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GILL, JUREL HELP INDIA CLINCH TEST SERIES AGAINST ENGLAND



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OMANI E&P SUBSIDIARY BRINGS DUTCH OFFSHORE GAS FIELD INTO PRODUCTION



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DISCOVERING HADASH: A JOURNEY TO OMAN'S SECRET VILLAGE



MUSCAT

HM SENDS CABLE OF GREETINGS

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Luis Abinader of the Dominican Republic on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Abinader and the Dominican people further progress and prosperity.

STONE FOR COPPER MINING PROJECTS

Minerals Development Oman Company (MDO) on Monday celebrated the groundbreaking ceremony for redeveloping the Lasil and Al Baydha copper mines in Block 4 of the wilayats of Suhar and Liwa. The event was held under the auspices of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals. The redevelopment of the Lasil and Al Baydha mines is the MDO's first copper mine project; resulted from the intensive exploration programmes carried out by MDO in 2022 revealed the potential of commercial reserves of copper ore estimated at approximately 2.78 million tonnes in Block 4, part of Oman Mining Company geological assets. **DETAILS ON P2**

OPINION

P8



Dr Muamar bin Ali Al Tobani
Is AI algorithm biased and racist?

P9



Ahmed al Mukhaini
Heritage preservation and private sector investments

National platform ‘Naqi’ to monitor air quality



HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said launching the initiative.

MUSCAT: Tasks of Oman Conference on Environmental Sustainability began on Monday at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. The three-day conference deals with carbon-neutrality-related research, the best practices, global experiences and environmental laws and regulations.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Co-operation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan.

The conference seeks to co-ordinate environment-action efforts of governmental, academic and research institutions, as well as regional and international organisations, private sector com-

The programme also provides for developing inspection and control mechanism, training inspectors in accordance with international standards

panies, civil society organisations and individuals.

The ceremony included the inauguration of ‘Naqi’ (Pure), the national platform for monitoring air quality indicators. The platform is designed to enhance public health and improve Oman’s Environment Indicator.

The conference activities include an environmental roadshow that showcases the latest

innovations, techniques, solutions and technologies in different environmental fields.

On the sidelines of the conference, the Environment Authority and the GCC Accreditation Centre signed a Cooperation Programme in the field of ensuring environmental safety in the Sultanate of Oman.

The programme is aimed at consolidating joint action, communication and coordination in the field of accreditation, quality assurance, environment safety and related services in Oman, in line with international practices.

The Cooperation Programme was signed by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, and Eng Mutib al Mizani, Director-General of the GCC Accreditation Centre. **TURN TO P2**



HM GREETINGS CONVEYED TO TUNISIAN PRESIDENT

President Kais Saied of the Tunisian Republic, received at the presidential palace in the capital Tunis on Monday Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior. This came during his reception to the Arab Interior Ministers who are taking part in the 41st session meeting of the Arab Interior Ministers Council. During the meeting, Sayyid Hamoud conveyed greetings and best wishes of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to President Kais Saied and the people of Tunisia. On his turn, the Tunisian President asked Sayyid Hamoud to convey his greetings and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people. **DETAILS ON P2**

Tourism sector to see \$5.9 bn in investments

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is working on National Tourism Strategy 2040, which will include tourism-friendly initiatives, investments in infrastructure, tourist attractions, capacity building, and the establishment of specialised investment zones for tourism development.

Speaking on the sidelines of the World Travel Week - Middle East, organised by Connections Luxury, Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, said: “Tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman is witnessing a steady growth with 4 million visitors arriving in the country last year, including cruise passengers, sports enthusiasts, and event attendees and among others.”

More than 180 companies from the Sultanate of Oman and

abroad are taking part in the event, titled ‘Connections Luxury Middle East.’

He said that the ministry has plans for the sector with over \$5.9 billion in investments for 360 projects, with a strong focus on the 2050 net-zero emissions target and as part of the efforts to develop integrated tourist complexes and preserve heritage sites and historical monuments.

He added: “At the ministry as we unveil our National Tourism Strategy 2040 and bring to life the ambitions of Oman Vision 2040 under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, we are focused on creating an environment where Tourism can flourish and grow.

“We are achieving this through the introduction of tourism-friendly legislation and enterprise-driven initiatives, investment in infrastructure and attractions, capacity building, the creation of specialised investment zones for tourism development and more.”



The Sultanate of Oman received 4 million visitors last year.

UN voices alarm as Israel ready for Rafah raid

GAZA STRIP: The UN chief warned on Monday that an invasion of Rafah in far-southern Gaza would “put the final nail in the coffin” of aid operations, after Israel said its army had readied a plan to move civilians out of the packed city.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Rafah — where 1.4 million Palestinians live in crowded shelters near the Egyptian border — is also “the core of the humanitarian aid operation” in the besieged Gaza Strip.

As tensions simmered across the region, Israel fired the first strikes on Lebanon’s east since the start of the Gaza war, killing two fighters.

In another shock impact of the almost five-month-old war, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh in the occupied West Bank handed in his government’s resignation to the head of the Palestinian Authority, President Mahmud Abbas.

Shtayyeh cited “the new reality” in Gaza and “the escalation in the West Bank and Jerusalem”,



A child holds food in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Monday. – Reuters

where deadly violence has surged since the war began on October 7.

Shtayyeh urged intra-Palestinian consensus after years of rift and the “extension of the Authority’s rule over the entire land of Palestine”.

Heavy fighting raged on in Gaza, where Israeli forces launched strikes and ground operations, killing 92 people overnight according to the territory’s health ministry.

Displaced Gazan Sharif Muammar said his son’s body had been pulled from the rubble in Rafah.

“There was no one here — only children, they are all children,” he said.

“There were no fighters at all. We weren’t launching missiles... We barely live.”

Israel’s military campaign has killed at least 29,782 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the ministry.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stressed on Sunday that, despite ongoing talks towards a ceasefire, the army will launch a ground invasion of Rafah.

Once land operations are launched there, an Israeli victory would be “weeks away”, he said, adding that any truce deal would delay, not prevent, the operation. **SEE ALSO P6**



GEN NUMANI RECEIVES INDIAN DEPUTY SECURITY ADVISER

Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office received in his office here today Vikram Misri, Deputy National Security Adviser of India and his accompanying delegation, currently visiting the Sultanate of Oman as part of the 9th round of the Strategic Dialogue between Oman and India. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed areas of cooperation and underlined the historical friendship relations binding the two countries.

— ONA

Pakistan Embassy honours luminaries



The awardees were those who are working in Oman and contributing in their own unique way

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

On the occasion of Pakistan's National Day, Pakistan Embassy held an event to honour 60 women from different countries and walks of life under the auspices of Her Highness Sayyidah Hujaija bint Jaifer al Said, Chairperson of the Association for Children with Disabilities.

The awardees were predominantly from Pakistan who are working in Oman and contributing in their own unique way, in addition to women from Oman, India, Philippines and England.

Speaking to the Observer, Imran Ali, Ambassador, said, "The initiative began with an intention to showcase the talent of Pakistani ladies in workforce, Omani women in different career path, in addition to ladies from India, Philippines and Britain — all who have made a difference by contributing to the Omani Society. Most of the ladies

who had been honoured, have been working at least for more than a decade."

In regards to empowerment of women, the ambassador said, "I think women need to be empowered inside and outside the house. Most importantly they deserve appreciation in professional excellence as much as men because you can see the lack of it as last year the Pakistan Women cricket team was the champions in Oman."

Amongst the awardees were achievers in sports, social workers, doctors, pilots, care givers, educators, entrepreneurs, business women, teachers and researchers.

"The people are not often applauded. There is often an argument that says they are doing their job, but the difference is some do the 9 to 5 job, while others perform their job to give relief to humans, where they go beyond their call of duty," he explained.

National platform 'Naqi' to monitor air quality

FROM P1

The Cooperation Programme stipulates that the two sides shall exchange information, legislations, plans, expertise and the best practices they undertake in the areas of accreditation, quality assessment procedures and database for service providers. It also introduces a mechanism for appointing and registering companies, recruiting specialised experts and conducting research and studies related to environmental laboratories.

The programme also provides for developing inspection and control mechanism, training inspectors in accordance with international standards, supporting small and medium enterprises and co-organising training and awareness events.

The conference is organised by the Environment Authority in cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme, Sultan Qaboos University, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. It discusses 160 scholarly papers from different countries of the world. — ONA



OMAN TAKES PART IN ARAB INTERIOR MINISTERS MEETING



Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, and his counterparts at the meeting in Tunis.



— ONA

TUNIS: The Sultanate of Oman took part in the meeting of the 41st Session of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers held under the auspices of Kais Saied, President of the Republic of Tunisia in the presence of Arab Interior Ministers and representatives of the League of Arab States (LAS) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

The delegation of the Sultanate

of Oman was headed by Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior.

Meanwhile, President Kais Saied of the Tunisian Republic received at the presidential palace in the capital Tunis on Monday Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior.

This came during his reception to the Arab Interior Ministers who are taking part in the 41st

session meeting of the Arab Interior Ministers Council.

During the meeting, Sayyid Hamoud conveyed greetings and best wishes of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to President Kais Saied and the people of Tunisia.

On his turn, the Tunisian President asked Sayyid Hamoud to convey his greetings and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan

and the Omani people.

During the reception, President Kais Saied underlined the effective and important role of the Arab Interior Ministers Council in coordinating the security cooperation between the Arab states. He wished them success in their meeting to come up with all that meets aspirations of the Arab leaders and peoples.

— ONA

MDO marks groundbreaking for redevelopment project at copper mines

SUHAR: Minerals Development Oman Company (MDO) celebrated on Monday the groundbreaking ceremony for redeveloping the Lasil and Al Baydha copper mines in Block 4 of the Wilayats of Sohar and Liwa.

The event was held under the auspices of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufer, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

The redevelopment of the Lasil and Al Baydha mines is the MDO's first copper mine project; resulted from the intensive exploration programmes carried out by MDO in 2022 revealed the potential of commercial reserves of copper ore estimated at approximately 2.78 million tonnes in Block 4, part of Oman Mining Company geological assets.

The project will encompass a series of phases, including the mobilisation and construction of the mines, open-pit mining operations and then the commencement of processing and concentration operations. The production of copper ore from the Lasil mine is



The redevelopment of the Lasil and Al Baydha mines is the MDO's first copper mine project.

— ONA

anticipated to begin this year, while production from the Al Baydha mine is expected to commence in 2026.

The project aims to produce approximately 800,000 tonnes of copper ore per annum. The project's initial phase is expected to last four years based on the current reserves. However, the company is progressing exploration campaign at the surrounding areas to

hopefully secure new reserves and extend the production period.

Nasser bin Saif al Moqbali, CEO of MDO, said, "The redevelopment project of the Lasil and Al Baydha copper mines marks the start of a significant journey for a series of mining projects and a crucial step towards reviving the copper mining industry in the Sultanate of Oman, which will keep up with the global demand externally and boost the

local industries internally." The project strives to enrich local value addition and optimise value chains in collaboration and partnership with the private sector.

MDO has awarded the mining contract to a national contractor and awarded the processing contract to Mawarid Mining to process the copper ore in their concentrator located in the Wadi Al Jizzi, Sohar. This initiative exemplifies the company's unwavering commitment to fostering the mining sector in Oman through a commendable public-private partnership.

MDO's CEO added: "Since the transfer of Oman Mining Company to the group, MDO has begun implementing an ambitious turnaround strategy to revive the company and benefit from its previously unexplored geological assets. Within a short period, we managed to overcome many of these challenges with the support of our partners in the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and other Government entities. — ONA

Suhar Smart City soon

HIBBA AL KINDI

SUHAR, FEB 26

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) announced its plans for establishing a smart city in Sohar on Monday at the Sohar Investment Forum.

According to a ministry official, the city will be 6,240,000 sqm and will include 15 neighbourhoods, two central parks, a museum, a university, an exhibition centre and a sports centre. The city will be located near Sohar Airport and 30 minutes from the Port of Sohar. Additionally, it is also situated close to the main roads and the expressway.

According to officials, the city will adopt 'the 5-minute city' concept — meaning that residents will be able to reach facilities within a 5-minute walk.

Furthermore, the city will also implement a grid design similar to the city of Barcelona. Moreover, it will also contain around 1,000 gardens and multiple urban blocks.

The city expects to house a population of approximately 70,162 and will include 15,340 housing units, the majority of which (66 per cent) will be apartments, townhouses (24 per cent) and villas (10 per cent), in addition to 4,200 student accommodation units.



The city will be located near the Sohar Airport and 30 minutes from the Port of Sohar. — Picture for illustrative purpose



Oman, Mauritania explore cooperation in endowments sector



The two sides stressed the advanced relations

MUSCAT: An official session of talks was held in Muscat on Monday between the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, represented by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Original Education.

The Omani side was chaired by Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, while the Mauritanian side was chaired by Dah Ould Sidi Ould Amar Taleb, Minister of Islamic Affairs and Original Education.

During the session, the two sides stressed the advanced relations between the two countries and the level of coordination and integration in areas of endowments and religious affairs. They also discussed topics related to means of promoting cooperation in religious fields and benefiting from the experiences in endowments sector.

A presentation was given during the session on the strategy of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs in Oman and the Ministry's experiences in digital transformation, endowments and funds, rebuilding mosques and Holy Quran schools, preaching and guidance, planning and studies.

— ONA

Oman, India hold strategic dialogue

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the friendly Republic of India held the 9th strategic dialogue meeting in Muscat on Monday.

The Omani side was headed by Major General Idris bin Abdulrahman al Kindi, Secretary-General of the National Security Council while the Indian side was headed by Shri Vikram Misri, Deputy National Security Advisor.

The meeting reiterated the deep-rooted relations and strategic partnership between the two countries in various fields and the desire of both countries' leaderships to boost the relations, which was crowned by the visit of His Majesty



The meeting reiterated the deep-rooted relations and strategic partnership between the two countries. — ONA

Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Republic of India in December 2023.

The two sides discussed wide range of strategic issues and matters of common interest, as well as updates of joint ventures and future projects in a manner that serves the orientations and interests of the two friendly countries.

— ONA

Plekhanov, author of 'A Reformer on the Throne' passes away

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 26

The Russian writer, Sergey Plekhanov, who authored 'A Reformer on the Throne: Sultan Qaboos bin Said al Said', has died at 74 in the Wilayat of Salalah after a battle with cancer, his wife, Julia, informed the Observer in a message. Plekhanov has been a regular contributor to the Observer with his last article published on December 03, 2023.

An author of 17 books (political biographies, science fiction) published from 1984 to 2017, published in Russian, Arabic, English, Spanish, German, Japanese and other languages, Plekhanov was also a script-writer of some movies and documentaries, including the documentary 'Different Faces of Democracy', dedicated to Omani traditional society and political structure (2007).



Sergey Plekhanov

He also served as an associate professor of political science at York University in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. He was also a former deputy director of the Institute for US and Canadian Studies in Russia.

Speaking during a panel discussion at the Muscat International Book Fair in 2020, Plekhanov highlighted the unique personality of late Sultan Qaboos. He said: "I sat with him when he received me at Saih Al Barakat. I asked him

many questions regarding my book about him. He talked to me about his childhood and his encounter with his grandfather in Mumbai. I was impressed greatly when he told me about his early passion for music and his rich knowledge of musicology. He told me about well-known Western musicians and their symphonies. He loved the indigenous music of India, Andalusia and Africa and he knew a lot about Arabian music."

The Observer will recall the unforgettable quotes he made during his interaction with community-related issues as he said in a separate interview.

On what inspired him to author a book 'A Reformer on the Throne: Sultan Qaboos bin Said al Said', Plekhanov said, "I was inspired not only by my political inclinations but also by my admiration for the beauty of Oman's use of its past," he said.

Workshop discusses malnutrition, solutions



Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Affairs and Sumaira Choudhry, the WHO's representative in Oman at the workshop in Muscat on Monday

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 26

According to the 2017 National Nutrition Survey, 9.3 per cent of children under five years old were experiencing wasting (low weight for height), while 11.4 per cent were affected by stunting (low height for age).

There has been a rise in the prevalence of overweight and obesity (high weight for height) among children, reaching 4.2 per cent. These metrics are categorised as moderate health risks by the World Health Organization.

This data was unveiled during the national multi-sectoral workshop organised by the Ministry of Health, in partnership with Unicef, which was under the auspices of Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Affairs. The workshop

involved relevant ministries, international entities, and civil society organisations to pinpoint causes and devise strategies to enhance nutritional outcomes in Oman.

The workshop was attended by Sumaira Choudhry, the World Health Organization's representative in Oman. Unicef provided technical assistance through experts like Ashima George and Kathleen Hennigan, who deliberated on various causes of malnutrition, including inadequate food intake, improper feeding practices like the lack of exclusive breastfeeding, reliance on infant formula, and children's recurrent exposure to infectious diseases.

