



P10

PERFECT START FOR OMAN IN U-15 WEST ASIAN TOURNEY



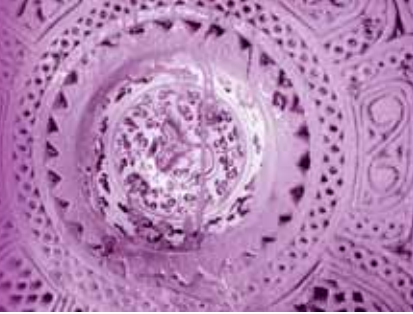
P15

OIL SLIPS AS WEAK SENTIMENT COUNTERS REGIONAL TENSIONS



P20

WHY ARE SOME OLD OMANI MOSQUES DECORATED WITH CHINESE PORCELAINS?



MUSCAT

CANCER-FIGHTING NANOEMULSION

An Omani research team from A'Sharqiyah University succeeded in preparing a nanoemulsion from frankincense oil in a simple and economically inexpensive procedure that led to the treatment of breast and lung cancer cells, as a lab experiment. The research project was carried out under the supervision of Dr Mohammed Jankeez, senior researcher who formerly led experiments about the same project affiliated to the university, and Dr Raya bint Ahmed al Balushiyah, associate professor of chemistry, head of the Department of Basic and Applied Sciences. **DETAILS ON P3**

FIRST HYDROGEN PROJECT IN DHOFAR

Hydrom, the master-planner and orchestrator of Oman's green hydrogen industry, has signed an agreement term sheet to establish the first green hydrogen project in Dhofar Governorate. The pact was signed on the sidelines of the Green Hydrogen Summit Exhibition which opened at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Tuesday. The project, which will be led by the SalalahH2 consortium, will produce 1 million tonnes of green ammonia per year, and 175,000 tonnes of green hydrogen by 2029. **DETAILS ON P13**

HM begins Singapore visit today



VISIT TO STRENGTHEN FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will pay two state visits to the Republic of Singapore and the Republic of India starting from Wednesday.

A statement was issued by the Diwan of Royal Court to this effect earlier reads as follows: “His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will pay two state visits to the Republic of Singapore and the Republic of India with effect from Wednesday (December 13). The two visits reflect the advanced relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the two friendly countries. They also come in response to invitations extended to His Majesty the Sultan.

“The two visits will discuss areas of cooperation between Oman and the two countries. They will also explore means of promoting these relations in various spheres to serve the joint interests and achieve further prosperity for the peoples of the three countries.”

The Sultanate of Oman, under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, continues extending bridges of communication and strengthening friendship and cooperation with various countries of the world.

His Majesty the Sultan's upcoming state visit to Singapore on Wednesday, as a first country in southeast Asia to be visited by His Majesty, evidently reflects this drive.

Oman and Singapore seek to maximise the benefit of their close relations and deep-rooted friendship, as the initiatives taken by both sides in various economic, political and cultural areas reflect their desire to push the joint cooperation towards wider horizons.

Bilateral trade between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Singapore constitutes about 3 per cent of the total foreign trade of Oman by the end of 2022. — ONA

Oman and Romania flay Israeli aggression

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Tuesday received a phone call from Luminița Odobescu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Romania, during which the two ministers exchanged views on current regional situations.

They affirmed a common desire to develop cooperation and maximise the two countries' mutual interests. The two ministers also discussed the ongoing Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip. They stressed the need to put an end to the aggression through a ceasefire.

They also laid emphasis on highly needed measures to protect civilians in the Strip, provide them with living requirements and implement the international law in addressing this crisis and terminate the ongoing conflict by realising the two-state solution. — ONA



مدينة السلطان هيثم
SULTAN HAITHAM CITY

PRE-QUALIFICATION ANNOUNCEMENT FOR PHASE ONE IN SULTAN HAITHAM CITY PROJECT

إعلان التأهيل المسبق للمرحلة الأولى لمشروع مدينة السلطان هيثم

Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, in coordination with the Secretariat General of the Tender Board, Muscat Municipality, and royal Oman Police announces for specialized companies registered in the excellent grade category to participate in the following tenders:

For contact and inquiries: sch@housing.gov.om

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للتواصل والاستفسار: sch@housing.gov.om

عدد السكان
POPULATION
35,000

مساحة الأرض
LAND AREA
4,222,762 sqm

الوحدات السكنية
NUMBER UNITS
6,700

مساحة البناء
BUILDING AREA
2,217,970 sqm

THE DETAILS

التفاصيل

PRE-QUALIFICATION OF INFRASTRUCTURE WORKS (LANDSCAPE, LIGHTING, AND STREETS)

التأهيل المسبق لأعمال البنية الأساسية (المساحات الخضراء، الإنارة، والشوارع)

LANDSCAPE
CENTRAL PARK: 447,552 M2
PARKS & GARDENS: 643,951 M2

المساحات الخضراء
الحديقة المركزية: 447,552 متراً مربعاً
المتنزهات والحدائق: 643,951 متراً مربعاً

STREET LIGHTNING
TOTAL NUMBER OF STREET LIGHTING: 2,530

إنارة الشوارع
إجمالي أعمدة إنارة الشوارع: 2,530

ROAD DISTANCE
THREE-LANE STREET WITH BICYCLE PATH AND PEDESTRIAN PATH: 8 KM
TOW-LANE STREET WITH A BICYCLE PATH AND A PEDESTRIAN PATH: 8 KM
ONE-LANE STREET WITH PEDESTRIAN PATH: 71KM

طول الشوارع
شارع بثلاث حارات مع مسار للدراجات الهوائية ومسار للمشاة: 8 كم
شارع بشارتين مع مسار للدراجات الهوائية ومسار للمشاة: 4 كم
شارع بحارة واحدة مع مسار للمشاة: 71 كم

BID SUBMISSION CLOSING

2023/12/28 10:00 AM

آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات

sch@housing.gov.om
+968 9671 7716 - +968 9951 1778

للتواصل والاستفسار
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الشركات المسجلة لدى الأمانة العامة لمجلس المناقصات بالدرجة الممتازة



WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 27°C Min 20°C SALALAH: Max 27°C Min 21°C NIZWA: Max 27°C Min 16°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 06:40 FAJR: 05:19 DHUHR: 12:06 ASR: 15:07 MAGHRIB: 17:27 ISHA: 18:42



The programme encompassed an array of critical subjects, encompassing the powers vested in the Council of Oman

RAM conducts Introductory programme for Council of Oman members

In adherence to the Royal directives of His Majesty the Sultan, the Royal Academy of Management (RAM) and the Foreign Ministry, represented by the Diplomatic Academy, jointly executed an extensive knowledge programme. The programme witnessed the participation of council members, fostering an environment of insightful learning and exchange. The programme was conducted from December 10 to 12 at the Al Bustan Hall in the Council of Oman.

The programme encompassed an array of critical subjects, encompassing the powers vested in the Council of Oman, legislative and legal aspects in the Council's work, as well as trends in foreign policy, international relations, ceremonial work, the foundations of the Omani media, preventive security, and local administration. Dr Ali bin Qassim al Lawati, President of the Royal Academy of Management, referred to the contents

of the speech of His Majesty during the opening of the Council of Oman's first annual session of the eighth term. He commended the Council's maturity in experience, highlighting its seamless integration with diverse state apparatuses and its pivotal role in the state system through collaborative partnerships.

"The rapid and successive developments we are witnessing, whether social, economic and technical and their impact at the national level have imposed a new reality that necessitates a redefinition of the roles played by state institutions and enhances the importance of joint integrated work between them. This is the focus of the comprehensive process that the Sultanate of Oman is witnessing today to renew the country's renaissance as required by the current and future need to push the actual implementation to achieve the goals set for the Oman Vision 2040," he said.

Royal Office Minister receives Ambassadors of Cyprus, Russia

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office received on Wednesday Andreas Nikolaides, Ambassador of the Republic of Cyprus to the Sultanate of Oman.

The meeting comes within the framework of the Sultanate of Oman's attention accorded to current issues on the regional and international arenas. The ambassador expressed his thanks for the Sultanate of Oman in enhancing means of cooperation in a bid to achieve joint interests.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed several matters of mutual interest.

Gen Al Numani also received Ilya Morgunov, Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Sultanate of Oman. During this meeting, Al Numani reviewed the march of relations binding the two countries.

The two sides discussed issues in the region and ways of resolving them with dialogue and peace.

They also reviewed several matters of mutual interest and means of promoting them. — ONA



Gen Al Numani with Andreas Nikolaides, Ambassador of the Republic of Cyprus to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA



Gen Al Numani received Ilya Morgunov, Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Lab dedicated to people with disability engages 500 participants

AFRAH AL BALUSHI

@afrahalbalushia

The ongoing Ministry of Social Development programme called 'laboratory' to empower people with disabilities classifies schemes, projects, and initiatives for the designated people.

The programme is being conducted with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

With over 500 participants actively engaged in the current phase, the laboratory focuses on classifying programmes, projects, and initiatives based on

their anticipated impact.

Programme participants are analysing the challenges while formulating detailed plans for each output. The overarching goal is not only to address challenges but also to develop comprehensive implementation plans, including the calculation of their impact on key performance indicators.

During the laboratory's opening, Badr al Yahyaee, Assistant General Manager for Persons with Disabilities, said the laboratory aimed to empower individuals with disabilities by addressing legislative challenges and propos-



The laboratory focuses on classifying programmes, projects, and initiatives based on their anticipated impact

ing sustainable financing models for services.

During the "preparation and setup" phase in January 2023, the scheme involved researching and

studying the sector's current status for persons with disabilities, establishing the strategic direction, defining the foundations of the laboratory's work, preparing the

general framework, and conducting meetings.

The subsequent phases included the first forum for persons with disabilities in May, where 120 participants contributed through announcements and community engagement. These phases involved diagnosing the current reality of the sector, holding intensive meetings and workshops, and progressing into the "evaluation phase" for another 120 participants. This phase encompassed data collection, determining the scope of work, identifying and analysing challenges, creating a list of initial

programs, projects, and initiatives, and pinpointing the relevant stakeholders and their responsibilities.

As the laboratory's work continues through December, its objectives remain aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

The initiative focuses on harmonising legislation, proposing sustainable financing programs, and concentrating on health, educational, and rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities. The strategic goals revolve around enhancing the sector through key pillars such as educational and rehabilitative life.

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- Management of Osteoporosis

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Dr. Paul Anthony

Dr. Sandeep Vijayaraj

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Dr. Akshay M.K. Choudhary

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RAFO CELEBRATES SAF DAY

MUSCAT: The Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo) on Tuesday marked the Sultan's Armed Forces Day (SAF Day), which falls on December 11 every year.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Za'abi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence.

The celebration took place at Al Seeb Air Base. It began with a military salute to the chief guest. The Rafo band played the Royal Anthem. This was followed by a silent infantry military parade performed by the Rafo music band, which presented a diverse set of musical pieces.

The ceremony also included the recital of a poem in celebration of the SAF Day, in addition to a parachute show performed by Rafo free fall team. Then, Rafo fighter planes passed over the celebration grounds.

The celebration reflected the high capabilities and skills possessed by Rafo military personnel, as well as the modernisation realised in Rafo equipment and systems, thanks to the Royal care of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, the Supreme Commander.

At the conclusion of the celebration, the chief guest and attendees toured an exhibition held on the sidelines of the ceremony. The exhibition showcased advanced aircraft, weapons and equipment that keep pace with the national requirements and promote the missions undertaken by the Royal Air Force of Oman.

The event was attended by the Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), current commanders of SAF and other military and security units, veteran commanders, senior officers, retired Rafo servicemen, invitees and school students. — ONA



The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Za'abi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence. — ONA





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Research team extracts cancer-fighting nanoemulsion from frankincense oil

MUSCAT: An Omani research team from A'Sharqiyah University succeeded in preparing a nanoemulsion from frankincense oil in a simple and economically inexpensive procedure that led to the treatment of breast and lung cancer cells, as a lab experiment.

The research project was carried out under the supervision of Dr Mohammed Jankeez, senior researcher who formerly led experiments about the same project affiliated to A'Sharqiyah University, and Dr Raya bint Ahmed al Balushiya, associate professor of chemistry, head of the Department of Basic and Applied Sciences (the current lead researcher). The project took approximately 3 years.

Dr Raya said that the outcome of the current study showed that



The project took approximately 3 years. — ONA

the frankincense extract contains various chemical plant substances and possesses a high anti-cancer composition that acts as a natural anti-cancer nanoemulsion.

She affirmed the solution's ability to inhibit the growth of breast cancer and lung cancer cells. She pointed out that the nanoemulsion was tested using a toxicity test, based on the fact that frankincense extracts control the growth of both drug-sensitive and drug-resistant breast cancer cells and lung cancer cells (in a dose-dependent methodology).— ONA

Digital platform launched to exchange data between Oman, GCC States

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has developed and launched a digital platform for digital integration that allows data exchange between the government units in Oman and the GCC counterparts.

The move was the outcome of efforts to enhance digital rapprochement and upgrade chances of cooperation in the field of information exchange.

The platform constitutes a major step forwards in realising digital integration between Oman and other GCC states.

Sami bin Suhail Bait Fadhil, Director-General of Infrastructure and Digital



The platform constitutes a major step forwards in realising digital integration between Oman and other GCC states. — ONA

Platforms at the ministry said that the platform provides an opportunity to improve the efficiency of services and accelerate digital data exchange by achieving real-time interaction between government institutions through modern technologies.

The platform keeps pace with the highest standards of security and privacy by utilising the protocols of an advanced Gulf network, Bait Fadhil added.

— ONA

National Museum Secretary-General gets Knight honour from France

MUSCAT: The French Government, represented by the French Ministry of Culture, bestowed the 'Order of Arts and Literature' (Knight) upon Jamal bin Hassan al Musawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum.

The honour is in recognition of his efforts to promote bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the French Republic in the cultural and museum fields.

The award ceremony took place on Tuesday at the French Embassy in Muscat. Veronique Ollivier, Ambassador of the French Republic to the Sultanate of Oman, presented the medal on behalf of Rima Abdul Malik, French Minister of Culture.

The 'Order of Arts and Literature' (Knight) is one of the highest decorations in the French Republic, consisting of three ranks: Knight, Officer, and Commander. The award is given in recognition of decision-makers, creators, and distinguished figures in literature and art for their contributions to promoting arts and literature in the French Republic or for promoting French culture worldwide.

It is worth noting that the National Museum has organised various exhibitions and events in collaboration with several cultural and Museum institutions in the French Republic. Notably, the exhibition "Fragrant Journeys" took place on October 17, 2022, at Bait Greiza, administratively affiliated with the National Museum, in collaboration with the Museum of Fine Arts in Lyon, France, and the French Embassy in Oman. The Museum also hosted a panel discussion on "Perfume Industry:



The honour is in recognition of Jamal bin Hassan al Musawi's efforts to promote bilateral relations between Oman and France in cultural and museum fields

Exploring New Perspectives" on November 7, 2022, in collaboration with the French Embassy in Oman and the Omani-French Friendship Association, as part of the accompanying events for the "Fragrant Journeys" exhibition. Additionally, on January 17 the National Museum hosted the conference "Oman Through the Eyes of Photographers: A Cinematographic Experience Through the Lenses of Omani and French Photographers" in collaboration with the French Embassy. On May 11, the National Museum inaugurated the "Oman Day" exhibition and activities

titled "Journey to the Land of Frankincense" at the Museum of Fine Arts in Lyon, France.

Furthermore, the National Museum has been involved in several bilateral agreements with the Louvre Museum in Paris since 2017. Up to the present date, the National Museum hosted the exhibition "Paradise Gardens: The Language of Flowers in Iznik Ceramics" as the first external exhibition organised by the Louvre Abu Dhabi (2021). This collaboration also extends to the field of training and professional development in the museum industry.

MICE tourism picks up in Oman; 2023 a successful year

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) has significantly boosted the revenue of meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE), playing a pivotal role in enhancing Oman's international visibility. The management representatives proudly reported hosting five major events in December, contributing to the flourishing business events industry.

In 2022, OCEC accomplished an impressive feat, organising 215 events, including six regional and ten international gatherings. The events attracted over 1.2 million visitors and over 10,000 delegates from 85 countries. Buoyed by this success,

OCEC continued its momentum into 2023, hosting a diverse lineup of seven regional and international events.

