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OMAN MAY HOST
BIGGEST WORLD
UNIVERSITY
CHAMPIONSHIPS



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OMAN'S LATEST
FERROCHROME PROJECT
STARTS TRIAL OPERATIONS
AT SOHAR FREEZONE



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OMAN'S INCREDIBLE
CALM MAKES THIS
WORLD TREKKER
FEELS AT HOME



MUSCAT

HM GREET'S SAUDI
AND SAINT LUCIA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on his country's Founding Day anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to King Salman, wishing him good health, happiness and long life. His Majesty also prayed to Allah the Almighty for the return of this and similar occasions on King Salman while the people of Saudi Arabia realise aspirations of further development and growth. His Majesty the Sultan has also sent a cable of greetings to Governor-General Cyril Errol Charles of Saint Lucia on his country's Independence Anniversary. — ONA

DUQM

DUQM REFINERY MARKS
100TH EXPORT VESSEL

OQ8, a \$9 billion joint venture between Oman's OQ and Kuwait Petroleum International (KPI), announced the dispatch of its 100th export vessel, from its terminal in Duqm. This milestone highlights OQ8's flawless safety record since its commencement in May 2023 and underscores its vital role in enhancing global supply chain resilience, having successfully exported over 4.1 million tonnes of products to global customers. **DETAILS ON P3**

OPINION

P8



Rumaitha Al Busaidi
Empowering leaders for
climate action

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Sonia Ambrosio
Are you ready to
disconnect?

AI TAKES CENTRE-STAGE
AS BOOK FAIR OPENS

28TH MUSCAT INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR KICKS OFF

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 21

The activities of the 28th edition of Muscat International Book Fair kicked off at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Wednesday marking the beginning of a new cultural season that celebrates books and authors. The fair runs until March 2.

The opening of the event was held under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. The ceremony was attended by Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, Chairman of the Main Committee of Muscat International Book Fair.

Al Dhahirah Governorate, the guest of honour at the current edition of the book fair, has been accorded a special pavilion that showcases the intellectual and cultural history of the governorate.

The theme of this year's book fair will be artificial intelligence (AI) and many cultural events and activities will highlight AI advantages. Visitors will have access to a 3D map to navigate directly to the pavilion they seek, along with assistance from robots, as lectures introducing AI technology will be held.

The chief guest toured the book fair's pavilions and viewed titles on cultural, intellectual and scientific topics. He took note of the Ministry of Information's



Dignitaries at the opening of 28th Muscat International Book Fair.



Today we celebrate the opening of the 28th edition of Muscat International Book Fair, the illustrious event that gathered momentum year after year, since its first inception in 1992, writing new chapters of dazzling development in the book industry, publishing and culture

DR MOHAMMED BIN SAID
AL MAAMARI

Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs

pavilion, which includes four sections representing the Oman News Agency (ONA), the Directorate General of Electronic Media (Ayn platform and the media portal), Nizwa Magazine and the

Directorate General of Publications and Artistic Works.

As many as 847 publishing houses from 34 countries participate in the book fair. Of these, 676 publishers are participating

directly and 171 others are participating through agents.

As many as 622,000 titles are listed at the book fair's website, including approximately 269,000 are Arabic books and 200,000 are foreign books. The Omani collection comprises 19,000 books. The number of newly issued publications (between 2023 and 2024) stood at about 35,989.

Al Dhahirah Governorate's pavilion includes two exhibitions, one of which showcases visual arts inspired by the history of the governorate and the other features the latest innovations and manuscripts dealing with the history of the governorate.

TURN TO P4

Oman regrets
failure to issue
Gaza ceasefire
resolution

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman expressed its regret over the UN Security Council's failure to issue a resolution for ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, as a result of the repeated use of veto that hampered the resolution.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Wednesday, Oman reiterated its plea for the international community and the Security Council to facilitate all initiatives to implement an immediate ceasefire in the region. It urged the Security Council not to stand in the way of peace.

Oman also urged friendly countries to put into practice their positions and statements that support the establishment of peace. It called upon all "to translate those positions into a just humanitarian reality".

Meanwhile, according to UN data and officials the flow of aid entering Gaza from Egypt has almost dried up in the past two weeks and a collapse in security has made it increasingly difficult to distribute the food that does get through. Daily figures show a precipitous drop in aid supplies since February 9 reaching Gaza, where the mostly displaced population of 2.3 million is facing crisis levels of hunger.

Before the conflict, Gaza relied on 500 trucks with supplies entering daily, and even during intense fighting in January around 200 aid trucks made it through on most days. **SEE ALSO P6**



Palestinian children inspect the site of an Israeli strike on a shelter belonging to Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in Khan Younis in southern Gaza Strip, on Wednesday. — Reuters

All set for Sur Maritime Heritage Festival from Sunday

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, FEB 21

The Sur Maritime Heritage Festival, which begins on Sunday in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, aims to highlight the historical role of the governorate in the past and the present, promote and introduce the maritime heritage and tourism components of Al Sharqiyah South Governorate and stimulate tourism in the governorate. The festival

continues until March 9.

The festival, organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in cooperation with the Office of the Governor of Al Sharqiyah South and several government and private agencies, includes activities of the marine heritage village, which tells the story of the maritime heritage of the Wilayat of Sur, known in the past for its maritime activity and includes a corner dedicated to craft industries. The festival



The festival will promote and introduce the maritime heritage and tourism of Al Sharqiyah South Governorate.

will also feature heritage sessions, a popular café, a theatre for recreational and cultural events and activities, popular games and traditional arts performances related to the sea.

The Omani Food Carnival will have a series of interactive activities that allows visitors to explore the most famous Omani and international dishes, with a focus on fresh seafood from local sources to reflect the richness of marine wealth

of the governorate, in addition to heritage and entertainment shows.

The festival will include events such as a windsurfing experience, a sailing experience, a marine fishing competition, a symposium on maritime heritage (images of man and the sea), a traditional boat race, a display of traditional Omani games and sports, in addition to a kite flying to offering tourism experiences through a visit to Oman.



First international bus service to Saudi Arabia starts today

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The first international passenger bus service between Muscat and Riyadh will commence today (Thursday) via the Empty Quarter road that directly links the two countries. Speaking to the Observer, Rashid al Khanjry, owner of Al Khanjry Transport, said, “The bus will start daily from Muscat at 6 am and from Riyadh at 5 pm. The travel will take approximately 18 to 20 hours depending on the time taken for immigration and formalities at the border. Timings from Riyadh will be adjusted as per the passenger demand.” The service will have three stops in the Sultanate of Oman, namely - Ruwi, Nizwa and Ibri. Riyadh stop will be Al Aziziyah. On the Saudi side, the bus will stop in Dammam, as the bus will operate to the Saudi capital via Dammam (in the Eastern province of the Kingdom of



The one-way fare promotional fare till the end of the month is RO 25 and after that, the fares will be RO 35

Saudi Arabia). The one-way fare promotional fare till the end of the month is RO 25 or SR 250. After that, the fares will be RO 35 or SR 350. “The Saudi authorities have stipulated that the bus should have a minimum of 25 passengers on board,” he said, adding that the route via Dammam would add some extra kilometres, but the dual carriageway would make a comfortable ride. The company will operate

two drivers on the route and there will be some stops for rest. Citizens and expatriates can avail of the service. Expatriates can avail of the visa, while some nationalities may have visa-on-arrival options or other exemptions.

HM’s greetings conveyed



SARAJEVO: Chairman Željko Komšić, of the Presidential Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, received HH Sayyid Nizar bin al Julanda bin Majid al Said Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Italian Republic who presented his credentials as Ambassador Extraordinary and Non-Resident Plenipotentiary of the Sultanate of Oman to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The ambassador conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik along with his wishes for good health and happiness to him, wishing the government and people of Bosnia and

Herzegovina continued progress and prosperity. The ambassador expressed the keenness of His Majesty’s government’ on fostering bilateral relations between the two friendly countries and upgrade them to a higher level in all fields in a manner that serves the common interests of the two countries. Chairman Željko Komšić asked the ambassador to convey his sincere greetings to His Majesty the Sultan wishing him good health and happiness and continued progress and prosperity for the government and the people of the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Winning research evaluates respiratory assistance among Covid-19 patients

MUSCAT: Among the many innovative research projects of the 10th National Research Award organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, ‘Comparison of Noninvasive Mechanical Ventilation With High-Flow Nasal Cannula, Face-Mask, and Helmet in Hypoxemic Respiratory Failure in Patients With Covid-19: A Randomised Controlled Trial’ has been awarded in the Health and Social Services field in the PhD category. This research is carried out by the principal investigator Dr Abdulhakeem bin Yaqoob al Hashim, Senior Consultant in Internal Medicine and Critical Care at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, Sultan Qaboos University. Dr Al Hashim explained that for the Covid-19-related respiratory failure, noninvasive



Dr Abdulhakeem al Hashim

respiratory assistance via a high-flow nasal cannula (HFNC), helmet, and face-mask noninvasive ventilation can be used. This study compared these three techniques of noninvasive respiratory support for Covid patients and to determine the superior technique. Dr Al Hashim mentioned that research project used a randomised control clinical trial, with three open-labelled arms. Adult patients

with Covid-19 with a Pao2/Fio2 ratio of less than 300, admitted between February 4, 2021, and August 9, 2021, to three tertiary centres in Oman, were included. They were then randomised into the three interventions: HFNC (n = 47), helmet continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP; n = 52), and face-mask CPAP (n = 52). The endotracheal intubation rate and mortality at 28- and 90- days were measured as the primary and secondary outcomes, respectively. Dr Abdulhakeem stated that the trial found no difference in intubation rate and mortality among the three intervention groups for the Covid-19 patients with hypoxemic respiratory failure; however, more evidence is needed to confirm these findings as the trial was aborted prematurely.

Al Dhahirah Tourism Festival attracts 47,000 visitors in six days



The festival is full of events and activities such as folk arts, horse show and heritage village activities



IBRI: The Al Dhahirah Tourism Festival is continuing to attract visitors and more than 47,000 have visited the venue since its launch last Thursday. It has received a wide turnout and heavy attendance from inside and outside of the Sultanate of Oman. Najeeb bin Ali al Rowas, Governor of Al Dhahirah,

said the festival has different programmes daily. It embodies the Omani identity through various events such as the heritage village, cultural theatres, and traditional bands. The festival is full of events and activities such as folk arts, the art of Humble Al Bush, horse show, heritage village activities, the Smurfs village, carnival and

circus shows, various theatrical works for adults and children, laser shows, daily competitions, children’s toys and a consumer exhibition, which includes many corners. The festival continues until March 6. The morning period of the festival (10 am -1 pm) is allocated for women and school students only.

Oman Journalists Association elects BoD for 2024-25

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Oman Journalists Association (OJA), the official body of journalists working in the Sultanate of Oman, held the elections for the Board of Directors on Wednesday. The winning panel, named Al Taawun, is led by Dr Mohammed bin Mubarak al Araiimi, Chairman, and comprising Salim bin Hamad al Jahwari; Talib bin Saif al Dhabari; Khalfan bin Said al Hasani, Mustafa bin Khamis al Maamari, Yousef bin Abdulkarim al Houti, Hamed bin Hamad al Qasmi, Abdullah bin Said al Jahwari; Said bin Nasser al Nahdi, Rashid bin Humaid al Rashidi, Zainab bint Khamis al Zadjalayah and Ahmed bin Thabit al Mahrouqi made it to the board for the third time. As many as 378 voters cast



As many as 378 voters cast their ballots to elect one of the three factions that contested. – Pictures by Khalfan al Ruzaiki

their ballots to elect one of the three factions that contested to the Board of Directors of the Oman Journalists Association (OJA). Nominations were invited from incumbent members of the OJA on January 1 and can be submitted until January 20. Any nomination submitted after the indicated date

will not be considered. Two panels, besides the present BoD, comprising 12 members each vied to the BoD to be chosen to be their representatives to the coveted positions of the apex body of journalists to represent Oman media for the year 2024 – 2026. Hatim al Tai, Saif al Mahrouqi,



Abdullah al Shueili, Zainab al Zadjali, Nabil al Hadi, Madrin al Maktoumi, Saleh al Balushi, Noah al Maamari, Khalifa al Rawahi, Hamad al Habsi, and Ahmed al Farsi made the second panel. The OJA, with its 10 sub-committees namely, Sports Media, Freedoms and International

Relations, Photographers, Membership and Member Affairs, Marketing and Investment, Women Journalists Affairs, Public Relations and Events, Media and Culture, Training and Qualification and Governorate Committee, holds membership in three international committees.

The three important international committees in which OJA has membership are, International Journalists Association (represented by Mubarak al Araiimi), Asian Journalists Association (represented by Salim al Jahwari), and International Gender federation in International Journalists Association (represented by Zainab al Zadjali) Prior to the elections, the existing committee presented a report on the performance of the Board, a draft work plan for the year, the balance sheet and final account for the ending fiscal year and the project, new year budget, auditor’s report and appointed the auditor in accordance with the Bylaw of the Committee for the current year.



Call for drug addiction rehabilitation centre

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

The Anti-Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Competition Project Team held a meeting on Wednesday headed by Abdul Hamid bin Abdul Rahman al Kharousi, Deputy Governor of Muttrah, to discuss the establishment of a rehabilitation centre for those recovering from drug addiction in Muttrah.

The meeting aimed at discussing the progress of the Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Competition project in the presence of a number

of members of the National Committee, and reviewed the achievements of the team responsible for the competition, a brief overview of the stages that were implemented, and aspects related to its organisation.

They also discussed allocating a site in Muttrah to establish a rehabilitation centre project for those recovering from addiction.

Such a competition comes to achieve a great goal and instilling a culture of awareness in society and young people of the dangers and harms of drug abuse or trafficking, as the problem of drugs and psychotropic substances occupies



The meeting discussed allocating a site in Muttrah to establish a rehabilitation centre project for those recovering from addiction.

The Sultanate of Oman has

substances for the year 2023-2028. It has developed the policies, programmes and organisational activities that should be worked on in the next phase to confront the challenges of combating narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

This is in addition to enhancing the capabilities of young people to confront the scourge, developing and strengthening human capabilities in prevention and awareness for a safe society free of drugs, and developing specialised programmes aimed at treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration.

The meeting also looked at

the progress of the activities organised during the previous period and the results achieved. Such activities are considered an important part of the efforts made to combat drugs and psychotropic substances in Muttrah.

The competition reflects the keenness of Muscat Governorate and the concerned authorities to increase national efforts to combat drugs and psychotropic substances as well as rehabilitating those recovering from addiction, integrating them with different groups of society, and providing the necessary support to individuals affected.

Sultanate of Oman, GCC states review criminal judicial procedures



Oman was represented at the meeting by Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdullah al Hajri, Judge of the Supreme Court. — ONA

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman on Wednesday participated in the 2024 interactive programme for employees of GCC Supreme Courts and Courts of Cassation.

The Supreme Judicial Council represented Oman at the meeting, held via videoconferencing.

The meeting elaborated on issues of criminal conciliation and criminal settlement, in addition to a proposal on placement of offenders under electronic surveillance, submitted by the Federal Supreme Court in the United Arab Emirates.

Oman was represented at the meeting by Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdullah al Hajri, Judge of the Supreme Court, Head of the Criminal Chamber, and Badr bin Mohsen al Rashidi, Judge of the Supreme Court, Member of the Criminal Circuit. — ONA



NAVAL DRILL 'SEA LION 1/2024' BEGINS

MUSCAT: Activities of the naval drill 'Sea Lion 1/2024' began on Wednesday. It is implemented by the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) in the Sea of Oman, with the support of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) and the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). The exercise began with a briefing on the drill's plan presented by Commodore Jasim bin Mohammed al Balushi, Director-General of Operations and Plans at the RNO. Carrying out this drill comes within the framework of the RNO annual training plans, which aim to sustain preparedness. — ONA

DUQM REFINERY CELEBRATES 100TH EXPORT VESSEL

DUQM: OQ8, a \$9 billion joint venture between Oman's OQ and Kuwait Petroleum International (KPI), announced the dispatch of its 100th export vessel, from its terminal in Al Duqm.

This milestone highlights OQ8's flawless safety record since its commencement in May 2023 and underscores its vital role in enhancing global supply chain resilience, having successfully exported over 4.1 million tons of products to global customers.

Al Duqm's location and proximity to key markets along the Indian Ocean has been instrumental in facilitating seamless trade across critical markets, from Brazil to the Gulf of Mexico, East Africa to India, enhancing the Refinery's value proposition to global partners.

David Bird, CEO of OQ8, emphasised the company's pivotal role in the global supply chain. "Our 100th shipment reflects our strategic foresight



The refinery's adaptability is further highlighted by its ability to handle ships of all sizes. — ONA

and operational expertise," Bird stated.

He added, "Located outside the Strait of Hormuz, our terminal is a vital link in global trade, offering a secure and dependable route for the flow of energy and commodities. This strategic position has been crucial in enabling seamless trade across key markets worldwide, enhancing our proposition to global partners. Our commitment to being

a reliable supplier of high-quality products has never been stronger, and this milestone further cements our reputation in the global market." OQ8 has set new benchmarks in maritime logistics, demonstrating its capability in safely managing the global supply of refined products. The terminal loaded a record-breaking 850,000 barrels of naphtha onto one of the largest vessels it has serviced, an LR2, achieving a loading rate of

47,000 barrels an hour.

As OQ8 gears up for its first sulphur shipment, it continues to showcase its commitment to diversifying export products and enhancing its service offerings.

