

P12

AL RAWAHI, AL HMOUD
FINISH GRUELLING
RALLY SWEDEN AT
FIRST ATTEMPT



P15

WAVE OF DEALS
PUTS US SHALE
OIL BACK IN
FOCUS



P20

THE COST OF
AGRICULTURAL WASTE
BURNING AND WHY
IT'S TIME TO RETHINK



■ **BAHLA**

**UNESCO-LISTED
FIGURES HONOURED**

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science (ONCECS), on Sunday celebrated the annual day of internationally influential Omani figures listed in Unesco, which falls on February 10 every year at Jibreen Castle in the Wilayat of Bahla in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate under the auspices of Eng Ibrahim bin Said al Kharousi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage. The celebration was organised in cooperation with government, civil and private institutions concerned with the preservation of the Omani cultural heritage.

**BATTERY RECYCLING
PLANT IN SUHAR**

SOHAR Port and Freezone signed a land lease agreement with Starsun Sohar (FZC) to establish a recycling plant dedicated to the sustainable management of lead-acid batteries in the freezone. Ensuring compliance with environmental standards, this project is set to enhance the recycling industry, highlighting SOHAR Port and Freezone dedication to circular economy principles in the Sultanate of Oman.

DETAILS ON P13



98 TENDERS
WORTH RO 612 MILLION
LAST YEAR



RO 114 MILLION
FOR MAINTENANCE
OF ROADS



11,000 SHIPS
RECEIVED BY PORTS
IN 2023



WORK ON
SUHAR-ABU DHABI
RAIL PROJECT



RO 15 MILLION
FOR AI PROJECTS
FOR 2025

Investments touch RO 1.6 billion

PLANS TO LAUNCH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE MODEL OMANGPT

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, Feb 18

The Sultanate of Oman is working to develop Oman GPT, an artificial intelligence model. This was revealed by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, during a press conference to review the ministry's achievements in 2023 and outline its plans for 2024 in Muscat on Sunday.

This year the ministry plans to launch the unified portal for digital government services, National Centre for Space, Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Technology and an advanced cybersecurity centre.

The 11th Annual Media Conference



Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali
Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

themed 'Logistics Network and a Thriving Digital Economy', highlighted the ministry's commitment to promoting communication and integration with the media and the general public. It also emphasised the importance of building sustainable and strategic partnerships with local and international media, government agencies, and the private sector.

Eng Al Maawali said the ministry has floated 98 tenders worth more than RO 612 million last year, including 56 tenders in the transport and logistics sector worth RO 597 million, 32 tenders in the IT sector worth over RO 11 million, and 10 tenders in various fields with a total value of more than RO 4 million. Of these tenders, small and medium-sized

enterprises had a share of 10 per cent. Eng Al Maawali stated that the total investment opportunities in transport and logistics sector amounted to RO 1.6 billion in ports, air transport, and logistics after workshops held in cooperation with the Civil Aviation Authority and the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit and the National Programme for Investment and Export Development 'Nazdaher'.

The ministry has completed awarding contracts for maintaining asphalt and dirt roads in all governorates of Oman at a cost of more than RO 114 million. It has paved more than 200 km in 2023, which included adding new roads and repairing roads that were damaged during rains at a cost of about RO 96 million. **TURN TO P2**



Oman calls for urgent ceasefire in Gaza Strip

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Hussein al Shaikh, Secretary-General of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, discussed during a phone call the developments in Palestine and the repercussions of the Israeli heinous war on the Gaza Strip.

The two sides stressed the importance of reaching an immediate ceasefire, the release of all prisoners and detainees, the entry of necessary humanitarian and relief needs into Gaza and ending to the siege on it, as well

as the withdrawal of all Israeli forces from the Strip, in preparation for achieving a just and comprehensive political solution to the Palestinian cause.

They also underlined the significance for the international community to recognise the establishment of an independent Palestinian state and the practical implementation of the two-state solution, while emphasising the leadership of the Palestinian National Authority as the legitimate representative of all sects and faction of the Palestinian people. — **ONA**

‘A House of Wonders’ premiers at Opera House

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The Ministry of Information, represented by the Nizwa magazine, launched the premiere of the documentary film 'A House of Wonders.'

The film, presented in three parts, explores the Omani presence in Zanzibar and East Africa. The unveiling of the film took place at the Royal Opera House Muscat at a ceremony held at the House of Musical Arts. Produced in three languages - Arabic, English and Swahili - these films shed light on the Omani civilisation's contributions in political, commercial, social, and cultural realms. The Omani influence is evident in the dissemination of Islam, culture, and Arab civilisation throughout East Africa. Each part of these films features a central



Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, receives a copy of the book that documents Oman's cultural role in East Africa at ROHM on Sunday.

character entwined in political, social, and cultural events. Saeed bin Sultan, portrayed by the artists Ahmed al Kalbani

and Amina Abdul Rasool in the first part, takes the lead, while the character Tebutib, embodied by Ismael al Jadidi, is the main

character in the second part. Mubarak al Hinai plays the lead role in the third part, portrayed by artist Hilal al Hilali.

VARIOUS LOCATIONS

The films were shot at various locations worldwide, including Zanzibar, African and Asian countries, as well as sites in Europe, America, and the Sultanate of Oman. Friedrich Kluetsch, the director of the documentary, said: "The goal of producing this film was to announce Oman's great history and its connection to East Africa. It is one of the grand stories in the Indian Ocean, and due to the events of 1964, much of it has been lost and forgotten.

"Therefore, we wanted to revive this event once again, to remember and explore all the documents and elements that prove the close relationship between Oman and East Africa." **TURN TO P2**

Eligible pilgrims told to pay 50 per cent cost to Haj companies

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs on Sunday announced the results of sorting for those eligible for Haj for the 1445 AH season via text messages.

Those eligible for Haj are required to complete contracting procedures and electronic payment of 50 per cent for the Haj companies they have joined within 10 days via the electronic registration system for pilgrims of the Sultanate of Oman (hajj.om).

This was stated during a meeting of the Permanent Committee for Haj Affairs, headed by Ahmed bin Saleh bin Sofian al Rashdi, Under-

Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. The electronic registration system for pilgrims in the Sultanate of Oman is considered one of the most prominent governed systems for registering pilgrims. The system automatically sorts those eligible according to specific criteria that take into account the priority of eligibility.

The system is characterised by transparency and speed in showing the results and sending messages to the eligible ones. This step facilitates early preparation and selection for the citizen and resident who intends to go to perform the Haj and to choose companies specialised in

operating haj missions.

The ministry said that the cost of the institution services in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia amounts to 6,274 Saudi riyals for pilgrims arriving by air to Medina and 6,078 Saudi riyals for those arriving by air to King Abdulaziz Airport in Jeddah.

The cost of the Haj for pilgrims travelling via land transport to Medina or Mecca stands at 4,613 Saudi riyals which covers service fee, tent fee, Mina and Arafat camps, health insurance and transportation fees which includes 15 per cent value-added tax, the cost of the Haj card as well as the visa fees for non-citizens (300 Saudi riyals). — **ONA**





MOH: 955941/2024

24 Feb

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‘A House of Wonders’ explores Omani presence in Zanzibar and East Africa

FROM PAGE 1

Regarding the origin of the project, the director added, “Actually, we started with the film and discovered that there were many things, people, and stories that we couldn’t fit into these three episodes that we decided to produce. We wondered how to deal with it? Where can we place all this information we gathered through our research? We



Friedrich Kluetsch, director, said the goal of producing the documentary was to announce Oman’s history and its connection to East Africa

then decided to produce a book to include all the things that we couldn’t include in the film.”
“This film took three years in its primary production stage, in addition to another period spent on research, text development, and review processes. Much time was dedicated to producing and translating the work into three languages, all this process began in 2019.”

2nd national student conference on Feb 21

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The second national student conference which is aimed at providing a platform for undergraduate students to showcase their research endeavours, with the goal of promoting growth, collaboration, and development across various domains, will be held under the auspices of Dr Maryam bint Belarab al Nabhaniyah, Director General of Private Colleges and Universities at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, on February 21 and 22, on hybrid model.
Organised by Muscat College in association with the Oman IT Society, the high-end conference aims to enhance the professional and academic experiences of undergraduate students across



Dr Maryam bint Belarab al Nabhaniyah
higher education institutions in Oman.
“The primary objective of the conference is to provide a platform for students to share their research findings, engage in networking opportunities, and cultivate a culture of research and innovation. With the participation of students

from various Higher Education Institutes in Oman, the conference seeks to foster collaboration and knowledge exchange among the academic community,” Dr Reshmy Krishnan, chief coordinator told the Observer.
“We anticipate the participation of students from various Higher Education Institutes across Oman, fostering collaboration and facilitating knowledge exchange within the academic community at the conference,” she added.
“We are excited to host the 2nd National Student Conference and provide students with a platform to showcase their research outputs and connect with their peers,” said Dr Khalfan al Masruri, Dean, Muscat College.
Distinguished speakers such as Dr Ali al Alawi, Laila al Hadhrami, and Ali bin Hassan bin Moosa will deliver addresses covering a range of fields.

RO 15 million approved for AI projects

MUSCAT: Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, revealed that the ministry’s approval of the development budget allocated for AI projects for 2025 will be about RO 15 million, of which RO 10 million allocated for government agencies and RO 5 million for the governorates.

In his speech, the minister said, “This forum comes out of the belief in the necessity of urging national efforts to keep pace with this global rapid development in technologies and to prepare the economy to be more flexible, responsive to changes, and more capable of investing in opportunities, which pushes the Sultanate of Oman to be a leader in AI and future technologies.
Al Saqri explained that the 10th five-year development plan (2021-2025) has attached an importance to AI for its role in economic growth. The same plan has also underlined in its goal related to stimulating economic activity the need to encourage the contribution of small and medium enterprises in innovation activities, the knowledge economy, AI, and specialised markets. The plan also approved the priority of information and communications technology by amplifying the contribution of the digital economy to the gross



The Ministry of Economy, in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology organised on Monday the “Artificial Intelligence Economics Initiative 2024” forum. – ONA

domestic product (GDP) by 2040 to about 10 per cent. This was translated into the form of a national programme for the digital economy, driven by the strategic approach towards building a prosperous digital economy that contributes effectively to the GDP.
The minister pointed out that the Ministry of Economy launched in June 2023 the “National Initiative to Empower the National Economy Enhanced with Artificial Intelligence”. The step aims to integrate AI applications and technologies into development projects and programmes in the diversification sectors specified in the 10th five-year development plan. The move aims to enable government

agencies and institutions to use AI applications and technologies in development projects. The ministry has approved RO 10 million allocated to the initiative’s projects for 2024.
The forum also included a review of the projects approved within the Artificial Intelligence Economics Initiative, with a focus on their social, developmental and economic impacts, and highlighting the capabilities of Omani companies in the AI field. A discussion session was held between government agencies and companies to explore the possibilities of cooperation and utilise local expertise in improving government projects and initiatives related to AI.
— ONA

Investments touch RO 1.6 billion

FROM P1

To increase the value of investments in the transport and logistics sector, Eng Al Maawali said that the ministry has announced the executive programme for the Oman Logistics Centre 2025 and is proceeding with the implementation of the programme’s initiatives.
Eng Al Maawali added that the number of ships received by ports in 2023 stood at 11,000, and the volume of cargo reached more than 93 million tonnes. In addition, 163,000 new operating cards were issued for transport vehicles.
Eng Al Maawali added that the number of transactions completed

through the integration platform for 2023 stood at 262 million, and the efforts of the government’s digital transformation programme resulted in the development of 39 platforms and electronic portals.
Boosting digital transformation, the ministry has simplified the procedures of 578 digital services. Deals that were signed at Comex-2023 reached RO 40 million, in addition to the successful testing of the first advanced chips Oman-1 and Oman-2.
He stated that the Omani satellite, the launch date of which will be announced during the coming period, will be dedicated to communications.
The Tamkeen initiative has

trained 4,800 young men and women in advanced digital skills.
Eng Al Maawali said that the ministry this year seeks to establish small and medium-sized dry docks and a project to build medium and large ships. The ministry also seeks to launch the first hydrogen-powered station in the country, continue to work on the Suhar-Abu Dhabi rail project and prepare a draft railway law.
The ministry has announced the launch of the ‘Green Mobility Award’ and the organisation of the Second Green Mobility Forum during the current year. It marked April 30 as Omani Logistics Day, which will be celebrated for the first time this year.

RAILWAY PROJECTS ON TRACK: MOTCIT

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The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) in its annual press conference confirmed that the railway projects planned in the Sultanate of Oman are making good progress, which include the ambitious and eagerly-awaited Muscat Metro project.
Among these, the studies conducted by a consultancy for a metro in the capital will be completed this year.
The metro line, which will

be built with an investment of RO1 billion, will have a length of 55km with 42 passenger stations including connectivity to the upcoming Sultan Haitham City.
The Suhar-Abu Dhabi international railway line is expected to enter the implementation stage this year.
Eng Said bin Hamoud bin Said al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) said that the decision will be made this year regarding the Muscat Metro following the completion of the studies.
Last year, MoTCIT opened



The decision will be made this year regarding the Muscat Metro following the completion of the studies.

the financial bid for the first consultancy study (phase 1 pre-feasibility outline) for the Muscat Metro.

The upgradation of the public transport system will be key as the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning embarks on the Greater

Muscat Development Plan.
The project aims to accommodate the increasing future population, attract investment, develop transportation, raise the quality of services, strengthen infrastructure, and protect the environment.
The Greater Muscat project will focus on making the capital easy to navigate with the provision of an integrated transport network suitable for sports and health activities.
A metro system will help in the green mobility of citizens and also that of visitors by providing fast connections between key

locations of the capital, reducing the congestion on the roads, and minimising the need for expanding roads in the future.
He said tenders will be awarded for the rail link between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates.
The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning compensated 3,367 people affected by the railway project in 2023.
A study regarding the railway link between Oman and Saudi Arabia will be also completed this year.
The ministry is also currently working on the draft Railway Law.



Major road projects to be completed this year

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) will complete many strategic road projects this year, a top official said during the annual press conference in Muscat on Sunday.

Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, said these projects include the completion of Al Batinah Coastal Road, which includes Barka-Al Suwaiq stretch; Al Sharqiyah Expressway (Al Kamil - Sur), Al Batinah Expressway (third package), Dibba - Lima - Khasab road in Musandam Governorate and dual-carriageway from the wilayats of Al Kamil W'al Wafi to the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali in the Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, and Adam-Thamrait dual-carriageway project.



Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi

Regarding logistical connectivity projects for the year, Al Shammakhi said that the ministry is implementing Khazaen Economic Zone's roads project, which is planned to be completed in the first quarter.

He added that the ministry has proposed a project to complete the dual-carriageway leading to the border crossing in the Empty Quarter (first phase) and construct an intersection on the souq roundabout in the Wilayat

of Ibri, the remaining works of Al Batinah Expressway (Package 5 - Free Zone Link) in Suhar, and the establishment of a factory for Nakheel Oman Development Company in the Wilayat of Nizwa, Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah.

Regarding tourism connectivity projects for the current year, Al Shammakhi said "The ministry is working to find an alternative road linking Al Batinah South Governorate to the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, design and construction of the Wadi Bani Jaber Road (Phase 2), complete the Saih Qatana Road in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and build the Jabal Shams Road.

The ministry will repair several roads, the most important of which are Bidbid-Nizwa, Al Hazm-Al Rustaq in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq and paving Al Afaj road in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi. The ministry will also work to repair the Nadan-Bahla Road. — ONA

ICEF ME scholarship summit kicks off

MUSCAT: Deliberations of ICEF Middle East Scholarship Summit began in Muscat on Sunday. The 2-day event is hosted by the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, in collaboration with the ICEF.

Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation stressed the importance of this forum as it closely follows the success achieved by the private higher education institutions of Oman in 2024 edition of the "Qs" rankings.

On his turn, Markus Badde, CEO of ICEF explained that the forum seeks to explore opportunities for the growth and promoting international education for scholarship students in the Middle East.

Three sessions were held during the first day of the summit. The first one was on regional visions and the opportunities for universities and scholarships, while the second one was on maximising the value of scholarships in a sustainable way. Meanwhile, the third session was



The event seeks to facilitate cooperation and activate exchange programmes between institutions concerned with scholarships in the GCC countries. — ONA

a roundtable themed discussion.

The summit aims to introduce universities in the Sultanate of Oman and the GCC countries as recognised institutions globally.

