



Shortage of new models puts buyers in waiting lane

VINOD NAIR
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Several potential buyers of vehicles in the Sultanate of Oman are forced to change their purchase plans due to a shortage of new cars in the market, which is yet to recover from the shutdowns of chip-producing units during the pandemic.

The industry sources told the Observer that the waiting period for new models is getting longer due to inventory shortages.

Upcoming Ramadhan is also the period when dealers offer promotions to clear the old inventory or attractive discounts on new vehicles.

Sreekesh N was forced to buy a high-end used SUV as the waiting

The dealer gave no guarantee about the availability of the latest model of my choice. Finally, I preferred to buy a 2022 model and make some compromises on the expected features.

SREEKESH N
Car buyer



period for the new model was slightly getting longer.

“The dealer gave no guarantee about the availability of the latest model of my choice. Finally, I preferred to buy a 2022 model and make some compromises on the expected features.”

As of late 2022 and early 2023, very few brands had the latest models in the market and customers were willing to wait for the new in the interim rather than go for the older versions.

According to statistia.com, an estimated 11.3 million units of vehicles were cut from production worldwide in 2021 due to the global semiconductor shortage, which though slowly increasing, will impact car production for

some time.

The report said around seven million cars were removed from production in 2022, and around 1.3 million cars were out of production in 2023.

“Initial disruption in the chip supply was due to China and Taiwan saw factories were forced to shut down when the pandemic first hit. While the industry recovered new surges in demand such as those brought about by changing consumer habits led to demand for chips and vehicles, which will continue until 2022.”

The shortage in the availability of new vehicles led to the demand for used vehicles, especially the 2020-22 models as they are as good as new ones, market sources said.

Oman’s longest zipline in Khasab is ready



KHASAB: As part of the National Tourism Strategy 2040 to offer more value added tourism services, Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) has announced the soft launch of the 1,800-metre dual zipline project in the Wilayat of Khasab, Governorate of Musandam, on Saturday. This project is part of an integrated adventure centre designed to offer tourists unique experiences that combine adventure and exploration.

Through this plan, the Musandam Governorate will be able to highlight its position as a prominent tourist destination in the region.

The Oman Adventure Centre

was designed to accommodate a broad range of facilities, providing visitors with an integrated tourism experience. The zipline project will be managed and operated by LEOS, a specialist operator that runs adventure and entertainment projects across the world.

Mubarak bin Ali al Rahbi, Head of the Musandam Governor’s Office, said, “The Musandam Governorate has a wealth of tourism offerings that can be utilised to develop a wide range of tourism projects. This project illustrates our ongoing efforts to utilise these elements for tourism development. We are confident that the zipline project will encourage businesses within and

outside the governorate to develop more tourism-related services. In doing so, they will contribute to the sector’s growth, aligning with our vision to place Musandam on the local and regional map of the most prominent tourist destinations, especially in the areas of exploration and adventure.”

Said bin Hareb al Obaidani, Director-General of Tourism Development at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said: “The Ministry is working to stimulate development and investment in the various key tourist destinations in the Sultanate of Oman, especially the Governorate of Musandam. Our goal is to enhance the tourism services ecosystem with a variety of specialised multi-use projects that satisfy the desires and tastes of various tourist segments. Currently in its soft opening phase, the zipline project serves as a quality benchmark for developing tourism products and enhanced tourism experiences that we aspire to achieve.”

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has allocated land and the budget for the zipline project, which has been implemented by Omran in partnership with the Musandam Governor’s Office.

People who wish to experience the zipline are welcome to visit the Oman Adventure Centre from 09:00 am to 04:00 pm, during the weekdays including the weekends and official holidays.

Oman and US to invest more in strategic sectors



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the United States of America (USA) underscored the importance of boosting trade and investments in strategic fields.

This came during the start of the inaugural session of the Strategic Dialogue between the Sultanate of Oman and the US.

In a joint statement, the two countries pointed out that the first Strategic Dialogue, which was held on Thursday, coincides with the 190-year anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce, which established commercial relations between the two countries. It was the first trade agreement the United States signed with an Arab country.

The two sides signed a memorandum of understanding to the tune of RO 192 million (\$500 million) to explore options for utilising the Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM)’s financing and to promote trade and investment in strategic sectors of Oman’s economy, ranging from renewable energy to manufacturing.

Bilateral trade between the US and Oman totalled \$4.22 billion in 2022, the highest ever and up 30 per cent from \$3.25 billion in 2021. The United States is Oman’s largest market for non-oil exports, providing the long-term partnership to create jobs and mutual prosperity in both countries.

Both sides discussed and

Bilateral trade between the US and Oman totalled \$4.22 billion in 2022, the highest ever and up 30 per cent from \$3.25 billion in 2021

outlined areas of cooperation within three working groups: trade and investment; clean energy; and education, culture and science.

In trade and investment, participants from both countries discussed activating a working mechanism to maximise the benefits of the United States-Oman Free Trade Agreement (FTA), the issue of tariffs, promoting trade and investment in strategic areas such as mining, logistics, energy, fisheries, agribusiness, and telecommunications and exploring possibilities for collaboration in the digital economy.

The two countries explored opportunities to collaborate on clean energy solutions such as carbon removal, clean hydrogen, industrial decarbonisation, as well as clean energy policy, including Oman’s net-zero 2050 roadmap, methane emissions reduction and other short-lived climate pollutants, and Oman’s plans for COP28. They also discussed enhancing cooperation on catalysing finance for clean energy as well as in research programmes and knowledge sharing for the decarbonisation of energy.

Both sides welcomed

cooperation on education, culture and science, and discussed a mechanism for resuming the Fulbright programme for Omani students and scholars and developing programmes in key areas discussed by both countries.

The two sides highlighted their close cooperation on issues that are central to the bilateral relationship, such as investment in innovation, higher education and scientific research programmes, including initiative programmes in various fields.

The Sultanate of Oman and the United States of America further expressed their mutual intent to collaborate on teachers’ professional development. They also decided to cooperate in the fields of literature and culture.

The Sultanate of Oman and the United States are committed to maintaining the exchange of high-level bilateral visits, including the goal of scheduling the next round of the Strategic Dialogue in 2024.

The inaugural Strategic Dialogue comes after the announcement made in Washington, DC by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, and Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken in November 2022 to launch the first Strategic Dialogue between the two countries – with the aim of building upon the strong partnership between the Sultanate of Oman and the United States.



Tender Announcement

Request for Qualification For Consultancy Services for (A Feasibility Study for an Agri-Industrial Food City)

Nitaj is seeking for a consultant to study Agri-industrial Food city in the Najd area. The consultant for the project may be part of a single organization or a consortium.

Scope of the Study: Detailed Feasibility Study

Qualification No.	PR 2023/006
Tender Fee	Free
Last Date for Collection Qualification	15 Mar 2023
Last Date for Clarifications	28 Mar 2023
Last Date for Response Submissions	26 Apr 2023

For inquiries or to request qualification documents,
please contact us by e-mail:

tenders@nitaj.om

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Visitor centre opens at Salut

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, FEB 25

Coinciding with the Al Dakhiliyah Festival, a visitor centre was opened at Bisya and Salut archaeological sites in the Wilayat of Bahla.

Eng Ibrahim bin Said bin Khalaf al Kharousi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage, said: “The visitor centre at the archaeological site of Salut and Bisya is an addition to the visitor centres in archaeological sites and world heritage sites. Surveys, excavations, studies, and archaeological finds confirm the existence of civilisation since the third century BC. Studies and excavations are still happening at the site and surrounding Salut.”

He indicated that the ministry is preparing the Salut to be designated as the World Heritage Site.

Haitham bin Mohammad al Ghassani, Director-General of Promotion at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said: “The launch of the activities of Al Dakhiliyah Festival 2023 comes within the plan of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to promote tourism and heritage. The festival’s



programme includes activities in keeping with what is unique to the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah.”

Ahmed bin Salim bin Saif al Tobi, Director-General of Administrative and Financial Affairs in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, said: “We hope that Al Dakhiliyah Festival will be an opportunity for the visitors to learn about its attractive natural features.”

Ahmed bin Mohammad al Tamimi, Director of the Bisya and Salut Archaeological Site Department, said: “The establishment of the centre comes within the framework of preparing archaeological sites for tourists.”

He explained that the exhibition halls in the centre are divided into three main halls. The first represents the Bronze Age period, the second hall represents the Iron Age period and the Islamic period, and the third is the World Heritage Hall.

The halls include displays that shine light on archaeological studies in Bisya and Salut.

Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, launched the Al Dakhiliyah Festival on Thursday. It will continue till March 4.

A platform for discussions, sharing experiences

FROM P1

Mona spoke about her passion for writing and said it started during her school days.

“The desire to explore literature and great writings had a great role in the development of the writing career. I read books and compared them with others in the competition,” she said.

She added that the education she received from her father, the poet, had a great role in refining her abilities and skills in this field.

She talked about her studies in Morocco and its impact on her writings as it helped her meet many prominent intellectuals and writers. In one of the sessions, Dr Hosni Ibrahim,

assistant professor of sociology, touched on the beginnings of the study of sociology at Sultan Qaboos University, which began with the establishment of the Department of Sociology aimed at contributing to the cultural and social development of Omani society. The book fair hosts 826 publishing houses from 32 countries with 533,063 titles on display.

Artificial Intelligence has been used in this year’s edition to analyse various data about the guests. The book fair will include a Bahraini Cultural Week. This book fair will hold 165 cultural events and 166 children’s activities.

384,474 people take part North Al Batinah fest

The North Al Batinah Marine Festival concluded at Al Manial Park in the Wilayat of Suhar on Saturday, under the auspices of Sayyid Sulaiman bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Deputy Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers. Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of North Al Batinah, hailed the success of

the festival and highlighted the role of productive families and small and medium enterprises. “We have been keen to facilitate the participation of these families and SMEs. Productive families through their stalls made sales worth RO 40,000.” Over 384,474 people visited the month-long festival.



Over 1,500 saplings of wild trees planted in Al Rustaq



More than 1,500 saplings of wild trees have been planted in South Al Batinah Governorate. The Environment Authority, represented by the Environment Department in South Al Batinah Governorate, implemented a campaign to plant 2,000 seedlings of Sidr, Ghaf and Qart in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq in the Governorate of South Al Batinah. The campaign was carried out in cooperation with the Youth Center of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and the Al Rustaq Charitable Team. The cultivation campaigns are a part of the national initiative to plant 10 million trees.

Theater competition concludes in Nizwa

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, FEB 25

A theatre competition was held in Nizwa Culture Centre to select troupes to represent Al Dakhiliyah and Al Wusta governorates.

Izki Club won first place, Bahla Club second, and Nizwa Third in the presence of a large audience of stage fans.

Izki Club’s play was written and directed by Abdul Malik bin Salim al Ghadani.

The play discusses social issues and is about a woman who torments her niece out of jealousy, which eventually leads to the death of the latter.

Nizwa Club presented a play written by Nouf bint Said al Mashaikhiyah and directed by Hafez al Busaidy, which discussed extortion in its various forms.

Bahla Club’s play on divorce was written

by Wafa al Rashdi and Ruqaiah al Alawi, and directed by Wafa al Rashdi.

Samayil Club’s play, which was written by Ahmed al Kharousi and directed by Mahmoud al Maamari, touched on the rising number of murder cases.

Many plays were aimed at spreading awareness about social issues. All the performances were dominated by suspense and excitement. The jury consisted of Ahmed al Awaini and Dr Said Shannon.

The evaluations were based on artistic and aesthetic values, compatibility of the cast with the rest of the show as well as the comprehensive display, elements of the theater and display of scenes. Emphasis was also placed on entertainment and topics that carry a message.





معرض مسقط
الدولي للكتاب - ٢٠٢٣
Muscat International
BOOK FAIR - 2023
محافظة جنوب الباطنة (ضيف الشرف)
٢٢ فبراير - ٤ مارس 22nd February - 4th March
النسخة
Edition

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EVERY DAY THE GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS CENTRE FEATURES
NEW BOOKS BY OMANI AUTHORS AND FEATURES THEM IN TIME-LAPSE VIDEOS PROMOTING
THE AUTHORS AT THE SAME TIME

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

AMID MANY TITLES AVAILABLE at the 27th Muscat International Book Fair, the presence of various organisations is a value addition to the annual event.

The Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Literature and Art is one such participant, which is taking part in the book fair with books featuring the winners of the prestigious award. It has its stall right at the entrance of the exhibition.

Fatma al Mamari, Head of Cultural Relations at Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science, is seen explaining to the visitors. The award grants the first winner a cash award of RO 50,000.

“Participation criterion rotates alternate years — one year for Omanis and the next year for Omanis and Arabs. There are categories for the people to participate,” explained Fatma.

Every year the award committee takes entries for three fields.

“For example, one field could be drama, another novel and third literature for children. Yet another category could be fiction. So each year, the list of fields varies,” she pointed out.

There is also an international committee to nominate the nominees, and the announcement of the award is made via television and social media to encourage people to participate.

The committee chooses the winners from each field, and then there is an announcement followed by a celebration.

The books on display are all about the winners from the inception of the award in 2011 until 2022.

For 2023, the fields announced are intercommunications and media, novels and director of cinema. After the official announcement of the award categories, candidates can submit their work. The winners are announced in December every year.

The books on display are not for sale, but the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science magazine is available for distribution. The contributors to the magazine are Omanis and others living in Oman, and the topics addressed are culture, economy, education, arts, literature and place of interest in Oman. It is an annual publication and is released at the book fair. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the cultural magazine's distribution was halted for three years.

It is back after three years, and all the previous issues are available at the book fair this year.

Dar al Luban is a publishing house that follows the objective of promoting Omani writers with great passion.

According to Al Aathra al Rahbi, this year, Dar al Luban is participating in the book fair with more than 150 new books in addition to their previous collections.

“About 95 per cent of our books are by Omanis and just about 5 per cent by non-Omani authors. The topics vary from the story, medicine, other educational books, travel etc.” Al Aathra said.

The bookstall has a book-signing corner.

Every evening during the ten days of the book fair, authors will be present for the signing of their books.

Every day the Government Communications Centre features new books by Omani authors and features them in time-lapse videos promoting the authors at the same time, making it easier for the public to access the books.

One can follow the social media account @oman.cg on Instagram and Twitter for more details.

