malabar Group, M P Ahamed.

Located at Patel Plaza in Naperville and spread across 6,400+ sq. ft, the new outlet houses over 30,000 designs across 25 exclusive brands and collections in gold, diamond & precious gem jewellery.

The new store will also showcase an extensive collection of bridal jewellery, alongside a wide range of options for

occasional wear, daily wear & office wear.

The other 3 showrooms of Malabar Gold & Diamonds are in Chicago, New Jersey & Dallas.

"The USA is one of the largest jewellery markets in the world in terms of both buying power and population, and I am very excited to launch our 4th showroom in the country.

The large segment of the Indian subcontinental diaspora in the USA is an opportunity for us to expand our offerings to a base of consumers who truly appreciate the artistry of Indian jewellery.

Geely launches all-new Tugella: Elevating SUV excellence across Oman

MUSCAT: Towell Auto Centre LLC (TAC), the official distributor of Geely vehicles in the Sultanate of Oman, proudly introduces the newly launched Geely Tugella to the Omani roads.

The Tugella that boasts a sleek, sporty, and modern design that seamlessly blends cutting-edge technology with exceptional performance has already started captivating SUV enthusiasts nationwide.

As Geely's first CMA-based coupe SUV, the Tugella sets a new standard in automotive excellence with its superior aerodynamics and unmatched comfort for both drivers and passengers.

Built on the advanced Compact Modular Architecture (CMA) platform, the Tugella sets a new standard in automotive reliability, offering customers enhanced safety, dynamic performance, and more user-friendly controls. Leveraging CMA, a stronger generation of "techno-being" is created.

The CMA Super Matrix boasts six core competitive edges, including high flexibility and scalability, diverse power sources, world-class chassis, world-class power, world-leading electrical and electronic architecture, and the ability to meet differentiated market needs globally.

Tugella's sporty design and adaptability to diverse powertrains and technology redefine the modern SUV experience for the people of Oman.

Commenting on the launch, spokesperson at Towell Auto Centre, said: "We are thrilled



to introduce the all-new Geely Tugella to SUV enthusiasts in Oman. With its luxurious interior, advanced technology, safety features, and extraordinary performance, the Tugella represents the pinnacle of automotive innovation.

We are confident that Omani customers will be delighted by the Tugella's superior driving experience and impressive list of features. Backed by Geely's commitment to quality, the Tugella is set to redefine the SUV segment in Oman."

The Geely Tugella ensures top-notch safety with its advanced cage-shaped structure, crafted from high-strength steel for efficient energy absorption from all directions during impacts.

Paired with its leading active

safety system and strategically placed airbags, it offers protection during both frontal and side collisions.

Additionally, Tugella comes equipped with child safety locks, ISOfix child seat anchorage points, and a range of safety features including collision oil cut-off, collision door unlocking, and speed warning with voice reminder.

It also features TPMS (Direct type, Digital display), an engine electronic anti-theft system, and a speed limiter, ensuring peace of mind for family travels.

Tugella's coupe design seamlessly incorporates a sleek 14-degree fastback design, blending elegance with intelligent aerodynamics for a modern and sporty aesthetic. Its extended

roofline enhances the vehicle's sleek and contemporary profile, while inside, the Tugella offers unparalleled comfort and a premium driving experience.

Smart features like the BOSE 12 audio system, head-up display, and anti-pinch front openable panorama sunroof elevate every journey to a luxurious experience.

Choose from a vibrant spectrum of colours, ranging from crystal black to amber red, each hue accentuating its distinct and dynamic profile, commanding attention on every road trip.

The SUV boasts a four-wheel drive system, propelled by a robust 2.0-litre turbocharged four-cylinder direct-injection engine, generating an impressive 238hp of power and 350Nm of torque.

OETC wins Gold Award in Oman Sustainability Award 2024

MUSCAT: In recognition of its ongoing achievements and contributions to enhancing sustainability aspects and integrating them into various plans, projects, and operations, and in line with its commitment to achieving the highest standards of quality and sustainability in all vital aspects for a more prosperous and sustainable future for the Sultanate of Oman, the Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) has won the Gold Award category at the Oman Sustainability Awards 2024 ceremony under the auspices of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

This ceremony comes as part of the activities and programmes of Oman Sustainability Week 2024, aiming to highlight initiatives and achievements in the field of sustainability and to promote the efforts of all Omani institutions, encouraging them to align their targets and plans with national visions and goals aimed at preserving and ensuring the safety and security of the Omani environment, as well as achieving global aspirations in environmental areas, carbon emission reduction, and others.