The event seeks to facilitate cooperation and activate exchange programmes between institutions concerned with scholarships in the GCC countries and international educational institutions. Moreover, it aims

at enhancing student exchange and academic opportunities for Omani students and students from the GCC countries.

As many as 100 international educational institutions and more than 150 Gulf government bodies are taking part in the summit, in addition to a number of representatives of relevant private scholarship universities and colleges. — ONA

MOE IMPLEMENTS OLYMPIAD IN INFORMATICS COMPETITION



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education, represented by the Department of Innovation and Scientific Olympiads, is holding, for two days, the National Informatics Olympiad competition at the Arab Open University.



Documentary tells tale of impact of education

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, FEB 18

The National Museum premiered a documentary 'More than a Teacher: A Story from Oman' at its premises on Sunday. The event was held under the auspices of Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, and was attended by several dignitaries, academics and students.

The documentary took the audience on a sentimental and impactful journey that unveils significant aspects of the beauty of the Sultanate of Oman. It highlights its natural charm, cultural diversity, and rich history. The film sheds the light on the journey of the American educator Don Yager after being commissioned by the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said to manage the scholarship programme of the Sultan's School from 1980 until his retirement in 2005.

The documentary explores the enduring relationship between

programme graduates and Yager, recalling memories and seminal encounters that deepened the bonds between them. It also showcases the students' leadership positions, actively contributing to the development of the country. The film narrates stories of some Americans residing in Oman, expressing their special fondness for the country. It also highlights modern Oman's renaissance and successful initiatives and achievements related to its history, culture, arts, tourism and environment. These achievements are credited to the wise vision of late Sultan Qaboos bin Said making Oman a role model in development and international cooperation.

The film reflects the broad creative interaction initiated by various stakeholders, all Omanis from production to direction, editing, and music. The film showcases impactful and inspiring stories of individuals influenced by Oman. It provides an opportunity for young and creative film-

makers to explore their talents, express their artistic voices and simultaneously promote their beloved country.

Sahar bint Waheed al Kharousiyah, the film's producer, said, "The film celebrates Oman's rich history, compelling present and promising future. It spotlights the story of Don Yager as an example among countless stories that embody the scope of the bilateral relations between Oman and the United States and by extension, the rest of the world. It highlights the wise vision of late Sultan Qaboos bin Said in prioritising the education sector since the early days of the renaissance, producing leaders in various sectors. It subtly highlights, too, the investment opportunities abundant in Oman in its renewed renaissance under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik." The film will be screened at the Sultan's School and later in the United States to raise awareness about the Sultanate of Oman across different states.



The documentary took the audience on a sentimental and impactful journey that unveils significant aspects of the beauty of Oman



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C invites interested companies to participate in the following tenders

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Tender Price (OMR)
RFP No. 02/ Nama Supply/ 2024	Renewal of AMC Support for AVAYA IP Telephone Systems	25/02/2024	04/03/2024	Specialist	Free Cost

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -					
Participation	• Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and in I Supplier with Nama Groupe may obtain Tender documents. • To obtain the tender document and payment procedure, please contact us by email procurement@supply.nama.om • Tender purchase will be in working ours between 08:00 AM till 02:00 PM.				
Enquiries	• Any inquiry can be sent using the inquiry form found in the tender document to procurement@supply.nama.om five (5) days before the date of submission of the tender. • Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.				
Tender Submission	• Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER mentioned in the Prime Document				
Terms and Conditions	• The Tender shall be valid for a period of not less than Ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. • NESC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer. • Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization. • NESC gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. • Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.				
Incentives and exemptions	• Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from Tender fees. • Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from bid bond requirements. • Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from registration fees on business opportunities platform and supplier registration with Nama Group.				



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SME SECTOR GROWING



ASMED to set up the
National Center for Craft and Creative
Industries in Sultan Haitham City in

10,000
square metres area

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushi

The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) this year will launch a project to set up the National Center for Craft and Creative Industries in Sultan Haitham City in 10,000 square metres. It also said the SME sector in Oman is growing at a fast clip. This was revealed by the ASMED officials during a press conference in Muscat on Sunday to review its accomplishments in 2023 and unveiled its initiatives of 2024 to support and empower small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Halima bint Rashid al Zareeyah, ASMED Chairperson, highlighted Oman's huge leap in the Global Entrepreneurship Index to 11th spot in 2023-2024 from 38th position in 2022-2023. She thanked His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the Royal support for entrepreneurs and the government for its packages of incentives, facilities and exemptions. Al Zaree praised the ASMED officials, partners in the government and private sectors for scoring better raking. She also mentioned University of Nizwa's research team's inputs for the remarkable achievement.

ASMED said the sector in Oman is witnessing progress at a rapid pace as the number of SMEs increased by 30 per cent in 2023 at 135,064 SMEs compared to 104,141 in 2022. The number of entrepreneurship cards reached more than 29,000 by the end of 2023, representing 22 per cent of the total number of registered SMEs. During the past year, the Authority issued legislation on regulations to prepare an integrated register for small and medium enterprises in the Sultanate of Oman. It also provides a regulatory environment that encourages the growth and development of SMEs and strengthens partnerships between the government and private sectors.

ASMED introduced five categories eligible for the entrepreneurship card to maximise the sector's impact on the national economy and raise its contribution to the gross domestic product. Among the new categories is an SME with GCC partner, where the Omani partnership should not be less than 30 per cent.

In financing, the Authority issued amendments to the regulatory regulations for financing SME and artisans and cancelled administrative fees on loans whose ceiling reaches RO 20,000.

Qais al Tobi, General Supervisor of the Promising Omani Start-ups Programme, said, "The Authority completed the crisis management work methodology during the year 202 for those wishing to establish their own projects, and decision makers. It also targets researchers and those interested in entrepreneurship." The Authority strengthened its communication to listen to the challenges facing SMEs like financing, land, usufruct, development, empowerment, training and find appropriate



Halima bint Rashid al Zareeyah
ASMED Chairperson

solutions through a series of meetings and brainstorming sessions. The Authority's business incubators provided the appropriate environment and technical support. The number of incubated enterprises reached 103 institutions, which provided 382 jobs for Omani youths and generated RO 4 million in revenues.

To maximise the local added value and support the sustainable growth of SMEs, many initiatives have been launched.

The total number of small enterprises that grew into medium enterprises during the past year reached 167 while the number of medium enterprises that grew into large enterprises reached 31. It also launched a supplier development programme, which aims to develop enterprises to increase their opportunities.

The Authority aims to implement 36 training programmes for more than 900 entrepreneurs in various governorates of Oman.

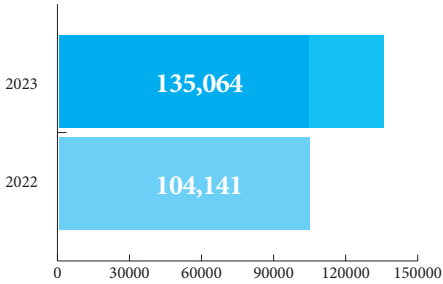
In handicrafts, ASMED said it received 2,064 applications from artisans of governorates last year, and the total beneficiaries of the training reached 597 craftspeople. It also helped more than 529 artisans in marketing their products. During this year, it will focus on introducing modern technologies and innovative machines in the production of handicraft. This year, ASMED plans to launch the Itqan platform which is AI enabled, and revamp its website with better services.

Last year, the number of Sanad Service Centers touched 902 and transactions topped more than centres, and the number of transactions topped more than one million. These centres now employ 2,619 Omanis. This year, ASMED plans to license 70 new Sanad service centres and add 20 new services. During the past two years, the Authority, in cooperation with Development Bank, launched seven financing programmes for entrepreneurs and job seekers. It is planning to finance 300 SMEs in various sectors.

The Promising Omani Start-ups Programme also aims to foster the culture of start-ups in educational institutions in line with Oman Vision 2040 goals of economic diversification and financial sustainability. The programme is chaired by His Highness Sayyid Bilal bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said. It is supervised by the Authority in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the Ministry of Economy, and ITHCA Group.

ASMED aims to implement
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SMEs
increased
by 30%
in 2023



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C invites interested companies to participate in the following tender

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Tender Type	Site Visit	Tender Price (OMR)
NESC/02/2024	Thabit Service Campaign (Media Campaign & Event Management)	25/02/2024	10/03/2024	Specialist	Public (Local)	N/A	52.500

The table below shows the instructions for participation:-							
Participation	- Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and in I Supplier with Nama Groupe may obtain Tender documents. - The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from Tender fees. - The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply). - To obtain the tender document and payment procedure, please contact us by email Tender@supply.nama.om. - Tender purchase will be in working ours between 08:00 AM till 02:00 PM.						
Enquiries	- Any inquiry can be sent to Tender@supply.nama.om. - Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered. - Last day of receiving clarifications on 06/03/2024.						
Tender Submission	Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER mentioned in the Prime Document.						
Guarantee	- The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of (1%) of the tender value valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF MINOR TENDER COMMITTEE, Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C. - The bid bond should including 5% VAT. - The bid bond should be submitted as seprate envelope. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from bid bond requirements. - Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected.						
Terms and Conditions	- The Tender shall be valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. - If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date. - NESC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer. - Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization - NESC gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.						



Nama Electricity Supply Company SAOC
PO Box 1239, PC 131, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 24250800 | CR 1/7/1235/7
info@supply.nama.om | www.supply.nama.om





The symposium includes a set of themes, most importantly the national challenges and AI. – ONA

National Defence College organises symposium on AI

MUSCAT: Activities of the annual symposium of strategic issues titled ‘Artificial Intelligence and Sustainability of Development’ began on Sunday in the National Defence College at the Academy of Strategic and Defence Studies.

The event was held under the auspices of Maj Gen Abdullah bin Ali al Harthy, Assistant Inspector General of Police, Customs and

Operations.

The symposium includes a set of themes, most importantly the national challenges and artificial intelligence, and international experiences in utilising artificial intelligence.

It also reviews the importance of investing in artificial intelligence technologies and ways to apply them in the fields of security, health, economics,

and education in a manner that enhances the quality of life. It is worth noting that the annual symposium on strategic issues comes within the curriculum of the 11th national defence course, which runs till February 22.

A number of government units in Oman and some academics and specialists from Arab and foreign countries are taking part in the symposium. — ONA



Dr Yasmin steps down from KO

MUSCAT: After successfully completing a year of community service, Dr Yasmin al Balushi has announced her decision to step down as the Chairwoman of the award-winning community knowledge platform, Knowledge Oman (KO) effective from February 18, 2024.

In a heartfelt message shared on various social media platforms, Dr Yasmin expressed her appreciation and gratitude to Knowledge Oman’s founder and leadership team for the opportunity given to serve the platform and for the support rendered throughout her tenure.

“I am immensely grateful to have had the opportunity to serve in this role and to be a part of such an impactful initiatives led by Knowledge Oman.

The experience has been nothing short of transformative. I leave with a heart full of gratitude and memories that will last a lifetime. Thank you for entrusting me with this responsibility and for the invaluable learning experience it has been. My deepest appreciation to Tariq al Barwani and Balqees al Hassani for believing in me and support me with the role of chairperson” said Dr Yasmin in her social media post.

Knowledge Oman founder, Tariq bin Hilal al Barwani, in the presence of the President, Balqees al Hassani, at a team gathering,



Dr Yasmin expressed her appreciation and gratitude to Knowledge Oman’s founder and leadership team for the opportunity given to serve the platform

honoured Dr Yasmin al Balushi with a community recognition trophy for her contribution to the development of the platform. “We extend our sincere appreciation to Dr Yasmin for her valuable contribution to supporting the development of our community initiatives. We wish Dr Yasmin the very best in her future endeavours”, added Knowledge Oman team.

Knowledge Oman leadership team will be announcing new direction, plans and projects during its up-coming 16th year Anniversary in April 2024.

Established in April 2008, Knowledge Oman has managed to successfully bring together

a diverse team of local and expatriate male and female living under one roof to support the vision of His Majesty of creating a knowledge-based society, attracting 700 volunteers that initiated 74 projects that received 80,000 registrations and has partnered with 35 local and international organisations that impacted over 130,000 people.

Knowledge Oman received 4 local and international awards for the projects contributed to the society since 2008. Periodically, Knowledge Oman attracts multinational community talents to create, share and promote knowledge as part of enriching the society with valuable knowledge.

Conference sheds light on new HR practices

MUSCAT: Five panel discussions and thirteen workshops have sparked a significant shift in the world of Human Resource Management in Oman, bringing together over 850 experts, academics, authors, and decision-makers.

This collaborative effort aimed to tackle important issues while looking ahead to the future of HR management.

The insights gained from these events shed light on new pathways and directions for HR practices in the country.

They served as valuable platforms for sharing knowledge and encouraging HR professionals to adapt to changing circumstances.

Covering a wide range of topics, these gatherings provided a comprehensive understanding of HR challenges and opportunities, inspiring fresh perspectives.

Recognised as key players in shaping Oman’s future, conferences like these serve as hubs for global experiences, offering practical exercises to boost HR skills and promote knowledge-driven initiatives.

Advertisement to customers depositing at Habib Bank Limited, Sultanate of Oman Branch

Habib Bank Limited - Sultanate of Oman Branch (“the Bank”), advertise to all customers who deposit with it that the bank has appointed the distinguished / Tariq Al Kiyumi Lawyers and Legal Consultants Office, which is located in Muscat, Al Khuwair, Sultan Qaboos Street, Sky Tower, Way No.35, Building No.479, First Floor, Office No.101, Phone No. 00968 97166697- 00968 24396873.

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- Communication Channel 1:**
HBL Website: <http://www.hbl.com/oman/contact-us>
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HBL UAE Call Centre: 00971- 600522228 (available 24*7)
- Communication Channel 3:**
Dedicated Senior Resource at HBL UAE:
1. Mr. Shoaib Abdul Ghaffar – Head of International Branch Operations (shoaib.ghaffar@hbl.com) Office Tel no. 0097143029158
2. Mr. Asad malik- Head Centralized Operations (Asad.malik@hbl.com) Office Tel- 0097143029170.
- Communication Channel 4:**
Tariq Al Kiyumi Legal Consultants and Law office (Muscat, Al Khuwair, Sultan Qaboos Street, Sky Tower, Way No.35, Building No.479, First Floor, Office No.101, Phone Nos. 00968 97166697- 00968 24396873.

Request for Qualification

Real Estate Development of Oman Business Gateway Project of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion Under a Public Private Partnership Agreement

As part of Public Private Partnership agreement in order to encourage private sector to invest in infrastructure projects and public services, the Ministry of Finance (MOF), in coordination with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MOCIIP), invites specialized local and international companies to participate in the real estate development of Oman Business Gateway project, including design, finance, and development of the MOCIIP’s Headquarter.

Interested companies can obtain the qualification document by sending an email outlining company name, competent staff name, contact number and email ID to: ppp.mociip@mof.gov.om

RFQ NO.	LAST DATE FOR OBTAINING QUALIFICATION DOCUMENTS	LAST DATE FOR CLARIFICATION	LAST DATE FOR SUBMITTING THE REQUIRED QUALIFICATION DOCUMENT
MOF-PPP-RFQ-02	4th of March 2024	18th of March 2024	1st of April 2024

For more information, please contact us via:

ppp.mociip@mof.gov.om

Sultanate of Oman The Supreme Judicial Council

Tender Announcement

The Supreme Judiciary Council announces its desire to submit the following tender:
The specifications shall be as follows:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Vendor Grade	Tender Document Fee
04/2024	Co-Term Renewal of Fortinet Appliances	06/03/2024	14/03/2024	Excellent, First, Second, Third, Fourth	RO 25/-

Where you can buy the tender documents electronically via the link below website:
(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Bidders shall submit their bids electronically via the aforementioned website. An electronic bank guarantee certified by one of the banks operating in the country shall be delivered at a rate of (1%) of the bid value with each bid, valid for a period of (90) days from the date of submission of bids and addressed in the name of the Chairman of the Internal Committee of Tenders in The Supreme Judiciary Council, based on directives from the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, and the latest updates to the electronic tender system.

- For inquiries and clarifications on the tender:**
Submit inquiries related to the project electronically through the website of the electronic tender system (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For inquiries and clarifications on the electronic bidding system:**
Submit inquiries regarding technical support for the electronic bidding system via e-mail and the phone number shown below:
Phone: +968 24402200
Email: etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Israel rejects international calls to spare Rafah

GAZA: Prospects for Gaza ceasefire dimmed on Sunday after the United States signalled it would veto the latest push for a UN Security Council resolution and mediator Qatar acknowledged that separate truce talks have hit an impasse.