95%

OF OUR BOOKS ARE
BY OMANIS AND JUST ABOUT 5%
BY NON-OMANI AUTHORS

A FAIR FOR ALL TASTES

FROM WINNING AUTHORS TO BUDDING WRITERS, AMID MANY TITLES AVAILABLE at the 27th Muscat International Book Fair, the presence of various organisations is a value addition to the annual event. The Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Literature and Art is one such participant, which is taking part in the book fair with books featuring the winners of the prestigious award. It has its stall right at the entrance of the exhibition. Fatma al Mamari, Head of Cultural Relations at Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science, is seen explaining to the visitors. The award grants the first winner a cash award of RO 50,000. “Participation criterion rotates alternate years — one year for Omanis and the next year for Omanis and Arabs. There are categories for the people to participate,” explained Fatma. Every year the award committee takes entries for three fields. “For example, one field could be drama, another novel and third literature for children. Yet another category could be fiction. So each year, the list of fields varies,” she pointed out. There is also an international committee to nominate the nominees, and the announcement of the award is made via television and social media to encourage people to participate. The committee chooses the winners from each field, and then there is an announcement followed by a celebration. The books on display are all about the winners from the inception of the award in 2011 until 2022. For 2023, the fields announced are intercommunications and media, novels and director of cinema. After the official announcement of the award categories, candidates can submit their work. The winners are announced in December every year. The books on display are not for sale, but the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science magazine is available for distribution. The contributors to the magazine are Omanis and others living in Oman, and the topics addressed are culture, economy, education, arts, literature and place of interest in Oman. It is an annual publication and is released at the book fair. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the cultural magazine's distribution was halted for three years. It is back after three years, and all the previous issues are available at the book fair this year. Dar al Luban is a publishing house that follows the objective of promoting Omani writers with great passion. According to Al Aathra al Rahbi, this year, Dar al Luban is participating in the book fair with more than 150 new books in addition to their previous collections. “About 95 per cent of our books are by Omanis and just about 5 per cent by non-Omani authors. The topics vary from the story, medicine, other educational books, travel etc.” Al Aathra said. The bookstall has a book-signing corner. Every evening during the ten days of the book fair, authors will be present for the signing of their books. Every day the Government Communications Centre features new books by Omani authors and features them in time-lapse videos promoting the authors at the same time, making it easier for the public to access the books. One can follow the social media account @oman.cg on Instagram and Twitter for more details.



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Nigerians vote for new president

ONITSHA, Nigeria: Nigeria’s presidential election was marked by long delays at some polling stations on Saturday that did not deter large crowds of voters hoping for a reset after years of worsening violence and hardship under outgoing President Muhammadu Buhari.

Reuters reporters at locations across Africa’s most populous country saw a mixed picture, with delays of several hours in some places while voting got underway more swiftly in others.

“As you can see, our people have turned out hugely. Voter enlightenment was high and people are excited to take part in the election,” said voter Emmanuel Nwosu, waiting for his polling station to open in the southeastern city of Onitsha.

“We will wait. They were supposed to start accreditation by 8:30 am but even if they come at 9 pm today we will stay and vote.”

Officials from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in several states said they had been delayed by the late arrival of vehicles to transport them.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, head of



Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari and his wife Aisha Buhari arrive to cast their votes during presidential election at a polling station in Daura, Nigeria. — Reuters

Race to succeed President Buhari seen as wide open as measures in place to mitigate risk of fraud

the World Trade Organisation, said on Twitter that her polling station in her home village in southeastern Abia State opened about three hours late.

“The turnout is unbelievable, the largest I have ever seen in all the years I have voted in the village. Young and very old all are

here,” she said just after voting.

Buhari, a retired army general, is stepping down after serving the maximum eight years allowed by the constitution but failing to deliver on his pledge to bring back order and security across Nigeria, Africa’s top oil-producing nation.

The candidates from two parties that have alternated in power since the end of army rule in 1999 are facing an unusually strong challenge from a minor party candidate popular among young voters. — Reuters

Note

Rural Areas Electricity Company (S.O.A.C) announces to modify the bids submission deadline of tender No. (Tanweer- 05/2023), as per the following.

Tender No	Description	Last Date of Submission
Tanweer - 05/2023	Management of Diesel Power Plants. For Rural Areas Electricity Company	20/06/2023

- Interested and Specialized local and International Companies and Registered Establishments may obtain the Tender documents from Procurement & Contracts Department, against non-refundable amount of RO (2500/-). The fees for the tenders shall be deposited on Tanweer account 0423010783090041 – Bank Muscat and for more information please contact via email address i.e. tender.purchase@tanweer.nama.om, or call us on phone number: 24250824.
- The Completed Tender should be deposited in the Tender Box at the Rural Areas Electricity Company (S.A.O.C) Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 12:00 P.M on the last date of submission.

For more information, please contact: 80077787



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Jordan to host Palestinian-Israeli talks today



Palestinian youths from Burin village hurl rocks at settlers from Israeli Bracha settlement who reportedly set fire to cars in the village in occupied West Bank. — AFP

AMMAN: Jordan will on Sunday host a “political-security” meeting between Israel and the Palestinians to try and restore calm to the occupied Palestinian territories after deadly violence, a Jordanian government official said.

The meeting to be held in the Red Sea resort of Aqaba will also be attended by United States and Egyptian representatives.

It aims at “building trust” between Israel and the Palestinians, the official said on Saturday, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The talks will come after 11 Palestinians were killed and more than 80 wounded in a gun battle on Wednesday when Israeli troops raided the city of Nablus in the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since the 1967 Six-Day War.

The death toll was the highest since the second Palestinian intifadha, or uprising, ended in 2005, the year the United Nations started tracking casualties.

Intensifying unrest this year has sparked international concern and follows violence in 2022 which was the deadliest in the West Bank since UN tracking began.

“The political-security meeting is part of stepped up ongoing efforts by Jordan in coordination with the Palestinian Authority and other parties to end unilateral measures (by Israel) and a security breakdown that could fuel more violence,” the Jordanian government official said.

The talks aim to reach “security and economic measures to ease the hardships of the Palestinian people,” the official added. Jordan like Egypt is bound by a peace treaty with Israel.

Since the start of this year, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has claimed the lives of 62 Palestinian adults and children, including fighters and civilians. — AFP



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Audited Financial Statement for the year ended 31 December 2022

BOARD OF DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Dear Shareholders,
On behalf of the Board of Directors of Sohar Power Company SAOG (“Sohar Power” or the “Company”), I am pleased to present you with the Eighteenth Annual Report of the Company for the year ended 31 December 2022.

On 27th March 2022, Sohar Power Company shareholders held their Annual Ordinary General Meeting (“AOGM”) to approve the 2021 Financial Statements and other related issues. On the same date, an Extraordinary General Meeting (“EGM”) was also held in which it was decided to wait until the Authority for Public Services Regulation’s (APSR) issuance of the Executive Regulations related to direct sale of electricity, study its economic feasibility and then to convene a further EGM before June 2022.

On 22nd June 2022, an Ordinary General Meeting (“OGM”) was held to approve the Company to enter into certain related party transactions. On 30th November 2022, an OGM was held to authorize the Company to execute certain security charges needed for the extension of the Final Maturity Date. An EGM held on the same date amended Company’s articles of association including reduction of the number of Directors from 9 to 7, among others.

Sohar Power was incorporated in 2004 after the award of the Sohar IWPP project resulting from a competitive bidding process and started its operations in 2007. The Company owns and operates the 585MW electricity generation and 33MIGD seawater desalination plant in Sohar Port and Freezone industrial area. It sells electricity and water to Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC (“OPWP”) under a 15-year Power and Water Purchase Agreement (“PWPA”), in a regulated but not competitive environment. The Company has been listed on the Muscat Securities Market since 2008.

Health & Safety

The year 2022 has seen excellent Health and Safety performance for Sohar Power. There were no Lost Time Accidents (LTA), accumulating to 3,623 days without LTA at the end of the year. The Health and Safety of our employees, contractors and visitors remains the utmost priority for the Company and its operator Sohar Operations & Maintenance Company LLC (“SOMC”).

Following the reduction in restrictions imposed by the Authorities on account of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Company and its Operator has also reduced the requirements to be followed. However, we remain vigilant and prudent measures are still in place to ensure that there are no infections.

Operations

The Contract Year 15 ended on 31st March 2022. However, on account of Force Majeure events suffered by Sohar Power during the PWPA Term and approved by OPWP, the Term was extended in accordance with the PWPA until May 15, 2022; at 18:00 hours. All maintenance activities on the plant equipment were conducted during the 2021 – 2022 Winter Period.

Since then, the plant has been maintained under preservation by SOMC. Such preservation is required for possible future operations under frameworks being discussed with the Authorities.

The Company was able to operate the Plant in July 2022 for supply of power to OQ’s Liwa Plastics, under a direct sale of power framework for which the Authority had provided the Company a one-time approval. The operation was undertaken over a period of 23 days. This is expected to provide useful inputs for the formal framework to be announced by APSR.

Financial Performance

The Board of Directors would like to announce that the Company has ended the year with a net loss of RO 14.8 million compared to a net loss of RO 34.9 million in 2021. The net loss in 2022 is mainly due to

the impairment charge of OMR 15.2 million based on the market valuation study that was conducted after the annulment of Power 2022 procurement process. Based on the market valuation study, the Company’s assets were estimated at a market value of OMR 7.5 million, compared to OMR 22.7 million the book assets values at the end of 2022, resulting in partial impairment of OMR 15.2 million. This has resulted in full equity erosion.

The revenues for the period amount to OMR 11.4 million against OMR 31.0 million for the same period last year. This is mainly due to the expiry of the PWPA on 15 May 2022 (i.e., 4.5 months in 2022 compared to full year in 2021).

The direct costs have decreased from OMR 11.1 million in 2021 to OMR 6.9 million in 2022, mainly due to the impairment charge which was taken at the end of the period in 2021. In addition, there has been a reduction in other costs including plant insurance costs, operational cost and others, considering that the Plant is under preservation since 15 May 2022.

The current principal, interest and swaps were settled on their due dates. The hedging deficit on the Company’s swap agreements at the close of business on 31st March 2022, was OMR NIL, in comparison with valuations as of 31st December 2021 of OMR 0.4 million. The swap agreements have expired at the end of their terms on 31st March 2022.

The finance costs decreased by OMR 0.9 million in 2022 in comparison to 2021 is associated with debt repayments during the period.

Under its Financing Agreements entered with its lenders, Sohar Power is subject to a cash sweep mechanism which started on 30th September 2015 and will last until the full repayment of the long-term loans. The cash sweep mechanism prevents the distribution of dividends to shareholders since all the available cash is devoted to the repayment of the loans. This mechanism is common in financing agreements throughout the region and helps to provide a competitive tariff for an off-taker such as OPWP at the time of the bid. As previously disclosed, the pay out of dividends ended in 2016, and there will be no more dividend distributions to shareholders unless the debt of the Company is refinanced, and the cash sweep is successfully removed. The Company has suspended its exploration of opportunities to refinance its debt until new sustainable source of revenues is secured.

The share price was OMR 0.020 at end of 31st December 2022.

There are no legal proceedings against the Company as of 31st December 2022.

Corporate Governance

In line with efforts deployed in previous years, the Company ensured that its organization, systems, policies, and procedures follow the highest standards of governance to always comply with the Code of Corporate Governance promulgated by CMA, including the new Code requirements effective since July 2016.

After resignation of the internal auditor of the Company, the Audit Committee and the Board has appointed, after obtaining CMA approval, an external firm to perform the IA activities of the company until the end of 2022.

Employment

Pursuing their continued efforts to develop, train, and employ Omanis, the Company and its operator have maintained the Omanisation level at 93.3% at the end of period.

Corporate Social Responsibility

In 2022, the Company further extended its support to the local community and municipality projects, mainly in North Batinah Governorate, while focusing on education, health and safety, social development

and environmental protection. Sohar Power was able to contribute to local projects intended for the local communities and the people of the Sultanate of Oman through a financial contribution of OMR 5,000 to Oman Charity Organisation, and OMR 1000 to support the Association of Welfare of Handicapped Children.

Outlook for 2023

Following the annulment of the Power 2022 Tender by OPWP, one of the options available to the Company for continued operations was the Spot Market, which went live on January 1, 2022. Revenues cannot be currently contracted in the Omani Spot Market due to oversupply; it may be possible in the future depending on the evolution of the overall supply and demand in the Market. OPWP’s last published 7 Years Statement for 2021 – 2027 shows a demand increase by 2024. However, this does not modify significantly, the earlier conclusions reached by an independent consultant engaged by the Company that it is very unlikely that the Company will be able to secure sufficient source of revenues under the current design of the Spot Market.

In October 2022, the APSR issued a Guidance Note for direct sale of power between Generator and Consumer, using the existing transmission network. In the Phase 1, the number of eligible customers is restricted by the APSR to those with self-generation. The Company is in discussion with the Authorities to expand the customer base in order to make such framework a viable option for Generators such as SPC.

OPWP has also communicated to companies with expiring / expired P(W)PAs that they intend to tender for Power 2024 to address the expected power demand from April 2024. OPWP has informed SPC that the RFP is expected to be issued by Q1 2023.

The Company has an ongoing contract with SOMC for the continued preservation of the plant to ensure the availability of the plant for use in bilateral contracts and / or long term PPA, when the power demand is likely to pick up and secure the retention of trained Omani workforce for such operation while avoiding demobilisation costs.

After getting the board and lenders approval, the company is in the process of selling the fuel oil during Q1 2023 to utilise the cash for its plant preservation requirements.

Due to the erosion of more than 50% of the Company share capital, the board of directors called for an EGM pursuant of article 147 of the Company Commercial Law which was held on 27 March 2022. The shareholders have decided to wait for issuance of bilateral framework by APSR to evaluate and pursue bilateral deals with potential customers and / or against the Power 2024 tender to be issued by OPWP. In view of this, the Lenders have granted an approval to the Company, an extension to the Final Maturity Date until 30th June 2023.

The outstanding debt at the end of the period is OMR 39 million. In case of none of the above options is feasible or viable, restructuring the outstanding debt beyond June 30, 2023 will be very challenging.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish to thank our valued shareholders for their continued support, trust, and confidence. I would also like to thank all the personnel associated with the operation and maintenance of the plant in Sohar and the staff of the Company for their loyalty, dedication and commitment. I would also like to express our gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Taik and His Government for their continued guidance, support and encouragement to the private sector.