Mubarak al Numani, Chief, Finance, Commercial and SCM, shared his insights on the achievement. "This milestone is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our team," Al Numani remarked.

— ONA

Oman hosts meeting on ESCWA social protection reform



The meeting aims to inform experts about Oman's legislations, services and social protection programmes. — ONA

MUSCAT: Represented by the Ministry of Social Development, the Sultanate of Oman on Wednesday hosted the 9th meeting of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)'s team of experts in reforming social protection systems in the Arab region.

The two-day meeting is held in Muscat under the auspices of Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development.

The meeting aims to inform experts about Oman's legislations, services and social protection programmes serving various segments of society.

The meeting provides an opportunity to exchange experiences and benefit from training provided by ESCWA experts for specialists at the Ministry of Social Development on how to prepare specialised international reports, monitor and

analyse data and draw up strategic plans and legislations.

ESCWA experts will also cooperate in preparing an integrated platform to list all expenditures for social services provided to social segments in Oman.

The meeting's working papers will provide further insights into protection services to children, the elderly and the overall social protection scheme. — ONA

Photographer gets jail, fine for failing to deliver wedding photos, video

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

A wedding photographer was slapped fine and jail by a court in Al Buraimi after it found that there was a serious violation of the terms of the contract, an official from the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) said.

The woman was found guilty of failing to provide service to a woman consumer. She was awarded with prison term and a fine equivalent to the consumer's material losses.

According to the CPA, the case began when a consumer lodged a complaint in Al Buraimi against a photographer and her studio. The consumer had asked the studio to create a photo album and video of her wedding. However, the studio failed to deliver it.



After the Consumer Protection Department intervened, the studio only provided some of the photos and a video. When questioned about the partial delivery, the studio owner claimed that the memory card was damaged. The consumer in her plaint said she suffered both mental and material damages.

The complaint was then transferred to the competent court, which issued its sentence.

The woman, who owned the studio, was sentenced to 10 days of imprisonment and a fine of RO 100. The court also ordered the studio to refund RO 300 and another RO 300 for the damages. The studio was also required to pay the legal expenses. The court decided to suspend the criminal penalty against the studio owner if the civil rights were fulfilled within one month from the date of the ruling.

"It is always important to stick to the terms and conditions agreed upon while entering into the contract and to take all the necessary steps to ensure that one can deliver whatever is agreed upon," said the senior official from the CPA.

The CPA further urged service providers to exercise care in delivering the service properly.

AI takes centre-stage as book fair opens

FROM PAGE 1
The governorate’s cultural programme consists of educational seminars, lectures, poetry evenings and discussion panels that will see the participation of an elite group of intellectuals, authors and literati. The display also includes antiques, sculptures, manuscripts and distinctive documents related to the history of the governorate, as well as visual presentations on tourism landmarks. A corner at the pavilion is dedicated to signatures of the governorate’s writers and literati, to celebrate their contributions.

The chief guest also inaugurated the Oman Youth Encyclopaedia (OYE), whose entries are derived from the original Oman Encyclopaedia in an orderly manner that pertains to the target age group.

Key features of the OYE highlight the themes of citizenship, cognitive values and rich data that appeal to the youth segment, notably scientific innovations and related matters.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari said, “Today we celebrate the opening of the 28th edition of Muscat International Book Fair, the illustrious event that gathered momentum year after year, since its first inception in 1992, writing new chapters of dazzling development in the book industry, publishing, and culture.”

“The book fair has experienced continuous growth and updates that keep pace with the latest global developments, affirming its international status as a lighthouse that illuminates the arenas of culture and scholarly development of our society,” Dr Al Maamari added.

“We take pride in the elaborate preparations that yielded such a spectacular cultural extravaganza, highlighting the remarkable progress made by Omani publishing houses and their valuable contribution towards enriching the readers’ experience,” he said.



Dignitaries at the opening of 28th Muscat International Book Fair.



Dignitaries at the opening of 28th Muscat International Book Fair.

Dr Al Maamari pointed out that the steady rise in the number of participating countries and the diversity of cultural programmes reflect the sincere efforts of individuals, supporting institutions and the Ministry of Information in organising this event. He described the initiatives as a firm commitment to the continuous amelioration of this rich cultural event namely Muscat International Book Fair.

Dr Al Maamari stressed that

indicators surveyed so far affirm this great development and emphasise the book fair’s noble goal in inspiring knowledge, expanding the book market and enriching the Omani library with the latest publications from international publishing houses and scholarly domains.

Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture, Deputy Chairman of the book fair’s main committee, said that Muscat International Book Fair figures among the most important cultural events in the Sultanate of Oman. The book fair provides a great opportunity for exchanging knowledge and cultural dialogue, notably through interaction among intellectuals, media professionals and authors. “Muscat International Book Fair is a prominent cultural platform par excellence,” he said.

Al Busaidy said that the 28th edition of the book fair includes a range of activities organised by the Cultural Committee, government institutions and private establishments, including poetry evenings, symposiums, lectures, training seminars and theatrical performances.

This is in addition to an exclusive cultural programme on Al Dhahirah



Dignitaries at the opening of 28th Muscat International Book Fair.

Governorate. There will be two dialogue sessions, one of which will be dedicated to the late actor Saud al Darmaki and the other to the late director and playwright Mohammed Al Muhandis al Yaf’ee.

Al Busaidy pointed out that artificial intelligence (AI) constitutes the main theme of the book fair this year, due to the technology’s significance in all sectors. He added that AI will be accorded attention in children and family events.

Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah, expressed pride at choosing Al Dhahirah Governorate as the guest of honour at the book fair. He said that the event provides an ideal opportunity to introduce the governorate’s cultural, artistic and literary components that stem from Oman’s culture and heritage.

“The hosting highlights the cultural, literary and scholarly aspects of the governorate and its ancient history that enriched Omani heritage throughout the ages. It spotlights the governorate’s glorious heritage and promote efforts to focus on sources of civilisation around the country,” Al Rawas added.

Al Rawas said that Al Dhahirah Governorate prepared a programme of activities that embody the diversity that characterises the governorate. “For the first time, there will be models of prominent governorate-based development projects,” said Al Rawas, noting that there is an innovation corner for Al Dhahirah Governorate’s students that showcases their achievements. There is also a special edition for 32 publications issued by the governorate’s authors, he added.

Events for children and families include workshops, an Arabic language corner, a children’s museum, a green corner for environment-friendly activities and cultural cafés.

Nasser al Balushi, a visitor to the book fair, highlighted the cultural and literary diversity of Oman and the participating countries. He emphasised that such exhibitions provide an opportunity to acquire new knowledge and interact with diverse opinions and ideas through literary cafes at the fair. Moreover, they offer a wonderful chance to meet authors and writers and get their signatures on published books. Al Balushi expressed confidence that both he and his children would enjoy watching the children’s theatre activities, which they have come to expect at the fair.

During the book fair, there are book signing ceremonies in which a number of authors participate. There will also be agreements signing ceremonies that will see institutions ink contracts with authors and related procedures.

The book fair’s Data Centre offers services that include electronic application, mobile indexing and a 3D map of the Muscat International Book Fair 2024.

The service facilities of the book fair were expanded to cover restaurants along the front garden of Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, as part of measures to support local SMEs. In the facilities, electronic payment is also applied in coordination with Bank Dhofar, the banking partner of the current edition of the book fair.

The management of the book fair provided electronic payment solutions at all its platforms in coordination with a local bank. Weekday mornings are generally dedicated to students and women, while evening hours from 2 pm to 10 pm are open to the public. Weekend timings are from 4 pm to 10 pm for the general public on Fridays and from 10 am to 10 pm on Saturdays for the general public. (With ONA inputs)



MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
1/2024 (2024/75/ 3 - ع / ج - ر (49589) at E-Tendering	GENERAL CLEANING SERVICES FOR MINISTRY OF INFORMATION PROPERTIES FOR THE PERIOD FROM 01.07.2024 TO 30.06.2026	Excellent First	5/3/2024	1/4/2024	25/-
2/2024 (2024/74/ 2 - ع / ج - ر (49678) at E-Tendering	MAINTENANING (MINISTRY OF INFORMATION) GARDENS, LAWNS & TREES AT QURUM FOR THE PERIOD FROM 01.07.2024 TO 30.6.2026	Excellent First	5/3/2024	1/4/2024	25/-
3/2024 (2024/76/ 4 - ع / ج - ر (49522) at E-Tendering	STUDY, SUPPLY, DELIVERY, INSTALLATION AND CONFIGURATION OF SWITCHES (CORE, DISTRIBUTION AND ACCESS) AND DOMAIN CONTROLLER UPGRADE/REPLACEMENT	International Excellent First	7/3/2024	16/4/2024	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 Isnaad 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)

30th anniversary of Nizwa magazine

The Ministry of Information on Thursday marks the 30th anniversary of Nizwa magazine’s publication. The celebration takes place as part of cultural activities accompanying the 28th edition of Muscat International Book Fair.

The event will explore the successful march of Nizwa magazine over the past three decades during which the publication continued to meet the aspirations of its readers. It will also demonstrate the extent to which Nizwa magazine contributed to scholarly discourse, spreading Omani culture and enriching the repertoire of Omani intellectuals and writers.

During the event, the participants will discuss Nizwa magazine’s influence

as a cultural guide to world writers and intellectuals.

The event will include seminars and dialogue sessions that address several themes in critical analysis, Omani poetry styles, oriental writings and civilised methods of exercising cultural influence, to name a few.



The celebration of the 30th anniversary of Nizwa magazine also anticipates the publication’s future potential amid interactions of a modern world of cognitive openness.

Nizwa magazine is issued by the Ministry of Information in the Sultanate of Oman. Its first issue was published by Oman Newspaper House in November 1994. The magazine is considered an Omani cultural arena where different Arab and international scholarly articles are presented to the readers.

In particular, Nizwa magazine stands out for its openness to various intellectual and literary schools, in a fabric that combines heritage and modernity. This enabled the magazine to gain great reputation, both at home and in Arab world. — ONA



Financial centre becomes Egmont group member

VALLETTA: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the National Centre for Financial Information, has obtained membership at Egmont International Group of Financial Information Units. This was unveiled during the group's general assembly meeting held in the Republic of Malta. Oman's joining this group will consolidate the national system for combating money laundering and terrorism financing.

— ONA



NEET centres in Oman reinstated

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

The National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) centres for the Indian students in Oman, which were suspended earlier, have been reinstated with immediate effect, thanks to the continuous requests made by expat families of NEET aspirants in Oman, along with others in other countries.

Parents of the children studying in Indian Schools in Oman had submitted a mass petitions requesting the reinstatement of the cancelled NEET examination centre in Oman to various authorities including the Indian Embassy in Oman recently.

There are 21 Indian schools and nearly 45,000 students spread across the country. There are over 500 NEET aspirants in the country.

The National Testing Agency (NTA), under whose umbrella the crucial NEET has been conducted, has earlier announced that the centres in Oman and other Gulf countries would be cancelled as the registration process for the NEET UG



Application process will now have the option to change their exam centres

2024 began and that a total of 554 centres across India have been said to be available for candidates.

The exemption of Gulf countries, including Oman, where 21 Indian schools are operating, from the list this year had created a crisis that had potentially affected the future of students, according to the parents.

A note from the The National Testing Agency (NTA) said, 'In continuation to the public notice dated 9th February 2024, where

in NTA has invited online application forms for the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test NEET (UG) 2024, it has been decided that the exam will be conducted in the foreign cities as per details mentioned below.' Accordingly, the countries mentioned below will get the NEET centres back to help the children studying in these countries with their tests.

The foreign cities and centres are Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Thailand, Srilanka, Qatar, Nepal,

Malaysia, Nigeria, Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Singapore.

The circular signed by Dr Sadhana Parashar, Senior Director (Exams) stated that candidates who have already selected centres in India and paid the fee without the option for foreign centres will have the opportunity to correct their centre and country choice during the correction window. This window will open after the registration window closes.

Also, candidates in foreign countries wishing to change their centres to foreign cities can make corrections during this period. However, they will be required to pay the differential amount.

Candidates registering afresh from foreign countries can select their preferred country and city directly from the drop-down menu during the application process. and they should pay the requisite fee and submit their application.

There is an exam centre for JEE in Muscat, under NTA, which is very effective for the local JEE aspirants.

Two Egyptian delegations visit military college, maritime security centre



The guests were briefed on the roles and tasks carried out. — ONA

MUSCAT: Two military delegations from the Arab Republic of Egypt visit the Military Technological College (MTC). The guests comprised a delegation from the Military Academy for Post-graduate and Strategic Studies, headed by Maj Gen Waleed Mohammed Nassar, Deputy Head of the Academy and a delegation of faculty and students at the Command and Staff College headed by Brigadier Walid Adel Ahmed Al Shorbaji.

During the visit, the two delegations were briefed on the roles and tasks carried out by the centre in the safety of the maritime environment. They also toured the college's departments.

Moreover, the two delegations also visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC).

During this visit, the guests were briefed on the roles and tasks carried out by the centre in the safety of the maritime environment. They also toured the MSC's facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies.

— ONA

Nama Water, ESO organise beach cleaning in Al Seeb

MUSCAT: Deepening its commitment to the local community by building on its existing initiatives, Nama Water Services (represented by the Hematkom Team) recently organised a campaign to clean up Al Seeb Beach in cooperation with the Environment Society of Oman (ESO).

The campaign drew participation from Nama Water Services, the Environment Society of Oman, students from Schools, and many citizens and residents.

On the importance of the initiative, Taqi bin Mohammed al Lawati, Chief Human Resources and Culture Officer at Nama Water Services, noted: "At Nama Water Services, we understand our responsibility to promote and embed community culture within society. We believe that it is an integral part that is no less important than our responsibilities in developing the services provided in the water sector."

He added: "Our inaugural community initiative, Al Seeb Beach Cleanup Campaign, brought together the Environment Society of Oman, enthusiastic school students, and dedicated citizens and residents, leaving a lasting positive impact on the environment. We look forward to organising more community initiatives this year."

He elaborated that these initiatives

cultivate a strong volunteer ethic among employees and community members while fostering an environment of meaningful participation and collaboration between companies, civil society organisations, and individuals, enhancing the sense of shared responsibility among different segments of society.

On the Participation of the Environment Society of Oman, Saud al Harthy, Executive Director of the society, said: "We are pleased to participate in this environmental initiative, which aligns with the goals of the Environment Society of Oman and our role as one of the civil society organisations that are concerned with the preservation and protection of the environment. We recognise our pivotal role in fostering community awareness about environmental issues.

By collaborating on diverse initiatives, we strive to minimise our impact and maximise our contribution to a sustainable future."

This collaboration between educational institutions and entities like Nama Water Services cultivates students' understanding and appreciation for volunteerism that transcends organisational boundaries.

It reinforces the concept of shared responsibility for community well-being.



The campaign drew participation from people of all walks of life

جامعة صحر
Sohar University



TENDER NOTICE No. 003/2024 001/2024

Sohar University invites sealed tenders from specialized, experience and authorized contractors/suppliers for Supply, Delivery, and Installation of Sohar University Data Center Core Switch.

The tender details are as follows:

Tender	Description	Fee OMR	Submission Date
003/2024	Supply, Delivery, and Installation of Sohar University Data Center Core Switch	~100	21.03.2024

The tender document can be obtained from the Procurement and Contracts Department from 22/02/2024 to 29/02/2024 from 08:00 to 16:00 hrs at Sohar University Main campus after payment of OMR100/- (Non-refundable) at the cash counter located in the Al Khauboura Building. The receipt of payment has to be taken to the Procurement and Contracts Department to collect the Tender Document.

Tender offers must be submitted in sealed envelopes, which should be submitted at the Sohar University premises. Only the tender number should be written on the envelope; no other indications shall be written on envelopes. The deadline for submission of offers is 21/03/2024 at 15:30 hours.

The tenders should be addressed to the Pro. Vice Chancellor for Administration & Finance (PVCAF) and deposited in the tender box at the PVCAF Office. The tender box is open from 08:00 to 15:30 from Sunday to Thursday.

Office of Pro. Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance
Sohar University

P.O. Box 44, P.C. 311, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman

Telephone: 26850100 Ext.: 421 & 289 (Procurement and Contracts Department)

Sohar University reserves the right to accept or reject any offer

without having to identify reasons.



الشركة المتحدة للطاقة (س.م.ع.م.)
UNITED POWER COMPANY (SAOC)

P.O. Box 147, PC 134, Jawharat A'Shatti, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24698498, Fax: 24698496

Notice and Invitation to Attend the Annual General Meeting & Extraordinary General Meeting

The Board of Directors of United Power Company SAOC (the "Company") has the pleasure to invite the shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting & Extraordinary General Meeting, which will be held on Wednesday at 03:00 PM on 06/03/2024, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.om). If the quorum requirement for holding the General Meeting is not fulfilled, a second meeting shall be held on Sunday at 03:00 PM on 10/03/2024, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.om) to discuss the following agenda:

Annual Ordinary General Meeting Agendas:

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To consider the Auditors' Report and approve the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2023.
- To consider and note the transactions carried out by the Company with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To consider and ratify the Board and Committees' sitting fees paid during the preceding year (as in Annexure).
- To appoint the statutory auditor for the financial year ending 31 December 2024 and approve his remuneration.

Extra Ordinary General Meeting Agendas:

- To consider and approve the dissolution and liquidation of the Company.
- To approve the appointment of the liquidator and determine his fees in accordance with the key terms set per Annexure.