Efforts to pause the over four-month-old war languish as Netanyahu vowed to reject international appeals to spare Gaza’s southernmost city of Rafah, where around 1.4 million people have sought refuge.

Israel’s relentless campaign has edged closer to the city, with attacks killing at least 10 people there and in central Gaza’s Deir Al Balah overnight to Sunday, according to official Palestinian news agency Wafa.

A total of 127 people died over the previous 24 hours, the health ministry in Gaza said on Sunday.

Israel’s retaliatory bombardment and ground offensive in Gaza have killed at least 28,985 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry.

Egypt, which controls the Rafah border crossing from Gaza, has repeatedly warned against any “forced displacement” of Palestinians into the Sinai desert.

President Abdel Fattah el -Sisi on Saturday reiterated his opposition. In a phone call with French President Emmanuel Macron, both leaders agreed instead on the “necessity of the



Palestinians gather near a crater at the site of an Israeli strike on a house, in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip.

– Reuters

Efforts to pause the over four-month-old war languish as Netanyahu vowed to reject international appeals to spare Gaza’s southernmost city of Rafah

resolution,” said US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield. “Should it come up for a vote as drafted, it will not be adopted.

”Algeria’s draft resolution seeks an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, but Thomas-Greenfield said the United States instead supports a truce-for-captives deal that would pause fighting for six weeks.

US President Joe Biden had “multiple calls” with Netanyahu as well as Egyptian and Qatari leaders this week “to push this deal forward”, she said.

Speaking at the Munich Security Conference, Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani called those talks “not very promising.”

— AFP

Fighting and fuel shortages knock out Gaza’s second-largest hospital



Palestinians rest as they arrive in Rafah after they were evacuated from Nasser hospital in Khan Younis. – Reuters file photo

GAZA: Fighting, fuel shortages and Israeli raids put the Gaza Strip’s second-largest hospital completely out of service on Sunday, local and UN health officials said, as Israel struck in the devastated Palestinian enclave.

The latest blow to Gaza’s destroyed healthcare sector came as Israel prepared for an assault of the southernmost city Rafah, home now to more than a million mostly displaced Palestinians — a move that the international community has warned would create enormous human suffering.

Israel’s air and ground offensive has devastated much of Gaza and forced nearly all of its inhabitants from their homes. Palestinian health authorities

say 28,985 people, mostly civilians, have been killed.

Gaza’s hospitals have been a focal point of the four-month-old war between Israel and Palestinians.

The Nasser Hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis went out of action early on Sunday, Gaza health ministry spokesperson Ashraf al Qidra said.

It still sheltered scores of patients suffering from war wounds and Gaza’s worsening health crisis, but there was no power and not enough staff to treat them all, health officials said.

“It’s gone completely out of service. There are only four medical teams — 25 staff — currently caring for patients

inside the facility,” he said.

Qidra said water supply to the hospital had halted because generators had been out of action for three days, sewage was flooding emergency rooms and the remaining staff had no way of treating intensive care patients.

A lack of oxygen supplies — also a result of having no power — had caused the deaths of at least seven patients, he said.

Most of Gaza’s hospitals have been put out of action by fighting and lack of fuel, leaving a population of 2.3 million without proper healthcare.

The international community says hospitals, which are protected under international law, must be protected.

The World Health

Organization urged Israel to grant its staff access to the hospital, where it said a week-long siege and raids by Israeli forces searching for Palestinian fighters had stopped them from helping patients.

“Both yesterday and the day before, the WHO team was not permitted to enter the hospital to assess the conditions of the patients and critical medical needs, despite reaching the hospital compound to deliver fuel,” WHO head Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on social media platform X.

Israel’s assault on Gaza began in the north and has moved south as Palestinians have fled, many crammed into tents around southern cities including Khan Younis and Rafah. — Reuters

“It’s gone completely out of service. There are only four medical teams — 25 staff — currently caring for patients inside the facility.

ASHRAF AL QIDRA
Gaza health ministry spokesperson

EU: West Bank tensions ‘obstacle’ to peace

MUNICH: EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell on Sunday said the situation in the Israel-occupied West Bank posed a major obstacle to finding a long-term solution for peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

“The West Bank is the real obstacle for the two-state solution,” Borrell said at the Munich Security Conference.

“The West Bank is at boiling... we could be on the eve of a greater explosion,” he said.

Many Israelis live in the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967, in dozens of settlements that are deemed illegal under international law.

The settlers live alongside around three million Palestinians in the territory.

Since the start of the Gaza war on October 7, the number of clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinians in the West Bank has increased.

Borrell’s comments come after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected a plan for international recognition of such a state, following reports of such an initiative in *The Washington*

Post. The US newspaper reported that US President Joe Biden’s administration and a small group of Arab nations were working out a comprehensive plan for long-term peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

A question mark remained over who would lead a post-war Palestinian state. The US has pinned its hopes on a reformed Palestinian Authority to be a better partner for Israel.

Speaking at the Munich conference, the Palestinian prime minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said the Palestinian Authority “does not have a partner in Israel.”

“We need to move from talking about two states to implementation of two states,” Shtayyeh said.

Meanwhile, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva accused Israel on Sunday of committing “genocide” against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip.

“What’s happening in the Gaza Strip isn’t a war, it’s a genocide,” Lula told reporters in Addis Ababa where he was attending an African Union summit.

— AFP



A Red Crescent ambulance enters as Israeli military vehicles retreat after a raid on the Tulkarm, in the West Bank. – AFP



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In brief

■ MADRID



SPANISH VOTERS GO TO POLLS IN CLOSE-RUN ELECTION

Voters went to the polls in Spain's northwest region of Galicia in a close-run race where polls have suggested the opposition conservative People's Party (PP) could lose an absolute majority that it has held for 15 years. The PP have ruled the region for all but four of the past 35 years and their leader, Alberto Nunez Feijoo, is a former Galician regional government chief. 46 per cent of voters would prefer a coalition of the Galician Nationalist Bloc (BNG) and the Socialist Party to the PP retaining power.

The PP is contending with conflict after Feijoo appeared to support an amnesty for Catalan separatists. — Reuters

■ THE HAGUE



6 POLICE HURT IN RIOTS BETWEEN ERITREANS

At least six police officers were injured and 13 suspects arrested after rival groups of Eritreans fought running battles in The Hague in the early hours of Sunday, torching police cars and hurling rocks. Special police units fired tear gas at the rioters, who police said were pro- and anti-Eritrean government groups attending a meeting in The Hague.

"During the riots, stones, fireworks, and other items were thrown at police officers and the fire brigade. Several rioters had weapons to hit people with," police said. The rioters set two police cars and a bus ablaze. During the disturbances, officers sustained injuries. — AFP

■ VATICAN CITY



POPE FRANCIS APPEALS FOR AN END TO SUDAN'S WAR

Pope Francis appealed on Sunday to Sudan's warring factions to put an end to a 10-month conflict that has seen millions displaced and prompted warnings of famine.

"I ask again the warring parties to stop this war, which causes so much damage to the people and the future of the country", Francis said. "Let's pray so that avenues of peace will soon be found for the future of beloved Sudan", he added.

Diplomatic efforts have so far failed to end the civil war in Sudan that pits the country's armed forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). — Reuters

Putin says Ukraine matter of life and death

MOSCOW: Events on the battlefield in Ukraine are a matter of "life and death" for Russia that could determine its fate, President Vladimir Putin said in remarks aired on Sunday.

The Kremlin has repeatedly framed the almost two-year conflict as a battle for Russia's survival in a bid to rally patriotic sentiment among its population, many apathetic toward the offensive.

"I think it is still important for us ourselves, and even more so for our listeners and viewers abroad, to understand our way of thinking," Putin said in an interview with state TV.

"Everything that is happening on the Ukraine front: For them it is an improvement of their tactical position, but for us it is our fate, it is a matter of life and death," he said.

Putin was responding to a question about a two-hour long interview he gave to US talk show host Tucker Carlson, which the Kremlin used to promote its narratives on the conflict.

In that interview, Putin talked at length about Russian history and continuously questioned Ukraine's statehood, drawing ire in both Kyiv and the West.

"For the Western listener, the viewer, it was not easy. Even more so for Americans," Putin



Ukrainian police officers and rescue workers clear the rubble of a destroyed private house after a Russian rocket attack in Kramatorsk, Donetsk region. — AFP

said when asked about his long, historical musings in the Carlson interview.

"The history of the United States is 300-odd years, and I started in 862. So I think it was not easy for American audiences to understand," he said.

On Saturday, Russia said it had taken "full control" of the eastern Ukrainian city of Avdiivka, hours

after Kyiv said it had pulled out of the former stronghold to save soldiers' lives.

Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu had informed President Vladimir Putin of the advance, said a defence ministry statement.

Putin "congratulated our military and fighters on such an important victory", Kremlin

spokesman Dmitry Peskov told state media.

Facing ammunition shortages and outnumbered on the battlefield, Ukrainian forces announced they had withdrawn in the early hours of Saturday.

It followed months of pressure after Russian forces stepped up efforts to capture the eastern industrial hub in October.



Everything that is happening on the Ukraine front: For them it is an improvement of their tactical position, but for us it is our fate, it is a matter of life and death.

VLADIMIR PUTIN

Russian President

The capture of Avdiivka represents Russia's biggest victory in the war since May.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky told a security conference in Munich: "The ability to save our people is the most important task for us.

"In order to avoid being surrounded, it was decided to withdraw to other lines."

"This does not mean that people retreated some kilometres and Russia captured something," he added. — AFP

Thai ex-PM Thaksin returns home after release on parole

BANGKOK: Former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra was released on parole on Sunday, just six months after he was arrested following a dramatic return to the kingdom from 15 years of self-imposed exile.

The controversial billionaire, twice elected premier and ousted in a 2006 military coup, was jailed for eight years on graft and abuse-of-power charges upon his return in August.

But his sentence was cut to one year by King Maha Vajiralongkorn within days of his return and the government said last week the 74-year-old was eligible for early release because of his age and health.

Thaksin — wearing a neck brace and sitting next to his daughters Paetongtarn and Pintongta — was driven away on Sunday from the police hospital in central Bangkok where he had spent the past six months.

A handful of people protesting against his release had gathered in front of the

hospital.

The car then drove to Thaksin's home, where a welcome banner was tied across the gates.

One woman wearing a T-shirt with a picture of Thaksin emblazoned across the front said she had stood outside his house for two days.

The department of corrections confirmed his release on parole on Sunday but the exact details of his freedom are unclear.

Thaksin may be subject to monitoring — possibly with an ankle tag — and restrictions on his right to travel.

Thailand's Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin suggested on Sunday that Thaksin would not involve himself in politics but said, if and when he is ready to give advice, "everyone in the government is ready to listen".

Thaksin's daughter Paetongtarn posted a picture on Instagram on Sunday of him sitting in front of a swimming pool at his home, his arm in a sling. — AFP



Members of the media gather outside the family compound of Thailand's former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra following his release from a police hospital in Bangkok. — AFP

AU to push renewal of US AIDS plan: Africa CDC boss

ADDIS ABABA: The African Union's health watchdog said on Sunday the continent's leaders will "send a strong message" for the renewal of the main US programme aimed at reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Launched in 2003, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR, is a major funder of HIV testing, counselling and life-saving treatment worldwide.

The programme until recently has enjoyed near universal support in the US Congress.

But lawmakers have failed formally to renew the scheme for another five years due to the hot-button US health issues.

African leaders "will send a strong message for the re-authorisation of PEPFAR", said Jean Kaseya, head of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC).

"We need to accelerate this agenda. Statistics are showing us that everyday young people are affected," he told reporters on the sidelines of the AU summit in Addis Ababa.

"Losing our young people means killing our economy and stopping our development."

The programme, launched by former US president George W. Bush, contributes \$16 billion each year for Africa's anti-AIDS response, Kaseya said.

It has been credited with saving millions of lives but health advocates worry that cutting back aid is putting those gains at risk.

The United Nations says the HIV prevention response is 90 per cent short of the amount needed by 2025.

As of 2022, there are 39 million people around the world living with HIV, according to the UN



African delegates during the second day of the 37th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union (AU) at the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa. — AFP

The programme, launched by former US president George W. Bush, contributes \$16 billion each year for Africa's anti-AIDS response

AIDS agency. Of them, 20.8 million are in eastern and southern Africa.

LIFE-SAVING TREATMENT

But out of the 39 million, 9.2 million do not have access to life-saving treatment. Those missing out include more than 600,000 children. The UN first set out in 2015 the target of ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

Kaseya said Africa was still on

course to achieve that target, adding that the continent would organise a summit later this year to discuss funding.

Without re-authorisation, PEPFAR will not automatically end, with funding still in the pipeline, but supporters say that health providers and other donor nations need assurances on long-term US commitment.

Meanwhile, tensions between Horn of Africa rivals Ethiopia and Somalia boiled over on Saturday on the opening day of an African Union summit in Addis Ababa.

Other issues faced by African nations include political instability, climate change, poverty, "deficits" in economic governance and marginalisation of women and young people in development and leadership. — AFP

Book fairs are becoming popular in Oman



Sandhya Rao Mehta

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

With the launch of the 28th Muscat International Book Fair on February 22, the popularity of book festivals in Oman is being firmly established. With the participation of more than 847 publishing houses from more than 34 countries, the book fair will be more than just an opportunity to browse through a vast selection of offerings from across the world. It will also be an opportunity to listen to writers, publishers and other cultural figures, as well as having an opportunity to attend creative writing workshops. With the first Muscat Book Fair being inaugurated in 1994, there have been 27 such events so far. Each has focused on a different aspect and region of Oman, and organisers added to the event by introducing seminars, presentations, workshops and children's corners. In 2016, during the 21st edition of the Book Fair, 550 exhibitors from 27 countries had participated. It received 250 000 vistors. By contrast, in 2023, 385,000 guests visited the book fair which offered

books from over 826 publishing houses. While book fairs are an opportunity for publishing houses to share and sell their books, they have a larger function in the community. They promote literacy and encourage the reading habit by making it fun and relatable. Hearing from your favourite writers or those who have received international recognition is a once in a lifetime opportunity for many. Over the years, the Muscat International Book Fair has reached out to more people through outreach programmes in schools and other educational institutions. It has also added various attractions like cultural centres and children's pavilions which make reading a holistic experience. One of the most important target groups for book fairs is children. At a time when competing distractions like social media and Internet games are available, getting children to read can be a challenge. But that does not mean that it is impossible, as data shows that children are the largest single group of visitors to book fairs. There are many other challenges to book fairs,

THE RISE OF E-BOOKS AND SELF-PUBLISHED DIGITAL BOOKS ARE FEW OF THE CHALLENGES FACING BOOK FAIRS BUT THE TRICK IS TO STAY RELEVANT THROUGH INNOVATION AND EXPERIMENTATION

including the rise of e-books and self-published digital books. The trick is stay relevant through innovation and experimentation. Such experimentation comes in the form of diversifying the content of the books made available. The Muscat International Book Fair has its fair share of diversity of reading material. Ranging from books on history and philosophy to interior design and culinary arts, there is something there for everybody. There are also a number of activity books for children in the form of puzzles, drawing and colouring books, as well as colourfully told stories. Such inventiveness makes the book fair more than just a collection of books but, rather, a literary festival. It is a very good sign that book festivals continue to attract visitors in large numbers at a time when reading itself is seen to be undervalued. Offering opportunities to read and interact is important to a reading community. It is a good sign that more guests are visiting book fairs and they continue to be enriched by it.