Miklos Almasy
Chairman of the Board

Statement of financial position as at 31 December 2022

	31 Dec 2022 RO'000	31 Dec 2021 RO'000	31 Dec 2022 USD'000	31 Dec 2021 USD'000
ASSETS				
Non-current assets:				
Property, plant and equipment	7,531	24,288	19,563	63,085
Right-of-use asset	66	76	171	196
Total non-current assets	7,597	24,364	19,734	63,281
Current assets:				
Inventory	817	817	2,121	2,121
Trade and other receivables	328	6,918	852	17,967
Cash and cash equivalents	2,246	7,365	5,831	19,130
Total current assets	3,391	15,100	8,804	39,218
Total assets	10,988	39,464	28,538	102,499
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity:				
Share capital	22,101	22,101	57,405	57,405
Legal reserve	4,373	4,373	11,358	11,358
Accumulated losses	(56,905)	(42,094)	(147,812)	(109,345)
Cash flow hedge reserve	-	(396)	-	(1,025)
Total equity	(30,431)	(16,016)	(79,049)	(41,607)
LIABILITIES				
Non-current liabilities:				
Term loans	-	34,195	-	88,821
Employee end of service benefits	18	16	46	42
Lease liability	16	-	42	-
Provision for decommissioning costs	2,014	1,895	5,232	4,921
Deferred tax liabilities	-	240	-	623
Total non-current liabilities	2,048	36,346	5,320	94,407
Current liabilities:				
Term loans	38,929	10,290	101,113	26,727
Derivative financial instruments	-	588	-	1,526
Trade and other payables	296	5,891	775	15,304
Lease liability	63	76	164	198
Amount due to a related party	83	589	215	1,531
Provision for taxation	-	1,700	-	4,413
Total current liabilities	39,371	19,134	102,267	49,699
Total liabilities	41,419	55,480	107,587	144,106
Total equity and liabilities	10,988	39,464	28,538	102,499
Net assets per share	(0.138)	(0.072)	(0.358)	(0.188)

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December 2022

	31 Dec 2022 RO'000	31 Dec 2021 RO'000	31 Dec 2022 USD'000	31 Dec 2021 USD'000
Revenue	11,436	30,990	29,705	80,496
Cost of revenue	(8,584)	(23,030)	(22,298)	(59,821)
Gross profit	2,852	7,960	7,407	20,675
Other income	48	442	125	1,148
Impairment of property, plant and equipment	(15,177)	(45,736)	(39,421)	(118,795)
General and administrative expenses	(675)	(585)	(1,749)	(1,532)
Operating loss	(12,952)	(37,919)	(33,638)	(98,504)
Finance costs	(2,244)	(3,197)	(5,830)	(8,304)
Loss before tax	(15,196)	(41,116)	(39,468)	(106,808)
Tax credit	385	6,168	1,001	16,023
Loss for the year after tax	(14,811)	(34,948)	(38,467)	(90,785)
Other comprehensive income:				
<i>Items that will be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss</i>				
Cash flow hedging:				
Current year gain	-	2,323	-	6,035
Income tax relating to item that will be reclassified	-	(349)	-	(905)
Other comprehensive income for the year	-	1,974	-	5,130
Total comprehensive loss for the year	(14,811)	(32,974)	(38,467)	(85,655)
Loss per share	(0.067)	(0.158)	(0.174)	(0.411)

Note: The complete accounts either in English or Arabic will be sent to any shareholder by mail within 7 days of receipt.



ominvest: A 40-Year

“ominvest has come a long way in 40 years by investing in high-quality, sustainable businesses that generate healthy cash flows. We transform businesses in a way that contributes to their growth and impact on communities, bringing innovative transactions to the market. Our ambition has no limits as we look to outgrow our current areas of interest to become a bigger regional player with global reach, with leading ambitions on Environment, Social, and Governance standards. With a clear vision and determination to succeed, we are building platforms, diversifying our revenue sources, and preparing for the ominvest of tomorrow.”

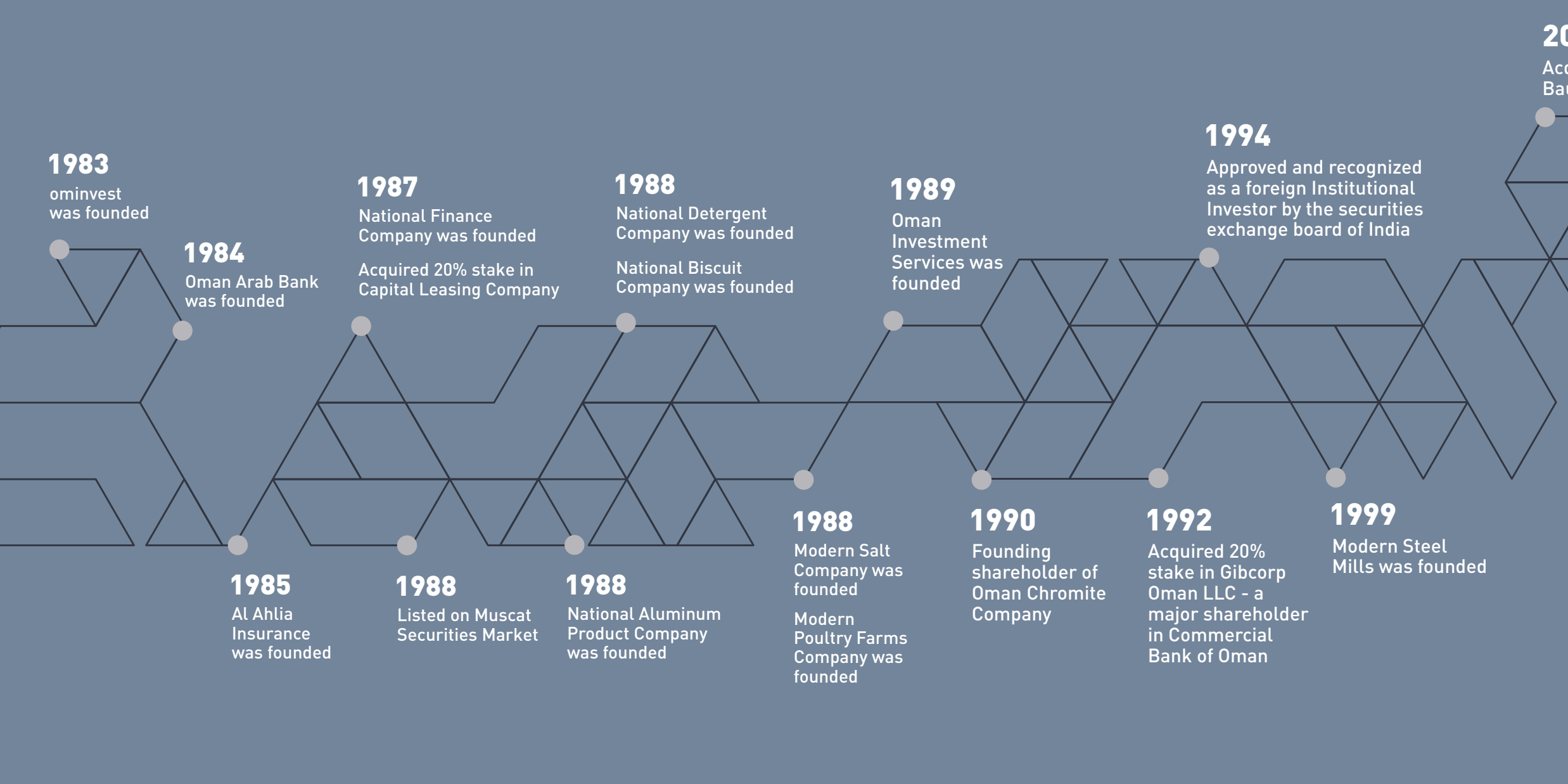


Khalid Muhammad Al Zubair,
Chairman of ominvest



Introducing The New Identity

As part of its 40th Anniversary celebrations, ominvest proudly unveiled its new identity to its stakeholders. The new identity retains the name to build on its 40-year legacy, moving upwards, symbolising the organisation's constant drive for growth and progress. The new identity features two hues of blue, where dark blue signifies leadership, and light blue signifies growth and progress. The new identity also reflects the confidence gained over decades of hard work and achievements. ominvest's new identity reflects its corporate living purpose of “Transforming Businesses to Enrich Society”.



Oman International Development and Investment Company SAOG (ominvest) celebrated its 40th Anniversary on Thursday, 23 February 2023. The celebration was held at Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah under the patronage of Mohammad Al Zubair, one of the founders and first chairman of ominvest. The event was attended by Government and International Dignitaries, prominent business leaders, and VIPs from Oman and overseas. The event not only commemorates 40 years of ominvest but also recognises the collective efforts of the Board and the entire ominvest team that have contributed to the Group's success. This would not have been possible without ominvest's elementary guiding principles and unique investment philosophy, which the organisation has tenaciously followed since day one. To understand the true scope of its growth and the inspiring scale with which ominvest has multiplied success over the last four decades, we must look back at the Group's fulfilling and humbling journey.



The First Chapter of a 40-Year Legacy

ominvest's story began in 1983 when Mohammad Al Zubair and his visionary friends laid the foundation for ominvest. Their vision and values have been the guiding principles for the Group ever since and continue to drive its success to this day. Over the past four decades, the company has been led by progressive boards and capable management teams dedicated to enhancing value for all stakeholders and positively impacting local communities. The past forty years have been not only full of challenges and risks but also tremendous opportunities for growth. By closely monitoring upcoming trends, advanced planning, adapting quickly to change, and implementing sound business strategies, ominvest made significant progress. As a matter of fact, in the four decades since its inception, ominvest has maintained an outstanding record of uninterrupted dividend payments to its shareholders. Its investment philosophy involved investing in high-quality, sustainable businesses with a robust governance framework that can withstand economic downturns. It maintains a high level of valuation discipline and has successfully diversified its investments across companies, sectors, and geographies, focusing on the financial services sector. It also has a clear and focused business model – build and manage a balanced investment portfolio with the right mix of strategic investments, private equity, and global capital markets. The Group exclusively invests in companies with exceptional management teams that demonstrate high levels of competence and integrity. ominvest provides strategic direction to its portfolio companies, along with full autonomy and flexibility to their management teams and supports them in achieving their full potential. ominvest has always supported its strategic investments to enable its growth and success. Its strong financial position and discipline have allowed it to take advantage of opportunities during market downturns and exit at the right time with attractive valuations.

Four Decades of Creating Value

The company's core competencies are its ability to invest prudently in a well-balanced portfolio and innovation-led value creation. Its positive and inclusive culture fosters high levels of performance, integrity, and fairness and encourages challenging the status quo. It approaches unique and unprecedented transactions with a positive mindset and strives to find ways to execute them reasonably and efficiently. It proactively engages with regulators and seeks their guidance, always striving for transparency in its plans. In fact, the company's diverse, multitalented, and hands-on team of fewer than 50 members have successfully managed consolidated assets of USD 3.4 billion, generating superior returns.

Our Legacy of Success

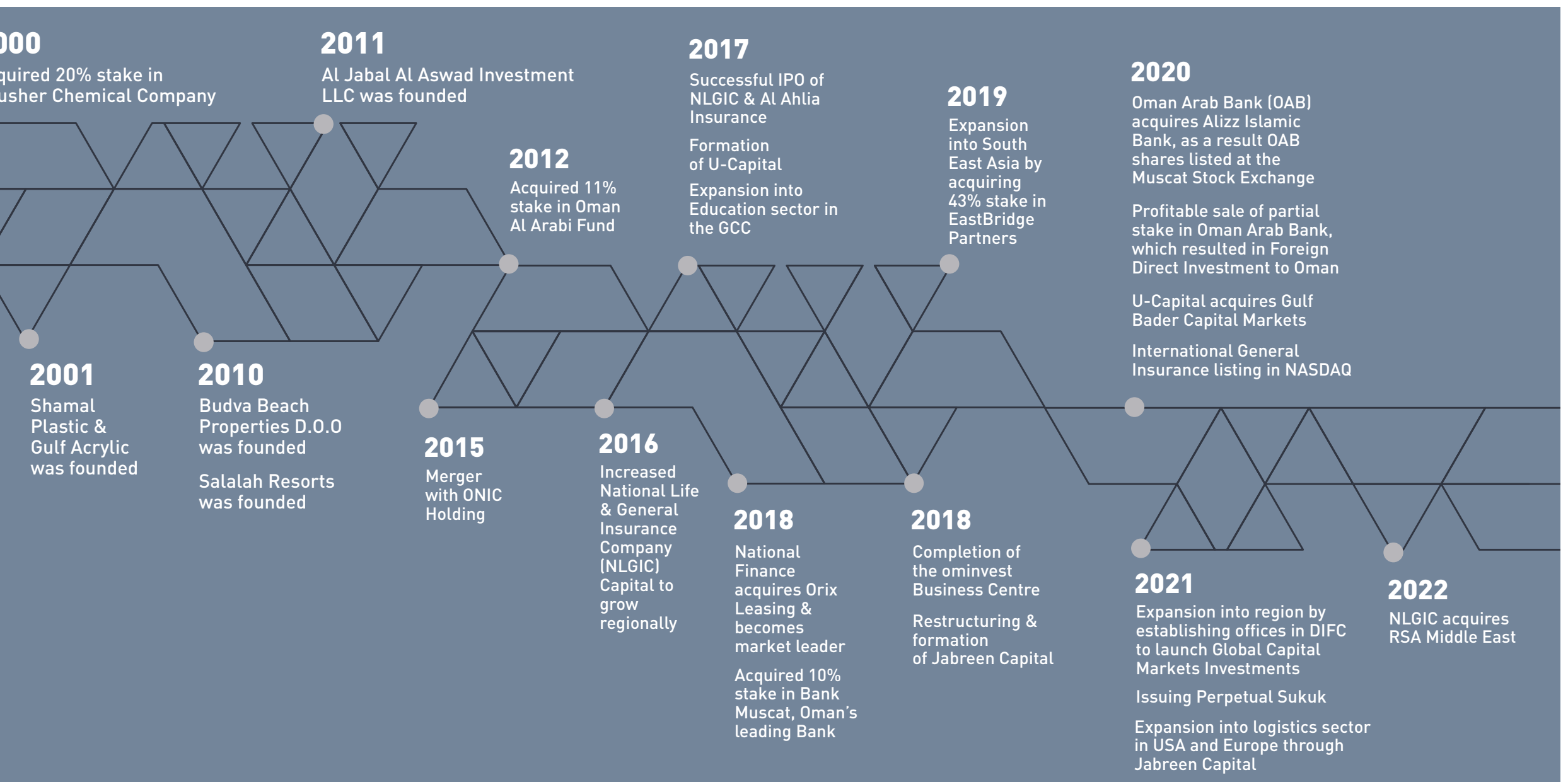
Invest

ed its new identity, reflecting its ambition, strength, and the trust of four decades-long legacy. The logo features a simple arrow pointing forward-thinking. The elegant, modern and bold design incorporates symbolises trust and loyalty. The name's lowercase lettering exudes invest's success and relentless vision will continue to drive it towards societies."



Abdulaziz Al Balushi,
Group CEO of ominvest

"Over the last four decades, our purpose-driven organisation has embedded social impact and good corporate citizenship at the heart of our vision, mission, culture, and values. By Transforming Businesses to Enrich Societies, we have made a real impact on the lives of everyone we have had the privilege of working with. This record of stability and success is a testament to the vision of our Board, past and present, and our ability to read and adapt to local, regional, and global trends. We owe our success equally to our close relationships, support, and mutual trust with regulators, partners, shareholders, and employees in all countries where we do business."



An excellent example of how ominvest creates value for its affiliated companies is the landmark merger with ONIC Holding. One of the additions to the Group resulting from this merger was National Life & General Insurance Company (NLG), which had great potential and a strong management team but limited scale.

In 2016, ominvest strengthened NLG's financial position by injecting capital and providing strategic direction. NLG quickly achieved a market-leading status in Oman and became a significant player in the UAE. Alongside its growth journey, ominvest also successfully floated the IPO of NLG in 2017.

With ominvest's support and strategic direction, during 2022 NLG completed a strategic transaction, which resulted in RSA Middle East becoming a wholly-owned subsidiary of NLG. This transaction aided in transforming the combined entity into a larger, stronger, and more competitive regional multiline insurance player emerging from the Sultanate.

Four Decades of Opportunistic Investments and Growth

Through its offices in Singapore and DIFC, its Private Equity and Investment Banking team is also building assets under management, focusing on generating fee income and creating a valuable platform. Currently, ominvest has assets under management of public and private investments of around USD 2.1 billion, which is a testament to the trust placed in its platform by third-party investors.



Moreover, ominvest has an ambitious growth plan and made a sizeable allocation to global capital markets, intending to build high-quality, multi-asset, multi-strategy portfolios as part of its ongoing diversification and liquidity management strategy.

2022 was another successful year for ominvest, with the organisation reporting its highest profit ever, with a return on shareholders' equity of 22%. With assets in excess of USD 3.4 billion and a strong financial position, ominvest is ready for its next growth phase.