Experts stressed the importance of addressing both short-term and long-term complications of malnutrition, encompassing physical and mental aspects, overall health

deterioration, heightened vulnerability to infectious diseases, and elevated child mortality rates.

To mitigate the worsening of child malnutrition in Oman, the Ministry of Health has been actively combating malnutrition. Efforts include establishing fully equipped nutrition clinics, deploying trained nutrition technicians to monitor malnutrition cases, conducting training sessions for healthcare workers on infant and young child nutrition and body measurements, and managing malnutrition cases.

The ministry has also revitalised the baby-friendly hospitals initiative and established breastfeeding clinics to support breastfeeding mothers, training 59 nurses from various regions of Oman in an international breastfeeding programme.

وزارة المالية
Ministry of Finance

27 February 2024

Auction Announcement

The Ministry of Finance is pleased to announce the sale of used vehicles, by online auction (www.mazadcom.om), as per the following details:

Auction	Preview location	Quantity	Preview Dates and Times	Auction Period
Used vehicles	Ministry of Finance's warehouse, Ghala Industrial	94	6-3 March 2024 8:00 am - 2:00 pm	12-14 March 2024

Interested persons/companies shall comply with the following:

- A bidder must register and sign up on the website (www.mazadcom.om)
- A bidder shall pay security deposit of RO 500 (refundable in case of non-purchase)
- A bidder shall pay the total value of the vehicles via the website within five working days after the end of the auction
- A %5 -VAT shall be added to the purchase value.
- A bidder is required to pick up the vehicle within three working days after paying the purchase value. In case the vehicle is not picked up, the Ministry shall not be responsible for any losses or damage may occur to the vehicle
- In case a bidder fails to pay the purchase value or transfer the vehicle within the specified period, then the security deposit shall be confiscated
- The mechanical condition of the vehicle, vehicle safety driving on the road, or possibility of it being licensed by the Royal Oman Police will not be guaranteed in any way
- The vehicles can be inspected by the interested bidders during the period starting from 03 March 2024 to 06 March 2024 at the Ministry of Finance's warehouse in Ghala Industrial from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm

N.B.:

01 The vehicle is sold as is.

02 The Ministry of Finance reserves the right to delay or cancel the auction without justifications.

For more details and information, please visit (www.mazadcom.om) or send an email via info@mazadcom.om or telephone number: (79919948 - 79919964 - 79919938).

To inspect the vehicles, please contact (during the working hours)
Ministry of Finance: (97787132 - 99736521)

oman_mof

www.mof.gov.om

وزارة المالية-سلطنة عمان

ministry of finance - Oman



A general view of the MIBF at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre



A workshop on debate at MIBF



A visitor at the bookfair



A boy speaks during the Bring Your Book programme

DIVERSE EVENT AND TITLES ATTRACT VISITORS



KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

The fifth day of the Muscat International Book Fair (MIBF) at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), witnessed a one of its kind event known to reinvigorating the minds with healthy discussions.

Currently in its third edition, the ‘Open Debating Championship’, being held as part of the book fair, aims to develop a culture of dialogue among participants, enhance the skills of thinking, analysis and persuasion, and stimulate the intellectual creative energies of youths in a way that enriches their general culture and communicates the values of dialogue within them.

“Through this tournament, we seek to enable community members to express their positions and opinions on issues of local, regional and global concern, thus contributing to the development of their constructive critical sense and the creation of dialogue traditions capable of developing existing

relations between the scientific community,” said Nasser bin Humaid al Hinai, Executive Director of OmanDebate.

Al Hinai pointed out that the tournament targets all segments of society. He further said that as many as 100 people in the individual category and 28 teams in the team category registered in this edition and were trained in the art of debate through a workshop by experts.

“The Muscat International Book Fair was chosen to hold the tournament as it is the largest cultural event in the Sultanate of Oman and receives tens of thousands of visitors, which is an opportunity for the centre to introduce the art of debate and the importance of its role in building generations armed with the tools of systematic dialogue. OmanDebate is the biggest of its kind and will be held over three days,” he said.

FIRST TIME FROM INDIA
DC Books, one of India’s leading publishers, DC Books, is taking part in the MIBF for the first time. “We have a wide range of latest

novels, story collections, poems, scientific works, travel literature and the like. These will be available at special rates at the stalls numbered 1F19 and 1F20. English language books will also be available from the stall,” Ravi DC, CEO of DC Books, told the *Observer*. “It is an honour for us to take part in the region’s most sought-after book fests.”

YOUTH CENTRE
The Youth Centre, present at the venue, is hosting several events along with the book fair. The first of them is a session where the future of creative business in the world of artificial intelligence is assessed under the content supervision of the Al Alama Company. The events which are specialised in digital marketing communication will be monitored by Mohammed al Ajmi, Technical content creator.

The fair, which began on Wednesday at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center, will conclude on March 2. Hours of operation are Saturday to Thursday 10am to 10pm and Friday 4pm to 10pm. Admission is free.



Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, presents prizes to winners

Winners of Knights of Arabic language competition feted

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 26

Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, presented prizes to winners of the Knights of the Arabic Language competition in Muscat on Sunday.

The ceremony included the Ministry's speech delivered by Dr Suleiman al Jamoudi, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Educational Supervision and Chairman of the Main Committee of the Competition, in which he said: "The Ministry's interest in the Knights of the Arabic Language Competition comes within the activities of the Arabic Language Month initiative, which was launched by the League of Arab States and

focused on students' creativity and stimulating the spirit of competition among them to nurture and hone their talents and develop their skills, in a way that is integrated with the school curricula. The competition included five areas: story, essay, poetry, calligraphy and drawing and was implemented for all three educational levels. Two hundred and twenty-eight students from public and private schools competed for its prizes in the finals and it contributed to achieving returns and benefits for students and competing schools alike and to produce student talents that enhance the national presence in various regional and international cultural competitions, so that the flag of the Sultanate of Oman flies high on the podiums.

Dr Sulaiman al Jamoudi said: "The competition, with the gains it achieved and the linguistic movement it created among students, enhanced the development of their linguistic and creative skills. From this standpoint, the vision of the initiative was not limited to the areas of the competition, but rather included extracurricular events and activities that helped hone the students' talents and abilities in the various Arabic language arts, such as training workshops for proficient students in how to write creatively in stories, articles, poetry, drawing and Arabic calligraphy."

Al Jamoudi concluded his speech by saying: "The ministry's continuous interest in student talents is the translation of the human and society

pillars in the Oman Vision 2040 and its priority to create a society whose human being is creative, proud of its identity, innovative and competitive, and an embodiment of what the great goal of the School Education Law stipulated in its second article is to achieve comprehensive and integrated growth of the personality of the learner in its mental, emotional, spiritual and physical aspects."

The students presented a theatrical performance entitled "Student Creations in the Arabic Language," after which a film entitled "Knights of the Arabic Language" was shown. After that, the Minister of Education honoured 44 students who won the Knights of the Arabic Language competition.

Solidarity Charity exhibition kicks off

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 26

The Association for Children with Disabilities organised the 10th edition of the Solidarity Charity exhibition which will run till February 28 at the Al Shafaq Club Hall. The event was held under the auspices of Dr Ahood bint Said al Balushiya, Member of the State Council.

The exhibition aims to highlight the role played by women and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in trade and manufacturing of Omani products. It also features a number of products of Omani entrepreneurs to allow visitors to shop for Eid and Ramadan supplies. The event is supervised by Khadeeja bint Nasser al Saatiya, Chairperson of the Association's Board of Directors.

The exhibition showcases a wide range of products including clothes, accessories, perfumes, incense, abayas and

other Eid essentials. The 10th edition also features a special corner for the association's vocational students to sell their handicrafts.

The Association for Children with Disabilities is a non-profit charitable organisation that provides its services free of charge to approximately 400 children.

Al Saati, Chairperson of the Association, explained that the Association for Children with Disabilities plays an active role in raising public awareness among various segments of society, public and private bodies and institutions, about the importance of providing support and voluntary services, both material and moral, to children with disabilities.

It also plays a role in assuming part of the responsibility for rehabilitating and training children with disabilities and works diligently to play a prominent role within its terms of reference and field of activity.



10th edition of the Solidarity Charity exhibition will run till February 28 at the Al Shafaq Club Hall

Geniuses of Science Forum held



Dr Madeeha al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, at the second edition of Oman Geniuses Forum at Al Bayan School for Basic Education in Muscat



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 26

Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, inaugurated the second edition of Oman Geniuses Forum at Al Bayan School for Basic Education in the Muscat Governorate. The forum links digital technology, innovation in school classes and reserve classes.

The Forum began with a poem recited by the student Mohammed bin Saif al Mana'i. After that, the programme of

the forum was introduced via a digital screen showing one of Al Bayan's students delivering the speech to the visitors of the forum, with a display of the locations of the forum's activities.

After that, the Minister and the attendees visited the astronomy corner, which allows the experience of observing the sun with a telescope, viewing space and the orbits of celestial bodies. Other exhibits a bee robot, a device for measuring the water level in the tank using basic electronic parts without programming and a path-

following robot.

The forum also included a dedicated corner for a digital lesson, where one learn to produce a cartoon film related to the curriculum, design a special code for each film, and circulate it. The corner also displays a group of lessons that were produced in the school.

It also has digital writer's corner specialised in producing digital curriculum stories and displaying the stories that were produced in the corner and the digital world corner in which the visitor sees various designs

made by students, and a group of electronic games. The Lego Genius Corner at the forum is about developing 21st century skills, innovation and higher-order thinking skills among students. In its second edition, the Geniuses of Science Forum aims to achieve Oman Vision 2040, employ artificial intelligence in classroom situations, sponsor educational and digital projects, as well as develop innovation, creativity, and learning skills for the future in academic classes, and invest reserve quotas to achieve this.

Sultanate of Oman

Ministry of Defence

ENGINEERING SERVICES

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Defence invites Contractors specialized in the under mentioned works and registered with the Govt. Tender Board and Ministry of Defence to participate in the following tender.

Tender No.	Tender Name	Contractors Grade	Last Date to Obtain Tender	Tender Submission Date	Tender Price (RO)
2024/001	CIVIL WORK	First & above Civil work - MAM	7 March 2024	1 April 2024	310 R.O
2023/039	CIVIL WORK	First & above Civil work - Salalah	7 March 2024	1 April 2024	675 R.O
2023/047	CIVIL WORK	First & above Civil work - MAM	7 March 2024	1 April 2024	860 R.O
2024/004	ELECTROMECHANICAL WORK - (RO PLANT)	First & above Electromechanical Work - Bidbid	7 March 2024	1 April 2024	165 R.O

*For more information about the above Tenders please visit gate number (14)

- Tender Documents (Electronic Tender Document) can be obtained from the Tender office, Gate No: 14, Muaskar Al Murtafa'a after payment of the tender fee indicated above.
- The Payment should be made electronically by using SMART CARD, VISA CARD and VISA ELECTRON. Sunday to Thursday (0900 - 1300 Hours).
- The Bid to be accompanied by Tender Bond in the value of (1%) of the bid value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank and addressed to HE the Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Bids are to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to HE the Chairman of Tender Committee and marked with Tender Number and Name. Name of Bidder or any other marks should not be printed on the envelopes.
- Bids to be deposited in the Tender office at Gate No: 14 Muaskar Al Murtafa'a before 1300 hours on the assigned day for submission of the Tender.
- We would like to draw your attention to the importance of adherence to the submission date, request and any queries related should not be submitted to MODES fourteen days prior to submission of offer & that queries must be on electronic (Microsoft word).
- You are requested to submit the following items within your tender submission, failure to submit the required information may result a disqualification of your offer without any further notification.
 - Percentage of Omaniisation within the company supported by an authenticated certificate from the Ministry of Labour (Updated Copy).
 - Detailed priced breakdown to be specified as per scope of works and drawings.
 - Tender Form and Tender Bonds to be submitted as hard copy and others documentation shall be as SOFT COPY (USB) in two separate files:
 - Financial (bill 1&2 separated file from bill3)
 - Technical files.
 - Confirmation of site visit.
 - All addendums and circulars.
 - List of sub-contractors/suppliers and their acceptance letter to this project.
 - List of current and executed projects for the last Five years.
 - Valid Registration Certificates from Tender Board.
 - Financial Statement for the last Three years.



People stand next to the rubble at the site of an Israeli air strike in the vicinity of Baalbek city. – AFP

Israel strikes deeper into Lebanon

BEIRUT: Israel carried out airstrikes in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley on Monday, killing at least two members of resistance groups in its deepest attack yet into Lebanese territory since hostilities erupted with last October, sources in Lebanon said.

The Israeli military said its warplanes had struck air defences in the Bekaa Valley in response to the downing of an Israeli drone by the groups earlier in the day. There was no immediate comment groups, which earlier said its fighters had shot down the drone using a surface-to-air missile.

The violence marked an escalation of hostilities that have been fought in parallel to the war in Gaza, heightening the risks of further escalation between heavily armed adversaries that last went to war in 2006.

The Israeli strikes hit an area some 18 km from the city of Baalbek, which is known for its ancient ruins - a Unesco World Heritage site. The region near the Syrian border is a political stronghold of Lebanese groups.

The sources said Israel had carried out simultaneous strikes in the area. A Lebanese security source and a source familiar with the matter said two members had been killed.

Lebanese television station Al-Jadeed broadcast images of plumes of smoke rising from the area.

The Israeli military said it

would continue operations to defend Israel, including within Lebanese air space.

Lebanese groups have been waging a campaign of attacks against Israel since the Oct. 7 raid from the Gaza Strip by Palestinians, in what it describes as an effort to support Palestinians under Israeli fire in Gaza.

The hostilities have largely played out in areas near the Lebanese-Israeli border, but last week widened when Israel struck an area just south of the coastal city of Sidon.

It was said earlier on Monday it had shot down an Israeli Hermes 450 drone over Lebanese territory using a surface-to-air missile, the second time it has announced a downing of this type of unmanned aerial vehicle.

The Israeli military said two missile launches had targeted an Israeli Air Force UAV operating over Lebanon. The first, it said, was intercepted by Israel's "David's Sling" Aerial Defense System but the drone "fell inside Lebanese territory" after a second launch.

Israeli strikes since October have killed some 50 civilians in Lebanon, in addition to some 200 fighters.

Attacks from Lebanon into Israel have killed a dozen Israeli soldiers troops and five civilians.

The violence has uprooted tens of thousands of people on both sides of the border.

— Reuters

ARAB STATES TELL UN ISRAELI OCCUPATION IS 'AFFRONT TO JUSTICE'

THE HAGUE: The League of Arab States on Monday called Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories an "affront to international justice", saying failure to end it amounted to "genocide".

The International Court of Justice entered its last day of week-long hearings after a request from the United Nations, with an unprecedented 52 countries giving their views on Israel's occupation.

"This prolonged occupation is an affront to international justice," the 22 Arab-country bloc's representative told judges in The Hague.

"The failure to bring it to an end has led to the current horrors perpetrated against the Palestinian people, amounting to genocide," Abdel Hakim El-Rifai said, reading a written statement.

Most speakers during the hearings have demanded that Israel end its occupation, which came after a six-day Arab-Israeli war in 1967.

But last week the United States said Israel should not be legally obliged to withdraw without taking its "very real security needs" into account.

Speakers on Monday warned a prolonged occupation posed an "extreme danger" to stability in the Middle East and beyond.

"If left unchecked, it runs the risk of not only threatening regional, but also global peace and security," Turkiye's representative Ahmet Yildiz said.

Zambia's representative however told judges that both sides had a duty to negotiate a peaceful settlement.

"Both Israel and Palestine have a duty to respect international human rights law and international humanitarian law," Marshal Mubambe Muchende said. He said any settlement of the conflict should not be "one that puts the blame squarely on one party, but rather one that advances a negotiated solution



Judges at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) rule on emergency measures against Israel following accusations by South Africa that the Israeli military operation in Gaza is a state-led genocide, in The Hague. – Reuters file photo



Palestinians search the rubble of their house destroyed in an overnight Israeli air strike in east Khan Yunis. – AFP

The failure to bring it to an end has led to the current horrors perpetrated against the Palestinian people, amounting to genocide

ABDEL HAKIM EL-RIFAI

Arab bloc's representative

which culminates in a two-state solution".

The UN has asked the ICJ to hand down an "advisory opinion" on the "legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem".

The court will probably deliver its opinion before the end of the year but it is not binding on anyone.

Israel is not taking part in the oral hearings. It submitted a written contribution, in which it described the questions the court had been asked as "prejudicial" and "tendentious".

The hearings began a week ago with three hours of testimony from Palestinian officials, who accused the Israeli occupiers of running a system of "colonialism and apartheid".

The case before the court is separate from one brought by South Africa against Israel for alleged genocide during its current offensive in Gaza.

— AFP

Rafah would be 'nail in coffin' of Gaza aid: UN chief

GENEVA: A full-scale Israeli military operation in Rafah would deliver a death blow to aid programmes in Gaza, where humanitarian assistance remains "completely insufficient", the UN chief warned on Monday.

