

Kamala Harris ‘ready to serve’

US Vice-President Kamala Harris said she was ready to serve as leader, in a *Wall Street Journal* interview published on Monday, as voter concerns mount about President Joe Biden’s age in an election year. The 59-year-old Harris has faced growing scrutiny about her own abilities as the first in line to the presidency should Democrat Biden, 81, be incapacitated or stand down. “I am ready to serve. There’s no question about that,” Harris told the newspaper when asked whether voters’ concerns about Biden’s age meant she must convince them of her credentials. – AFP



P12

“AOUN”,
“KAIFAN” CLAIM
AL BASHAYER
FESTIVAL OPENING



P13

OMANI INDUSTRY
DAY CELEBRATIONS
TO FOCUS ON AI,
AUTOMATION



P20

A JOURNEY FROM
BBC RADIO TO
BEING OMAN'S
MEDIA ICON



MUSCAT

CAA UNVEILS NEW
BRAND AUTHORITY

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) launched its new identity and also that of the Civil Aviation Club under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers. The newly developed identity is part of the plans to keep pace with global changes and support future visions, strategic directions, and goals. Eng Nayef bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of CAA, said that the launch of the new identity reflects the launch of Afaq programme in 2021 highlighting the new identity and the change in institutional culture.

DETAILS ON P5

GRADUAL PHASE OUT
OF PLASTIC BAGS

The Sultanate of Oman will gradually phase out plastic shopping bags by the second half of 2027. The Environment Authority issued a decision to ban the use of plastic shopping bags based on the Environmental Protection and Pollution Control Law issued by Royal Decree No 114/2001, Royal Decree No 106/2020, and Ministerial Decision No 2020/23 regarding ban on single-use plastic shopping bags. It may be noted that the ban on the use of single-use plastic bags, which was implemented in Oman in 2021, is yet to yield 100 per cent results, according to a top official of the Environment Authority.

DETAILS ON P5

OPINION

P8


Khalid Alsafi Al Huraibi
White Swan and impact of
the highly probable

P9


Ahmed Al Mukhaini
Redrawing boundaries
in a dynamic world

35,000 JOB OPPORTUNITIES TO BE GENERATED FOR NATIONALS IN 2024

New Sports City to come up in Al Musannah

MAI AL ABRI &
AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, Feb 12

The second day of the second edition of the ‘Together We Make Progress’ forum included discussions on diverse topics, including work, employment, economy, investment, culture, sports, youth, media, and national identity.

Leading the session for the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, emphasised that the Sultanate of Oman is globally recognised for its ancient history, customs, traditions, and established principles. Despite being open to the world throughout history, HH Sayyid Theyazin asserted the importance of not allowing the country to be influenced by changing behaviours observed in some other nations.

In his interactions, HH Sayyid Theyazin assured the audience that, despite financial



HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth leading the session.

challenges, the ministry has reviewed its priorities, placing a strong emphasis on the sports sector and ongoing adjustments. Government companies are

actively contributing to the budgets of creative entities in the sports field.

Regarding the new integrated sports city in Al Musannah, HH

The ministry has reviewed its priorities, placing a strong emphasis on the sports sector. Companies are actively contributing to the budgets of creative entities in the field

HH SAYYID
THEYAZIN

Minister of Culture,
Sports and Youth

Sayyid Theyazin mentioned the engagement of a reputed British company for the project, providing potential models. The final decision on the sports city’s location near a resort in Al Musannah will be disclosed later.

HH Sayyid Theyazin emphasised that in October 2023, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik directed the initiation

of procedures for an integrated Sports City project, aiming to attract and host regional and global tournaments. The restoration of the Sultan Qaboos Bausher Sports Complex is a key focus, with plans currently in progress.

The privatisation of clubs is under way, starting with four clubs supported by major companies. A final study for the project aims to set standards for improved performance, focusing on one activity for enhanced attention and care. The government’s support is distributed across various sectors of operation, such as sports and cultural activities. The ongoing study will apply standards to clubs to improve their performance and focus on specific activities.

HH Sayyid Theyazin noted the openness to questions from young people, highlighting the progress in preparing a children’s encyclopedia set to be launched at the upcoming Muscat Book Fair. Plans also include initiation of an adventure sports centre and a museum of contemporary art.

TURN TO P2

Israeli assault on Rafah a ‘terrifying’ prospect: UN

GENEVA: The United Nations said on Monday the prospect of a full Israeli incursion into the cramped Gaza town of Rafah was “terrifying” and risked an “extremely high” number of casualties.

UN human rights chief Volker Turk urged world powers to “restrain rather than enable” as fears of a looming ground incursion grew among more than one million Palestinians trapped in the territory’s far south.

Israeli Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to send ground troops into the crowded Rafah area. His declarations have sparked international alarm.

“A potential full-fledged military incursion into Rafah — where some 1.5 million Palestinians are packed against the Egyptian border — is terrifying, given the prospect that a high number of civilians, again mostly children and women, will likely be killed and injured,” Turk said in a statement. — AFP

SCHOOLS SHUT TODAY DUE TO HEAVY RAINS Oman braces for more rain as low pressure system continues



Many roads were cut off in some governorates.

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The National Multi- Hazard Early Warning Centre has issued third weather alert for Monday night and early Tuesday morning due to the expected heavy thundershowers associated with downdraft fresh winds and hail over the governorates of Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South, Muscat, and parts of Al Batinah South.

Forecast indicate a continuation of heavy thunderstorms accompanied by active winds and

2 children washed away in Al Rustaq

Three children were washed away in Wadi Bani Ghafir in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, and search and rescue teams from the Civil Defence Department and Ambulance in the Al Batinah South Governorate are at the site to deal with the accident. Two children were found dead, and the teams are continuing the search for the third child. Rescue teams also saved one person when a vehicle with two people drifted in Wadi Ghayya in Yanqul and the search for the other person is under way.

hailstorms likely tonight and early tomorrow morning, concentrated in the governorates of Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South, Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah and parts of the Al Batinah South Governorate, with rain ranging between 20-60 mm, and sporadic rainfall continuing.

The Ministry of Education said schools will remain shut on Tuesday in the Sultanate of Oman except in the governorates of Dhofar, Musandam, and Al Wusta. Studies will resume on Wednesday, February 14.

TURN TO P3



SOUDAL QUICK-STEP TEAM DUO TAKE OVER STAGE 3

The duo of Soudal Quick-Step team comprised of Paul Magnier and Luke Lamperti excelled a promising finish in the third stage of 13th edition of Tour of Oman on Monday. The French rider Paul Magnier claimed the title of the stage, which began from Al Naseem Garden in Barka and finished at Al Bustan within a timing of 1 hour, 47 minutes and 54 seconds while US’s Luke Lamperti ended as a runner-up from the same team with minor difference in timing. Another French rider Bryan Coquard from COFIDIS team concluded the 76-km distance with third place. DETAILS ON P10



New Sports City to come up in Al Musannah



FROM PAGE 1

JOB MARKET

Speaking on 'Work and Employment in the Macroeconomic System', Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, said regarding educational qualification, approximately 2,000 individuals with different educational qualifications joined the workforce in the education sector last year.

Dr Baowain added that the ministry offers specialised courses in vocational institutes for short periods for those who do not hold a General Education Diploma. He said the private sector and some government sectors allow working beyond retirement age, and there are efforts to force companies to accommodate more Omanis.

"The issue of employment is linked to economic growth, and the job market, like other sectors,

depends on supply and demand. We are trying to bridge the skills gap by providing training," Dr Baowain said. "We aim to target a minimum of 35,000 job opportunities in 2024."

Dr Baowain highlighted that the health and education sectors employ most of the job-seekers in the government sector. Regarding the necessity of employees at the Ministry of Labour to possess skills to interact with the deaf community, Dr Baowain said: "We have an application that will be launched soon to serve this community. We also have coordination with the Ministry of Social Development to provide employees from them at the service outlets of the Ministry of Labour to facilitate communication with this community. We also have a direction to employ people with disabilities in the services of the ministry's visitors to enable them to serve visitors from this

community."

The Ministry of Labour issues 300,000 permits annually in the Sultanate of Oman, and there is a problem with educational courses not meeting the needs of the labour market.

Nasr bin Amer al Hosni said rewards vary between Omanis and expatriates depending on the job market and experience. He added that programmes are being implemented by the ministry to qualify and empower Omanis in vital sectors such as banking, oil and gas.

Al Hosni said qualitative economic growth depends on diversity in growth, and the Omani labour market can absorb outputs if we change work culture.

Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, said that job opportunities increased by half a million in 2023 compared to 2022.

Dr Al Saqri said that the job

market is changing, and training is necessary due to the changing nature of the job market. There must be training and upgrade of qualifications to keep pace with this change, which is a global phenomenon discussed at the Davos Forum due to continuous technological change. He added that we need to increase Omanis in senior positions in the private sector.

Dr Al Saqri added that reforming the job market is important and ongoing, and the Tenth Five-Year Plan has adopted several measures to serve this goal. Awarding tenders to companies is done according to regulations and conditions, where we not only look at Omanisation as a percentage, but rather where Omanisation is concentrated.

MEDIA LAW

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, said that

the new Media Law encourages freedom of speech that builds Oman. No article in the new law limits freedom, and it only aims to regulate modern media.

The Ministry of Information will launch three documentaries on the Sultanate of Oman and its historical presence, produced at the highest level, along with a documentary book. The documentaries will be in English, Swahili, and Arabic.

Dr Al Harrasi said Oman is progressing in press freedom, culture and economic spheres. The future looks even better with clear policies from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to position Oman among one of the top-ranking nations in the world.

Dr Al Harrasi pointed out that preserving Omani identity is the responsibility of everyone to uphold these values, which is important to mobilise all our efforts to empower this identity.

He added that councils are one of the mainstays of Omani educational building for the upbringing and education of the youth, and everyone is on the same page regarding its importance.

"Investment in the media sector should be enhanced," he said and indicated that some in the media do not want to keep pace with developments, and there are significant efforts to adopt modern media concepts. He added that he is not satisfied with some media institutions as they are outdated. Dr Al Harrasi added that 99.9 per cent of media jobs are held by Omanis.

Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information said that a special workshop on journalism, with participation of Unesco, has produced several recommendations, which are being reviewed.





SEVERAL RESCUED AS RAINS CONTINUE

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

A vehicle with two people drifted in Wadi Ghayya in Yanqul where the rescue teams of the Civil Defense and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) in Al Dhahirah Governorate were able to save one person and the search for the other person was still underway on Monday evening.

Three children drifted into the stream of Wadi Bani Ghafir in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, search and rescue teams from CDAA in the Al Batinah South Governorate rushed at the site to



CDAA advised that if one is trapped in a valley or pool of water, climb onto the roof of the vehicle to call for help and try to stay on top until help arrives

deal with the incident. In Yanqul, six people were rescued after their vehicle was impounded in a valley.

CDAA has called on everyone to take the utmost caution, not

to risk crossing valleys and to stay away from low-lying places.

The rescue teams of CDAA in Muscat Governorate dealt with a report of a person being detained inside his boat in water



bodies in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, where he was rescued and is in good health.

There was also deployment of rescue teams in various CDAA departments in the governorates

of the Sultanate of Oman to secure sites, raise awareness and provide guidance.

CDAA advised that if one is trapped in a valley or pool of water, climb onto the roof of the

vehicle to call for help and try to stay on top until help arrives.

The authority stressed the necessity of staying at home and not going out except for necessity.

On Tuesday, there would be advection and formation of clouds associated with heavy rain, hail and fresh wind may cause wadis and flash floods and the intensity will be concentrated over the Musandam, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Sharqiyah North and Al Sharqiyah South governorates and the coastal areas of Al Wusta and Dhofar.

CAA asks people not to cross wadis

FROM PAGE 1

Meanwhile, the Consumer Protection Authority has prepared a comprehensive action plan to deal with the effects of the weather condition, which includes forming teams to cover the markets in two shifts (morning and evening), and a team to receive and follow up on consumer reports, and communicate with various commercial institutions to ensure the availability of goods and market stability. Businesses were

told not to exploit the current situation.

The authority called on suppliers and merchants to adhere to consumer protection laws and legislations and not to exploit the current situation to raise prices and disrupt market stability.

The Civil Aviation Authority called on everyone to exercise caution during thunderstorms and not to cross wadis and to avoid low-lying areas, and not to go to the sea during the period.

A number of roads in Al

Dhahirah Governorate were cut off, namely Ibri road towards Al Rustaq, Al Sinainah main street, Al Khubayb towards Yanqul, Al Fateh towards Al Buraimi, Ibri towards Suhar, Al Marri towards Al Buraimi, and Al Dhuwaihriyah road towards Dhank.

The Wilayat of Yanqul recorded the highest amount of rain 135.6 mm at the weather monitoring stations of the Civil Aviation Authority, while Al Buraimi recorded 76.8, Suhar 56, and Saiq 40.6.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health rescheduled more than 25,000 appointments that include visits to outpatient clinics, non-emergency appointments and operations, laboratory tests and other health service appointments that were postponed due to the current climatic conditions.

The Ministry of Health affirmed that patients and their safety top its priority.

The ministry also seeks to meet patients' health, preventive and therapeutic needs.



The National Multi- Hazard Early Warning Centre said heavy thundershowers associated with downdraft fresh winds and hail are likely over Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South, Muscat, and parts of Al Batinah South. — Photos by Khalfan al Ruzaiqi & ONA



Rains spare Muttrah souq as shops stay shut, stocks moved to safety

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Shopkeepers in the Muttrah Souq, which always borne the brunt of heavy rains, were relieved on Monday as the traditional market remained shut on Monday after Muscat Municipality weather directives.

Most of the shops on the Muttrah Sea Road were open just for a few hours due to the weather announcement while the shops inside the souq remained fully-closed throughout the day.

“We were open for a few hours but closed towards noon as rains started to pour in and we were well prepared to face any adverse situation,” said

Navas Kasargode, a merchant in the souq.

As the rain progressed, water gushed through the souq towards the sea road but the shoppers either pulled down the shutters or moved the stocks to safe areas as instructed by Muscat Municipality.

“We could save the stocks, thanks to the civic body that instructed us to do so,” Abdullah al Hadhrami, who runs a herbs shop, said.

Muttrah traders inside the souq always bore the brunt of the heavy rains in the past; the last such situation occurred in October 2021 October when Cyclone Shaheen wreaked havoc in the country.

“It (Shaheen) was disastrous



Most of the shops on the Muttrah Sea Road were open just for a few hours due to the weather announcement while the shops inside the souq remained fully closed throughout the day

as the majority of our products were damaged in the storm and flash floods,” said Mohammed Ameen, another shopkeeper.

The loss suffered by the Souq that houses more than

5,000 vendors and traditional tradespeople was colossal during Shaheen and they thanked the authorities for adopting effective measures against the adverse weather.





AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahbalushia

Successful people are those who take advantage of opportunities. No one can give you a job as a gift of friendship or chart your career path for you.

This means that you are the architect of your path to success. Careers rarely follow a linear, preordained path. The onus is on you to decide where you want to go and then proactively pursue that path.

Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, said in her speech at the ‘Together We Progress Forum’ that your specialisation won’t guarantee you a job.

There is no denying that searching for a job is a job in itself. Unfortunately, it becomes more difficult as you get older.

If you feel like you are walking in a vicious circle without achieving what you want, perhaps it is time to take a step back and reconsider the strategy you are following in your job search.

Create a resume and profile as your resume is usually a recruiter’s first impression of you. Ensure that the form, content and flow of information in your resume is written in a professional style. A survey conducted by Bayt.com on “Employment Practices in the Middle East and North Africa” showed that 21.3 per cent of employers believe that poor language used in writing a CV is the biggest mistake job seekers make.

Create a CV specific to each job. 42.5 per cent of employers prefer a brief CV of no more than one page. Employers also believe that experience is the most important element in a CV, followed by skills, educational level, professional, and finally awards and recommendations for each. Also, 53.8% of employers prefer to add a personal photo of the candidate to his or her CV.

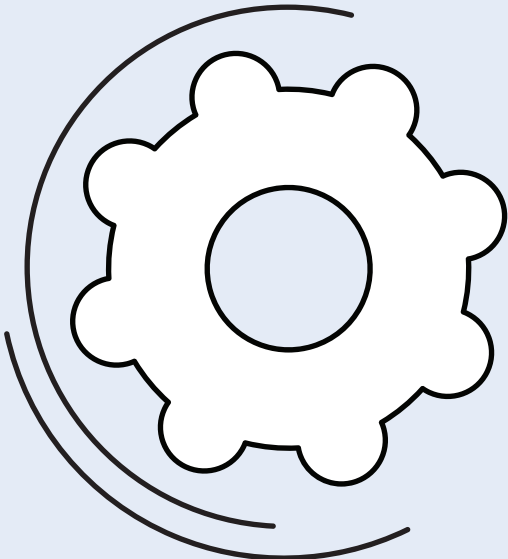
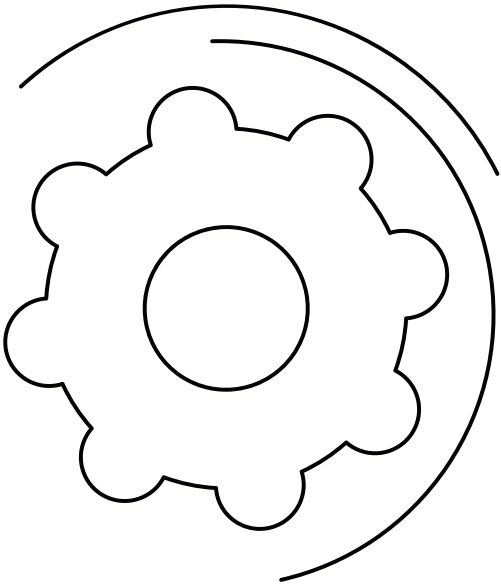
You must excel and do not use CV templates that have been used thousands of times and memorised by recruitment officials in companies. You must build your own CV step by step and write in it what distinguishes you, not what is repeated in CVs.