December 2023 witnessed the culmination of a successful year with five noteworthy events. These included the SMEs – Omani Startup Forum, Oman Agro Food 2023, the National Olympiad for Student Scientific Innovations, Muscat International Jewellery Exhibition (MIJEX), and the Annual Career and Research Forum 2024/2023. The upcoming Green Hydrogen Summit Oman (GHISO) from December 12 to 15 is anticipated to be the highlight, attracting numerous international delegates for strategic discussions on Oman's energy transition strategy.

Said al Shanfari, CEO of Oman



December 2023 witnessed the culmination of a successful year with five noteworthy events

Convention and Exhibition Centre, highlighted the significance of 2023, emphasising that December marked the busiest post Covid-19 month. Al Shanfari expressed OCEC's commitment to attracting international events, citing the

positive impact on key stakeholders, including the airport, hospitality sector, and the broader economy.

Al Shanfari underlined the role of OCEC in raising Oman's international profile, channelling foreign investments, and contributing

to the country's overall foreign investment strategy. He emphasised the invaluable knowledge exchange and legacy resulting from hosting such events.

The year 2023 commenced with the World Veteran Table Tennis Championships, welcoming 1,600 competitors from 69 nations and injecting over RO 3 million of direct and indirect revenue into the economy. Another notable event, the 2nd Asian Arabic Debating Championship, attracted 300 intellectuals and academics, fostering debate and cultural exchange.

"Apart from hosting events, OCEC organises flagship events like Muscat Art, providing a platform for international and local artists.

As the 2023 season concludes with the MIJEX jewellery exhibition, the OCEC is already preparing for an ambitious 2024 calendar, anticipating surpassing the achievements of 2023," Al Shanfari said.

Al Shanfari emphasised that securing high-profile, internationally recognised events enhances competitiveness and boosts economic activity, positioning Oman as a formidable host in the Middle East and beyond. With over 1.5 million square metres of exhibition space and advanced infrastructure, OCEC is poised to continue hosting global events in the coming months, further solidifying its role on the international stage.



HOMework BLUES

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
@shadadm

We know well that school homework helps parents follow up on their children's progress, but the same homework brings difficulties in staying focused and also pressures parents, especially those who find it difficult to balance life and home stresses.

"It is extremely difficult to balance the equation at home. I have home responsibilities, and I also run my business at home. I also have hundreds of responsibilities on my shoulders. On top of that, there is daily school homework for my children," Umm Hayyan, a mother of five, a home business owner and a housewife, said.

She added that such homework not only comes in on one subject, but the lesson has almost two to three assignments daily, which they don't even mark daily.

"I would like to plea for something to be done as soon as possible. Yes, we need our children to pass, but there must be a better solution," she said.

Free time allows children to relax and discover the world on their own terms, like riding a bike, reading books or interacting with friends and family. Additionally, it teaches students valuable skills that can't be learned at school.

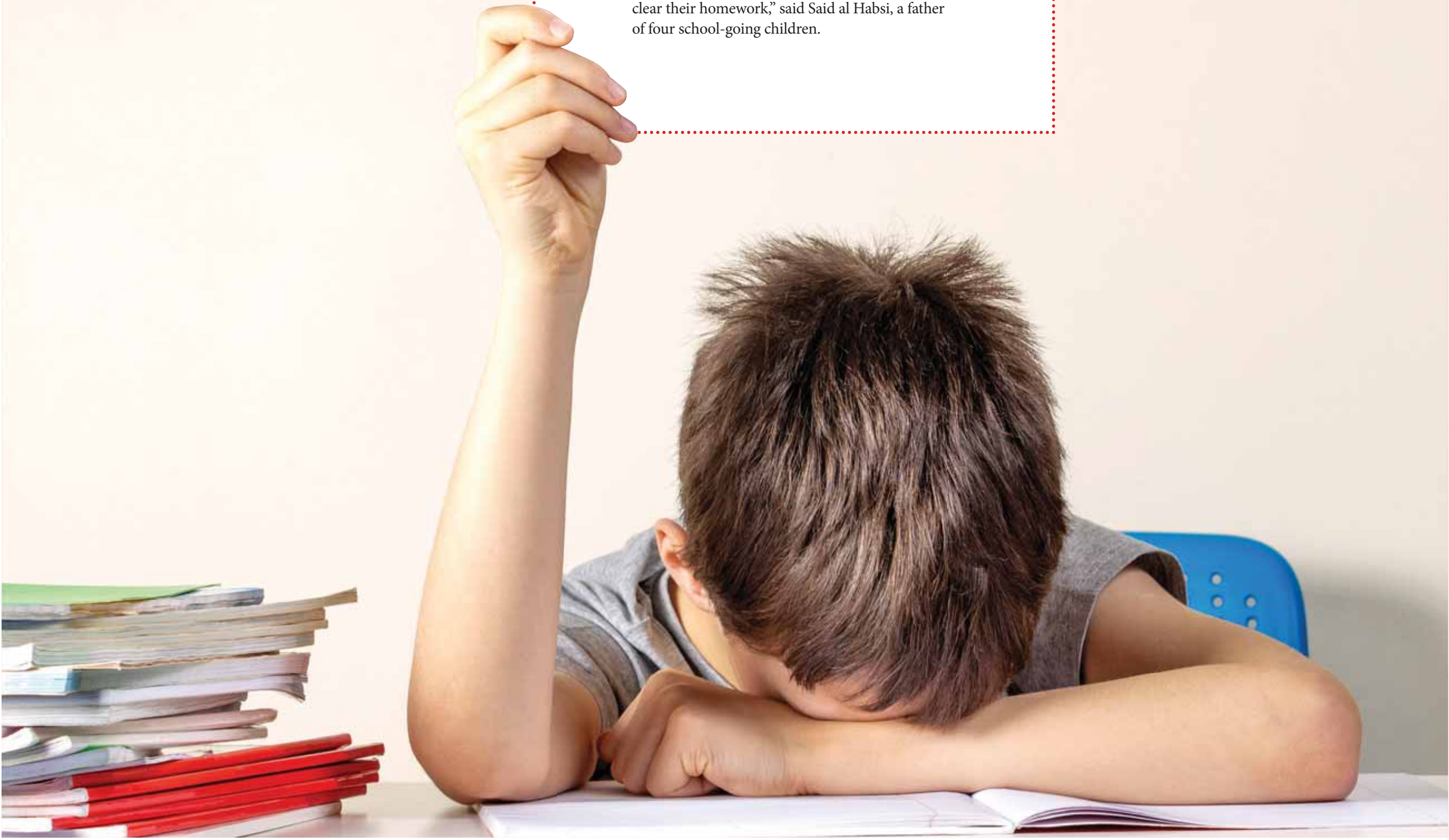
Children also gain healthy levels of physical activity, which can help boost cognitive function and replace the time spent completing homework.

"When we also take a closer look at students themselves, especially from grade one to four, parents claim that after school, the children want to play outdoors, interact with their siblings or take a nap, but they find themselves in fear of having homework and claiming to be difficult for them," Sawsan al Ajmi, a private sector employee, said.

"I feel students concentrate more on the fear of homework completion than striving and reinforcing learnt knowledge," she said.

Yahya Rashid, a father of three in Al Amerat, said the struggles of today's world are great. They are reasons behind stress. "Most people have to work, pass through heavy traffic to and from work and after reaching home, they find different responsibilities, including school homework lined up. Something needs to be done to reduce the pressure or devise new means to scrap school homework," he said.

Others say it is difficult for working parents to take control of school homework. "Both my wife and I are employed, which causes work-related stress. We need rest, but our children wait for us to clear their homework," said Said al Habsi, a father of four school-going children.





The forum aimed to elevate the quality of vocational guidance programmes



Vocational guidance critical element to job market demand

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahbalushia

In a proactive move to enhance vocational guidance services in the Sultanate of Oman, a forum on Tuesday underscored the significance of vocational guidance as a critical element fostering cohesion between educational outcomes and the dynamic demands of the labour market.

The forum aimed to elevate the quality of vocational guidance programmes offered by the National Employment Programme through the Khatta platform for vocational guidance, focusing on broadening its reach to the widest spectrum of beneficiaries.

Central to this initiative is vocational guidance's role in shaping informed professional decisions among individuals, influencing academic and

career choices. By offering guidance grounded in scientific principles and cultivating essential skills for professional success, the service bolsters the preparedness of educational institutions' graduates for the intricacies of the labour market.

Dr Badr al Kharousi, Capacity Building Adviser at the National Employment Programme, emphasised the forum's significance in his opening address. He highlighted the objectives and services of the Khatta platform for vocational guidance, emphasising its accessibility to all segments of society, particularly higher education students.

Dr Al Kharousi underscored the relevance of vocational guidance in the Fourth Industrial Revolution era, addressing key challenges and exploring the intersection

of technology, vocational guidance, and the evolving role of specialists in an era dominated by artificial intelligence.

The forum featured presentations of scholarly papers detailing essential programmes and training courses provided by the Khatta platform. It showcased future skills aligned with the Omani national framework, encompassing basic, applied, and professional skills essential for users. Papers also delved into the roles and responsibilities of career guidance specialists in higher education institutions, emphasising the importance of aligning academic specialisations with students' inclinations, abilities, and professional values.

Furthermore, the forum spotlighted the imperative of educating students on selecting academic specialisations that

resonate with their aptitudes. It stressed the significance of obtaining professional certificates to enhance employability, facilitating connections between specialisations and job market demands. Additionally, the forum emphasised the importance of students understanding the needs of the labour market and provided resources to aid them in making informed decisions about their career paths.

The proceedings also shed light on the self-employment initiative championed by the National Employment Programme in collaboration with government and private entities. Presentations covered the initiative's objectives, key components, and fundamental capabilities, aiming to create an integrated support system for self-employed individuals in the Sultanate of Oman.

Pacts signed to set up labour inspection units

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour and the Security and Safety Corporation signed an agreement to launch an inspection unit, which will provide security support services and operate the labour welfare facilities.

The scope of the agreement includes transporting violators to the labour welfare facilities, the Ministry of Labour, Public Prosecution, or any relevant entity within the inspection system.

It also includes regulating workers violating labour laws, providing security, operational maintenance, and other necessary services to operate and manage labour welfare activities.

Major General Abdullah bin Ali al Harthy, Chairman of the Board of Directors at the Security and Safety Corporation, said, "This system will be accompanied by training for the human workforce and logistical preparedness.

There will also be arrangements for accommodation facilities, facilitating integration within the legal frameworks of relevant authorities. Additionally, this



The scope of the agreement includes regulating workers violating labour laws

agreement opens up avenues for more job opportunities in the security and safety sector, contributing to the labour market's development and stability."

Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, said, "The role undertaken by the inspection sector requires a qualitative proficiency that enables it to perform its tasks with effectiveness and quality.

We aim to enhance this through the memorandum of cooperation that we have signed with the Security and Safety Corporation to establish a joint inspection unit. It aligns closely with the objectives of the national vision."

CDA reports vehicle fire incident



MUSCAT: The firefighters from the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDA) in Muscat Governorate reported a vehicle fire incident in Muscat. The fire was extinguished and no casualties were reported.

13 institutions offer diverse pathways at Dhofar Higher Education Institutions Exhibition

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, DEC 12

The Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Recreation in Salalah buzzed with excitement on Tuesday as the first Higher Education Institutions Exhibition kicked off. Organised by the Directorate General of Education in Dhofar Governorate in collaboration with the Murshid Professional Platform, the three-day event aims to bridge the gap between students and representatives from various colleges and universities, empowering them to make informed decisions about their educational and professional futures.

The opening ceremony was attended by Mohammed bin Hassan al Ansi, member of the Majlis AshShura, and Dr Maizoon bint Bakhit al Shihriyah, Acting Director General of Education in Dhofar, alongside other dignitaries. The high-profile attendance underscored the importance of collaborative efforts in fostering educational opportunities for Dhofar's youth.

Dr Nasima bint Mohammed al Mashaykhiyah, Head of the Professional Guidance



The opening ceremony was attended by Mohammed bin Hassan al Ansi, member of the Majlis AshShura



Department, emphasised the exhibition's role in bridging the gap between the public and private sectors. "This event aims to raise awareness about the diverse higher education options available and equip

students and parents with the knowledge they need to make informed choices," she stated.

The exhibition provides a unique platform for students and parents to interact directly with representatives from 13

prestigious institutions. This includes Mazoon College, Al Bayan College, Majan University College, the Scientific College of Design, the Global College of Engineering, Nizwa University, Al Sharqiya University, Gulf College, the National University, Oman College of Health Sciences, the Professional College, the Murshid Professional Platform, and the College of Islamic Sciences.

Dr Nasima highlighted the exhibition's impact in empowering students. "By providing direct access to information and guidance from leading institutions, we aim to equip students with the tools they need to prioritise their specialisation choices and select appropriate academic subjects for their future aspirations," she explained.

This inaugural event serves as a significant step in enhancing the educational landscape of Dhofar. By connecting students with diverse educational opportunities and providing them with valuable guidance, the First Higher Education Institutions Exhibition empowers them to chart their future paths with confidence.



Head Office: P.O. Box No. 1706, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24470000 info@nationalfinance.co.om nationalfinance.co.om

NOTICE OF THE EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of National Finance Co. SAOG (Company) is pleased to invite all shareholders to the Extraordinary General Meeting to be held at 3:00 p.m. on **Wednesday, 27 December 2023** via the electronic platform for convening general meetings which can be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company website (www.mcd.gov.om), if quorum is not met for the meeting, a second meeting shall be held at 3:00 p.m. on **Sunday, 31 December 2023**, to discuss the following agendas:

- To consider and approve the issuance of unsecured perpetual bonds (Bonds) up to RO 25 million with a greenshoe option for an amount of up to RO 10 million, in one or more tranches, by way of private placement at the nominal value of **RO 1.000** for each Bond, in addition to issue expenses, in accordance with the regulatory approval. The Bonds shall be perpetual with no fixed date for maturity and shall be listed on the bonds and sukuk market of the Muscat Stock Exchange.
- To authorize the Board of Directors to do all such acts and take any decision, without restriction, which may in their sole discretion be deemed necessary or desirable in relation to the Bonds; including but not limited to:
 - Approve the structure, terms, conditions, timing, issue price, interest rate, allocation, the final size of the Bonds;
 - Negotiate, agree and approve the entry into, execution and performance of the transaction documents (in relation to the Bonds) to which the Company is a party;
 - Prepare, execute, deliver, publish and distribute or cause to be prepared, executed, delivered and filed any documents, applications, exhibits, notices, supplements and/or amendments (and related documents) in connection with the Bonds;
 - Appoint any advisors in connection with the Bonds;
 - Liaise, discuss and agree with any regulatory authorities including but not limited to the Capital Market Authority, Central Bank of Oman, the Muscat Stock Exchange, and Muscat Clearing and Depository Company SAOC on any matters relating to the Bonds;
 - Make any announcements and issue publications in connection with the Bonds; and
 - Authorize as it deems fit, the management of the Company with the whole or part of its authorities.
- To appoint Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC as an agent for the bondholders in its capacity as trustee or agent.

In accordance with the Company's Articles of Association and the rules for convening general meetings via electronic means issued by the Capital Market Authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- A legal (juristic) person, exclusively, shall have the right to appoint a natural person, as proxy, to attend the general meeting, and vote on decisions taken on his behalf using electronic means. Such natural person must have an investor number registered with the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company SAOC.
- Shareholders will be able to vote for the items set out in the agenda starting from 3 days prior to the meeting date up until the end of the voting process for that particular item presented in the agenda on the day of the meeting. If a shareholder's shareholding is increased or decreased, then such shareholders votes will be void, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the general meeting.

For further information, please contact on telephone No. **99609667** or email: **r.panneerselvam@nationalfinance.co.om**



Zelensky makes plea for US aid as Russia claims advances

WASHINGTON: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky presses on Tuesday for more US military aid to battle Russia, which said any funding would be a “fiasco” and claimed its forces were advancing on the front.

Zelensky, who is in Washington to plead for continued support, will meet with President Joe Biden at the White House and also with congressional leaders from both parties.

For much of the nearly two years that Ukraine has resisted President Vladimir Putin’s onslaught, the United States has led a Western coalition sending billions of dollars in weaponry and ammunition.

But Republicans are ever-more openly rejecting the need to fund Ukraine, saying that Biden needs to devote more attention to domestic security, particularly to stopping illegal migration over the US-Mexican border.

The Republicans are also questioning whether Ukraine should keep fighting at all.

