

P13

OMAN'S BIGGEST
E-WASTE RECYCLING
PROJECT LAUNCHES
IN SALALAH



P18

EXCITEMENT
BUILDS FOR THE
2ND AL BATINAH
FILM FESTIVAL



P12

KOHLI MARKS 35TH
BIRTHDAY WITH
RECORD-EQUALLING
49TH ODI CENTURY



MUSCAT

OHRC ELECTS NEW CHAIRMAN, DEPUTY

Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) during its first meeting elected Dr Rashid bin Hamad al Balushi as Chairman of the OHRC, and Saud bin Saleh al Maawali as Deputy Chairman. Al Balushi told Oman News Agency that the commission is working on setting up a national strategy for human rights based on Article 11 of the commission's regulations. He affirmed that a lot of work awaits the commission at the national and international levels.

Royal Decree stipulates signing of a written oath

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday issued two Royal Decrees.

Royal Decree No 78/2023 deals with oath-taking.

Article (1) states that — with the exception of the oath to be taken before the Sultan, the oath to be taken by members of the State Council, the Majlis Ash'shura and judges — oath-taking stipulated by laws shall be performed by signing an Oath to be written in the following wording: "In the name of Allah, the Almighty, I swear to respect the Basic Law of the State and enforced laws and legislations, to carry out my duties truthfully, honourably and honestly and to safeguard public funds, as well as the dignity and integrity of my profession and its secrets".

Prior to assuming their tasks, all employees of the State's Administrative Apparatus and other public legal persons shall pledge to sign the Oath stated in the first clause of this article.

Article (2) cancels all that contradicts this Decree or contravenes its provisions.

Article (3) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the day following its date of publication.

Royal Decree No (79/2023) ratifies an agreement between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the Slovak Republic on mutual visa waiver for holders of diplomatic, special and service passports, signed in New York on September 21, 2023.

Article (1) ratifies the abovementioned agreement as per the version attached to this Decree.

Article (2) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its data of issue. — ONA

2.5% INCREASE IN HAJ APPLICANTS

There has been an increase of 2.5 per cent in the number of applicants for performing holy Haj in 2024 through the online portal of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs as the registration closed on Sunday. The registration process on www.hajj.om, began on October 22 lasted for two weeks and recorded as many as 34,126 registrations till Sunday which included 31,064 Omanis and 3,062 expatriates. "There has been an overwhelming response from those aspiring to carry out this year's (Hijri 1445) Haj through the ministry and the online portal received 34,126 registrations which included 3,062 expatriates as well as 31,06 4 Omanis till Sunday," Ali al Hattali, spokesperson of the ministry said.

DETAILS ON P5

Air trough brings rain and hailstorm

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Many wilayats in the northern governorates received rain on Sunday as part of the air trough that is expected to have an impact on Oman starting from Sunday till Thursday.

The trough due to low pressure system that has been developed in southern part of Iran has been having its impact on the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates, said the weather forecaster at Oman Met Office.

"Some of the wilayats like Saham, Suhar and Liwa experienced hailstorms. We are expecting clouds and isolated rain over the wilayats of Al Suwaiq, Samayil, Al Musannah and some parts of Muscat," said the weather forecaster.

A weather alert was issued on Sunday due to heavy thunderstorms accompanied by strong downdraft wind with hailstorms for the governorates of Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah and Al Sharqiyah North. The heaviest rainfall is expected over Al Hajar Mountains.

Parts of the mountainous areas in Al Rustaq, Al Awabi, Nakhal and Bidbid also received rains, with chances of thunderclouds extending towards Al Khabourah, Al Suwaiq and Al Musannah.

"In Muscat Governorate rains might not be just in Qurayat and Al Amerat, but Muscat city itself might experience rain on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday," pointed out the weather forecaster.

The weather expert said public should avoid low-lying areas, not to cross over-flowing wadis and not to approach sea as the wave height will be moderate with maximum of 2 metres. **SEE ALSO P3**

Oman, Iran call for humanitarian truce

SEEK ESTABLISHMENT OF INDEPENDENT PALESTINIAN STATE



Palestinians search for casualties at the site of Israeli strikes at the Magazi Refugee Camp, in Gaza Strip, on Sunday. – Reuters

OMAN, IRAN
FM's EXCHANGE
VIEWS ON
ISRAELI
AGGRESSION

GIVE
PRIORITY TO
DIPLOMATIC
AND POLITICAL
ACTION

SAYYID BADR,
JORDAN FOREIGN
MINISTER SEEK
END TO
BRUTAL WAR

NETANYAHU
REJECTS
MINISTER'S
N-BOMB REMARK
ON GAZA

Al Wusta joins world wetland site list

MUSCAT: The Wetland Reserve in Al Wusta Governorate has been added to the list of Wetland Sites of International Importance by the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar), the Environment Authority announced on Sunday.

This is the third site in the Sultanate of Oman that has been registered on the world's wetland list after the registration of Qurum Natural Park in 2013 and Al Ansab Lakes in 2020. The Wetlands Reserve in the Wilayat of Mahout in the Al Wusta Governorate, declared by Royal Decree No 51/2014, is among the sites that have multiple ecosystems and a rare biological uniqueness both in the region and world. Hence, the site has been placed among the rare sites for studying biodiversity and the sustainable use of existing wetlands. The reserve is classified as the best site of international importance for bird migration during winter in the Middle East region of the migration route

The wetland reserve in Al Wusta Governorate boasts natural tourist potentials that can place it as a major tourist destination for nature lovers and wildlife enthusiasts. In addition, it has the potential to contribute to the national economy by exploiting investment opportunities and operating environmentally friendly projects to ensure sustainability of natural resources. — ONA



The Wetland Reserve in Al Wusta Governorate.

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Sunday received a phone call from Dr Hossein Amir Abdollahian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The ministers exchanged views on the continuation of the Israeli military aggression against Gaza Strip, causing more civilian casualties, and the destruction of public facilities, hospitals and schools.

Sayyid Badr and Dr Hossein also discussed regional and international efforts to achieve a humanitarian truce and allow relief organisations to carry out their missions, to treat the injured and deliver highly needed life-saving supplies to the population in Gaza Strip and repair demolished vital utilities.

The two ministers stressed the need to give priority to diplomatic and political action to activate the international law for restoring the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

They laid emphasis on the importance of terminating the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and establishing an independent Palestinian state. They underscored the futility of expanding the scope of the current brutal war waged by the Israeli occupation forces which, they said, have to bear its legal consequences.

Meanwhile, Sayyid Badr received a phone call from Ayman al Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriate of the Kingdom of Jordan.

During the telephonic conversation, the two ministers reviewed the latest developments of diplomatic and political efforts aimed at halting the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip, in addition to achieving a truce that would allow the flow of humanitarian and relief supplies to the injured and people in Gaza.

The two ministers also touched on the danger of continued military escalation and the worsening humanitarian situation, in addition to the grave regional challenges that are expected to be discussed at the extraordinary Arab Summit that will be hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia this month. — ONA

SEE ALSO P6&7



RNO marks annual day

AL MUSANNAH: The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) marked its annual day which falls on November 3 every year, on Sunday. A ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Taimour bin Asaad al Said, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) at the military parade ground of the Said bin Sultan Naval Base. A new batch of cadets graduated as part of the ceremony which

saw a varied military parade that embodied the skills and competence of the RNO personnel and the attention it receives from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. The event began with the Royal anthem for HH Sayyid Taimour bin Asaad al Said, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), chief guest following which he reviewed the front row of the graduates. – **ONA**



UNIVERSITY OF NIZWA CELEBRATES GRADUATION

NIZWA: The University of Nizwa on Sunday held graduation ceremony of its 16th batch of Master's and Education Higher Diploma degree holders. In total, 736 students graduated with Master's degrees and Higher Education Diplomas. The graduation ceremony

was held under the auspices of Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, accompanied by the University Chancellor, Prof Ahmed bin Khalfan al Rawahi. The ceremony was attended by renowned dignitaries in academia and community honourable guests.

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahbalushia

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority announced the 'Entrepreneurial Ideas Competition' in cooperation with Oman Investment Authority (OIA) companies on November 11. The initiative aims to unlock innovative ideas and explore opportunities within various economic sectors, ultimately contributing to the growth of industries and services within the Sultanate of Oman. Participating in this competition are three major OIA companies: Nama Group, Global Integrated Energy Group (OQ), and Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran). Together, they aspire to instill a culture of initiative and innovation, generating groundbreaking ideas and identifying leadership

prospects in sectors vital for localising industries and services. The competition will also focus on supporting local value-added programmes and addressing challenges faced by businesses, ensuring that the innovative solutions align with the strategic plans of these organisations. Furthermore, it will encourage the exchange of knowledge and expertise with renowned economic field experts and specialists. Qais bin Rashid al Toobi, General Supervisor of the Omani Emerging Companies Programme, emphasised the significance of the competition. He described it as a golden opportunity to chart a new path for innovative solutions and explore promising economic opportunities that respond to the rapidly evolving world, where technology and the elements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution are



The initiative aims to unlock innovative ideas and explore opportunities within various economic sectors

at the forefront, offering numerous possibilities for economic and societal advancement. The competition is open to approximately 130 participants, including young men and women from all governorates of Oman, spanning various age groups from 18 to 40. The diverse pool of participants includes young entrepreneurs, government and private sector employees, university and college students, as well as experts and academics. The event will kick off with virtual workshops designed to equip participants with theoretical and practical insights into entrepreneurship. Intensive in-person workshops will follow these activities. Participants will be organised into groups, allowing them to collaborate with mentors and advisers to refine their solutions, initiatives, and opportunities.

Anti-fraud forum to discuss latest trends to prevent the menace

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE) Oman Chapter joins the global movement to throw light on International Fraud Awareness Week with an anti-fraud forum. The International Fraud Awareness Week kicks off on November 12, worldwide and in Oman, the Anti-Fraud Forum-2023 is to be held under the patronage of Central Bank of Oman and ACFE Oman Chapter. Tahir bin Salim al Amri, Executive President of Central Bank of Oman, is to inaugurate the Forum. The Forum is being looked upon as an invaluable opportunity for anti-fraud professionals in Oman to meet and discuss the latest trends and tools in fraud prevention and detection. Organisations worldwide lose an estimated five per cent of their annual revenues to fraud, according to Occupational Fraud 2022: A Report to the Nations. Fraud takes many shapes and forms, among them corporate fraud, consumer fraud, tax fraud, identity theft and many others. Explore the resources and links below to see just how large of an impact fraud has on the world. ACFE Oman Chapter president Khalil al Rawahi, CFE, said that the active



Khalil al Rawahi

participation of government and private sector organisations in the Sultanate of Oman and around the world helps make International Fraud Awareness Week an effective tool in raising anti-fraud awareness. The forum is lined up with expert speakers and panellists from the banking and financial sectors, regulatory bodies like the State Audit Institution, Central Bank of Oman, Capital Market Authority, Public Authority for Consumer Affairs etc and all stakeholders from all spectrums of the community participating in this mega event. The Anti-Fraud Forum, a full-day event, will feature more than 11 subject matter experts as speakers. The Forum will be conducted from 8.30 am to 5 pm with topics of discussion mainly on anti-corruption and bribery, money laundering and terror funding, privacy compliance, fraud risk management, and regulatory framework to combat fraud.

This year's event will also emphasise on AI, block chain, Internet of things, mobile apps, public data infrastructure space for digitisation challenges, etc. The seriousness of the global fraud problem is why ACFE Global announced that it would be launching International Fraud Awareness Week from 12-18 as an official supporter to promote anti-fraud awareness and education. The movement, known commonly as Fraud Week, champions the need to proactively fight fraud and help safeguard businesses and investments from the growing fraud problem. The Week's message is, "Fraud awareness is the beacon that illuminates the dark alleys of deception, guarding the wealth and trust of nations. In a world where the shadows of fraud loom large, our collective vigilance is the key to unlocking the doors of a more honest and prosperous future." According to Fraudweek.com, the eight key warning signs out of which 85 per cent of all fraudsters displayed at least one behavioural red flag- 39 per cent living beyond means, 25 per cent financial difficulties, 20 per cent had an unusually close association with vendors/ customers, 13 per cent has control issues, unwillingness to share duties, 12 per cent irritability, suspiciousness or defensiveness, 12 per cent bullying or intimidation, 11 per cent divorce/ family problems and 10 per cent wheeler-dealer attitude.



MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee in Ministry of Information announces its Tender for the following work:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
4/2023 2023/257 13 - ١٣ / ٤	CONSTRUCTION OF RADIO AND TV STATION IN DABBA (MUSANDAM GOVERNORATE)	Third	19/11/2023	21/12/2023	25/-

1. All specialized companies in the field of the tender shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicated above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

2. Companies and institutions are exempted from providing a temporary insurance of 1% when submitting their bid, provided that they sign a document committing themselves to the submitted bid for a period determined when the bidding strategy is approved in accordance with the document attached to the Isnad platform. As for international companies that do not have a headquarters in the Sultanate of Oman, they are required to provide temporary insurance of 1%.

(For more information, please see the original circular issued by the Tender Board on the Isnad platform.)

Note that the last date for accepting bids as mentioned above is before 10:00 am. Any bid received after the time and date mentioned in the submission date will be rejected automatically.

You are requested to provide 2 hard copies for your offer after the submission in Projects Department at Ministry of Information.

3. The Ministry has the right to:

1) Add or Cancel some works in the tender if necessary.

2) Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:
Telephone : 24943785, 24943177, Email: (Moi.Tenders@omaninfo.om)



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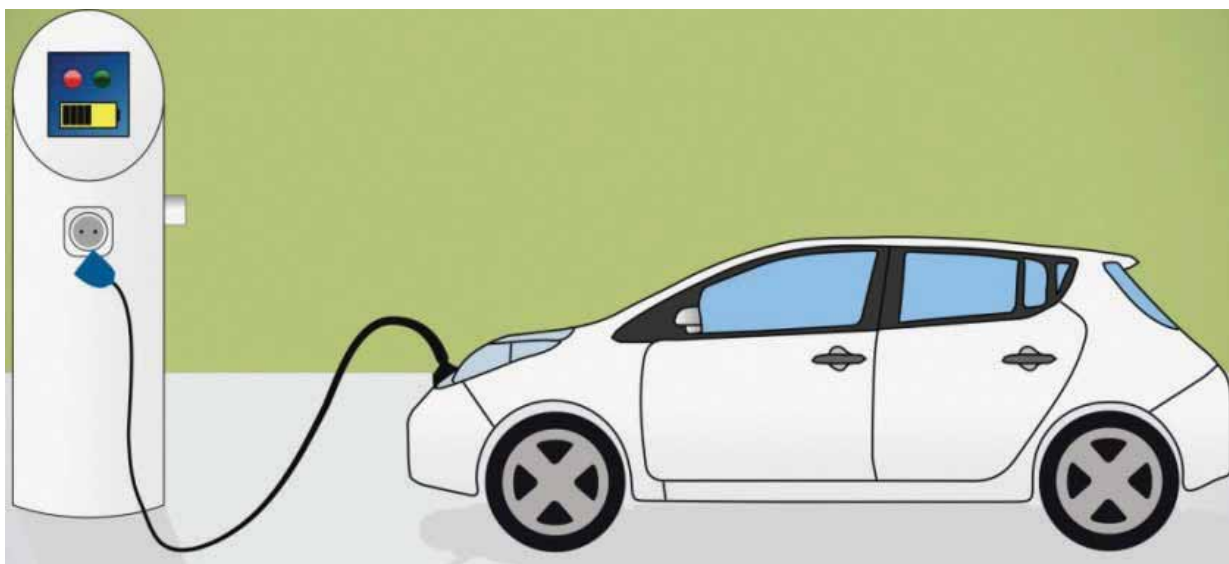
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EV charging units mandatory at fuel stations

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

As part of the national strategy towards achieving zero carbon neutrality by 2050, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) issued decision 615/2023 amending some provisions of the regulatory conditions for issuing licenses to establish and operate fuel filling stations.

Under the new decision, Article 32 will have a new section (32 bis), which states that owners of commercial filling stations are obligated to provide an electric charging point for vehicles in accordance with the requirements



and controls issued by the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR).

At the same time, Article 32

will ensure that fuel marketing companies are committed to providing basic public facilities at all fuel filling stations such

as toilets and other basic services required by the station's geographical location, apart from ensuring the cleanliness of these

facilities during the station's operating hours.

Article 38 states that there will be a written warning for the first violation followed by an administrative fine of RO1,000 if the violation is repeated. There will also be an administrative fine of RO3,000, which will be doubled if the violation is repeated.

The decision shall be published in the Official Gazette and shall be effective after 180 days.

It may be noted that the number of electric cars in the Sultanate of Oman is over 400 and there are efforts to facilitate procedures for new car dealers to import directly from manufacturers.

He said that there are around

100 points for electric cars, which will go up to 300 in the next two years in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, recently said that there are initiatives to manufacture electric cars in the Special Economic Zone in Al Duqm.

He said, "There is a steady increase in their number of electric cars as a number of agencies have begun selling electric vehicles, and the challenge remains regarding prices. There are efforts to enable agents to import less expensive, high-quality and safe cars."

Oman to showcase landmarks at WTM London

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, will showcase the country's landmarks at the World Travel Market London 2023, which begins in London on Monday and lasts for three days.

Oman's delegation to the event will be led by Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism.

The Omani pavilion at the expo will bring together partners from the government and private sectors, whose participation in the global event stems from a promotional programme aimed at highlighting Oman's competitive tourism capabilities. — ONA



The Omani pavilion at the expo will highlight the country's competitive tourism capabilities. — ONA

Mwasalat reports jump in bus passengers

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 5

The Public Transport Company, Mwasalat, has reported that its buses ferried 3,145,545 passengers by Q3, 2023, compared to 2.1 million passengers during the same period in 2022 with more than 11,500 passengers travelling in these buses daily.

It added that 177,973 used ferry services during the same period, compared to 163,700 in 2022. As many as 652 passengers used ferries daily.

The cargo shipped through buses is 18,000 tonnes while 45,600 vehicles were transported through ferries.

The Omanisation percentage at the company is 93 and it may be noted that Omanis travelling in buses is 34.98 per cent and 80.68 per cent in ferries.

Female passengers constitute 12.73 per cent of total travellers in buses and 21.34 per cent in ferries.

Mwasalat recently resumed international service to Abu Dhabi from October 1. The service operates via Al Buraimi and Al Ain in the UAE.

Rains lash many wilayats in northern governorates



Many wilayats in the northern governorates received rain fall on Sunday as part of the trough that is expected to have an impact on Oman starting on Sunday until Thursday. The trough is due to low pressure system that has been developed in Southern part of Iran has been having its impact on the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates.





AIR POLLUTION
CAN MAKE OUR LUNGS
MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO
INFECTIONS

**AFRAH
AL BALUSHI**
@afrahalbalushia

RESPIRATORY DISEASES
continue to be a serious health issue, emphasising the importance of adopting healthy practices to mitigate the risk of infection. According to the Ministry of Health, respiratory diseases account for 10 per cent of hospital admissions, with the latest statistics revealing their prevalence. Infectious respiratory diseases are the most frequently encountered conditions in healthcare institutions, constituting about 27.6 per cent of all outpatient clinic visits and 11.2 per cent of hospital admissions.

PROTECTIVE MEASURES
Preventing respiratory diseases, particularly pneumonia, is within our grasp. Implementing protective measures, including proper nutrition and minimising risk factors like air pollution, which can make our lungs more susceptible to infections, is crucial. Additionally, embracing effective hygiene practices, such as thorough handwashing with soap, can reduce the likelihood of contracting pneumonia by half, significantly reducing exposure to harmful bacteria.

Lower respiratory tract diseases remain a global health concern, ranking fourth among the leading causes of death. However, there is positive news: The number of deaths attributed to these diseases has significantly declined. In 2019, they claimed the lives of 2.6 million people, representing a decrease of 460,000 deaths compared to the year 2000.

Acute respiratory infections are a major contributor to morbidity and mortality in the region, significantly impacting both health and economic development. Seasonal influenza stands out as the primary cause of morbidity and mortality

associated with acute respiratory infections across the region. Other respiratory viruses like respiratory syncytial, rhinovirus, and Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus also demand close monitoring and rapid response due to their potential to mutate into epidemics or pandemics.

The winter season provides an ideal environment for the replication, mutation, and spread of respiratory viruses. These viruses naturally flourish during this time, leading to an annual surge in cold and fever symptoms. Factors such as increased indoor gatherings with poor ventilation can expedite virus transmission.

VIRAL INFECTIONS
Children are particularly vulnerable to respiratory diseases, with those under a year old having underdeveloped immune systems that increase susceptibility to viral infections. Each year, some vulnerable children require hospitalisation, either in regular wards or intensive care units, due to respiratory virus infections. An international collaboration involving the World Health Organisation (WHO), member states, and other partners has yielded significant progress in enhancing and fortifying health systems to prepare for, detect, prevent, and control emerging respiratory diseases in the region. Countries in the region are actively working to bolster their preparedness, early detection, and response to respiratory diseases. This necessitates a focus on key priorities, including the strengthening of integrated systems and structures for respiratory disease surveillance. Building capacity for the detection, prevention, and control of respiratory diseases, particularly at the community level, is critical in ensuring the health and well-being of the population.

BE ON
GUARD
TO BEAT
RESPIRATORY
DISEASES



2.5 PER CENT INCREASE IN HAJ APPLICANTS THIS YEAR

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

There has been an increase of 2.5 per cent in the number of applicants for those wishing to perform Haj in 2024, according to the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA).

The registration, which closed on Sunday, began on October 22 and lasted for two weeks and recorded as many as 34,126 registrations till Sunday which include 31,064 Omanis and 3,062 expatriates.

“There has been an overwhelming response from those aspiring to carry out this year’s (Hijri 1445) Haj. The ministry and the online portal received 34,126 registrations which included 3,062 expatriates as well as 31,064 Omanis till Sunday,” Ali al Hattali, spokesperson of the Ministry told the Observer.

Like in the previous years, Muscat recorded the largest number of applicants (5,373) while Musandam reported (172) the lowest applicants. Although there has been a substantial increase in the number of applicants in all governorates, Dhofar, Musandam and Al Sharqiyah

“We will be choosing 14,000 people from the total number of applicants to perform this year’s Haj through the ministry and preference will be given to first timers as well as people suffering from chronic diseases and cancer

ALI AL GHAFRI

South reported a decline in the number of applicants.

“However, we will be choosing 14,000 people from the total number of applicants to perform this year’s Haj through the ministry and preference will be given to first timers as well as people suffering from chronic diseases and cancer,” Ali al Ghafri

from the Department of Haj and Umrah told the Observer.

This number is based on an agreement with the General Authority for Awqaf of Saudi Arabia where it was agreed to maintain the status quo of pre-Covid time number of Haj pilgrims.

Provisions are also in place to send more applicants from visually-impaired sector, elderly, cancer patients and disabled people who wish to perform Haj.

During the last Haj season in June 2023, the online portal received 33,536 applications including 29,930 requests from Omanis, and 3,606 requests from residents to perform Haj rituals which was held in the first week of June this year.

“Nonetheless, only 14,000 people, constituting nearly fifty per cent of the applicants, from Oman were able to perform haj in 2023 through registration on MoARA portal,” he added. He further said that those who are selected electronically through the e-sorting and e-selection process, will be contacted directly and will have five days to contract through the electronic system with Haj companies to take further steps in order to process their documentation.

A’Sharqiyah University inks agreements worth RO 7.8m



The total capacity of the units will exceed 1,600 students. – ONA

IBRA: A’Sharqiyah University on Sunday signed two agreements with private sector establishments to provide solar energy and establish student housing units to the tune of RO 7.8 million.

The first agreement deals with designing,

exporting, installing and connecting a solar energy plant with a capacity of 980 kilowatts. The total cost of this project is estimated at RO 350,000.

It is expected to contribute to reducing carbon emissions by

1818 tons. The second agreement, worth RO 7.5 million, is regarding the establishment of 4 student housing units with 132 rooms in each unit. The total capacity of the units will exceed 1,600 students.

— ONA



There has been an increase of 2.5 per cent in the number of applicants for those wishing to perform Haj in 2024

Kuwait military delegation visits MTC

MUSCAT: A delegation from the Ali Al Sabah Military Academy of the State of Kuwait, headed by Brigadier Khalid Shuja Al Otaibi on Sunday visited the Military Technological College (MTC). Upon the delegation’s arrival at the college, they were received by the Acting Commandant of the MTC. The visiting delegation were briefed on the MTC and they toured its various facilities. — ONA



Awareness programme on children’s rights in Dhofar schools

SALALAH: The General Directorate of Education in Dhofar Governorate began the child rights awareness programme implemented by the Directorate in a number of schools in the governorate in partnership with the Omani Human Rights Commission.

The programme will continue until November 9, Thursday.

The programme includes an introduction to the Omani Human Rights Committee, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its articles, and the Children’s Law, in addition to distributing the Committee’s publications on the



rights of the child and practical application for students in this field.

Dr Maison bint Bakhit Al Shehri, Director-General, General Directorate of Education in Dhofar Governorate, said that this programme

comes within the framework of integration between various government institutions concerned with children’s rights and care programmes, indicating that the implementation of the programme coincides with the celebration of World Children’s Day, which falls on November 20 of each year. It is worth noting that the Omani Human Rights Committee seeks to instill a culture of children’s rights among students in all governorates of Oman, in addition to spreading awareness and education about human rights and freedoms and consolidating their principles at the levels of thought and practice. — ONA



SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH



ANNOUNCEMENT

The Directorate General of Financial Affairs at Ministry of Health announces to all companies and institutions dealing with (MOH Headquarters) and (Directorates General of Health Services and its affiliated departments at all the Governorates) to submit their invoices to the concerned authorities not later than **15.11.2023**, to settle all their claims before the end of current year 2023.



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Announcement of Public Auction No. (35/2023)

Muscat Municipality, represented by the auction committee the establishment of a public auction for the sale of variety of different items (scrap, caravan, water tank with stand, light poles) according to the following details:

Interested individuals for this Auction must comply with the conditions set out here under:

- Those wishing to enter the auction must pay a fee of (4 OMR) (four Omani rials) which is not refundable, and a temporary deposit (refundable) is required of (500 OMR) (five hundred Omani rials) as fees to participate in the auction, as it required to be paid electronically to the cashier of the committee in the Directorate of Administrative & Financial Affairs at municipal presidency building Darsait.
- The person who wins the auction obligated to pay the full price of the items if awarded to him plus (5%) value added tax, and the auction fees by (3%) of the total amount through electronic payment.
- Items are sold in their current condition, and Muscat Municipality is not responsible for the loss or damage of it once its value is paid
- The items sold are not returned or reduced in value, and any petition submitted in this regard will not be accepted.
- the buyer is obligated to transfer the items that have been awarded to him after paying their full value within a period not exceeding two weeks from the date of purchase, and he bears full responsibility for the items that were not transported within the specified period, and in the event that they are not transferred within the specified period, the municipality may resell it at his own expenses.
- The date and location set for inspecting the movables and awarding the bid are specified as follows:

Location	AL Amerat Park – Labor Camp in AL Mahj
The Date/Time of inspection	12/11/2023 From 08: 00 AM to 12:00- 00PM
The date for the submitting the participation	From 13/11/2023 to 16/11/2023
A site for submission participation fees	Head office in Darsite at the committee cashier at the General Directorate of Administrative & Financial Affairs
Auction date	21/11/2023 at 7:30 am o'clock in the morning (extendable)
For inquires and coordination	Please contact the specialist of the committee member at (98070900)

Other terms

- The VAT specified in the law will be applied to successful bidder.
- It is not allowed to enter the auction area until after showing the receipt of the subscription fee and amount of insurance.
- Muscat Municipality may cancel or defer the sale without providing any justification.
- The security deposit will not be refunded in cases;
 - If he does not pay the value of the movables.
 - If he does not transfer the movables from the site within the specified period.
 - If the buyer did not clean the site after moving the items



NETANYAHU SUSPENDS
ISRAELI MINISTER OVER
GAZA NUCLEAR
COMMENT



POPE FRANCIS
CALLS FOR CEASEFIRE
IN THE MIDEAST
CONFLICT



HEALTH MINISTRY
SAYS 4,800 CHILDREN
KILLED IN
GAZA WAR

GAZA: Israel pressed its war nearly a month as the Palestinians said strikes on a central Gaza refugee camp killed dozens. Ground battles raged in the north of the densely populated Gaza Strip, despite calls for a ceasefire from Arab countries and from desperate civilians after 30 days of a war that has killed thousands, mostly civilians.

