

HM VISITS MILITARY UNITS IN SARFAIT

SALALAH: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, went on a Royal tour of military units of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) in Sarfait, Dhofar Governorate, on Monday.

Upon his arrival at Sarfait Camp, His Majesty the Sultan was received by Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), the Commander of the 11th Infantry Brigade and the Commander of the Northern Frontier Regiment. His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with the officers of the RAO military sites at the camp.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan listened to a briefing about the military units, their equipment and the national roles they undertake. During his field tour, His Majesty the Sultan took note of supplies in a number of military sites.

At the conclusion of his visit, His Majesty the Supreme Commander posed for a commemorative photo with the officers of the military sites, and later left the camp. — **ONA** **SEE ALSO P2**

Royal Decree ratifies Kigali Amendment

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday issued Royal Decree No (37/2024) ratifying the Kigali Amendment of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

Article (1) ratifies the aforementioned Kigali Amendment, in accordance with the version attached to this Decree.

Article (2) says that competent departments shall deposit the endorsement document as per the aforesaid amendment's provisions.

Article (3) says that this Royal Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — **ONA**

HM GREETES GUINEA-BISSAU

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Umaro Sissoco Embalo of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to President Umaro Sissoco Embalo. His Majesty also wished the people of Guinea-Bissau further progress and prosperity.

OMAN COMMITTED TO PEACE

PARIS: Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, headed the Sultanate of Oman's delegation at the 'International Meeting for Peace 2024' held in the French capital, Paris from September 22-24. During the meeting, the minister conveyed the greetings of His Majesty the Sultan and his sincere hope that this meeting will be crowned with success. Dr Al Maamari said that the Sultanate of Oman has paid a great attention to peace and the Basic Law of the State states that 'peace is the objective of the state.' The Sultanate of Oman remains committed to a global vision that supports the achievement of peace and calls on all parties to commit to achieving peace. — **ONA**



Only dialogue can resolve conflicts in the ME: Sayyid Badr

NEW YORK: Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, headed the Sultanate of Oman's delegation to the "Summit of the Future 2024" held on Monday at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on the sidelines of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly. In his speech at the opening of the summit, Sayyid Badr affirmed the Sultanate of Oman's steadfast commitment to multilateral action and international cooperation as the means to achieve the common goals sought by the Future Summit.

Sayyid Badr said that dialogue, realism and mutual respect are the basic principles

adopted by the Sultanate of Oman in its foreign policy. He stressed that these values constitute a basic necessity in addressing the complex and global crises prevailing in the world today.

Sayyid Badr added that "the challenges we face cannot be addressed by traditional methods alone, but rather they require methodologies based on sustainable development concepts. Therefore, we must act wisely and begin policies that place future generations at the centre of attention."

Sayyid Badr pointed out that international peace and security are the two main pillars of world stability. In this context, he underlined the importance



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, speaking at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

of applying preventive diplomacy, being the most significant means of preventing and resolving conflicts. He called for strengthening methods of international dialogue and mediation and the need to engage in full commitment to international law and the United Nations Charter to ensure the realisation of justice, peace and stability for all.

Stating that modern technology and digital cooperation are crucial factors in addressing environmental, economic and social challenges, he noted that technological innovations open up new vistas for upgrading the efficiency of resource use and cutting down harmful gas emissions. This, in turn, will contribute

to promoting clean energy, achieving food and water security and developing more prosperous and sustainable societies.

Sayyid Badr also underlined the need to accord due importance to current political challenges incurred by the ongoing war in Gaza. This, he explained, highlights the fragility of the regional and international situations, which leads to the escalation of violence, the suffering of civilians and the failure of peace efforts. These, he observed, pose a threat to the principles of pluralism and the rule of law. He said that failure to learn from the past and understand the present, notably the Palestinian cause, hinders efforts to achieve a lasting peace. **TURN TO P5**



His Majesty visits military units in Sarfait



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, went on a Royal tour of military units of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) in Sarfait, Dhofar Governorate, on Monday. Upon his arrival at Sarfait Camp, His Majesty the Sultan was received by Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), the Commander of the 11th Infantry Brigade and the Commander of the Northern Frontier Regiment. His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with the officers of the RAO military sites at the camp. — ONA





Foreign Minister participates in GCC coordination meeting in New York

NEW YORK: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, participated in the coordination meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers. The meeting was held during the ministers’ participation in the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly, held

in New York. The meeting covered a range of topics on related to international action agenda of UN General Assembly and the upcoming scheduled joint meetings between GCC states and various countries and regional blocs.



The Ministers underlined their support for efforts that are exerted to tackle regional and international challenges and to resolve those issues in a peaceful manner. At the forefront of these issues is the Palestinian cause and the efforts to end the war in the Gaza Strip and containing

current escalations which are taking place on several fronts. The foreign ministers underscored the commitment of GCC countries in backing dialogue, justice, international law and the application of the UN Charter in the resolution of conflicts. — ONA

Workshop focuses on digital transformation efforts

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

The workshop on simplifying and automating procedures in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate successfully concluded, focusing on enhancing operational efficiency, streamlining processes, and improving the experience for beneficiaries. The initiative began under the auspices of Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor Al Sharqiyah South. The initiative emphasises the importance of digital transformation. The Governor highlighted the advanced strides the region has made in its digital transformation plan and underscored the critical role such workshops play in fostering awareness among employees about improving services and simplifying procedures to boost beneficiary satisfaction. The workshop stressed the



The workshop programme included a thorough listing of all procedures within the governorate, identifying areas for improvement need to begin with an in-depth analysis of the current processes, ensuring that optimal benefits are achieved through institutional cooperation and active engagement with service beneficiaries. The workshop programme included a thorough listing of all procedures within the governorate, identifying areas for improvement and developing streamlined methods to enhance the service delivery experience. Each process was evaluated to determine the most efficient approach to simplification and enhancement. Over 30 services were targeted for improvement, beginning with a study of the existing procedures, identifying weaknesses and challenges and progressing towards drawing a clear picture of the future state. The workshop also featured a quality control stage, where stakeholders reviewed and refined re-engineered procedures, leading to the final approval of

the optimised service framework by specialists. Ahmed al Khamisi delivered a specialised session focusing on procedural simplification for several departments, including Legal, Technical Affairs, Reconciliation and Mediation, Electronic Information Security, Information Technology, and Violations. Additionally, an agreement was signed to develop and implement a business continuity plan, reviewing 37 services in the governorate. This plan outlines a detailed mechanism for automating service pathways according to the digital transformation specifications. The agreement, signed by Dr Yahya al Maawali and Dr Yousef al Khamisi from the Development and Quality Company for Business, aims to save time, effort, and costs by reducing redundant procedures.

Oman, Zanzibar explore areas of joint cooperation

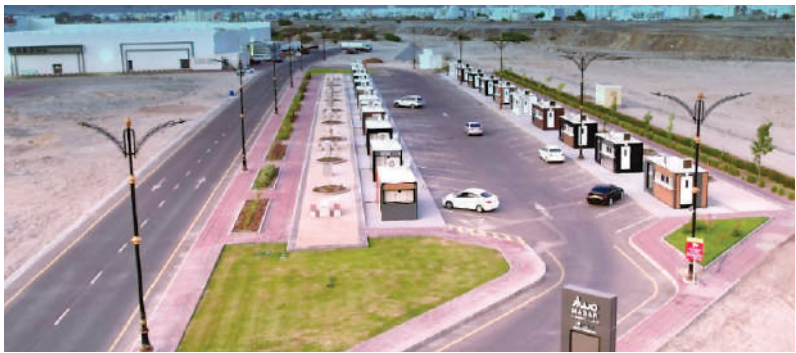


The two sides underscored the joint keenness to boost bilateral relations in various fields. — ONA ZANZIBAR: Dr Hussein Ali Mwinyi, President of Zanzibar on Monday received Khalid bin Hashil al Muselhi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs. During the meeting, areas of bilateral cooperation between Oman and the government of Zanzibar were explored, particularly in economic, cultural and heritage fields. The two sides underscored the joint keenness to boost bilateral relations in various fields. Meanwhile, the under-secretary also met with Hassan Khamis Hafidh, Deputy Health Minister of Zanzibar. This meeting dealt with cooperation in the health field and means of enhancing this cooperation. The two meetings were attended by Said bin Salim al Sinawi, Consul General of the Sultanate of Oman in Zanzibar and several officials from both sides. — ONA

Dedicated zone for street food opens in Amerat

STAFF REPORTERT
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

Muscat Municipality announced the opening of the dedicated site for Street Food (Masar) in Al Amerat in cooperation with Riyadh, as part of the projects aimed at supporting small business owners and organising the activities of street vendors. The site provides an integrated environment that includes all basic services at 20 modern food carts designed according to the highest technical and health specifications. The project offers a distinctive destination for enjoying unique



The site provides an integrated environment that includes all basic services at 20 modern food carts designed according to the highest technical and health specifications dining experiences while ensuring a comfortable and safe environment that meets the required health and technical standards. Earlier, the Muscat Municipality invited street vendors to register for opportunities to operate in a dedicated zone in Wadi Kabir in the Wilayat of Muttrah.

According to Muscat Municipality, priorities will be given to owners residing in Muttrah. The operator must have a license to practice the activity, must be of Omani nationality, and must be at least 18 years old. The project owner can practice the activity as stated in the license. The applicant must not have another license to practice any other commercial, professional, or craft activity. The site has been prepared to cater to around 12 street vendors, with facilities such as electricity and water connections and designated parking spaces for customers’ vehicles.

First batch of Karwa school buses launched

DUQM: The Ministry of Education (MoE) on Monday launched the first batch of new school buses at the Karwa Motors factory in Duqm. The agreement, which seeks to replace old vehicles, stems from the ministry’s efforts to modernise the school bus fleet. The first batch includes manufacturing 5 buses and handing them over to current bus owners during October 2024. In the meantime, Karwa Motors Company announced



the launch of after-sales services in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman through Opal Company. This will ensure technical support and periodic maintenance of buses in accordance with highest global standards. — ONA

‘Majors Fair’ opens at Sultan Qaboos University

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
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The ‘Majors Fair’ at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) kicked off on Monday to help students plan a successful career path by selecting the suitable academic major. The event will run for three days, from 9 am to 5:30 pm. The event got inaugurated under the auspices of Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, at the Grand Hall of the university Cultural Centre. Organised by the Career Guidance Centre in collaboration with the university’s nine colleges, the fair showcases a variety of specialisations available

to students and visitors. The Deanship of Admission and Registration and the Deanship of Postgraduate Studies are also participating, with a focus on raising academic awareness among students. Amani al Jalboubi, Head of the Awareness and Guidance Department, highlighted that this ninth edition of the ‘Majors Fair’ seeks to educate students on their academic choices and the skills demanded in the labour market. The event also promotes community participation, targeting school students in grades 10, 11 and 12. “This fair includes various activities such as workshops led by specialists from the Career Guidance Centre,” she stated.



The exhibition presents detailed information on 61 different majors, catering primarily to new university students

The exhibition presents detailed information on 61 different majors, catering primarily to new university students, those selecting their majors and students considering transferring or changing their major. Additionally, university students from other institutions who wish to learn about Sultan Qaboos University’s offerings are encouraged to attend. The primary aim of the fair is to provide students with insights into the available majors, associated job prospects and the skills required for each field. It also extends its outreach to the community by inviting career guidance specialists and students from schools across Oman,

alongside their parents and other interested individuals. Asila al Shamsi, a student from the College of Arts and Social Sciences, Department of Tourism, emphasised the department’s role in promoting awareness about tourism as a growing sector in Oman. “Tourism is not limited to hotels; it encompasses diverse fields in line with current labour market demands,” she noted. Basma, a student from the College of Nursing, shared that their booth focuses on educating prospective students about the various programs within the nursing field, including the academic standards required for admission. “In 2024, female students were accepted with an average of 97.56 per cent, while

male students had an acceptance average of 95.66 per cent,” she added. The event also features a range of additional activities, including an awareness corner with the participation of the Khata career guidance platform. Workshops will be held throughout the fair, led by experts from both the Career Guidance Centre and various professional sectors. Moreover, a CV clinic has been established in collaboration with human resources specialists to assist students and graduates in improving their resumes. The clinic offers personalised feedback and guidance, helping students better prepare for the job market and compete for top employment opportunities.



Oman Health Exhibition, Conference begins



The three-day Oman Health Exhibition and Conference 2024, was inaugurated by HH Sayyid Mohammed bin Thuwaini al Said

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The three-day Oman Health Exhibition and Conference 2024, hosted by the Ministry of Health, began at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Monday.

The exhibition, inaugurated by HH Sayyid Mohammed bin Thuwaini al Said, features six country pavilions representing Malaysia, Turkey, Iran and India, as well as local and international participation from Poland, Jordan and Egypt (Treat in Oman) under the umbrella of the Directorate General of Private Health Establishments.

Wahid al Maskari, from the Ministry of Health, explained that the section of the Directorate General of Private Health Establishments features the facility to showcase the process of starting a private institution. “We are also representing private hospitals and clinics in Oman,” he said.

The conference has brought together more than 60 speakers for 50 sessions. The theme this year is Innovating Healthcare, Empowering Society.

Dr Abdullah al Maamari, co-founder of Future Health and a speaker at the conference, said, “Our panel discussion is about investment and how this

will look in the future, as well as discussing the Oman market. The Oman market is a growing market, especially in the health sector.”

A major focus is also on digital health. “We are going to explore how we can leverage the economy using digital technology in Oman’s market. There are many areas where digital technology can enhance the health sector. I think the main focus of Oman and the Ministry of Health today is using AI and data analytics leading to data-driven decisions, especially in operational models for hospitals — private and public. This will impact the quality and access to healthcare in Oman,” explained Dr Al Maamari.

The exhibition has the participation of 160 exhibitors. Farida Magdi, International Business Development Assistant Manager of BDMS Wellness Clinic, said they have been participating every year at the Oman Health Exhibition and Conference.

“We are different from traditional hospitals. Traditionally, people go for checkups to see if they have any disease, and the hospital will treat the disease. But for wellness, we do the checkup to see what diseases could occur in the future. We provide vitamins and supplements to prevent potential diseases,” she said.

Beauty of Ain Sahalnoot lures visitors beyond khareef

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Though khareef season in Salalah is close to an end, the promise of nature’s lingering beauty still lures visitors to the enchanting Ain Sahalnoot. Just 19.4 kilometres from the city and a mere 20-minute drive brings one to this hidden gem, where the humdrum of city life fades and the symphony of nature takes over.

“As I approached Ain Sahalnoot, the road led me gently through lush valleys and rugged mountains, the last vestiges of khareef greenery holding on in patches. Though the rains had subsided, the heart of Ain Sahalnoot remained vibrant, offering a sight of the famed Wadi Darbat waterfall,” said



Ayn Sahalnoot presents a sense of intimacy offering visitors a cool place to unwind

Kamram who made it to Salalah from Muscat on a weekend.

Cool mountain air and the gentle sounds of water flowing through the rocky landscape attract visitors.

Ain Sahalnoot offers a picture of serenity. A few early birds, chose to visit the place early in the morning. Some sat close to the water’s edge, soaking their

feet in the cool stream, while others wandered, cameras in hand, capturing the quiet beauty of the place.