Biden is a key supporter, framing the Ukrainian war effort as part of a global struggle between democracies and aggressive autocracies.

But on Capitol Hill, Zelensky will face his real test when he addresses Republican and Democratic senators, and meets the new Republican speaker of the House, Mike Johnson.

In a speech on Monday at the National Defense University in Washington, Zelensky said that politics should not “betray”



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and International Monetary Fund (IMF) Director Kristalina Georgieva speak to the press after talks at IMF headquarters in Washington, DC. — AFP

Ukraine’s soldiers and he echoed Biden in saying that the struggle had global implications.

“When the free world hesitates, that’s when dictatorships celebrate and their most dangerous ambitions ripen,” he said. “They see their dreams come true when they see delays.”

The Kremlin played down the consequences of any further US funding on Tuesday, saying it would be doomed to a “fiasco.”

“It is important for everyone to understand: the tens of billions of dollars pumped into Ukraine did not help it gain success on the

For much of the nearly two years, the United States has led a Western coalition sending billions of dollars in weaponry and ammunition

battlefield,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

“The tens of billions of dollars that Ukraine wants to be pumped with are also headed for the same fiasco.”

In an interview with Russian state television on Sunday, Putin said that Ukraine was “running out” of arms because its defence industry was not able to produce enough.

“They have no base of their own. When there is no base of their own, no ideology of their own, no industry of their own, no money of their own, nothing of their own, then there is no future. And we have one.”

Russia further upped the pressure on Tuesday, saying its forces had “advanced significantly” in southern Ukraine. — AFP

PM Tusk vows to make Poland a leader in Europe

WARSAW: New Prime Minister Donald Tusk set out a pro-European Union vision for Poland and pledged strong support for Ukraine on Tuesday, a day after his appointment ended eight years of nationalist rule that soured relations with the EU.

Presenting his government’s plans to parliament, Tusk said Poland would be a loyal ally of the United States and a committed member of Nato, and signalled his determination to mend Warsaw’s ties with Brussels after years of feuding over judicial independence issues.

“Poland will regain its position as a leader in the European Union... Poland will build its strength, the position it deserves,” said Tusk, later promising to “bring back billions of euros” from Brussels.

The European Commission, the EU executive, put significant funds earmarked for Poland on hold when the nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) party was in power because of concerns over the rule of law.

Poland has gained approval to access 5.1 billion euros in advance payments as part of an EU programme to encourage a shift from Russian fossil fuels.

But the rest of a total of 59.8 billion euros in green transition and Covid-19



Newly appointed Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk presents his government’s programme in Parliament in Warsaw, Poland. — Reuters

recovery funds is frozen until Warsaw rolls back a judicial overhaul implemented by PiS which critics say undermined the independence of the courts.

Despite his pro-EU line, Tusk, who was also prime minister from 2007 to 2014, said he would oppose any changes of EU treaties that would disadvantage Poland.

“Any attempts to change treaties that are against our interests are out of the question ... no one will outplay me in the European Union,” said Tusk, a former president of the European Council, which groups the leaders of EU member states.

Tusk, 66, also promised his government would make defence a priority and honour previously signed arms contracts. PiS came first in an Oct. 15 election and had the first shot at forming a government, but lacked the necessary majority to do so after all other parties ruled out working with it. — Reuters

China and Vietnam agree to build ‘shared future’

HANOI: China and Vietnam declared on Tuesday they want to boost ties and build a community with a “shared future”, just three months after Hanoi upgraded its formal relations with the United States.

As Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Hanoi on his first trip as China’s leader to Vietnam in six years, the two countries signed 37 cooperation deals in what can be seen as a triumph of Vietnam’s diplomacy as both China and the United States vie for influence.

After China’s push, Vietnam agreed to “support the initiative of building of a shared future community for human kind”, according to a joint statement shown to reporters.

The two countries signed a

The two countries agreed to jointly promote the “two corridors, one belt” initiative, which is the Vietnamese term for infrastructure projects supported by China

memorandum of understanding for joint patrols in the Tonkin Gulf in the South China Sea, according to one of the agreements.

Deals included a memorandum of understanding on cross-border rail development.

Top officials in both countries had urged a boost to a rail link



Chinese President Xi Jinping (2nd L) and Vietnamese Communist Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong (2nd R) attend a meeting at the Central Office of the Communist Party of Vietnam in Hanoi. — AFP

between the southern Chinese city of Kunming and the northern Vietnamese port of Haiphong, which crosses regions in Vietnam rich in rare earths.

China’s ambassador to Vietnam Xiong Bo said earlier this week Beijing was ready to offer grants to develop rail connections, though the volume and terms of possible loans are not clear.

Boosting transport links would allow Vietnam to export more to China, especially farm products, while Beijing wants to further integrate the country’s north with its southern supply chain networks.

Chinese firms have moved some operations to Vietnam quicker this year than before the Covid pandemic, looking to be closer to Western clients there, to lower risks

from US-China trade tension and cut exposure to China’s weakened economy.

Stronger rail networks would speed import of components from China for assembly in Vietnam, effectively expanding China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Currently the Hanoi metro is Vietnam’s only project to have received BRI loans, but it has not been labelled as such in a country where anti-Chinese sentiment is still widespread enough that such moves could be viewed as getting too close to Beijing.

The two countries agreed to jointly promote the “two corridors, one belt” initiative, which is the Vietnamese term for infrastructure projects supported by China.

— Reuters

HELSINKI

Finland reopens its border with Russia

Finland will reopen two crossings on its border with Russia, its prime minister said on Tuesday, after Helsinki in November shut its frontier.

“The government has today decided to keep the eastern border closed except for two border crossing points,” Prime Minister Petteri Orpo said.

Helsinki will open the southeastern border crossing points of Vaalimaa and Niirala on Thursday.

Orpo said that the restrictions



have been eased in order to assess whether “there is a change for the better.” “If the phenomenon continues, we will close these border crossings,” he added.

— AFP

KUALA LUMPUR

Malaysia PM announces major cabinet reshuffles

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim announced a major cabinet reshuffle on Tuesday, adding several new ministers and agreeing to share the finance portfolio with a trusted technocrat.

“I think that I have built a consensus that the finance ministry, other than being headed by me, must have a strong professional team to ensure we are on the right track, focus on the economy, and not be sidelined or deflected by political



pressures,” Anwar said.

The cabinet reshuffle — the first since Anwar became prime minister in November 2022 — increased the number of ministers to 31 from 28. — AFP

DERA ISMAIL KHAN

Suicide truck attack kills 23 soldiers

A six-man suicide squad drove an explosive-laden truck into a military camp in northwest Pakistan on Tuesday, killing at least 23 soldiers, the army said, the heaviest death toll in a single attack in years, less than two months ahead of elections.

The gun and bomb attack comes as political watchers have already voiced concerns about holding the vote, scheduled for Feb. 8, amid a surge in attacks in the northwest and southwest.

The attack occurred in the



remote district of Dera Ismail Khan on the edge of tribal regions bordering Afghanistan, the army said in a statement, adding all six attackers were killed in an ensuing battle. — Reuters



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Gaza

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People search building rubble for items to salvage following an early morning Israeli strike in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. – AFP



People search for belongings following an Israeli strike in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. – AFP



A picture shows smoke billowing during Israeli bombardment of the Palestinian territory, Gaza. – Reuters

ISRAEL POUNDS GAZA AS HUNGER SPREADS, DISEASE RISK GROWS

GAZA: Israeli tanks and warplanes pummelled southern Gaza on Tuesday, and the UN said aid distribution to Gazans facing growing hunger had largely halted because of the intensity of fighting in the war, now in its third month.

In Khan Younis, southern Gaza's main city which Israel troops began storming last week, residents said tank shelling was now focused on the city centre. One said tanks were operating on Tuesday morning in the streets.

An elderly Palestinian, Tawfik

Abu Breika, said his residential block in Gaza's Khan Younis was hit without warning by a fresh Israeli air strike on Tuesday that had brought down several buildings and caused casualties.

"The world's conscience is dead, no humanity or any kind of morals," Breika said as neighbours sifted through rubble. "This is the third month that we are facing death and destruction... This is ethnic cleansing, complete destruction of the Gaza Strip to displace the whole population."

Residents said the shelling of Rafah, where the Israeli army this month ordered people to head for their safety, was some of the heaviest in days

Further south in Rafah, which borders Egypt, health officials said 22 people including children were killed in an Israeli air strike on houses overnight. Civil emergency workers were searching for more victims under the rubble.

Residents said the shelling of Rafah, where the Israeli army this

month ordered people to head for their safety, was some of the heaviest in days.

"At night we can't sleep because of the bombing and in the morning we tour the streets looking for food for the children, there is no food," said Abu Khalil, 40, a father of six. "I couldn't find bread and the

prices of rice, salt or beans have doubled several times over. This is starvation," he said. "Israel kills us twice, once by bombs and once by hunger."

Israel's military said that over the past day it hit several launch posts that were used to fire rockets at its territory, raided a Hamas compound where it found some 250 rockets among other weapons and struck a weapon production factory.

An Israeli ground assault that had been confined to the north

has expanded to the southern half of the Gaza Strip since a week-long truce collapsed at the start of December.

Residents and aid agencies say that means no place is now safe in a territory where bombing has already rendered the vast majority of people homeless and nearly all areas are entirely cut off from food, medicine and fuel.

Displaced people sheltering in Rafah have erected tents of wood and nylon in open areas. Some are sleeping in streets. — Reuters

UN labels Gaza 'hell on earth'

GAZA: Israeli forces battled Palestinians and bombed more targets in the devastated Gaza Strip on Tuesday as the UN General Assembly was due to vote on a new demand for a ceasefire.

More than two months into the war sparked by the October 7 attack, the visiting chief of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, Philippe Lazzarini, likened Gaza to "hell on earth".

Gaza's health ministry charged on Tuesday that Israeli forces were raiding a hospital in Gaza City, the biggest urban centre, in the north of the coastal territory.

"Israeli occupation forces are storming Kamal Adwan hospital after besieging and bombing it for days," ministry spokesman Ashraf al Qudra said, accusing troops of rounding up men in the hospital courtyard, including medical staff.

The army did not immediately comment, but Israel has repeatedly accused the Palestinian groups of using hospitals, schools, mosques and tunnels beneath them as military bases — claims Palestinians have denied.

The UN humanitarian agency OCHA said earlier that "the hospital remains surrounded



An Israeli artillery unit operates near the border with Gaza. – Reuters

by Israeli troops and tanks, and fighting with armed groups has been reported in its vicinity for three consecutive days".

It said two mothers were killed in a strike on the maternity ward and that about 3,000 internally displaced people were trapped in the facility amid reports of "extreme shortages of water, food and power".

Israel has attacked with an offensive that has reduced much

of Gaza to rubble and killed more than 18,200 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry.

UN agencies and aid groups fear the Palestinian territory will soon be overwhelmed by starvation and disease and are pleading with Israel to boost efforts to protect civilians.

The war has deepened the suffering in Gaza, whose devastation the EU's top diplomat

The war has deepened the suffering in Gaza, whose devastation the EU's top diplomat Josep Borrell has compared that of Germany during World War II

Josep Borrell has compared that of Germany during World War II.

The UN estimates 1.9 million of Gaza's 2.4 million people have been displaced by the war, half of them children.

The Israeli military said later on Tuesday that 105 soldiers had died in the Gaza war, including 13 killed by friendly fire and others in accidents.

Fighting and heavy bombardment in the south, where Israel had previously urged civilians to seek safety, have left people with few places to go.

In central Gaza, Al Aqsa hospital was inundated with victims on Monday, including dozens of screaming children, after Israeli strikes on the Al Maghazi refugee camp. — AFP

WHO protests after patient dies on rescue mission held up by Israeli troops

GENEVA: The World Health Organization complained on Tuesday about the Israeli detention of a medical rescue convoy in the Gaza Strip, saying one patient had died during an evacuation held up by troops who detained and abused a Red Crescent staff member.

In a post on the X social media platform, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said a WHO-led mission to bring supplies in and evacuate patients from the last partly functioning hospital in northern Gaza was stopped in both directions by Israelis.

One of 19 critically wounded patients the team was trying to rescue died en route because of the hold-up. One Red Crescent staff member was separated from the convoy, stripped, beaten and harassed before being sent out hours later on foot, unclothed and shoeless, with his hands still tied behind his back.

"We are deeply concerned about prolonged checks and detention of health workers that put lives of already fragile patients at risk," Tedros said.

Saturday's mission evacuated critical patients and delivered trauma and surgical supplies to cover the needs of 1,500 people at battle-scarred Al Ahli Hospital, the last hospital still partially functioning in the northern half of



Emergency responders and residents carry a wounded Palestinian man on a stretcher following Israeli air strikes in Rafah. – AFP file photos

the Gaza Strip.

On the way out of the north, some patients and Red Crescent staff were instructed at an Israeli checkpoint to leave the ambulances. Critical patients were searched by armed Israeli soldiers.

"Some health workers were held and questioned for several hours," Tedros said. "Due to the hold-up, one patient died en route."

Richard Peepkorn, WHO representative in Gaza, who was on the convoy, said the medics had been forced to leave behind one Palestine Red Crescent Society staff member.

"After two and a half hours, we had to make this incredibly difficult choice to leave this highly dangerous area and proceed for the safety and well-being of the patients," Peepkorn told reporters via video link. — Reuters

A circular portrait of Dr. Yael Shrager, a woman with dark hair, smiling, wearing a red top. The background is green foliage.

Hyesha is a certified Master Life Coach and NLP Practitioner based in Muscat. She is affiliated with the Whispers of Serenity Clinic

This immersion into the unknown fosters a sense

Not merely a physical journey, to travel is a



A woman with curly hair, wearing a pink and white striped shirt and blue jeans, stands in a grassy field with trees in the background.

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P.O. Box 974,
Postal Code 100, Muscat,
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e-mail: editor@omanobserver.om

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A planet in crisis...

How many of us are aware that there is hardly any space on earth that is safe from pollution? For many of us, pollution is something that happens far away in some industrial zones.

But why then we face acid rains on our cities and country sides and oil spills in our oceans? Why our forests are diminishing into stupor?

Let's talk about air pollution alone. In the past, it meant smoke pollution and was limited to urban areas. Today, air pollution has become more subtle without any geographic, political, or social boundaries. Today, even the far-flung polar regions of our planet, which were once considered pristine, are now polluted.

"With every breath we take, we suck in tiny particles that can damage our lungs, hearts, and brains and cause a host of other health problems," points out a report by Earth.Org.

According to a recent study by the international scientific group Earth Commission and published in the journal Nature, air pollution is dangerous at local and regional levels. Air pollution isn't just an environmental concern; it's a public health crisis that affects every one of us.

The World Health Organisation cites air pollution as one of the greatest environmental risks to health. "By reducing air pollution levels, countries can reduce the burden of disease from stroke, heart disease, lung cancer, and both chronic and acute respiratory diseases, including asthma," it says.

In 2019, 99 per cent of the world's population lived in places where the WHO air quality guidelines were not met. The combined effects of ambient air pollution and household air pollution are associated with 6.7 million premature deaths annually.

Although climate change and air pollution may sound like two very different issues, they are closely interwoven, so by reducing air pollution, we also protect the climate.

As a UN Environment Programme report states, "erupting volcanoes,



Samuel Kutty
@samkutttyp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

FOR THE LAST SEVERAL DECADES, WORLD LEADERS MEET AND TAKE DECISIONS TO REPAIR THE OZONE LAYER, PROTECT THE OCEANS, AND PHASE OUT DEADLY FORMS OF AIR POLLUTION. BUT MANY OF THESE EVENTS OFTEN END IN ACRIMONY!

earthquakes, dust storms, and meteorites smashing into the Earth's crust are natural phenomena that can cause climate change and air pollution."

In addition to these potential threats, we humans are also contributing to air pollution and global warming through our resource-intensive lifestyles.

"We're producing and consuming more than ever before, and we're generating more greenhouse gases as a result, as well as air pollutants in the form of chemicals and particulate matter," the report points out.

For the last several decades, world leaders meet and take decisions to repair the ozone layer, protect the oceans, and phase out deadly forms of air pollution. But many of these events often end in acrimony!

Examples include big climate events that have been around us for a long time. World leaders and celebrities often jet in and join them, while the global media reports every move in the corridors of power and concerned citizens protest outside. Finally, most of these summits end up as talking shops!