Israeli troops were seen engaged in house-to-house battles as tanks and armoured bulldozers churned through the sand in footage released by the army to tighten the encirclement of Gaza City, still home to hundreds of thousands of civilians.

Since October 7, Israel has relentlessly bombarded the besieged Gaza Strip, levelling entire city blocks.

The health ministry in Gaza says more than 9,480 Gazans, mostly women and children, have been killed.

In the latest strikes in Gaza, health ministry said, Israeli bombing of Al-Maghazi refugee camp late on Saturday killed 45 people, with an eyewitness reporting children dead and homes smashed.

“An Israeli air strike targeted my neighbours’ house in Al-Maghazi camp, my house next door partially collapsed,” said Mohammed Alaloul, 37, a journalist working for the Turkish Anadolu Agency.

A military spokesperson said they were looking into whether their forces had been operating in the area at the time of the bombing.

Türkiye said that it was recalling its ambassador to Israel and breaking off contacts with Netanyahu.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, whose country has been acting as the sole conduit for foreigners to escape the Gaza Strip and for aid to get in, called for an “immediate and comprehensive ceasefire”.

The call was echoed by thousands of protesters in Washington in solidarity with Palestinians, one of multiple rallies held from Indonesia to Iran as well as in European cities.

“The violence in Gaza has been prolonged and indiscriminate — it’s not a war but a massacre,” 27-year-old Indonesian protester Dwi Nurfitriani said during a march in Jakarta. “So, if we consider ourselves human, let’s step in and reject all of the violence.”

In the north of Israel, the army again traded fire across the border on Saturday, with each claiming to have hit the other’s positions. — AFP



THE HEALTH MINISTRY IN GAZA SAYS MORE THAN 9,480 GAZANS, MOSTLY WOMEN AND CHILDREN, HAVE BEEN KILLED

FIERCE
FIGHTING
IN GAZA
AS ISRAEL
BOMBS
CAMP

A Palestinian man gestures as he stands on the rubble of a collapsed building on Khan Yunis. – AFP

GAZA EVACUATIONS SUSPENDED AFTER A



People carrying some of their belongings reach the central Gaza Strip on foot via the Salah al-Din road on their way to the south. – AFP

CAIRO: Evacuations of injured Gazans and foreign passport holders through the Rafah crossing to Egypt have been suspended since Saturday.

The evacuations were suspended after an Israeli strike on Friday on ambulances in Gaza being used to transport injured people, Egyptian official sources said.

The Rafah crossing to Egypt’s Sinai peninsula is the only exit point from Gaza not controlled by Israel.

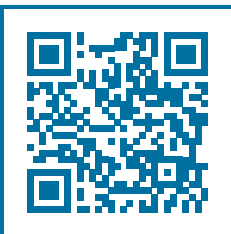
Evacuations began on Wednesday under an internationally brokered deal aimed at letting some foreign passport holders, their dependents and some wounded Gazans out of the enclave. Unlike on previous days, the Gazan border authority on Sunday did not publish a list of approved foreign passport holders and dependents.

Hundreds of people have been evacuated in coordination with their home countries, along with

some of injured Gazans who are receiving medical assistance in hospitals in Sinai.

An Egyptian official said that the Egyptian side of the border was open as usual for any evacuees, but that crossings were suspended because of bombardments in Gaza. Egypt was making “genuine efforts” to resume activity, the official said.

The U.S. diplomat said there had been a “a lot of work” to reopen the crossing over the past 24 hours and



QATAR SAYS
GAZA HOSTAGE
RELEASES NEED
'PERIOD OF CALM'



PROTESTERS OPPOSE
WAR POLICY IN LARGE
PRO-PALESTINIAN RALLY
IN WASHINGTON



WFP CHIEF SAYS AID
ENTERING GAZA
'NOWHERE NEAR'
ENOUGH



People check the damage caused by an Israeli strike on the Al-Maghazi refugee camp in Deir Balah in the central Gaza Strip. — AFP



Palestinian cameraman hugs his father after two of his children and his brother were killed in an Israeli strike on the Al-Maghazi refugee camp in Deir Balah. — AFP

Blinken says Gazans must not be 'forcibly displaced'

RAMALLAH: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Gazans "must not be forcibly displaced", speaking on a surprise visit on Sunday to the West Bank to meet Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas.

It was the top US diplomat's first visit to the Palestinian territory since war erupted following the October 7.

"The secretary reaffirmed the United States' commitment to the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance and resumption of essential services in Gaza and made clear that Palestinians must not be forcibly displaced," said a summary of the meeting released by the US State Department.

Abbas condemned what he labelled a "genocide" unfolding in the Gaza Strip, according to the official Palestinian news agency Wafa.

"I have no words to describe the genocide and destruction suffered by our Palestinian people in Gaza at the hands of Israel's war machine, with no regard for the principles of international law," Abbas was quoted as saying to Blinken.

Blinken flew into Tel Aviv on Sunday morning



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken meets with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at the Muqata in Ramallah. — Reuters

and travelled in a high-security convoy to the Ramallah headquarters of the Palestinian Authority.

The US Secretary of State is the second high-ranking Western visitor to the West Bank since the war started, following French President Emmanuel Macron.

The unannounced trip came amid sharply rising violence in the West Bank since the outbreak of the war in Gaza.

Blinken and Abbas "discussed efforts to restore calm and stability in the West Bank, including the need to stop extremist violence against Palestinians and hold those accountable responsible", said the State Department.

The US "remains committed to advancing equal measures of dignity and security for Palestinians and Israelis alike," it added.

More than 150 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank in clashes with Israeli soldiers and attacks by Israeli settlers since the start of the war, according to the Palestinian Authority.

Blinken has urged "humanitarian pauses" in Gaza on his latest tour of the Middle East, to protect civilians and ease aid deliveries to the densely populated territory.

The United States has also advocated for a two-state solution as the only path out of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. — AFP

TÜRKIYE SAYS IT AGREED WITH EGYPT TO TAKE GAZA CANCER PATIENTS

ANKARA: Türkiye and Egypt have agreed for some 1,000 cancer patients and other injured civilians needing urgent care in Gaza to be sent to Türkiye for treatment, Turkish Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said on Sunday, adding work was underway to plan the move.

Koca said on Thursday that Ankara was prepared to bring in cancer patients from the Turkish-Palestinian Friendship hospital in Gaza, the enclave's only cancer treatment hospital, which went out of service after running out of fuel this week.

On Sunday, Koca said he held a phone call with his Egyptian counterpart to discuss the matter.

"Our efforts continue for almost 1,000 patients, especially

Our efforts continue for almost 1,000 patients, especially cancer patients who were being treated at the Türkiye-Palestine Friendship hospital in Gaza that had to stop its operations

FAHRETTİN KOCA
Turkish Health Minister

cancer patients who were being treated at the Türkiye-Palestine Friendship hospital in Gaza

that had to stop its operations, and wounded persons we were previously notified about and who are in need of urgent care, to be brought to Egypt through the Rafah border crossing," Koca said on social media platform X.

"After that, it is being planned for the cancer patients and those in emergency conditions to be transferred to our country via ambulance planes and hospital ships," he said.

On Tuesday, the United Arab Emirates said it planned to treat 1,000 Palestinian children from Gaza, without saying how they would leave the enclave for the Gulf state.

Türkiye has sent more than 200 tonnes of humanitarian aid and a team of medical personnel to Egypt for Gazans. — Reuters

AMBULANCE ATTACKED

The bombing of hospitals and the bombing of ambulances, which are part of the agreement to move patients out of harm's way, certainly does not help.

MAJED AL ANSARI

Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs

thought the problem would be resolved.

Qatar, which has played a major role in facilitating humanitarian aid and hostage releases, said it was also pushing to resume crossings but no timeline was set.

"The bombing of hospitals and the bombing of ambulances, which are part of this agreement for ambulance convoys to move patients out of harm's way, certainly does

not help," said Majed Al Ansari, spokesperson for Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a briefing on Sunday.

"We urge all parties, but especially the occupation army to make sure that there is safe routes and that the agreement, as it was reached, is respected," he added.

The United Nations Secretary General and aid agencies working in Gaza have condemned Israel's air strike on an ambulance on Friday. — Reuters

Photography a modern tool for social change



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Associate Professor, Dept of English Language and Literature Sultan Qaboos University

As troubling images greet us every moment across all media, whether social media or popular media like newspapers (digital or otherwise), the power of photography is even more evident in its powerful messaging and capacity to move the world.

We are all familiar with iconic photographs that brought wars to the living room — the napalm girl running away from the inferno in Vietnam or the breaking of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Iconic moments like that, when recorded visually, evoke powerful emotions of awe, fear, revulsion, and horror, often leading to people demanding systemic changes.

Photographs of the First World War brought the realities of war to the consciousness of the common people who thought of it as something noble and necessary as they didn't have to face its harsh realities.

It was only when grainy photos from the battlefields of Europe entered newspapers that the true price of war was understood by common people.

Photographs can move the world to action. It can bring together diverse communities to jointly call for the end of war, strife, climate action, or social change. Images of the 2004 tsunami brought home the awful power of nature and the consequences of not taking climate change seriously. Subsequent visuals of forest fires, earthquakes, and hurricanes have only re-asserted the impact of these pictures.

Photojournalism, documentary photography, or storytelling through photos have the power to move society and “shed light on important social and political issues and to bring about change”, according to photographer and film-maker Angel Sanchez.

Today, everybody is a photographer and this is, in many ways, positive because we can capture realities that previously would stay hidden. Social ills, inequalities, and abuse of any kind are all routinely documented and published, much to the consternation of the people concerned. The additional boon is that such photos can be widely shared for immediate effect.

Of course, this kind of power is not without its

PHOTOGRAPHS CAN MOVE THE WORLD TO ACTION. IT CAN BRING TOGETHER DIVERSE COMMUNITIES TO JOINTLY CALL FOR THE END OF WAR, STRIFE OR CLIMATE ACTION

risks and possible fallouts. Like all other creative mediums, photography is a tool in the hands of its creator, at first. Later, once out in the public, it stops being the property of its creator and gets a life of its own, as viewers interpret possible meanings.

The ethical questions regarding sharing troubling photographs will continue to be debated. When asked how photos of war are taken without feeling sympathy or trying to help the victims, photographers often speak about the need to keep emotions outside the job, which is one of informing and documenting.

In spite of its ubiquity, or perhaps because of it, photographs have an intense and immediate quality. It has its own language and follows its own rules. It reminds us of the importance of the moment, and the need to memorialise it.

Award-winning poet Carol Ann Duffy describes the chore of the war photographer who documents “A hundred agonies in black and white/from which his editor will pick out five or six”. It is a hard, thankless task but one that promotes questioning and social change.

Selfies with asteroid hinting at Earth’s origins

AZIZ EL MASSASSI

In a hushed room of a museum in Washington, cameras and cell phones focus on a tiny piece of rock, no larger than a piece of gravel.

The fragment might seem insignificant, but it is a sample taken from the asteroid Bennu, which scientists are studying in the hope of discovering if asteroids actually brought the building blocks of life — carbon and water — to Earth.

Exhibited to the public on Friday for the first time at the Smithsonian in the US capital, the tiny stone is just visible inside its small capsule.

“This asteroid, now we know, has water crystals and carbon, two of the elements that produce ultimately life,” said Nasa boss Bill Nelson, a few minutes before the curtain rose on the dedication ceremony.

The new space venture is “part of our quest to understand, to try to understand, who we are, what we are, where we are, in the vastness of this cosmos,” Nelson told journalists and space enthusiasts eager to whip out their cameras to snap an image of the rock fragment.

Other museum visitors then come in and they too reach for their phones for a selfie with the little black rock.

Jenn Mann came from neighbouring Virginia to take her grandson to “finally” see a piece of asteroid on Earth.

“I was afraid it was just a speck of dust, but it’s actually much bigger than I thought,” laughed the 64-year-old systems analyst.

“I was 10 years old when man first walked out on the Moon, and I think everyone in my generation is just really keen on all of that because you wouldn’t remember all the excitement that was going on during that time,” she said, before taking a photo for her daughter.

Nasa’s Osiris-Rex mission took the sample in 2020 from Bennu, a 4.5 billion-year-old asteroid 500 metres in diameter, which was more than 300 million kilometres from Earth at the time.

The capsule containing the precious cargo returned successfully to Earth in September, landing in the American desert.

Since then, analysis has been under way at Nasa’s Johnson Space Center in Houston.

Even though she worked with the scientific team on the project, Nayi Castro, like the other visitors, was seeing a fragment of the sample with her own eyes for the first time.

“It’s indescribable, I can’t wait to bring my family and my friends to look at it,” said the 36-year-old mission operations manager, proudly wearing the Nasa logo on her t-shirt. — AFP



Sergey Plekhanov

The writer is author of A Reformer on the Throne. sergey.plekhanov@gmail.com

THE IRON AGE DAWNED UPON HUMANITY FOLLOWING THE COPPER AGE, WHEN THE KNOWLEDGE OF SMELTING IRON WAS STILL IN ITS INFANCY. INITIALLY, IRON’S UTILITY WAS LIMITED TO DECORATIVE PURPOSES

Amidst the fringes of India’s bustling capital, Delhi, nestled within the ornate fence of the Qutub Minar mosque, stands an enigmatic testament to human ingenuity — a colossal iron column. This monumental artefact has stood the test of time for over sixteen centuries, its most astonishing trait being its resistance to rust. What secrets lie within this exceptional purity of iron, and what does its enduring presence reveal about the ever-evolving concept of value? Intriguingly, while some common iron objects succumb to the relentless march of rust, this ancient iron giant remains unscathed, standing stoically under the sun and rain as if it were cast just yesterday.

The Iron Age dawned upon humanity following the Copper Age, when the knowledge of smelting iron was still in its infancy. Initially, iron’s utility was limited to decorative purposes. The Hittites, early masters of metalworking, revered iron as a symbol of power. Crowns of kings and regal symbols were meticulously crafted from this scarce and coveted metal. During this epoch, the value of iron far surpassed that of gold, a measure of its exceptional rarity.

