

H M COMMENDS OMAN'S PROGRESS



Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik presided over a meeting of the Council of Ministers at Al Barakah Palace on Tuesday.

At the outset of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan gave thanks and praise to the Almighty Allah for the bounties of security and stability that He has bestowed on Oman and its people. He prayed to the Almighty to perpetuate these bounties and blessings on all citizens and residents on Oman's lands, wishing all good health and wellbeing.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan reviewed domestic conditions. He commended the accomplishments made during the past year (2023) and expressed his satisfaction with the continuous improvement in financial, economic and social performance indicators. He stressed the importance of all government departments keeping up efforts to upgrade performance.

As part of his keenness to follow up the evaluation of government institutions' performance in 2023, His Majesty the Sultan took note of an uptick in performance that promises the realisation of goals, visions and aspirations in tune with developments.

His Majesty underscored the significance of the authorities improving their assessment of all indicators during this year (2024) and studying the areas of strength and weakness, with the primary aim of determining the best ways to address potential

- Service fees for residential and non-residential water connections to be reduced
- Directives to develop Al Jabal Al Abyad area and Wakan village
- National Policy for Local Content (2024-2030) approved to develop a national system for regulating and monitoring local content in all sectors
- National Product Loyalty Programme approved to promote national products
- National Centre for Statistics and Information praised for its role in meeting the state's needs for statistics and information

challenges.

His Majesty the Sultan commended the efforts made by government institutions in their efforts to perform the tasks entrusted to them, notably the units that received 'high' and 'excellent' performance evaluation.

His Majesty the Sultan also praised the role of the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) in meeting the state's needs for statistics and information. He laid emphasis on government departments using the data provided by NCSI as a springboard for planning, decision-making, evaluating government programmes and projects and measuring the impact of policies and plans to determine the degree of their effectiveness and gauge progress in achieving the desired goals.

Regarding implementation of the provisions of the social protection scheme in 2024, His Majesty the Sultan stressed the importance of monitoring the system's performance and all its programmes. He gave directives to evaluate its performance and accommodating social and economic developments, with special emphasis on further studying the needs of citizens, notably the segments that rely on the social protection system.

The Council of Ministers had directed the authorities concerned to prepare a national policy for local content with the aim of reducing imports and increasing exports.

Continued on Page 04



Wise guidance.  
Renewed renaissance.

Congratulations to  
**His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**  
on the occasion of the anniversary of His Majesty's  
accession. Guided by his Majesty's wise leadership,  
we pledge to the progress of this renewed renaissance.



We extend our sincere congratulations and best wishes to **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik** may God protect him, on the anniversary of his accession to the leadership and reins of power of the country. May the God Almighty grant His Majesty robust health and well-being, and may Oman and its people experience continued prosperity and growth under his wise leadership



# ACCESSION DAY ANNIVERSARY

Oxy is pleased to extend its sincere congratulations and best wishes to His Majesty **Sultan Haitham bin Tarik** on the 4th anniversary of His Majesty's Accession to the Throne

We reaffirm our commitment to supporting Oman under His Majesty's strong leadership as we celebrate the Sultanate's continued prosperity.



ZERO IN™

H M CONFERS ROYAL COMMENDATION ON EX-MINISTER ALAWI



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik conferred the Order of Royal Commendation – First Class on retired minister Mohammed bin Ali al Alawi in appreciation of the latter’s sincere efforts in performing his national duty throughout his tenure. The ceremony took place at Al Barakah Palace on Tuesday  
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H M MEETS GERMAN VICE-CHANCELLOR



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave an audience to Dr Robert Habeck, Vice-Chancellor and Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Climate Action of the Federal Republic of Germany, on Tuesday. Their meeting dealt with the friendly relations and means of consolidating cooperation in various areas to serve the interests of both the Omani and German peoples. His Majesty the Sultan and the guest also exchanged views on a number of issues of common concern  
ONA



H M commends Oman’s progress

Continued from Page 01

The council endorsed the National Policy for Local Content (2024-2030), which aims to develop a national system for regulating and monitoring local content in all sectors. In this context, His Majesty the Sultan stressed the importance of focusing on all target goals, notably generating more employment job opportunities for citizens, localising industries, supporting entrepreneurs, encouraging small and medium enterprises and startups, and cutting down the volume of foreign purchases to secure surplus in the country’s trade balance.

Given the need to promote the culture of local content in society - supporting, introducing and backing the national product - the Council of Ministers gave green light to the National Product Loyalty Programme, which seeks to encourage consumers to opt for Omani products and enhance the growth of local companies.

To further utilise the diversity of the governorates of Oman and its natural attractions, and historical and cultural heritage, the Council of Ministers stressed the importance of governors focusing on tourist sites in their respective governorates

and developing appropriate plans to host tourism activities and events that attract visitors to such sites throughout the year.

To enhance the role of the tourism sector in boosting the gross domestic product - and generating local added value and providing employment opportunities for citizens - His Majesty the Sultan gave directives to set a timeframe for developing the Al Jabal al Abyad area and Wakan village, including providing necessary infrastructure and appropriate conditions for the development of the two areas factoring in their unique features and tourist attractions that qualify them to be major destinations for trips, camping and adventure tourism.

His Majesty the Sultan gave directives to review the roles of the authorities operating in areas of food safety, with a view to integrating these roles to ensure the effectiveness of relevant procedures. This was seen within the context of the Council of Ministers’ attention to food safety and related legislations, and executive procedures aimed at ensuring the production, import, export, circulation and consumption of food products that are safe for the health of consumers.

In pursuance of the general trend regarding the streamlining of procedures, the business environment and the competitiveness of the national economy, the Council of Ministers approved the results of the third phase of the draft government services’ pricing guide. This includes cancelling, reducing, simplifying and merging of 411 fees. The council also approved a proposal submitted by the authorities regarding the reduction of drinking water connection service fees for residential and non-residential units.

Upon his review of relations with Arab and friendly countries, His Majesty the Sultan pointed out that the visits and meetings that took place recently yielded good results. In this context, he stressed the Sultanate of Oman’s keenness to continue cooperating with all in accordance with the principles of the country’s foreign policy.

At the conclusion of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan touched on various aspects of concern to the nation and citizens and gave directives in this regard. He wished all continued success and progress, along with his sincere wishes for Oman and its loyal citizens.  
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Marafiq Company and all its employees express their heartfelt congratulations to  
  
His Majesty Sultan  
**Haitham bin Tarik**  
and to the people of Omani on the occasion of His Majesty’s  
**Accession Day**



نهضة  
بالعطاء  
تتجدد

## Thriving Renewed Renaissance



ونحن نُحيي ذكرى تولي  
جلالتكم مقاليد الحكم في البلاد،  
نعاهدكم بالمضيّ قدماً  
لخدمة سلطنة عُمان وشعبها.

As we commemorate  
Your Majesty's accession, we pledge  
to continue playing our role in  
serving Oman and its people.



# OMAN'S GLOBAL OUTREACH

## His Majesty the Sultan's diplomatic endeavours pave way for strengthened ties

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's state visits to the UAE, Egypt, Iran, Singapore and India symbolise Oman's commitment to fostering strategic partnerships globally. Experts view these visits as crucial steps towards enhancing economic, commercial and scientific cooperation.

Dr Ahmed Said al Jahwari, a legal consultant, emphasised the significance of these visits in establishing international cooperation, deeply rooted and evolving over centuries. These diplomatic engagements are strategically aligned to bolster economic ties, with a focus on the energy, trade and investment sectors. Such efforts are

seen as congruent with the economic interests and visions of these nations.

"These countries' policies have played a pivotal role in diversifying cooperation areas and exploring new opportunities, aligning with the economic interests and visions of their leaders," Jahwari stated. He highlighted the role of communities from these countries in Oman, serving as cultural and commercial bridges, and reinforcing the harmonious coexistence and mutual respect that define Oman's relations with these nations.

Khamis al Abri, legal advisor and political analyst, described His Majesty the Sultan's visits as turning points in Oman's relations with these countries marked by the signing of numerous agreements in sectors such

as maritime, navigation, investment, trade, industry, clean energy and defence.

"Oman's stability, positive investment climate and progressive credit rating make it an attractive destination for foreign investors, including those visited by H M the Sultan. These visits are not only about strengthening ties but also about joint goals of sustainable economic development," Abri explained.

He also stressed the importance of these visits in building upon historical relations and ushering in a new era of positive development in bilateral ties. The visits symbolise milestones in Oman's diplomatic journey, reinforcing its role as a stable oasis and a hub for cultural and knowledge exchange in the region.