Look at the current COP28 climate conference in Dubai that ended on Tuesday, although a final outcome of the summit was not available till I finish these lines; reports indicate that countries clashed on Saturday over a possible agreement to phase out fossil fuels.

As UN Climate Change Executive Secretary Simon Stiell told reporters during the Dubai COP28, "We do not have a minute to lose in this crucial home stretch. There is still a chance for negotiators to start a new chapter—one that really delivers for people and the planet."

So we can be optimistic that the dedication and commitment of our environmental scientists and other experts along with a wise leadership will make a significant difference at these events. Along with them, we can all play our part in turning the tide!

Although history is littered with broken promises that aren't worth the paper they're written on, there is still hope.

FAREWELL TO FORCES!



A dancer takes part in a ceremony as Indonesian troops prepare to travel to Papua for deployment in security operations, at Sultan Iskandar Muda Airforce base in Blang Bintang, Aceh province on Tuesday. – AFP

The futility of waste management

With world leaders gathered in Dubai for the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28), the United Arab Emirates has unveiled the world's highest-capacity waste-to-energy (WTE) facility. The plant is designed to process two million metric tonnes of municipal waste annually, producing enough electricity to power 120,000 households per year by incinerating discarded materials. Paradoxically, it is both a cutting-edge innovation and a strategy from the past.

The Dubai facility is one of thousands of WTE projects recently completed, under construction, or planned. Over 2,600 such facilities are currently operational worldwide, including more than 400 in China alone. A recent report projected rapid growth for the WTE industry, with revenues nearly doubling from \$27.7 billion in 2021 to roughly \$45.2 billion in 2029. That expansion will be largely owed to the global effort to meet the Paris climate agreement's targets, which has fuelled increased investment in sustainable waste-management solutions.

This bodes well for the battle against climate change. WTE facilities currently process more than 400 million tonnes of waste annually, accounting for roughly 20 per cent of the two billion tonnes of residual waste remaining each year after reuse, composting, and recycling.



Sarah Newman
is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of Chicago

WHILE WASTE-TO-ENERGY FACILITIES HAVE BEEN TOUTED AS A SUSTAINABLE RESPONSE TO THE ESCALATING PRODUCTION OF SOLID WASTE WORLDWIDE, THEY ARE MERELY THE LATEST IN A LONG LINE OF INNOVATIONS THAT ADDRESS THE SYMPTOMS

Decomposing waste in landfills emits methane, a gas with 28 times the warming potential of carbon dioxide. Redirecting waste materials to WTE facilities helps to reduce methane emissions, as well as conserve land and generate electricity.

This is good news, but it is also old news. WTE facilities are adaptations of earlier concepts rather than revolutionary innovations. They are humanity's latest attempt to eliminate waste instead of preventing it in the first place. In my recent book, Unmaking Waste, I chronicle this centuries-long quest to transform profligate consumption into a positive force.

In the early twentieth century, for example, multiple US cities invested in what were known as "reduction" plants, which compressed trash to extract oils and other byproducts for use as fertilisers, lubricants, and even perfume bases. At the time, this process was viewed as a major advance in waste management. As the Chairman of the New Orleans Committee on Health put it during the 1898 Convention of the League of American Municipalities, the burgeoning field offered the "glowing promises of rich rewards." Similarly, landfills, frequently maligned nowadays, were viewed as a way to recover valuable resources and reclaim

usable land. But this approach proved to be unsustainable in the long run. The reduction plants, which "cooked" vast quantities of decaying waste to extract grease and oil, produced pungent odours and polluted nearby waterways with liquid runoff from the compression process.

Incineration, the core technology behind today's WTE facilities, has long been touted as a sanitary, efficient, and profitable method of waste disposal. In the late nineteenth century, many public officials and sanitary engineers lauded the power of fire not only to

destroy and purportedly disinfect waste but also to generate steam for powering various types of engines.

Like the nineteenth-century waste-reduction facilities, however, incineration failed to live up to its potential. Burning organic materials, which typically contain lots of water, required higher temperatures than what garbage alone could produce. This forced plants to augment their garbage with coal and other fuels, driving up costs. Alternatively, plants could operate at lower temperatures, which resulted in partly incinerated waste, along with increased smoke and gas

emissions. These challenges made converting waste to steam and electrical energy more expensive than simply burning wood and coal. Nearly 60 per cent of the incinerators built around the turn of the twentieth century were abandoned or dismantled by 1910.

WTE facilities have encountered similar setbacks. For example, a proposed plant in the Bahamas was initially projected to require 1,500 metric tonnes of combustible waste per day to offset its own energy consumption, a figure that exceeded the entire country's daily waste production by 1,000 metric tonnes. In the United Kingdom, ambitious plans for two WTE plants were scrapped, at a cost of nearly \$1 billion, after the first completed unit produced much less electricity than expected.

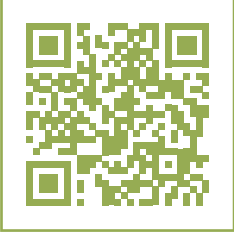
WTE technologies continue to improve, particularly in reducing toxic emissions. Still, the parallels between the late nineteenth century and today are striking. In 1888, S S Kilvington, then-president of the American Public Health Association, delivered an impassioned speech in which he foresaw a transition from an "age of filth-formation" to an "era of filth-destruction," in which fire would purify both the "refuse of the living and the remains of the dead."



Decomposing waste in landfills emits methane.

sport

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Perfect start for Oman in U15 West Asian tourney



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 12

The Oman Under-15 football team began their campaign at the uder-15 West Asian Football Championship which is underway in Salalah on a bright note as the Oman boys snatched the only goal in the match in the 53rd minute from penalty shootout to deliver a crucial triumph for junior Red Warriors in the beginning of the campaign.

In the same group, Yemen captured a 2-1 win over Iraq at Al Saada Stadium on Monday. Yemen's goals were netted by Abdul Rahman Abdul Nabi and Mohammed Shams al Deen while Iraq's consolation goal was scored by Alaa al Helfi.

With the conclusion of the opening round of Group A matches, Yemen are leading the points table by three points with goals difference advantage compared to the hosts Sultanate of Oman who are positioned in second place with the same credit.

The 10-day tournament is taking place in Salalah under West Asian Football



Federation (WAFF) umbrella in coordination with the Oman Football Association (OFA). The Group B matches begin

Oman team, coached by Anwar al Habsi, will take on Yemen in a tight clash on Wednesday at Al Saada Stadium. The match will start at 8 pm (Oman time) while Lebanon will meet Iraq in the other match which will kick off at 5 pm.

The Oman boys will look to register their second straight win and confirm their presence in the semifinals as a victory will guarantee the team's attendance in the next stage of the tournament.

The title owner of Arab School Football Championship in Egypt will eye on reaching to the final stages of the tournament

specially as it is taking place in the Sultanate of Oman. The coaching staff of the national team may depend on the same names who took part in the opening match including Suleiman al Mahrrouqi, Aseel al Habsi, Firas al Saadi, Al Waleed al Buraidi, Ibrahim al Tamami and Fahad al Mashakhei among others.

In the other match, Lebanon and Iraq will target to revive their chances in the championship after both teams suffered defeats in the previous round. It will be chance for them to return back to the competition and compete on two direct tickets to the semifinals.

Oman chess team gears up for Asian tourney in Al Ain

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 12

The Oman national chess team has wrapped up its intensive preparations for the upcoming Asian Chess Championship, set to take place in Al Ain, United Arab Emirates, from December 13 to 22. The championship will feature age categories including youth, cadets and juniors as Oman will be represented by a team of 13 players across various age groups.

Under the guidance of coach Bashir al Qadimi, the youth team engaged in a rigorous three-day training camp at Al Amal Club. The focus of the camp was on honing both offensive and defensive strategies to ensure the team is well-prepared for the challenges ahead. This physical training camp complemented



the daily virtual training sessions that have been ongoing since the beginning of December. The virtual sessions covered individual tactical exercises, finals, analysis of games played by world champions, discussions on playing styles, and in-depth

insights from the opening to the endgame. The comprehensive training aimed at maximising strategic skills in openings, middlegame, finals, tactics, and overall critical thinking.

The Oman Chess Committee emphasised maximising

participation in the Asian Youth Chess Championship to enhance players' skills and experiences, provide more interaction with world champions in the tournament, refine their expertise and achieve new ranking numbers, especially for new and unrated players.

The Omani delegation, consisting of Basmah al Sadeeri as the delegation head, Khaled al Maliki as the mission administrator and coach Bashir al Qadimi, is accompanied by 13 players from various age groups. The players include Majid al Riyami, Abdulaziz al Hinai, Amar al Hatmi, Mohammed al Riyami, Ahmed al Rahbi, Hamoud al Busaidi, Firas al Lawati, Meitha al Maqbali, Noor al Ghafri, Duaa al Maqbali, Fatma al Ghafri, Reem al Shukaili and Hoor al Shukaili.

30 referees take part in referee training for Oman Para Athletics



SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 12

The training session for the qualification of para-athletics referees for people with disabilities began at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, organised by the Oman Paralympic Committee (OPC) under the supervision of the International Paralympic Committee from December 12 to 13. This is in preparation for the Oman Para-Athletics Meeting scheduled for December 15-16.

Under the auspices of Dr Mansour bin Sultan al Touqi, OPC Chairman, and in the presence of international lecturer Tariq al Suwaidi, the course was inaugurated with the participation of 30 referees.

Al Touqi emphasised that the arbitration course is part of the committee's efforts to qualify Omani referees to manage athletics competitions for people with disabilities, under the supervision of the International Paralympic Committee. He highlighted the course's focus on the unique rules governing para-athletics compared to able-bodied athletics, addressing legal aspects of field and track events and modifications in competitions. The course also covered the arbitration of throwing equipment such as the shot put, javelin, and discus considering differences in weight and disability categories.

He stressed the importance of benefiting from both theoretical and practical sessions, noting

that the course's participants contribute significantly to the OPC goal of qualifying referees for international licenses, enabling them to officiate in various para-athletics championships. The sessions covered topics such as the basics of refereeing for disabled competitions, classification based on the degree and type of disability, and the ethics of the refereeing profession and the roles of referees. The two-day course included theoretical and practical sessions, addressing the arbitration laws for para-athletics, including track and field events and key legal modifications for various motor, visual, and paralysis disabilities.

Following that, the sessions of the course began with the presentation of several working papers. The first paper provided an overview of the basics of refereeing for competitions involving people with disabilities. The second paper addressed the classification of disabled sports based on the degree and type of disability. The third session covered the 'Ethics of the Refereeing Profession and the Roles of Referees'.

The course, spanning two days, includes theoretical sessions and practical applications. It encompasses the refereeing laws for Para Athletics, addressing the officiating of field and track sports, along with crucial legal amendments for track races, throwing events, and jumping for various motor, visual and paralysis impairments.

LYLES, KIPYEGON NAMED TRACK ATHLETES OF YEAR

PARIS: American sprinter Noah Lyles and Kenya's Faith Kipyegon were named the men's and women's track athletes of the year by World Athletics on Monday.

Lyles was recognised for the three gold medals he won at the world championships in Budapest.

After an all-conquering 2023, the 26-year-old will now turn his focus to next year's Paris Olympics where he is targeting gold in the 100m, 200m and 4x100m relay and has said he will also aim for a spot in the US 4x400m relay quartet.

In Budapest, he scorched to gold in the 100m in 9.83sec for his first global title in the short sprint.

"I've always known I was the fastest man on the planet but no one would have believed me unless I had the 100m title," Lyles said. "That changed the way that people have viewed me a little bit, especially outside of the sport," he added.

Kipyegon clinched the women's prize after setting three world records in the 1500m, the mile and the 5,000m.

She also completed a 1500m-5,000m double at the world championships.

"It was a magnificent year," the 29-year-old said.

"I didn't expect what I did this year, breaking three world



Noah Lyles of the US was recognised for the three gold medals he won at the world championships in Budapest. – Reuters



Kenya's Faith Kipyegon clinched the women's prize after setting three world records in the 1500m, the mile and the 5,000m. – Reuters

records and winning two gold medals.

"It was a historical year for me and I'm very very happy and

I know it's not only what I did for myself but I know I inspired many young girls out there," she added.

— AFP

#Cricket4Her programme successfully completes first phase

MUSCAT: Oman Cricket's resolute push to elevate women's cricket within the Sultanate of Oman reached a significant milestone as the inaugural phase of the #Cricket4Her programme concluded successfully recently.

The programme, designed to invigorate cricket among girls and women, recently culminated with a display of skill and sportsmanship in both indoor and outdoor softball cricket tournaments.

These events witnessed an overwhelming participation of over 300 women, encompassing schoolgirls and a commendable involvement of 16 teams.

Emphasising the success of the primary objectives, senior officials from Oman Cricket (OC) expressed satisfaction with the outcomes achieved by the #Cricket4Her initiative, launched in October.

The past two months showcased an enthralling series of matches across indoor and outdoor softball tournaments, serving as a testament to the commitment and talent of female cricketers.

In the outdoor event, Women's



Cricket Sohar emerged victorious, securing a gripping five-run win over Oman Tuluver.

Noteworthy performances led to Murugeswari Vijay of the Sohar team being honoured as the Player of the Final, while her teammate Bhavya Shetty was adjudged the Player of the Tournament.

The indoor tournament, concluded in October, witnessed the triumph of Wadi Kabir Women's, showcasing an outstanding

performance as they dominated Muscat Tamizh Queens in the eight-over title clash.

Jayavarsaa Sridevi of Wadi Kabir Women's was named the Player of the Final, with her teammate Akshada Gunasekar earned the coveted title of Player of the Tournament.

The ceremony honouring these achievements was graced by OC board members Paul Sheridan, Alkesh Joshi and Kiran Asher, who presented the awards to the

deserving talents. Looking forward, the programme's second stage is poised to introduce women to hardball cricket, inviting team and individual registrations for similar tournaments.

OC Treasurer Alkesh Joshi expressed an optimistic outlook regarding the programme's impact, highlighting its successful integration into various Muscat schools.

Schools such as Downehouse Muscat, Cheltenham Muscat and The Sultan School have witnessed active participation, with over 75 girls engaging in the sport and attending weekly training sessions, envisioning a promising future for women's cricket in Oman.

Joshi underscored the significance of #Cricket4Her as a pivotal initiative for Oman Cricket, firmly supported by the entire OC board and the cricketing community, aiming to breathe new life into women's cricket.

Furthermore, Oman Cricket received commendation from the ICC for the innovative approach and the significant strides made through the #Cricket4Her programme.

Europcar take lead in Oman Golf League at Al Mouj Golf

MUSCAT: The second round of the Oman Golf League concluded with Europcar taking a significant lead, showcasing remarkable performance and strategic play, by securing 88 points in the second round, bringing their total to 181 points. The competition heated up as teams from various corporate sectors, vied for top positions.

Notably, Marafiq managed to maintain their second spot with a total of 175 points, while Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) emerged as a strong contender in third place with 170 points. David Miles, representing PDO stood out as the best individual player

with an impressive 38 points. This suggests that the third round could bring a shift in the leaderboard, with every team eyeing a spot in the top three.

Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, said: "The Oman Golf League is progressing splendidly. The competitive edge displayed by the teams is commendable, and we are thrilled to host such an inspiring event. Congratulations to the champions of this round, and we are eagerly anticipating the next phase of this exciting league."

Rashid Ali from the Renaissance team one, praised the course at Al Mouj Golf, saying "the course is in



pristine condition, the best I've experienced. Since it's mostly about networking, we are thoroughly enjoying our time at

Al Mouj Golf. We are optimistic about our chances of finishing in the top three and look forward to the next round with great

enthusiasm."

Tom Annberg from the Asyad team, also expressed his admiration for the course, highlighting its role in their strategic approach. "Al Mouj Golf's course with its impeccable maintenance, serves as a testament to its fantastic set up, reflecting high standards we strive for at the league. Our team is deeply committed to taking the lead in the league; we continuously re-evaluate and adapt our strategy, focusing on optimising our strengths and addressing any weaknesses to ensure we emerge victorious in the upcoming assignment."

Following the same sentiment,

Nitin Sapre from the Europcar team, shared his team's optimistic stance. "Our spirit is high, and we are very optimistic about our performance. We are positive about finishing on top by the end of this league."

As the Oman Golf League moves into its third round, the fairways of Al Mouj Golf will once again be the stage for friendly yet intense competition in November. Supported by Nama Water Services, Hi FM and Hala FM, the league offers teams the chance to leverage the exceptional amenities of Al Mouj Muscat, including its vibrant dining and retail district and luxurious stay-and-play options.