According to the Company's Articles of Association and the controls for holding General Meetings using modern technology issued by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- Legal person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCD.
- Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information please contact on
Telephone No 99219419 or E-mail: salah.farsi@upcmanah.com

Chairman

Legal Advisor

External Auditor



US veto resumes Israel genocidal strikes



US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield casts a veto vote on the Gaza war, at UN headquarters in New York City. – AFP

THE HAGUE: The United States told the UN’s top court on Wednesday that Israel should not be legally forced to withdraw from occupied Palestinian territory without security guarantees.

The International Court of Justice is holding a week of hearings after a request from the United Nations, with an unprecedented 52 countries giving their views on Israel’s occupation.

Most speakers have demanded that Israel end its occupation, which came after a six-day Arab-Israeli war in 1967.

“The court should not find that Israel is legally obligated to immediately and unconditionally withdraw from occupied territory,” said Richard Visek, legal adviser at the US State Department.

“Any movement towards Israel withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza requires consideration of Israel’s very real security needs,” he argued.

The UN has asked the ICJ to hand down an “advisory opinion” on the “legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem”.

Palestinian Foreign Minister



Palestinians inspect a car hit by an Israeli strike, in Deir Al Balah, in the central Gaza. – Reuters

We tried other fora for the last 75 years and we confronted the US veto and the US hegemony over decision-making processes within the UN system.

RIYAD
AL MALIKI

Palestinian Foreign Minister

Riyad al Maliki told reporters after the US statement: “I expected much more. I didn’t hear anything new.”

Washington has been insisting that the Israel-Palestinian conflict

be addressed in “other fora and not here”, Al Maliki said.

“Well, we tried other fora for the last 75 years and we confronted the US veto and the US hegemony over decision-making processes

within the UN system,” he said.

Israel is not taking part in the oral hearings, but submitted a written contribution in which it described the questions the court had been asked as “prejudicial” and “tendentious”.

Also speaking on Wednesday, the representative from Egypt, which has played a key role in talks between Israel and the Palestinians, said the occupation was “a continued violation of international law”.

“The consequences of Israel’s prolonged occupation are clear and there can be no peace, no stability, no prosperity without upholding the rule of law,” foreign ministry legal adviser Jasmine

Moussa said. The hearings began on Monday with three hours of testimony from Palestinian officials, who accused the Israeli occupiers of running a system of “colonialism and apartheid”.

Al Maliki had urged the judges to call for an end to the occupation “immediately, totally and unconditionally”.

South Africa’s ambassador to the Netherlands told the court that Israel’s policies were “more extreme” than the apartheid black South Africans suffered before 1994. The case is separate from a high-profile case brought by Pretoria against Israel for alleged genocide during its current offensive in Gaza. — AFP

Israel troops stage killing in West Bank

JENIN: Israeli troops killed three Palestinians during an overnight raid in the northern West Bank city of Jenin, the military said on Wednesday.

The Palestinian health ministry confirmed at least one death in the Israeli operation, the latest in a months-long military crackdown across the occupied West Bank since October 7.

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa said Israeli troops stormed the city during the night.

“An undercover Israeli force besieged two houses in the camp sparking violent confrontations during which three Palestinians were also injured,” Wafa said, adding that troops also struck “a house with a missile” in the adjacent refugee camp.

Marwan Aref Ali, father of one of the men killed in the raid, said his son had been arrested and wounded several times before.

Ali came to know about his son’s death from an Israeli army officer. Later on Wednesday, Palestinian gunmen led a crowd of mourners in a funeral procession for the son, a photographer reported.

Charred vehicles and bullet-pocked walls bore testimony to the fierce clashes in the overnight raid.

Three sons of Siham Ahmed Qasim Jaber were arrested, she said, adding she was visiting her ailing daughter late on Tuesday when she heard that troops had entered her house.

“I tried to go back but I was told that there were snipers and I could not return,” she said.

“What will we do? We have to remain patient,” she said, pointing to a picture of one of her sons.

Jenin has been the focus of repeated Israeli raids which have often led to clashes with Palestinians.

The city’s refugee camp is one of the most crowded and impoverished in the West Bank.

Violence was already on the increase across the West Bank and has only escalated since the war in Gaza erupted. The territory has seen frequent Palestinian attacks on Israelis and near-daily raids by the Israeli military that often turn deadly.

Israeli troops and settlers have killed at least 400 Palestinians in the West Bank since the Gaza war began, according to the Palestinian health ministry in Ramallah.

Israel captured the West Bank in the Arab-Israeli war of 1967. — AFP



Palestinian gunmen lead the procession as mourners walk in the funeral of Aref Marwan who was killed by the Israeli army, in the West Bank. – AFP

Hunger grips Gaza as truce talks continue

GAZA: Heavy fighting rocked besieged Gaza on Wednesday as aid agencies warned of looming famine. Global concern has spiralled over the high civilian death toll and dire humanitarian crisis in the war sparked by October 7 attack.

Combat and chaos again stalled the sporadic aid deliveries for desperate civilians in Gaza, where the UN has warned the population of 2.4 million is on the brink of famine and could face an “explosion” of child deaths.

The UN World Food Programme said it was forced to halt aid deliveries in north Gaza because of “complete chaos and violence” after a truck convoy encountered gunfire.

More Israeli strikes pounded Gaza, leaving 103 people dead during the night, according to the health ministry in the territory, which put the overall death toll at 29,313.

“We can’t take it anymore,” said Ahmad, a resident of Gaza City, where entire blocks are in ruins and cratered streets are strewn with rubble.

“We do not have flour, we don’t even know where to go in this cold weather,” he said. “We demand a ceasefire. We want to live.”

Particular concern has centred on Gaza’s far-southern Rafah area, where 1.4 million



Displaced Palestinians check their belongings in a territory named Al Mawasi after Israeli tanks reportedly raided the territory in Khan Yunis. – AFP

people now live in crowded shelters and makeshift tents, fearing attack by nearby Israeli ground troops.

Aid groups warn a ground offensive could turn Rafah into a “graveyard” and the United States has said the vast numbers of displaced civilians must first be moved out of harm’s way.

US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said that “without properly accounting for the safety and security of those refugees, we continue to believe that an operation in Rafah would be a disaster”.

Israel has heavily bombed Gaza and launched a ground

attack that has seen troops and tanks push through from the north towards the south, leaving vast swathes entirely destroyed.

The World Health Organization called the devastation “indescribable” around Nasser Hospital in the southern city of Khan Yunis,

Combat and chaos again stalled the sporadic aid deliveries for desperate civilians in Gaza, where the UN has warned the population of 2.4 million is on the brink of famine

where it said it managed to evacuate some 32 patients.

“The area was surrounded by burnt and destroyed buildings, heavy layers of debris, with no stretch of intact road,” WHO said.

The clinic has no power or running water, it added, and “medical waste and garbage are creating a breeding ground for disease”.

On Tuesday, the UN Security Council voted on an Algeria-drafted resolution which demanded an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and the release of all captives.

The United States vetoed the resolution, which it labelled “wishful and irresponsible”, drawing strong criticism from China, Russia, Saudi Arabia and even close ally France.

— AFP



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THURSDAY | FEBRUARY 22 | 2024

7

In brief

■ BRUSSELS



URSULA WANTS NEW DEFENCE TSAR IN SECOND EU TERM

European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen argued on Wednesday for creating a post of defence commissioner to lead a drive to rearm Europe if she wins a second term in office.

The new role would focus on bolstering Europe's "defence industrial base" in the face of Russia's war on Ukraine, said the head of the European Union's executive. "Citizens want more Europe in defence," she told journalists. "They want us to invest more. They want us to invest better. They want us to invest European and smarter."

The EU is holding elections for the European parliament in June. — AFP

■ KINSHASA



DR CONGO GOVT RESIGNS IN ELECTION AFTERMATH

The prime minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo has tendered his and his government's resignation two months after winning general elections, according to a video released by the presidency on Wednesday.

Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde was shown offering his resignation on Tuesday after three years in office to President Felix Tshisekedi in the video.

The departing government will handle affairs until a new government is appointed, at a date yet to be announced.

Security challenges are monumental. Violence has resumed between the army and M23 rebels. — AFP

■ LONDON



ASSANGE WANTED FOR PUBLISHING SOURCES' NAMES

Julian Assange is being prosecuted for publishing sources' names and not his political opinions, lawyers representing the United States said on Wednesday as the WikiLeaks founder fights to stop his extradition from Britain.

US prosecutors argue the leaks imperiled the lives of their agents and there was no excuse for his criminality. Assange's supporters, however, hail him as a journalist and a hero who is being persecuted for exposing US wrongdoing.

Assange's lawyers told London's High Court on Tuesday that the case was politically motivated. — Reuters

France to placate farmers as protests flare up

PARIS: France's Prime Minister Gabriel Attal sought to head off fresh farmers' protests on Wednesday, as they resumed direct action including dumping produce and blocking roads in pursuit of their demands.

Attal promised to elevate agriculture "to the status of a fundamental national interest", outlining an agriculture bill designed to address farmers' grievances.

Farmers staged crippling nationwide protests last month before their unions called for them to be suspended after the government promised reforms.

But this weekend's national agriculture show - a major annual event for both the French public and its politicians - has become a de facto deadline for the government to meet farmers' demands.

Even as Attal was speaking on Wednesday, farmers were blockading a stretch of around 70 kilometres on a motorway in the south of the country.

On Tuesday, farmers had blocked a milk transport in protest against wholesale prices they say are too low, and set fire to tyres at roundabouts.

In some of the angriest protests in Europe, French farmers were



Farmers ride their tractors in front of the Lactalis headquarters in Laval, northwestern France. — AFP

out in force for more than a week in January, using tractors to block key roads into Paris and other major highways nationwide.

Their grievances include burdensome environmental rules, the threat of cheap imports from outside the EU, and measures to address the low income many of

them still suffer.

In France on Wednesday, Attal said a forthcoming law would lay out measures "in black and white".

He said it was aimed at achieving "farming and food sovereignty" for France, and incorporating the dozens of promises already made to protesting farmers since the

start of the crisis.

It would also create a new basis for negotiations between producers and wholesalers to improve the income of farmers, a key issue for the sector.

Already, payments under the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) have

Even as Attal was speaking on Wednesday, farmers were blockading a stretch of around 70 kilometres on a motorway in the south of the country.

been made much faster than at this time last year, he said.

Several million euros have been paid out in emergency aid, notably to livestock farmers, he added.

France will also stop using its current national indicator for pesticide reduction — which farmers' unions want to get rid of — and would switch to an EU indicator instead, he said.

"That is what farmers wanted," he said, though the measure has drawn protests from environmental groups.

The head of the Young Farmers (JA) union, Arnaud Gaillot, said after Attal's conference that "some things are beginning to move", but added that "what we need is actions". — AFP

G20 ministers discuss global governance

RIO DE JANEIRO: Foreign ministers from the G20 group of nations gathered in Rio de Janeiro on Wednesday to discuss world tensions and ways to improve multilateral organisations in preparation for their annual leaders' summit presided by Brazil.

Brazilian President Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva has made reform of global governance a top priority for the G20 this year, along with curbing climate change and reducing poverty.

But with continued fighting between Russia and Ukraine and the war in Gaza, diplomats are not optimistic that proposals to upgrade global governance will advance easily within the group of the world's largest economies.

"We are living in a world with no governance and the proliferation of conflicts is unprecedented. There is a lack of governance to deal with global challenges," diplomat Mauricio Lyrio, Brazil's G20 sherpa, told reporters.

He said there is consensus today on the need to reform the United Nations, where Brazil has advocated the expansion of the Security Council, a proposal that has not gained momentum due to the resistance of nations with veto power since the world

body was created after World War Two.

Lyrio acknowledged that divergences arise when it comes to which changes to make at the United Nations, he said.

"This meeting will essentially be a venting session to build the case for multilateral reform and diagnosing the problem," a European diplomat said.

The two-day meeting held at a Rio marina will start on Wednesday with an overview of the global situation and its conflicts, including the wars in Ukraine and Gaza.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will face each other across the table for the first time since they spoke briefly face-to-face at last year's foreign ministers' meeting in New Delhi.

As an innovation, Brazil will propose holding a second G20 foreign ministers' meeting in September during the UN General Assembly in New York to advance talks on global governance, he said, with all UN member states invited to take part.

The G20 represents around 85 per cent of the global GDP, over 75 per cent of global trade, and about two-thirds of the world population. — Reuters



Ukrainian servicemen walk past abandoned armoured fighting vehicles near the front line village of Robotyne, in Zaporizhzhia. — Reuters

Ukraine denies losing Dnipro bridgehead

KYIV: Ukraine's army on Wednesday denied Russian claims that it had lost a key bridgehead on the Dnipro river frontline that has faced fierce attacks since Russia lost it.

Russia's defence minister said on Tuesday that Moscow's forces had retaken the village of Krynky, seized by Ukrainian troops last year.

Russia has stepped up its offensive ahead of Saturday's second anniversary of its attack, retaking the symbolic town of Avdiivka last week.

Ukrainian troops have held positions at Krynky since November despite heavy Russian artillery fire.

"We officially inform that this information is not true," the command of the Ukrainian army on the southern front said of the Russian claims over the village.

"The defence forces of southern Ukraine continue to hold their positions (in Krynky)," the command said on social media.

It claimed Russian forces launched an assault on Krynky but suffered "significant losses" and retreated.

Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu told President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday that Krynky had been "cleared" of Ukrainian forces.

The US-based Institute for the Study of War said on Wednesday that "available open-source visual evidence" as well as reports from both sides "suggests that Ukrainian forces maintain their limited bridgehead in the area."

It added that it had "not observed any visual evidence of recent notable Russian advances" in and around Krynky.

Russian military bloggers also did not report that Krynky was fully under Russian control. One influential channel close to Moscow's forces said that Ukrainian control in the area had "decreased".

Putin handed medals to pilots at a base in the Moscow suburbs after what he called a "turning

point" on the front following the fall of Avdiivka.

"Thanks to heroic actions and impeccable preparation, it was possible to achieve a turning point in the most difficult areas of the front," Putin told the pilots, according to Russian news agencies.

Moscow's capture of Avdiivka came after months of battles — costly for both sides.

In Ukraine, Russian army chief Valery Gerasimov also handed out medals to troops for taking Avdiivka.

"For today the main aim that was given is completed: Avdiivka is liberated," he said, a video posted by the Russian defence ministry showed. He claimed that Avdiivka was captured in "quite a short time but this was preceded by a long period of preparation."

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky has acknowledged ahead of the anniversary that the country's forces are in "extremely difficult" positions in many places. — AFP



A G20 Brazil banner is displayed at the Rio de Janeiro city hall building in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP file photo

Empowering leaders for climate action



Rumaitha Al Busaidi
@RumaithaBusaidi

The writer is an Omani environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development, focusing on climate change impacts in the Middle East and women's empowerment in environmental solutions

In the ever-evolving landscape of climate action, one truth remains constant: the pivotal role of women in driving change. As we continue our journey towards a more sustainable future, it's crucial to recognise the indispensable contributions of women in tackling the pressing challenges of climate change.

From advocating for gender-inclusive policies to spearheading innovative solutions, women worldwide are at the forefront of the movement, catalysing progress and inspiring generations to come.

At the heart of our collective endeavour lies the principle of empowerment—the bold and unwavering empowerment of women to step into leadership roles, challenge existing norms, and effect tangible change in their communities and beyond. It's about more than just representation; it's about providing women with the tools, resources, and platforms they need to thrive in the face of climate adversity. It's about amplifying their voices, celebrating their achievements, and dismantling the systemic barriers that have historically hindered their participation in decision-making processes and environmental discourse. Our journey towards empowering women for climate action has been marked by significant milestones. From grassroots initiatives to international collaborations, we've witnessed the integration of gender equity into climate-resilience standards, with initiatives linking foreign aid to women's empowerment gaining

momentum on the global stage. I personally had the pleasure of working on such a project advising the Biden administration especially in the way they incorporate gender in their aid policies in Africa. These efforts recognise the pivotal role of women in building climate-resilient communities, fostering sustainable development, and driving climate adaptation and mitigation efforts from the ground up.

Yet, as we celebrate our progress, we recognise that our work is far from complete. It's time to dig deeper, push boundaries, and amplify our impact. Collaboration emerges as a cornerstone of our continued efforts; by forging partnerships across sectors, industries, and geographical boundaries, we can leverage our collective expertise, networks, and resources to drive systemic change at scale. From grassroots initiatives to international alliances, collaboration serves as the catalyst for greater impact and lasting change.

Innovation emerges as another critical element of our journey. As we confront the multifaceted challenges of climate change, we must embrace innovation at every turn. Whether it's harnessing cutting-edge clean energy technologies, implementing nature-based solutions, or reimagining our relationship with the environment, innovation holds the key to unlocking new pathways towards sustainability. By fostering a culture of creativity, experimentation, and adaptive learning, we can pave the way for a more resilient,

BE BOLD IN
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regenerative, and equitable future for all.

To my fellow women changemakers, I extend a resounding call to action. Be bold in your vision, relentless in your pursuit of change, and unwavering in your commitment to a sustainable future.

Your voices matter, your actions count, and your leadership is needed now more than ever. Together, we possess the power to reshape the trajectory of our planet. Let us seize this moment, harness our collective strength, and forge a path towards a brighter, greener, and more equitable future for all.