### Diplomatic leap in building bilateral relations

**India visit - December 15, 2023** - In a landmark visit, the first in over 25 years for the Sultan of Oman, His Majesty Sultan Haitham travelled to India on the invitation of President Droupadi Murmu. The visit, marked by a ceremonial welcome in New Delhi, emphasised the enduring partnership between Oman and India, rooted in historical ties and mutual trust



### New era of cooperation

**Egypt visit - May 21, 2023** - His Majesty Sultan Haitham's visit to Egypt, spanning two days, symbolised a commitment to deepening the historical ties between Oman and Egypt. The visit marked a new chapter in bilateral relations, focused on enhancing cooperation and mutual prosperity



### Reinforcing longstanding relations

**Iran visit - May 28, 2023** - Accepting an invitation from President Dr Ebrahim Raisi, His Majesty Sultan Haitham visited Iran, reinforcing the longstanding friendly relations. The visit included drafting a strategic cooperation charter to enhance bilateral ties and discussions on trade, energy, investment and culture. The leaders also committed to regional peace and stability



### Securing regional prosperity and stability

**UAE visit - January 18, 2023** - Participating in a significant meeting in Abu Dhabi, His Majesty Sultan Haitham joined leaders from the GCC states, Jordan and Egypt. Themed 'Prosperity and Stability in the Region,' the meeting emphasised collaborative efforts towards shared aspirations



### Strengthening economic and trade ties

**Singapore visit - December 13, 2023** - Responding to President Tharman Shanmugaratnam's invitation, His Majesty Sultan Haitham visited Singapore, reinforcing the longstanding friendship and mutual cooperation between the two countries. Discussions with President Tharman and Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong focused on enhancing trade and economic collaboration in sectors like aquaculture, food security and transport logistics, while fostering connectivity between startups and SMEs



شركة تنمية نفط عُمان  
Petroleum Development Oman

Warm felicitations to  
**His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**  
and the people of Oman  
on the occasion of the 4<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
of His Majesty's Accession



## *Greetings*

to His Majesty  
**Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**  
and the citizens of Oman on  
Accession Day anniversary  
May the Sultanate grow from strength to strength!



# Art show to celebrate 4th Accession Day

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MCSY) is set to commemorate the fourth anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's accession to the throne with the 111 Fine Arts Exhibition.

Scheduled for January 14 at Rozna Hall in Airport Heights, the exhibition will be held under the auspices of H E Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidi, MCSY Undersecretary.

The exhibition is a tribute to His Majesty the Sultan's accession to the throne, while celebrating the nation's artistic heritage and contemporary creativity.

Ibrahim bin Saif Bani Araba, Assistant Director General of Arts at MCSY, emphasised that the exhibition is integral to Oman's cultural strategy, fostering creativity, development and cultural identity. "It aims to support and showcase talents in the cultural field and enhance artistic and cultural communication between generations of Omani artists."

The exhibition will feature 90 paintings by 25 distinguished artists, including those from the pioneering generation of the Omani fine art movement, which emerged in the 1970s, as well as subsequent generations that represent various artistic trends and schools.

The event promises to be a confluence of traditional and contemporary art forms, reflecting the rich tapestry of Omani



Anwar Sonya's art will be on display in 111 Fine Arts Exhibition



Art by Hafsa al Tamimi



Art by Mohammed Fadel

culture.

Among the notable participants are Anwar Sonya, Hassan Meer, Mohammed al Sayegh, Maryam al Zadjali and Hussain Obaid.

The exhibition will also feature works by Saud al Hunaini, Abdullah al Hunaini, Khamis al Hunaini, Abdel Nasser al Sayegh and Mohammed Fadel, and pay homage to the late artists Ayoub Malang, Muhammad Nizam and Moosa Omar.

# MoCIIP unveils Accession Day sales across Oman

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), in collaboration with Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Consumer Protection Authority, held a press conference on Tuesday to launch 'National Campaign for Discounts and Promotional Offers'.

The campaign will start on January 11 and continue till February 11 to commemorate His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's fourth anniversary of accession to the throne.

The conference was attended by Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of Board of Directors of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), and several senior MoCIIP and Consumer Protection Authority officials.

Details of the national campaign were presented at the conference to enhance partnership between the public and private sectors during the campaign period.

The campaign aims to offer products at affordable prices for all segments of society, while supporting commercial centres increase sales.

The initiative seeks to facilitate collaboration between the public and private sectors to stimulate economic growth and enhance the overall trading environment in the sultanate.

"The national campaign consolidates the role of the private sector as a key partner in the ongoing renaissance witnessed in the sultanate under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan



*The national campaign consolidates the role of the private sector as a key partner in the ongoing renaissance witnessed in the sultanate under the leadership of His Majesty*

FAISAL AL RAWAS

Haitham. It highlights the leading role of the private sector in a competitive economy linked to the global economy, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040," said Rawas.

He stated that the campaign will stimulate shopping activities significantly, reflecting positively on the competitiveness of the business environment in Oman.

The wide coverage of the campaign across all governorates will help boost the economy in all regions through

sustainable growth of private sector businesses.

Mubarak bin Mohammed al Dohani, Director General of Commerce at MoCIIP, informed that the ministry encourages all institutions and entities to participate in this national celebration. "The campaign aims to increase footfall in commercial establishments, providing memorable experiences to consumers."

Hassan bin Jamah bin Ismail al Is'haq, Chairman of Trade and Retail Committee at OCCI, stated that the campaign will run under the slogan 'Oman, a Renewed Renaissance'.

"The emphasis is on offering competitive prices for essential and consumer goods, aiming to provide consumers a variety of purchasing options and enhance market competitiveness."

According to Is'haq, the campaign is an opportunity for the retail sector to increase sales and attract a larger number of consumers through promotional offers and valuable prizes.



The Chairman and members of the Board of Directors of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, members of the boards of directors of its branches across the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, the executive management of the Chamber, and all companies and enterprises of the Omani private sector , are honored to congratulate His Majesty

## Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

-May Allah the Almighty protect him-

On the anniversary of His Majesty's Accession to the Throne May Allah the Almighty protect His Majesty the Sultan, and perpetuate the blessing of peace, security and prosperity for the Sultanate of Oman.



chamber\_oman





Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The sultanate saw the launch of two landmark projects last year - one looking at Oman's past glory while the other focusing on the future - presided over by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.

The Oman Across Ages Museum, inaugurated on March 13 by His Majesty the Sultan, is a celebration of the country's rich history, culture, and economic growth through time - while offering an insight into Oman's tomorrow.

The plan for the Sultan Haitham City, which was unveiled on May 31 under the patronage of His Majesty the Sultan, constitutes a futuristic urban icon, a sustainable treasure gifted by His Majesty to future generations and all segments of the society.

The museum is a cultural and educational landmark for all Omanis taking the visitor on a vast, sweeping journey through time.

It traces the story of Oman from the first settlers of prehistory to the present, spanning different ages, dynasties and civilisations.

Special emphasis has been given on Oman's renaissance since the 1970s, during which the sultanate experienced remarkable economic, technological, political and social progress. This unique journey has been displayed with a series of installations and extensive use of interactive visual and sound presentation devices.

The museum adequately highlights the unique character of the Sultanate of Oman, and introduces its prominent features, its ancient history and its renaissance which is continuously making progress at the local and international levels under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.

Oman Across Ages Museum is located in the wilayat of Manah in the heart of the Governorate of Dakhliyah - 160km from Muscat and 20km from Nizwa.

The museum has created a package to present Oman's transition from its past glories, to the present and into the bright future in modern style using interactive, audio-visual displays.

The purpose of the museum is to spread awareness and strengthen the relationship of Omani youth with their cultural heritage. It encourages them to interact with their past in a way that inspires them to participate in the building and shaping the future of their homeland.

In 2015, His late Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said laid the foundation stone for the Oman Across Ages Museum project.

Today, the project occupies an estimated area of 300,000sqm and its buildings cover more than 66,000sqm.

Its design is inspired by the Al Hajar mountains. It is an architectural wonder that represents the Omani environment, with its unique geographical traits.

The project organisers envisioned that the building should have a creative character - an icon that would represent the Omani Blessed Renaissance through its structure and design.

The museum portrays Omani architecture in a unique modern style, through its technical details, construction features and building materials.

The Oman Across Ages Museum is an environmentally-friendly structure. On its eastern

# REFLECTING PAST, SHAPING FUTURE



side it has a low profile, so that when it receives natural light in the morning the inside is protected from direct sunlight. On its western side, the museum's windows are set in slanted walls so that they can prevent the impact of direct sunlight and reduce the energy that the museum needs for lighting.

Its design replicates the building techniques of castles and ancient buildings - its walls cooling the surrounding hot air thanks to the 130,000sqm of high-quality Omani stone from Dhahirah and North Batinah used to cover the walls of the museum, both inside and out. The waste from those stones has been used in the museum's garden.

The Oman Across Ages Museum houses 310 video exhibits and 1,200 interactive, 2D and 3D screens, map projection technology, as well as 1,300 antique exhibits, 80 replica exhibits, 500 text panels and drawings, 150 display boxes, 61km of fibre optic cables and 21km of audio-video cables.

*Oman Across Ages Museum traces the story of Oman from the first settlers of prehistory to the present, while the Sultan Haitham City constitutes a futuristic urban icon, a sustainable treasure*

Sultan Haitham City

The Sultan Haitham City is the fruitful outcome of the comprehensive transformation approach espoused by the Ministry of Housing and Urban

Planning. It envisages transition into sustainable urban development that benefits thriving communities through the implementation of national strategic projects for urban development in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Sultan Haitham City represents the cornerstone of upcoming projects and a new model for building sustainable cities. It simulates modern life and epitomises the aspirations of young people in Oman.

The city, on an area of 14.8mn square metres, has been designed to reflect sound and sustainable urban planning based on the utilisation of green spaces on an area of 2.9mn square metres.

It targets to house 100,000 people in 20,000 housing units ranging between separate villas, semi-attached villas, townhouses and flats. The housing units will be distributed over 19 integrated residential neighbourhoods, supplied with various facilities and services to meet the needs of the residents. It will have 24 mosques

and a grand mosque.

The city will also have 11 health facilities, including two health centres with capacity to handle up to 20,000 patients; and another set of six health centres with a capacity to serve 10,000 patients.

The city will have a 1,200-bedded referral hospital, a private hospital and a centre to serve elderly people and persons with disability.

There city will have 39 government and private schools offering all levels of education.

The ambition behind this new city is to have 12 international criterions of luxury and welfare - at affordable costs, integrated utilities and sustainable systems. All of these played a role in drawing out the city's masterplan.