Famine becomes latest threat in bombed-out north Gaza

ADEL ZAAOUN & GUILLAUME LAVALLEE

Like many in northern Gaza, Shadi Jenina has resorted to desperate measures to stave off hunger for his five children — grinding up animal feed into flour. “We’re looking for food for birds, animals and livestock... such as barley, corn, wheat and fodder. We grind them and make flour,” Jenina, 40, explained. “The bread is dry and not suitable for humans but we’re forced to eat it,” he said, adding they struggle to feed their children. The Gaza Strip was already one of the poorest places in the Middle East even before Israel declared a complete siege on the territory after Hamas’s October 7 attack. Though much of Gaza was reliant on food aid, enough of it was entering the territory to largely meet the needs of its 2.4 million inhabitants. But now, after more than four months of war that has flattened huge swathes of the Strip, Gazans are inching closer towards famine, according to the UN’s World Food Programme. And the situation in the north of the coastal territory is particularly acute, with international aid agencies unable to get in. Since the start of this year, Israel has only given permission to 12 out of 77 United Nations evaluation missions to assess the needs of people in northern Gaza. “There are about 300,000 people in the north and I have no idea how they’ve survived,” said Andrea De Domenico, head of the UN humanitarian agency OCHA in the Palestinian territories. “What we managed to bring up there is absolutely not enough. It is pure misery,” he said. “Repeatedly when we are allowed to cross the checkpoint at Wadi Gaza to deliver food assistance, thousands of people block and unload the trucks at the risk of being shot.” In the last few days, the non-profit organisation World Central Kitchen, which made thousands of meals a day, said it had been forced to leave Gaza City for Rafah in the south. Rafah, on the border with Egypt, has been turned in recent weeks to a vast camp for some 1.4 million people — most of them displaced by Israel’s relentless bombing. As Egypt refuses to house Palestinian civilians on its side of the border, the question now is how to move more than a million people back towards the north to prevent them getting caught up in fighting. — AFP

From frigid cells to mystery injections, prison imperiled Navalny’s health



Paul Sonne

The writer is an intl correspondent for TNYT focusing on Russia and Ukraine



Ivan Nечepurenko

The writer is a Russian writer and journalist

Alexei Navalny portrayed himself as invincible, consistently using his hallmark humour to suggest that President Vladimir Putin couldn’t break him, no matter how dire his conditions became in prison. But behind the brave face, the reality was plain to see. Since his incarceration in early 2021, Navalny, Russia’s most formidable opposition figure, and his staff regularly suggested his conditions were so grim that he was being put to death in slow motion. Now his aides believe their fears have come true. The cause of Navalny’s death in prison at 47 has not been established — in fact his family has not yet even been allowed to see his body — but Russia’s harshest penal colonies are known for hazardous conditions, and Navalny was singled out for particularly brutal treatment. “Aleksei Navalny was subjected to torment and torture for three years,” Russian journalist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Dmitry Muratov wrote in a column after his death was announced. “As Navalny’s doctor told me: the body cannot withstand this.” More than a quarter of Navalny’s incarceration since 2021 was spent in freezing “punishment cells” and he was often denied access to medical care. He was transferred to ever crueler prisons. And at one point, he said he was being given injections but was prevented from finding out what was in the syringes. His team worried he was again being poisoned. What specifically led to Navalny’s death at a remote prison above the Arctic Circle may remain a mystery. The Russian prison service released a statement saying that Navalny felt sick and suddenly lost consciousness after being outside. Russian state media reported that he had suffered a blood clot. But the story changed the next day, when Navalny’s mother and lawyer arrived at the prison. They were told he had suffered from “sudden death syndrome,” which appeared to indicate sudden cardiac arrest, according to



A picture of late Kremlin’s critic Alexei Navalny lays next to flowers and candles at a makeshift memorial in front of the Russian Embassy in Vienna. — AFP

NAVALNY OFTEN EMPLOYED SUCH WIT IN THE FACE OF HIS INHUMANE TREATMENT, BUT IT HAD BECOME INCREASINGLY CLEAR, OVER HIS THREE YEARS OF INCARCERATION, THAT HE MIGHT NOT SURVIVE

Ivan Zhdanov, director of Navalny’s anti-corruption foundation. Investigators told a lawyer for Navalny that a repeat examination was being conducted and the results would be released this week. Navalny’s staff called for the body to be released immediately so that his family could order an independent analysis, accusing Russian authorities of lying to conceal the body. According to his aides, Navalny had been put in a punishment cell at the Arctic prison in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Region on Wednesday, two days before Russian authorities announced his death. His spokesperson, Kira Yarmysh, said that marked his 27th time in such an inhumane space, usually a roughly 7-by-10-foot concrete cell with unbearable conditions — cold, damp

and poorly ventilated. His latest round of punishment, had he survived, would have taken his total period in such a cell to 308 days, more than a quarter of his time in incarceration, according to Yarmysh. Once a day at 6:30 am, prisoners in the punishment cells at the Arctic facility are allowed into a coffin-like concrete enclosure open to the sky through a metal grate, Navalny said in a message from the facility this year. It appeared to be after such a session that Navalny lost consciousness, according to the Russian prison service’s account. It was about minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit outside. In a letter from prison last month, Navalny described how he could walk a total of 11 steps from one end of the open-air space to the other, noting that the coldest it had been so far on one of his walks was minus 26 degrees Fahrenheit. “Even at this temperature, you can walk for more than half an hour, so long as you have time to grow a new nose, ears and fingers,” he wrote. “There are few things as invigorating as a walk in Yamal at 6:30 in the morning. And what a wonderful fresh breeze blows into the yard, despite the concrete enclosure, wow!” Navalny often employed such wit in the face of his inhumane treatment. But it had become increasingly clear, over his three years of incarceration, that he might not survive. — The New York Times

Chase it with will and thrill

Not everyone has the courage to challenge themselves and chase what they have dreamed of. Instead some might see their dreams complicated and impossible; perhaps they even get discouraged by others around them. It has been said that success comes only to those who believe in their dreams. Thus, all that matters is about keeping hope alive, being positive and staying focused.

A negative mind will never give you a positive life at all. Nobody can change the past, but everyone has a certain power to change their future. Therefore, you are never too old, never too bad and never too late to start your dream-chasing journey from scratch once again. There is always time to restart; to have a better life and plan for a brighter future. All of us have lost different opportunities, but it is never too late to look for new ones and start things from the beginning.

What is so important is to give yourself another chance and make things work better. Perhaps not all people learn the lessons of life the same way. There are people who learn lessons the hard way; everybody experiences life in his or her own way. What suits you may not suit others as everyone has a different way of perceiving life and experiences. Hence, what works for you might not work for someone else.

The amazing thing about life is that you choose what you allow into it, you choose how things affect you, you choose how you react. It is all in your hand, so the choice is yours to look at life the way you want it. Nobody should undervalue his or her power to change themselves or even change others. As Walt Disney said, “If you can dream it, you can make it.”



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
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An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

JUST HAVE YOUR OWN PRINCIPLES IN LIFE, BELIEVE IN YOUR DREAMS AND STRIVE HARD TO ACHIEVE THEM

It is really true; if we all have the confidence in ourselves, then we can achieve what we dream of. Somewhere inside all of us is the power to change the world; at least our own world. All what we should believe in is that we should not give up on our dreams no matter what it takes from us, either time or effort.

Undoubtedly, with hope and persistence, dreams can be achieved. This is another way of making people more confident, so they can make their dreams possible. They should all believe in self-confidence as a key principle in life. Otherwise, they will not have the courage to make their minds on anything. Thus, they don't dare to make sure of what they do in their day-to-day life. It is true they should think twice before they take any decision, but confidence is an urgent need too.

It is not complicated, rather it is a simple equation to make you a happy person. You deserve it like anybody else who cares about nothing, but to have a decent living. You should not think of being someone else to be successful and having a respectable life. All you need to do is just to discover yourself well and think of all the blessings you have in hand. Other than that, you need to bring out all the talents and competencies you have inside.

Never ever think that would be a difficult task to accomplish, although it is not easy. As they say, you need to work smart and not hard.

Just have your own principles in life, believe in your dreams and strive hard to achieve them. Eventually with strong self-confidence and courage, your dreams will come true someday. Just remember that your dreams are always possible if your strongly believe in them.

AERIAL PROWESS!



Indonesian Air Force's Jupiter Aerobatic Team performs in their KT-1B aircraft during an aerial flying display ahead of the Singapore Airshow at Changi Exhibition Centre in Singapore, on Sunday. – Reuters

Plastic pollution needs local remedies

As the United Nations enters the final stretch of negotiations for a new treaty to end plastic pollution, governments must work to ensure that the agreement not only reduces plastic production, but also strengthens local initiatives to remove and recycle existing plastic waste.

Consider the Juan Díaz River, which runs through my hometown of Panama City. Tonnes of plastic – bottles and other detritus – bob in the river's currents, owing to poor waste management. Faced with this problem, Marea Verde (Green Tide), a non-profit organisation that I co-founded, has installed a trash-trapping water wheel – dubbed the “Wanda” device – that now collects much of this waste before it reaches the ocean.

Local initiatives like ours are necessary to achieve global climate goals. This is especially true for eliminating plastic pollution, which is largely driven by local consumption decisions. The new UN treaty, in my view, should thus balance top-down efforts to reduce plastic production and ban the use of toxic chemicals in these products with support for on-the-ground efforts to recycle, reuse, or transform in a sustainable way the billions of tonnes of plastic already clogging the world's waterways and harming the environment. Otherwise, the ocean will contain more plastics than fish by 2050, and new diseases caused by micro-plastics – which have already been detected in human blood – could become commonplace.

So far, stakeholders are split on how best to proceed. During the latest round of treaty negotiations, held in Nairobi last November, the



Mirei Endara

de Heras, a former environment minister of Panama, is Co-Founder and Chairwoman of the Board of Marea Verde, a Panama-based nonprofit addressing global plastic pollution through local action

SOLVING THE PLASTIC CRISIS CALLS FOR BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE, WHICH CAN BE ACHIEVED ONLY BY ENGAGING LOCAL COMMUNITIES

plastics industry and some oil- and petrochemical-exporting countries called for more emphasis on recycling and reuse, while environmental campaigners and other governments advocated curbs on production. To reach a consensus by late 2024, the two sides must be brought into alignment and agree on an integrated approach that links global goals to local action.

Working in government and non-profits, I have experienced first-hand how a disconnect between international plans and on-the-ground realities can thwart progress and breed cynicism.

That is why we at Marea Verde adapt ideas that have been successfully implemented elsewhere – from the United States to Nigeria and Australia – to our context and culture.

For example, our Wanda device is based on Clearwater Mills' trash wheels, a clean-energy technology that debuted in the US but is customised for a tropical ecosystem. Over the past year, Wanda has collected more than 130 tonnes of trash from the Juan Díaz River – a more effective intervention than fishing plastics from the sea or beach cleanups. Replicating this model worldwide could dramatically reduce land-sourced debris, which accounts for 80 per cent of ocean plastic pollution.

Fortunately, many other organisations are focusing on river cleanup to prevent new plastic waste from entering the ocean. Eight of these groups – including Marea Verde –

are participating in the Clean Currents Coalition, a network of projects that are piloting innovative waste-removal technologies in river communities around the world.

Coalition members can share knowledge and work collaboratively while also encouraging and facilitating effective on-the-ground action.

The plastic crisis is a result of human activities, and solving it calls for behavioural change, which can be accomplished only through initiatives that engage local communities. For example, Marea Verde organises and empowers residents in areas without recycling facilities by going door to door to collect

plastic waste. As a result, many people have become aware of their ability to improve their surroundings, leading them to participate in neighbourhood cleanups, reclaim green spaces, and lobby for better waste management.

Moreover, the lack of local data in many developing countries, including Panama, can make it difficult to design climate policies that are fit for purpose. That is why Marea Verde is also building databases on the volume and types of plastic trash in Panama's rivers, which will improve reporting, help urban planning, and demonstrate the scale of the crisis.

Efforts to counter plastic

pollution must be equal to the size of the problem. To that end, the new UN treaty should include severe curbs on plastic production to choke off output and give clean-up efforts a fighting chance. But it must also support the local groups at the forefront of tackling the plastic problem.

These groups' innovative strategies, tools, and data-gathering practices can serve as a model for the global community. This is not an either/or decision: both international regulations and local action are needed.

The latter is already underway and is making a difference, one community and one river at a time. ©Project Syndicate, 2024



Wanda has collected more than 130 tonnes of trash from the Juan Díaz River.

sport

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Yahay al Muraki celebrates after the winning

Oman revive quarter-finals hopes with victory against Mexico in beach soccer

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 18

Oman Beach Soccer team defeated Mexico 5-2 in the second match of the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup 2024 in Dubai on Sunday to revive their quarter finals hopes. Talib Hilal's men netted the first three winning points in the group after they lost their opener against the World Champions Brazil 5-3 in a tight clash.

At the Dubai Design District Stadium, Yahya al Murkhi put Oman in the lead in an early minute of the opening period while C. Castillo equalised the result for Mexico and managed to made it 1-1 before D. Martinez put the opponent Mexico ahead for the first time in the game through netting the second goal for this team in the beginning of the second period.

Oman players pressed hard later to return the match to the origin point and meanwhile alive their hopes of progressing to the next round of the tournament. After a few attempts, Yaqdhan al Hindasi equalised for Oman and made the result at 2-2. Coach Talib Hilal's battalion continued their top show in the game as Munther bin Hilal al Orami brought back Oman to the



lead as he struck a third goal in style to end the second period with Oman leading by 3-2.

During the break, coach Talib Hilal's instructions were clear to the players — to continue attacking and ensure claiming the victory. In the beginning of the third quarter, Yahya al Muraki added another goal for Oman to raise the chances of Oman's win as he put it at 4-2 before Oman's captain Khalid al Orami raised the goal tally to 5-2.

In the opening match of the group D, Oman lost the game against Brazil despite a top show by Oman players. In the same group, Portugal thrashed Mexico 8-2. The hosts UAE and Italy confirmed their spots

in the quarters after victories against USA and Egypt. Tahiti from group B booked their quarterfinals spot after they collected six points while Iran raised their chances to secure the second ticket from the group.

Oman will face former champions Portugal on Tuesday in a tight clash at 5:00 pm. Oman heroes will aim for the first time to move into the second stage of the world-class Beach Soccer event as the top two from each group will move to quarterfinals on February 22 while semifinals will take place on February 24. The third and fourth play-off and the final are scheduled for February 25.

Bidding Announcement

Investment of the Club's Land

Oman Club is floating the following biddings:

Bidding No.	Area	Subject	Document Price (Non-refundable)	Classification of the Bidder	Date of Purchasing the Bidding	Date for Inquiry & Clarification	Date for Bid Submission
1	Located to the right of the Club's entrance and overlooking Muscat Holiday Inn	To construct a commercial building in line with construction's specifications for sport clubs	RO 150/-	2 nd grade and above	Between 19/2/2024 & 29/2/2024	Between 24/2/2024 & 27/2/2024	1/3/2024
2	Area adjacent to the main stadium behind the Bowling lounge	To construct a commercial building in line with construction's specifications for sport clubs	RO 100/-	2 nd grade and above	Between 19/2/2024 & 29/2/2024	Between 24/2/2024 & 27/2/2024	1/3/2024
3	Club Land (Ghala Industrial)	To construct a commercial building	RO 300/-	1 st grade and above	Between 19/2/2024 & 29/2/2024	Between 24/2/2024 & 27/2/2024	1/3/2024

Note: Every project shall have their respective bidding being purchased separately as per prices mentioned in the table.

Requirements:

- Receipt of Biddings:** Tendering investors/ companies shall have a minimum experience of 3 years and a valid commercial registration. Those who have met the requirements may collect the bidding documents from the Club's administration provided that the bidding's amount has been deposited into the Club's account (01041571485001) Bank Dhofar before receiving the bidding documents.
- Bid Submission:** The bidding shall be submitted in a red-waxed-sealed envelop, addressed to the Chairman of the Directors Board and written from outside the name and number of the bidding without mentioning or referring to the bidder's identity.
- Place of Bid Submission:** The bidding shall be submitted to the Secretary of the Club at the Club's headquarter in Al Khuwair before 1 pm on the deadline of the bidding.
- Bidding submitted after the deadline or those not in line with the requirements shall not be considered.
- Signing and stamping the bidding are only allowed for authorized persons.
- Oman Club has the right to accept or refuse any bidding as well canceling the bidding without stating justification.
- Oman Club has the right to determine the type of the project and the shape of the bidding if necessary.
- Oman Club is not obliged justify accepting the lowest or any other bidding.
- For more details, those interested in the investment shall communicate through omansportclub@gmail.com or contact through telephone on 99206060.

Oman, Seeb post crucial wins in OFL

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 18

Oman Club defeated Sur 2-1 in the 11th round of the Oman Football League (OFL) at the Sur Complex Stadium on Saturday. Oman Club started the first half with the better of the play, pressing hard and winning the ball back quickly. They had several chances to take the lead but were denied by some good goalkeeping. Sur played defensively and looked to hit Oman on the counter-attack, but they failed to create any clear-cut chances. The first half ended in goalless draw.

Oman Club started the second half in the same scenario as the first and they were rewarded for their efforts when Osama Aqar scored in the 72nd minute. After the goal, both teams exchanged attacks and Nasser al Rawahi scored the second goal for



Oman in the 85th minute. Sur pulled one back in the 92nd minute through Robert Jansa, but it was too little too late as Oman held on for a 2-1 victory.