Wolves sunk by Pelicans, Doncic dazzles for Mavs

LOS ANGELES: Zion Williamson erupted for 36 points as the New Orleans Pelicans exploited the absence of Anthony Edwards to upset the Minnesota Timberwolves 121-107 on Monday.

Williamson spearheaded a dominant offensive performance by New Orleans, who bounced back superbly after being bullied into defeat by 44 points against the Los Angeles Lakers in last week's in-season tournament.

CJ McCollum added 23 points while Brandon Ingram weighed in with 20 to fire the Pelicans to a deserved victory over the NBA Western Conference leaders.

The defeat snapped Minnesota's six-game winning streak although the Wolves remain clear at the top of the table with a 17-5 record.

"We trusted each other and we executed," Williamson said.

"We've been through tough moments but we're resilient. I think that showed tonight, glad we got the win," Williamson added.

New Orleans improved to 13-11 and are ninth in the Western standings.

Elsewhere, Luka Doncic inspired the injury-hit Dallas Mavericks with 35 points, eight rebounds, and six assists in a gutsy 120-113 road win over the Memphis Grizzlies.

The shorthanded Mavs, missing Kyrie Irving, Grant Williams and Tim Hardaway Jr amongst others, took the lead eight minutes into the first quarter and kept their noses in front to claim victory.

Rookie Dereck Lively II had 16 points and 16 rebounds while Jaden Hardy added 19 from the bench.

Mavs coach Jason Kidd saluted Doncic's leadership in galvanising an understrength Dallas line-up.

"I think you've seen enough of him that he believes anytime he takes the floor he has a chance to win," Kidd said.

"His leadership of always getting that group together, to make sure everybody was on the same page, he's done that



Portland Trail Blazers' Jabari Walker (34) shoots the ball against LA Clippers' Daniel Theis (10) in the second half at Crypto.com Arena. – USA Today Sports

all year for us. "That just shows his leadership, his maturity. He's growing. On the road, against a talented team, we found a way to win, but it starts with Luka and he set the tone."

PRETTY AMAZING

It was another in a sequence of MVP-calibre performances from Doncic, who has now scored 30 or more points in his last seven games.

"I think leadership is important," Doncic said. "I think this year has been way better for me. Obviously we had like five

guys out, so it's a pretty amazing win."

In other games, the San Antonio Spurs' woes continued with a franchise-record 17th straight defeat in a 93-82 loss to the Houston Rockets. San Antonio remain rock bottom of the Western Conference with a 3-19 record.

San Antonio's No 1 draft pick Victor Wembanyama led his team's scoring with 15 points but the Spurs were always struggling after converting only five successful three-pointers from 41 attempts from beyond the arc.

"They played their ass off. They played a great game," Spurs coach Gregg Popovich said. "But you've got to make a shot in the NBA — you can't shoot five for 41 from three... it just makes it very, very difficult."

In Atlanta, a 29-point performance from Jamal Murray and 25 points from Nikola Jokic helped the NBA champion Denver Nuggets to a 129-122 win over the Hawks.

Bogdan Bogdanovic made 40 off the bench — including a remarkable 10-of-17 from three-point range — but it was

not enough to get Atlanta over the line.

In Philadelphia, Joel Embiid's 34 points stole the show as the Sixers crushed the Washington Wizards 146-101.

In Milwaukee, the Bucks held off the Chicago Bulls in overtime to claim a 133-129 win.

Giannis Antetokounmpo topped the Milwaukee scoring with 32 points with 12 rebounds and six assists as Chicago's challenge fell short despite 41 points from DeMar DeRozan and 33 from Coby White. — AFP

NBA RESULTS

Bucks bt Bulls133-129 (OT)
Pacers bt Pistons 131-123
Rockets bt Spurs 93-82
Heat bt Hornets 116-114
Magic bt Cavaliers 104-94
76ers bt Wizards 146-101
Nuggets bt Hawks 129-122
Knicks bt Raptors 136-130
Pelicans bt
Timberwolves 121-107
Thunder bt Jazz 134-120
Mavericks bt
Grizzlies 120-113
Clippers bt
Trail Blazers 132-127
Kings bt Nets 131-118

Turkish football plunges into crisis after referee attack

ISTANBUL: Turkiye's football plunged into all-out crisis on Tuesday following an on the pitch attack on a referee by a club president who was mentioned as a possible candidate for mayor of Ankara.

The top-flight SuperLig indefinitely suspended matches and a court placed Ankaragucu club president Faruk Koca and two others in pre-trial detention for "injuring and threatening a public official".

Images of Monday night's incident showed Koca rushing onto the pitch with a group of men and throwing a punch at referee Halil Umut Meler after he had blown the final whistle.

Koca appeared to be incensed at Meler for awarding a stoppage-time penalty kick that allowed visiting Caykur Rizespor to leave the capital with a 1-1 draw.

Meler fell to the ground and was kicked several times in the ensuing melee.

The 37-year-old match official was shown standing minutes later with a black eye that had

swelled up the left part of his face.

He released a statement after being rushed to hospital saying Koca had threatened his life.

"Faruk Koca punched me under my left eye and I fell to the ground. While I was on the ground, they kicked my face and other parts of my body many times," Meler said in a statement.

"Faruk Koca told me and my fellow referees: 'I will finish you'. Addressing me in particular, he said: 'I will kill you.'"

MY BRAIN WENT CRAZY

Koca admitted to Beyaz TV immediately after the match that he had momentarily lost control.

"My brain went crazy," Koca said. "My eyesight blacked out! I don't remember what I did!"

The incident pushed all other events off the front pages of the main newspapers in a nation where football passions run deep — and are often politically linked.

The Turkish Football Federation condemned "this



Turkish referee Halil Umut Meler (ground) covers his face as MKE Ankaragucu's president Faruk Koca (L) attacks him at the end of the Turkish Super Lig football match between MKE Ankaragucu and Caykur Rizespor at Eryaman Stadium in Ankara, on Monday. – AFP

vile attack" and suspended all matches until further notice.

It also prompted President Recep Tayyip Erdogan — a one-time football player whose love for the game has helped improve the fortunes of top Turkish clubs — to issue a late-night appeal for calm. "Sports means peace and brotherhood. Sport is incompatible with violence," he said in a social media statement.

The Turkish interior ministry later released a video showing Erdogan placing a call to Meler in his hospital bed. "We are so deeply sorry and we wish you a speedy recovery," Erdogan told the injured referee in the clip.

"I told all our friends, my interior minister, my justice minister and all the other relevant friends to do what is necessary," Erdogan said.

Turkish football is known for its passion and occasional bursts of violence. A Turkish court briefly arrested 19 people involved in a brawl that broke out during a second-division match in November of last year.

Second-division Bursaspor played seven matches earlier this year in an empty stadium following another incident during which fans chanted anti-Kurdish slogans.

Turkish clubs are followed by legions of fans who often align themselves with various social causes and become a part of the country's political life.

Football supporters played an integral part in 2013 youth-driven protests that formed the first serious challenge to Erdogan's socially conservative government.

The Ankara club and its president are linked closely to Erdogan's ruling AKP party.

Koca told one reporter this year that he could consider running for mayor as the AKP candidate in a closely-watched municipal election scheduled for March 31.

Ankaragucu are in 11th place in the SuperLig after Monday's draw. Rizespor are four points above them in eighth place.

— AFP



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Key agreements signed at Green Hydrogen Summit

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, DEC 12

Several key agreements were signed yesterday, December 12, at the inauguration ceremony of the Green Hydrogen Summit Exhibition at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in Muscat.

The first was an agreement by Takhzeen — a partnership of ONEIC of the Sultanate of Oman and Energy Dome of Italy — to support the rollout of energy storage solutions in Oman.

Speaking to the press, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufo, Minister of Energy and Minerals, highlighted the significance of the agreement, sharing that it marked a significant development given the importance of energy storage in the field of renewable energy.

The second agreement was signed between Hydrom and Asyad Group to establish logistics infrastructure for green hydrogen.

According to Al Aufo, the partnership will entail the transportation of desalinated water to production areas, the transport of hydrogen locally and the export of hydrogen in the form of green ammonia.

Furthermore, the third agreement was signed between Hydrom and Oman Investment



Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufo, Minister of Energy and Minerals, (centre), leads the signing of agreements during the Green Hydrogen Summit Oman.

Authority (OIA) and Siemens Energy to study the development and construction of an electrolyser manufacturing facility in Oman.

Commenting on this agreement, Al Aufo shared that due to the huge number of electrolysers needed for the upcoming green hydrogen projects in the country, it is crucial to study the possibility of manufacturing electrolysers in the country.

He added that later ventures will study the possibility of manufacturing solar panels and wind turbines in Oman.



The first was an agreement by Takhzeen – a partnership of ONEIC of the Sultanate of Oman and Energy Dome of Italy – to support the rollout of energy storage solutions in Oman.

The presence of companies at the local and global levels interested in the entire supply chain in the green hydrogen sector at the exhibition accompanying the summit represents a unique opportunity to exchange experiences and learn about the latest technologies and advancements in this sector.

ENG SALIM
BIN NASSER
AL AUFI
Minister of Energy and Minerals

and advancements in this sector. We look forward to their direct contributions to the energy transition.”

The Green Hydrogen Summit Conference is set to begin today, December 13, in the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in Muscat.

Korea-Oman Green Hydrogen Forum stresses importance of collaboration

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, DEC 12

The Korea-Oman Green Hydrogen Strategic Forum 2023, held against the backdrop of the Green Hydrogen Summit Oman (GHSO), provided a platform for industry leaders to share invaluable insights.

The first session, focusing on the Development of Green Hydrogen Supply Chain and Eco-System, saw the participation of prominent figures in the field. Dr Chang-Keun Yi, President of the Korea Institute of Energy Research (KIER), brought his expertise to the forum.

Dr Abdullah al Abri, an Energy and Investment Consultant from the International Energy Agency (IEA) in France, added an international perspective.

Dr Firas al Abduwani, Director-General of Renewable Energy & Hydrogen at the Ministry of Energy and Mineral in Oman, contributed valuable insights into the nation's commitment to sustainable energy. Eng Abdulaziz al Shidhani, Managing Director of Hydrom, rounded out the panel with his expertise in hydrogen development.

The second session, centred on the Development of Hydrogen



Guests listen to a presentation during the Korea-Oman Green Hydrogen Strategic Forum 2023.

Industrial Infrastructure and Mobility, featured a distinguished panel of industry experts. Dr Khalil al Hanashi, Coordinator of the National Hydrogen Alliance (HY-FLY), shared insights into the alliance's efforts. Tae-Hyung Kim, Vice-President of Hydrogen Business at POSCO Holdings, provided a corporate perspective.

Seung-Yup Lee, Vice-President of E-Mobility & Energy Solution Division at GS Energy, offered expertise on the intersection of mobility and hydrogen.

Kwang-Ho Lee, Regional Representative at Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO) Middle East & CIS, highlighted the role of power corporations in this transition.

Nabil Nachi, Head of MEA New Business at Hyundai Motor, shared the automotive industry's perspective. Jay Koo, Director of Business Development Division at G-Philos, concluded the session with insights into business development.

The sessions showcased a collaborative effort to pave the way for a greener future, aligning with the forum's mission to drive sustainable energy development on a global scale.

The diverse expertise of the speakers illuminated crucial aspects of the hydrogen industry, emphasising the importance of international partnerships in achieving a sustainable and low-emission energy landscape.

Oman to establish first hydrogen project in Dhofar

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, DEC 12

Hydrom, the master-planner and orchestrator of Oman's green hydrogen industry, has signed an agreement term sheet to establish the first green hydrogen project in Dhofar Governorate. The pact was signed on the sidelines of the Green Hydrogen Summit Exhibition which opened at OCEC here on Tuesday, December 12.

The project, which will be led by the SalalahH2 consortium, will produce 1 million tonnes of green ammonia per year, and 175,000 tonnes of green hydrogen by 2029.

Speaking to the press, Managing Director of Hydrom, Eng Abdulaziz al Shidhani, shared that the project will be the first of its kind in the Dhofar Governorate.

He explained that the project will highlight the appeal of Dhofar Governorate, and will increase the participation rate for the next bidding round in the area.

According to Al Shidhani, the winners of the ongoing bids for the hydrogen block auction



Managing Director of Hydrom, Eng Abdulaziz al Shidhani (right), shared that the project will be the first of its kind in the Dhofar Governorate.

in Dhofar will be announced in early 2024.

The SalalahH2 consortium includes Oman-based OQ Alternative Energy, Japanese Marubeni Corporation, UAE Dutco Overseas (Dutco Group), and Korean Samsung C&T.

It is worth noting that the project was part of a set of legacy projects, which are a group of clean hydrogen projects signed prior to the establishment of a relevant regulatory framework in the country and prior to the establishment of Hydrom.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufo,

Minister of Energy and Minerals, and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Hydrom, shared that the project, which is the sixth of its kind, will help bring Oman closer to its goal of producing one million tonnes of green hydrogen by 2030.

“This sixth agreement.. brings us closer to the larger goal, which is one million tonnes by the year 2030. The expected investment level for the six agreements that have been signed exceeds \$38 billion.”

Construction of the project is expected to begin in 2026.



Participants pose for a photo after the event.

Omantel spearheads Sustainability Innovation Hub

MUSCAT: Omantel has announced its participation in the establishment of the Sustainability Innovation Hub in collaboration with the GCC Telco Alliance members (STC, e&, Zain, Beyon, du, and Ooredoo) and other key regional and international partners. This initiative is driven by the urgent need to address climate change and expand access to affordable and reliable energy.

As the global energy landscape undergoes a significant transformation, telecom operators are actively seeking alternatives that enhance energy efficiency and reduce their carbon footprint.

The Sustainability Innovation Hub aims to bridge the gap between technology, telecom, innovation, and climate action for a low-carbon economy. It will bring together cutting-edge technologies, visionary experts, and collaborative efforts to tackle one of the most critical challenges faced by the telecom industry today.

The primary focus of the Sustainability Innovation Hub will be to develop and implement innovative power solutions that are cost-effective, reliable, and environmentally friendly by harnessing the power of renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind.

The hub will enable telecom operators to reduce their reliance on traditional fuel sources and move toward a greener future. This transition will not only lead to substantial long-term cost savings but will also play a significant role in protecting the environment,

aligning with the broader sustainability goals of the sector.

The Sustainability Innovation Hub has been established with a clear set of objectives aimed at revolutionising the telecom industry's approach to energy consumption and sustainability.

The hub will foster a collaborative environment where telecom operators, technology providers, and research institutes can share knowledge, resources, and expertise, driving the development of innovative power solutions tailored to the specific needs of the telecom industry.

Equipped with state-of-the-art facilities for prototyping, testing, and validating innovative power solutions using GCC telecom networks, the hub will accelerate the development cycle and ensure the effective implementation of new technologies within the industry.

Recognising the importance of skilled professionals in driving innovation, the hub will offer training programmes and workshops to enhance the competencies of individuals involved in the design, installation, and maintenance of power solutions within the telecom sector.

The hub will actively seek collaborations and partnerships with leading industry players, government entities, and regulatory authorities, fostering a supportive ecosystem where knowledge sharing, best practices, and standardisation can flourish.

Bank Muscat hosts workshop on global financial markets

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, hosted recently a workshop on global financial markets for its corporate customers in Suhar. The event was attended by a number of officials representing different institutions and corporates.

During the workshop, customers were introduced to a number of topics, including major updates about global financial markets such as US economy, euro zone economy, China, Oman economy, as well as, data related to Federal Reserve interest rate, supply and demand on crude oil, and inflation rates.

The discussion also shed light on global economy outlook in the forthcoming period.

The event aims to ensure that partners are well-aware about the latest trends on the local, regional and international arena.

Providing non-financial support is one of the most important forms of support that financial institutions are working to develop to suit the rapid changes in the sector.

Besides innovative services and financial facilities, Bank Muscat was keen throughout the years to offer various



The event was attended by a number of officials representing different institutions and corporates.

workshops, training and advisory programmes to different customers' segments facilitated by noted and specialised coaches about different topics that concern the business sector.

Through continuously upgrading the services and products, Bank Muscat seeks to meet the aspirations of its customers by keeping pace with the latest trends in banking sector and it exerts efforts to provide only the best to them.