The city will have an internal transport network whose routes were carefully designed to provide access to the largest possible number of facilities. The network will be suitable for public and private vehicles to smoothly crisscross the roads from the centre to the periphery.

Enough green areas, shaded corridors and lanes allowing the flow of gentle breeze have been incorporated in the planning so as to give its inhabitants an extra sense of comfort.

The city boasts other features like pedestrian passages and bicycle paths to help diversify the traffic system, healthy lifestyles and sustainability of the environment. These include options for the use of renewable energy and measures for water conservation.

The city's overall configuration enhances interaction and communication among various segments of society that benefit from common spaces and designs of neighbourhoods.

The design of the city's residential quarters also provides privacy with a range of options that combines high and low densities to accommodate all income groups.

The city's design also addresses the issue of climatic change and cater to future developments, with its infrastructure tailored to adapt to the needs of population growth and the cost of maintenance.

The city welcomes all segments of society, with their diverse social and cultural backgrounds. It offers all segments an easy access to its social and recreational facilities, thereby consolidating the bonds of belonging and cultural diversity.

In Sultan Haitham City, strategic locations for community facilities have been carefully selected to allow residents access them with complete ease. The strategy allows residents to jointly use public facilities, such as parking lots, playgrounds and parks, and contributes to achieving optimal use of spaces and amenities in the heart of the metropolis.

The design of the new city's external areas is inspired by the natural surroundings, with options for utilising the natural shade of trees during the daytime, which will be much in harmony with the urban structures. The overall idea is to provide natural outdoor spaces in the vicinity of buildings and well-designed streets.

The city has been designed to raise the quality of life by optimising the use of solar energy as a sustainable source. In this setup, waste energy production systems and wastewater outputs will act as key factors in the protection of natural resources. The outcome will be the control of waste and the recycling of materials.

# H E Aufi meets German minister Habeck, discusses cooperation in green energy

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

H E Salim Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, on Tuesday met with Dr Robert Habeck, Vice Chancellor, Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Climate Action of the Federal Republic of Germany.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and means of boosting co-operation, especially in the fields of energy, hydrogen and combating climate change.

The two sides discussed areas of cooperation in the clean energy field.

This discussion took place within the context of Oman's



investment opportunities, especially in producing green hydrogen.

Oman has the main compo-

nents to produce hydrogen, such as solar energy, wind energy and vast spaces.

The meeting was attended

by H E Muhsin Hamad al Hadhrami, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and Humaid al Maani,

Head of the International Affairs Department and CEOs of OQ, Hydrom Oman and Oman LNG.



**Habeck visits GUtech**  
Dr Robert Habeck visited the German University of Technology (GUtech) on Tuesday as

part of his visit to the sultanate.

Prof Michael Brown, Rector of GUtech, gave a speech in which he introduced the university and its academic role. He also highlighted the academic specialisations and services offered by GUtech to students.

On the sidelines of the visit, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between GUtech and Siemens Company for the enhancement of energy and sustainability within the university campus.

The MoU was signed by Dr Hussain al Salmi, Deputy Rector of GUtech for Administration and Finances and Jamie Hoyzer, CEO of Siemens company in Oman.



## Steering the nation to a brighter future

Congratulations and warm wishes to **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq** and the citizens of Oman on the occasion of the 4<sup>th</sup> Accession Day.

On this momentous occasion, Lulu Group salutes the wisdom and prudent policies initiated by **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq** for making Oman an exemplary model of modernisation and prosperity.

Our wishes also go out to the citizens of this beautiful country for the commitment to the cause. On this historic day, we reaffirm our pledge to take an even more active role in steering the nation to a brighter future.



Where the world comes to shop

حيث يأتي العالم للتسوق

## MoCIIP sets drone standards to boost innovation

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has on Tuesday announced standard specifications and technical requirements for drones to streamline their operations in the sultanate.

Marking a significant step in fostering the country's trade and industry sector, the ministry finalised the specifications to ensure product quality, thereby enhancing the investment environment and boosting innovation in the country.

According to a statement by MoCIIP, the new standards encompass various technical aspects. 'These include testing methods for drones and their electrical power systems, defining configuration and functional requirements, and establishing flight controls for multi-copter drones,' the ministry added.

The specifications also mandate the provision of a flight control system, including a controller, a navigation unit, as

well as a unit for fault diagnosis and management.

The requirements for flight planners and recorders have also been specified under these new guidelines.

The ministry's move comes in the wake of its efforts last year to raise awareness about the importance and potential of these remote-controlled flying robots.

MoCIIP organised a competition focused on drones equipped with advanced artificial intelligence systems last year.

The annual event was complemented by workshops and training courses designed to develop and refine the skills of the participants, highlighting the ministry's commitment to promoting innovation and efficiency in production through the use of drones.

These developments not only underscore Oman's dedication to technological advancement but also reflect its vision to create a competitive, innovative environment that leverages modern technology for economic growth.



## MCSY's 'Youth Ready' skill development programme launched

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth (MCSY) has unveiled details of the ambitious 'Youth Ready' programme, a major skill development initiative chosen for 2024.

Hilal al Siyabi, Director General of Youth in MCSY, said that the 'Youth Ready' programme would be held across five governorates where Outward Bound Oman operates.

These governorates are North Sharqiyah, Dakhliya, Musandam, Al Wusta and Dhahira.

The four-day camp for each governorate promises a distinctive journey through experiential learning to imbibe skills that is expected to have a lasting impact on industry practices.

According to Siyabi, the programme aligns with the Omani National Framework for Future Skills, a strategic move resonating with the commitment of Oman Vision 2040 to sustainable development.

The camp's agenda includes problem-solving activities, group discussions, mountain hiking, and camping, all meticulously designed to immerse participants in a natural environment conducive to learning, led by proficient Omani trainers.

"These camps will help participants develop skills and behaviours for better communication, problem solving, and self-management. They will make participants more aware of the requirements of the labour market," the Director General of Youth added.

# Greetings

to His Majesty  
**Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**  
and the citizens of Oman on  
Accession Day anniversary  
May the Sultanate grow from strength to strength!



**Muscat Pharmacy & Stores LLC**  
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As we commemorate the Anniversary of  
His Majesty's Ascension to the Throne,  
**TRAVELPOINT LLC**  
joyfully extends warmest

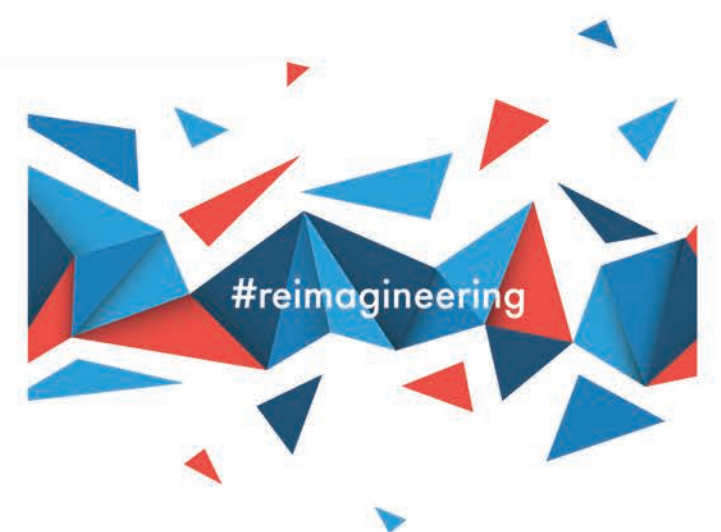
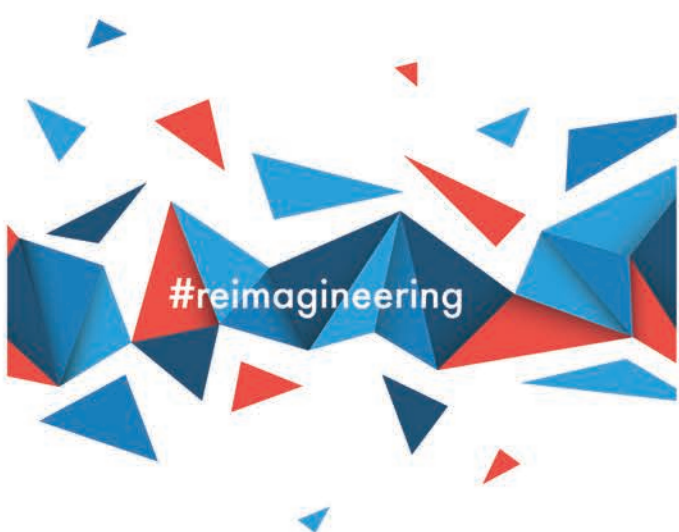
*Congratulations to*  
**HIS MAJESTY**  
**SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK**



Congratulations to  
**His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik**  
and the people of Oman  
on the Fourth  
Anniversary of the  
Accession Day

May Allah bestow  
His blessings  
upon him and  
all the people  
of Oman.

Al Ansari Group,  
management team and  
employees are  
wholeheartedly  
committed to the  
progress of the  
Sultanate and the  
prosperity of its people  
under the wise  
leadership of  
His Majesty  
Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik



PROJECTS PRODUCTS SERVICES FABRICATION

A portrait of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, wearing a white thobe with gold embroidery and a grey ghutra with a red and white pattern. He is holding a silver dagger (khanjar) in his hands. The background is a clear blue sky with light clouds.

**Towards a brighter  
tomorrow**

Our sincere congratulations and warm wishes are extended to

**His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**

– May the Almighty protect and preserve him –  
and the Omani people on the anniversary  
of His Majesty's accession to the throne.