Since rains have stopped, most of the small waterfalls have dried, but Ain Sahalnoot still has lots of fresh running water oozing from mountain pores.

“The mountains surrounding Ain Sahalnoot gave the scene a

sense of peace, their towering presence making the waterfall appear even more magical. There was a stillness here, as though time itself slowed down, allowing you to feel every moment. The gentle splashing of water over the rocks, the whisper of the wind through the trees, and the soft calls of birds created a peaceful atmosphere that was both invigorating and soothing,” said Atiya Fatima, who chose to visit the place early in the morning with family and friends with a basketful of breakfast stuff.

“The resemblance to Wadi Darbat was striking, though Ain Sahalnoot had its own unique charm — a sense of intimacy, a quiet pocket of nature where visitors could sit undisturbed, absorbing the tranquil surroundings,” she said.

Scientific Research and Innovation Clinic opens

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

A Scientific Research and Innovation Clinic opened under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

The clinic aims to empower Oman’s national scientific research and innovation system, enhance the Sultanate of Oman’s performance in the Global Innovation Index, and contribute towards the ambitious goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The Global Innovation Index is a key indicator of national potential, using various input and output metrics to assess countries’ innovation capabilities and competitiveness. As part of the Oman Vision 2040 strategy, the Sultanate has prioritised economic development fuelled by innovation and creativity.

The clinic reflects this strategic focus, advancing efforts by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, to integrate research and development



The clinic aims to empower Oman’s national scientific research and innovation system, enhance the Sultanate of Oman’s performance in the Global Innovation Index

into national objectives, supporting economic transformation and the broader vision for a knowledge-driven society. The clinic is a collaborative initiative, created in partnership with the “Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit” and other key stakeholders in the research and innovation ecosystem.

Running from September 22 to October 3, it will highlight the pivotal role of scientific research in economic and social development, closely aligning with Oman Vision 2040. At its core, the clinic focuses on two strategic axes: Sustainable, participatory

funding and enhancing legislative and legal frameworks that support research and innovation. These efforts aim to strengthen Oman’s innovation capacity and improve its performance in the Global Innovation Index. Key objectives include identifying challenges, proposing solutions, and fostering partnerships between government, research institutions, and industry sectors.

Structured around four main pillars—research, innovation and digital infrastructure, scientific and technical skills, legal frameworks, and funding—the clinic directly supports the priorities of Oman

Vision 2040. These priorities encompass building a competitive, future-focused knowledge economy, establishing diverse funding sources, and integrating research and development efforts across all sectors.

In her opening remarks, Dr Rahma emphasised the importance of supporting Omani youth and nurturing their research capabilities.

Dr Jamila al Hinaï, Executive Director of the project, also gave an insightful presentation on the clinic’s empowerment journey for the national research and innovation system.

A total of 12 initiatives were introduced during the launch, all designed to bolster the core pillars of the national research system, promoting the strategic priority of fostering scientific research, building a knowledge-based society, and creating competitive national capabilities.

These initiatives will also support economic and social development, further aligning with Oman Vision 2040’s objectives.

Workshop looks at kingfish fisheries management

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR), in collaboration with the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI), organised the Second Regional Workshop on the Management of Kingfish Fisheries in Muscat. The event was held under the auspices of Eng Yaqoub bin Khalfan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Fisheries, from September 23 to 25, with the participation of regional and international experts.

Abdulaziz al Marzouqi, Director General of Fisheries Resources Development and Vice-President of the Authority for Fisheries highlighted the economic importance of kingfish as a key commercial species in



The workshop focuses on key objectives aimed at improving the management of kingfish populations. – Photo by Salim al Ghazili

the region, targeted through various fishing methods, including gillnets and hook-and-line. However, he noted the decline in production due to unsustainable fishing practices across the Arabian Sea, the Sea of Oman and the Arabian Gulf. The migratory nature of kingfish poses a challenge

to effective management, necessitating cooperation and coordination among regional countries to implement unified management systems. This workshop, organised as part of the Fisheries Working Group’s annual programme, focuses on key objectives aimed at improving the management of kingfish

populations. These include assessing the status of fisheries in the RECOFI area, developing a comprehensive kingfish database, and establishing governance frameworks for joint management and sustainable exploitation. Reflecting on past efforts, Al Marzouqi recalled the Sultanate’s

leadership in initiating joint management efforts for kingfish fisheries, dating back to 2014. He acknowledged the work of the Permanent Committee for Fisheries Wealth under the umbrella of the GCC, which laid the foundation for joint monitoring and management of kingfish stocks. The first phase of

these efforts led to the creation of a joint database and technical analysis, with Oman hosting the electronic system.

In 2019, the Regional Fisheries Commission accelerated its efforts, advancing from merely monitoring fisheries developments to evaluating the status of fisheries based on scientific analysis models. This culminated in the implementation of joint management systems, including the annual ban on kingfish fishing from August 15 to October 15.

Given this distribution, he stressed that sustainable management of the species can only be achieved through collective regional efforts. He added the workshop aims to review stock data and propose amendments to current management practices, with the results to be presented at the next RECOFI session in 2025.



Morocco applauds Oman’s legal system

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The Kingdom of Morocco has lauded the Sultanate of Oman for its efforts in enhancing its legal system, particularly in the area of commercial arbitration. Moroccan Minister of Justice, Dr Abdellatif Wahbi, expressed this sentiment during a meeting with Shaikh Khalid bin Salim Bamkhalef, Oman’s Ambassador to Morocco, after receiving a 17-member delegation from the Omani Lawyers Association. The delegation, comprised of legal professionals from various litigation levels, had participated in a specialised training workshop on arbitration in investment disputes. The advanced training, aimed at enriching Omani lawyers’ expertise in arbitration, was made possible through a cooperation agreement with the Moroccan Ministry of Justice. This partnership fosters knowledge exchange and shared expertise, further developing the legal systems of both countries. “Oman possesses a robust legal framework for arbitration



Omani Lawyers Association delegation during their visit to Morocco

and litigation, continually striving to enhance its legal infrastructure. This agreement reflects our commitment to mutual development and strengthening the legal foundation of both nations,” Dr Wahbi remarked, also noting Morocco’s conducive environment for postgraduate legal studies. Shaikh Khalid expressed gratitude to the Moroccan minister, emphasising the significance of this legal collaboration. He also highlighted the 100 doctoral scholarships offered by the Moroccan government and the growing areas of cooperation between the two nations. Dr Hamad bin Hamdan al Rubaie, Chairman of the

Omani Lawyers Association, underscored the association’s commitment to attracting promising economic investments by promoting commercial arbitration and developing legal expertise through specialised training. “We are continuously seeking ways to improve our legal acumen, and this cooperation with Morocco will further strengthen our capabilities in other legal fields,” Dr Al Rubaie said. The training course included various sessions on national and international trends in commercial arbitration, the role of national courts in arbitration and investment disputes, and the procedural rules governing arbitration awards.

Only dialogue can resolve conflicts in the ME: Sayyid Badr

FROM P1

Sayyid Badr also underscored the need “to get rid of the Cold War mentality that perpetuates bilateral divisions and is based on zero-sum game concepts”. He noted that “enhancing the effectiveness of international institutions in resolving conflicts depends largely on adopting more open and realistic thinking” which, he said, is consistent with the reality of today’s multipolar world. The conflicts in the Middle East will not be resolved unless

channels of dialogue and communication are opened with all parties, including those described by some members of the international community as “enemies”, Sayyid Badr said. A sustainable solution can only be achieved by addressing the fundamental roots of the conflict, said Sayyid Badr, noting that the ongoing violations of international law since the establishment of the Zionist project have made the region less safe and that a just and lasting solution must be based on the principle of the Two-State

Solution. Sayyid Badr also stressed the need to reform multilateral frameworks to reflect the “evolving international reality”, through broader representation of different voices and by laying emphasis on justice and international law by resolving disputes through peaceful means. At the conclusion of his speech, Sayyid Badr reaffirmed that the Sultanate of Oman will continue to support efforts that enhance cooperation, trust, understanding and justice among all. — **ONA**

Symposium elaborates on means to invest in Omani Youth Encyclopedia

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth is organising a symposium titled “Investment Opportunities in the Omani Encyclopaedia for Youth.” The two-day symposium, which kicked off on Monday, focuses on highlighting the encyclopaedia’s importance in instilling national and cultural values in Omani children and grooming their identity. It identifies the most important opportunities to invest in the encyclopaedia cognitively, technically and economically.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information. It was attended by Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture. The symposium discussed a paper titled “The role communication means in boosting awareness about local culture, national values and knowledge treasures in the Omani Encyclopaedia for Youth.” An exhibition of the Omani Encyclopaedia for Youth was opened on the sidelines of the symposium. It showcased methods of selecting text titles, summarising and paraphrasing them, providing textual data and the stages of linguistic review, design and final drafts. It also highlighted means of converting texts into images, maps, and graphs to attract the target segment. The Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information stated that the Omani Encyclopaedia



for Youth is a crucial resource for young people. “During this seminar, we hope to generate ideas and suggestions for enhancing this encyclopaedia to better serve cultural, media, social, and educational purposes. Additionally, we aim to explore ways to deliver this valuable resource to youth through modern technology and social media platforms,” he said. He emphasised the importance of providing our children with an encyclopaedia that encompasses Omani culture, history, and customs, utilising modern communication methods to instil values and traditions. Regular updates about the encyclopaedia will be shared through various media channels and the Ain platform. Fatima bint Khalifa al Hosni, Director of the Omani Encyclopaedia Department, elaborated on the objectives of the symposium, which aims to introduce and promote the Omani Encyclopaedia for Youth. The event will showcase

the artistic and aesthetic values of the encyclopaedia while emphasising its role in educational development and nurturing national and cultural identity in Omani children. The symposium will feature scientific papers and practical experiences across various aspects, including education, culture, media, economics, arts, and technology. It will consist of dialogue sessions over two days, covering topics such as the integration of twenty-first-century skills in the Omani Encyclopaedia for Youth and the utilisation of folk tales in educational settings. Dr Amal bint Rashid al Abrouiyah, a participant in the session on economic aspects, highlighted the significance of introducing Omani youth to their heritage and promoting knowledge investment opportunities. Dr Obaid bin Saeed al Shaqsi emphasised the role of communication media in preserving and promoting local culture and knowledge treasures through the Omani Encyclopaedia for Youth.

Longtime Oman resident bids farewell after 35 years

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

Ramachandran Nair, a longtime resident of Oman, is set to return to his home country, India, this week after residing in the Sultanate of Oman for nearly 35 years. Known for his avid readership of local newspapers, particularly the Oman Observer, Nair frequently contributed letters and columns throughout his time in Oman. Having contemplated leaving Oman for the past few years, Nair finally decided that it was time to begin a new chapter. “Due to a mix of emotional reasons, the decision has been taken now. Even though it is difficult to decide, things become calm and gradual once you do,” he reflected. Nair first arrived in Muscat Governorate in September 1990, after a stint in Mumbai, India. His Gulf career began with a memorable 12-hour bus journey to the Wilayat of Salalah where he found reminiscent of his native Kerala. Over the years, Nair worked across Oman in the wilayats of Al Buraimi and Bahla, and finally joined GAC Oman in 2001 in Muscat. Over his tenure, he played a crucial role in developing the company’s Quality, Health, Safety, Security and Environment (QHSSSE)



Ramachandran Nair

functions, eventually rising to the position of ‘QHSSSE & Compliance Manager’. A part from his professional contributions, Nair has always had a passion for writing and creative arts. He has penned over 9,000 letters and opinion pieces across various publications in India, Oman and the Gulf, including contributions to the BBC World’s ‘Have Your Say’ section. His creative endeavours also extended to film-making, with his short films on themes such as ageing parents and adoption gaining recognition. In 2022, he won Media City Awards for the best script and concept for his short film and musical album. As Nair departs Oman, he plans to retire in the south Indian state of Kerala, where he intends to continue writing and engaging with the media.



الهيئة العامة للاعتماد الأكاديمي وضمان جودة التعليم

Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA)
Announcement of the re-launch of a public tender
TENDER NOTICE

Tender Number	Tender Title	Company Grade:	Tender Fee	Dates		
				Distribution Till	Last Day to receive Clarifications	Bid Submission Date
2/2024 (re-launch)	Development of AI Simulation & Media Center (Smart Solutions in Managing Training Workshops)	First/ Second/ Third	OMR 25	3 October 2024	10 October 2024	31 October 2024

The Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation & Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA) is hereby inviting all local, specialized bidders to participate in this TENDER as per the following instructions, in addition to all terms of TENDER enclosed in the TENDER documents. For project brief, please visit the below link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

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

B. Submission
All Proposals should be SUBMITTED ONLINE AT e-TENDERING System (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) Proposals to be accepted for evaluation which will be submitted through the eTendering System ONLY.

C. Correspondence Tender Inquiry:
All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online through the eTendering System ONLY.

e. Tendering System Inquiry:
correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200
All correspondence pertaining to the OAAAQA tender must be directed to the following email address and phone number: tenders@oaaaqa.gov.om and +968 24121663

OAAAQA Business Hours
Sunday – Thursday, 7:30 – 14:30 Oman Time, (+4 UTC)
OAAAQA Business Hours are to be considered in all correspondences.



274 dead in Israeli strikes on Lebanon



Smoke billows over southern Lebanon following Israeli strikes. – Reuters

BEIRUT: Lebanon’s health ministry said Israeli strikes on the south killed 274 people and wounded more than 1024 on Monday, in the worst toll by far in nearly a year of cross-border clashes between Hezbollah and Israel.

“Israeli enemy strikes on southern towns and villages since this morning” have killed “274 people and wounded 1024 others,” the health ministry said, with casualties including “children, women and paramedics”.

War began when Palestinian groups carried out the attack on Israel, with groups around the region, chiefly Hezbollah, increasingly drawn into the violence.

On Monday, Israel said it had hit more than 300 Hezbollah sites with dozens of strikes, while Hezbollah said that it had targeted three sites in northern Israel. The strikes on Lebanon, which also wounded more than 400 people according to the health ministry, were the deadliest in nearly a year of violence along the border with Israel.

“Enemy raids on southern towns and villages since this morning... killed 100 and injured more than 400,” the health ministry said in a statement, adding that “children, women and paramedics” were among the dead and wounded.

World powers have implored Israel and Hezbollah to pull back from the brink of all-out war, with the focus of violence shifting sharply from Israel’s southern

front with Gaza to its northern border with Lebanon in recent days.

Israeli military spokesman Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari told people in Lebanon to avoid potential targets linked to Hezbollah as strikes would “go on for the near future”. Hagari said Israel’s military “will engage in (more) extensive and precise strikes against terror targets which have been embedded widely throughout Lebanon”.

Ahead of the annual General Assembly in New York, United Nations chief Antonio Guterres warned of Lebanon becoming “another Gaza” and said it was “clear that both sides are not interested in a ceasefire” there.

Lebanon’s official National News Agency reported “more than 80 air strikes in half an hour” early on Monday targeting the south of the country, as well as intense raids in the Bekaa Valley to the east.

Meanwhile, two strikes by Israeli forces killed at least 10 Palestinians, including four children, in the central Gaza Strip on Monday, medics said, as heavy rains flooded displaced residents’ tent encampments.