OETC won the Gold Award category at the Oman Sustainability Awards for

sustainability achievements in environmental, social, and governance areas. The awards witnessed a substantial competition with the participation of more than 50 institutions from various fields.

Reaffirming OETC's commitment to sustainability and directing all its efforts and targets in this regard, Eng Saleh bin Nasser al Rumhi, OETC's CEO, highlighted the company's adoption of various measures and steps aimed at integrating sustainability into the various operations, in addition to OETC's commitment to aligning its plans with national plans and global targets.

He also emphasised the company's commitment to implementing various initiatives and projects aimed at contributing to the preservation of the Omani environment and enhancing its sustainability for future generations.

Al Rumhi added, "We recognise the importance of working within a framework to achieve national targets, visions, and aspirations represented in Oman Vision 2040, which places sustainability among its highest priorities, to ensure sustainable and comprehensive development in various sectors and to build a more prosperous future for Oman and its people."





Sohar Port and Freezone, Metcore sign pact for mass flow meter implementation

SUHAR: Sohar Port and Freezone has signed an agreement with Metcore International Pte Ltd, a leading marine solutions provider based in Singapore, to deliver technical expertise for the integration and testing of Mass Flow Metering (MFM) Systems on board bunker tankers at Sohar Port.

The agreement underscores Sohar's commitment to bunkering transparency and innovation by adhering to ISO 22192 standards.

Sohar Harbour Master Captain, Batti al Shibli, said: "At Sohar Port and Freezone, we have taken a major step forward by implementing cutting-edge Mass Flow Metering Systems with Metcore International. Aligned

with ISO 22192 standards, this agreement revolutionises bunker operations, ensuring transparency, precision and future digitalisation.

It includes advanced MFM deployment, staff and stakeholder training, and conformity assessment programmes, setting a new standard for excellence in bunker fuel operations." In bunker fuel trading, fuel is sold by mass but delivered by volume, which can be affected by variations in pressure and temperature.

MFM is considered to be significantly more reliable and accurate than traditional methods as it allows fuel to be directly measured by mass during custody transfers.

ASAAS to develop Neighbourhood 8 in Sultan Haitham City

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 30

ASAAS, a leading investment and development company in Oman, announced yesterday the signing of a development agreement with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning to develop Neighbourhood Number 8 within the prestigious Sultan Haitham City.

This strategic collaboration marks a significant step forward in developing this landmark project, envisioned to be a vibrant and sustainable urban centre in the heart of Oman.

"This collaboration with ASAAS underlines our commitment to working with leading developers to bring the vision of Sultan Haitham City to life," said Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning.

"We are confident that ASAAS's expertise and track record will be instrumental in creating a vibrant and thriving phase that contributes to the project's overall success."

"We are honoured to partner with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning on this transformative project," said Ahmed al Busaidy, Chairman of ASAAS.

"Sultan Haitham City represents a unique opportunity



The agreement was signed in the presence of the Minister of Housing and Urban Planning.

SULTAN HAITHAM CITY REPRESENTS A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE A MODERN, SUSTAINABLE, AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY THAT CATER TO THE NEEDS OF RESIDENTS, BUSINESSES, AND VISITORS ALIKE

to create a modern, sustainable, and inclusive community that caters to the needs of residents,

businesses, and visitors alike.

ASAAS is committed to leveraging our expertise and experience to deliver a world-class development that aligns with Oman's 2040 vision and contributes to the overall growth and prosperity of Oman."

The development will prioritise sustainability, adhering to the highest standards and incorporating innovative green building practices to promote energy efficiency.

This commitment aligns with ASAAS's vision for fostering a progressive and environmentally responsible Oman.

The development of Sultan Haitham City is expected to create significant job opportunities and contribute to the diversification of the Omani economy.

The project is also expected to attract new residents and businesses to the Sultanate of Oman, further boosting economic growth and development.

OSW 2024 showcases Oman's progress in achieving carbon neutrality

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 30

The Sultanate of Oman has been actively implementing projects and initiatives to enhance economic sustainability, said Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy.