As I reflect on our journey thus far, I am filled with hope and optimism for the road ahead. Despite the challenges that lie ahead, I remain steadfast in my belief in the power of collective action and the resilience of the human spirit. Our journey may be arduous, but it is also filled with boundless opportunities for growth, transformation, and positive change. Let us continue to stand united, to champion change, and to lead by example, inspiring others to join us in our mission to safeguard the planet for future generations.

In conclusion, I am reminded of the profound words of Margaret Mead: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

Let us heed her wisdom and rise to the challenge before us, knowing that together, we can indeed make a difference—for the planet, for future generations, and for all living beings that call Earth home.

‘World needs trillions for climate action’

MATHILDE DUMAZET

The world needs “trillions” of dollars to spur on the green transition and tackle global warming, the head of last year’s COP28 climate talks said on Tuesday, warning that political momentum can evaporate without clear action.

COP28 president Sultan al Jaber hailed progress made at UN negotiations last year in Dubai, where countries agreed to triple global renewables capacity this decade and “transition away” from polluting fossil fuels.

But the deal lacked important details, including on funding, putting the onus on this year’s COP29 meeting in Azerbaijan.

With impacts accelerating as global heat records are smashed, experts say that funding agreed this year will also play an important role in encouraging governments to toughen up their decarbonisation targets.

Jaber said finance was “the key enabler of positive change at the speed and scale” needed.

“But not normal scale finance — we need finance at every level,” he said, at an event in Paris organised by the International Energy Agency (IEA).

Countries are expected this year to hammer out a new target for the amount of annual support rich nations will provide to poorer ones for their energy transitions and adaptation to climate impacts from 2025.

The failure of wealthy nations to meet their previous goal of \$100 billion per year by 2020 has soured trust, with indications the target was likely reached only in 2022.

Needs already far outstrip the money available. The UN-backed climate finance expert group has estimated that emerging economies except China will need to spend around \$2.4 trillion a year by the end of the decade.

“The world must now raise the bar to address the challenge we face,” Jaber said.

“We need to start thinking trillions, not billions.” Recognition of the scale of support needed has put the focus on expanding sources of funding. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund are under pressure to initiate sweeping reforms to align their lending with the Paris deal goal of capping global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels. — AFP

Polluted flowers smell less sweet to pollinators

EMILY ANTHERS

The damage that air pollution can do is wide-ranging and well-known: The chemicals produced by human activities can trap heat in the atmosphere, change the chemistry of the oceans and harm human health in myriad ways.

Now, a new study suggests that air pollution might also make flowers less attractive to pollinating insects. Compounds called nitrate radicals, which can be abundant in nighttime urban air, severely degrade the scent emitted by the pale evening primrose, reducing visits from pollinating hawk moths, researchers reported in Science this month.

This sensory pollution could have far-reaching effects, interfering with plant reproduction and decreasing the production of fruits that feed many species, including humans. It could also threaten pollinators, which rely on flower nectar for sustenance and are already experiencing global declines.

“We worry a lot about exposure of humans to air pollution, but there’s a whole life system out there that’s also exposed to the same pollutants,” said Joel Thornton, an atmospheric chemist at the University of Washington and an author of the new study. “We’re really just uncovering how deep the impacts of air pollution go.”

The project was led by Thornton; his colleague Jeff Riffell, a sensory neurobiologist and ecologist at the University of Washington; and their joint doctoral student, Jeremy Chan, now a researcher at the University of Naples in Italy.

The study focuses on the pale evening primrose, a plant with delicate flowers that open at night. Its key pollinators include hawk moths, which have exquisitely sensitive odour-



A tobacco hawk moth navigating to a flower amid air fouled by vehicle exhaust emissions. – NYT

COMPOUNDS CALLED NITRATE RADICALS, WHICH CAN BE ABUNDANT IN NIGHTTIME URBAN AIR, SEVERELY DEGRADE THE SCENT EMITTED BY THE PALE EVENING PRIMROSE, REDUCING VISITS FROM POLLINATING HAWK MOTHS

detecting antennae. “They’re as good as a dog in terms of their chemical sensitivity,” Riffell said.

A flower’s scent is a complex olfactory bouquet that contains many chemical compounds. To identify the ingredients in the signature primrose scent, the scientists fastened plastic bags over the blooms, capturing samples of the fragrant air. When the team analysed these samples in the lab, it identified 22 distinct chemical components.

The scientists then recorded the electrical activity of the moths’ antennae when they were exposed to these scent compounds. They found that the moths were especially sensitive to a group of compounds called monoterpenes, which also help give conifers their fresh, evergreen smell.

The researchers used these attractive aromas to concoct their own simulated primrose scent. Then, they added ozone and nitrate radicals, both of which can form when pollutants produced by fossil-fuel combustion enter the atmosphere. Ozone, which forms in the presence of sunlight, is abundant during the day, whereas nitrate radicals, which are degraded by sunlight, are more dominant at night.

The scientists added ozone to the primrose scent first and observed some chemical degradation, with concentrations of two key monoterpenes dropping by roughly 30 per cent. They next added nitrate radicals to the mix, which proved far more damaging, reducing these key moth attractants by as much as 84 per cent compared with their original levels. — The New York Times

Are you ready to disconnect?

Using a mobile phone without Internet access is an unusual experience. Most of us are fortunate to have several providers offering tempting benefits to lure subscribers. Many of us carry multiple smartphones. Certainly, we are privileged, and we can afford the costs, as the United Nations Specialised Agency for Information and Communication Technologies reported that an estimated 2.6 billion people, or one-third of the global population, remained offline in 2023.

People are buying the latest and more sophisticated smartphone versions. Everybody talks about new models, and retailers are eager to sell them. I have been experiencing life with a dumbphone, which lacks online browsing, social media apps, and other features. But I also have a smartphone with connectivity which serves as a tool. It seems unfashionable, and yes, people laugh at my old dumbphone. It sets me apart in a world filled with flashy screens.

Digital communication offers many advantages and is convenient, but it also alienates us. People are losing their social communication abilities and behaving rudely when interacting with others. Unfortunately, there is a loss to humankind even though there are huge advances in communication technology.

My decision to try something uncommon resulted from some episodes. The first was at a press event, where journalists were expected to pay attention, take notes and ask relevant questions, but all I observed were ‘important media professionals’ checking their Instagram accounts and scrolling through applications.

The second case occurred at a birthday dinner celebration. It caught my attention that, except for two people, everybody else appeared immersed in their bubbles, interacting with their mobile phones. The body was present, but the mind was elsewhere. Probably no one noticed the unusual scenario; after all, they had gathered to commemorate a special occasion.

The third circumstance I observed



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The writer is a journalist, academic, and researcher in media studies

was less shameful. A group of friends were getting together for coffee, but no one was chatting to each other. Everyone was checking their phones as well as their smartwatches; the phone was not enough to distract them. It will not take long for smartphones to start fading, as people will be using smart devices such as smart keychains, eyewear, smart cars, smart wristbands, and so on. The issues will be different!

Actually, when one goes to customer service at a bank or a shop, we almost have to justify ourselves for interrupting the employee’s engagement with social media. Everyone has their necks bent, their heads down and their gaze fixated on a small, bright screen. Sometimes it’s not just an excuse for disturbing, but having to wait for the customer liaison to finish viewing something far more essential on the screen than attending to the client. It would be great if only dumbphones could be used during working hours. This may result in better customer service. After all, smartphones increase distractions.

One advantage of using a dumbphone is that it is a significant step towards preventing digital addiction. The act of constantly checking the phone can cause anxiety, stress and reduced mindfulness. App designers are not interested in how brilliant you are at social media; they want to keep people hooked on the screen. And more, the immediate gratification of googling shuts the door to creativity. A dumbphone is boring in comparison to the bazillion alternatives of a smartphone, yet it can help you stay away from mental health problems and be more productive. On another note, dumbphones are recommended for specific professions because of security concerns, and individuals involved in obscure activities use dumbphones for business.

Rejecting convenience is difficult. Nobody will throw away their smartphone, but it is a good idea to have a dumbphone and use the cell phone as a tool. It can help to unplug briefly and serve as a backup. The challenge is to try something different.

THE ACT OF CONSTANTLY CHECKING THE PHONE CAN CAUSE ANXIETY, STRESS AND REDUCED MINDFULNESS

OPPOSING CLIMATE MEASURES



This aerial view shows Polish farmers with their tractors and vehicles blocking the highway linking Warsaw and Lublin outside the town of Ryki, Lublin region, during a protest of farmers across the country against EU climate measures. – AFP

Empowering the Pandemic Accord

The Covid-19 pandemic taught us several lessons, many of which came at great cost. Chief among them was that, despite years of rehearsals, the world was not prepared for a fast-moving outbreak of a novel infectious disease.

Countries failed their own citizens, but the global response was even more inadequate. It was marked by an inexcusable absence of cooperation and coordination, ugly nationalism that included vaccine hoarding, and greed on the part of Western countries, which refused to share information, pathogens and therapeutics. I would say that the response was — to use a word that may seem old-fashioned and out of favour in some quarters — sinful.

The overwhelming lesson we learned the hard way is that no one is safe anywhere until everyone is safe everywhere. Could the wave of infections caused by the second Omicron variant have been avoided if the Global South had been vaccinated more quickly? We cannot be sure. But we do know that international cooperation is not compatible with nationalism, xenophobia, and new forms of colonialism. We need a form of globalisation that works for everyone, because while our world may be deeply fractured, we are all still inescapably interdependent.



Gordon Brown
The writer is a former prime minister of the United Kingdom, is UN Special Envoy for Global Education and Chair of Education Cannot Wait

In response to our collective failures, the World Health Organization’s member states decided to negotiate a Pandemic Accord, an international legal instrument that would provide a global framework to ensure equitable access to vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics. You could call it a pandemic nonproliferation accord, an agreement to help each other and work together in the event of a new public-health catastrophe.

Unfortunately, this global effort is being threatened by a torrent of misinformation and disinformation, blatant lies and percolating conspiracy theories. Among the falsehoods are that the WHO would be empowered to strip member states of sovereignty, deploy armed troops to enforce mandatory vaccinations and lockdowns, and monitor people’s movements through digital passports. All these claims are wholly untrue.

National governments themselves have proposed and are negotiating the Pandemic Accord, and they alone — not the WHO — will be responsible for its requirements and, ultimately, for its success or failure.

We must not underestimate

the importance of the Accord, which represents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to improve the world we live in, especially for young people and future generations. Young people, in particular, suffered greatly during the pandemic: their education was disrupted, their lives turned upside down and their prospects diminished. And, given the endurance of the collateral effects of Covid-19 and its control measures, especially their adverse impact on mental health, young people have a right to expect that their future will be protected.

But the clock is ticking. Countries must act now to meet the

self-imposed deadline of May 2024, when they are expected to present an agreement to the 77th World Health Assembly (the WHO’s decision-making body). They must not squander the opportunity to adopt a global pact that will protect future generations from a repeat of the devastation wrought by Covid-19. The unprecedented nature of the pandemic requires an unprecedented response.

Some of the current sticking points in the Pandemic Accord are related to intellectual property. But if countries embrace a spirit of global collaboration, they can devise creative solutions that balance intellectual-property

rights, incentives, and the flexibilities in TRIPS, the World Trade Organization’s intellectual-property agreement. Compromise on this issue and others requires recognising that the private and public sectors must work together in the fight against infectious diseases. But above all, security, equity, and equal access to information, technology, and products must be at the heart of the Accord.

People all around the world are desperate for hope. They want assurance that the future will be better than the past. Countries must recognise that adopting a give-and-take approach during the final negotiations is critical to reaching an agreement on the Pandemic Accord, which in turn could provide some much-needed optimism. We must demonstrate through our deeds as well as our words that we live in a deeply interconnected world in which we share each other’s burdens, even when times are difficult. Establishing an effective model of open and inclusive health multilateralism will deliver the crucial message that cross-border cooperation can deliver global solutions to global problems.

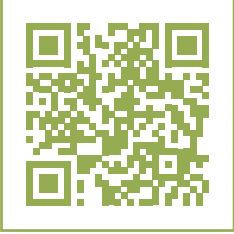
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The WHO member states decided to negotiate a Pandemic Accord.

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OMAN MAY HOST BIGGEST WORLD UNIVERSITY CHAMPIONSHIPS IN 2028

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 21

International University Sports Federation (FISU) President, Leonz Eder, appreciated and praised the Sultanate of Oman’s prominent role and efforts towards excellent organisation of the first 2024 FISU World University Championships Cross Country in Muscat.

In an exclusive interview with the Observer, the Swiss official shared his thoughts on various topics relevant to the future of FISU and the discussions he had with the government officials and other local stakeholders on Oman’s abilities to host another bigger World University Championships in 2028.

“Majority of the athletes who attended FISU World University Championships Cross Country came for first time to Oman to compete in this world-class event. It was a golden opportunity for them to have a proper competitive environment and also it is a great opportunity for them to explore Oman’s culture and learn more about the country. We at FISU are working hard on these values and encouraging all the athletes in all events to expand their relationships with local people and learn more about the host countries,” Eder said.

Over 200 athletes representing 21 nations across the world took part in the FISU World University Championships Cross Country (Muscat 2024). The event featured different categories including mixed short and long relay events.

“It was the first World University Championships in Oman and we are at FISU are



very grateful to the officials for this success. The event showcased Oman’s capability and ability to host major sporting events,” he added.

“FISU events are normally hosted in European countries and we are looking to diversify the hosts to different geographical zones. Oman has the ability to successfully stage top-class events and Muscat may host an international major University

Championships in 2028. We had successful discussions and meetings with Omani officials in sports field in this regard. Beside the sporting events, there are many world-class events in FISU namely: FISU World Forum and International Day of University Sport where the values and strategic plans of the FISU will be introduced and discussed with the participants from across the world,” the FISU chief said.

“FISU’s major events are represented by FISU World University Games Summer which features participation of more than 10,000 athletes competing in 18 different sports, while FISU World University Games winter is another major event where 2,500 athletes took part in different nine sports. Beside that, there are various FISU World Championships in different sports including cycling, shooting, sports climbing, squash, beach sports, triathlon, powerlifting, etc,” he added.

“Oman is a great hub to host many top international university sporting events and this is a great investment for a country where athletes from different parts of the world come to compete and promote about the country in many social media platforms,” he added.

Spain athletes claimed the

overall title of the championship, while athletes from Great Britain claimed the gold medal in team’s classification for women. Spanish athletes received silver medals, the South Africans got bronze medals. In the men’s team classification, French athletes topped the podium with gold, while athletes from Spain came second with silver, Great Britain finished third to receive bronze medals.

Haaland goal lifts Man City within a point of Liverpool

MANCHESTER: Erling Haaland erased any questions about his scoring touch on Tuesday, netting Manchester City’s only goal in a 1-0 victory over Brentford that lifted them into second place in the Premier League table, just one point behind leaders Liverpool.

Pep Guardiola’s team, unbeaten in their last 10 league matches and finally even in games played with title rivals Liverpool and Arsenal, have 56 points, one ahead of Arsenal in a title race that looks destined to go down to the wire. Brentford are five points above the relegation zone in 14th.

Haaland, who three days earlier pushed a camera in frustration after failing to score with nine shots in a 1-1 draw with Chelsea, was back in form, increasing his league tally to 17 goals.

The Norwegian broke the deadlock in the 71st minute when he sprinted onto a beautiful through ball from Julian Alvarez then stroked it past a slipping Kristoffer Ajer before beating keeper Mark Flekken. Haaland has now scored against every



Kristoffer Ajer in action with Manchester City’s Erling Braut Haaland. – Reuters

Premier League club he has faced. He has yet to play Luton Town.

Guardiola issued a warning to Haaland’s critics and said the Norwegian had come through a difficult period in his personal life. “Top strikers score a lot of goals, don’t criticise, he will shut your mouth. Sooner or later he is there,” Guardiola told reporters.

“He was out for two months (with a foot injury), he lost his

grandmother, it is not easy for a human being.

“We spoke about the moment and I realised this later, but he didn’t say anything about the passing away of his grandmother. In this type of games like Brentford, you need Erling,” added Guardiola, who said he left playmaker Kevin De Bruyne on the bench because of “niggles in his hamstring”.



Manchester City’s Erling Braut Haaland celebrates scoring their first goal with Ruben Dias and Kyle Walker. – Reuters

Haaland, who had scored just two goals in his previous seven games, had another effort ruled out late in the game because Kyle Walker was offside in the buildup.

Chelsea thoroughly frustrated City on Saturday and it was more of the same on Tuesday — besides Haaland’s goal — with City taking 25 shots, 11 on target to Brentford’s two, with Flekken producing an excellent

performance.

Oscar Bobb, who made his first Premier League start, had one of City’s best chances, deftly cutting around Christian Norgaard before unleashing a shot that defender Ben Mee sprinted back to just clear off the line.

Brentford missed a huge early opportunity when Frank Onyeka ran onto a pass from Yoane Wissa but shot straight at City’s keeper

Ederson.

“It wasn’t easy. We scored a goal on the counter-attack,” City defender Manuel Akanji said. “The defender slipped early and the efficiency was there (from Haaland). He scored a great goal.

“We know how hard it is to play against Brentford, with their back five. That’s why we tried to attack and we didn’t run into too many counter-attacks. I can’t remember too many big chances they had.

“After the weekend we had to show a reaction and I feel we did that. Now we have to improve game by game.”

Brentford manager Thomas Frank lamented the misstep that led to Haaland’s goal.

