

Asaad receives Algerian official

Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received at his office Ibrahim Boughali, President of the People's National Assembly of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, who is currently visiting the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged cordial talks and discussed aspects of the existing cooperation between the two countries in many areas of mutual interest. **DETAILS ON P4**

SUNRISE - 05:39 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:20 AM

DHUHR - 12:10 PM

ASR - 03:37 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:36 PM

ISHA - 07:50 PM



HM, UAE President hold official talks



TWO LEADERS
DISCUSS AREAS
OF EXISTING
COOPERATION

GREAT SATISFACTION
WITH CONSTRUCTIVE
PARTNERSHIP

JV PROJECTS
IN SECTORS, NOTABLY
IN RENEWABLE
ENERGY

INAUGURATION
OF RAILWAY PROJECT
TO LINK OMAN
WITH UAE

LOOKING FORWARD
FOR BROADER
HORIZONS OF
COOPERATION

OMAN-UAE
RELATIONS ARE
DEEP-ROOTED IN
HISTORY

ECONOMIC
TIES A SUPPORTIVE
CHANNEL FOR
JOINT ACTION

COLLECTIVE ACTION
AND SOLIDARITY TO
PRESERVE INTERESTS
OF GCC STATES

ABU DHABI: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), held an official session of talks at Qasr Al Watan (Palace of the Nation) in Abu Dhabi on Monday.

At the outset of the session, His Majesty the Sultan delivered a speech reading as follows: “Our dear brother, Your Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed, Your Highnesses, Your Excellencies: We are delighted to be here in Abu Dhabi. We express our thanks and appreciation to the person of Your Highness, the government of the United Arab Emirates and the UAE people for

the warm welcome and hospitality.

We also express our feeling of great satisfaction with the constructive, strategic partnership through which we launched a bright new chapter during Your Highness’s visit to your second homeland, Oman, and the ensuing investment projects and close cooperation between the two brotherly countries in various fields. We have directed members of our government to keep up this trend of diligent action in collaboration with their counterparts on the Emirati side, and to accord top priority to vital areas of cooperation.

We would like to commend the two countries officials’ commitment to

In honour of HM, UAE President hosts dinner

In honour of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), hosted an official dinner at Qasr Al Watan (Palace of the Nation) in Abu Dhabi, marking His Majesty’s visit to the UAE. The dinner was attended by members of the official delegation accompanying His Majesty the Sultan. – **ONA**

tangibly realise our common vision by starting the implementation of joint investment projects in strategic sectors, notably in renewable energy and related industries, as well as the inauguration of the railway project to connect the Sultanate of Oman to the UAE railway network, electrical interconnection project and other projects.

Allow me, Your Highness, to note down our support for the strategic partnership binding the Sultanate of Oman and the UAE. We look forward to a future of broader horizons of cooperation and progress in various political, security, social, cultural and scientific fields. We are certain that the

outcome of this partnership will spur the growth of the economies of the two countries and realise the aspirations of their brotherly peoples.

This visit marked a historic opportunity to celebrate the process of benign relations between our two countries, an opportunity that will usher in a new phase of further progress and prosperity, as indicated by the shared vision that the two countries intend to realise in the next phase. Your Highness, the bonds of good neighbourliness and shared historical relations between Oman and the UAE evince satisfaction over the strong solidarity between our two brotherly peoples.” **TURN TO P2**



IN HONOUR OF HM, UAE PRESIDENT HOSTS DINNER



ABU DHABI: In honour of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) hosted an official dinner at Qasr Al Watan (Palace of the Nation) in Abu Dhabi, marking His Majesty's visit to the UAE. The dinner was attended by members of the official delegation accompanying His Majesty the Sultan, as well as some Shaikhs and senior UAE officials. – ONA

HM, UAE President hold official talks

FROM P1

“Good neighbourliness and civilised conduct in particular constitute some of the blessings bestowed upon us all by the Almighty Allah. We hereby underline these bounties and advise all official concerned and popular bodies in the two countries to preserve them, to help realise our desired goals. We pray for assistance from Allah the Almighty.

My brother, Your Highness Shaikh Mohammed, we hereby reiterate our deep thanks to you for this generous invitation and the warm welcome we received, hoping that such bonds will continue to be strengthened by constant mutual visits and constructive dialogue aimed at consolidating ties of cooperation between our two countries. Our sincere wishes to the brotherly people of the Emirates.”

Earlier, the UAE President delivered a speech reading as follows: “We are pleased that our meetings are renewed and we hope that this visit serves as an important milestone in the process of relations between our two countries.

Your Majesty, Sultan Haitham: Relations between the UAE and the Sultanate of Oman are deep-rooted in history. The two countries boast a special social and cultural fabric characterised by strong family bonds and ties of good neighbourliness, cooperation and integration.

May the Almighty Allah have mercy on Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan and His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, who laid down a fundamental base for building strong fraternal relations fortified with love and wisdom. I am confident that this social solidarity will constitute foundations for constant and exemplary relations that serve the



interests of the two countries and achieve their peoples' aspirations for progress and prosperity.

Economic relations constitute a supportive channel for joint action. Praise be to Allah, these relations experienced constant growth over the past years and culminated in economic and strategic partnerships in many fields. We still look forward to exploring further economic opportunities and developing them in the interest of the two countries' peoples.

Your Majesty, Sultan Haitham: The system of joint GCC is still and will remain, God willing, a strong fortress in the face of regional and global challenges. The UAE believes in the principle of collective action and solidarity in a manner that preserves the interests of the GCC states, enhances the bloc's regional and international role, meets the aspirations of its peoples for further progress and prosperity and supports peace and stability in the region and the world at large.”

The session reviewed the march of deep-rooted and fraternal relations between the

Sultanate of Oman and the UAE. It underscored the historical ties binding the two countries.

During the session, the two leaders discussed areas of the existing cooperation and means of promoting them in various spheres in a way that serves interests of the two peoples and meets their aspirations.

After the session of talks, His Majesty the Sultan signed the Senior Visitors Book at Qasr Al Watan (Palace of the Nation).

The session was attended from the Omani side by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, HH Sayyid Bilal bin Haitham al Said, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Dr Hamad bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister

of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Sayyid Dr Ahmed bin Hilal al Busaidy, Ambassador of Oman to the UAE.

Meanwhile, it was attended from the UAE side by Shaikh Mansour bin Zayed al Nahyan, UAE Vice-President, Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the Presidential Court (Head of the Mission of Honour), Shaikh Khalid bin Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, Heir Apparent of Abu Dhabi, Shaikh Tahnoun bin Zayed al Nahyan, Deputy Ruler of Abu Dhabi and National Security Adviser, Shaikh Hamdan bin Zayed al Nahyan, Representative of the Ruler in Al Dhafra Region, Shaikh Soror bin Mohammed al Nahyan, Shaikh Saif bin Zayed al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, Shaikh Hamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, Managing Director of Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed al Nahyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Shaikh Dr Sultan bin Khalifa al Nahyan, Adviser to the UAE President.

Earlier, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq arrived in Abu

Dhabi on a two-day state visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, led the welcoming party for His Majesty the Sultan at the Presidential Airport in Abu Dhabi. Shaikh Mohammed wished His Majesty and his accompanying delegating a pleasant stay in the UAE.

His Majesty was also received by Shaikh Mansour bin Zayed al Nahyan, UAE Vice-President, Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the Presidential Court (Head of the Mission of Honour), Shaikh Tahnoun bin Zayed al Nahyan, Deputy Ruler of Abu Dhabi and National Security Adviser, Shaikh Saif bin Zayed al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, Shaikh Hamdan bin Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, Shaikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Tahnoun al Nahyan, Adviser for Special Affairs at the Presidential Court, and Mohammed bin Nakhira al Dhaheri, UAE Ambassador to Oman.

When the Royal aircraft entered the UAE airspace, it was joined

by a fleet of UAE military aircraft which escorted it in a gesture of warm welcome until it landed at the Presidential Airport in Abu Dhabi.

After a short stay at the airport, His Majesty the Sultan, accompanied by the UAE President, mounted a vehicle that took them over to Qasr Al Watan (Palace of the Nation) in Abu Dhabi where official and popular reception protocols were held.

As the motorcade of the two leaders entered the main gate of the Palace, two sets of cavalymen and cameleers lined the street and a flypast by ceremonial aircraft sketched the Sultanate of Oman's flag on the sky of the ceremony, while the artillery fired a 21-gun salute to His Majesty the Sultan.

Folklore troupes also joined the ceremony, chanting popular songs and poetic verses of welcome to His Majesty the Sultan, while groups of children waved flags in a manifestation of bonds of amity and fraternity.

Upon the arrival of the motorcade at the main reception grounds in the Palace, Shaikh Mohammed accompanied His Majesty the Sultan to the Dais of Honour, where the Omani Royal Anthem and the UAE National Anthem were played. Then, His Majesty the Sultan and Shaikh Mohammed inspected the Guard of Honour that gave the salute to His Majesty the Sultan.

After that, a commemorative photo was taken for His Majesty the Sultan and Shaikh Mohammed. The photo documents the historic visit of His Majesty the Sultan. Then, His Majesty shook hands with members of the welcoming party.

On his turn, Shaikh Mohammed shook hands with members of the official delegation accompanying His Majesty the Sultan, wishing them a pleasant stay. — ONA



HIS MAJESTY IN UAE ON ‘STATE’ VISIT



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq arrived in the United Arab Emirates on a two-day ‘state’ visit on Monday. Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates was at the forefront of receiving him and his delegation. – ONA





The two sides exchanged cordial talks and discussed aspects of the existing cooperation between the two countries in many areas of mutual interest.

Sayyid Asaad receives President of Algerian National Assembly

MUSCAT: Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received in his office on Monday Ibrahim Boughali, President of the People's National Assembly of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, who is currently visiting the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, the two sides exchanged cordial talks and discussed aspects of the existing cooperation between the two countries in many areas of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ashshura, Ahmed bin Nasser al Abri, Member of Majlis Ashshura, the Secretary-General and the Adviser at the office of HH Sayyid Asaad, Dr Mohammad Ali Boughazi, Ambassador of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria to the Sultanate of Oman, and the delegation accompanying the guest. — ONA

Carpentry, metal workshops building to empower people with disabilities



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

The carpentry and metal workshops building was inaugurated on Monday, under the auspices of Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour. The opening comes as a new step towards empowering people with disabilities and affirms the ministry's commitment to providing high-quality vocational rehabilitation services to them to develop their skills and integrate them into the labour market.

The 652 square-metre building houses two main workshops - carpentry and metal working - alongside a dedicated handicrafts workshop specialising in hand weaving. All workshops cater to the specific abilities and skills of people with disabilities. Additionally, a vocational assessment hall allows for tailored training programmes based on individual needs. The facility boasts the latest equipment and tools, ensuring participants receive the highest quality training.

Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar,

Minister of Social Development, said, "We are truly happy to inaugurate the vocational training workshops in the field of blacksmithing and carpentry for our children with special needs. There is no doubt that what we have witnessed during their work on these machines and equipment is that they have many skills and abilities to be able to engage in the labour market."

"This indicates that there is a future for them in having their projects or also benefiting from them as employees or workers in the professional aspect in the fields of blacksmithing or carpentry in many companies or institutions where they can be as employees capable of implementing these models and designs with this high technology and craftsmanship and the appearance of the product in a very beautiful way as I see it competes with what is available in our markets. Therefore, we consider such projects to be the nucleus for empowering people with disabilities and integrating them into the labour market in the coming years," she added.

Omani media seeks to strengthen national unity, says minister



Majlis Ash'shura in session on Monday.

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
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The Majlis Ash'shura on Monday hosted Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, to discuss the ministry's statement.

In the statement, which coincided with the Council's 8th regular session of the 10th Term's first annual convening, the minister outlined the media strategy and policy of the Sultanate of Oman. The statement touched on the actual outcome of efforts undertaken by the ministry within the context of the 9th Five-Year Plan, and the strategic programmes of the ministry during 10th Five-Year Plan, the laws regulating the media sector in Oman and the ministry's efforts in the field of media training.

Dr Abdullah said that the Omani media receives the support of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik who expressed his conviction in the significant role of the media in the next stage of development.

"This is in addition to the importance of the media in enhancing awareness, shaping discourse, preserving the national identity, safeguarding the great gains of the modern and renewed renaissance, conveying Oman's judicious voice and portraying its sound image to the countries and peoples of the world," said the minister.

He added that "Omani media is undertaking an enlightenment role, disseminating knowledge and achieving cultural openness with others."

The media in Oman, he explained, lays emphasis on the principle of freedom of opinion and freedom of expression within legal boundaries defined by the Basic Law of the State promulgated by Royal Decree No 6/2021.

The minister pointed out that Omani media stems from the tenets of the religion of Islam, its noble values and the Basic Law of the State.

The minister underscored the fact that Omani media seeks to strengthen the national unity, consolidate the values of loyalty to the homeland and allegiance to His Majesty the Sultan.

In particular, the Omani media contributes to the promotion



Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, giving the ministry's statement.

of the authentic principles, said the minister, noting that various programmes of the Omani media enshrine Omani society's cultural identity and aspire to preserve it.

It should be noted that the Majlis Ash'shura has approved the Draft Media Law and referred the bill to the State Council to round up the legislative session.

The Draft Media Law was based on rapid developments that have been taking place in the media domain since the issuance of the laws governing media activities, making it necessary to merge the statutes into one uniform law.

The new bill, once endorsed, will result in the abolition of the laws governing media activities, which are the "Printing and Publishing Law", the "Law on Private Radio and Television Establishments", and the "Law on Censorship of Artistic Works".

The minister said that efforts are made to highlight Oman in the foreign media by hosting a large number of journalists and media professionals from abroad.

As for the training programmes, it was noted that the training programmes were not limited to employees and students, but rather included officials in various government units.

The Media Training Centre provides specialised training programmes for employees of the ministry, those working in

the media field in private media institutions, workers in media departments and in various government units, students from colleges and universities in the field of media training and development.