Palestinian health officials said at least five Palestinians were killed at a school sheltering displaced Palestinians in Nuseirat, one of Gaza Strip’s eight historic refugee camps.

More than 41,300 Palestinians have been killed in the Israeli assault, according to the Gaza health ministry. — **Agencies**

Saudi National Day marked at Empty Quarter Border Checkpoint



IBRI: A ceremony was organised at the Empty Quarter Border Checkpoint to mark the 94th National Day of the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on Monday.

The celebration, organised by the Secretariat-General for National Celebrations in cooperation with the Royal Oman Police at the Empty Quarter Border Checkpoint between the Sultanate of Oman and the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, embodies the close fraternal and historical ties that bind the two brotherly countries and peoples reflecting the bonds of joint cooperation in various fields.

A number of artistic shows that reflected the depth of the strong relations binding the two brotherly countries. It began with a musical piece presented by the Royal Oman Police Music Band followed by singing and traditional art shows performed by the popular folk art groups from Al Dhahirah Governorate as well as paragliding and free-fall shows. — **ONA**



Sri Lanka’s new president Dissanayake promises change

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka’s leader Anura Kumara Dissanayake took office as president on Monday, promising change in the island nation long led by powerful political families which is emerging from its worst economic crisis in more than seven decades.

Millions of Sri Lankans had voted for the opposition parliamentarian, putting faith in his graft-fighting pledge and vow to bolster a fragile economic recovery.

“I pledge... to demonstrate dedication to protecting and upholding democracy,” Dissanayake, 55, said in inauguration remarks at the president’s office, saying he was taking office at a challenging time in the Indian Ocean nation. “Our politics needs to be cleaner, and the people have called for a different political culture,” he



Sri Lanka’s newly elected President Anura Kumara Dissanayake addresses a gathering after taking his oath of office at the Presidential Secretariat, in Colombo. – Reuters

added. “I am ready to commit to that change.”

Dissanayake ran as the candidate for the National People’s Power (NPP) alliance, which includes his Janatha Vimukhti Peremuna (JVP) party that traditionally championed Marxist economic policies centred on protectionism and state intervention. Outside, dozens of supporters held up posters carrying his image, with some waving the Sri Lankan flag and chanting “AKD”, the initials of the new president, who

displaces the incumbent, veteran politician Ranil Wickremesinghe. “I’m very happy,” said one of them, beautician Iroma Nilanthi Liyanage, adding that Dissanayake inspired supporters with hope. “We worked very hard for this victory. For the first time

Our politics needs to be cleaner, and the people have called for a different political culture. I am ready to commit to that change

ANURA KUMARA DISSANAYAKE
Sri Lanka President

the poor people have someone who stands for them.”

Tasks he now faces include setting up a new cabinet and wooing parliament, where his party has just three of 225 seats, to pass a budget under the terms of a \$2.9-billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This was Sri Lanka’s

first election since its economy buckled in 2022 under a severe foreign exchange shortage, leaving it unable to pay for imports of essentials including fuel, medicine and cooking gas. Protests forced then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee and later resign.

Before Monday’s swearing-in, Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena resigned to make way for a new prime minister and cabinet. Gunawardena, 75, took over as prime minister in July 2022 after Rajapaksa fled and resigned amid protests unleashed by the crisis, which also triggered a debt default.

Dissanayake was declared the new president late on Sunday, displacing Wickremesinghe, who had been appointed by parliament to serve out Rajapaksa’s remaining term. — **Reuters**

SEOUL

Seoul warns of action against trash balloons

South Korea said it would take “decisive military action” if anyone is killed by the wave of trash-carrying balloons being launched across the border by North Korea. Pyongyang has sent more than 5,500 balloons carrying payloads of garbage since May, disrupting flights, causing fires and hitting buildings. Pyongyang says it is a response to activists in the South sending balloons carrying propaganda to the North.

Seoul “will take decisive



military actions if the North’s trash-filled balloons pose a serious safety threat or are deemed to have crossed a line”, Lee Sung-joon, of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters. — **AFP**

MOGADISHU

Egyptian warship delivers arms to Somalia

An Egyptian warship has delivered a second major cache of weaponry to Somalia including anti-aircraft guns and artillery, port and military officials said.

The warship began unloading the weapons on Sunday, one diplomat said. Security forces blocked off the quayside and surrounding roads on Sunday and Monday as convoys carried the weapons to a defence ministry building and nearby military bases, two port workers and two military officials said.



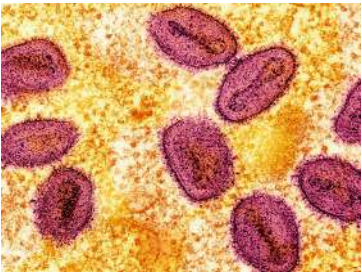
Nasra Bashir Ali, an official at PM Hamza Abdi Barre’s office, posted a photo on X of Defence Minister Abdulkadir Mohamed Nur watching as the ship was being unloaded. — **Reuters**

NEW DELHI

India reports first case of fast-spreading mpox

India said on Monday that an mpox case involving a man in the southern state of Kerala was from the fast-spreading clade 1b variety, marking South Asia’s first recorded case from the new strain. Health Ministry spokesperson Manisha Verma confirmed the strain after news agency ANI cited officials as saying that the mpox case reported in the Malappuram district of Kerala.

The caution followed the rapid spread that prompted the



World Health Organization to declare the outbreak a global health emergency, first identified in the Democratic Republic of Congo, began spreading to other countries. — **Reuters**



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In brief

WASHINGTON



TRUMP HOLDS EDGE IN ARIZONA, GEORGIA, NORTH CAROLINA

Republican Donald Trump leads among likely voters in the battleground states of Arizona, Georgia and North Carolina, outpacing US Vice-President Kamala Harris six weeks before the November 5 presidential election, a New York Times/ Siena College poll showed.

The three states are among seven critical swing states that are likely to decide the 2024 presidential contest between Trump and Harris.

The former president faces federal and state criminal charges over efforts to overturn the election results.

The poll indicates a tight matchup in line with other recent national polls. — Reuters

ATHENS



AT LEAST FOUR DIE IN MIGRANT SHIPWRECK OFF GREEK ISLAND

At least four migrants died when their boat sank off the Greek island of Samos, the Greek coastguard said. At least 30 migrants were believed to be initially on board the vessel that foundered off the rocky shores of Agios Isidoros in the northwestern part of the Aegean island, according to coastguard officials.

The four migrants found dead were all women, a coastguard official said. Five migrants have been rescued so far, among them a pregnant woman and a minor who were taken to hospital for medical checks. The coastguard said another 25 migrants had been located on shore. — Reuters

NICOSIA



NINE EU STATES EYE COOPERATION ON RENEWABLES

Energy officials from nine EU member states in the Mediterranean said on Monday they wanted to turn the region into a renewable energy hub. Representatives of the MED9 group — Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain, said they planned to conduct assessments of specific opportunities and challenges focused on turning the region into a green energy hub.

“We invite the European Commission to collaborate closely with us in undertaking this assessment,” representatives said after meeting in Larnaca in Cyprus. — Reuters

Russia says 56 civilians killed in Kursk

MOSCOW: At least 56 civilians have been killed and 266 wounded during Ukraine’s seven-week-old incursion into Russia’s western Kursk region, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Monday.

Kyiv began the cross-border attack on August 6, more than two years after Moscow sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine, and Ukrainian forces remain in the Kursk region. The Russian Foreign Ministry had earlier put the death toll at 31 in the period to September 5. The new toll covered the period up to September 20.

It said 131,000 civilians had left the most dangerous areas of the region but accused Ukrainian forces of holding some civilians against their will, including 70-120 people in the town of Sudzha.

Asked about the statement, Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesman Heorhiy Tykhyi said Ukraine abides by international humanitarian law and does not target civilians, and that it was unable to verify the assertions. “Given Russia’s long history of false numbers and propaganda, there is simply no way of verifying their claims. If Russia wants to show the real situation on the ground it can grant such access to the UN and ICRC,” he said. Both sides have denied targeting civilians and making false claims for propaganda purposes during the 31-month-old conflict.

The Kremlin has previously made clear it regards Ukraine’s invitation to the United Nations and International Committee of the Red Cross to the Kursk region as “provocative”, and that Moscow expects the UN and ICRC not to accept the invitation.

Kyiv has said its incursion, the biggest foreign attack on Russia since World War Two, is intended partly to prevent Russian forces in the area launching their own incursion across the border into Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said earlier this month that his forces controlled 100 settlements in Kursk region over an area of more than 1,300 sq km.

Meanwhile, Ukraine accused Russia at an international court on Monday of flouting sea law by trying to keep the Kerch Strait between mainland Russia and annexed Crimea under its sole control.

Kyiv began proceedings at the Hague-based intergovernmental Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016 after Moscow began building the 19 km Crimea Bridge link to the peninsula it seized from Ukraine two years previously. The bridge is crucial for the supply of fuel, food and other products to Crimea, where the port of Sevastopol is the historic home base of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet, and became a major supply route for troops after Moscow’s full-scale attack in 2022. — Reuters



Ukrainian servicemen fire ZU-23-2 anti-aircraft cannon near a frontline, in Zaporizhzhia region, Ukraine. — Reuters

French PM tells new govt to ‘respect all citizens’



French President Emmanuel Macron (L) and French Prime Minister Michel Barnier (R) meet with members of the new government during the weekly cabinet meeting at the Elysee Palace, in Paris. — AFP

PARIS: French Prime Minister Michel Barnier on Monday urged his cabinet to “show respect for all our fellow citizens” as his freshly-appointed government went to work, backed by only a minority in parliament.

A long wait for the new French government — 11 weeks after a snap election called by President Emmanuel Macron — ended on Saturday when the new team was announced, marking a clear shift to the right.

In the July vote a bloc of leftist parties, the New Popular Front (NPF) came first, but failed to persuade Macron that they could form a government with any staying power.

Instead, the president turned to veteran conservative Barnier to head up the new government which has the support of Macron allies, some conservatives and centrists in the National Assembly, but no majority —

which makes it vulnerable to being toppled in a no-confidence motion. Its critics say that the government lacks legitimacy, failing to reflect the election outcome.

Faced with this reproach, Barnier urged his ministers to “show respect for all our fellow citizens and all political parties and listen to everybody”.

At a breakfast gathering on Monday ahead of the cabinet’s first formal meeting, Barnier also asked his team to be “beyond reproach and modest” as they take up their portfolios, an official from the prime minister’s office said. The 39 ministers should “act first and talk second” to the media or the public, he said. “No bluster, please.”

Already Sunday evening, Barnier had called for “the greatest possible cohesion” within the government, and for a willingness to find “compromise”. The leftist opposition has already

said they will bring a no-confidence motion in parliament at an early opportunity, while the far right has also blasted the cabinet lineup. Barnier on Monday countered that his lineup was “republican, progressive and pro-European”.

Left-wing criticism has homed in on the new interior minister, Bruno Retailleau, a social conservative and defender of law-and-order, who has in the past opposed same-sex marriage and the inclusion of the right to abortion in the French constitution.

As he took over Monday from his predecessor Gerald Darmanin, Retailleau said that he would “re-establish order” in France, having previously criticised what he called “laxness” in the outgoing administration concerning security, immigration and the protection of French secularism.

— AFP

UK’s Labour pledges economic rebuild

LIVERPOOL: Britain’s governing Labour party on Monday sought to strike a more upbeat note about the country’s economic future against a furious backlash at proposed cuts to welfare payments and a row over top ministers receiving gifts.

In a keynote speech to the centre-left party’s annual conference in Liverpool, interrupted by hecklers, finance minister Rachel Reeves reiterated the need for “iron discipline” on the economy amid ballooning state debt.

Britain’s first woman chancellor of the exchequer said her first budget next month would open the way for business investment that would hand the country “lasting growth”. She repeated Labour’s pre-election pledge that workers would not face tax rises on salaries, paving the way, however, for increases on other levies, according to analysts.

She also pledged “no return to austerity” as seen under Conservative rule. The government last week agreed bumper pay rises for doctors and train drivers but as Reeves neared the end of her speech, news came through that nurses had rejected an improved pay deal.

“We must deal with the Tory legacy and that means tough decisions but I won’t let that dim our ambition for Britain,” Reeves told a packed hall as she looked ahead to next month’s budget announcement. She said her spend plans will show “real ambition... a budget to rebuild Britain”.



Britain’s Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves acknowledges the applause after delivering her speech on the second day of the annual Labour Party conference in Liverpool. — AFP

Reeves also confirmed the appointment of a new Covid corruption commissioner to try to claw back billions of pounds in taxpayers’ money wasted on contracts.

But as the chancellor and other ministers try to prevent a row over “freebies” from escalating, Britain’s economy is failing to deliver, with recent official data showing UK government debt at the highest level in more than 60 years.

At the same time, the nation’s economic growth has stalled and its annual inflation rate remains above the Bank of England’s target, slowing a path to cuts in interest rates that would likely boost consumer spending.

The conference should have been an opportunity for Labour to toast its landslide July general election victory over the Conservatives after 14 years out of power. — AFP

Dialogue, mutual respect basic principles adopted by Oman



Dialogue, realism and mutual respect are the basic principles adopted by the Sultanate of Oman in its foreign policy. These were the words of Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, at the ‘Summit of the Future 2024’ held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Indeed, these values constitute a basic necessity in addressing the complex and global crises prevailing in the world today. As rightly said by Sayyid Badr, the challenges faced cannot be addressed by traditional methods alone, but rather they require methodologies based on sustainable development concepts.

The Sultanate of Oman has established itself as a unique player in the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. Its foreign policy is characterised by a commitment to dialogue, realism and mutual respect. These principles not only guide its international relations, but also reflect its internal governance and societal interactions.

Dialogue is a cornerstone of Oman’s approach to both domestic and international affairs. Oman emphasises open communication as a means to resolve conflicts and foster understanding among diverse groups.

As an example, conflicts in the Middle East will not be resolved unless channels of dialogue

and communication are opened with all parties, including those described by some members of the international community as ‘enemies’.

A sustainable solution can only be achieved by addressing the fundamental roots of the conflict and the ongoing violations of international law since the establishment of the Zionist project have made the region less safe, and a just and lasting solution must be based on the principle of the Two-State Solution.

In this regard, Oman will continue to support efforts that enhance cooperation, trust, understanding and justice among all. This principle is evident in Oman’s diplomatic engagements, where it often acts as a mediator in regional disputes.

For instance, Oman has played a crucial role in facilitating discussions between conflicting parties in Yemen and has been involved in back-channel negotiations regarding Iran’s nuclear programme. The Omani government believes that constructive dialogue can lead to peaceful resolutions and long-term stability.

Realism in Oman’s foreign policy refers to a pragmatic approach that prioritises national interests over ideological commitments or alliances. Oman recognises the complexities of regional politics and adopts a flexible stance that allows it to navigate relationships with various

REALISM IN OMAN’S FOREIGN POLICY REFERS TO A PRAGMATIC APPROACH THAT PRIORITISES NATIONAL INTERESTS OVER IDEOLOGICAL COMMITMENTS OR ALLIANCES

powers without becoming embroiled in their conflicts. This realism is evident in Oman’s balanced relations.