“It was an unlucky situation, if Kristoffer doesn’t slip, I’m convinced it was never going to be a goal,” said Frank. “Haaland is quick, but Kristoffer is just as quick and it would never have been a goal. City are good enough with their quality, they don’t need the margins going their way. I think we needed it more than them.” — Reuters

Al Nahda School wins Pocari Sweat Championship

MUSCAT: Al Nahda School in Al Batinah South Governorate won the Pocari Sweat School Football Championship, after defeating Al Shoumoukh School in Al Wusta Governorate 3-1. At Cheltenham School in Muscat.

The conclusion ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Ohoud bint Said bin Rashid al Balushiyyah, Member of the State Council, in present of Taher bin Mabkhout al Junaibi, First Deputy Chairman of the Majlis Ashishura, representative of the Wilayat of Al Duqm, in present of former national team player, Ali al Habsi and Mohammed al Nofali, ambassadors of the Oman School Sports.

The tournament organised by the Oman Sports Federation for students in grades 2-4, which witnessed 88 students represented 8 schools, competed in 16 matches.

In determined match of third and fourth place, Al Khashabah school represented Al Wusta Governorate finished third place, after beat Bat school, Al Dhahirah Governorate representative.

The distinguished players were also honoured, as for the individual, Turki al Thuhli from Al Nahda School, along with his colleague Moataz al Hattali. While Abdullah al Muqbali from Bat School award for best goalkeeper.



Al Nahda School lifts the cup

Drift Parade Explodes with Smoke and Backfires

MUSCAT: The Drift Car was an impressive spectacle that left the onlookers in amazement as the sound of engines reverberated through the streets.

The Parade was held on February 19, at the Oman Automobile Association in Muscat.

The event was not only about the impressive tire-shredding moves but also the epic backfire that filled the air with thunderous booms, creating a smoke-filled display of controlled chaos in the city.

From the moment the first modified beast erupted in a symphony of flames and exhaust, the energy was electric. The Muscat Drift Arena pulsed with excitement as drivers pushed their machines to the limit. The backfires, punctuating each manoeuvre with a dramatic curlicue, added a raw, wild element to the already impressive displays of skill.

But the excitement didn't stop there. Fans weren't just spectators; they were part of the experience.



From the competitions at the Oman Automobile Association in Muscat.

The dedicated Meet & Greet zone transformed into a thrilling reunion, as fans had the chance to rub shoulders and celebrate with the very drifters who conquered Rounds One and Two of the Oman International Drift Championship (OIDC). Selfies, autographs, and animated discussions flowed freely, solidifying the deep bond between these motorsport heroes and their passionate fans.

Beyond the Parade:

Supercar Showcase: Dazzling arrays of the world's most

prestigious and luxurious supercars, each a marvel of engineering and automotive excellence, were on display for all to admire in a static showcase.

Digital Drift Motorsports Competition: Beyond the roar of engines and the smoke-filled spectacle, the Drift Car Parade embraced the cutting edge of motorsport with the Digital Drift Motorsports Competition. In a mesmerising display of virtual ability, skilled e-racers battled it out on simulated tracks,

replicating the adrenaline-pumping thrills of drifting in the digital realm.

More than just drifting:

The Drift Car Parade excelled expectations. It wasn't just about drifting; it was a celebration of passion, skill, and the raw power of automobiles. From the smoke-filled drifts to the thunderous backfires, the event etched itself into the memories of all who witnessed it, leaving them desire for the next smoke-filled, adrenaline-pumping spectacle.

Alcaraz to have tests on injured ankle after Rio Open retirement

RIO DE JANEIRO: World number two Carlos Alcaraz is to have tests on his ankle after sustaining an injury that forced him to retire from his Rio Open first-round match against Thiago Monteiro on Tuesday.

Alcaraz needed medical attention after twisting his right ankle on the second point of the contest, but the 20-year-old returned to the court a little later with heavy strapping.

He played through the pain and managed to break Brazilian Monteiro's serve but retired after



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz gestures after suffering an injury during the ATP 500 Rio Open tennis.— AFP

being broken in the next game as the match ended with the score at 1-1.

"Tomorrow I'll have a test for my ankle and let's see if it's something serious or not," Alcaraz told reporters.

"I felt bad. That was the first impression I had. I was feeling pain once I fell down, so I thought it was going to be difficult to continue if I was still having those feelings.

"After a few points it didn't feel better. I couldn't move well and I knew that it was going to be

impossible to continue. I thought it was going to get worse if I kept playing for such a long match and that's why I choose to retire."

Top seed Alcaraz won the Rio title in 2022 and was runner-up last year, when he lost to Briton Cameron Norrie. He arrived in Rio after losing to Chilean Nicolas Jarry in the semi-finals of last week's Buenos Aires Open.

Alcaraz announced earlier on Tuesday that he would play at the Queen's Club Championships before defending his Wimbledon title in July. — Reuters

OOTC begins quarter-finals today



MUSCAT: The quarter-final round of the Oman Open Tennis Championship (OOTC), organised by the Oman Tennis Federation, concludes today on the tennis courts at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

With participation of more than 130 Player from Male, Female, girls, boys, veterans men's and women's from various nationalities residing in the Sultanate of Oman and national team players.

The quarter-finals of the tournament continued for three days of competition between players in the various categories, the tournament witnesses exciting and beautiful competitions between players.

The doubles competitions also began, which today will witness a number of important matches in various categories and ages.

The results of the under 14 boys category came with player Ahmed Ehab defeating player Abdulrahman al Rahbi with a score of 6/2 - 6/3, and player Moataz al Mazrouei beating player Kavin Raj with a score of 6/1 - 6/1 in the quarter-finals.

In the Man's veterans under

50 category in quarter-finals, Saad al Sulaimani defeated the player Giampaolo 6/3 - 6/3. In the women's veterans under 50, The player Elizabeth defeated Giselda with a score of 6/1 - 6/1. In the Man's veterans under 40 quarter-finals - the player Mohammed al Yawri defeated the Indian Suhail Khan 6/2 and 6/1.

The Italian player Giampaolo Calvi said: "Oman tournament was a good occasion to play tennis. I'm Italian and I always played tennis in my life and thanks to Oman tennis federation to organising and officiating this prestigious tournament I'm meeting lots of players with whom I'm enjoying to play tennis with".

"I want to suggest to plan some tennis courts indoor in order to have the chance to play during hot season", he added. "I appreciate the fact that this tournament tournaments there was so many different categories from different ages so that give opportunities all the ages and gender to participate.

In conclusion i hope this will be the first of many more" he ended.

Warm Wishes to His Majesty Emperor Naruhito of Japan on the Occasion of his 64th Birthday

On behalf of all the Members of the Board of the Oman Japan Friendship Association (OJFA), I take this opportunity to convey warm and heartfelt greetings to His Majesty Emperor Naruhito of Japan on the auspicious occasion of the 64th Birthday.

It is a matter of joy that this year Oman is celebrating the fourth anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's Accession Day. Oman under the wise and visionary leadership and guidance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik is making rapid progress on all fronts, guided by Oman Vision 2040. We pray to the Almighty to bless His Majesty with good health and long life.

Celebrating the deep-rooted and long-standing relationship between Oman and Japan is the Oman-Japan Friendship Association (OJFA). Established in January 1974, OJFA, in close cooperation with the Embassy of Japan, has played a pivotal role in nurturing lasting bonds between the two great nations through a range of impactful events and activities in the fields of culture, society, economy, arts and science.

The friendship between Oman and Japan is truly inspiring. It is forged on shared values and mutual respect. It has weathered the test of time, fostering deeper understanding of each nation's rich and diverse culture and heritage. It is interesting to note that our two nations, Oman and Japan, have accomplished a remarkable milestone of sharing this unique relationship for over 50 years. This friendship is testament to the passion, commitment and understanding that continued to play a binding role over the years.

The Oman-Japan Friendship Association has been a distinct platform for cultural exchange and deeper, more meaningful people-to-people connections. The



Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan

association in close cooperation with the Embassy of Japan has held several events that have showcased the inspiring heritage and culture of Japan, here in Oman.

Last year in November, the Ship for World Youth (SWY) Committee-Oman commenced the 14th SWYAA Global Assembly in Muscat under the auspices of Khalid bin Hashil al Muselhi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs. 141 alumni from 25 countries participated in the opening ceremony. SWY is the international youth exchange programme sponsored by the Japanese government, and Oman has been one the most active participating countries.

In the same month, the Oman-Japan Friendship Association, in cooperation with the Embassy of Japan, commenced the Japanese language course conducted by a native Japanese language speaker.

Apart from this, several activities like book launches, specialised workshops for children and more, offered people in Oman opportunities to understand, be inspired and absorb the subtle nuances about the Japanese culture.

Beyond cultural bonds, Oman and Japan have a long-time partnership in the area of trade. Through exports and imports, both Oman and Japan have benefitted with each other's strengths. Japanese advancements in engineering has led to exports of products like machinery, electronics, steel, ion, automotive and more to Oman. Japanese companies have also made their presence felt in Oman through joint ventures in various sectors including the growing energy sector. Similarly, Oman, a nation reputed for its oil and gas, aluminium and fishery products, has remained one of the largest exporters of these products to Japan.

Today on this special occasion, the Oman-Japan Friendship Association reiterates its commitment to taking this beautiful bond of friendship between Oman and Japan to even greater heights.

Once again, on behalf of all the Board members of the Oman-Japan Friendship Association, I once again convey sincere greetings to His Majesty Emperor Naruhito on his 64th birthday. **Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan, Chairman of the Board Oman-Japan Friendship Association**

MESSAGE OF AMBASSADOR H.E. JOTA YAMAMOTO

On the occasion of His Majesty the Emperor's birthday, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and people in Oman and the bilateral relations continued success and prosperity.

Japan got off to a difficult start of year 2024 with an earthquake on Noto Peninsula. During this difficult time, we are all comforted by the thoughtful words from the world, which give us the courage to move towards recovery and reconstruction. I would like to take this opportunity to show my sincere gratitude for your support.

On the fifth anniversary of the accession of His Majesty last year, Their Majesties Emperor and Empress paid a State Visit to Republic of Indonesia. It was Their Majesties' first goodwill visit after ascending the throne and showed their enthusiasm to work in the international arena.

Thirty years ago in 1994, Their Majesties Emperor and Empress, then Crown Prince and Crown Princess, made their first official overseas trip, including Oman. The long-standing relationship between the Imperial Family of Japan and the Royal Family of Oman was further cemented by their visit, and I am confident that it will last in the years to come.

Last year, we have witnessed growing bilateral interactions in various entities. A visit by Ms Yamada Miki, former State Minister of the Environment/Secretary-General of the Oman-Japan Parliamentary Friendship Association, was a symbolic event to demonstrate our diversified connections.

We cannot discuss Japan-Oman relationship without referring to our economic ties. A number of Japanese delegations visited Oman aiming for business opportunities in February and March and organised Japan-Oman business mission. We are privileged to announce some of the business will be materialised shortly.

Collaborative tourism sector between the two countries has also been evolving these days. Saud Bahwan Group is now in full swing to open a Japanese renowned hotel in Muscat. Japanese-styled hot spring spa will be introduced in Ain Al Kasfa, Al Rustaq, a city rich in history and



H.E. JOTA YAMAMOTO

culture. Speaking of one-of-a-kind product from Japan, Seiko opened its first boutique at Mall of Oman.

As Oman is gearing up for developing clean energy in line with Oman Vision 2040, Japanese companies stand in support of their efforts. Kobe Steel, Ltd and Mitsui & Co, Ltd signed a deal with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) for the production of direct reduced iron. Marubeni Corporation under Salalah H2 Consortium agreed with Hydrom on studies for Green Ammonia. What makes unique in our ties is the Japanese liquefied hydrogen carrier's port call during its world tour.

Our interactions have extended to defence, sports, culture, academic sectors and more. Bilateral defence authorities dialogue paved the way for future cooperation and exchanges, followed by a recent visit of Admiral Sakai Ryo, Chief of Staff, Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force. I was honoured to present the Japan Foreign Minister's Commendation to Oman Karate Committee in the presence of many distinguished Majlis Ash'shura members last December.

An exhibition to showcase Japan's proud cuisine, sushi, was held in cooperation with the Ministry of

Culture, Sports and Youth. A Japanese professor delivered lectures on international politics at the National Defence College and Diplomatic Academy. Works by archaeologists at historic sites in Oman were huge success as in the previous years.

We made a leap forward in many fields, and I have to highlight that we could successfully resume a long-awaited Japanese language course for people in Muscat. After nearly four-year suspension, Oman-Japan Friendship Association (OJFA) welcomed a professional Japanese teacher in November and the course has already attracted many active learners.

OJFA underwent a transformation last year with a new Chairman, Shaikh Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan. I would show my great respect and appreciation to Shaikh Mohammed Saud Bahwan for his leadership during the tenure to steer his team towards success. I am committed to working close with Shaikh Abdullah and OJFA to bring our friendship to a next level.

As more and more people start to see Japan as their academic destination, the Embassy of Japan participated in the education fairs, GHEDEX and EduTrac Oman for the first time and staged a campaign 'study-in-Japan' to meet a high demand. At these events, strong interaction with people was also demonstrated by an Omani alumni who studied in Japan. Their firsthand experiences motivated visitors, and I could reaffirm the importance of people-to-people ties.

Year 2023 concluded with another milestone event where Oman officially announced its participation for Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai. High-ranking delegation has repeatedly visited Japan to prepare for the event and more is expected to follow this year. Expo 2025 showcases arts and culture of the world, and at the same time, it will serve as a catalyst for the closer bonds of people.



OMAN JAPAN FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION

Congratulations and Warm wishes to the people of Japan on the occasion of the 64th Birthday of His Majesty Emperor Naruhito





Inspiring Values. Timeless Bond of Friendship.

The two great nations Oman and Japan share a deep-rooted relationship built on trust and mutual respect. This relationship that has grown from strength to strength for centuries has also offered several opportunities for growth and success.

The Oman Japan Friendship Association has actively played a responsible role in bringing the people of both nations closer by celebrating the rich heritage and culture of Oman and Japan. Through periodic cultural events, book fairs and more, the association strives to foster a broader understanding, appreciation and friendship between the people of both the nations.

Today on this special occasion, the Oman Japan Friendship Association reiterates its commitment to taking this beautiful bond of friendship between Oman and Japan to even greater heights.



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Oman's latest ferrochrome project starts trial operations at SOHAR Freezone



View of Oman's first ferrochrome smelter, which was launched at SOHAR Freezone in 2013.

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 21

A new low-carbon ferrochrome project has commenced trial operations at SOHAR Freezone, bolstering Oman's credentials as a regional ferrochrome production powerhouse.

Gulf Alloys and Metals (FZC) LLC began a trial run of its 10,000 tonnes per annum (tpa) capacity ferrochrome alloy plant at the free zone last month, according to a key shareholder in the venture.

Oman Chromite, a publicly traded company, which has a 20% shareholding in Gulf Alloys and Metals, said the eventual commercialisation of the project — anticipated during the current year — is anticipated to spur the company's annual revenue growth.

Set up on a 37,000 m2 site at the free zone, Gulf Alloys & Metals' \$9 million-worth plant utilises chrome ore and calcined lime, sourced from local producers, to produce low-carbon ferrochrome — an alloy of iron and chromium used primarily for stainless steel production.

The alloy is extensively used in the manufacture of parts for airplanes, automobiles, consumer electronics and Oil & Gas hardware, among other types of equipment and machinery, making it a pivotal commodity for further value addition through downstream investments in SOHAR among other locations in Oman.

Low carbon ferrochrome blended with silicon metal also has wide applications in the production of special steels for the aerospace, oil and gas and automotive industries.

Significantly, the project is the latest in a burgeoning cluster of industries operating in the production of ferrochrome and related alloys, effectively reinforcing the free zone's reputation as a leading manufacturing hub for such alloys.

Another investor, Safe Alloys, is also developing a 16,500 tpa capacity low-carbon ferrochrome plant at SOHAR Freezone with an investment of around \$18 million.

The company had signed a sharia-compliant financing agreement with a local lender to help fund the construction of the project. Output from the plant, when operational, is earmarked for export to Europe, the United States, South Korea, Japan and India.

Ferrochrome smelting in SOHAR Freezone began in 2013 when Al Tamman Indsil Ferrochrome LLC, a joint venture of Muscat Overseas Group and Indsil Group of India, brought its 75,000 tpa high carbon ferrochrome smelter into operation that year.

It was the first ferroalloy production in Oman and the first ferrochrome plant in the GCC.

Local capacity-building pivotal to growth of semiconductor industry in Oman

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, FEB 21

Local capacity building is the next key step in developing the semiconductor industry in the Sultanate of Oman, according to Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary for Communications and Information Technology at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT).

Speaking at the recent 2024 MoTCIT Media Gathering, Dr Al Shaithani shed some insight on the status of the sector in the country, "Last year, we hosted a major conference where we invited semiconductor executives from around the world to come to Oman to explore what can be done here in the semiconductor industry.

As you know, the semiconductor industry has a wide value chain, spanning from designing chips to manufacturing and distribution and in between. There are numerous other aspects in the semiconductor industry."

"So for us, it was important that we assess our situation and understand our competitive



Omani engineers working on the country's first indigenously designed integrated chips at a facility in Muscat.

advantage throughout the conference and our discussions with different companies in Oman and abroad. We've also invited the third largest semiconductor company in the world, SK Hynix, to explore different investment opportunities," he added.

According to Dr Al Shaithani, more emphasis will be given to chip design and capacity building. "The way forward is to focus on design and to put more effort into capacity building."