Given that most employers choose the Internet as a source for searching for candidates, it has become very important for job seekers to have a distinct presence on the Internet. In fact, a Bayt.com survey indicates that 92 per cent of professionals believe that an online profile can help you get more job interviews, and 61 per cent of them stated that they research candidates before hiring them.

Establish a clear presence on the Internet using your real, full name, and preferably create a special website that contains your CV, qualifications, talents, skills, previous experiences, and what you aspire to. Also include a professional photo of yourself or a short video showcasing your abilities.

If you cannot create your own website, you can achieve a strong presence on the Internet by building your own pages on specialised recruitment sites such as LinkedIn Facebook and Twitter. All of this will help create a strong presence and a reference that employers can benefit from as they search for talent and competencies.

IF YOU CAN'T FIND A JOB, CREATE ONE





Oman will phase out plastic shopping bags by 2027 in phases: EA

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Oman will gradually phase out plastic shopping bags by the second half of 2027.

The Environment Authority issued a decision (No. 7/2024) to ban the use of plastic shopping bags based on the Environmental Protection and Pollution Control Law issued by Royal Decree 114/2001, Royal Decree No106/2020, and Ministerial Decision 2020/23 regarding the ban on single-use plastic shopping bags.

It may be noted that the ban on the use of single-use plastic bags, which was implemented in the Sultanate of Oman in 2021, is

yet to yield 100 per cent results, according to a top official of the Environment Authority (EA). Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of EA, said that the earlier decision was to ban only the use of plastic bags that are less than 50 microns. “Bags that weigh more than 50 microns are still on the market. These bags are easy to collect from places, do not move around and land in places such as water bodies and mountain tops. The decision did not achieve its ultimate goal, but we hope to make amends in the future,” he said. It may be noted that while several retailers encourage reusable bags, including cotton-made, thicker plastic reusable bags are still available across



the country, leaving it to the consumers to decide whether they need to use them or not.

The new decision stated that companies and institutions are prohibited from using all kinds of plastic shopping bags, according to the time plan attached with this

decision.

Individuals are also prohibited from using these bags as of the last date specified in the plan. As per Environmental Protection and Pollution Control Law, anyone who violates the provisions of this decision will be subject to

an administrative fine of not less than RO50, not exceeding RO1,000.

The fine shall be doubled if violation is repeated. The deadline to reduce the use of plastic shopping bags is July 1, 2024 for pharmacies, hospitals, and clinics; January 1, 2025 for textile and tailoring shops, eyewear stores, mobile phone stores, watch shops, and furniture, furnishings, and household shops; July 1, 2025 (foodstuff stores, fruits and vegetable stores, gift shops, bakeries and sweet shops); January 1, 2026 (building and construction materials stores, utensils stores, shops selling feed, grains, agricultural materials, and pesticides, shops selling ice

cream, juice, mashakeek, mills, honey, dates, repairing water filters, selling and maintaining water pumps, car pumps and stores selling modern irrigation systems, shops selling birds, fish, and pets; July 1, 2026 (shops selling blankets, dagger, gold, silverware, car care centres, vehicles); January 1, 2027 (electronics stores, sanitary and electrical materials, fish supplies, repair shops, boat repair workshops, stores selling vehicle spare parts, fishing equipment spare parts, vehicle electrician, motor oils, selling and repairing electrical appliances and television broadcasting equipment and stationery and office supplies, etc); and July 1, 2027 (all other activities that use bags).

CAA UNVEILS NEW BRAND

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) launched its new identity and also that of the Civil Aviation Club under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers.

The newly developed identity is part of the plans to keep pace with global changes and support future visions, strategic directions, and goals. Eng Nayef bin Ali bin Hamad al Abri, Chairman of Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), said that the launch of the new identity reflects the launch of Afaq programme in 2021 highlighting the new identity and the change in institutional culture.

Hamed bin Ahmed al Barashdi, Chairman of the Civil Aviation Club, said that the club has been operating as an entertainment centre for more than 40 years for civil aviation employees and other 1,000 members. He added that the launch of the new brand for the Civil Aviation Club comes in line with the development in its services and facilities, as well as the development of policies and



HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, presided over the launch of the brand

strategies.

The Authority's logo consists of the letters of the abbreviation of the name in English (CAA), and the aircraft that symbolises the authority's responsibility as a regulating body for the civil aviation sector, and its upward direction indicates its ambition to reach highest standards in civil aviation.

The side shapes are inspired by the handle of the Omani dagger, in addition to the name of the authority in both languages.

The newly developed identity is part of the plans to keep pace with global changes and support future visions

Arabic and English. The logo also includes two basic colours: dark blue and green. Dark blue stands for sustainability, depth, and open space, while the green colour

expresses diversity and prosperity. These colours are used in air navigation lights that help aircraft crews determine the direction of other aircraft to ensure air safety.

As for the identity of the Civil Aviation Club, it was taken from the Civil Aviation Authority logo. The logo consists of CAC, which is the abbreviation of the club's name in English, and the letter A refers to the aircraft derived from the Civil Aviation Authority logo. The club's logo colours are dark blue, orange, and turquoise.

Kamil to inaugurate Arab insurance conference on Feb 19

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, the Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers, will patronise the opening ceremony of the 34th General Arab Insurance Federation Conference (GAIF34) on February 19.

The conference, themed 'Sustainability and inclusivity in the Arab Insurance Industry; How Arab Insurers Leverage the Artificial Intelligence Revolution' will convene with the participation of international, regional, and local stakeholders from the insurance industry. This biennial event is a key regional gathering for insurance industry policymakers, companies, brokers, and reinsurers from the Arab world and beyond. The Oman Insurance Association, in collaboration with the Capital Market Authority, are finalising preparations for the launching of this significant conference. The event has garnered widespread interest from a large number of

entities and companies in the insurance industry, with over fifty local, Arab, and international companies providing diverse sponsorships. The conference is scheduled to take place at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre from February 18 to 21 and will address various topics in line with theme of the event over a span of three days by eminent panels of industry leaders and subject matter experts along with meticulously moderated plenary sessions.

Oman's hosting of this regional conference comes after winning the bid in the previous edition held in Oran, Algeria. The organisation of this conference in Oman is considered an exceptional event, given its large attendance and the high-quality topics presented. The anticipated positive impact includes contributing to national goals, showcasing the country's capabilities, and continuing to host events of this magnitude in the future, enriching economic activity and tourism.

Over 17,000 visit Buraimi Winter Festival in Mahadha

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
BURAIMI, FEB 12

Over 17,000 visitors turned up for Buraimi Winter Festival over four days in the Wilayat of Mahadha, according to Al Buraimi Governor's Office.

Salim bin Namshan al Kaabi, Director of the Events and Awareness Department at Al Buraimi Governor's Office, said that after the success of the festival in the Buraimi Public Park in the Wilayat of Al Buraimi, Al Kahf Park in Mahadha witnessed a wide participation people from Oman and abroad in the festival that included a number of heritage and entertainment activities which highlighted the diversity of the governorate.

Al Kaabi explained that the event witnessed the participation of 10 SMEs, 20 productive families, 8 fire and bicycle shows, a poetry evening and an artistic evening. It also had a job fair attended by 20 recruiters.

He stated that the event included cartoon character shows, theatre, community shows, competitions, and accompanying activities.

Al Kaabi said the third phase of the Buraimi Winter Festival will start in the Wilayat of Al Sinainah on February 22.





EU’s Borrell urges Israel allies to stop sending weapons

BRUSSELS: EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell on Monday urged allies of Israel — primarily the United States — to stop sending it weapons as “too many people” are being killed in Gaza. Pointing to US President Joe Biden’s comment last week that Israel’s military action was “over the top”, Borrell said: “Well, if you believe that too many people are being killed, maybe you should provide less arms in order to prevent so many people have been killed.”

“Is it not logical?” he asked, in a Brussels news conference alongside Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN’s agency for Palestinian refugees UNRWA whom Israel is pressuring to resign.

“How many times have you heard the most prominent leaders and foreign ministers around the world saying too many people are being killed?” Borrell asked.

The chief EU diplomat slammed an order that the more than one million Palestinians sheltering in the Gaza city of Rafah need to be “evacuated” ahead of a planned Israeli military operation. “They are going to evacuate — where? To the moon? Where are they going to evacuate these people?” Borrell asked.

Meanwhile, the population of the Gaza Strip is suffering “unprecedented” levels of “near famine-like conditions” as the war drags on, the UN’s agriculture agency said on Monday.

Some 550,000 people are now likely facing catastrophic food insecurity levels, while the whole population is in crisis mode, the UN’s Food and Agriculture



People inspect the damage in the rubble of a mosque following Israeli bombardment, in Rafah. — AFP

The chief EU diplomat also slammed an order that the more than one million Palestinians sheltering in the Gaza city of Rafah need to be “evacuated” ahead of a planned Israeli military operation.

Organization (FAO) said. “There are unprecedented

levels of acute food insecurity, hunger, and near famine-like conditions in Gaza,” FAO Deputy Director General Beth Bechdol said in an interview published by the Rome-based agency.

“We are seeing more and more people essentially on the brink of and moving into famine-like conditions everyday,” she said.

All 2.2 million people in Gaza are in the top three hunger categories, from level three, which is considered an emergency, to level five, or catastrophe, she said.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) rates hunger levels from one to five.

“At this stage, probably about 25 per cent of that 2.2 million are in that top-level IPC five category,” Bechdol said.

Israel has raged with a relentless bombardment and ground offensive in Gaza that the territory’s health ministry says has killed at least 28,340 people, mostly women and children.

Rafah, on Gaza’s southern border with Egypt, has become a last refuge for fleeing civilians.

Many are sleeping outside in tents and makeshift shelters amid mounting concern about lack of food, water and sanitation during an Israeli siege. — AFP

Rwanda army fires SAM missile in DR Congo

GOMA: Elements of Rwanda’s army supporting M23 rebels in eastern DR Congo have launched at least one surface-to-air missile, according to an internal UN document seen on Monday.

A “suspected Rwandan Defence Force (RDF) mobile Surface-to-Air Missile (SAM)” was fired at a UN observation drone last Wednesday without hitting it, the confidential report said.

“External military intelligence from France supports assessment that the suspected WZ551 6×6 IFV mobile SAM system is Rwandan,” it added.

Attached to the report are two aerial images in which a six-wheeled armoured vehicle is visible with a radar and missile launcher



Congolese M23 rebels secure locations in Kibumba, near Goma, North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo. — Reuters file photo

system on the roof.

The photos were taken by the targeted drone about 70 kilometres north of the city of Goma, in rebel-held Rutshuru territory.

The UN’s MONUSCO peacekeeping mission says in the document it has “no past reporting of known armed groups possessing the training, capital or resources

to operate and maintain a mobile SAM system”.

Neither the United Nations nor the army of the Democratic Republic of Congo have so far commented on the incident.

Clashes have intensified recently between the M23 — among the strongest of dozens of armed groups roaming the country’s troubled east — and the Congolese army. The escalating fighting has pushed thousands of civilians to flee the town of Sake, a strategic location on the route towards Goma, capital of North Kivu province.

Clashes have intensified recently between the M23 — among the strongest of dozens of armed groups roaming the country’s troubled east -- and the Congolese army. — AFP

RSF imposes telecoms blackout darkening Sudanese situation

CAIRO: A communications network blackout in Sudan, blamed on the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, has hobbled aid delivery and left the war-weary population of almost 50 million unable to make payments or contact the outside world.

The RSF has been fighting Sudan’s army for control of the country since April in a war that has killed thousands, displaced almost 8 million, and sparked warnings of famine.

Four industry sources said that the RSF began shutting down the networks on Feb. 5, completing the blackout two days later.

After 10 months of conflict, the RSF controls most of the capital Khartoum and some of Sudan’s infrastructure that is based there, including the headquarters of the telecoms providers.

An RSF source said on Feb. 5 the paramilitary had nothing to do with the outages.

The sources said that RSF soldiers had threatened the blackout unless engineers restored service to the western Darfur region, which the RSF controls and which has experienced a blackout for months.

A telecom industry official blamed the

situation there on lack of fuel and dangerous working conditions.

Devices hooked up Elon Musk’s Starlink satellite internet system have proliferated, despite a government order against them, but most are in the dark in a country where smartphone use for most aspects of life was ubiquitous and many had access to WiFi or data networks.

Unicef said on Friday that 700,000 children in Sudan were likely to suffer from the worst form of malnutrition this year, with tens of thousands who could die.

“The consequences of the past 300 days means that more than 700,000 children are likely to suffer from the deadliest form of malnutrition this year,” James Elder, spokesperson for Unicef, told a press conference in Geneva.

“Unicef won’t be able to treat more than 300,000 of those without improved access and without additional support. In that case, tens of thousands would likely die.”

The United Nations on Wednesday urged countries not to forget the civilians caught up in the war in Sudan, appealing for \$4.1 billion to meet their humanitarian needs and support those who have fled to neighbouring countries. — Reuters



Sudanese refugee women who have fled the violence in Sudan’s Darfur region, sit beside their makeshift shelters near the border between Sudan and Chad in Koufroun, Chad. — Reuters file photo

SHORT TAKES

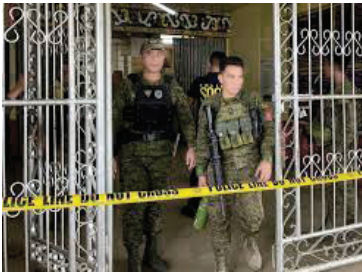
MANILA

Philippines says mass bombing ‘mastermind’ dead

The alleged mastermind of a bombing at a Catholic mass in the southern Philippines has died after a clash between members of a pro-IS group and government troops, officials said in Manila on Monday.

Four people were killed and dozens wounded in the December 3 attack on worshippers inside a university gym in Marawi, the country’s largest Muslim city, that was later claimed by the IS group.

Eight group members were



suspected of carrying out the attack on Mindanao island, army brigade commander Brigadier General Yegor Rey Barroquillo said.

—AFP

NEW DELHI

Farmers ready for mass protests over crop prices

Indian police erected barricades and banned public gatherings ahead of threatened protests by thousands of farmers demanding minimum crop prices in a bid to stop them from marching on parliament.

Long convoys of tractors gathered on borders between the capital New Delhi and Haryana state, with police using a fearsome blockade of metal spikes, barriers and cement blocks to close key highways.

Farmers have called for a



‘Delhi Chalo’ echoing protests in January 2021 when farmers breached barricades and marched into the city on Republic Day.

— AFP

BANGKOK

Thai reporter arrested over graffiti coverage

A Thai journalist was arrested over a graffiti incident that he reported on, his company and a legal rights group said. Prachatai, an independent online newspaper said its reporter Nuttaphol Meksobhon was arrested as an “accomplice” in the damaging of a historic monument.

The allegation relates to an incident last March in which a man spray-painted an anarchist symbol and the number 112 with a line through it on the outside wall of Bangkok’s Temple of the



Emerald Buddha.

The act, caught on video, was widely reported in Thai media because the temple is part of a complex of historic royal buildings. — AFP



omanobserver.com/podcast

world

OMANDAILYOBSERVER

TUESDAY | FEBRUARY 13 | 2024

7

In brief

■ STOCKHOLM



LARGE FIRE BREAKS OUT AT BIGGEST AMUSEMENT PARK

A large fire broke out on Monday at Sweden's largest amusement park in Gothenburg, engulfing a newly built water park in flames, authorities said, with a dozen people sustaining minor injuries.

Police evacuated a hotel and offices connected to the Liseberg Amusement Park in central Gothenburg, and warned households in the area to remain indoors due to smoke. 12 people sought treatment at a nearby hospital for minor injuries.

"The fire originated at one of the water attractions" located outside the main building housing the water park "and then spread throughout the building", Liseberg said. — **AFP**

■ ATHENS



GUNMAN KILLS 3 AT GREEK SHIPPING COMPANY

A man shot three people dead at the premises of a shipping company in a coastal suburb of Athens on Monday before killing himself, a Greek police source said.

The shooter broke into the building in Glyfada belonging to European Product Carriers and killed two men and a woman before barricading himself inside, the source said. Greek media reported the gunman was a former employee of the company who had been made redundant and that he was found dead in the basement with his weapon next to him.