The Way of the Future – Sustainability, Scalability & Diversification

The creation of jobs, nurturing of talent, the building of expertise, fostering of innovation, and regular knowledge transfer are just a few of the tools and methods ominvest uses, not only to support local communities but also to embrace best practices in Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance (ESG). ominvest believes integrating ESG best practices will drive long-term value across all operational and investment levels. To date, the organisation's efforts have included a comprehensive ESG capacity-building programme across its group companies and the development of a defined strategy for sustainable operations and responsible investing.



A circular portrait of a man with a grey beard and mustache, wearing a patterned headscarf and a white shirt. He is smiling slightly.

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

Initially this was a relief from the social interaction that I experienced in my village as a child where every older man we call “uncle” and older women “aunties.”

In western countries there has been a recent interest in designing communities with shared living facilities so people can have their own private rooms but share

Initially the idea behind this was to support people who cannot afford their own house but studies showed this living arrangement had a positive impact on people's mental health as it has the potential to create new meaningful social connections which means a 'network of potentially supportive

Last week I attended a presentation by a professor from

Finally, a village can raise a child and support older people so let's take the positive aspects of village life and avoid the negative ones.

DANIEL LAWLER

How will Euclid, which is named after the ancient Greek founder of the field of geometry, observe something that cannot be seen? By searching for its absence. — **AFP**

The writer is a reporter,
story editor on the
International desk

More than 800,000 people have fled the quake zone Türkiye since the first earthquake, according to Yunus Sezer, head of Türkiye's emergency management agency, AFAD. About 350,000 others have been evacuated



Rescue workers in Adiyaman, Türkiye.

THE EXODUS OF
RESIDENTS FROM HATAY
HAS TURNED THE
CONSTELLATION OF
HISTORIC CITIES ALONG
THE MEDITERRANEAN
INTO GHOST TOWNS

Thousands of engineers have fanned out across the wrecked areas to assess the safety of buildings left standing, as residents wait in shelters, many too afraid to enter their homes even if they are intact.

“Finally, I felt like I was at home,” she said. But hours later, she heard a familiar rumble from the mountains, and the walls began to shudder. The new quake had struck near Samandag.

— **The New York Times**

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

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Teacher’s Day — A ground for self-binding commitment

On February 24 every year, the whole world honours teachers on Teacher’s Day. Education institutions celebrate and observe this noble occasion in recognition of the service rendered by teachers to humanity.

Teachers hold an honourable position in the society which commands respect. They always deserve high and special regard. Hence, Teacher’s Day is marked and characterised by superiority of mind of ideals and morals and is made glorious by bestowing praise and admiration on teachers.

In the Sultanate of Oman, education has always been accorded an exalted status. In his first speech to nation, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik laid special emphasis on education. Since then, it has had always received due prominence and attention by the government.

Oman Vision 2040, which is regarded as the highest and most supreme plan to guide the country’s progress towards achieving various goals, focusing on education as one of its central and fundamental axis with programmes of action.

In Oman, education is available to all citizens free of charge. In 1970s, education was imparted under the shelter of trees, and today there is no wonder to find schools across the country where Omanis dwell, regardless of physical terrains. Schools are built on mountainous



Dr Musallam al Ma’ani

The writer is Dean of Al Zahra College for Women

areas as well as in cities and villages.

This stems from the government’s belief in providing equal educational opportunities without discrimination, which has at all times been marked with firmness and resolution.

Education also occupies the same status in the minds of the people of Oman. Throughout the history Omanis are known for their passion to learn, and strong liking and desire for seeking knowledge while setting a high value for education. Omanis also glorify and praise scholars, who are often held in great esteem and respect.

That is why Omanis always express their feeling of admiration, approval and gratitude to learned persons and to those who possess knowledge. Such a desire, which is marked by forceful energy, stems from the fact that Omanis are not only hardworking, but are prompted to act in accordance with the commands, guidance and the teachings of Islam which urges its followers to seek knowledge and learn.

The first verse that was sent down to our Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) urged him to read.

To conclude, teachers have every right to celebrate this day. People around the world have high regard for teachers and respect them. The day should also serve as a motive for them to devote their efforts to the profession and continue to deliver this noble mission with enthusiasm and the energy.

THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OMANIS ARE KNOWN FOR THEIR PASSION TO LEARN

FAMED DABBAWALAS



A man peddles past a wall mural of the city’s famed dabbawalas (tiffin delivery men) created as part of an arts festival in Mumbai, India, on Saturday. – AFP

The Ukraine war — one year on

After a string of speeches from both sides in the run up to the Ukraine war anniversary, the situation seems to be heating up.

Amidst the striking images of President Biden’s surprise visit to Kyiv, and his follow up speech in Warsaw where he raised the loud slogans “Kyiv stands strong” and “Ukraine will never be a victory for Russia,” Putin was also busy in commemorating the “anniversary” with back to back three retaliatory speeches in which he announced the unilateral suspension of the New START treaty as well as announced to deploy new Sarmat multi-warhead intercontinental ballistic missiles this year.

The western perception is that, with no major battlefield victories to report in time for the anniversary and Biden trying to rebuke him by journeying to Kyiv, Putin has instead turned to nuclear rhetoric and suspend participation in the New START arms control treaty.

There is no denying that Putin was hoping that the Russian troops would be able to capture Bakhmut ahead of the anniversary and he would be able to tell the war victories to the Russian public to massively mobilise their support for his Ukraine venture. But it did not happen.

He had no “good news” from the war front to share with the Russians, so he ultimately used these two symbolic actions – nuclear rhetoric and New START suspension - to add spice to his duelling speeches on the state of the nation and the Defenders



Dr Imran Khalid

The writer is freelance columnist on international affairs

of the Fatherland day.

While President Biden reiterated the American support for Ukraine in very categorical terms and vowed that Washington is there for “as long as it takes”. Despite such generous and passionate words from President Biden, one cannot ignore the legitimate concerns and uncertainties surrounding the US approach to the ongoing conflict and its differences with Ukraine. These issues manifest in multiple ways, from the types of weapons the US is willing to provide to divergent scenarios about how the war may ultimately come to a close.

The phrase “as long as it takes” means different dogmas to different stakeholders, and signs indicate that this war - one that Putin cannot afford to lose - may continue for many more years, testing the West’s tenacity with regard to the Ukrainian sovereignty and stability.

President Biden’s dramatic appearance in Kyiv, which is being compared with two other defining trips to divided Berlin by Presidents John Kennedy and Ronald Reagan that were flashpoints of the Cold War and each of which sent their own image of US resolve to the Kremlin, was designed more to influence domestic audience than attract the international community.

It definitely helped him in exposing growing opposition to

the war among the conservative Republicans, which is going to help him in winning the American public support for the quantum of the future aid packages for Ukraine. Ironically, one potential consequence of Biden’s visit is that it could inadvertently reinforce Putin’s

narrative at home that he is combating the West rather than an independent, sovereign nation - an argument that has gained traction among some Russians and one that Biden has been attempting to counteract.

At the moment, in spite of all the closeness and chumminess,

Biden and Zelensky have divergent views on what kind of the US is willing to provide. While Zelensky is pushing hard for F-16 fighter jets, Biden is quite reluctant to agree, highlighting the dilemma of how far to go in supporting Ukraine without provoking direct clash with Russia. This tension is further heightened by the growing support from the influential bipartisan members of the Congress for sending F-16s to Ukraine.

As momentum builds for this request, it remains to be seen how Biden will navigate this delicate balance. Will we see the repetition of the tanks episode, where Biden was adamant to provide M1 Abram tanks to Ukraine for many months, but eventually he yielded to the pressure from his peers in Europe.

Meanwhile, the rumours are rife that Putin is planning to launch a spring offensive to grab some selective territories inside Ukraine. He knows well that the Russian forces, hampered by numerous logistical handicaps as we have seen in the last one year, have limited capacity to move forward. That is why he is eyeing on only soft and easy targets inside Ukraine. Zelensky, on the other hand, is eagerly waiting for the pledged weapons so as to be ready on time to deflect the spring offensive. So, all is set for another intense phase of the Ukraine war.



A young woman reacts during a rally marking the first anniversary of the Russian war on Ukraine in front of the Russian Embassy in Copenhagen, on Friday. – AFP



Al Nahda storm into HM Cup final

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 25

Al NAHDA marched into the final of the 2022-23 His Majesty’s Cup football championship after beating Al Rustaq 1-0 in an exciting return semifinal encounter at Al Buraimi Sports Complex on Saturday.

Substitute Sami al Hasani netted the all-important goal in the final minutes of extra-time after receiving a cross from another substitute Mansoor al Naimi.

The first leg match ended in a goalless draw on February 21 at Al Rustaq Sports Complex.

With the victory, Al Nahda booked a

spot in the final which is scheduled to take place on March 9 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

The other side of the coveted cup’s final will be decided in Sunday’s clash between Al Suwaiq and Seeb in the second-leg semifinal which will be played in Al Rustaq Sports Complex. The match will start at 5:25 pm.

It will be the fourth final for Al Buraimi representatives after they reached to the final in 2008, 2013 and 2014.

In front of their home crowd at Al Buraimi Sports Complex, Al Nahda players were seeking for an opening goal that will position the team in a perfect place during the game.

The experienced coach Hamed al Azani’s instructions were very clear for his striker Abdulwase al Matri, Al Mundher al Alawi and Gui Oxnis for pressing towards the opponents’ side and avoid missing any scoring attempts.

On the other side, the visitors were very careful in the back line as they defended their goal properly and later they raised their presence in the attacking area for the same target to take the lead in the match. The first half did not register any goals from both teams and ended at a goalless draw. In the second half, Al Rustaq were the better side as they missed many scoring attempts.

Al Rustaq’s Mazin al Saadi was very

close to score the opening goal in the match but his shot in the 63rd minute went outside the net.

Later, Al Nahda sensing the danger after continuous attacks from the visitors, started to create some attacking chances.

In the 62nd minute, Abdulwase received a perfect cross ball to make an effort but it was saved by goalkeeper Ibrahim al Mukhaini. Al Rustaq’s response was quick as the active player Linga Leci Perca tried to shoot a strong ball from outside the box but his shot went off a defender for a corner kick.

Keeper Al Mukhaini saved another crucial scoring attempt from Al Rustaq’s Musaab al Mamari in 77th minute. In the

dying minute of the regulation time, Al Rustaq players dominated in order to find the net but their attempts were stopped by strong Al Nahda defence and an active goalkeeper.

In the extra-time, Abdulrahman al Ghassani was in front of the goalie and he missed the chance in the 96th minute. Before the match end by three minutes and in the 117th minute, Sami al Hasani scored for Al Nahda as he benefited from Al Rustaq defender’s mistake inside the box to guide the ball to the net of goalkeeper Bilal al Balushi. The crucial goal in the second-half of extra-time was enough to take Al Nahda to the final match of the coveted cup.

Salalah’s Musallam al Amri claims maiden title

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 25

Salalah’s Musallam al Amri displayed maturity performance to claim his maiden title in the 10th edition of Oman Individual Chess Championship for senior category. He scored creditable eight points from the nine rounds and ended his campaign with no loss.

Unbeaten Musallam was among 126 players representing 31 clubs in this edition of the event which featured presence of top domestic players including national team player Salim al Amri with Fide ranking points of 1,935, AbdulRahman al Zadjali (1,888) and Hamood al Busaidi with 1854 points. As many as 62 ranked players took part in the

top domestic individual event while 64 participated players were not ranked internationally.

The eight days championship that was held at the main hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat saw tough competitions among the participants. The Salalah Club champion lifted the title after registering eight points in the Swiss classic format competition. Mohammed al Saidi from Al Khabourah club finished as runner-up as he claimed 7.5 points while Mohammed al Amri from Mirbat club took third place award as he recorded seven points. This year’s championship featured attendance of many junior faces who showed top performance beyond their age.

The top local event was played inline to the international Chess



Federation (Fide) rules and regulations. The matches were played based on an electronic draw. The event implemented Swiss classic format competition from nine rounds. Each match was given 90 minutes with 30 seconds for each movement.

ATTENDANCE OF 31 CLUBS

The championship featured attendance of 31 clubs for first time including: Masirah, Al Khabourah, Al Nahda, Qurayat, Salalah, Oman club, Al Rustaq, Madha, Jaalan, Al Nasr, Ibri, Al Shabab, Taqah, Mirbat, Saham, Nizwa, Al Suwaiq, Ahli Sidab, Majis, Samayel, Al Bashaer, Seeb, Al Salam, Dima W’attayeen, Nakhl, Yanqul, Bausher, Al Taliah, Al Musannah, Izki and Al Kamil W’al Wafi. The local championship

was officiated by International referee Musallam al Wadhai, International referee Khalid al Hadidi, besides attendance of umpires Yasser al Raisi, Younis al Rashdi and some local umpires.

At the end of the championship, Hisham bin Juma al Sinani, General Manager of Welfare and Sports Development in Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, presented the awards and cash prizes to the top winners. Salalah’s Musallam al Amri received the champion’s trophy besides a cash prize.

With the conclusion of senior category competitions, the Oman Singles Chess Championship reached to its end in this season after completion of singes competitions of women and junior categories recently.



South Africa's Tazmin Brits (4th R) celebrates with teammates after the dismissal of England's Danni Wyatt (not seen) during the semifinal of T20 Women's World Cup at Newlands Stadium in Cape Town on Friday. - AFP

Brits show puts hosts South Africa in final

CAPE TOWN: Tazmin Brits said South Africa had nothing to fear in the final after producing a match-winning performance in the Women's T20 World Cup semifinal against England at Newlands in Cape Town on Friday.

Brits hit 68 in a South African total of 164 for four, then held four catches, two of them exceptional, as England were restricted to 158 for eight.

"I still can't believe it," she told journalists after the South African players performed a lap of honour for a boisterous crowd of 7,500 after upsetting the odds with a shock victory.

South Africa will meet Australia in the final at the same venue on Sunday.

"Australia might be the top team but you play the ball and not the players," she said of the five-time champions.

Experienced all-rounder Marizanne Kapp took a more measured view.

"We have to get the emotion of today out of it and get ready for Sunday," she said. "We know how tough Australia are."

England captain Heather Knight acknowledged the performance of the hosts which made them the first South African team - male or female - to reach a white ball World Cup final.

"South Africa bowled brilliantly," said England captain Heather Knight.

"They had a very clear, simple plan, took a lot of pace off and made it very tricky to score boundaries."

But Knight said she believed England's attacking strategy under new coach Jon Lewis was the right way to play.

"It's certainly the way forward," she said. "Unfortunately it didn't come

off today but the future looks bright."

Friday's clash matched Australia's five-run win over India on Thursday for excitement but with a considerable increase in decibels as the home crowd got behind the host nation.

Brits and Laura Wolvaardt (53) followed up their unbeaten century opening stand in the last group match against Bangladesh by putting on 96 for the first wicket in 13.4 overs.

England threatened to make light of the target when Danni Wyatt and Sophia Dunkley raced to 53 in the first five overs. But Brits said South Africa did not panic.

"There were a lot of nicks and stuff like that," she said. "We knew we just had to stick to the basics."

Fast bowler Shabnim Ismail made the first two breakthroughs with the help of catches by Brits at midwicket, first to dismiss Dunkley for 28 and then with a sensational diving effort that sent back Alice Capsey without scoring.