Within the framework of the Ministry of Information's interest in media in various governorates,

OMANI MEDIA RECEIVES THE SUPPORT OF HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK

MEDIA STEM FROM THE TENETS OF THE RELIGION OF ISLAM, ITS NOBLE VALUES AND THE BASIC LAW OF THE STATE

THE MEDIA IN OMAN LAYS EMPHASIS ON THE PRINCIPLE OF FREEDOM OF OPINION AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION WITHIN LEGAL BOUNDARIES

THE DRAFT MEDIA LAW WAS BASED ON RAPID DEVELOPMENTS THAT HAVE BEEN TAKING PLACE IN THE MEDIA DOMAIN SINCE THE ISSUANCE OF THE LAWS

more than 120 correspondents and journalists are working to feed its various media outlets with media content from all governorates and there are media offices in addition to the Directorate-General of Information in Dhofar Governorate, and a media team in Al Wusta Governorate.

The volume of news flow from these offices has reached more than 5,000 items distributed among print, visual, audio and electronic content during the year 2023, and it is working in coordination with authorities to establish an office in Al Wusta Governorate to highlight its various capabilities and components, especially the Special Economic Zone in Duqm.

The minister praised the important and pioneering role played by Oman newspaper and Oman Daily Observer with its various supplements.

In accordance with the Ministry of Information's interest to keep in touch with audiences, it has created a group of electronic accounts with the aim of interacting with the public, and the number of its followers reached more than 6 million followers from various countries around the world by the end of 2023.

The number of views of the content of the Sultanate of Oman's TV channels on the global YouTube platform rose to more than 300 million views by the end of 2023.



The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Habib bin Mohammed al Riyami, Chairman of the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science

Symposium explores Arabic language learning, teaching practices

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

Represented by the Ministry of Education, the Sultanate of Oman is hosting the 4th edition of the Arabic Language Symposium, in the presence of local and international experts and specialists under the slogan ‘Teaching and Learning the Arabic Language: Insights and Practical Experiences.’ The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Habib Mohammed al Riyami, Chairman of the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science. Held for three days, the event explores modern techniques in teaching and learning Arabic language and showcases local and international practical experiences in teaching and learning Arabic.

Its activities include the presentation of working papers, panel discussions and training

workshops on successful models in teaching and learning Arabic. The symposium also sheds light on the reality of teaching and learning the Arabic language in light of modern educational trends and learning about the applications of technology and artificial intelligence in the field of language teaching by presenting successful and inspiring practical experiences from local and international experts.

The symposium includes five basic topics which are teaching and learning the Arabic language in light of modern educational trends; strategies for literacy and language empowerment; learning theories and results of educational studies in language empowerment; methods for evaluating language skills as well as practical experiences and applications in language teaching.

The first day of the symposium included a presentation of

the main paper on ‘Language Learning with Patterns’ by Dr Suhair al Sukari, in addition to the presentation of three working papers on the axis of reading strategies and language empowerment, followed by a dialogue session entitled ‘Teaching the Arabic Language to Speakers of Other Languages between the Explanations of Traditional and Modern Methods.’

The symposium targets Arabic language curriculum and evaluation specialists, Arabic language subject evaluation specialists, trainers in the Arabic language expert programmes at the Specialized Institute for Vocational Training for Teachers, and educational supervisors in the first field. This is in addition to specialists in teaching the Arabic language in private schools and special education and a number of those invited to the symposium.

OMAN HAS GREAT POTENTIAL FOR WATER METRO TAXI

KABEER YOUSUF
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With vast seafront area and projects overlooking the Sea of Oman and Arabian Sea, the Sultanate of Oman has a great potential to develop water metro taxi service capitalising on the increasing tourism demand and to act as a feeder service while creating thousands of direct and indirect jobs, according to experts.

The water metro developed along the coastline of Oman will connect all major projects on the sea side and will target both the tourists and those using residential as well as commercial properties alongside.

Speaking to the *Observer* on the sidelines of Horwath HTL Tourism Conference, Dr S Jeevan, CMD, Samudra Shipyards Pvt Ltd who delivered a keynote address on Muscat Water Metro, said that the proposed water metro service is backed in line with the Oman Vision 2040 where the government has geared to make tourism one of the significant contributors to the economic development of the Sultanate of Oman and significant investment opportunities and tourism initiative implementation plans have been developed in the country.

“With lots of waterfront properties and places of interest, sea transport has great potential as the country has only land connectivity. We have identified the routes with a metro connectivity including the Royal Opera House Muscat, that can bring in a lot of tourism activities and fetch tourism revenue,” said Dr Jeevan.

“We have created a framework for introducing it and now we are working with a couple of companies to fund it and most probably we will be working with



one company which has been short-listed. With the government support and once it is done, we are confident to go ahead in less than 15 months. We have already signed two MoUs for the same,” he added.

The two MoUs include one for building the infrastructure including the jetty, the bay and the yard while the other one is for implementing the project and the yard that will be functioning as a boat building for fishing, leisure and tourism.

Philip Bacon, Senior Director, who is also a member of the ICAEW and of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, added that the water metro can be an innovative and sustainable mode of transportation that connects various governorates through its intricate network of waterways.

“For the influx of tourism to be managed and flourish; sustainable, environment friendly, and efficient mode of transportation are key to connect various parts of the city. With over 3,000 plus km of coastline in Oman, the development of Water Metro shall play as an innovative and sustainable mode of transportation that connects various governorates through its intricate network of waterways,” Philip said.

According to the promoters

of the water metro, the service will cover about 45 nautical miles, roughly converted into 70 kilometres using five yachts and the job creation is plentiful. The proposed water metro can also act as a feeder to land transport and increase the job potential.

SCOPE OF TOURISM

Horwath HTL Tourism Conference in Oman kickstarted at the Crowne Plaza on Monday gathering stakeholders from the relevant industries and discussed how strategies and initiatives can be formulated to attract and support the hospitality and tourism industry in Oman.

James Chappell, Global Business Director of Crowe Horwath discussed on the global trends in tourism where he pointed that tourism, for many countries in the region, accounts as a healthy contributor towards the GDP that enables extensive investments from public and private sector.

“While many countries, including Oman, have identified Tourism as the enabler for significant growth,” said James, who is a member of the advisory board of the International Hotel Investment Forum and the HOTCO investment conference which enables him to have vast experience in the field of hospitality and tourism.



Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs

TENDER NOTICE

The Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs hereby announces the re-offering following tender:

Tender Number	Name/Description	Grade	Closing Date for Collecting Tender Documents	Closing Date for Submitting Tender	Tender Document Cost
2/2024	Providing consultancy services related to design and supervision of furniture supply for the two VIP halls	EXCELLENT GRADE AND FIRST CLASS	24/4/2024	5/5/2024	25 R.O

All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender Board participate and get the specifications and condition of the tender from the ESNAD Electronic Tendering Services website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) In exchange for paying the amount specified above electronically, which amount shall be non-refundable.

Offers must be submitted in ESNAD Electronic Tendering Services website **before (12:00) Twelve pm** on the closing date for submitting Tenders; Tenders submitted after that will not be considered regardless of the reasons for lateness, which is valid for ninety (90) days from the closing date for submitting tenders.

NOTE:
For clarifications, you may contact via ESNAD Electronic Tendering Services website mentioned above.

***The Ministry is not obliged to accept the lowest or any Tender.**

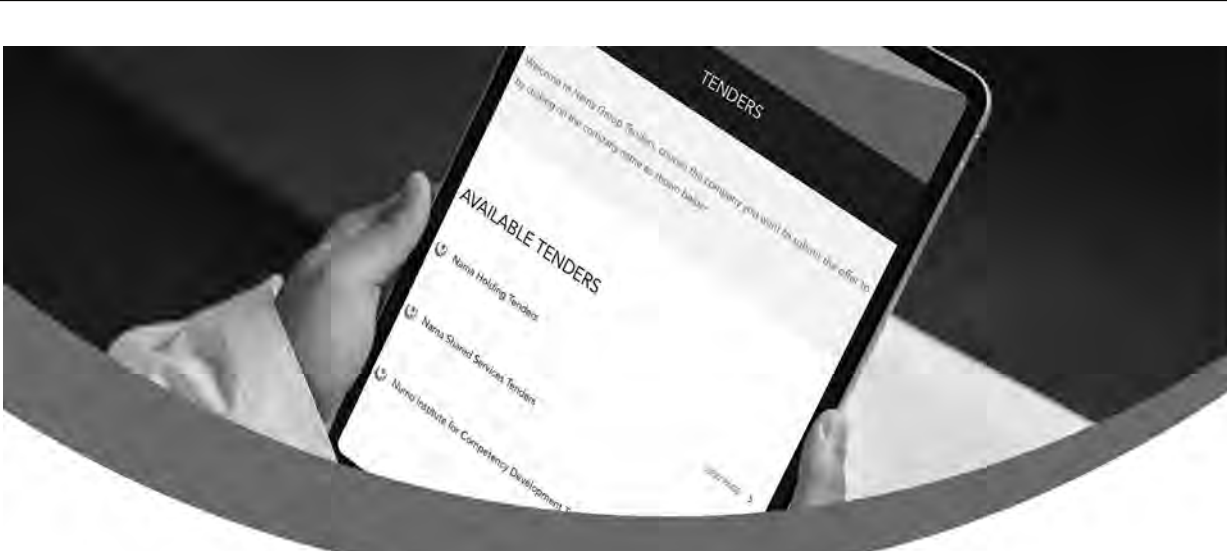
Oman's central desert witnesses historic flood

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

Al Wusta Governorate, particularly Mahout, has etched a significant chapter in its modern history by witnessing the highest recorded water levels despite the absence of rainfall.

While the Sultanate of Oman received a generous downpour, Al Wusta emerged as the crucial outlet for some of the nation's most vital wadis, including Wadi Andam and Wadi Halfin, situated within the Wilayat of Mahout. Despite experiencing only light showers, Al Wusta bore the brunt of torrential downpours originating from the mountainous terrains of Samayil, Izki, Nizwa, Adam, Al Mudhaibi and Sinaw.

The resulting deluge traversed vast distances, leaving widespread devastation in its wake. The overflow from Wadi Halfin inundated the Al Joubah basin, forming an immense body of water.



TENDER

Nama Holding invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR)
EHC/2024/09	Transaction Legal Advisor for the Initial Public Offering (IPO) of Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC)	28 April 2024	2 May 2024	100 /- Plus VAT Total amount: 105 OMR

- Interested party may purchase the tender through the company website (www.nama.om). Supplier user guide is available to be downloaded on the same page.
- Payment of the tender fees to be done online through the link available on the website. The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be made before 3.00 pm.
- Bids shall be submitted online through I-supplier portal no later than 3.00 pm, time of the Sultanate of Oman, on Thursday 2 May 2024.
- NH is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.



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TO ENSURE A SMOOTH OPERATION, UPDATE YOUR DETAILS



A man walks past destroyed buildings in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip. – AFP

ISRAELI TROOPS STORM BACK INTO EASTERN KHAN YOUNIS

KHAN YOUNIS: Israeli troops fought their way back into an eastern section of Khan Yunis in a surprise raid, residents said on Monday, sending people who had returned to abandoned homes in the ruins of the southern Gaza Strip's main city fleeing once more.

Elsewhere in Khan Yunis, scores more bodies were recovered from what Palestinian authorities said were mass graves on the site of the city's main hospital, abandoned by Israeli troops.

Residents have begun making their way home to previously inaccessible neighbourhoods of what had been the enclave's second-biggest city, finding homes reduced to rubble and unrecovered dead in the streets.

"This morning many families who had left here in the past two weeks to go back home to

Scores more bodies were recovered from what Palestinian authorities said were mass graves on the site of the city's main hospital, abandoned by Israeli troops

fighting of the seven-month-old war.

Residents have begun making their way home to previously inaccessible neighbourhoods of what had been the enclave's second-biggest city, finding homes reduced to rubble and unrecovered dead in the streets.

"This morning many families who had left here in the past two weeks to go back home to

Abassan came back. They were too frightened," Ahmed Rezik, 42, said from a school where he is sheltering in the western part of Khan Yunis, referring to a district in the east.

"They said tanks pushed in the eastern area of the town under heavy fire, and they had to run for lives," he said.

In the ruins of what had been Nasser hospital, the biggest in southern Gaza, witnesses saw emergency workers in white hazmat suits digging corpses out of the ground with hand tools and a digger truck.

The emergency services said 73 more bodies had been found at the site in the past day, raising the number found over the week to 283.

Israel says it was forced to battle inside hospitals because fighters

operated there, which medical staff and Palestinian groups deny.

Gaza authorities say the bodies recovered so far are from just one of at least three mass graves they have found at the site.

"We expect to find another 200 bodies at the same mass grave in the coming two days before we will begin working at the two other cemeteries," Ismail Al-Thawabta said, director of the government media office.

He accused Israel of carrying out "executions" at the hospital and covering up the crimes by burying bodies with a bulldozer.

Gaza residents reported air strikes in several other areas, including Rafah. In Nusseirat in central Gaza, officials said an air strike had damaged solar panels the hospital relies on for power.

— Reuters

West Bank camp mourns Palestinians

TULKAREM: Families kissed the faces of the dead and neighbours cried in the streets after one of the worst Israeli raids anyone in the Nur Shams refugee camp can remember.

A funeral procession for 13 Palestinians killed in the army's West Bank operation passed through roads piled with rubble from Israeli bulldozers and rocket fire.

Israeli forces carry out regular raids on towns and cities in the occupied West Bank, and violence has soared since the war in Gaza broke out last year.

The Israeli army said it had killed ten Palestinians in a three-day raid on Nur Shams. Residents in the camp gave a different account.

Niaz Zandeq, 40, said his son Jihad was shot dead by an Israeli soldier on his 15th birthday.

Neighbours said troops told Jihad to leave his uncle's house then shot him as he stepped out of



People take part in the funeral procession of Palestinians killed in an Israeli raid in the West Bank. – AFP

the front door with his hands up.

They displayed images of his body in the street with a bullet wound to the forehead.

Jehad was not the only young person among the dead. The Palestinian health ministry said 16-year-old Qais Fathi Nasrallah was killed by Israeli troops in the nearby Tulkarem refugee camp.