Ancient civilisations regarded iron as a divine gift from the heavens, and this reverence persisted for centuries. Hittite rulers believed that they enjoyed special favor from the divine realm as they possessed the exclusive reserves of this celestial metal.

Over the eons of Earth’s existence, countless meteorites have descended upon its surface, contributing to a substantial layer of metallic riches. The Hittite monopoly endured for several centuries, but the secrets of metalworking couldn’t be concealed indefinitely. The once-plentiful meteoric iron supply dwindled, prompting the exploration of new sources through ore extraction.

In the earliest days of the Iron Age, tools and weaponry relied heavily on meteorite iron. While the value of iron eventually diminished, it retained its significance among warriors, who esteemed iron rings and insignia over gold. Remarkably, this iron-crafting culture persevered through history. Even during World War II, Germany’s highest military honour was the Iron



While some common iron objects succumb to the relentless march of rust, this ancient iron giant remains unscathed, standing stoically under the sun and rain as if it were cast just yesterday.

Cross.

Gold, however, managed to stage a remarkable comeback, once again becoming the ultimate prize for armies besieging medieval cities. Vikings, on their triumphant returns from European and Middle Eastern raids, flaunted their wealth with gold chains, pearls, and ostentatious adornments. Their fierce warriors, bedecked in silk and smelling of incense, embodied a stark contrast to the austere origins of their homeland. Presumably, their wives, smelling of fish and sheepskins, were quite embarrassed by such a display of luxury.

For centuries, Scandinavian warbands held sway until new conquerors emerged on the vast Eurasian expanse — the Mongols and, later, the Turks. Yet, the thirst for conquest and riches endured, shifting its focus from precious metals to lands abundant in spices, minerals, coal, and oil. Rainbow-coloured securities, stocks, became more alluring than banknotes. In a quiet revolution, the foremost measure of wealth transitioned from gold to entries in shareholder registers, and vast financial empires rose and fell with unprecedented speed.

But where does gold — the former titan of markets and dreams — reside today? Gold remains ubiquitous, especially in India, where women hold vast quantities of gold jewellery, amassing a wealth equivalent to, if not exceeding, the combined gold reserves of entire nations such as the United States and Germany. The celebration of life, however, takes a different path elsewhere.

First, Bitcoin reshaped paradigms, revealing that a digital coin could transform ordinary individuals into overnight millionaires. Cruise ships carried hordes of newfound princes and princesses, rejoicing in their unexpected fortunes.

Recently, the family of virtual currencies expanded further, with official digital currencies steadily gaining prominence. The world hurtles towards a future where money, as we’ve known it for millennia, may vanish entirely.

If ancient civilisations considered iron a gift from the gods, can we regard the emerging world of values in a similar light? Only time will unveil the secrets hidden within the ever-changing landscape of human worth.

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

Time to deliver on the promises

Citizens all over the Sultanate of Oman have voted for their candidates who will represent them in Majlis Ash'shura for the next four-year term. Candidates were impatiently waiting to get the results revealed. Some have won the game while others lost despite the efforts, time and money they had dedicated for their campaigns. Though, all got their chances, but some were not lucky enough to win.

All winners and those who voted for them were on cloud nine, celebrating their victory. People were happy for them with the hope that the elected will be supportive and reliable members. As well, the candidates were undoubtedly delighted to have won the election. It is not necessary that those who lost were not qualified, but maybe they did not get enough votes to beat their competitors.

As the elections are over now, winners are getting ready to officially get onboard in the Majlis. Congratulations on your win and May Allah grant you support and success to shoulder this responsibility. Hope you will be as serious and sincere as you have promised to your society and country during the campaign. It is time to fulfil all the promises you have made; this is the time to make them come true. People are happy for you because they gave you the trust and the support to be responsible and capable to serve the society.

During the campaign, most of the candidates made various promises to individuals, society and nation. Perhaps, you saw some of their promises showcased on different platforms during their campaigns. It was all for the sake of enticing people to vote for them. We all believe that only few of these promises will be accomplished. Anyway, at least they must try their best to get their promises fulfilled.

Dear members, not only individuals,



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
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An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

DURING THE CAMPAIGN, THE CANDIDATES MADE VARIOUS PROMISES AND IT IS THE TIME TO FULFIL THEM

but the government too is expecting you to be the right candidates to join the Majlis. All believe in you to be accountable and honest to represent your people for whom you will be their ambassador to the government. The government has also given you the responsibility to spare no effort to support the government through various committees, proposal and studies of the Majlis that are presented to the government authorities.

Late Sultan Qaboos placed his personal confidence and support on all members of Majlish Ash'shura. In one of his addresses, he stated: "Each and every one of you is required to work for the national interest and carry out his patriotic duties with wholehearted devotion. In addition to this, one of the main tasks of every member is to give particular attention to the welfare and development of his local community. We are confident that your Majlis can make a constructive contribution to ensuring that this country continues to make steady and consistent progress".

Reflecting on his confidence on all members, the late Sultan pointed out, "You must always be prepared to deal realistically with matters affecting the higher interests of the nation and the citizen and when dealing with them, to look at them from the point of view of the country as a whole, with all its regions and wilayats, with no other purpose than that of the public interest".

For all those reasons, all members are required to shoulder the nation-building responsibility along with the government in all spheres of life. As always, with authority comes responsibility and thus, being a member is an opportunity given to all candidates to play their significant role. Of course, it is an honour for all elected members to be assigned to this mission, but it should be carried out seriously and adequately. Congratulations to all members — it is time to fulfil your promises!

CARNIVAL TIME!



A participant parades in a carnival as part of Aceh Cultural Week in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, on Sunday. – AFP

New frontiers in low-cost clean tech

The leaders' declaration that emerged from the recent G20 summit in New Delhi highlighted the urgent need for collective action on climate change and sustainable finance. Central to the group's Green Development Pact is the recognition that the energy transition must be cost-effective to accelerate progress. To reach this tipping point in affordability, we must remove the barriers – like insufficient and expensive energy storage – currently preventing the growth of renewables.

To be sure, there is a lot of ground to cover. According to the International Energy Agency's World Energy Outlook 2022, the energy sector needs to triple renewable energy capacity by 2030 to achieve Net-Zero emissions by 2050.

There is also the question of funding. As part of the declaration, G20 leaders reaffirmed the commitment made by developed countries to mobilise \$100 billion per year in climate finance to support the developing world's mitigation and adaptation efforts. In a speech before the summit, European Council President Charles Michel claimed that this goal would be met for the first time in 2023. While this represents a significant step forward, it falls far short of the \$4.5 trillion in annual clean-energy investments required by 2030 to limit global warming to 1.5° Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

A massive shift in our approach to climate finance is clearly necessary.



Ravi Venkatesan

The writer is Chairman of the Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet

TO ACCELERATE THE UPTAKE OF RENEWABLES, LEADERS FROM ALL QUARTERS MUST COLLABORATE TO MAKE CLEAN ENERGY MORE AFFORDABLE

Multilateral development banks and philanthropies should play a vital role in facilitating affordable financing and mitigating risk to encourage private-sector investment, as well as establishing low-cost funds to ease the transition from fossil fuels to renewables. The goal is not only to decrease dramatically the price of clean-energy technologies, but also to lower the costs for research and development, facilitate reaching mass-market scale, and develop financial linkages.

But progress on affordability requires a concerted effort from all quarters. By collaborating to drive down the costs of renewables, we can ignite demand, stimulate innovation, and trigger a market transformation that paves the way to a more sustainable and resilient future for us all.

Much depends on solving the problem of energy storage. Solar and wind power will almost certainly account for most renewable-electricity generation, owing to their affordability and widespread availability. But these sources are abundant only some of the time: countries around the equator receive about 12 hours of sunlight each day, while wind is inconsistent. Battery energy storage systems (BESS) are emerging as a potential solution to this inherent variability – especially as they approach a critical cost-efficiency threshold.

The Global Leadership Council, which was established by the Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet (of which I am chairman), has made BESS one of its signature initiatives. At the upcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai, the council will launch the BESS Consortium, a multi-stakeholder partnership of leading development-finance institutions that will support the deployment of first-wave BESS projects across developing countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The aim is to mobilise five gigawatts of

BESS by the end of 2024, secure more than \$4 billion in grant, concessional, and commercial finance, and, by 2030, unlock 90 gigawatts of BESS to enable 400 gigawatts of renewable energy.

India, in particular, has huge potential for BESS, given its plan to increase renewable-energy capacity to 600 gigawatts (65 per cent of total installed capacity) by 2032. To achieve this ambitious goal, distribution companies must be able to procure and accommodate large volumes of renewables in a sustainable manner. At the distribution end, BESS can provide grid balancing, ramping

support, and other critical services to reduce the total cost of power procurement.

In New Delhi, a 40-megawatt-hours BESS project aims to build a scalable pathway for one gigawatt of storage by 2026, creating 10,000 jobs. The pilot project, when scaled up, could advance the technology and encourage more widespread renewable use.

This would enhance the stability and dependability of the power grid, allowing for greater integration of clean-energy sources. Eventually, the project could cut carbon dioxide emissions and ensure a cost-effective and reliable supply of renewables.

These technologies have immense potential to promote economic diversification, strengthen energy security, and foster job opportunities. Collaborating to advance them and establish a global landscape where sustainable energy underpins prosperity is the focus of this week's Energy Transition Dialogues in India.

The race to make renewables affordable offers an unparalleled opportunity to generate sustainable and inclusive growth while reducing CO2 emissions. But we can get there only if the private sector, governments, and civil society act together to lower the price of – and increase access to – clean tech.

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A massive shift in our approach to climate finance is clearly necessary.

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Oman champions in ICC T20 Asia Qualifier Final

MUSCAT: Oman emerged champions of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Asia Qualifier Final after a nail-biting win over hosts Nepal in the summit clash at the TU ground in Kirtipur, Nepal, on Sunday.

In a match that was decided through a one-over eliminator (Super Over), Oman outplayed Nepal by 11 runs. Naseem Khushi blasted 19 runs for Oman to score 21 in the over and then Bilal Khan conceded just ten runs and took a wicket to silence the 35,000 fans who packed the ground.

Earlier, Oman, chasing 185 to win, were restricted to 184/9 with seasoned Mohammed Nadeem playing a crucial knock of 24 in nine balls to tie the match. Needing eight to win in the final over, Oman lost two wickets off successive balls from Sandeep Lamichhane but Nadeem hit a four off the penultimate ball to set up a GrandStand finish.

Needing two to win off the final delivery of the match, Nadeem played a sweep and ran the first run but while going for the winning run, Fayyaz Butt fell short to send the match to super over.

Oman's chase was kept on track with opener Kashyap Prajapati playing a stellar innings of 63 off 52 balls that included four maximums and three boundaries. Aqib Ilyas (33) and skipper Zeeshan Maqsood (26) played crucial knocks to take the game deep into the final overs. Maqsood also became the top



Oman team celebrate claiming Champions of the ICC T20 World Cup Asia Final 2023

scorer for Oman in T20Is with 1,100 runs following his knock, getting past Jatinder Singh's 1,078 runs.

Hosts Nepal elected to bat first and put up a solid total of 184, courtesy an unbeaten 52 from skipper Rohit Paudel and Gulshan

Jha's hurricane 54 off 25 balls. Opener Kushal Bhurtel's 31 at the top helped the team put on 47 in the powerplay. A late cameo of 20 off just six balls from Karan KC put Nepal in a good position to defend.

Oman's Fayyaz Butt went for runs aplenty as he conceded 63

runs in his four-over spell while Bilal Khan was the most successful with 3/26. Ilyas picked 2/22 and Maqsood had one for 27. Butt's 63 runs in four overs was the most given by an Oman bowler in T20Is.

Prajapati was named the player of the match.

Both Oman and Nepal booked their spots in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 after winning their respective semi-final matches against Bahrain and the UAE respectively on Friday.

Briefscores: Nepal 184/6 (Kushal Bhurtel 31, Rohit Paudel 52*,

Gulshan Jha 54; Bilal Khan 3/26, Aqib Ilyas 2/22) tied with Oman 184/9 (Kashyap Prajapati 63, Aqib Ilyas 33, Zeeshan Maqsood 26, Mohammed Nadeem 24*; Sandeep Lamichhane 2/31, Karan KC 2/30). Super over: Oman 21/0 (Naseem Khushi 19) beat Nepal 10/1).

Al Hajri Team claim title in Co-League basketball

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, NOV 5

The Second Co-League Basketball Championship 2023 came to an exciting conclusion at the sub-court of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. The Al Hajri Team clinched the championship title with a well-earned victory over the Volkswagen Team, securing a final score of 73-62.

The event, held under the auspices of Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi, Chairman of Oman Basketball Association, witnessed the presence of Christian Naima, CEO of Al Mutamiz Automobiles Company. The championship was organised by Sports Mania in collaboration with Volkswagen Oman.

Following the conclusion of this gripping match, Eng Khalfan al Naabi and Christian Naima awarded the deserving players with the following accolades: Ahmed Abuhamar from the Al

Hajri Team was honoured as the Most Valuable Player (MVP) of the final match. Haitham Bani Arabah of the Surooj Team received the Assist Award, while Sharbel from the Volkswagen Team earned recognition as the Best Defender. Jazil Qamar of the Al Hajri Team secured the Three-Point Shooting Award, and Basim al Musalmi, also from the Al Hajri Team, was recognised as the Best Player of the Tournament. Subsequently, Al Hajri Team celebrated with the gold medals and the championship cup, while the Volkswagen Team received silver medals and the runner-up prize.

From the onset, Al Hajri demonstrated their dominance, making a strong start and maintaining their lead throughout the first three-quarters of the game. Despite Volkswagen's valiant efforts to narrow the gap during the final quarter, Al Hajri's swift response ensured their lead remained intact until the final buzzer.



Eng Khalfan al Naabi, OBA Chairman honoring the Al Hajri Team

Ivankovic picks new faces, recalls former players OFA unveils new jersey for national team, Khalid al Rawas named as team manager

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, NOV 5

The head coach of Oman national senior football team, Branko Ivankovic, announced on Sunday the 28-man squad for the upcoming domestic camp which will begin on Tuesday and will run until November 22 in Muscat.

The Oman Football Association (OFA) also unveiled new jerseys for Oman national teams in presence of Mohammed bin Suleiman al Yahmadi, OFA Executive Director, and other officials. Former national player Khalid al Rawas was appointed as the new team manager of Red Warriors replacing Maqbool al Balushi.