Speaking before the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Antonio Guterres said that Gaza's southernmost city, where more than 1.4 million Palestinians are crowded together in tent cities, was "the core of the humanitarian aid operation" in the Palestinian territory.

"An all-out Israeli offensive on the city would not only be terrifying for more than a million Palestinian civilians sheltering there; it would put the final nail in the coffin of our aid programmes," he said.

His comments came after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin



ANTONIO GUTERRES

Netanyahu on Sunday reiterated that his country was intent on a ground invasion in Rafah, in its bid for "total victory".

He said that once a ground invasion happens, victory would be just "weeks away", and that a potential ceasefire, being discussed in Doha, would only delay the operation.

The war has been raging for more than four months broke out after October 7 attack.



A displaced Palestinian child stands outside a makeshift tent attached to a school hosting families in the Rafah refugee camp. – AFP

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 29,692 people, mostly women and children, according to the latest tally issued by the health ministry in Gaza.

Guterres stressed on Monday that "nothing can justify deliberate killing, injuring, torturing and kidnapping of civilians, the use of physical violence -- or the indiscriminate launching of rockets".

"And nothing justifies the collective punishment of the Palestinian people," he said.

Amid a spiralling humanitarian crisis, UNRWA, the main UN aid agency for Palestinians, has urged political action to avert famine in Gaza.

But Guterres stressed that "humanitarian aid is still completely insufficient".

"I repeat my call for a humanitarian ceasefire and the

immediate and unconditional release of all captives," he said.

He lamented that despite his urgent calls for the UN Security Council to take all measures to "end the bloodshed in Gaza and prevent escalation", it had failed to act.

As one of five permanent members of the 15-member council, the United States — Israel's biggest ally — has a veto that it has wielded three times so far to bar the body from calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. Guterres warned of the consequences of the council's lack of action on Gaza, and its failure to act on the war in Ukraine.

This inaction "has severely — perhaps fatally — undermined its authority", he cautioned.

"The council needs serious reform to its composition and working methods." — AFP



omanobserver.com/podcast

In brief

■ HANOI



NEARLY 100 DRUG USERS ESCAPE FROM REHAB

Authorities in Vietnam are searching for nearly 100 drug users who escaped from an overcrowded state-owned rehabilitation centre in the Mekong Delta, state media said on Monday.

Following an “internal dispute” on Saturday night, 191 addicts broke out of a rehab centre in the southern city of Soc Trang, reported *Cong An Nhan Dan* newspaper, the official police mouthpiece.

By Monday morning, 94 had been found and brought back. Police and families were searching for nearly 100 others still on the run, the paper said.

— AFP

■ LAGOS



WEST AFRICAN BLOC LIFTS GUINEA, MALI SANCTIONS

West Africa’s regional bloc ECOWAS said that it was easing sanctions imposed on Guinea and Mali, a day after announcing a similar decision for Niger, another country under military rule. ECOWAS said it was lifting financial and economic sanctions against Guinea and ending restrictions on the recruitment of Malians to professional positions within the bloc’s institutions.

The measures concerning Guinea and Mali, while decided during Saturday’s emergency summit, were not mentioned during the closing speech by ECOWAS Commission chief Omar Aliou Touray but appear in the bloc’s closing statement.

— AFP

■ TOKYO



JAPAN MOON LANDER REVIVES AFTER LUNAR NIGHT

Japan’s Moon lander has produced another surprise by waking up after the two-week lunar night, the country’s space agency said on Monday.

The unmanned Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM) touched down last month at a wonky angle that left its solar panels facing the wrong way.

As the sun’s angle shifted, it came back to life for two days and carried out scientific observations of a crater with a high-spec camera, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) said.

“Yesterday we sent a command, to which SLIM responded,” JAXA said on X, formerly Twitter, on Monday.

— AFP



Gas leak from Nord Stream 2 pipeline as seen from a Danish F-16 interceptor jet over Bornholm island, Denmark. — Reuters file photo

Denmark closes Nord Stream sabotage probe

COPENHAGEN: Danish police said on Monday that they were closing their investigation into the 2022 sabotage of the Nord Stream gas pipelines linking Russia and Germany, a move dubbed “close to absurd” by the Kremlin.

Neighbouring Sweden closed its investigation in early February citing a lack of jurisdiction, meaning only Germany now has an ongoing investigation into the leaks.

“Based on the investigation, the authorities can conclude that the sabotage of the pipelines was intentional,” Copenhagen police said in a statement.

“At the same time, it also assessed that there is not the necessary basis for pursuing a criminal case in Denmark,” it said.

Different theories about who is responsible for the sabotage have emerged — pointing the finger at Ukraine, Russia or the United States. All have denied involvement.

Four large gas leaks were discovered on Nord Stream’s two pipelines off the Danish island of Bornholm in September 2022, with seismic institutes recording two underwater explosions just before.

The pipelines had been at the centre of geopolitical tensions as Russia cut gas supplies to Europe in suspected retaliation for Western sanctions over

Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine.

While the leaks were in international waters, two were in Denmark’s exclusive economic zone and two in Sweden’s.

The pipelines were not in operation when the leaks occurred, but they still contained gas which spewed up through the water and into the atmosphere.

Russian energy giant Gazprom holds a majority stake in the twin pipelines, with the rest owned by German, Dutch and French companies.

Denmark, Sweden and Germany have kept a tight lid on their investigations, which analysts have said was because of the potential diplomatic fallout of what they might uncover.

The decision to close the Danish investigation was immediately criticised by Russia.

“The situation is close to absurd. On the one hand, they recognise that a deliberate sabotage took place, but on the other hand they are not moving forward,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists.

Peskov had previously described the Swedish decision to close its probe as “remarkable.”

Copenhagen police said that the investigation — which had been carried out together with Denmark’s intelligence service PET — had been “complicated and extensive.” — AFP

Farmers protest across Europe as ministers meet

BRUSSELS: Farmers on Monday blocked a border crossing between Poland and Germany, threw bottles at police in Brussels and gathered in Madrid to demand action on cheap supermarket prices and what they say is unfair competition from abroad, including Ukraine.

Agricultural ministers from across the European Union were meeting in Brussels on Monday to discuss the crisis in the sector after weeks of angry protests.

The 27-nation EU has already weakened some parts of its flagship Green Deal environmental policies, scrapping a goal to cut farming emissions from its 2040 climate roadmap.

“We’re here again in Brussels today as farmers because the European Union is not listening to our demands. Our demands are for fair revenue,” said Morgan Ody, general coordinator of farming organisation La Via Campesina.

“We produce the food and we don’t make a living. Why is that? Because of free trade agreements. Because of deregulation. Because the prices are below the costs of production. So we demand the EU to move on this.”

In the margins of the Brussels protest, riot police fired water cannon at protesters throwing bottles and eggs, while about 900 tractors jammed parts of the Belgian capital, a short distance from the cordoned-off area where ministers were meeting.

At a protest in Madrid, farmers from across Spain blew whistles, rang cowbells and beat drums, urging the EU to cut red tape and drop some changes to its Common Agriculture Policy (CAP).

“It’s impossible to stand these rules, they want us to work on the field during the day and deal with paperwork at night — we’re sick of the bureaucracy,” said Roberto Rodriguez, who grows cereal and beetroots in the



Spanish farmers protest shared by farmers across Europe, at Paseo de la Castellana street in Madrid, Spain. — Reuters



Police vehicles stand during a protest of European farmers over price pressures, taxes and green regulation, on the day of an EU Agriculture Ministers meeting in Brussels. — Reuters

Agricultural ministers from across the European Union were meeting in Brussels on Monday to discuss the crisis in the sector after weeks of angry protests

The EU agriculture ministers were set to debate a new set of proposals to ease the pressure on farmers, including a reduction in farm inspections and the possibility to exempt small farms from some environmental standards.

German Agriculture Minister Cem Ozdemir said the EU needed to ensure farmers could earn good money if they opted for biodiversity and green measures and talked of existing EU farm policy as being a “bureaucracy monster”.

In response to weeks of protests by angry farmers, the EU has already scrapped a goal to cut farming emissions from its 2040 climate roadmap. — Reuters

central province of Avila.

In Poland, farmers blocked the highway at a border crossing with Germany.

In Warsaw, Prime Minister Donald Tusk and President Andrzej Duda said farmers’ problems needed fixing at an EU level.

Last holdout Hungary to vote on Swedish Nato bid

“The Swedish-Hungarian military cooperation and Sweden’s accession to Nato will strengthen Hungary’s security, so I ask my fellow members to vote for the parliamentary resolution

VIKTOR ORBAN
Hungarian Prime Minister



Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban addresses the parliament in Budapest, Hungary. — Reuters

military cooperation and Sweden’s accession to Nato will strengthen Hungary’s security, so I ask my fellow members to vote for the parliamentary resolution on Sweden’s accession to Nato,” Orban told parliament on Monday.

Lawmakers were widely expected to greenlight the

Nordic nation’s bid in the parliamentary vote.

Orban’s nationalist Fidesz party — whose ruling coalition with the Christian Democratic KDNP holds a two-thirds majority in parliament — has already indicated it would support Sweden’s bid.

All opposition parties except

the far-right Our Homeland movement are in favour of ratification.

Once parliament has approved the bid, the president is expected to sign it in the coming days.

Sweden will then be invited to accede to the Washington Treaty and officially become Nato’s 32nd member.

In the case of Finland, Turkiye gave the green light on March 30, 2023, and Finland became a Nato member on April 4.

After Russia’s attack of Ukraine, most Nato members were keen to quickly approve the membership bids of both Finland and Sweden.

Hungary and the other holdout Turkiye held up the process, especially for Sweden.

For some experts, it was a strategy to wring concessions from Brussels to unlock billions of euros in frozen funds. Others argued it underlined Orban’s closeness to the presidents of Russia and Turkiye. — AFP

What does it mean to be a patriot in the West?



Karim Easterbrook

Former Cambridge School Principal

Pro patria mori, a Latin phrase, means to die for one’s fatherland. The word “patriot” is derived from the Greek “patrios” meaning “of one’s father.” Patriotism is perhaps above all a western phenomenon which refers to a person’s allegiance to a country or homeland rather than to one leader of a country as in the case of most Middle Eastern States. I am English and yet I condemn in the strongest possible terms my government’s refusal not to call for an immediate ceasefire in Palestine as do the majority of people around the world.

In the UK, the word patriot has come to mean for many “my country right or wrong.” In this article I will argue that such a definition of what it is to be an English patriot is not only incorrect but describes the opposite. I propose that such a definition describes what it is to be unpatriotic. In view of what is happening in Palestine the meaning of what it means to be an English patriot is particularly relevant.

Most westerners would agree that patriotism involves the feeling of love, devotion and a sense of attachment to their homeland. This attachment can

be a combination of different feelings for things such as the language of one’s homeland and its ethnic, cultural, political or historical facts. To be a patriot means that you have a special affection for one’s own country, a special concern for the well-being of your country and when necessary as in the Second World War (1939 - 1945) a willingness to sacrifice yourself to protect it from an enemy seeking to destroy and invade your homeland.

But there are limitations: it does not permit a patriot to promote his country’s interests under any circumstances and by any means. To be a true patriot one should acknowledge the constraints morality imposes on the pursuit of your people’s individual and collective goals. Being a patriot may require you to fight for your country but only in so far as the war is and remains, just.

To be a true patriot you also have an obligation to criticise your government when appropriate, to point out its faults, to say and do what is necessary to improve your country for all its people. To be a patriot you have at times to oppose your country’s government policies and actions and hold it to account when it harms its own people and people

WHEN MY COUNTRY FAILS TO DO WHAT IS MORALLY RIGHT, WHEN IT ALIGNS ITSELF WITH A COUNTRY WHICH IS COMMITTING GENOCIDE IN PALESTINE, MY DUTY AS A PATRIOT IS TO WITHHOLD SUPPORT.

in foreign lands. You have a duty to make your compatriots aware of any government in power at any given time which fails to uphold moral standards and pursue ethical policies.

A patriot should expect his country to live up to certain moral standards. In return a country has an obligation to deserve his support and allegiance. Patriotism isn’t a one-way street. It isn’t unconditional. If it were then all countries no matter how immoral their governments behaved would deserve their people’s support. When my country fails to do what is morally right, when it aligns itself with a country which is committing genocide in Palestine, my duty as a patriot is to withhold support.

In the western world it has never been so important to question the actions of the nations in which we live. Western Societies can only improve if they are constantly under the scrutiny of their people. To be a patriot in the West one has to stand up for what is right. Even if yours is the only voice which opposes its government’s policies. I might still love my country but as long as it refuses to call for an immediate ceasefire in Palestine I am unable to give it my support.

Does Sweden joining make the Baltic Sea a ‘Nato lake’?

MAX DELANY

Sweden’s accession to Nato adds a final puzzle piece to the alliance around the shores of the strategically important Baltic Sea — but Russia still poses a threat above and below water.

After Finland joined last year, Sweden’s membership — which looks set to clear the final hurdle on Monday with Hungary’s vote on ratification later on Monday — means all the countries surrounding the Baltic Sea, except Russia, will be part of the US-led military alliance.

That has led some to label the sea a “Nato lake”, with the Western allies now appearing well-placed to strangle Russia’s room for manoeuvre in the crucial shipping route if a war with Moscow ever breaks out.

But analysts warn that while Sweden’s entry makes it easier for Nato to exert control and reinforce its vulnerable Baltic states, Russia can still menace the region from heavily-armed exclave Kaliningrad and threaten undersea infrastructure.

“If you look at a map then geographically the Baltic Sea is becoming a Nato lake, yes,” said Minna Alander a research fellow at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs. “But there is still work to do for Nato.”

Since Russia’s attack on Ukraine, a series of high-profile incidents involving pipelines and cables under the Baltic Sea have given Nato a wake-up call over its vulnerabilities.

In September 2022 a sabotage attack hit the Nord Stream gas pipelines between Russia and Europe. Over a year on, investigators have still not publicly named those responsible.

Then last October a gas pipeline and a cable from Finland and Sweden to Estonia were damaged. Finnish police say they believe a Chinese cargo ship was likely involved.

Nato has bolstered its naval deployments in response and is looking to step up its monitoring capabilities, but keeping an eye on what’s happening beneath the water is a major task.

Sweden has long had a close partnership with Nato but its formal membership will allow it to be fully integrated into the alliance’s defence plans.

Beyond its long Baltic coastline, Sweden brings with it the island of Gotland which would play a central role in helping Nato impose its will.

But just across the water Russia has its own vital outpost — the exclave of Kaliningrad.

— AFP

Is AI algorithm biased and racist? Depends on the nature of data fed into it



Dr Muamar bin Ali Al Tobi

The author is an academic and researcher

I have followed several reports and video clips that showed what some might see as bias and racism in generative AI models like ChatGPT.

Some experiments showed a bias in AI systems favouring the occupying Israeli entity when asked about the Palestinians’ right to freedom and an independent state, and conversely, when asked about the Jewish right to freedom and an independent homeland, the responses from ChatGPT as shown by the experimenter in the video clip, were blatantly biased towards the occupying entity.

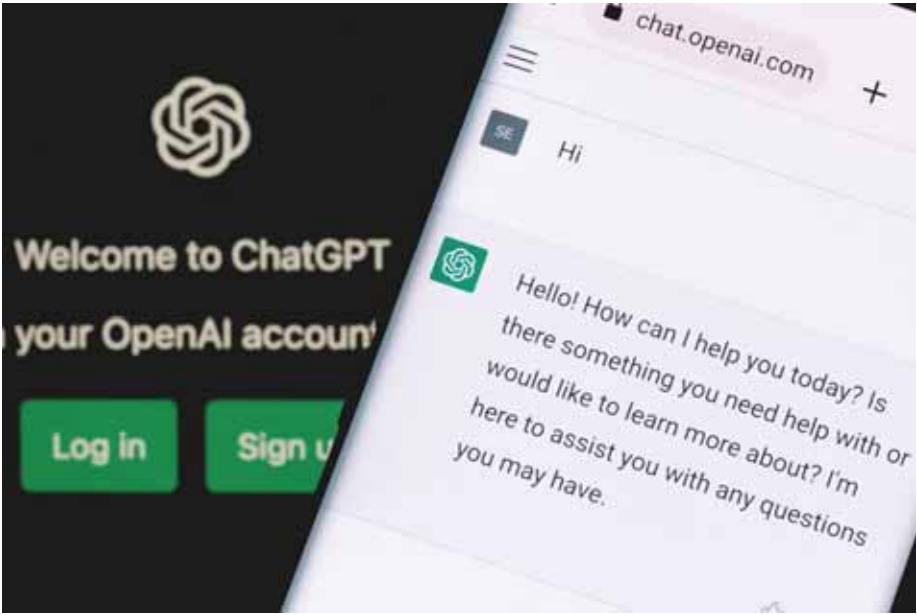
It clearly affirms this entity’s and its settlers’ right to freedom and an independent sovereign homeland, while providing a general answer to the Palestinian situation as a complex issue without delving into its political intricacies. Thus, some understand that such intelligent models agree with the occupier’s view that the Palestinian people have no rights and their cause is non-existent

The existence of deliberate bias by the designers of these models are either through the systematic guidance of generative AI systems’ algorithms or through the data these models feed on, or even both.