We express our unwavering commitment to steadfastly  
follow under his wise and visionary leadership, working  
towards a brighter future for Oman and its people.

# Greetings

to

**His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**

and the citizens of Oman on

Accession Day anniversary

May the Sultanate grow from strength to strength!



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# Oman achieves remarkable fiscal turnaround

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Oman has successfully achieved a remarkable turnaround in its fiscal situation and notable accomplishments across social and economic sectors, despite global economic challenges over the past three years.

The government's efforts in controlling spending, coupled with measures to enhance spending efficiency and increase non-hydrocarbon revenues, have positively impacted the sultanate's fiscal performance. Fiscal performance during the initial three years of the 10th Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025) has shown remarkable improvement. The 2021 budget figures revealed a reduction in the deficit to approximately RO1.223bn. Subsequently, in 2022, there was a fiscal surplus of about RO1.146bn, surpassing the fig-

ures outlined in the financial framework of the 10th Five-Year Development Plan for the same period.

The preliminary results of the 2023 budget indicate a fiscal surplus of about RO931mn, in contrast to the deficit of RO605mn approved in the 10th Five-Year Development Plan's financial framework for the corresponding period.

The fiscal surplus achieved during 2022 and 2023 allowed for increased social spending and initiatives to stimulate economic growth.

According to H E Sultan bin Salem al Habsi, Minister of Finance, Oman's 2023 budget achieved additional revenue that was redirected to enhance social spending and stimulate economic growth. "This was reflected in the increase in the allocated budget for the 10th Five-Year Development Plan projects from RO5bn to over RO8bn by the end of 2023. Priority was given to projects with a

social dimension, such as those related to education, healthcare, and social housing," H E Habsi said in the 2023 budget statement.

**Public debt decreases**

Oman's government directed a portion of the fiscal surplus during 2022 and 2023 towards reducing public debt and managing financial risks. These efforts improved Oman's credit ratings, helping mitigate the impact of rising global interest rates on the government's loan repayments.

Helped by fiscal reforms and elevated oil prices, Oman's public debt has substantially decreased to 35% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023 from nearly 70% of GDP in 2020 when the dual shock of the pandemic and oil price collapse severely impacted the country's fiscal situation. The sultanate's debt-to-GDP ratio also declined significantly in 2023 compared to 2022 when it stood at 40%, attributed to the government's

*Oman's public debt has substantially decreased to 35% of GDP in 2023 from nearly 70% of GDP in 2020 when the dual shock of the pandemic and oil price collapse severely impacted the country's fiscal situation*

spending restraints and higher-than-budgeted oil prices.

Due to the sudden fall in oil prices since 2014, Oman's general budgets recorded deficits for around eight years until 2021, forcing the country to finance these deficits by borrowing from local and external institutions. As a result, public debt increased to nearly 70% of GDP in 2020.

As part of the government's initiatives of Liability Management Exercise and Public Debt Reduction, the preliminary results of the 2023 budget showcase significant achievements. The government successfully reduced public debt from RO17.6bn in 2022 to RO15.2bn at the end of 2023, effecting a repayment of approximately RO 2.4bn, the Ministry of Finance said in its 2024 budget statement.

'Consequently, the public debt ratio, calculated as a percentage of GDP, declined to 35% at the end of 2023. Additionally, the public debt servicing cost underwent a substantial reduction from the approved budget of RO1.2bn to about RO1.06bn in 2023,' the ministry noted.

The preliminary results of Oman's 2023 budget reveal a substantial surplus of approximately RO931mn, in stark contrast to the initially projected deficit of RO1.3bn. 'Several factors have contributed to this pos-

itive shift, including an upturn in oil prices, the persistent implementation of the government's fiscal consolidation measures, in addition to the reduction in public debt service,' the ministry said.

**Ratings boost**

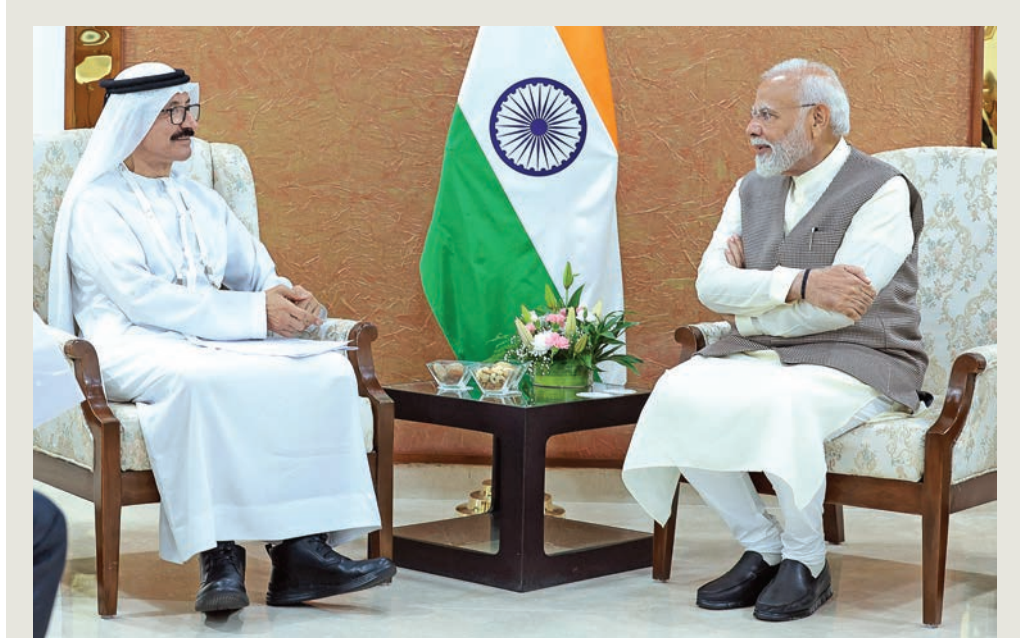
Oman's initiatives to strengthen public finances, reduce public debt, and oversee the lending portfolio, coupled with elevated oil prices, have played a pivotal role in enhancing the state's fiscal performance. Consequently, all major three global credit rating agencies upgraded Oman's sovereign credit ratings during 2022 and 2023, marking a notable reversal from the rating downgrades observed in recent years.

In December 2023, Moody's upgraded Oman's credit rating from Ba2 to Ba1, as the outlook revised from positive to stable. Moody's highlighted the enhanced and effective implementation of fiscal policies,

emphasising the government's resolve to curtail public debt. Moody's expects a reduction in Oman's public debt to around 35% of GDP in the coming three years.

In September 2023, S&P Global Ratings upgraded Oman's credit rating from BB to BB+, with a stable outlook. S&P confirmed that Oman's credit rating could improve further if the government persists in reducing public debt and improving non-oil revenue.

Similarly, in September 2023, Fitch Ratings also upgraded Oman's credit rating from BB to BB+, with a stable outlook. Fitch lauded the government's steadfast commitment to fiscal consolidation measures, even amid the upswing in oil prices. The agency affirmed that Oman's credit rating could ascend further if external public debt as a percentage of GDP continues to decrease, coupled with an improvement in net sovereign foreign assets.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets DP World CEO, Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem on Tuesday (ANI)

## Modi, DP World CEO discuss investment plans in India

**Gandhinagar, India** – Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a meeting with the CEO of UAE's DP World, Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem, in Gandhinagar on Tuesday, where they discussed plans to further bolster investment in India.

In a post on X, PMO said the discussions revolved especially around creating sustainable, green, and energy-efficient ports, and world-class sustainable logistic infrastructure.

After the meeting with the prime minister, Sulayem said his group has invested almost \$2.5bn and is going to invest more in the next three years.

"We have a long history in India we are more committed," Sulayem said.

"As a market and as a trade partner India is respected around the world. We are also discussing specific areas and lands around the world in Africa mainly for Indian entrepreneurs to manufacture."

"Tanzania, Kenya, Senegal, Nigeria, Central Africa, East Africa and this is something we're going to do now encouraging Indian companies to manufacture in the designated area, and these are the main issues we discussed today."

DP World is in India for close to two decades now.

"Our operation and knowledge of the market gives us the courage and the confidence and the policies of prime minister," the CEO said.

Speaking on CEPA agreement and how it benefited the two countries, he said, "India anyway enjoys an amazing relation. After the signing of the CEPA agreement, a lot of products are today going even more to India and more from our country to India."

It would be important to see what fresh investment plans DP World commits here at the Vibrant Gujarat summit.

The Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit was initiated by Narendra Modi in 2003, then chief minister, to put Gujarat on the world map of trade and industry. The tenth edition of the Summit is being held from January 10 to 12, 2024.

ANI

# India-Oman to start next round of FTA discussions from January 16: Report

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The upcoming round of discussions for the proposed free trade agreement (FTA) between India and Oman is set to begin on January 16, with negotiations progressing well, a senior Indian government official said on Tuesday, according to Indian media reports.

Both sides have concluded talks on the text of most chapters for the free trade pact, officially dubbed the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), according to the official.

"The negotiations are progressing well. Two rounds of in-person discussions and numerous inter-session meetings have already taken place. Substantial progress has been achieved on all the chapters covered under the CEPA," the official said, as reported by Business Standard newspaper.

Regarding certain media reports suggesting possible delays in the talks, the Indian official dismissed them, stating that any talk of hindrances or bottlenecks is 'speculative and presumptuous' as the negotiating process is currently underway.

"Currently, both sides are working towards concluding the



*Both sides have concluded talks on the text of most chapters for the free trade agreement, officially dubbed the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), according to the official*

negotiations with the aim of delivering a mutually beneficial agreement contributing to the welfare and development of the people of the two countries,' said the official.

