

His Majesty greets
President of Cameroon

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Paul Biya of the Republic of Cameroon, on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Biya and the people of his country.

SUNRISE - 05:23 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 03:59 AM
DHUHR - 12:08 PM
ASR - 03:30 PM
MAGHRIB - 06:49 PM
ISHA - 08:08 PM



OMAN FOLLOWS WITH DEEP CONCERN

Search for
Iran’s President after
helicopter ‘crash’

The Sultanate of Oman said it is following with great concern the incident of the disappearance of the helicopter carrying Dr Ibrahim Raisi, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and other officials, expressing its solidarity and readiness to provide support and assistance.

Meanwhile, Iranian search and rescue teams were scouring a fog-shrouded mountainside after a helicopter carrying President Ebrahim Raisi went missing in an “accident” on Sunday, state media said.

Fears grew for the 63-year-old president after contact was lost with the helicopter carrying him as well as Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in East Azerbaijan province, reports said.

“An accident happened to the helicopter carrying the president” in the Jolfa region of the western province, state television said, while some officials described the incident as a “hard landing”.

“The harsh weather conditions and heavy fog have made it difficult for the rescue teams to reach the accident site,” said one state broadcaster.

More than 40 rescue teams using search dogs and drones were sent to the site, reported the Irna news agency. Raisi was visiting the province where he inaugurated a dam project together with Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev, on the border between the two countries.

Raisi's convoy included three helicopters, and the other two had “reached their destination safely,” according to Tasnim news agency.

Foreign countries were closely following the

search effort at a time of high regional tensions over the Gaza war.

A US State Department spokesman said: “We are closely following reports of a possible hard landing of a helicopter in Iran carrying the Iranian president and foreign minister.

“We have no further comment at this time.”

An Iranian Red Crescent team was seen walking up a slope in thick fog and drizzling rain, while other live footage showed worshippers reciting prayers in the holy city of Mashhad, Raisi's hometown.

In neighbouring Iraq, Prime Minister Mohamed Shia al Sudani “instructed the interior ministry and the Iraqi Red Crescent and other relevant authorities to offer available resources... to aid in the search”.

Azeri President Aliyev said in a post on X that “we were profoundly troubled by the news of a helicopter carrying the top delegation crash-landing in Iran”.

“Our prayers to Allah Almighty are with President Ebrahim Raisi and the accompanying delegation,” he said, noting that his country “stands ready to offer any assistance needed”.

The accident happened in the mountainous protected forest area of Dizmar near the town of Varzaghan, said the official Irna news agency.

Military personnel along with the Revolutionary Guards and police had also deployed teams to the area, said army chief-of-staff Mohammad Bagheri.

Iran's Health Minister Bahram Eynollahi said medical resources had been dispatched.

The Shargh daily also reported that “the helicopter carrying the president crashed” while two other helicopters had landed safely. SEE P7



Palestinians carry boxes of humanitarian aid after rushing the trucks transporting the international aid from the US-built Trident Pier near Nuseirat in the central Gaza Strip on Sunday. – AFP

MAJOR GAZA HOSPITAL REOPENS

KHAN YUNIS: Lying bedridden in her room at the recently reopened Nasser hospital in Khan Yunis in Gaza, Alaa Abu Ahmed is relieved that she can finally restart her medical treatment. Displacement because of fighting between Israeli forces and Hamas in the Palestinian territory interrupted Abu Ahmed's treatment for a chronic condition.

Over a week in February, the hospital was attacked when Khan Yunis was the focus of fighting and soldiers raided it.

Now hallways are filled with still-wrapped boxes of equipment, and some semblance of order is returning to the facility. While air strikes, bombardment and fighting continue to rock other areas of Gaza, in Nasser the beds have been straightened, the debris cleared and white coats bearing Doctors Without Borders (MSF) logos mix with the blue uniforms of local medics.

The international NGO has just resumed work at the hospital, the most important in the southern Gaza Strip. **SEE ALSO P6**

Countdown begins for Khareef season

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

With some areas covered with greenery and a green carpet spreading on the mountains, the Khareef season in Dhofar is knocking.

The Dhofar Khareef season is increasing in popularity year after year to become one of the distinctive and attractive tourist seasons, which constitutes a major tourist season for tourism activity and an important economic and commercial tributary to the Dhofar Governorate in particular and the Sultanate of Oman in general.

The concerned authorities represented by the Governor's Office and the Municipality of Dhofar, along with the main supporter, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, and the Omran Group, are preparing for an exceptional 2024 season. Preparations began since the end of the season last year, and certainly the successes and achievements were studied alongside the challenges faced by the organisers regarding the violations during this season and other seasons. The following continues until success and development become more established year after year.

The growth rate of tourism flow in Dhofar Governorate reached 18.4 per cent as visitors to the Dhofar Khareef season for the year 2023 reached about 962,000, while the number of charter flights in the winter season to Salalah Airport reached 239 direct flights, while the



number of winter season visitors reached 35000 by the end of February of this year, in addition to an increase in the hotel occupancy in five and four stars 95 per cent in the winter season.

Khaled bin Abdullah al Abri, Director General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar Governorate, confirmed the investment opportunities in Dhofar Governorate, as there are direct and promising investment opportunities in the governorate, as it is hoped to open a number of hotel projects to enter into operation with the beginning of the Dhofar 2024 fall season, including the opening of a five

and four star hotels.

This is part of the ministry's plan to increase the number of hotel rooms in the governorate, which amounted to about 6,000 hotel rooms at the end of last year, and it is hoped that it will reach 7,000 rooms by the end of this year.

Importantly, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism continues to implement development projects in Dhofar Governorate in the tourism sector in cooperation with partners from government units and the private sector, with the aim of exploiting and developing natural sites in the governorate.







25-26
May

Visiting Burjeel Hospital, Al Khuwair

Injured on the field?
We'll help you come back stronger, faster, and more resilient.

Dr. Jacob Varghese
Sr. Consultant - Sports & Joint Surgery

بورجيل
burjeel
hospital
a burjeel holdings company

24399777
 92167571

omanburjeel

ROYAL COURT AFFAIRS RECEIVES NEW BATCH OF RECRUITS

MUSCAT: The Royal Court Affairs, in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, on Sunday received a new batch of recruits. The new batch will undergo the basic military training programme for recruits in order to enlist them in various military units of the Royal Court Affairs. The enrolled recruits finished all procedures and underwent evaluation. They also passed all admission stages, including written and physical tests and interviews. — **ONA**



Oman to celebrate World Metrology Day today

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, MAY 19

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), joins nations worldwide in celebrating World Metrology Day today (May 20). This annual event highlights the importance of metrology in shaping a sustainable future, echoing this year's theme,

'Measuring Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow.'
Imad bin Khamis al Shukaili, Director-General of the Directorate General of Standards and Metrology (DGSM) at MoCIIP, underscored the significance of metrology in fostering sustainability. He emphasised its role in optimising resource utilisation, reducing waste in industrial processes, and enhancing

product quality and safety. Al Shukaili highlighted the ministry's commitment to advancing metrology infrastructure through the DGSM. The DGSM works to ensure the accuracy of measurement technologies and enforce metrology and standards regulations, contributing to the Sultanate of Oman's sustainable development goals.

OHRC DEALS WITH 523 ISSUES IN 2023

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MAY 19

Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) handled 523 issues and reports during 2023 while it helped settle and resolve the issues in coordination with the departments concerned. It offered legal opinion to the parties that reported the issues and advised them to follow up with the relevant authorities. The OHRC received 65 reports pertaining to civil,

political, economic, social and cultural rights, in addition to reports on environmental and development affairs. From the point of view of human rights, the commission offered opinion to citizens and residents on a total of 458 reports, and advised them how to get the issues resolved in coordination with other departments. It also made field visits to the Central Prison and detention centres where it checked the conditions of inmates and

detainees and studied their workplaces. The OHRC valued the recent Royal orders issued in 2023 granting pardon to 864 inmates, both citizens and expatriates, noting that the Royal orders had a positive impact on the social life of the discharged inmates and their families. In remarks to the Observer, the official from OHRC stated that the the committee also indicates that it has submitted its recommendations to the



Supreme Council of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik which included important topics that contribute to advancing the

human rights process towards further progress and prosperity. It urged the government to join some international conventions and treaties concerned with human rights. "The recommendations also relate to topics concerned with the rights of persons with disabilities and those on the autism spectrum from legislative aspects and aspects of health, therapeutic and educational services provided to them, in addition to topics related

to making some legislative amendments to the applicable laws," the official said. The OHRC also took note of reports issued by international governmental and non-governmental bodies on the human rights situation in the Sultanate of Oman. It received fact-finding questionnaires from United Nations special rapporteurs and coordinated with parties concerned on measures to verify the reports and respond to them.

National University's College of Medicine and Health Sciences Attains Full Accreditation by TEPDAD



The National University of Science and Technology proudly announces the successful completion of the International External Quality Assurance (IEQA) process, conducted by the Association for Evaluation and Accreditation of Medical Education Programs (TEPDAD/Turkey) and approved by the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA). The outcome of this rigorous evaluation, finalized on January 1, 2024, is **Full Accreditation for the College of Medicine and Health Sciences' undergraduate medical program (MD)**. This accreditation underscores the commitment to meeting the high standards set by the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME) satisfactorily, marking a significant achievement for the College. The accreditation, valid for six years from January 1, 2024, to December 31, 2030, is a testament to our dedication to excellence in medical education. The process involved meticulous preparation, including the submission of a comprehensive Self-Evaluation Report (SER) in February 2022, followed by a thorough Site Visit in November 2023 by a distinguished team from TEPDAD, comprised of eminent professors and experts in the field of medical education. The Honourable Dr. Ali Al Bimani, Vice Chancellor of the University, expressed his delight in announcing this significant milestone, highlighting that the full accreditation marks a pivotal moment in our capacity to implement progressive and contemporary curricula within the realm of medical education, aligning with international benchmarks of excellence. He underscored his deep pride in the exemplary leadership demonstrated by the College of Medicine, acknowledging the invaluable contributions of its faculty, staff, and students, whose dedication has been instrumental in achieving this commendable recognition. Dr. Salim Al Araiimi, Deputy Vice Chancellor and Provost of the University emphasized that this accomplishment underscores our unwavering dedication to upholding standards of excellence, professional proficiency, and continual advancement in nurturing the next generation of medical practitioners. He commended the College of Medicine for its remarkable efforts in pursuing academic accreditation, citing it as a testament to the institution's commitment to excellence and a source of collective pride for the entire university and community. He also emphasized that this achievement has increased NU's international visibility. Dr. AL Araiimi extended his warm congratulations to all members of the National University and the community at large. Professor Mohammad Al Shafae, Dean of the College of Medicine and Health Sciences, reiterated the significance

of this full accreditation, highlighting its affirmation of our steadfast commitment to producing highly competent doctors poised to elevate healthcare standards on local, regional, and global scales. Emphasizing the college's dedication to an ever-evolving curriculum tailored to address the evolving healthcare needs of our community, Professor Al Shafae underscored the pivotal role this accreditation plays in assuring students, their families, and the wider community of our adherence to rigorous international standards in medical education. Further, he emphasized that this accreditation serves as a testament to the college's dedication to fostering an enriching educational environment, one that empowers students to actively engage in their learning journey. By providing a conducive atmosphere for education, the college equips students with the necessary tools to cultivate a profound comprehension of medical sciences, nurture critical thinking abilities, and instil an unwavering commitment to continuous improvement in patient care. The National University extends its heartfelt appreciation to the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the Ministry of Health, the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education, and our academic partner, West Virginia University, for their unwavering support. Gratitude is also extended to the university's Board of Directors, the Board of Trustees, alumni, faculty members, staff and students, whose collective efforts have been instrumental in attaining this significant milestone. Special thanks is also due to the Turkish Association for Evaluation and Accreditation of Medical Education Programs (TEPDAD) for their valuable guidance. Dr. Maryam Bint Belarab Al-Nabhani, Director-General of Private Universities & Colleges at MOHERI, said: This achievement reflects the Ministry's commitment to empowering and encouraging private educational institutions to check and ensure the quality of their programs, as the Ministry works closely with the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education to achieve quality according to locally and internationally approved standards and support institutions in obtaining academic accreditation. Thus, enabling them to compete globally in terms of providing high-quality education as well as attracting international students and contributing to raising the level of Oman in local and international indicators. She also indicated that the entry of 4 universities among the top 500 in the QS World University Rankings is one of the goals of Oman Vision 2040, and such achievements contribute to this vision through integration and sustainable cooperation between the Ministry and the relevant authorities.

Airfares skyrocket during likely long Eid al Adha holidays

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Airfares have risen manifold in view of the likely nine-day-long Eid al Adha holidays beginning the third week of June, spoiling holiday plans. A one way fare to a South Indian state of Kerala is nearly RO 120, three times higher than the off-peak period. Fares have further shot up due to cancellations of many Air India Express flights due to mass leave by employees. "I had to reschedule my holiday plans due to exorbitant rates and lack of sufficient services to north Kerala," an expatriate employee in Muscat said. As per the lunar calendar, the first day of Eid al Adha, in all likelihood, falls on June 17 and June 16 would be the Day of Arafah, another holiday. In the event of Eid holidays ending on June 19, the only day left in the week is Thursday (June 20),



The soaring airfares may benefit domestic tourism although the majority preferred to travel abroad

which will most likely be another holiday. As these holidays are preceded and succeeded by weekends, a long Eid holiday is awaiting the people of Oman and many have begun to plan holidays accordingly. "Air fares have shot up in view of the long holidays as people would start booking as soon as airlines open it," says Mohammed al Mukhaini, a holiday planner in Muscat. Of all the sectors, fares to India's Kerala state are the highest ranging between RO 120

to RO 140. A ticket on Oman Air after June 10 is RO 150 and for Salam Air, it is RO 120. The soaring airfares may benefit domestic tourism although the majority preferred to travel abroad. Oman has a diverse range of tourist destinations, starting with world heritage and ancient archaeological sites, to dozens of forts and castles, to mosques, souqs and dhows, which provide a unique holiday experience and taste of the rich history and culture of Oman.

KERALEEYAM 2024 CONCLUDES

MUSCAT: Keraleeyam 2024, held in Muscat under the aegis of Kala Muscat, concluded. A large number of people from different parts of Oman witnessed the cultural festival, which began at 6.30 pm on Friday at the Ruwi Al Falaj Grand Hall. The programmes were inaugurated online by Kerala's Minister for Culture and Youth Affairs Saji Cheriyan. Oman Chamber of Commerce Board Member Dr Abdul Latheef Uppala, Loka Kerala Sabha member and Pravasi Welfare Fund Director Wilson



George, Falcon Printers owner Surendran, Malayalam Mission Oman Chapter President Sunil Kumar and Techmark representative Pradeep Panikkassery were present in the occasion. The drama "Koothu", directed by noted theatre

activist and director Jino Joseph, was the first programme performed on the stage. The drama performed by expatriate artists received with huge applause. Many people who have been living an expatriate life in Oman for a long time commented that Koothu is the best drama they have seen in their life in Oman. Those who attended the event said that the play is a mirror to the existing social conditions and congratulated the Arts Muscat leadership for conducting the event.



Follow us on **facebook**
omanobserver

OMANDAILYOBSERVER
MONDAY | MAY 20 | 2024

3



It is permissible to have a longer period based on the owner's request, provided that the vehicle is covered by insurance

Longer validity period for vehicle registration

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

As part of the plans to ease services provided by the Royal Oman Police (ROP), Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin bin Salim al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, issued a decision No 61/2024, amending some provisions of the executive regulations of the Traffic Law, which shall be effective from the day following the date of its publication in the official gazette.

As per the decision, the validity of the vehicle operating licence (private vehicles) will be one year from the date of registration or renewal, but it is permissible to have a longer period based on the owner's request, provided that the vehicle is covered by insurance or unless it has been decided to inspect it annually by the provisions of Article 39 of the Traffic Law.

Tractors used for agricultural

purposes have been exempted from the duration requirement.

Previously, the vehicle operating licence was valid for one year from the date of registration or renewal, and maybe for two years for government vehicles and vehicles of diplomatic and consular bodies and organisations accredited to the Sultanate of Oman unless it is decided to inspect them annually as per the provisions of Article 39 of the law. The decision stated that vehicles that will be subject to technical examination upon registration and renewal of the vehicle operating licence are commercial vehicles of all types, heavy government vehicles and equipment, taxis of all types, school cars, buses of various types, cars, and bicycles that were manufactured 10 years ago or more and vehicles of limited use.

Light passenger vehicles that have been manufactured for less

than 10 years and are not used for advertising and publicity purposes are exempted from annual inspections.

Small trucks (pick-ups) and light passenger vehicles that are less than 10 years old and are not used for advertising purposes are exempt from technical inspection. The privilege given to government vehicles and vehicles of diplomatic and consular bodies has been cancelled by extending the validity of the licence for two years. Vehicles will be subject to technical inspection in cases of changing or replacing their engine or structure or its colour or any essential part.

The decision states that no black points will be recorded for failure to provide proof of obtaining a driving licence or proof of obtaining a vehicle operating licence. It was three black points earlier for these violations.