Oman’s strategic location along vital maritime routes enhances its importance as a neutral facilitator rather than an adversary.

By maintaining this realistic posture, Oman has managed to avoid direct involvement in regional conflicts while still asserting its influence through diplomacy.

In Oman’s perspective, mutual respect underpins interactions with other nations and within its society. This principle is particularly significant given Oman’s diverse population, which includes various tribal affiliations and expatriate communities.

On the international stage, Oman advocates respect for sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs. This stance aligns with its historical context as a nation that has experienced colonialism and understands the importance of self-determination.

The principles of dialogue, realism and mutual respect are integral to the identity of the Sultanate of Oman.

These values shape not only its foreign policy but also its internal governance structure, fostering an environment conducive to peace and stability both at home and abroad.

What is the UN’s ‘Pact for the Future’?

AMÉLIE BOTTOLIER-DEPOIS

The ‘Pact for the Future’ is the United Nations’ master plan for tackling challenges that lie ahead for humanity, with 56 “actions” covering everything from peacekeeping to the potential threats posed by artificial intelligence.

These are the key aspects of the pact that was adopted on Sunday by the UN’s 193 members at a gathering ahead of the body’s centrepiece high-level week.

The pact underlines the “increasingly complex challenges” to world peace, notably the threat of nuclear war, with the document reiterating the UN’s core tenets.

They are respect for the organisation’s charter, respect for human rights, protection for civilians and promotion of diplomacy to resolve conflict — all of which are routinely trampled in the numerous conflicts raging worldwide.

The pact also calls for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

At a time when thousands of blue helmet peacekeepers are deployed internationally, it acknowledges the continued need for such missions — even though they are sometimes decried by host countries.

It also demands Secretary-General Antonio Guterres undertake a review of the future of the UN’s peacekeeping operations and how the body’s “toolbox” can be adapted to respond to situations in a more “agile” and “tailored” way.

“Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time” and “we are deeply concerned at the current slow pace of progress” in arresting the march of environmental destruction, states the pact.

In spite of efforts, it is not markedly different from the commitments of COP28 at the end of 2023 — namely to transition away from fossil fuels, triple renewables usage by 2030, attain carbon neutrality by 2050, and redouble efforts to cap warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Achieving those lofty ambitions will be a challenge. Any reference to fossil fuels was scrubbed from the text during negotiations, only to be subsequently reintroduced.

“There was ferocious pushback from some fossil-fuel-producing countries,” said Alden Meyer, of the E3G think-tank who hailed the inclusion of a sole, hard-won reference to fossil fuels in the adopted pact. — AFP

The growing threat of cyber wars...



Dr Muammar al Tobi
The writer is an Omani academic and researcher

We are not used to witnessing the deadly consequences of cyber warfare unfolding before our eyes, especially through the devices we use daily. However, the impact of these wars is no longer confined to mere disruption of military and economic systems. We recently saw a deadly cyber-attack that targeted Hezbollah in Lebanon, resulting in the loss of innocent lives, including children, and injuring thousands.

On Tuesday (September 17), a cyber-attack targeted Hezbollah’s wireless communication devices, which had been considered more secure than mobile phones. These devices, however, were compromised, resulting in explosions that killed 12 people, including children, and wounded over 3,000 others. The following day, additional explosions killed over 20 more people.

Initial theories suggested that the Israeli entity was responsible for the breach, leading to device malfunctions and the overheating of batteries.

However, further investigation revealed a more sinister plan: small explosive devices had been placed inside the communication equipment, programmed to detonate via cyber manipulation.

Hezbollah disclosed that they had acquired these devices several months ago, confirming that the attackers had used a combination of cyber tactics and traditional explosives to carry out the attack.

This event, which can be seen as a form of psychological warfare, demonstrated an alarming shift in how cyber warfare can directly cause death and destruction.

With this recent attack, many are left wondering: could the devices we use every day, such as mobile phones and televisions, also be turned into deadly weapons by foreign entities? Are they simply waiting for the right moment to carry out similar attacks?

We have already witnessed cyber-attacks in various forms, including the infamous digital viruses used by the Zionist entity to target Iran’s nuclear facilities. While such attacks have primarily caused economic damage, the events in Lebanon highlight a shift in the use of cyber warfare. The combination of intelligence operations and cyber manipulation now appears to be a new method of causing mass casualties.

This leads us to question the future. What kind of deadly cyber-attacks could be on the horizon, and what

COULD THE DEVICES WE USE EVERY DAY, SUCH AS MOBILE PHONES AND TELEVISIONS, ALSO BE TURNED INTO DEADLY WEAPONS BY FOREIGN ENTITIES?

technology might be used in ways we have yet to imagine?

While we cannot predict the future with certainty, history teaches us that technological advancements are often kept hidden until their military applications are fully exhausted.

For example, the Internet, developed in the 1960s, was primarily used by the US military until it became available to the public in the 1990s. The same pattern applies to the Global Positioning System (GPS), which was also initially restricted to military use.

Artificial intelligence, which has recently gained widespread attention, was similarly monopolised by military institutions before being introduced to the public. These historical examples remind us that many of the technologies we use today were first tested and developed in secret for military purposes. This raises important questions

about the unknown technological advancements currently under development, which could be used in future cyber-attacks.

As these dangers loom, we must reflect on our region’s vulnerability. Our reliance on imported technology has left us exposed to these threats. The solution lies in achieving scientific independence. We must develop our own technologies and safeguard them from foreign manipulation.

This is a call for a scientific revolution, one that will enable us to protect our region from the technological traps set by others. Without such a revolution, we will continue to face the risks posed by cyber warfare, as our dependence on external technologies deepens.

In an article written by me and published in the *Oman* newspaper, entitled “Reflections on the Trial of the Arab Mind,” I addressed the need for intellectual independence. The current cyber warfare threats further emphasise the urgency of this issue. We must develop the capacity to create and control our technologies to ensure our security and independence.

Until the Arab mind awakens and rises to meet these challenges, we must approach imported technologies with caution and vigilance. Data security and the integrity of our electronic systems must be prioritised.

In conclusion, the recent cyber-attacks remind us of the critical need for technological independence. We must build our own systems, develop our own expertise, and protect our region from the cyber and technological threats that are sure to become more dangerous in the future. Let this be a wake-up call for a region that must rise to meet the challenges of the modern age.

(The original version of this article was published in Arabic in the print edition of Oman newspaper on September 22 and is translated by Badr al Dhafari)

We are travelling again as tourists

The tourism industry is bouncing back to pre-pandemic figures driven by strong demand in Europe and the re-opening of markets in Asia and the Pacific, while the Middle East continues to grow, states the UN Tourism Report.

Just reflect on yourself- how many times you made travel plans?
According to the latest World Tourism Barometer by UN Tourism, around 790 million tourists travelled internationally in the first seven months of 2024. The international arrivals in the Middle East climbed 26 per cent above 2019 levels, pointed out the report.

“Oman’s focus on eco-tourism and cultural tourism, preserving its natural beauty and heritage, has appealed to those seeking more sustainable and immersive travel experiences. The recent developments in luxury resorts and adventure tourism are also drawing a new segment of travellers,” wrote Travel and Tour World.

Oman’s tourism sector has been attracting investments, and the strategy has been about positioning the country as a premier destination for both business and leisure travellers, travel industry experts have pointed out.

According to me, the people of Oman are an integral part of the tourism industry. There is something about the cultural exchange that happens when people interact. And that magic happens in Oman, which is the result of the inherent element of hospitality as part of the culture.

For Oman, nature has been one of its major assets. The monsoon-based tourism season has just ended in Dhofar, but the winter season titled Qitaf Musandam is to begin in November and activities will continue till April, next year.

Are these indicators point that tourism is the area to invest at present?
However, globally, there are challenges for the tourists.
Who are the tourists?
You, me, and others across the globe wondering where to travel next?
The UN Panel of Tourism Experts pointed to inflation in global travel and tourism, namely high transport and accommodation prices, as the main challenges the tourism sector is currently facing. The other



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The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

THE PEOPLE OF OMAN ARE AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY. THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT THE CULTURAL EXCHANGE THAT HAPPENS WHEN PEOPLE INTERACT

drawbacks have been, according to the report, shortage of staff, global economic situation, and weather conditions.
In 2024, the global travel and tourism sector demonstrated significant resilience, nearly reaching pre-pandemic performance, with international tourism recovering to 96 per cent of its 2019 levels within the first seven months. According to Travel and Tourism World, four of the advantages are enhanced air connectivity, investment in infrastructure, digital transformation that has resulted in electronic visas, and cultural festivals and international events.

The UN Tourism Confidence Index shows positive expectations for the last part of the year, at 120 points for September-December 2024, though below the prospects for May-August, which stood at 130 (on a scale of 0 to 200, where 100 reflects equal expected performance).

“A total of 67 out of 120 destinations around the world had recovered 2019 arrival numbers in the first half of 2024, based on countries reporting monthly or quarterly data,” stated the UN Report.

Now it would be interesting to know if we travel seeking to repeat a likable experience or is it a search for new places to be explored.

Maybe more people would travel when air fares could come down. The distance between countries is becoming less just because people are travelling to at least two countries when they plan their holidays. Families that include grandparents as well as uncles and aunts are becoming the norm in Oman, creating wonderful memories for the young travellers and nostalgia for the grownups. This means destinations have to be chosen that are suitable for all age groups.

A growing trend has been women choosing to travel together. This has become specialised tour packages as well that required a lot of planning with intricate details. These tours are tailor-made keeping in mind the likes and dislikes.

As we approach the tourism season in Oman, tour operators must be gearing into action. The wedding bells are ringing too. The marriage season is approaching, and with India’s love for destination weddings, I heard that Oman is once again a destination in demand for weddings where the families of the bride and groom with friends check in booking the whole hotel.

Enjoy the experience of Oman.

PROTESTING CLIMATE CRISIS!



Greenpeace activists attend a protest against the climate crisis that caused wildfires in the country, in Sao Paulo, Brazil, on Monday. – Reuters

New leftist president Dissanayaka vows to ‘rewrite Sri Lankan history’

AMAL JAYASINGHE

Sri Lanka’s leftist president-elect on Sunday invited his compatriots to help him “rewrite” history in the cash-strapped island nation after winning a vote coloured by discontent over an unprecedented financial crisis.

Anura Kumara Dissanayaka, the 55-year-old leader of the People’s Liberation Front, was declared the winner of the weekend’s poll with nearly 1.3 million more votes than his nearest rival.

The once-fringe leader, whose party won less than four per cent of the vote in parliamentary elections four years ago, saw a surge of support as the economic meltdown forced widespread hardships upon Sri Lankans.

“The dream we have nurtured for centuries is finally coming true,” he said in a statement shortly after the announcement. “This victory belongs to all of us,” he added. “Millions of eyes filled with hope and expectation push us forward, and together, we stand ready to rewrite Sri Lankan history.”

Outgoing President Ranil Wickremesinghe — who took office at the peak of the 2022 economic collapse and imposed tough austerity policies per the terms of an IMF bailout -- was a distant third in the contest with 17 per cent of the vote. “History will judge my

THE ONCE-FRINGE LEADER, WHOSE PARTY WON LESS THAN FOUR PER CENT OF THE VOTE IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS FOUR YEARS AGO, SAW A SURGE OF SUPPORT AS THE ECONOMIC MELTDOWN FORCED WIDESPREAD HARDSHIPS UPON SRI LANKANS

efforts, but I can confidently say that I did my best to stabilise the country during one of its darkest periods,” he said in a statement.

He congratulated Dissanayaka on the win and said he was “confident” the politician would “steer Sri Lanka on a path of continued growth and stability”.

US Ambassador Julie Chung also passed on her congratulations, saying in a statement that Washington stood “ready to work together on shared priorities” with his administration.

Dissanayaka was sworn in on Monday morning at the colonial-era President Secretariat in Colombo, election commission officials said.

Economic issues dominated the eight-week campaign, with widespread public anger over the belt-tightening measures imposed by Wickremesinghe since the peak of the island nation’s bruising financial crisis.

Dissanayaka would “not tear up” the IMF deal but would seek to modify it, a party politburo member said.

“It is a binding document, but there is a provision to renegotiate,” said Bimal Ratnayake.

He said Dissanayaka had vowed to reduce income taxes that were

doubled by Wickremesinghe and slash sales taxes on food and medicines. “We think we can get those reductions into the programme and continue with the four-year bailout programme,” he said.

Dissanayaka’s once-marginal Marxist party led two failed uprisings in the 1970s and 1980s that left more than 80,000 people dead.

But Sri Lanka’s crisis has proven an opportunity for Dissanayaka, whose popularity rocketed on his pledge to change the island’s “corrupt” political culture.



Sri Lanka’s newly elected President Anura Kumara Dissanayake reads a document after being sworn in as President at the Presidential Secretariat, in Colombo on Monday. – Reuters

Around 76 per cent of Sri Lanka’s 17.1 million eligible voters cast ballots in Saturday’s poll.

Dissanayaka’s party sought to reassure India that any administration he led would not be caught up in geopolitical rivalry between its northern neighbour and China, the country’s largest lender. New Delhi has previously expressed concerns over what it sees as Beijing’s growing influence in Sri Lanka.

“Sri Lankan territory will not be used against any other nation,” Ratnayake said.

“We are fully aware of the

geopolitical situation in our region, but we will not participate.”

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on X he was looking forward “to working closely with (Dissanayaka) to further strengthen our multifaceted cooperation for the benefit of our people and the entire region”.

Wickremesinghe sought re-election to continue the austerity policies that stabilised the economy and ended months of food, fuel and medicine shortages during Sri Lanka’s economic meltdown.

His two years in office restored calm to the streets after civil unrest spurred by the downturn saw thousands storm the compound of his predecessor Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who then fled the country.

But Wickremesinghe’s tax hikes and other measures imposed under the \$2.9 billion IMF rescue package he secured last year left millions struggling to make ends meet.

Official data showed that Sri Lanka’s poverty rate doubled to 25 per cent between 2021 and 2022, adding more than 2.5 million people to those already living on less than \$3.65 a day.

Thousands of police were deployed to keep watch over voting on Saturday. — AFP

SPORTS

ASIA-AFRICAQUALIFIERS



Oman women's padel team

OMAN VIE FOR SPOT AT FIP WORLD PADEL

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

Oman padel team is underway in its historic participation at the in the FIP World Padel Championships Asia-Africa Qualifiers which is underway in Kuwait City. The qualifiers began on Sunday and will run until September 27 as Oman's men team was drawn in a tough group with Iran, Japan, and China in Group C while Oman women's team was clubbed alongside with United Arab Emirates and Lebanon teams in Group B. The final stage of the lead-up to the FIP World Padel Championships is scheduled to take place in Doha city of Qatar from October 28 to November 2.

In the men's day one result, Oman suffered a 3-0 loss against Iran. Oman team was represented by Abdullah al Barwani, Sami Habib, Younis al Rawahi, Muneer al Rawahi, Khalid al Nabhani and Abdulaziz al Balushi. Japan made strong start in the same group as they blanked China by 3-0. In Group A, Egypt managed to take the lead following their crucial 3-0 win against Lebanon. The UAE managed to beat Philippines in Group B while Senegal and Australia secured essential victories in Group D after defeating Thailand and Saudi Arabia.