Officers entered the building and evacuated two women the shooter had locked. — **AFP**

■ MADRID

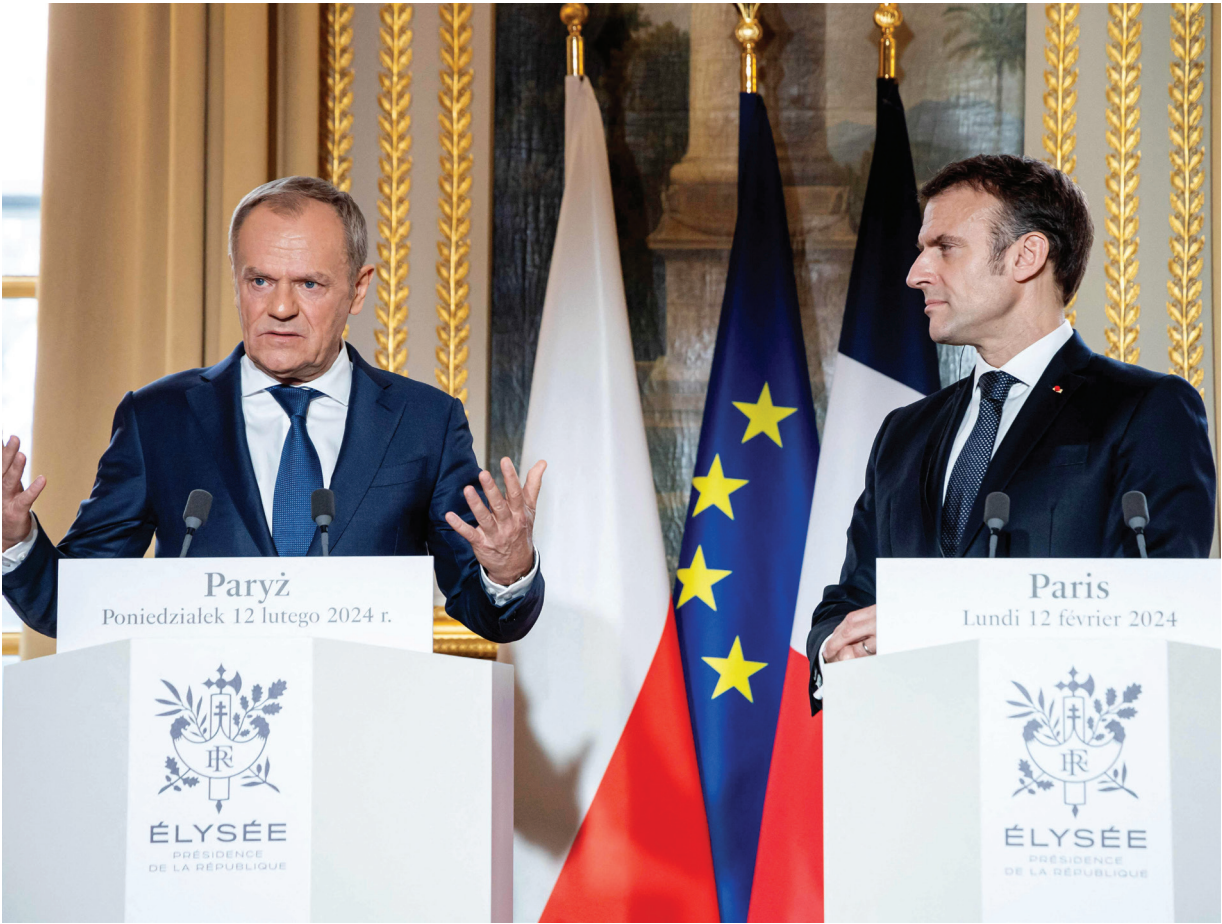


POLICE SEIZE 8 TONNES COCAINE SHIPMENT INSIDE A CONTAINER

Spanish customs agents said on Monday they had seized eight tonnes of cocaine inside a container from the tiny Latin American country of Suriname in one of the largest such shipments to date.

The container arrived at the southern port of Algeciras and inside it was a metal structure made with a special alloy that was designed to confuse the customs agents' scanning equipment, customs authority said. The scanner managed to detect that the structure contained "a large quantity of merchandise" which turned out to be eight tonnes of "very high purity cocaine". — **AFP**

Poland's Tusk vows EU-Nato unity with US



Polish PM Donald Tusk (L) gestures as he speaks to the media next to French President Emmanuel Macron (R) as they deliver a statement as part of their meeting at Elysee Palace, in Paris. — **AFP**

Warsaw, Paris and Berlin see EU unity on defence and a ramping up of the 27-member states' support for Ukraine as crucial at a time when US backing of Kyiv is wavering

Musketeers' by Alexandre Dumas resonate most clearly: 'All for one, and one for all,' he said, referring to Dumas' novel.

Warsaw, Paris and Berlin see EU unity on defence and a ramping up of the 27-member states' support for Ukraine as crucial at a time when US backing of Kyiv is wavering amid political infighting in Washington.

"Europe has to get its act together ... This is a matter of answering a question about what will happen if Trump wins. We don't have time. We must have bigger defence industry capacity," said a Polish government source.

The source added that Europe urgently needed joint production of ammunition and that Poland was no longer blocking "strategic autonomy" — making Europe less dependent on others.

The shift has been noticed elsewhere in Europe.

"Now for the first time a Polish government is saying that strengthening the European Security Defence Capabilities area is not a contradiction to a strong Nato," said Dietmar Nietan, a German official in charge of cooperation with Poland.

Analysts say the return of former European Council President Tusk to prime minister makes it easier to reinvigorate the "Weimar Triangle" platform of political cooperation between Germany, France and Poland created in 1991.

"It's a joy to have you back and have through your government, partners who we can trust, are pro-European and clear on European security and the major challenges we face," Macron said. — **Reuters**

Brazil beefs up its military presence in the Amazon

BRASILIA: Border tensions over Guyana's Esequibo and the humanitarian crisis among the Yanomami Indigenous people have led Brazil's army to increase its forces in the Amazon by 10% ahead of plan, the military commander for the region said.

The additional 2,000 troops will help the army patrol a 9,000 km border with Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia in a jungle region used by drug traffickers and illegal miners, loggers and smugglers, General Ricardo Costa Neves said.

"They will reinforce our operations in this vast area to help combat border and environmental crimes," the four-star infantry general said in a rare media interview.

The dispute arising from Venezuela's claim over Guyana's oil-rich Esequibo region has already led the Brazilian army to send more soldiers, armoured cars and artillery to the border state of Roraima with the creation of a new regiment there.

"The border situation made us bring forward some changes that were in our strategic plan. We are practically tripling our mechanised infantry, armoured vehicles and artillery in Roraima," Costa Neves said.

The reinforcement will include the creation of two permanently deployed forward bases inside the Yanomami reservation on the Uraricoera and Mucajai rivers, major access routes for wildcat gold miners that have invaded the territory.

The miners brought disease,

clandestine jungle airstrips, environmental enforcement agents told Reuters.

Costa Neves said the army will have a permanent presence at two new bases providing logistical support to environmental, Indigenous and health agencies, beside repressing illegal activities within a 150-kms zone from the border.

The general rejected criticism of the military's failure to secure the Yanomami territory last year.

"We airlifted 600 tonnes of food and supplies that were dropped by parachute to Indigenous communities. It was the largest airlift operation in the Brazilian Air Force's history," he said.

With the support of the military, 80% of the miners were evicted, some 80 dredging barges were blown up and 22 planes seized or destroyed, Costa Neves said. — **Reuters**

The reinforcement will include the creation of two permanently deployed forward bases inside the Yanomami reservation on the Uraricoera and Mucajai rivers

destruction of the rainforest and armed violence to the isolated Yanomami lands bordering Venezuela, causing malnutrition and deaths. Brazil's government last year declared a humanitarian emergency and sent a task force to remove an estimated 20,000 miners. But gold miners began to return after the armed forces scaled back their operations and failed to enforce a no-fly zone for planes flying them to



Brazil's army moves armoured vehicles from Manaus to Boa Vista to reinforce the border with Venezuela and Guyana due to tensions over Venezuelan claims to the Esequibo region, in Manaus Brazil. — **Reuters file photo**

Kremlin, Musk deny army using Starlink



A Starlink satellite Internet system is set up near the frontline town of Bakhmut, Donetsk region, Ukraine. — **Reuters file photo**

KYIV: The Kremlin on Monday rejected Ukraine's claims that Russian troops fighting on the frontline were using Starlink terminals.

Kyiv's GUR military intelligence agency said it had evidence that Starlink Internet terminals were being used on a "systematic" basis by Russian troops, accusing Moscow of "smuggling" them into the country.

Starlink, owned by Elon Musk's SpaceX, is a network of satellites in low Earth orbit that can provide Internet to remote locations, or areas that have had normal communications infrastructure disabled.

"It cannot be officially supplied here and is not officially supplied here," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Monday.

"Accordingly, it cannot be officially used here in any way," he added.

The system is not active in Russia, meaning even a device inside Russia could not connect.

But Kyiv has accused Russian troops of using the device across the frontlines in Ukraine.

"Starlink is freely available in Russia. Compared to last year, now the use of Starlink in the Russian army on the front line has become more systematic," Andriy Yusov, GUR

spokesman said on Monday on state television. He said it would not "reveal all the details" of its claims.

Ukraine itself has widely used Starlink to ensure communications and connectivity for its troops during the two-year war.

Musk called reports SpaceX had sold Starlink terminals to Russia "categorically false," in a post on his X social media platform.

"To the best of our knowledge, no Starlinks have been sold directly or indirectly to Russia," he added.

Ukraine's Yusov said Kyiv accepted that Starlink was not "officially being sold to the Russians."

He said Russia bought them through "parallel imports, which is essentially smuggling," he said.

Since Moscow attacked Ukraine and was hit with Western sanctions, it has set up a network of traders and intermediaries in third countries to get hold of banned goods and other products no longer available inside Russia. It is not the first time Kyiv and Musk have clashed over Starlink.

Last year the Tesla and Space X tycoon rejected a request to activate the network in the Crimean city of Sevastopol to support a Ukrainian attack on Russia's naval fleet. — **AFP**

White Swan and impact of the highly probable



Khalid Alsafi Al Huraibi
khalidalharibi@gmail.com

The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation adviser

Since 2007, we have learned, the hard way, how reading global signs and wisely assessing situations is the best way to avoid global crises that harm our health, economy, and overall livelihood.

This was in great part due to the book of the influential thinker, and former options trader Nassim Taleb called ‘The Black Swan: The impact of the Highly Improbable’. Taleb argues that we do not acknowledge crises until they occur again because “we concentrate on things we already know, and time and time again fail to take into consideration what we don’t know. We are, therefore, unable to truly estimate opportunities.”

While it was hard to predict the global financial crisis, and the Covid-19 pandemic it is easier to foresee a White Swan crisis in the horizon facing our world’s larger economy US and exacerbated by a total global failure in communications, that is resulting in the suffering of millions of people in our region and around the world.

There are three predictable global White Swans that our world could turn into opportunities this century; the occupation of Palestine, the Russian attack of the Ukraine, and the US-China rivalry. Without deliberate and wisely seeking to avoid these three crises this century will likely continue to suffer

from one crisis to the other.

The occupation of Palestine

As the highest judicial body in the world, International Court of Justice (ICJ), a specific group of people, the Palestinians, are suffering from the signs of genocide.

Israel and its accomplices’ continuous disregard for the genocide convention and international humanitarian laws, and the ongoing dehumanisation of human beings is the White Swan spreading hatred and violence in all corners of the world. We have a great opportunity in 2024 to hold ourselves accountable and alleviate almost a century-old suffering and stand by the right of Palestinians to be free. For almost a hundred years our world tried to achieve collective peace and prosperity without ending the occupation, and the result has been always the same a complete failure, and this is the right time to try to do the right thing.

The Russian attack of Ukraine

In February 2024, the charismatic Russian President Vladimir Putin granted an interview to an American media influencer who is an extremist white supremacy sympathiser Tucker Carlson.

This interview showed the leadership failure of both superpowers to spare the world from decades long destructive conflict. It also showed the toxic link

WE COULD HAVE SAVED MILLIONS OF LIVES IF THE PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY WASN’T CONCENTRATED IN A FEW WEALTHY COUNTRIES THAT MONOPOLISE HEALTH INVESTMENTS AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

between parties that fuelling violence, racial hatred and islamophobia in the US and Russia.

The lengthy interview also showed we have a valuable opportunity as human beings to shared understanding of history to achieve truth and reconciliation. Here’s an opportunity to follow the example of a nation that survived one of our history’s greatest evils - apartheid and build a revamped United Nations body that can guarantee peace and prosperity.

US China rivalry

US China trade wars has been causing global supply chain and procurement disruptions and stifling global research, development, and innovation outside the so-called global north.

We could have saved millions of lives if the pharmaceutical industry wasn’t concentrated in a few wealthy countries that monopolise health investments and intellectual property rights.

The opportunity is to dedicate more investments to more sustainable local supply chains that complement global supply chains.

We have seen how black swans like the global financial crisis and Covid-19 harm humanity, and now that we have several highly probable, man-made crises, I believe we can turn these white swans into opportunities that bring us more justice, prosperity, and useful innovations.

Embracing authenticity in content creation

In an era of technological development and globalisation, despite the ease of communication and access to countless stories, news, literary works often lack the depth and quality that give them an authentic and timeless touch.

Older works, whether theatrical, literary, or cultural, have a lasting impact and relevance. So, what has changed?



Attifa Nasser

If we delve into the matter, we can see a connection between the rapid technological advancements and the overwhelming amount of information that has made people try to keep up with everything.

This has led to a more horizontal expansion of knowledge and awareness, rather than a deep vertical exploration of a specific subject.

The focus has shifted towards knowing a little bit about everything, instead of delving deeply into a particular aspect. This fast-paced pattern has also influenced people’s expectations, as they now seek quick results and resort to shortcuts.

The goals they aspire to may not be as profound, and the value system and societal standards have changed as well. Characters that used to bring awareness and create valuable productions have taken a backseat.

However, quality is closely tied to mastery and careful consideration. It is crucial to reassess the standards by which we judge our productions and not neglect the importance of quality, depth, and originality in any field.

While technology offers benefits like rapid publishing and broader reach, we should not sacrifice the essence of our work. Content creators should break free from the superficial standards imposed by social media and embrace the advantages of technology while still delivering meaningful and original content.

In a world that often prioritises speed and convenience, embracing depth can be a refreshing and transformative experience.

It allows us to break free from the superficial and delve into the richness that lies beneath the surface.

By seeking out meaningful connections, exploring diverse perspectives, and immersing ourselves in the beauty of art, literature, and culture, we can cultivate a sense of authenticity and fulfilment.

Depth invites us to slow down, savour the details, and appreciate the nuances that make life truly extraordinary. It is through this intentional exploration that we can rediscover the depth of our humanity and create a lasting impact on the world around us.



Marc Santora

The writer is a reporter at New York Times Digital



Eric Schmitt

The writer is a senior writer with NYT

Despite command shake-up, Ukraine’s problems might not change

Russian forces are razing the already battered city of Avdiivka in eastern Ukraine to the ground and sending waves of assault units to overwhelm outgunned Ukrainian troops. After months of brutal fighting, the Russian military is threatening to cut off a vital supply line to the city, which could render further defence impossible.

As Gen Oleksandr Syrsky assumes his role as Ukraine’s top military commander — after a broad shake-up of army leadership — he could soon be confronted again with the grim calculus that has been a feature of the two-year war: When does the cost of defending ground outweigh any benefit gained by inflicting pain on the enemy?

It is a bloody equation that Syrsky has had to try to work out many times as the commander of ground forces in eastern Ukraine, and it is one that critics — including US military officials — contend he has not always gotten right, particularly in the battle for Bakhmut.

Assessing that strategy will be only part of the “renewal” that President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said was necessary when he dismissed his commanding general, Valery Zaluzhny, on Thursday and named Syrsky to replace him. Zelenskyy also named five generals and two colonels he intends to promote as part of the sweeping overhaul.

Ukraine’s military challenges go well beyond any single battle. US assistance, urgently needed, remains in doubt. Ukrainian troops are exhausted, and they lack weapons and ammunition. Air defence systems, crucial to protecting civilians from Russian missiles, are being steadily exhausted by repeated bombardments.

US officials assess that, without replenishment, Ukraine has enough air defences to last until only next month.

And Russian President Vladimir Putin delivered a blunt message on Thursday night in an interview with Tucker Carlson, saying Ukraine would



Ukrainian soldiers from the 72nd Mechanised Brigade in Vuhledar, eastern Ukraine, on Jan. 27, 2024. (Tyler Hicks/The New York Times)

not regain territory and that it was time to make a deal.

Western military analysts have suggested that 2024 will be a rebuilding year for Ukraine, and Syrsky will need to figure out how best to employ soldiers to hold back Russian offensives while generating new and effective fighting forces. Before Ukraine’s leaders

AIR DEFENCE SYSTEMS, CRUCIAL TO PROTECTING CIVILIANS FROM RUSSIAN MISSILES, ARE BEING STEADILY EXHAUSTED BY REPEATED BOMBARDMENTS

think of regaining ground, though, they must first hold what they have — and preventing Russian advances is complicated by critical shortages of soldiers and ammunition.

Western officials and military experts have warned that without US assistance, a cascading collapse along the front is a real possibility this year.

It would still be at least a couple of months before the lack of renewed aid

has a widespread effect, they say. But without it, they add, it’s hard to see how Ukraine will be able to maintain its current positions on the battlefield.

By next month, Ukraine could struggle to conduct local counterattacks, and by early summer, its military might have difficulty rebuffing Russian assaults, the officials and analysts say.

However, officials also assess that Russia would struggle to quickly build enough capability to conduct a major offensive across eastern Ukraine. Instead, Russian forces would most likely move forward in a clumsy disjointed way but with a high threshold for casualties among their own troops.

On Friday, the Kremlin dismissed the Ukrainian leadership change as inconsequential. “We don’t believe this is a factor that can change the course of the special military operation,” Putin’s spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, told journalists, using Moscow’s phrase for the war. “It will continue until all of its goals are achieved.”