His father, a paramedic, was on shift at the hospital when staff brought his son's body in, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent.

Including Nasrallah, the organisation said the total number of dead in Tulkarem and Nur Shams stood at 14.

The Israeli army said it had

made eight arrests and seized weapons around Nur Shams, and that eight soldiers and a police officer were wounded.

As some residents began clearing debris and repairing their smashed homes, others remained in shock.

Hamdia Abdallah Sarhan, 85, said she was still shaken after soldiers broke into her home and shot at the wall, trying to open up a firing position while she lay terrified on the ground.

Sarhan suffers from a lung condition and uses a machine to help her breathe.

She said the soldiers broke the machine when they burst in and she struggled for air until relatives found an emergency oxygen tank.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967 and over 480 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli troops or settlers there since the start of the war in Gaza on October 7, according to Palestinian officials. — AFP

10 key moments in Gaza war

- 1

Israel on fire
At dawn on October 7, hundreds of Palestinian group members Israel from Gaza by land, sea and air.
- 2

North Gaza exodus
On October 13, Israel calls on civilians in northern Gaza to move south within 24 hours, declaring the north, which includes Gaza City, a war zone.
- 3

Tanks enter Gaza
On October 27, Israeli tanks roll into Gaza at the start of a ground offensive. The troops fight their way towards Gaza City.
- 4

Gaza biggest hospital raid
On November 15, Israeli troops launch a night-time raid on Al-Shifa hospital, Gaza's biggest medical facility where bodies had been piling up after food and fuel ran out.
- 5

Truce and captives swap
On November 24, a week-long truce between warring sides negotiated in talks mediated by Qatar goes into effect.
- 6

Strikes on Yemenis
On January 12, the US and Britain launch air strikes on targets in Yemen after weeks of attacks on Red Sea shipping by Yemenis, who are acting in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza.
- 7

Call to prevent genocide
In an interim ruling on January 26 in a case brought by South Africa, the International Court of Justice finds it "plausible" that Israel's acts could amount to "genocide" of Palestinians.
- 8

Deadly food stampede
On February 29, Israeli forces open fire on desperate residents of northern Gaza who rush towards a convoy of food aid trucks, 115 people were shot dead.
- 9

Aid workers killed
On April 2, seven aid workers from the US charity World Central Kitchen, six of them foreigners, are killed in an Israeli strike when leaving a warehouse in Gaza.
- 10

Iran attacks Israel
In its first direct assault on Israel, Iran launches more than 300 drones and missiles at the country on April 13.



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In brief

ROME



ITALY POLICE ARREST 13 PRISON GUARDS OVER YOUTH ABUSE

Italian police on Monday arrested 13 prison guards accused of violent behaviour towards inmates at a juvenile institution in Milan, while eight other guards were suspended. The arrests at the “Cesare Beccaria” prison on the outskirts of the city in northern Italy followed an investigation into crimes against youngsters allegedly committed since 2022. They include “complicity in the crime of torture... aggravated by abuse of power”, “complicity in the crime of causing injury to minors... aggravated by abuse of power” and one case of “attempted physical violence”. Investigators used wiretaps and security cameras. — AFP

KYIV



KYIV WARNS SITUATION ON FRONT WILL WORSEN IN MAY

The situation for Ukraine on its front line is likely to steadily deteriorate in coming weeks, Ukraine’s head of military intelligence said in an interview published on Monday. “In our opinion, a rather difficult situation awaits us in the near future,” Kyrylo Budanov said. “But it is not catastrophic and we need to understand that. Armageddon will not happen, as many people are now saying,” he said. Russia has regularly claimed new gains in eastern Ukraine. Troops had seized the village of Novomykhailivka, some 20 kilometres away from Vugledar, which Russian forces have been trying to capture. — AFP

WARSAW



PRESIDENT SAYS POLAND READY TO HOST NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Poland’s president on Monday said his country is ready to host Nato’s nuclear arms after Russia reinforced its armaments in neighbouring Belarus and the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. “If our allies decide to deploy nuclear arms on our territory as part of nuclear sharing to reinforce Nato’s eastern flank, we are ready to do so,” Duda said. Duda spoke to the Polish media after a visit to New York, where he held meetings at the UN and discussed the war in Ukraine. Prime Minister Donald Tusk said he “would have to understand the president’s intentions,” suggesting the matter had not been discussed between them. — AFP

Erdogan in Iraq to push for cooperation



Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan and Iraqi PM Mohammed Shia al Sudani attend a press conference, in Baghdad. – Reuters

BAGHDAD: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan began a rare visit to neighbouring Iraq on Monday aiming to reset rocky bilateral ties with a raft of deals covering energy, trade and security cooperation. Erdogan’s long-awaited visit is the first by a Turkish leader since 2011 and follows years of relations. “President Erdogan stated that Türkiye had expectations from Iraq in the battle with the PKK organisation, that Iraq must eradicate all sorts of terror,” the Turkish presidency said in a statement after talks between Erdogan and Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid. Rashid — the most senior Kurdish official in Iraq — said Baghdad backed joint work to fight terrorism and was against its territory being used to attack any neighbours, the Iraqi presidency said. Türkiye plans a new swoop on the groups this spring and has sought Iraqi cooperation, in the form of a joint operations room, as well as recognition by Baghdad of the PKK threat. Cooperation on big economic projects were also on the table. Erdogan and Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani oversaw the signing of a four-way memorandum of understanding between Türkiye, Iraq, Qatar and the

United Arab Emirates for joint cooperation on Iraq’s \$17 billion Development Road project, with Qatari and Emirati ministers in attendance. Launched last year, the 1,200-

km road and rail project aims to turn Iraq into a transit hub, connecting Asia and Europe with a link between Iraq’s Grand Faw Port in the oil-rich south and Türkiye in the north.

Baghdad is also seeking a deal to secure a larger share of water from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, both of which originate in Türkiye and are the main source of freshwater in drought-

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said that he discussed with the Iraqi prime minister joint steps the two countries could take against PKK groups

stricken Iraq. Rashid told Erdogan that Iraq was entitled to its “fair share” of that water, the Iraqi presidency said. Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said that he discussed with the Iraqi prime minister joint steps the two countries could take against PKK groups, welcoming Iraq’s designation of them as a banned group. In a joint news conference with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani in Baghdad, Erdogan said he had shared his strong belief that the PKK’s presence in Iraqi territory would end as soon as possible. Iraqi and Turkish officials said more than 20 memorandums of understanding would be signed during Erdogan’s one-day visit. After meetings in Baghdad, Erdogan was set to travel to Erbil, the provincial capital of Iraq’s semi-autonomous Kurdistan region, for talks with Iraqi Kurdish officials. — Reuters

TRUMP SCHEMED TO CORRUPT 2016 ELECTION

NEW YORK: New York prosecutors on Monday began telling a jury why Donald Trump’s alleged cover-up of a hush money payment to a movie star during his 2016 campaign broke the law, as the first-ever criminal trial of a former US president got underway. “This case is about conspiracy of fraud,” prosecutor Matthew Colangelo told the jury. “The defendant, Donald Trump, orchestrated a criminal scheme to corrupt the 2016 presidential election.” Though Trump called for supporters to protest peacefully at courthouses “all over the Country,” few were on hand to greet him when he arrived at the downtown courthouse. Trump suggested tight security measures were responsible for the sparse turnout, but the streets surrounding the courthouse were open to the public. “Lower Manhattan surrounding

the Courthouse, where I am heading now, is completely closed down. so unfair,” he wrote on social media. Prosecutors say Trump’s former lawyer Michael Cohen’s \$130,000 payment to Stormy Daniels for her silence about an alleged encounter with Trump a decade earlier deceived voters in the waning days of Trump’s 2016 campaign. As the trial opened, Justice Juan Merchan ruled that prosecutors would be able to ask Trump, if he testifies, about two other court cases: one that found he fraudulently misstated the value of his real estate assets, and another that found he defamed writer E. Jean Carroll after she accused him of physical assault. Trump has pleaded not guilty to 34 counts of falsification of business records brought by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg. Testimony about those payments could help prosecutors establish

that Cohen’s payment to Daniels was part of a broader pattern. Prosecutors plan to call at least 20 witnesses total, according to Trump’s defence team. The trial could last six to eight weeks. Trump faces three other criminal indictments stemming from his efforts to overturn his 2020 election defeat and his handling of classified documents after leaving the White House in 2021. Trump has pleaded not guilty in those cases, and he portrays all of them as a broad-based effort by Biden’s Democratic allies to undercut his campaign. Merchan, who is overseeing the hush money trial, imposed a limited gag order on Trump after he criticised witnesses, prosecutors, the judge and his daughter. Prosecutors are pressing Merchan to penalise Trump for violating that order. — Reuters



Former US president and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump speaks to the media at Manhattan Criminal Court, in New York. – Reuters



A view of flooded buildings and streets after heavy rains in Qingyuan city, China. – AFP

Southern China storms kill 4, force mass evacuations

BEIJING: Four people are dead and 10 others missing following storms that battered southern China, state media said on Monday, with tens of thousands evacuated from areas hit by torrential downpours. Heavy rain has descended upon the vast southern province of Guangdong in recent days, swelling rivers and raising fears of severe flooding that state media said could be of the sort only “seen around once a century”. “Three deaths were reported in Zhaoqing City while the remaining one is a rescuer in Shaoguan City,” state news agency Xinhua reported, citing local authorities. Ten others remain missing as search and rescue efforts in the area continue to be carried out, said Xinhua. China is no stranger to extreme weather but recent years have seen the country hit by severe floods, grinding droughts and record heat. More than 110,000 people have been relocated across Guangdong. Of those, more than 45,000 were evacuated from the northern city of Qingyuan, which straddles the banks of the Bei River, a tributary in the wider Pearl River Delta. Heavy rain is expected to continue, with meteorological authorities forecasting “thunderstorms and strong winds in Guangdong’s coastal waters” — a stretch of sea bordering major cities

including Hong Kong and Shenzhen. Neighbouring provinces, including parts of Fujian, Guizhou and Guangxi, will also be affected by “short-term heavy rainfall”, the National Meteorological Centre said. “It is expected that the main impact period of strong convection will last from daytime until night,” it added. Authorities on Monday issued a yellow alert for rainstorms — the second-lowest in its four-tier system — with high levels of precipitation expected to continue across large swathes of the country. Guangdong province is China’s densely populated manufacturing heartland, home to around 127 million people. In the town of Jiangwan, six people were injured and a number were trapped in landslides caused by heavy rain on Sunday, state media reported. Photographs published by state broadcaster CCTV showed waterfront homes destroyed by a wall of brown mud, and people sheltering in a soaked public sports court. CCTV reported on Sunday that floods as high as 5.8 metres (19 feet) above the warning limit would strike in Pearl River tributaries on Monday morning. Climate change driven by human-emitted greenhouse gases makes extreme weather events more frequent and intense. — AFP

Oman and UAE — The relationship that can only get better



Close relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates are affirmed because thousands of people from both sides cross land, sea, and air borders seamlessly as if they were in one nation.

Diplomats from both sides stress that the two nations enjoy close ties across multiple levels, evident in frequent dialogues and high-level meetings involving top officials and ministers.

Experts have often underlined the historic visit of Late Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahyan to the Sultanate of Oman in 1991, which marked a significant turning point by laying the foundation for cooperation and coordination in areas such as economy, trade, culture, education, communications, transport, in addition to increasing opportunities for joint investment.

These relations only strengthened in recent times when the UAE President Shaikh

Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan visited the Sultanate of Oman in September 2022, in response to the invitation of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

And now, the current visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the UAE during which he met Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, stems from the fraternal bonds and good neighbourliness between both countries.

It also reflects the keenness of the two countries’ leaderships to push further joint ties towards wider horizons.

During that visit, both leaders explored opportunities for increased collaboration in several sectors including finance and industry.

They reviewed developments in the region with a call for efforts to achieve peace and prosperity.

Sixteen agreements and memoranda of understanding in seven sectors were signed

during the visit of Shaikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan to Oman in 2022.

They also agreed to reach agreements on renewable energy projects, industry, health, pharmaceutical industries, real estate development, tourism, petrochemicals, manufacturing, supply chains, logistics, information technology, financial technology, and other sectors that would enhance mutual benefits and bring prosperity to the people of the two countries.

But the milestone of that visit was the

joint railway network, which has made considerable progress in the efforts to advance the land transport system between the two countries.

In 2022, the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding to bolster the role of cultural dialogue and youth gatherings, promote exchange visits among cultural and youth authorities, and support collaboration among writers, thinkers, experts, and youth to enhance youth policies and initiatives.

Visitors from UAE were a significant part of the 2.9 million international overnight visitors Oman received in 2022.

Visitors from the UAE to Oman increased to 1,357,559 in 2022 compared to 22,322 in 2021, the largest source market for the Sultanate of Oman, while visitors from Oman contributed significantly to Dubai attracting 14.36 million international overnight visitors in 2022.

Deepfakes spark worries of AI meddling

ADITYA KALRA AND DHWANI PANDYA

In fake videos that have gone viral online, two of India’s A-lister Bollywood actors are seen criticising the government and asking people to vote for the opposition party in the country’s ongoing general election.

In a 30-second video that shows Aamir Khan and another 41-second clip of Ranveer Singh, the two Bollywood actors purportedly say the current government failed to keep campaign promises and failed to address critical economic issues during its two terms.

Both AI-generated videos end with the Congress election symbol and slogan: “Vote for Justice, Vote for Congress”.

The two videos have been viewed on social media more than half a million times since last week, a Reuters review shows. Their spread underlines the potential role such AI (artificial intelligence)-generated content can play in the mammoth Indian election that started last Friday and will continue until June. AI and AI-generated fakes, or deepfakes, are being increasingly used in elections elsewhere in the world, including in the US, Pakistan and Indonesia.

Campaigning in India has long focused on door-to-door outreach and public rallies, but extensive use of WhatsApp and Facebook as campaigning tools started in 2019. This year’s general election — in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to secure a rare third term — is the first in which AI is being used.