As per earlier media reports on December 27, a senior Indian government official had mentioned that negotiations for the

proposed free trade pact between India and Oman are progressing rapidly, and the agreement is likely to be signed in January 2024.

In December, India and Oman concluded the second round of talks in Muscat for the CEPA. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Indian Prime Minister Naren-

dra Modi have given strong support to concluding the agreement as early as possible.

Oman is India's third-largest export destination among the GCC countries. The free trade deal is expected to boost bilateral trade between India and Oman. India has already implemented a trade agreement with the UAE in May 2022.

According to a report from the Global Trade Research Initiative, Indian goods worth \$3.7bn, such as gasoline, iron and steel, electronics, and machinery, will receive a significant boost in Oman once both sides reach a comprehensive free trade agreement.

The Lexus ES has been one of the brand's most popular luxury sedan owing to characteristics like design, interior detailing, engineering, features and more.

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The ES is equipped with two powertrain options. A 3.5-litre 24-valve V6 engine that produces 298 hp and 36.3kg-m of torque. And a high-efficiency 2.5-litre 16-valve DOHC engine that produces 204hp and 24.8kg-m of torque. The two powertrains on ES350 and ES250 are paired to an eight-speed direct-shift automatic transmission.

The ES Hybrid is equipped with Lexus' pioneering hybrid electric technology. It has a hybrid battery that is available with



eight years/160,000km warranty and is automatically charged either by petrol engine or during braking or decelerating, eliminating the need to plug in a power cord. Furthermore, it hosts number of advanced technologies, yet drives like any other conventional car and does not require special fuel. The E330h offers an impressive 24.1km per litre mileage.

For those interested in lifting driving thrill a few notches up have the choice of the ES350 F Sport version, gives a new dimension to how thrilling driving experiences can be.

In addition to a thrilling exterior that highlights its bold and aggressive personality, the Lexus ES350 F SPORT has features such as a retuned suspension, 19-inch wheels and tyres, and unique aluminium interior trim that gives the machine a more

dynamic look and feel.

The ES is equipped with an exquisite interior that invites the driver and passengers to enjoy a range of advanced features offering a refined cabin experience. They include Dual Zone Auto Air-conditioning, Voice Recognition, Power Rear sunshade, Premium Touchscreen Audio System, Android Auto & Apple CarPlay and much more.

Highlighting Lexus' unrelenting focus on safety, the vehicle ensures complete peace of mind with an advanced safety technology package that includes Anti-Lock Braking System (ABS) / Traction Control (TRC) / Brake Assist System (BAS) / Electronic Brakeforce Distribution (EBD) / Vehicle Stability Control (VSC) among many others.

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Oman Cables Industry (OCI), the leading cable solutions provider in the Sultanate of Oman, announced the introduction of a new Parental Policy.

The comprehensive policy outlines the company's commitment to promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion, addressing global natality concerns.

The policy would enhance employer branding, and reinforce employee retention, OCI stated.

With this, the company enhanced its parental leave policies, reinforcing its commitment to employee well-being and work-life balance, extending the fully paid maternity coverage period for mothers from 12 to 16 weeks at full salary. Fathers will benefit from expanded paternity leave, now set at a minimum of two weeks (ten working days) at full salary, from the previous three days, which surpasses the Oman Labour Law regulation of seven calendar days. Recognising the unique challenges of welcoming a new addition to the family, OCI has also introduced a 'Baby Bonus' from January 1, 2024.

This dedicated amount, set at RO900, provides crucial financial support to employees,

demonstrating the company's commitment to creating a family-friendly and supportive workplace environment.

Cinzia Farisè, CEO of Oman Cables, said, "Our new parental policy is in harmony with OCI's social ambition, providing concrete help to those wanting to become and supporting parenthood as a special time to be embraced. We take pride in reinforcing our efforts towards diversity, equity and inclusion, while fostering a positive journey into parenthood for all our employees."

OCI has also enforced its 'Leave and Back to Work Program', a comprehensive support initiative for mothers. This programme, starting as they approach parental leave and extending into their initial months back at work, features a 'Stay in Contact' plan agreed upon with managers before the leave period. Upon returning, the program which includes training and counselling, can be activated. The new policy highlights the importance of regular communication among new mothers, and managers, ensuring ongoing feedback and a smooth transition.

Maisarah Islamic Banking Services, BankDhofar's Islamic Banking window, announced the launch of its Minor Account, a new and innovative product designed to empower young individuals and instill positive financial habits from a young age.

The Minor Savings Account offers a comprehensive range of features that provide a strong foundation for a secure financial future. It brings to fore Maisarah's commitment to financial literacy, demonstrating that the account isn't just about deposits and withdrawals.

"We are excited to launch the Minor Savings Account and provide young individuals with the tools and resources they need to develop a strong financial foundation," said Amor Said Mohamed al Amri, DGM and Head of Maisarah Retail Banking. "We believe that financial literacy is essential for success in life and we are committed to empowering young people to make informed financial decisions as well as achieve their goals."

The Minor Savings Account is a sharia'a compliant solution (based on Mudarabah princi-



ples) specially crafted to cater to the unique needs of minors aged between 13 and 18 years, providing them with a safe and accessible platform to manage their funds while learning the essential principles of money management. With no minimum balance requirement, competitive profit payments based on monthly average balance, flexibility in changing withdrawal limits as per the request of the father/guardian as well as a customized debit card, young account holders enjoy the benefits of an innovative product whilst being assured of monthly financial assistance through social protection programme.

In addition, parents or

guardians can actively participate in their child's financial journey by monitoring account activities and transactions. This feature promotes responsible money management and transparent communication. Maisarah will also issue a supplementary debit card with the minor's name with no restriction on the father/guardian to deposit or withdraw money at any time and free standing instructions.

The Minor Savings Account can be opened by the minor's father/guardian with a copy of a passport or national ID, birth certificate, and proof of address (electricity/ water bill). The father/legal guardian will also have to provide ID (if Omani).

The Australian Business Group Oman (ABGO) hosted its annual Taste of Australia Dinner at the Crowne Plaza Qurum on December 15.

The Guest of Honour was H E Mark Donovan, Australian Ambassador to Oman.

A unique feature of the evening was the mesmeric didgeridoo playing by Kehaan Lange-McGuire, an Australian Aboriginal artist and musician.

Kehaan brought a unique sound to the Taste of Australia Dinner, which was a feature of the evening that will be remem-



The Taste of Australia menu was prepared by the Crowne

Plaza's very own Executive Chef  
- Anuraj Nair.

# Death toll in Gaza rises to 23,210

Gaza City, Palestinian Territories

- The number of people killed in Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip since October 7 has risen to 23,210, the Health Ministry in the besieged enclave said on Tuesday. The ministry in a statement said at least 59,167 others had been injured.

The Israeli forces committed 12 massacres against Palestinian families across the enclave in the last 24 hours, leaving 126 Palestinians killed and 241 others injured, the ministry added.

It said that a number of victims were still under the rubble and on the streets, as the ambulances were unable to reach them due to relentless Israeli air and ground attacks.

Israel has pounded the Gaza Strip since a cross-border attack by Palestinian group Hamas in October. The onslaught has left Gaza in ruins, with 60 per cent of the enclave's infrastructure damaged or destroyed and nearly two million residents displaced amid acute shortages of food, clean water, and medicine.

About 1,200 people were killed in Hamas's initial attack on Israel. At least 57 bodies and 65 injured were brought to Gaza's Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital over the past 24 hours, the Health Ministry in the enclave said on Tuesday. The ministry, however, did not provide further details on the victims.

**Meeting in Tel Aviv**

Meanwhile, Israeli President Isaac Herzog and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday held a meeting in Tel Aviv where they discussed the war on Gaza and the war crimes case against Israel in the International Court of Justice.

The meeting came shortly



*At least 57 bodies and 65 injured were brought to Gaza's Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital over the past 24 hours, said the Health Ministry*

after Blinken arrived in Israel amid a regional tour, according to a statement by the Israeli Presidency. Herzog expressed gratitude for Blinken's fourth visit during the Gaza war and his 'steadfast commitment to Israel's safety' and thanked the US administration for its support to Israel.

He touched on a genocide proceeding slated to start on Thursday in the International Court of Justice in The Hague in

a case lodged by South Africa against Tel Aviv. "We will be there at the International Court of Justice and will present proudly our case of using self-defense under our most inherent right under humanitarian international law," Herzog told reporters.

Herzog noted that Israel is doing its 'utmost in extremely complicated circumstances on the ground to make sure that there will be no unintended consequences and no civilian casu-

alties'. Blinken, for his part, said: "As always, we greatly value the Israeli President's leadership in these incredibly challenging times for Israel, for countries in the region, and especially for people who continue to suffer."

Underlining that he has visited several countries in the region, including Türkiye, Greece, Jordan, Qatar, UAE, and Saudi Arabia as part of his recent tour to the Middle East, Blinken said: "I want to be able to share some of what I heard from those leaders with President Herzog as well as with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the Cabinet later today."

Blinken noted that during his visit to Israel, he will also have an

opportunity to sit with the families of some of the hostages and discuss the US' 'relentless' efforts to bring everyone home and back with their families.

Blinken, on his fourth mission to the region since October, also met Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and others.

The visit seeks to prevent the offensive in Gaza from turning into a wider regional conflict, urge Israel to decrease the number of casualties in Gaza, increase humanitarian aid and ensure that Palestinians are not forcibly displaced from the enclave.

**Philadelphia Corridor**

Egypt is not cooperating with

Israel regarding the Philadelphia Corridor, a narrow buffer zone between Egypt and Gaza, Egyptian media reported on Monday.