I will try to give my scientific and objective perspective — as much as possible — on this issue concerning the working mechanism of generative AI models and the possibility of their bias or lack thereof. It also discusses the limits of such bias, if it exists, as well as present a quick experiment I will conduct with the ChatGPT model through a question-and-answer method regarding the Palestinian issue and the Zionist entity.

Do Palestinians deserve an independent state? I asked ChatGPT. The generative model’s response was: “The question of whether the Palestinian people deserve an independent state is a matter related to international discussion and negotiations. The desire for an independent Palestinian state is a key issue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

When the same question was



The existence of deliberate bias by the designers of these models are either through the systematic guidance of generative AI systems’ algorithms or through the data these models feed on, or even both.

directed to ChatGPT but with Israelis instead of Palestinians, do Israelis deserve an independent state? the answer was, “Yes, the Israeli people have the right to an independent state, and the State of Israel was established in 1948, which gained recognition by the United Nations.”

What matters to us from a scientific perspective is this question: Why might the generative model behave with such biased behaviour? The simple answer is

THE GENERATIVE MODEL LIKES CHATGPT RELIES ON DATA AND INFORMATION FED INTO IT, WHICH IT IS TRAINED ON TO BE ABLE TO PREDICT TEXTS ACCORDING TO WHAT IS ASKED OF IT AND INQUIRED ABOUT

that the generative model relies on data and information fed into it, which it is trained on to be able to predict texts according to what is asked of it and inquired about.

Several points can be inferred from the previous two answers of ChatGPT. The first being that human influence on AI models is most likely through the type of data provided to the AI algorithm, which determines the

algorithm’s behaviour. It is obvious that most of the data the generative model trained on is carefully selected by its makers from specific sources. It establishes the second conclusion affirming the autonomy of generative models after the training phase in terms of their ability to predict text based on their training on data and their analysis of it based on a mathematical mechanism.

The AI algorithm operates according to a fixed mathematical mechanism with no way to be controlled either through programming or any other means during its actual operation except during the establishment of its mathematical elements in terms of the number of neural networks, learning functions, and their speed.

This naturally does not interfere with the prediction mechanism and decisions during the model’s operation. It is not possible to attribute the characteristics of bias and racism to a smart digital machine due to the similarity of its operation and logic of the human brain.

Since it does not possess the total rationality that humans have the emotions leading to practicing bias and racism are not inherent in it. They are generated as a result of data interacting with an ultra-smart mathematical algorithm.

Art shapes the fear of the future

The hero of the Russian writer Andrei Platonov’s story “The Trash Wind” exclaims: “Beautiful 19th century, you’re wrong!” The story is about the Nazi regime in Germany, which seemed to have emerged shortly before, but in fact it is more about the Soviet totalitarian regime. The 19th century was a time of unbridled dreams of socialists like Fourier, Owen, then Marx came along with more pragmatic dreams. They saw the future as beautiful, bright, very attractive.

In fact, the beginning of the 20th century disproved all these beautiful dreams and in fact saw the realisation of Utopia very repulsive. Socialists who came to power in several European countries showed themselves as destroyers of morality not only in Soviet Russia but also in Hungary and Bavaria, where local socialists began repressions against the propertied classes.

Looting and shootings accompanied the attempt to establish the same regime in Finland. In the last 3 countries listed above, the supporters of traditional values managed to fight back and suppress communist plots. But the psyche of many social groups and even entire nations was traumatised. The result was a reaction: the representatives of extreme right-wing movements and parties who came to power unleashed terror against the left. Within one decade, almost the whole of Europe had become a sanctuary of ultra-right and ultra-left regimes. And in literature, dystopian alternatives took the place of the utopians’ beautifully soulful dreams.

One of the first was a novel by Yevgeny Zamyatin, a Russian writer who had had the experience of living under the Communists. In 1920 he wrote the novel We. The meaning of the title is that We, that is, the collective, the community was opposed to the individual and turned into an instrument of suppression of the individual. Soon followed other books of a similar nature, the most famous of which are Aldous Huxley’s “Brave New



Sergey Plekhanov

The writer was the author of ‘A Reformer on the Throne: Sultan Qaboos bin Said

THIS ARTICLE IS REPUBLISHED HERE TO MARK THE MEMORY OF SERGEY PLEKHANOV, A COLUMNIST WITH OBSERVER AND AUTHOR A REFORMER ON THE THRONE, WHO PASSED AWAY IN SALALAH LAST WEEK

World” and George Orwell’s “1984”.

Both books show a totalitarian society formed in the West, that is, under capitalism. Although, of course, the novel 1984 shows a kinship with the Soviet regime, which through violence and propaganda achieved the formation of the so-called new man. The closest resemblance to the regime depicted by Orwell was the Soviet regime. This is not accidental.

The writer was a socialist, participated in the Spanish Civil War on the side of the socialists. There he had the opportunity to familiarise himself with the methods of imposing the Soviet order. It was after participating in this war that Orwell moved away from socialism and realised that the future, where the Soviets beckon mankind, is hell, not paradise, about which the communist propaganda is constantly crackling. It goes without saying that in the countries that became the prototypes of totalitarian empires, pessimism about the future was not welcomed.

Only a happy future could await the inhabitants of such countries. And it was to be enjoyed by the nearest generations, especially the so-called science fiction insisted on it.

The main task of this literature was to show the future non-alternative communist were present in the novels of Soviet writers. The heroes of such works were people possessed of only good feelings, they had practically no negative qualities. Therefore, these novels, which were quite a lot of editions, were actually very boring to read, and as soon as translations of American and English writers appeared, which were more realistic, readers pounced on them and there were queues in libraries. In the 60s the glamorous fiction of writers like Nemtsov and Efremov went bankrupt, but it was still being published for a long time. No one was interested in it any more, and the reader’s imagination was captured by dystopia.

These dystopias became more and more, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union it became the main genre of literature.

RECORD PROJECTION-MAPPED DISPLAY



The Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building No 1 is lit up with projection mapping which was recognised by Guinness World Records as the 'largest architectural projection-mapped display' in Tokyo on Monday. – AFP

Heritage preservation and private sector investments... a path forward for Oman

Preserving cultural heritage while promoting economic development is a complex challenge faced by many nations, including Oman. The idea of opening heritage sites to private sector investments has the potential to generate revenue, create job opportunities, and enhance tourism experiences. However, this approach also raises concerns about safeguarding the authenticity and integrity of these invaluable assets.

This topic was among several important and critical topics that were addressed in the recently held conference on Opportunities for Heritage, which was convened by the Unesco chair for World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Management in the Arab Region in the German University of Technology in Oman from February 24-27.

It became evident from the discussions and deliberations that the intersection of private sector investments and heritage management requires careful consideration and thoughtful planning. The debates surrounding this topic highlight the complexities and challenges that we face in safeguarding our cultural legacy while also ensuring sustainable development.

Heritage sites are not just



Ahmed Al Mukhaini

The writer is a Muscat-based policy analyst and international interlocutor

FINDING A BALANCE BETWEEN HERITAGE PRESERVATION AND PRIVATE SECTOR INVESTMENTS IS ESSENTIAL FOR OMAN’S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

commodities and services but repositories of our shared history, identity, and values. As we move forward, we need to strive to find innovative solutions that harness the potential of private sector involvement while upholding the principles of conservation, community engagement, and sustainability.

We need to advocate for responsible heritage management practices, and work together to ensure that our heritage sites remain protected, accessible, and meaningful for generations to come.

Policy makers need to develop criteria and policy framework that build key components for striking a balance between preservation and development. Such a policy framework entails the following: Criteria for Selection: Establish clear criteria for selecting heritage sites suitable for private sector investments or those sites that are open for some compromise. Such criteria include factors such as the site’s historical significance, fragility, and potential for sustainable development; Partnership Models: Develop partnership models that prioritise collaboration between the

government, local communities, and private investors. Ensure that all stakeholders have a voice in the decision-making process to maintain transparency and accountability; Regulatory Framework: Implement a robust regulatory framework that outlines guidelines for development projects within heritage sites. Enforce strict standards to protect the authenticity of the site and mitigate any potential negative impacts; and Sustainable Practices: Promote sustainable practices within the development



Heritage sites are not just commodities and services but repositories of our shared history, identity, and values.

projects, such as adopting green building technologies, conservation efforts, and community engagement initiatives. Ensure that heritage sites are preserved for future generations to enjoy.

In conclusion, it is recommended that Omani government adopts three principles as follows when it comes to opening public heritage sites to private investment: Integrated Approach: Adopt an integrated approach that combines heritage management with sustainable

development goals. Encourage collaboration between government agencies, heritage experts, private investors, and local communities; Capacity Building: Invest in capacity building programs to enhance skills and knowledge in heritage management and sustainable practices among relevant stakeholders. This will ensure the effective implementation of preservation efforts; Public Awareness: Raise public awareness about the importance of preserving Oman’s rich cultural heritage. Engage with local communities, educational institutions, and the media to foster a sense of pride and ownership in heritage conservation.

Finding a balance between heritage preservation and private sector investments is essential for Oman’s sustainable development. By learning from global examples, establishing clear criteria and policy highlights, and implementing strategic recommendations, Oman can navigate this delicate balance successfully, ensuring the protection and promotion of its unique cultural heritage for generations to come.

sport

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Al Nahdha players gearing up for the match



Al Nasr players gearing up for the match

AL NAHDHA TO FACE AL NASR IN A TIGHT CLASH AT HM CUP SEMIS

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 26

The defending champion, Al Nahdha, will face Five-time winners Al Nasr in the first leg of the semifinals round of the His Majesty’s Cup football championship. Al Buraimi representative team will host the match at the Al Buraimi Sports Complex on Tuesday as the match will kick off at 5:30 pm.

Al Nahdha, coached by the experienced coach Hamed al Azani, secured spot to the semis after they outclassed Seeb in the quarterfinals as the first leg match ended for Al Nahdha by 2-1 and the second leg match finished in a goalless draw. Al Buraimi Governorate based team will eye to snatch a win that will raise the team’s chances to secure a slot in the final of the coveted Cup especially the match will be

held in Al Buraimi Sports Complex and they will have an advantage of the fans crowd. Al Nahdha entering this game with high hopes following their crucial win over Bahrain’s Al Riffa 3-1 after extra-time on February 19 to wrap up a 4-2 aggregate victory in the AFC Cup 2023/24 West Zonal Semifinal at the Sultan Qaboos Sport Complex. Al Nahdha confirmed spot in the two-leg West Zonal final which

will be held in April. Al Azani will depend on many key players including the star of the national team player Salah al Yahyaee, Issam al Subhi, Harib al Saadi and many other essential players. On the other hand, Al Nasr team will eye to get much closer to their sixth title after they had lifted the coveted Cup five times and the last one was in 2017/2018 season. Al Nasr under technical supervision

of the head coach Cătălin-Mihai Dinu will aim for a strong show in today’s clash and end the game with positive result. Fahmi Durbeen, Mahdi al Humidan from Bahrain, AbuBaker Masali will be some of the key players in Al Nasr’s squad that will be some choices of coach Mihai in the starting list of the game. Al Nasr reached to the semis after they won against Fanja 2-1 in the first leg and duplicated the win

by 2-0 in the second leg game. The other semifinal match of the His Majesty’s Cup football championship will be held on Wednesday between Bahla and Dhofar at Nizwa Sports Complex and the match will start 5:25 pm. The second leg matches will be held on March 10 between Dhofar and Bahla at Al Saada Sports Complex while Al Nahdha and Al Nasr will meet in the same venue on March 11.

Oman Handball League kicks off on Wednesday



SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 26

The first round of the 2023-2024 Oman Handball First Division League will kick off on Wednesday evening with three matches. In the first match, Salalah will face Muscat followed by Nizwa vs Ahli Sidab and Khasab Vs Al Seeb. All matches will be held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. The Oman Handball Association Competitions Committee announced the schedule, rules and regulations of the First Division League with the participation of 7 clubs: Muscat, Al Seeb, Ahli Sidab, Oman, Khasab, Salalah and Nizwa. The league will be played in a two-stage system. In the first stage, the seven clubs will play a single round robin league. In the second stage, the clubs that finish in the top four positions will play a double round robin league (home and away). The club that finishes in seventh place will be relegated to the Second Division. The team with the highest number of points wins the league championship. If two or more teams are tied on points for any position, the ranking will be determined on the basis of the total number of points obtained by

each team from the tied teams in the matches played between them only. If the tie continues, the goal difference (goals scored minus goals conceded) between the tied teams in the matches will be taken. If the tie continues, the goal difference in all matches will be taken after excluding all goals from the matches of the team that withdraws from any match. If the tie continues, the team that scores more goals in all matches after excluding all goals from the matches of the team that withdraws from any match will be ranked higher. If the tie still persists, the precedence will be determined by drawing lots in the presence of representatives of the tied teams. Points in official league matches organised by the association are calculated as follows: two points for the winning team and one point for each team in a draw. The withdrawing team will not be awarded any points. The team that wins first place will be awarded a shield, a gold medal and a cash prize of RO 10,000. The runners-up will get a silver medal and RO 5,000, while the third place will receive a bronze medal and RO 3,000. The coach of the winning team will get RO 250.

Al Seeb qualifies for semis of Arab volleyball championship

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 26

Al Seeb Club has qualified for the semifinals of the 42nd Arab Clubs Volleyball Championship, which is currently being held in Jordan. The tournament will continue until February 28. Al Seeb defeated Dar Kulaib of Bahrain 3-1 in the quarterfinals on Monday. The set scores were 25-19, 25-22, 22-25, and 25-22. Al Seeb had finished third in Group A, which also included Ahli Benghazi of Libya, Kazma of Kuwait, Al

Najma of Bahrain, Qatar SC, and Shabab Al Hussein of Jordan. Group B consisted of Dar Kulaib of Bahrain, Al-Shorta of Qatar, Al-Sweihli of Libya, Mosul Oil Refineries of Iraq, Burgan of Kuwait, and Shabab Arabi of Jordan. Al Seeb finished third in their last participation in the tournament (the 41st edition), which was the first achievement for the Sultanate of Oman in the history of the championship. The semifinals will be played on Wednesday with the final scheduled for Thursday.



Al Seeb players celebrating the qualification



Preparation centre tourney to boost hockey

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 26

The first edition of the Athletes Preparation Centres Championship in hockey was held at the Oman Hockey Stadium in Al Amerat, with the participation of 500 players representing various governorates. These centres include the clubs of Oman, Al Salam, Al Nahda, Al Seeb, Nizwa, Muscat, Ahli Sidab, Qurayat, Bausher, Al Itihad, Al Nasr, Sohar and Salalah.

The male centres were divided into four groups, each

consisting of 6 centres from categories “A” and “B”, while the female centres were distributed into two groups, each group including 6 centres.

Said Al Maamari, member of the Board of Directors of the Oman Hockey Association and Chairman of the Athletes Preparation Centres Committee, pointed out the importance of the initiative to open Athletes Preparation Centres in clubs with the support of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth. These centres aim to spread hockey and build a new base for

the game, and provide players of both genders from different age groups.

Al Maamari stressed that the first Athletes Preparation Centres Hockey Championship reflects the goals of the association in developing the youth teams, as more than 500 players participated in it. The tournament was also dedicated to the hockey five-a-side game, as it is the most popular and widespread at the present time.

Al Maamari added that the tournament witnessed the participation of national team players to provide assistance

in the technical, administrative and refereeing aspects.

Ahmed al Darmki, the general supervisor of the Athletes Preparation Centres for hockey, indicated that the main goal of the tournament was to measure the technical levels of the players after 7 months of the opening of the centres, and to encourage participation in the game. He pointed out that the tournament witnessed exciting competitions, and that the participants expressed their desire to extend the period of the tournament.

Al Darmki added that

the tournament was not competitive to determine winners and losers, but was open to promote participation, which contributed to attracting and motivating players. He stressed that there is a future plan to develop the Athletes Preparation Centres Hockey Championship and implement it annually.

Regarding the refereeing aspects, Thani al Wahaibi, member of the OHA board and Chairman of the Referees Committee, praised the role of local referees in reviving the game in clubs. He pointed

out that Omani referees are working hard to develop their skills to obtain international refereeing badges.

Al Wahaibi concluded by stressing that the first Athletes Preparation Centres Hockey Championship was an important step towards developing the game in Oman, and that the positive indicators that appeared during the tournament confirm the existence of promising generations capable of representing the national teams at the continental and international levels.