A Congress spokesperson, Sujata Paul, shared actor Singh’s video with her 16,000 followers on X on April 17 and by Saturday afternoon, her post had been reshared 2,900 times, liked 8,700 times and received 438,000 views.

Paul said by telephone she was aware the video was marked “manipulated media” by X, but she did not want to delete it as, while posting, she thought the person was a look alike of Singh and “it has creativity for sure”.

The post was no longer visible on X on Sunday, hours after Reuters sent a request for comment to Congress’ head of social media cell, who did not respond. Both actors have said the videos are fake. Facebook, X and at least eight fact-checking websites have said they are altered or manipulated, which the Reuters digital verification unit has also confirmed.

Reuters could not ascertain who created the videos. Khan was “alarmed” by the viral “fake” video and Singh’s team was looking into the matter, according to a spokesperson for both actors. Singh wrote on X on Friday: “Beware of deepfakes, friends”.

Modi’s office, and the IT head of his Bharatiya Janata Party, did not respond to requests for comment. — **Reuters**



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Measuring success in digital teaching can take many forms



Online learning has become part of our educational ecosystem.

With the recent weather upsets that the Sultanate of Oman and the UAE have faced, the impact on education came into discussion once again.

While snow days are common in cold countries, rain days seem to be becoming all too regular in the Arabian Gulf, and smart solutions are the need of the hour.

Online classes and work from home modes are more often being implemented as a response to such weather emergencies.

Online learning is now more common than ever before — whether done individually by learners who want to learn a new skill or gain access to more information on a topic in which they are interested, or institutionally, where classes, or some portion of a class is offered online.

Now that online learning has become part of our educational ecosystem, the accompanying question is, how do we know whether the given course has been a success? Of course, that is itself a complicated question because it involves success from two different stakeholders: the teachers and the students. One’s success does not necessarily mean the other’s.

For the present, we can focus on the

ONLINE TEACHING IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF OUR LIVES NOW, AND TEACHERS WILL NEED TO RE-INVENT THEIR COURSE CONTENT TO BE ABLE TO BE FULLY OR PARTIALLY CAPABLE OF SHIFTING TO ONLINE MODES WHENEVER NECESSARY

teachers. There are a number of digital course providers internationally and some of them are suspect in terms of their goals and delivery systems.

There are also many gaps between the stated outcomes and actual, measurable results.

A good online course, from the teacher’s or the provider’s point of view is one which has clear objectives, goals, strategies and assessment systems.

This means that the content of the course is understood at the outset, the ways in which learning is to take place is set with a teaching plan, and that the ways in which grading or evaluation is going to be made is transparent.

One of the simplest ways of gauging the success of an online class is to ask the participants themselves.

Although a necessary and important step, research has shown that learners

are not always reliable in their assessment of a course as there may be many other factors that interfere with their learning process.

Other methods of measuring the success of a digital course includes tracking the progress of students through compulsory pop up quizzes which need to be done to proceed to the next unit.

While doing so, even the marks of the quizzes can offer an idea of what is being learnt and understood. The next unit could then be tweaked to suit the learning levels and goals of a class.

As learning is more than just knowledge acquisition, working on the practical applications of the course content would be more beneficial.

This could be achieved by setting up real world scenarios like mock sales pitches where language has to be used or creating websites for a target audience.

Another effective strategy to measure the success of a course is to make the students teach an online class or two, using the strategies developed in the class.

Online teaching is an integral part of our lives now, and teachers will need to re-invent their course content to be able to be fully or partially capable of shifting to online modes whenever necessary.

Giving tourists what they want

We must attend conferences and at times on topics that maybe of our area of interest. Being a journalist gives one an opportunity to learn something new in different fields each day.

And the latest one was the Oman Tourism Conference in association with the Tourism and Foreign Investment Committees of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry as well as the Indo-Gulf Middle East Chamber of Commerce.

It was interesting to look at tourism from various angles because while countries are exploring opportunities in tourism sector, there are counties which are suffering from unsustainable tourism and over-tourism looking for solutions to come out of it.

According to one of the speakers at the conference, the focus is on the right strategies and getting the right travellers to the respective countries.

According to James Chappell, Global Director of Horeath HTL, tourism and leisure are two areas that come into the list of trends.

It was interesting to look at leisure with a fresh perspective.

And under leisure comes theme parks, concerts, sport events and attractions. Tourism infrastructure does not just mean infrastructure but it is also important to see what people would look for. They need activities and most importantly a tourist today looks at experiences to take back home.

Hospitality has always been in focus but should it was just luxury oriented?

More and more people want to travel and experience new environments and cultures. For sure they do not want something that they can experience in their own country.

This is where the heritage comes into play. Recently read this line somewhere



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The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

EXPERTS POINT OUT THAT IT WOULD BE BEST TO PROVIDE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT AND WITH FACILITIES AVAILABLE FOR ALL POCKET SIZES

which said, ‘Preserve culture and culture will preserve you.’

According to James sporting activities, which are expected to be guaranteed success projects, but require investment and the fact is not all sports are applicable.

Meanwhile, another trend that is going to revolutionise the hospitality industry is Artificial Intelligence, and so the buzz word is AI.

On the other hand, the hospitality industry has not moved too close to technology. What was good to know was people are paying more attention to experience more than possessions.

But then there are other industries based on tourism such as small scale and cottage industries.

Over all, the experts pointed out that it would be best to provide people what they want and with facilities available for all pocket sizes.

Another aspect was the nautical tourism and that is the marine tourism.

And this is very much part of Oman’s heritage. Throughput out the globe it has been noted that this generation has not been able to carry history forward.

And the experts suggested, it is essential to preserve history and build upon the heritage and share it with others. Another area that has been showing tremendous interest from tourists is the health and wellness sector.

So in other words it is not about selling the hotel industry, because it is about the reason for being there. Philip Bacon, who spoke on valuation and trends in Omani Hotels and Tourism Sector pointed out that markets tend to change more than what hotels can cope with and said any destination needs balance that sees a combination of luxury hotels and a varying range.

After all tourists tend not to just stay in hotel rooms because they want to see the monuments and experience the land.

CARE FOR THE EARTH



Students hold their paintings and models with environmental themes as they gather on the occasion of ‘Earth Day’ at a school in Amritsar, India, on Monday. – AFP

Gender-neutral fintech isn’t working for women

Financial technology (fintech) has often been touted as a powerful enabler of financial inclusion. And over the past several years, the fintech industry has enabled important advances in access to financial services – including digital savings, credit, insurance, payments and remittances – for previously underserved populations. But when it comes to women’s inclusion, we have a long way to go.

To find out how fintech firms are delivering on the promise of women’s financial inclusion, and which practices work, we asked industry experts.

A new study by the International Finance Corporation, based on a survey of 114 fintech firms from 17 countries, captures what they had to say. The findings are telling.

Although 59 per cent of the fintech firms included in the study collect sex-disaggregated customer data, only 32 per cent of firms use this information to tailor the design and delivery of financial services for women.

Instead, firms tend to take a “gender-neutral” approach, which does not directly address how to reach women at scale.

Perhaps it should not be surprising, then, that for a majority of fintech lenders, women constitute less than 25 per cent of their business customers.

Paradoxically, the report also found that executives in the majority of fintech firms considered women to be valuable customers: more loyal, less risky and with better repayment rates compared to men.

The IFC study results affirm this assessment: while only a small percentage of the surveyed fintech firms tailor products and services to women, most of those who do (63 per cent) said that women customers generate higher



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customer lifetime value than men.

These firms can offer valuable models for others. Consider the Colombian digital lender Juancho Te Presta: recognising that women have higher loan-approval rates and lower delinquent-loan rates, the company began using data analysis to tailor products and credit conditions to meet women’s needs and preferences.

For example, it piloted women-only credit products that cut instalment costs by about 15 per cent.

Similarly, mfarmPay – a fintech firm operating in Ghana and Kenya – noticed that women farmers display better loan-repayment patterns, and that their involvement in agriculture over time tends to be more consistent than that of men, who might switch to other activities.

So, the company began to consider gender-related factors alongside geodata in credit scoring, thereby narrowing the lending gap between financial institutions and smallholder farmers.

The strong presence of women in mfarmPay’s management team helps the firm to identify gender-related constraints and informs product design and features.

The India-based firm Indifi developed short-term small loans to help women-led micro, small, and medium-size enterprises to build credit histories.

An Egyptian fintech firm has developed a mobile wallet solution that enables the secure and instant delivery of monthly social transfers, thereby helping women to save time and travel costs – and avoid possible harassment.

There are also fintech firms that use alternate data sources to generate credit histories for women customers.

Others are providing digital literacy and business training to women alongside financial services, hiring gender-diverse cohorts of agents, and working with telecom companies to provide targeted financial services to women farmers.

And yet, overall, the fintech industry is still missing the opportunity to accelerate financial inclusion for women.

The business case for action

is clear. Women comprise an enormous market segment with growing economic and social power. Moreover, they tend to show higher customer loyalty, more financial discipline, better loan performance, and stickier deposits.

Women’s financial inclusion leads to job creation, higher productivity, and faster GDP growth. There are even links between women’s inclusion and climate-conscious business and investment decisions.

When it comes to understanding, valuing, and investing in women’s inclusion, the

fintech industry is not moving fast enough.

And speed is essential: without drastic acceleration of women’s financial inclusion, gender bias may become hard-coded into the digital financial-services industry.

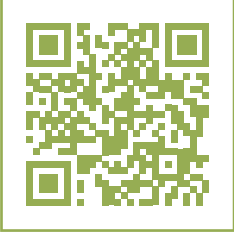
The good news is that, as a relatively nascent industry, fintech can still build gender inclusion into its design and delivery.

As our study shows, a number of fintechs have already discovered the potential of gender-inclusive design. That must become the norm, not the exception.

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Women customers generate higher customer lifetime value than men.



Ahmed al Rahbi claims rapid chess silver

OMAN DELEGATION TO TAKE PART IN OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY IN DUBAI OPERA



WALEED AL JAHWARI
DUBAI, APRIL 22

Ahmed bin Bader al Rahbi claimed a silver medal in the under-18 individual rapid chess at the first GCC Youth Games being held in United Arab Emirates from April 16 to May 2.

After the conclusion of five-day chess competition on Monday night, Oman bagged three medals in rapid chess category. Oman won a silver in the under-14 girls team and bronze medals each in under-18 male and female team categories.

Ruqaya al Balushi, Oman chess delegation official, said: “The national team opened the participation immediately upon its arrival in the UAE, after a delay due to the weather conditions. The results were modest on the first day, after which the team compensated

with three medals the next day.”

“The achievement is noteworthy as most of the Omani players are appearing in a major tournament for the first time.”

“We thank Oman Olympic Committee for all efforts made to overcome the difficulties, also we thank the Organising Committee for its professional conduct of the event.”

On Tuesday, the Oman delegation will take part in the official opening ceremony of the Games in Dubai Opera. The delegation includes HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said, Vice-Chairman of Oman Olympic Committee, Taha bin Sulaiman al Kishri, Secretary-General of OOC, Qais bin Saud al Zakwani, board member, Lujaina bint Mohsen Haider Darwish, board member, Sanaa al Busaidi, Chairperson of Oman Committee for Women's Sports and Gender Equality,



and Kadhim al Balushi, Director of the Mission.

VOLLEYBALL, HANDBALL TEAMS LOSS

Oman volleyball team lost its third match against Qatar with a score of 25-16, 25-23, 25-15 at Al Nasr Club hall in Dubai. Oman had two losses previously against the UAE and Kuwaiti teams.

Oman are out of the tournament with two matches still remaining. Oman will face Saudi Arabia on Wednesday and will conclude the league round against Bahrain on Thursday.

On the other hand, Oman handball team stumbled against Kuwaiti when it lost 36-28 in the third match that was held at Al Bataeh Cultural Club hall in Sharjah. Omani players, led by Al Mamoun al Hassani, sought to keep up with the Kuwaiti team, but the opponent was

more prepared since first half led by Kuwait 20-15.

Oman still have chances for a medal as they have three points from the first match against the UAE. Oman will face Qatar on Wednesday and the last match is against Bahrain on Friday.

Meanwhile, Oman table tennis players all set to compete in competitions from April 23 to 27 at Shabab Al Ahly Club hall in Dubai. Oman boys are under male coach Omid Shams Shahrabaki, while girls are guided by female coach Fatimia Keifani. The team include Ahmed al Riyami, Ali al Rawahi, Luqman al Farsi, Nasser al Zaabi, Salma al Nasiri and Taliyah al Rawahi.

Oman cycling team will begin their competitions on Tuesday morning competing in individual and team events which will continue until April 27 in Abu Dhabi.

Al Nahda hope to bounce back in AFC West Zone final

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

Oman's Al Nahda will meet energetic Lebanon's Al Ahed SC in the second leg of the AFC Cup 2023/24 West Zone final on Tuesday at the Sultan Qaboos Complex. The match will kick off at 8 pm (Oman time). The Lebanese side are taking an advantage thanks to their first leg triumph in Karbala, Iraq, by 1-0 last week through the only goal in the match netted by Mohammed al Hallaq.

The national representatives wrapped up their technical preparations ahead of the crucial tie as they underwent intensive training sessions under watchful eyes of head coach Hamed al Azani. The head coach and his assistant team focused on

improving the weak areas that occurred in the previous game. The last warm-up session for Al Nahda took place on Wednesday at the venue of the match and coach Al Azani implemented different technical tactics and finalised the squad which will represent the team in Tuesday's clash.

Al Nahda will chase a win that will ensure sealing spot in the AFC Cup final as the team is away by one step. The AFC Cup final is scheduled to take place on May 5 in Muscat and it is a golden opportunity for Oman's representative. Al Buraimi-based team will hold an advantage of home support as the match will be held in Muscat on Tuesday and it is expected the domestic clubs fans will attend to cheer Al Nahda.



During the press conference, Al Nahda head coach Hamed al Azani voiced confidence that his team can move to the final. “It is expected to be a tough match for both sides as they will try to reach into the final. I am confident that Al Nahda can move to the next stage,” he said.

Responding on Junior's absence, coach Hamed said: “Junior did a surgery and his absence is very crucial. However, the substitute will be ready and we may play with Ahmed al Matroushi or Nasser al Shamali.”