Still, Ukraine has managed to fend off doomsday scenarios in the past, most notably when it drove Russian forces from Kyiv in the first months of the war. — *The New York Times*

What is that draws us to wadis?

The social media showed the videos of the wadis in their different moods. We could see wadi in Samayil gently encroaching the streets and Wadi Yanqul displayed a vortex, giving a glimpse of what and how a whirlpool looks like. So on display were elements of physics and geography and obviously nature.

A wadi remains dry and sits patiently until the clouds above bring down the water to touch the earth. It seems the soil takes as much as it can as fast as possible because the excess would have to move on, teaching us the fact that we have a limit and then the excess must move on whether it is money or resources.

There are numerous messages conveyed to us general public, not to venture out into the wadis or even go near it while it is flowing.

That is the difference — a flowing wadi is in motion and when something tries to move in it, the wadi takes over. To think the water in the wadi were all just raindrops a few minutes before teaches us the power of unity.

The speed of the wadi may not be recorded often, but the flow of wadi is not maintained like a river because the source is the rain and when it stops, the flow of the wadi will slow down to halt. The wadi will sustain until it has enough water before it is drained down or reaches its destination, the sea or dam.

On the way the water is absorbed and what remains will evaporate when the skies clear up.

It is this factor that makes people want to watch as the wadi puts out its personality even if it means for a few hours. Some of the governorates that are close to Al Hajar Mountains get their share of summer rains thanks to the mountains. But other governorates have been waiting for the rains and so have the wadis. So the low-pressure generated February thunderstorms have been much awaited but it came with advice and precautions.

And one of the major ones was not to approach flowing wadis and to stay away from low-lying areas.

Wadi bashing may be a sport but not during a storm or just after it and that



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

THE VERY NATURE OF A WADI IS THAT IT WILL RUN. IT IS NEITHER LIKE A LAKE THAT WOULD JUST FILL IN CALMLY, NOR LIKE A RIVER THAT WILL FLOW WITH A CONSISTENT MOMENTUM

is because one never knows when the water from the mountains might reach the base to intensify the flow.

What we are actually talking about is energy.

When we see the rushing wadi we get a glimpse of hydropower and the process of water cycle. It came from the sky and it must go back but it will also quench the thirst of earth.

In Oman, today there are dams to capture running water as part of the reservoir. And the calmness of the water in the dam is in direct contrast to the running wadi.

These are almost like life lines of fresh water to reach the sea. And it wasn't until a conference by Oman Water Society it dawned on me that even fresh water springs reach out to sea.

The network of water is more than what we see. The underground water channels created an oasis that was a blessing for settlers and travellers, like the wells in the Empty Quarter.

People have been holding prayers for the rains, a tradition that continues today. They must be experiencing pure joy now.

But what we must realise is that no matter how much the wadi intrigues us, it is important not to approach it while it is on the move. It is not a calculated risk because we are also endangering the lives of rescue operators. When the authorities request us not to venture out until it is necessary, it is a point to dwell on before we choose the action.

But the beauty of water flowing through a wadi for sure is picturesquely capturing and we tend to pick on the pure energy roaring with power.

But in life, timing is everything. And human psychology is such that we want happy endings. So let the appointment be late, let's not cross a wadi that is rushing to its destination.

The very nature of a wadi is that it will run. It is neither like a lake that would just fill in calmly, nor like a river that will flow with a consistent momentum.

The flowing wadi might have just been reactivated, but experience has shown us that its currents are unpredictable just like the vortex seen in the wadi of Yanqul.

Let the water run its course. And let us stay safe.

CASTING THE NET!



A fisherman casts his net along the confluence of Adyar river and Indian Ocean at the Srinivasapuram beach in Chennai, India, on Monday. – AFP

Redrawing boundaries in a dynamic world

In the course of human events causing an ever-evolving political landscape, the notion of legitimacy has come under intense scrutiny. The very foundations upon which governance structures are established are being questioned as political narratives rapidly change, emerging movements gain traction, and ideological shifts reshape public opinion. With elections on the horizon in several countries across the globe, it becomes imperative to analyse these dynamics and contemplate potential trends that might unfold.

The concept of legitimacy in governance has traditionally relied on the adherence to constitutional frameworks, the use of democratic processes, and the consent of the governed. However, as societal expectations, values, and priorities continue to shift, the pillars of legitimacy are being redefined. For example, efficiency and efficacy in delivery of public goods is a de facto additional factor.

One crucial factor influencing the legitimacy debate is the rise of social movements and grassroots activism. From climate change advocates demanding urgent action, to civil rights activists fighting for equality and justice, these movements pioneer new narratives and platforms, reshaping the expectations of the



Ahmed Al Mukhaini

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

EXPLORING THE CHANGING NOTIONS OF LEGITIMACY AMIDST SHIFTING POLITICAL NARRATIVES, EMERGING MOVEMENTS, AND THE IMPACT ON GLOBAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

governed, and blending further internal and external agendas. Their collective voices resonate with citizens who are increasingly dissatisfied with traditional political establishments, forcing a reassessment of governance structures, and democratic processes.

Simultaneously, ideological shifts are challenging the traditional left-right political spectrum. The rise of populist movements, nationalist sentiments, and identity politics has fractured long-standing political alliances and divided societies. As these movements gain political ground, they introduce alternative visions of legitimacy that align with their own ideologies and aim to challenge established power structures.

Looking ahead at the upcoming elections, it is essential to recognise the unique dynamics at play in each country. While the idiosyncrasies of each election must be respected, it is worthwhile to explore potential trends that may emerge collectively, whether globally or regionally. It is also worthwhile to observe to what extent the well-established American exceptionalism persists. In other

countries, one possible trend to watch is the growing appeal of non-traditional, outsider candidates who promise to bring unconventional approaches to governance. These candidates often appeal to disillusioned voters searching for alternative avenues to express their demand for change. The risk of radicalised right-wing or nationalists voters gathering momentum remains, which will drag the world further into a xenophobic and protective mindset.

Additionally, the increasing influence of technology on political campaigns cannot

be overlooked. Social media platforms have provided a powerful tool for mobilising support and shaping public opinion. The ability of political candidates to effectively utilise these platforms and engage with voters in a meaningful manner may have a significant impact on their perceived legitimacy.

However, it is crucial to recognise that trends are not universal and can differ drastically from one country to another, influenced by unique historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors. It is within this context that the legitimacy debate

must be framed, acknowledging the complexity and fluidity of the global political landscape.

As we move forward in this dynamic world, it is essential for governance structures to adapt and redefine their legitimacy frameworks to remain inclusive, responsive, and accountable to the evolving needs and aspirations of their citizens. The reimagining of international governance must navigate the complexities brought by shifting power dynamics, emerging movements, and ideological shifts.

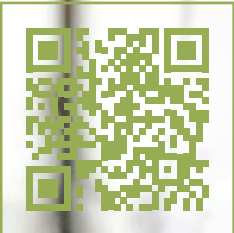
In conclusion, the discussion on legitimacy in governance is more pertinent than ever before. As elections loom on the horizon across different countries, it is essential to recognise the potential trends that might emerge. The changing political narratives, the rise of grassroots movements, and the ideological shifts within societies demand a critical examination of governance structures worldwide. It is only through an open and honest debate that we can build stronger systems that stand the test of time, ensuring the legitimacy of our global governance frameworks in this dynamic world.



One crucial factor influencing the legitimacy debate is the rise of social movements and grassroots activism.

sport

Follow us on
omandobserver.om/sports



MAGNIER & LAMPERTI STORM SOUDAL QUICK-STEP TO TAKE OVER STAGE 3

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 12

The duo of Soudal Quick-Step team comprised from Paul Magnier and Luke Lamperti excelled a promising finish in the third stage of 13th edition of Tour of Oman on Monday. The French rider Paul Magnier claimed the title of the stage, which began from Al Naseem Garden in Barka and finished in Al Bustan within a timing of one hour, 47 minutes and 54 seconds while US's Luke Lamperti ended as runners up from the same team with minor difference in timing. Another French rider Bryan Coquard from COFIDIS team concluded the 76 km distance in third place.

The organising committee of Tour of Oman in coordination with the relevant government entities, decided on Sunday night

to modify stage 3 which was proposed from Bidbid to Eastern Mountain to another shorter and safer stage from Naseem Garden to Al Bustan for a distance of 76 kilometres due to the current weather conditions in the Sultanate of Oman and to ensure the safety of the riders during the race.

Luke Lamperti took overall leader as he claimed the red jersey while he topped the general point ranking classification to receive the green jersey by 24 points. He took the white jersey as he was the best young rider classification. Oscar Pelegri Ferrnandis from Burgos-BH team of Spain remained in the golden jersey for the third time in a row.

Paul Magnier, the young French sprinter (19 years old) made the most of his explosive abilities to claim his second

professional win already. "This is my second triumph this season after my opening win in Mallorca end of January. I am living great moments after this victory and it is definitely good feedback for me and for the team," the French champion said.

"I am happy to be part of this strong team as we are very specialised in how to manage the sprint. This was very clear in today's race as we did very well and two members of the team led the race's tally," he added

"Thanks to the organisation team as it was a good idea to change to the route and made it shorter to ensure the safety of the riders," he concluded

Magnier and Lamperti were team-mates last year in the UCI Continental Team Trinity Racing. Their association immediately makes wonders among the

professionals!

The Spanish rider Oscar Pelegri Ferrnandis from Burgos-BH team expressed his joy to remain the champion of the golden jersey. "It was a good day and I was lucky as the route was changed and the organisers made it shorter. I am looking to take this jersey to home and I am looking for more victories in the remaining stages. It was quite easy route today but I am looking for tomorrow's race as it is going to be little bit tough," he ended

On the day after Qurayat's storm, David Delgado (Burgos-BH), the Omani national champion Mohammed al Wahibi and Ariya Phounsavath (Roojai Insurance) set off at km 4. They joined at the front by Anton Palzer (Bora-Hansgrohe). UAE Team Emirates set the pace in the bunch early in the stage. The

gap reaches 1 minute after 20 km of racing but it never gets higher than 1'10" with 50km to go. Soudal Quick-Step join UAE Team Emirates at the front of the bunch.

Young power duo rises

As the riders enter the second half of the stage, a few drops pour on the riders but the conditions remain favourable. Palzer wants to make the most of the situation with an attack 27km away from the finish. His lead to the bunch is down to 20" with 20km to go. He is caught 15km away from the line. Munder al Hsani (Oman National Team) tried to upset the peloton with a daring attack inside the last 8km. He opened a gap of 18" but was caught 4km to go.

Several teams tried to position their sprinters. But when the road rose ahead of them with 500m

to go, there was no containing Paul Magnier and Luke Lamperti (Soudal Quick-Step), punching their way to the stage win (Magnier) and the red jersey (Lamperti), while Bryan Coquard (Cofidis) finished 3rd.

Following the completion of the race, the podium ceremony took place in indoor hall of the Hormuz Grand Hotel due to the outside heavy rains in Muscat. Saif bin Sebaa al Rushaidi, Chairman of Oman Cycling Association, the chief guest handed over the awards to the top winners in presence of team's representatives and media people.

The fourth stage of the tour is slightly changed to began from Fanja instead of Al Rustaq Fort and will conclude in the same proposed place in Yitti hills for a distance of 104 km instead of 207.5 km.

Home victory a fitting end to Cup of Nations success story

ABIDJAN: Success for the home team in Sunday's Africa Cup of Nations final ensured a storybook ending to a riveting tournament, with the Ivory Coast celebrating success both on and off the field.

The month-long tournament set new standards and had many thrilling matches, starting with a series of dramatic upsets and culminating in victory for the hosts.

The Ivorians beat Nigeria 2-1 in the final to complete a fairytale comeback after stumbling through the early stages and being handed the heaviest defeat ever suffered by a home country.

The 4-0 loss to tiny Equatorial Guinea in the last group match was the biggest shock in 34 editions of the Cup of Nations, stretching back more than six decades.

It left Ivory Coast on the brink of elimination but they squeezed through as lucky losers into the knockout stages, sacked their coach, altered the line-up and slowly built momentum.

"After that slap, it was difficult but it helped us come back even stronger to take our second chance and show everyone that we were the best," said Ivorian midfielder Seko Fofana.

The tournament seemed destined for a showpiece finish, having started with shock results that saw several heavyweight contenders tumble out early as unfancied teams proved more than competitive at the 24-team tournament.

The Cape Verde Islands, the smallest of the countries competing, eliminated Ghana early on and came within a penalty shootout of a semi-final place.

Equatorial Guinea's exploits were also extraordinary and their 34-year-old captain Emilio Nsue,



Ivory Coast's Max Gradel lifts the trophy as he celebrates with teammates. – REUTERS



Ivory Coast's Nicolas Pepe with teammates celebrate with the trophy. – REUTERS



Oumar Diakite (L) and Karim Konate celebrate after the winning. – AFP

who plays for a third division club in Spain, ended as the tournament's top scorer.

There were many headline players too but two of the biggest endured disappointing tournaments.

Egypt forward Mohamed Salah limped out with a hamstring injury, Sadio Mane went home after the last 16 as holders Senegal were dumped out and Morocco, who reached the World Cup semi-finals 14 months ago, were eliminated at the same stage, again failing to live up to their status as pre-tournament favourites.

COLOURFUL SPECTACLE

The Cup of Nations has always been a colourful spectacle, and often enlivened by controversy on the field or rioting off it but many times also pilloried for the poor standard of matches. Past tournaments too have seen empty stands for matches not involving the hosts.

But the Ivory Coast, who put back the timing of the tournament six months to avoid the rainy season in west Africa, changed that perception, helped by a high quality of pitches and good attendances at most matches.

"With the image we showed today, Africa must be proud," said Ivory Coast captain Serge Aurier after Sunday's final. "We have progressed, whether it be the teams, the stadiums, the living environment."

The 2025 Cup of Nations will be in Morocco, where the infra structure is expected to be even better. But there is still no clarity from the Confederation of African Football on when the event will be held, either at the start of the year or in June-July when it would clash with FIFA's new expanded Club World Cup.

— Reuters

Hernandez strike earns Milan 1-0 win over Napoli

MILAN: A first-half goal from Theo Hernandez was enough to seal a 1-0 victory for AC Milan over visiting champions Napoli on Sunday, helping Stefano Pioli's side remain unbeaten in Serie A since the turn of the year.

The France defender controlled a brilliant pass from Rafael Leao on the edge of the box and sent it low past Napoli goalkeeper Pierluigi Gollini to give Milan the lead in the 25th minute.

Milan, third in the standings on 52 points, extended their unbeaten league run to nine games, including seven wins.

They are eight points behind leaders Inter Milan and one adrift of Juventus in second, who both have a game in hand.

"We worked very well in the first half, then in the second we lost some distance, but we couldn't imagine not conceding anything to Napoli, who have a lot of quality," Pioli told a press conference.

Walter Mazzarri's side, ninth on 35 points, travelled to Milan without striker Victor Osimhen, who at the same time played with Nigeria against Ivory Coast in the Africa Cup of Nations final.

Pioli, meanwhile, had to make an early change when defender Davide Calabria was forced off with an adductor problem, the coach confirmed after the game, and Alessandro Florenzi came on for the Milan captain in the 37th minute.

With Italy manager Luciano



Theo Hernandez celebrates after scoring first goal. – AFP

Spalletti watching from the stands, Napoli had an early chance when Khvicha Kvaratskhelia squared the ball to forward Giovanni Simeone inside the box but the Argentine knocked it wide with his first touch.

But Milan were the better team and, after Hernandez netted the opener, Leao could have doubled their lead three minutes later with a shot from distance, which forced Gollini into a save.

Napoli, who did not have a shot on target in the opening 45 minutes, showed more intent after the break but substitute Matteo Politano narrowly missed the target when he fired from outside the box on the hour mark.

They had another opportunity one minute from fulltime when Napoli midfielder Jesper

Lindstrom sent in a cross which came off Milan defender Jan-Carlo Simic and hit the post, narrowly avoiding an own goal.

Napoli have not scored a single goal in their last five away games in the league, their longest such streak since 1979 (a run of six).

They next host 12th-placed Genoa on Saturday.

Milan, who on Thursday host Stade Rennais in the Europa League, travel to Monza in the league on Feb. 18.

Earlier on Sunday, Fiorentina hammered Frosinone 5-1 at home for their first win in five Serie A games.

Fifth-placed Bologna beat Lecce 4-0 and Atalanta, in fourth, won 4-1 at Genoa in the day's other matches.

— Reuters

OCC crowns individual chess winners

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 12

The Oman Chess Committee (OCC) announces the triumphant conclusion of the 6th Individual Chess Championship, held from February 8 to 11. The tournament organised in collaboration with Women Sports and Cultural Creativity Club, showcased exceptional talent and fierce competition among female players across two categories, Women and Under 16.

Closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Sanaa bint Hamad al Busaidiyah, the president of the Women Sports and Cultural Creativity Club.

The competition aimed to selecting national team members to represent

Oman national team in the upcoming Gulf Olympic Games in April, featured intense matches in the women and under 16 categories, showcasing a high level of skill among the players.

Sanaa al Busaidy awarded the winners. While in Women's category, Anaa al ssaai secured first place with 7 points, followed by Al Anoud al Ghafri from Rustaq Club snatched second place with 4.5 points. Khawther al Maamari from Salalah Club claimed third place with the same points 4.5 point, which determined by direct confrontation.