The win moved Oman Club up to third place in the standings with 22 points, level on points with second-placed Al Nahda but behind on goal difference. Sur remains in 10th place with 10 points.

In another match on Saturday, Seeb defeated Al Shabab 3-1 at the Rustaq

Sports Complex.

Al Seeb Club started the first half with an attacking approach in an attempt to snatch the match points and maintain their lead in the league. They faced a defensive style from the home team, Al-Shabab Club. In the 8th minute, Seeb Club managed to score the first goal through player Frank Williams from a quick counterattack. After the goal, Al-Shabab Club tried to change their playing style and put pressure on Seeb's

goal in order to equalise. After several attacks launched by Al Shabab players, Majid al Saadi succeeded in scoring the equalising goal. Following the equaliser, both teams exchanged a series of attacks, during which Seeb Club managed to score the second goal through Frank Williams, ending the first half with Seeb leading 2-1.

Seeb continued to press in the second half and they were rewarded for their efforts when Frank William scored his second goal of the game in the 70th minute. Al Shabab tried to find a way back into the match, but they were unable to break down the Seeb defence. In the 90th minute, Abdulaziz al Muqbali added a third goal for Seeb to seal a 3-1 victory.

The win took Seeb to the top of the standings with 26 points, while Al-Shabab remains in ninth place with 10 points.

Ominvest Masters tourney spot sports and tourism

MUSCAT: Dedicated to bolstering the sports and tourism industries in the Sultanate of Oman, Oman International Development and Investment Company “Ominvest”, orchestrated the Oman Ominvest Masters Golf Tournament which took place on February 16 and 17 in the La Vie Club at Muscat Hills, Madinat Al Irfan.

The closing ceremony was attended by His Highness Azzan bin Qais al Said, Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al Balushi, Group CEO of Ominvest, CEOs of the group’s companies, and a number of amateurs and concerned parties.

The event drew 60 golfers from the GCC countries, featuring participation from national teams of Oman, as well as teams from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.

Saudi player Khalid al Attiyah, who secured the championship title. He indicated that the tournament was successful from the organisational and competitive point of view and witnessed a great participation of professional and distinguished players, applauding the organisers’ great efforts.

The Oman Ominvest Masters Golf Tournament, recognised as the largest amateur golf event in Oman, showcased the considerable potential within the sports and tourism sectors.

Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al Balushi, Group CEO of Ominvest, stated that the tournament played a role in advancing the opportunities within the Sultanate of Oman to support and foster the sport of golf. It also aimed to inspire talented individuals and amateurs to enhance their skills.

In a media announcement, he expressed, “LA VIE Club, an investment of Ominvest, features mountainous terrain, lush greenery, and panoramic views of the Sea of Oman. This enhances the Sultanate of Oman’s standing in the realm of golf both regionally and globally.”

The Oman Ominvest Masters Golf Tournament was supported by numerous local businesses. Platinum sponsorship was extended by Ominvest, Oman Arab Bank, and Oman Real Estate Investment and Services (Oris). Gold sponsorship was generously provided by Alizz Islamic Bank, U-Capital, Liva Insurance, Takaful Oman Insurance, and National Finance Company.

LA VIE Club features an 18-hole grassed golf course which is uniquely situated across 45 hectares of land, it provides picturesque sea views and a breathtaking backdrop of the mountains. The course integrates the natural valley terrain, incorporating expansive fairways along the cliffs. With five golf play options, it caters to a diverse range of golfing skills.

The LA VIE project covers an area of around 640,000 square metres and features a natural golf course spanning 600,000 square metres, complete with 18 holes and a private club.



Arsenal's Bukayo Saka celebrates scoring their third goal. – Reuters

ANDY JALIL
BURNLEY, FEB 18

Arsenal’s extraordinary goal-scoring form continues unabated bringing them their fifth successive win in the Premier League. Their 5-0 victory against Burnley took their tally of goals to 21 in last five matches. It’s the first time Arsenal have scored 5 goals or more in consecutive away matches – following their 6-0 win last weekend at West Ham.

It has done them well for goal difference on the league table and places them just two points behind league leaders Liverpool. Arsenal manager, Mikel Arteta, said: “We

have the momentum and need to keep it going. We tried to get our players to be unpredictable. We have to find ways to do that. Bukayo Saka has the ability and he trains in many different situations for when he is in and around the box. Today he had two very good finishes.”

He added: “We are showing a high efficiency in front of goal. The players want to go forward and be a threat and the players up front feel really connected at the moment. It’s about maintaining momentum now.”

Irrepressible and rampant from the start, the Gunners shot into lead in the 4th minute.

Declan Rice began the attack with a run in Burnley’s half and swept the ball out to the left for Gabriel Martinelli who then found Martin Odegaard on the edge of the area for the Norwegian to put a low shot into the corner.

Four minutes before the break, the visitors were two goals up from a penalty when Lorenz Assignon skid into Leandro Trossard. Saka took the spot kick and scored for the fourth consecutive game.

Burnley struggled throughout the first half, unable to get a shot on target and they fared no better in the second half. Their form has been poor playing at home giving them just one win out of the three

they have had.

Arsenal showed their superiority again within two minutes of the start of the second half. Odegaard’s excellent pass to Saka split the Burnley defence and Saka’s thumping, weaker right-foot shot went into the roof of the net.

Burnley replaced Aaron Ramsey who was stretched off with a knee injury shortly before Arsenal’s fourth goal in the 66th minute. Hannes Delcroix attempted to block a shot by Kai Havertz following a run down the left wing by Jakub Kiwior but the ball broke loose to Trossard who promptly smashed it in first-time.

Australian Rafael snatches IRONMAN 70.3 title

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 18

The Australian Rafael Domingos won first place in the men’s category and Elizaveta Ivanova won in the women’s category after the Ironman 70.3 Triathlon Championship “Muscat 2024”.

While Tridubai team won first place, Oman team Triathlon in second place and Triegypt team came third at team category.

In the men’s relay race, Cassmic team won first place, MHT team in second place and Tri team Burger in third.

In the mixed relay race, Smart team Pro secured first place, followed by Sulei’s Angels team in second and Flying Dutchman team finished third.

Where at women’s relay race, Chicks with Kick team won first place, Bussettes team claimed second place and the ZAC attack team won third place.

The championship took place at Qurum Beach in the Muscat Governorate, sponsored by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, organised by the Modern Triathlon Company.

850 athletes from 54 countries across various age groups participated in the championship, which included passing through tourist landmarks in the Muscat Governorate.



In the women’s race for the age group 25-29, Michelle Nagle won first place, followed by Mogen Llewellyn in the second place and Amy Wu in the third place. In men’s race for the same age group, Rafael Domingo took first place, Quentin Amral came second and Nile Matherthi finished third.

In the men’s race for the age group 30-34, Tim Gosnjak won first place, Gilberto Neirotti claimed second and Oliver Lockyer won third. In the women’s race for the same age group, Elizaveta Ivanova claimed first place, Janina Rhode took second and Slayde Baker finished third.

In the men’s race for the age group 35-39, Ryan Christian managed first place, Zakarin Ilnur finished second and Grigorii Navrotskii came in the third place.

In women’s race for the same age group, Lea Lienshoef secured first place, Laura BROWN won second place and Yasmin Halawa finished third.

In the men’s race for the age group 40-44, ERNESTO ESPINOZA claimed first place, followed by Volker Voit in the second, and David Hynes in the third. In the women’s race for the same age group, Inalize Oosthuizen won first place, Arlene Cowgill took the second, and Olga Gorvat finished third.

The men’s race for the age group 45-49 ended with Ralf Preissl finishing first, Walter Kaspirowitsch coming the second and Andy Edwards securing third place. In the women’s race for same age, Silvia Weishauepl won first place, Valentina Sestan in

second and Ksenia Savostianova in third place.

Ahmad bin Khalfan al Obaidani, the director of the 2024 IRONMAN 70.3 Muscat triathlon, praised the fierce competition that took place throughout the event, with a large participation of athletes from 54 countries around the world, he said.

“The race courses were carefully selected according to specific criteria, which made them pass through diverse geographical areas including mountains, seas, and charming views”.

“The championship achieved sports and tourism goals, as it focused on promoting the prominent tourist attractions in Muscat Governorate, as part of a well-studied marketing plan by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for tourism in the Sultanate of Oman. The participants confirmed the beauty of the tracks and their compliance with the international specifications for competitions”, he ended.

Al Obaidani praised the great role played by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in sponsoring and supporting the championship, and he praised the role of the Modern Triathlon Company in organising the championship in an ideal way and transferring the event to local and international communities.

Ruwi wins Muscat KMCC Trikaripur title

MUSCAT: The inaugural Muscat KMCC Trikaripur Constituency Cricket Fest 2024, orchestrated with precision by the dedicated committee, reached its grand conclusion with RUWI SMASHERS clinching a thrilling victory against ASFANDYAR X1 in the final. The tournament, featuring 16 competitive teams, showcased exceptional cricketing skills and marked a successful beginning for what promises to be an annual tradition.

The semifinals were intense, featuring clashes between RUWI SMASHERS and MIS, as well as ASFANDYAR X1 against ALDAAM. The final battle between RUWI SMASHERS and ASFANDYAR X1 added a captivating chapter, with Ruwi Smashers displaying exceptional skills to claim the championship.

Shanid of Ruwi Smashers was rightfully bestowed with the ‘Man of the Series’ award for his stellar all-round performance. Additionally, he secured the ‘Best Bowler’ title, showcasing his prowess on the field. The title of ‘Best Batsman’ was deservedly awarded to Umar



Ruwi team with KMCC Trikaripur title

Aslam of ASFANDYAR X1 for his outstanding contributions throughout the tournament.

Conducted across four grounds, the cricket fest provided an electrifying experience for both players and spectators. The success of the inaugural tournament was acknowledged during the closing ceremony, where Muscat KMCC Trikaripur Constituency Secretary, Mohammed Riyaz N, and President, S Kunnamahad Said, expressed their satisfaction and gratitude.

The winners’ trophy, sponsored by Arco Heritache Village, AH Group, was honoured by Muscat KMCC Joint Secretary, Shajahan Pazhayangadi, and Wise President, Navas Chenkala, adding a special touch to the celebratory moment.

AL RAWAHI, AL HMOUD

FINISH GRUELLING RALLY SWEDEN AT

FIRST ATTEMPT



Abdullah al Rawahi battles the wintry conditions at Rally Sweden.

UMEÅ: Oman's Abdullah al Rawahi and his Jordanian co-driver Ata Al Hmoud fulfilled their objective of finishing Rally Sweden and getting their challenge for honours in the FIA Junior World Rally Championship (JWRC) off to a strong start in Umeå on Sunday.

The Oman Rally Team duo overcame a collision with a snowbank and a damaged radiator on Friday afternoon and a second similar stoppage late on Saturday — in what turned out to be unlucky stage 13 — to complete one of the most specialised and difficult rallies in the FIA World Rally Championship calendar at their first attempt.

Heavy snowfall and tricky road conditions made the going even more difficult early in the rally but the defending FIA Middle East rally champions persevered and got to grips with their M-Sport Poland Ford Fiesta Rally3 running on studded tyres to reach the finish in 14th place in the JWRC

category.

Al Rawahi said: "We made it to the finish., It was a great experience and tough at the same time. It was probably the toughest rally I have ever been to, especially with the condition changes. We struggled a lot with the set-up of the car. I wasn't really comfortable. Every time I tried to push, we had a moment, hitting a lot of snow banks. We could restart every time. I guess it is part of the experience and hopefully we can come back and use what we have learned this year in the future."

Al Hmoud added: "Finally, we made it to the finish. Almost a crash on every stage. It was a really tough one. We had so many mistakes. For sure, the first time doing an event like this in such difficult weather and conditions, but at least we manage to complete the rally and see all the stages. We have good data for our next event or next year, hopefully. It was a dream participating on it and we have



Night action for Abdullah al Rawahi at Rally Sweden.

done it. We learned such a lot and gained good experience from it. Now we can focus on Croatia..."

Victory at the first round of the JWRC went to local driver Mille Johansson, who finished 48.9 seconds in front of Estonian Romet Jürgenson. Ireland's Eamonn Kelly was a distant third.

PENALTY

After taking a time penalty and restarting on Saturday morning, following the collision with a snow bank on Friday, Al Rawahi emerged unscathed from the first pass through the Vännäs, Sarsjöleden and Bygdsiljum specials and reached the service break in Umeå without dramas as he continued to gain winter experience and time behind the wheel of the M-Sport Fiesta Rally3. Johansson, meanwhile, extended his advantage over Estonian Romet Jürgenson to 37.5 seconds.

The three specials were repeated on Saturday afternoon before competitors

tackled an additional 10.08 km stage at Umeå in the evening that would also act as the Power Stage finale on Sunday.

Al Rawahi was 11th through the re-run of Vännäs but hit trouble on the second pass through Sarsjöleden, when he again damaged the front of the car after an impact with a snowbank and incurred additional time penalties for missing the last two stages of the day.

Undeterred and with the car repaired for the final two pushes through the 25.50km Västervik stage and a second run through the 10.08 km Umeå special on Sunday morning, Al Rawahi got down to the serious business of finishing the event to continue his rapid learning curve.

He set the 12th quickest time on SS16, completed the second run through Västervik safely and the Power Stage to return to Umeå and fulfil his objective of finishing Rally Sweden.

The FIA JWRC continues with Rally Croatia on April 18th-21st.



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Oman to accelerate AI adoption across key sectors

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, FEB 18

The Ministry of Economy hosted on Sunday, February 18, 2024, the AI Economics Initiative Forum – an event that brought together Omani companies specialising in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and various government entities, marking a pivotal moment in the nation’s journey towards AI-driven development.

The daylong forum was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers.

The primary objective of the forum, which took place at JW Marriott Hotel Muscat, was to foster collaboration between the public and private sectors, emphasising the importance of maximising local value from national AI projects.

The event showcased the capabilities of Omani AI companies, providing a platform for potential collaboration.

Moreover, it served as a knowledge-sharing hub, updating government entities on the latest AI technologies and innovations.

Led by the Ministry of Economy, the AI Economics Initiative has already allocated RO 10 million to invigorate the national economy through AI. This initiative spans crucial



Dignitaries at the opening of the AI Economics Initiative Forum on Sunday.

sectors, aligning with Oman’s developmental goals during the tenth five-year plan (2021-2025).

The initiative strategically targets sectors such as Health, Energy, SMEs, Innovation, Government Administration, Environment, Tourism, Logistics, Transportation, and Education.

Its goals include accelerating diversification, integrating AI into development projects, improving spending efficiency, developing smart government services, and supporting technology-based investments.

Various impactful projects have surfaced from different ministries in Oman, exemplifying the

diverse applications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the country.

The Health Ministry’s “National Center for Virtual Health” pioneers the use of AI to deliver specialised medical services remotely, ushering in a new era of medical technology and bolstering the well-being of local communities.

The Energy and Minerals Ministry spearheads the “Geological Data Analysis” project, leveraging AI to efficiently identify potential locations for discovering oil, gas, minerals, and renewable energy. This initiative contributes significantly to sustainable economic development and

resource exploration.

In a forward-thinking approach, the Environment Authority integrates AI with blockchain in the “Environmental Information Bank.” This project not only enhances environmental management but also supports the planning of sustainable projects, further contributing to economic development.

Under the purview of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, projects like the “Linguistic Model for Omani Content Chat GPT” and the “Artificial Intelligence Studio” are set to boost cultural

understanding, social interaction, and national pride through innovative AI applications.

The “AI Investment Dashboard” of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, introduces a smart solution for obtaining accurate investment data, streamlining strategic decision-making processes, and providing essential support to the overall economy.

The Dhofar Municipality undertakes the “Smart Electronic Gates” project, focusing on enhancing traffic management, improving the visitor experience, and contributing to local economic development through

intelligent electronic gates.

The Labour Ministry’s “Smart Administration” project employs AI to expedite processes, enhance work quality, and improve beneficiary services. This contributes not only to administrative efficiency but also creates new employment opportunities.

The Academic Accreditation Authority delves into the “Smart Solutions in Workshop Management” project, fostering learning and innovation, thereby contributing to both economic and social development.

These projects collectively aim to enhance service delivery efficiency, stimulate innovation, attract investments, and support small and medium enterprises, contributing to economic growth.

The initiatives also accelerate decision-making, improve training effectiveness, and foster innovation, thereby positively impacting social development.

The successful hosting of the AI Economics Initiative Forum signifies Oman’s commitment to technological advancement and sustainable development.