“Al Nahda are taking part in many events including domestic

league, HM Cup and the AFC Cup. The team is playing many matches within short time. Our focus now is shifted on the recovery of the players due to the high number of the matches. From last August and until today, Al Nahda's performance is progressing. I am confident that the players will take the desired responsibility to do their level best in this essential assignment. Also, the focus factor is very important and we have to convert the scoring attempts properly into the target,” he concluded.

Rafat Mohammed, head coach of Al Ahed SC, affirmed that Tuesday's game will be different than the previous match. “The first leg result is not an indicator for our performance as Oman's side will do their best as well. We

know the opponent as we had met several times in the same competition. Our strategy will be entering the match with an attacking technique,” he added.

Al Nahda will aim to emulate fellow Omani side Seeb - the 2022 champions - in lifting the AFC Cup trophy while Al Ahed will work hard as well to repeat their last accomplishment in 2019 as they were crowned champions. It is expected that Mohammed al Hallaq and his team-mates will work hard to keep their advantage from the first leg and snatch a positive result.

The winner from the West Zone final will meet either Abdysh-Ata Kant of Kyrgyz Republic or Australia's Central Coast Mariners in the AFC Cup final on May 5.

KOLKATA EDGE BENGALURU BY ONE RUN IN LAST BALL

Gujarat Titans beat Punjab Kings by 3 wickets in low-scoring game



Kolkata Knight Riders wicketkeeper Phil Salt runs out Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Lockie Ferguson in the last ball. – IPL

KOLKATA: Kolkata Knight Riders survived a late charge by Royal Challengers Bengaluru batsmen to win by one run in an IPL thriller after Virat Kohli's angry outburst at his dismissal on Sunday.

Bengaluru conceded 222-6 after electing to field first at Kolkata's Eden Gardens with Phil Salt smashing 48 off 14 balls and skipper Shreyas Iyer hitting 50.

Needing 21 to win in the final over bowled by Mitchell Starc, Bengaluru's number 10 Karn Sharma hit the Australian left-arm quick for three sixes before being caught and bowled.

Wicketkeeper Salt then ran out Lockie Ferguson on the last ball despite a wide throw by the fielder as Bengaluru were bowled out for 221.

Bengaluru slipped early in their chase when Kohli, who made a seven-ball 18, fell caught and bowled off Harshit Rana.

But the former India captain looked confident the high full-toss was above his waist as the umpires checked for a no-ball.

TV umpire Michael Gough declared it out after technology suggested the trajectory of the ball dipped below the waist of the batsman, who returned furious after exchanging words with the on-field officials.



Gujarat Titans captain Shubman Gill (R) and Sai Kishore celebrate a wicket.

"It was crazy. Rules are rules, Virat and myself in that space thought the ball was higher than his waist," skipper Faf du Plessis, who was with Kohli at the other end when the drama unfolded, said.

"You always find one team happy and the other not so with such decisions."

The drama did not help Bengaluru in their chase as the bottom-placed side in the 10-team table slumped to their seventh loss in eight matches.

Earlier Kolkata, who jumped to second in the table with their fifth win in seven matches, started strongly with Salt's explosive knock.

Fast bowlers Yash Dayal and Cameron Green took two

wickets each to dent Kolkata's top and middle-order but Iyer kept calm to raise his fifty in 35 balls. He fell after a 40-run stand with Rinku Singh, who hit 24.

ALL-ROUND RUSSEL

Andre Russell, who made 27 off 10 balls, and Ramandeep Singh, who hit 24 off nine, finished with a flourish in an unbeaten stand of 43.

Russell, who was named man of the match, then turned up with his pace bowling as he took three wickets and fellow West Indian Sunil Narine took two to dent the chase.

England batsman Will Jacks, who made 55, and Rajat Patidar, who hit 52, attempted to set up the chase in a 102-run third-

wicket stand, which was broken by Russell.

Russell took down both the batsmen in one over and mystery spinner Narine came up with another double blow in one over including Green and Mahipal Lomror.

Dinesh Karthik with his 18-ball 25 and Sharma with 20 off seven balls tried their best to chase down the target but Kolkata held their nerve.

"We go through so many emotions, tough to stay calm," said Iyer. "Elated to get these two points. I feel that every individual should take responsibility to deliver. Russell came on and completely changed the momentum."

In the second match of the day, Gujarat Titans defeated Punjab Kings by three wickets after they bowled out the opposition for 142 in a low-scoring game.

Indian Sai Kishore returned figures of 4-33 and ably supported by fellow spinners Noor Ahmad, who claimed 2-20, and Rashid Khan, who had 1-15.

Gujarat looked in trouble at 103-5, but Rahul Tewatia steered the team home with five balls to spare as the left-handed batsman hit an unbeaten 36 off 18 balls. — AFP

Ruud outsmarts Tsitsipas for 'biggest title' of career

BARCELONA: World number six Casper Ruud defeated Stefanos Tsitsipas 7-5, 6-3 to win the Barcelona Open on Sunday, the biggest title of his career.

The Norwegian earned revenge after his defeat by the Greek world number seven in the Monte Carlo Masters final last weekend.

Ruud, a three-time Grand Slam runner-up, had won 10 titles at 250 level with the 500-ranked clay-court event in Barcelona his 11th career triumph. "For me it means a lot, this is my biggest title that I ever won in my career, it's something I've chased for a long time already," Ruud told Teledeporte.

"I've never won a 500 before or a 1,000, I've been to a few finals but always came up a little bit short.

"I didn't start great during the match but luckily I was able to come back in and play really well in the end of the first and the second set."

The 25-year-old leads the tour with 29 wins this year but had lost in three finals before wrapping up his first title of 2024 when Tsitsipas, who lacked his usual spark, went long.

"The last six, seven months I've taken a few steps in the right direction in my game and I'm glad it's paying off," added Ruud.

Ruud conceded a break in the opening game, which Tsitsipas consolidated for 2-0, giving the chance of a repeat of his first-set collapse in the Monte Carlo final.

However Ruud stayed calm

and broke back in the sixth game with a passing shot the Greek could not control.

The Norwegian brought up two set points at 6-5 up, clinching it with a break when Tsitsipas erred at the net.

'TOO GOOD'

Two-time Grand Slam runner-up Tsitsipas slapped a forehand into the net to concede the first break of the second set and Ruud then held to open up a 4-1 lead.

Tsitsipas saved two break points in the sixth game to give himself a chance of a comeback, but could not match Ruud's energy after two draining three-set matches in his run to the final.

Ruud's 91-minute victory ended a 10-match winning streak for Tsitsipas.

"I wasn't playing my best tennis this week in Barcelona... throughout the whole week I didn't feel like my shots had the same effect as they did in Monte Carlo," said Tsitsipas.

"Today it felt like I didn't have the mental capacity to even fight. Even if I wanted to push myself to fight, Casper was just too good today."

Tsitsipas blamed the Catalan clay for taking the edge off his shots but said the courts at the Madrid Open where he will compete next week are a better fit for his game.

"The environment in Madrid has shown in the past that it suits me and it's a place I can play well if I'm in the right mindset and committed to the game," he added. — AFP



Norway's Casper Ruud holds up the trophy after beating Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas in the ATP Barcelona Open final in Barcelona. — AFP

Oman Sail's Optimist, ILCA sailors strike gold in UAE

MUSCAT: Oman's youth team triumphed at the first Youth GCC Games in the United Arab Emirates, claiming three gold medals as part of a seven medal haul. Abdul Latif al Qasbi recorded a perfect score, notching eight wins from eight races to take the ILCA 4 gold medal, while Elyas al Fadali claimed gold after winning the final race of the day in the ILCA 6, and the team picked up Optimist gold.

Tamim al Balushi finished second in the Optimist fleet, in between two UAE sailors, to win the silver medal in both Optimist overall and Optimist youth competitions. Hatem al Araimi won the ILCA 6 bronze medal after finishing just a point behind his teammate in first.

Tarteel al Hasani won bronze in the Optimist girl's competition. Teammate Hood al Nofli finished fourth overall, narrowly missing out on a podium position, Khamis al Mashaikhi finished sixth, and Mohammed al Qasbi finished 11th as a junior.

All four excelled on the water against very tough competition. Conditions remained excellent and it allowed the team to focus on the race and ensuring they were in the right positions to consistently earn the points to finish in the medal positions. The support of coach Mundher al Kindi was integral in preparing the sailors and giving them the confidence to put their training into practice.

Abdulaziz al Shidi, Oman



Oman Optimist team won the gold medal in GCC Youth Games.

Sail's Sailing Development Manager and Team Lead for the GCC Youth Games, said, "This is an excellent result for our sailing team and we are very proud of the performances of our medal winners — especially Abdul Latif al Qasbi for winning eight rounds. They all sailed against very strong competition and kept their composure as the pressure increased. To bring home medals for Oman is a great achievement and we hope to build on this in the coming weeks and months. The whole team did really well and gained valuable experience as they progress into well-rounded sailors. The future of sailing in Oman is very bright with such an exciting group of sailors at Optimist and ILCA level."

Elsewhere, Firas al Hashmi finished sixth in the ILCA 4 competition after a close series of races where just three points separated fourth to sixth positions. Tarteel al Hasani finished ninth in the Optimist with teammate Mohammed al Qasbi just behind in 11th.

Currently, the Sultanate of Oman has earned 31 medals, including 13 golds, and sits fourth in the medal table. The first Youth GCC Games features 25 individual and team sports with a total of 3,500 athletes representing the UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Kuwait, as well as Oman. The Oman Sailing Team is part of a 200-strong Omani delegation taking part in 14 sports throughout the event.

AHMAD STORMS TO MAIDEN FIA WEC PODIUM

IMOLA/ITALY:

Ahmad al Harthy produced an outstanding performance during the opening two hours of the second race of the FIA World Endurance Championship season on Sunday to lay the foundations for an excellent runner-up finish in LMGT3 – the Omani’s deserved first podium of 2024.

Showcasing great pace throughout and driving a faultless first third of the 6 Hours of Imola, Al Harthy ensured the No 46 BMW M4 GT3 was squarely in the fight for a famous first victory of the year, and the squad’s challenge went all the way to the closing stages of the terrific action in Italy.

All set for a grandstand finish, team-mate Maxime Martin battled the sister No 31 Team WRT car for supremacy during the final couple of hours with both BMWs staying on slick Goodyear tyres as rain showers arrived.

The great call to do so by Team WRT ensured a famous one-two result, an unfortunate drive-through penalty late on – linked to a Full Course Yellow period – meaning it was the No 46 trio who ended up in second place at the flag. Martin was little more than 20 seconds adrift of the No 31 at the finish, having lost more than half a minute with the penalty.

GRAND SUPPORT

Determined to mount a sustained podium challenge this weekend, Al Harthy made those hopes an absolute reality after qualifying an excellent third on the LMGT3 grid and he was tasked with driving the first couple of hours of the six-hour contest on Sunday in front of almost 74,000 spectators.

Making a great start to the race, the Omani was able to quickly move into second in class close behind the No 92 Porsche 911 out of Turn One – thankfully avoiding lap one chaos which brought out the Safety Car.

When the action resumed, Al Harthy settled into his rhythm and around 30 minutes into the contest he was within just two seconds of the class lead. At the conclusion of the first hour the BMW racer maintained second place, only 1.6 seconds shy of the Porsche, with a fastest lap at that point only 0.4 seconds shy of the LMGT3 pace.

During his second hour of driving after the initial round of pit-stops, Al Harthy – who is supported by key partners OQ, Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Omantel and BMW Oman – was every bit as competitive and ensured the No 46 BMW stayed in contention for the win.

Home hero Rossi took over from Al Harthy at the second pit-stop and when the order settled the Italian was third but glued to the No 55 Ferrari. Soon moving back up to second, Rossi

was little more than 10 seconds shy of the lead as the race hit mid-distance and during his second stint he started to come under pressure from the sister Team WRT car – allowing the leader to pull clear.

With just under two hours to run Martin climbed into the driving seat and he was able to take the lead of LMGT3, before slipping back to second in class behind the No 31 Team WRT car as they expertly dived on slicks in among the rain showers which had arrived over Imola.

As the sixth and final hour began, Martin was 8.3 seconds behind the sister BMW and with just 35 minutes to go he was almost attached to its bumper.

Hopes of victory, though, were dashed in the last half hour when Martin had to make an unscheduled pit-stop for the penalty. Ultimately finishing the race in a richly deserved second position, the No 46 car was less than 23 seconds shy of victory.

AHMAD AL HARTHY:

“What an unbelievable race! Where can I begin? I had a perfect start to be honest, there was an incident into Turn One and I was in the right place so managed to move up from P3 to P2. We kept pushing for the entire one hour and 45 minutes in the car, we maximised everything we could to increase the distance between me and third, and try and keep first as close as possible.

“What a job by the team, they made unbelievable calls. Valentino and Maxime both did amazing in the car, and obviously the pit-stops were smooth – and then the rain came down! We were the

only LMGT3 cars to stay out on slicks throughout, it was a huge call by the team and it was the right call as well to take a BMW one-two and with us on the podium for the first time this season.

“Thank you so much to everyone for their

incredible support, all of our sponsors, family and fans back home in Oman. It’s an amazing feeling to have my first podium with WRT and BMW in FIA WEC and hopefully this will push us on to more great results.”

There is now a three week break from race action for Al Harthy with round three of the FIA World Endurance Championship taking place on May 11, at Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium.

FIA World Endurance Championship LMGT3 Driver Standings (after Rd2): 4. Ahmad al Harthy / Maxime Martin / Valentino Rossi, 36 pts



SUPERB IMOLA P2 FOR AHMAD AL HARTHY, MAXIME MARTIN, VALENTINO ROSSI

NO 46 TEAM WRT TRIO PRODUCE EXCELLENT PERFORMANCE IN RD2 OF FIA WEC

LMGT3 VICTORY HOPES DASHED BY UNFORTUNATE LATE DRIVE-THROUGH PENALTY

AL HARTHY AND TEAM-MATES P4 IN LMGT3 CHAMPIONSHIP AFTER 6HRS OF IMOLA





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Standards and conformity assessment key to boosting Omani exports



The strength of Omani exports depends on compliance with standards.