FORUM ON SUSTAINABILITY IN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION BEGINS

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahbalushia

The Third Forum for Schools has commenced under the theme 'Leadership and Sustainable Educational Visions' targeting over 1,800 participants including school principals, supervisors, and educational directors from various governorates. The forum aims to promote sustainability within the school environment.

Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs, inaugurated the forum and toured the educational visions exhibition. The exhibition featured ten local and international educational models from universities, colleges, public and private schools, and institutions dedicated to educational development, aligning with the forum's themes.

Dr Sulaiman al Jamoudi, Chairman of the Forum's Main Committee, emphasised the critical role of effective school administration in ensuring the efficiency of the educational process and sustainability within school environments. He highlighted the importance of strengthening material, human and technical resources to achieve educational goals.

Nada al Rawas, Director of Manbaa al Hekma School in Dhofar Governorate, expressed the collective pride and determination of school principals to continue achieving remarkable results through clear, strategic plans.

The first day featured three dialogue sessions. The initial session, moderated by Dr Rashid al Mahrezi, Member of the State Council, included two key presentations. Greg Parry, CEO of Education in Services Global Company, discussed "Future Skills and Promoting a Culture of Innovation among School



The forum emphasised the critical role of effective school administration in ensuring the efficiency of the educational process and sustainability within school environment. — ONA

There is determination of school principals to continue achieving remarkable results through clear, strategic plans

NADA AL RAWAS
Director of Manbaa al Hekma School

Leaders," focusing on preparing students for future challenges and fostering creativity and critical thinking among educational leaders.

Hamid al Busaidy, Executive Director of the Oman Centre for Governance and Sustainability, threw light on 'Enhancing the Culture of Governance in School Administrations' emphasising the role of governance in improving school performance and policy setting.

The second session, led by Dr Ali al Harrasi, Member of the State Council, included three presentations. Dr Rima al Karami Akkari from the American University of Beirut spoke on 'School-Based Development' highlighting the importance of visionary educational leadership.

Professor Dr Khaled al Thubaiti from Imam Mohammad bin Saud Islamic University discussed 'A Future Vision for Developing the Performance of School Administration' stressing the need for strategic planning in line with global development projects.

The day concluded with a third session featuring three papers. Dr Salim al Shueili from the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology spoke on 'Utilising Artificial Intelligence Applications in Improving the Educational Process' detailing AI applications such as personalised learning, automated assessment, and administrative support.

Consultant Nasser al Yaarubi, CEO of Jibreen Scientific Academy, addressed 'Enhancing the Culture of School Leadership with the Community During Crises' focusing on crisis management and decision-making.

Major Salim al Rasbi from the National Centre for Emergency Situations Management discussed 'The Roles of School Leadership in Managing Emergency Situations' outlining key concepts and principles of emergency management.

The forum concluded with the launch of the new logo for the School Administration Forum's third edition.

شانغريلا بر الجصة، مسقط
SHANGRI-LA
BARR AL JISSAH
MUSCAT

شانغريلا الحصن، مسقط
SHANGRI-LA
AL HUSN
MUSCAT

SHANGRI-LA MUSCAT WELCOMES JOAKIM VELINDER AS ITS NEW DIRECTOR OF SALES AND MARKETING

Joakim Velinder will assume the role of Director of Sales and Marketing for Shangri-La Muscat in Oman from 19th of May 2024. The Swedish national will join the leadership team at the iconic Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah and Shangri-La Al Husn, a complex boasting 640 rooms with 14 outlets, in their beautiful setting on the shores of the sparkling Gulf of Oman.

Joining Shangri-La Group from the Hyatt Group, Joakim Velinder has distinguished himself as an award-winning and visionary leader in his field. After gaining early experience in Europe, his career has focused on commercial roles in the Middle East's hotel industry, with assignments in Dubai, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and culminating in his most recent role as the Cluster Director of Sales and Marketing for Alila Hotels in Oman.

The Commercial leader brings a wide-ranging experience within the hospitality industry to bear on his new role, holding several operational positions before moving into Sales and Marketing. In a career that has already taken him to several landmark luxury hotels around the world, including London's Goring Hotel and the Park Hyatt Dubai, this broad operational and strategic knowledge is complemented by an in-depth understanding of the regional market, with successful leadership positions & assignments in four of the six GCC states.

"I'm looking forward to joining the Shangri-La team, leveraging my regional expertise, global connections and enhance and expand the group's exceptional partnerships across the board" says Velinder. "I relish the opportunity this presents to drive business in our key source markets, in alignment with the ethos of the Shangri-La Group, which prides itself on giving a local flair to international standards of luxury and elegance."

Nick Flynn, Hotel Manager states, "I'm delighted to be welcoming Joakim Velinder to our leadership team to oversee the property's Sales and Marketing strategies. His experience speaks for itself, and his broad knowledge of both the industry and the region will be an exceptional asset to the team as we pursue our key priorities through 2025."

With a sterling track record of innovation and detail-oriented strategic planning, and a commitment to devising optimal solutions that has often made his work a regional reference point, Joakim Velinder will bring a new energy and a clear vision of the future to this role. His addition to the Shangri-La team will enhance and support the continued flourishing of Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah and Shangri-La Al Husn, allowing the warm and gracious Omani welcome of this uniquely beautiful resort to be experienced by a truly global audience.



SAY SAFE IN SCORCHING SUMMER

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

AS SUMMER is here, high temperatures and increased humidity pose significant risks to public health. This applies even during the transition period between moderate and extreme weather conditions.

An international team of climate scientists predicts a 90 per cent chance that the summer of 2024 will set new records for average temperatures. This follows several months of the El Nino phenomenon, which began in mid-January and has caused higher sea surface temperatures. The transition to La Nino is also expected to contribute to hotter weather than previous years.

Oman has experienced notable climate changes, with varying weather conditions including high temperatures recorded in several regions. Met office reported that the Wilayat of Sur reached 42.0°C, the highest temperature recorded recently.

**MET OFFICE
REPORTED
THAT THE
WILAYAT OF
SUR REACHED
42.0°C,
THE HIGHEST
TEMPERATURE
RECORDED
RECENTLY**

It is crucial to understand the dangers posed by extreme heat, which can lead to heat stress, characterised by symptoms such as sweating, fatigue, severe headaches, increased heart rate, muscle cramps, dizziness and fainting. Vulnerable groups include children, the elderly, and those who engage in physical activities in hot weather. Without proper management, heat stress can escalate to heat stroke or heat poisoning.

Heat waves also impact mental health, causing increased irritability, tension and a higher likelihood of traffic accidents due to impaired attention and concentration. Hence, maintaining a balanced temperature is vital for both physical and psychological well-being.

Preventive measures to combat heat stress include wearing suitable clothing, staying hydrated, using sunscreen, avoiding strenuous activities during peak temperatures, and not leaving children in parked cars. Additionally, precautions should be taken with vehicles, such as avoiding overfilling fuel tanks and slightly opening windows to reduce heat build-up.

As temperatures rise, scorpions and reptiles become more active, posing additional risks. The Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance (PACDA) advises vigilance to avoid these creatures entering homes and farms.

Safety measures also include not exposing gas cylinders to direct sunlight, managing electricity loads carefully, and limiting air conditioner use to occupied rooms during peak heat times. By following these guidelines, individuals can protect themselves and their loved ones from the adverse effects of extreme summer heat.



Vacancy for a Technical (Academic) Post at OAAAQA

The Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA), in coordination with the Ministry of Labour in the Sultanate of Oman, is pleased to announce an academic position for a technical role. Suitably qualified candidates eligible to meet the appointment criteria noted herein may submit their application via OAAAQA's website <https://www.oaaaqa.gov.om/vacancies/Careers> from 20 May 2024, and extending through 19 June 2024. For further inquiries, please email hr@oaaaqa.gov.om

Position: National Qualifications Framework Consultant

Number of Opportunities: One

Financial Grade (Non-Omani Applicants): Grade A

Post Requirements:

- PhD or equivalent qualification with a minimum of 12 years of post-qualification experience in the field of higher education, or vocational/ technical education and training including a minimum of 6 years in the field of quality assurance of education
- Or
- A Master's degree or equivalent qualification with a minimum of 17 years of post-qualification experience in the field of higher education, or vocational/ technical education and training including a minimum of 4 years in the field of quality assurance of education
- Preference will be given to candidates who have experience in designing, developing, and reviewing programmes and qualifications.
- Preference will be given to candidates with hands-on experience in both developing and reviewing national qualifications frameworks, as well as in developing and reviewing vocational/technical education and training qualifications within educational systems.
- Candidates should demonstrate familiarity with higher education systems, vocational/technical education and training systems within the Sultanate of Oman, international qualifications frameworks, and their alignment with national contexts.
- Proficiency in English, both verbal and written, is essential, along with exceptional communication and presentation abilities. Candidates should also demonstrate proficiency in technical report writing.
- Strong team leadership, training, research, and analytical skills are desired qualities. Candidates should be capable of working effectively under pressure

General Appointment Criteria

Eligible candidates must be:

- Medically fit for service and under 59 years of age
 - Of good conduct
 - Willing to undergo an interview and any testing prescribed for the job on offer
- The advertised posts are not open to the following:
- Retirees and those where retirement is imminent
 - Those dismissed from a government post within the past three years
 - Those non-rehabilitated persons who have a criminal record involving honour or honesty

Conditions of Application

- Applicants must submit the following documents with their application:
 - Updated CV, copy of all academic qualifications, training courses approved and certified prior to the issuance of the job advertisement
 - Copy of passport
 - Only applications received after the issuance of this announcement and before the deadline will be considered.
 - Any application that does not meet the specified conditions will be rejected.
 - Any candidacy that violates, for any reason, the conditions of application or of the advertised post at any time throughout the appointment process will be rejected, regardless of the results of the interview or any associated tests.



NDC begins parallel programme on climate change, net zero

MUSCAT: The parallel programme themed “Climate Change and Net Zero” kicked off today at the National Defence College (NDC). The programme aims to highlight the national strategy and national programme for net zero emissions. It also sheds light on best practices, sustainable solutions



and national priorities in a bid to achieve net zero emissions. Further, the first day's programme included a lecture on the “National Strategy for Organized Transformation to Net Zero” delivered by Eng. Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals. The programme will run till May 23, 2024. It is held within the framework of the NDC's role in enhancing the leadership skills and abilities of several government officials as well as senior officers at the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and other military and security units. — ONA

EA cracks whip on waste management institutions

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 19

The Environment Authority (EA) has issued an important notice to institutions and companies involved in the collection and transport of waste. This aims to ensure compliance with the best international standards in hazardous waste management and to enhance environmental protection from its risks. This step comes as part of the EA's ongoing efforts to promote environmental sustainability and enforce the relevant laws and regulations. In a statement, EA said obtaining the necessary licenses from the authority and adhering to its conditions is necessary, as no institution or company will be allowed to transport or process waste without prior authorisation. Additionally, the transfer

Institutions and companies dealing with hazardous waste must obtain hazardous waste management licenses (for transport and collection) to ensure that all entities comply with environmental safety standards when handling hazardous waste

or sale of waste by unlicensed recycling institutions and companies is prohibited to ensure that hazardous waste does not spread randomly and to prevent environmental pollution risks. 'Proper storage of this waste is also mandated to avoid any environmental contamination,' EA stated. Institutions and companies dealing with hazardous waste must obtain hazardous waste management licenses (for transport and collection) to ensure that all entities comply with environmental safety standards when handling hazardous waste.

All waste transportation and collection companies must register in the national waste management registry and disclose the quantities collected and transported every quarter through the system. This system aims to facilitate the tracking of hazardous waste from its source to its final destination. Disclosure of the recipient of the waste and directing them to register the produced waste in the system as per Article (7) of Decision No. (2021/15). Waste disposal or export must only be done

in accordance with the procedures outlined in Decision No. (15/2021). EA must be provided with the quantities transported and the receiving institutions and companies during January, February, March, and April of 2024. The notice is a significant step towards raising awareness about the importance of proper hazardous waste management and ensuring environmental protection from its risks. EA plays a crucial role in regulating and managing hazardous waste in the Sultanate of Oman. It works on establishing the relevant laws and regulations, providing transportation and collection licenses, overseeing waste transport and storage operations, and ensuring that institutions and companies comply with environmental safety standards.



All waste transportation and collection companies must register in the national waste management registry and disclose the quantities collected and transported every quarter

Approved outcomes of ‘Manjam Labs’ courses to streamline services



MUSCAT: Officials at government departments have approved the outcomes of 8 user training courses out of a scheduled 14 courses within the context of a drive to streamline government procedures. The outcomes endorsed were part of the third phase of a plan targeting the streamlining of 45 services within 14 training courses being carried out through Manjam Labs. The outcomes approved included those of a course on registration of newborns, a household care initiative on streamlining services for the elderly, a course for trainees entrusted with implementing socio-religious obligations, a course on care and services for the disabled, a course on protecting childhood and addressing the issues of abuse, a course to deal with post-mortem services and a course on registering official service periods and recognising related fiscal dues. In the third phase, the drive benefits a number of government institutions, including: the Ministry of Health, the Supreme Judiciary Council, the Social Protection Fund, the Royal Oman Police, the Foreign Ministry, municipalities, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Education, the Security and Military Services Retirement Fund, the Ministry of Labour, the Central Bank of Oman (and private banks), Petroleum Development Oman, the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs and the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. The labs introduced many improvements that included providing a “one-time request submission” that covers a set of services provided within one package to be made available to the beneficiary within the shortest possible time. The improvements also include the introduction of a set of services provided proactively without the need for the beneficiary to request them. Related recommendations focused on reconsidering the laws and legislation related to these training courses, lending stronger backing for the human resources specialised in the related domains and providing and integrating data among government departments, besides organising roles and competencies among the relevant institutions. — ONA

SQU'S COLLEGE OF EDUCATION RECEIVES ACCREDITATION

MUSCAT: The College of Education at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has received International Academic Accreditation for its undergraduate studies programmes from the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). This accreditation is a significant achievement that reflects the College's commitment to maintaining the highest standards in teacher preparation. It also confirms the position of Sultan Qaboos University as a leading institution in the field of university education and learning and its continuous efforts to improve academic and professional opportunities for its faculty members and students. It is worth mentioning that the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) is an organisation that accredits Educator Preparation Institutions inside and outside the United States of America by providing evidence that confirms quality and supports continuous improvement to enhance the learning of school students. CAEP has six standards that must be met in teacher preparation programmes. Each standard includes a set of standard characteristics and conditions for the educational programme in order to obtain academic accreditation.

The Dean of the College of Education at Sultan Qaboos University, Prof. Saleh bin Salim bin Mohammed al Busaidy, stated that what distinguishes the teacher preparation programmes at the College of Education is the balance between the theoretical and practical aspects. Where students obtain a broad depth of knowledge in their specialty and at the same time acquire practical skills through field experiences and field training. Note that the number of hours of field training exceeds 500 hours during the study period in the programme, as the college allocates an entire semester for field training, or what is also called practical education, in public and private schools. Dr Shubair Abdullah, Head of the Quality Assurance and Academic Accreditation Unit at the College of Education, indicated that preparations for the academic accreditation process began early, and the College adopted the participatory method in managing the accreditation stages. For instance, a main committee was formed to review all requirements for academic accreditation. In addition, subcommittees were formed consisting of members from various departments and academic specialisations at the college.

Tender Announcement

"Mwasalat" invites professional firms for the following tender:

Tender Number	T-44-2023 (re-tender)
Tender Name	Pre-qualification Tender for "the Construction of New Aluminium Catamaran type HSC Passenger Vessel"
Project Summary	MWASALAT (Ferial) invites competent and specialized Shipbuilder and Shipyard to submit a "Pre-qualification Proposal" for the Construction of "Aluminium Catamaran type HSC Passenger Vessel" for MWASALAT. Detailed specifications and requirements can be found in the tender documents provided. The pre-qualified Shipbuilder and Shipyard will be expected to participate in the bidding process for "the Construction of Catamaran type HSC Passenger Vessel" over a contractual period of five years.
Tender Fee	NIL
Grade & Specialty	Shipbuilders / Shipyards specialized in Vessel Construction
Start date for tender document distribution	Monday, 20th May 2024
Last date for tender document distribution	Sunday, 09th June 2024
Last date for submission	Sunday, 30th June 2024

The Tender documents may be shared by email during official working hours between 9:00A.M - 2:00 P.M.

Tenderers are requested to share commercial registration (CR) & business card through email tenders@mwasalat.om and tender number as the subject of email. Tender Document shall be shared by email, after the receipt of Tender Fee.

The submission Date / Time shall be on or before the deadline specified in the above table.

Participants should submit their offers through email tenders@mwasalat.om.

Any proposal submitted after the given Date & Time shall be rejected.

"Mwasalat"
Head Quarter, Ghala Tel: +968 24121500/24121555
P.O.Box: 911, Al Khums, PC: 119, Sultanate of Oman

For more information please send to: tenders@mwasalat.om



Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli strike on a house, in Nuseirat, in the central Gaza Strip. – Reuters

UN AID CHIEF WARNS OF ‘APOCALYPTIC’ CONSEQUENCES OF GAZA SHORTAGES

GAZA: The stranglehold on aid reaching Gaza threatens an “apocalyptic” outcome, the UN’s humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said on Sunday as he warned of famine in the besieged territory.