On the following day, Japan defeated Oman 3-0 while Iran outclassed China in the same group.

In the women's team results, Oman registered a strong start as they managed to earn a crucial 3-0 win over Lebanon. Oman were represented by Sara al Balushi, Eathar al Balushi, Leena al Zadjali, Aisha al Suliemani, Mariam al Balushi and Ruaa al Suwaid. The Omani women's team will play a key game on Tuesday against the UAE.

The six days of qualifiers in Kuwait is being organised by the International Padel Federation in collaboration with the Kuwait Padel Federation. At stake is one spot in the men's tournament of the World Championships and two in the women's finals. The group matches will conclude on Tuesday while the quarterfinals featuring the top two teams from each group will be played on Wednesday. Then it will be followed by the semifinals on Thursday while the winners and champions will be decided on Friday.



Oman men's padel team

Alcaraz beats Fritz to seal Laver Cup for Europe



Players of Team Europe and Team Europe's captain Bjorn Borg (L) celebrate with the trophy during the awarding ceremony in Berlin. — AFP

CARLOS Alcaraz shot down comparisons with 20-time Grand Slam winner Roger Federer moments after his victory over Taylor Fritz won the Laver Cup for Team Europe on Sunday.

The 21-year-old Spaniard, playing in the tournament for the first time, beat American Taylor Fritz 6-2, 7-5 to win the tournament in Berlin.

Team Europe had lost the past two events and needed a come-from-behind victory from local player Alexander Zverev against Frances Tiafoe, 6-7(5/7), 7-5, 10-5, to send the tournament to the final match between Al-

caraz and Fritz. After his win, the four-time Grand Slam winner was compared to peak Federer, but Alcaraz said such a comparison was "impossible".

"I'm too far away from that level," he said. "I hope I'll reach it one day, but it's really impossible." Alcaraz, who won the French Open and Wimbledon this season, had not played the event before.

"It's great. We can feel proud, all of us. I'm really happy. All of us did a pretty good job over the days. It's been a top one," the Spaniard added.

"We almost lost, but Sasha (Zverev) came with some really good tennis and gave me a

chance to win the Laver Cup."

The world number three won Sunday's opening match, a doubles clash alongside Casper Ruud, 6-2, 7-6 (8/6), to help put his side on course to lift the Laver Cup for the fifth time.

Alcaraz said he found it more difficult to watch matches with his Team Europe colleagues than to actually take to the court, saying "the nerves were killing us".

"It's really difficult to watch the matches from outside. I was trying to stay away a bit, watching on TV in the locker-room, trying to support from there.

"The nerves were there." — AFP

Saham to host Seeb, Al Nahda take on Al Khabourah in OL sixth week

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

The sixth week of the Omantel League football begins on Tuesday with two matches. In the first game, Ibri host Al Nasr, with Ibri aiming to get back to winning ways after a draw in the last round, leaving them in ninth place with four points. On the other hand, Al Nasr sit in fourth place with seven points and is looking for their third win of the season.

In the second match, Al Shabab face Al Rustaq at the Al Rustaq Complex. Al Shabab is aiming for their first victory after five winless rounds, currently positioned in 11th place with just one point. Meanwhile, Al Rustaq, who are

in eighth place with four points, hope to improve their standing and secure their second league win after a draw in the previous round.

The sixth week's matches continue on Wednesday, as Saham host Seeb at the Sohar Sports Complex. Saham enter the game in fifth place with six points, having won two of the previous rounds, while Seeb, leading the league with 15 points, seek to secure their sixth win and pull ahead of Al Nahda, who share the same points.

Wednesday will also feature a match between Al Khabourah and Al Nahda at the Rustaq Sports Complex. Al Khabourah enter the game in sixth place with six points after two consecutive losses since the league resumed,



while Al Nahda aim to continue their winning streak and challenge Seeb for the top spot.

The week's matches conclude on Thursday with two encounters. In the first match, Sohar visit Bahla at the Ibri Sports Complex. Bahla are searching for their first points in the league, while Sohar, seventh with five points, are looking for their second win after a series of mixed results.

The final match of the sixth week is a much-anticipated clash between Oman Club and hosts Sur at the Sur Sports Complex. Oman Club enter the match in third place with 13 points, aiming to secure all three points, while Sur, 10th with just one point, hope to claim their first win of the season.

FIRST TEST



Sri Lanka's Prabath Jayasuriya walks back to the pavilion at the end of the first Test match between Sri Lanka and New Zealand at the Galle International Cricket Stadium in Galle. — AFP

JAYASURIYA GRABS 5 AS SRI LANKA BEAT NZ BY 63 RUNS

GALLE, SRI LANKA: Prabath Jayasuriya took five wickets to steer Sri Lanka to a 63-run victory on Monday against New Zealand on the final morning of the first Test in Galle.

Set a target of 275 to win, the Black Caps were bowled out for 211 less than 15 minutes after play resumed, with Rachin Ravindra top-scoring on 92.

"When you come to Galle, all that you need to do is to stick to the basics," said man-of-the-match Jayasuriya. "The wicket provides plenty of assistance and you just need to bowl with discipline. Your consistency is the key and there was lot of help from the rest of the spinners as well."

Ravindra had finished on Sunday waging a lone battle on a sharply turning pitch in Galle, where the tourists had lost all four of their previous Test encounters. His knock was the highest score by a New Zealander at the ground, eclipsing Ross Taylor's 89 in 2019.

But the slender path to victory he had opened was snapped shut when Jayasuriya trapped him lbw while trying to defend on the back foot.

The decision was upheld despite Ravindra's review, and he departed having added just one run to his overnight total.

Jayasuriya, who took nine wickets across the match and finished the second innings five for 68, brought the match to an end when he bowled rookie pacer William O'Rourke for a duck.

"Disappointed we didn't get enough lead in the first innings," New Zealand skipper Tim Southee said. "We had the game in the hand, but we threw it away."

'Sensational' O'Rourke lauded

O'Rourke, 23, had impressed for New Zealand with eight wickets, including his second five-wicket haul from just three Test appearances in the first innings.

"William O'Rourke has been brilliant for us," Southee said. "For him to come here and do what he did was absolutely amazing. He's never played in conditions like these... when there is not much for pace bowling. His effort was sensational."

New Zealand had cause for cheer after fighting on for a fifth day during their first Test in six months on a pitch where they have always struggled. Their scheduled warm-up against Afghanistan earlier in September was washed out without a ball being bowled. — AFP

Stones gets point for City against 10-man Arsenal

JOHN STONES' 98th-minute equaliser salvaged a 2-2 draw for Manchester City against 10-man Arsenal in a bad-tempered clash between the two favourites for the Premier League title on Sunday.

Arsenal played the entire second half a man down after Leandro Trossard was sent off but were seconds away from inflicting City's first home defeat since November 2022.

A draw is enough for City to retake top spot, two points clear of Arsenal in fourth.

Erling Haaland's 100th City goal had given Pep Guardiola's men the perfect start.

Arsenal turned the game around thanks to Riccardo Calafiori's wonder strike and another set-piece header from Gabriel Magalhaes.

The Gunners lost Trossard for a second booking just before half-time.

However, Mikel Arteta's men produced a stunning rearguard action to hold out until the final seconds when Stones bundled in after Arsenal failed to clear a corner.

The powder keg for an explosive encounter was lit within the first few seconds when Kai Havertz charged into Rodri to leave the Spaniard needing treatment.

Guardiola said City had been handed an advantage by having an extra day's rest and not travelling for their Champions League draw with Inter Milan on Wednesday.

Arsenal, by contrast, were in Italy on Thursday for their 0-0 stalemate against Atalanta.

City burst out of the traps to try and make their fresher legs count and got an early reward.

Haaland had not even managed a single shot on target in the two league meetings between the sides last season as Arsenal kept two clean sheets against the champions.

But the Norwegian is in unstoppable form and took just nine minutes to score his 10th goal of the season and bring up his century in 105 games for City.

Savinho's through ball split the Arsenal defence and Haaland coolly prodded past the onrushing David Raya.

Ilkay Gundogan then curled a free-kick off the post.

But City's momentum was interrupted when Rodri was forced off in some distress with a knee injury.

Just seconds after he was replaced by Mateo Kovacic, Arsenal levelled in stunning fashion.

Calafiori was picked out by Gabriel Martinelli at the edge of the box and the Italian defender curled a brilliant effort beyond Ederson for his first Gunners goal.

Gabriel scored the winner in Arsenal's 1-0 win at Tottenham in the north London



Manchester City's John Stones celebrates scoring their second goal. — Reuters

derby last weekend.

And City were also unable to cope with the Brazilian's power at set-pieces.

Guardiola's men got away with a warning when Gabriel headed over his first big opportunity from a Bukayo Saka corner.

Yet there was another huge momentum swing just before half-time when Trossard saw red. The Belgian was shown a second yellow for kicking the ball away after committing a foul.

Arsenal dropped two points in a 1-1 draw with Brighton after Declan Rice did likewise

just three weeks ago and they suffered a similar fate in heartbreaking fashion.

Arteta responded by introducing an extra defender in Ben White for Saka as the visitors set up camp in their own box to repel wave upon wave of City attack.

Raya was called upon to save a powerful downward header by Haaland. It was another City defender who finally got what could be a defining goal in the title race. Stones swept home the loose ball from Jack Grealish's cross to extend City's near two-year invincible streak on home soil. — AFP

ISC annual badminton 2024 concludes with thrilling finals

MUSCAT: The highly anticipated O Millionaire Annual Badminton Tournament, organised by the Indian Social Club Oman, came to a spectacular conclusion on Saturday. The tournament, which saw participation from numerous talented athletes across various categories, proved to be a celebration of both skill and sportsmanship.

The tournament was supported by Food lands Restaurant, Oman Express Restaurant, MBE-Official distributor of Yonex in Oman and Oman Oasis water.

Sanjit Kanojia, ISC sports secretary, mentioned that the championship attracted participants from ISC members, different linguistic wings and age groups, making it a truly inclusive event. The matches were held over several days, culminating in an exciting final day where the winners in each category were crowned.

The highlight of the tournament was undoubtedly the Team Championship final. After several rounds of fiercely competitive matches, ISC MKW Team emerged victorious.

Competitive

The highlight of the tournament was undoubtedly the Team Championship final. After several rounds of fiercely competitive matches, ISC MKW Team emerged victorious.



ISC tournament winners and runner-ups pose with their trophies alongside officials.

nail-biting finale, they managed to defeat the formidable Kerala Wing Team, who put up an impressive fight. The final was one for the history books, with spectators on the edge of their seats throughout.

The event concluded with a grand closing ceremony, where the winners were awarded trophies and prizes. The chief guest Indian Social Club Chairman Babu Rajendran applauded the efforts of all the participants and

emphasised the importance of sports in bringing communities together. The organisers also extended their gratitude to the sponsors and volunteers who made the event a grand success.

The O Millionaire Annual Badminton Tournament has truly established itself as a premier sporting event in Oman, and participants are already looking forward to next year's edition.

In addition to the team events, there were several individual and

doubles categories, each with its own set of thrilling matches.

RESULTS: Open Men's Singles — Winner: Jinesh P, Runner-up: David Kennedy; **ISC Men's Singles** — Winner: Vinod Abraham, Runner-up: D Hemanth Kumar; **Boys Under-15 Doubles** — Winners: Sahil Ganesha Sheregar and Vivan Shet, Runners-up: Imaad Ayman and Rian Saldanha; **Girls Under-15 Doubles** — Winners: Risha Saldanha and Sanvi Ganesha, Runners-up: Lavanya and Naiara Anthon; **Women's Singles** — Winner: Krittika Girish Nair, Runner-up: Safiya Shakil Narmawala; **Men's Doubles Premier** — Winners: Vishak Nair and Jithesh Pandian; Runners-up: Rajesh R and Noufal; **Men's Doubles Open** — Winners: Damodhar Shenoy and Mohammed Zakeer, Runners-up: Jayaraj and Robin Sebastian; **ISC Men's doubles** — Winners: Dr Rajesh Rajendran and Moncy Francis, Runners-up: Sundarsh S and Syed Mohammed U; **ISC Team** — Winner: Mangalorean Konkani Wing, Runner-up: Kerala Wing.

SPORTS/MOTOR RACING



FIRST OUTRIGHT GTWCE VICTORY FOR AHMAD

OQ BY Oman Racing achieved an absolutely incredible outright victory during round four of the Fanatec GT World Challenge Europe powered by AWS Endurance Cup at Monza in Italy on Sunday – one of the proudest moments of Ahmad al Harthy’s glittering motorsport career.

When a chaotic opening lap with a series of multi-car incidents resulted in the No 30 BMW M4 having to pit with damage, hopes of a Bronze class podium, let alone a challenge for outright victory in the three-hour race, looked absolutely unthinkable.

But inspired strategy from Team WRT, the squad which prepares and runs the OQ by Oman Racing entry, meant the car – in the hands of Sam De Haan for the first stint – made no fewer than three pit-visits

while the Safety Car was circulating following the lap one dramas.

Enabling the BMW to have repairs facilitated, while vitally remaining on the lead lap, importantly it also meant they had begun to clear the three mandatory timed pit-stops which each entry had to serve during the race. Pain at the beginning led to sheer joy at the chequered flag thanks to steely focus, determination, faultless driving and nothing short of genius from Team WRT.

In addition to the stunning overall result, it is also the first Bronze class win for Al Harthy, De Haan and Jens Klingmann and the trio have become the first non-Pro class line-up, and maiden Bronze line-up, to claim an Endurance Cup win outright. For Team WRT, it marks the outfit’s first race win in the Endurance Cup with BMW.

INSPIRED STRATEGY FROM TEAM WRT SETS UP GLORY FOR OQ BY OMAN RACING

STAR DRIVING FROM AL HARTHY, DE HAAN, KLINGMANN DELIVERS MONZA SUCCESS

NO 30 BMW M4 MAKES HISTORY, FIRST NON-PRO CLASS ENTRY TO WIN OUTRIGHT

JAW-DROPPING WIN FOR OQ BY OMAN RACING

Preparation for the race weekend went well, with the No 30 squad just 0.6 seconds away from the quickest overall time in free practice and only 0.5 seconds shy of the pace in pre-qualifying. Final qualifying on Sunday morning, run across three sessions for the trio of drivers, concluded with OQ by Oman Racing sixth fastest in Bronze and 29th on the overall grid from 52 cars.

With an extra mandatory pit-stop required in this weekend’s race, differing approaches were taken by the teams. More spice was then added when De Haan sustained damage on lap one after contact from another car, so he pitted as the Safety Car made an early appearance.

After the decision by the team to pit multiple times under the early Safety Car to eat into the mandatory pit-stops, De Haan was at the tail of the field and with significant work to do. During the opening hour he carved through impressively, ultimately rising into fifth and the Bronze lead as other squads ran more traditional strategies.

Al Harthy got behind the wheel early in hour two and was third in class and 24th overall when he joined the race. Maintaining his top three in class, OQ, Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Omantel, Experience Oman and BMW Oman backed Al Harthy continued to move forward in the overall battle and with 70 minutes to go he held second in Bronze and was up into the outright top 20.