Abrar al Busaidy from Masirah Club secured fourth place with 4 points. Mona al Mughaiswi from Masirah Club finished fifth with 4 points.

In Girls under 16 category, Maryam al Balushi from Salalah Club took first place with 6 points, followed by Reem al Shukaili from Masirah Club won second place with the same 6 points and a difference in direct confrontation, Reem al Balushi from Salalah Club secured third place with 5.5 points.

The competition, held with a Swiss system format over seven rounds, included 22 players in the Women's category and 16 players in under 16 category, representing various sports clubs in Oman.

The event was officiated by a group of national referees, certified by the International Chess Federation, who have previously officiated in several tournaments.



Sanaa bint Hamad al Busaidiyah, the president of the Women Sports crowning the 6th individual chess winners

‘Aoun’, ‘Kaifan’ claim prizes in day 1 of Al Bashayer camel race



Dr Mohammed bin Ali Zaabanoot al Mahri (L), Wali of Adam, presents the opening day cup to Humaid bin Ali al Zari, Director-General of the Royal Camel Corps (C), along with the coach, Nasser al Daree (R).



WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, FEB 12

The 7th edition of Al Bashayer Camel Racing festival kicked off on Monday in the Wilayat of Adam, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Ali Zaabanoot al Mahri, Wali of Adam.

The 6-days festival is organised by the Al Bashayer Arabian Camel Field Department and supported by His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan.

As many as 4,000 camels from GCC and various governorates of Oman are competing in the event from February 12 to 17. The competition will be held in 74 rounds in different categories. The winners will get cash prizes, 20 cars, trophies, golden and silver swords. The opening day witnessed 25 rounds, in the ‘Hagayeg’ category covering for 4 km. Nineteen races were in the morning with cash prizes for the top ten. In the afternoon, there were six main races with winners getting cars and

cash prizes for the top 10.

MORNING COMPETITIONS

‘Zazaah,’ owned by Humaid al Qanoubi snatched the opening round. ‘Shaheen,’ owned by Sultan al Jahafi, won the second round. ‘Shawaheen,’ owned by Amer al Omari, finished first in the third round. ‘Shawaheen,’ owned by Suleiman al Qanoubi, claimed fourth round ‘Murkh,’ owned by Said al Mughairy, won the fifth round, ‘Awayed’ owned by Obaid al Junaibi was the champion in the sixth round. ‘Fiafi,’ owned by Ghosn al Musallami, came first in the seventh round. ‘Zaafraan,’ owned by Awad al Wahaibi, ranked eighth round.

‘Nasiya,’ owned by Ali al Shibli, won the ninth round. ‘Nasi,’ owned by Abdullah al Wahaibi claimed the 10th round. ‘Al Musk,’ owned by Ahmed al Junaibi won the eleventh round.

‘Waqad,’ owned by Majid al Daree snatched the 12th round. ‘Hamloula,’ owned by Ali al Wahaibi grabbed the 13th round. ‘Raddad,’ owned by Yasser al Wahaibi was the hero in the 14th round.

‘Al Shayba,’ owned by Abdullah al Amri

topped the 15th round. “

‘Al Muhandis,’ owned by Hamad al Wahaibi, snatched 16th round. ‘Al Shahiniya,’ owned by Salim al Daree finished first in 17th round.

‘Najd,’ owned by Salim al Jabri won the 18th round. ‘Nouda,’ owned by Badr al Mushaifri, topped the morning race.

EVENING ROUNDS

‘Aoun,’ owned by Royal Camel Corps snatched the Cup and the car. It was coached by Nasser al Daree. ‘Kaifan,’ owned by Hamad al Jadailli claimed the rifle and the car.

‘Sama,’ owned by Hamad al Wahaibi, won the third car, ‘Luzha,’ owned by Mohammed al Wahaibi, claimed the fourth car.

‘Al Faisal,’ owned by Saif al Wahaibi, grabbed the fifth car, ‘Al Fayeza,’ owned by Sultan al Habsi, bagged the sixth car.

The second day competitions will continue for the ‘Lagaya’ category for 5 km divided into 15 races in the morning time with cash prize for the top 10.

Five main races will be held in the afternoon with five cars for the winners and cash prizes up to 10th place.





Closer than you think

Over 100 branches, and more than 300
ATMs/CDMs/FFMs/MFKs to serve you

 bankdhofar

 www.bankdhofar.com


بنك ظفار
BankDhofar

New law and roadmap under development for Oman’s postal sector



Eng Said al Maawali addressing the 1st Arab Postal Leaders Forum in Muscat.

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, FEB 12

Activities of the first Arab Postal Leaders Forum began yesterday, February 12, at the JW Marriott Hotel in Muscat. The three-day forum is organised by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

In a statement, the Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, highlighted the significance of the forum in establishing sustainable digital transformation.

“The introduction of digital technologies and continuous interaction with them poses a challenge and an opportunity for the postal sector, and today we are here to explore the possibility of achieving sustainable digital transformation and enhancing innovation in the postal sector,” he said.

“Digital transformation represents an opportunity to improve postal operations, starting from accurate tracking of shipments to smart data management to enhance the user experience,” he further added, noting that the Omani postal

sector was ranked 6th in the region and 65th internationally in 2023, according to Universal Postal Union report.

According to Eng Said al Maawali, postal sector laws are currently under development, “The government has paid great attention to the postal sector by establishing clear governance for the sector according to the best global practices.

The ministry, in collaboration with all relevant entities, has worked on preparing a law for the sector in addition to a general policy to be a roadmap that aligns with global and local trends.”

The forum is attended by more than 60 participants from 18 Arab countries, including stakeholders in the postal sector and partners of the Universal Postal Union, according to ministry officials.

The first day of the forum included panels discussing the postal sector and the digital economy, and e-commerce.

In addition to several keynote speeches and meetings to address sectoral challenges. It was also accompanied by a parallel exhibition which showcased local and global postal companies.

Omani Industry Day celebrations to focus on AI, factory automation

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT FEB 12

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), marked Omani Industry Day on February 9 this year on the theme of “Factory Automation and Artificial Intelligence.”

This year’s theme underscores His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq’s emphasis on making Oman a leading investment destination as part of the transition towards a sustainable economy. This celebration highlights the importance of the industrial sector as a key pillar for economic diversification and the achievement of Oman Vision 2040 objectives.

In the context of the global shift towards Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies, rapid adoption of these technologies by the industrial sector is necessary to maintain competitiveness, enhance production efficiency, and foster innovation.

The MoCIIP emphasises that embracing artificial intelligence technologies and factory automation is vital to enhance companies’ competitiveness in the industrial sector, improve planning and production processes, increase productivity, enhance equipment maintenance, and improve customer experience.

On Wednesday, February 14, the MoCIIP will host a celebration in Suhar, Al Batinah North. The event will witness the signing of agreements and memoranda of understanding, as well as the launch of various initiatives,



The number of Omani workers in the sector, with social security coverage, exceeded 33,000 workers.

including those related to this year’s Industry Day theme. These agreements and memoranda are expected to enhance production efficiency, open new avenues for innovation, diversify products, and improve their quality.

Additionally, modern industrial technologies will play a significant role in improving supply chain efficiency, reducing waste, and enhancing the environmental and economic sustainability of various Omani factories.

Manufacturing Industries Statistics from the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicate that the contribution of the manufacturing industries continues to actively contribute to the national economy.

Its contribution to the gross

domestic product reached 9.3% by the end of September 2023, equivalent to RO 2.454 billion at constant prices.

The number of Omani workers in the sector, with social security coverage, exceeded 33,000 workers, while foreign direct investment in the industrial sector exceeded RO 1.4 billion.

Additionally, Omani non-oil commodity exports amounted to RO 6.767 billion by the end of last November. Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, the Under-Secretary of MoCIIP for Commerce and Industry, stated that the ministry will undertake the implementation of a series of initiatives, including the automation of Omani factories, adoption of artificial intelligence technologies, and a shift towards a circular economy.

He indicated that an

announcement will be made during this year’s Industry Day event regarding some of these groundbreaking projects aimed at enhancing the sector’s productivity and reducing operational costs through the adoption of practical programmes for factory automation and operational efficiency improvement.

He further added that the government, recognising the importance of the industrial sector and its desire to make the Sultanate of Oman a leading investment destination, has chosen the theme “Factory Automation and Artificial Intelligence” to celebrate Omani Industry Day this year, with the aim of continuing the growth trajectory towards broader horizons and sustainable development.

TURN TO PAGE 15

Efforts ongoing to future-proof Oman’s labour market

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 12

Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, has stressed the pivotal role of a dynamic and robust labour market in driving Oman’s economic growth and creating opportunities for its citizens.

With the workforce witnessing rapid expansion, Dr Said al Saqri emphasised the need for comprehensive labour market reforms that focus not just on quantity, but also on the quality and relevance of employment opportunities.

His comments came in the context of the ‘Together We Progress’ forum, which opened on Sunday under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin

bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The strategic vision articulated in the Tenth Five-Year Plan outlines a blueprint for building a more robust and resilient labour market.

This plan goes beyond mere numerical growth, prioritising the creation of high-quality and relevant job opportunities across various sectors. A key aspect of this approach is a shift in perspective on Omanisation.

Rather than focusing solely on achieving specific percentages, Dr Said al Saqri underlined the importance of strategically upskilling and empowering Omanis to take on leadership positions within companies.

This strategic approach promotes the upskilling and



By fostering a culture of continuous learning, innovation, and collaboration, Oman’s workforce can remain competitive.

career advancement of Omanis, ensuring a more equitable distribution of opportunities and unlocking the full potential of the nation’s human capital.

Aware of the ever-evolving job

market landscape, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation has taken proactive steps to equip Omanis with the necessary skills and adaptability.

They have established a flexible and future-oriented education system that focuses on critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy.

This forward-thinking strategy will position Oman as a leader in innovation and competitiveness, ready to seize the opportunities of tomorrow and navigate the disruptions that may arise.

“We are committed to building a future-proof labour market that empowers Omanis and fuels our economic diversification goals,” Dr Said al Saqri stated, underlining the government’s dedication to achieving these

objectives.

“By fostering a culture of continuous learning, innovation, and collaboration, we can ensure that Oman’s workforce remains competitive and ready to thrive in the decades ahead.”

Dr Said al Saqri’s vision, coupled with the dedicated efforts of relevant ministries and private sector stakeholders, paints a promising picture of an agile and adaptable labour market in Oman.

Through strategic reforms, a nuanced approach to Omanisation, and a focus on future-proofing the workforce, Oman is well-positioned to not only overcome present challenges but also emerge as a thriving hub of innovation and opportunity in the coming decades.

Sohar International receives JP Morgan Chase Bank quality recognition awards



MUSCAT: Sohar International, Oman's fastest-growing bank, has earned the prestigious JP Morgan Chase Bank Global Clearing Quality Recognition Awards (MT103 and MT202).

This accolade acknowledges the bank's high-quality procedures in SWIFT-based fund transfers, with nearly 99.40 per cent of payments processed seamlessly. This recognition underscores Sohar International's commitment to operational efficiency and technological advancement in electronic payment services for a diverse clientele, including individuals and institutions.

Commenting on this achievement, Hamood al Sawai, Chief Operating Officer at Sohar International said, "We are honoured to receive the JP Morgan Quality Recognition Award, underscoring our dedication to scaling up growth with excellence."

This award confirms Sohar International's operational excellence and high-quality services, particularly in collaboration with correspondent banks. We remain committed to providing top-notch services while upholding the highest international compliance standards."

The MT103 and MT202 are Straight-Through Processing (STP) mechanisms that offer significant advantages to financial service providers. These benefits include substantially shortened processing cycles, diminished settlement risk, and decreased operating costs.

These transactions make use of contemporary electronic instruction systems like SWIFT, and each numbered Message

Type (MT) is designed for a specific purpose.

Since 1997, JP Morgan has annually acknowledged the foremost US Dollar clearing clients who exhibit outstanding operational excellence and achieve remarkable STP results in SWIFT payments.

Over the years, recipients of this prestigious accolade have demonstrated unmatched transaction-processing quality, resulting in heightened operational efficiencies, accelerated payment timelines, and substantial cost savings.

To attain such a remarkable milestone, Sohar International has remained invested in state-of-the-art automation systems and modern technology platforms that seamlessly integrate with its financial processes.

A dedicated workforce that undergoes continuous training and development to maintain a high level of professional competence complements this tactical approach.

Adding to its list of accomplishments, Sohar International also earned the JP Morgan Quality Recognition Award for MT202 in 2021, highlighting a best-in-class STP rate of 99.40 per cent. Such awards highlight the bank's outstanding performance and precision in global payment processing, reaffirming its position as one that not only adapts to change but also thrives on innovation.

Sohar International continues to set itself apart as a financial institution that not only adapts to change but also drives innovation, ensuring its customers receive unparalleled services in today's dynamic financial landscape.

Asyad Shipping, Glander sign pact for global bunkering solutions

MUSCAT: In a move to enhance its global shipping capabilities, Asyad Shipping, a pivotal arm of the Asyad Group, has entered a strategic collaboration with Glander International Bunkering, a leading global bunker trading firm.

This alliance aims to seamlessly facilitate the supply of various types of bunker fuels to Asyad Shipping's extensive fleet across major ports worldwide, marking a significant leap in operational efficiency and service excellence.

At the forefront of Oman's maritime sector, Asyad Shipping has cemented its position as a vital component of the nation's shipping industry.

Boasting a fleet of 85 vessels linked to over 120 ports in 57 countries, Asyad Shipping is dedicated to delivering a diverse range of shipping solutions tailored to meet evolving global demands.

Originating from the visionary blueprint of the Omani government, Asyad Shipping (Oman Shipping Company) (OSC) serves as a cornerstone for the nation's hydrocarbon, petrochemical, mining, and metallurgical industries.

With a comprehensive fleet comprising over 85 vessels and



Asyad Group official signing the pact with a representative of Glander.

a total deadweight capacity (DWT) of 10.0 million plus, Asyad Shipping caters to a broad spectrum of shipping needs.

Its fleet includes Very Large Crude Carriers (VLCCs), Product Tankers, LNG carriers, Chemical carriers, LPG Tankers, Very Large Ore Carriers (VLOCs), Dry Bulk carriers, and various regional container line services.

Established in 2003, Asyad Shipping offers tramp and liner shipping services, ship management, and chartering

activities through its subsidiaries: Oman Ship Management Company, Oman Charter Company, and Asyad Lines.

Driven by a set of ambitious corporate objectives, Asyad Shipping is committed to developing a world-class fleet, ensuring the highest standards of safety, reliability, and environmental sustainability.

It aims to contribute significantly to Oman's national economy, support the country's National Logistics Strategy, foster

local workforce competency, professionalism, and revitalise Oman's maritime heritage through modern shipping practices.

Glander International Bunkering, with its inception dating back to 1961, stands as one of the premier bunker trading and brokering firms globally. Renowned for its integrity, professionalism, and enduring client relationships, the company serves a vast clientele of international ship owners across major ports worldwide.

ICAI Muscat chapter wins best overseas chapter award

MUSCAT: The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) Muscat Chapter [under the sponsorship of the College of Banking and Financial Studies (CBFS)] has bagged the prestigious 'Best Chapter Overseas Award' for the year 2023, for the ninth consecutive term.

The Chapter won second prize in Category-II among 48 overseas chapters of ICAI across the globe.

The award ceremony was conducted along with the 74th ICAI Annual Event in New Delhi last week. Jim Joseph Itty, Chairperson, ICAI Muscat Chapter and Gaurav Kapoor, Vice Chairperson along with Managing Committee members, received the award from Om Birla, Speaker of the Lok Sabha in the presence of Aniket Sunil Talati, President of ICAI and Ranjeet Kumar Agarwal, Vice President of ICAI.

Jim Joseph Itty, Chairperson said, "The year 2023 will be



written in golden letters in the history of ICAI Muscat chapter. We were able to complete the first batch of Omani CFO Mentoring programme in Muscat and Salalah and we are proceeding with a batch in Suhar.

This initiative increased the visibility of ICAI as a brand and we were able to join hands with the local accounting community to develop aspiring Omani

CFOs. We are also delighted to support the Oman India Investment Forum conducted in association with Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Embassy of India during this year.

Further ICAI have expressed their interest in supporting OCCI to develop a curriculum for Omani Chartered Accountancy students, which will strengthen the co-operation between two

friendly nations."

Congratulating the chapter Dr Zahran al Salti, Dean, CBFS said "This is also a proud moment for CBFS. ICAI is one of the most active professional Chapters under our sponsorship. We appreciate the efforts of the chapter managing committee that enabled the Chapter to win this prestigious award for the ninth year."

Takaful Oman Insurance wins Oman insurer of the year 2024

MUSCAT: Takaful Oman Insurance SAOG was honoured with the prestigious title of 'Oman Insurer of the Year 2024', a testament to the company's commitment to excellence and innovation in the insurance sector.

The accolade was presented during a gala event hosted by MENA IR at the Shangri-La Hotel in Dubai. This esteemed recognition comes as a result of Takaful Oman's unwavering dedication towards organisational transformation and operational efficiency.

The financial results for the year 2023 showcase very strong & promising numbers, highlighting the company's outstanding customer service and

forward-thinking approach to insurance solutions that cater to the evolving needs of the Omani market.

Takaful Oman Insurance, listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange, has successfully turned around its net results, reporting a net profit of RO 647,856 (\$1.68m) for 2023. In comparison, the company posted a net loss of RO 1,514,305 for 2022.