“If fuel runs out, aid doesn’t get to the people where they need it, that famine, which we have talked about for so long, and which is looming, will not be looming anymore. It will be present,” Griffiths said.

“And I think our worry, as citizens of the international community, is that the consequence is going to be really, really hard. Hard, difficult, and apocalyptic,” he said on the

sidelines of meetings with Qatari officials in Doha.

An Israeli incursion into the southern Gaza city of Rafah, launched in the face of international outcry, has deepened an already perilous humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.

Griffith, the UN’s Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, said some 50 trucks of aid per day could reach the hardest-hit north of Gaza through the reopened Erez crossing.

But battles near the Rafah and Kerem Shalom crossings in Gaza’s south meant the vital routes were

“If fuel runs out, aid doesn’t get to the people where they need it, that famine, which we have talked about for so long, and which is looming, will not be looming anymore. It will be present”

MARTIN GRIFFITHS
UN’s aid chief

“effectively blocked”, he explained.

“So aid getting in through land routes to the south and for Rafah, and the people dislodged by Rafah is almost nil,” Griffiths added.

The UN said on Saturday that

“And we all said that very clearly, that a Rafah operation is a disaster in humanitarian terms, a disaster for the people already displaced to Rafah. This is now their fourth or fifth displacement,” he said.

With key land crossings closed, some relief supplies began flowing in this week via a temporary, floating pier constructed by the United States.

Griffiths said the maritime operation was “beginning to bring in some truck loads of aid” but he cautioned “it’s not a replacement for the land routes”.

On Thursday, the Arab League called for a UN peacekeeping force to be deployed in the

Palestinian territories and for an international conference to resolve the Palestinian issue on the basis of the two-state solution. Griffiths said the statement from the 22-member bloc in Manama was “very important because it focused on the future”.

He explained there were a “number of different conferences being mooted and potentially planned” to discuss humanitarian arrangements in Gaza, including in Jordan. “I feel very strongly and I know that the Secretary-General feels very strongly that the United Nations needs to be present at the table when all these things are being discussed,” the UN aid chief said. — AFP

Bombs hit the enclave as US security envoy visits Israel

RAFAH: An Israeli strike in Gaza killed 31 people on Sunday, the Palestinian civil defence agency said, as US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan was visiting for talks on the brutal conflict and post-war scenarios.

Army troops have moved in on Gaza’s crowded far-southern city of Rafah, which they describe as the last Palestinian groups stronghold and where the UN says 800,000 civilians have been newly displaced by the fighting.

But Israel has also fought and bombed resurgent forces in northern and central areas of Gaza previously considered to be under army control, sparking US warnings that the military could become mired in a lengthy counterinsurgency campaign.

In the latest aerial bombardment overnight, Gaza’s civil defence agency said that a strike had killed

31 people and wounded 20 more in a family house in the central Nuseirat refugee camp.

The wounded included several children and rescuers were searching the rubble for missing people, said the Palestinian official news agency Wafa, while the Israeli army said it was checking the reports.

On Saturday, Palestinian relatives wailed with grief as victims including an infant were rushed to Kamal Adwan hospital in northern Beit Lahia, following Israeli strikes and heavy clashes in Jabalia.

The Gaza war broke out after unprecedented October 7 attack on Israel, which resulted in the deaths of more than 1,170 people, according to a tally based on Israeli official figures.

Israel’s offensive has killed at least 35,386 people in Gaza, mostly civilians, according to latest data

provided by the territory’s health ministry.

The Israeli military said two more soldiers were killed in Gaza on Saturday, raising its death toll to 282 soldiers in the campaign since the start of the ground offensive.

Amid the war, Israel has also imposed a siege on the Gaza Strip’s 2.4 million people that has deprived them of normal access to clean water, food, medicines and fuel, the suffering eased only by sporadic aid shipments by land, air and sea. However, truck arrivals have slowed with the Rafah crossing with Egypt, a vital conduit for humanitarian aid, closed since Israel launched its operation in the city.

In recent days aid began entering Gaza via a temporary US-built floating pier, where shipments sent from the island of Cyprus are offloaded for distribution. — AFP



Smoke billows during Israeli bombardment in eastern Rafah. – AFP



omanobserver.om/podcast



Rescue vehicles are seen following a crash of a helicopter carrying Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi, in Varzaqan, East Azerbaijan Province, on Sunday. – Reuters

What we know about Iranian President's helicopter 'accident'

Uncertainty hung over the fate of Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi after state media said his helicopter had an accident on Sunday in poor weather in a western province.

Iran launched a large-scale search and rescue operation in the fog-shrouded mountain area of East Azerbaijan province.

Supreme leader Ali Khamenei said "the Iranian people should not worry" about the country and voiced hope Raisi and the others aboard would be found in good health.

On Sunday, Iranian state television reported that the helicopter carrying Raisi had an "accident" in the Jolfa region of East Azerbaijan province amid poor weather conditions.

The accident happened in the mountainous protected forest area of Dizmar near the town of Varzaghan, said the official Irna news agency.

Raisi had earlier inaugurated a dam project with his Azeri counterpart, Ilham Aliyev, on the border between the two countries.

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi described the accident as a "hard landing due to the weather conditions".

Raisi's convoy comprised three helicopters including two that landed safely in the northwestern city of Tabriz.

Vahidi said it was



Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev visit the Qiz-Qalasi dam on the Azerbaijan-Iran border



In this photo provided by Islamic Republic News Agency Irna on Sunday, shows the helicopter carrying Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi taking off at the Iranian border with Azerbaijan after the inauguration of the dam of Qiz Qalasi, in Aras. – AFP



A man follows the news of a crash of a helicopter carrying Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi, on his phone in a cafe in Tehran, Iran, on Sunday. – Reuters

"difficult to establish communication" with the third helicopter which was carrying Raisi.

Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian was also on board along with the governor of East Azerbaijan and the province's main imam, according to Irna news agency.

Rescue teams have since been scouring the area.

More than 40 rescue teams using search dogs and drones were sent to the site, said Irna.

Military personnel along with the Revolutionary Guards and the police have also been sent there, said the army's chief-of-staff Mohammad Bagheri.

An Iranian Red Crescent team was seen on state TV walking up a slope in thick fog and rain.

The European Commission is activating satellite mapping service to aid search efforts after President Raisi's helicopter crashed, following a request for assistance from Iran, the European commissioner for crisis management said.

The European Commission's Copernicus Emergency Management Service provides mapping products based on satellite imagery.

Crisis management commissioner Janez Lenarcic said on X that the service was activating its "rapid response mapping service in view of the helicopter accident."

Bookstagram is a new reading trend but has limitations



Sandhya Rao Mehta

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

Almost everything today is on a digital device, most commonly on a mobile phone. It doesn't matter what the activity is — travel, hobbies, shopping, dining or any other aspect of life — it's available on a mobile application. No wonder, then, that even reading has got re-invented on social media. But is that a good trend or is it problematic? There are no easy answers. Bookstagram, as the work suggests, is the book club equivalent of Instagram. It is a reader's Instagram account that focuses on books, stacking them to look impressive, briefly reviewing them and keeping the attention of a scroller for a few seconds. Even traditional publishers rave about Bookstagram. Penguin, the world famous publisher, has a special page where it celebrates digital book lovers: "One of the best corners of the Internet is, without a doubt, #bookstagram. Readers from around the world celebrate their love for the printed word with boundless creativity". Clearly, being on social media is an important

way of getting attention. The posts are creative, colourful, edgy and opinionated. Their target audience is the social media native — one who scrolls between posts, has different interests and ostensibly little time to spend on a detailed description, review or discussion of a book. Still, it does bring younger audience to read, or at least, close to a digital picture of a book. The common complaint about Gen Zs is that they do not read anything substantial, but research suggests that it is not that they read less but that the sources that they read from have changed. Bookstagram is one such example. If packaging is key to bringing in an audience, online platforms are doing a good job with all the innovative ways in which they add photos, videos, animations and catchy quotations to stand out from thousands of similar sites. Such a micro site also connects people together, often giving opportunities to share similar interests, taste in books and even collaborate in the future. Often, such sites also lead to more formal book clubs, competitions and even

THE COMMON COMPLAINT ABOUT GEN ZS IS THAT THEY DO NOT READ ANYTHING SUBSTANTIAL, BUT RESEARCH SUGGESTS THAT IT IS NOT THAT THEY READ LESS BUT THAT THE SOURCES THAT THEY READ FROM HAVE CHANGED

introduce book signing events. If all this is possible through bookstagram, is there an issue? To the extent that reading has become another commodity, just like high fashion or unboxing trends, reading seems to have just become another trend, fashionable until it is not. A 30-second reel or shot surely does not do justice to a book, even if it merely introduces it. While the intention may be to make those interested reach out for the books shown in a reel, the fleeting way in which an author or a book is announced barely makes a dent. The focus on appearance — of colour, layout, style and movement — takes over any discussion of content that may have been an intention in sharing a book recommendation. By virtue of its genre, a bookstagram feed has to be attractively minimal, not deeply thoughtful. The reading habit has certainly changed and bookstagram has contributed largely to this trend, but whether it has added to the quality of reading will remain uncertain for the near future.

Space data fuels India's farming innovation drive

NIVEDITA BHATTACHARJEE

Lokeswara Reddy, an Indian farmer with two decades of experience, has seen his crops flourish after lean years, thanks to earth-observation satellites. Shifting climate patterns, high input costs, a scarcity of labour and erratic weather began to disrupt his earnings about 10 years ago, said Reddy, 52, currently a contract farmer with global giant Syngenta. Satellite data, gathered and crunched by Indian startup Cropin and provided to him by Syngenta, now gives him optimal sowing times, weather warnings, and better use of irrigation and pesticides, he said. Reddy said that over the last decade he has increased his net profit to Rs 20,000 (\$240) per acre on corn at his farm in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, up from Rs 5,000-10,000. "We are on a surer footing when it comes to agricultural practices; (using satellite data) safeguards us from climate change, pest and disease, problems with irrigation scheduling," he said. The Indian government, which just relaxed foreign investment rules for the space sector, is leaning heavily into the use of satellite data to solve problems on the ground, with agriculture a key focus. Reuters spoke to 11 experts and farmers, six startups in the industry and three NGOs who said space technology and big data were primed to help Indian agriculture reach new heights. "India's path to leadership in the new space race lies in utilising the power of data, and applications within the agricultural sector offer immense potential," said Pawan Goenka, chairman of the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre, the country's space regulatory body. Market Research Future, an India-based data analysis firm, says the global space agriculture market will be worth \$11.51 billion by 2032, up from \$4.99 billion in 2023. Although China holds the largest market share, the sector is growing faster in India than anywhere else in the Asia-Pacific region, it said. Cropin, founded in 2010 and backed by both Google and the Gates Foundation, recently signed a deal with Amazon Web Services to crunch satellite data to solve for global food insecurity. Cropin's partnership with farmers, the World Bank and the government of India in 244 villages digitised more than 30,000 farm plots, covering 77 crop varieties across climate-zones, a company project analysis in 2019 showed. The study showed 92 per cent of the farmers involved increased their average yield by 30% and their farm revenue by nearly 37 per cent. The company got similar results in Africa. — Reuters



Karim Easterbrook

The writer is former School Principal Cambridge UK

How the world has failed the Palestinians



A mourner is comforted as she grieves during the funeral of Palestinians killed in an Israeli strike at Al Aqsa hospital in Deir Al Balah in the central Gaza Strip on Sunday. — Reuters

Like many of you reading this article the plight of Palestinians, especially that of Palestinian children, weighs heavily on my heart. The genocide taking place in Gaza affects each one of us in different ways. Some are so distraught at the images showing the plight of Palestinians that they break down in tears. I have seen this on several occasions. Others keep their sadness deep inside them, but their emotions are no less painful. Others like me are angry at the world's lack of political will to force a ceasefire and hold Israel to account for its human rights abuses which even the few remaining friends Israel has are now calling genocide. Israel's response to allegations of genocide is that it has an inherent right to defend itself. It continually points to the taking of captives on October 7 and the killing of Israeli citizens. Whilst I may not fully condone what happened on October 7, I understand why it happened. The taking of captives has been described as a war crime, if so Israel has committed this war crime many more times over by imprisoning hundreds of Palestinians including children without trial. October 7 happened as a result of decades of oppression by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) and cannot be viewed in isolation. The disproportionate use of force by the Israeli military has led to the deaths of tens of thousands of non-combatant Palestinians, most of

whom are children and women. The accusation that the IDF has targeted non-combatants cannot easily be denied. Both the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute which lay down the rules of conduct in an armed

OCTOBER 7 HAPPENED AS A RESULT OF DECADES OF OPPRESSION BY THE ISRAELI DEFENCE FORCE AND CANNOT BE VIEWED IN ISOLATION

conflict clearly state that such action constitutes a war crime.

The suffering and oppression of the Palestinian people started the day after Israel established what it called a sovereign State in 1948. That was 76 years ago. This unilateral declaration of Israeli statehood led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes and land, fearful for their lives. On May 15 every year Palestinians commemorate this day which they call Nakba Day or the Day of the Catastrophe. In the

land occupied by Israel it is illegal to commemorate this day. Just one of 60 laws which directly or indirectly discriminate against Palestinian Arabs. I cannot help but feel angry, shocked and disappointed by the failure of the international community to protect the civilians of Gaza who for 76 years have been forced to live in what some have called an open prison or a Concentration Camp. Their lack of freedom and exposure to continual violence at the hands of the IDF has resulted in a sense of despair and helplessness which is the root cause of what happened on October 7. Palestinians continue to suffer and to feel marginalised by the rest of the world. Owing to the failure of more moderate powers to protect them from oppression and violence, the Palestinians themselves were pushed to take violent action. October 7 was an outburst of pent up anger and a determination to regain a Palestinian identity. And yes they were also seeking revenge. The Western powers who have supported Israel may come to regret their failure to intervene to stop the IDF from attacking Rafah. Their complicity is losing the friendship of many nations. The Palestinians deserve our help. They are our brothers and sisters. Our families. They feel pain no less than we feel pain. I end by quoting Malcolm X. "You can't separate peace from freedom because no one can be at peace unless he has freedom." The Palestinians deserve better.

Closed doors bring challenges...

Life, usually, brings new challenges every now and then; some are big and others are small. Sometimes, those challenges keep repeating until one learns a lesson. This is life; every dawn comes with different surprises, some of which are pleasing while some are frustrating. However, what really matters is the way we perceive every challenge we come across every single day!

There are days that bring more than a challenge on a single day! Sometimes, there are multiple factors being the reasons behind us getting challenged. Our work environment, day-to-day attitudes, feelings and personalities as well as those with whom we work or live with are creating obstacles in our way. Likewise, all those aspects might possibly be provoking us to get challenges or displeasing experiences.

As hand's fingers are not all the same so are days of life are not always the same. Yet, it is we who control how we run the show on every single day of life regardless of what happens around us. Being positive and looking at the brighter side of each experience and challenge we come through is the best way of overcoming the disappointing or unpleasant moments.

Although it is not often easy to manage our reaction, attitudes and feelings, but we can try our best to enjoy every moment of life.

What we need is just to have some patience, so we could manage our tensions, frustrations and disappointments.

Unfortunately, whenever we get unexpectedly shocked or displeased, we get frustrated and our minds focus on the negative side of that certain experience. Why this happens though we have not given ourselves the chance or time to investigate or even think of what happened or what was the motive behind it.

This is not a general assumption of our reaction to every incident; rather it is a common observation. Perhaps, this is what happens initially with some



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
aljahdhami22@gmail.com

An author, columnist,
creative writer,
translator and a
communications
professional

CHALLENGES
SHOULD BE
TURNED INTO
LEARNING
LESSONS AND
DISABILITIES
SHOULD BE
TURNED INTO
ABILITIES THAT
BRING NEW
OPPORTUNITIES

of us, but everyone has a different way of perceiving things and experiences around them. Everyone gets affected either emotionally or behaviourally by what happens. However, our reactions differ depending on the challenges we face, time, condition and environment we are in.

Accordingly, we should all try to act differently when being challenged. We should be fair with ourselves by thinking of fully understanding what happens and what are the possible reasons behind it? Then, one can think of the potential solutions for that particular challenge.

Seeking support from others could be another way of getting things out of one's mind. Thus, in some cases, one might need to get a proper consultation and advice from trusted ones.

More important is that whenever we come across a challenge, we should try to be positive and look at the positive side of the challenge.

Helen Keller, an American lecturer and creative author, said: "Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence."

Likewise, one should dig for an opportunity that could possibly emerge out of what has happened! One needs to turn obstacles into opportunities and problems into possibilities.

As Alexander Graham Bell said, "When one door closes another door opens; but we so often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door, that we do not see the ones which open for us."

Opportunities rarely knock one's door until they are ready to welcome it, or the right time comes. However, few people have ever been really ready without receiving a call for opportunity.

That is why challenges should be turned into learning lessons and disabilities should be turned into abilities that bring new opportunities. Sometimes, we are tested not to show our weaknesses, but to discover our strengths.

GLORY IN THE NIGHT!



The picture shows a general view of French architect Jean Nouvel's building Torre Glories at night, in Barcelona. Recently, Glories Tower has become a member of the World Federation of Great Towers. – AFP

Can we rid artificial intelligence of bias?