The Egyptian news outlet Al-Qahera News quoted an Egyptian official who said such reports were 'completely false'.

Last week, Israeli reports claimed that Israel had asked Egypt for more security measures to be enforced and more surveillance equipment to be installed along the Philadelphia Corridor in order to notify Israel if weapons were being smuggled in and to detect the use of tunnels by the Palestinian resistance group Hamas.

Anadolu Agency

## Israel admits killing Hezbollah commander

Jerusalem - Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz has admitted that Israel is behind the killing of senior Hezbollah commander Wissam al-Tawil. Speaking to the far-right Channel 14 late on Monday, he said: "Yes, we did take responsibility for the assassination of the commander."

"This is part of the war," he added. "We're targeting Hezbollah operatives, infrastructure, and systems they've set up to deter Israel." Early in the day, the Hezbollah said al-Tawil, 58, was killed in the town of Khirbet Selm, southern Lebanon. The Lebanese state-run National News Agency said the attack was carried out by an Israeli drone.

The killing came days after the deputy chief of Palestinian group Hamas, Saleh al-Arouri, was killed in a suspected Israeli airstrike in Beirut. Katz also threatened Lebanon for consequences far more than the war in 2006, but said Israel was not interested in escalating tensions.

"We need to act to remove the threat on the northern border and create the conditions that will allow its residents to return home safely," the minister added.

Hezbollah and Israel have been exchanging fire along the Lebanese-Israeli border since the October 7 cross-border attack by Hamas.

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## Ecuador: State of emergency after gangster vanishes from prison cell

**Bogota, Colombia** - Ecuador declared a state of emergency on Monday after one of the country's most dangerous gang leaders disappeared from his prison cell, triggering riots in at least six correctional facilities across the country.

President Daniel Noboa declared a 60-day state of emergency, the first since he came to power on November 23 last year.

"I have just signed a decree for a state of emergency so that the armed forces have all the political and legal support in their actions," Noboa said on social media.

The state of emergency allows the army to act to control internal security, especially in prisons, as previous presidents have done.

The leader of the powerful Los Choneros gang, Jose Adolfo Macias, alias 'Fito', was reported missing on Sunday from his high-security cell at a prison in the city of Guayaquil. Macias was sentenced in 2011 to 34 years in prison for various crimes, including murder and drug trafficking.

The Los Choneros gang has been embroiled in bloody disputes with other criminal groups with connections to cartels in Mexico and Colombia over drug trafficking routes. More than 3,000 members of the police and armed forces have been deployed to locate Macias's whereabouts, the government confirmed.

In August last year, Macias was transferred from the Guayaquil regional prison to the La Roca penitentiary center 'as a security measure for citizens'.

Anadolu Agency

## North India shivers under fog

**New Delhi, India** - Fog enveloped many parts of North India including Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, among others, on Tuesday morning, causing disruptions to daily life and impacting visibility.

Visibility in some parts of Uttar Pradesh was down to a mere 50 metres, while isolated pockets of Rajasthan, Bihar, Haryana-Chandigarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha experience dense fog with visibility ranging from 50 to 200 metres, according to the Met Department.

Bhopal, the capital of Madhya Pradesh, witnessed dense fog in the morning hours with visibility dipping as low as 50 metres at 5:30am on Tuesday.

"Fog conditions observed (at 0530 IST of today): Very Dense fog (visibility < 50 metre) in some parts of Uttar Pradesh; Dense fog (visibility 50-200 metre) in isolated pockets of Rajasthan, Bihar, Haryana-Chandigarh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha," said Met Department.

Maximum temperature that was recorded on January 8 in Delhi was 17.5 degree Celsius. The minimum temperature recorded at Safdarjung in the national capital on Tuesday was 7.9 degree Celsius while Lodhi Road recorded a minimum of 6.4 degree Celsius.

Visuals from Mathura in Uttar Pradesh showed thick layer of fog early morning. "Visibility recorded (at 0530 hours IST of today) (in metres): Uttar Pradesh: Bareilly, Varanasi (Baatpur) & Gorakhpur-25 each; Jhansi, Lucknow & Varanasi-50 each, Sultanpur-500; Rajasthan: Jaisalmer-50, Churu & Kota - 200 each, Jaipur-500; Bihar: Purnia-50, Gaya-200; Haryana-



Security personnel cross a road as dense fog engulfs Kartavya Path during the early morning of a cold winter day in New Delhi on Tuesday (ANI)

*Visibility in some parts of Uttar Pradesh was down to a mere 50 metres, while isolated pockets of Rajasthan, Bihar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha experienced dense fog*

Chandigarh: Ambala and Chandigarh-200 each; Madhya Pradesh: Gwalior-200; Odisha: Chandbali-200." IMD posted on X.

Cities like Bareilly, Varanasi, Gorakhpur, Jhansi, and Lucknow

in Uttar Pradesh, and Jaipur in Rajasthan, are struggling with visibility less than 50 metres. Chandbali in Odisha and Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh also face dense fog conditions, hampering morning activities.

Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued dense fog and cold wave warnings for the coming days. Dense to very dense fog is expected to persist in parts of Punjab, Haryana-Chandigarh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Jammu division, Himachal Pradesh, north Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura.

Meanwhile, minimum temperatures were significantly above normal in most parts of Bihar, Konkani and Goa, Madhya Maharashtra, and Sub-Himalayan West Bengal & Sikkim. Maximum temperatures were markedly above normal in Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh-Gilgit-Baltistan-Muzaffarabad and Goa.

ANI

## Somali president meets Egyptian delegation

**Mogadishu, Somalia** - Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud met with a high-level delegation from Egypt at the State House in Mogadishu, his office said on Monday.

The delegation reiterated Cairo's 'unwavering' support for Somalia's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, according to a statement issued by the Somali presidency.

The statement said the delegation also emphasised 'the paramount importance of respecting these fundamental principles and firmly stated their opposition to any actions that would encroach upon them'. It also conveyed an official invitation for Mohamud to visit Egypt.

Egypt announced its stance on an initial agreement that land-



Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud

locked Ethiopia signed earlier this month with Somalia's breakaway region of Somaliland which will give it access to the sea through the Red Sea port of Berbera and said Cairo will stand by Somalia and provide support for its secu-

rity and stability after the leaders of the two countries spoke by phone. Mohamud, who is currently in Eritrea for a two-day state visit, has signed a law that nullifies the sea access deal.

Ethiopia lost its Red Sea ports

in the early 1990s after the Eritrean War of Independence, which lasted from 1961 to 1991.

In 1991, Eritrea gained independence from Ethiopia, leading to the establishment of two separate nations. The separation resulted in Ethiopia losing direct access to the Red Sea and key ports. Ethiopia has since been landlocked, affecting its ability to conduct efficient maritime trade.

Ethiopia and Egypt have been engaged in a lukewarm relationship for years over Ethiopia's Nile Dam project.

Last month, Egypt declared a dead end in Renaissance Dam negotiations with Ethiopia and Sudan and vowed to defend its water and national security if they are violated.

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### A TRIBUTE TO GURU



Artists perform Odissi dance during 'Antardrishti' as they celebrate the 98th birth anniversary of Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra in Bhubaneswar, India on Monday (ANI)

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12- Residential/commercial Land with an area of 750 square meters in Duqm

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## 2023 was hottest year on record

**Athens, Greece** - Just-concluded 2023 was the hottest year in recorded history, and likely beyond, the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) said on Tuesday in a report.

"With the global-average temperature 14.98 C (58.96F), 2023 has replaced 2016 as the warmest calendar year on record," it noted, adding that 'each month from June to December in 2023 was warmer than the corresponding month in any previous year'.

July and August 2023 were the warmest two months on record, according to the report.

More specifically, 2023 was the second-warmest year for Europe, 1.02C above the 1991-2020 average, and just 0.17C cooler than 2020, the warmest year on record for the continent.

As such, temperatures in Europe were above average for 11 months during 2023, with September being the warmest September on record.

Anadolu Agency



PORTRAIT ARTIST

Photo: V K Shafeer

Hubert Vaz

He could pass off as the guy next door or as anyone journeying through an anxious middle age, but Sheffy Tattarath is no ordinary guy... In his sway is a unique ability to create true-to-life portraits of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, which he does frequently, without always being commissioned to do so.

This week, Sheffy has just completed a huge portrait of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik seated on a chair with a nostalgic portrait of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said in the backdrop signifying a unique synergy between the two royals in taking Oman to great heights. This new painting is one of his latest works that has been completed just in time to coincide with the 4th Accession Day of His Majesty, the Sultan, and his 'Renewed Renaissance'.

Sheffy admits that he has been working on this painting all through the past year and cannot quite quantify the hours of effort put into it. "I have been working on this painting, off and on, not at a stretch for many days. That is my style and I enjoy the process of making every portrait, adding my own creative effects, to make each work look unique and attractive in its own way," he asserts.

Having done scores of portraits of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said over the past few decades in Oman, Sheffy admits that his demise (in January 2020) was the saddest part of his life and it threw him totally out of gear. Besides facing certain health issues, he also had to shelve his talent for some time, to come to terms with reality. However, switching to painting portraits of His Majesty Sultan Haitham, he was able to find new expression for his talent, often binding emotions of the past and present together.

Sheffy, who took to realism at the age of 17, has been a mentor to many young artists in Oman over the years who now are established artists in their own rights. Apart from participating in many joint exhibitions in Oman with his unique portraits and landscapes, he has also created portraits for many personalities in Oman - those in good stead as well as friends and folks.