Toyota GAZOO racing’s Kogure and Yamamoto complete rally 2 challenge

MUSCAT: TOYOTA GAZOO Racing WRC Challenge Program drivers Hikaru Kogure and Yuki Yamamoto successfully completed their first events in the Toyota GR Yaris Rally2 at the Arctic Rally on February 2-3.

Representing the second generation of the WRC Challenge Program, Kogure and Yamamoto have made the step up to faster four-wheel drive Rally2 machinery for 2024 after competing in two-wheel drive Rally4 cars during their first two years on the Program.

For their debut at this higher level, the pair took on the famous Arctic Rally, round two of the Finnish Rally Championship.

Based in Rovaniemi in Finland’s northernmost region of Lapland, the rally features fast stages on snow and ice, some of which must be driven in darkness.

Both Kogure and Yamamoto already experienced the event one year ago, but the increased performance level of their new GR Yaris Rally2 cars would provide them with many new challenges to adapt to.

The main goal was to complete the full distance and gather as much experience as possible – and both drivers achieved this, reaching the finish in eighth and ninth positions in the highly competitive SM1 category. After 199.95 kilometres of rallying, they were separated by only 1.7

seconds, with Kogure finishing just ahead of Yamamoto.

Kogure, co-driven by Topi Luhtinen, showed good performance already on Friday’s opening leg, which he finished in ninth position. On Saturday morning, a technical issue meant he lost some time but this was resolved in service so that he could drive strongly to the finish in a challenging last loop that featured long stages and fresh snowfall.

Yamamoto, who links up with Marko Salminen as his new co-driver for this year, also dropped some time on Saturday morning with a couple of overshoots, but recovered well to set good times in the afternoon.



Hikaru Kogure and Yuki Yamamoto Navigate New Challenges in GR Yaris Rally2 Cars, Finish Eighth and Ninth in SM1 Category at Finnish Rally Championship’s Arctic Rally.

Ronaldo rapped for making obscene gesture in Saudi pro league game

RIYADH: Cristiano Ronaldo faced a flurry of criticism after appearing to make an obscene gesture following the end of Al Nassr’s 3-2 win over Al Shabab in an exciting Saudi Pro League game on Sunday.

The Portugal forward opened the scoring with a 21st-minute penalty but Al Nassr needed a late goal from Brazilian Talisca, who struck twice, to settle the game with four minutes left.

After the final whistle, social media videos captured Ronaldo cupping his ear before repeatedly pumping his hand forward in front of his pelvic area.

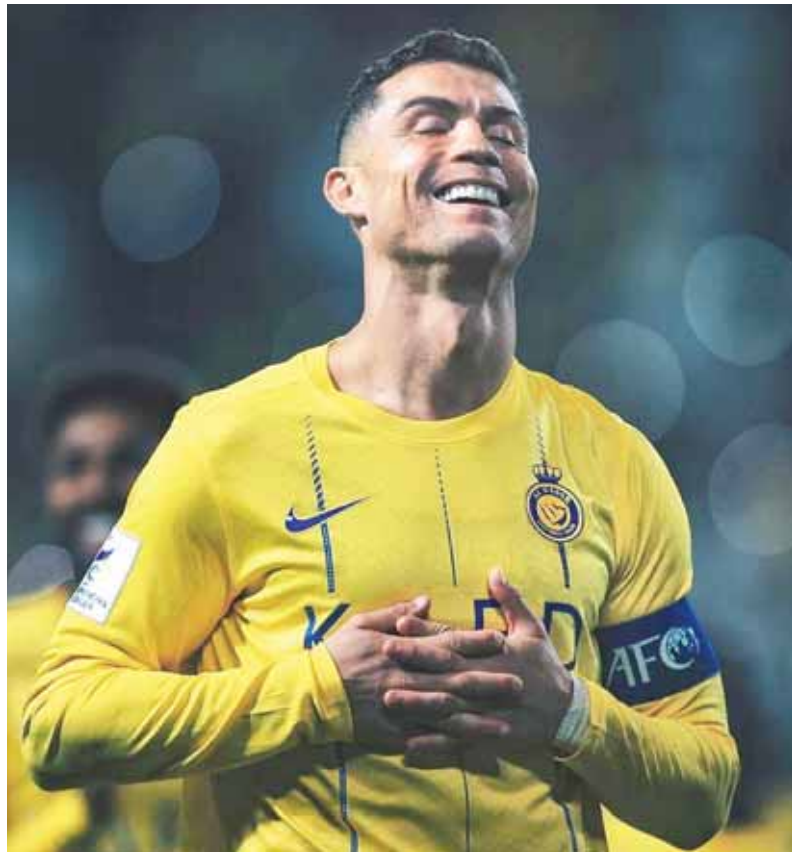
The action appeared to be directed at the rival Al Shabab supporters.

In the background, chants of “Messi” could be heard, referencing Ronaldo’s long-term football rival from Argentina.

The incident was not caught on television cameras, but some Saudi pundits said Ronaldo should be sanctioned.

There has been no official response but Saudi newspaper Asharq al-Awsat said the national football federation (SAFF) had opened an investigation into the incident.

“The disciplinary committee is facing the biggest test. We will wait and see,” Waleed Al Farraj, a prominent Saudi writer and television host, said on social media platform X.



“Everything has its limits, no matter how famous you are. This is how the major leagues are.”

Al Nassr were not immediately available to comment.

The 39-year-old Ronaldo has faced similar criticism in the past. In April last year, he appeared to grab his genitals while on his way to the dugout following the end of a league game against Al Hilal, which Al Nassr lost 2-0.

Earlier this month, he picked

up an Al Hilal scarf thrown at him from the stands, put it in his shorts and then threw it away as he walked towards the tunnel after Al Nassr lost 2-0 in the Riyadh Season Cup final.

Ronaldo, who joined Al Nassr as a free agent in late 2022, tops the Saudi league scoring charts with 22 goals in 20 appearances so far this season. Al Nassr are second in the table with 52 points, four behind Al Hilal, who have a game in hand.

— Reuters

Shubman Gill and Jurel help India clinch Test series against England

RAJKOT: Shubman Gill and Dhruv Jurel guided India to a series-clinching five-wicket win over England on day four of the fourth Test on Monday.

Chasing 192 for victory, India slipped to 120-5 but Gill (52) and Jurel (39) put on an unbeaten stand of 72 to achieve the target during the second session in Ranchi.

The win gave India an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match series after they lost the first Test.

“It’s been a very hard-fought series, so to come on the right side of it feels very good,” India’s skipper Rohit Sharma said.

“A lot of challenges were thrown at us, but we responded.” It was the first series defeat for captain Ben Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum since they took charge in 2022 and changed England’s fortunes with their attacking philosophy dubbed “Bazball”.

“It was a great Test match, the scoreboard doesn’t give enough credit to the game as a whole, the ebbs and flows,” Stokes said, adding that he “couldn’t be more proud” of his spin bowlers.

“So much credit to our spinners, being exposed to a situation like that at the start of their careers,” Stokes said. Gill played the anchor in his 124-ball knock as he and Jurel, who made 90 in India’s first innings, staved off a mini-crisis when Shoaib Bashir took two wickets in two balls soon after lunch.

UNDER PRESSURE

India still needed 72 more but Gill and Jurel rotated the strike coolly to pick off singles before the former raised his fifty with two successive sixes off Bashir.

“We were put under pressure... but Jurel came out and took the pressure off, he saw the situation and played accordingly,” Gill said.

He praised captain Rohit Sharma for his support, saying he “gave us the confidence to go out and play with freedom”.

Jurel hit the winning runs, punching the air and hugging his partner as the Indian dressing room rose to celebrate.

India started the morning strongly with Rohit and Yashasvi Jaiswal extending their overnight 40-run opening stand to 84. Joe Root made the breakthrough in his first over of the day, as he induced Jaiswal, on 37, to loop a catch to a diving James Anderson at backward point. Rohit reached his half-century but fell for 55, caught behind by wicketkeeper Ben Foakes off Tom Hartley’s left-arm spin.

He was initially ruled as stumped, but it was later changed to caught behind.

England’s travelling army of fans then erupted when Bashir, who took his maiden five-wicket haul in the first innings, had Rajat Patidar brilliantly caught by Ollie Pope for a duck to leave India 100-3.

After the interval, Bashir

silenced the home fans with his twin strikes to give England some hope of an unlikely win.

Ravindra Jadeja slapped a full toss to Jonny Bairstow at mid-wicket and Sarfaraz Khan tickled the next ball to Pope at backward short-leg for a duck, but Jurel survived the hat-trick ball.

England had scored 353 all out in their first innings and led by 46 after India’s 307.

We want to win

Indian spinners Ravichandran Ashwin and Kuldeep Yadav set up the victory after they shared nine second-innings wickets to bundle out England for 145 on day three.

England had recovered from 112-5 in their first innings courtesy of Root’s unbeaten 122.

India were without pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, who was rested, but the bowling stood up -- including debutant quick Akash Deep, who took three early wickets after England elected to bat.

Anderson reached 698 Test wickets in the match and needs two more to become only the third bowler to 700 after Sri Lanka’s Muttiah Muralitharan (800) and late Australia spin wizard Shane Warne (708).

The fifth and final Test begins on March 7 in the Himalayan hill town of Dharamsala.

“We turn up to every Test thinking we want to win,” Rohit said, adding he was “confident we will put on a good show” for the last match. — AFP



India's Shubman Gill and Dhruv Jurel celebrate after the match. – REUTERS

Messi grabs late leveller for Miami at Galaxy

LOS ANGELES: Lionel Messi scored a last-gasp stoppage time equaliser as Inter Miami escaped with a 1-1 draw at the Los Angeles Galaxy in Major League Soccer on Sunday.

The Galaxy dominated for long stretches of the game and had taken the lead in the 75th minute through Serbian striker Dejan Joveljic.

But the home side ended the game with ten men after midfielder Mark Delgado was sent off for a second yellow card in the 87th minute.

Jordi Alba then combined with Messi down the left, the Spaniard delivering a killer pull-back into the path of Messi who, at full stretch, found the target with the outside of his left foot.

It was a rare moment of impact from Messi who had been mostly ineffective in the game where Miami, with seven starters over the age of 30, struggled with Galaxy’s tempo.

Miami had all four of their former Barcelona stars in their starting line-up with Alba, Sergio Busquets and Luis Suarez alongside Messi.

But it was the Galaxy’s former Barca player, 24-year-old Spaniard Riqui Puig, who was the dominant player on the field, especially in the first half when the California side had a series of chances.

Confident on the ball and



Lionel Messi celebrates his goal.

incisive in his passing, Puig was dictating play but he should have given the home side the lead in the 13th minute from the penalty spot. The lively Joseph Paintsil, a recent signing from Genk in Belgium, had been pulled down in the box by Busquets but Puig’s low free-kick was well-saved by Drake Callender.

The Miami keeper then

produced fine saves to keep out efforts from Paintsil and Puig and apart from a deflected Messi effort which was parried by Galaxy keeper John McCarthy, Miami created little.

Busquets and Suarez looked particularly off the pace and with their contributions limited, Messi received little space or service.

RED CARD DRAMA

It was better after the break as Miami pushed into a more offensive shape but McCarthy did well to keep out two good efforts from Gomez and deal with routine shot from distance from Messi.

The Galaxy finally got their reward when Paintsil burst at the creaking Miami back-line, Puig’s

shot was parried by Callender and Delgado squared to Joveljic who tapped home.

After Delgado’s dismissal, Alba found Messi whose first time shot flashed just wide, an effort which proved to be a dress rehearsal for the equaliser.

“We were outplayed in the first half, we could have gone into

the dressing room a goal down,” said Inter head coach Gerardo Martino.

“They scored on a counter-attack but after that we showed character,” he added.

Miami have four points after winning Wednesday’s season opener against Real Salt Lake 2-0.

Earlier, former Canada national team coach John Herdman made a positive start to his new role as head coach of Major League Soccer’s Toronto FC with a well-deserved 0-0 draw at FC Cincinnati.

Toronto finished last in the 29-team MLS last season, with just four wins all year, while Cincinnati won the Supporters Shield for the team with the best regular season record.

But there was little to choose between Herdman’s revamped Toronto team and a Cincinnati side who have lost their centre-forward Brandon Vazquez, who was sold to Mexico’s Monterrey.

Irish defender Kevin Long, signed from Birmingham City, made a solid debut in the centre of defence while another debutant Honduran Deiby Flores gave a strong showing as the anchor of the midfield.

The woodwork denied New York Red Bulls a winning start for new German coach Sandro Schwarz as they were held to a goalless draw at Nashville. —AFP





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Omani E&P subsidiary brings Dutch offshore gas field into production

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 26

In a notable triumph for Oman's upstream energy services sector, the subsidiary of a local Exploration & Production (E&P) company has announced the successful start-up of natural gas from its offshore licence in the Dutch North Sea off the Netherlands.

Petrogas E&P Netherlands, a subsidiary of Oman-based Petrogas E&P (part of MB Holding), has commenced first gas production from three wells in its A15 licence off the Dutch coast. The company owns and operates interests in the A and B blocks (including the A15 and B17 licenses) in the Dutch North Sea.

"Petrogas E&P Netherlands is pleased to announce, along with our partners EBN, Rockrose and TAQA, that we have achieved first gas on February 12, 2024 with our A15 project in the Dutch North Sea," it said in a recent post.

"Having taken project sanction end-March 2022, we have worked hard with our key contracting partners Enersea, HSM Offshore Energy, Heerema Marine Contractors, Allseas, Noble Drilling, Bluestream and DCN Diving to construct and install our 'zero emission' A15 platform, drill and complete three wells, safely and without environmental incident.

All three wells are now online, providing much



Petrogas E&P Netherlands's A15 'zero emissions' platform deployed in the Dutch North Sea.

needed domestic gas to the Netherlands," it further added. Aside from its interests in Dutch Blocks A and B, Petrogas E&P Netherlands also owns and operates a number of fields in Blocks P and Q.

The company has been active in the upstream energy sector in the Netherlands since the mid-1960s, and producing oil since 1982.

Elsewhere in Europe, Petrogas E&P also has interests in Denmark, Germany and the UK. In Africa, it has assets in Area A in Egypt, while in Oman, it has a 50% stake in Block 5 through its subsidiary Mazoon Petrogas E&P LLC.

Furthermore, Petrogas Rima LLC has a 75% working interest in Rima Satellites Small Fields Service contract with Petroleum Development Oman.

Al Batinah North's non-oil GDP contribution climbs to RO 11bn

HIBBA AL KINDI
SUHAR, FEB 26

The 1st Suhar Investment Forum opened here on Monday, February 26, under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Fahr bin Fatik al Said. The two day event, organised by the Al Batinah Branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), was attended by investors from twenty different countries.

In his keynote address, Eng Said bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of OCCI branch in Al Batinah North Governorate, highlighted the Chamber's role in facilitating the economic growth of the governorate.

"The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry aims to enhance Suhar's position within Oman as an attractive investment destination and to support the private sector in capitalising on various investment opportunities."

"The forum will offer a suitable platform for all interested investors to closely examine the investment system and the latest economic developments in Oman, particularly in the Al Batinah North Governorate, as well as the rapid progress in Suhar and its neighbouring areas.

It will include various discussions, workshops, and presentations involving government officials, experts, and business leaders from different sectors," Eng Al Abri said.

"The forum will facilitate in-depth and extensive dialogue on



A number of project agreements were signed on the margins of the forum.

various topics and issues, serving as a platform for discussion, in addition to facilitating bilateral meetings between investors and representatives of relevant entities involved in investment matters in Oman, as well as businessmen and officials," he further added.

In his address, the Governor of Al Batinah North, Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, highlighted the economic significance of the governorate and its growth.

"The governorate accounted for 16% of the non-oil GDP in the Sultanate of Oman, which is approximately \$11 billion worth. The growth over the past two years reached 16.23%, starting from RO 3.7 billion and reaching almost RO 4.3 billion. I'm referring to the gross domestic product excluding

oil and gas, which is evidence of rapid growth in the governorate."

The Forum also included the signing of business agreements between various entities for upcoming projects in the governorate.

Suhar Industrial City, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) signed four projects worth over RO 17 million.

The projects include an investment contract with the United Feeds Company for a project valued at RO 12 million, a contract with Sedra International Industries Company for a project to manufacture plastic raw materials with an investment value of RO 3.7 million, a contract with Omran White Cement

Company, with an investment of RO 1 million, and a contract with Al Madina Food Industries to establish a project of tea blending and packaging with an investment value of RO 850,000.

The first day of the forum was also accompanied by a parallel exhibition, showcasing various public and private investment stakeholders in Oman.

OCCI-Al Batinah North has identified over 100 investment opportunities with investments totalling over RO 1 billion in the governorate. These investments offer the potential of creating 9,000 jobs spanning across eight main sectors: healthcare, information technology, logistics, circular economy, industry, food security, and tourism.

Oman needs to enhance its cybersecurity resilience, say experts

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, FEB 26

In a gathering of top industry experts and cybersecurity professionals, the Oman American Business Council (OABC) spearheaded an influential discussion in partnership with Benjamin Lotto, a distinguished US Fulbright Scholar conducting research in Muscat.