Artificial intelligence built on mountains of potentially biased information has created a real risk of automating discrimination, but is there any way to re-educate the machines?

The question for some is extremely urgent. In this ChatGPT era, AI will generate more and more decisions for healthcare providers, bank lenders or lawyers, using whatever was scoured from the Internet as source material.

AI's underlying intelligence, therefore, is only as good as the world it came from, as likely to be filled with wit, wisdom, and usefulness, as well as hatred, prejudice and rants.

"It's dangerous because people are embracing and adopting AI software and really depending on it," said Joshua Weaver, Director of Texas Opportunity & Justice Incubator, a legal consultancy.

"We can get into this feedback loop where the bias in our own selves and culture informs bias in the AI and becomes a sort of reinforcing loop," he said.

Making sure technology more accurately reflects human diversity is not just a political choice.

Other uses of AI, like facial recognition, have seen companies thrown into hot water with authorities for discrimination. This was the case against Rite-Aid, a US pharmacy chain, where in-store cameras falsely tagged consumers, particularly women and people of colour, as shoplifters, according to the Federal Trade



JULIE JAMMOT

The writer
is a Tech correspondent
at AFP

THE AI GIANTS
ARE WELL
AWARE OF
THE PROBLEM,
AFRAID THAT
THEIR MODELS
CAN DESCEND
INTO BAD
BEHAVIOUR, OR
OVERLY REFLECT
A WESTERN
SOCIETY WHEN
THEIR USER BASE
IS GLOBAL

Commission.

ChatGPT-style generative AI, which can create a semblance of human-level reasoning in just seconds, opens up new opportunities to get things wrong, experts worry.

The AI giants are well aware of the problem, afraid that their models can descend into bad behaviour, or overly reflect a western society when their user base is global.

"We have people asking queries from Indonesia or the US," said Google CEO Sundar Pichai, explaining why requests for images of doctors or lawyers will strive to reflect racial diversity.

But these considerations can reach absurd levels and lead to angry accusations of excessive political correctness.

This is what happened when Google's Gemini image generator spat out an image of German soldiers from World War Two that absurdly included a black man and Asian woman.

"Obviously, the mistake was that we over-applied... where it should have never applied. That was a bug and we got it wrong," Pichai said.

But Sasha Luccioni, a research scientist at Hugging Face, a leading platform for AI models cautioned that "thinking that there's a technological solution to bias is kind of already going down the wrong path."

Generative AI is essentially about whether the output "corresponds to what the user expects it to" and that is largely subjective, she said.

The huge models on which ChatGPT is built "can't reason about what is biased or what isn't so they can't do anything about it," cautioned Jayden Ziegler, head of product at Alembic Technologies.

For now at least, it is up to humans to ensure that the AI generates whatever is appropriate or meets their expectations.

But given the frenzy around AI, that is no easy task.

Hugging Face has about 600,000

AI or machine learning models available on its platform.

"Every couple of weeks a new model comes out and we're kind of scrambling in order to try to just evaluate and document biases or undesirable behaviours," said Luccioni.

One method under development is something called algorithmic disgorgement that would allow engineers to excise content, without ruining the whole model. But there are serious doubts this can actually work.

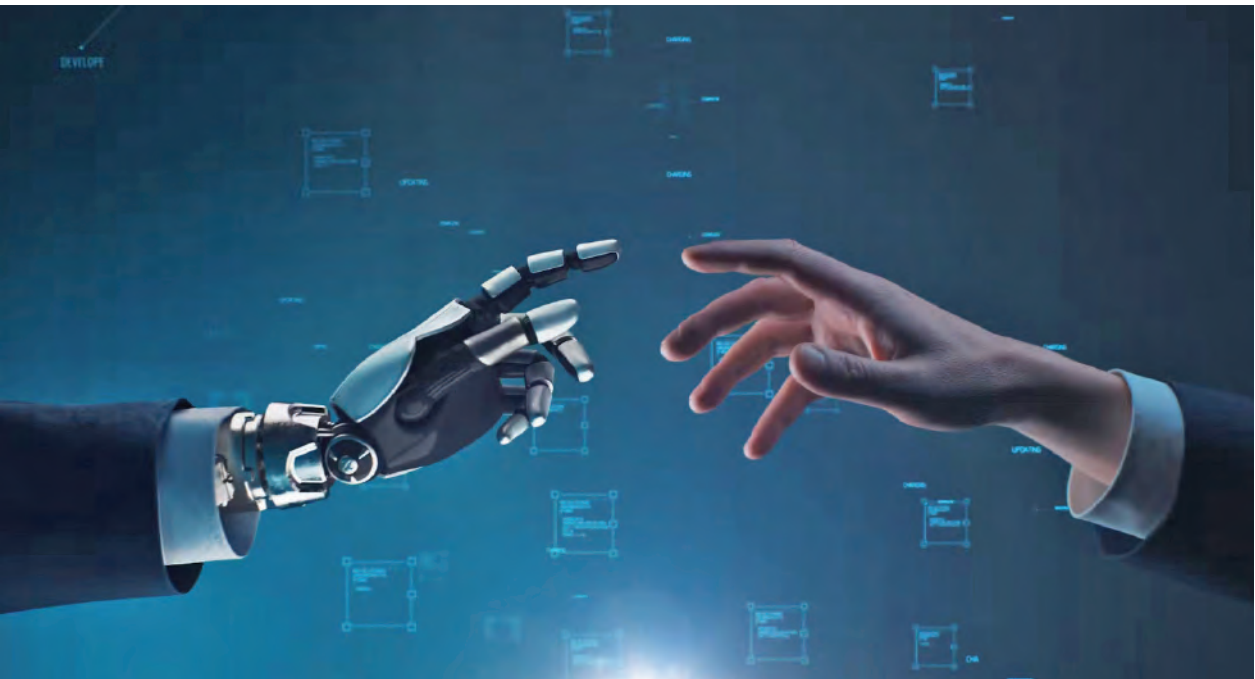
Another method would "encourage" a model to go in the right direction, "fine tune"

it, "rewarding for right and wrong," said Ram Sriharsha, chief technology officer at Pinecone.

Pinecone is a specialist of retrieval augmented generation (or RAG), a technique where the model fetches information from a fixed trusted source.

For Weaver of the Texas Opportunity & Justice Incubator, these "noble" attempts to fix bias are "projections of our hopes and dreams for what a better version of the future can look like."

But bias "is also inherent into what it means to be human and because of that, it's also baked into the AI as well," he said.



Making sure technology more accurately reflects human diversity is not just a political choice.

sport

Follow us on
omanobserver.om/sports



Oman clinch first Badminton Championship

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 19

Oman club's duo Akram al Haji and Toshar Kumar defeated Bausher's pair, Khalil al Darmaki and Mashiri Fashorsi 2-0 (21-18, 23-21) to snatch the title of Men's double event of the inaugural edition of Oman Club Badminton Championship on Saturday night. The winners defeated Al Amerat's dup comprised from Mohammed Ghloum and Rangit Kumar in the semis. Oman club players claim the trophy after showed an outstanding performance.

The three days Championship, organised under supervision of Oman Racket Sports Committee (ORSC), concluded on Saturday at the AMM Sports Arena in Ghala under the auspices of Abdullah bin Khamis al Kindi, member of the State Council, in presence of Dr Abdulrahim bin Musallam al Droushi, Chairman of ORSC, dignitaries and officials from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

At Men's single competitions, Masirah club player Salim al Maqbali managed to lift the title after he edged Sultan al Shibani from Al Kamil W'al Wafi club with score of 2-0 (21-16, 21-10). Al Maqbali impressed in local clubs tournament as he beat Mohammed al Rasbi in the semis 2-0 before defeating Akram al Haji in the quarters.

In U-15 singles boys event, the potential player Zaid al Hinai from Masirah club bagged the gold medal as he managed to register a 2-0 win over his opponent Abdulaziz al Hinai from Masirah club 21-16 and 21-15.

Following the completion of the final match of senior double event, the chief guest delivered the awards to the top winners and sponsors who have been involved in the championship. Dr Abdullah bin Khamis al Kindi, a member of the State Council, affirmed that the tournament was successful as 12 clubs took part in the inaugural edition event. "It is



Salim al Maqbali claims individual title



ORSC delivers an award to chief guest

very special tournament and it is the first of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman at the level of domestic sports clubs. Thanks to ORSC for their hard efforts despite its recent establishment since July last year. These kind of events are an ideal opportunity for emerging talents to develop and refine their skills and artistic experiences," he ended

As many as 12 clubs representing five governorates, including: Al Amerat, Al Kamil



from final match of team category

W'al Wafi, Bausher, Oman, Seeb, Al Shabab, Sohar, Majees, Salalah, Masirah, Qurayat and Ibri clubs took part in the Oman Club Badminton Championship which registered thrilling competitions. The competition included 31 players in the general single

category, divided into eight groups. In the general doubles category, there were 19 teams divided into four groups, while 17 players took part in the under 15 years category and divided into four groups.

Abdulrahim bin Musallam al



Crowning U-15 category

Droushi, Chairman of ORSC, said. "Participation of 12 clubs is record-breaking and has exceeded all our initial expectations set before the tournament commenced. This high level of participation reflects sincere interest among clubs in promoting this sport. With this interest, there are future plans to establish training centres within clubs. The tournament played effective role in developing local staff and domestic referees and the

enhancement of organisational skills among local talents who supervised the event," he finished. Iran's Seyed Omid Moghadaszadeh was appointed as general referee and assisted by Oman's referee Ahmed al Mafraji accompanied with eight referees including four from Oman namely Hamed al Harrasi, Shaikhan al Abri, Haitham al Shibli and Mohammed al Wardi besides 12 line umpire.

AL SUWAIQ ANNOUNCE INTEGRATED INVESTMENT

AL SUWAIQ PULL OUT FOOTBALL TEAM FOR 3 SEASONS

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MAY 19

Al Suwaiq Club announced an integrated investment project that includes football stadiums, a gym and an olympic swimming pool, in addition to building of 30 residential units with a hotel feature to and focusing on sustainability and smart energy.

HH Sayyid Firas bin Fatik al Said, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Al Suwaiq Club, reviewed the investment file of the club's future projects, at the general assembly meeting.

The investment project will be at the current club's area, including three different football yards, an administration building, entertainment centre, a multi-purpose hall, an Olympic swimming pool, fitness hall, parking, a physical therapy centre and accommodation for players.



GNzby6ZXUAAhRne

HH Sayyid Firas explained that: "All approvals had been obtained from all relevant government departments. We made great efforts to make the club a destination for all community groups in the state and through it also created a good environment by establishing these projects. And all current buildings will be demolished."

"We expected to begin in November and to be completed

after approximately 15 months. Three main football yards will be constructed with several entrances, including main and sides entrances. The main stadium integrated from all sides with a main platform and surrounding stands," he added.

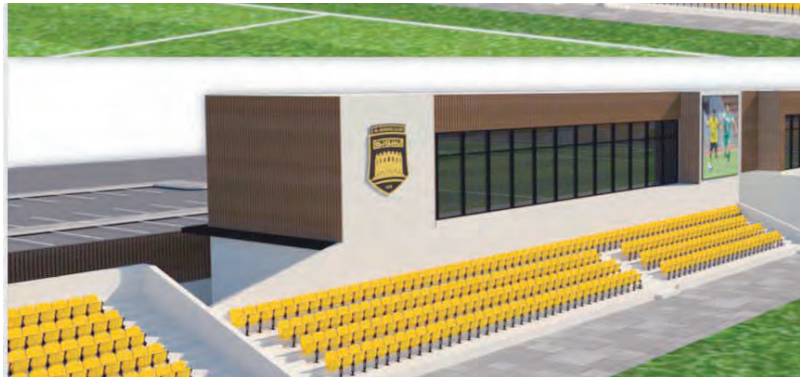
His Highness indicated that: "Administrative offices building will be a mini museum with smart screens and include an Olympic swimming pool with international



specifications."

"30 housing units will be built in order to service internal camps from inside and outside of Oman, with an integrated hall for technical staff, players and media, a physical therapy centre and two prayer rooms. In addition, the mini hall includes all the club's achievements."

"The investment project will focus on sustainability and smart energy, as solar panels will be used



to reduce electricity consumption. And to activate the water treatment technology system."

HH Sayyid Firas confirmed it will provide replacement fields for training during the construction, as well as for age groups and other games such as handball and volleyball.

Al Suwaiq club president distinguished the first football team freezing will continue to return to play after 3 seasons, to

succeed the investment plan.

Al Suwaiq Club Chairman extended his sincere thanks to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth under the leadership of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, to Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, and to all parties of government services to overcome all difficulties and obstacles.

SWIATEK DEMOLISHES SABALENKA TO WIN 3RD ROME TITLE

ROME: Iga Swiatek won the Rome Open on Saturday after sweeping aside Aryna Sabalenka 6-2, 6-3 in the final to claim her third Foro Italico title. World number one Swiatek comfortably prevailed against second-ranked Sabalenka in the last major tournament before she defends her French Open crown.

In front of a packed centre court crowd Swiatek won her 12th successive match on clay and became the first woman since Serena Williams in 2013 to win at Madrid and Rome in the same season.

Swiatek will be red-hot favourite to win her fourth title, and third in a row, at Roland Garros which starts later this month after besting Belarusian Sabalenka as she did at the recent Madrid final.

“Another final, another great battle. After Madrid I knew it wasn’t going to be easy, it can always go both ways,” said Swiatek on court.

“We’ll see about that Roland Garros final!”

The Pole took her winning record over Sabalenka to 8-3 in another hugely impressive display from what has been an almost flawless tournament from the four-time Grand Slam champion, who didn’t drop a single set on her way to another championship victory.

Saturday’s match was less dramatic than Madrid’s three-set thriller as Sabalenka, who has won the two most recent Australian



Sabalenka poses with her trophy.

Opens, gave herself too much to do. Swiatek took the opening set in just 36 minutes in a clinical display of tennis against Sabalenka, who has said repeatedly that Rome is her dream tournament to win.

Going into Saturday’s final Swiatek had won 97 per cent of her matches in which she went one set ahead since the start of 2022 and Sabalenka didn’t help her cause by wasting seven break points over two games in the second set.

After Swiatek broke Sabalenka’s serve in game seven it was only a matter of time before she closed out the match and championship.

“I would say the first set I didn’t play well at all. I wasn’t, I don’t know, feeling my game well,” Sabalenka told reporters.

“In the second set I just tried to stay a little bit more aggressive... I just tried to put her a little bit under pressure. “I had couple of opportunities to break her serve. Probably if I would take that opportunity, the match would go differently. I didn’t use it, so it is how it is.”

On Sunday Alexander Zverev bids to win his second Rome title when he faces Nicolas Jarry in the men’s final.

Zverev is in his 11th Masters final, equalling Boris Becker’s record for the most by a German since the series began in 1990. — AFP



Iga Swiatek celebrates with the trophy. – REUTERS

Hyderabad down Punjab to keep second place, Kolkata on top

HYDERABAD: Indian batsman Abhishek Sharma smashed 66 as Sunrisers Hyderabad kept their hopes alive for a top-two finish in the IPL league stage with a four-wicket win over Punjab Kings on Sunday.

Chasing 215 for victory, Hyderabad, who are already among the top four teams to have made the play-offs, reached the target with five balls to spare at their home.

The former champions, led by Pat Cummins, have moved to 17 points from 14 matches and will need Rajasthan Royals to lose the second match of the day against toppers Kolkata Knight Riders or a no result in the game to stay in top two.

“We’ve had a lot of fun and played some really great cricket,” said Cummins. “It’s satisfying and exciting (to be in the play-offs).”

The first- and second-placed teams have the advantage of two chances to qualify for the final on May 26 in Chennai.

Left-handed Abhishek, who has been a breakout young Indian star in this edition with 467 runs including three half-centuries, took



Hyderabad batsman Abhishek Sharma in action

charge after Travis Head departed for a first-ball duck.

“He (Abhishek) is amazing. I wouldn’t want to bowl to him,” Cummins said of his team’s player of the match. “It’s scary as he plays with freedom, not only against pacers but also against spinners.”

He reached his 50 in 21 balls and hammered five fours and six sixes in his 28-ball blitz to set up the chase.

Abhishek put on an attacking stand of 72

with Rahul Tripathi, who smashed 33, before Nitish Kumar Reddy and Heinrich Klaasen steadied the innings and hit back.

Klaasen smashed 42 before he got out in the 19th over and Sanvir Singh steered the team home.

Punjab, who exited the play-off race early and extended their wait for a first IPL title, posted 214-5 as Prabhsimran Singh hit 71 off 45 balls to lay the foundations for the total.

Prabhsimran put on a key stand of 54 with South Africa’s Rilee Rossouw, a left-handed batsman who hit 49, to set up the batting attack.

Rossouw kept up the charge after Prabhsimran’s departure in the 15th over as he smashed three fours and four sixes in his 24-ball knock.