As the nation continues its AI journey, collaborative efforts between the public and private sectors promise transformative impacts on the economy and society, positioning Oman as a regional leader in AI-driven innovation.

Oman attracts RO 30m investment in artificial intelligence last year

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, FEB 18

Oman’s Ministry of Transport, Communications and Informational Technology (MoTCIT) has attracted investments worth RO 30 million in the field of artificial intelligence (AI) in 2023, as a result of the growing number of artificial intelligence startups in the country.

Dr Ali al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, described the private sector investments as a “significant leap” for the Ministry’s efforts to drive AI deployment in the local economy.

“The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology leads the artificial intelligence strategy, with a set of indicators being put in place regarding artificial intelligence. Among these indicators is the increase in startups in artificial intelligence, which resulted in an increase in investments in artificial intelligence,” Dr Ali al Shaithani stated at the ministry’s annual media briefing on Sunday, February 18, 2024.

According to the official, the Ministry also collaborated



Dr Ali al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology

with local academic institutions to enhance the local artificial intelligence. “The most important thing in artificial intelligence is not merely using the technology but rather creating the industry. And the industry is developed in think tanks and universities.

Therefore, there is a concerted effort with universities to develop artificial intelligence algorithms.” He shared that the Ministry is actively collaborating with the University of Technology and Applied Sciences to launch an artificial intelligence industry programme and was also able to increase the number of AI-related research papers last year. Significantly, the Ministry is in the process of designing an Omani artificial intelligence model, which

will be trained using different aspects of Omani culture.

Furthermore, the Ministry is currently collaborating with the National Applied University and Sultan Qaboos University to establish a cybersecurity industry to attract and guide young people to the industry, the Under-Secretary said. In regards to digital transformation, Dr Al Shaithani shared that in 2023 the Ministry launched “Manjam” labs in an effort of simplify government procedures.

He added that the government introduced many easy-to-use applications, such as the one used during Majlis Ashshura election. The Ministry is currently developing 39 electronic portals.

Moreover, Dr Al Shaithani shared that the Ministry was successful in creating the first Omani computer chips, Oman-1 and Oman-2, following the hosting of a semi-conductor world forum in Oman. Additionally, the Ministry was able to train more than 4800 young men and women in over fifty programmes as part of its Empowerment Initiative (Makeen).

In regards to the space sector, he shared that the Ministry successfully hosted the first-ever space conference in the MENA region last year and will launch the first public Omani satellite this year.

Lead acid battery recycling plant to be set up in Sohar Port

MUSCAT: SOHAR Port and Freezone signed a land lease agreement with Starsun Sohar SFZ to establish a recycling plant dedicated to the sustainable management of lead-acid batteries in SOHAR Freezone.

Ensuring compliance with environmental standards, this project is set to enhance the recycling industry, highlighting SOHAR Port and Freezone dedication to circular economy principles in the Sultanate of Oman.

With a total investment of \$3 million and an area of 7000 m2, the recycling plant, furnished with cutting-edge technologies, is focused on recovering valuable materials from locally used batteries, with a projected production capacity of 1000 tonnes per month, along with exporting lead ingots, lead oxide, and red lead oxide to key markets, including India, China, Korea, and several European countries.

These products will be traded on the London Metal Exchange, thereby bolstering global trade capacities.

The agreement between SOHAR Freezone and Starsun



Ensuring compliance with environmental standards, this project is set to enhance the recycling industry in Oman.

Sohar SFZ leverages existing industrial activities in SOHAR, transforming waste into resources and fostering a sustainable economic ecosystem.

Israil Khan, Chief Managing Director of Starsun Sohar stated, “We are excited about this agreement with SOHAR Freezone and the promising opportunities it offers to investors.

By leveraging the strategic advantages provided by SOHAR Freezone and its continued growth, this project will create new avenues for economic growth and advance the technology behind lead acid battery recycling.”

Commenting on this agreement, Omar bin Mahmood

al Mahrizi, CEO of SOHAR Freezone- DCEO SOHAR Port, said: “By establishing this new recycling plant, the third in SOHAR Freezone, we are taking a step forward in demonstrating our commitment to circular economy.

We are setting a model for sustainable industrial practices, where waste is transformed into valuable resources, thereby fostering a greener, more resilient economic ecosystem.

Through strategic industrial synergy, we are harnessing the collective strengths of our partners to drive positive change in the industry, pioneering the transition towards a sustainable greener future.”

NBO, Sohar Aluminium to accelerate economic growth in Oman



The agreement was signed by Abdullah al Hinai, CEO at NBO and Eng Said Mohammed al Masoudi, CEO of Sohar Aluminium.

MUSCAT: Aligning with its commitment to meet the diverse financial needs of its customers, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has announced its strategic collaboration with Sohar Aluminium Co LLC.

This significant partnership entails the provision of a \$50 million working capital facility to support Sohar Aluminium's operational requirements.

An agreement signed recently, by Abdullah al Hinai, Chief Executive Officer at National Bank of Oman, and Eng Said Mohammed al Masoudi, CEO of Sohar Aluminium, is poised to fortify ties and attain mutually advantageous goals, contributing significantly to the overall economic development of the Sultanate of Oman.

Ghadeer bint Iqbal al Lawatiyah, Assistant General Manager — Head of Project Finance and Syndication at National Bank of Oman, said: "At National Bank of Oman, our unwavering focus remains on supporting the financial requirements of both local and multinational corporates.

We are pleased to provide our support to Sohar Aluminium through this substantial working capital facility. This strategic partnership underscores our

commitment to strengthening connections with pivotal industry players, fostering economic growth, and solidifying our position as the preferred financial partner in Oman. It signifies our ongoing efforts in propelling economic development through impactful collaborations."

The recent agreement underscores NBO's commitment to its corporate clients and also positions the bank as a key player in the corporate lending landscape in Oman. A working capital facility totalling \$50 million will substantially elevate Sohar Aluminium's operational capabilities.

Ricardo Santana, Chief Financial Officer at Sohar Aluminium, said: "We are pleased to reestablish our relationship with NBO, which was our partner for several years in the early period post-inception of the plant.

The realisation of this agreement underscores the trust placed in our robust operations and strong balance sheet.

The Working Capital Facility signed recently will support Sohar Aluminium in its cash management strategy, which is vital for the stability of our operations. Perhaps this is the start of a new chapter in our relationship with NBO."

MoU signed to promote sustainable waste management in Oman

MUSCAT: In a stride towards environmental stewardship and innovative waste management, Al Mouj Muscat signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Oman's waste management authority be'ah, and biodiesel producer Wakud to launch a pilot project aimed at converting used cooking oil (UCO) from its residences and commercial outlets into biodiesel.

Residents of Al Mouj Muscat will be equipped with special bottles and funnels, facilitating the safe and efficient collection of UCOs, thereby contributing directly to the production of biodiesel.

The collected UCO will be processed into green fuel at Wakud's advanced biofuel facility in Khazaen Economic City, symbolising significant advancements in sustainable waste management, recycling efforts, circular economy developments in Oman.

Nasser al Shaibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, said, "This partnership with be'ah and Wakud underscores our commitment to sustainability and our vision for a greener future. By turning waste into energy, we are contributing to the creation of a circular economy that benefits our community and the environment."

As one of the fastest-growing alternative fuels globally, biodiesel aids sectors such as trucking, transport, shipping, and construction in dramatically reducing their carbon footprint. It provides a cost-competitive



The pilot project is aimed at converting used cooking oil into biodiesel.

solution that supports the achievement of climate goals, demonstrating the practical value of sustainable energy sources.

As such, it represents a pivotal element for Oman to reach its 2050 Net Zero emissions goals.

Emphasising the extensive potential of these partnerships, Kumail bin Ahmed al Lawati, Vice-President of Business Development at be'ah, remarked, "These agreements mark concrete progress in be'ah's mission to implement its strategy and contribute to the realisation of Oman Vision 2040.

Our collaborations are crucial instruments that we will leverage fully to uphold our dedication to sustainable resource management and environmental stewardship."

Al Lawati further stated, "The implications of this agreement extend beyond environmental advantages, as it creates fresh opportunities to engage with biofuel buyers."

Maher al Habsi, CEO of Wakud mentioned, "I am proud to announce the signing of this groundbreaking memorandum in the Sultanate of Oman, aligning with our nation's Vision 2040 and commitment to carbon neutrality by 2050.

Our goal is to promote waste recycling and produce eco-friendly biofuels, safeguarding both the environment and community health.

This partnership exemplifies the potential of local companies to drive positive change, and we

thank the management of Al Mouj Muscat and be'ah for their trust and support in Wakud's pioneering initiatives.

This tri-party pilot project at Al Mouj Muscat hopes to achieve more than the conversion of waste into green energy; it also aims to educate residents and retailers on the importance of responsible waste disposal, the broader implications of environmental sustainability, and the value of a circular economy as a driving force for a better future.

By promoting practices that minimise waste and repurpose resources, this waste management programme demonstrates how communities can adopt strategies that are environmentally and economically rewarding.

Ominvest Masters Golf Tournament underscores potentials of sports and tourism sectors in Oman

MUSCAT: Dedicated to bolstering the sports and tourism industries in the Sultanate of Oman, Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest), orchestrated the Oman Ominvest Masters Golf Tournament which took place on February 16 -17, in the La Vie Club at Muscat Hills, Madinat Al Irfan.

The closing ceremony was attended by Azzan bin Qais al Said, Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al Balushi, Group Chief Executive Officer of Ominvest, CEOs of the group's companies, and a number of amateurs and concerned parties.

The event drew 60 golfers from the GCC countries, featuring participation from national teams of the Sultanate of Oman, as well as teams from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.

Azzan bin Qais al Said and Abdulaziz al Balushi, Group CEO of Ominvest presented the award to the Saudi player Khalid al Attiyah, who secured the championship title.

The Oman Ominvest Masters Golf Tournament, recognised as



The event drew 60 golfers from the GCC countries.

the largest amateur golf event in the Sultanate of Oman, showcased the considerable potential within the sports and tourism sectors in the country.

Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al Balushi, Group CEO of Ominvest, stated that the tournament played a role in advancing the opportunities within the Sultanate of Oman to support and foster the sport of golf.

It also aimed to inspire talented individuals and amateurs to enhance their skills.

In a media announcement, he expressed, "La Vie Club, an investment of Ominvest, features mountainous terrain, lush greenery, and panoramic

views of the Sea of Oman. This enhances the Sultanate of Oman's standing in the realm of golf both regionally and globally."

The Saudi golfer, Khalid al Attiyah, the Champion of the Tournament, expressed his delight of the participation in Oman's Masters Golf Tournament.

He indicated that the tournament was successful from the organisational and competitive point of view and witnessed a great participation of professional and distinguished players, applauding the organisers great efforts.

"Oman stands out with its global stadiums and the well-

organised tournaments it hosts, drawing in a significant number of international events. I've taken part in several of these tournaments, and there's considerable enthusiasm for the game in Oman," he added.

Al Attiyah commended the Saudi Arabian Golf Federation for its substantial support to Saudi players and their active involvement in the tournament.

He emphasised the remarkable growth of the game in the Gulf region, attributing it to the heightened interest, leading to the emergence of players, training programmes, and officiating teams.



Asyad Group showcases integrated logistics prowess at Breakbulk Middle East 2024

MUSCAT: Asyad Group, Oman's global integrated logistics provider, took centre stage as the Strategic Partner at Breakbulk Middle East 2024.

Held on February 12 and 13 in Dubai, this paramount event attracted over 8,000 professionals and key decision-makers from the global oil & gas, energy, chemicals, and infrastructure sectors, reinforcing its position as the region's foremost venue for initiating new project ventures.

Asyad's showcase featured its integrated logistics capabilities, including Asyad Shipping, Asyad Ports, Port of Duqm, Asyad Logistics, Oman & Etihad Rail, all backed by the strategic support of Asyad's Free Zones.

This holistic approach not only highlighted the Group's important role in facilitating major projects, but also positioned Oman as a key logistics hub in the region.

"As part of our group-wide commercial integration efforts, we're committed to showcasing

our comprehensive suite of services to regional and global players," asserted Dr Ahmed al Abri, CEO of Asyad Ports.

"Aligned with our ambitious objectives, we're aggressively expanding into global markets to understand customer needs and promote Oman and Asyad as the ideal logistics hub and global supply chain facilitator."

Breakbulk Middle East 2024 is a pivotal forum for exploring the latest trends and challenges facing the breakbulk and project cargo sector, including sustainability, decarbonisation, and the handling of project cargo. Asyad highlighted its leadership in these critical areas.

This participation reflected the Group's dedication to steering the industry towards more sustainable and efficient paradigms, embodying Asyad's commitment to integrating innovation with sustainability in maritime and logistics operations."



DEPLETING RESERVES IMPACT OMAN CHROMITE'S 2023 PRODUCTION

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, FEB 18

Oman Chromite Company, a public shareholding company traded on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), has reported a 44 per cent slump in the production of chromite ore during 2023 – the result of depleting ore reserves in its existing mining concessions in north Oman.

Output plummeted to 59,438 tons in 2023, down from 105,992 tons a year earlier, Humaid bin Masoud al Maqbali, Board Chairman, said in the company's Annual Report for the year.

Efforts are now focused on evaluating the potential of new mining sites awarded by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, as well as the acquisition of other concessions — initiatives that will, however, take some time for exploration activities and validation of prospects, he noted.

On a positive note, however, chromite ore sales yielded revenues of RO 5.9 million in 2023, up from RO 4.5 million a year earlier, an increase of 31 per cent, the Chairman said.

“This is due to the increase in



Chromite ore production at one of Oman Chromite's facilities in the north of the country.

selling prices during the middle of the year and to the increase in demand and sales quantities as a result of the quality of the company's products and its good reputation among customers,” he stated.

Net profit after tax amounted to RO 1.631 million in 2023, up from

RO 1.384 million a year earlier. According to CEO Abdulmunim bin Mohammed al Murshidi, sales of 83,840 tons in 2023 were the highest in the company's history.

The sales figure, encompassing both domestic and overseas sales, represented a 36 per cent increase over the previous year's tally of

68,937 tonnes.

Underscoring initiatives to build Oman Chromite's reserves potential, Al Murshidi stated: “The company continues its efforts to acquire new mining areas and prepare the company to win new mining concession areas according to the current mining

investment procedures in the Sultanate of Oman.

Work is also underway to jointly invest with concession owners wishing to cooperate with Oman Chromite Company and benefit from its experience and capabilities in the field of chrome ore mining.

In this context, plans have been developed to raise the company's efficiency and exploration capabilities and work on the use of modern technology in exploration.”

In June 2022, Oman Chromite entered into a joint arrangement with Minerals Development Oman (MDO), the nation's mining investment and development flagship, to share the cost of exploration, evaluation and feasibility phases covering the development of two sites at Liwa and Mahadha.

MDO, a subsidiary of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), is key shareholder in Oman Chromite.

Established by Royal Decree in 1991, Oman Chromite produces metallurgical and refractory chromite ores for a variety of industrial applications.

Banking workshop hosts former CBO executive president



MUSCAT: In a step towards fostering excellence in Oman's banking sector, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) successfully hosted a transformative workshop hosted by Hamood bin Sangour al Zadjali, the esteemed former Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman.

The workshop brought together bank officials including the young participants from OAB's Ruwad Al Arabi programme, and was centred around two main themes, 'Adapting to Diverse Market Economies' and 'Envisioning the Future of Banking'. Esam al Busaidy, Chief Human Resources & Administration Officer at OAB, said, “Al Zadjali's workshop perfectly aligned with our ethos of continuous learning and adaptation. His session highlighted the keys to thriving in a transformative industry in Oman, and showcased the active engagement and eagerness to learn among our team members.

It was an honour to have him share his insights with Ruwad Al Arabi trainees and leaders, and with our management teams.”

Wave of deals puts US shale oil back in focus

NEW YORK: American shale oil is back at the centre of the global petroleum game, a driver of major deals involving petroleum giants more inclined to buy up rivals than to undertake wildcat exploration.

On Monday, Diamondback Energy announced the \$26 billion acquisition of Endeavor Energy, combining two of the top 10 producers in the Permian Basin, which has the largest unconventional petroleum reserves in the United States.

The Permian, which is located in western Texas and eastern New Mexico, has emerged as an especially hot commodity.

In October, ExxonMobil announced the acquisition of Pioneer Natural Resources, the

biggest Permian producer, for about \$60 billion.

That was followed in December by Occidental Petroleum's \$12 billion takeover of CrownRock, another Permian producer.