Brits held another diving catch to dismiss Wyatt (34) at backward square leg and then calmly held a high hit from the dangerous Nat Sciver-Brunt (40) at long-on.

Thirty-three runs were needed off 22 balls with six wickets in hand after Sciver-Brunt's dismissal but medium-pace bowler Ayabonga Khaka took three wickets in the 18th over to put the target just beyond England's reach. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES

South Africa 164-4 in 20 overs (L Wolvaardt 53, T Brits 68; S Ecclestone 3-22)
England 156-8 in 20 overs (D Wyatt 34, N Sciver-Brunt 40, H Knight 31; S Ismail 3-27, A Khaka 4-29)
Result: South Africa won by 6 runs

New Zealand collapse after Stokes' brave declaration

WELLINGTON: Joe Root hailed another aggressive declaration from England captain Ben Stokes on Saturday as the key to their commanding position in the second Test against New Zealand in Wellington.

The tourists are on the verge of a series sweep after dominating day two at the Basin Reserve, reducing the Black Caps to 138-7 when rain forced an early end, having earlier declared their first innings at 435-8.

Red-hot England have employed the same mix of aggressive batting and potent new-ball bowling that was at the heart of their commanding 267-run win in the first Test at Mount Maunganui.

Another similarity is the assertive captaincy of Stokes, whose declaration half an hour before lunch was described as "brilliant" by Root.

Former skipper Root said the ploy gave England's pace greats James Anderson and Stuart Broad two chances to attack the hosts in fresh conditions either side of the break.

"Where we're playing at the minute, with the amount of confidence that we've got, with the two leading wicket-takers we've ever had, it just seemed like a very brave and attacking option," said Root, who lost the captaincy midway through last year.

Since taking charge, Stokes has led an attacking revolution that has carried England to 10 wins from their last 11 Tests.

"Ben's walked so naturally into the role. He's managing the game so well and everyone's really responding to it, which is very important," Root said.

Stokes only declared once Root had reached 153 not out, the 32-year-old having advanced easily from 101 overnight, unperturbed by the early dismissal on Saturday of Harry Brook for 186.

Anderson (3-37) then stepped up with the ball, unleashing a lethal opening spell that validated his elevation this week to top spot in the world Test bowling rankings — at 40, the oldest player to hold the perch.

The exacting paceman removed Devon Conway (0) and Kane Williamson (4) to have the hosts languishing at 12-2, before dismissing Will Young (2) after the break.

All three batsmen feathered edges to gloveman Ben Foakes, extending the number of Test victims caught by a wicketkeeper



England's Ollie Pope (2nd L) celebrates catching New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell (R) during day two of the second Test match between New Zealand and England at the Basin Reserve in Wellington on Saturday. - AFP



England's Joe Root plays a shot during day two of the second Test between New Zealand and England at the Basin Reserve in Wellington on Saturday. - AFP

off Anderson to 188 - 36 more than any other bowler.

Spinner Jack Leach (3-45) ripped through the middle order, leaving New Zealand staring at a 297-run deficit with three days remaining.

Left-handers Tom Latham (35) and Henry Nicholls (30) looked to be launching a rearguard action, but both fell when attempting to reverse-sweep Leach, offering catches to fielders around the bat.

New Zealand batting coach Luke Ronchi didn't want to criticise the pair overly for their unconventional dismissals.

"The way cricket is these days, you want to try and score," Ronchi said.

"But it's also understanding that you don't have to score off every ball. You can bat for lengths of

time where bowlers will be on top for periods of a game.

"They've all done it before so there's no need to panic about things."

First-Test centurion Tom Blundell head reached 25 not out before play was called off at 5.45 pm (0445 GMT), and his free-wheeling captain Tim Southee was unbeaten on 23 — in an innings featuring two sixes.

About 25 overs were lost to the late rain, mirroring the premature finish to day one when the clouds opened.

However, England still have ample time to push for a seventh straight Test win and consign New Zealand to an eighth successive winless Test.

Earlier, England lost five wickets and racked up a further 120 runs

SCOREBOARD

ENGLAND 1ST INNINGS	
Z Crawley c Blundell b Henry	2
B Duckett c Bracewell b Southee	9
O Pope c Bracewell b Henry	10
J Root not out	153
H Brook c and b Henry	186
B Stokes c sub b Wagner	27
B Foakes st Blundell b Bracewell	0
S Broad lbw Bracewell	14
O Robinson c Southee b Henry	18
J Leach not out	6
Extras (lb8, w2)	10
Total (8 wkts, 87.1 overs)	435/d
Fall of wickets: 1-5, 2-21, 3-21, 4-323, 5-362, 6-363, 7-389, 8-424	
Bowling: Southee 24-5-93-1, Henry 22-1-3-100-4, Mitchell 9-1-61-0, Wagner 21-1-119-1, Bracewell 11-0-54-2	
NEW ZEALAND 1ST INNINGS	
T Latham c Root b Leach	35
D Conway c Foakes b Anderson	0
K Williamson c Foakes b Anderson	4
W Young c Foakes b Anderson	2
H Nicholls c Pope b Leach	30
D Mitchell c Pope b Leach	13
T Blundell not out	25
M Bracewell c and b Broad	6
T Southee not out	23
Total (7 wkts, 42 overs)	138
Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-7, 3-21, 4-60, 5-77, 6-96, 7-103	
Bowling: Anderson 10-1-37-3, Broad 12-2-50-1, Robinson 8-4-6-0, Leach 12-1-45-3	

in an entertaining opening session after resuming at 315-3.

Brook fell in the third over, caught and bowled by Matt Henry (4-100), having added just two to his overnight score.

His blazing knock formed part of a 302-run stand with Root — the second-highest in England's Test history against New Zealand — having rescued the tourists from 21-3 early on day one.

Root struck 10 fours and three sixes, including a reverse ramp shot that cleared the boundary rope off the fourth ball he faced on Saturday, from Southee. — AFP

Murray saves five match points to reach final

DOHA: Former world number one Andy Murray was at a loss to explain how he saved five match points on Friday to overcome Czech challenger Jiri Lehecka and reach the Qatar Open final.

The 35-year-old launched into a roar of delight after the 6-0, 3-6, 7-6 (8/6) triumph that took him into his first ATP tour final for eight months.

Murray now has to take on Russian world number eight Daniil Medvedev who beat Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime 6-4, 7-6 (9/7) in the second semifinal.

"That was one of the most amazing turnarounds of my

career," said Murray, a two-time winner in Qatar.

"I don't know how I managed to turn that match around."

Murray saved two match points on his own serve and three as his 21-year-old opponent tried to complete victory with his own big serve. The British veteran, who had a hip replacement in 2019, has now come back from eight match points in four matches at the Doha tournament.

He has fought two tie-breaks and been taken to three sets in every match this week.

"I have never experienced this in my whole career," he said.



Britain's Andy Murray celebrates his win against Czech Republic's Jiri Lehecka (not pictured) after the Qatar Open semifinal in Doha on Friday. - AFP

After he took the first set without losing a game in just 32 minutes, Murray had believed this would be an easier encounter -- "and then it turned into something completely different".

Murray had the best of a nervy start by both players. Considered one of the hottest prospects on the tour, Lehecka, who beat top seed Andrey Rublev in the quarterfinal, served first, went 15-40 down, had two advantage points and then let Murray take over.

The Czech rediscovered his big serve and powerful returns for the second set when he broke Murray's serve in straight games.

Murray reclaimed two match points on his serve in the deciding set and Lehecka had three more when serving at 5-4. Murray took the game and held his nerve in the tie break. "This week could have ended very differently," admitted the former two-time Wimbledon champion. "But the way that I have played in the really important moments, the critical moments, has shown that there is a confidence and a belief in my game that has been missing for a while."

Murray last reached an ATP final in Stuttgart last June. He has not won a tournament since Antwerp in 2019. — AFP



WILLCOX CLAIMS SECOND, CYCLE KOM WIN TEAM TITLE



Said al Rahbi takes red in OCA League

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, FEB 25

OMAN Royal Army's Said al Rahbi edged Cycle KOM's Paul Willcox by 20 points to emerge overall champion of Oman Cycling Association (OCA) League Championship 2022-23 in Sur on Saturday.

After the six-race League, Al Rahbi earned 480 points to top the podium, while Willcox claimed runner-up spot with 460 points. Former winner Mundher al Hasani finished third with 440 points.

In the sixth and final stage of the OCA League for Sur Championship, Oman Club's Faisal al Mammari came home first with a timing of two hours six minutes and 50 seconds. Teammate Islam Ayad (02:06:50) took the second spot while Mundher al Hasani finished third (02:06:56).

Cycle KOM – NRO's Bradley Perkins came fourth (02:06:56).

Al Rahbi, who had a 15-point difference with second-placed Willcox before the sixth race, just made enough to keep his overall lead by taking the fifth spot ahead of the British cyclist.

"It was a good season and it came down to the last five metres for a sprint finish to decide the red jersey in Sur," Willcox told Oman Observer. "Our team riders gave our best shot in an effort to take the red jersey for me. I had to beat Said with a rider in between and it was a tall order to be honest."

"Nonetheless, it was a great season for us with me winning the Masters title and Cycle KOM taking the team crown," the veteran cyclist added.

The Cycle KOM captain however had two overall titles to his credit after emerging the Masters (40+) champion and team winners.

Willcox was a runaway winner in the section with teammates Daniel Baldwin a distant second at 180 points and Gregory Pollard taking third with 163 points. Capital Team's Simeon Gelacio (94) was fourth while Bahla Club's Mohammed al Kindi finished fifth (66).

In the team category, Cycle KOM – NRO dominated the League with 1230 points followed by Oman Royal Army (1080) and Salalah Club (1045). Oman Club (879) and Capital Team (447) took the fourth and fifth spots respectively in the 18-team competition.

DOUBLE FOR SAID

Said al Rahbi topped the under-23 category for a double title, followed by Mundher and Faisal al Mammari (398 points). Islam Ayad (324) took the fourth spot while Bradley Perkins (302) finished fifth. In the Amateur race held alongside the sixth stage, Majed al Habsi came first with a timing of 28 minutes and 28 seconds followed by Said al Maamari and Asad al Habsi. Thirty-four local riders took part in the 15 km race.





‘Invest in Oman Hall’ to speed up FDI inflows



PERSONALISED ATTENTION: Account Manager to be assigned to each investor to ensure personalised attention during the processing of project applications

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 25

An innovative effort by the Omani government to enhance the business environment for local and international investors will be launched on Monday, February 27, 2023 at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).

Dubbed the ‘Invest in Oman Hall’, this unique setting will be inaugurated by Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, in the presence of a number of local and international dignitaries.

In essence, investors seeking approvals for projects valued at RO 1 million and more will have the opportunity to submit their proposals which will be reviewed by officials representing 14 different government stakeholder entities, as well as six private sector organisations, each having a presence in the Invest in Oman Hall.

The overall goal is to reduce bureaucracy in the processing of projects and ensure speedy issuance of the requisite permits and approvals.

According to the ministry, the Hall will serve as a first point of reference for investors seeking to complete all prescribed procedures to ensure the speedy disbursement of approvals for their projects in the Sultanate of Oman.

Tastefully furnished, the Hall also has access to all kinds of investment informational and national databases to help prospective investors get all the information they need to make informed decisions.

Information about the laws and regulations relevant to the nature of their investments will be on hand as well. An electronic platform for submission of applications, and a communications centre for inquiries and complaints are in operation as well.

In a statement, Ibtisam bint Ahmed al Faroujiyah, Under-Secretary for Investment Promotion at



The Invest in Oman Hall is considered the first platform to provide all services to investors and offer investment opportunities, that exceed RO 1 million

IBTISAM BINT AHMED AL FAROUJIYAH
Under-Secretary for Investment Promotion

the ministry, said: “The ministry is working to facilitate and improve the business environment in order to enhance the rank of the Sultanate of Oman, as a fertile environment for business and investment growth, and a leading destination for attracting investors, and entrepreneurs, all that through enhancing the integration of efforts between the concerned authorities.”

She further added: “The Invest in Oman Hall is considered the first platform to provide all services to investors and offer investment opportunities, that exceed RO 1 million, in cooperation with the relevant governmental and private agencies, in accordance with the best international practices.

The Invest In Oman Hall embodies the concept of complementarity of the roles of government and private agencies, as it provides a unique model in the service offered to the investors starting from the stage of discovering investment opportunities, reaching to the stage of establishing and localising the project.”

The under-secretary added that as many as 14 government entities are operating within the Invest In Oman Hall to serve investors, in addition to six private bodies that can meet the needs of investors. The goal is to smoothen and expedite the review of applications.

In addition, an account manager will be assigned to each investor to ensure that each applicant has the focused attention they need for their proposal to be suitably and swiftly processed.

Oman projected to have the lowest inflation rate in GCC for 2023

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, FEB 25

The Sultanate of Oman is projected to have 1.9% consumer price index (CPI) for 2023 — the lowest in the GCC region — according to the latest report by Kamco Invest. CPI is the most well-known indicator of inflation, which measures the percentage change in the price of a basket of goods and services consumed by households.

Oman’s low inflation rate is attributed to the government’s pro-active handling of the global inflation problem such as tackling the supply chain crisis related to foodstuffs.

As a result, during January 2023, the inflation rate in Oman increased to 1.89% y-o-y — the lowest monthly growth since August 2021. Oman’s inflation growth was mainly driven by a 4.78% y-o-y growth of food and non-alcoholic beverage index, the biggest weighted index.

Furthermore, Oman’s restaurant and hotel index also recorded 3.91% y-o-y increase during January 2023. The Sultanate of Oman also witnessed one of the lowest inflation rates among the GCC countries in 2022 with price growth peaking at 4.4% in January 2022.

Meanwhile, inflation in the GCC region is expected to diminish in 2023 mainly because of higher interest rates and slowing global growth.

According to PWC, inflation in the GCC is expected to average at



2.7% in 2023.

The GCC region is expected to gain from its relative stability in its financial sector, thanks to higher oil prices and higher energy exports in 2022. This would allow GCC countries to invest in critical sectors in order to protect from future fluctuations in key food and component prices, the report added.

In the greater MENA region, inflation is expected to affect economic growth despite being low when compared to global economies. Efforts of some countries in the MENA region such as price controls and

consumption subsidies helped to control prices. However, these measures are expected to result in additional costs to oil importing countries in the region.

According to the World Bank, developing oil importing countries in the region might need to find new revenues, increase deficit, debt, or even cut government spending in other areas of the economy to fund costs of the inflation mitigation programmes. In contrast, there is no such fiscal pressure for the GCC and other oil-exporting countries in the region as state revenue growth mainly from higher oil prices is

expected to more than compensate for additional inflation mitigation costs incurred by governments.

The International Monetary Fund, on the other hand, said global inflation is expected to stabilise at 6.6% in 2023 and then drop to 4.3% in 2024 as compared to 8.8% in 2022.

The forecast is based on expected drop in energy prices, improving global supply chains and stabilisation in prices of essential commodities.

However, factors such as faster economic growth in China and a rise in energy prices can push inflationary pressures upwards.