Jitesh Sharma, who stood in as captain after England’s Sam Curran returned home after the previous win, steered the team past 200 and ended the innings with two sixes in his unbeaten 32 off 15 balls. Left-arm medium-pace bowler T. Natarajan stood out with figures of 2-33 in his four overs. — AFP

OOC holds second meeting



Archived photo, from previous OOC meeting

The Executive Office of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) held its second meeting of the year on Sunday, chaired by Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, OOC Chairman. The meeting discussed several important topics, notably the review and discussion of OOC proposal to establish GCC sports federations as the optimal framework for addressing the organisational and technical challenges of sports competitions in the GCC.

This proposal represents one of the mechanisms and executive tools that will effectively implement the approved strategic plan for developing joint work in the sports field among the GCC countries. The attendees agreed to present the proposal at the meeting of GCC NOCs Executive Office, scheduled for May 28 in the state of Qatar.

Additionally, amendments to Ministerial Resolution No. 88/2024 concerning the guidelines for allocating and disbursing government support to OOC were reviewed, along with the financial status of OOC until May of this year.

The attendees also reviewed the invitation from the General Secretariat of the GCC for participation in the GCC 36th meeting of NOCs Presidents, scheduled to be held in the Qatari capital, Doha, from May 27 to 29. OOC will participate in the meeting with a delegation headed by Khalid al Zubair, OOC president, in addition to HH Sayyid Azan al Said, OOC vice president, Taha al Kashri, OOC Secretary-General, Lujaina al Zaabiya, board member, and Dr Mansour al Touqi, board member. OOC Executive Office concluded the meeting with the discussion of several agenda items related to new developments and the necessary decisions taken regarding them.



Kyle Walker and teammates celebrate with the trophy. – REUTERS

MANCHESTER CITY CELEBRATE UNPRECEDENTED FOURTH SUCCESSIVE LEAGUE TITLE



Erling Braut Haaland and Ruben Dias. – Reuters



Phil Foden with manager Pep Guardiola. – Reuters

MANCHESTER, ENGLAND: Manchester City won an unprecedented fourth straight English top flight title with a 3-1 win over West Ham United on Sunday to pip rivals Arsenal on the final day of a thrilling Premier League season as the fans turned the pitch into a sea of blue.

Two glorious early goals from league player of the season Phil Foden created a party atmosphere in the sunshine at the Etihad Stadium, before a stunning bicycle kick from Mohammed Kudus before halftime brought West Ham briefly into the game.

But Rodri sealed the victory with a low 59th minute shot from outside the area, giving Pep Guardiola's side a phenomenal sixth title in seven years. Fans danced in their seats, belting out: "Champions again!" and "Are you watching Arsenal?"

In one of the closest title races in Premier League history, Arsenal could have taken the championship had City dropped points. But the Londoners' 2-1 win in their game against Everton was in vain, leaving them two points behind.

City have the chance of winning the double as they face Manchester United in the FA Cup final next Saturday.

Foden's already brilliant season got even better when he arrowed the ball into the top corner in the second minute then capped a fine team move to sweep home the second in the 18th.

"It's so hard to put into words what we've done today," Foden said. "No team has ever done it. You see what it means to the fans and it means to us. Working all year for this moment.

"I thought today we just looked confident and just played our football and in the end it paid off."

The midfielder has scored 19 league goals this season and has won six Premier League titles at just 23, making him one of England's best hopes for this year's Euros in Germany.

At the final whistle, the home fans poured onto the pitch, some letting off blue flares in celebration, while the players hugged each other in joy. — Reuters



Rodri celebrates scoring their third goal. – Reuters



Manchester City's Phil Foden celebrates scoring their second goal. – REUTERS



Terms And Condition Applies



Get more returns on High Yield Savings Account

With Al Rifaa Privilege Account

Visit your nearest branch today



الأعمال المصرفية الحصرية
PRIVILEGE BANKING



2479 1111



www.bankdhofar.com



bankdhofar

Scan to learn more





Al Rifaa

BIDS INVITED FOR THREE MINERAL BLOCKS IN IBRA



The latest auction round targets areas in Ibra that hold resources suitable for the construction sector.

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 19

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals has announced a promising set of investment opportunities for domestic companies operating in the mineral sector.

Three mining blocks for building materials are up for grabs through a public auction within the Wilayat of Ibra.

The auction aims to bolster domestic participation in the crucial construction materials

industry.

The mineral site, situated 17 kilometres northeast of Ibra’s centre, boasts a mountainous landscape rich in gabbro rocks.

The ministry has conducted preliminary studies on the area, identifying three distinct mining blocks (GS-0000023-4, GS-0000023-7, and GS-0000023-12) that will be available for bidding by Omani firms.

The bidding process will be conducted electronically

on the Taqa platform (<https://mem.gov.om/en-us/Home>) starting immediately.

Omani companies with a proven track record in mineral sector projects are encouraged to participate.

However, to qualify for bidding, they must be registered with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and submit bids that meet the minimum requirements established by Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

This initiative by the ministry signifies a strategic step towards fostering self-sufficiency in Oman’s construction materials sector.

By offering these mining blocks to domestic companies, the ministry hopes to stimulate local industry growth and reduce reliance on imported building materials.

This not only strengthens the national economy, but also potentially creates new employment opportunities within Oman.

TRA launches survey to regulate last-mile delivery in Oman

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MAY 19

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has launched a public consultation to elicit stakeholder feedback on its draft regulations governing last-mile delivery services in Oman.

In an online post, the Authority explained that the survey will aim to improve postal services by regulating postal drivers and vehicles and ensuring regulatory compliance.

Speaking to the media, Ali al Shukaili, Executive Manager of the Postal Sector at TRA, said, “The public consultation is a regulatory tool that the authority consistently uses, considering it a means to make regulatory decisions that ensure the participation of relevant parties.

“These parties include licensed companies in sectors supervised by the authority,



Last-mile delivery services are key to boosting the e-commerce sector in Oman.

such as telecommunications and postal services, as well as any official and private entities and individuals interested in the sectors regulated by the Authority.”

According to Al Shukaili, the public consultation for last-mile delivery regulations is a result of a collaboration between the Authority and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, that

aims to utilise the ministry’s land transport platform - Naql.

“This collaboration aims to maximise the benefit of the postal sector through the transport platform managed by the ministry. This platform serves as a technical means to regulate the transport sector in its broadest sense. We aim to leverage this system for the postal services sector to ensure that it integrates seamlessly with the broader transport

sector,” he shared.

Interested participants can participate in the survey by visiting the Authority’s website. Submissions close on June 3.

Speaking to the *Observer*, several government officials highlighted that last-mile delivery is key to boosting e-commerce, which generated revenues totalling \$657.1 million in 2020 in Oman.

Last year, the Sultanate of Oman — represented by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion — unveiled an e-commerce regulatory framework in an effort to pave the way for the anticipated executive e-commerce strategy, under the auspices of the Digital Economy Programme.

Additionally, earlier this year, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, announced that a new law and roadmap for the postal sector are under development.

Landbridge option positions Sohar Port as alternative gateway amid Red Sea crisis

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 19

Hutchison Ports Sohar, the operator of Sohar Port’s modern container terminal, has reported an uptick in cargo volumes being routed through the maritime gateway by shipping lines seeking a viable alternative to the Red Sea route currently plagued by traffic disruptions.

According to the terminal operator, Sohar Port is increasingly preferred by carriers to load or discharge cargoes linked to markets previously served by ports in the Red Sea prior to the start of the maritime blockade mounted by the Yemen’s Ansar Allah last November.

Sohar Port’s preference as an alternative to the Red Sea route lies in its appeal as a ‘landbridge’ that enables cargo flows to and from countries deep within the Arabian Peninsula and as far afield as the Mediterranean region as well.

Overland connectivity between Sohar and these markets is enabled by a desert highway, first launched in 2021, that cuts through The Empty Quarter in the Wilayat of Ibri before penetrating deep into Saudi Arabia.

“The ideal landbridge route for seamless connectivity is through Oman’s direct road link to Saudi Arabia through Rub Al Khali (The Empty Quarter),” the terminal operator explained.

“With the landbridge facility available through Hutchison Ports Sohar, Sohar Port is a viable alternative gateway port connecting via road transport to other GCC countries during this crucial time. With this direct road access, coverage can extend to Saudi Arabia and other surrounding

Red Sea areas as well.

“The potential for coverage can be further expanded to include Mediterranean and European ports by connecting the ports in the Red Sea, while connecting to Mediterranean countries and Europe by sea.”

Significantly, Hutchison Ports Sohar has recorded an increase in volumes being transported through Sohar during the last few months.

These volumes are not limited to containerised cargoes alone, but other types as well, depending upon the requirements of traders in the region, the operator points out.

This is made possible by the joint efforts of all stakeholders involved, including the port authority, customs, terminal operators, shipping lines and logistics companies.

Also aiding this effort is a task force set up by Hutchison Ports Sohar in coordination with Sohar Port and Freezone and other stakeholders.

“The taskforce collaborates with relevant authorities to promote Sohar as a gateway with seamless processes, to capitalise on the opportunities and to position Sohar as a truly logistical hub per the Sultanate of Oman Logistics Strategy 2040,” the terminal operator noted.

Complementing Sohar’s appeal as an alternative gateway are a number of factors: its strategic location outside of the Strait of Hormuz, and proximity to major markets like India, UAE, Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries.

Furthermore, with many carriers and common feeder operators calling at Sohar Port, shippers have a wide range of flexible options to choose from, it added.



Hutchison Ports Sohar’s modern container terminal at Sohar Port and Freezone.



شركة الصلان للصناعات الغذائية ش.م.ع.
Al Sallan Food Industries Co. SAOC

ص.ب: ٩٧٠ صحر - الرمز البريدي: ٣١١ سلطنة عمان - تلفون: ٢٦٧٥٠٦٢٣٣ - فاكس: ٢٦٧٥٠٩١٠

Invitation for attending the Annual General Meeting & Extraordinary General Meeting

The Board of Directors of Al-Sallan Food Industries SAOC is pleased to invite the shareholders of the Company to attend the Annual General Meeting & Extraordinary General Meeting to be held at 3:00 pm on Monday 31/3/2024 via the electronic platform to attend the General meetings which can be accessed through the website of the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.om). if the quorum of the meeting is not completed, a second annual ordinary general meeting will be held at 3:00 pm on Wednesday 12/6/2024, to discuss the following Agenda

First: Extraordinary General Meeting:

1- To consider the company’s financial situation and to approved the measures according to the proposal of the Board of Directors (as per the explanatory note)

Second : Annual General Meeting:

1- To consider and approve the Board of Directors’ Report for the year ended on 31/3/2024.

2- To consider the Auditors Report and approve the Financial Position and Comprehensive Income for the year ended on 31/3/2024.

3- To consider and approve the transactions entered into by the Company with related parties for the year ended 31/3/2024 (As per the Attachment).

4- To consider and approve the transactions the company will enter into with related parties during the financial year ending 31/3/2025 (As per the Attachment).

5- To appoint the auditors for the financial year ending 31/3/2025, and determine their fees.

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

(a) Juristic persons , only , has the right to appoint a natural person as a proxy to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCDC.

(b) 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 more information and enquiries, shareholders may please contact Mr. Ismail Roushdhi on Mobile no : +968-92863004

Chairman

Legal Advisor

Auditors

OETC prepares for summer 2024 with enhanced electricity transmission network

MUSCAT: To enhance the reliability, safety, and sustainability of the electricity transmission network, and to ensure its stability and performance efficiency, the Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) has confirmed its readiness for the summer of 2024 across all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

This includes preparedness at the load dispatch centre in Muscat and the control centres in Dhofar and Musandam. The company is committed to meeting the increasing electricity demands in the Sultanate of Oman.

It is anticipated that electrical loads will rise by 7% compared to last year, driven by the integration of new areas into the main grid, such as Duqm, Mahout, and Saih Al Khairat, along with a significant increase in various industrial loads.

OETC has collaborated closely with Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (NPWP) to guarantee ample generation availability during the summer period.

The company has conducted a series of mock drills, technical workshops, and training



programmes involving all technical teams to ensure their preparedness for anticipated challenges and to ensure the completion of all asset maintenance programmes, thus ensuring readiness for the summer peak.

The company has successfully completed and energised several projects aimed at supporting the safe and reliable operation of the network during the summer.

These projects are Jefnain 400/132 kV Grid Station, part

of Al Rustaq 400/132 kV Grid Station and Jawabi 132/33 kV Grid Station. Eng Sultan al Rawahi, General Manager of the Load Dispatch Center at the OETC, reaffirmed the company's commitment to enhancing the quality, safety, and reliability of the electricity transmission network. He underscored the ongoing efforts to deliver high-quality and dependable services to the community and all developmental sectors in the Sultanate of Oman.

The company maintains

regular communication through workshops and meetings with various licensed distribution and supply companies to address the key challenges anticipated during the summer season.

These engagements aim to identify suitable solutions and ensure effective coordination in load transfer for new projects. Moreover, the company emphasises the preparedness of emergency teams to promptly address any unforeseen emergencies that may arise.

Al Rawahi added, "OETC is keen to enhance the efficiency of the electricity transmission network and train employees, technical teams, and all related parties to ensure the smooth flow of work according to plans and for optimal response to the significant growth in the sector.

The company organises many training campaigns to simulate power outages, technical workshops, and field visits in cooperation with all relevant parties in the sector, aiming to enhance the readiness of all teams to deal with any emergency situation and ensure a quick response to restore services efficiently, safely, and professionally."

OETC, a member of Nama Group is the only company responsible for the transmission and control of electricity in the country's network, where electricity is transferred from generation stations to distributed load centres in all governorates, and the transmission network operates at a voltage of 132 kV and above, to cover most of the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, whether in the north or the south.

Dhofar Islamic unveils innovative vertical card designs



MUSCAT: Dhofar Islamic, the Islamic Banking Window of BankDhofar, proudly announces the launch of contemporary vertical card designs for debit and credit cardholders. These new cards seamlessly integrate Islamic banking principles with a sleek, modern aesthetic.

The vertical design fosters a more convenient user experience with a contemporary design, aligning perfectly with today's mobile wallet and contactless payment preferences. It is easier to hold, making it ideal for one-handed use.

As an additional robust security feature to safeguard against fraud, the card number and other sensitive information are hidden from view when the card is used for payments.

The colour scheme of the cards was chosen carefully to reflect the specific segment colours along with a wave pattern of silver to reflect the movement and endless possibilities.

"We are delighted to introduce our innovative vertical card designs. They embody both practicality and security, while adhering to Islamic banking principles.

We're confident our customers will appreciate this exceptional banking experience."



Experience financial growth with NBO Muzn's structured deposit

MUSCAT: Continuing its commitment to financial empowerment, the National Bank of Oman Muzn Islamic Banking's Structured Deposit product offers customers a suite of premium benefits.

Designed to maximise the potential of customers' savings, this product integrates seamlessly with the Flexi Wakala savings account, permitting deposits starting from RO 40,000.

Funds are allocated between a Flexi Wakala Savings account and a one-year Wakala Investment fixed deposit, with the latter offering an expected profit of up to 5.75% per annum.

By offering a flexible structured financial solution, Muzn showcases its commitment to catering to diverse financial needs.

Salima al Marzooqi, Assistant General Manager and Chief Islamic Banking Officer at NBO, said: "This product is designed to not only enhance the financial well-being of our clients but also to provide a robust foundation for their future economic security.

By connecting the Flexi Wakala savings account with our new Structured Deposit, we provide a strategic tool for those looking to grow their wealth responsibly. This combination offers a range of exclusive, value-added services designed to enrich their financial and lifestyle needs.

Sohar Port and Freezone receives two RoSPA awards

LONDON: In an exceptional celebration of excellence and recognition at the iconic House of Lords, Sohar Port and Freezone has received the RoSPA's Best New International Entry Award, and the RoSPA's Gold Sector Award for Health and Safety performance for the period of January 2023 to December 2023 by Lord Bill Jordan, Life President of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA).

RoSPA is a not-for-profit organisation patroned by His Majesty King Charles III, King of the United Kingdom that has worked for more than 100 years to exchange life-enhancing skills and knowledge to reduce serious accidental injuries.

The esteemed RoSPA Awards programme is celebrating its 68th year as the UK's largest and most impactful health and

safety programme. With almost 2,000 entries annually from over 50 countries, impacting over seven million employees, they offer a platform to spotlight an unwavering commitment to continuous improvement and excellence in health and safety.

Omar bin Mahmood al Mahrizi, CEO of Sohar Freezone and DCEO of Sohar Port, said, "We are honoured to receive the Gold Award for Health and Safety 2023 and the Best New International Entrant Award from RoSPA.

This recognition reflects our team's and tenants' dedication and efforts to ensure a safe and healthy work environment. It strengthens our commitment to improving standards, enhancing safety culture, and developing best practices for all stakeholders.

We are proud to be part of the



international awards community, setting a standard for safety and occupational health excellence."

Rebecca Hickman, CEO of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), expressed her delight in welcoming Sohar Port and Freezone to society. Hickman commended Sohar Port and Freezone's exceptional commitment to safety excellence and their efforts to promote a safety culture among the

companies within the port and freezone.

In line with this achievement, Sohar Port and Freezone has signed an MoU agreement with RoSPA to collaborate on occupational safety training and the exchange of expertise. This partnership aims to enhance safety standards and boost operational efficiency, establishing Sohar Port and Freezone as a benchmark in this field.