The new squad featured three new faces who are participating with the national team for first time including: Ghanim al Habshi, Ahed al Hudaifi and Nasser al Rawahi. Moreover, the Red Warriors list included return of Sur's player Sami al Hasani after four years absence in the national team besides other recalled several former players including Khalid al Hajri, Amjad al Harthy and Ali al Busaidy who registered return to the team since 2021.

The Croatian coach began his statements in the press meet that the team will have major assignments including the Preliminary Joint Qualification



T Branko Ivankovic (C) , the head coach of Oman national football team



The new goalkeeper's jerseys

Round 2 for Fifa World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 besides 2024 AFC Asian Cup in Qatar campaign in between. "The upcoming local gathering will consider the two postponed matches of Omantel League and Al Nahda's match in AFC Cup," he said.

Commenting on Abdulaziz al Maqbali and he was not as one of the coach's selection despite his top show currently in the league, coach Branko responded that Mohsin al Ghassani and Esam al Subhi are scoring besides Khalid



The new player's jerseys

al Hajri and Sami al Hasani called also for examination period with the national team in this camps as priority in comparison to other strikers. "The national team doors are open always for all the players and I am trying to give an equal chances for some players," he said.

The 69 years old told reporters that Al Munthir al Alawi was not among the selected players due to his injury status. "The same story for Arshad who is suffering from an injury and he showed his best in the Uzbekistan friendly tournament in last June. I did not

call him for this camp but he may be available for December camp if he showed good performance during coming period. Meanwhile, Tamim, Musab and Harib are in better readiness than Arshad in this position currently but the doors are open," he added.

OMAN TO MEET CHINESE TAIPEI

Oman will begin their campaign in the preliminary Joint Qualifiers with a match against Chinese Taipei on November 16 in Muscat before meeting Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek city on November 21.

The former coach of Iran confirmed his message that there are 50 players in good shape and readiness to join the national team. "Oman national team list is open for all the players and will select the right players for the right position," he said.

In reply to a query related to Hatim al Roushdi, the head coach said that Hatim currently is not in his list. "I am following up him continuously and he can get back to the team anytime. Hatim was in the last camp but he was injured," he said.

Branko affirmed that the squad featured from new faces, return of many players after few years and there is always chance to call up for new players as we did ahead of USA camp in last September," he concluded.



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Ravindra Jadeja celebrates with Virat Kohli after taking the wicket of Keshav Maharaj. – Reuters

Kohli marks 35th birthday with record equalling 49th ODI century

KOLKATA: When India last hosted the World Cup in 2011, the only team to beat them was South Africa.

As it was, that three wicket group-stage win failed to stop MS Dhoni's men from lifting the World Cup on home soil and 12 years on, the 2023 edition of the Indian juggernaut seems to be unstoppable as they maintained their 100 per cent record at the tournament with a 243-run win over South Africa on Sunday.

Virat Kohli, the only survivor from that 2011 Nagpur line-up, was celebrating his 35th birthday on Sunday and even when a lone fan had the crowd chuckling as he started belting out an out-of-tune rendition of 'Happy Birthday' - the batsman turned a deaf ear to the commotion.

That laser focus sums up the way India has approached this World Cup as they remain the only unbeaten side among the 10 participating nations, having won all eight of their group matches. A sea of blue-clad India fans kept filing into the 66,000-capacity ground for several hours before the 2pm local time start as excitement mounted for the top-of-the-table showdown that many believe will be a dress rehearsal for the Nov. 19 final.

With a place in the semi-finals already bagged by both teams before Sunday's contest, India put on a dazzling show with bat and ball to keep the home fans roaring at full throttle for hours and hours.

Leaving the likes of captain Rohit Sharma (40 off 24 balls) and Shreyas Iyer (77) to smash the crowd-pleasing sixes into the stands, Kohli never lost sight of the long game even as deafening chants of "Kohli-Kohli-Kohli" kept reverberating around the cavernous Eden Gardens ground.

The 25th meeting between the two teams since India last hosted tournament showed just how far Kohli has come since his contribution in that 2011 Nagpur tussle with South Africa amounted to one measly run.

On Sunday, he avoided the temptation of going for the big hits over the boundary as he scored a record-equalling 49th ODI century - a milestone he now shares with Indian great Sachin Tendulkar.

"Every opportunity to play for India is big one for me. To be able to do that on my birthday, in



Virat Kohli celebrates after reaching his 49th century. – Reuters

front of the whole crowd, it's stuff of dreams, something that as a child you wish had happened," Kohli said.

While Tendulkar scored his 49th century in his 451st ODI innings, Kohli reached the landmark in his 277th innings, a fact noted by Tendulkar who celebrated his 50th birthday in April.

"Well played Virat. It took me 365 days to go from 49 to 50 earlier this year. I hope you go from 49 to 50 and break my record in the next few days. Congratulations!!" Tendulkar said on social media platform X.

When Kohli reached triple figures with a single off Kagiso Rabada in the 49th over, he left the organisers to mark the occasion with some pyrotechnics while he simply removed his helmet, looked skywards, acknowledged the cheers and within seconds he was back marking his crease.

His unbeaten 101 off 121 balls included 10 fours but tellingly no sixes in a match that the Indians had started off at a fast and furious pace, with the hosts reaching 61-0 after five overs and then 91-1 after 10 overs.

Though it was inevitable that India would not be able to sustain the early 12.2 or 9.10 run rates over 50 overs, the 326-5 total they ended up posting proved to be insurmountable for South Africa.

Bowled out for 83, South Africa fell to their second defeat of the tournament after being stifled by Ravindra Jadeja's left-arm spin. Jadeja finished with five for 33. — Reuters



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Oman’s biggest e-waste recycling project launches in Salalah

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, NOV 5

Value creation from electronic waste recycling has commenced in earnest in the Sultanate of Oman with the launch of the country’s largest processing plant at Raysut Industrial City in Dhofar Governorate.

Evergreen Gulf Recycling Hub (EGRH), with a processing capacity of 20,000 tonnes per annum, has been established on a 10,500 sq metre site. Supported by Canada-based environmental services specialist Sparta Group, the facility is billed as one of the most modern in the Gulf region and suitably equipped to recover optimal recyclable value from all kinds of electronic waste.

“We are now fully functional,” said Shaikh Salim Ahmed Ali Shore Qatan, Chairman. “The Evergreen Gulf Recycling Hub has put in place systems for the collection of e-waste from designated areas around the country, which is then transported to Salalah for processing and recycling. Companies and individuals can also reach out to us via our mobile app (Evergreen Recycling Hub) for the collection of their e-waste.”

Last month, EGRH signed an agreement with the Port of Duqm Company for the collection of their e-waste from the latter’s Muscat and Duqm offices. In opting for EGRH to handle its e-waste, the port cited the recycling hub’s AI-enabled technologies that would help with the segregation



Modern machinery installed at site at the Salalah e-waste recycling hub

of the waste at a molecular level. In addition, EGRH is making available facilitate for onsite shredding of hard drives to ensure that any data remaining on the devices is permanently destroyed.

“Our mobile shredder, which is available around-the-clock, travels the nation to safely destroy confidential hard drive data at customers’ locations,” said the Chairman. “Our E2MS management system generates Certificates of Destruction, Certificates of Recycling, etc. for the relevant process and produces Inventory Reports of all e-waste received at our site after processing. These reports are sent to the customers as proof that their e-waste has been disposed of to an authorised recycler.”

Significantly, the Salalah hub has been equipped to process and recycle a wide array of electrical and electronic waste. The list includes computers, monitors, printers and other office

equipment, microwave ovens, television and music systems, mobile phones, fluorescent bulbs, air-conditioners, cables, wires and motors, among other items. Recovered after processing are recyclable materials such as ferrous metals, aluminium, plastic and printed circuit boards (PCBs).

Sparta Group’s role as Technical Partners ensures that the hub’s recycling standards are consistently superior. “Sparta has provided us with innovative equipment, methodologies, and internal software systems that are run under rigorous guidelines to guarantee client privacy and effectiveness throughout the waste processing process,” said Shaikh Salim.

Barring some volumes being shipped out of the country for recycling, the vast bulk of e-waste generated in Oman has ended up in landfills – a trend that the Salalah hub is now determined to address.

OCCI unveils new strategy in alignment with Vision 2040

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, NOV 5

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) yesterday, November 5, 2023, unveiled its strategies connected to Vision 2040.

Addressing the audience, OCCI Chairman Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas highlighted the importance of the partnership between the Chamber and the Implementation Follow-up Unit of Vision 2040, the executive entity of the vision.

According to Al Rawas, the Chamber is responsible for supporting and executing a total of 30 programs linked to Vision 2040.

Al Rawas introduced the



The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry mapped out a new strategy on Sunday at a joint meeting with the Implementation Follow-up Unit of Oman Vision 2040

Chamber’s six strategic directions, which align with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. Half of these directions are related to the

private sector, while the other half pertain to the Chamber’s own roles and responsibilities.

TURN TO P15

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Majjan
University
College

كلية مجان الجامعية

BOARD REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st AUGUST 2023

Respected Shareholders

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Majjan College SAOG (Majjan University College), I am pleased to present this report on Majjan’s financial and operating performance and the accompanying financial statements for the year ended 31st August 2023.

Business Environment

While the Government has undertaken to reduce overall expenditure, spending on basic services such as education as a percentage of total expenditure has been the highest. Education got the highest 44% out of a total of 39% allocated for the basic services in Oman year 2023 budget. This measure reduces the challenges on the private higher education sector. The challenges posed by the increasing competition, however, put extensive pressures on revenue growth.

Business Associates

Guided by our vision and mission, Majjan College SAOG (Majjan University College) offers programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels that address the needs of the local, regional and international markets in a competitive environment. Majjan continues to enjoy a well-respected position among higher education institutions through its quality academic provisions. Majjan maintains its academic long-standing partnership with the University of Bedfordshire in the United Kingdom which validates Majjan’s undergraduate programmes in business, English and information technology disciplines. Majjan hosts four University of Bedfordshire Master programmes (MBA and Masters in Computer Science and International Human resource Management and Applied Linguistics). Majjan also hosts the University of Bradford Doctor of business Administration programme (DBA).

Commitment to Quality

Majjan was the first higher educational institution to be institutionally accredited by Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education. It was accredited in December 2017 for a period of five years, now extended to six years. The reaccreditation process will take place in year 2024.

Majjan goes through the institutional review by the University of Bedfordshire, an exercise that takes place every 5 years. The latest took place in year 2022 and the next review will be conducted in year 2027. The College maintains its commitment to enhance its academic provision and support to students through its transparent quality assurance measures.

Financial Performance

In comparison to the previous financial year, total income was decreased by 8% to be OMR 4.41 million. This was mainly from decrease in new undergraduate students and decrease in other miscellaneous & Investment income. Total expenses have increased by 6% to be OMR 3.82 million. This was mainly from increase in academic staffs to provide new programmes and increase in utilities consumption and face to face services & events after discontinuation of online learning. Therefore, net profit before tax and taxation decreased by 50% and 52% consecutively. Consequently, overall net profit after tax has decreased by 50% to be OMR 0.5 Million. Earnings per share has decreased from 11 Baiza per share to 6 Baiza per share.

Community Support

Majjan recognizes its social responsibility and shares its resources with the Omani society through its contribution to the Ministry of Higher Education scholarships programme. As part of its training programme, Majjan offers scholarships to its employees at the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Majjan also operates a discount scheme for

siblings and students with special needs and supports different charity organizations through its CSR budget and activities. A feature of its Human resource is the recruitment, training and retention of Omanis

Dividend

Considering the annual financial performance, the liquidity requirements for operational needs. The board of directors recommends this year

to distribute 2.5% cash dividends on paid up capital, i.e., 2.5 Baiza per share to the shareholders registered as on the date of the annual general meeting. The board of directors also recommends this year to distribute 7.5% bonus shares on paid up capital, i.e., 0.0075 shares for every share to the shareholders registered as on the date of the annual general meeting. This distribution results in an increase in the college paid up capital from OMR 9 million to OMR 9.675 million.

Future Outlook

Today Majjan is well positioned in the private higher education sector and is highly regarded. Despite the competition in the education sector, the management believes that the demand for private higher education will continue to grow in the future. Majjan has strong management since its inception and will continue on growth strategies that maximize shareholder value whilst maintaining sustainable quality higher education.

Appreciation

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to his Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for his unlimited support and guidance to higher education. Our sincere thanks to the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for its support to the private higher education sector. This has resulted in tremendous growth in the sector. It is our intention that Majjan College SAOG (Majjan University College) continues to contribute to the achievement of the vision of the country by continuously improving and enriching the standards of its academic programmes and its resources.

Dr. Salam Salim Al Mur Al Kindi
Chairman

AUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 AUGUST 2023

	31/08/2023	31/08/2022
ASSETS		
NON-CURRENT ASSETS		
Property, plant and equipment	3,229,767	3,448,621
Deferred tax asset	275,285	257,237
Total non-current assets	3,505,052	3,705,858
CURRENT ASSETS		
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss, Current	1,275,722	1,322,350
Financial assets carried at amortized cost, current	7,370,730	6,418,857
Trade and other current receivables	789,351	1,157,200
Cash and bankbalances	1,065,295	712,965
Total current assets other than non-current assets or disposal groups classified as held for sale or as held for distribution to owners	10,501,098	9,611,372
Total current assets	10,501,098	9,611,372
Total assets	14,006,150	13,317,230

EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
EQUITY		
Share capital	9,000,000	9,000,000
Statutory reserve	1,621,157	1,571,098
Retained earnings (Accumulated losses)	1,793,087	1,342,553
Other equity interest	0	0
Total equity	12,414,244	11,913,651
LIABILITIES		
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		
NON-CURRENT PROVISIONS		
Non-current provisions for employee benefits	650,614	566,933
Other non-current provisions	236,755	260,555
Total non-current provisions	887,369	827,488
Total non-current liabilities	887,369	827,488
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
CURRENT PROVISIONS		
Trade and other current payables	601,511	405,089
Current tax liabilities, current	103,026	171,002
Total current liabilities other than liabilities included in disposal groups classified as held for sale	704,537	576,091
Total current liabilities	704,537	576,091
Total liabilities	1,591,906	1,403,579
Total equity and liabilities	14,006,150	13,317,230
Number of outstanding shares	90000000	90000000
Net assets per share	0.138	0.132

Note: The complete accounts are available on Muscat Stock Exchange (www.msx.om)

Tax Authority and Bank Muscat organise seminar on value added tax



A seminar on value added tax (VAT).