The event, themed "Oman's Cyber Landscape: Trends, Threats, and Opportunities," delivered unparalleled insights into Oman's cybersecurity terrain and strategic initiatives aimed at fortifying its cyber defences.

Hosted at the Outward Bound Oman, the panel boasted a lineup of esteemed speakers. James Shires, co-director of European Cyber Conflict Research Initiative, profoundly dissected the dynamic

cyber threats hovering over Oman, stressing the imperative for a multifaceted approach that encompasses individuals, organisations, and national interests.

He pinpointed cybercriminal activities, sophisticated persistent threats, and the critical lack of security awareness as frontline challenges confronting Omani organisations.

Sara al Kindi, the cyber defence head at Petroleum Development Oman, underscored the paramount significance of cybersecurity in safeguarding human health and safety. Amidst the surging technological reliance of Omani enterprises, she advocated for proactive cybersecurity measures as a bulwark against the mounting cyber perils.

Connor Evans, a Muscat-based cybersecurity consultant, painted



Sara al Kindi, OABC Chairperson Rebecca Olson, James Shires, Benjamin Lotto, Haitham al Hajri, and Connor Evans pose for a photo after the event.

a vivid picture of the cybersecurity vulnerabilities plaguing Omani enterprises. With a resounding call for heightened cybersecurity awareness on both personal and organisational fronts, Evans emphasised the pivotal role of awareness in promptly detecting and neutralising cyber threats.

Haitham al Hajri, a

distinguished senior cybersecurity professional from Muscat, shed light on Oman's accelerated technological progress and its escalating susceptibility to cyber threats owing to its rising geopolitical significance.

Al Hajri underscored the urgent need for collaborative cybersecurity efforts among

neighbouring Middle Eastern countries to counter the malevolent actors targeting Oman's digital infrastructure.

Unifying their voices, the panellists championed the cause of cybersecurity awareness, education, and stringent regulatory frameworks as cornerstones in fortifying Oman's cyber resilience.

They echoed the clarion call for a joint front in tackling cybersecurity challenges and called for enhanced investments in cybersecurity capabilities to shield critical infrastructure and data.

Oman is ranked 3rd in the Arab world and 21st globally out of 193 countries in the Global Cybersecurity Index, according to a report issued by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). Oman also shares third place

with Australia and Malaysia, behind Canada and the United States among the countries best prepared for cyberattacks. Meanwhile, Trend Micro, a global leader in cybersecurity solutions, said in its report that Oman thwarted more than 12 million cyber threats in 2022.

The consensus reverberating through the panel discussion underlined cybersecurity in Oman as a non-negotiable priority for both governmental bodies and private enterprises.

Amidst the dynamic cyber threats looming large, proactive cybersecurity measures, heightened awareness, and collaborative endeavours emerged as the bulwarks safeguarding Oman's digital assets and nurturing a secure and thriving society poised to counteract the evolving cyber challenges.



Meethaq
Islamic Banking
extends support
to traditional
shooting
competition

MUSCAT: Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat extended its support to the annual traditional shooting competition recently concluded in Wadi Bani Omar, in the Wilayat of Saham. The event was held under the auspices of Salim bin Musallam Qatan, Vice-Chairperson of the State Council and was attended by a numerous dignitary, including under-secretaries, shaiyks and enthusiasts from various governorates. This year's competition boasted a remarkable turnout, with over 1000 participants. The tournament garnered significant attention, with participants, being duly honoured by the chief guest during the closing ceremony. In acknowledgment of Meethaq's unwavering support, Sultan bin Saif al Maamari, Branch Manager of Meethaq Islamic Banking Saham, received recognition from the chief guest on behalf of Meethaq. Meethaq's support for such events underscores its dedication to preserving and promoting the country's traditions, heritage and culture. As the leading Islamic financial institution, Meethaq is committed to seizing opportunities to engage with the community and foster a deeper appreciation for Oman's heritage and traditions. Meethaq moves steadfastly to uphold its social and developmental responsibilities, striving to collaborate with all segments of society. As a result of its commitment to enhance Public-Private Partnership, Meethaq has consistently contributed to the success of various sporting, cultural and economic events.

Suhar Investment Forum 2024
kicks off with wide participation

MUSCAT: The Suhar Investment Forum, organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OOCI) branch in Al Batinah North Governorate, commenced on Monday at Radisson Blu Hotel, Suhar under the auspices of HH Sayyid Fahr bin Fatik al Said. The event was attended by several esteemed dignitaries, officials from the public and private sectors and representatives from over 20 countries. The primary objective of the forum is to showcase the economic and infrastructural potential of Al Batinah North Governorate. The region possesses a fertile and attractive investment environment, making it capable of attracting both local and foreign investments, as well as investors from around the world. The aim is to position Al Batinah North Governorate as a compelling investment destination. In his opening speech, Eng Saeed bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry branch in Al Batinah North Governorate and Chairman of the forum's Organising Committee, emphasised the crucial role played by the Chamber in enhancing Oman's position as an appealing investment destination. He also highlighted the importance of supporting the private sector in capitalising on various investment opportunities. The forum serves as a platform



Dignitaries attending the opening of the two-day Suhar Investment Forum.

to bring together leaders, officials, businessmen and investors. It aims to shed light on the latest developments in the investment landscape of the governorate, as well as leverage its numerous advantages and benefits. Al Abri emphasised that the Sultanate of Oman possesses unique capabilities and qualities that position it as an attractive destination for international investments. This will contribute to strengthening Oman's presence on the global investment map, attracting investments and

seeking growth and expansion opportunities. Al Abri further emphasised that the comprehensive two-day program of the Forum would serve as an ideal platform for interested investors to gain insights into the investment system and economic developments in the Sultanate of Oman, with a specific focus on Al Batinah North Governorate. The programme would also highlight the rapid progress in the city of Suhar and its surrounding areas. The first day of the forum featured numerous speeches,

working papers, presentations and discussion sessions. Government officials, industry experts and representatives from various sectors of the business community actively participated in these sessions. Al Abri highlighted that the forum aimed to foster in-depth and extensive dialogues on the topics. Additionally, bilateral meetings were arranged to facilitate interactions between investors and relevant authorities, businessmen and officials involved in the investment sector in Oman.

AL YOUSEF TO HEAD OMAN'S DELEGATION AT 13TH
WTO MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

MUSCAT: Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), is set to lead the Omani delegation at the thirteenth ministerial conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The conference will take place in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, from February 26 to 29, 2024, offering a platform to explore the latest developments in the ongoing negotiations



Qais al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion

among member countries. Key topics on the agenda include trade agreements concerning support for fisheries, agriculture, intellectual property, development issues and electronic commerce. Preceding the event, intensive meetings have taken place to formulate a comprehensive set of decisions, poised to be discussed by trade ministers during the conference. The Sultanate of Oman, having joined the WTO on

November 9, 2000, is a significant player among the 164 member countries of the organisation. The forthcoming conference will also serve as a platform to celebrate the recent accession of Comoros and East Timor to the WTO. Accompanying Al Yousef is a delegation including high-ranking officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and the MoCIIP.

Dhofar Islamic
offers bonus
points for
credit
cardholders

MUSCAT: Dhofar Islamic, BankDhofar's leading Islamic banking window, is presenting the "Bonus Points" promotion campaign for credit cardholders. All customers who apply for a new Gold or a Titanium credit card will have their annual fees reimbursed in the form of Reward points (points equal to the paid card annual fee). Dhofar Islamic cardholders will have a chance to be part of the credit card "Bonus Points" promotion campaign. During this campaign for spend of RO 200, Titanium cardholders can earn 3,000 bonus reward points (worth of RO 30 which is equivalent to the card's annual fee) and for spend of RO 100 Gold credit card holders will have the opportunity to earn 2,000 bonus points (worth of RO 20 which is equivalent to the card's annual fee). The campaign is valid till March 31, 2024.

The points will be available at the rewards programme, which is a seamless and user-friendly experience, making it easy for cardholders to track their points, browse the rewards and redeem their points through Dhofar Islamic mobile app or website. Along with the Rewards program, credit cardholders are able to earn and collect points on every purchase, which can easily redeemed instantly across groceries, essentials, electronics, jewellery, dining categories and many more. Cardholders can even choose to redeem points for flight tickets at over 900 airlines, book a holiday, stay in more than 700,000 hotels or redeem at the Bank's partner outlets in the Sultanate of Oman. All that a cardholder needs to do to earn reward points is use the credit card for every day essentials, both locally and abroad as more points are accrued for purchases made using the card while travelling.



Burjeel Hospital launches paediatric haematology clinic in Muscat

Burjeel Hospital Al Khuwair, Muscat is proud to announce the expansion of its Centre of Excellence — Paediatric Department, with the launch of an exclusive Paediatric haematology Clinic. This clinic is the first-of-its-kind in the private healthcare sector in Oman and aims to provide specialised care for children with blood-related disorders. Paediatric haematology disorders have a significant prevalence in Oman. Recognising this need, Burjeel Hospital Al Khuwair has established the paediatric haematology clinic to address these conditions comprehensively. The clinic will offer early detection, accurate diagnosis and advanced treatment modalities for a range of blood-related disorders including anaemia

(iron deficiency anaemia, sickle cell anaemia and thalassemia), bleeding disorders (haemophilia, von Willebrand disease, platelet disorders) and blood cancers (leukaemia, lymphoma, myeloma). Dr Zainul Aabideen, a renowned Paediatric haematology Oncologist, from Burjeel Medical City Abu Dhabi has joined Burjeel Hospital Al Khuwair as a visiting consultant. With his extensive expertise and experience, Dr Aabideen will play a pivotal role in leading the paediatric haematology clinic and ensuring that young patients receive the highest quality of care. Burjeel Hospital Al Khuwair and Burjeel Medical City Abu Dhabi are now aligned to provide affordable pricing and services for advanced treatments, ensuring



Dr Ibrahim al Ghaithi, consultant paediatric haematology oncology from the Royal Hospital, Oman graced the event as the guest of honour.

patients in Muscat have access to follow-up care. This collaboration aims to deliver comprehensive and accessible healthcare options to patients, emphasising Burjeel's commitment to delivering high-quality and affordable medical services. In a Continuing Medical Education (CME) event held

on February 25, Dr Aabideen conducted a session titled "Updates in Paediatric Haematology." Eminent doctors attended the event, where they discussed advanced diagnosis and treatment modalities for blood-related disorders. Dr Ibrahim al Ghaithi, consultant paediatric haematology

oncology from the Royal Hospital, Oman graced the event as the guest of honour. The event provided a platform for sharing knowledge and insights into the latest developments in the field. Dr (Major) Pankaj Chawla, Regional Director of Burjeel Hospital Oman, emphasised the hospital's commitment to advancing paediatric care. He highlighted the significance of the Paediatric haematology Clinic and its contribution to improving healthcare services for children in Oman. Dr Achini De Silva, the Head of the Paediatric Department at Burjeel Hospital, conveyed her excitement about the expansion of paediatric services. She expressed the hospital's commitment to delivering

patient-centric care and services while working collaboratively with the Ministry of Health Oman to prioritise the well-being of children. Burjeel Hospital Al Khuwair is equipped with state-of-the-art facilities and advanced technology, ensuring the highest standard of care for patients. The hospital offers expansive and upscale facilities, along with a team of highly qualified Omani and expatriate doctors, as well as dedicated medical professionals. It also provides round-the-clock services in its cath lab, laboratory, and advanced radio diagnostics departments. With three modular state-of-the-art operation theatres and compassionate, expert care, Burjeel Hospital Al Khuwair stands out as a leading healthcare provider in Oman.



Oman HRD conference focuses on power of values in shaping the future of work

JOMAR MENDOZA

MUSCAT, FEB 26

The 10th Oman HRD Conference began yesterday with business expert Dave Ulrich, the Rensis Likert Professor at the Ross School of Business, University of Michigan, as the keynote speaker on “The Value of Values: Shaping the Future of Work through Human Capability” at the Grand Millennium Muscat.

This highly anticipated event brought together business leaders, HR professionals, and industry experts to explore the critical role of values in driving organisational success and shaping the future of work.

The 2-day conference, organised by the Ministry of Labour with Al Assayel for Conferences Co, include six sessions on the first day and five sessions on the second day.

In his thought-provoking presentation, Dave Ulrich emphasised the importance of instilling strong values within organisations to enhance human capability and drive sustainable growth.

He highlighted new competition realities creating value for all stakeholders through human capability. He also discussed the importance of recognising new disruptors



Ashraf al Maamari, Acting CEO of OQ Group, Prof Dave Ulrich, Sayyid Salim al Busaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development and Dr Amer al Rawas, transformational leader and AI advocate are pictured during the panel discussion at the 10th Oman HRD Conference.

in businesses like Artificial Intelligence (AI), uncertainties and new demographics.

Ulrich's insights resonated with the audience as he delved into the transformative power of identifying ten trends and practices in creating a talent advantage, posing the assumptions between “Our people are our most important asset” and “Our people are our customer's most important asset.”

He emphasised that talent acquisition is the most important pathway a company should focus on, followed by creating a positive employee experience.

Ulrich's address also shed light on organisation culture elaborating on the importance of intellectual agenda, behavioural agenda and process agenda.

He gave importance on the leadership skill for the future emphasising the need for HR

leaders to attend to mental health and well-being of their talents.

The event provided a platform for attendees to engage with Ulrich's research and practical strategies for integrating values into their organisations.

Participants actively participated in interactive discussions, sharing their experiences and best practices for aligning values with business objectives and creating a culture

of excellence.

Meanwhile, Mohammed bin Issa al Fayrouz, Chairman of Al Assayel, underscored the imperative of investing in human capabilities to navigate disruptive changes in the global business sphere and propel growth and development.

Highlighting the pivotal role of adept employees and visionary leaders in steering organisations through a world characterised by accelerated technological and economic transformations, Al Fayrouz stressed the correlation between workforce enhancement and organisational success in the present era.

Echoing these sentiments, Ashraf bin Hamad al Maamari, Acting Chief Executive Officer of OQ Group, expounded on the group's endeavours to fortify leadership competencies and skill sets essential for spearheading innovation and progress within corporate entities and industries.

Through initiatives such as the Pathways programme, OQ Group has been instrumental in grooming over 800 employees for supervisory roles while nurturing leadership acumen across academia and global institutions, emphasising the criticality of preparing future-ready leaders to drive sustainable growth and business excellence.

US diesel exports to Europe dip on plummeting refining output



Aerial view of Phillips 66 Company's Los Angeles Refinery in Carson, California. — Reuters

NEW YORK: A slump in US refining activity and disruptions to global trade have tightened diesel supplies in recent weeks, dampening historically high US diesel exports to Europe this month.

Difficulties in securing US diesel complicate an existing supply crunch in Europe, which previously relied on Russian fuel exports. US diesel cracks briefly surged to a four month high of over \$48 a barrel this month, crimping arbitrage opportunities to ship the fuel to Europe.

Many of Europe's other suppliers in the Middle East and Asia have been forced to traverse around the Cape of Good Hope due to Ansar Allah attacks on vessels in the Red Sea, adding lengthy delays and making that trade less profitable too.

European imports of US diesel fell by almost half this month to 6.65 million barrels, down from 11.44 million barrels in January, which marked the highest level since August 2017, according to analysis by ship tracking firm Kpler.

“European diesel appears to be the key at-risk product due to rerouting, supply availability, and distorted arbs,” Macquarie analysts said in a note this month.

The decline in trade came as the 435,000 barrel-per-day BP Whiting refinery in Indiana - a major US diesel producer - was forced shut in early February following power outages.

That outage coincided with operational issues at several plants from a mid-January cold snap, like TotalEnergies' 238,000 bpd Port Arthur, Texas, refinery. Others, including Motiva Enterprises' 626,000 bpd plant in Port Arthur, are undergoing planned turnarounds. US refinery utilisation rates have fallen from near 93 per cent at the start of the year to 80.6 per cent this month, the lowest rate since December 2022, according to government data. As a result, US refiners' distillates output slumped to 4 million barrels per day in the week ended Feb. 9, also the lowest since December 2022.

US distillate stockpiles have dropped for five straight weeks and now stand 10 per cent below the prior five-year's seasonal average, the data showed. Diesel prices in Northwest Europe rose steadily throughout February, averaging over \$118 a barrel, compared with \$109 last February. — Reuters

Import price index in Oman decreases by 4.7 per cent



MUSCAT: The general index of import prices in the Sultanate of Oman recorded a decline of 4.7 per cent at the end of the third quarter of 2023 compared to the same quarter of 2022, as a result of a decline in most of the groups that make up the general index.

The machinery and transportation equipment group decreased by 0.8 per cent, the manufactured goods classified mainly by material group declined by 5.4 per cent, the food and live animals group fell by 3.1 per cent, the mineral fuels, mineral lubricants and similar materials group fell by 16.2 per cent, and the inedible raw materials excluding fuel by 2 per cent and beverages and tobacco by 2.9 per cent.