Additionally, he shared that the Ministry has plans of attracting more semiconductor companies to Oman, which will

only be possible if there is an enhancement in the skillsets of graduates.

"We have currently have an existing company and we are looking for more companies to come to the country. But we will need to work on upskilling our graduates, specifically graduates in electronics engineering, computer engineering, and so on. We need to upskill them to be able to work in such world-class companies."

Earlier this year, Oman was successful in designing the first microchips "Oman-1" and "Oman-2" in collaboration with GSME Oman — the local affiliate of global semiconductor company GS Micro Electronics — as part of an agreement between the company and the Ministry of Labour, which also entailed the training of 100 young Omanis.

Oman's keen venture into the global semiconductor industry — which was valued at almost \$600 billion in 2021 — is part of its plans to boost its digital economy, which is expected to contribute a 3 per cent share of the local GDP by 2025, 5 per cent in 2035 and 10 per cent in 2040.

The sector currently contributes to 2 per cent of the country's GDP.

CMA eyes AI-driven insurance growth, prioritising consumer protection in Oman

AI automation may displace some current professions, but it also opens doors to entirely new career paths: Shaikh Abdullah al Salmi

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 21

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) in Oman sees Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a transformative force for the insurance sector, but emphasises responsible implementation to protect policyholders and maintain institutional stability.

Speaking at the 34th General Arab Insurance Federation (GAIF) Conference, underway at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, CMA Executive President Shaikh Abdullah bin Salim al Salmi highlighted AI's potential for advancements in underwriting, actuarial analysis, and customer service.

He stressed the shared responsibility among stakeholders



CMA Executive President Shaikh Abdullah al Salmi takes part in a panel discussion during the GAIF Conference in Muscat.

to use this technology ethically.

Acknowledging the rapid development of AI, Al Salmi assured the public that the CMA is actively developing regulatory frameworks.

"These frameworks will protect data privacy for both service providers and beneficiaries," he stated. Further demonstrating the CMA's commitment to innovation, Al Salmi explained their approach: "Our regulations allow companies to explore new activities responsibly, with regulations implemented based on local market experience."

The CMA and Central Bank of Oman are also collaborating to create an experimental environment for FinTech services in insurance, capital markets, and the broader financial sector.

This proactive approach

positions Oman to leverage AI responsibly, driving insurance sector growth while safeguarding consumer interests and institutional stability.

While AI offers potent tools for regulatory authorities, navigating its impact on the insurance industry requires careful oversight and ethical considerations.

AI automation may displace some current professions, but it also opens doors to entirely new career paths. The key lies in upskilling the workforce with specialised expertise for the AI-driven digital insurance revolution.

The challenge lies in finding the right balance between fostering innovation and mitigating risks.

Allowing insurers to explore AI-powered initiatives can spur creative problem-solving and generate valuable insights.

These real-world experiments can then inform the development of nuanced regulations for a vibrant and responsible AI-powered insurance market.

Ooredoo offers corporate customers enterprise brand protection



Ooredoo and Resecurity officials are seen during the signing ceremony.

MUSCAT: Committed to robust cybersecurity measures to secure our customer's assets in an increasingly digital, interconnected world, Ooredoo offers its corporate customers a next-generation platform for enterprise brand protection from Resecurity.

Through its unified platform, Resecurity protects clients from data breaches and cyberattacks by providing intelligence-driven offerings that are specific to every client's unique set of digital transformation challenges.

Saeed al Lawati, Director of Business Marketing at Ooredoo, said, "In today's interconnected world and with a growing dependence on technology, corporate and government organisations are future-proofing their digital ecosystems by protecting themselves against the increasing sophistication of cyberattacks.

This latest exclusive offering from Ooredoo means that we are providing the latest-innovative solutions tailored to robustly protect our customers from the most sophisticated cyber-attacks."

Resecurity delivers its unified platform for brand protection, risk management, and threat intelligence for large enterprises and government agencies worldwide and invests in big data, artificial intelligence, and data science.

The platform, offered exclusively by Ooredoo in Oman, will enable customers to detect and mitigate tomorrow's cybersecurity threats today as it can solve not one, but many challenges.

Hublot expands its presence in Oman and Middle East markets

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, FEB 21

Hublot, the renowned Swiss luxury watchmaker, is strategically positioning itself for expansion in Oman and the broader Middle East region under the guidance of David Tedeschi, the Regional Director for Latin America, Middle East and Africa.

In a recent interview with *Observer*, Tedeschi elaborated on Hublot's endeavours in Oman, shedding light on the pivotal factors that have propelled the brand's success and delineating its future expansion plans.

When considering Hublot's decision to widen its footprint in Oman, several factors played a pivotal role in shaping this strategic move.

Tedeschi underscored the burgeoning market potential in the Middle East, highlighting the distinctive appeal and connection that Hublot felt with local partners, particularly the esteemed Khimji family and Dharmesh Khimji (Managing Director of Al Mistal).

This collaborative effort bore fruit, paving the way for the brand to establish a showroom in the heart of Al Mistal, in Al Qurum, resonating with the discerning Omani clientele who possess a deep appreciation for luxury timepieces, particularly those crafted by Hublot.

To effectively capture the essence of the Omani market, Hublot has meticulously crafted product strategies and fine-tuned its brand positioning to align with local preferences. Tedeschi accentuated the ardent affinity of Omani "Hublotistas" towards the brand's ethos of youthfulness and innovation.

By curating limited-edition watches exclusively tailored for the Omani market, Hublot showcases its unwavering commitment to serving the local clientele while staying true to its global growth strategy anchored in innovation and exclusivity.

Looking towards the horizon, Hublot is steadfast in its pursuit of long-term strategic objectives through a steadfast commitment



(From left to right) Mistal Managing Director Dharmesh Ajit Khimji, HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers and David Tedeschi, Hublot Regional Director for Latin America, Middle East and Africa pose for a photo at the Hublot showroom in Al Mistal, Al Qurum.



Hublot underscores its commitment to honouring the rich heritage and traditions of Oman with the image of Omani Khanjar engraved on the watch.

to innovation and the introduction of captivating new offerings that cater to the evolving tastes of consumers in the region.

Tedeschi reiterated the significance of staying abreast of market trends and unleashing a spectrum of novelties to satiate the discerning palates of Hublot aficionados in Oman.

By unveiling the latest collections and orchestrating dedicated launches, Hublot aims to fortify its brand presence and captivate luxury watch enthusiasts in the region with its cutting-edge timepieces.

Navigating the landscape of setting up a branch in Oman

comes laden with a unique tapestry of opportunities and challenges for Hublot.

Despite the relatively modest size of the Omani market, Tedeschi perceives it as a crucial locale within the brand's global strategy.

Through strategic collaborations and partnerships, Hublot has deftly enhanced its visibility in Oman by infusing elements of Omani culture into its special edition timepieces.

By melding the artistry of local engraving techniques inspired by traditional Omani Khanjar (a symbol of pride, power and honour in Omani culture), Hublot

underscores its commitment to respecting the rich heritage and traditions of the region.

Concerning expansion plans, while Hublot has recently revamped its showroom in Oman to cater to its burgeoning clientele, the focus remains on strengthening its presence in Oman while concurrently eyeing further expansion opportunities in key markets like Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

With an array of new projects in the pipeline and a keen eye on emerging luxury markets, Hublot is well-positioned to bolster its foothold in the region and continue its legacy of delivering unparalleled timepieces to watch enthusiasts.

Hublot's innovative approach, strategic collaborations, and dedication to catering to local market nuances position the brand for sustained growth and success in Oman and the broader Middle East region.

As the brand continuously evolves and adapts to the dynamic consumer landscape, Hublot remains a beacon of luxury and sophistication, catering to the refined preferences of watch aficionados worldwide with its unparalleled craftsmanship and timeless elegance.



BankDhofar partners with The Entertainer

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, the leading bank in Oman, has partnered with The Entertainer, the lifestyle savings app, to offer exclusive offers to its customers. Accessed through BankDhofar's Entertainer mobile app, Al Riadah (credit & debit cards) and Al Rifaa credit cardholders can enjoy several instant discounts, from personalised deals to thousands of exclusive 2 for 1 offers throughout Oman and GCC.

This collaboration reflects BankDhofar's commitment to providing its customers with unparalleled value and enriching their lives through unique experiences.

Through the BankDhofar Entertainer app, the cardholders will unlock a world of savings on everyday activities, from enjoying delicious meals at top restaurants to thrilling adventures and relaxing spa treatments.

Bilal bin Faiz al Raiisi, AGM - Cards & Bancassurance of BankDhofar said: "We are glad to partner with the The Entertainer and bring their comprehensive platform of benefits to our valued customers.

This collaboration aligns perfectly with our commitment to exceeding customer expectations and providing our Al Riadah and Al Rifaa customers with rewarding experiences beyond traditional banking services."

Vaibhav Goel, Chief Revenue Officer (B2B) of The Entertainer added, "We are extremely excited to collaborate with BankDhofar. It reflects a shared understanding that fantastic value can be unlocked when creating a unique app with BankDhofar. The Entertainer brings all benefits and exciting offers forming a seamless and intuitive customer banking experience."

To activate the BankDhofar Entertainer App benefits, BankDhofar customers simply need to download the BankDhofar's Entertainer app and register using their BankDhofar's Al Riadah (credit & debit cards) and Al Rifaa credit cards details. They will then have instant access to a multitude of exciting offers, making every day an opportunity to save and discover something new.

Wide demand for Omani products at Gulfood 2024

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman's pavilion at the Gulf Food Exhibition (Gulfood 2024), which is held in Dubai, is witnessing a wide demand for the products of Omani companies and factories specialised in the food industries sector.

The exhibition is one of the largest annual food and hospitality trade exhibitions in the world. The Sultanate of Oman is represented by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn).

A number of marketing and sales officials in Omani companies and factories present at Gulfood 2024 in Oman's pavilion pointed out the prominent role that specialised food exhibitions play in expanding the spread of the Omani product around the world in general, and the positive future results that participation reflects on it by being present side by side with a large group of regional and international companies in



The Sultanate of Oman is represented by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn).

particular.

Badr al Rashidi, Marketing Director at A'Saffa Foods, explained that the company is

present at the Gulfood exhibition for the seventh time because this exhibition presents an opportunity for companies to

learn about the most important modern technologies used in the field of the poultry industry in particular and food in general.

It is also a good opportunity to get to know new customers and markets.

In addition to identifying new companies in the field of shipping, export and storage, and introducing the company's various products of meat, chicken, sausages, burgers, fruits and vegetables.

For his part, Abdullah al Ghaithi, Sales Director at Luban Foods Company (Delicio), pointed out that the Gulfood exhibition helps the company's products and facilitates its expansion by communicating with investors and entrepreneurs from the region in particular and international ones in general.

Delicio is an Omani product and is currently present in the Gulf market, indicating that the company seeks, through these exhibitions, to reach beyond the Gulf markets.

Rami al Lawati, CEO of

the Unique Food Solutions Corporation (Zaheb) said: The Corporation is considered one of the most promising projects in food security in the Sultanate of Oman, and specialises in the field of meat processing, and is gradually seeking global expansion.

The company began last year with its participation in the Gulfood exhibition alongside SMEs that are participating this year with large projects specialised in the food industry sector.

Zakaria al Hassani, CEO of the International Marine Products Company (SEMAG), explained that the Fisheries Development Oman's participation in Gulfood will contribute to highlighting the potential of the seafood sector in Oman, as the company provides opportunities that include providing white label products to retail stores and canning services.

— ONA

Salalah Free Zone signs five investment pacts totalling RO 44 million



MUSCAT: Salalah Free Zone recently signed five agreements totalling RO 44 million, marking the initiation of five new investments.

These agreements span from Oman to Hong Kong, Jordan to Kuwait, and beyond, showcasing the free zone's growing global partnerships that are shaping a brighter economic landscape.

The first agreement was inked with Naseem Salalah Trade and Processing Industries LLC to establish a factory for the production of paper towels, with a substantial investment value of RO 38 million. Following this, a deal was struck with Kuwaiti Engineering Industries Company to set up a factory for air conditioning units under the brand "Moraya," with an investment of RO 4.56 million.

Moving on, a partnership was solidified with Tawfeeq Medical Supplies Company from Jordan to establish a factory for the production and packaging of sugar strips, with an investment value of RO 760,000.

Additionally, an agreement with Wadi Hawjar from Oman was made to establish a factory for mixing and producing raw materials from frankincense derivatives, as well as packing products like soap and frankincense oil, with an investment value of RO 247,000.

Finally, the fifth agreement symbolises a commitment to sustainable business practices and global partnerships, as a deal was signed with Green Stream Solution Company from Hong Kong to establish an import, re-bagging and export company for potash fertilisers, with an investment of RO 57,000.

These agreements mark a significant step towards fostering economic growth and collaboration with companies across the globe.

Oman's industrial sector advances through automation and innovation

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) is dedicated to enhancing the country's industrial sector and boosting its contribution to the local GDP.

By continuously updating laws, providing support to Omani factories through facilities and exemptions, and addressing sector challenges, the ministry aims to drive growth and sustainability.

Initiatives focused on localising investments, creating value addition and embracing advanced technologies like Factory Automation and Artificial Intelligence are at the forefront of Oman's industrial strategy.

The current emphasis on 'Factory Automation and Artificial Intelligence' as the theme for Oman's Industry Day highlights the country's commitment to advancing its industrial landscape.

By promoting the adoption of these technologies, the ministry envisions improved production efficiency, enhanced product competitiveness and adherence to global best practices.

This strategic move aligns with global trends towards the Fourth Industrial Revolution and underscores the importance of modernisation for economic development. Recognising the pivotal role of the industrial sector in economic diversification and the Oman Vision 2040 goals, the MoCIIP stresses the necessity of integrating Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies to maintain competitiveness and foster innovation.

The recent launch of the 'Factory Automation and



The value-added efforts and focus on non-oil revenue sources align with Oman's economic diversification strategy.



Mazin al Siyabi



Ahmed al Barwani



Prof Ghassan al Kindi

Artificial Intelligence' initiative aims to elevate local industries by promoting operational excellence and advanced technology adoption among both new and existing factories.

As Oman celebrates its Industrial Day, stakeholders acknowledge the sector's growth and success, driven by supportive policies and collaborative efforts.

The manufacturing sector's significant progress reflects the positive outcomes of government initiatives and private sector engagement, leading to enhanced productivity, quality and competitiveness.

Notably, the value-added efforts and focus on non-oil revenue sources align with Oman's economic diversification strategy.

Key industry figures like Mazin al Siyabi highlight the manufacturing sector's transformation into a vital economic driver, reducing reliance on oil revenues.

Initiatives such as the Value-Added Localisation Programme aim to boost local industries, expand production capacities and increase contributions to the GDP.

The launch of the 'Made in Oman' electronic platform further promotes local products,

streamlining certification processes and endorsing Omani quality standards.

Professor Ghassan al Kindi emphasises the importance of innovation, artificial intelligence and research in advancing Oman's industrial capabilities.

Embracing automation and Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies is seen as crucial for sustainable growth and global competitiveness.

The proactive approach of the MoCIIP to assess and qualify industrial companies for technology adoption underscores the government's commitment

to upgrading production processes and creating skilled job opportunities for Omanis.

Investing in skills development is a cornerstone of Oman's industrial strategy, as highlighted by Ahmed al Barwani of the Sectorial Skills Unit for the industrial sector.

By identifying skill needs, setting national standards and accrediting programs, the unit aims to build a competitive workforce and enhance sector competitiveness.

Collaboration with various stakeholders and a focus on continuous skill improvement are vital for the sector's growth and contribution to the national economy.

Looking ahead, partnerships between the public and private sectors are essential for attracting investments, supporting exports and enhancing product competitiveness.

The upcoming transition to more advanced industries necessitates training and preparation for the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Leveraging modern technologies, market trends and scientific research will be key to driving industrial development, reducing costs and preserving the environment.

Oman's industrial sector is poised for growth and innovation through automation and technology adoption. By embracing change, investing in skills and fostering collaboration, Oman aims to position itself as a hub for industrial excellence and economic diversification in line with its Vision 2040 objectives.

Omantel launches national cloud

MUSCAT: Omantel, in cooperation with Huawei, yesterday launched a national cloud that provides the latest global technologies and expertise and enhances the security and hosting of local data for various sectors that include government institutions and companies, including the financial sector, energy, health, and others.

The national cloud was designed to be in line with the requirements of the digital revolution, such as smart cities, smart banking services, smart campuses, government data solutions, smart education and digital human solutions.

This will accelerate digital transformation and support the digital economy in the Sultanate of Oman. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

Eng Aladdin bin Abdullah Bait Fadel, Chief Commercial Officer at Omantel, said, "The company seeks to provide its system with the latest technologies and integrated solutions, explaining that the national cloud will open new horizons for Omantel subscribers to keep pace with developments and obtain services with a high level of quality and security."



The ceremony was held under the auspices of Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.



The national cloud will accelerate digital transformation and support the digital economy in Oman.

He added, "The cloud will provide the best global practices in this field to ensure data security while ensuring that the data is hosted in the Sultanate of Oman, noting that this partnership will contribute positively to the digital economy, and the national cloud

project will enable various public sector institutions, in particular, it supports the goals of Oman Vision 2040."