To create this current painting, Sheffy says he has checked out several photographs of both HMs to understand the detailing, stance, glance, as well as emotional composure of both royal personalities. He worked on it in several stages, changing shades, combining elements that complement each other as well bringing in a chiaroscuro effect (effect of lighting and shadows) to give the final result a three-dimensional feel.

Sheffy has been privileged to paint around 30-

# Regal realism

Sheffy Tattarath, an Indian painter in Oman, has been obsessed with painting portraits of royals in the sultanate. Having done numerous portraits of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said as well as of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik over the years, he admits that every single painting has been a fulfilling experience



*I have been working on this painting, off and on, not at a stretch for many days. That is my style and I enjoy the process of making every portrait*

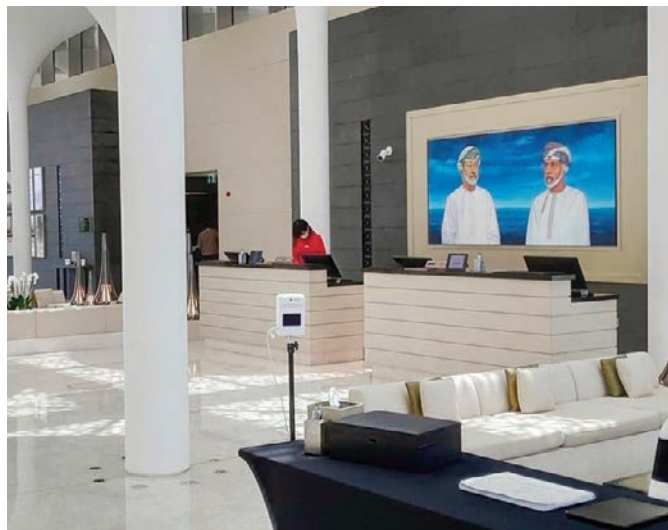
SHEFFY TATTARATH

odd portraits of both Sultans during the past two decades, most of which have been commissioned works. Many of his portraits have also been sold at exhibitions while a few have been presented to people by the artist. One can see a huge portrait of both HMs together, created by Sheffy, installed on one wall at The Walk, in Al Mouj Muscat, as well as one in the lobby of hotel Kempinski Muscat.

Having come to Oman in the mid-90s, Sheffy, who had an innate talent for sketching and painting from early childhood, attributes his prowess with the brush to Betty Edwards (New York Times' best selling author) whose book - Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain - which is used as a standard text in many art schools around the world, equipped him with apt knowledge, tools and instruction needed to shape his career as an artist on sound lines.



A huge portrait of both HMs together, created by Sheffy, installed at The Walk, in Al Mouj Muscat, and (below) another portrait in the lobby of hotel Kempinski Muscat



Congratulations to  
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On the **4<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Accession Day**

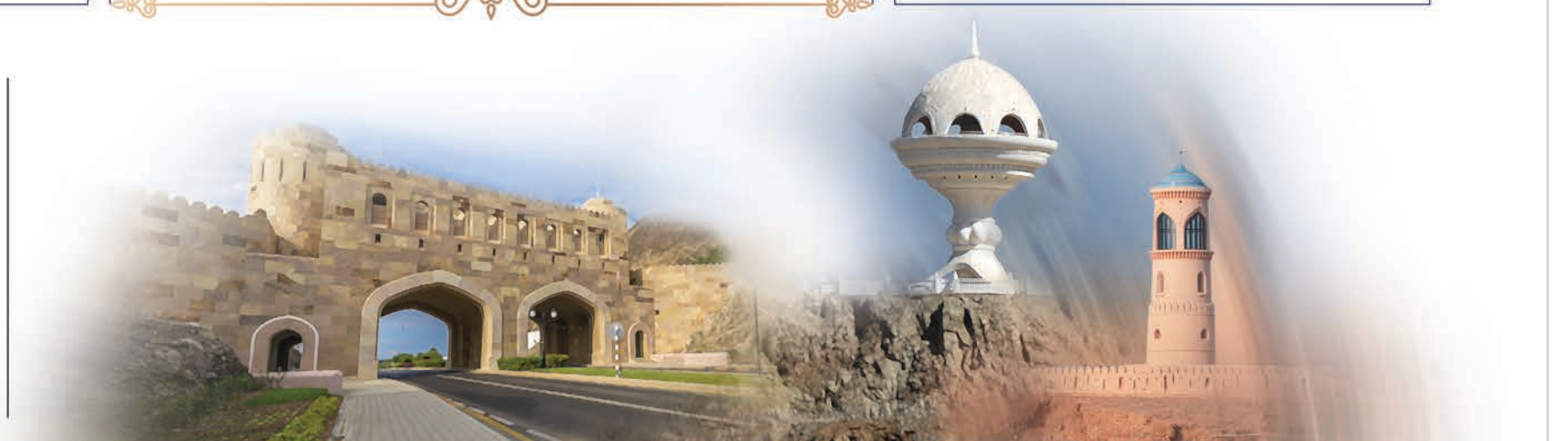


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Nicolai Hojgaard

# Dubai Desert Classic set to welcome exciting field

Dubai - An exciting group of established stars and emerging talent is set to light up the 35th edition of the Hero Dubai Desert Classic at Emirates Golf Club from January 18-21.

World Number Two and defending champion Rory McIlroy headlines the field at the first Rolex Series event of the 2024 Race to Dubai, as he seeks to lift the famous Dallah trophy for a historic fourth time.

The Northern Irishman will be joined by fellow Major winners, including reigning Open champion Brian Harman - who makes his debut at the iconic event - Pádraig Harrington, Francesco Molinari and Adam Scott. Most recent Rolex Series winner Nicolai Hojgaard - who triumphed the last time he teed it up in Dubai at the season-ending DP World Tour Championship - is joined in the field by his twin brother and four-time DP World Tour winner Rasmus.

The Danish duo are amongst a host of multiple winners gathering at Emirates Golf Club, including Adrian Meronk, a three-time champion in 2023, and Ryan Fox, who claimed his fourth DP World Tour victory and first on the Rolex Series last season. Meanwhile, rising PGA TOUR

star Cameron Young is set to make his tournament debut.

Victorious European Ryder Cup Captain Luke Donald returns to take on the Majlis Course once again, alongside stars of that famous victory in Rome Tommy Fleetwood and Tyrrell Hatton.

The Hero Dubai Desert Classic also continues to showcase up and coming stars, with PGA TOUR University Number One Michael Thorbjornsen returning to the event after taking low amateur honours with his top 20 finish at Emirates Golf Club last season. His fellow amateur and 2023 Walker Cup winner Caleb Surratt will make his DP World Tour debut, while the event also welcomes UAE player Joshua Grenville-Wood, who impressed on Tour last season with a tied sixth place finish at the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters.

Simon Corkill, Executive Tournament Director of Hero Dubai Desert Classic, said: "We are eagerly awaiting the return of the top stars from the DP World Tour to the Majlis course for this year's historic edition of the Hero Dubai Desert Classic. The 35th edition promises to be the best Dubai Desert Classic on record."

# From World Cup buzz to continental battle

Qatar all set to host Asian Cup as Gulf influence in football grows

Doha - Qatar returns to the spotlight on Friday little more than a year after the first World Cup held in the Arab world when the relocated and delayed 2023 Asian Cup gets underway amid a seismic shift in football's global order.

Fuelled by massive sums of Saudi cash, following huge investment from Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, West Asia is now undoubtedly the dominant financial power in the game but it remains to be seen whether that transfers to pre-eminence on the pitch.

Qatar go into the tournament as defending champions having picked up their first title five years ago with a surprise victory over four-time champions Japan in Abu Dhabi.

Following China's withdrawal as hosts because of its rigid "zero-COVID" policy, Qatar will now also stage the tournament for the third time in its 68-year history.

China's footballing gold rush has petered out since it won hosting rights and Saudi Arabia has emerged as one of the most powerful forces in the game.

Emboldened by Qatar's success in hosting the 2022 edition, the Saudis emerged as the only candidate to host the 2034 World Cup, having already organised the Club World Cup and won the rights to host the 2027 Asian Cup.

Those moves have come after a major recruitment drive by Saudi Pro League clubs, led by the arrival of Cristiano Ronaldo, that has thrown further shade on their neighbours.

With many of his key players struggling for game time since the start of the foreign influx, however, former Italy coach Roberto Mancini might have his work cut out to lead the Saudis to their first title since 1996.

Qatar will be desperate to



Oman players during a training session in Doha

banish the memory of their miserable World Cup campaign but their preparations have been hit by the departure of coach Carlos Queiroz, who left last month after a year of mixed results.

Oman, in Group F alongside Saudi Arabia, Thailand and Kyrgyzstan, will be confident of making the knockout stage.

While the Gulf nations might be able to claim superiority in

*Palestine managed to qualify for the 24-team tournament despite the many challenges they face and are likely to attract a huge amount of support in Qatar*

state-of-the-art sporting infrastructure, East Asia remains home to much of the cream of the continent's playing talent.

The Japanese will start the tournament as favourites with the decision to retain Hajime Moriyasu ensuring coaching

continuity at the Samurai Blue.

Moriyasu, looking to become the first man to win the Asian title both as a player and a coach, masterminded impressive wins over Spain and Germany at the World Cup and oversaw a 4-1 thrashing of the Germans in a friendly in September.

Juergen Klinsmann has made no secret of his desire to end South Korea's 64-year Asian Cup title drought and the German World Cup winner will look to captain Son Heung-min to fire his side's challenge.