When he handed the BMW over to Klingmann for the final hour, not only did the Bronze podium look likely – so did a big overall result. Into the final 50 minutes Klingmann was extremely well placed and just 10 minutes later he had risen to the class lead and an incredible third overall as the differing pit strategies continued to play out.

Needing to stop one more time inside the final 20 minutes, with the longer mandatory stops

served at the beginning it meant Klingmann’s last visit to pit-lane was fast. Driving superbly against vastly experienced topline Pro drivers, Klingmann was up to second with mere minutes to go and then took the lead – holding off the sister Pro class Team WRT car of Dries Vanthoor for the dizzying win.

Ahmad Al Harthy: “Unbelievable, unbelievable – I can’t actually believe what happened! History, absolute history. It’s amazing to take this win, I am over the moon. This means so much to everybody in the team, to Oman, to our incredible sponsors and I would like to dedicate this remarkable win to HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth. “We actually had this plan drawn up, we said if it works it works and if it doesn’t we’ll look like we’ve done something wrong! It worked, it worked perfectly well, this was a team effort. Our engineer Will came up with the plan, he did an amazing job as well. This is what racing is about, you know, you have to really work together as a team and today we proved that, like nobody else could have.

“We out-performed everybody, a huge grid of the most professional teams and drivers. To win it with OQ by Oman Racing, our first win with BMW, and to win our class and the race overall really is unbelievable. I am so proud to see the Oman flag fly high here in Monza, I cannot describe it. I also want to thank HH Sayyid Nazar bin Al Julanda bin Majid al Said, Oman Ambassador to Italy, for attending the race and for his support along with that of everyone from OQ and all our partners.”

The fifth and final round of the GTWCE Endurance Cup season will take place on November 29 and 30 in Saudi Arabia – the 6 Hours of Jeddah. Before then, on November 2, Al Harthy will bring the curtain down on his 2024 FIA World Endurance Championship campaign at Bahrain International Circuit in Sakhir.

GTWCE ENDURANCE CUP MONZA RESULT	
1. Ahmad Al Harthy / Sam De Haan / Jens Klingmann (OQ by Oman Racing, BMW M4 – Bronze)	
2. Dries Vanthoor / Sheldon van der Linde / Charles Weerts (Team WRT, BMW M4 – Pro)	
3. Alessio Rovera / Vincent Abril / Alessandro Pier Guidi (AF Corse, Ferrari 296 – Pro)	
4. Christopher Haase / Alex Aka / Ricardo Feller (Tresor Attempto, Audi R8 – Pro)	
5. Raffaele Marciello / Maxime Martin / Valentino Rossi (Team WRT, BMW M4 – Pro)	
6. Thomas Drouet / Sergio Sette Camara / Maximilian Gotz (Boutsen VDS, Mercedes – Pro)	
2024 GTWCE ENDURANCE CUP BRONZE CLASS STANDINGS (AFTER RD4)	
1. Jonathan Hui / Chris Froggatt / Eddie Cheever, 65 pts	
2. Jef Machiels / Louis Machiels / Andrea Bertolini, 57 pts	
3. Max Hofer / Andrey Mukovoz, 53 pts	
4. Ahmad Al Harthy / Sam De Haan / Jens Klingmann, 40 pts	



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Al Rifaa

Oman targets 20 per cent increase in AI investments and start-ups annually

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

THE Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology announced a target of boosting the number of AI tech start-ups and the amount of investments within the sector by 20 per cent annually, according to the recently launched revised version of the AI and Advanced Technologies Executive Programme.

The document, released earlier this week, was launched to “align with global advancements in AI, particularly the emergence of generative AI technologies”, according to Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

In a foreword, Al Maawali emphasised the significance of AI adoption.

“Artificial Intelligence (AI) and advanced digital technologies are seen as some of the most important innovations that will drive global leadership across all

In 2023, AI sector investments in Oman reached \$78 million (RO 30 million), with a goal to increase this by 20 per cent annually.

future industries. Countries are racing to adopt AI technologies for various reasons, including ensuring national security and improving essential services for society.

“According to PwC, AI’s contribution to the global economy

is expected to reach \$15.7 trillion by 2030, with \$320 billion projected for the Middle East,” he said.

“Oman is actively working on establishing the foundational pillars for AI and advanced digital technologies, both in daily life

and professional settings, with the goal of creating an effective digital economy that leverages these technologies.

“This includes: enhancing and adopting AI in economic and developmental sectors, localising AI technologies and governing AI applications and advanced digital technologies with a human-centred approach,” the minister added.

Earlier this year, Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, revealed that Oman has attracted \$78 million (RO 30 million) worth of investments in the field of Artificial Intelligence in 2023.

He added that the volume of investment inflows into the Artificial Intelligence (AI) sector in Oman is expected to reach \$250 million.

AI TECHNOLOGIES

According to the Executive Programme, 26 initiatives have been identified under the three main axis pertaining to the adoption,

localisation and governance, and achieving a human-centric stance with AI technologies.

Some of the most notable ones include the creation of a national data portal, the establishment of an AI studio, the issuance of AI regulations and an AI framework, quantum computing initiatives, the establishment of a national AI ethics centre, and the rehabilitation of workers whose jobs will be affected by the adoption AI technologies. The programme is part of the country’s wider plan of boosting the contribution of the digital economy to the local GDP from the current 2 per cent to 5 per cent by 2030 and 10 per cent by 2040.

It aims to target key economic diversification sectors in an effort to accelerate the adoption of these technologies within them.

Pact to establish UTAS branch in Musandam

MUSCAT: Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, met with Badr Mohammed al Saad, Director-General and Chairman of the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, to discuss enhancing cooperation between Oman and the Fund.

During the meeting, a loan agreement was signed to finance the first phase of establishing a new branch of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) in Musandam Governorate. This agreement extends the existing collaboration between the two sides in supporting developmental, economic, and social projects across Oman.

The new UTAS branch in Musandam is a key initiative under Oman Vision 2040, aiming to equip graduates with the skills and knowledge needed to meet the demands of the labour market. The university will offer specialised programmes in economics, business administration, information technology, engineering and education, catering to both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

This initiative is set to enhance national capabilities and prepare qualified professionals for the future. — **ONA**

CBO issues RO 30m treasury bills

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) announced the allocation of government treasury bills worth RO 30 million for this week. The bills include RO 4.3 million with a 28-day maturity at an average price of RO 99.650 per RO 100, yielding an average discount rate of 4.55947 per cent and an average return of 4.57547 per cent.

Additionally, RO 25.7 million was allocated for a 91-day maturity at an average price of RO 98.817 per RO 100, with an average discount rate of 4.74639 per cent and an average return of 4.80325 per cent.

The CBO statement noted that the interest rate on repurchase operations (repo) with the Central Bank is 5.50 per cent, while the discount rate on treasury bill facilities is 6.00 per cent.

Treasury bills, managed by the CBO on behalf of the Ministry of Finance, serve as a short-term secured investment option for licensed commercial banks.

These bills offer rapid liquidity through discounting with the CBO or via repo transactions between banks in the interbank market. Additionally, they provide a benchmark for short-term interest rates in the local financial market and offer the government a flexible tool to finance expenses. — **ONA**

Al Maktoom hosts first beam pump factory acceptance test in Oman

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

OMAN-BASED artificial lift service (ALS) provider Al Maktoom Trading and Contracting (Al Maktoom), in a landmark event for Oman’s burgeoning oil and gas industry, has conducted the country’s first-ever Factory Acceptance Test (FAT) for a beam pump, signalling a significant shift in the nation’s manufacturing capabilities.

This test, held recently at their new manufacturing facility in Nizwa, marks the beginning of a phased strategy aimed at establishing Oman as a key player in the artificial lift systems market across the Middle East.

The company has rapidly evolved into a comprehensive artificial lift total solutions provider. The company’s growth trajectory has been remarkable, with branches now in Bahrain and Kuwait, and successful short-term projects completed in Yemen, India, Somaliland and Iran. This expansion, according to Sohail Mikrani, Deputy General Manager of Al Maktoom Trading and Contracting, is driven by the industry’s need for advanced technologies.

In an interview with *Observer*, “Only 5 per cent of the world’s oil and gas wells have enough reservoir pressure to flow naturally, with the remaining 95 per cent relying on artificial lift technologies,” Mikrani explained.

“This reality motivated us to take the next step — manufacturing artificial lift systems ourselves.” The decision to establish a manufacturing facility in Nizwa was not made lightly. It aligns with Oman Vision 2040, which emphasises economic diversification and local manufacturing. Mikrani under-

scored the importance of this initiative: “This new factory in Nizwa Industrial City is not just about manufacturing; it’s about contributing to Oman’s GDP, creating jobs and supporting the national strategy.”

The first phase of manufacturing in Oman begins with conducting FAT, a crucial step in ensuring that the equipment meets all necessary standards before full-scale production begins. Following the FAT, Al Maktoom plans to gradually ramp up its operations — from partial to full manufacturing.

The ultimate goal is to produce a wide range of ALS systems locally, branded with a ‘Made in Oman’ label, which Mikrani believes will position Oman as a hub for ALS in the region.

The impact of this new facility on the local economy is expected to be substantial. The company has acquired additional land to expand its operations and plans to introduce a comprehensive training programme for fresh graduates, further enhancing job opportunities for Omani nationals. “Our aim is to create a sustainable pipeline of skilled professionals who can contribute to Oman’s growing industrial sector,” Mikrani said.

BUSINESS/ADVERTORIAL

NBO WELCOMES DELEGATION FROM ICD



MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman welcomes a delegation from the Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector (ICD), led by Bahauddin Karimli — Chief Investment Officer. Considered to be the first of its kind to the Sultanate of Oman, the visit aims to develop strategic partnerships while gaining insight into the bank's role in providing financial services. It also highlights NBO's commitment to promote Islamic banking and support the sustainable development of Oman's private sector.

GENETCO RELOCATES TO NEW HEADQUARTERS



MUSCAT: Genetco is pleased to announce the relocation to its new, cutting-edge headquarters, equipped with the latest technologies and modern facilities. This strategic move represents a significant milestone, highlighting Genetco's continued commitment to enhancing services, achieving operational excellence, and fostering innovation across all areas of business. The new headquarters is situated in a prime, easily accessible location and features advanced amenities designed to elevate client experiences and optimise internal processes. This state-of-the-art facility also provides an ideal work environment for Genetco's team, enabling them to continue delivering exceptional services that meet the highest quality standards. Genetco aims to reinforce its position as a market leader in providing unparalleled customer experiences. For over 54 years, Genetco has offered premium brands such as Gree, Canon, Hitachi, JBL, Best, TCL, and many others to consumers in Oman, while delivering top-notch Facility Management Operations and Engineering Services and projects, including end-to-end Air Conditioning solutions, Industrial Kitchens, and a comprehensive range of Cold Chain solutions.

OABC STRENGTHENS US-OMAN TRADE TIES

MUSCAT: The Oman American Business Council (OABC) participated in a recent trade delegation led by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, aimed at expanding commercial partnerships between Oman and the United States. During the visit, Rebecca Olson, CEO of OABC, attended key meetings with institutions such as the Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM Bank), the US Chamber of Commerce, Arizona Commerce Authority, Arizona State University (ASU), and numerous private sector companies. OABC played a role in facilitating introductions in the aviation and aerospace sectors, while also engaging with companies from other industries to explore broader opportunities for collaboration. The delegation, which engaged with a wide range of US entities, focused on promoting strategic partnerships and exploring new opportunities for trade and investment between Oman and the US. "We're seeing more momentum now than ever before in utilising the US-Oman Free Trade Agreement. The connections made during this delegation highlight the immense potential that remains to be unlocked, and OABC is one of the entities actively driving these conversations forward. With a



strong foundation built over the years, we're now entering a phase where opportunities for growth and collaboration are expanding rapidly, and we're excited to explore the full scope of what's possible," said Rebecca Olson, CEO of OABC. OABC remains committed to supporting its members by enhancing trade and investment opportunities, ensuring businesses on both sides benefit from the growing US-Oman relationship.

Toyota Urban Cruiser now with Akeed benefits

GEAR up to cruise cityscapes with the Toyota Urban Cruiser, a bold compact SUV that matches the pace of a fast urban lifestyle. Toyota Oman brings to you an exciting opportunity to double up on savings with Toyota Akeed and avail exciting service perks up to 2 years/20,000 km or 10 years/100,000 km (whichever comes first). Get exclusive 1- year free insurance and a chance to win an all-new Toyota Prado through the grand raffle draw before the offers end on 31st October 2024. "Navigating the city is challenging with the narrow lanes, signal stops, and traffic congestion. The Urban Cruiser introduces smooth acceleration and dynamic on-road performance. We invite you to have a look at the SUV if you're looking to upgrade." Shared an official from Toyota Oman. Under the hood, it boasts a 1.5-litre, 4-cylinder gasoline engine and an Integrated Starter Generator (ISG) that functions as both an electrified generator and motor. Combined with a compact lithium-ion battery, the power-train delivers 102 hp and 135 Nm of torque. The cruiser offers matchless fuel efficiency of 19.8 km/l mated with a six-speed automatic transmission making it an ideal city-life car that saves up on fuel during low-speed and stop-start conditions. Experience an immersive driving experience with the Urban



Toyota Oman brings to you an exciting opportunity to double up on savings with Toyota Akeed and avail exciting service perks up to 2 years/20,000 km or 10 years/100,000 km (whichever comes first).

Cruiser's ravishing exterior crafted with a chrome finish and bold lines that complement quirky social and busy corporate lifestyles. Stay focused on the road and monitor traffic conditions with the modern head-up display, a 4.2-inch multi-information display. The telescopic steering wheel, equipped with an audio system and vehicle operation controls, adds to the experience. Own an Urban Cruiser and delve into impressive high-tech features that include a dual-sliding panoramic roof, a 7-inch or 9-inch multimedia screen with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto inte-

gration, a wireless smartphone charging system, three USB ports, a six-speaker sound system, and a powerful automatic air conditioning system with rear AC vents, and 60:40 split reclining rear seats. Your family's safety is Toyota's top priority. The Urban Cruiser comes complete with a comprehensive array of safety features. These include six SRS airbags, Vehicle Stability Control, Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Traction Control, Hill-start Assist Control (HAC), Panoramic View Monitor, Rear Parking Sensors, Tyre Pressure Warning System, and many more.

Renaissance Services supports two Omani artists taking part in UK exhibition

MUSCAT: Renaissance Services has announced its support for two emerging Omani artists, Majid al Amri and Sara al Hosni, as they embark on an inspiring artistic journey to the UK. This initiative, in collaboration with the British Omani Society Art Group, offers the two artists an opportunity to refine their skills and gain international exposure through a series of workshops and exhibitions. The artists' journey begins with a two-week residency at the Welsh Academy of Art under the guidance of well-known artist Lucy Corbett, where they will engage in intensive skill development. Following their time in Wales, Majid and Sara will travel to London for a series of studio visits, workshops and networking opportunities, culminating in a highly-anticipated exhibition. The event, which will be held at the British Omani Society's premises in central London, will showcase

This initiative, in collaboration with the British Omani Society Art Group, offers the two artists an opportunity to refine their skills and gain international exposure through a series of workshops and exhibitions.