MUSCAT: The Oman Tax Authority, in collaboration with Bank Muscat, hosted a seminar on Value Added Tax (VAT) to enhance the understanding of corporations and entrepreneurs regarding VAT regulations and obligations.

The seminar covered a range of topics, including the concept of VAT, tax rates, taxable registrants, input tax calculations, tax returns, tax payment methods, tax records, books, as well as tax refunds and deferred tax payments.

The seminar also featured an engaging Q&A session where attendees had their queries addressed. Participants were informed about tax laws and the essential electronic services that enable taxable entities to process transactions and submit returns within the prescribed timelines.

Specialists from the Tax Authority emphasised the significance of raising tax awareness among the corporate sector and familiarising them with the key developments in tax legislation.

They highlighted the importance of timely submission of tax returns through the Authority's electronic portal, where most services are accessible online, simplifying the tax-related transactions for businesses in Oman.

On this occasion, Ibrahim bin Khamis al Balushi, Senior Assistant General Manager, SMEs at Bank Muscat, commented, "Bank Muscat places great importance on supporting corporations and the development of small and medium-sized enterprises.

We are committed to organising workshops and seminars featuring renowned global experts to ensure that our customers are well-informed about economic trends and the latest business perspectives, aligning with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040."

Al Balushi also mentioned that in July 2021, the bank established a partnership with Morison Muscat Chartered Accountants, a leading full-service audit, tax, and business advisory firm.

This collaboration aimed to assist Bank Muscat and Meethaq SME customers in complying with Value Added Tax, which was recently introduced to many local businesses.

Bank Muscat actively organises specialised workshops and seminars to facilitate the exchange of information and experiences across various fields related to corporate activities and the banking sector.

In the recent past, the bank has initiated numerous events and programmes, including setting up a help desk for company registration in the tax system and offering technical advice and support on VAT by experts in the field.

Furthermore, the bank has organised tailored programmes and workshops for its employees through Jadara Academy, collaborating with esteemed educational institutions worldwide.

Experience distinctive luxury with the Lexus ES

MUSCAT: The Lexus ES leaves an indelible impression with its sleek design, remarkable luxury, exceptional fuel efficiency, and an array of features that enhance every journey.

The Lexus ES captivates with its impressive design language. It is equipped with two powertrain options, including a 3.5-litre 24-valve V6 engine, producing 298 hp and 36.3 kg-m of torque, and a high-efficiency 2.5-litre 16-valve DOHC engine, generating 204 hp and 24.8 kg-m of torque.

Both powertrains for the ES350 and ES250 variants are mated to an eight-speed direct-shift automatic transmission.

For those seeking a touch of luxury combined with eco-consciousness, the ES hybrid electric model stands out.

This model features a hybrid battery with an 8-year/160,000 km warranty, automatically recharged through the petrol engine, braking, or deceleration, eliminating the need for external charging.

Furthermore, it incorporates advanced technologies while driving like any conventional vehicle and does not require special fuel. The ES300h achieves an impressive mileage of 24.1 km/L.

To add excitement and thrilling experiences, the ES350 F Sport version offers a new dimension to the thrill of driving.

In addition to its bold and aggressive exterior, the Lexus ES350 F Sport features a retuned suspension, 19-inch wheels and tires, and unique aluminium interior trim, giving it a more dynamic look and feel.

The ES boasts an opulent interior, inviting drivers and passengers to indulge in a range of advanced features that create a refined cabin experience.

These features include Dual Zone Auto Air-conditioning, Voice Recognition, Power Rear Sunshade, Premium Touchscreen Audio System, Android Auto & Apple CarPlay, and much more.



Lexus ES-new

Underlining Lexus's unwavering commitment to safety, the vehicle ensures peace of mind with an advanced safety technology package.

This package includes Anti-Lock Braking System (ABS), Traction Control (TRC), Brake Assist System (BAS), Electronic Brakeforce Distribution (EBD), Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), among others.

In Oman, every Lexus vehicle comes with special benefits and privileges, such as a Manufacturer's Warranty of 4 years/100,000 km (whichever is earlier), 1st-year free pickup and drop for service, and 24-hour on-road assistance from e-Fetch.

For more information, please visit www.lexusoman.com, subscribe to the YouTube channel "Lexus Oman," like Lexus Oman on Facebook, or follow Oman Lexus on Instagram.

For further details and stock availability, please visit your nearest Saud Bahwan Automotive Showroom.

‘Fill & Win’ National Day with special prizes from Al Maha

MUSCAT : In celebration of the Sultanate's 52nd National Day of the Renaissance, Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG has initiated its 'Fill & Win' promotion to express gratitude to its loyal customers.

This promotional event offers an opportunity to win a variety of exciting prizes, including one year's worth of free fuel for 10 lucky winners, 5 grams of gold for 5 winners, and an MG5 car as the grand prize for one fortunate winner.

Al Maha aims to spread joy and appreciation among its devoted customers who have played a pivotal role in the company's sustained success.



Until December 17, customers can participate in the National Day exclusive raffle by scanning the QR code displayed at all Al Maha fuel stations and providing the requested details, including their mobile number and tax invoice number for the purchase of M91 and M95 petrol for OMR 5.

It's important to note that the promotion does not cover non-fuel or diesel purchases, and each OMR 5 spent on petrol will double the chances of winning the raffle.

Omantel hosts Global Carrier Community Meeting today

MUSCAT: Omantel, the Sultanate of Oman's foremost integrated telecommunications services provider, proudly announces its role as the esteemed host for this year's Global Carrier Community Meeting (GCCM), scheduled to take place in Muscat today and tomorrow.

This exclusive gathering will bring together over 600 elite telecom professionals, representing decision-makers from more than 300 operators, service providers, hyperscalers, and vendors hailing from more than 50 nations.

The Middle East 2023 GCCM in Muscat, Oman, will serve as a pivotal networking platform for these distinguished industry leaders.

This prestigious event is organised by the Carrier



Yasser al Lawati, General Manager of marketing wholesale, Omantel

Community (CC), a globally recognised telecom club and professional networking community based in Berlin,

Germany.

Yasser bin Redha al Lawati, General Manager of Marketing Wholesale at Omantel, remarked, "As industry leaders and key players in the wholesale telecommunications arena, Omantel is honoured to host this exceptional congregation of global telecom operators.

This event ranks among the largest telecom gatherings in the region, particularly within the wholesale sector.

Through GCCM, we underscore our dominant position in the wholesale domain and our robust partnerships with major international telecom giants and hyperscalers.

Many of these industry giants have chosen Oman as their regional hub for service provision.

Our support for this event reflects our expansive global influence.

Furthermore, we will use this platform to introduce the recently unveiled wholesale entity, Zain Omantel International (ZOI), a groundbreaking joint venture between Zain Group and Omantel, positioned to become the Middle East's premier international wholesale services provider, poised to revolutionise the telecom landscape across the region and beyond."

This GCCM event will grant Carrier Community members, representing various sectors, including voice, data, SMS, mobile, VAS, subsea cables, satellite, data centres, and related fields, complete access to meeting facilities, executive panels, knowledge-

sharing sessions, and exclusive networking opportunities.

Notably, Omantel is hosting this event in Muscat for the third time, and it will feature Knowledge Sharing Master Classes led by international industry experts, delivering insights into the latest advancements in fiber optic and subsea cable technologies.

Omantel's initiative aims to facilitate extensive knowledge sharing, particularly on emerging and trending telecom technologies, setting GCCM apart from other regional events.

Omantel's rise to prominence as a pivotal wholesale provider, both locally and globally, reflects its unwavering dedication and visionary approach.

The company's innovative strategies continue to pave the

way for cutting-edge solutions in various consumer and business sectors.

Omantel is committed to delivering an unparalleled and exceptional experience to its subscribers while consistently exceeding their expectations.

The company is actively contributing to the realisation of Oman Vision 2040 objectives through investments in emerging technologies and the provision of state-of-the-art solutions in modern technology, information and communications technology, including cloud solutions, ICT solutions, AI, Smart solutions, cybersecurity, and much more.

Additionally, Omantel leverages its technological prowess to foster innovation and leadership in new and advanced technologies.



Khazaen to underpin Oman's logistics ambitions

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, NOV 5

Oman's logistics industry is on the cusp of a major transformation, aided in part by the rapid development of Khazaen Economic City, the country's largest logistics-centric Private-Public Partnership (PPP) initiative.

Located at Barka in Al Batinah South Governorate, Khazaen is Oman's largest integrated economic city.

It strategically beckons both domestic and foreign investments in key sectors, including pharmaceuticals, food, industrial, logistics, technology, and clean energy.

Khazaen's value as an integrated economic city is evident in the rising volume of investments.

To date, over 100 investment agreements have been signed, surpassing a cumulative value of \$820 million. These investments affirm Khazaen's status as a lucrative



Khazaen Dry Port at Khazaen Economic City

destination for investors.

Spurring Khazaen's growth as a strategic logistics hub is an array of services to businesses, including technological solutions, online order management, efficient inventory control, and streamlined

operations, facilitating the smooth flow of goods through various transportation modes.

A critical factor in Khazaen's success is the PPP model, which leverages the private sector's resources and expertise, a key driver

in operating and developing Oman's first integrated international dry port, the Khazaen Dry Port.

The dry port plays a pivotal role in logistics management and efficient movement, offering comprehensive services to

businesses, ensuring the seamless flow of goods both domestically and internationally.

Investor confidence in Khazaen is evident as it attracts significant players in the logistics industry.

The Global Warehousing Company (GWC), well-known for its extensive warehousing capabilities in the GCC region, recognised Oman's potential and invested in Khazaen.

Prominent companies like Saudi Arabian Express Naqel have also become part of Khazaen.

The logistics sector has also benefited from an 80 per cent increase in government subsidies, which climbed from RO 30 million to RO 54 million between the second quarter of 2022 and the second quarter of 2023.

This substantial increase underscores the government's commitment to the sector's growth and aligns with the ambitious Oman Vision 2040, which envisions Oman as a logistics hub.

OCCI unveils new strategy

FROM PAGE 13

The first three objectives include improving the business environment in Oman, partnership in the economic development of governorates, and expanding the economic diversification base.

In regards to improving the business environment in the country, Al Rawas shared that the Chamber regularly conducts workshops and events with stakeholders to improve the entrepreneurial climate.

This is in addition to constantly promoting Oman as an investment hub, and commissioning a study to assess Oman's competitiveness rate. The Chairman also highlighted the importance of partnering with local governors to boost the local economy of each governorate in the Sultanate of Oman.

TASK FORCE SET UP TO DRIVE AGRICULTURAL TOURISM IN OMAN

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, NOV 5

At a gathering held on Sunday, as part of the Food Security Lab 2023 initiatives aimed at bolstering local resources and competencies, a specialised task force was assembled to help boost agricultural tourism in the Sultanate of Oman.

The team's central aim is to strengthen prevailing laws and regulations, specifically tailored to cater to the unique requirements of the agricultural tourism sector. During the meeting, the task force diligently outlined the roles and responsibilities of its members.

In remarks to the Observer, Eng Khalid bin Hamad al Aghbari, who presides over the on-site team at the Tourism Agriculture Development Company and is a key figure of the core unit within the Food Security Lab 2023, stressed that the absence of specific legislation to govern the nascent agricultural tourism sector in Oman will be addressed.

Presently, land use is categorised into either agricultural or touristic, with no provisions in place for shared-use lands.

This ambiguity extends to fundamental issues such as licensing fees and the provisioning of essential services like electricity and water, he said.

Agricultural tourism represents a distinctive form of

tourism where individuals visit farms to gain firsthand insights into agricultural activities and rural lifestyles, Al Aghbari explained. The paramount objective of agricultural tourism is to furnish visitors with an educational and pleasurable experience that enhances their understanding of agriculture and rural existence.

It simultaneously offers an avenue for farmers to diversify their income streams by engaging in activities related to tourism.

Agricultural tourism, the official stressed, also encompasses farm tours, the active participation of tourists in agricultural chores, dining at rural restaurants, and the direct acquisition of agricultural produce from these farms.

Al Aghbari also underlined the importance of raising awareness about the societal and economic importance of agriculture.

This promising tourism segment, he further pointed out, has the potential to bolster the economic development of rural areas, support employment generation within the agricultural and tourism sectors, and also conserve the rich cultural heritage embedded in rural communities.

In conclusion, Al Aghbari emphasised the need for comprehensive regulations and laws meticulously tailored to accommodate the requisites of the agricultural tourism sector.

Oman Post boosts parcel sorting with AI capabilities

MUSCAT: Oman Post, part of Asyad Group, has launched an automatic sorting system for postal parcels.

This has contributed to a 43 per cent increase in operational efficiency for postal services and solutions by the end of August 2023, compared to the same period in 2022.

The launch of the automated sorting system for postal parcels reflects Oman Post's strategy of employing the latest technological solutions to increase the speed of processing postal materials, improve productivity, and enhance the efficiency of parcel delivery to customers.

The system, considered the most advanced in the Sultanate of Oman in this field, utilises artificial intelligence techniques and data-based solutions to automate the sorting process.

It has a capacity of approximately 6,000 postal parcels per hour, distributed across up to 12 paths.

It can sort shipments of different weights, up to 20 kilograms per shipment, with a size of up to 40 centimetres in height and 50 centimetres in width per shipment.

Additionally, it records the weight of the shipment and optically reads the data related to it, comparing it with the international postal tracking system and the



An automatic sorting system for postal parcels

delivery management system to verify the validity of the recorded data.

It also provides postal parcel tracking technology to facilitate direct customer tracking of their postal shipments.

Shaikh Ibrahim bin Sultan al Hosni, Acting CEO of Oman Post and Asyad Express, stated that Oman Post is committed to staying up-to-date with the latest technological developments by employing digital system solutions that meet customer aspirations, providing high-quality services that adhere to international best

practices.

He noted that the automated parcel sorting device for the Postal Service was developed in cooperation with international companies "BlueCrest" and Emerdis.

This collaboration will enable Oman Post to make a qualitative shift in the mechanism for processing postal parcels, increase operational efficiency, reduce potential errors, streamline operational work, provide a distinguished level of service to customers, and reduce operational costs for the company.