Omani electric car maker to add Sport Utility Vehicle to portfolio

PROMISING INDUSTRY: Mays Motors garners around 500 bookings for debut Mays iE1 model

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 25

Mays Motors, the Sultanate of Oman’s first high-end Electric Vehicle (EV) manufacturer, has announced plans to add a battery-powered Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV) to its evolving automotive portfolio.

The announcement underscores the Oman-based automaker’s ambitions to venture into promising segments of the automotive market, having already garnered significant market interest in its maiden electric car offering — the Mays iE1. More than 500 units of the iE1 have so far been booked by interested customers, according to the company.

In a post on its social media account, Mays Motors said its decision to add electric SUVs to its offerings was guided by strong customer interest in this segment. “We have managed to complete



the concept of the new Mays SUV car. We see there a high demand in the SUV segment, which made us enter this segment,” the automaker said.

“If we finish our investor negotiations within the next months, then we shall be able to launch this car into the market by next year,” it stated.

Significantly, the announcement comes on the first anniversary of the formal unveiling of the Mays Motors’ debut model — the Mays iE1 — at a grand ceremony held at Al Bustan Palace — A Ritz Carlton Hotel. Representatives of Oman Technology Fund (OTF), a state-backed fund investing in tech innovations and start-ups, were also present. OTF is a key investor in the Omani company.

According to Mays Motors,

a lot has been accomplished in preparing the groundwork for actual production to start on its maiden electric car offering.

“We have managed to partner with the biggest global suppliers and manufacturers to make the essential parts for Mays cars. We have also learnt from their experiences during our visits to some of the global factories. This will help us get to market faster and at lower costs,” it stated.

Importantly, a modern modular chassis for the Mays brand has been finalised, the Omani automaker said.

“It enables you to build and design different types of cars within the same chassis platform. This chassis has also passed all the safety tests as per the tests of the NCAP (New Car Assessment

Programme).”

Mays Motors also thanked its growing base of prospective customers who have booked a total of around 500 EV cars to date. “We are committed to bringing out cars of the highest standard and quality because, as you know, we are competing not just locally but globally.

And in the car industry there are lots of options — which is why it’s necessary for us to differentiate ourselves with new technology and attractive designs,” the company said.

Responding to opinions shared online by people commenting on the current sports design of the launch model, the company noted that the model showcased at multiple public forums in the past was merely a “prototype” that would be quite different from the final product.

“The final car is always improved in design and technology,” it pointed out.

Billed as a performance car in the electric vehicle category, Mays will offer a range of around 500 km per charge with top speed of 280 km/hour. The proposed SUV version will be a five-door, five-seater model.

Abraj Energy Services expands regional presence

Growing footprint: Omani driller signs strategic partnership with Saudi Arabian Chevron and Kuwait Gulf Oil Company in the field of drilling and oil extraction

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 25

Abraj Energy Services SAOC (under transformation), the market leader in the Oil & Gas drilling and explorations sector in Oman, signed a strategic partnership with Saudi Arabian Chevron and Kuwait Gulf Oil Company aimed at enhancing opportunities between the two parties through drilling and oil extraction for a period of five years, by building three drilling platforms and providing other related services for the Wafra oil field project located within the Onshore Partitioned Neutral Zone (PZ) in the southern



part of Kuwait.

This agreement leverages Abraj's competitive advantage of being a leading service provider in Oman with a depth of experience and

expertise.

The collaboration envisages an opportunity to expand its portfolio of services, exchange experiences and adopt best practices in the

field of drilling, sustainability and technology in the sector.

Remarking on the importance of this partnership, Saif al Hamhami, Abraj Energy Services CEO, said,

CONSISTING OF 25 DRILLING RIGS AND 5 WELL MAINTENANCE RIGS THAT OPERATE WITH THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY, ABRAJ ENERGY SERVICES OFFERS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE TO ITS CLIENTS PARTICULARLY IN SAUDI ARABIA, KUWAIT AND ALGERIA

"We are pleased to announce our strategic partnership with Saudi Arabian Chevron and Kuwait Gulf Oil Company, emphasising our commitment to expand our regional footprint in the Middle East and North Africa region.

The company is pre-qualified to provide various services in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Algeria, where the company's advanced rigging fleet is linked to long-term contracts with leading national and international companies in the field of exploration and production."

He added, "Abraj Energy Services is uniquely poised for this opportunity as it owns the most

modern and advanced drilling fleets in the Middle East and North Africa region. Consisting of 25 drilling rigs and 5 well maintenance rigs that operate with the latest technology, it offers a competitive advantage to its clients particularly in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Algeria."

In line with its growth strategy, Abraj Energy Services has recently announced the listing of its shares on the Muscat Stock Exchange on February 20, 2023.

This was part of the exit plan announced by Oman Investment Authority to facilitate investment opportunities for local and foreign investors in tandem with the goals of Oman Vision 2040. This step aims to enhance the participation of the private sector in various economic fields at the national level.

The offering for the first category extends from February 20 to March 2, 2023, while the subscription stage for the second category is from February 20 until March 1, 2023.

Sohar Islamic unveils student account



MUSCAT: Providing banking that fulfils the various needs of the society, Sohar Islamic introduces its new "Student Account". Designed to complement the lifestyle of the local youth community, the account seeks to provide a host of benefits to the students within the country as well as contribute towards financial inclusion.

Commenting on introducing the Student Account, Abdul Wahid al Murshidi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer, said, "The young generation is the country's most prized asset and represents the future of the nation. It is, therefore, our duty to ensure that they receive the right financial support, assistance, and empowerment to achieve their aspirations.

Sohar Islamic believes in nurturing long-term relationships with its customers and the Student Account is an excellent way for students to begin acquainting themselves with dedicated banking products and services. Giving students the opportunity to monitor, control, and manage their finances on a daily basis leads to the inculcation of more prudent spending, saving, and investment habits. This will also go a long way in promoting financial independence."

Earlier this year, Sohar Islamic signed a cooperation agreement with GTS Alive Middle East, the exclusive regional representative for the International Student Identity Card (ISIC), to provide student account holders with opportunities and benefits complementing their life style with exclusive offers from over 100 merchants locally.

Shahi Foods and Spices hosts Business Conclave 2023

MUSCAT: Shahi Foods and Spices LLC, Oman's leading FMCG brand that supplies spices, pulses, coffee, nuts, dry-fruits and cereals company hosted a business conclave (Biz-Con'23) to celebrate its 37 years in business in the Sultanate of Oman. Held at the Sheraton Oman Hotel in Muscat, the event was attended by the company's associates, retail partners, special invitees, management and executives.

Showcasing the brand's journey, encompassing its brand philosophy, history and major achievements, the conference was hosted by popular emcee



Salim al Rahbi, and witnessed the announcement of the names of the Mega Raffle Draw winners of the recently concluded 'Shahi Golden Bonanza': Annie Varghese (100gm gold coin), Husam (50gm gold coin), MD Absar (25gm gold coin), Muhammed Shan (10gm

gold coin) and Atiqur Rahman (5gm sold coin).

The event also saw the company's Core team & Sales team take centre stage, as part of its 'Star Assets' programme. The highlight of the evening, however, was a special motivational address by

ace keynote speaker, technology and marcom consultant — Tariq al Barwani — who kept the audience captivated throughout his segment.

The evening's proceedings culminated with a performance by renowned violinist Lanny Alarcon. In his welcome speech to the delegates and other attendees, Mohammed Ashraf Mulamparambil, Founder, Managing Director, and driving force behind the brand, laid emphasis on the brand's legacy, emphasising that the company's retail partners, employees and teams are the biggest reason for its

success. Shedding light on Shahi's modern manufacturing facility with cutting edge technology in production and packaging, Mulamparambil emphasised that it is their state-of-art infrastructure that helps maintain the purity and freshness of their products. He also highlighted the high-quality stringent processes adapted in procurement of raw material, packaging, quality control and delivery of the spices to the retailers, that have helped make the brand the preferred choice of millions of households for over three decades in Oman and beyond.

Bank Muscat partners with SME Development Authority to launch Al Wathbah Academy programme for entrepreneurs in Al Wusta

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has partnered with SMEs Development Authority to launch the Al Wathbah Academy entrepreneurial training for Omani SMEs in Al Wusta.

The Al Wathbah Academy programme, which is part of the bank's CSR commitment to deliver long-term benefits to the nation, is being held in Duqm this year and will benefit 25 Omani entrepreneurs.

In this context, the Authority recently signed an agreement with the bank to provide the programme for Omani entrepreneurs, who will get training certificates on successful completion of the programme as well as special consultancy sessions for SMEs.

It was signed by Abdulaziz bin Said al Raisi, Vice President of the SME Development Authority and Ibrahim bin Khamis al Balushi, Senior Assistant General Manager — SME, Bank Muscat. Speaking on the occasion, Ibrahim bin Khamis al Balushi, Senior



Assistant General Manager — SME, Bank Muscat, said: "We are pleased to partner with SMEs Development Authority to conduct this year's Al Wathbah Academy programme in Duqm so as to take the fruits of world-class entrepreneurial training to Omani SMEs in Al Wusta.

The Al Wathbah Academy, which was launched by the bank in 2014, reflects the bank's commitment to sustainable development in Oman by strengthening the role of SMEs. The bank continues to implement plans to develop Omani entrepreneurship as part of its commitment to the development

of the country. I wish all success to the participants in completing the programme."

The Al Wathbah Academy is conducted by the bank in partnership with the Radiant Sail Foundation.

The curriculum has been tailored to provide a practical,

comprehensive business course on growing a business successfully with the course content based on the actual needs of small and medium business owners in Oman.

The programme covers topics in various aspects of business and management, which will enable entrepreneurs to manage their businesses on a structured manner. Utilising global best practices and local case studies, experienced trainers will equip SME entrepreneurs with the necessary knowledge and resources over a period of 4-8 months.

The training programme will provide business owners the opportunity to set goals, analyse the market, and revise strategies to meet new trends. Over 170 entrepreneurs have graduated from the Al Wathbah SME Academy till date and are contributing to the Omani economy.

For more information about the Al Wathbah Academy, please go to https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/Business/Business_segements/Pages/Al-Wathbah-Academy.aspx

The gold rush to AI powered search engines



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Search engines have become an integral part of our daily lives. We use them to find information, products and services online.

Google has been the undisputed leader of the search engine industry for over two decades, with a market share of over 90 per cent.

However, a new generation of search engines powered by artificial intelligence (AI) is emerging, and they may challenge Google's dominance in the market in the coming years.

One such company is You.com, an AI-powered search engine that aims to provide more personalised and relevant search results to users.

If successful, You.com could capture a significant market share of the search engine industry, which is projected to be worth \$27.77 billion by 2025, according to a report by Zion Market Research.

Assuming that You.com captures 5 per cent of the search engine market by 2025, which is a realistic goal given its unique approach to search, it could potentially reach a valuation of \$27.8 billion by 2025.

These projections are based on several factors, including the projected growth of the search engine industry, the unique approach of You.com to search, and the potential for AI-powered search engines to provide more personalised and relevant search

results to users.

If you think of it, Google rarely gives you an answer. Usually the search results are displayed in form of a list of websites that might contain the information that you are looking for.

The other day I was in a sports apparel and accessories shop. I found a cool bag meant to store table tennis rackets. I do not have table tennis rackets to store, but I have an iPad. So I measured the bag with a tape measure and "googled" whether an iPad could fit in it.

No luck. On my mobile, 100 per cent of the first page of results were iPad for sale, with no measurements in centimetres. Then I used You.com, and immediately I got back not 1,

not 2, but 5 results answering the question in the first page.

Bing, owned by Microsoft, has come a long way since its initial launch in 2009.

At the time, it was seen as a direct competitor to Google, but it failed to gain traction in the market, with many users finding its search results to be less relevant and useful than Google's.

However, in recent years, Bing has undergone a significant transformation, thanks in part to the implementation of AI-powered search algorithms. Microsoft has invested heavily in AI technology, and this has led to significant improvements in the quality and relevance of Bing's search results.

One of the key advantages of

AI-powered search algorithms is that they can analyse vast amounts of data and provide more personalised and relevant search results to users.

Bing has leveraged this technology to provide more accurate and useful search results, which in turn has led to increased user satisfaction and engagement.

In addition, Bing has also implemented a number of features and functionalities that are not available on other search engines, such as the ability to perform complex computations and provide answers to specific questions.

This has helped Bing to differentiate itself from other search engines and attract more users.

Bilateral trade between GCC and emerging Asia to reach \$578 billion by 2030

The GCC pivot towards Asia will continue to gain momentum, with bilateral trade between the GCC and emerging Asia set to grow by almost 6 per cent per year over the next decade, to reach approximately \$578 billion by 2030.

Trade between these two economic blocks will surpass the GCC's trade with advanced economies by 2028, according to a study by UK-based think tank Asia House, which was discussed recently at an event organised by Gulf Capital, one of the largest and most active private equity firms investing from the GCC to Southeast Asia and Asia House.

Speakers at the event included former minister of trade in Indonesia, Thomas Lembong, who is currently Director, Consilience Policy Institute; Abdulla al Hashmi, Chief Operating Officer, Parks and Zones at DP World UAE; Eric Robertson, Global Head of Research and Chief Strategist, Standard Chartered; Richard Dallas, Senior Managing Director, Gulf Capital, and Freddie Neve, Senior Middle East Associate, Asia House and author of the "Middle East Pivot To Asia 2022" report.

Freddie Neve said: "Rapidly expanding ties between the Gulf and Asia are creating a fundamental global shift that will have far-ranging implications for international trade, business and politics. The investment corridor is growing in both directions and across various industries, including oil and non-oil sectors.

"In particular, Gulf economic diversification which is moving at a staggering pace, is attracting Asian investment into emerging economic sectors within the GCC, such as construction, renewables and technology. We also expect sustainability cooperation to grow in importance as Gulf and Asian economies transition away from hydrocarbons over the next few decades."

GCC trade with emerging Asia, according to the report, will rise to approximately 36.41 per cent of total GCC trade from the current 30.83 per cent.

Dr Karim El Solh, co-Founder and CEO of Gulf Capital, said: "We are operating in the fastest growing economic corridor in the world today, one that is geopolitically neutral and enjoys demographic and economic fundamentals. Gulf Capital has identified this trend early on and, for the past 14 years, we've been looking east when growing companies from the GCC. Taking our local portfolio companies through this corridor has helped us build global champions, which have become trophies for strategic buyers looking at acquiring cross-country platforms to boost their businesses. Our direct presence through our Singapore office will also help us now grow companies from South East Asia to the GCC."

Gulf Capital invests in five core sectors - healthcare, technology including fintech and healthtech, sustainability, business services and consumer.

Will the new industrial policy work?



KEUN LEE

The author is Distinguished Professor of Economics at Seoul National University and the author of China's Technological Leapfrogging and Economic Catch-up: A Schumpeterian Perspective (Oxford University Press, 2022).

Industrial policy has returned to government agendas across the developed and developing world. While the US Inflation Reduction Act has shocked America's Asian and European trading partners, the Biden administration's signature climate-change legislation is just the latest in a series of recent policies that seemingly fly in the face of World Trade Organization rules.

At a time of growing economic and political uncertainty, it is hardly surprising that governments are increasingly embracing industrial policy. Massive government intervention, after all, underpinned East Asia's "economic miracle" between the 1960s and 1990s.