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

Standards and conformity assessment are indispensable to the goal of boosting Omani exports according to Imad bin Khamis al Shukaili, Director-General of Standards and Metrology at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Al Shukaili explained that exports are not possible unless the products meet international and territorial standards.

Hence, boosting the standards of local products in accordance with local and global standards will automatically allow for their exports, he stressed, adding that the ministry has recently taken various measures in support of this goal.

One such measure, he said, was the establishment of the Oman Accreditation Centre this year, which will be responsible of assessing conformity assessment bodies including calibration and testing laboratories, certification bodies and inspection bodies.

According to ministry officials, the ministry signed a contract with the Gulf Accreditation Centre (GAC) — the regulatory body responsible for the accreditation of conformity assessment centres in the GCC — to assist with the establishment of the Oman Accreditation Centre, and to “enhance the efficiency the accreditation system in Oman.”

Furthermore, the ministry launched an online platform, Hazm, in 2023, that allows importers and manufacturers to obtain conformity certificates online, in addition to other certificates such as the energy efficiency labels for products, and certificates of origin.

According to Al Shukaili, the platform boasts over 37 services. It is also integrated with other systems including the customs declaration system, the Gulf Conformity Tracking Platform, Gulf Conformity Assessment Platform, Oman Business Platform, and Conformity Assessment Bodies Appointment Platform.

Pact signed to establish \$1.6 billion LNG bunker project at Port of Sohar

MUSCAT: Global integrated energy group OQ signed an investment agreement with TotalEnergies to establish the Marsa project to supply ships with liquefied natural gas (LNG) at the Port of Sohar, at a cost of \$1.6 billion, with TotalEnergies contributing 80 per cent of the project costs and OQ with 20 per cent of the joint investment.

The project is characterised by the integration of the upper and lower parts; where the upper part involves the production of 150 million cubic feet per day of gas from Block 10 concession area, and then the gas is transported through OQ to gas networks to the Port of Sohar.

The lower part involves building a liquefied natural gas plant with a capacity of one million tonnes annually, consisting of a renewable energy station by building a 300-megawatt solar power station to provide the annual energy needs for the liquefied natural gas plant.

The Marsa LNG project will achieve two goals for the first time in the region: the establishment of a facility with emissions less than 3 kilogrammes of CO2 equivalent per barrel of oil equivalent, to reduce emissions of greenhouse gas, and a centre to supply ships with liquefied natural gas fuel, the first of its kind in the Middle East.

The Marsa LNG project embodies OQ’s commitment to strategically contribute to the development of the energy sector in the Sultanate of Oman to achieve sustainable value in the long term.

It also works to diversify OQ’s investments in a new energy field, supplying ships with liquefied natural gas fuel, reflecting the company’s strategy in shaping a sustainable future for the



Eng Salim bin Nasser al Auqi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and Patrick Pouyanné, Chairman and CEO of TotalEnergies, lead signing agreements linked to TotalEnergies multi-energy strategy in Oman.

THE MARSA LNG PROJECT WILL ACHIEVE TWO GOALS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE REGION: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FACILITY WITH EMISSIONS LESS THAN 3 KILOGRAMMES OF CO2 EQUIVALENT PER BARREL OF OIL EQUIVALENT, TO REDUCE EMISSIONS OF GREENHOUSE GAS, AND A CENTRE TO SUPPLY SHIPS WITH LIQUEFIED NATURAL GAS FUEL, THE FIRST OF ITS KIND IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

energy sector and is expected that the project will contribute to enhancing local value addition.

The Marsa LNG project will rely on electricity, making it the least greenhouse gas emissions-intensive plant in the world.

It will set a new industrial

emissions standard, and the full electrical design of the plant and the integration of the solar power station will avoid over 200,000 tonnes of CO2 equivalent annually over the life of the project, compared to the gas-fueled design.

The project will establish the first centre to supply ships with liquefied natural gas in the Middle East, thus offering an alternative maritime fuel at competitive prices to contribute to reducing the carbon footprint of the maritime shipping sector.

Liquefied natural gas compared to traditional maritime fuel will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions by up to 23 per cent, sulfur emissions by 99 per cent, fine particle emissions by 99 per cent, and nitrogen oxide emissions by up to 85 per cent.

Minister of Energy and Minerals Eng Salim bin Nasser al Auqi affirmed that the Marsa LNG project embodies Oman’s

strong commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 as it will contribute to reducing emissions, placing Oman on the world map in a special way, and will be operated fully with renewable electric power.

He said in a statement to the Oman News Agency that the project is the first of its kind in the region, Middle East and Africa, and the project’s goal is to dispatch approximately 150,000 cubic feet of gas for use by ships.

It will provide approximately 3,000 jobs during construction and will provide between 90 to 100 jobs at Sohar Port when operational, adding that the project will begin receiving ships in 2028.

Mulham bin Basheer al Jarf, Chairman of OQ’s Board of Directors, explained that entering into joint investments with the global French company TotalEnergies in the Marsa LNG project will represent the first

natural gas supply centre for ships in the region. The project will be operated by solar power from the 300-megawatt photovoltaic solar power station.

He added that the project will contribute to enhancing OQ’s position as a major contributor in the liquefied natural gas markets. OQ’s gas distribution network company will provide the necessary gas transportation services for the project.

Patrick Pouyanné, Chairman of the Board and CEO of TotalEnergies, stated that the project is an innovative low-emission project that relies on clean energy derived from solar energy.

He noted that such a project has been implemented before in the Netherlands and Singapore, and will now be implemented in Oman, reflecting the company’s confidence in the Omani liquefied natural gas market.

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Oman’s FDI reaches RO 25.050 billion in 2023

MUSCAT: The volume of foreign direct investments (FDI) in the Sultanate of Oman by the end of Q4 2023 amounted to RO 25.050 billion, with an increase of 21.6 per cent compared to the same period in 2022, which was RO 20.590 billion.

Preliminary statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that the volume of inflows in foreign direct investment recorded a growth of 57.5 per cent by the end of the fourth quarter of 2023, reaching RO 4.45 billion



The oil and gas extraction sector accounted for 78 per cent of the total FDI. compared to RO 2.83 billion by 2022. The oil and gas extraction

sector accounted for 78 per cent of the total foreign direct investment by the end of Q4 2023, with a total value of RO 19.523 billion, an increase from RO 14.638 billion.

The value of foreign direct investment in the manufacturing sector by the end of the fourth quarter of 2023 reached RO 1.781 billion, up from RO 1.873 billion, while the value in financial intermediation was RO 1.347 billion compared to RO 1.824 billion.

The value in real estate, rental and business activities amounted

to RO 1.034 billion, up from RO 1.005 billion.

The United Kingdom led the total foreign direct investment by the end of Q4 2023, accounting for 50.7 per cent of the total foreign direct investment with a value of RO 12.676 billion, followed by the United States of America with a total investment of RO 4.296 billion.

The People’s Republic of China came third with RO 1.329 billion, the United Arab Emirates with RO 958.600 million and Kuwait with RO 830.900 million. — ONA



Bank Muscat inaugurates lighting project in Rustaq

MUSCAT: As part of the Green Sports Programme from Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, the Bank participated in the celebration of the opening of the Tadamun Sports and Cultural Team Lighting Project in Al Rustaq, Al Batinah South Governorate, under the auspices of Dr Hamad bin Saif bin Ali al Hammami, permanent representative of the Sultanate of Oman to Unesco, in the presence of Adnan bin Ahmed al Balushi, Assistant Regional Manager of Bank Muscat branches, Al Batinah South Governorate, Yousuf bin Ali bin Khalfan al Hatmi, Head of the Tadamun Sports and Cultural Team, and a number of guests and team members.

During the ceremony, the Bank representative delivered a speech, expressing delightedness of the inauguration of the lighting system in Tadamun team's play yard which comes within the Green Sports

Programme, one of the sustainable social responsibility programmes of Bank Muscat.

“The initiative aims to supporting Omani youth and contributing to the development of local teams spread across governorates.

This project allows team members to practice evening sports, which will help developing their skills while contributing to strengthening the infrastructure of Omani sports,” he stressed.

Yousuf bin Ali al Hatmi, Head of the Tadamun Sports and Cultural Team, expressed gratitude to Bank Muscat for its support provided to the local sports teams in Oman, adding that Green Sports programme represents an example to follow in the field of supporting youth talents and contributing to the development of local playgrounds, which are strategic locations for organising various sports and community events and activities.

Al Harthy shifts gears to new team backed by BMW M Motorsport

MUSCAT: Omani racing champion Ahmad al Harthy (pictured) has joined Team WRT, taking the wheel of a BMW M4 GT3 car for the 2024 season and joining the ranks of global racing icon Valentino Rossi and professional BMW factory driver Maxime Martin.

This transition is not just a change of teams for Al Harthy, backed by BMW M Motorsport, for a dual programme in the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) and GT World Challenge Europe, but also marks the beginning of his role as Brand Ambassador for BMW Oman.

The popular motorsport champ, celebrated for his achievements on the track – including several victories and podium finishes – also launched his racing programme this February at the Al Jenaibi International Automobiles showroom in Muscat.

The partnership is fuelled by Al Harthy's long-standing loyalty to the BMW brand as a customer, and also showcases his new role as brand ambassador for BMW Oman by driving the BMW M4 CSL.

“The move to Team WRT – driving the BMW M4 GT3 – and becoming a Brand Ambassador for BMW Oman is a milestone in my career that fills me with immense pride,” said Al Harthy. “Besides continuing



my long-standing relationship with Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, BMW's unmatched legacy in performance and innovation aligns perfectly with my racing requirements. Off the track, driving the BMW M4 CSL – a marvel of engineering and a light, practical roadster – is an absolute pleasure as well.”

Rachid Zamani, Managing Director of Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, expressed his excitement about the partnership, stating, “Having a distinguished racing driver like Ahmad Al Harthy represent BMW Oman is a privilege. Ahmad's exceptional talent, dedication, and passion for racing perfectly embody the values of BMW, its racing heritage and backing of racing teams. We are thrilled to support him on this exciting new journey

and look forward to revving his future successes.”

The BMW M4 CSL, Al Harthy's choice as a brand representative, is a perfect nod to BMW's motorsport heritage and credentials and is the lightest road-ready car M4 ever made.

The car boasts a high-performance M TwinPower Turbo inline 6-cylinder petrol engine, producing an exhilarating output of 551 hp and 650 Nm of torque.

Engineered for sheer performance, the M4 CSL is equipped with specifically fitted Ultra Track tyres.

The interior and exterior of the M4 CSL reflect the racing inspiration – from the visible carbon structure and red CSL-specific foil on the CFRP bonnet to the M Carbon full bucket seats designed for the ultimate driving

experience.

Supported by a strong partnership network including BMW Oman, Al Harthy's journey in racing is not just a personal endeavour but a source of national pride, with the driver even earning praise from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

The 2024 WEC season commenced on Qatar's Lusail International Circuit in March, with Al Harthy finishing in fourth place in the No.46 car, the high-performance BMW M4 GT3 powered by a BMW P58 3.0L Turbo I6 engine.

Al Harthy and Team WRT are supported by BMW M Motorsport, following his recent move from the ORT by TF Sport team driving an Aston Martin car.

Al Harthy also competed in the GT World Challenge Europe, bidding for the new Bronze class title in France, after a positive two-day prologue test in early March with the BMW M4 GT3. The 42-year-old's journey in the world of competitive racing is marked by significant milestones.

As Al Harthy embarks on this new chapter with Team WRT, backed by BMW M Motorsport and BMW Oman, the racing world watches with anticipation for the next wave of victories and stellar performances from one of Oman's most celebrated drivers.

Sohar International strategic partner for Oman Forum 2024

MUSCAT: With a strong aspiration to serve as a significant catalyst in propelling the economy of the Sultanate of Oman, Sohar International, the fastest-growing bank in Oman, is supporting the 12th edition of the Oman Forum as the strategic partner.

This year's forum will centre around the theme of Sustainability, Innovation, and Inclusive Growth, and it will take place under the auspices of Shaikh Salim bin Mustahail al Maashani, Adviser at the Diwan of Royal Court, on April 29, 2024, at the Sheraton Oman Hotel.

Over 200 leaders from the government, private sector, SMEs, civil society, and youth segments will engage in a highly interactive conversation.

Thought leaders, including top business leaders and C-Suite executives from leading business



groups and listed companies in Oman, alongside policymakers who shape our futures, will interact with the next generation of leaders, including SMEs and upcoming young executives.

The upcoming Oman Forum will feature two engaging panel discussions.

Representing the bank, Khalil bin Salim al Hedaifi, Chief Government and Private Banking Officer of Sohar International, will attend the forum alongside other members of the bank's executive management.

Commenting on Sohar International's sponsorship of the Oman Forum 2024, Khalil bin Salim al Hedaifi,

Chief Government and Private Banking Officer, stated, “Sohar International is proud to participate in the upcoming Oman Forum, a pivotal platform driving discussions on sustainable economic development.

This forum underscores the imperative for Oman's growth trajectory, touching upon critical themes such as GDP expansion, innovation, and environmental stewardship.

We believe that forums like these are instrumental in charting Oman's path towards a prosperous and sustainable future, harnessing innovation across sectors like technology, energy, banking, venture capital, and logistics. Together, we will leverage this platform to catalyse growth, empower entrepreneurs, and drive positive change in Oman's economic landscape.

Dhofar Insurance launches Qafilat Al Khair to assist those affected by adverse weather

MUSCAT: As unity and social solidarity stand as fundamental pillars uplifting Omani society, and underscoring the importance of unity in challenging times, Dhofar Insurance Company has launched the ‘Qafilat Al Khair’ initiative to extend a helping hand to those impacted by the recent adverse weather conditions.

The company's teams have tirelessly distributed food parcels to affected households across the governorates of Al Batinah North, Al Sharqiyah North and Al Dakhiliyah, while simultaneously providing financial assistance to charitable organisations operating within these governorates.