Iran, a perennial Asian power, reached the semi-finals in 2019 under Queiroz and Amir Ghalencheh has an experienced squad full of players such as Ehsan Hajsafi, Alireza Jahanbakhsh and Mehdi Taremi who play their

club football in Europe.

Australia's run to the last 16 at the 2022 World Cup was built on a tight-knit squad and the Socceroos could challenge for another title to match their 2015 triumph on home soil if they can build momentum and find enough goals.

China still do not have a team that anywhere near matches their ambition, while the world's most populous nation, India, will be represented but are highly unlikely to still be around when the prizes are handed out.

Palestine managed to qualify for the 24-team tournament despite the many challenges they face and are likely to attract a huge amount of support in Qatar as the war continues to rage in Gaza.

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# ALL HAIL DER KAISER



Franz Beckenbauer

Berlin, Germany - Franz Beckenbauer, who has died at the age of 78, helped modernise soccer and came to personify Germany's post-war sporting success, captaining his country to the 1974 World Cup title on home soil to anchor his legacy.

'Der Kaiser', as he was nicknamed for his imperious playing style and command of the game, was for decades synonymous with Germany's success on the pitch, as player and then coach.

He amassed every major honour in his glittering playing career and continued his extraordinary record of success after switching to the manager's bench.

Beckenbauer won 103 caps and captained West Germany to World Cup success in 1974, two years after lifting the European title.

At club level he steered Bayern Munich to three successive European Cup victories from 1974 to 1976 and won the World Club Cup, the European Cup Winners' Cup and eight domestic trophies -- four league titles and four cup triumphs.

He was West Germany's footballer of the year a record four times and twice European footballer of the year.

Widely regarded as one of the greatest soccer players of all time, and by many as the best European, as a player he invented and defined the modern libero role.

Always calm under pressure and a skilful marshal of his defence, Beckenbauer could read the game so astutely he knew



## Beckenbauer revolutionised game and became icon of German sporting success

exactly the right moment to surge upfield.

The unhurried sweeper never seemed to break sweat as he sprayed perfect long raking passes to his strikers.

He enjoyed success as a coach while leading the Germans to the 1990 World Cup title in Italy, one of only three men to have won world titles as both player and coach.

But despite heading the 2006 World Cup on home soil as organising chief, his reputation was tarnished in recent years following an investigation into a potential slush fund for that tournament and a 6.7 million euros (\$7.34 million) payment

to world soccer's governing body FIFA in 2005.

Beckenbauer, who had been battling several health issues in recent years, denied any wrongdoing and largely withdrew from the public eye.

Born in Munich on Sept. 11 1945, Beckenbauer, a postal official's son who once trained to be an insurance salesman, joined Bayern's youth teams in 1959.

He progressed to the first team and, with Beckenbauer orchestrating from midfield, Bayern rocketed to international prominence from the obscurity of West German regional league soccer to establish the most

powerful brand in German football.

Shortly after his 20th birthday Beckenbauer was capped for the first time in a World Cup qualifier against Sweden and became a fixture in the national team for more than a decade.

Beckenbauer produced notable performances in three World Cups before moving across the Atlantic to New York Cosmos in a multi-million-dollar deal in 1977.

He stayed in the United States for three lucrative years before returning to West Germany in a shock that which took him to Bayern's northern rivals Hamburg SV.

Beckenbauer retired to a comfortable life at his home in the Austrian ski resort of Kitzbuehel, spending much of his time on the local golf course.

But he kept in the public eye with a regular column in West Germany's mass-circulation Bild newspaper and eventually took over as Germany coach despite his lack of managerial experience.

Beckenbauer brought discipline to the squad and commanded instant respect.

Less than two years after taking over, he guided West Germany to the 1986 World Cup final in Mexico where they lost 3-2 to Diego Maradona's Argentina.

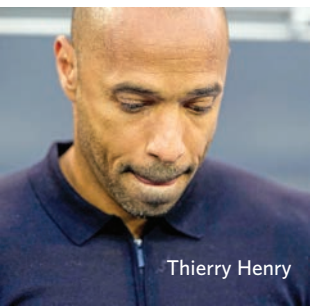
However, they won the title four years later in rematch against the Argentines to give Beckenbauer a rare World Cup double as player and then coach and enhance his legacy.

## Henry: Throughout my career, I must have been in depression

Paris, France - Footballing icon Thierry Henry, whose name is synonymous with on-field brilliance, has opened up about his hidden struggle, saying he "must have been in depression" throughout his career.

The 46-year-old ended his glittering 20-year club career in 2014, which also included stints at Monaco, Juventus, Barcelona and New York Red Bulls.

He scored 228 goals for Arsenal during his two spells, winning



Thierry Henry

two Premier League titles before moving to Camp Nou, where he won a pair of LaLiga crowns and

the Champions League.

A World Cup winner with the Les Bleus, Henry has also managed Arsenal's youth teams, served as assistant coach of Belgium, and was the head coach of Monaco and Montreal Impact. He is currently the head coach of France Under-21s.

"Throughout my career, and since I was born, I must have been in depression," Henry told The Diary Of A CEO podcast. "Did I know it? No. Did I do

something about it? No. But I adapted to a certain way."

Henry said it had been a difficult time for him during the COVID-19 pandemic, when he was managing Major League Soccer side Montreal.

"I was in isolation in Montreal, and not being able to see my kids for a year was tough," he added. "Tears were coming alone. Why I don't know, but maybe they were there for a very long time."



Manchester United's Diogo Dalot scores against Wigan Athletic in their FA Cup match on Monday

## Man United beat Wigan to make FA Cup fourth round

Wigan, England - Diogo Dalot and Bruno Fernandes, with a penalty, were on target as Manchester United defeated Wigan Athletic 2-0 to reach the FA Cup fourth round on Monday.

The victory over the third-tier side was a welcome relief for the 12-time FA Cup winners, who are out of Europe and the League Cup and languishing eighth in the Premier League.

"The FA Cup is all about winning, it is knockout. You want to finish the job. That is what I said in the dressing room 'job done,'" United manager Erik ten Hag told ITV.

United will next visit the winners of the third round replay be-

tween League Two (fourth tier) Newport County and National League (fifth tier) Eastleigh F.C. in the fourth round.

Ten Hag's side comfortably avoided an eighth defeat in 14 away matches in all competitions since last season's FA Cup final, which they lost to neighbours Manchester City.

Dalot scored in the 22nd minute at Wigan when Marcus Rashford had a shot blocked before laying the ball off to the Portuguese, who took a touch before finding the bottom corner of the net from just outside the 18-yard box.

"It gave us more confidence," Dalot said. "We were needing the

goal so we could be more calm and not rushing to score. We created a lot and could have scored more. It's what we missed today."

Fernandes doubled United's lead in the 74th with a penalty after Liam Shaw caught the captain's foot in the box.

United also wasted a bucket load of chances.

"Oh, definitely (we should have scored more)," Ten Hag said.

"In the first half I think we created five or six very good chances. I think it was very good football. We should have taken more, but if you don't score you have to stay focused and I think we did that tonight."

## Man City to meet Spurs, Villa take on Chelsea in FA Cup fourth round

London, England - The FA Cup fourth round has delivered a spicy mix of Premier League clashes and potential giant-killings, pitting giants Manchester City and Chelsea against Tottenham Hotspur and Aston Villa respectively.

Holders City, perched a point above Spurs but with a game in hand, face a tricky London trip to their league rivals.

Aston Villa, soaring high in second place in the league, will look to continue their dream run when they visit Stamford Bridge to take on a struggling Chelsea side.

Twelve-time FA Cup winners Manchester United face a fourth-round match at either Newport County or Eastleigh after their 2-0 win at Wigan Athletic on Monday.

Fulham welcome Newcastle United and Sheffield United host Brighton & Hove Albion in



Manchester City face a tricky trip to London

other all-Premier League ties, with matches scheduled to be played over the Jan. 27-28 weekend.

League leaders Liverpool, who knocked Arsenal out in the third round, received a more favourable draw on Monday.

Juergen Klopp's team will host the winners of the replay between Norwich City and Bristol Rovers.

Sixth-tier Maidstone United,

the lowest-ranked side left in the competition, travel to second-tier Ipswich Town.

The winners of the replay between Crystal Palace and Everton will host either Luton Town or Bolton Wanderers.

League Two side Wrexham A.F.C., owned by Hollywood actors Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney and who reached the fourth round last season, will visit Blackburn Rovers.

### Atletico to host Real in Spanish Cup

Holders Real Madrid have been drawn away to Atletico Madrid in the Copa del Rey last 16, with the city rivals set to clash twice in a matter of days as they will also meet in the Spanish Super Cup semi-finals in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday.

Diego Simeone's Atletico will hope to bury memories of last season's 3-1 quarter-final defeat by Real at the Bernabeu. They will fancy their chances as they handed Real their only loss in all competitions so far this season by 3-1 when Carlo Ancelotti's side visited the Metropolitano in late September.

Since then LaLiga leaders Real have won 15 of 19 games in all competitions, dropping points in the league on only three occasions, while Atletico have struggled with inconsistent results and sit in fifth spot.



On the 4<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the accession of  
**His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**  
to the throne, we extend our most sincere greetings.  
May Allah bestow His blessings on him  
and the people of Oman.

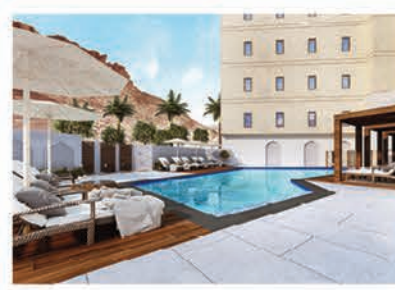


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