Political scientist Chalmers Johnson attributed Japan's postwar economic boom to the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, which dominated Japanese policymaking from 1949 to 2000. Similarly, economist Alice Amsden argued that South Korea's transformation into an economic powerhouse relied on subsidies and tariffs that encouraged the formation of giant, state-backed industrial conglomerates.

Despite the contributions of industrial policy to the East Asian growth miracle, the rise of neoliberal economics in the West made it taboo there.

That began to change in 2008, however, as the global financial crisis created a seemingly insatiable appetite for government intervention. Faced with a rapidly growing China and a looming climate catastrophe, economist Mariana Mazzucato and others have reimagined industrial policy as a way to achieve a mission-oriented innovation economy guided by an entrepreneurial state.

But industrial policy's fall from grace in recent decades reflected its own shortcomings, not just a rightward ideological shift.

Japan's failed efforts to promote domestic aircraft production in the 1970s, for example, showed that governments are not always good at picking winners.

For today's industrial policies to be effective, governments must learn from the past and avoid two common mistakes. The first is shielding domestic companies from market discipline. Malaysia's failed effort to build an internationally competitive automotive industry around the national car company Proton is a cautionary tale.

In the 1980s, Proton gained a monopoly in the Malaysian car market thanks to various subsidies and tax benefits. But because government support insulated the company from market discipline, it never managed to meet the quality standards needed to become a global brand. Another mistake is overreliance on foreign ownership.

Thailand and South Africa used financial incentives to lure foreign car producers to work with local manufacturers.

But while their automotive industries have been more successful than Malaysia's, they are also limited to producing lower value-added components; the higher value-added activities, such as research and development or the production of engines and transmissions, remain in foreign companies' home countries.

China's thriving car industry underscores the importance of nurturing local entrants.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Chinese automotive sector relied on technology transfers via foreign-owned joint ventures like Shanghai-Volkswagen. But after that strategy failed to produce the desired

outcomes, the Chinese government pivoted to investing heavily in domestic manufacturers such as Chery, Geely, and BYD, enabling them to emerge as global players.

By combining financial incentives with market discipline and local ownership, policymakers can ensure that the industries they want to promote are competitive.

The evolution of South Korean car manufacturer Hyundai is a case in point. In the 1970s, Hyundai's domestic lead was protected by high tariffs. But when the company exported its Pony model to North America, the car became notorious for failing to meet even basic quality and emissions standards and could not compete with comparable French and German models.

This failure, together with robust domestic profits, encouraged Hyundai to invest in R&D and eventually expand global production. South Korea's industrial policy soon shifted from protectionism and financial incentives towards public-private joint R&D, enabling local producers to gain the technical knowhow needed to expand into high-end products.

Mobilising private-sector participation from the beginning and creating viable markets are crucial to industrial policies' success.

In 2008, for example, the South African company Optimal Energy unveiled an electric vehicle called Joule that was funded almost entirely by government investments.

The five-seat car was well-received at that year's Paris Auto Show and won the Best on Display award at the Geneva Motor Show

in 2010. But local manufacturers deemed it too expensive to commercialise, given the small size of the electric vehicle market at the time and the steep cost of producing it at scale, and the project was abandoned in 2012.

Vietnam and Türkiye offer two other models of encouraging EV production. Vietnamese car manufacturer VinFast, for example, abandoned gasoline-fueled cars last year to focus on EVs. It reportedly sold 23,000 cars in 2022, with sales undoubtedly boosted by government tax credits to buyers.

VinFast, a subsidiary of Vietnam's largest business conglomerate, Vingroup, is reportedly planning to enter the US market by building a \$2 billion factory in North Carolina. Türkiye, where the Automobile Joint Venture Group (TOGG) recently launched the first locally-made EV, offers another interesting case.

TOGG, established in 2018 as a joint venture to develop a viable domestic car industry, is planning to produce 18,000 cars this year and up to 175,000 vehicles annually within the next five years. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who is up for re-election in May, is reportedly heavily invested in the project, which he touts as the "people's car."

Given the urgency and scale of the challenges posed by climate change, the next decade will likely be characterised by increased state intervention in the economy. But policymakers must remember that successful industrial policies are not about picking winners.

They are about picking good students and providing them what they need to grow and prosper.

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Celebrating his coffee farm growing abundantly in Dhofar mountains

Coffee's history in Oman is thought to have started in the 15th century when Yemeni traders introduced the beverage to the nation. Coffee quickly gained popularity among Omani citizens and began to be cultivated and made locally... **P20**

Egypt's unveils renovations of venerable Tahrir Square Museum

EGYPT HAS INAUGURATED the first phase of renovations on the venerable Egyptian Museum in central Cairo, giving the collection a facelift after many of its objects were relocated to other museums in the area.

The building in Cairo's Tahrir Square first opened in 1902 and has long ranked as one of the world's greatest museums, with its vast

displays of Pharaonic artefacts that stretch over 3,000 years of history.

Tourism is a major dollar earner in Egypt's cash-strapped economy and has been gradually recovering from multiple hits, including political turmoil after a popular uprising in 2011, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian attack of Ukraine, which cut off a substantial flow of tourists from both



countries.

Egypt hopes to grow its tourism industry by 25 per cent to 30 per cent a year, Tourism Minister Ahmed Issa said at the inauguration ceremony on Monday.

The renovation, financed by the

European Union and assisted by five major European museums including the Louvre and British Museum, was designed to modernise the presentation of the objects. Some of its display cases dated to the mid-19th century.

Among its treasures sent to newer museums were objects discovered in King Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922, which were relocated to the Grand Egyptian Museum in Giza, scheduled to open within months, and a royal mummy collection, now in the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization 4 km to the south.

"The Egyptian Museum continues to develop itself, allowing it to compete with the other major modern museums," Issa said. The renovation was also designed to improve infrastructure, archiving and digitisation, according to a press statement. The wing of the museum inaugurated on Monday contains artefacts never before displayed, including the collection belonging to 21st Dynasty King Psusennes I, who reigned until about 1,000 B.C., museum official Abir Abdelaziz said.

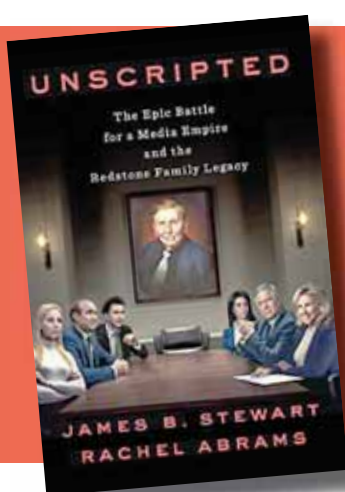
Also on display is the Waziri-1 Papyrus, a scroll containing 113 chapters from the Book of Death, and the first to be discovered and unwrapped by Egyptians, said Mostafa al Waziri, Secretary-General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities. — **Reuters**

READ

UNSCRIPTED

BY JAMES B. STEWART
AND RACHEL ABRAMS

Two New York Times journalists portray power struggles within Paramount Global, the multibillion-dollar entertainment empire controlled by the Redstone family.



FASHION

Filipina actress, artist, businesswoman, and socialite Heart Evangelista attends the presentation of Max Mara's Fall-Winter 2023-2024 Women's Collection during the Fashion Week in Milan. — **AFP**



TRAVEL TALES

People take photographs of cherry blossom trees at a park in the Edogawa district of Tokyo. The peak season for cherry blossoms in Japan is generally from late March to early April. — **AFP**





In Old Cairo, residents reconnect with their heritage

FOR MOST OF THEIR lives, children from historic Cairo's Al-Khalifa district only saw the mausoleums, mosques and madrasa schools that pepper their neighbourhood from outside heavy bronze doors.

In one of the world's oldest Islamic cities, communities were becoming increasingly separated from the centuries-old buildings they lived alongside — prompting architect and heritage management expert May al Ibrashy to launch a programme to “foster a sense of ownership over this heritage”.

Believing a sense of belonging is integral to protecting heritage, her “participatory conservation initiative” has included bringing the young through those once-closed doors.

“The first time we opened a heritage monument to children, they were ecstatic,” Al Ibrashy said.

“Every day they had passed in front of this historic site, but had never been allowed inside”.

The Athar Lina initiative, whose name means “the monument is ours” in Arabic, has carried out workshops, tours and summer camps in the Egyptian capital since 2012.

After years of slowly earning the neighbourhood's trust with the children's programme — including play dates in the famous ninth-century mosque of Ibn Tulun, one of the oldest in Africa — Athar Lina expanded the workshops to include adults.

In one of the first buildings Athar Lina renovated at the community's request — an unfinished mosque that is now the Al Khalifa Community Centre — the sound of children playing echoes off ancient stone, while their mothers learn traditional embroidery skills.

- 'LOCK AND KEY' -

On the outskirts of the sprawling megacity of Cairo, ancient tombs, pyramids and temples hug the edge of the desert.

But the iconic domes and minarets of Islamic Cairo — listed on the UN's World Heritage List for its “absolutely unquestionable historical, archaeological and urban importance” — are embedded into

the labyrinthine alleys of tight-knit working-class neighbourhoods.

However, since the 1980s, the authorities increasingly protected monuments by keeping “them under lock and key”, said conservation and cultural heritage expert Omniya Abdel Barr.



“This idea is rooted in 19th-century beliefs that Egyptians don't deserve their heritage, that you have to erect fences or else they'll ruin it”, she added.

Experts worried younger generations were growing alienated from their heritage.

“We noticed that the older

generations knew a lot more about the monuments and had a much deeper connection to them, because they had all these childhood memories that today's children didn't,” Al Ibrashy said, speaking from the Athar Lina office rooftop, framed by twin 14th-century

- 'COMMUNITY IS THE SOUL' -

One example of the change is the 17th-century building of Beit Yakan, once known locally as “the dump”.

The crumbling historic house, used by a butcher as a slaughterhouse, was condemned to be demolished.

But Alaa Habashi, professor of architecture and heritage conservation at Egypt's Menoufia University, bought the building in 2009 and spent a decade turning it into a community space.

Today its elegant restored courtyard, with a gentle breeze wafting through aromatic plants under intricately latticed “mashrabiya” windows, hosts locally led heritage crafts workshops and conservation awareness campaigns.

Such courtyards played “a key social and economic role” as community centres, Habashi said, a role he works hard to revive.

Under a half-Mamluk, half-Ottoman patterned library ceiling, Habashi said there were once around 600 historic houses with similar courtyards — all built facing northwest to catch the cool wind — but just 24 are protected as heritage monuments.

“The rest, those of them that are still standing, who knows what state they're in?” he said. “Every day, another one gets torn down.”

Habashi warned the loss of such heritage would be irreparable.

“These buildings are only the body, the surrounding community is the soul”, he said.

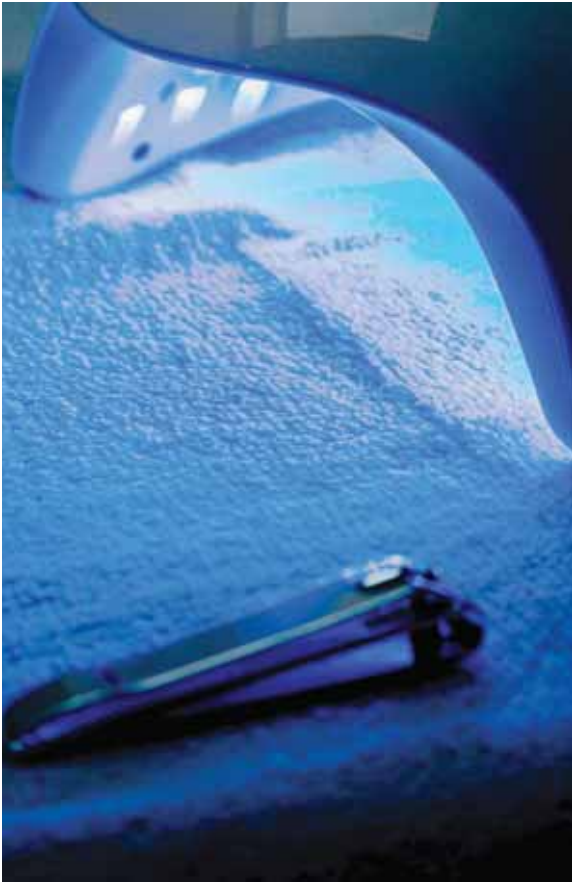
Public space is increasingly rare in crowded Old Cairo, often smothered in dangerous smog from traffic-packed streets, and sizzling summer heat rising amid global warming.

“There are very few places where people can come together, away from cramped apartments and congested streets,” said Abdel Barr, who hopes the old houses could help solve modern problems.

“They can bring some peace of mind to the neighbourhood...I would love for these houses to become your local parks, where women can bring their kids and sit in the garden.” — AFP

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Are Gel Manicures Dangerous?



Q: I RECENTLY READ THAT THE UV LAMPS USED FOR GEL — AND SOMETIMES DIP — MANICURES COULD RAISE MY CHANCES OF GETTING CANCER. IS THAT TRUE? ARE THERE ANY ALTERNATIVES?

A: Gel manicures are popular because they last a long time and don't easily chip or peel. But they've come under scrutiny in recent weeks following a new study that found that the ultraviolet lamps used for these nail treatments damage cells in ways that could potentially increase the risk for cancer.

The findings add to a small but growing body of research suggesting that regular use of UV nail lamps could accelerate aging and increase cancer risk. Health experts agree that UV light causes damage to skin cells, but there's still not enough data to determine just how dangerous the occasional gel manicure might be, said Dr Chris Adigun, a dermatologist in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, who was not involved in the study.

“We can't quantify the risk,” she said.

Still, Adigun and other dermatologists said that taking certain precautions can help make gel manicures safer. Dip powder manicures are another option, though they may not be entirely risk-free, either.

UV RADIATION IN NAIL LAMPS

UV lamps are essential for gel manicures because the light makes the nail polish harden and become more durable. (Some salons use LED lights for gel manicures, but these release plenty of UV light, too, Adigun said.)

In the new study, published in the peer-reviewed journal *Nature Communications* last month, researchers exposed human and mouse cells to radiation from a nail lamp used in many US nail salons.

When the cells were exposed to UV light from the lamp for 20 minutes, around 30% of the cells died. Some of the cells that survived suffered damage to their DNA. The damage patterns that researchers observed were similar to those seen in people with melanoma, a potentially deadly type of skin cancer, said Maria Zhivagui, a co-author of the study and a postdoctoral scholar of cancer genomics and public health at the University of California, San Diego.

Although the cell damage is worrying, Zhivagui said, the study does not prove that UV lamps can cause cancer. Cells in a lab are more vulnerable to damage than cells on a person's hand, which has a thick outer layer of skin made of dead cells that helps protect against environmental damage, Adigun said.

No major studies have yet evaluated whether people who get gel manicures are more likely to develop skin cancer than people who don't. There have been case studies involving people who were diagnosed with skin cancer on their hands after getting gel manicures regularly, but it's unclear whether their nail treatments were the culprit.

Still, “the data is mounting that UV radiation emitted by nail lamps could be potentially dangerous,” Adigun said.

SAFETY TIPS FOR YOUR NEXT MANICURE

Thankfully, there are steps you can take to minimise health risks the next time you visit the salon.

If you're getting a gel manicure, consider wearing fingerless UV protective gloves, Adigun said. (She did not recommend using sunscreen, as sunscreens have been shown to protect against UV exposure only from the sun, not from UV lamps, she said.)