Bank Muscat inaugurates lighting project for Alharam sports team in Barka

MUSCAT: In emphasis of its stance of leadership in the field of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and support to the youth and community, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, continues to enhance the annual Green Sports programme through the inauguration of more green sports fields across the Sultanate of Oman.

The bank has recently participated in the inauguration of the lighting project for Alharam sports team in Barka, Al Batinah South Governorate.

The event was hosted under the auspices of the businessman Sami bin Ali al Siyabi, in the presence of Adnan bin Ahmed al Balushi, Assistant Regional Manager of Bank Muscat branches, Al Batinah South Governorate,



Younis bin Hashil al Yahmadi, Head of Alharam sports team, and a number of invitees and team members. During the inauguration ceremony, Adnan bin Ahmed al Balushi, Assistant Regional Manager of Bank

Muscat branches, Al Batinah South Governorate, expressed his happiness about the successful execution of Alharam sports team's lighting project as part of the "Green Sports" programme.

Adnan al Balushi congratulated

the team for the successful completion of the project which will contribute to the development of the main infrastructure of the team.

The field will also represent a suitable venue for the team to organise events and different cultural and sports activities contributing to the enhancement of their sports skills.

Furthermore, a large segment of the Omani youth with different age groups are keen to join the events related to the sports and communal arenas.

Bank Muscat will remain committed to serving the youth through its CSR programme "Green Sports" to keep pace with the developments that contribute to the growth of the sports teams all over the Sultanate of Oman.

Speaking on the occasion,

Younis bin Hashil al Yahmadi, Head of Alharam sports team, said: "I would like to take this opportunity to thank Bank Muscat for the continuous support to enhancing the "Green Sports" programme."

This programme represents a major social initiative for developing the youth's talents and sports teams in the Sultanate of Oman.

The fields of local sports teams constitute strategic and convenient areas to organise various events and sports activities.

Therefore, the new lighting project of Alharam sports team was the dream of the Omani youth and now it would provide the team with an ample opportunity to develop their talents and sports potential through hosting multiple sports and cultural events, activities, and competitions in the evening."



OQ8 dedicates \$534 million towards SMEs

HIBBA AL KINDI

MUSCAT, MAY 19

OQ8, the joint venture of Oman's OQ Group and Kuwait Petroleum International (Q8), which owns and operates the Duqm Refinery, has revealed that it had allocated over \$500 million to support local SMEs.

In an interview to *Al Roya*, Nas-ha al Falahi, Chief of People, Technology & Culture at OQ8, shared that the company has allocated \$534 million to empower small and medium enterprises, in addition to investing \$182 million in locally manufactured goods. Additionally, she shared that the



OQ8's refinery in Duqm SEZ was formally inaugurated earlier this year.

percentage of locally sourced products and goods used by the

refinery does not dip below 20 per cent.

Furthermore, Al Falahi also highlighted the significance the company places in social investments. "We are committed to developing sustainable communities, providing job opportunities for youth and local talents, and making a lasting impact on the lives of community members. Our social responsibility initiatives include environmental protection projects, community development programmes, and support for the local education and health sectors. "We believe that our success is closely tied to the well-being of the communities we are proud to serve."

According to the report, the company's investment in social projects exceeded \$5.4 million, and have benefited over 450,336 individuals since 2014.

Furthermore, the company carried out 58 social investment projects in 2023 in collaboration with stakeholders, and launched 27 projects and sponsorship programmes in the same year.

The refinery, located in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) in Al Wusta Governorate, was inaugurated earlier this year and is considered amongst the largest refineries in the region with a processing capacity of 230,000 barrels of crude oil per day.

New grid station to support Manah solar PV projects



BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 19

Local electrical contractor Trade Links & Services (TLS) announced the successful energising of its first 400-kilovolt grid station at Manah for Oman Electricity Transmission Company SAOC (OETC).

Built at a cost of over RO 13 million, this grid station will transmit renewable power generated by the Manah Solar I IPP and Manah Solar II IPP currently under construction in the Wilayat of Manah.

Output from the two solar plants will be evacuated to the OETC network, enhancing the supply of renewable energy while displacing fossil fuel based generation from other generators.

The new grid station has an interconnectivity with Nahada and the new Izki grid station through 400 KV double circuit transmission lines. Leveraging its vast experience in engineering, procurement and construction services, TLS completed the construction of the new grid station on schedule within 20 months.

"We are delighted to have contributed, and in a very safe and timely manner, to the upgrade of the network of the Oman Electricity Transmission Company. The new grid station in Manah further sets the stage for the national transition to greener forms of power generation and decarbonisation.

As one of Oman's leading contractors, we aim to utilise our expert capability and extensive experience to contribute to such projects that provide secure and cleaner energy for the future nation," said Hani Ali Mirza, Managing Director at Trade Links & Services.

Ubhar Capital receives investment banking licence from FSA



BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 19

Ubhar Capital SAOC (U Capital), a leading financial services firm in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced that it has officially been permitted to practice the activities of an Investment Bank by the Financial Services Authority (FSA).

The licence marks a significant milestone in U Capital's journey of growth and cements its position as a key player in Oman's financial sector, it said in a press statement.

As the first Omani private company to be awarded this prestigious licence, U Capital says it is now poised to expand its comprehensive suite of investment services, thereby contributing to the realisation of Oman Vision 2040's economic objectives.

bp Oman makes sizable investments in socio-economic and sustainability initiatives in 2023

JOMAR MENDOZA

MUSCAT, MAY 19

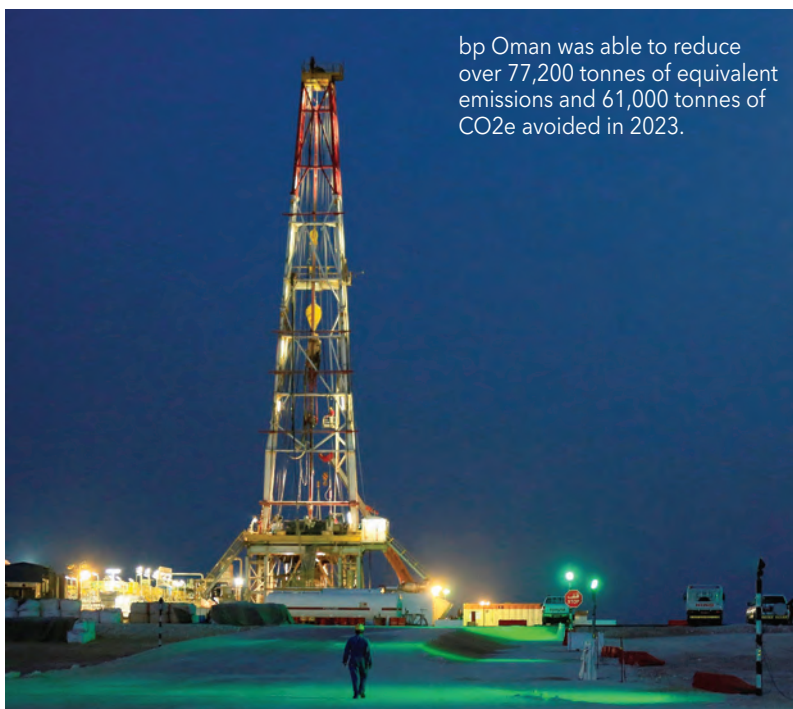
In a year marked by challenges and opportunities, bp Oman has released its annual socio-economic review for 2023, highlighting its commitment to supporting Oman's society and economy while aligning with the global push for sustainability and decarbonisation.

The report showcases a range of initiatives and achievements that underscore bp Oman's pivotal role in the country's energy landscape and its efforts to empower local communities and advance towards a more sustainable future.

bp Oman's impactful contributions in 2023 are reflected in the significant investments made in various projects and programmes.

With a total expenditure of \$10 million at Block 77 and a total expenditure of \$281 million in Oman (excluding Block 77), bp Oman's financial commitment to the country's socio-economic development is evident.

Additionally, the company's total procurement spend of \$327 million, with \$281 million spent with Omani-registered companies, demonstrates its dedication to supporting local



bp Oman was able to reduce over 77,200 tonnes of equivalent emissions and 61,000 tonnes of CO2e avoided in 2023.

businesses and promoting economic growth within Oman.

The establishment of a global procurement hub in Oman in collaboration with Worley, with a total direct spend of \$16.4 million on SMEs, has not only streamlined procurement operations but also increased efficiency and sustainability practices within the supply chain.

The procurement hub's launch has enabled the development of a more sustainable supply chain across bp Oman's operations, while the focus on Omanisation efforts

and developing local capabilities has contributed to enhancing the country's workforce and promoting economic diversity.

Furthermore, bp Oman's initiatives to empower Omani contractors through programmes like the Ruwad training programme and partnerships with companies like Oceaneering Muscat have led to tangible outcomes.

With 30 individuals graduating in 2023 and a target to support the company's Omanisation roadmap from 41 per cent to 80 per cent

Oman Business Forum to focus on digitalisation and sustainability

NASRULAH AL AJMI

MUSCAT, MAY 19

The Oman Business Forum, organised by The Business Year in partnership with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), will take place at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) on Monday, May 20, 2024.

The forum will feature the participation of several distinguished figures, including Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and other prominent industry leaders.

The event marks the launch of the 10th Anniversary Edition of The Business Year Oman 2024 and will feature two pivotal panel discussions focusing on technology and sustainability.

The first panel, 'Empowering a Tech-Driven Business Landscape in Oman', will delve into the transformative impact of digitalisation across sectors like banking, transport and logistics.

Participants include Bader al Zaidi, CEO of Vodafone Oman;

Mustafa al Hinaï, CEO of National Energy Centre Group; Maqbool al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Data Park; Khalid al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa; and Sultan al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Broadband.

The second panel, 'Navigating Sustainability in Oman', will highlight the growing importance of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) considerations in shaping the nation's sustainable development strategies.

Prominent figures participating in this panel include Mansoor bin Ali al Abdali, Managing Director of OQ Gas Networks; Said bin Salim al Shanfari, CEO of OCEC; David Bird, CEO of OQ8; and Paul Callaghan, Partner of Moore Stephens LLC.

The forum will end with closing remarks from Shaikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, followed by a networking session and lunch. This event promises to underscore Oman's dedication to leveraging technology and sustainability as cornerstones for its economic growth and development.

Salalah Mills and Atyab Food weigh merger of industrial bakery operations

QASIM AL MAASHANI

MUSCAT, MAY 19

In a move announced through a filing to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Sunday, Salalah Mills Company has announced that it has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Atyab Food Industries Company, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Oman Flour Mills (OFM), to explore the potential merger of their industrial bakery operations in the Khazaen Economic City.

This MoU signifies a collaborative effort between the two companies, both leading players in Oman's bakery sector, to assess the economic viability of this venture through a comprehensive feasibility study. The study will delve into financial aspects, operational efficiency,



The move will spur a consolidation in the industry bakery business in Oman.

and the formulation of a strategic plan aligned with both companies' long-term goals.

This potential partnership is expected to yield significant benefits for both companies, contribute to the economic growth of the region, and create new employment opportunities.

This MoU has the potential to significantly reshape the industrial bakery landscape within the Khazaen Economic City.

The combined expertise and resources of Salalah Mills and Atyab Food Industries could lead to the creation of a stronger and more competitive entity in the

market.

Publicly traded Salalah Mills, which has its flagship operations in Raysut Industrial City in Salalah, had previously announced plans to establish a Food Industries Hub at Khazaen Economic City.

In addition to investments in an industrial bakery, the Khazaen facility is also proposed to host production lines for frozen and semi-cooked pastries in the first phase, followed by frozen cakes, snacks, noodles and biscuits in the second phase.

At the same time, Oman Flour Mills — the parent company of Atyab Food Industries — has been progressing plans for the establishment of an industrial food cluster, envisioning a variety of small-scale manufacturing units that will meet the food-related requirements of Oman.

Growth and innovation: A vision towards 20240

As Oman steadily advances towards the year 2040, we stand witness to a pivotal transformation in its economic structure, paving the way for a new era of prosperity and innovation. Oman Vision 2040 isn't just a blueprint for growth; it represents a commitment to diversified, sustainable development that leverages our unique strengths.

At the heart of this ambitious plan is a profound commitment to diversifying the economy beyond its traditional reliance on oil. With strategic focus shifting towards tourism, manufacturing, and logistics, the government is making long-term investments in sustainable growth.

The expansion of Duqm Port and the development of new industrial hubs are clear



JUNAID AL SAID

The author is an investment analyst at Oman Investment Authority with experience in financial and operational analysis and research in tourism, logistics and aviation

indicators of Oman's intent to bolster these sectors. These enhancements in infrastructure are not merely a hedge against oil price volatility; they are essential to the nation's economic resilience.

The plan also emphasises innovation and entrepreneurship as crucial drivers of economic vitality. With the establishment of technology parks and innovation centres across the country, Oman is creating a vibrant ecosystem where innovative ideas can flourish. These hubs serve as incubators for startups and attract international investments.

Additionally, regulatory reforms aimed at simplifying business operations reflect a shift towards a more business-friendly environment, encouraging both local and foreign entrepreneurs to invest with confidence.

A key aspect of Vision 2040 is

its focus on human capital. An economy cannot thrive without investing in its people.

By enhancing educational curricula and partnering with international institutions, Oman is equipping its youth with the skills needed for the jobs of tomorrow. This not only improves employment prospects for Omani citizens but also makes the country an attractive destination for multinational corporations seeking skilled labour.

In response to global climate challenges, Oman is taking significant strides towards environmental sustainability. Initiatives to develop renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power, are in full swing.

These efforts contribute to the global fight against climate change and ensure the long-term sustainability of Oman's economic

expansion. Companies are increasingly incentivised to adopt sustainable practices, integrating green policies into their business operations.

However, the journey towards 2040 is not without its challenges. Transitioning to a diversified economy requires not just financial investment but also a cultural shift in the business community.

The global economic environment remains uncertain, posing risks to economic stability. Yet, these challenges also present opportunities for growth and innovation. By continuing to invest in education, infrastructure, and regulatory reforms, Oman can navigate these turbulent waters and emerge stronger.

As we inch closer to Vision 2040, Oman stands at a crossroads, with the potential

to dramatically transform its economic landscape. The steps we take today towards diversification, innovation, and sustainability will not only define the future of Oman's economy but also its role on the global stage.

It is an exciting time for us in the business community, as we are at the forefront of this transformation, driving change and reaping the benefits of a forward-thinking, robust economic strategy.

The journey towards Vision 2040 is a collective endeavour that requires the participation of all sectors of society.

It is a vision that promises not just economic prosperity but also a sustainable, inclusive future for all Omanis. As we move forward, let us embrace change, foster innovation, and work together to realise the full potential of Oman's Vision 2040.

Accelerating Oman's green revolution: Pioneering sustainable energy and fuelling tomorrow's transport



MARYAM AHMED YOUSUF AL NOFLI

The author is a faculty staff member at University of Technology and Applied Sciences - Musandam. She can be contacted at maryam.alnofli@utas.edu.om

figure in the global transition to a sustainable energy landscape.

Amid escalating global initiatives to address climate change, the Sultanate of Oman finds itself at a critical juncture in its journey toward energy transition.

The movement towards adopting green transport fuels represents not merely an environmental necessity but also a significant economic prospect for the nation. This article examines the advancements, impediments, and future opportunities associated with the development of green transport fuels in Oman.

Following last year's COP28 in Abu Dhabi, global attention remains focused on renewable energy, with biomass emerging as a key player. The United Nations predicts significant growth in biomass energy by 2050.

It currently accounts for 10% of global energy production and is expected to grow by 7% annually by 2030, according to the International Energy Report 2020.

Bioenergy is seen as a promising alternative to fossil fuels and offers hope for reducing environmental impacts and promoting a circular economy.

While bioenergy generation grew significantly by 8% in 2020, exceeding forecast growth, deployment has historically been inconsistent and has not reached required levels.

This highlights the urgent need to work together to accelerate deployment and ensure alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Integrating bioenergy into the broader renewable energy framework is critical to closing the gap between current energy needs and future environmental goals.

As the renewable energy penetration targets of intergovernmental panel of climatic change (IPCC) and legacy of COP 28 resonate, biomass is emerging as a central

Amid the discussions stemming from COP28, Oman's strategic pivot towards sustainable energy solutions has garnered notable attention.

Historically reliant on oil and gas, Oman has embarked on a trajectory aimed at diversifying its energy portfolio and curtailing carbon emissions.

By 2023, Oman's commitment to renewable energy initiatives has gained significant traction, exemplified by the Dhofar Wind Power Project and the Ibri II solar project, which signify substantial progress towards achieving 30% renewable electricity by 2030.

Moreover, Oman's ambitious foray into green hydrogen, notably through the Green Hydrogen Project in Duqm, underscores its steadfast dedication to carbon abatement and sustainable energy adoption.

These initiatives align seamlessly with Oman's Vision 2040, charting a course towards a resilient, diversified economy and positioning the nation as a leader in the global energy transition.

As for a recent study, a notable contribution comes from the "International Journal of Green Energy" (2022), which underscores Oman's potential for biofuel production. The study suggests that the country's agricultural by-products have the capacity to yield up to 150,000 tonnes of biodiesel annually.