The bank has succeeded over

40 years to gain people's trust which can be seen in the ever-growing bank's customers in all governorates. As part of its efforts to enhance convenience and add value to services offered to the governmental institutions, corporates and SMEs, the bank's five exclusive corporate branches are located at major business hubs in the Sultanate of Oman, Al Nahdha Towers branch, CBD corporate branch, Sohar corporate branch, Salalah corporate branch and the newly-

opened branch in Duqm.

The corporate banking branches represent a one-stop shop for all business banking requirements ranging from a simple account opening to availing of credit facilities and more complex transactions such as global trade services.

They maintain and build relationships with government bodies, large corporates and SMEs and provide products and services that meet their various business requirements.

ahlibank garners great results in managing Taageer Finance bonds issuance

MUSCAT: ahlibank, a leading institution within the Sultanate of Oman's banking landscape, proudly announced its instrumental role as the issue manager and collection bank in the highly successful issuance of Taageer Finance Company's SAOG latest bonds.

This milestone marks the third consecutive bonds issuance in collaboration with Taageer, showcasing ahlibank's continued commitment to financial excellence. Initially projected at RO 10 million, the overwhelming investor demand led to the exercise of the green shoe option, elevating the issue size to RO 14.956 million.

A diverse spectrum of investors, including sovereign funds, pension funds, corporations, insurance companies, banks, and high-net-worth individuals,



ahlibank corporate office.

participated in this transaction. The subscription period for the bonds was open from November 16th to 27th, 2023.

In reflection of the bonds' issuance, Hanaa al Kharousi, Senior General Manager – Wholesale Banking at ahlibank, expressed, "The positive response

from investors to Taageer Finance Company's SAOG latest bonds' issuance is a clear testament to the confidence in the company and its businesses.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the investors and the Capital Market Authority for their support in successfully

closing this issue.

At ahlibank, we are proud to deliver innovative funding structures for our clients, and meet the requirements of investors and issuers.

We have a strong and vastly experienced investment banking team able to provide support to state entities and corporates wanting to tap into the capital markets."

ahlibank's string of successes, driven by a deep understanding of prevailing market dynamics, cements its position as a trailblazer in digital and financial offerings.

Clients across diverse segments continue to benefit from a tailored and unparalleled banking experience, aligning with Oman Vision 2040 — a strategic road map embraced by the government to foster economic growth and prosperity.

BankDhofar unveils salary transfer campaign

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, one of the largest banks in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced its customer centric initiative, a salary transfer campaign designed to bring unparalleled value and convenience to its customers.

The proposition offers a range of benefits and rewards including: credit and debit card, seamless digital banking access, competitive rates on loans and deposits and access to an extensive branch network.

Key benefits of BankDhofar's salary transfer campaign:

1. Large Network of Branches and ATMs: Extensive network of



Mobile banking platform provides customers with a seamless and user-friendly banking experience, allowing them to perform various transactions and access banking services on the go.

branches and ATMs across Oman, making it more convenient for customers to access our services wherever they are located.

Customers will tend to benefit from access to extensive branch network across the country ensuring that customers receive dedicated and personalised service and reflects the commitment of bringing banking closer to customers.

Apart from branches, the bank also expanded its ATM and Cash Deposit Machines (CDMs) network ensuring a 24x7 banking service access

2. Convenience via mobile banking App: Our mobile

banking platform provides customers with a seamless and user-friendly banking experience, allowing them to perform various transactions and access banking services on the go.

The award winning app enables customers to make payments to utilities, bank to bank transfers, opening of saving accounts and much more.

3. Preferential interest rates: By transferring their salaries to BankDhofar, customers can enjoy preferential interest rates on their savings and deposits, giving them the opportunity to grow their wealth faster.

4. Quick loan process: We have

streamlined our loan processing system to ensure eligible customers can access funds quickly and conveniently

5. Credit card offers: By transferring their salaries to BankDhofar, customers become eligible for exclusive credit card offers, allowing them to enjoy benefits such as cashback, rewards, and discounts on a range of purchases.

Additionally, customers can apply to the vertical credit card, designed to reward customers for their everyday spending.

Each transaction offers an opportunity to earn valuable rewards.



Oil slips as weak sentiment counters regional tensions



An attendant pumps fuel into a customer's car at a gas station in Shanghai, China. – Reuters

LONDON: Oil slipped on Tuesday, giving up earlier gains, as concern over excess supply and slowing demand outweighed escalating supply risks in the Middle East region after an attack on a tanker.

A cruise missile launched from Yemen struck a commercial chemical tanker, causing a fire and damage but no casualties in the latest such attack to heighten safety risks for tankers in vital shipping lanes.

Brent crude futures for February fell 56 cents, or 0.7 per cent, to \$75.47 per barrel by 1257 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate crude futures for January delivery slipped 47 cents, or 0.7 per cent, to \$70.85. Although the attack on the vessel helped oil to rally earlier, "sentiment remains negative," said Tamas Varga of broker PVM. "There is no help coming from the demand side of the oil equation. The fundamental backdrop is discouraging."

Global oil demand growth is set to slow in 2024 with Opec and the International Energy Agency split on the extent, and a recent Opec + deal to limit supply underwhelmed the market. Opec and the IEA both update their forecasts this week. Investors were also cautious ahead of a crucial US inflation report and interest rate decision. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) report is due out on Tuesday, while the Federal Open Markets Committee's two-day policy meeting ends on Wednesday.

"All attention will be on the US CPI data today to potentially set the tone for US policymakers at their upcoming meeting," Yeap Jun Rong, market analyst at IG, said in a note.

Also in focus are talks at the COP28 climate summit, where negotiators are awaiting a new draft deal after many countries criticised a previous version as too weak because it omitted a "phase-out" of fossil fuels.

— Reuters

Uptick in investment appeal of Oman's key economic sectors: Nazdahaer

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, DEC 12

The National Programme for Investment and Export Development, 'Nazdahaer,' has unveiled promising outcomes in Oman's investment sector, showcasing significant progress achieved through the active collaboration of key stakeholders in the industry.

Over the preceding two years, the Nazdahaer team has diligently partnered with the public and private sectors to enhance the business environment and successfully address numerous challenges investors encounter.

Furthermore, the team worked to identify investment priorities for various economic sectors, empowering them to achieve their specific targets by 2025. Additionally, efforts were dedicated to cultivating opportunities within each, ensuring they are meticulously and seamlessly prepared for presentation to potential investors.

The Nazdahaer team put in significant effort to enhance the foreign trade sector, focusing on refining its performance and leveraging the strategic location of the Sultanate of Oman to transform it into a regional export and re-export hub.

Expressing his satisfaction with the milestones achieved within each of the Programme's pillars at the level of the business environment, the investment sectors, and the development of foreign trade, Khalid al Shuaibi, President of Nazdahaer, stated, "The Programme has accomplished numerous milestones across various fronts.

We are confident that Oman's investment ecosystem is now in a strong and competitive position globally. In the upcoming period, we will pursue implementing several initiatives to maximise our efforts' outcomes.

We will focus on attracting the desired investments in line with the specific targets set for each sector. "Presently, the achievement rate stands at 68.9 per cent of the investment target for non-oil sectors outlined in the tenth five-year plan (2021-2025).

This progress is reflected across 305 projects, each valued at over one million Omani riyals.

Currently, efforts are underway to analyse and enhance numerous investment opportunities spanning various sectors. Nazdahaer consistently showcases a comprehensive and refined list of investment opportunities on an interactive investment map on the Invest Oman platform," Al Shuaibi



Containers and cargo vessels are seen at the Port of Salalah in Oman, in this file photo.



further stated.

Initiated by the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-Up Unit and supervised by the Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion, the Nazdahaer programme commenced operations in late 2021.

It is strategically centred on three pivotal pillars: the business environment, the investment sectors, and the development of foreign trade. The Programme also oversees various tasks falling within its purview and responsibility.

In a concerted effort to elevate the business environment, the Nazdahaer team worked diligently to align all stakeholders within the investment sector.

Additionally, a paramount objective was to boost Oman's competitiveness on an international scale. Noteworthy among the initiatives undertaken recently was the establishment of the National Negotiation Team, which was given the authority to negotiate and confer incentives and facilities to investors. Furthermore, the Programme played a pivotal role in overseeing the inauguration of the Invest Oman lounge, designed to serve as the unified window for investors both within and outside the Sultanate of Oman.

The team also developed the unified investment incentives

guide for all economic sectors, including free zones, special economic zones, scientific zones, industrial zones, and small and medium enterprises.

This comprehensive guide serves as a valuable resource, providing in-depth information about the diverse investment incentives offered by the Sultanate of Oman to potential investors.

The Nazdahaer team also played a pivotal role in overseeing the establishment of the Fast Track Team in collaboration with the Invest Oman team.

This dynamic team is tasked with thoroughly investigating challenges encountered by investors and designing innovative solutions to address them. Furthermore, the Fast Track Team actively supports the government in making strategic decisions related to these challenges.

On the other hand, Nazdahaer's team of business analysts has successfully devised the National Matrix for Investment. Notably, the Programme has secured an intellectual property certificate for this matrix.

For the first time, this matrix offers a practical analysis to gauge the economic impact of investment projects in the Sultanate of Oman, incorporating international best practices for assessing the investment return on

the Omani economy arising from these projects.

Furthermore, the evaluation process encompasses measuring the employment opportunities generated for Omanis, assessing the impact on the handling capacity of Omani ports, gauging the benefits accruing to small and medium-sized enterprises through project realisation, and determining the extent of local purchases from the Omani market during both the construction and operation phases.

This comprehensive analysis is designed to assist decision-makers in determining the appropriate scale of incentives for investment projects and providing the necessary support for their successful realisation.

Regarding the development of foreign trade, the Nazdahaer team successfully executed the executive programme for The Development of Foreign Trade framework aimed at attaining international performance benchmarks.

A total of 14 initiatives were introduced to optimise the programme's impact across three key pillars: developing exports, substituting imports, and maximising the strategic advantages of the Sultanate of Oman's location to strengthen its position as a prominent re-export hub.

"Recently, we established the Investment Targeting Team, which commenced operations in the current year's third quarter. The team formulated a methodology grounded in economic data and indicators to identify target markets that align with the nature of the economic sectors to be promoted.

Concurrently, they developed a realistic, detailed work plan with a timeframe and specific outputs. Notably, the team successfully conducted over 100 meetings with potential investors, resulting in approximately 25 companies expressing interest in investing in the Sultanate of Oman.

Moreover, discussions with six of these companies have progressed to advanced stages, and it is anticipated that these talks will culminate in the signing of investment agreements in the upcoming stage," stated Khalid al Shuaibi.

He concluded by saying, "We are confident that the initiative is on the right trajectory to attract the necessary investments, thereby boosting comprehensive economic development and achieving the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 within the economic and development pillar.

We extend our gratitude to all entities in the public and private sectors for their collaborative efforts over these past months. We will continue to provide support and facilitate a conducive environment for all stakeholders to collectively achieve the mutual goals of elevating Oman on the global map of major investment destinations."

Pact signed for setting up boatbuilding yard in Oman

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, DEC 12

South Indian-based shipbuilder Samudra Shipyard has signed an MoU with OTE Group of the Sultanate of Oman for the establishment of a boat building yard in Oman with an investment of over RO 1 million.

Separately, Samudra Shipyard has inked a deal with a Muscat-based entrepreneur for the purchase of a houseboat for their

Bell Farms resort in the south Indian state of Kerala.

The two MoUs were signed against the backdrop of a seminar organised by the Indo Gulf Middle East Chamber of Commerce (Oman Chapter), in collaboration with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry's (OCCI) Foreign Investment Committee.

The event was held under the auspices of Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of OCCI, and attended by industry experts,



Guests are pictured during the seminar.

government officials, and business leaders to discuss the challenges and opportunities in the Oman fisheries sector.

The seminar was the first by the newly formed Foreign Investment Committee of OCCI under the chairmanship of Abdul Latheef, the expatriate member on the board of OCCI and held in association with the Indo Gulf Middle East Chamber of Commerce (INMECC) incorporated in India.

Taking part in the proceedings

were Amit Narang, Indian Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, Fuad Jaffar – former Omani Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries; Mohammed Hanish, Principal Secretary (Industries), Kerala Government; Dr N M Sharafudeen, Chairman – INMECC; and Mohiyudeen Mohammed Ali, Chairman - INMECC (Oman Chapter). Davis Kallukaran, founding director of INMECC Oman, also addressed the gathering.

Business backs Britain with £30 billion booster



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our
correspondent based in
the UK.

Some of the world's biggest businesses have committed to invest a total of nearly £30 billion in Britain, the government announced recently ahead of a major investment summit.

World-leading investors are set to plough tens of billions into projects up and down the UK in the country's tech, life sciences and renewable energy sectors, creating over 12,000 new jobs.

It came as over 200 A-list chief executives and investors gathered in London's Hampton Court Palace for the Global Investment Summit. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said this planned investment represented "a huge vote of confidence in the future of the UK economy."

Sunak said: "Global CEO's are right to back Britain — we are making this the best place in the

world to invest and do business."

He added: "From giving businesses the biggest tax cut in history, to our culture of innovation and thriving universities producing some of the finest minds in the world, ours is truly a nation of opportunity."

Major investments secured include £10 billion from Australia's IFM investors on energy and infrastructure schemes and £7 billion from Spain's Iberdrola, which will focus on the UK's electricity networks.

Microsoft has also pledged £2.5 billion to build crucial artificial intelligence (AI) infrastructure, which will bring more next-generation AI data centres and thousands of graphic processing units to the UK.

Switzerland's Partners Group, Germany's BioNTech, the US based Ellison Institute, and the Netherlands' Yondr are all also

planning to invest between £1 billion to £2.5 billion in the UK, the government said.

David Neal, IFM CEO said: "Our presence in the UK continues to grow and we look forward to working closely with the government to drive investment into large-scale infrastructure and energy transition projects across equity and debt funding."

The capital pledged is triple the amount secured at the last Global Investment Summit in 2021, the government said. It added that the department for Business & Trade is also exploring options for a UK corporate re-domiciliation regime to make it easier for foreign companies to relocate to the UK in a bid to spur further investment.

Notable business chiefs interested in attending included Stephen Schwarzman from Blackstone, Amanda Blanc from Aviva, David Soloman from

Goldman Sachs and Jamie Dimon at JP Morgan. Chase Barclays, HSBC and Lloyds Bank are principal partners of the event.

The Bank of England is likely to give the UK economy a "modest" upgrade following the impact of the autumn statement, a leading analyst predicted.

In the fiscal event last month, Chancellor Jeremy Hunt unveiled a fiscal loosening worth £18 billion, the majority of which came from tax cuts.

In a surprise move, Hunt cut the rate of national insurance by two percentage points and also made the full expensing of capital investment permanent. Sanjay Raja, chief UK economist at Deutsche Bank, said the MPC will see a "meaningful upgrade to their government spending assumptions, especially in 2024".

"This will result in a modest upgrade to the Bank's growth

projections (particularly for 2024), all things equal," he added.

The Bank predicts almost zero-growth over the next two years, while, despite hefty downgrades, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) expects the UK to grow 0.7 per cent in 2024 before picking up to 1.4 per cent in 2025.

Focusing specifically on the measures announced by Hunt last month, the fiscal watchdog forecast a "modest boost" to output of 0.3 per cent in five years time.

Richard Hughes, chair of the OBR, said: "Although 0.3 per cent doesn't sound very much it is one of the biggest growth upgrades we have ever done for policy in our forecasts."

Raja said the Statement had "raised the bar for HI-24 rate cuts" while analysts at Capital Economics expected the government's fiscal policy to push the first rate cut back even further.

COP28 plan to triple renewables is doable, but not easy

SARAH MCFARLANE &
SUSANNA TWIDALE

More than 100 countries at the COP28 climate summit in Dubai have agreed to triple renewable energy capacity by 2030 — one of the least controversial commitments floated at the conference.

But they have given little detail on how they can make an industry running flat out go that much faster.

"It is realistic, but there are elements that need to be solved; permitting, leases, grid connections," Anders Opedal, chief executive of Norway's Equinor, a major renewable energy developer.

Renewable energy is key to meeting the 2015 Paris climate agreement to limit global warming. And while renewables are already expanding fast, this latest goal would require solar and wind power deployments to speed up a lot. The tripling target would bring global renewable energy capacity to at least 11,000 gigawatts (GW) in just six years - more than 20 per cent higher than current projections from BloombergNEF of around 9,000 GW by that time.