In a statement, Omar bin Ahmed al Sheikh, the Executive Vice-President of Dhofar Insurance Company, affirmed that the company prioritises social responsibility and contributing to community support. He added that the company had provided an unprecedented service, with its team clearing all vehicle claims of those affected during the past weekend.

“The company extends an open invitation to all affected citizens across the Sultanate of Oman to file their claims, urging Omani society to unite and stand together to face the damage. We pray to the Almighty Allah to safeguard Oman, its people, and its esteemed leader from all harm,” he said.

BankDhofar offers various savings solutions to customers

MUSCAT: Bank Dhofar, the leading financial institution in the Sultanate of Oman, provides multiple savings options with the aim of improving customers' financial plans, which achieves unparalleled lucrative returns on their investments.

Therefore, the bank designed the Recurring Deposit Account as a powerful and flexible savings tool to meet the financial needs of customers and their future aspirations to achieve competitive returns and sustainable growth for their money.

The Recurring Deposit Account from BankDhofar is characterized by unique benefits for customers



from all segments of society, especially for those who are looking for reliable and rewarding

financial solutions, as the account allows the commitment to deposit small amounts of money starting from 0.500 baisas in order to achieve higher returns than a regular account.

In addition to the flexibility to pay on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis, with an interest rate of up to 5 per cent.

Depending on the deposit structure, customers can commit to an amount starting from 0.500 baisa for a daily plan, RO 5 for a weekly plan, and RO 10 for a monthly plan.

The interest rate on the Recurring Deposit Account ranges between 4.25% - 5%.

Amjad al Lawati, Chief Retail Banking Officer at the bank, said: We at BankDhofar, through the

Recurring Deposit Account, try to help customers build a good financial plan to achieve their goals in financing their children's education, their dream trip, or opening a small or medium business, etc., by allowing customers deposit a fixed amount of money every month on a regular basis. In addition, account holders have a clear advantage in obtaining competitive interest rates in the market and achieving better returns on their investments.

BankDhofar also offers a different group of deposits that allow customers to enriching their savings experience and

giving them an opportunity to grow their wealth, such as a fixed deposit, especially for individuals who are looking to secure their savings at a competitive interest rate, in addition to the high-yield savings account, which is a suitable option for customers who prefer flexibility and liquidity with get the best returns, as it offers competitive interest of up to 4.25 per cent annually on balances.

The bank also provides another saving option for customers in US dollars for those wishing to keep a saving account with dollar currency and grow it at a fixed rate to exceed \$50,000 at a competitive price.



OQ8 to spur growth in Duqm SEZ

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

The recent launch of Duqm Refinery (OQ8) not only doubles Oman's refining capacity to 500,000 barrels per day, but also signals a transformative shift in the energy sector and stimulates growth within Duqm's Special Economic Zone (SEZ), according to OQ8 CEO David Bird.

Writing in Duqm Economist, the newsletter of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), Bird emphasised the significant influence the company is poised to have on Oman's economic landscape, particularly through its impact on Al Duqm.

The doubling of refining capacity represents a transformative leap for Oman's energy landscape, promising not just increased production capacity but also a ripple effect of economic growth and development within the SEZ, said Bird.

Supported by substantial investments in local suppliers, talent development, and job creation, OQ8's operations, he said, are set to propel Duqm into a vibrant industrial and economic hub, with far-reaching implications for the region's prosperity.

Furthermore, Bird noted OQ8's collaboration with OPAZ and integration within the SEZ at Al Duqm opens doors to downstream investments and attracts diverse sectors, including renewable energy, thereby laying the groundwork for sustainable growth and innovation aligned with Oman



Vision 2040.

Beyond economic measures, Bird emphasised OQ8's aim to foster a thriving ecosystem that propels growth and prosperity within the community. He noted that OQ8's operations are instrumental in transforming Duqm into a vibrant industrial and economic hub, with significant investments in local suppliers, talent development, and the creation of valuable job opportunities, underscoring OQ8's dedication to sustainable community development.

Moreover, Bird highlighted OQ8's collaboration with OPAZ and integration within the SEZ at Al Duqm offers strategic benefits, providing unparalleled opportunities for downstream investments and attracting diverse sectors, including renewable energy.

The role of OQ8 as a fundamental component of Al Duqm's and Oman's economic framework, noting its commitment to innovation, sustainability, and prosperity, positioning Oman strategically at the heart of the Gulf Cooperation Countries to meet global energy demands more efficiently and sustainably, Bird reiterated.

Bird pointed out that this \$9 billion joint venture between Oman's OQ Group and Kuwait Petroleum International stands as the most substantial investment in the GCC's oil sector between two countries.

New copper mining project gearing up for maiden concentrate export

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

The maiden shipment of copper concentrate from a newly commissioned project launched recently in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, has been delayed due to a technical snag at the plant, the company behind the venture announced on Monday.

Al Hadeetha Resources LLC, which is 51 per cent owned by Australian-based miner Alara Resources, said a 'tailing filter press' at its 1 million tonne per annum (mtpa) capacity copper concentrator plant at the heart of its Al Wash-hi Majaza license, has not been performing to its optimal capacity.

Consequently, delivery of the first shipment of copper concentrate, originally scheduled to take place during April 2024, has been deferred, it noted.

Global commodities group Trafigura is the offtaker of copper



concentrate from the project under an agreement signed with Al Hadeetha Resources committing all output for a period of eight years from the start of production.

Pricing is based on the official London Metal Exchange cash settlement quotation for Grade A copper at the time of delivery. Commissioning of the project

began earlier this year – the first by an international mining firm to exploit copper and associated gold resources since the enactment of a revamped mining law in the country.

At full production, the venture is expected to herald a new wave of copper mining in Oman amid a rapid uptick in global demand for the metal.

Commenting on the technical snag that has forced a delay in the export of the first shipment of concentrate from the project, the company explained: "The copper concentrator plant was successfully commissioned, with low-grade ore initially being fed into the plant to produce a low-grade copper concentrate, with the intention of increasing the grade of the ore feed over the initial weeks of operation until sale-grade concentrate was produced.

The tailing filter press, while operational, has not performed to its design capacity, slowing the ramp-up phase of the plant. Engineers are working on the problem and a resolution is expected.

This issue has put back the sale of first copper concentrate from April 2024. A revised expected first concentrate sale target will be announced when known," it added in a statement.

Pact signed to establish \$1.6 billion LNG bunker project at Port of Sohar

FROM PAGE 13

Ahmed bin Saeed al Azkawi, CEO of OQ Upstream, stated that the Marsa LNG project is a distinctive project in terms of integration between various sectors connected to OQ, such as the upper and lower sectors, alternative energy, as well as OQ Trading and OQ Gas Networks.

They will be responsible for delivering gas from Block 10 concession in the Governorate of Al Wusta to Sohar Port where it is planned to start operating a liquefied natural gas plant to supply ships with alternative energy that contributes to reducing emissions and the carbon footprint.

The project benefits the



Sergio Giorgi, Interim CEO, Marsa LNG LLC and Ahmed al Azkawi, CEO of OQ Upstream, sign the agreement.

economy with substantial economic feasibility by increasing cash flows to the state treasury and adding local value through joint investments.

The partnership with Total

Energies will boost activity in Omani ports, enhance investments in various sectors, and create employment opportunities for Omani youth.

The Minister of Energy and

Minerals highlighted that the strict Covid-19 requirements are in place to ensure the safety of the workforce and the community.

These measures include regular testing, social distancing and enhanced sanitation protocols. The project management team is dedicated to upholding these guidelines throughout all project phases to protect the health and well-being of all involved.

The Marsa LNG project marks a significant milestone in Oman's commitment to sustainable energy development and environmental responsibility. It sets a precedent in the region and underscores Oman's dedication to fostering innovation and progress in the energy sector. — ONA

OPES paves way for affordable, sustainable and clean energy

MUSCAT: Under the distinguished auspices of the Ministry of Energy & Minerals, Oman Petroleum & Energy Show (OPES) 2024, officially commenced today at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. The event was inaugurated by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Auqi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, drawing the presence of eminent figures from various ministries, authorities, esteemed delegates, and luminaries representing the spectrum of energy stakeholders.

Organised by CONNECT (Oman Exhibitions Organizing Company LLC) and the Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE), in partnership with the host organisation, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), OPES will run until April 24, 2024 and is geared at elevating the discourse surrounding Oman's energy future.

The notable participation of global and the Sultanate of Oman's industry titans underscores OPES's commitment to nurturing dialogue, fostering innovation, and propelling progress within the realms of oil, gas, and energy.

OPES leads in cultivating a robust energy ecosystem with a



Eng Salim bin Nasser al Auqi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, inaugurated the Oman Petroleum & Energy Show 2024.

keen focus on decarbonisation, and in promoting accessible, sustainable and reliable energy solutions.

Reflecting on the occasion, Eng Salim al Auqi stated, "This significant national event reflects the diligent efforts undertaken by the Sultanate of Oman in the realm of sustainable energy and the balance between promoting economic development and preserving the environment.

It also presents a favourable

opportunity to embrace the latest developments in the fields of petroleum and energy to harness them in relevant sectors.

The exhibition serves as a vital platform for knowledge exchange, fostering innovation and building fruitful collaborations to enhance local expertise.

Moreover, it strengthens the resilience of the national economy by pushing the boundaries of innovation and excellence, and steering the future of energy

towards new horizons of growth, sustainable development, and reducing carbon emissions to achieve carbon neutrality goals."

Commenting on the significance of the event, Steve Phimister, Managing Director, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), said, "We are excited to host the prestigious Oman Petroleum and Energy Show (OPES) 2024, where participants will share their innovation and sustainable practices that redefine

industry standards.

This significant occasion offers an open platform to connect with fellow leaders and professionals, a place to push the boundaries of excellence and sustainability.

For PDO, OPES is more than just a meeting ground; it's a spotlight on the future of energy, where our purpose comes alive – Building a Sustainable and Low-Carbon Future to Maximise Value for Oman."

Boasting an impressive lineup of over 300 participating companies from 24 countries, OPES has set the stage for a dynamic exchange of ideas and innovations.

Anticipating over 15,000 visitors this year, the event promises a bustling atmosphere conducive to networking and collaboration.

Furthermore, attendees can gain insights from more than 200 expert speakers and 900 conference delegates, ensuring an enriching experience for all involved. OPES is open to visitors from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm between April 22 and 24, Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre.

Visitors can expect to experience the latest technologies

at OPES 2024. Gold Sponsor SLB is introducing two advanced artificial lift systems: The Reda Agile compact wide-range electric submersible pump (ESP) system and the rod-less Reda PowerEdge energy-efficient wide-range electric submersible progressing cavity pump (ESPCP) system.

Their breakthrough designs deliver enhanced reliability and efficiency with a reduced footprint to operators.

A key highlight of the event is the SPE Conference, centred on 'Affordable, Sustainable, and Clean Energy'. Organised by the Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE), it offers a platform for discussions on innovations, technologies, and industry best practices. With a distinguished faculty of experts, the conference includes technical ePoster sessions promoting knowledge sharing and an engaging project showcase.

In addition, OPES Talks, a free-to-attend, CPD-accredited workshop tailored to industry professionals, serves as a comprehensive showcase of cutting-edge technologies and solutions within the oil, gas, and energy sectors.

All the hackers are going to GISEC 2024

Many of the world's elite bad boys (hackers) are attending GISEC 2024 tomorrow. I'm honoured to be selected and invited among the security professionals to attend, network, share and exchange knowledge and tools in the area of cybersecurity.

As I always do, I will ensure to summarise and highlight the latest trends in cybersecurity as a debrief after the event.

For today, I would like to focus on what are we expecting to see, learn and get exposed to at the event. GISEC is a short form for the Global Information Security Exhibition and Conference.

It is one of the leading gathering ground for the cybersecurity community worldwide. Top global cybersecurity enterprises, Chief Information Security Officers from major corporations across the Middle East, Africa & Asia,



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The author is Knowledge Oman Founder
knowledgeoman.com

government dignitaries and cyber leaders, regional and international innovators and global experts come together to decisively lead cybersecurity transformations across sectors and nations.

The event is hosted by the UAE Cyber Security Council and officially supported by the Dubai Electronic Security Centre, Ministry of Interior (UAE), Telecommunications and Digital Regulatory Authority (TDRA), and Dubai Police It is organized annually, and this year, the event takes place from April 23 to 25, 2024 at the Dubai World Trade Centre.

Over 8 halls, fully packed with conferences, interactive business exhibitions, workshops, cyber competitions, and training sessions from the best of the best in the world of cybersecurity is what the conference aims to deliver to its visitors.

I understand that over 750 brands will be showcasing their innovations to an expected

audience of over twenty thousand (20,000) from over 130+ countries worldwide.

The event has been designed to connect professionals and provide a comprehensive program for the influential information security leaders and professionals from the cybersecurity ecosystem.

86% of the top cyber security companies are expected to attend and share their knowledge (in the form of exhibiting, presenting and/or showcasing) for industries that include but is not limited to banks & finance, healthcare, government, retail, telecommunications, transportation, critical infrastructure and more.

The theme of GISEC this year is all on AI (artificial intelligence), and specifically AI-Driven Cyber Resilience.

This, from all discipline and domain of technology, is what I expect will be stealing the spotlight in the cybersecurity space and consequently the

event.

It is reported that 48% of Chief Information Security Officers are bracing generative AI to shake up their strategies within the next 5 years.

Around the world of course, many countries, including here in Oman, are working on strategies, policies, initiatives so as projects, and are working on AI rulebooks to ensure responsible AI behaviour. With cyber threats on the rise, everyone from every corner, be it the individuals, businesses and government as a whole, are on a hot seat.

As you may be aware, the Ministry of Economy approved RO 15 million budget for artificial intelligence projects for 2025, and an annual summit, called Oman AI Summit, is organised annually to bring all AI industry professionals and experts in the Sultanate of Oman to discuss everything and anything with AI.

This clearly highlights the importance of the medium, and

Oman's realisation of the same too. To conclude my article this week, it is important to note that one cannot deny that cyber security as a sector continues to emerge as a paramount concern for businesses and individuals alike.