Sara al Hosni painting the landscape in Wales.

their work to a wider international audience from September 25-27, 2024. A few art works will also be available for sale during the exhibition.



Majid al Amri painting the British countryside.

Stephen R Thomas, CEO, Renaissance Services, said, "We are delighted to support Majid and Sara, two talented Omani artists, on their journey to the UK. This opportunity, facilitated by the British Omani

Society, provides them with a rare chance to enhance their skills and expand their artistic horizons. At Renaissance, we believe in nurturing local talent, and this experience - from tailored workshops to an exhibition in London - will help these talented young artists to further refine their craft. We hope that this will also serve to raise the overall profile of Omani artists in the future." Major General (Retd) Felix Gedeney of the British Omani Society Art Group, said, "The visit shows the close cultural links between the UK and Oman. It has been made possible by the kind support of the sponsors. The artists are all developing their skills exceptionally well. The standard of their painting, and the creativity of their composition, demonstrates the amazing depth of talent amongst emerging Omani artists."

OQEP plans to exit three upstream blocks in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

WHOLLY Omani state-owned upstream energy firm OQ Exploration and Production (OQEP), which is preparing to shortly go public via one of the biggest public subscriptions on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), says it will relinquish its interests in three non-operated oil and gas concessions in the Sultanate of Oman.

OQEP — the upstream energy arm of Oman’s global integrated energy group OQ — is offering 25 per cent of its capital, representing two billion shares, via an Initial Public Offering starting from September 30, 2024.

With investments in a portfolio of 14 oil and gas assets, OQEP currently ranks among the biggest contributors to Oman’s hydrocarbon output, averaging 249,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day (boe/d) in 2023 — representing around 14 per cent of total oil, gas and condensate production that year.

However, targeted for relinquishment are the non-operated blocks 52, 30 and 62, none of which has yielded any commercial discoveries to date.

“For certain non-operated blocks, no discoveries have been made, and consequently, pursuant to the terms of the relevant Exploration & Production Sharing Agreements (EPSA), the participants have notified the government of their intention to relinquish the contract area.

“In addition, for certain contract areas, exploration or development



OQEP has interests in a portfolio of 14 operated and non-operated blocks in the Sultanate of Oman.

With investments in a portfolio of 14 oil and gas assets, OQEP currently ranks among the biggest contributors to Oman’s hydrocarbon output.

activities are ongoing, but the company has decided to exit the contract area,” OQEP noted in its IPO prospectus.

Of the three blocks identified for relinquishment, the most notable is the deepwater offshore Block 52 located off Oman’s southeastern coast. Italian based energy giant Eni acquired the block in 2017 with an 85-per cent working interest and operatorship, while OQEP held the remaining 15 per cent interest.

In 2019, Qatar Petroleum purchased a 30-per cent working interest from Eni.

Following their inability to unearth any commercial discoveries, the participants notified the government of their intention to relinquish the contract area, which they expect to be completed in

2024, said OQEP.

Also prepped for relinquishment is the gas concession Block 30 in northern Oman.

OQEP holds a 27.14-per cent interest, while Oxy is the operator with a 72.86-per cent interest. According to OQEP, development options for the contract area are currently being assessed, but the company has agreed in principle to exit Block 30.

Likewise, Block 62, located adjacent to Block 30, is a gas contract area in central Oman operated by Oxy with an 80-per cent interest. OQEP holds the remaining 20 per cent interest.

“The company has agreed in principle to exit Block 62 (together with Block 30) and is awaiting government approval,” OQEP added.

GOLD PRICES FALL AFTER RECORD HIGH

SINGAPORE: Gold prices fell after hitting record highs yesterday, as a stronger dollar prompted some investors to book profits, but strong market sentiment and geopolitical tensions kept prices above the key \$2,600 per ounce level.

Spot gold fell 0.2 per cent to \$2,616.57 per ounce after hitting an all-time high of \$2,631.31 earlier in the session.

The dollar index, which measures the



greenback against six major currencies, rose about 0.3 per cent.

Non-yielding gold has risen more than 27 per cent since the beginning of the year and is on track for its biggest annual rise in 14 years. As for other precious metals, silver in spot transactions fell 2 per cent to \$30.48 per ounce, platinum fell 2.1 per cent to \$954.84 and palladium fell 1.9 per cent to \$1,047.27. — **ONA**

FSA approves prospectus of OQ Exploration and Production IPO

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

THE FINANCIAL Services Authority (FSA) has announced the approval of the prospectus of OQ Exploration and Production (under conversion to a public joint stock company), which offers no less than 2 billion shares constituting 25 per cent of the company’s capital.

The offering is the largest in the history of the Omani capital market by volume and market value of the company.

OQ Exploration and Production is part of OQ Group which is owned by the Oman Investment Authority (OIA). The offering is in line with the policy of Oman Investment Authority to divest some government assets in translation of the goals of Oman Vision 2040 that aim to attract national and foreign investments and support the diversification and expansion of the shareholder base.

The offer allows investors to invest in one of the top companies specialised in the exploration and production of oil and gas in the Sultanate of Oman.

The prospectus shows that the

The prospectus shows that the subscription period will be for two weeks from September 30 to October 10, 2024 for Category I investors, while the subscription period for Category II investors — representing individuals — will close on October 9.



The offering is the largest in the history of the Omani capital market by volume and market value of the company, says the FSA.

subscription period will be for two weeks from September 30 to October 10, 2024 for Category I investors, while the subscription period for Category II investors — representing individuals — will close on October 9.

The prospectus shows that the number of offered shares are divided into three main categories

namely the institutions (first category), individuals (second category) and large investors. As to the offer price the prospectus shows that the first category which is the institutions their price band will be determined through book building process in a band of 370 to 390 baisas per share.

The share price for Omani individuals will be 351 baisas based on the higher price at 390 baisas per share minus 10 per cent to incentivise the Omanis to take part in the issuance and benefit from the investment opportunities. The price for non-Omanis will be 390 baisas.

The prospectus points out that the share of the first category i.e. the institutions is 40 per cent of the total offering divided equally between local institutions and regional and international institutions. The minimum limit for subscription for this category will be 100,000 shares without maximum limit.

As for the individuals in the second category in the prospectus they take 40 per cent of the total offering divided equally between large and small investors. The minimum limit for large investors

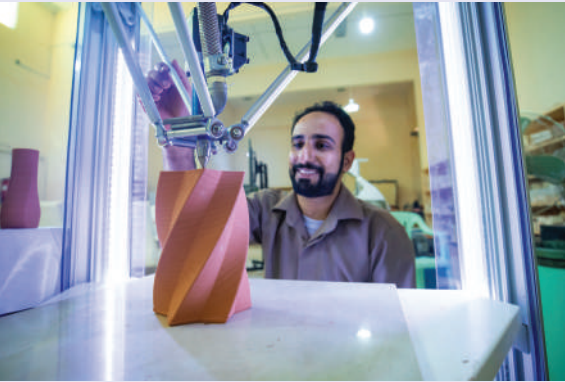
will be 28,600 shares with no maximum limit.

The minimum limit for small investors will be 500 shares and the maximum 28,500 shares. Importantly, 20 per cent of the offer volume will be allocated for anchor investors. FSA emphasises that the prospectus is the main reference on the information related to OQ Exploration and Production which is prepared by the issue manager in accordance with the legal requirements to assist the investor to take informed investment decision away from the roammers and news from anonymous sources.

Hence, careful reading of the prospectus is the sound step to have adequate knowledge of the company, its performance and historical financial position.

The prospectus also shows the current opportunities of the company and the sector and the challenges including future risks. It also shows the contracts of the company and their periods beside the prospects of dividends distribution in the near future and the company’s future policy in dividends distribution.

SME INITIATIVE



The programme is open to all existing SMEs with export contracts or purchase orders from foreign companies.

NEW FINANCING PROGRAMME BOOSTS SME EXPORTS

MUSCAT: The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) has launched a financing programme to support SMEs aiming to export their products to regional and global markets. The initiative seeks to boost national exports, enhance economic diversification, and increase the international competitiveness of Omani SMEs.

The programme is open to all existing SMEs with export contracts or purchase orders from foreign companies, provided they have insurance coverage from Credit Oman.

It supports businesses that have previously exported, as well as those venturing into exports for the first time.

The programme offers financial facilities to cover production costs related to foreign invoices, contracts, or purchase orders, enabling SMEs to enhance product quality and expand their market reach.

By providing necessary financial resources, the initiative aims to boost the volume of Omani exports, improve the competitive edge of local businesses on an international level, and strengthen Oman’s commercial position globally.

To qualify, entrepreneurs must complete ASMED-approved training programmes on project management and obtain insurance approval from Credit Oman. Applicants must also meet financial and credit standards to access funding.

ASMED has published a guide outlining loan disbursement procedures on its website and social media channels, detailing requirements for buildings, machinery, equipment and vehicles.

The guide aims to simplify the application process, promote transparency and ensure compliance with disbursement standards, making it easier for SMEs to access financing and expand their export activities. — **ONA**

OPINION

India’s open for business push has local quirks



SHRITAMA BOSE

The author, an India columnist, joined Breakingviews in November 2022. She covers the financial sector and related topics from Mumbai.

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi has spent much of the past decade lowering barriers to foreign investment in India. Yet a growing list of firms including BlackRock, BMW and Shein are expanding in the country in partnership with local tycoons. It tightens the grip powerful families have on the world’s fifth-largest economy, and sets them up as future global rivals to those knocking on their door. On paper, the once-markedly socialist country is open for business. Its craving for capital is strong. Overseas companies in most sectors are free to enter the market on their own, unlike in China, where large swathes of the economy were kept off limits and where some sectors, like autos, were opened up on the condition that foreign companies found local partners. The problem is, India’s federal political system and sheer cultural and geographical diversity means it remains a tricky place for international companies. Powerful families offer a shortcut to establishing a nationwide footprint, avoiding cut-throat domestic competition, or achieving both of those things.

BlackRock’s decision to re-enter India exemplifies the dilemma. The company run by Larry Fink, which manages over \$10 trillion, is in the process of teaming up with Mukesh Ambani’s Jio Financial Services in asset and wealth management. The US company exited an Indian joint venture with DSP in 2018 because it didn’t have a path to control. Fink is unlikely to have a path to control with Jio but the rapid financialisation of savings in recent years means the market is too attractive for BlackRock to ignore. Partnering with a tycoon is less risky for the US company than trying to beat India’s richest man who wants to push into financial services and is known for obliterating competition. The desire of foreign companies to defend their market position in India partly explains their rush to subscribe to fundraisings by Reliance’s business units in 2020. These include Facebook-owner Meta Platforms’ \$5.7 billion purchase of a 10-per cent stake in Reliance’s digital and telecoms business. India remains open for US Big Tech but Indian companies are also flexing their muscles more in digital businesses from telecoms to e-commerce as more Indians get smartphones.

Highlights

The desire of foreign companies to defend their market position in India partly explains their rush to subscribe to fundraisings by Reliance’s business units in 2020. These include Facebook-owner Meta Platforms’

\$5.7 BILLION purchase of a 10-per cent stake in Reliance’s digital and telecoms business.

Elsewhere, New Delhi is encouraging partnerships through subsidies in its flagship production-linked incentive scheme to spur manufacturing. This allows the government to dictate which foreign companies team up with which Indian families to be the next leaders in future industries. Taiwan’s Hon Hai Precision Industry, more widely known as Foxconn, pulled out of a joint venture last year to make chips with Anil Agarwal’s Vedanta, after widespread concerns about the Indian company’s debt and its ability to fund investments. Global companies like French oil giant TotalEnergies are burnishing their green credentials by partnering with Indian tycoon Gautam Adani, who has big ambitions in renewable energy. Smoother access to subsidies is one reason companies including Japan’s Fujifilm are scouting for local partners before they start production in India. It’s significant that many of the new partnerships are in the realm of technology. Adani’s group will work with German carmaker BMW and Tata Technologies, plan to leverage Indian talent in IT to develop intellectual property that will drive cars of the future. — **Reuters**

LESS HOURS AT WORK



SALIM AL RIYAMI

The author, with over 20 years of experience as an HR practitioner and executive in the private sector, is currently an Executive Business Developer at Nama Holding.

In the past, when you went to the HR Department of an organisation or policymakers at the workplace and asked them to reduce the working hours by working less hours a day or a week, they would look strangely at you, thinking that you were coming from a different planet. Now, the imaginary question arises: How can fewer working hours be more productive? As employees, can we dream to have a less burnout working environment, a less stressed one, with more rests and better work-life balance? Yes, I believe we can dream of this, and the dream may come true. Possibly, we can reduce the working hours by 20 per cent or so and give an additional rest day to the employees, i.e., work 4-days a week instead of 5. Statistics and studies have shown that human beings cannot work for a continuous 8 hours per

Highlights

Statistics and studies have shown that human beings cannot work for a continuous 8 hours per day, and in fact, productivity reaches the highest

95 PER CENT productive, in a total of 6 hours per day.

day, and in fact, productivity reaches the highest (95 per cent productive) in a total of 6 hours per day. In one study during 2019, Microsoft found that reducing working days from 5-day-a-week to 4 had increased productivity by 40 per cent. In addition, Scandinavian countries, like Sweden and Iceland, were among the pioneers (during 2017) in applying fewer working hours, with evidence of productivity increasing by 30–40 per cent in many business fields. The UK and our neighbouring country, the UAE, have recently started trials for shorter working hours and longer rests in both their government and private sectors, with the aim to observe productivity during the trial period. It is believed that the bet is on completing tasks in fewer hours, resulting in more productivity! It is time now for our country, our organisations, our employers and decision-makers to reconsider changing our working patterns with fewer hours and more rest days and forget about the 8-hour-day routine. What is the point of having an 8-hour per day schedule when 50 per cent of the actual time is wasted by many employees/workers surfing the net, communicating in social media, exchanging unnecessary e-mails, conducting unproductive meetings, extending coffee and refreshment breaks? It’s time to think about employees’ well-being and work-life balance, as well as cost savings on some operational costs (electricity, water, papers, and other utilities)!

Backlash erupts over EU’s anti-deforestation law



People work on a reforestation project in Mae Do Rio, Brazil. — The New York Times

THE EUROPEAN UNION has been a world leader on climate change, passing groundbreaking legislation to reduce noxious greenhouse gases. Now the world is pushing back. Government officials and business groups around the globe have jacked up their lobbying in recent months to persuade EU officials to suspend a landmark environmental law aimed at protecting the planet’s endangered forests by tracing supply chains. The rules, scheduled to take effect at the end of the year, would affect billions of dollars in traded goods. They have been denounced as “discriminatory and punitive” by countries in Southeast Asia, Latin America and Africa. In the United States, the Biden administration petitioned for a delay, as US paper companies warned that the law could result in shortages of diapers in Europe. In July, China said it would not comply because “security concerns” prevent the country from sharing the necessary data. Last week, the chorus got larger. Cabinet members in Brazil, the director-general of the World Trade Organization and even Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany — leader of the largest economy in the 27-member European Union — asked the European Commission’s president to postpone the impending deforestation regulations. The uproar underscores the bruising difficulties of making progress on a problem that most everyone agrees is urgent: protecting the world’s population from devastating climate change. The widespread, often illegal, destruction of tropical forests and woodlands contributes to the buildup of carbon emissions and rising temperatures, increases soil erosion and flooding, and destroys habitats for thousands of animals, putting them at risk of extinction. After years of debate, lawmakers approved a ban in 2023 on all products derived from seven key commodities — cattle, cocoa, coffee, palm oil, rubber, soybeans and wood — cultivated on newly cleared forest land. The results are rules that affect pretty much every item used in your home, slathered on your



PATRICIA COHEN

The author is the global economics correspondent for The New York Times based in London.