“Consolidation in the space was a bit overdue because the exploration and production space is fairly fragmented, or had been, until all these deals,” said CFRA Research analyst Stewart Glickman.

“People have this idea that it's very monopolistic,” Richard Sweeney, an economics professor at Boston College, said of the oil industry in places like the Permian.

“The US oil and gas market is incredibly fragmented,” Sweeney said. “There's, like, easily 50 firms



A work-over rig performs maintenance on an oil well in the Permian Basin oil production area near Wink, Texas US. — Reuters

that drill a substantial number of wells in Texas.”

One large deal that doesn't involve the Permian is Chevron's \$53 billion purchase of Hess Corporation.

However, Chevron highlighted the appeal of Hess's assets in the Bakken region in the state of North Dakota, another big shale region.

Such shale basins take advantage of horizontal drilling techniques, which permit the drilling of wells from miles away once large companies buy neighbouring sites.

The addition of the Pioneer acreage “means fewer wells” and lower capital spending, said Kathryn Mikells, chief financial officer at ExxonMobil. — AFP

Winning research develops advanced MDC reactor for bioelectricity production, wastewater treatment and desalination

MUSCAT: The 10th National Research Award, organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, has witnessed an array of research projects in various fields that serve a set of national priorities.

In the Environmental and Biological Resources field in the PhD category, ‘Novel two-chamber tubular microbial desalination cell for bioelectricity production, wastewater treatment and desalination with a focus on self-generated pH control’ led by principal investigator Dr Tahereh Jafari, Assistant Professor in the Process Engineering Department at the International Maritime College Oman, National University of Science and Technology, was one of the winning projects in latest edition of the National Research Award.

According to Dr Tahereh, in today's era of increasing global freshwater scarcity, seawater desalination has emerged as an alternative solution to overcome this urgent challenge.

However, the considerable environmental and economic downsides of conventional methods of desalination prevent them from being sustainable and practical options in the long-term, particularly in light of the escalating demands of the future.

The negative impacts of these technologies, such as brine disposal into the ocean and ecological impact, are so severe that they urge researchers toward a significant shift towards more sustainable and environmentally friendly methods in the foreseeable future.

Dr Tahereh stated that a

novel approach is required to overcome current desalination challenges, aiming to improve the process while ensuring environmental sustainability and cost-effectiveness to meet water demands.

Originating from bioelectrochemical systems (BES), Microbial Desalination Cells (MDCs) have emerged as an innovative technology in the world.

They provide a multifaceted solution that simultaneously incorporates wastewater treatment (WWT), desalination, the generation of valuable by-products, and bioelectricity production, all without relying on external electrical power.

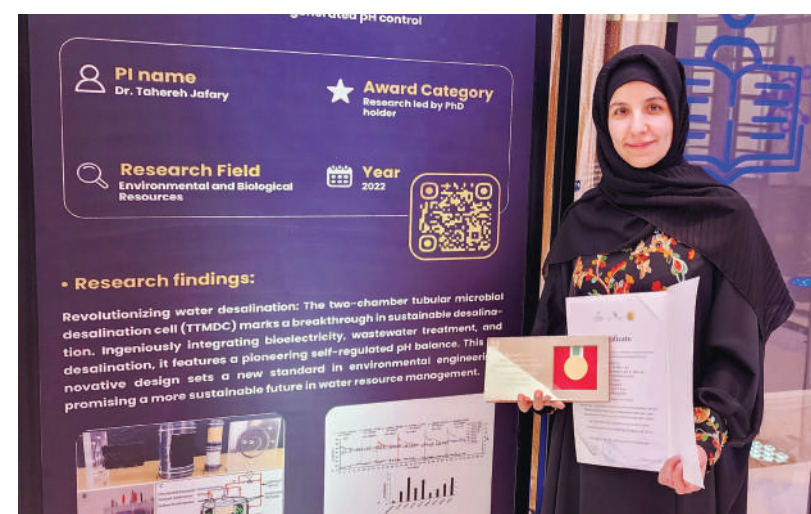
Dr Tahereh elaborated that this innovative approach utilises the energy stored in wastewater,

extracting it in the form of bioelectricity while treating the wastewater simultaneously.

Although MDC technology holds the potential to spearhead a transformative movement within both the desalination and wastewater industries, this technology is still in the research and development stage and it faces a range of technical and fundamental obstacles that have delayed its progress.

In conventional MDC designs, pH imbalances caused by proton accumulation and consumption have a detrimental impact on performance and salt removal, presenting a complex challenge including low efficiency, and high internal resistance that has hindered the technology's advancement.

For the research objective, Dr



Dr Tahereh Jafari, Assistant Professor in the Process Engineering Department at the International Maritime College Oman, National University of Science and Technology.

Tahereh mentioned that this study introduced an innovative two-chamber tubular MDC (TTMDC) design with a unique anion and cation membrane arrangement

for the first time.

The primary goal was to develop an advanced MDC reactor that effectively addresses key challenges in MDC technology.

Everything, everywhere, all as one: how the UNEA can steer the world to a sustainable future



INGER ANDERSEN

The author is Under-Secretary of the United Nations and Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme

The world does not have an environmental to-do list. The world has an environmental must-do list — for 2024 and for decades into the future.

We must slow and adapt to climate change, protect and restore nature and biodiversity, reverse land degradation and desertification, and end pollution and waste. Get it right, and we can build a future that works for the many, not just the few — a principle that is at the heart of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Nations at all stages of

development have committed to work towards this sustainable future under dozens of multilateral environmental agreements. In times of geopolitical crisis and shifting political landscapes, this is no mean feat. Action on the environment is a powerful force for unity.

There are global deals that set agreed goals and targets, such as the Paris Agreement, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the Global Framework on Chemicals.

Many businesses and investors are promising to align their models and capital with low-carbon and nature-positive aspirations. International banks and organisations of all shades and stripes are making environmental action a core part of their objectives.

The scientific community is increasingly moving from sounding the alarm to signposting solutions.

However, progress on turning commitments into transformative action must accelerate rapidly. Last year was the warmest on record, with resultant heatwaves, storms and droughts causing havoc.



A delegate looks at an installation called 'Turn Off the Plastic Tap', made with plastic waste collected from the Kibera slum in Nairobi and exhibited outside the United Nations Environment Programme Headquarters in Nairobi. – Reuters

Millions of people died from pollution of the air, land and water. Rainforests continued to shrink and populations of species crucial to ecosystem health dwindled.

Every day, every week, every month this continues, humanity digs itself into a deeper hole that will take longer to climb out from.

However, it isn't just about working harder; it's about working smarter. With so many agreements in play, there is a growing risk of fragmentation. This is a challenge we need to

address by ensuring that work on each commitment dovetails with and amplifies the work of the others.

After all, we are essentially facing one single global challenge: what we at the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) call the triple planetary crisis: namely the crisis of climate change, the crisis of nature and biodiversity loss and the crisis of pollution and waste. The core drivers of every environmental challenge are often the same: unsustainable consumption and production

chief among them. The best solutions to deploy are those that hit multiple challenges at once.

This is where the United Nations Environment Assembly, known as UNEA, comes in. The Assembly, the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment, unites nations every two years to look not just at isolated issues, but everything, everywhere, all as one.

The sixth gathering of the Assembly is taking place this month in Nairobi, Kenya at the home of UNEP — which hosts the secretariats of over two dozen agreements, regional conventions and scientific panels. This year, we are inviting the multilateral environmental agreements, nations and indeed every actor to come together and find new ways of working together towards a common goal.

I am not saying this will be simple. There are dozens of bodies, covering hundreds of goals and targets. The Paris Agreement targets limiting global temperature rise to well below 2°C or 1.5°C. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework foresees the protection, restoration and sustainable management of Earth's lands, oceans, coastal

areas and inland waters. Nations are aiming for land degradation neutrality under the UN Convention to Combat Desertification.

The Montreal Protocol continues to protect the ozone layer and is contributing to climate action. We have other agreements to do everything from protecting species to shielding people and the planet from harmful chemicals and waste.

A new instrument to end plastic pollution is also in the final stages. Meanwhile, nations will step up at UNEA-6 with new resolutions aimed at tackling the triple planetary crisis.

With so much going on, it sometimes feels like we are all in one boat aiming for the same port, operating dozens of different wheelhouses connected to different rudders. We are not taking the fastest, most direct route to the destination.

At UNEA-6, everyone must strive to find new ways to coordinate the wheelhouses. To learn from each other and apply lessons of the past to the future. And to start delivering on the many commitments that will make the planet, and humanity, whole and healthy.

America's steel madness



ANNE O. KRUEGER

The author is Senior Research Professor of International Economics at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies and Senior Fellow at the Center for International Development at Stanford University.

Late last year, Japan's Nippon Steel announced that it had reached a deal to acquire US Steel Corporation for \$14.1 billion — a move that would make it the world's second-largest steel producer by capacity. Nippon Steel agreed to retain US Steel's name, keep its corporate headquarters in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, honour all contracts with union-represented workers, and preserve its manufacturing facilities, which will get a technological upgrade to raise productivity closer to Japanese levels.

And Nippon Steel has pledged not to move existing production facilities or jobs overseas. It is a good deal.

The announcement, however, was met with a powerful bipartisan political backlash. Republican Senator J D Vance said the deal amounted to "auctioning off" a "critical piece of America's defence industrial base" to foreigners "for cash."

Democratic Senator Joe Manchin called it a "direct threat" to US national security.

Democratic Senator Sherrod Brown urged US President Joe Biden to "explore all options to protect the American steel industry, American steelworkers, and our national and economic security."

The White House has now called for "serious scrutiny" of the deal, which will include a review by the US Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) to determine whether it is compatible with US security interests.

The United Steelworkers union has also come out against the acquisition. All this opposition is practically incomprehensible — and not just because the United Steelworkers have assurances that employees will be retained, and union contracts honoured.

In fact, political leaders should be welcoming the agreement, which promises far-reaching benefits for America's economy and its workers, and possibly even for US foreign policy and security.

Biden has established three key economic-policy objectives: increasing the number of "good jobs," partly by encouraging foreign direct investment; strengthening US manufacturing and local production; and accelerating the adoption of modern technology.

Biden has also sought to shift more trade, especially imports of critical goods, towards US allies — so-called friend-shoring. The steel merger will advance all of these goals, while potentially reinforcing ties with a key US ally.

To understand why, let us start with some background. When World War II ended, Japanese steel companies were far less productive than their American counterparts, including US Steel — then an icon of American industrialisation. But, over the



A worker cuts a piece from a steel coil at the Novolipetsk Steel PAO steel mill in Farrell, Pennsylvania. – Reuters

US PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN HAS ESTABLISHED THREE KEY ECONOMIC-POLICY OBJECTIVES: INCREASING THE NUMBER OF "GOOD JOBS"; STRENGTHENING US MANUFACTURING AND LOCAL PRODUCTION; AND ACCELERATING THE ADOPTION OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY. NIPPON STEEL'S ACQUISITION OF US STEEL WOULD ADVANCE ALL THREE, SO WHY HAS IT AROUSED BIPARTISAN OPPOSITION?

ensuing decades, Japan's steel industry made rapid progress, with productivity surpassing that of the US steel industry in the 1970s.

Unable to compete on cost, American producers have long sought — and usually received — tariff protection. But not even protectionism could close the gap: American steel is among the world's most expensive.

Over the years, employment in the US steel industry has plummeted, from over 180,000 in 1987-91 to 87,100 in 2010 and

83,200 in 2022. But this cannot be blamed on foreign competition; after all, US steel production and consumption increased over this period.

Instead, declining employment is largely the result of technology-enabled productivity gains: it now takes just 1.5 man-hours to produce a tonne of steel in the US, compared to 10.1 man-hours in the 1980s.

Holding employment steady amid such large productivity improvements would have

required steel consumption to rise more than twofold.

One key innovation — which Nippon Steel has embraced — was the electric-arc furnace, which uses scrap as raw material, relies on electricity for fuel, can be turned off when not needed, and requires a limited amount of labour. But US Steel remains more reliant on higher-cost and older, more labour-intensive blast furnaces, which use iron ore and coal.

As a result, US Steel's costs are particularly high, even compared to other American producers. When the acquisition was announced, US Steel had been losing market share nationally and globally almost continuously since the 1970s — falling from eighth place in 2008 to 27th place in 2022 — and was the least

profitable of the large US steel manufacturers.

US Steel's acquisition by Nippon Steel — and the associated technological upgrading — should reverse this decline. The terms of the deal mean that the acquisition will most likely result in higher productivity in the US steel industry.

As the prices of US steel fall, the incentive to import steel will decline, and American manufacturers of goods like refrigerators and automobiles will be able to reduce costs, thereby becoming more competitive.

All of this will strengthen America's manufacturing sector and technological base, and ensure the continued provision — and possible creation — of "good jobs" in the US. Not many big corporate deals advance all three of Biden's biggest economic-policy objectives.

All Americans — including steel workers — should be hailing this one, which represents a real opportunity to reverse US Steel's fortunes and improve the American steel industry's prospects.

The alternative is bleak: if the acquisition is not approved, the US steel industry will keep depending on protective tariffs, and other US industries will continue to lose competitiveness as they are forced to pay higher prices for steel.

Meanwhile, foreign actors will be discouraged from pursuing productive investments in the US.

If a Japanese company cannot own manufacturing facilities in America without jeopardising America's national and economic security, can any foreign-owned company produce anything on US soil?

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China's holiday travel spending tops pre-Covid level

BEIJING: Tourism revenues in China during the eight-day Lunar New Year holidays that ended on Saturday surged by 47.3% year-on-year thanks to a domestic travel boom, surpassing pre-Covid 2019 levels, official data showed on Sunday.

The data may offer temporary relief to policymakers as the world's second-largest economy has been facing deflationary risks amid weak consumer demand, but the sustainability of the tourism boost remains uncertain.

During the holiday, known as the world's largest annual migration, tourist attractions across the country witnessed massive crowds.

Domestic tourism spending jumped by 47.3% to 632.7 billion yuan (\$87.96 billion) from the same holiday period in 2023, and were up 7.7% from pre-Covid levels in 2019, according to the data by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

The number of domestic trips made during this year's holiday grew by 34.3% from a year ago, totalling 474 million which also exceeded the pre-pandemic levels of



During the holiday, known as the world's largest annual migration, tourist attractions across the country witnessed massive crowds. — Reuters

2019 by 19%. The holiday was seven days long in 2019.

Average spending per trip during the holiday this year reached 1,335 yuan, according to Reuters

calculations based on the ministry data. This compared to 1,238 yuan per trip in 2019.

The holiday, also called the Spring Festival, is traditionally the

time hundreds of millions of people return to their hometowns by air, train or road to reunion with family members.

For international travels, China

witnessed around 13.52 million inbound and outbound trips during the holiday, growing by 2.8 times from the same holiday period last year, according to the National

Immigration Administration. The total entry-exit trips during the holiday returned to 90% of the 2019 levels, according to the administration.

As film watching becomes one of the most popular entertainment activities during the holiday, the country's box office revenue exceeded 8 billion yuan over the eight days, according to the China Film Administration, marking a new record high.

The economy has been grappling with multiple challenges including a property downturn and sluggish demand since last year, forcing policymakers to cut interest rates to spur growth even as many developed economies were focused on taming stubbornly high inflation.