To reduce your risk of infection, Adigun suggested asking your stylist not to push back or remove your cuticles, which provide an important barrier against germs. Many people blame post-salon infections on contaminated equipment, she said, when it's more likely that their own germs infected the nails after their cuticles were removed.

“Tell them, ‘Please trim my nails, file my nails, do not touch my cuticles,’” Adigun said.

It's also a good idea to request that your stylist only lightly buff and file your nails before adding polish, Shipp said, because heavy buffing and filing can make them thinner and more brittle. Thick coats of polish can also weaken nails, she said, so it's best if stylists apply thinner layers. Also, skip the gel topcoat if you're getting a dip manicure so you don't have to use a UV lamp.

And it may seem obvious, but pick a salon that takes safety seriously, Shipp said. Ask if the staff members reuse equipment and, if so, how they sanitise it between customers. (Autoclaves or dry-heat sterilisers are ideal.) You could also purchase your own drill bits, files and buffers and bring them with you, she added.

Although gel and dip manicures can pose risks, they don't have to be a source of anxiety, Adigun said, adding, “It's all about having the information you need to be able to go in there and get a great manicure or pedicure safely.” — **NYT**



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AROUND THE WORLD

DINING

Recipe:
Sheet-Pan
Shrimp Boil



THERE IS ABSOLUTELY nothing like a shrimp boil, but this flavourful recipe captures its essence by roasting the ingredients on a sheet tray instead of simmering them in a pot of broth. Serve it on its own or tossed with pasta. The slight char brings out sea-food's sweetness, so for contrast, serve with tart lemons or a tangy cocktail sauce.

SHEET-PAN SHRIMP BOIL

Yield: 4 to 6 servings
Total time: 50 minutes

FOR THE ROASTED POTATOES:

- 1 pound baby red or yellow potatoes, halved (or quartered, if large)
 - 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
 - 2 garlic cloves, minced
 - Kosher salt and black pepper
- For the Broiled Corn:
- 4 ears fresh corn, husked, cut into 4 segments
 - 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

FOR THE BROILED SHRIMP:

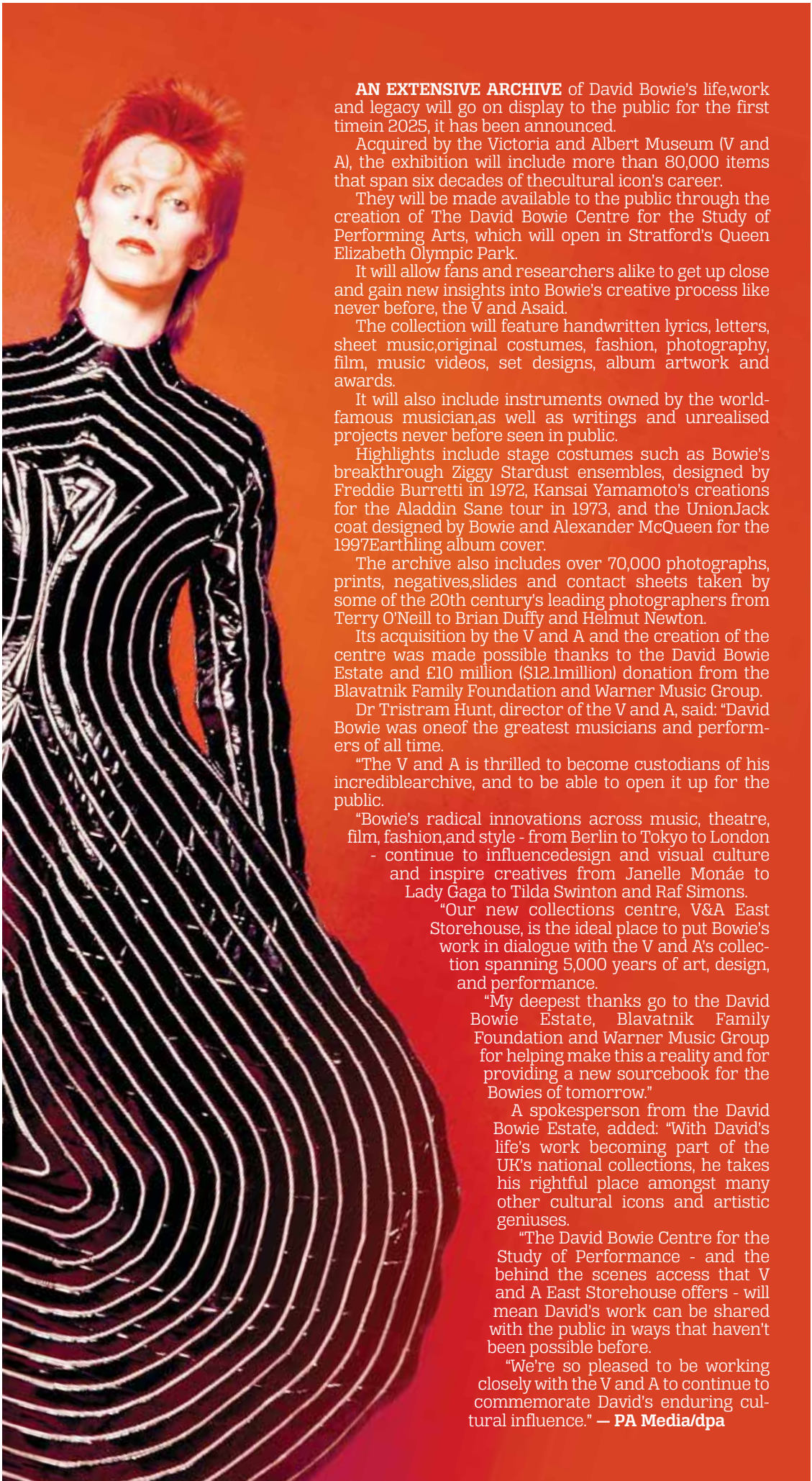
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon seafood seasoning, such as Old Bay, or Cajun seasoning
- 1 teaspoon ground paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cayenne, or to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 2 pounds peeled and deveined tail-on jumbo shrimp, fresh or frozen and thawed, patted dry
- 1 lemon, cut into 8 wedges
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley leaves (optional)

METHODS:

- Heat oven to 425 degrees. Place a rack in the centre of the oven.
- Prepare the potatoes: In a large bowl, toss potatoes with oil and garlic until coated. Season with salt and pepper, then pour onto a large baking sheet and set aside.
- Prepare the corn: Spread each piece of corn with some of the butter and set aside.
- Prepare the shrimp: In the same big bowl, whisk together the olive oil, lemon juice, garlic, seafood or Cajun seasoning, paprika, cayenne and pepper. Add the shrimp and stir to coat evenly. Set aside.
- Bake the potatoes until golden brown and fork tender, about 20 minutes. Remove the potatoes from the oven, set the rack in the middle of the oven and switch oven to broil. Scatter the corn over the potatoes and broil 3 to 4 minutes, or until kernels begin to brown slightly.
- Remove the pan from the oven, and flip the corn. Scatter shrimp all over the pan and broil for 2 minutes, or until the shrimp have curled and turned pink.
- Turn the shrimp, scatter the lemon wedges on top and broil 2 more minutes. Squeeze the lemon juice over everything and sprinkle with parsley, if using. Serve immediately, on its own or tossed with pasta. - **NYT**

ENTERTAINMENT

Extensive archive
of David Bowie's
work to be made
public in 2025



AN EXTENSIVE ARCHIVE of David Bowie's life, work and legacy will go on display to the public for the first time in 2025, it has been announced.

Acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum (V and A), the exhibition will include more than 80,000 items that span six decades of the cultural icon's career.

They will be made available to the public through the creation of The David Bowie Centre for the Study of Performing Arts, which will open in Stratford's Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.

It will allow fans and researchers alike to get up close and gain new insights into Bowie's creative process like never before, the V and A said.

The collection will feature handwritten lyrics, letters, sheet music, original costumes, fashion, photography, film, music videos, set designs, album artwork and awards.

It will also include instruments owned by the world-famous musician, as well as writings and unrealised projects never before seen in public.

Highlights include stage costumes such as Bowie's breakthrough Ziggy Stardust ensembles, designed by Freddie Burretti in 1972, Kansai Yamamoto's creations for the Aladdin Sane tour in 1973, and the Union Jack coat designed by Bowie and Alexander McQueen for the 1997 Earthling album cover.

The archive also includes over 70,000 photographs, prints, negatives, slides and contact sheets taken by some of the 20th century's leading photographers from Terry O'Neill to Brian Duffy and Helmut Newton.

Its acquisition by the V and A and the creation of the centre was made possible thanks to the David Bowie Estate and £10 million (\$12.1million) donation from the Blavatnik Family Foundation and Warner Music Group.

Dr Tristram Hunt, director of the V and A, said: "David Bowie was one of the greatest musicians and performers of all time.

"The V and A is thrilled to become custodians of his incredible archive, and to be able to open it up for the public.

"Bowie's radical innovations across music, theatre, film, fashion, and style - from Berlin to Tokyo to London - continue to influence design and visual culture and inspire creatives from Janelle Mon  e to Lady Gaga to Tilda Swinton and Raf Simons.

"Our new collections centre, V&A East Storehouse, is the ideal place to put Bowie's work in dialogue with the V and A's collection spanning 5,000 years of art, design, and performance.

"My deepest thanks go to the David Bowie Estate, Blavatnik Family Foundation and Warner Music Group for helping make this a reality and for providing a new sourcebook for the Bowies of tomorrow."

A spokesperson from the David Bowie Estate, added: "With David's life's work becoming part of the UK's national collections, he takes his rightful place amongst many other cultural icons and artistic geniuses.

"The David Bowie Centre for the Study of Performance - and the behind the scenes access that V and A East Storehouse offers - will mean David's work can be shared with the public in ways that haven't been possible before.

"We're so pleased to be working closely with the V and A to continue to commemorate David's enduring cultural influence." - **PA Media/dpa**

CULTURE

Looted Artifacts,
Returned to
Yemen, Will Go to
the Smithsonian,
for Now



AS THE PRESSURE ON museums and collectors to return looted artifacts to their countries of origin has grown in recent years, one issue has been whether some countries are equipped to accept them immediately.

On Tuesday, under an agreement designed to recognise such a difficulty, the Smithsonian Institution announced that the US is returning 77 looted artifacts to the government of the Republic of Yemen, but their physical return will be delayed during the current violent conflict there.

For the next two years at least, the objects will be housed at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art in Washington, where some may be put on display.

The artifacts include 65 funerary stelae, or carved stones, from northwest Yemen, dated to the second half of the first millennium B.C., a bronze bowl, and 11 folios from early Qurans.

They were seized from a New York art dealer more than a decade ago. Since then, they have been held in storage, and the new partnership, the first return of cultural objects by the US government to Yemen in almost 20 years, means some could soon emerge from the darkness of storage and be exhibited.

"The current situation in Yemen is tragic," Chase F. Robinson, director of the museum of Asian Art, said in an interview. "This is just a small moment in which we can celebrate some collaboration."

Yemen is trying to emerge from an eight-year civil conflict between the government, backed by Saudi Arabia, and a well-armed rebel group called the Houthis. The United Nations estimates that the war has claimed more than 200,000 lives, mostly from indirect causes like hunger and disease.

As well as creating a refugee and humanitarian crisis, the war has left much of the nation's infrastructure in ruins. According to the National Museum of Asian Art, the country "has experienced heavy looting and destruction of its tangible cultural heritage."

The objects were turned over to the custody of the National Museum of Asian Art on Tuesday afternoon during a ceremony at the Embassy of the Republic of Yemen in Washington, with officials from the US departments of Homeland Security, State and Justice.

"With the current situation in Yemen, it is not the right time to bring the objects back into the country," Mohammed Al-Hadhrani, Yemen's ambassador to the United States, said in a statement.

According to the initial two-year custodial agreement, which Yemen can request to extend, the museum will store, document and care for the objects and will be able to "exhibit the collection to foster a greater understanding of ancient Yemeni art," the museum said in its announcement.

As museums have increasingly embraced the repatriation of objects stolen from other countries or acquired under disputed circumstances, the Smithsonian has sought to be a prominent voice in the debate about how and when objects should be returned.

Lonnie G. Bunch III, the secretary of the Smithsonian, has said he wants the institution's museums to update their collections practices, and last year adopted an ethical returns policy that holds that issues of fairness could trump any legal title to objects it might possess. - **NYT**

Celebrating his coffee farm growing abundantly in Dhofar mountains

By Miaad Ali Darwish al Darabi

The history of coffee is lengthy and extensive, going back many centuries. Coffee is thought to have originated in Ethiopia, where it was initially grown before being transported throughout the Middle East and beyond. The beverage gained popularity swiftly in the Muslim world and was significant to the social and cultural life of many nations, including Oman.

Coffee's history in Oman is thought to have started in the 15th century when Yemeni traders introduced the beverage to the nation. Coffee quickly gained popularity among Omani citizens and began to be cultivated and made locally. The beverage evolved into a significant component of Omani society and culture, with coffee shops and cafés playing a crucial role in social life.

The history of coffee in Oman is intricately entwined with that of the nation. With a history dating back centuries, Oman is one of the oldest coffee-producing countries in the world.

Not many people know that the Dhofar Governorate in the Sultanate of Oman is abundant in terms of coffee vegetation, which is not surprising as the governorate is also remarkably well-known for cultivating fruits and vegetables.

Ahmed al Kathiri grew the coffee plant for the first time on a farm in the mountains of Dhofar, where the Arabica coffee plant grows only in certain agricultural conditions.

Al Kathiri started cultivating coffee on his farm five years ago, focusing on two types of coffee — Mexican and Adeni (Yemeni). Yemeni coffee is the best and bears abundant fruits. Ahmed considers it one of the best varieties he has tried. He shared that the Adeni-Yemeni variety is better than the Mexican and has a bright future.

Al Kathiri started by planting only three coffee plants, which took several months to grow.

"The coffee plant needs a specific climate to grow. The coffee I have planted has adapted well to the climate of the mountains of Dhofar Governorate. Coffee is harvested at my farm during July, as my first harvest reached 10 kgs," he said.

Al Kathiri used to work for the Ministry of Information. After retirement, he decided to develop an interest in farming. His interest and passion for agriculture led him to travel to some countries to import seeds and plants.

Ahmed tries to grow tropical plants, provides them with appropriate conditions for growth, and often succeeds in these experiments.

"The farm contains more than 700 types of Omani and Arabic fruits, such as mango trees, spices, and some rare tropical fruits, including American apples and more than nine varieties of jackfruit," Al Kathiri said.

Coffee symbolises generosity and hospitality among the Arabs, in addition to their use of coffee seeds in folk remedies, Ahmed shared.

The beverage continues to play a significant role in the history and culture of the nation. A blend of gently roasted beans is used to make traditional Omani coffee. The beans are ground and the coffee is boiled in a unique kettle known as a dallah. The beverage is a tasty and gratifying treat because it is sometimes served with dates or other sweet delicacies.

Because of its significance to the customs and traditions of his community, Al Kathiri said that it was one of the reasons why he highly considered producing his own.

Beyond farming, Ahmed is also doing a series of experiments with other varieties of plants.