The rules, scheduled to take effect at the end of the year, would affect billions of dollars in traded goods. They have been denounced as “discriminatory and punitive” by countries in Southeast Asia, Latin America and Africa.

body or put in your mouth, from living room sofas and lipstick to soap and instant noodles. Penalties for traders are steep. The hope was that the law would have a cascading effect, spurring nations like the United States, China, India and Japan to pass similar legislation. Yet proving that each step of a supply chain is free of ingredients linked to deforestation is formidable in a globalised world of mass production. “Both the private sector and governments are rapidly innovating solutions,” said Tina Schneider, director of forest governance at the World Resources Institute, “but the challenges remain complex and varied across both commodities and geographies.” Some countries already have monitoring systems in place. Argentina and Uruguay have been tracing cattle for more than 15 years. Ghana, one of the world’s largest exporters of cocoa, has mapped 1.2 million farms so far and has said it can start tracking cocoa beans from farms to ships next month. Several multinational food giants, including Nestlé, Mars

Wrigley, Mondelez and Unilever, have backed the deforestation rules, while ADM announced that its verifiable supply chain for soybean oil and meal was ready. And the United Nations Development Programme, which has conducted workshops on compliance, noted that several countries, including Peru and Vietnam, were establishing certification systems. Progress, though, is uneven. And officials, farmers and trade associations around the globe have complained that the law, which requires companies to map every square foot of farmland and trace the origin of every soybean or wood chip, is nearly impossible to comply with. Even within the European Union, agricultural ministers in 20 countries, including Austria, France, Italy and Sweden, have reportedly asked for a delay. For some countries, the response to the law is akin to passing through the seven stages of grief. Some are still in denial; many are in the anger and bargaining phases; a few have progressed to acceptance and hope. At the same time, the law has become a flashpoint for other concerns and grievances. © **The New York Times**

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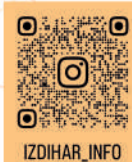
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ART/LIFE



L I F E S T Y L E

Royal Blooms: The Tradition of Naming Roses After Oman Royals >20



FASHION

A model walks the runway during the Bottega Veneta collection show at Milan's Fashion Week Womenswear Spring / Summer 2025. — AFP



MUSIC

Canadian singer-songwriter Shawn Mendes performs during the Rock in Rio music festival in the Rio 2016 Olympic Park in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A man riding a horse crosses a river with other horses in the morning in Chifeng, in northern China's Inner Mongolia region. —AFP

ART ATTACK



Man smashes Ai Weiwei sculpture at Italy art show opening

A man shattered a sculpture by Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei on Friday during the opening of his exhibition at Palazzo Fava in the Italian city of Bologna, a spokesperson for the show said.

Footage from CCTV cameras — posted on Ai Weiwei's Instagram account — showed a man vigorously pushing the sculpture over, breaking it and then holding a piece of it over his head.

The sculpture targeted was the artist's large blue



and white 'Porcelain Cube', the spokesperson said.

The exhibit's curator, Arturo Galansino, said the perpetrator was well-known in the art world.

"Unfortunately, I know the author of this inconsiderate gesture from a series of disturbing and damaging episodes over the years involving various exhibitions and institutions in Florence," said Galansino.

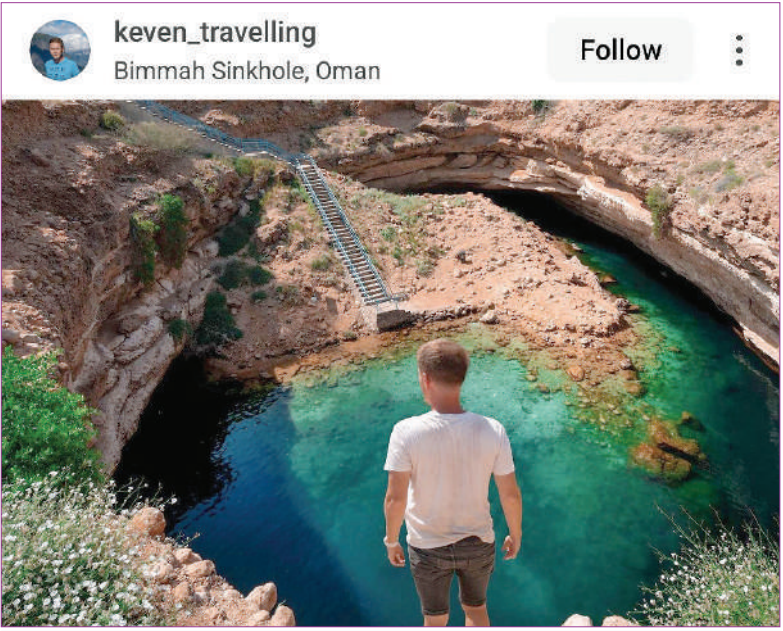
The police in Bologna said a 57-year old Czech man had been arrested after being stopped by the museum's security. The police could not immediately be reached for comment.

The spokesperson said the art show, entitled "Who am I?" had opened on Saturday as normal and that the oeuvre will be replaced by a life-size print of the cube. The exhibition is due to run until May 4.

"Ai Weiwei worried that no one was hurt and then asked that the remains of the work be covered and taken away," he said.

It was not clear how the man had entered the building during the invite-only event on Friday. —Reuters

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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Musical chairs at top as Paris Fashion Week starts



Paris Fashion Week starts on Monday in a swirl of rumours of musical chairs at some of the sector’s most fabled brands. Falling profits at the two luxury giants LVMH and Kering have sent a shudder through the industry, fuelling talk of a “Game of Thrones” among top designers. Celine’s Hedi Slimane and Simon Porte Jacquemus – the young French designer who made tiny handbags and tiny everything else a thing – are being talked of to fill Karl Lagerfeld’s empty chair at Chanel after Virginie Viard, who took the reins after the Kaiser’s death in 2019, bowed out in June. Tongues are also likely to wag at the spring-summer shows over where John Galliano might go, with his contract at Maison Margiela nearing its end.

Rising young French star Victor Weinsanto – dubbed “The Jacquemus of the East” because he comes from the eastern region of Alsace – kicks off the nine-day marathon of 66 shows, not to mention the myriad of off-calendar shows and presentations. The starriest affair on Monday, however, is likely to sponsor L’Oreal’s show in front of the Paris Opera, with the cosmetic giant’s ambassadors Jane Fonda, Kendall Jenner and Eva Longoria likely to be among the guests. The first of the big-hitters follow on Tuesday with Dior and Saint Laurent, the packed calendar reflecting Paris’s crushing dominance over rivals Milan, New York and London. And there is no let-up at the end: Chanel opens the final day on October 1 by returning to the vast Grand Palais, the scene of some of Lagerfeld’s most jaw-dropping shows, after an absence of four years. The brand is shelling out 30 million euros (\$33.5 million) for the right to stage its shows at the iconic Belle Epoque edifice, which reopened after a major facelift to host fencing and taekwondo at the Paris Olympics and Paralympic Games. With Viard – long Lagerfeld’s right-hand woman – gone, observers expect a collection drawn from Chanel classics. In contrast, there could well be fireworks from Alessandro Michele, the mercurial Italian designer who transformed Gucci, who may be keen to make his mark with his debut show for Valentino. —AFP

Met Opera opens season with tech-heavy ‘Grounded’

New York’s prestigious Metropolitan Opera will open its season on Monday with “Grounded,” a work that explores technological evolutions of war against the backdrop of motherhood. Commissioned by the Met and based on a one-woman play by George Brant, the piece kicking off the opera’s 2024-25 season first opened at the Washington National Opera last year. The opera, scored by the Tony Award-winning composer Jeanine Tesori, sees a star fighter pilot named Jess lose her role in the skies -- she’s grounded, as they say -- after an unexpected pregnancy demands she takes time off. When Jess, played by mezzo-soprano Emily D’Angelo, returns to work, her new job is as a drone

The Met’s production of “GROUND” is the latest in a string of more contemporary works in recent years, part of the institution’s efforts to attract younger and more diverse audiences. The company has found box office success with operas by living composers, including “THE HOURS” and “Fire Shut Up In My Bones.”

operator, which she does from a trailer in Las Vegas — and her sanity begins to spiral. The opera premiered at Washington’s Kennedy Center in a kind of tryout for the new work, but reviews were mixed, some of them negative. Since then Tesori and Brant have done a revamp — the latest version of their opera is 45 minutes shorter, for one thing. The revision process is a matter of “being very brave about the big brushes,” Tesori said in an interview. “And then when we got to the Met, you go to the point where you’re using eyeliner brushes” to clean up the details. For someone who’s spent a significant part of her career in musical theatre, composing for the unamplified voice of the opera offers both a challenge and a joy, she said. “I really love the responsibility of the orchestration to carve a place for the voice,” Tesori said. “I can write for the orchestra as a character.” Tesori said one way she could represent the ethical conflicts within the main character -- after returning to work Jess operates drone strikes before rushing off to pick up her young daughter — was through splitting vocal pitch. “The idea of splitting pitch is an expression of disassociation or the beginnings of trauma and the protection of the psyche,” the composer said. “I was really playing with a woman who almost is like a cell and starts to divide, and that’s expressed in the way her pitch is splintered and bent, and eventually becomes another singer.” “She just can’t keep all of what she’s seeing and remain intact mentally.”



HUMANS AND TECH The Met’s production of “Grounded” is the latest in a string of more contemporary works in recent years, part of the institution’s efforts to attract younger and more diverse audiences. The company has found box office success with operas by living composers, including “The Hours” and “Fire Shut Up In My Bones.” Part of this forward-looking shift is also expressed through the content and themes of “Grounded” — “Ultimately, the story is about the relationship between humans and technology,” said set designer Mimi Lien, also a Tony Award winner. Core to the production of “Grounded” are Lien’s sets that occupy the Met’s vast stage, which include massive screens comprised of LED panels to convey imagery including the sensation of flying. Lien also said she used the screens to portray the contrast between the sweeping sky and the compression of the drone trailer where Jess begins to pass her days. “Grounded” is also the first production composed by a woman to ever open a season at the Met, which was founded in 1883. “I’m conflicted about it because of course, I’m incredibly honoured and grateful — and it does feel quite late,” Tesori said. —AFP



Royal Blooms:
The Tradition
of Naming
Roses After
Oman Royals

BY YERU EBUE

THE TRADITION

of naming roses after royalty, including the Sultans of Oman, finds its roots in the centuries-old European practice of associating the elegance and timeless beauty of roses with the status and prestige of royal figures.

This custom began in earnest during the 19th century, particularly in Victorian England, where botanists and horticulturists would dedicate new roses to monarchs and aristocrats as a symbol of admiration and respect. The rose, being a flower rich in symbolism for love, power and purity, made it the perfect tribute for royalty, a tradition which expanded globally.

In Oman, this practice

tional flower shows, including the renowned Chelsea Flower Show in London. The Sultan Qaboos Rose is more than just a beautiful flower — it symbolises Oman's growing presence on the world stage during the reign of the late Sultan Qaboos, a time marked by modernisation, diplomatic engagement and environmental stewardship.

Oman's relationship with Britain, established during the 19th century and deepened throughout the reign of the late Sultan Qaboos, played a role in the naming of the rose. The Sultan's efforts to strengthen ties with the United Kingdom and other nations were instrumental in elevating Oman's global reputation. The Chelsea Flower Show appearance and the rose's inclusion in various international exhibitions and commemorative stamps further solidified this connection, showcasing Oman's

tory, Oman unveiled two remarkable roses, each carrying deep symbolic meaning. The roses, Harcarmine, bearing a rich red colour, represents His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, and Harforever, with its pristine white hue, is dedicated to Her Highness The Honourable Lady As-sayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman. Both colours derive from Oman's national flag, with green, representing the landscape, framing these exquisite blooms.

The honour of having a rose named after a royal figure is not merely symbolic; it is a testament to leadership, legacy and global recognition. For centuries, roses have been named after prominent individuals, often royals, as a tribute to their influence, contributions and impact. In this case, the Harcarmine and Harforever roses were introduced not only as a nod to the Sultanate of Oman's leadership, but also to emphasise Oman's growing connection to global horticultural practices.

These roses were the result of extensive cross-breeding efforts by specialists who aimed to create resilient hybrids suited to Oman's climate. After successful agricultural experiments, the roses were found to thrive in Salalah, in the Governorate of Dhofar, where the unique climatic conditions mirror the roses' natural adaptability. Beyond Oman, the roses also flourished in Europe, reflecting

gained relevance with the naming of roses after the late Sultan Qaboos, and His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, recognising their contributions to the nation and its environment.

These roses are not only a nod to the legacy of the rulers, but also a way to connect Oman's rich heritage of agriculture and botanical appreciation with modern times. In the context of royalty, naming a rose is a gesture that honours their lasting impact and the blossoming future they envision for their people. The continuity of this tradition emphasises the intersection of nature, culture and leadership, linking Oman with a broader global heritage.

THE SULTAN QABOOS ROSE

The Sultan Qaboos Rose, a symbol of beauty, resilience and international respect, is a tribute to the visionary leadership of the late Sultan Qaboos. Named in his honour by the World Rose Society in 1990, this rose was created to reflect the values and achievements of a leader who dedicated his life to the progress of his people, the preservation of the environment and the promotion of peace on the global stage. The Sultan Qaboos Rose made its first public appearance at the Osaka Gardens Expo in Japan that same year, where it garnered international attention for its vibrant red colour, exquisite fragrance, and unique adaptability to both hot and cold climates.

The rose itself is a product of extensive research by scientists who sought to create a new class of rose that could flourish in diverse environments. Its long stem, brilliant hue and sweet scent quickly made it a favourite at interna-



cultural and environmental contributions to the world.

The rose was formally presented to the late Sultan Qaboos during Oman's 20th National Day celebrations. The late Sultan Qaboos's dedication to environmental preservation, exemplified by this honour, remains one of his lasting legacies. His vision transformed Oman into a nation celebrated for its development, stability and commitment to peace — a legacy embodied by the Sultan Qaboos Rose, which continues to flourish as a symbol of his enduring impact.

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM AND THE HONOURABLE LADY ROSES

At the 2023 Chelsea Flower Show, a prestigious event steeped in horticultural his-

their versatility and appeal on a global stage.

The official inauguration of Harcarmine and Harforever at the Chelsea Flower Show was attended by Omani officials, including Badr bin Mohammed al Mantheri, Oman's Ambassador to the UK. This event, which also hosted British royalty, including King Charles III, underscored the long-standing connection between Oman and the United Kingdom.

The Chelsea Flower Show, established in 1862, has long been a platform for showcasing the finest in horticulture, with the participation of the Omani roses reinforcing Oman's environmental stewardship and its contributions to global botanical culture.