On the other hand, the chemicals and related materials group increased by 3.8 per cent, and the miscellaneous manufactures group increased by 1.4 per cent.

Compared to the second quarter of 2023, the import price index declined by 7.2 per cent. The machinery and transportation equipment group declined by 16.1 per cent, manufactured goods classified primarily by material by 9.9 per cent, miscellaneous manufactures by 5.3 per cent, mineral fuels, mineral lubricants and related materials by 6.2 per cent, and beverages and tobacco by 3.2 per cent.

In contrast, the index for the food and live animals group increased by 4.1 per cent, and inedible raw materials excluding fuel by 1.5 per cent. — ONA

Top global energy traders face multi-billion cash quandary

LONDON: As the world's top global energy trading houses prepare for their biggest annual industry get-together this week in London they face a growing problem, what to do with their cash.

Most trading houses, which are privately owned and controlled by their employees, disclose little about their cash position, equity or dividends.

But according to more than 10 trading and banking sources and Reuters calculations, Vitol, Trafigura, Mercuria and Gunvor are collectively sitting on billions of dollars, even after paying out record dividends. “We borrow much less from banks and are waiting for good investment opportunities.

But those are slim, especially in loss-making green energy,” said an executive at one of the top trading houses, who declined to be named. Trading houses, which already control large areas of global oil, gas and power markets, are finding it difficult to grow, while poor returns in recent years on wind, solar and hydrogen assets have irked some investors.

The cash conundrum is likely to be one of the topics on the table as traders gather for receptions and parties in London ballrooms and pubs for International Energy Week.

Vitol, the world's biggest trader, has increased its total equity to \$26 billion even after paying \$5 billion in record dividends after earning \$15 billion in 2022, its non-public balance sheet

And its equity will probably



Oil, miniatures of oil barrels, oil pump jack and US dollar banknote are seen in this illustration taken. — Reuters

rise close to \$30 billion based on its 2023 results if Vitol sticks to transferring a significant chunk of retained earnings to equity, two banking sources familiar with the company's performance said.

Meanwhile, Mercuria and Gunvor have accumulated around \$6 billion each in equity and retained earnings in recent years, sources familiar with their results said. Equity figures for Vitol, Mercuria and Gunvor have not been previously reported.

All three companies declined to comment. Rival Trafigura disclosed in its latest report its equity grew almost 2.5 times to \$16.5 billion in the last 4 years.

The equity of the big trading houses is still dwarfed by oil majors such as Shell, opens new tab with \$188 billion or BP with \$85 billion, according to their latest reports.

Until a decade ago, most traders preferred to have few assets, low equity or cash positions and pay out most of their profits in dividends to their employee shareholders. The exception was Glencore, which began trading as Marc Rich in the 1970s and gradually amassed coal and metals assets.

It went public in 2011, raising \$11 billion. Total equity is calculated as the difference between assets, including retained earnings, and

liabilities and is key to determining how much a company is worth.

Trading houses have bought assets over the past decade, from oil refineries to wind farms and metals mines, using profits and money borrowed from banks while keeping their cash reserves low.

That changed in 2022 when gas prices soared after Russian gas supplies to Europe dropped as a result of Western sanctions that aimed to punish Moscow for its attack of Ukraine.

Traders often hedge their positions with derivatives, usually borrowing 90% of the money to buy them while using their own cash to cover the remainder.

— Reuters

What would it take to improve employee happiness?

Just landed in Barcelona, Spain, from about 10+ hours air journey from Muscat. The experience was amazing, inshallah, especially with the caring flight attendant, Mohammed, who ensured that he briefed joyfully about the security regulations and made the flight experience not only comfortable yet enjoyable too, visiting my seat every now and then to ensure I am quality served without any issues.

Marc, the driver and transportation specialist, on the other hand, arrived on time to pick and send me to the hotel, was extremely pleasant and kept me informed on all the happenings in the city, so as ensured he sends me list of places to visit and dine.

When I arrived the hotel, the receptionist, Maria, was jolly, all smiles and checked me into my



TARIQ AL BARWANI
The author is Knowledge Oman Founder knowledgeoman.com

IMPROVING EMPLOYEE HAPPINESS IS NOT A WALK IN THE PARK NOR IS AN INITIATIVE THAT CAN BE ACHIEVED OVERNIGHT. IT CERTAINLY REQUIRES A LOT OF WORK, FROM BEING PROACTIVE, DEDICATED AND OF COURSE CONSISTENT.

room swiftly ensuring I get the necessary rest coming from a long journey from home.

Ahmed (the flight attendant), Marc (the driver) and Maria (the receptionist) are example of happy employees, that not only represented their different respective organisations positively, but also ensured I remain a happy and paying customer.

Yes, the same can be applied to any organisation and the same will apply to you as a happy customer.

Last week my article revolved around steps one could take to measure employee happiness in an organisation.

This week, my article is on ways organisation can take in order to improve employee happiness, irrespective of the outcome of the results attained from the measurement.

Improving employee

happiness is not a walk in the park nor is an initiative that can be achieved overnight. It certainly requires a lot of work, from being proactive (and not reactive as majority of the organisations are), dedicated and of course consistent.

Organisations need to have a good strategy in place for specifically working on improving employee happiness, if the wish is to sustain and grow in a healthy fashion.

What kind of activities should organisations undertake is what I wish to share today.

First, organisations need to have a measurement in place, taken periodically to assess employee happiness. You may refer to my last week article on the steps. The result will shed light on the feelings that the employees have towards their organisation. Furthermore, on a regular basis, organisations

need to gather feedback from the employees, be it via surveys, one-2-one meetings, etc on their needs, wants and concerns.

Secondly, ensure a work-life balance is encouraged and promoted in order to improve employee happiness, my future articles will elaborate more on work-life balances approaches that organisation can follow.

Thirdly, ensure employees are recognised and rewarded for the good-job-done. Employees that feel valued will always perform more (and consequently be happy).

Last but not least, organisations need to offer opportunities for growth, be it in conducting or sending employees to trainings, offer career advancements and the likes.

Employees need to feel and know there is a future investing in the organisation. Having

these activities implemented will surely help improve employee happiness in the respective organisations.

To conclude my article this week, I would like to note that making employees happy is hard, and furthermore, few organisations really have measures and initiatives in place that help improve employee happiness.

Nevertheless, successful organisations clearly understand the value that can be obtained out of their employee happiness.

By planning and working proactively in finding the sources of employee happiness, be it the workplace environment, relationships, recognitions, assignments, etc, Organisations will ultimately reap the benefits as a result, and gladly be referred to as the employer of choice. Until we catch up again next week, stay positive.

Avoid the shiny objects syndrome in the digital transformation journey

The journey towards building a knowledge-based economy and achieving e-governance and a digitalised society has been adopted as a core component of the national strategies of many nations.

This initiative requires the adoption of state-of-the-art technological infrastructure that is both at par and fully compatible with other countries around the globe.

In pursuit of such a goal, many new fascinating technological developments such as blockchain, cloud computing, the Internet of things, artificial intelligence (AI), and robotics, among others, have become ubiquitous.

Particularly, the exponential rise in the capacity of generative AI is touted as a game-changer and has drawn substantial interest from policymakers, organisations, and individuals.

However, while pursuing the goal of successful digital transformation, it is critical to ensure that the digital strategies among large organisations in Oman do not fall into the trap of pursuing shiny new objects.

Therefore, this calls for a disciplined approach toward safeguarding the effectiveness of digital transformation strategies by paying attention to three key issues: (i) Battling ignorance, (ii) overcoming fears and (iii) avoiding guesswork.

Battling ignorance requires the recognition that many senior-level executives in organisations are not clear about what exactly digital transformation is.

They tend to have a superficial understanding of the phenomenon and are not aware of the differences between digitisation, digitalisation and digital transformation.

The concepts of digitisation and digitalisation are all stages of the digital transformation journey, but they are quite distinct from each other.



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IN PURSUIT OF SUCH A GOAL, MANY NEW FASCINATING TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS SUCH AS BLOCKCHAIN, CLOUD COMPUTING, THE INTERNET OF THINGS, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI), AND ROBOTICS, AMONG OTHERS, HAVE BECOME UBIQUITOUS.



Navigating the Future, embracing digital transformation with the click of keys on the journey of innovation.

Digitisation refers to the conversion of analog data to digital form, whereas digitalisation is about deploying digital technologies into the systems and processes of an organisation.

Finally, digital transformation is referred to as a strategy that is aimed at a complete transformation of an organisation from its traditional ways of managing processes to a completely digitalised one.

Due to a general lack of awareness of the above, key decision-makers in organisations often fall into the trap of adopting new digital hardware and software, that are hyped up by the media, without understanding how the “new shiny object” fits in with their current digital transformation strategy.

At the core is the issue that such senior decision-makers often don’t truly understand how new technologies such as generative AI or blockchain can add value to their organisation.

Hence, it is imperative to ensure that senior decision-makers frequently attend seminars and workshops where they familiarise themselves with new technologies to identify how they fit in with their digital strategies.

On the other side of the spectrum is the fear of losing out by not adopting a new technology into the organisation.

The need for key decision-makers to overcome the fear of being left out by other first movers is also an essential factor that needs to be ensured to avoid jumping into a new

technology without analysing the advantages and perils of mindless adoption of a new system.

Thus, without having clarity of how it is likely to add value to the present digital transformation journey of the organisation, executives need to avoid impulsive decisions about technology adoption.

Finally, stakeholders of both public sector and private sector organisations expect their senior managers to be agile in implementing their digital strategies.

In this process, often managers feel pressured to rely on guesswork and make wholesale adoption of new digital technologies without doing sufficient evidence-based research to ensure the cost-benefit of such technology.

Therefore, without sufficient empirical studies that show the clear benefit of the new technology to the organisation and its alignment with the current digital strategy, those in charge of digital transformation must avoid such pitfalls.

The above three factors are crucial for senior management of public and private organisations, to avoid any obstacles towards achieving the aspirations of the nation in transforming the country into a technologically advanced knowledge-based economy.

At the core of this is to stick to a well-designed and robust digital strategy that needs to be flexible and dynamic yet cautious in adopting any new digital technologies without thorough understanding and analysis.



Oil extends losses on cautious interest rate outlook

LONDON: Oil prices fell on Monday, extending losses on market views that higher than expected inflation could delay cuts to high interest rates that have been capping growth in global fuel demand.

Brent crude futures fell 39 cents, or 0.5%, to \$81.23 a barrel by 1001 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate crude futures (WTI) were down 34 cents, or 0.4%, at \$76.15.

The dip extended losses registered last week, when Brent lost about 2% and WTI fell more than 3% on signs that the US Federal Reserve is in no rush to cut interest rates.

Sentiment appears focused on higher-for-longer interest rate expectations that lifted the US dollar and pressured commodity prices, said independent analyst Tina Teng.

A stronger dollar makes oil more expensive for buyers holding other currencies.

Oil prices have been trading between \$70 and \$90 a barrel since November as rising US



Workers walk as oil pumps are seen in the background in the Uzen oil and gas field in the Mangistau Region of Kazakhstan. — Reuters

supply and concern over weak Chinese demand offset Opec+ supply cuts despite two wars raging in Ukraine and Gaza.

As the Israel-Hamas conflict continues in the Middle East, White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan told CNN on Sunday that negotiators for the United States, Egypt, Qatar and Israel had agreed on the basic contours of a hostage deal during talks in Paris but are still in negotiations. — Reuters

Chinese companies axe IPO plans amid listing scrutiny

SHANGHAI: Companies have scrambled to scuttle plans for initial public offering in China this year as the securities watchdog tightens rules on share listings in a bearish market.

Forty-seven companies pulled their listing plans from China's stock exchanges so far this year, compared with 29 withdrawals during the same period one year earlier, data from stock exchanges showed.

The cancellations come as the China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC), under new chairman Wu Qing, solicited regulatory opinions from market participants and fined a company for fraudulent listing, amid other measures to restore confidence as major indexes linger near five-year lows.

A CSRC official also said on Friday that share issuers will face heavy penalties for accounting fraud, and the watchdog



A man sits in front of an electronic stock board in the stock market of Shanghai, China. — Reuters

will conduct more on-site inspections.

“Under high-pressure regulation, the number of IPO (initial public offering) withdrawals reached a new high,” securities broker Shenwan Hongyuan said in a note.

China's new share sales, which once dominated the global

IPO market going by proceeds, already slowed late last year when regulators started a phased restriction on IPOs to promote a “dynamic equilibrium” between investment and financing.

Some 313 companies completed IPOs in China last year, raising 356 billion yuan (\$49.5 billion) in total, down

from 424 IPOs and 587 billion yuan raised in 2022, according to Guotai Junan Securities.

Last week, the Shenzhen Stock Exchange terminated IPO plans of appliance maker Ningbo Borine Electric Appliance Co and diagnostics firm Fapon Biotech Inc, after the firms requested to withdraw their listing applications.

Early this month, the CSRC fined Shanghai-based semiconductor company S2C Ltd for fraud in its listing application, even though the firm's IPO plan was cancelled in July 2022.

“This means that the regulators’ punishment of fraudulent issuances has been moved to the IPO review stage,” said Shenwan Hongyuan Securities.

“A-share IPOs will enter an era where quality is more important than quantity,” the brokerage said referring to shares listed on the Chinese mainland. — Reuters

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M.COM graduate with Oman driving licence, residing in Muscat with 1 year and 4 months work experience as Media Finance Executive in India, seeking for Accounts Assistant or other related eligible jobs. Contact: 71755901, E-mail: krishnamahesh02@gmail.com

PART time accountant 22 years in Muscat. Please contact: 78293476

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

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

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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.

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ANIMAL PLANET

Tupak, a juvenile Andean bear whose life was endangered due to proximity to humans, awaits a helicopter to take it back into the wild, in an enclosure at the Quito Zoo, Quito, Ecuador. — Reuters



BOLLYWOOD

Bollywood actress Kareena Kapoor attends the 'Dadasaheb Phalke International Film Festival Awards 2024' in Mumbai. — AFP



FASHION

A model walks the runway during the Giorgio Armani collection show at the Milan Fashion Week Womenswear Autumn/Winter 2024-2025. — AFP



FESTIVAL

Workers carry a litter, a type of human-powered chair during the Bombing Master Han Dan festival celebrations on the last day of the Lunar New Year of the Dragon in Miaoli county, central Taiwan. — AFP

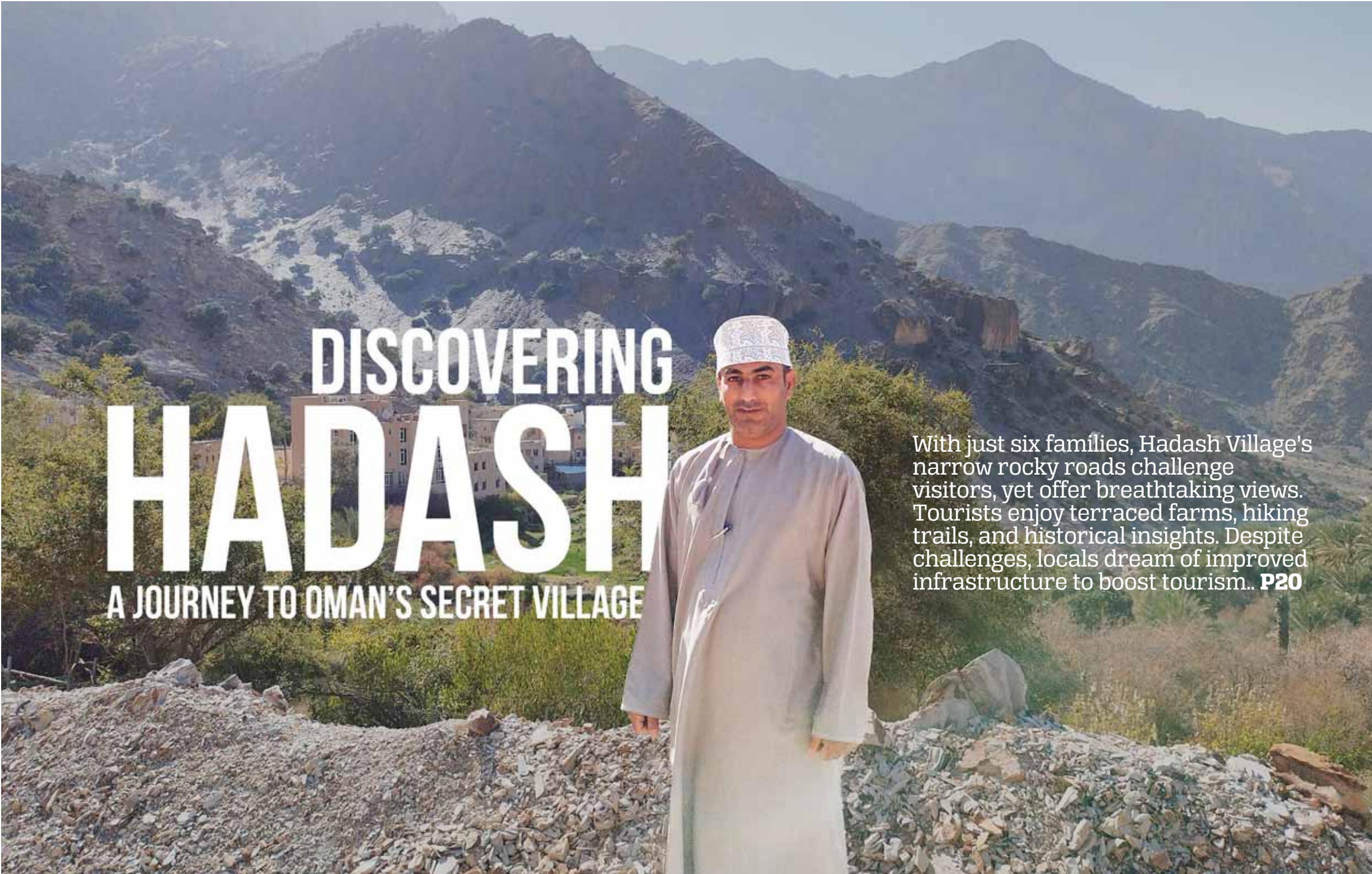


LIFESTYLE

American white pelicans are seen on the island of Petatan in the municipality of Cojumatlan de Regules, Michoacan state, Mexico. — AFP

art & life

TUESDAY | FEBRUARY 27, 2024 | SHAABAN 17, 1445 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om