This strategic shift not only



By 2023, Oman's commitment to renewable energy initiatives has gained significant traction, exemplified by the Dhofar Wind Power Project and the Ibri II solar project (pictured), which signify substantial progress towards achieving 30% renewable electricity by 2030.

bolsters Oman's efforts in energy diversification but also aligns with its goals for waste reduction and economic diversification.

Additionally, Oman's strategic focus on hydrogen is evidenced by its ambitious Hydrogen Strategy 2040, aiming to produce at least 1 million tonnes of renewable hydrogen annually by 2030, escalating to 3.75 million tonnes by 2040, and potentially reaching 8.5 million tonnes by 2050.

This forward-looking strategy, supported by the findings of the Oman Hydrogen Centre, capitalises on Oman's abundant solar and wind resources, positioning the nation as a prospective global leader in green hydrogen export.

Furthermore, while Oman's electric vehicle (EV) market is nascent, it shows promising growth, with a 20% year-on-year surge in EV registrations in 2023.

Forecasts suggest that EVs could constitute 10% of all vehicle sales in Oman by 2025, bolstered by the development

of EV infrastructure, including plans to install over 200 charging stations nationwide by the end of 2024.

Despite this optimistic development, Oman still faces several obstacles on its path to green transportation fuels, including infrastructure deficit, limited public awareness, and technology gaps. In particular, the country's infrastructure quality index highlights the urgent need for improvements to enable renewable energy and green transportation projects, according to the World Bank.

Furthermore, public awareness remains low: only 35% of people recognise the benefits of green fuels, according to a study by the Oman Environmental Research Centre.

Oman's Oil and Gas Research Institute noted that the need for further innovation hampers technological readiness.

Addressing these challenges requires significant initial investment. The International Renewable Energy Agency

(IEA) estimates the annual cost of renewable energy projects at between \$1.5 billion and \$2.5 billion.

To overcome these barriers, joint public and private sector efforts are critical, including government incentives, educational initiatives, and international collaboration to promote a sustainable and resilient transport sector.

In tackling these obstacles, Oman is taking a multifaceted approach that blends policy innovation and technological advancements.

They're offering incentives such as feed-in tariffs and tax breaks to encourage investment in renewable energy.

Additionally, partnerships with global tech companies are propelling the development of green transport infrastructure, as seen in the 2021 agreement with an electric vehicle manufacturer.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) is spearheading

educational campaigns to raise awareness and promote acceptance of sustainable transportation options. These efforts underscore Oman's commitment to forging a more environmentally conscious path forward. The Sultanate of Oman is at a critical stage in its shift towards sustainable energy, especially in green transport fuels. Its progress, exemplified by projects like the Dhofar Wind Power Project and the Ibri II solar project, reflects both environmental priorities and economic potential outlined in Vision 2040. Despite strides, challenges like infrastructure deficits and limited public awareness persist.

Overcoming these demands substantial investment and collaborative efforts. Oman's multifaceted approach, combining policy innovation, technological advancements, and education campaigns, underscores its commitment to a greener future and global energy leadership.

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

• Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
• Choose from a wide range of brands & models
• PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
• Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

أوربيت ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

Classifieds

URGENT HIRING

LEADING LAB CHEMICAL/CONSUMABLE/EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTION COMPANY IN OMAN
URGENT HIRING
TECHNICAL SUPPORT ENGINEER

- More than 2-year work experience in Oman/GCC
- Degree of bachelor of Mechanical Engineering
- Driving license in Oman preferred.

Suitable candidate can send CV to:
recruitment74@gmail.com

MONDAY MAY 20, 2024 | DHUL QAADA 12, 1445 AH

Auditors & Accountants

• Audit & Accounting • CFO Services • Secondment
• VAT & Tax Return Filing • VAT Refund Assistance

Contact: 92182750 • Email: contact@umpauditors.com

ROYAL CARGO

ALL OVER INDIA
INDONESIA ► NEPAL
AIR EXPORT (Port to Port)
SEA EXPORT (Container Booking)

SERVICES BY AIR & SEA

FOR MORE INFORMATION JUST DIAL
CUSTOMER CARE 93213207

PICK UP FREE ANYWHERE IN MUSCAT 93213206

Driving School

Special offers for those wishing to learn driving in (Aziba - Khwair Qurum - Ruwi Al Amirat)

Contact No: 99074072

SIT. WANTED

ACCOUNTANT with over 6 years of experience. Detail-Oriented Financial Professional: Expert in Accounting, Audit Prep, and Expense Management. Ready to join immediately. Contact: +968 78320801

INDIAN male 14 years experience light/heavy driver. Looking for suitable opening currently in Oman. Contact: 77050986/ 91280205, email: kokkadmou@gmail.com

B. COM. 35 years of experience in accounts, sales coordinator, admin, HR, personal assistant, document controller with Oman D/L, looking for a job. Contact: 92558734

INDIAN male 6 years experience in accounts/automobile/admin. Seeking for suitable opening in any field, currently in Oman. Contact: 78988055/ 92850930, email: ullasmon8@gmail.com

PLANNING Engineer, PMP. Indian male 11 years experience in Construction Projects. Well versed with Primavera P6 Software, strong communication skills, Interpersonal skills, EDT Claims, Recovery schedules, project control. Having Omani Driving License. Contact: 78002582, email: engineer4planning@gmail.com

SIT. VACANCY

MECHANICAL/ TECHNICAL
REQUIRED service technician for air compressors with D/L. Send your CV to denny@pumpsoman.com. 79119341

SIT. VACANCY

SALES Executive required for building materials, hardware items and similar items. Driving licence necessary. E: sangita@dhayahilal.com. M: 93559800

Looking for a candidate having minimum 5 years of Oman experience in accounts and administration. Knowledge of Oracle/ Tally accounting & inventory package is must preferable experienced in Trading of Building Materials, Tools etc e-mail CV to jobvacancyoman2023@gmail.com

BACHELOR degree in mechanical or electrical engineering ASNT level 2 (NDT), ASNT level 3 (NDT) additional advantage. LEEA foundation, LEEA lifting accessories diploma (LAC). Contact: pipe2566@yahoo.com

FOR RENT

400M RENTAL space Ghubra 18 Nov Street second line suitable for all commercial use. Tel: 92408308

WAREHOUSE / workshop 2,600 sq metres for rent in Misfa near Oman Cement Factory including accommodation contact: GSM 98286899, email: sales@jetsoman.com

3BKH- Ghubra 18 Nov Street. Tel: 92408308

IN Ruwi, 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, hall, kitchen, with car parking. RO 150 monthly only. Tel: 94402003.

SIT. WANTED

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

28 YEARS Experience in Oman in sales, marketing and management, Indian with DL and release.

Looking for a good job change. Contact: 78501743.

A Sudanese resident in Salalah, Bsc of administrative sciences with 21 years of experience in the fields of (sales/ management/ logistics and fleet). Contact: +968 98510880.

Job Vacancy

Candidates with at least 5-10 years of experience are urgently needed for the following positions in a multinational company in Oman

- **Electrical Engineer** (O & M experience)
- **DCS Engineer** (Honeywell DCS experience)
- **Planning Engineer**
- **Quantity Surveyor**
- **Draftsman**

Interested candidates can send CVs to **recruitment2024n@gmail.com**

PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.

Supply of Pesticides, Gel (crocoraches), Public Health chemicals, Agriculture chemicals, Snake repellent, Rodent baits and other insect repellent from UK & USA

PROFESSIONALS in Pest Control Service, Bedbug Treatment, Rodent Treatment, Snake Treatment and Termite Treatment [Pre & Post Construction]

Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309
pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

SIT. WANTED

ACCOUNTANT & sales Executive, Indian male, 31 years, BA English, specialised in Accounting. 2 years experience in India & 6 years experience in Oman. Seeking position in Accounts/Sales fields (has Oman licence). Mob: 78805951. Gmail: akhilgopinath2017@gmail.com

FOUR STAR TECHNICAL SUPPLIES LLC
(Formerly OMEIR NASSER AL FALAHY & PARTNERS TRAD. CO. LLC)
"Quality products, exceptional service, guaranteed"

Our products:
Electrical, Building Material, Hardware, Oilfield Industrial Equipment & Tools

KNIPEX Honeywell Makita DEWALT
OSRAM Milano ELORA
VICTOR DORMER BOSCH
CRC KINGSTON Wera Clarke
RIDGID DeWcon Milwaukee Schneider Beta
ALEMITE MK PCE

P.O. Box 3897, P.C. 112, Ruwi, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Tel.: +968 24837874, Fax: +968 24831341
Mobile: +968 99354944
Email: onasser@omantel.net.om / nelson@onasser.com

HAVE A PROPERTY FOR RENT?

Advertise with us.

Contact us on: 99639264

OMAN OBSERVER

Now get news on the go

To receive news updates from OMAN OBSERVER,
WhatsApp <your name> to **96473232**

To advertise on our social media platforms and website

Please Contact our Team

95210257

OMAN OBSERVER
www.omanobserver.om

3,255 Posts 26.5K Followers 38 Following

we shall overce

BREAKING NEWS

86 new Covid-19 cases in Oman, Muscat crosses 1,000

OMAN DAILY
Observer

FREE* CLASSIFIEDS

SITUATION WANTED

* NOW FREE CLASSIFIED IN OMAN DAILY OBSERVER ON THE ABOVE CATEGORIES ONLY

Send your advertisement (Only one per coupon & no photocopies), either by mail or in person, with your local identity.

To advertise please contact:
Tel: 71455532/ 71455531/ 71455530
Email: adv@omaninfo.om

To advertise in Information Ministry channels

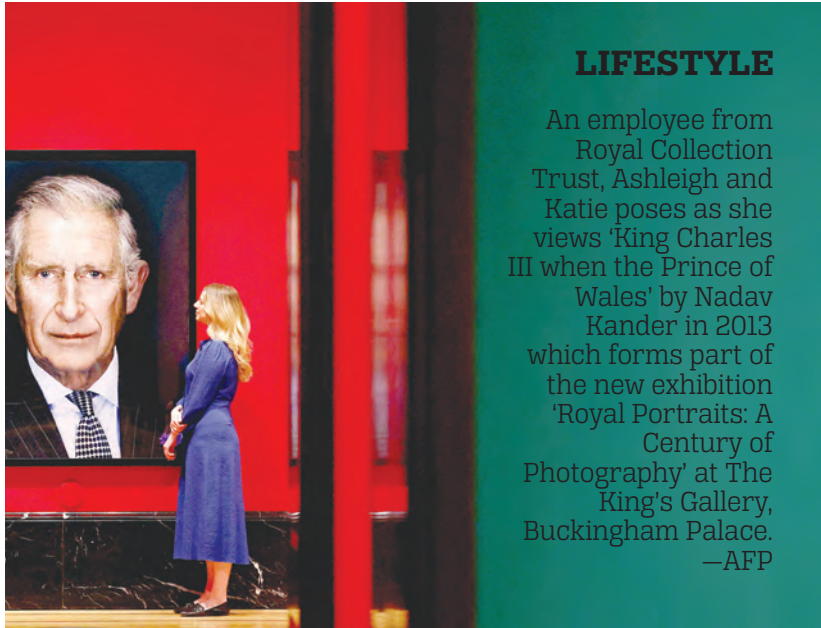
To contact 71455532- 71455531- 71455530
adv@omaninfo.om
izdiyar_info izdiyar.info

اردھار izdiyar

IZDIYAR_INFO



CULTURE
Russian girls take photographs wearing traditional Chinese outfits in a Chinese park in Moscow. — AFP



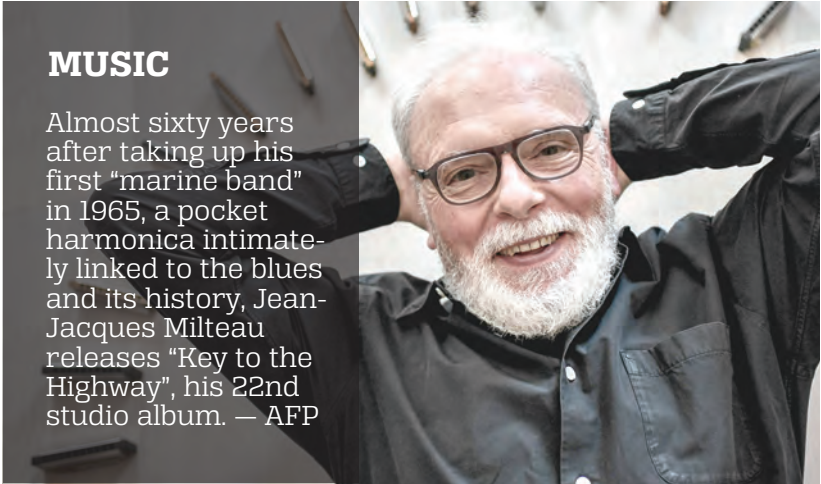
LIFESTYLE
An employee from Royal Collection Trust, Ashleigh and Katie poses as she views 'King Charles III when the Prince of Wales' by Nadav Kander in 2013 which forms part of the new exhibition 'Royal Portraits: A Century of Photography' at The King's Gallery, Buckingham Palace. —AFP



ENTERTAINMENT
US director Kevin Costner poses after being awarded Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, on the sidelines of the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP



FASHION
A model presents a creation during the Red Sea Fashion Week in Saudi Arabia's Ummahat Island. — AFP



MUSIC
Almost sixty years after taking up his first "marine band" in 1965, a pocket harmonica intimately linked to the blues and its history, Jean-Jacques Milteau releases "Key to the Highway", his 22nd studio album. — AFP

art & life

MONDAY | MAY 20, 2024 | DHUL QA'ADA 12, 1445 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om



ROHM'S LA BOHEME REDEFINES STAGECRAFT AND LEAVES AUDIENCES AWESTRUCK

AS THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE MUSCAT NEARS ITS CLOSING SEASON, THE PERFORMANCE OF LA BOHEME MESMERISES WITH TIME-LESS TALE OF LOVE AND LOSS. A POIGNANT TRIBUTE TO OPERA'S ENDURING POWER, IT LEFT THE MUSCAT AUDIENCES SPELLBOUND

BY YERU EBUEN

Taking on the principal roles of La Boheme can be intimidating. One of the most beloved operas in the repertoire, composed by Giacomo Puccini, many stellar performers have left a lasting impression with their interpretations of the roles.

Set in Paris, La Boheme follows the lives of impoverished bohemian artists. The central focus is on the passionate love between Rodolfo, a poet, and Mimi, a seamstress. Their romance faces challenges from jealousy, illness and financial struggles. The opera explores themes of love, friendship, sacrifice, and the fleeting nature of life, culminating tragically as Mimi succumbs to tuberculosis.

Cherished for its timeless melodies, rich characters and poignant storytelling, La Boheme made a mark because of Puccini's lush score which captures the essence of romanticism. Its vivid portrayal of bohemian life in 19th-century Paris, combined with its universal emotions and tragic conclusion, creates a deeply moving and unforgettable experience that continues to captivate opera lovers worldwide.

Opening on Thursday last week, there was immense pressure on the performers. How will one ever compete with Luciano Pavarotti as Rodolfo world renowned for his golden voice and charismatic stage presence or Placido Domingo who in the past has embodied the romantic hero with both ardour and sensitivity?

Names like Maria Callas, Renata Tebaldi and Mirella Freni had also been associated with the character Mimi, and their performances helped propel this opera to even greater fame.

But Thursday's performance showed that not only Conductor Leonardi Sini did a good



job, signing the Orchestra Filarmonica Italiana and the Symphonic Choir of Parma and Emilia Romagna to help bring to life the other elements of the opera truly paid off making the two nights' performance in Muscat a definite not-to-miss.

What this writer likes is the direction the team took for the stage design. Not only was the audience taken to the forlorn quarter where the artists were living, but it was one of the most creative modern switches to happen at the Royal Opera House stage where the audience was beautifully transported to the bustling streets of Paris without needing to close the curtains. The moving parts where the audience saw the switch from one scene to the next were refreshing and effortlessly



executed, it's exciting to see what more stage director Jean-Louis Grinda and set designer Rudy Sabounghi can magically pull off.

The Symphonic Choir of Parma and Emilia Romagna added depth and richness to the performance, their voices blending seamlessly to evoke the vibrant atmosphere of the Latin Quarter. From the jubilant chorus of Christmas revellers to the haunting strains of Mimi's final aria, the choir elevated the production with their impeccable vocal artistry.

At the heart of the performance were the principal singers, whose interpretations breathed life into Puccini's iconic characters. Mariangela Sicilia (Mimi) mesmerised with her ethereal soprano, capturing the fragility



and innocence of the tragic heroine.

Liparit Avetisyan (Rodolfo) showcased his powerful tenor voice, imbuing Rodolfo with the blend of ardour and vulnerability expected from the role.

The chemistry between the leads was palpable, their voices intertwining in moments of tender intimacy and heart-wrenching despair. Rodolfo's ardent declarations of love, sung with fervour by the tenor, resonated throughout the hall, while Mimi's delicate soprano captured the character's fragility and grace.

Hasmik Torosyan (Musetta) commanded the stage with her captivating presence and luminous soprano, infusing the role with charisma and charm. She was a fantastic char-

acter to watch throughout.