Speaking at the opening of Oman Sustainability Week (OSW) 2024 on Monday, the projects and initiatives in question encompass efforts to diversify energy sources, improve efficiency, reduce carbon emissions, develop the productive sector, and foster investments and strategic partnerships in these domains.

Such endeavours contribute to job creation, income generation, and added value for citizens and the national economy, he stressed.

"Oman is moving forward with confidence and determination to face future challenges, and based on the guidance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, it has committed to achieving zero-carbon neutrality by the year 2050, in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement, which are to limit the phenomenon of global warming and also in line with the goals of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals related to energy.

In this regard, the Sultanate of Oman has developed a roadmap to achieve carbon neutrality by the year 2050, and Hydrom was launched in October 2022 to organise and accelerate the development of the green hydrogen sector in Oman," Dr Al Saqri stated.

The commencement of Oman



Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, addressing the opening session of OSW 2024.

19 initiatives to enhance Oman's financial sustainability

MOHAMMED AL DIGHAISHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 30

As many as 19 developmental initiatives that will strengthen the country's financial sustainability, have been approved for implementation this year, according to Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Dr Al Saqri said the projects will be implemented at a total cost of around RO 49 million. When operational, they will make a direct financial return to the public treasury, he stated.

Significantly, 11 of the initiatives pertain to the use of Artificial Intelligence in various economic and social sectors.

Collectively valued at around RO 10 million, these projects aim to enhance financial sustainability by raising the efficiency of these sectors, as well as those targeted for economic diversification during the 10th five-year plan.

The Ministry, he said, has approved the allocations for the National Programme for Digital Transformation, which amounts to around RO 200 million till the end of the current plan.

He added that an annual disbursement amount of about RO 33 million had been allocated for this year, stressing that the projects will enhance the financial sustainability of the state and contribute to the growth of the digital economy as well.

Sustainability Week, the Minister said, represents an opportunity to showcase the nation's progress towards achieving carbon neutrality. This event serves as a platform for public and private sector entities, experts, and researchers to exchange experiences, knowledge, and best practices in sustainability-related areas such as energy, water, waste management, environment, and society.

It aims to present a holistic vision for the future of energy considering scientific, technological, economic, and social developments. Building upon the success of the previous editions, Oman Sustainability Week aims to address pertinent issues concerning sustainability and the imperative to reconcile economic growth, social integration, and environmental protection. It underscores Oman's commitment to strategic frameworks aimed at steering the nation towards a prosperous and stable future.

Oman Sustainability Week, he stressed, will facilitate the exchange of experiences in tackling challenges such as global warming, environmental degradation, and the depletion of natural resources.

The event comprises various activities including the Oman Sustainability Week Awards, an international conference on sustainability resources and technology, a specialised exhibition, an intellectual leaders' summit, and field visits to sustainability projects within Oman.

Sohar Aluminium, OAPIL ink MoU to explore low carbon aluminium manufacturing

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 30

Sohar Aluminium and Oman Aluminium Processing Industries (OAPIL) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to collaborate and explore potential opportunities in manufacturing low carbon green aluminium powered by renewable energy and recycling of aluminium scrap.

The MoU was recently signed by both companies and made public during Oman Sustainability Week, a national platform that focuses on sustainability in the Sultanate of Oman's energy and water demands and environment protection.

Signing this MoU emphasises the commitment of Sohar Aluminium and OAPIL to support the Sultanate of Oman's net-zero carbon emissions target by 2050 and reflects their environmental, social and innovation ambitions.

Further, it supports the initiatives of both companies to build a more sustainable future.

Commenting on this MoU, Eng Said bin Mohammed al Masoudi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar Aluminium, said, "Focusing on our promise to deliver aluminium responsibly, this collaboration supports our ambitions to achieve Net-Zero by 2050 in line with the Sultanate of Oman's commitment to accelerate the country's journey towards carbon neutrality."

Furthermore, this partnership marks a tangible outcome of the Aluminium Recycling Forum organised by Sohar Aluminium earlier this year, which aimed to maximise in-country value through aluminium recycling and promote a circular economy."

On behalf of OAPIL, Shareholder's Representative Erkan Aydogdu, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Cables Industry SAOG, stated, "For Oman Cables Group, sustainability is of the utmost importance. OAPIL, the fully owned subsidiary of Oman Cables, has consistently placed a high priority on sustainability efforts, which include recycling



The initiative centres on the use of renewable energy to recycle scrap aluminium.

aluminium scrap, recovering aluminium from dross, and reusing steel drums, all the while reducing waste at every stage.