For his part, Qi Xiao, CEO of Business Computing Business in the Middle East and Central Asia at Huawei — Oman, said, "This

THE NATIONAL CLOUD WAS DESIGNED TO BE IN LINE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION, SUCH AS SMART CITIES, SMART BANKING SERVICES, SMART CAMPUSES, GOVERNMENT DATA SOLUTIONS, SMART EDUCATION, AND DIGITAL HUMAN SOLUTIONS.

partnership comes after the two companies achieved during the recent period the implementation of many successful projects in the Sultanate of Oman, and that the company's choice to support Omantel in the cloud is one of the projects of great importance at the national level, which will play a major role in digital transformation." — **ONA**

Automatic invoice verification system launched in Oman

MUSCAT: A leading IT-enabled service (ITES) provider in Oman, Infoline, is dedicated to transforming business operations by redefining processes and technology to create value for a diverse range of clients from both government and private sectors.

In their latest innovation, Infoline, along with their partner, has introduced an Automatic Invoice Verification System for a client in the utility sector, poised to revolutionise transaction processes.

This system establishes Infoline as a pioneer in technological advancements in the sector.

Muadh al Aimairi, Commercial Vice-President at Infoline, highlighted the significance of operational efficiency and precise handling of transactions within the power and water sector.

He emphasised that the Automatic Invoice Verification System signifies a revolutionary shift in addressing transactions within these critical industries.

The system, set to be the country's first centralised smart system for power and water production companies, is designed to automate and verify invoices from 25 generators throughout Oman, ensuring alignment with contractual commitments and reducing errors in manual calculations.

This initiative aims to streamline the labour-intensive process, reduce errors, and expedite payment cycles.

Navigating economic resilience: Insights from CBO’s 2023 macroeconomic stability report

FARAH ANWAR

The Central Bank of Oman’s (CBO) latest Macroeconomic Stability Report for 2023 unveils a comprehensive overview of Oman’s economic performance, and thoroughly examines its adept manoeuvring through turbulent times.

Beyond the conventional metrics, the report delves into Oman’s strategic responses to unforeseen challenges, highlighting its ability to navigate economic uncertainties and emerge stronger.

According to the report amid a constantly evolving global economic landscape, the Sultanate of Oman has demonstrated remarkable

resilience and adaptability.

The CBO’s Macroeconomic Stability Report for 2023 highlights Oman’s ability to leverage oil market opportunities, diversify its economy, and maintain stability in external balances despite declining reserves.

Proactive policies in managing inflation risks and improving sovereign ratings underscore Oman’s commitment to economic stability and growth.

According to the report, despite facing a global economic slowdown marred by inflationary pressures and energy supply bottlenecks, Oman seized opportunities within the oil market.

Leveraging its strengths, the country capitalised on surging oil prices to foster growth across oil

and non-oil sectors. This surge bolstered public finances and propelled Oman into a surplus, a testament to its resilience in the face of adversity.

DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

The report reveals that Oman’s economic resurgence in 2022 was fuelled by robust growth in nominal GDP, primarily driven by rebounding oil prices.

While the hydrocarbon sector played a pivotal role, Oman’s commitment to diversification was evident through contributions from non-hydrocarbon sectors.

This diversified economic landscape underscores Oman’s dedication to sustainable growth beyond traditional oil dependency.

As highlighted in the report

there was a remarkable reversal in Oman’s external balance, transitioning from deficit to surplus, marked a significant milestone.

Fuelled by improvements in the merchandise trade balance, Oman’s adaptive capacity in navigating global trade dynamics shines through.

This resilience positions Oman as a reliable player on the international economic stage, capable of weathering external shocks.

As stated in the report, Oman’s prudent financial management is evident in its maintenance of vital external buffers despite declining foreign exchange reserves. The stability of Oman’s fixed peg to the US dollar instils confidence and mitigates the impact of imported inflation.

This steadfast stability underscores Oman’s commitment to ensuring price stability amidst global economic fluctuations.

The report highlights Oman’s ability to maintain moderate inflation rates showcases its proactive policies. Measures such as the fixed exchange rate regime and subsidies on essential goods shield Oman’s citizens from the adverse effects of inflation, demonstrating the country’s unwavering dedication to economic stability.

SOVEREIGN RATINGS

Furthermore, the report indicates the upward trajectory of Oman’s sovereign ratings reflects significant improvements in its economic fundamentals.

Fiscal discipline, external balance, and macroeconomic

stability have collectively contributed to lowering perceived country risk, bolstering Oman’s position in the global financial landscape.

In conclusion, Oman’s proactive approach, combined with its prudent financial management and adaptive capabilities, positions the country well for continued economic resilience and growth.

As Oman navigates global economic uncertainties, the insights gleaned from the CBO’s Macroeconomic Stability Report for 2023 serve as guiding beacons, illuminating a path toward sustainable growth and stability.

(The writer is a Pakistan-based researcher and financial analyst and can be reached at farahanwar666@gmail.com)

Will food prices stop rising quickly? Many companies say yes

Few prices are as visible to Americans as the ones they encounter at the grocery store or drive-thru window, which is why two years of rapid food inflation have been a major drag for US households and the Biden administration.

Shoppers have only slowly regained confidence in the state of the economy as they pay more to fill up their carts, and President Joe Biden has made a habit of shaming food companies — even filming a Super Bowl on Sunday video criticising snack producers for their “rip-off” prices.

But now, the trend in grocery and restaurant inflation appears to be on the cusp of changing. After months of rapid increase, the cost of food at home climbed at a notably slower clip in January.

And from packaged food providers to restaurant chains, companies across the food business are reporting that they are no longer raising prices as steeply.

In some cases that’s because consumers are finally pushing back against price increases after years of spending through them. In others, it’s because the prices that companies pay for inputs such as packaging and labour are no longer rising as sharply.

Even if food inflation cools, it does not mean that your grocery bill or restaurant check will get smaller: It just means it will stop climbing so quickly. Most companies are planning smaller price increases rather than outright price cuts.

Still, when it comes to the question of whether rapid jumps in grocery and restaurant prices are behind us, what executives are telling investors offer some reason for hope.

Executives have found in recent months that they can raise prices only so high before consumers cut back.

Soda and snack maker PepsiCo had raised prices by double-digit percentages for seven straight quarters, and while that streak ended at the close of 2023, PepsiCo still raised prices



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EVEN IF FOOD INFLATION COOLS, IT DOES NOT MEAN THAT YOUR GROCERY BILL OR RESTAURANT CHECK WILL GET SMALLER: IT JUST MEANS IT WILL STOP CLIMBING SO QUICKLY. MOST COMPANIES ARE PLANNING SMALLER PRICE INCREASES RATHER THAN OUTRIGHT PRICE CUTS.



People dine at a restaurant in the West Village neighbourhood in Manhattan. – The New York Times

by 9 per cent in the final months of the year.

But all those price jumps on sodas and chips have started to bite. The company recently posted a surprise drop in sales.

Ramon Laguarta, PepsiCo’s CEO, said on a recent earnings call that the company would be less likely to raise prices beyond “normal pricing levels” — around 2 per cent to 3 per cent per year. The firm is seeing milder cost increases on ingredients and is focusing more on keeping sales up, he explained.

James Quincey, CEO of Coca-Cola, explained on a recent earnings call that the company had seen a stark divide among US customers.

Some are under financial stress and are facing a “real spending power squeeze,” while others “still have plenty of money, plenty of purchasing power” to spend on lactose-free milk and protein shakes.

Walmart, the nation’s largest retailer, reported strong US sales in the fourth quarter, in part as more higher-income households turned to the value chain for grocery shopping.

“We continue to see a customer that’s resilient but looking for value,” Doug McMillon, CEO of

Walmart, said during an earnings call on Tuesday.

He noted that prices for food and consumable products were still “slightly” higher than a year ago.

“Prices are lower than a year ago in places like eggs, apples and deli snacks,” he said, “but higher in other places, like asparagus and blackberries.”

Some companies seem to be following the rest of the economy back to more moderate price changes. Overall inflation, as measured by the consumer price index, peaked at 9.1 per cent in summer 2022 but slowed to just 3.1 per cent at the start of this year, while food commodity costs such as beef, grains and some kinds of dairy have been easing.

“Our pricing broadly is coming down in line with kind of inflation getting back to what I’ll call more normal levels,” Ian Borden, chief financial officer at McDonald’s, said on a call with investors. (McDonald’s executives also noted that they were seeing some lower-income customers spend less per visit.)

Shake Shack, the burger and ice cream chain, is planning on raising prices by 2.5 per cent this year — a return to the sort of increases that were normal before

the pandemic, Katie Fogertey, the company’s chief financial officer, said on a recent earnings call.

But she noted that some stores would need to raise prices by more than that to offset increasing costs. In particular, that is true in markets where workers are hard to find and bigger price increases are needed to “offset wage inflationary pressures,” she said.

Such comments underline an important point. Many companies have taken advantage of inflation to pad profits, but for the past several years, some portion of grocery and restaurant price increases has been aimed at covering higher costs.

Wages have been rising rapidly in the hospitality and retail sectors, and key ingredients had been expensive amid supply-chain problems, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and bouts of avian flu.

Companies typically at least try to raise prices when the cost of doing business climbs to avoid losing profits.

But as wage and input cost pressures begin to fade, companies can stop aggressively lifting prices without risking a hit to their bottom line.

Of course, there is a way to cover higher costs without

raising prices: Companies can improve their productivity, so that each worker can stock more shelves, flip more burgers or wait more tables. That is, partly, what Wendy’s is doing.

The fast-food chain is rolling out digital menus, hoping they enable “immediate benefits to order accuracy, improve crew experience” and allow for sales growth, Kirk Tanner, the company’s CEO, said on a recent earnings call.

Wendy’s also plans to try out “dynamic pricing,” he said, using technology to change prices to meet consumer demand. Another company executive suggested that the company expected “low, single-digit prices” this year.

Taken together, the signs suggest that grocery and restaurant inflation is likely to prove more moderate in 2024 than it was in the previous three years.

Many food-related input costs are either coming down or jumping less aggressively. Wage gains remain elevated in food service, but they are cooling back toward normal. And consumers are beginning to push back on the kind of big price increases that firms were using to pad their profit margins.

— The New York Times

Tumbling US natural gas prices prove unstoppable

TEXAS: For nearly a year, US natural gas producers have slammed the brakes on production as prices fall.

But relentless output gains including from oil companies that pump gas as an oil byproduct have unleashed record supplies. In the oil versus gas contest, gas producers are losing out.

Some are shutting in wells, cancelling projects or selling themselves to rivals to avoid losses. Natural gas prices this month fell to an inflation-adjusted 30-year low of \$1.59 per thousand cubic feet, benefitting consumers of the fuel like utilities, but hurting producers who are selling at nominal prices as low as they were in the depths of the Covid-19 downturn.

Nowhere is the pain of cheap gas as evident as Denver-based BKV Corp. In the last five years, it spent \$2.7 billion to acquire 4,000 gas wells and two gas-fired power plants. It also pledged \$250 million to build a dozen underground carbon capture and storage sites to make its gas more



Illustration shows model of LNG tanker and the US flag in this illustration. – Reuters

climate friendly.

The nosedive in US gas prices has stalled BKV's plans for an initial public offering and scuttled the carbon joint venture with

Verde CO2 to couple its gas and power plants with carbon sequestration. BKV last year narrowly avoided loan defaults with a \$150 million bailout by its

parent.

Majority-owned by Thailand power giant Banpu Public Co, the little-known BKV in 2016 began buying scores of US gas wells,

taking castoffs from oil producers' Exxon Mobil, Devon Energy and others.

"We absolutely want to be the biggest natural gas producer in the country. That's my ambition," BKV Chief Executive Christopher Kalnin said in an interview here in December at its first carbon-sequestration site.

BKV's profits soared to \$410 million in 2022 on strong natural gas prices after Russia's attack on Ukraine spurred huge demand for exports of liquefied US gas.

The company launched a plan to build a US version of its Thai parent, tying together natural gas and power. The plan included an IPO to help finance the gas-to-power expansion and a complement of carbon-burying wells.

But BKV fell back to earth under prices suffering from a relentless expansion of US natural gas output. Its profit fell to about \$79 million in its most-recently reported nine-month period. US gas firms last year cut drilling 22 per cent to stem the gusher.

But the flows keep coming: The US will pump 105 billion cubic feet a day of gas this year, up 2.5 billion cubic feet a day in the last year.

That increase is enough to fuel 12.5 million US homes for a day. In most industries, volume increases are good. More production equals more profit.

But rising output has overwhelmed efforts to curtail drilling and even demand from frigid temperatures, leading to a price drop that knocked US gas recently to less than a third of 2022's average \$6.50 per million British thermal units. By contrast, benchmark WTI crude prices fell just 17 per cent.

Oil prices have held steadier thanks to global supply cuts by major Opec producers and their allies. But soaring gas production, especially from oil companies who view gas as a byproduct of their output, has proven "relatively insensitive to prices," said Nicholas O'Grady, CEO of US shale gas explorer Northern Oil and Gas. — Reuters

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ANNOUNCEMENT

ANNOUNCEMENT OF AMENDMENT TO THE LEGAL FORM

Based on the provisions of Article 13 of the law 18/2019 and its amendments announces, the company (Aal Tech Marine and Industrial) is registered at Commercial Registry under the number (1341764). It is in the process of changing the form of company from Individual Firm/Merchant to SPC (Sole proprietorship company). Anyone who has an objection to this must submit the reasons for his objection to the Secretariat of the Commercial Registry, The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in Muscat within one month from the date of publication of this announcement.





FASHION

A model presents a creation by London-based designer Susan Fang during the Autumn/Winter 2024 collection catwalk presentation during London Fashion Week in London. — AFP



ART

An artist works on a carnival mask at the Venice Art Mask workshop in Shkoder as more than two dozen craftsmen in a quaint studio in northern Albania put the final touches on a series of elegant Venetian masks. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Bollywood actress Alia Bhatt attends the trailer launch of Amazon original series 'Poacher' in Mumbai. — AFP



FILM

Austrian actor David Scheid and Austrian actress Anja Plaschg pose during a photo call for the film Des Teufels Bad (The Devil's Bath) presented in competition at the 74th Berlinale film festival in Berlin. — AFP



TRAVEL

A man pushes a baby carriage near snow-covered trees and plants in a park in Moscow, Russia. — AFP

art & life

THURSDAY | FEBRUARY 22, 2024 | SHAABAN 12, 1445 AH OMAN OBSERVER www.omanobserver.om features@omanobserver.om

OMAN'S INCREDIBLE CALM MAKES THIS WORLD TREKKER FEELS AT HOME

Nico Moro, a 25-year-old Czech-Italian artist, embarked on a soul-searching journey spanning 19 states, including Oman, India and Pakistan, aiming to cover the area between Nepal and his hometown, the Czech Republic. He walked 8,000 kilometres, interacting with people and raising awareness about disabilities... **P20**

FASHION

Milan Fashion Week buyers seek bold designs to spark spending

GLOBAL RETAILERS SAID they were hoping to place orders for bold, eye-catching styles at Milan Fashion Week for the autumn 2024 season, despite a recent trend for so-called "quiet luxury" designs characterised by understated elegance. The clothing trade show, which starts on Tuesday, following New York Fashion

Week and London Fashion Week this month, includes big names such as Giorgio Armani, Dolce & Gabbana and Versace. Global luxury demand has settled down after a strong post-pandemic rebound, with consultancy firm Bain forecasting a "probable scenario" of a 1-per cent to 4-per cent growth in sales this year. "After a period where brands were focused on classicism and simplicity, on 'quiet luxury' and timeless products, I expect a move towards more pronounced creativity," said Federica Montelli, fashion consultant and former head of fashion at Italian high-end department store chain Rinascente. "Given smaller retailers' budgets, I hope they can find a push to go further (over that budget)," she added. The National Chamber for Italian Fashion said this year's event is expected to attract more international buyers than it did before the pandemic, but did not provide figures. Among those buyers will be Bosse Myhr, director of womenswear at British luxury department store chain Selfridges. Myhr said he hopes to see a "fashion moment" for Belgian designer Glenn Martens of Diesel. The Italian streetwear brand sells shimmery denim jackets for



\$995 and stretched leather bootcut trousers for \$950. Some shoppers are tightening their spending on luxury goods amid an economic slowdown and rising prices, said Federico Giglio, Chief Executive of Giglio.com, an Italy-based retailer of high-end looks from Versace and Valentino, among other brands. Given that, "what we expect from the

collections is that designers come up with something new, which can motivate people to spend," he added. Retailers may direct their spending to big-name labels that make the biggest splashes on the runway. "This is a difficult time for emerging brands... because they need strong investments and it takes a risk appetite on the part of buyers that is not there at the moment", Giglio said.

"Quiet luxury" remains the dominant fashion trend, implying higher-priced products and a more affluent customer base, according to a Bank of America research report released in January. "We believe that throughout the year brands should focus back on fashion content and newness in order to re-engage customers and drive traffic," the report said.