Semyon Antakov (Marcello) brought depth and richness to the role of the passionate painter, his baritone voice resonating with warmth and intensity, while Riccardo Zanellato (Colline) and Daniele Terenzi (Schaunard) rounded out the ensemble with their strong vocal performances and compelling characterisations, adding depth to the camaraderie of the bohemian friends.

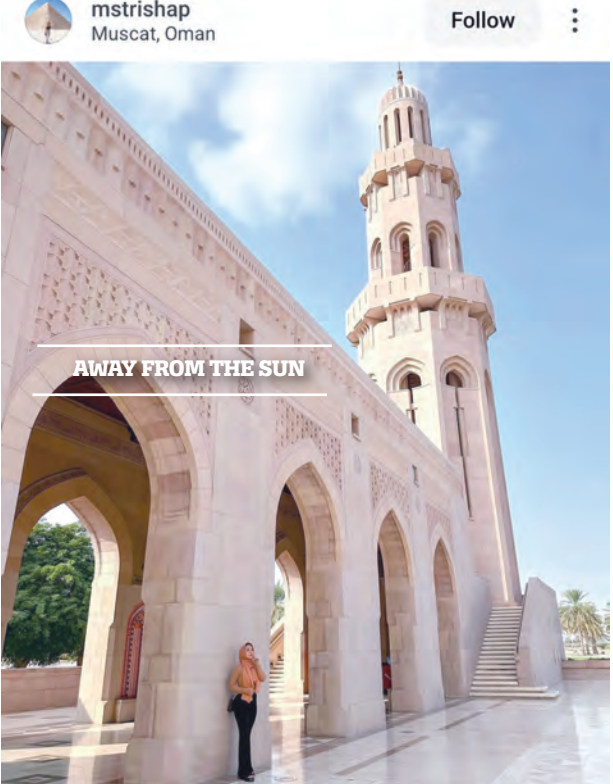
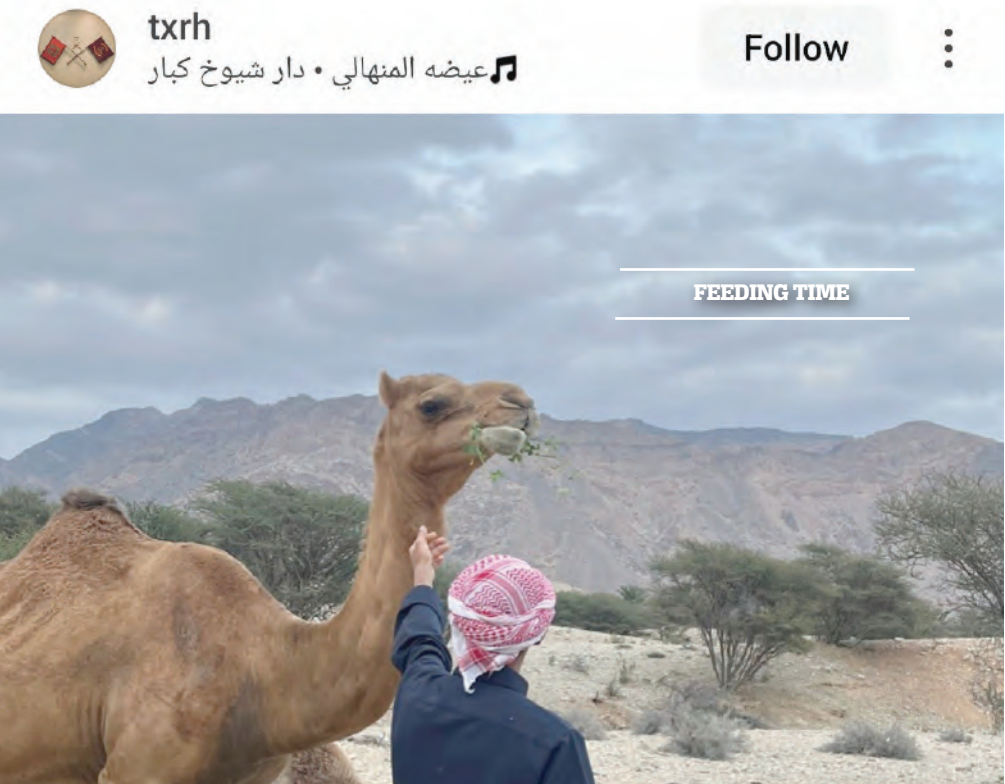
Maestro Sini's conducting was a revelation, guiding the performers with a deft hand and a deep understanding of the opera's emotional core. Under his direction, the music swelled and soared, eliciting tears and applause from the captivated audience. Each crescendo, each delicate pianissimo, was executed with masterful precision, drawing the listener ever deeper into Puccini's lyrical world.

Mimi's death at the end was shocking. As the final notes faded into silence, the characters performed so well that it felt wrong to give them a thunderous ovation when they were still mourning a death. How can anyone, after all, clap, when a beloved character just died?

For those fortunate enough to witness it, the performance was a testament to the enduring power of opera to touch the soul and stir the heart.

The performance of "La Boheme" at the ROHM on May 16, 2024, was nothing short of extraordinary. The characters were able to hold their own and I had forgotten that these roles had also been performed by other greats. With its sublime music, stirring performances and inspired direction, it captured the timeless beauty and poignancy of Puccini's masterpiece, leaving an indelible mark on all who were fortunate enough to experience it.

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.



TÜRKIYE'S 'MAD HONEY' THAT CAN KNOCK YOU FLAT

ITS FANS SWEAR it can cure heart palpitations, dodgy stomachs and even impotence. Yet every year hundreds of people end up in hospital after gorging themselves on Türkiye's "mad honey".

But beekeeper Bayram Demirciler is adamant the honey his bees make high in the mountains above the Black Sea "has never caused any problems".

In good years his hives in the province of Rize in northeast Türkiye produce up to 350 kilos of "mad" rhododendron honey.

The lush green Pontic Alps is home to a subspecies of rhododendron whose purple flowers drip with pollen that give "mad honey" its colour. They also contain a neurotoxin called grayanotoxin which can slow the heartbeat and that also packs a hallucinogenic punch.

"This honey is very good for people with hypertension," said Mustafa Oguz Alparslan, whose hives — protected from sweet-toothed bears by an electric fence — are even higher up the mountains at 1,400 metres (4,600 feet).

But eat too much and "it can also cause a rapid fall in blood pressure",

warned the beekeeper, who said he always "tests his honey as it takes it out the hive".

KNOCKED OUT A BEAR

Doctors — who recognise its virtues in small homoeopathic doses — say the honey can slow the flow of blood to the brain, causing dizziness, fainting and even hallucinations.

Intoxication with "mad honey" was even documented in ancient times.

The Greek historian Strabo, who was born in the Black Sea region, said three of Pompey's Roman cohorts were put out of action by allies of the Pontian king Mithridates who left "pots of mad honey" in their path.

And it also figured in Agatha Christie's novel, "A Haunting in Venice", filmed last year by Kenneth Branagh.

The "Queen of Crime" — who wrote part of "Murder on the Orient Express" in Istanbul — had Rowena Drake kill her own daughter with it and even used it to give Belgian detective Hercule Poirot visions.

The honey can even put beasts on their back. A young brown bear



made headlines in August 2022 when he was found unconscious near hives in Duzce province at the other end of Türkiye's Black Sea. It had keeled over after overindulging on "mad honey", according to the ministry of forestry and agriculture.

The same month a bus driver travelling between Rize and the port city of Trabzon blamed the honey for him passing out and crashing into cars at a traffic light.

In his hospital in Trabzon, Professor Abdulkadir Gunduz treats between "30 and 100" people who have been knocked sideways by the honey in bad years.

The doctor said it was "possible that there are thousands of cases" across the wider region.

"If we have a sunny May and June, the bees will feast on the rhododendrons," making the honey even stronger, said Professor Gunduz,



who has long researched the subject.

One particular detail pricked his interest. "More than 80 per cent of the intoxicated patients are men over 50. Some believe (the honey) ups their sexual performance," he said.

ALMOST DIED FOR NOTHING

In his shop in Cayeli, 20 kilometres from Rize, Necmettin Colak recommends his customers "take a soup spoon of the honey on an empty stomach". He advises his chestnut honey instead, which he swears is "more efficient".

He stores his "mad honey" for several months to allow its more problematic attributes to dissipate before tasting it himself and selling it at 55 euros a kilo.

But not everyone takes such precautions. Alaattin Demirci, from Trabzon province, had to be taken to hospital after eating some "mad honey" in January 2021.

A few days later the sixty-something posted photos of himself on Facebook on a drip, insisting that he would "never again" try it, saying he "almost died for nothing". — **AFF**

FILM

Brit drama 'Bird' brings grit, fantasy and tunes to Cannes

"BIRD", FEATURING BARRY Keoghan as a young dad, is an early frontrunner at the Cannes Film Festival with its tough but sweetly fantastical tale of working-class England.



Irish actor Keoghan is one of Hollywood's most sought-after stars following hit film "Saltburn" and his Oscar nomination for "The Banshees of Inisherin".

But it's 14-year-old newcomer Nykiya Adams who carries the movie, dealing with a world of gang violence, poverty, teen pregnancy and abusive parents — and who finds support from an otherworldly character called Bird (played by German actor Franz Rogowski).

Keoghan said there were "a lot of similarities" to his tough upbringing in the Summerhill neighbourhood of Dublin and he could easily relate to his character, Bug: "A pure chancer, a pure charmer."

"I've been saying in interviews since 2015 that I wanted to work with Andrea Arnold and then the opportunity came. I wasn't even given a script... I'd do anything she makes," said Keoghan, who will soon star as the Joker in "The Batman Part II".

"Bird" director Arnold is one of

Britain's most acclaimed directors, with an Oscar for short film "Wasp" and three Jury Prizes at Cannes for "Red Road", "Fish Tank" and "American Honey".

She said she wanted to capture the rich life of Gravesend, a working-class town an hour from London, close to where she grew up.

"There's a load of life, probably because it is so working-class. I grew up in a working-class family and they were definitely not afraid to express themselves," she said, laughing.

She said they found their young star by asking schools in the area for "their naughtiest kids".

"Interestingly Nykiya wasn't quite the kid I had in mind, but she really struck me as having this presence," Arnold said.

ALWAYS BEEN A DANCER

As always with Arnold's films, there is an ultra-cool soundtrack featuring bands such as Fontaines

DC, Sleaford Mods and Burial.

"I've always been a dancer," Arnold revealed.

"At age 13 I was out four or five nights at clubs. I'd get in for free because I always started the dancing. I'd go wearing flat shoes and really comfortable clothes. I was straight on the dance floor and I was there all night."

In typically understated fashion, she first met Keoghan in a cafe and they immediately hit it off.

"I just loved him. I love the way he looks and he feels very real to my world. It was Halloween and I think he was very amused because I gave him a toffee apple and some pumpkin," Arnold said.

The Hollywood Reporter called "Bird" a "warmhearted fable", while Deadline said it's "a jolt of culture shock that makes way for universal human truths".

It is one of 22 entries for the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, which concludes with its awards ceremony on May 25. — **AFF**

PORTRAITS OF BRITISH ROYALS FROM LAST 100 YEARS ON SHOW IN NEW LONDON EXHIBIT

FROM ANDY WARHOL'S colourful depiction of Queen Elizabeth II to Cecil Beaton's pictures of her sister Princess Margaret, a new exhibition looks at portrait photography of Britain's Royal family over the last 100 years.

"Royal Portraits: A Century of Photography", which opens at The King's Gallery in Buckingham Palace on Friday, features more than 150 photographic prints, proofs and documents from the Royal Collection and the Royal Archives, some of them never released or seen before in public.

"This exhibition charts the evolution of Royal portraits photography over the past century, so from... the high society glamour of the 1920s all the way to the coronation of King Charles III in 2023," Allesandro Nasini, senior curator of photographs at the Royal Collection Trust and exhibition curator, told Reuters.

The exhibition begins with a 1923 engagement portrait of Prince Albert and Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, who later became King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, which hangs close to the 2023 official coronation

portrait of King Charles.

"(They are) exactly 100 years apart. We have analogue technology one side, digital technology (on the other), monochrome, colour and a private commission and the official. I think gives the range... of the exhibition which goes from the very private to the very public, the official."

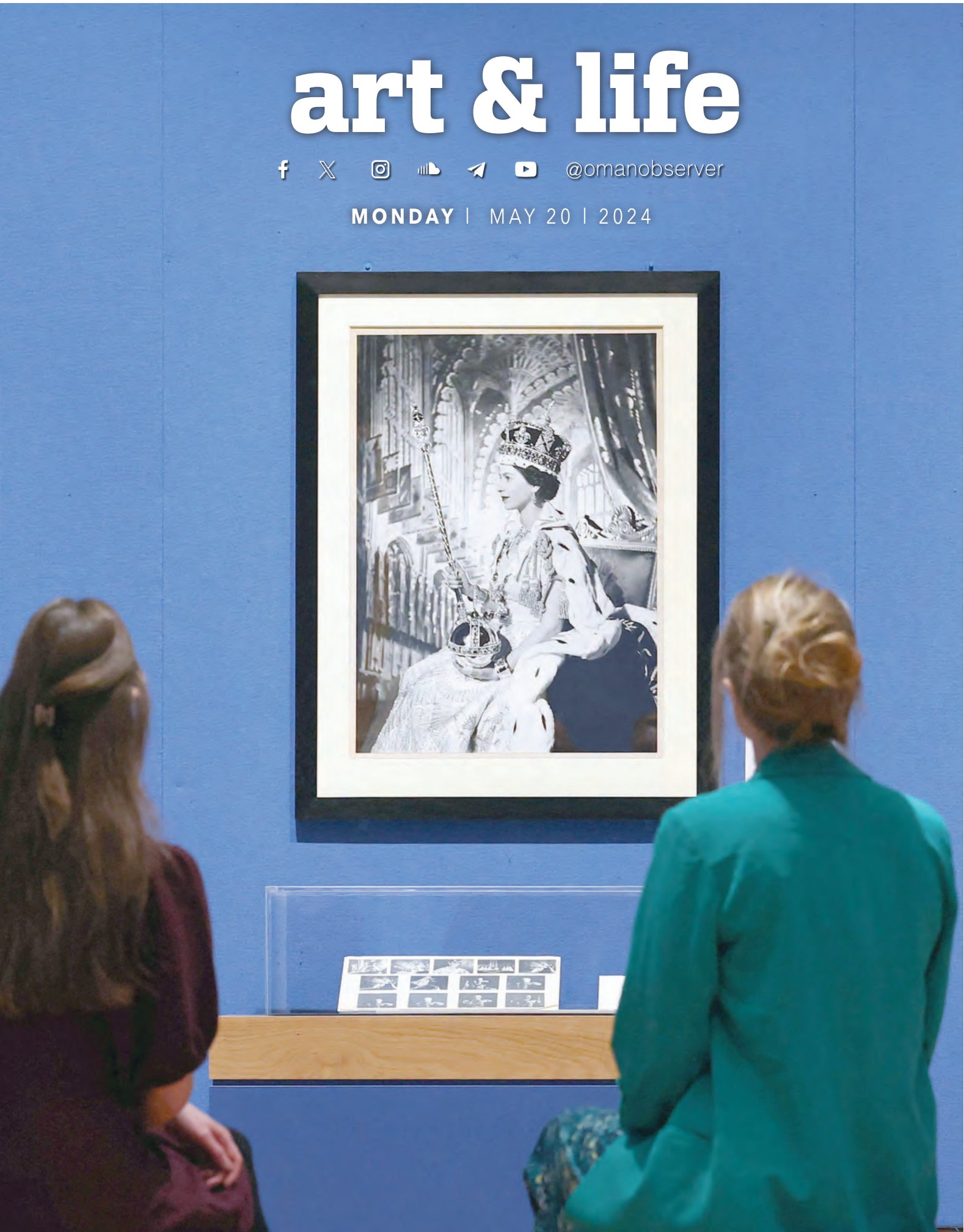
Among highlights is a colourful 1985 screenprint of Elizabeth II, who died in 2022, by Warhol, based on a portrait of the monarch and features "diamond dust", or fine particles of crushed glass.

There are wartime images of the Royal family, including some by society photographer Beaton who took many portraits of the Royal family over several decades.

A 40th-birthday portrait of Prince William's wife Kate, the Princess of Wales, hangs near a painting that inspired it: that of a previous Princess of Wales, Alexandra of Denmark.

The exhibition also features pictures of the Royals by famous photographers including Annie Leibovitz, David Bailey and Rankin.

— Reuters







CHERY NOW CLOSER TO YOU IN AL HAIL !





Now get closer to Chery experiences with the latest addition to Chery's fast expanding network in Oman. Simply walk-in to the Chery Al Hail showroom and learn more about how you can maximize your ownership experiences with a brand new Chery backed by Saud Bahwan Group support.





NEW WORLD AUTOS LLC.
P O Box 3168, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 24578000, Fax: +968 24561631, C. R. No. 1347521,
E-mail: sales@new-worldautos.com

For Test Drives & Bookings Call / Whatsapp 24579541 / 92616598



*Chery Automobile took the first spot among all Chinese automotive brands in J.D. Power 2023 China Initial Quality Study(SMIQS). For more details please visit <https://china.jdpower.com/press-release/2023-IQS>