DISCOVERING HADASH

A JOURNEY TO OMAN'S SECRET VILLAGE

With just six families, Hadash Village's narrow rocky roads challenge visitors, yet offer breathtaking views. Tourists enjoy terraced farms, hiking trails, and historical insights. Despite challenges, locals dream of improved infrastructure to boost tourism.. **P20**

FASHION

Giorgio Armani catwalk blooms with florals at Milan Fashion Week

FLORALS BLOOMED on the catwalk at Giorgio Armani on Sunday, adorning winter outfits and accessories as the veteran Italian designer presented his latest collection for his main line at Milan Fashion Week. Armani, affectionately known as King Giorgio in Italy, opened the autumn/winter 2024 womenswear show, called "Winter Flowers", with fluid looks in light grey and brown - jackets and trousers, accessorised with floral blue scarves or sashes. The floral theme was omnipresent in the show with floral prints or embroidery adorning jackets, dresses, blouses, hats and bags. Floral prints or embroidery in pink, blue and green added colour to dark creations in blue or black. "The flowers are a sign of



a better season coming and I really liked the contrast - there are no flowers in winter; I created them," Armani, 89, told reporters. For the evening, sequined floral embroidery shimmered on jackets, sheer tops and dresses. Armani closed the show with a selection of strapless frocks with sparkling flower decorations. The designer presented the latest collection for his second line, Emporio Armani, on Thursday. Milan Fashion Week runs until Monday, with editors and buyers then heading to Paris for the last leg of the month-long seasonal catwalk calendar. — AFP

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INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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Early jacaranda bloom sparks debate about climate change in Mexico



EVERY SPRING, THE STREETS of Mexico's capital are painted purple with the flowering of thousands of jacaranda trees. Their spectacular colours not only attract the eyes of residents and tourists, but also birds, bees and butterflies that find food and shelter in them.

But this year something changed.

Some jacarandas began blooming in early January, when they normally awaken in spring. The early onset bloom has set off alarm bells among residents and scientists in Mexico City, where the trees have

become an iconic, photogenic mainstay of city streets.

Local scientists have begun investigating how widespread the early-bloom phenomenon is, but they point to climate change as the first culprit.

"We've always seen the jacaranda beginning to bloom towards the end of March, in spring, when we see the flowers change to violet," said Constantino Gonzalez, a researcher at the Institute of Atmospheric Sciences and Climate Change Research at the National Autonomous University of Mexico

(UNAM).

"They are starting to flower in January, February, which is winter, when it is not yet their time," said the biologist of 48 years.

Gonzalez explained that in order to draw a correlation between climate change and the early flowering of jacarandas his team needs a representative sample and compare blooms year to year. To do this, he has started to lead a group of young people who are collecting data throughout the city and using satellite imagery.

He noted rising temperatures caused winter in the Mexican capital to end early this year, in mid-January, instead of late March when it is supposed to end.



ADAPTATION

Enthralled by the Japanese cherry trees that cover Washington, DC in pink and white every spring, Mexican President Pascual Ortiz (1930-1932) set out to replicate the same landscape in his nation's capital.

But Tatsugoro Matsumoto, a Japanese landscape architect who settled in Mexico in the late 19th century, told him they would not survive the city's temperate climate for long, so he advocated for jaca-

randas, a tropical tree he had learnt about during a brief stay in Peru.

Since then, the tree has become a staple for Mexico City's nine million inhabitants.

In January alarm spread when users on social networks started to publish photos of flowering jacarandas and began to wonder about the effects of climate change.

"Like never before ... people have started to say 'this is serious, it's real' and it's no longer just a polar bear floating adrift," said Cristina Ayala, biologist and doctor in Sustainability Sciences.

"It is very good that people are beginning to become aware of what climate change is going to bring to us as urbanites," she added.



K-pop girl group TWICE aims for top of the Billboard

WITH AN UPEBEAT new album all about love and friendship and a world tour under way, K-pop girl band TWICE has set its sights on a new high on the Billboard main chart, the group said.

The nine-member band has helped to drive the global K-pop phenomenon since its debut in 2015, propelled by cheerful songs, catchy hooks and choreography.

TWICE released its album

cial bond that glues together nine of us and that only TWICE can show," she said.

The pre-released single, "I Got You," had headed iTunes' top songs chart in 41 regions, TWICE's management JYP Entertainment Corp said and the band aims for a higher spot on the Billboard main chart.

"I have a dream. I'll be really happy if we score high on the Billboard, even if not No. 1," Chaeyoung said.



"With YOU-th," on Friday, following an all-English language single "I Got You" early this month.

In an interview with Reuters, members of TWICE said they were elated to perform as a group after focusing on solo or sub-unit activities over the last year.

The six-track mini album and its lead single, "One Spark," were meant to embody the passion and love the members share among themselves and with the fans, Chaeyoung said. With two other band members, Jeongyeon and Dahyun, she wrote the lyrics.

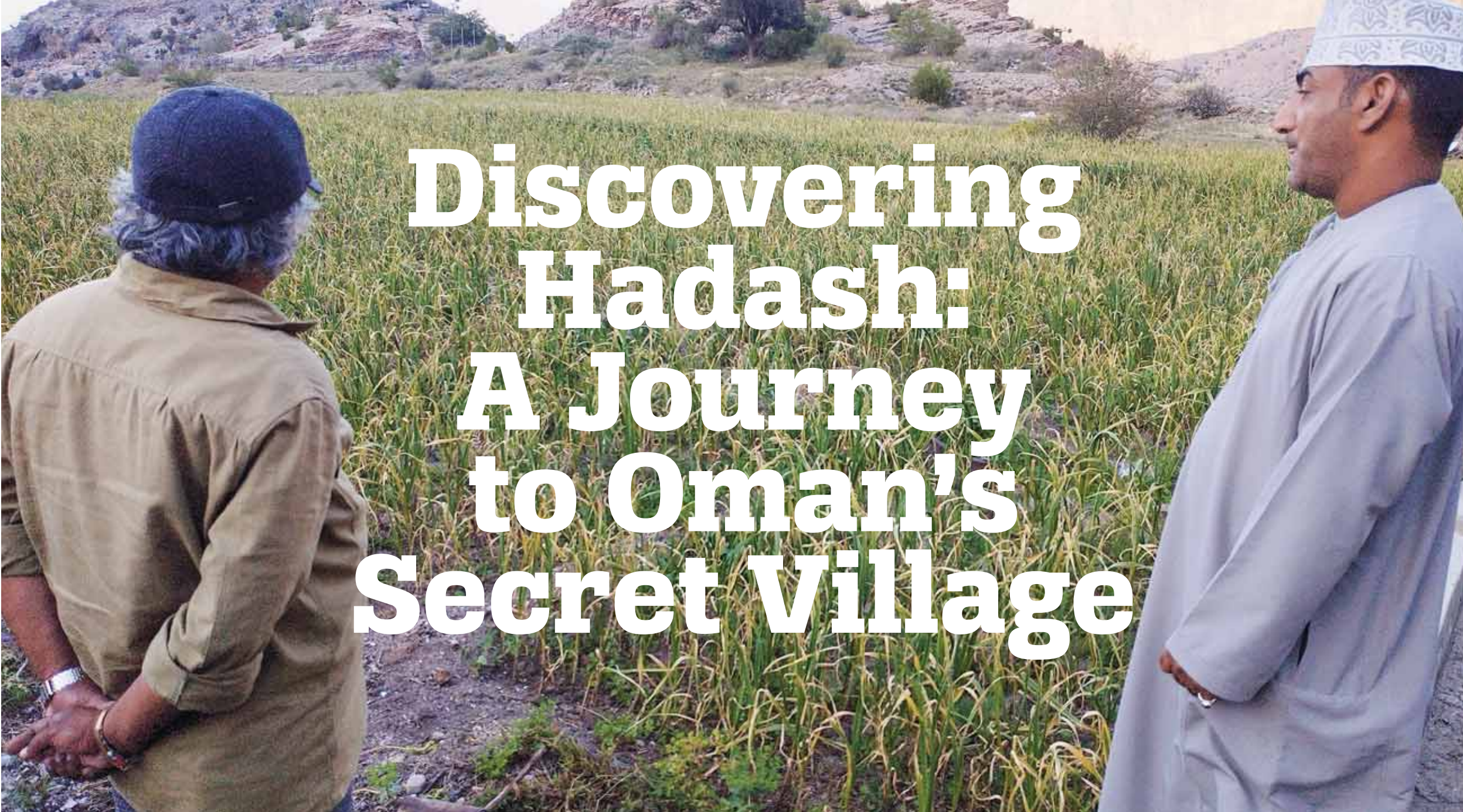
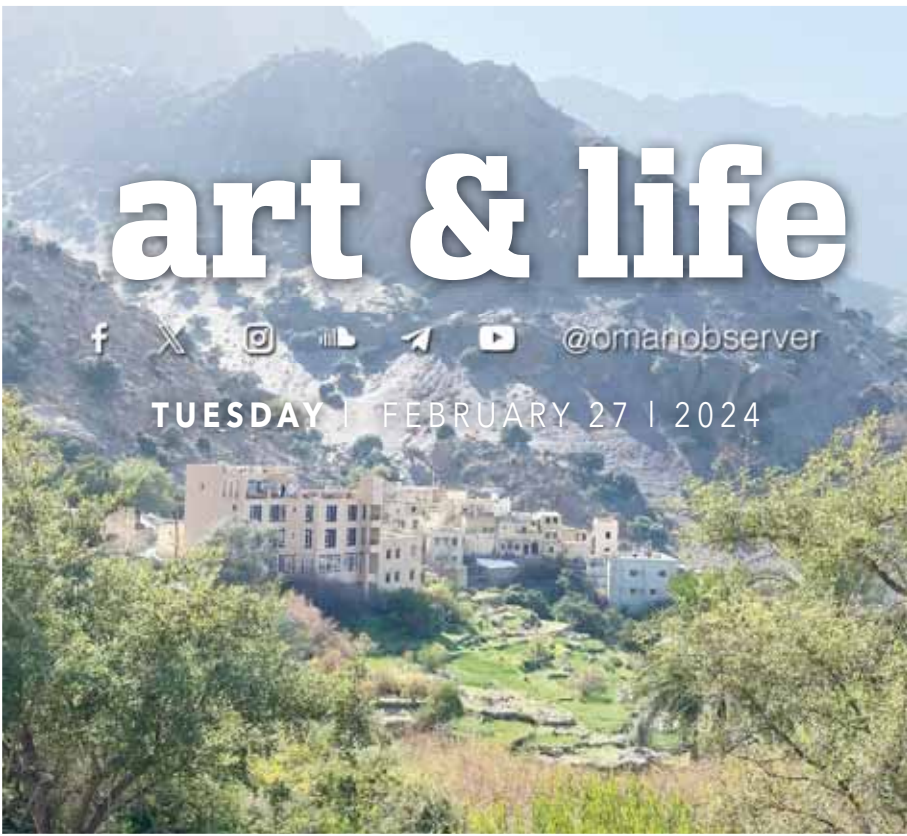
"I think this album is a collection of things that represent our youth, the friendship and spe-

TWICE has resumed its fifth world tour, performing in Mexico City and Sao Paulo this month and is set to visit Las Vegas in March. In July, the band's members will become the first overseas female artists to play the Nissan Stadium in Kanagawa, Japan.

Like many other K-pop groups, TWICE faces tight schedules and public pressure, but "letting go of things" and strength as a group helped its members to cope, they said.

Jeongyeon also said she had taken boxing lessons to unwind.

"You need to learn to rely on the people around you and to get help from them, not do everything alone," Mina said. — Reuters



BY KABEER YOUSEF
@kabeeryousef

There are barely six families residing in this mountainous village, situated approximately 1,500 metres above sea level. The 4-kilometre road leading to it is a narrow, rocky path, the journey along which is truly breathtaking. Nighttime temperatures here plummet to as low as 7 degrees Celsius these days, surrounded by crops ranging from pomegranates to grapes, and from backyard vegetables to commercial crops, which sustain these families.

Potable water for all six families is stored in large tanks filled by tanker

becoming a popular destination for tourists looking to explore this beautiful region of Oman, with its picturesque terraced farms, breathtaking views, and mild climate.

Salim bin Mansoor al Hadhrami, who operates the only guest house, Hadash Guest House, under the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, a renovated version of a heritage home from their ancestral home, recalls the sight of snow-capped mountains.

"Hundreds of visitors flocked to the mountains of Wakan and Hadash villages, delighted to witness this rare phenomenon in the desert. The maximum temperature here is 30 degrees, while other areas report 49

With pleasant weather year-round, an exhilarating ride, comfortable accommodations at the guest house, and panoramic views through the expansive windows, Hadash proves to be an ideal spot for picnics for couples and families alike.

"We mostly receive visitors on weekends, and they depart the next day. The services we offer truly provide value for money, as we operate under the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism," adds Salim.

PERFECT SPOT FOR HIKING

A trekker from the Wilayat of Samayil can reach this scenic location across the mountains in ten kilometres, whereas it takes nearly two

frames from any angle. During our visit, a commercial was being filmed, and as a filming destination, this spot is steadily gaining recognition, thanks to its remote and secluded appearance.

MEMORIES OF A BYGONE ERA

Salim showcased the notepads and stencils used by our forefathers in days past. They used small sheets of natural stone as notepads and cracked pieces as stencils to jot down daily tasks and important information for

provisions, medical needs, children's education, and all other necessities, braving the gravelly, often rock-strewn mountain paths. The lack of mobile towers hampers their communication needs, with children relying on their parents' data connection to complete their school-work.

"Our dream is to have a proper road of at least 5 kilometres, WiFi connection, a robust mobile network, public water supply, and similar amenities. With these facilities atop the mountain, not only would our lifestyle improve, but there could also be a tourism boom, encompassing adventure, leisure, and historical tourism," adds Salim.



trucks. Their provision shopping is limited to once a week.

Wakan and Hadash villages are two of the settlements nestled in the Western Hajar mountain ranges, overlooking the barren landscape near Wadi Mistal, and are part of the Wilayat of Nakhal in Al Batinah South Governorate. Wakan Village gained attention some four years ago when it experienced snowfall, hailstorms, lush greenery, and drizzles, making it an ideal destination for a weekend getaway, as did Hadash village.

Hadash village is increasingly

or 50 degrees, and the minimum sometimes dips below zero," Salim, who navigated the steep, rocky paths overlooking the gorges, remarked.

From the summit, it resembles nothing short of a jungle. Trees adorn the rocky mountains, swaying gently in the chilly wind. The expansive vistas occasionally echo with the bleats of passing sheep herds. The tranquillity is often punctuated by the call to prayer from the mosque atop the hill by a young boy.

PICNIC SPOT FOR COUPLES

hours by road. This mountain range is a paradise for trekkers, as they can enjoy hikes from Hadash village to Wakan village via a mountain path that offers panoramic views of Wadi Mistal, unique viewpoints of the surrounding mountains, and the villages nestled beneath the foothills.

IDEAL LOCATION FOR FILM SHOOTS

Several documentaries, short films, and commercials have been filmed on this mountain, with cameramen praising the unparalleled

future generations. Visitors can examine the inscriptions on these plates, kept at the guest house and widely used in those times.

CHALLENGES

The six families residing atop the mountain endure chilling cold, navigating up and down the hill in their SUVs for