The unaudited preliminary financial results reveal that the company's total revenues jumped by 30.3 per cent to RO 24.36m in 2023, compared to about RO 18.7m in 2022.

Acknowledging the support and efforts of all stakeholders, Neelmani Bhardwaj, the Chief Executive Officer at Takaful Oman Insurance SAOG, said, "We would



like to express our heartfelt gratitude to our shareholders, board of directors, regulator, partners, and customers, who have placed their confidence in us.

Their unwavering trust and support have been the bedrock of our journey. It is their belief in our vision and investment in our values that have propelled us to the forefront of the insurance industry. We would like to thank all of our stakeholders for being an integral part of our success story."

Echoing the statement, Sulaiman al Harthi, the Chairman of the board, commented on the occasion, "This recognition is a collective achievement of Takaful Oman's significant contribution, unparalleled dedication, and team spirit

towards excellence.

Their drive continues to be of essence in providing exceptional value to our clients. Our success is a testament to the trust our customers have placed in us and the tireless efforts of our employees.

The company has developed a business strategy, and has been tracking it diligently to maintain a focus on profitable growth, a critical pillar of the strategy. The improvement in financial results are testament to the effectiveness of this approach.

Takaful Oman has cemented its standing as a leading name in the insurance industry, known for its integrity, customer focus, and commitment to excellence."

Tejarah Talks returns for season three

MUSCAT: Oman Business Forum in partnership with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), will hold the first session of the 2024 Tejarah Talks season “Explore. Dream. Discover” at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), on Tuesday, at 7:30pm. Delving into business, investment and employment opportunities in the tourism sector, the popular discussion forum will also explore trends such as astro, frontier and ecotourism, the influence of AI, multi-generational travel and much more. Tejarah Talks is sponsored by Jindal Shadeed, Nortal, Apex TransGulf Manufacturing and MHD and supported by OCEC, JW Marriott and Oman FM.

Expert panellists for this edition of Tejarah Talks are Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism; Shabib al Maamari, Managing Director, Visit Oman; and Eng Said al Shanfari, Chief Executive Officer, OCEC. The evening’s discussions will be moderated by Jamal al Asmi, Executive Producer, RealityCG.

“As Oman’s tourism figures for 2023 set new benchmarks and with a raft of new accommodation options and attractions recently launched — Oman Botanic Gardens and the Khasab Zipline amongst them — the first Tejarah Talks of 2024 looks to be particularly exciting and sure to be of interest to tourism professionals and those aspiring to join the industry, entrepreneurs and investors.



Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy

And given the fact that travel is such an important part of life today, we have designed the evening to also appeal to the general public, offering insights into trends shaping vacations at home and abroad in the years ahead,” explained Maymuna al Adawi, MoCIIP Director, Public Private Partnerships and Tejarah Talks organiser. Speaking ahead of the event, Shabib al Maamari MD, Visit Oman and a regular Tejarah Talks panellist noted: “While the audience is certain to be fascinated by the general sector developments that are up for discussion, I am sure the biggest takeaways will be the insights they gain into Oman’s own travel and tourism industry, the areas being prioritised, the markets that we are growing in, how tourism is attracting significant investment and opening up not simply job opportunities but pathways to quality, rewarding careers.”

Concluding, Al Adawi said: “Whether you are looking to explore a business or career opportunity in tourism, dreaming about holiday possibilities or hoping to discover what the future of travels holds, we encourage you to join us at 7:30pm on Tuesday, February 27 and look forward to seeing you at OCEC.”

Oman’s new LNG bunkering project to be fully solar-powered

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 12

A new LNG bunkering project set to be established at the Port of Sohar will be fuelled entirely by solar energy in the first such renewables-powered venture of its kind in the Middle East.

Marsa LNG — a partnership of French-based energy giant TotalEnergies (80%) and Almuzn LNG LLC, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Omani integrated energy group OQ (20%) — is developing the 1 million tonne capacity LNG project to serve primarily as a bunkering and export terminal.

For want of suitable land in the vicinity of the project, the solar farm is proposed to be established elsewhere within Oman and with enough capacity to meet the energy needs of the LNG plant nearly twice over.

This output will be fed into the national grid, which in turn will power the LNG plant through a ‘power wheeling arrangement’ with grid operator, the Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC).

Outlining its strategy to deliver a wholly renewables-powered LNG plant at Sohar Port, Marsa LNG explained: “The solar plant will be connected to the grid network and from there, energy will be procured for the LNG plant.

The LNG plant will consume around 44% of the energy produced by the solar plant during the day through power wheeling agreements with OETC for usage of their grid network for



Illustration of an LNG plant.

FOR WANT OF SUITABLE LAND IN THE VICINITY OF THE PROJECT, THE SOLAR FARM IS PROPOSED TO BE ESTABLISHED ELSEWHERE WITHIN OMAN AND WITH ENOUGH CAPACITY TO MEET THE ENERGY NEEDS OF THE LNG PLANT NEARLY TWICE OVER

power supply.

Nighttime electricity will be procured from the OETC grid through the same dedicated power connection. Since the solar plant will be producing the entire energy needs of the LNG plant during the day itself, there will be an excess of around 56% during the day which will be sold on the Omani spot market.”

Importantly, the solar project

will help offset the LNG plant’s Scope 2 emissions — indirect greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with the procurement of electricity, as well as steam, heat or cooling for plant operations.

It will allow for Marsa LNG to market its output as low-carbon (in comparison with the output from conventionally powered LNG plants) and qualify for carbon credits as well. Further, to ensure that the project’s carbon footprint is pared to the minimum, Marsa LNG has been designed to be a zero-flaring plant.

Accordingly, all the normal flaring base line emitters (flare header purging, compressor seal gas vents) have been eliminated. “The proposed design will include the best-in-class passing valve

design and will implement the latest guidance on passing valve identification/ repair.

Any identified passing valves can be repaired promptly online using temporary operating procedures,” said Marsa LNG.

Besides, all compressors operating within the LNG plant will be driven by electric motors, while the cooling system selected for the project will use air instead of water due to water scarcity in the project area, the promoters stated. French engineering contractor Technip Energies has been tipped to undertake the construction of the LNG bunkering project at an estimated cost of \$1 billion.

Not included in the scope of this project is the solar farm, which will be undertaken as a separate venture.

Omani Industry Day celebrations to focus on AI, factory automation

FROM PAGE 13

He emphasised the necessity for the Omani industrial sector to adopt modern technologies to enhance its efficiency, diversify its products, improve their quality and enhance environmental and economic sustainability, in line with the global acceleration towards the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Sector Performance

Mazin al Siyabi, Assistant Director-General for Industry at the MoCIIP, stated: “In light of the global shift towards Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies, we must be at the forefront of adopting these technologies to ensure the continuity of success in our industrial sector.”

He added, “We will work closely with industrial sector establishments to achieve set goals and elevate the performance of the Omani industry to global standards.”

Al Siyabi further added, “The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion constantly seeks to develop the industrial sector and increase its contribution to the domestic product through updating laws, providing facilities, and exemptions for Omani factories.”

He noted that Omani Industry Day embodies the partnership between the public and private sectors by discussing the challenges facing industrial establishments, finding solutions and focusing more on topics relevant to the industrial sector’s interests.

The Assistant General Manager for Industry affirmed that the manufacturing sector has become a key driver of the Omani economy since the beginning of the third millennium, contributing to reducing the country’s reliance on crude oil.



Factories need to increase production in less time while minimising product costs to the lowest possible.

Given the importance of the manufacturing sector in achieving economic diversification, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion is working to enhance the sector’s role through a range of initiatives and programmes aimed at increasing its contribution to Oman’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Among these initiatives is the Value-Added Programme, which aims to localise several industries, prioritise government procurement, expand and increase the productivity of existing factories, as well as establish new industries to enhance local value added.

On his part, Eng Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Director of the Industrial Operations Department at the MoCIIP, stated: “The efforts of the ministry aim to enhance the capacity of industrial companies to innovate in their operations and

boost productivity through the use of modern technologies.

These initiatives will assist innovative industrial projects in developing the national industry and enhancing its position in the international market through various government initiatives that will be announced in the near future.”

Automation technologies

Sultan al Khadouri, Head of the ICV Office at the MoCIIP, affirmed that factory automation technologies are fundamental for enhancing value addition in the industrial sector.

Adopting these technologies enhances production efficiency, fosters innovation and significantly contributes to enhancing competitiveness and stimulating the growth of the local industry.

Al Khadouri stated, “The ministry

is diligently working to support and encourage companies to utilise these technologies to enhance sustainability and diversity in the sector.

Moreover, the adoption of a national policy for local content contributes to strengthening the transformative industries sector in the Sultanate of Oman, playing a prominent role in achieving sustainable development and boosting the national economy.”

He pointed out that the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion is working on developing the industrial sector by leveraging national industrial capabilities as a key driver for the desired economic diversification outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

Increasing manufacturing capacity

The Head of the ICV Office at the

MoCIIP, has adopted programmes to enhance value addition to increase the contribution of the national workforce in the industrial sector.

This includes linking various sectors and factories and empowering small and medium-sized enterprises by boosting goods production and providing locally offered services.

Additionally, it aims to enhance Oman’s manufacturing capacity, achieve integration between industries, and develop the skills and capabilities of the national workforce through training and qualification programmes.

Some services provided by the ministry are conditioned upon achieving a certain percentage of local content.

Al Khadouri emphasised that the ministry, in collaboration with its partners, is striving to identify suitable potentials for implementing value-added programmes, along with enhancing national exports, attracting direct local and foreign investments, localising supply chains and improving the business environment.

He noted that programmes aimed at enhancing value addition and local content are among the primary methods employed in national economic development to maximise the benefit from financial flows in the sector.

Currently, the ministry is implementing a special programme to enhance and empower value addition in the industrial sector through industrial networking models with the aim of localising intermediate product manufacturing and leveraging local production input.

4th Industrial Revolution

Engineer Idris al Sinan, Head of the Knowledge-Based Industries Department at the MoCIIP, pointed

out that the ministry seeks to enhance Omani industries by enabling them towards applications of the Fourth Industrial Revolution through improving their production processes and adopting advanced technology.

The world is undergoing rapid scientific and technological changes, leading to the evolution of the concept of production and manufacturing factors.

This is the goal of the Industrial Strategy 2040, aiming to “achieve the diversification of the manufacturing industry in the Sultanate of Oman and transform it into technology and knowledge-based activities.”

Today, factories need to increase production in less time while minimising product costs to the lowest possible. To ensure this, there is a need to reduce the reliance on human labour and also decrease instances of failure and accidents.

This is why industrial automation systems, which rely on the use of technology and machines to perform tasks previously done manually by human workers, involve integrating various technologies such as artificial intelligence, robots, sensors and software systems in manufacturing processes.

Eng Al Sinan stated: “The primary goal of industrial automation is to improve productivity, efficiency, innovation, competitiveness, create new jobs, and enhance environmental sustainability. Through the application of automation to the factory, the factory can be monitored from a single centre and controlled from anywhere. It is also possible to monitor symmetrical values such as temperature, pressure and pH at the same time.

Additionally, the factory can be monitored and viewed from anywhere in the world online.”

Happy employees gain happy customers



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The author is an award-winning technology expert & renowned motivational speaker

Think of an experience walking into a store and being welcomed by a passionate, energetic and a happy employee who walks you through the store, looks after (and cares about) you, and speaks highly of the store, product and services it offers.

I can bet out of 10 that 8 of you would mostly not leave the store without buying something (or encouraging/influencing others to buy) even if they were only window shopping.

The same would occur in the same way you would engage with the company, be it electronically (online/digitally) or physically.

This is the result of having happy employees, who ultimately create happy customers. Why is it important to make employees happy is the focus of my article this week.

Unless you are among the extremely very few organisations that offers unique solutions

(product or service), there will mostly be another organisation (a competitor) that offers a similar (but cheaper or probably better) solution to your organisation in one way or another. How then can one organisation be the customer's choice?

Definitely not by just reducing the price (as that has a limit so as reduces the bottom line profits the shareholders demand ultimately), yet by providing a differentiated value as an experience.

If an organisation is looking for a continued growth and consequent profit, then a positive customer experience is paramount, for it creates loyalty, retention and also encourages brand endorsement and support from the customers too.

Look at how you promote what you like and buy from a certain organisation that also has a great customer service and experience delivered by its employees.

How then does an organisation deliver a great customer service and experience? Simply by first having happy employees!

Many studies including the Harvard Business Review has shown that happy employees lead to happy customers.

A happy employee would be positive, productive, creative, innovative and most importantly treat the organisation they work for as his/her own and that would ultimately lead to providing a better customer service and experience.

Therefore, as an organisation, it is quite important to invest in employee happiness in order to create a successful and sustainable organisation, that is also customer focused.

Happy employee includes feeling valued and given importance in the organisation one works for.

Happy employee also includes being recognised for the kind work he/she does and contributes

to the organisation as a whole.

Moreover, Happy employees also includes getting opportunities for growth, opportunities for development (personally and professionally) and working in a positive environment. Of course these are generic attributes of what makes an employee happy but I trust the idea is clear.

Unhappy employees will only stick around because they have no other option, and trust me, the moment they get an opportunity elsewhere, they will leave.

Why is it important to make your employees happy? I would like to respond to this question by referring to Simon Sinek, one of the popular author and inspirational speaker, quote i.e. "Happy employees ensure happy customers, and happy customers ensure happy shareholders".

Simply put, if the employees are happy, the organisation in question will see productivity among employees improved, creativity and innovation enhanced, absentees from the employees and turnover is reduced (great retention), positivity is increased, and ultimately the customers are better served (and are satisfied).

Happy employees will also attract other talents to join on-board, and your organisation may be touted for being the best place to work for, and getting serviced too.

To conclude my article this week, happy customers is an attribute that organisations must strive for, if they wish to attain sustainable growth and success, apart from differentiating one organisation to another.

Nevertheless, happy customers must not come at the expense of losing happy employees, for there will be a negative impact to the business.

Next week, my article will look at how can organisation find out and create happy employees. Stay tuned.

America’s emulation of China calls for new rules



DANI RODRIK

The author is a Professor of International Political Economy at Harvard Kennedy School

It is common to think of US-China tensions as the inevitable result of stark differences between the two countries. The United States has a fully capitalist market economy, whereas the Chinese government keeps a strong hand on the economic tiller. For all its faults, the US is a democracy, whereas China is a single-party regime that brooks no political challenge.

Though the US remains the world's most powerful country, China's growing economic and geopolitical might threatens American hegemony.

But while all that is true, many US-China conflicts stem from their increasing commonalities.

America's relative decline has made it feel more insecure, prompting economic and national-security policies that are reminiscent of China's own decades-long strategy of prioritising national economic strength and renewal over the requirements of an open, "liberal" global economy.

Paradoxically, as the US emulates strategies that served China quite well, the strains in the bilateral relationship multiply.

Even though China turned toward markets after 1978 and significantly liberalised its economy, the Communist Party of China's policies reflected more than the pursuit of economic growth. They were part of a national project of rejuvenation designed to re-establish China as a major power.

Consequently, China played the globalisation game by its own

rules, sheltering and promoting its own industries while leveraging external markets.

The state was never too shy to step in and subsidise what it saw as strategic industries (either from a commercial or national-security standpoint).

I once heard a Chinese policymaker describe this strategy as "opening the window, but placing a screen on it." The Chinese economy would get fresh air – foreign technologies, access to global markets, critical inputs – but it would keep out harmful elements such as destabilising short-term capital flows, excessive competition that might harm its nascent industrial capabilities, or restrictions on the government's ability to conduct industrial policy.

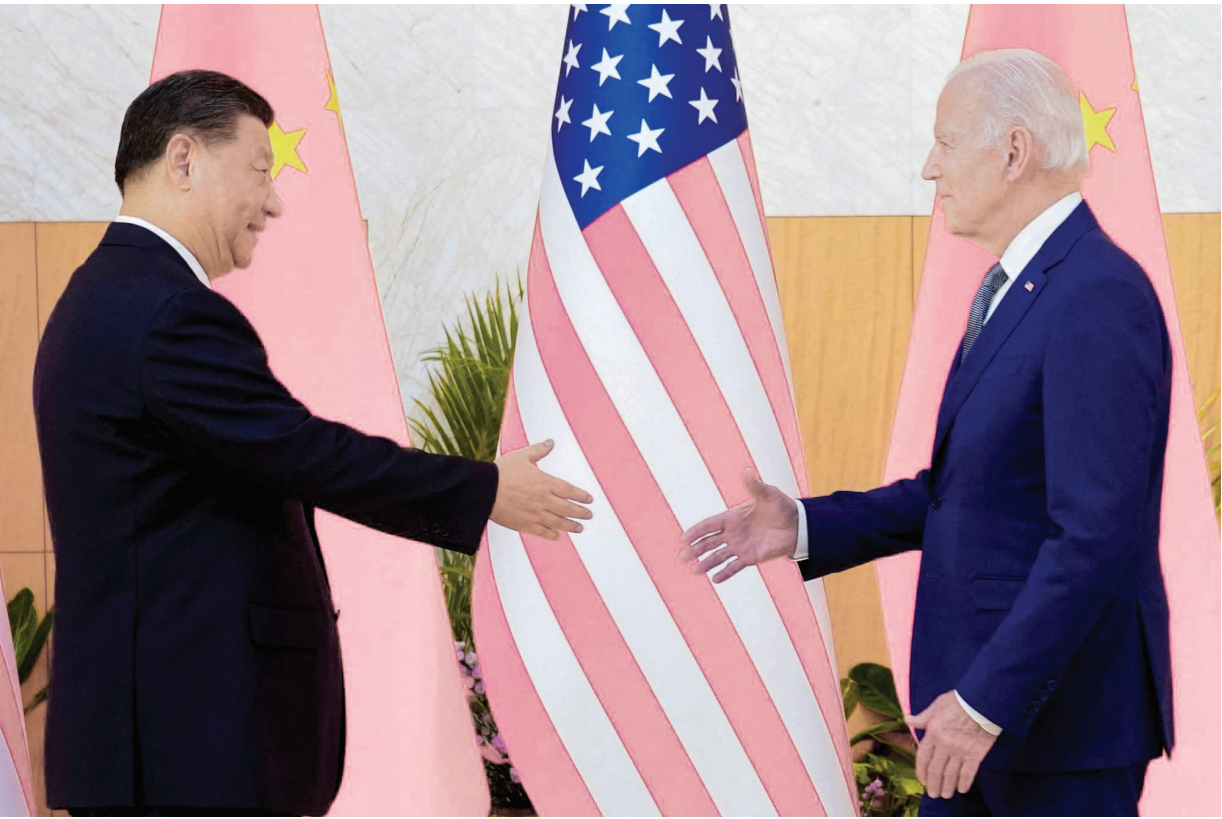
China's phenomenal economic growth was ultimately a great boon for the world economy, as it created a large market for other countries' firms and investors.