That would mean pumping up investment in renewables, which the International Energy Agency (IEA) says hit \$600 billion globally last year, at a time some investors are retreating due to higher borrowing costs.

But the problems extend far beyond that.

Across the renewables industry, there are signs of strain. Supplies are short of everything from wind turbines to transformers. There is a labour shortage. The cost of wind and solar projects has spiralled up. And local opposition to big energy projects has slowed layered bureaucracy with years-long processes to get permits.

Developers also face long delays getting connected to the grid. And new high-voltage transmission lines to ease that bottleneck can take a decade or

more to plan, permit and build, making the 2030 target more challenging.

"I don't see clear signs that we are ready to overcome the barriers we have identified," said Francesco La Camera, Director-General of the International Renewable Energy Agency.

On the upside, the industry has regularly exceeded historical growth forecasts and there is more capital and more government support focused on it than ever before.

A record 500 GW of renewable capacity is expected to be added globally in 2023, according to think-tank Ember, up from 300 GW in 2022, with 12 countries set to exceed national targets, it said.

Ember said global renewable capacity would need a sustained growth rate of 17 per cent annually to triple by 2030, a pace it has already been posting since 2016. Financing the growth is a huge challenge.

Investment in renewables needs to more than double to over \$1.2 trillion annually by 2030, to have tripled capacity and be on a path to net-zero emissions for 2050, according to the IEA.

Infrastructure investors who helped catalyse the rapid expansion of solar and wind globally have tightened purse strings because of higher interest rates, making it harder to finance and sell projects.

Infrastructure funds raised \$29 billion in the first nine months of the year, a precipitous decline from the \$128 billion raised over the same period a year ago, according to data provided to Reuters by research firm Prequin.

Fabian Pötter, managing partner of 51 North Capital GmbH, which acts as a broker matching up investors with infrastructure funds, said he believed investment in the sector was now being left mainly to utilities. The drop in infrastructure fundraising comes at a time when that cash is needed to build the networks to connect new projects to the grid. — Reuters

Opportunities and considerations for AI adoption in banking



HUSSAIN AL YAFAI

The writer is CEO and Head of Corporate, Commercial and Institutional Banking, Standard Chartered Oman

Revolutionised by the rapid growth and ubiquitous nature of the digital economy, the banking sector is embracing a new era of generative artificial intelligence (AI) systems built around large language models (LLMs).

Their application in financial services is transformative, redefining customer interactions and streamlining operational processes.

Based on algorithms, LLMs process natural language inputs — as is the case with platforms such as ChatGPT or Google's Bard. Trained on trillions of word combinations, LLM systems can learn and generate text.

They can also participate in two-way conversations with humans, making it possible for banks that use them to deploy generative AI solutions to answer questions, recommend services and advise on how their customers can manage their financial affairs.

Redefining the banking experience

The ability of LLM systems to engage directly with customers in two-way dialogue represents a paradigm shift in the customer experience. The core outcome is hyper-personalisation. By merging customer data with generative AI systems, banks now have the ability to create a bespoke experience in real time that reflects the customer's unique needs, preferences, and behaviours.

For corporate and commercial banking clients, this means being



(Image for illustration only)

DESPITE THE OVERWHELMINGLY POSITIVE POTENTIAL, GENERATIVE AI PRESENTS BANKS, BUSINESSES, AND POLICYMAKERS WITH SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES.

able to access tailored financial services that meet.

Despite the overwhelmingly positive potential, generative AI presents banks, businesses, and policymakers with significant challenges. With very little effort, cybercriminals can use generative AI to create highly convincing scams — including credible text, images, and deep fake audio to fake a customer's voice.

The potential for cybercriminals is vast — since the fourth quarter of 2022, there has been a 1,265 per cent increase in malicious phishing e-mails.

Security and governance

Generative AI can also be used to damage an organisation's reputation or operations and be used for nefarious purposes such as unjust bias or the infringement of copyrights and intellectual property.

For banks, generative AI also complicates the potential for data leaks because LLM systems are designed to ingest, learn, repurpose, and regurgitate data.

This raises questions about data handling and regulatory compliance, which governs the storage and processing of data.

Banks will also be cognisant of the risks attached to using public AI platforms such as

ChatGPT. Trained using publicly available data, such platforms are inherently more vulnerable to inaccuracies and could also be used to train models used by competitors.

This further raises the potential for data exposure.

To mitigate risks associated with LLM systems, banks must take a multi-pronged approach to ensure maximum security, regulatory compliance, and good governance. Implementing a 'human-in-the-loop' approach for outcome validation introduces human oversight.

This means that banks can ensure regulatory compliance, ethical standards, and data accuracy. It also makes it possible for banks to ensure that generative AI outcomes are in alignment with the organisation's values, ethics, and sustainability principles.

Managers should also incorporate LLM risk into their overall environment, social and governance (ESG) standards, risk management frameworks and reporting protocols.

Striking a balance

A bank's approach to generative AI risk mitigation should also include industry collaboration with peers and thought leaders, as well as strategic partnerships with

fintech innovators and proactive participation across the fintech ecosystem. By working with peers, banks can share best practices for data handling and security, collaborate in contributing to the development of standards and pool their respective resources.

Furthermore, all banks should embrace regulatory engagement as a fundamental basis for AI digital compliance and risk management.

Internal processes should also integrate best practices so that employees are trained and informed on how to use and navigate AI. At Standard Chartered, responsible AI (RAI) governance principles are followed to ensure that AI-related processes are reviewed and approved by the bank's RAI Council.

Standard Chartered also ensures that all new technologies follow the bank's technology onboarding processes and comply with relevant standards and controls.

Openness, dialogue, and the sharing of experiences are critical for banks as they strive to strike a balance between innovation and responsibility. All players in the banking sector must work to usher in a secure and client-focused future within the evolving realm of generative AI — a trend that Standard Chartered is committed to and very proud to champion.

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m.alrahdi86@yahoo.com

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ali.almashari@omandaily.om

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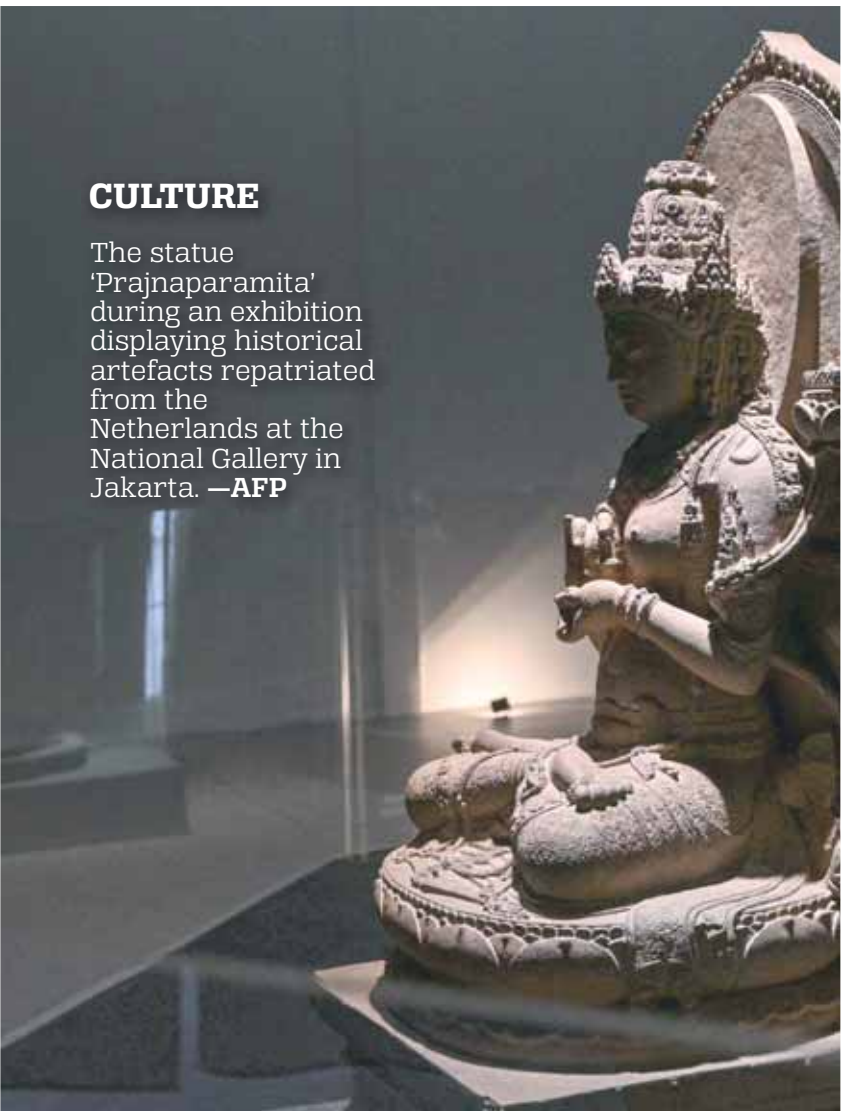
OPERA

French actor and director Louis Garrel arrives at the Teatro alla Scala prior the gala opening of the Scala Opera House new season. —AFP



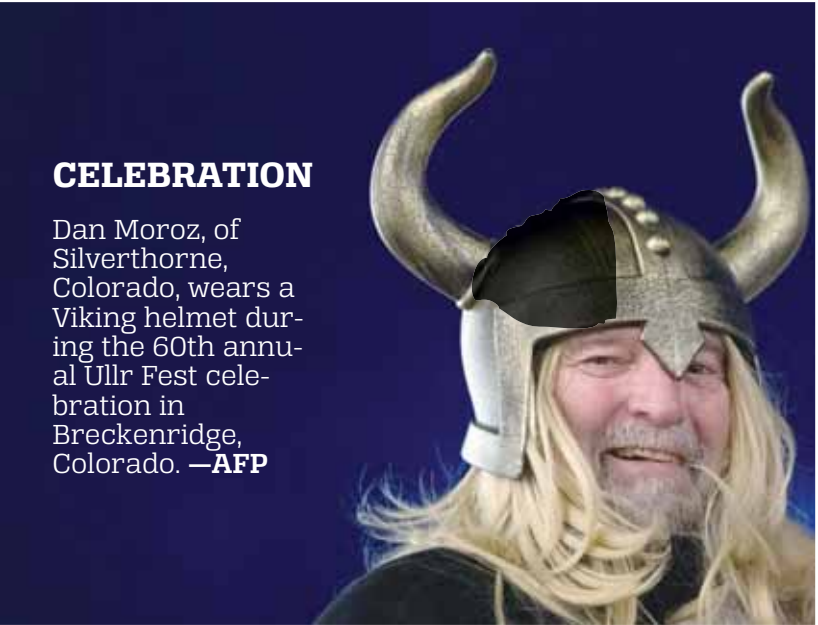
ENTERTAINMENT

South African singer and songwriter Zahara performs at the Cape Town International Jazz Festival in Cape Town. —AFP



CULTURE

The statue 'Prajnaparamita' during an exhibition displaying historical artefacts repatriated from the Netherlands at the National Gallery in Jakarta. —AFP



CELEBRATION

Dan Moroz, of Silverthorne, Colorado, wears a Viking helmet during the 60th annual Ullr Fest celebration in Breckenridge, Colorado. —AFP



TRAVEL TALES

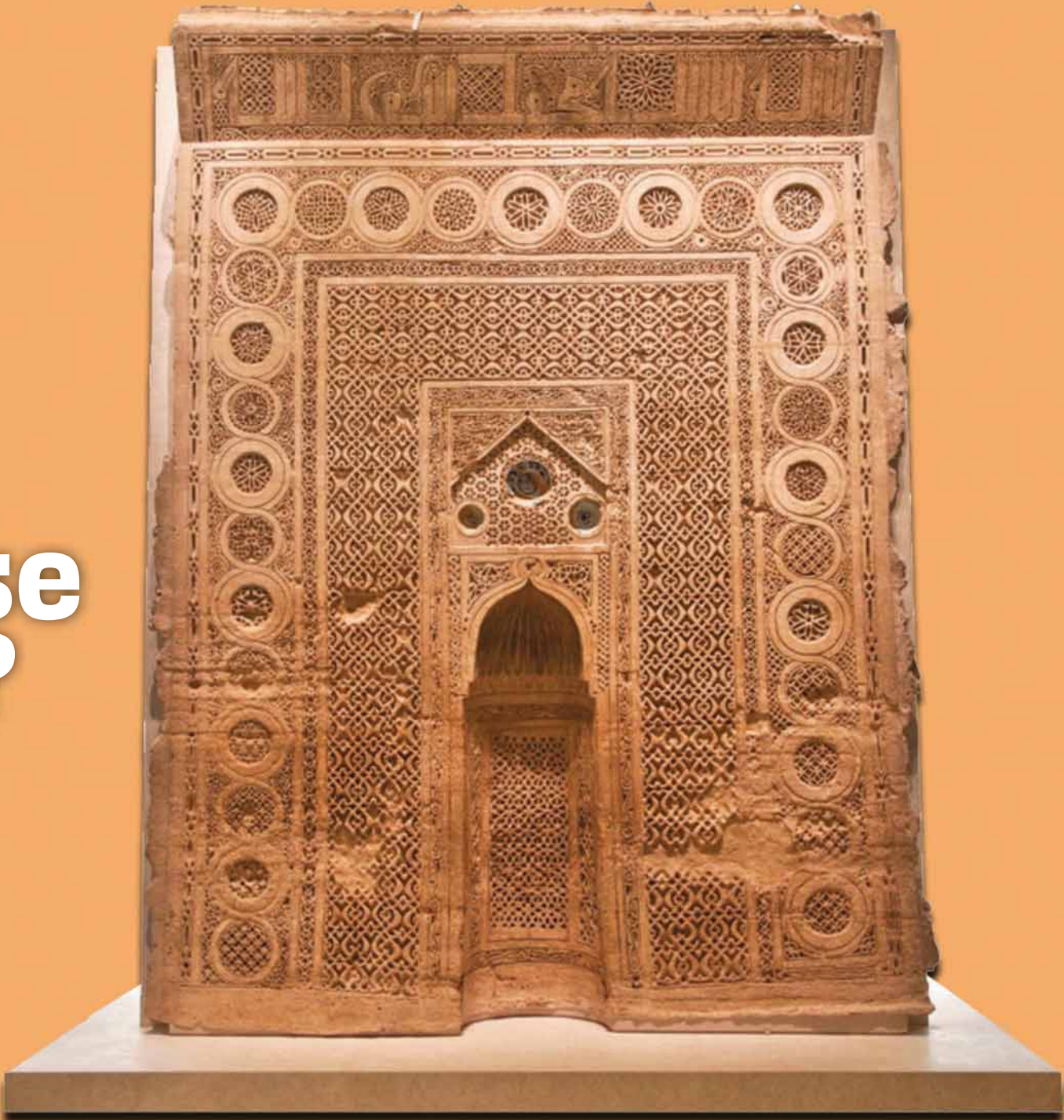
Migrants watch the sunset near the US-Mexico border fence in Jacumba, California. Hundreds of migrants who cross into the United States each day are being herded into open-air camps. —AFP

art & life

WEDNESDAY | DECEMBER 13, 2023 | JUMADA AL ULA 29, 1445 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om

Why are some old Omani mosques decorated with Chinese porcelains?

Sixteenth-century saw a surge in mihrab adornment with Chinese ceramics, revealing strong Oman-China ties. The integration and subsequent decline of Chinese porcelain in Omani designs reflect a blend of cultural exchange, trade dynamics, and cultural transitions.... **P20**



CULTURE

Swiss village set to vote to keep cowbells ringing

COWS GRAZING ON LUSH pastures with ornate metal bells gently tinkling around their necks may be one of the ultimate symbols of Switzerland, but not everyone is enchanted by such traditional scenes. In the village of Aarwangen in central Switzerland, a complaint was filed earlier this year over the noise levels from a herd of around 15 cows grazing overnight on a field next to a residential area. Two couples in rental apartments overlooking the field asked authorities to inter-

vene to make the farmer remove the bells at night. The reaction was swift and fierce, with overwhelming demands for a local vote to protect the traditional use of bells. "My first reaction when I heard about the complaint was one of surprise," Aarwangen's Mayor Niklaus Lundsgaard-Hansen, who lives near the field in question, said. "I wasn't aware that cows made a lot of noise, but I have learned that they can disturb some people." He was even more surprised at the massive response. Petitioners needed to gather backing from just 10 per cent of those eligible to vote in the village of 4,800 people — about 380 signatures — to push the issue to a vote under Switzerland's direct democracy system. Instead, they showed up with 1,099 signatures for the "Bell Initiative", aimed at maintaining the right of farmers to use cowbells at all hours. "That's enormous," Lundsgaard-Hansen said. The initiative was officially presented at a municipal assembly on Monday evening, and the village decided it should be put to



a popular vote that is expected to take place in June. The backing was "overwhelming", Andreas Baumann, a neurologist who spearheaded the initiative, said, adding that only four of the 166 people present at the meeting had opposed moving ahead with a vote.