As authorities are striking a delicate balancing act to support the economy at a time when signs of deflationary pressures call for more stimulus measures, China's central bank left a key policy rate unchanged on Sunday when rolling over maturing medium-term loans. — Reuters

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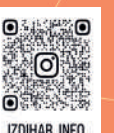
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ANNOUNCEMENT

ANNOUNCEMENT OF AMENDMENT TO THE LEGAL FORM

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





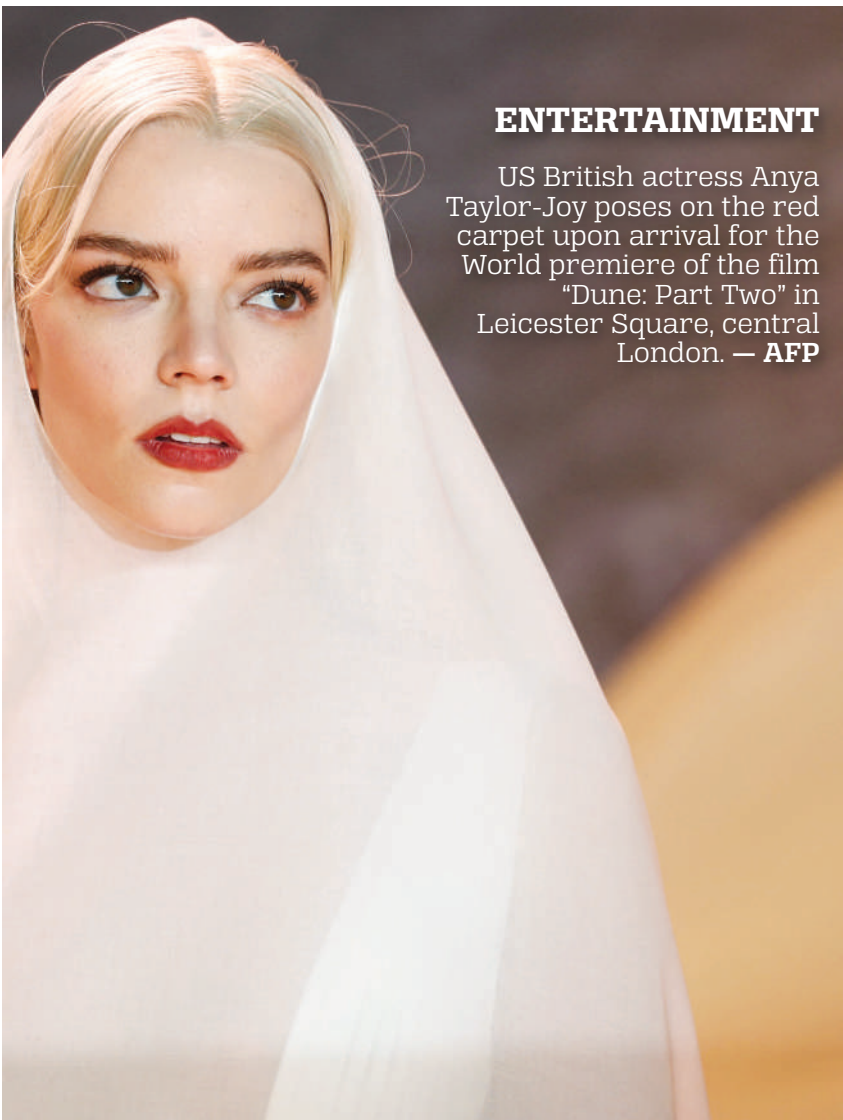
CELEBRATION

A performer holds a fish lantern to celebrate the Lunar New Year of the Dragon on a street in Luoyang, in central China's Henan province. — AFP



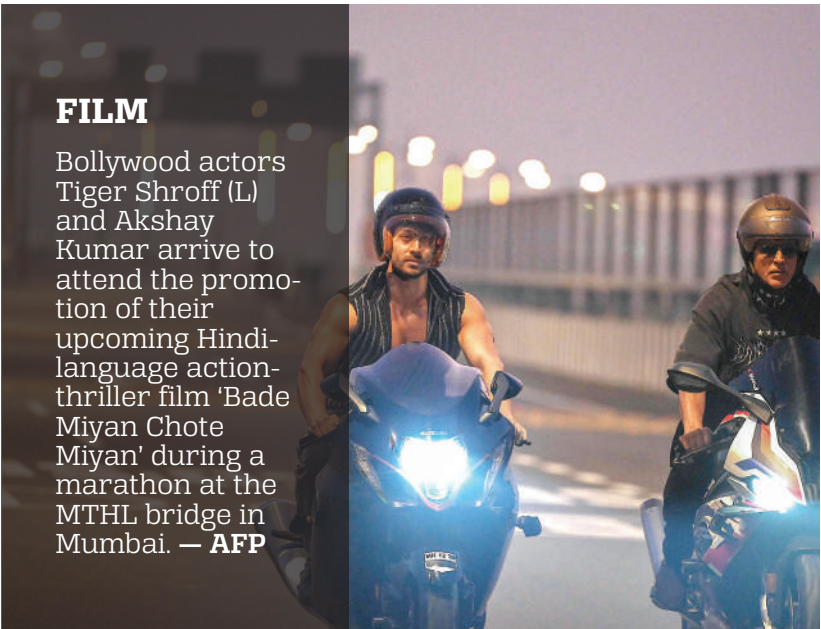
CULTURE

Georgians celebrate Lamproba, a traditional religious festival honouring the dead by burning fires at their graves, what is believed warming their souls, in the highland townlet of Mestia, located at an elevation of 1,500 metres (4,921 feet) in the Caucasus Mountains, in north-western Georgia's Svaneti region. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

US British actress Anya Taylor-Joy poses on the red carpet upon arrival for the World premiere of the film "Dune: Part Two" in Leicester Square, central London. — AFP



FILM

Bollywood actors Tiger Shroff (L) and Akshay Kumar arrive to attend the promotion of their upcoming Hindi-language action-thriller film 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan' during a marathon at the MTHL bridge in Mumbai. — AFP



CONSERVATION

Laura Carreno, wild animals veterinary, holds a Bengal Tiger cub born in captivity at the "Reserva La Pequena Africa" in Jimena de la Frontera, near Cadiz. — AFP

art & life

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Burning agricultural waste has many negative consequences not just to the environment but also the people who practise them. In a conversation with an environmental advocate, the expert shared insights as to the best alternatives to burning and highlighted Oman's best programmes that support environmental preservation initiatives...20

FASHION

London Fashion Week show at British Museum irks Greece

THE GREEK MINISTER of Culture, Lina Mendoni, expressed her anger late on Saturday after a London Fashion week show took place in front of the Parthenon Marbles at the British

Museum. Designer Erdem Moralioglu chose the impressive setting of the Athens Parthenon sculptures showroom at the British Museum to present the autumn winter 2024 collection of his eponymous brand Erdem, inspired by Greek singer Maria Callas and her interpretation of the opera Medea in 1953. "By organising a fashion show in the halls where the Parthenon Sculptures are exhibited, the British Museum, once again, proves its zero-respect for the masterpieces of Pheidias," Mendoni said in a statement. "The directors of the British Museum trivialise and insult not only the monument but also the universal values that it transmits. The conditions of display and storage of the sculptures, at the Duveen Gallery, are constantly deteriorating. It is time for the stolen and abused sculptural masterpieces to shine in the Attic light," she added. The sculptures were taken from the Parthenon temple at the Acropolis in Greece in the early 19th century by British diplomat Thomas Bruce, the

earl of Elgin. Athens raised eyebrows when Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis expressed his "displeasure" over UK counterpart Rishi Sunak's last minute cancellation of a bilateral meeting set to discuss their long-running dispute over the Parthenon Marbles. At issue for London was the Greek leader's comments in a BBC interview a day before the meeting about ownership of the 2,500-year-old marbles. Sunak was allegedly angry about Mitsotakis's comments that having some of the marbles in London and others in Athens was like cutting the Mona Lisa in half. — AFP



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London Fashion Week celebrates multiculturalism and urban life

THE CULTURAL RICHNESS brought by migrations across the world, familial nostalgia and the frenetic pace of London life marked the second day of the city's Fashion Week on Saturday as up-and-coming designers showed off their styles for the season ahead.

Some 60 designers, ranging from rising talents to renowned brands like Burberry, are exhibiting their new designs over five days, hoping to draw the interest of buyers and fashion influencers.

The 40th anniversary edition of the event is also introducing greater diversity and inclusivity in terms of body shapes, ages, and skin colours of the models, as well as in the designers' collections.



MULTICULTURALISM IN SPOTLIGHT

Sierra Leone-born designer Foday Dumbuya's Labrum London brand closed the day with its "Journey Through Colour" collection, celebrating the diversity of cultures brought by immigrants.

The winner of the 2023 Elizabeth II Award for British Design focused on texture plays, newspaper patterns or monogram patterns on more classic cuts.

There were as many tones of colour — from royal blue to black, orange, brown, yellow and green — as there were "inspiring stories" from immigrants.

Some models wore suitcases as headgear, a reference to people fleeing conflict taking their belongings with them.

"People move for different reasons, and when they move, they move their culture with them. And we wanted to celebrate that tonight," Dumbuya told AFP.

One of the models carried on his back a large frame with dozens of flags of "countries that have been involved in key migration throughout history", including the Palestinian flag.

It was a political message and a call for tolerance, argued the creator.

"It's just to showcase you got to support each other. Where we are does not matter. People's life is what is important," Dumbuya said.

"Wherever you are ... Palestinian, Jewish, whatever it is, that world belong to us. It's just saying don't just demonise these people."

- OLD PHOTOGRAPHS -

In her show, Dublin-born menswear designer Robyn Lynch drew inspiration from her sister's career as a Gaelic dancer, using old photographs of high kicks, spangled costumes and passionate spectators for inspiration.

"I vividly remember spending all these weekends in sports halls at competitions

seeing all the glitz and drama that happened on and off stage," said the designer, who used Celtic knots and monograms in her designs.

Lynch's designs featured diamante encrusted jorts (jean shorts), a long line of hoodies with elastic toggle belts and laser-etched jeans with a colour palette of hickory brown, screen blue, matte black and oat milk white.

- Life in the metropolis -

Earlier, models paraded in London's famous red double-decker buses in outfits inspired by traditional dance.

British designer Ricky Wesley Harriott kicked off his brand SRVC's show with a collection named "Human Resource", inspired by modern "professional women's outfits".

The designer had his models, all perched on vertiginous heels, parade on the iconic red double-decker buses of London to "celebrate life in the metropolis".

The show featured rigid and structured jackets with pronounced shoulders, in dark colours with flashy accessories, from XXL silver hoop earrings to rings covering every finger.

- FAIRY TALES -

Designer Priya Ahluwalia, who draws inspiration from her Indian-Nigerian heritage, was cheered after her show, which featured male and female models in earthy reds, oranges and blues parading to thumping house music.

The designer used the Indian and West African fairy tales that she grew up with — like "The Prince Who Wanted The Moon", "The Magic Fiddle" and "How The Leopard Got His Spots" — in her designs for the season, she told *British Vogue*.

"I was thinking about how stories have affected my life — why do we like the stories we like, and how do they get passed on," she said.

Ahluwalia said the corset-like detailing in the knitwear of her designs was inspired by Netflix's "Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story", which she watched while conducting research for her collection.

The designer, who launched her brand Ahluwalia in 2018, works with limited quantities of fabrics, often upcycling and using patchwork techniques to limit waste.

LFW comes at a tumultuous time for Britain's fashion industry, amid post-Brexit trade barriers and the country's cost-of-living crisis.

The difficult economic situation has even prompted some nascent designers to question the viability of investing in British fashion events.

Rising star Dilara Findikoglu made headlines last September after she cancelled her show days before the event for financial reasons.

The industry, which employs close to 900,000 people in the UK and contributes 21 billion pounds (\$26 billion) to the British economy, is facing "incredibly challenging times," LFW's director Caroline Rush told AFP. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

And the winner is... London rolls out red carpet for BAFTA Film Awards



HOLLYWOOD STARS descend on London on Sunday for the annual BAFTA Film Awards, where US historical drama "Oppenheimer", one of the highest-grossing films of 2023, leads nominations for Britain's top movie honours.

The three-hour epic about the making of the atomic bomb during World War Two has 13 nods, including for the night's top prize — best film — which it is the current favourite to win.

Also leading betting odds are the film's Irish star Cillian Murphy, who

so it's a local film," Sandwell said.

Jonathan Glazer's chilling movie "The Zone of Interest" — about the commandant of Auschwitz and his family living next to the death camp — has nine nominations.

The other contenders for best film include Emma Stone's sex-charged gothic comedy "Poor Things", Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon", about the murders of members of the Osage Nation in the 1920s, courtroom drama "Anatomy of a Fall" and "The Holdovers", a comedy set in a boys'



plays the American theoretical physicist J Robert Oppenheimer, to win the leading actor prize and Briton Christopher Nolan for best director.

Digital Spy movies editor Ian Sandwell said the local talent in "Oppenheimer" could help its BAFTA chances.

"It's got Christopher Nolan, it's got Cillian Murphy in the lead. I think it would be a massive surprise if that film does miss out," Sandwell told Reuters.

Last year, a German remake of "All Quiet on the Western Front" was the big winner at the BAFTAs, including, in a surprise for many, for best film, beating the 2023 awards season favourite "Everything Everywhere All at Once".

"If there's anything that's going to do that this year it will be 'The Zone of Interest' because it's got a British director, even though it's foreign language, it's a British co-production

boarding school.

Previous BAFTA and Oscar winner Stone is the favourite to win the leading actress category.

"It was an absolutely extraordinary performance for any actress to do," Tim Richards, founder and CEO of cinema operator Vue International, told Reuters.

None of the best director contenders has previously won the award, and four out of the six are first-time director nominees, including Glazer and Justine Triet for "Anatomy of a Fall".

Triet is the only woman on the list, with the omission of "Barbie" director Greta Gerwig raising some eyebrows.

"Barbie", the highest grossing film of 2023, has five nominations overall. Known as the BAFTAs (British Academy of Film and Television Arts), the awards ceremony will take place at the Royal Festival Hall on the banks of the River Thames and will be hosted by actor David Tennant. — Reuters

THE COST OF AGRI-WASTE BURNING AND WHY IT'S TIME TO RETHINK

“Agricultural burning diminishes water retention and soil fertility by 25 to 30 per cent, necessitating farmers to invest in costly fertilisers and irrigation systems for compensation. Additionally, the carbon emitted during the burning process can disrupt rainfall patterns and the Asian monsoon, thereby disturbing the climate conditions crucial for supporting agriculture.”

BY RUQAYA AL KINDI

Agricultural waste on many farms doesn't merely dissipate into the atmosphere as a dark cloud. While burning agricultural waste is the easiest and quickest method for farmers to eliminate this accumulation, coupled with its low cost and minimal physical exertion, regrettably, it adversely impacts human health and the environment.

The primary agricultural waste materials subjected to burning include dry tree trunks and branches, along with some crops with poor nutritional value like dry grass.

According to Azhar al Hinai, the Head of the Waste Management Section at the Environment Authority, burning these wastes results in heightened environmental pollution due to the release of toxic gases, leading to an

increase in the Earth's temperature, a phenomenon scientifically termed global warming, which adversely affects the plants themselves.

She added, “Agricultural burning diminishes water retention and soil fertility by 25 to 30 per cent, necessitating farmers to invest in costly fertilisers and irrigation systems for compensation. Additionally, the carbon emitted during the burning process can disrupt rainfall patterns and the Asian monsoon, thereby disturbing the climate conditions crucial for supporting agriculture.”

The noxious odors and toxins emitted during this burning process significantly contribute to the likelihood of various diseases and instances of suffocation. International studies have linked the resultant dark cloud from burning to heightened risks of heart and lung diseases, stroke, and certain types of cancer.

The repercussions of this haphazard practice extend to the detriment of both individuals and public property.

“Random burning poses a threat to residential areas close to the fire area if the fire spreads throughout the farms. This irresponsible behaviour also harms the general appearance of the place and leads to the gathering of animals and insects,” Azhar noted.

Individuals can contribute to transforming farm waste into a valuable economic resource for the country by adhering to proper disposal methods (whether it's dates, unusable grains, or palm remains).

This involves, as Azhar emphasised, collecting farm waste in designated areas or contacting the responsible waste collection company, Oman Environmental Services Holding Company “be'ah,” through its hotline (1881) to ensure the proper collection, treatment, or dis-

posal of this waste in an environmentally sound manner.

Azhar further stated, “Agricultural wastes constitute secondary products within the agricultural production system and farmers can repurpose them by converting them into organic fertilisers to enrich the soil, either by shredding dry branches and herbs and incorporating them into the soil or by transforming this waste into animal fodder or clean energy. These initiatives will not only bolster the economic and environmental landscapes but also elevate health and societal standards.”

As highlighted by Azhar, the Sultanate of Oman boasts two recycling factories for agricultural waste, producing organic fertilisers and animal feed in Barka and Raysut. Moreover, there are local initiatives aimed at converting agricultural waste into wooden products and utilising them in artisanal

projects.

The Environment Authority, in collaboration with pertinent entities, is exploring avenues to support investment opportunities in recycling agricultural waste to generate products that contribute to the Omani economy instead of merely accumulating it in landfills.

The Sultanate of Oman is earnestly addressing the issue of indiscriminate burning of agricultural waste. “The relevant authorities are continually intensifying inspection and monitoring campaigns across farms and areas where such practices are prevalent, particularly during morning and evening hours,” she affirmed.

She added that specific sites have been designated for collecting this waste adjacent to farms to facilitate proper disposal until the competent company assumes responsibility for transporting this waste to designated disposal sites.