CREATIVE DIRECTORS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Gucci parent Kering is planning a relaunch of the brand this year as it prepares for creative director Sabato De Sarno's third show since he took on the role last year. British designer Peter Hawkins will present his second collection for Tom Ford, after being named creative director at the fashion house last April, taking over from founder Tom Ford. Matteo Tamburini will present his first collection as creative director of luxury shoemaker Tod's. Adrian Appiolaza will debut as creative director of Moschino, controlled by Italian fashion group Aeffe. Its previous director, David Renne, died in November at the age of 46, only a month after taking up the role. — Reuters

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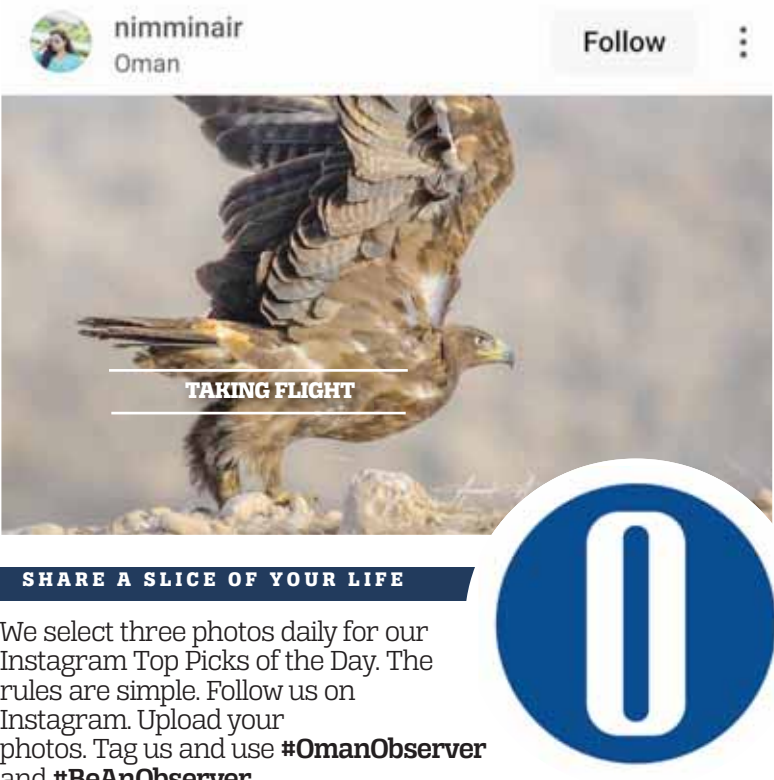
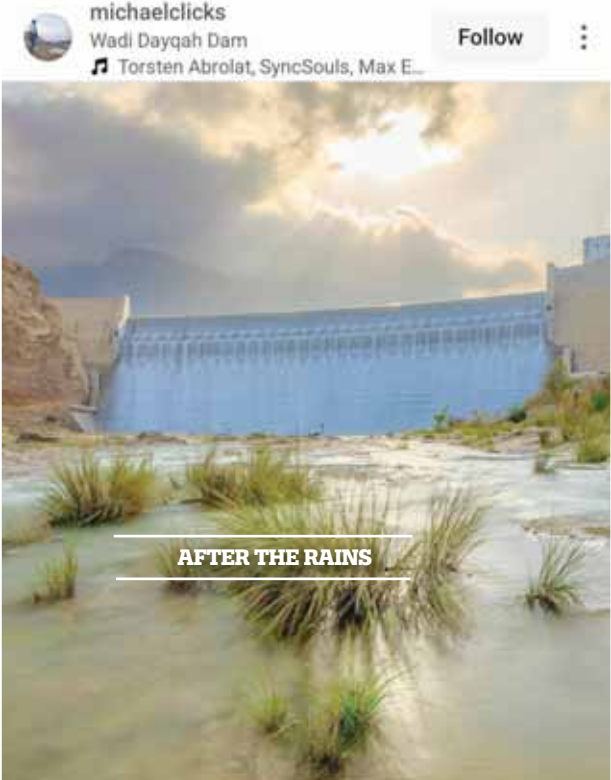
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INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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Quietly Dressing Hollywood's Cool Girls

DANIELLE GOLDBERG WAS sitting at a table with her eyes glued to a laptop screen. On it was actress Greta Lee, who was trying on a satin gown the same colour as the flesh of a banana.

"This dress cannot puddle," Goldberg, 40, said, squinting her eyes as she focused on a slight break at the bottom of the custom Loewe piece. (Lee is an ambassador for the brand.) It was just past 9 on a Saturday evening in January, the night before the Golden Globe Awards, and Goldberg, a stylist, was conducting a video fitting from her studio in New York with Lee, who was beaming in from her home in Los Angeles. "What it's doing

right now," Goldberg said of the dress on-screen, "It can't do that. It has to be perfect." Nanaz Hatami, a tailor Goldberg has worked with for five years, who was with Lee, sprang into action.

Video fittings have been a solution for the stylist as she has juggled the demands of her job, which lately has included dressing Lee along with actress Ayo Edebiri and singer-songwriter Olivia Rodrigo for awards season appearances.

Goldberg, who lives in downtown Manhattan with her husband, Michael Goldberg, a creative director, and their young son, doesn't like to spend too much time away from home if she can help it. Especially now that she is pregnant with her second child.

Halfway through the fitting with Lee, flashes of red began appearing at the bottom corner of Danielle Goldberg's laptop. They were photos from the stylist's assistant in Los Angeles showing Edebiri in her own custom dress, made of scarlet satin by Prada. The following night, millions of viewers watched as Edebiri clutched the gown's train while accepting the Golden Globe for best actress in a TV musical or comedy.

The next Sunday, Goldberg was contemplating another outfit with Edebiri, this time in person at a Los Angeles hotel where the two were meeting before the Critics Choice Awards.

In a video call from the hotel room, Goldberg explained that the actress's look — a roomy white suit by the Row and wire-rimmed Oliver Peoples sunglasses — was inspired by outfits worn by Whoopi

Goldberg in the '90s.

Danielle Goldberg has been working with Edebiri for just a few months: The actress's team approached the stylist after noticing her work with Lee and Kaia Gerber, a model and an actress. (Goldberg's celebrity styling fees are typically paid by studios and brands working with her clients.) Edebiri, 28, said Goldberg had played a crucial role as her profile rose after she received a spate of accolades for her work in "The Bear."

She choked back tears as she described how Goldberg's approach to styling had made her feel comfortable and, in turn, confident. "We have these conversations," Edebiri said. "Sometimes it will be, like, an ode to Whoopi. Then I can have that in my mind when I'm out there taking pictures, which is fun. It's like an actor telling a story."

"I get to be myself," she said, "but also have this armour of the clothes."

Chioma Nnadi, the head of editorial content at British Vogue, said Edebiri had made "Strong fashion choices" that still reflected her "Sense of humour and youthful energy" — a balance, Nnadi added, that can be hard to strike. Goldberg's ability to shape a rising star's look, she said, "is so powerful."

Recent looks Goldberg has styled — including a feathered-and-opera-gloved ensemble by Bottega Veneta that Edebiri wore to the British Academy Film Awards on Sunday, and Rodrigo's vintage white Versace gown at the Grammys — reflect her aim to have "this moment that feels like a quiet statement," as she put it.

Zanna Roberts Rassi, a fashion correspondent for "El Live from the Red Carpet," described Goldberg's aesthetic as an antidote to the flamboyant attire that has lately been embraced as formal wear. "You know when you are in a meeting and there is a person who speaks quietly and you really listen to them?" Rassi said. "She is the equivalent of that."

Lee, 40, compared her relationship with Goldberg to "The dreamiest collaboration" between an actor and a director. The "Past Lives" actress said the outfits they have chosen — like a meme-inspiring, blood-orange Bottega Veneta dress she wore to the Governors Awards last month in Los Angeles — are not for attention, but "For no one other than us."

They met in 2013 when Goldberg had a gig in the wardrobe department of a TV show on which Lee was a guest star. Later that decade, Lee approached Goldberg about dressing her while preparing to promote another show.

The stylist put the actress, who was pregnant at the time, in an archival floral-print dress from a Balenciaga collection by Nicolas Ghesquière. "I knew that I wanted to do something mini, even though she was pregnant," Goldberg said. "Greta can carry fashion that isn't easy and make it look effortless."

Lee said their red-carpet moments could not have been achieved without the stylist's exhaustive researching of references and encyclopedic memory of runway shows. Goldberg started learning about the industry sooner than others: Her father, Oded Nachmani, founded a contemporary sportswear line called Coolwear not long after she was born. (Her mother, Carrie Nachmani, came up with the name for the brand, now defunct.)

On a Wednesday in late January, Goldberg was at her studio organising both Rodrigo's wardrobe for the Grammys and Edebiri's for a "Saturday Night Live" hosting gig (a Thom Browne corset and pants). "If I wasn't this pregnant, I would be getting on the first flight to LA after 'SNL' for the Grammys," she said.

Her second child, a girl, is due in May — the same week as the Met Gala. Maternity leave doesn't exist in her chosen profession, Goldberg joked.

But time off, according to Lee, is not something the stylist often seeks out. "Danielle is so satiated by the work," she said. "She is relentless." — NYT

ENTERTAINMENT

Original Films

KILLERS OF THE FLOWER MOON

'Flower Moon' film song is an ode to endangered Osage language

SONGWRITER SCOTT George is looking forward to the performance of the Osage Nation song "Wahzhazhe (A Song for My People)" at the 96th Oscars ceremony on March 10.

The song is featured in the final scene of the Oscar best-picture nominee "Killers of the Flower Moon," a drama directed by Martin Scorsese and starring Indigenous actor Lily Gladstone and Oscar winner Leonardo DiCaprio.

"The song itself is telling our people to get up," George, a member of the Osage Nation, said during a rehearsal of the Oscar-nominated song at the Grammy Museum in Los Angeles.

"It's 'Wahzhazhe no-zhin te-tha-bey,' which means just 'to stand up,' and then the next phrase is 'Wa-kon-da they-tho gah-ka-bey,' which means 'God made it for us,'" he added.

For George and others in the Osage tribe, the performance of the song before millions Oscar viewers on TV will remind everyone that their people still exist.

"We still have what we've always had for thousands of years. It's sitting here and here it is in front of you," he said.

"Wahzhazhe" will be performed live by members of the Osage tribe who will gather in a circle around a sacred drum.

George wants the audience to watch the performance with an open mind.

"Most people, they don't hear our music. They hear the same thing, and they think all of our songs sound the same," he said.

"But if you'll train your ear for it, you'll know every one is different."

The song's title, "Wahzhazhe," refers to the original name of the Osage people before it was changed by French colonizers who could not pronounce it.

Colonisation also took a toll on the native Osage language,



which now barely survives.

"It's in an endangered state," Vann Bighorse, an Osage performer and cabinet minister for language, culture and education, said. "We don't have any more fluent speakers, but we are working towards fluency the best we can."

For the Osage people, the tradition of song helps keep the language and culture alive.

"We're not doing any of this for ourselves. We just do it for our love of our culture," said one of the Osage singers, Angela Satepauhoodle Toineeta. — Reuters

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OMAN'S INCREDIBLE CALM MAKES THIS WORLD TREKKER FEELS AT HOME



BY KABEER YOUSUF

His "walk" spans 19 states including Oman, India and Pakistan with the full aim of covering the areas between Nepal and his hometown, the Czech Republic. It is not a mere physical endeavour but a soul-searching quest, culminating in his hometown.

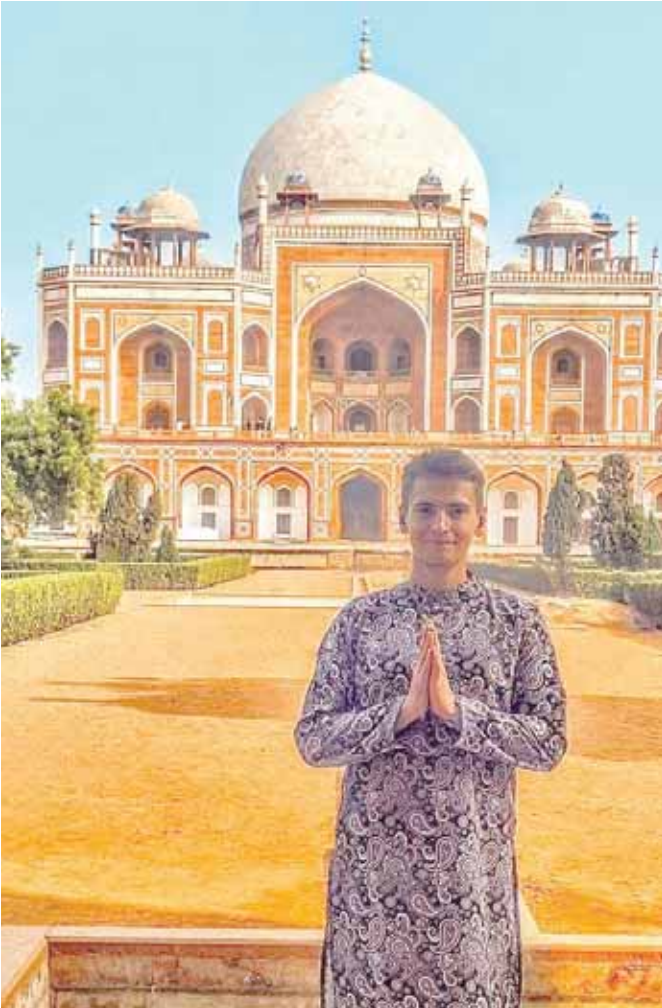
In between, he wants to meet people, interact with different nationalities and ethnic background and raise awareness about disabilities.

Born to a Czech Republican mom and an Italian father, Nico Moro, a 25-year-old Czech-Italian artist, set out on this epic journey a year ago, wearing handmade shoes crafted by his father. Starting the adventure at 24, he covered a staggering 8,000 kilometres requiring over 2.8 million steps. It is an odyssey that speaks of Nico's unwavering determination and spirit.

Despite his demanding journey, Nico maintains a multifaceted life, balancing work in a restaurant in Bowling U Kmotra while pursuing his Russian Cultural Studies at Masarykova Univerzita.

He reached Oman on Friday after completing Nepal, India and Pakistan and walked over 2000 kilometres before reaching Oman. Wherever he visits, he makes it a point to get the iconic landmark of the country tattooed on his body. In Nepal, he got a tattoo of the Nepalese flag; in India, the Taj Mahal; in Pakistan, a snake with the inscription made in Pakistan, and in Oman, he got a tattoo of the celebrated Omani dagger Khanjar.

The whole 8,000 km journey, other than Oman, has taken him from Nepal to the Indian subcontinent including Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Iran, Armenia, Georgia, Turkiye, Greece,



Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia.

For some of the countries he visited, Nico shared that he has already dreamt of them long before he even stepped on them. He has such love and admiration for the Taj Mahal that he already has it tattooed on his arm.

His quest started on September 26, 2023 in Kathmandu, Nepal. Nepal's allure for soul-searching travellers lies in its stunning natural beauty, including the majestic Himalayas and serene lakes, providing a backdrop for introspection. Deeply rooted in spirituality, the country offers sacred sites like Pashupatinath Temple and Swayambhunath Stupa. From Nepal, he traversed nearly 1,076 km to explore places like Pokhara, Sonauli, Lucknow, Kanpur to reach Agra.

India had been enticing soul-searching travellers with its profound spiritual heritage, offering sacred sites like Varanasi and Rishikesh for introspection. As the birthplace of yoga and meditation, it hosts transformative retreats and ashrams. Its diverse culture, rich in traditions and festivals, invites exploration and learning.

For Nico, it is the historical marvel of Taj Mahal that made him zoom into India as a destination to explore. He spent six thousand rupees to get a tattoo of Taj Mahal on his hand and it became iconic for him to have the photo of his tattoo with the iconic building in the background. While touring on foot, he also visited Agra Fort, Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar's Tomb and Itmadaula. From Agra, he reached Delhi via Mathura.

In a lot of these stops, Nico made sure not just to be an observer but an active participant in some cultural celebrations. In India, he celebrated Diwali, the biggest Hindu holiday, in the city of Firozabad near Agra. In Pakistan, he interacted with the locals and participated in some events which got the interest of local newspapers earning a coverage in publications like Doniya, News 92, Jhang and Mara Qalam.

Nico shared that doing a trip like he did comes with different risks and challenges. From getting sick while on the road to having his phone stolen in one of his stops to getting attacked by tribesmen, Nico learned that there were trips that had to be cut short for safety purposes.

Oman, among the countries that he visited, is a surprise with its rich cultural heritage and warm hospitality.

"I have only been in Oman for a few days, but I have to say that I feel at home and I am comfortable here," he said.

Landing in Muscat, Nico automatically took note of the coastal beauty and the rugged mountains and how sustainable tourism ensures preservation of natural and cultural treasures. In a few days, he has explored the gems of the capital including the Sultan Qaboos Mosque, the Royal Opera House Muscat and the National Museum.

"There is an incredible calm here, which I value immensely and I firmly believe that Oman will stay under my skin until the end of my life," Nico shared.

To commemorate his visit to Oman, Nico was drawn by the strength and symbolism of the khanjar. As an important part of the national costume, Nico felt that his tattoo of this icon will always make him fondly recall of his stay here.

Reflecting on his journey, Nico emphasises its altruistic motive, supporting a Czech organisation aiding individuals with disabilities. From the UAE to Iran, Nico's path is marked by resilience and hope, resonating with readers worldwide.

"This journey is mainly to support Czech organisations supporting people on wheelchairs. Nico go for people who can't go. To raise awareness and generate support globally, that is something truly humanitarian," said Milan Papezik, a PR manager and a friend of Nico.

From Oman, Nico is headed to the UAE next followed by his traverse of Abu Dhabi to Kuwait. From there, he will be off to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Qatar. After completing the GCC, he plans to fly to Tehran in Iran and from there, head back to his hometown in the Czech Republic.

Overall, Nico said that like his journey from Paris to Santiago de Compostela, he is also planning to write a book about this new experience not just to guide other travellers, but also help set expectations about the beauty and challenges of each destination.