ABOUT TRADITION

Cowbells were once indispensable for keeping track of herds grazing on Alpine pastures, and while their usefulness has waned with the emergence of GPS trackers, they remain a powerful symbol of idyllic Swiss rural life. Last week, rituals related to Alpine farming, including driving cattle up to high mountain pastures for the summer wearing the decorative bells, were added to UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list. But with many urbanites seeking tranquil havens in the countryside, often within commuter distance from cities and towns, the charm of cowbells sometimes

wears thin. A growing number of complaints have been lodged in recent years over noise levels from cowbells. There have also been protests about churches ringing out the time every 15 minutes, night and day, as is typical in many Swiss communities — something the "Bell Initiative" also aims to defend. Such complaints frequently spark heated reactions in defence of traditions feared under attack in Switzerland — a country of high immigration where foreigners make up a quarter of the population. "It's about our tradition," Baumann said. "Do we want to preserve what our ancestors created, or do we just put that into a museum?" "The bells are in the DNA of Swiss people, and here in Aarwangen we want to preserve that." Set on the banks of the Aare river against a backdrop of snow-covered mountains, Aarwangen counts 19 working farms, according to Lundsgaard-Hansen. But the village, half an hour's drive from Bern and about an hour to both Zurich and Basel, "is not really a farming community", he said. — **AFP**

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



RO 18,000 up for grabs at the rebranded Qade Film Festival

BY KHALID AL BALUSHI
@khalid_albalushi94

IN AN EXCITING turn of events, formerly OMQ Production, which has rebranded to Qade Film Festival, announced that OMR 18,000 prize money is up for grabs for the participants in this year's competition.

Addressing the rebrand of the film festival, organisers explained that the departure from its former name to embrace the Qade Film Festival name is to establish the festival's independence and create a strong identity.

The choice of "Qade" is rooted in one of Oman's ancient names, "the Land of Qade," as explained by Abdulmalik al Yaqoubi, a member of the festival's management. He explained, "The name has historical significance, dating back to the seventh century in the Oman Peninsula, as documented in Assyrian records discovered in the Temple of Ishtar in Nineveh."

In collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and through a strategic partnership with OQ, the festival's current edition is scheduled to run for four days, from February 1 to 4, 2024. The event will take place at the Oman Across Ages Museum and follows the success of the previous edition. The festival aims to expand job opportunities and enhance the diverse skills of creative youth.

Sara al Shaibani, a festival management member, shared, "The festival



marks a tribute to the late Ahmed al Abadi, Oman Al Maani, and Mohammed al Nahdi, who worked for the institution and passed away during significant work assignments." Revealing key details, the organising committee shared that the film festival received 68 submissions, but only 25 of which will be included in the initial evaluation to qualify for the competition. Five jury members will participate in judging the films. The judging panel includes Saudi director Abdul Rahman Sundakji, Palestinian-Swedish film director and producer of the Malmo Arab Film Festival Mohammed Qiblawi, Saudi director Ayman Jamal, Omani videographer and director Ahmed al Muqbali, and Omani film director

Mohammed al Harthy.

The festival has opened its scope to various film genres, including documentary, promotional, cinematic films, and other kinds of film with a total prize value of 18,000 Omani riyals. The awards will be distributed among three major categories for the best film and 12 individual awards for the best film idea, director, cinematographer, actor, actress, visual effects artist, and sound engineer, among others.

The festival features notable events such as "The Production House," where professionals from diverse specialisations in the artistic and cinematic fields converge to serve filmmakers under one roof. It serves as a hub for exchanging skills, showcasing

production and distribution services, and offering opportunities for film funding. The festival also includes the "Red Carpet Walk" celebration and screenings of participating and exclusive films, accompanied by workshops and seminars conducted by prominent Arab film-makers.

Khalid al Abri, representing the festival's management, expressed the festival's aspiration to be a platform for aspiring film-makers, offering examples of their work. He highlighted the potential for today's amateurs to become professionals in the future, contributing to the growth of cinema in Oman. Al Abri anticipates that this initiative will lead to diverse and successful future endeavours.

LIFESTYLE

Jordan's mission to save its ancient olive trees

EVERY MORNING, Jordanian farmer Ali Saleh Atta swallows two cloves of garlic with a cup of olive oil before heading out to check on his ancient olive trees.

"These trees represent the history of Jordan," said the 84-year-old, looking at the 2,000-year-old trees whose enormous gnarled trunks hoist up branches with delicate, pale green leaves.

The trees are a beloved national symbol, but they are also under threat from urban sprawl, illegal logging for firewood and uprooting to the homes and gardens of the wealthy for decoration.

The land of Atta, a father of 10, is in Al-Hashimiyya, a wooded area about 70 kilometres (45 miles) northwest of Amman.

"I have given my children and grandchildren a written will that after my death, you preserve



them and (live) from what they produce," he said.

Jordan is the tenth-largest producer of olives globally, according to the World Olive Council.

Its many ancient trees that have survived thousands of years are an integral part of the country's identity and culture.

Across many regions, "you can hardly visit a house ... without finding an olive tree in every garden," said Nizar Haddad, director general of the National Agricultural Research Center.

"We were raised from childhood on this culture."

But today, he said, the trees' beauty has put them in danger.

"Some hotels, villas, businessmen and companies like to add a touch to their institutions' deco-

ration, so they buy such trees and transport them" away, he said.

The trees often do not survive the move, said Haddad, adding that new laws aim to protect them.

"New Jordanian legislation protects these trees from being uprooted or removed, and there is coordination between the Ministry of Interior, our centre and the police to prevent transport operations except in very exceptional cases."

NATIONAL TREASURE

Jordan has 11 million olive trees in groves that make up 20 per cent of all cultivated land in the country.

They produce 50,000 tons of olives and 25,000 tons of olive oil annually, contributing 120 million



Jordanian dinars (\$169 million) to the economy.

Haddad noted that the olive tree has symbolic meaning for both Muslim and Christian Jordanians, saying they are mentioned in the Koran and "Jesus Christ spent his last hours praying on the Mount of Olives".

"These trees must be preserved so that they can remain a source of inspiration for the community, especially since they are the type capable of adapting to all



the environmental challenges facing not only our region, but the world."

The tree variety, commonly known as Roman or Mehras, should be preserved as a "national treasure", said Amer Gharaibeh, head of the Mehras Cooperative Society.

"Here you can see the oldest olive trees... they have been here since the Romans ruled this region, before Muslims controlled it," he said.

Research has shown that the Mehras has a common ancestor



with cultivated olives in Italy, Cyprus and Spain.

Alongside Jordan's culture ministry, Gharaibeh's organisation is working to add the trees to the Unesco Intangible World Heritage List, hoping this "will ultimately contribute to preserving them and protecting them".

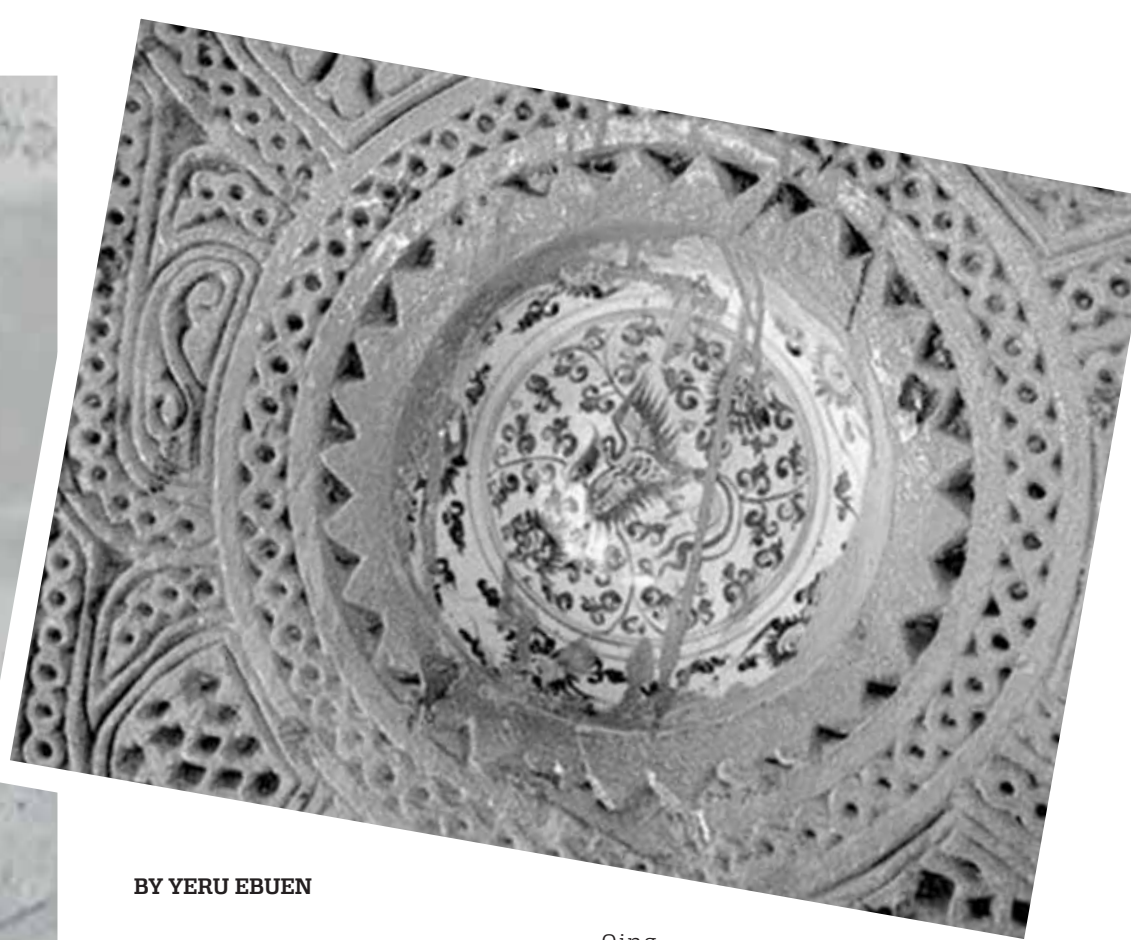
Jordan is working on a plan to engage the public with the trees by placing a QR code on every bottle of olive oil produced.

It lists the tree's location, the name of its owner, its history, the quality of the oil and the age of the tree, said Haddad, whose organisation is working on the project.

"We will not only sell olive oil," he said, "but we spread a relevant story through which we can fully market our country". — AFP

Why are some old Omani mosques decorated with Chinese porcelains?

The integration of Chinese porcelain into Omani architectural designs and its subsequent decline serve as a testament to the intricate interplay between cultural exchange, trade dynamics, and religious shifts in the historical fabric of Oman's heritage.



BY YERU EBUEN

For over 3000 years, China has been a renowned producer of ceramics, its trade expanding notably during the Han dynasty, especially from the 1st century AD onwards. The evolution of Chinese ceramics, particularly the advent of high-temperature-fired porcelains made from fine kaolinite clays around AD 600, marked a significant turning point in export history. By the 7th century, these sought-after objects were being traded in the Arab and Middle Eastern regions.

The infusion of Chinese porcelain into Omani mosques, particularly within the prayer niches known as mihrabs, represents a unique and captivating artistic tradition. While the practice of

Qing dynasty Dehua blue and white dating from AD 1650-1750. These findings coincide with a significant increase in Chinese exports and mark a distinct shift in the cultural landscape of Oman during that era.

The means of arrival of these Chinese porcelain objects in Oman remains a subject of inquiry. Were they brought in by Omani traders active in the Indian and southeast Asian coasts, dealing in high-value goods like horses, pearls, and incense? Or did the Portuguese introduce them to facilitate trade in Oman's interior, utilising celain as a substitute for the silver required for Chinese markets?

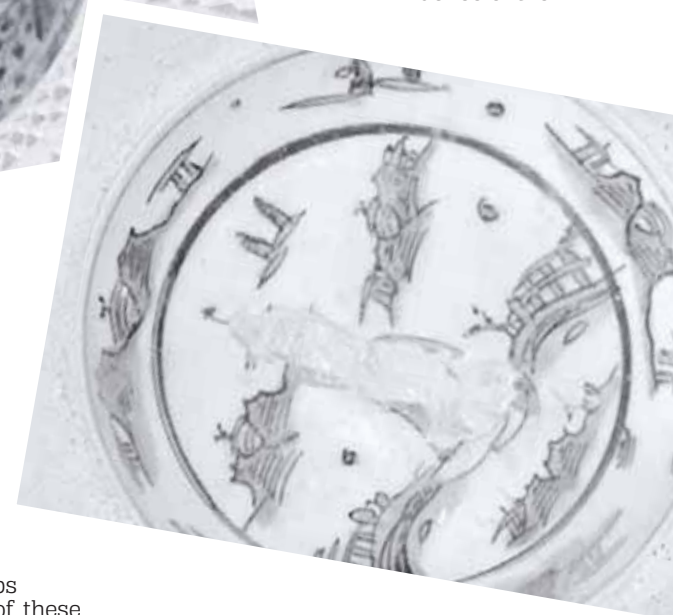
The majority of porcelain surface findings in Oman date back approximately to the sixteenth/seventeenth century, continuing into the nineteenth century, suggesting a gradual transformation in the region's politico-religious climate. However, the elaborate mihrab decorations ceased in the mid-nineteenth century, seemingly correlating with the growing influence of the



adorning mihrabs with ceramic dishes is not exclusive to Oman, the rapid proliferation of this artistic expression throughout the Omani interior in the sixteenth century holds immense significance.

Today, when you visit some sites in Izki, Manah, and Sinaw, you will still find these ornate Chinese porcelains adorning the mihrabs of some old mosques. Some of these ceramics also found their way to museums and speak of the strong relationship that ancient Oman shared with China.

During the sixteenth century, a resurgence in the highly elaborate design of decorating mihrabs emerged,



Wahhabi movement in peninsular Arabia.

As the Wahhabis extended their influence, Ibadi mosques, like Sulayf, started showing indications of this shift, particularly through the addition of projecting mihrabs. This transfor-



reminiscent of Buyid/Seljuq antecedents and dating back to the thirteenth century. An exceptional example exists in Nizwā, dating back to AD 1252, showcasing a heavily stuccoed mihrab in this distinctive style.

This decorative revival, continuing into the early-nineteenth century in specific regions, coincided with the increasing insertion of Chinese porcelain bowls and dishes into the stuccoed framework. The inception of this decorative tradition traces back to the early sixteenth century, notably beginning with Masjid Al Kalī in Manah in AD 1503-1504.

During this period, coinciding with Portuguese control over the Arabian coast and their dominance in long-distance trade within the Indian Ocean, questions arose regarding the influence of this newfound presence on the influx of Chinese porcelain into Oman. The Ming administration's efforts to regulate foreign trade emphasised the use of silks, porcelains, and lacquerwares by Chinese traders, evident in the quantity of Chinese porcelain found at coastal sites such as Suhār.

Surface findings from Manah and Sināw showcased consistency, with chemical analysis pinpointing Ming dynasty wares from Zhangzhou and Jingdezhen blue and white ceramics in Manah, and Zhangzhou blue and white in Sināw, predominantly from the period around AD 1550-1650. Similarly, a discovery from Izki was identified as

mation coincided with the decline in the ornate mihrab decorations that previously included Chinese porcelain, marking a fascinating convergence of historical and religious influences in Omani architecture.



The integration of Chinese porcelain into Omani architectural designs and its subsequent decline serve as a testament to the intricate interplay between cultural exchange, trade dynamics, and religious shifts in the historical fabric of Oman's heritage.

Taken from the studies titled "Chinese porcelains and the decorations of Omani mihrabs" by authors Martin S Goffriller, Ma Hongjiao, Soumyen Bandyopadhyay and Julian Henderson