Moreover, its green industrial policies have made a substantial contribution to the global low-carbon transition by lowering the prices of solar and wind energy.

Naturally, other countries have complained about China's interventionist and mercantilist practices. Most consequentially, the rapid expansion of Chinese exports – the so-called "China shock" – wreaked economic and social havoc on hard-hit manufacturing communities and lagging regions in Western economies, creating fertile ground for the eventual rise of right-wing authoritarian populists such as Donald Trump.

Yet as long as advanced economies' policies were driven by a consumerist, market-fundamentalist logic, these effects did not cause huge strain on relations with China. On the contrary, many intellectual and policy elites thought Western and Chinese approaches to the economy were complementary and mutually supportive.

Historians Niall Ferguson and Moritz Schularick coined the term "Chinamerica" to describe the apparently symbiotic relationship in which China subsidises its industries, and



US President Joe Biden meets with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the G20 leaders' summit in Bali, Indonesia, in this file photo. – Reuters

the West happily consumes the cheap goods China sends it.

So long as this conception reigned in the West, workers and communities that lost out received little help or sympathy; they were told to retrain and move to areas with better opportunities.

But the situation was unsustainable, and the problems posed by the disappearance of good jobs, growing regional disparities, and increased foreign dependence on strategically important industries became too big to ignore.

US policymakers started to pay more attention to the production side of the economy, first under Trump and more systematically under Joe Biden, whose administration has embraced a different set of priorities that favours the middle class, supply-chain resilience, and green investment.

The new strategy revolves around industrial policies that are not so different from those that China has long practiced.

New technologies and advanced manufacturing activities are subsidised, as are renewable technologies and clean industries.

AS THE UNITED STATES PURSUES INDUSTRIAL POLICIES TO SERVE ITS OWN NATIONAL INTERESTS, AND AS CHINA STICKS WITH ITS STATE-DRIVEN ECONOMIC MODEL, COOPERATION WILL NOT BE THE ORDER OF THE DAY. BUT IT COULD BECOME A BIT EASIER IF BOTH SIDES RECOGNISED THAT THEIR POLICIES ARE NEITHER TOO DIFFERENT NOR NECESSARILY HARMFUL TO EACH OTHER.

Local suppliers and domestic content are encouraged, while foreign producers are discriminated against. Investments by Chinese companies in the US are heavily scrutinised.

Under the "small yard, high fence" doctrine, the US seeks to restrict Chinese access to technologies deemed critical to national security.

If these policies succeed in producing a more prosperous, cohesive, and secure American society, the rest of the world will benefit, too – just as Chinese industrial policies benefited trade partners by expanding the Chinese market and reducing the price of renewables.

The implication, then, is that these new policies and priorities do not necessitate a deepening US-China conflict; but they do require a new set of rules to govern the relationship.

A good first step is for each side to abandon hypocrisy and recognise the similarity of their approaches.

The US continues to criticise China for allegedly pursuing mercantilist and protectionist policies and violating the norms of a "liberal" international order,

while Chinese policymakers accuse the US of turning its back on globalisation and waging economic warfare on China. Neither side seems to be aware of the irony: China put a screen on its open window; the US is putting a high fence around a small yard.

A second important step is to pursue greater transparency and better communication about policy objectives. In an interdependent global economy, it is inevitable that many policies targeting national economic well-being and domestic social and environmental priorities will have some undesirable side effects on others.

When countries engage in industrial policies to fix important market failures, their trade partners need to be permissive and understanding. Such measures should be distinguished from those that are explicitly beggar-thy-neighbour (meaning they generate benefits at home precisely because they harm others).

Third, it is important to ensure that restrictive national-security policies are well-targeted. The US characterises its export controls as "carefully tailored" measures on "a narrow slice" of advanced technologies that raise "straightforward" national-security concerns.

These self-professed limitations are praiseworthy, but there are questions about whether the actual policy on semiconductors fits this description, and about what additional measures might look like.

Moreover, the US tends to define its national security in overly expansive terms. The US will continue to put its economic, social, environmental, and national-security concerns first, and China will not abandon its state-driven economic model. Cooperation will not be the order of the day.

But it may become a bit easier if both countries recognise that their policies are neither too different nor necessarily harmful to the other side.

© Project Syndicate, 2024

MoH unveils strategic orientation, plans to establish pharma factories

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, FEB 12

In a recent announcement, Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, the Minister of Health in Oman, revealed the Ministry of Health's (MoH) strategic orientation towards becoming a leading health system with high standards.

The primary focus of this strategic orientation is to prioritise health and ensure that the healthcare system in Oman meets international standards.

The announcement was made during the 'Together We Make Progress' forum, held under the patronage of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, the Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Dr Hilal al Sabti outlined key strategic objectives that the Ministry of Health aims to achieve. These objectives include creating a society that promotes sustainable health by instilling a culture of health and wellness in every individual.

Efforts will be made to prevent



Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, outlined key strategic objectives that the ministry aims to achieve.

health issues and minimise wastage in healthcare resources.

Establishing a decentralised health system is another priority, aiming to ensure fairness, transparency, justice, and accountability in the healthcare system.

Healthcare services will be decentralised, making them accessible to all segments of the population.

The ministry also plans to enhance medical technical systems and services by prioritising preventive healthcare measures

and high-quality medical care at all levels of the healthcare system. This focus is intended to improve health outcomes and patient satisfaction.

Diversifying sources of funding is crucial to sustain the healthcare system in Oman. The ministry

intends to explore various funding sources to ensure the availability of essential healthcare services to the population.

Additionally, developing qualified national cadres and capabilities is a key objective. The ministry recognises the importance of investing in the training and development of local healthcare professionals to drive innovation and advancements in healthcare delivery.

The minister also announced plans to establish three pharmaceutical and medical solutions factories in Oman. These factories are set to be located in Nizwa, Rusayl, and Salalah, aiming to boost the local manufacturing capabilities in the healthcare sector.

The establishment of these factories aligns with Oman's vision to enhance self-sufficiency in healthcare products and reduce dependence on imports. "Our aim is to provide sustainable healthcare solutions that cater to the evolving needs of our citizens, both now and in the future.

By investing in local production, we can ensure that our healthcare system remains resilient, responsive, and capable of meeting the dynamic demands of our society," he said.

The establishment of these factories is poised to significantly contribute to Oman's healthcare landscape by fostering the growth of the domestic healthcare sector.

By locally manufacturing essential medicines and medical equipment, the country can reduce its reliance on imports, thereby enhancing its self-sufficiency and resilience in the face of global supply chain disruptions.

The initiatives outlined by the Ministry of Health demonstrate a proactive approach towards improving healthcare services in Oman and nurturing a sustainable healthcare system that meets the needs of the population.

By focusing on strategic objectives and investing in local manufacturing capabilities, Oman aims to strengthen its healthcare infrastructure and ensure the well-being of its citizens.

Classifieds

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

أوربيت ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

- Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
- Choose from a wide range of brands & models
- PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
- Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

Job Vacancy **AL RAI TECHNICAL SERVICES**

• Engineering Designers

Wanted engineering designers for Oil and Gas services with minimum 5 to 8 years' experience with AutoCad in Process, Piping, Pipeline, Electrical and instrumentation

Send CV to: hr@alraioman.com

TUESDAY

FEBRUARY 13, 2024 | SHAABAN 3, 1445 AH

UMP UNITED MAWA PROJECTS

Auditors & Accountants

- Audit & Accounting
- CFO Services
- Secondment
- VAT & Tax Return Filing
- VAT Refund Assistance

Contact: 92182750 • Email: contact@umpauditors.com

ROYAL CARGO

DOOR TO DOOR CARGO

ALL OVER INDIA
INDONESIA | NEPAL
AIR EXPORT (Port to Port)
SEA EXPORT (Container Booking)

SERVICES BY AIR & SEA

FOR MORE INFORMATION JUST DIAL CUSTOMER CARE 93213207

PICK UP FREE ANYWHERE IN MUSCAT 93213206

■ SIT. WANTED

Female PROJECT Co-ordinator and Research Assistant* with 15 years experience in Training, Recruitment, Administration and Finance. Work experience with UN-FAO. Exe. MBA, MSc in Sustainability, MA Eng Lit. I am looking for a full-time work opportunity. meena.v24@gmail.com. Contact: 98260708.

ACCOUNTANT & sales Executive, Indian male, 31 years, BA English, specialised in Accounting, 2 years experience in India & 6 years experience in Oman. Seeking position in Accounts/Sales fields (has Oman licence). Mob: 78805951. Gmail: akhilgopinath2017@gmail.com

A SUDANESE resident in Salalah, Bsc of administrative sciences with 21 years of experience in the fields of (sales/management/ logistics and fleet). Contact: +968 98510880.

Driving School

Special offers for those wishing to learn driving in (Aziba - Khwair Qurum - Ruwi Al Amirat)

Contact No: 99074072

■ SIT. WANTED

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: krishnanmahesh02@gmail.com

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

28 YEARS Experience in Oman in sales, marketing and management, Indian with DL and release. Looking for a good job change. Contact: 78501743.

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

ACCOUNTANT, Bcom, 7 years exp. Male/Indian. Looking for suitable job, holding valid GCC driving license, plz contact: 77530633. Email: sayedazeem723@gmail.com

PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.

Supply of Pesticides, Gel (crocroches), Public Health chemicals, Agriculture chemicals, Snake repellent, Rodent baits and other insect repellent from UK & USA

PROFESSIONALS in Pest Control Service, Bedbug Treatment, Rodent Treatment, Snake Treatment and Termite Treatment [Pre & Post Construction]

Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309

pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

ACCOUNTANT with 4 years of experience in accounts payable, receivables, financial reporting, VAT, payroll, and dispute resolution. Actively seeking new opportunities. Contact: 95807206, E-mail: huzaifbng09@gmail.com

CHARTERED Accountant 1 year of post qualification experience in financial management, auditing & compliance. Contact: 78079794. Ready to join immediately.

CHARTERED accountant, MBA, MCom, Indian, 20 years experience looking for CFO/ Sr finance role. Experience in accounts, finance, group accounts and consolidation, VAT and tax matters, liaison with bank and auditors, board presentation. Contact: 76870183.

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

EAGLE FREIGHT EXPRESS

DOOR TO DOOR COURIER SERVICES
INDIA | NEPAL | BANGLADESH

25 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE
FAST DELIVERY
EXCELLENT SERVICES

WORLD WIDE CARGO SERVICE Tel.: 99432926, 78211708, 92319472, 93350126

Head Office (H.O.) Room No: 216, 1st Floor, Aircargo Complex, Branch Al-Hail, Email: eaglefreightexpress@gmail.com

HAVE A PROPERTY FOR RENT?

Advertise with us.

Contact us on: **99639264**

■ FOR SALE

CAFE for sale in Ruwi Rex Road CCTV controlled, 3 visas & investor status, for a good deal, Contact : 78501743.

■ SIT. VACANCY

BACHELOR degree in Mechanical or electrical engineering ASNT level 2 (NDT), ASNT level 3 (NDT) additional advantage. LEEA foundation, LEEA lifting accessories diploma (LAC). Contact: pipe2566@yahoo.com

Outdoor Sales Staff required for building materials, hardware items and similar items. Driving licence necessary (manual) E: sangita@dhiyahilal.com M: 93559800.

■ SIT. VACANCY

JOB wanted:
1) Accountants and auditors who have experience and are fluent in the English language.
2) Sales representatives who have sufficient experience in marketing and are fluent in the English language.
Contact: 98212345 - 98212127. Email: administration@tuhamigroup.com

■ FOR RENT

WAREHOUSE/ workshop 2,600 sq metres for rent in Misfa near Oman Cement Factory including accommodation contact: 98286899, email: sales@jetsoman.com

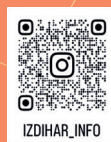
FLATS and offices for rent in Muscat. 96379095, 98403020.

IN Ruwi, 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, hall, kitchen, with car parking. RO 150 monthly only. Tel: 94402003.

■ ANNOUNCEMENT

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CAPITAL REDUCTION

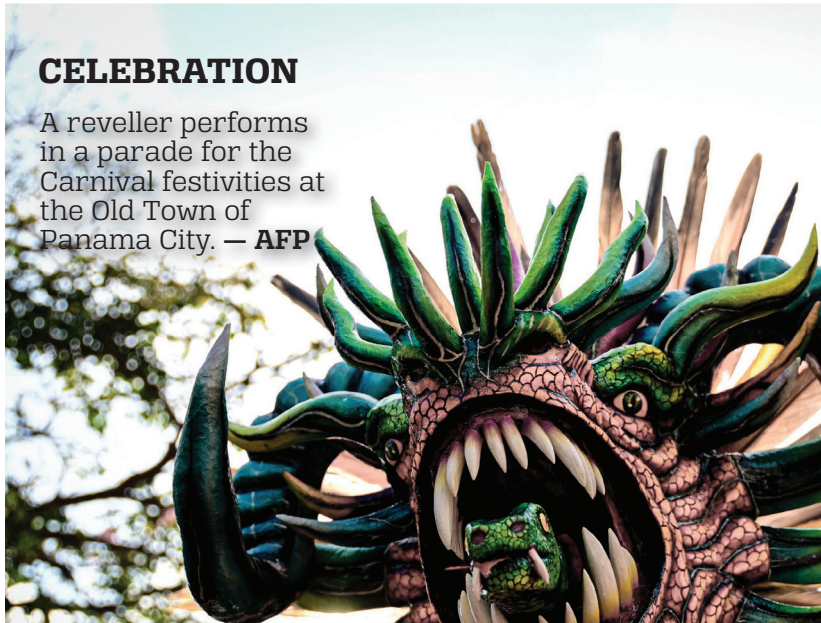
IN accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Golden Jewel Trading Contracting(SPC)**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No **1301346**, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from **RO 10,000.000** to **10,000.000**. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.