Rohan Mathur, Director of Emerdis Company Limited, expressed his satisfaction with this strategic cooperation and the successful delivery of the first automated sorting system equipped with scanning technology in the Sultanate of Oman.

He explained that this investment will pave the way for Oman Post to attract additional quantities of postal parcels, expand the capabilities of available services, maintain the quality of operational processes, and provide advanced analytical data. — ONA

China to accelerate issuance of government bonds

BEIJING: China is set to expedite the issuance and utilisation of government bonds, as reported by the state-run news agency Xinhua on Sunday, citing an interview with the new finance minister, Lan Foan.

The finance ministry, under Lan's leadership, will steadfastly work on resolving local government debt risks and intensify efforts to harness the potential of special bonds in stimulating economic growth, as per Xinhua's report quoting Minister Foan.

Lan emphasised, "The Ministry of Finance will continue to implement a proactive fiscal policy, focusing on enhancing efficiency and maximising the

impact of fiscal policies." He also acknowledged the challenges posed by the "complex domestic and international situation."

To ensure local financing needs are met reasonably, certain new local government debt quotas for 2024 have been issued ahead of time, noted Lan.

Lan, a 61-year-old technocrat with limited central government experience, assumed the role of finance minister, according to state media last month.

His appointment coincides with the government's intensified fiscal stimulus measures to revive the world's second-largest economy.

He succeeded Liu Kun, who had held the position since 2018.

Prior to this role, Lan served as the party chief of the northern province of Shanxi.

His appointment aligns with the central government's approach, which relies heavily on debt and state spending for economic revitalisation.

However, analysts have pointed out the need for more comprehensive reform.

In its latest move, the top parliamentary body approved the issuance of 1 trillion yuan (\$137 billion) in sovereign bonds in the fourth quarter to fund the rebuilding of areas affected by floods, as reported by state media.

The economy surpassed analyst estimates in the third



People walk in Beijing's Central Business District (CBD)

quarter, increasing the likelihood of the government meeting its full-year growth target of around 5 per cent.

Nevertheless, challenges persist as the property crisis deepens, and private businesses remain hesitant to invest due to weakened confidence.

As part of broader financial policy adjustments, the ruling Communist Party plans to enhance its control over China's \$61 trillion finance industry and reinforce measures to mitigate local debt risks, according to state media.

This decision was reported following a biennial financial policy meeting held on October 30-31. — Reuters

Leadership skills for startup founders



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The author is a renowned coach, trainer and consultant

In the labyrinth of entrepreneurship, leadership isn't just a role; it's the guiding force that propels startups to new heights. As a founder, mastering leadership skills isn't just an option; it's a necessity for navigating the unpredictable terrain of the startup world.

1. Visionary Thinking: Leadership begins with a vision. Successful startup founders possess the ability to see beyond the immediate challenges and envision the long-term impact of their ventures. It's about painting a compelling picture that inspires not just the team but the entire ecosystem.

2. Effective Communication: Communication is the currency of leadership. Startup founders must articulate their vision clearly, ensuring that every team member understands their role in achieving the collective goal.

Clear communication fosters collaboration and aligns everyone with the startup's mission.

3. Adaptability: In the dynamic startup landscape, adaptability is key. Leaders must navigate through uncertainties, pivot when necessary, and lead their teams through change. The ability to adapt ensures that the startup stays resilient in the face of challenges.

4. Decisiveness: Leadership demands decisive action. Startup founders often face situations where swift and informed decisions are crucial. Decisiveness, coupled with the ability to learn from both successes and failures, is a hallmark of effective leadership.

5. Empowering Others: Great leaders don't just lead; they empower others to lead. Encouraging autonomy, fostering a culture of innovation, and recognising and nurturing talent

within the team are integral aspects of effective leadership in startups.

6. Resilience: The journey of a startup is a rollercoaster of highs and lows. Resilience is the armour that leaders wear to weather the storms. It's the ability to bounce back from setbacks, learn from failures, and keep the team motivated during challenging times.

7. Continuous Learning: Leadership is a journey of continuous learning. Successful startup founders are avid learners, staying abreast of industry trends, technological advancements, and leadership strategies.

This commitment to learning positions them as thought leaders in their field.

The Teaser for What's Next As you hone your leadership skills, there's another dimension of success waiting to be explored: emotional intelligence. In

the upcoming article, "The Importance of Emotional Intelligence in Business," we'll delve into the often underestimated but powerful skill of understanding and managing emotions in the business landscape.

Emotional intelligence isn't just a soft skill; it's a strategic advantage in leadership. How does it influence decision-making? How does it shape the culture of your startup? Get ready for insights that will not only enhance your leadership prowess but also elevate the emotional intelligence quotient of your entire team.

In Conclusion Leadership is not a destination; it's a journey of continuous growth and refinement. As a startup founder, the skills you cultivate today will shape the success of your venture tomorrow. Vision,

communication, adaptability, decisiveness, empowerment, resilience, and a commitment to continuous learning are the pillars of effective leadership in the startup realm. So, as you navigate the intricate dance of leadership, remember that it's not just about reaching the summit; it's about ensuring that every member of your team reaches new heights alongside you.

Leadership is not a solo performance; it's a symphony where every instrument, every note, contributes to the masterpiece. As you lead your startup through uncharted territories, may your leadership be the compass that guides your team to unprecedented success. Until then, embrace the journey, refine your skills, and get ready for the next chapter in the saga of entrepreneurial excellence. Ma'as salama

Should fiscal policy resemble private budgets?



KOICHI HAMADA

The author is a Professor Emeritus at Yale University, was a special adviser to former Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo

The threat of a US government shutdown underscores the dilemma facing many countries trying to balance their budgets and stimulate economic growth. In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, a growing number of economists are questioning the notion that a balanced budget should take precedence over all other considerations

Every few months this year, the US government appears on the verge of shutting down. It happened in May, when congressional Republicans initially refused to raise the debt ceiling, and in September, when Congress managed to avert a last-minute shutdown by passing a stopgap bill to keep the federal government open until November 17.

In the event that Congress fails to reach an agreement to fund federal agencies by the next deadline, millions of government employees, including millions of military personnel, will be furloughed, disrupting critical public services.

While government shutdowns are a uniquely American phenomenon, the US highlights the dilemmas facing fiscal policymakers today. It also sheds new light on the ongoing debate among economists over whether government budgets should be balanced, particularly in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Fiscal hawks often liken governments to private citizens or corporations. Just as insolvent private entities can be declared bankrupt and prohibited from doing business, the argument goes, governments must avoid accumulating large debts.

While this view resonates with the general public and numerous economists, it is rather naive.

To be sure, public spending should be prudent, especially since governments do not operate according to the same competitive, profit-driven logic as private enterprises. But that does not mean that zero debt is ideal for a country's welfare.

Those who believe that governments should avoid debt also often assert that deficit



Public spending should be prudent, especially since governments do not operate according to the same competitive, profit-driven logic as private enterprises.

spending cannot effectively stimulate the economy. The so-called Ricardian equivalence, which David Ricardo himself deemed unrealistic, suggests that debt-financed spending will lead to a higher tax burden on future generations, so that present-day consumers, anticipating these future tax hikes, will become more cautious.

But that is true only if the government is expected to raise taxes to balance the budget. Absent such expectations, the Ricardian equivalence concept crumbles.

The most radical (and compelling) argument against the balanced-budget doctrine was advanced by the Russian-born American economist Abba P Lerner, who introduced the concept of "functional finance."

Much like John Maynard Keynes, Lerner believed that fiscal policy can and must be used to achieve full employment.

Public policies are designed to enhance the well-being of both the citizens and the state. When public debt is owned by domestic institutions and households,

it can be viewed as an asset rather than a liability. Although a significant rise in public debt could result in increased foreign borrowing, domestic debt is merely a question of income distribution within the country.

With this in mind, Lerner proposed that the government could print money to cover its debts. Should this trigger inflation or negatively affect the balance of payments, it could jeopardise the country's welfare.

But if printing money does not cause such problems, the public deficit could serve as an effective tool to achieve full employment.

While not explicitly endorsing the concept of functional finance, Nobel laureate economist Paul Krugman champions its core tenets (albeit with slight hesitation). Given that states outlive individuals, he writes, they can refinance their debt or otherwise print money.

Over the past few years, as countries around the world have grappled with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, our understanding

of the age-old debate around public debt has evolved in two meaningful ways.

First, the pandemic underscored the limitations of maintaining a balanced budget. Unexpected events like wars, natural disasters, and public-health emergencies demand swift increases in public spending. If governments aimed to fund these outlays solely through taxation, they would need to impose much higher marginal tax rates, potentially reducing economic efficiency.

Therefore, striving for a "primary balance" could be unwise. In fact, following the outbreak of Covid-19, the US and other governments adopted Robert Barro's revenue-smoothing approach to managing public deficits.

Second, US President Joe Biden's 2021 American Rescue Plan, with its hefty \$1.9tn price tag, provided much-needed stimulus but also placed further strain on an economy already burdened by the Trump administration's tax cuts for the rich.

This helps explain why high inflation has been so persistent despite the Federal Reserve's aggressive interest-rate hikes.

In his latest book, *Fiscal Policy under Low Interest Rates*, former IMF Chief Economist Olivier Blanchard argues that the world's major economies can sustain reasonable deficits without risking bankruptcy, provided that the nominal interest rates on their public bonds remain low.

Though this perspective is more conventional than the functional-finance approach, Blanchard also cites opinion polls suggesting that many US economists no longer believe that a balanced budget trumps all other considerations.

While this indicates a potential paradigm shift in economic thinking, the question remains: Should governments aim to balance their budgets despite the potential economic pitfalls? The past few years have certainly illuminated the serious consequences of not striking the right balance between fiscal discipline and fiscal expansion.

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NEWSPAPER

A runner reads a newspaper ahead of the 52nd Edition of the New York City Marathon. — AFP



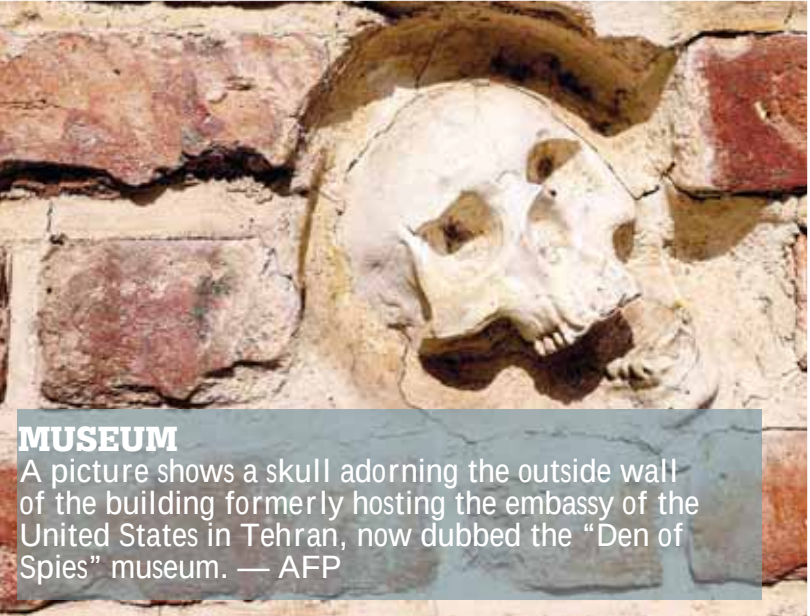
HALLOWEEN

A mask artist prepares the makeup of one of the characters ahead the most giant Halloween party in Hungary at Cinemaqua Filmpark, in Kiskarda. — AFP



FILM

French actor, film director, screenwriter and theatre director Pierre-Fran is Martin-Laval (nicknamed "PEF") poses with the crown from the musical "Spamalot" during a photo session in Paris. —AFP



MUSEUM

A picture shows a skull adorning the outside wall of the building formerly hosting the embassy of the United States in Tehran, now dubbed the "Den of Spies" museum. — AFP



SKATING

US Isabeau Levito poses with the gold medal for the Women's free skating as part of the ISU 2023 figure skating Grand Prix de France in Angers, western France — AFP

art & life

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OMAN OBSERVER



Excitement builds for the 2nd Al Batinah film festival

BY BALQEES AL ORAIMI

In a vibrant celebration of cinematic artistry, the eagerly awaited 2nd Al Batinah International Film Festival is set to captivate audiences in Nakhal, commencing on November 12. Organised by the dedicated team at the Al Batinah International Film Festival, the event promises four days of cinematic brilliance, featuring renowned artists and movie stars hailing from Oman, the Gulf countries, and the Arab world. Under the visionary leadership of Dr Hamid al Ameri, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Omani Cinema Society and President of the Festival, this remarkable event aims to enrich Oman's cultural landscape by fostering a deeper understanding of cinema. Dr Al Ameri emphasised the festival's significance in promoting Omani cinematic talent, be it in writing, directing, or acting. Notably, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will be the honoured guest cinema, enhancing the festival's international allure. Saif al Hadhrami, CEO of Nakhal National Company, expressed his enthusiasm, stating, "Hosting the film festival in the Al Batinah South Governorate reflects the collaborative efforts of the Omani Film

Society and other art institutions. Together, we are revitalising the cinematic movement, transforming it into engaging tourism projects that enrich Oman's cultural tapestry. We warmly invite all enthusiasts to partake in these cultural festivities across the Sultanate of Oman." The festival's identity, as described by Festival Director Mohammed al Ajmi, beautifully intertwines people, place, and time, symbolised by the warm hues of copper representing the region's historical significance. In addition to its aesthetic appeal, the festival is set to host esteemed figures from the film industry, including Ashraf Zaki, Rogina, Abdul Mohsen Al-Nimr, and film critic Salah Al-Nouri. Participants from 16 countries, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, and Bahrain, will compete in various categories, showcasing a diverse array of cinematic brilliance. Beyond the screenings, the festival boasts a rich array of activities, including workshops, dialogue sessions, and forums, providing a platform for learning and collaboration. Seven prestigious awards, including the Ministry of Information Award and the Ain Platform, will recognise outstanding contributions in various cate-



gories. The festival also introduces four awards, reflecting the public's opinions and preferences, adding an exciting element of audience participation. The festival's vibrant itinerary includes a grand opening ceremony featuring specially curated films and engaging discussions. Subsequent days will witness enlightening biographical sessions with industry luminaries like Professor Dr Ashraf Zaki and Omani artist Fakhriya Khamis. Attendees can also enjoy captivating film screenings at WOW Cinema in the Grand Center Barka and Fox Cinema in Sohar. The festival will conclude on its fourth day with a

thought-provoking critique session, biographical discussions, and a grand awards ceremony set against the picturesque backdrop of the ancient Nakhal Castle. As anticipation builds, film enthusiasts, artists, and industry aficionados are warmly encouraged to join this cinematic extravaganza, embracing the art of storytelling and celebrating the rich cultural heritage of Al Batinah North and South governorates. The 2nd Al Batinah International Film Festival promises a unique blend of professionalism and warmth, making it a must-attend event for everyone passionate about the magic of cinema.