GISEC promises to share invaluable insights into the emerging threats, innovative technologies, and best practices to safeguard one's digital assets.

The focus is on the brightest minds, innovative technologies, and game-changing solutions in the world of cyber security; fostering an environment of collaboration, learning, and progress is the goal of the conference this year.

I look forward to meet with like-minded professionals from industry, government, and academia, so as explore the event and share with you all that you need to know and stay Cyber Security aware!

Until we catch up again next week, stay safe and be positive.

How Ozempic is transforming a small Danish town



ESHE NELSON

The author is an economics and business reporter for The New York Times based in London.

As the sun sets over the harbor in Kalundborg, a small town about 60 miles west of Copenhagen, light streams through the glass walls of Shaun Gamble's cafe and bathes his afternoon customers in a warm glow.

It's an enviable location — on the water, next to a large playground — except for the fact that little else is nearby.

That is expected to change soon as the town benefits from America's scramble for weight loss drugs.

Nearby, at a sprawling manufacturing plant, Novo Nordisk makes nearly all of its semaglutide, the active ingredient in the company's wildly popular diabetes and obesity treatments Ozempic and Wegovy.

The company has been in Kalundborg for half a century but in the past two years announced it would invest 60 billion kroner (about \$8.6 billion) into expanding the facilities here.

It's the largest manufacturing investment in Denmark by a company, and it's happening in this town of fewer than 17,000 people.

The money is part of Novo Nordisk's global transformation to ramp up production of its bestselling drugs, but perhaps nowhere will feel the impact like this coastal community.

Novo Nordisk plans to add 1,250 jobs to the existing 4,500 employees at the Kalundborg plant. A highway is being

extended; investors are snapping up houses and planning new construction; universities have begun offering biotech courses to feed Novo Nordisk and nearby businesses with workers.

Gamble, who opened his Costa Kalundborg Kaffe four years ago after a job at a nearby Novo Nordisk warehouse, is optimistic.

The cafe's business is unsteady — busy in the summer when tourists flock to nearby cottages, yet money-losing for much of the rest of the year when it's rainy and windy.

But the municipality, bolstered by Novo Nordisk's boom, plans to open a library and cultural hub next door.

Gamble is investing too, planning to open earlier and serve more food, including breakfast.

"In five years it'll be a totally different town," he said. "That's what I'm betting on." Novo Nordisk is already reshaping Denmark's economy.

The country's economy grew 1.9% last year, among the fastest in Europe, and all thanks to the pharmaceutical industry, led by Novo Nordisk.

Without it, the economy would have stagnated.

Nearly all of Novo Nordisk's revenue is earned overseas, more than half in the United States alone.

There are other, more tangible benefits for Danes. The company is the largest corporate taxpayer in Denmark.

Last year it paid about 15% of the country's entire corporate tax intake, more than other big Danish companies like the brewer Carlsberg, the toy company Lego and the shipping firm Maersk.

Some analysts wonder if this blessing could become a curse, recalling Finland's long recession when Nokia lost its dominance in mobile phones with the arrival of the iPhone and Android smartphones.

Stephanie Lose, the economy minister, isn't too concerned that Denmark will suffer a similar fate.

"The pharmaceutical sector is



Engineering students and their professor at the Helix Lab, which is financed by the Novo Nordisk Foundation, in Kalundborg. — The New York Times

THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY GREW 1.9% LAST YEAR, AMONG THE FASTEST IN EUROPE, AND ALL THANKS TO THE PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY, LED BY NOVO NORDISK. WITHOUT IT, THE ECONOMY WOULD HAVE STAGNATED.

not as interwoven with the Danish economy," she said.

Novo Nordisk's employees represent just 1% of the Danish workforce — though it did account for 20% of the jobs added last year.

Some of the corporate taxes that Novo Nordisk pays return to the communities where the company operates.

Gadsaxe, the municipality on the edge of Copenhagen that includes Bagsvaerd, the home of Novo Nordisk's headquarters, is investing in day care centres and new sports facilities, and is

building a light rail transit system with other regions outside the capital.

"Our economic leeway is generally larger thanks to Novo and the many other companies we have," said Trine Graese, the Gadsaxe's mayor.

Kalundborg knows the benefits and risks of pinning the town's fortunes to one company.

A shipyard briefly dominated the town's economy early last century, but was decimated during the Great Depression.

In the 1960s, Kalundborg thrived as the manufacturing site for Carmen Curlers, which pioneered electric hot hair curlers, causing a sensation in the United States.

Then the company was sold to the American firm Clairol, fashions changed, thousands were laid off and the plant eventually closed in 1990.

"The third time is the lucky one," said Martin Damm, the mayor of Kalundborg municipality, which has branded itself "Biotech City." Educational

opportunities are already undergoing a transformative change. For years, high school graduates left town to continue their education, and Novo Nordisk struggled to retain scientists and other employees with advanced training.

Now, three universities offer courses in biotechnology and related subjects in town, with more institutions arriving soon.

The Novo Nordisk Foundation also finances the Helix Lab, where graduate students complete their master's thesis working with local companies, including Novo Nordisk.

The company's investment is expected to draw more people to the area.

Recently, Kalundborg has been able to sell plots of land it had previously been struggling to shift to private developers.

And there is talk of opening an international school to teach children in English to accommodate the drugmaker's increasingly international workforce.

For now, first-time homebuyers must compete against investors in Copenhagen or other locals looking to rent space to temporary construction workers, said Jesper Olsen, a local estate agent.

Still, the changes have had a limited impact for some.

"It's great to have new people to talk to," said Malte Glad, 19, as he got his hair cut.

But, for people his age, Kalundborg is "still a little bit slow," he said. On the weekend, he often heads to other cities for entertainment.

Justyna Anna Kowalczyk, a 22-year-old student from Poland, studies engineering at University College Absalon.

She works part time across the street at Novo Nordisk, and hopes to make it a full-time job after graduation.

"I like little cities," she said, because she's from one. But it's the connection between the university and Novo Nordisk that matters: "That's what brought me here." — The New York Times

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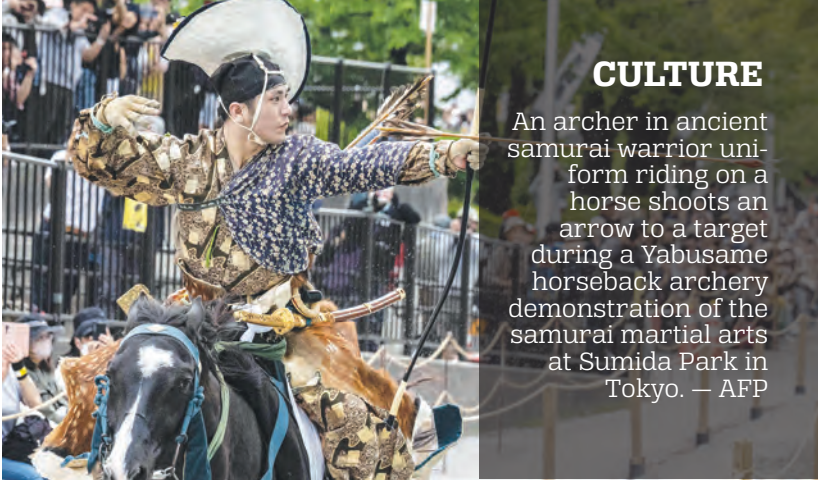
ART

A painting of Marie
Madeleine, painted by
Italian painter
Raphael, exposed for
the first time at the
Basilica of Saint-
Maximin, in Saint-
Maximin-la-Sainte-
Baume, southwestern
France. — AFP



DINING

A chef
stands in the
kitchen of a res-
taurant in the
Jing'an dis-
trict of
Shanghai. —
AFP



CULTURE

An archer in ancient
samurai warrior uni-
form riding on a
horse shoots an
arrow to a target
during a Yabusame
horseback archery
demonstration of the
samurai martial arts
at Sumida Park in
Tokyo. — AFP

art & life

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SURREALIST TRAILBLAZING IN OMAN’S CONTEMPORARY ART SCENE

Aina al Zakwani has emerged as a prominent figure in navigating the surrealism movement in Oman uniquely fusing Omani symbols and narratives into her art. Her journey symbolises Oman's cultural resurgence, facilitated by educational institutions and technology... **P20**



ENTERTAINMENT

Spice Girls reunite for Victoria Beckham's 50th birthday party

THE SPICE GIRLS reunited for Victoria Beckham's 50th birthday party which saw celebrity appearances from the likes of Tom Cruise and Salma Hayek. The 1990s girl group, comprised of Geri Horner, Emma Bunton, Melanie Chisholm, Melanie Brown and Victoria,

were seen dancing to their hit song "Stop," which was released in 1998. Victoria's husband, former England footballer David Beckham, posted a video to Instagram of the five some performing the song as he gleefully looked on. Victoria also posted the video to her social media and wrote: "Best night ever! Happy Birthday to me! I love you all so much!" The fashion designer, known as Posh Spice, reunited with her bandmates at the party, which was reported to have taken place at Oswald's private members club in Mayfair, with celebrities including Cruise and Hayek photographed outside the London address. Other celebrities who were snapped arriving and exiting the party include Rosie Huntington-Whiteley, Jason Statham, Gordon Ramsay, Marc Anthony, who is godfather to Posh and Beck's son Cruz, and Eva Longoria, who is godmother to their daughter Harper. Prior to the celebrations, Victoria posted to Instagram to say that she felt "so incredibly blessed to have reached this milestone" and added that she was



grateful for the "unconditional love and support" of her husband David. On April 17, the day of her milestone birthday, Victoria received online mes-

sages from David, her children, Brooklyn, Cruz and Romeo, as well as her old bandmates. David wrote: "As you head into this

birthday you should look back and be proud of what you have accomplished, achieved and what you have built." The Spice Girls reunited in 2012 for the closing ceremony of the London Summer Olympics and in 2019 for a world tour which Victoria did not attend. The girl group's debut single "Wannabe" was released in 1996 and after two years at the top of the charts Horner, aka Ginger Spice, shocked the world when she left in 1998, citing "differences between them." In December 2000, the rest of the group went their separate ways, announcing an indefinite hiatus. In 2023 Victoria's life with David was explored in a four-part Netflix documentary series, which also addressed his rise to fame as a footballer and the speculation that he allegedly had an affair while he was playing for Real Madrid in 2003. It was recently announced that Harper Collins will publish a story about the couple titled "The House Of Beckham: Money and Power," written by former BBC Panorama reporter Tom Bower. — PA Media/dpa



SURREALIST TRAILBLAZING IN OMAN’S CONTEMPORARY ART SCENE

BY SIHAM AL SAIDI

The modern history of art in Oman embodies a rich fusion of traditional roots and contemporary expressions, reflecting the nation's cultural resurgence and global engagement. From its traditional art forms, deeply rooted in Omani heritage, to the burgeoning contemporary art scene, Oman's artistic journey has evolved significantly. Educational institutions and art organisations have played a pivotal role in nurturing emerging talent and facilitating cultural exchange through workshops, exhibitions, and residency programmes. In the digital age, technology has further expanded artistic horizons, enabling experimentation with digital art and multimedia installations. Essential to the industry's growth are new voices, bringing diverse perspectives, relevance to contemporary issues, and fostering cultural exchange. Embracing these voices ensures Oman's continued enrichment of the global artistic landscape, reflecting its vibrant cultural identity and fostering dialogue across borders. One of the strongest emerging

voices in the art scene in Oman is Aina al Zakwani, who not only pushes the boundaries of classical surrealism but also makes sure that she pays it forward by teaching the younger artists drawn towards her interest. Alzakwani's journey has been nothing short of extraordinary. Her artistic passion ignited at the age of 17, when she began sketching anime cartoons. This initial spark evolved into a fervent commitment as she pursued her studies at Sultan Qaboos University, where she not only immersed herself in art but also took on leadership roles within the activity department, seizing every opportunity to broaden her skills. While formally graduating as an art teacher, Al Zakwani's thirst for knowledge extended far beyond the classroom walls. Her relentless pursuit led her to the realm of surrealism, a movement characterised by its exploration of the subconscious mind and unconventional imagery. Drawing inspiration from her Omani surroundings, she embarked on a quest to infuse her art with local symbols and narratives, forging a unique style that resonated deeply with her audience.

Surrounded by the tools of her trade—canvas, brushes, and oil paints—Al Zakwani's imagination soared to new heights. Her fascination with surrealism blossomed, driven by her ability to translate abstract ideas into tangible visual experiences. She expressed her artistic philosophy, stating, "I delve into the depths of the subconscious mind to reveal the potency of our thoughts and emotions." Surrealism can be considered a challenging school of art due to its unconventional and often dreamlike imagery, which aims to explore the subconscious mind and challenge reality. Artists navigating this terrain must possess a rich imagination capable of conjuring imagery that defies logic and taps into the subconscious mind. Mastery of symbolism is paramount, as surrealism relies heavily on metaphor to convey meaning, demanding a deep understanding of psychology and cultural contexts. To excel, artists must study the works of surrealist masters, experiment fearlessly with different mediums and techniques, and cultivate a personal symbolic language. Practice and dedication are crucial,



as surrealism demands continual exploration and refinement of one's artistic voice. This is exactly the kind of environment that Al Zakwani said she thrives in. What sets her apart is her ability to weave together diverse ideas, creating unexpected connections

between the human psyche and inner landscapes. Through her art, she confronts societal issues and challenges viewers to perceive the world through a fresh lens. Pieces such as "Into the Earth," "Sensations," and "Glimpse of Consciousness" have garnered widespread acclaim, showcasing her talent and vision. Despite her growing recognition, Al Zakwani remains humble and grounded, always pushing the boundaries of her creativity. While she has participated in over 40 events, her recent foray into international exhibitions, such as those in Bahrain, marks a new chapter in her career. When asked about her aspirations, she expressed her desire to delve deeper into the human experience, produce more unique pieces, and represent her country on global platforms. As Al Zakwani continues to navigate the evolving landscape of surrealism, her commitment to artistic excellence and innovation serves as a beacon of inspiration for future generations. Her journey exemplifies the transformative power of art and its ability to transcend boundaries, leaving an indelible mark on the world stage.