We are now taking a step further by partnering with Sohar Aluminium to explore the production of low carbon green aluminium rods and conductors. OAPIL's initiatives align with the decarbonisation goals of its worldwide clientele.

Furthermore, OAPIL is committed to setting a regional benchmark for Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) through its strategic focus and unwavering commitment to environmental preservation."

OAPIL is one of Sohar Aluminium's downstream customers.

The company supplies OAPIL with liquid metal aluminium, which does not have to be solidified, remelted, and transported long distances, which reduces its environmental impact.

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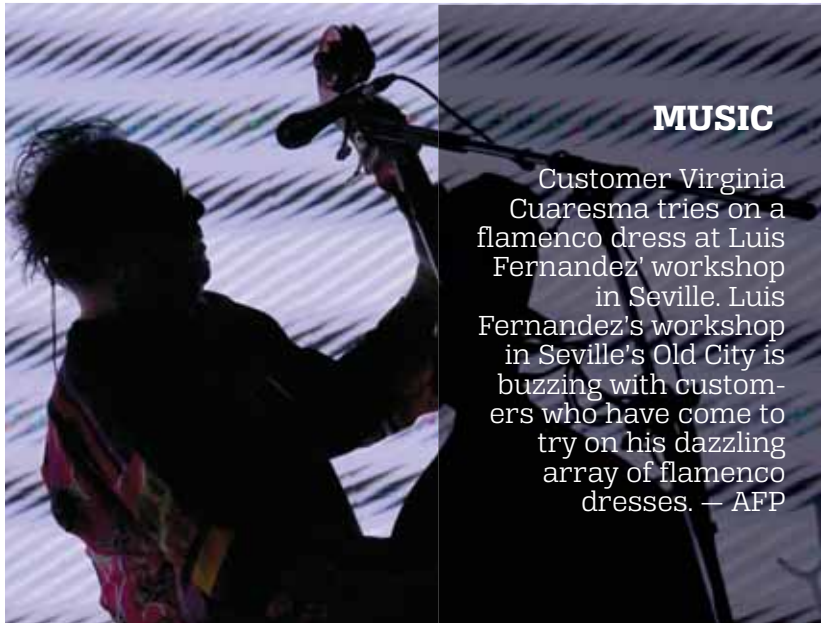
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LIFESTYLE

A fisherman casts his net from a boat at Dal Lake after water levels rose due to heavy rains in Srinagar. — AFP



MUSIC

Customer Virginia Cuaresma tries on a flamenco dress at Luis Fernandez's workshop in Seville. Luis Fernandez's workshop in Seville's Old City is buzzing with customers who have come to try on his dazzling array of flamenco dresses. — AFP



FASHION

A model walks the runway during the Ralph Lauren Fall/Holiday fashion show in New York City. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

An actress is seen in costume before a rehearsal held for the media to promote an opera titled "Axe the Coffin" by the Taiwan Bangzi Opera at the Taiwan Traditional Theatre Centre in Taipei. — AFP



TRAVEL

A woman walks along a wooden foot bridge after water levels rose in the interior of Dal Lake due to heavy rains in Srinagar. — AFP

art & life

WEDNESDAY | MAY 1, 2024 | SHAWWAL 22, 1445 AH OMAN OBSERVER www.omanobserver.om features@omanobserver.om



“FORMA: BEYOND TIME” EXPLORES THE CONCEPT OF TIME AND EARTH

“Forma: Beyond Time” showcases contemporary sculptures at Matti Sirvio Art Galleria, blending Omani and international artists' interpretations of 'Time and Earth'. Through diverse mediums, artists explore abstract concepts, personal healing, and societal growth, culminating in a profound reflection on existence, communicated through visionary sculptural expressions... P20