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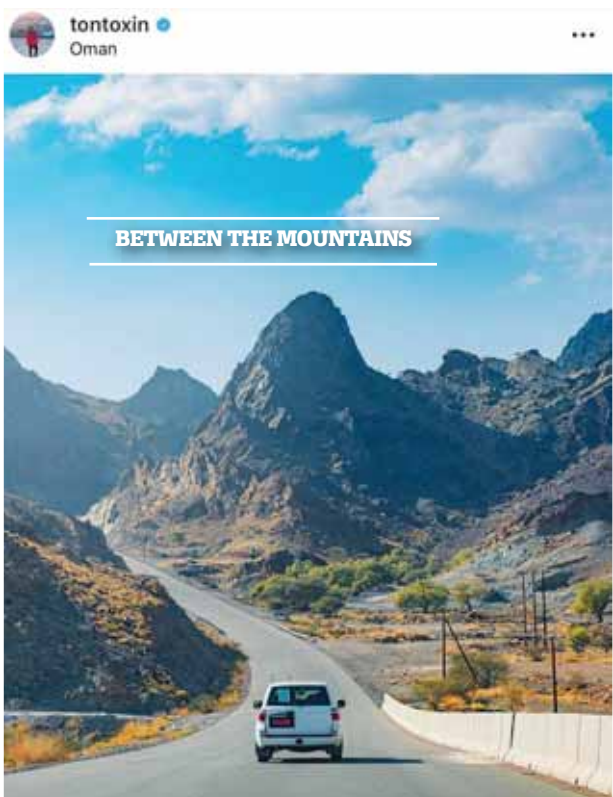
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Missy Elliott, George Michael, Kate Bush entering Rock Hall of Fame

A COTERIE OF MUSIC'S A-listers convened in Brooklyn on Friday to celebrate this year's class of legends entering the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, among them Missy Elliott and the late George Michael.

Rock experimentalist Kate Bush, agitators Rage Against the Machine, country icon Willie Nelson, heartland rocker Sheryl Crow and R&B group The Spinners will round out the 2023 class of inductees.

Chaka Khan, Al Kooper and Bernie Taupin will receive the Hall's musical excellence awards. DJ Kool Herc and Link Wray meanwhile will be inducted as "influences" and the late creator of "Soul Train," Don Cornelius, will receive a non-performer honour.

The Cleveland-based Hall of Fame — which surveyed more than 1,000 musicians, historians and industry members to choose the entrants — will honour the acts in a star-studded gala concert at Brooklyn's Barclays Center.

For some time now the institution has defined "rock" less in terms of genre than of spirit, with a number of rap, pop, R&B and country stars included.

Elliott will become the first woman in hip-hop — a constantly evolving genre that this year is celebrating its 50th anniversary — to enter the music pantheon. The "Lose Control" and "Get Ur Freak On" rapper made the cut in her first year of eligibility.

Artists can be inducted 25 years after their first commercial music release.

Fellow rap star Queen Latifah will induct Elliott, who called the honour "a blessing" in an interview with ABC's "Good Morning America" show.

It's particularly poignant given hip-hop's milestone anniversary, Elliott said: "No matter what people say, the hip-hop world is something special and unique."

But Bush said in a statement on Friday that she "won't be able to attend" without specifying why, adding that "for me the real honour is knowing that you felt I deserved it."

"I am completely blown away by this huge honour — an award that sits in the big beating heart of the American music industry," Bush said in a statement on her website.

"Thank you so much to everyone who voted for me. I never imagined I would be given this wonderful accolade."

- 'PROGRESS' ON INCLUSION -

The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame is a music industry pillar that, much like the Recording Academy that runs the Grammys, has in recent years worked to revamp its image — long criticised as too masculine and too white.

The likes of Whitney Houston, Aretha Franklin and Madonna are members — but women represent fewer than 100 of the nearly 1,000 Hall inductees since 1986.

The Hall of Fame's image problem resurfaced earlier this year, when Jann Wenner — one of the Hall's board members who helped start the institution



— made comments disparaging women and people of colour in an interview with *The New York Times* about his book "The Masters."

The 77-year-old Wenner, who cofounded Rolling Stone magazine in 1967, featured seven white men including Mick Jagger and Bruce Springsteen in his book.

Queried about the absence of women and people of colour, Wenner said none could "articulate" on the level of "philosophers of rock."

The comments were widely eviscerated as racist and sexist, and Wenner was swiftly axed from the Hall's board of directors.

In a recent interview Hall of Fame Chairman John Sykes emphasised efforts to "update the general voting body" to "reflect the artists that are eligible" for the Hall.

"I want to make sure the voting body is young and diverse enough to really make the most educated decisions about who should be inducted," he told *The*

New York Times.

Sykes underscored the women inducted in recent years, including Bush, Elliott and Crow this year: "We have to do better, but we're making progress."

As for the ever-shifting definition of rock, the chairman interpreted it as "what's moving youth culture."

Rock and roll, Sykes said, is "what a 16-year-old is obsessed with."

Disney+ will livestream Friday's event, beginning at 8 pm (0000 GMT). — **AFP**

TRAVEL

All aboard Thailand's 'floating train'

A LONE BOATMAN watched the spectacle of Thailand's so-called "floating train" as selfie-seeking passengers soaked up the water views after disembarking from carriages stopped on a narrow bridge.

Railway adventures are gaining popularity in the kingdom with tourists seeking off-the-beaten-track travel experiences away from the hordes visiting temples and beaches.

Saturday was the State Railway of Thailand's first Bangkok to Pasak Jolasid Dam service "Rot Fai Loi Nam" marking the end of the rainy season. Hundreds of bleary-eyed passengers boarded the train

at Bangkok's century-old Hua Lamphong Station before sunrise.

Lotus ponds, jungles, temples and rice paddies zipped by as tourists in third class hung out the window and took pictures while enjoying the natural air conditioning.

Greying Thai aunties boarded at Ayutthaya, the ancient former capital of Siam — to sell fairy floss and pad krapow, a famous stir-fry basil dish.

Three and a half hours after chugging out of Bangkok, the refurbished Japanese train pulling more than a dozen carriages crossed the Pasak Jolasid reservoir over a series



of viaducts and stopped for 20 minutes of selfie time.

For most of the year, cattle graze underneath the bridge "but from October to January, the water is high on both sides which gives the impression that the train is floating on water," said long-time British expat, train enthusiast and travel blogger Richard Barrow.

"I have done it many times and I am already booked to do



it three more times this season."

Barrow lamented the trip was only publicised in Thai language and not English so not many foreigners know about

the unique experience.

"It's kind of a missed opportunity," he said. Enjoying the day trip with her mother, 11-year-old Lily Piratchakit said the water view was "endless". "It was amazing," she told AFP.

"It's nice to travel, be outdoors and get some fresh air."

Taiwanese university exchange student Wei Wu, 21, said it was a thrill to pose for photos on the railway track.

"It's very cool. It's my first time to take a train in Thailand," she told AFP.

"Most tourists will only see the stereotypes of Thailand."

Later some passengers toured the Pasak Jolasid Dam and enjoyed picnics.

The dam is used for agriculture and flood prevention and is fast becoming a tourism drawcard with the popular rail trips running from November to January.

For Mail, 28, and his boyfriend the floating train experience was the perfect compromise on water views.

"I don't like the sea, but he likes it. That's why we came here," he joked. — **AFP**



OPERA

‘A tragic hero’ Malcolm X opera comes to New York’s Met



A MESMERIZING musical biography of civil rights leader Malcolm X that infuses history with Afrofuturism will open at New York’s Metropolitan Opera on Friday.

It’s a long time coming: “X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X” first premiered in the mid-1980s to favourable reviews, but went unrevived for decades, with just a few stagings over nearly 40 years.

Its Met debut features a revised, jazz-infused score from composer Anthony Davis, Thulani Davis’s libretto and direction from the Tony-nominated director Robert O’Hara, who worked on the acclaimed “Slave Play.”

The opera traces the life of one of the 20th century’s most influential civil rights orators, including his childhood — he was born Malcolm Little in 1925 — and the death of his father, his joining of the Black nationalist group Nation of Islam and adoption of the name Malcolm X, and his assassination in 1965.

This revival, which first ran in Detroit in 2021, sees O’Hara put on an Afrofuturist legend of sorts, with an enormous spaceship swirling above the prestigious Met Opera stage, and a choir whose aesthetic marries pre-colonial traditions with high-fashion sci-fi.

The show’s title character is portrayed throughout his life but cuts across time and space, accompanied by a troupe of dancers whose bodies give shape to the score.

Composer Davis said the operatic rendition is an effort to see the leader’s ideas “elevated into song.”

“Not to try to do a realistic



portrayal of Malcolm, but to try in a way to bring in all the ideas and concepts that he was so committed to,” he said.

“Malcolm is a tragic hero.”

- ‘CHALLENGE PEOPLE’ -

The production stars baritone Will Liverman, who opened the Met’s 2021-22 season in “Fire Shut Up in My Bones” — the house’s first presentation of a work by a Black composer in its lengthy history.

For Davis, “the reawakening that happened after George Floyd” — the Black man whose 2020 murder by police sparked a popular uprising across the United States over racism and state violence — lent urgency in the classical music world to

improve diversity and inclusion.

“There’s so many people and ideas and aesthetics that were excluded,” Davis said. “I think there’s more openness now... and reaching out to find these pieces like mine that really speak to the community.”

For Leah Hawkins — the soprano who stars as both Malcolm X’s mother, Louise Little, and his wife, Betty Shabazz — bringing the Black experience to the stage “is something that I want to be normal... I don’t want it to be a special event.”

“I want it to be something that people are used to seeing.”

She said that’s slowly happening in the classical world, including at the Met: the house has made a point of staging

more contemporary and diverse productions in recent years, including 2021’s “Fire” and last year’s “Champion,” both composed by jazz artist Terence Blanchard.

Hawkins says progress can be slow because “people don’t like to be made uncomfortable.”

“They want art to just make them feel at ease and at peace, and that is the goal much of the time, but also we need to be speaking to people on a very real level,” the artist said. “It sometimes needs to be thought-provoking, and it needs to challenge people.”

Opera, she said, “needs to do this.”

Part of staging “X,” both Davis and Hawkins said, is to teach.

“I know plenty of people who’ve never read ‘The Autobiography of Malcolm X,’ who don’t know his story,” said Hawkins. “So I think it’s important to bring a figure like this to the stage — to educate people, if nothing else.”

For Davis, that mission is particularly imperative in a country that’s seen an uptick in misinformation, book bannings and restrictive school curricula.

The story of Malcolm X, he said, is “a slice of American history that’s not told all the time.”

And these days “you have politicians who want to suppress history and silence history,” Davis continued.

“I think it’s important that people see that, and understand those stories... and also wrestle with America, and racism in America, and politics, and the importance of Malcolm X in challenging some of the basic ideas that are fundamental to white supremacy.” — **AFP**



Cal Smith

Street Theatre in the UK

WHEN WE THINK of theatre many of us will think of a stage, performers, scripts, lighting, scenery, costumes and sound.

There are only three things that all theatre shows need to be successful.

A story, information or skill to be told or performed, some performers to perform it and , an audience to perform to.

On the street there is no stage, no lights and very little in the way of props and costumes. Some would say that street theatre is the rawest form of theatre because the performers are out there with little or no technical support, up close and personal with the audience.

Theatre was brought to the UK with the Romans when they invaded and settled in AD 43. They also brought Christianity, which was delivered in churches in Latin, the language of the Romans, not the people of England.

Later in medieval UK morality was questionable. People were very poor and would do anything to survive including theft and murder. Churches sent messengers around the country in travelling wagons to teach religious lessons through performance. The people couldn’t learn these lessons in church because they didn’t speak Latin.

People enjoyed this form of storytelling so much that the stories developed into folk tales such as Robin Hood and Saint George and the Dragon. The travelling actors would perform in return for food and money.

In the 1960’s and 70’s street theatre became a means of expressing political and social issues such as war, inequality and environmental destruction. These performances were hard hitting street plays, where acting took place with characters, a script and a deep message. However, they realised that this didn’t really work because the audience wasn’t listening. They couldn’t hear what the actors were saying, and they didn’t have time to stay for the duration of the play. This type pf theatre needs to be saved for the stage, unless you can guarantee a small audience who have the time and patience to stay until the end.

Today street theatre in the UK has evolved into a form of performance art, exploring many forms and styles. This is a celebration of all artistic styles such as busking, clowning, mime artists, magicians, acrobats, escapologists and dancers to name a few. Tickets are not sold, and a scheduled timetable is not set out. The street performers arrive and perform unannounced, and spectating is free.

Due to the restrictions that accompany a street performance, dance, singing and physical theatre tend to be the most popular to draw in a crowd and hold its attention. But people lead busy lives and won’t stop for long, so performances need to be short, visual and get to the point quickly.

Street theatre has a rich history and because it is relatively cheap to put on a show on the street, many performers begin their careers in this way, including Ed Sheeran who began as a busker in the streets of London.

It is no surprise therefore that many up-and-coming performers from all walks of life get involved with the various street theatre festivals that take place across the UK every month every year. Each with its own niche.

The real beauty of street theatre is, that is doesn’t matter who you are, where you came from, how much money you have, or what talent you would like to express. Everyone and anyone can have the opportunity to be seen or to be heard.

There will always be somebody watching. There will always be somebody listening.

Cal Smith, a drama teacher for children aged 4-14, ran a theatre academy in Muscat and now teaches in the UK, emphasising the role of drama in education.

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