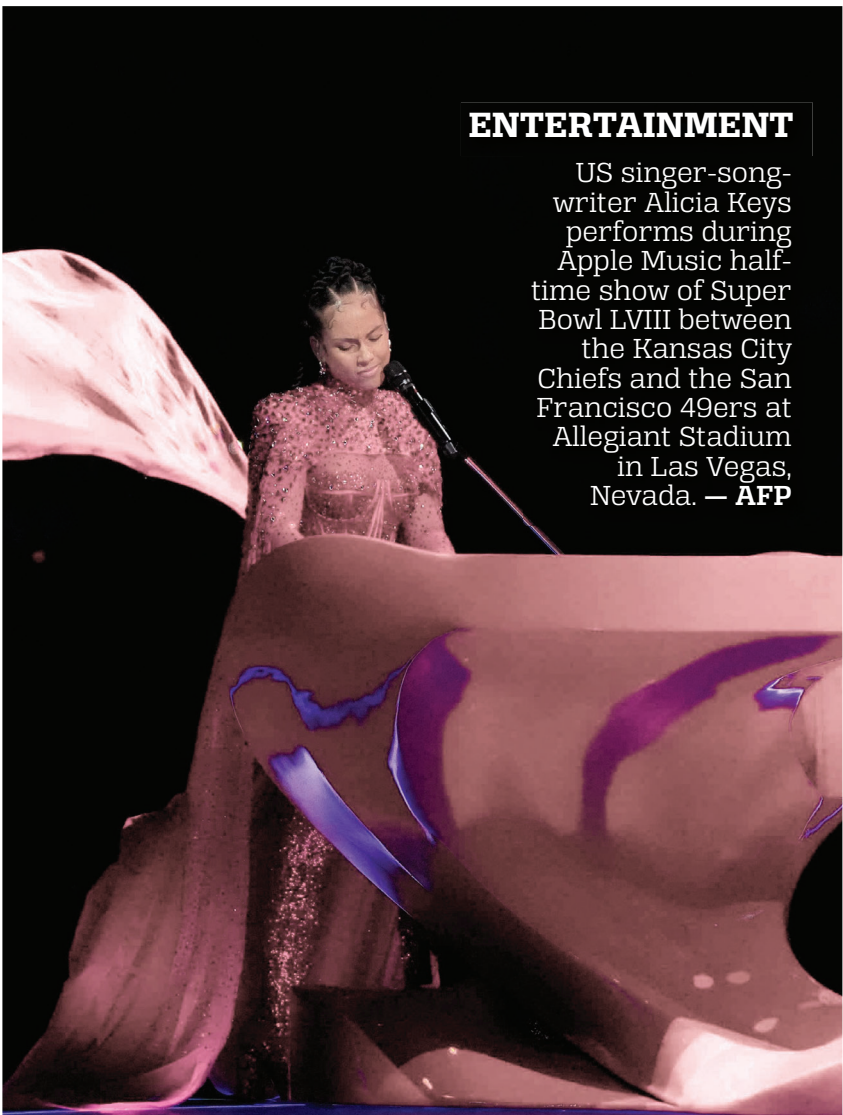
ANIMAL PLANET

Juvenile lesser adjutant storks sit on its nest on a Bombax tree in Morigaon district of Assam state. — AFP



CELEBRATION

A reveller performs in a parade for the Carnival festivities at the Old Town of Panama City. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

US singer-songwriter Alicia Keys performs during Apple Music half-time show of Super Bowl LVIII between the Kansas City Chiefs and the San Francisco 49ers at Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP



CULTURE

Ethnic Hmong women wearing traditional outfit speak as they celebrate on the occasion of Vietnamese Lunar New Year or Tet, in northern Vietnam's Yen Bai province. — AFP



DINING

Cooks wearing traditional costumes prepare food at the Longtan park fair on the second day of the Lunar New Year of the Dragon in Beijing. — AFP

art & life

TUESDAY | FEBRUARY 13, 2024 | SHAABAN 3, 1445 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om

A journey from BBC Radio to Oman's media icon

Influenced by BBC radio, Abdallah bin Ahmed al Rubaiey began his journey in journalism as a passionate news reader. Over three decades, his career at Oman TV and Radio flourished, covering significant events and inspiring youth... **P20**



DISCOVERY

Vast personal library of Charles Darwin uncovered for the first time

THE VAST PERSONAL library of influential naturalist and biologist Charles Darwin is to be published in its entirety online for the first time. Scientists said the collection — the majority of which was unknown or unpublished until now — shows the "extraordinary extent" of Darwin's research.

The 300-page catalogue will detail the personal library, which comprises 7,400 titles and 13,000 volumes. Previous lists had only included 15 per cent of the library, which includes books, pamphlets and journals on subjects such as biology, geology, philosophy, psychology and religion, as well as art, history and travel. Among the items is also a German periodical containing the first known photograph of bacteria. Most works are in English, although half were published in other languages including German, French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch and Danish. The project — The Complete Work of Charles Darwin Online — spanned 18 years and its publication coincides with what would have been Darwin's 215th birthday. It was led by Dr John van Wyhe at the National University of Singapore (NUS) Department of Biological Sciences. He said: "This unprecedentedly detailed view of Darwin's complete library allows one to appreciate more than ever that he was not an isolated



figure working alone but an expert of his time building on the sophisticated science and studies and other knowledge of thousands of people. "Indeed, the size and range of works in the library makes manifest the extraordinary extent of Darwin's research into the work of others." The project also includes a virtual reconstruction of the library with 9,300 links to copies of the work available for free. Darwin died in 1882 and an inventory of his home recorded more than 2,000 bound books. Researchers used a 426-page, handwritten catalogue from 1875, comparing its abbreviated entries to reveal 440 unknown titles that were originally in the library. Other sources include lists of pamphlets, his reading notebooks, the diaries of his wife Emma Darwin, books given to the Cambridge Botany School in 1908 and 30 volumes of the Darwin Correspondence, a collection of letters that the biologist wrote to people across the world. — PA Media/dpa

find us on



@omanobserver

To keep updated on the latest trends,
login to www.omanobserver.om

OMANDAILYOBSERVER

TUESDAY | FEBRUARY 13 | 2024

19

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



travelwith_shetti

Ibra

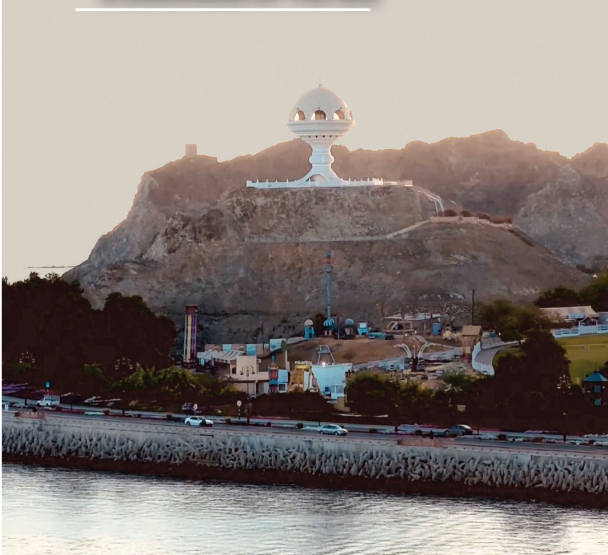
Maisy Stella • Riding Free (Spirit: Ri...

Follow



sidheekh_
Joel Sunny • Luminary

A LANDMARK BY THE SEA



whisk_and_zoom

Sohar, Oman

Moayad • Tale of beauty

Follow



SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use **#OmanObserver** and **#BeAnObserver**.



Tommy Hilfiger pays tribute to NY as city's fashion week kicks off

AS HIS RED, WHITE and blue mainstay prepares to turn 40, Tommy Hilfiger paid tribute to New York as a leading character in his journey to the design big-time as the city's fashion week got underway.

To a hip-hop and disco-heavy soundscape curated by DJ Questlove evocative of the city's recent past, Hilfiger showcased a strong campus look set off by book bags, varsity ties and nearly ubiquitous baseball caps. Under Rafael Guastavino's tiled vaulted ceilings in New York's Grand Central station oyster bar, 72-year-old Hilfiger dazzled Manhattan's glitterati with a stream of blazers and chunky knitwear over crisp cotton button-up shirts with wide 90s collars.

"We're coming out of the baggy era," said one fashion

observer after seeing the offerings of fitted skirts and flared trousers that were less flared than those of past Autumn-Winter collections.

Such was the appeal of Hilfiger's return to contention in the Big Apple after missing last year's fashion week, one gatecrasher in a beige overcoat was bundled out by security.

Organisers promised "A New York Moment," which pulled into the station when Jon Batiste of Stay Human came out sporting a preppy sports jacket with leather arms, going on to sing his hit "FREEDOM" to a cheering crowd.

He was followed by Hilfiger himself who was greeted rapturously and wore a jacket emblazoned with the words "Empire State" -- New York's nickname -- and the names of

the eponymous city's five boroughs.

Outside, and in honour of the railway setting, station staff in train conductor's hats kept the crowds at bay as homebound commuters bustled past the full-to-capacity show.

BUBBLE WRAP AND BALACLAVAS

Across town in Brooklyn, bubble wrap, balaclavas and puffy jackets took center stage at the Helmut Lang show that kicked off New York Fashion Week a few hours before Tommy.

"I feel like living in New York, a lot can happen in a day. So I feel like I want to provide a tool for you to be ready for whatever it takes," said Vietnamese-American designer Peter Do following the show.

An in-demand designer who also heads his own line, Do was tasked with reinventing Helmut Lang's chic and minimalist aesthetic, which shaped fashion in the 1990s and 2000s, before the Austrian designer quit.

Now the brand belongs to Japanese giant Fast Retailing, which also owns Uniqlo.

Under the dome of a former bank in the trendy Williamsburg neighbourhood, Do revisited the inventions of his artistic ancestors, including coloured bubble wrap made from silk worn as pants and jackets.

Oversized wool coats, quilted jackets, turtlenecks, hoods and balaclavas reinforced the collection's "protection and projection" themes.

Some were inspired by space suits, while the colour palette echoed the bright, almost fluorescent orange of the past.

"I just want to see the street represented," Do said.

With a dozen shows a day until mid-week, the Big Apple heralds the start of the Autumn-Winter 2024 ready-to-wear fashion weeks, ahead of London, then Milan and Paris.

Testament to Lang's influ-

ence, the schedule was changed in the late '90s when he decided to leave Paris for New York, so that the US megacity would come first.

Willy Chavarria, still basking in the glow of his American Menswear Designer of the Year Award for 2023, rounded off the inaugural day of shows with an ambitious nighttime show in industrial chic surroundings, also in Williamsburg.

The show entitled "Safe From Harm", was preceded by a convention-busting short silent film brimming with tension, complete with close-ups of characters with rough, tattooed bodies protecting one another.

Show-goers were then transfixed by the garments that borrowed as much from American fashion as from California-born Chavarria's Mexican heritage who has long championed meaningful diversity in fashion.

A strikingly diverse audience was treated to wide-brimmed hats, a shirt with a large collar budding with a gigantic rose, long coats over square-shouldered jackets, and baggy pants with voluminous, dancing pleats.

With the film, "I wanted to see how the clothes move with us through our lives," said Chavarria, who declares himself a political fashionista.

"And I also didn't want to make something that was a distraction from reality, distraction from the wars that we're seeing."

A number of heavyweights and renowned American ready-to-wear designers are expected this season, including Michael Kors, Thom Browne and Tory Burch.

Carolina Herrera and Gabriela Hearst are also on the calendar.

Paris-based designer Ludovic de Saint Sernin, a proponent of intimate, androgynous designs, will also make a rare detour to New York with a show on Sunday evening. — AFP

ENTERTAINMENT

A-list stars to confront dicey politics at Berlin film festival

NEW MOVIES STARRING Cillian Murphy, Kristen Stewart, Gael Garcia Bernal and Adam Sandler will top the line-up of the Berlin film festival starting on Thursday which risks getting upended by geopolitics.

Battered by the pandemic and last year's strikes in Hollywood, international cinema is enjoying a strong rebound and sending some of its leading lights to the wintry German capital for 11 days of premieres and parties.

But the war in Gaza, cultural repression in Iran and an increasingly emboldened far right in Germany risk spoiling the festival atmosphere at the 74th annual event known as the Berlinale, Europe's first major cinema showcase of the year.

"In the past the festival has allowed global politics to be in focus -- last year with the war in Ukraine for example," The Hollywood Reporter's European bureau chief Scott Roxborough said.

"Gaza is a topic on the streets in Berlin this year and could be extremely polarising" with film-makers asked to declare their stance on the war and protests expected under the Berlinale spotlight.

He noted a small number of directors had pulled their entries ahead of the event in protest against the German government's support for Israel.

The Berlinale however dodged another hot-button issue likely to have sparked demonstrations by rescinding an opening-night invitation to five representatives of the resurgent far-right Alternative for Germany party after a deluge of criticism. The festival's outgoing director duo, Mariette Rissenbeek and Carlo Chatrian, said the officials were "not welcome at the Berlinale" in a stand against "anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim resentment (and) hate speech".

FANTASY AND SCI-FI

Meanwhile the event, which has long championed Iran's embattled directors, has urged Tehran to allow two film-makers who have reportedly been slapped with a travel ban to attend.

Maryam Moghaddam and Behtash Sanaeie had been due to present their new movie "My Favourite Cake", about the strictures imposed on Iran's women, among 20 films in competition.

Murphy, who is nominated for a best actor Oscar for his turn in "Oppenheimer", will kick off the festival with the drama "Small Things Like This" about the systematic abuse of "fallen" women at Irish laundries run by the Catholic Church.

The Irish star reunited for the movie with Belgian film-maker Tim Mielants, who directed him in the hit series "Peaky Blinders".

Stewart, who led last year's Berlinale jury, will show "Love Lies Bleeding" about a violent liaison between a gym manager and a bodybuilder.

This year's festival boasts a strong line-up of fantasy and sci-fi flicks and new cinema from Africa.

Sandler will unveil his latest Netflix picture "Spaceman" about a lonely astronaut estranged from his wife, played by Carey Mulligan.

Mexico's Garcia Bernal appears in "Another End", which envisions a technology allowing the bereaved to reconnect with the dead. Cannes best actress winners Renate Reinsve ("The Worst Person in the World") and Berenice Bejo ("The Artist") co-star. French arthouse favourite Bruno Dumont will present "The Empire", billed as a Star Wars parody.

FRAUGHT RESTITUTION DEBATE

Mauritanian director Abderrahmane Sissako, who won France's Cesar for his 2014 picture "Timbuktu", returns with "Black Tea", the story of an Ivorian woman who falls in love with an export merchant in China.

French-Senegalese director Mati Diop (Netflix hit "Atlantics") will screen "Dahomey", a documentary on the return of cultural artifacts to West Africa from Europe, while "The Empty Grave" will also address the fraught restitution debate.

The Berlinale's Golden Bear last year went to "On the Adamant", a French documentary about a floating day-care centre for the mentally ill. This year Kenyan-Mexican actor Lupita Nyong'o will serve as the festival's first black jury president.

And Martin Scorsese, nominated for a record 10th time for a best director Oscar for "Killers of the Flower Moon", is due in Berlin to collect an Honorary Golden Bear for lifetime achievement. —AFP

A journey from BBC Radio to being Oman's media icon

Global radio enthusiasts celebrate February 13 as World Radio Day

BY KABEER YOUSUF

Inspired by the voices of BBC radio during his formative years, this boy's passion for news reading emerged at a young age. His talent for mimicry and modulation quickly garnered attention, leading him to deliver daily news updates at school assemblies.

Fuelled by his father's habit of tuning in to BBC broadcasts during his childhood and engaging in spirited discussions on current affairs in East Africa, this young boy's passion for journalism was nurtured and honed over the years. Even during his academic pursuits, including studies in health sciences methodology at the University of San Francisco, his resolve to pursue broadcasting remained unwavering.

This is Abdallah bin Ahmed al Rubaiey, a stalwart newscaster at Oman TV and Radio, who has illuminated the realm of journalism for over three decades. From his early fascination with BBC news broadcasts to his current role as a paragon of dedication and resilience, Abdallah's journey exemplifies a lifelong commitment to the craft.

He remembers the pivotal moment occurring during his time at the Columbia School of Broadcasting in California, where his exceptional presentation style earned him recognition and foretold a promising career in broadcasting. Rigorous training honed his skills in articulation and modulation, laying the foundation for his future success.

Joining Oman TV and Radio in 1994 marked the beginning of Abdallah's

illustrious career. Transitioning seamlessly between roles as a news reader, editor, and reporter, he made significant contributions to Oman's media landscape.

Covering notable events, from accompanying late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos on 'Meet the People' visits to reporting live during natural calamities, Abdallah demonstrated unwavering dedication to informing the public.

Abdallah's scope of work extends beyond newsrooms to the vast expanse of Oman itself. Through his special radio programme, Destination Oman, he meticulously documented the nation's development across its wilayats, from the deserts and sand dunes to valleys, mountains, and sea. His insightful reporting not only informed but also inspired audiences nationwide.

One of Abdallah's most cherished achievements is his impact on Oman's youth. Through his engaging news presentations, he has assisted countless young Omanis in improving their English language skills, particularly in reading comprehension. Many have expressed gratitude for his contributions, citing his broadcasts as instrumental in their educational journey.

Moreover, Abdallah's interviews with prominent figures who visited Oman, including princes, presidents, prime ministers, and ministers from various countries, have provided invaluable insights into global affairs and Oman's diplomatic endeavours.

Reflecting on his journey, Abdallah expresses gratitude for the privilege of connecting with fellow young Omanis across the Sultanate of Oman. His work has not only informed but also fostered a sense of unity and pride among all.

Embracing new challenges in recent years, Abdallah expanded his skill set to include camera operation, conducting interviews, and video editing. His adaptability shone during crises like the Covid-19 pandemic, where he played a crucial role in disseminating information and reassurance. Reflecting on his journey, Abdallah emphasises the

importance of research, data-driven storytelling, and audience engagement in journalism. His exemplary style has made him a role model for aspiring journalists, with his techniques often used as teaching tools in educational institutions across Oman.

Despite global challenges faced by journalists, Abdallah remains steadfast in his belief in the power of journalism to unite communities and inspire positive change.

Abdallah's story stands as a beacon of hope and inspiration, showcasing the transformative potential of passion, perseverance and integrity in the pursuit of truth.

His message to those who would like to pursue journalism and broadcasting careers: "Embrace the digital era's vast opportunities, but never compromise on the timeless values of truth, integrity and accountability. Journalism and broadcasting in the digital age demand adaptability, innovation, and unwavering commitment to ethical storytelling. Pursue this career with passion, but always remember the immense responsibility you carry in shaping public discourse."

Thanks to our Government and esteemed leaders, Oman's journalism and media thrive, fostering an atmosphere where the values of truth, integrity, and accountability are paramount.

"Let's remind ourselves that Journalists serve as the custodians of truth, tasked with the responsibility of delivering news with integrity, impartiality, and fairness. It is incumbent upon us to adhere unwaveringly to professional codes of conduct, respecting the rights of individuals, avoiding sensationalism, and refraining from the dissemination of misinformation," Abdallah concludes.

He has high hopes pinned on the future of journalism and says smilingly, "By adhering to ethical guidelines, to safeguard the credibility of our profession. Our dedication to ethical journalism not only enhances public trust in the media but also fosters a more informed and enlightened society."

Let's remind ourselves that Journalists serve as the custodians of truth, tasked with the responsibility of delivering news with integrity, impartiality, and fairness.

--Abdallah al Rubaiey