FILM

Zendaya helps 'Challengers' net top spot in N America box office



MGM'S TENNIS-BASED romance “Challengers” opened this weekend atop the North American box office, taking in an estimated \$15 million behind positive reviews and the powerful net game of actor/singer Zendaya, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported on Sunday. “This is a strong opening for a romance and sports drama,” said analyst David A Gross, crediting Zendaya’s star power and the directorial talents of Luca Guadagnino (he of “Call Me By Your Name”). “This is the right material with the right director, featuring the right star at the right time,” Gross said. Zendaya plays a tennis prodigy who retires after an injury, then later helps her husband (Mike Faist) prepare for a key match against a player (Josh O’Connor). By the way, yes, Zendaya can play tennis. She trained for three months with tennis pro Brad Gilbert, and Guadagnino told Variety that

she was so good he rarely had to use film of her double. In second spot for the Friday-through-Sunday period was another new release, Lionsgate and Kingdom Story Company’s faith-based drama “Unsung Hero,” at \$7.8 million. The partly fact-based film follows a man who moves his music-loving family from Australia to the United States after his concert promotion business collapses. Friendly fellow churchgoers and the power of prayer (spoiler alert) just might help him and his seven kids turn things around. In third, for the second straight weekend, was Warner Bros’ “Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire,” at \$7.2 million. The humongous gorilla and giant reptile, not natural buddies, team up this time to save their species — and ours. Meantime, A24’s “Civil War,” a disturbing saga about a dystopian America in the near future, dropped three places from last weekend’s top spot,

earning \$7 million. Kirsten Dunst plays a veteran photojournalist who finds herself increasingly tormented as she travels through a blood-soaked country in hopes of interviewing a besieged third-term president. And in fifth, down two spots, was Universal’s horror film “Abigail” at \$5.3 million. Alisha Weir plays 12-year-old Abigail, whose kidnappers learn too late that she is a killer vampire. Rounding out the top 10 were: “The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare” (\$3.9 million) “Kung Fu Panda 4” (\$3.6 million) “Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire” (\$3.3 million) “Dune: Part Two” (\$1.9 million) “Boy Kills World” (\$1.7 million) — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



LOOKING INTO THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF SCHOOL THEATRE ON KIDS



BY KHALID AL BALUSHI
PHOTOS BY MOHAMMED AL ANBOURI

Amid an eager audience comprising students, parents and educators, the Governorate of Al Sharqiyah South unveiled a captivating theatrical production titled "Agibat Al Tama'a" or The Consequence of Greed.

Ali al Alawi, one of the participating students said, "The performance embodies the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, while also satirising those who consider themselves clever and believe they can benefit from the power struggles, much like the slave Jaber, who conveyed a message without knowing its content, driven by greed to marry the slave girl Zumurda, unaware that the price would be his head."

Khalid al Arimi, who played the role of the guard, said, "We trained for this performance for four months, during which we enjoyed ourselves immensely and developed many qualities, especially self-confidence, despite the pressure we felt before the show. This experience, we will never forget."

For the Governorate of Al Batinah North, they presented a play called "Wadi Al Hakayat" or the Valley of Tales.

Issac bin Elias al Maamari, one of the key characters in the play, said, "In the play, I portrayed Soheil's father. The story centred on Soheil, a boy who was afraid of valleys and swimming pools. One day, two children got trapped, and despite his fear, Soheil bravely attempted to rescue them. He ventured into the valley and vanished without a trace, leaving uncertainty about his fate. His father embarked on a search for him and encountered a

character named 'Huboub,' symbolising the unpredictable weather conditions. Their dialogue added depth to the narrative."

He added, "We also tried to highlight the role of Omanis and their unity in such situations through our colleagues who participated in the chorus of the performance."

Turki al Maamari, who played the role of Soheil in the performance, said, "It was quite hard to put my feelings into words and I'd been having it since early morning of the performance. I felt nervous and scared, but I also felt excited at the same time. However, the fear started to dissipate after I delivered my first lines in the show and after the applause of the audience." Student Ahmed al Balushi also shared the same sentiment.

Nine-year-old Turki bin Ali al Balushi was very pleased with the performances, saying he thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

"The students excelled in presenting this theatrical performance, which I enjoyed with my family. I admired their confidence and that they were not tense. I hope to participate in one of the shows someday. I also liked their costumes, which depicted the valley, and I liked the music they played on stage," he shared.

Actress Samira al Wahibi, a member of the judging committee, said that it was a great joy to see the performances, but beyond that, she was pleased that students were taking the courage to perform.

"Beyond judging the performances, I was hoping to discover new talents and creative potentials through the shows that will be presented. School festivals are very important

because they allow us to discover students' interests and inclinations. Theatre is not just acting; it involves costumes, set design, makeup and other artistic specialities where students can find themselves. Therefore, the theatre is the mother of all arts," she said.

Emirati artist Marai al Halyan said that the good number of male and female participants sends a clear message that younger people are eager to join such activities.

"I am happy to be part of this beautiful event where we see a large gathering of male and female students in a theatrical forum at the national level," she said.

She added, "The importance of theatre lies in shaping personalities to be able to communicate with audiences, to overcome shyness and to help students participate. Through it, they can learn a lot about the arts and aesthetics. Additionally, it gives them the courage to address societal issues and discuss them, providing them with an opportunity to express themselves."

"In advanced countries that have preceded us in this aspect, school theatre is heavily relied upon in character building. Many introverted students have begun to be treated through theatre, as it has become a form of psychological therapy. Moreover, theatre nurtures children's artistic tastes," she added.

Al Halyan further stated, "We all started in school theatre, and from there, many poets and writers emerged. We believe it is one of the most important things because it encompasses all arts and literature."

Artist Jasim al Batashi, another member of the judging committee,

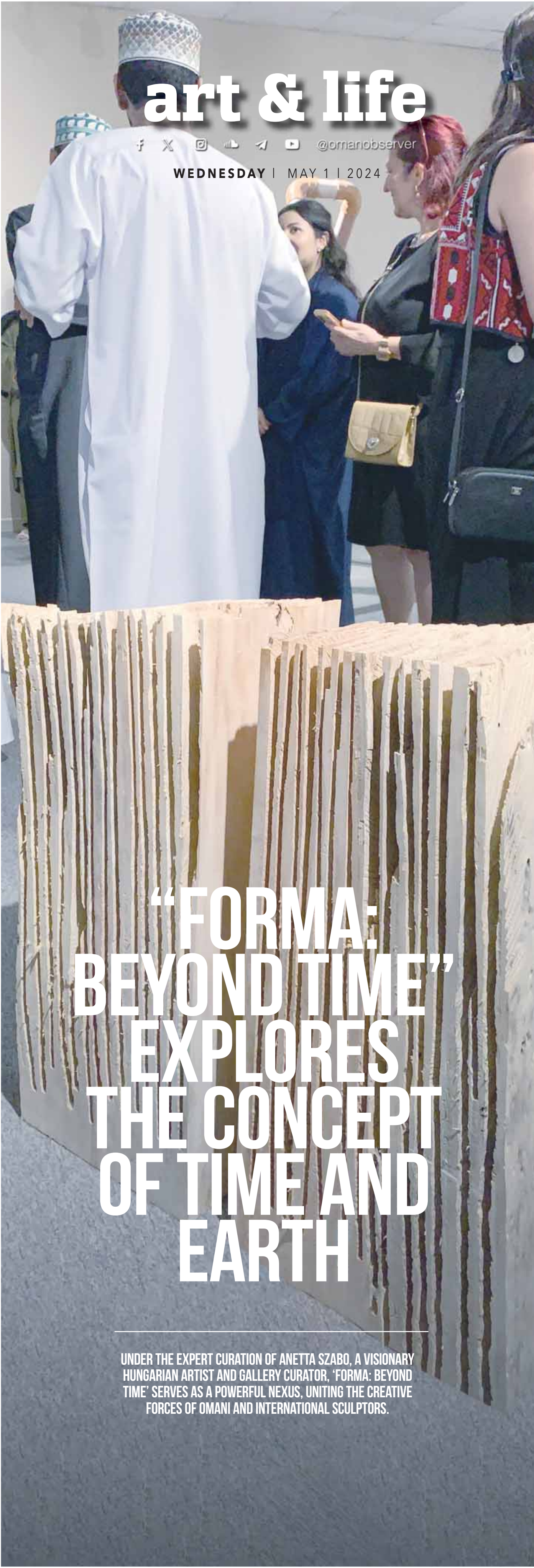


said, "School theatrical festivals are particularly important in establishing a theatrical generation of artists in the Sultanate of Oman. We all went through this stage, and that's where our beginnings were. Through school and its focus on talent, whether in acting, writing, directing or set design, this step is important. We hope this festival continues because its continuity means a source for artistic and theatrical movement in Oman, and the emergence of new faces and personalities in the artistic scene, which will benefit the artistic and media community in Oman."

Writer Mohammed Khalfan emphasised the importance of attending feedback sessions, saying, "The student's attendance at critique sessions is important. Firstly, it's a culture and a learning experience, seeing how

people speak and how they view the performance, what aspects they focus on, and the observations they provide to enhance and develop the work."

He added, "Critique sessions can also introduce us to a group of young people who understand and learn the art of theatrical criticism, and at the very least if they don't continue, they will pursue theatrical studies in the field of criticism. It's important for me that when a student comes to the theatre and then to the introductory session, it's a sign that we will later find a group of young people or even an entire nation that is cultured. There is a saying that is often repeated, one of the beautiful sayings that say, 'Give me a theatre, and I'll give you an educated nation.' It manifests in this presence."



UNDER THE EXPERT CURATION OF ANETTA SZABO, A VISIONARY HUNGARIAN ARTIST AND GALLERY CURATOR, 'FORMA: BEYOND TIME' SERVES AS A POWERFUL NEXUS, UNITING THE CREATIVE FORCES OF OMANI AND INTERNATIONAL SCULPTORS.



BY LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

Forma: 'Beyond Time' explodes onto the scene, captivating audiences with its daring contemporary sculptures at the esteemed Matti Sirvio Art Galleria in Jawaharat Al Shatti, Qurum. Unveiled last Saturday, this groundbreaking exhibition promises to mesmerise patrons until its grand finale on May 30, 2024.

Under the expert curation of Anetta Szabo, a visionary Hungarian artist and gallery curator, 'Forma: Beyond Time' serves as a powerful nexus, uniting the creative forces of Omani and international sculptors. Visitors will be enthralled by the transcendent beauty and profound messages woven into each masterful piece.

The artists were given a theme to work on: Time and Earth.

"Conceptional art and abstract thinking sometimes are unknown to people. There are millions of others throughout the world who have no abstract thinking. They just left home for tomorrow. They cannot think beyond space and time, but abstract means that it is non-material, which is beyond time, space, and circumstances. So I strongly believe in abstract art in the sense that it is great as a means to communicate something of greater value and direction in our lives," pointed out Matti Sirvio, owner of the gallery.

Shima Amia, from Iran, has used earthen clay to express her feelings about time.

"I chose to show the healing process, and for the healing process, we need time. This sculpture is me and through time, I began to get rid of all the things which I don't like and don't want. And I have begun to grow from inside," she said.



Anetta said they wanted the artists to use earth-like materials, and one will see that everything is natural. The theme, 'Time', is multidimensional and is something exciting for the artists to discover.

"I always think about how time is connected with eternity and wonder: does time ever stop? Does time go slow or fast? I think because of this, it is interesting to express it in an abstract form. Other artists at this exhibition have used it more at an earthly level, like memories and past," explained Anetta, whose work is titled, 'A Radical Perspective Shift', made with stones collected from Balad Sattriya, Oman.



One of the other interesting works on display is 'Leucaena' Processing in a vacuum by Azd al Hinai. The idea of the work expresses and embodies the Omani sticks in their various forms, and the extension of the stick from the bottom to the top to the ceiling expresses the uses of the stick (for the elderly and as adornment when young).

The wood burning technique was used to draw geometric decorations and letters of the Mahri language used in Dhofar, as well as inlaying with metal for the symbolism of silver in the Omani sticks, explained Al Azd.

Soma Chandra Shree usually works with artists and architects to make their art pieces, but this is the first time she is exhibiting her work. She is a fabricator but the dried mountain plant caught her attention while she was in Al Duqm.

"I found it and brought it back to the office, and colleagues were helpful and when we flipped it over it was really beautiful. It is also a light fixture and has a spotlight in the centre. It works when it is bright and dark."

"I was going through a pretty difficult time in my life and that is why it is named what it is: 'Today I swallowed the Sun.' I was feeling the weight of a lot of things on me, and I was thinking how difficult it would be to swallow the sun. It would have to go through a very tight, compressed space. I try to materialise that space."

Omani artist Saleem Sakhi's work is in plastic titled Linkage and his work is about the linkage between the lines and the cylindrical shape without any sharp corners.

"The lines form into different angles, and there are no parallel lines, so it expresses modern cities and growth. It gives comfort to look at it as well. The materials used are recycled, and once I got the materials, I thought about the concept," he said.